

First IUDOP press release Presidential Election Observation 2009

The University Institute of Public Opinion (*Instituto Universitario de Opinión Pública*, IUDOP) of the Central American University (*Universidad Centroamericana*) presents its first report on election day to citizens and the media. This press release is based on systematic information collected by 2,500 observers deployed in the country's 14 departments. The sample used is random, permitting the results to be generalized to the national level.

This report corresponds to the setup process of the voting stations (*Juntas Receptoras de Votos*, JRV) and the opening of the voting centers (*centros de votación*), with information through 9:30 a.m. corresponding to 69.1 percent of the national sample.

First, we express our satisfaction with the citizen responsibility demonstrated from the beginning of these elections. There has been a general tranquility throughout the day, for which reason we invite those who have still not cast their votes to participate in this election day in a civic spirit. At the same time, it is important to recognize that the majority of the observations about the setup and beginning of voting indicated in January have been addressed by the Supreme Electoral Tribunal (*Tribunal Supremo Electoral*, TSE). We are pleased that the TSE has implemented these suggestions relating to the organization and logistics of the process.

Setup of the voting stations

The IUDOP observation network recorded that an ample majority of voting stations (96.0 percent) were installed before 7:00 a.m., reflecting that there were no fundamental delays in terms of setup. In relation to the findings from the January observation, the delays reported in installation of the voting stations were substantially overcome.

Comparing the findings from the national sample to the findings in all of the voting stations for citizens residing abroad, referred to as "department 15," there were no substantial differences in terms of the installation time.

Seventy-five percent of voting stations were installed with four members present, the configuration established by the TSE for this election in particular; however, 22.3 percent of voting stations (424) were reported as having installed with five members. This should be clarified, as it contradicts the inter-party agreement on the composition of the elections boards (*mesas*). At the voting center for Salvadorans resident abroad, 10 percent of elections boards installed with five members. At present, nobody has presented reliable information on the identity of that fifth member and the reason for his/her inclusion.

More than 99 percent of voting boards were installed in the presence of pollwatchers from the two contending parties. In relation to the election of January 18, this is a slight increase in the presence of pollwatchers both from the Nationalist Republican Alliance (*Alianza Republicana Nacionalista*, ARENA) as well as from the Farabundo Martí

National Liberation Front (*Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional*, FMLN). In the case of voting stations for voters residing abroad, all of the stations had pollwatchers from ARENA and from FMLN.

Moreover, at more than 97 percent of the voting stations observed, the materials necessary to begin voting were present, including the ballot box, the voting shield, the ballots, the bottle of indelible ink, the electoral registry and the opening and closing reports (*actas*), among other items. That is to say that a broad majority of voting stations were installed with the necessary materials for the administration of election day. We must note that 3.0 percent of the stations did not have the three seals required by statute. A lack of indelible ink during the setup process was noted at an insignificant percentage of stations.

In comparing the availability of election materials on this election day to the findings from the January elections, there is an improvement. However, in the case of the stations for voters residing abroad, six of the ten stations did not have the three copies of the electoral registry (for search, signature, and display) available, and one of them did not have the three required seals during installation.

A difficulty encountered in the early hours of the morning was the unfamiliarity of some members of the elections boards with the installation procedures; this was recorded at 19.1 percent of voting stations. In relation to the January election, there was a significant reduction in the uncertainties displayed by board members regarding these procedures.

Start of voting

According to reports from IUDOP's observation network, 29.9 percent of the voting stations observed began voting before 7:00 a.m.; 69.7 percent, between 7:00 and 8:00 a.m.; and only 0.4 percent began after 8:00 a.m. In contrasting this data with the January findings, there is an important improvement in terms of an earlier starting time. In the voting stations for voters residing abroad, 50 percent began voting before 7:00 a.m., while the rest did so between 7:00 and 8:00 a.m.

A minor difficulty identified during the start of voting was the placement of the voting shield. At 7.0 percent of the voting stations observed, its placement did not guarantee the secrecy of the vote. This situation also has improved substantially from the January election, when this problem was observed at 21.1 percent of voting stations. In the case of voting stations for voters residing abroad, no problems with the placement of the voting shield were reported.

The work of IUDOP's observers

In the great majority of cases, IUDOP's volunteer observers have been able to conduct their work without difficulty. In the early hours of the morning, only the observer assigned to the voting center at Centro Escolar Meanguera in Golfo, La Unión department, has been restricted in his work, as his immediate access to the voting station

was not permitted. Additionally, at noon, the municipal coordinator of San Miguel was hit by an ARENA party activist. Relative to January, the conditions for domestic observers at the voting stations have been improved. In this respect, the TSE's efforts for greater publicity of the contribution of domestic observation to the transparency of the process should be recognized.

Journalistic coverage

The media monitoring conducted by the project provides evidence of inequality in journalistic coverage. Television coverage clearly provides greater visibility to the ARENA party. The few sources that are cited are partial to one side, and their principal arguments are supported by perceptions. This is particularly evident in the complaints of irregularities and the commentary by reporters on the electoral process and the two parties.

Regarding the electoral process, more than half of the media monitored (Internet, radio and television) were limited to describing developments in the process at the centers where the coverage was taking place.

The domestic observation had little media visibility, and in this context the most mentions were for the Human Rights Ombudsman (*Procuraduría de Derechos Humanos*, PDDH). The most-cited source as a guarantor of the process is the OAS. In this respect, it is important to call on the media to conduct more objective and balanced coverage.

Finally, we wish to inform you that IUDOP's network of observers will remain at their voting stations, and we will continue to present information on developments during election day.

San Salvador, March 15, 2009