

GUATEMALA

Date of Elections: 7 March 1982

Purpose of Elections

Elections were held for all the seats in Parliament on the normal expiry of the members' term of office.

Characteristics of Parliament

The unicameral Parliament of Guatemala, the Congress, consists of 66 members* elected for 4 years. Deputies are eligible for re-election only once, four years after the termination of their first term.

Electoral System

All Guatemalan citizens who are at least 18 years of age and inscribed on the electoral register have the right to vote. Persons who have been deprived of their civil rights pursuant to criminal conviction or judicial interdiction are barred from being electors.

Voting is compulsory for all citizens who can read and write and optional for illiterate electors.

To be elected Deputy, a person must be a native Guatemalan, enjoy his rights of citizenship and be over 30 years of age. Public contractors, close relatives of the President and Vice-President of the Republic, persons who have been convicted in a case involving accounts and have not settled their liabilities, members of the armed forces on active duty, persons representing the interests of companies or of individuals operating public services, and ministers of any religion or sect are not eligible for the Congress. Officials of the executive and judicial branches and employees thereof, or of the legislative branch, may not concurrently hold parliamentary seats; persons holding a teaching position and professionals in the service of social welfare establishments are exempted from this incompatibility.

Candidates must be nominated by legally registered political parties. The Constitution prohibits the formation of parties which advocate the Communist ideology, or whose doctrinal tendency, method of action or international connections threaten the sovereignty of the State or the foundations of its democratic organization. For election purposes, Guatemala is divided into districts; the number of Deputies from each depends on the latter's population.

Deputies are elected by simple majority in constituencies in which there is only one seat to be filled. If two seats are to be filled, the two candidates of the party that polled the most votes are elected, with one exception: when the difference between the total number of valid

- This total represents an increase of five members since the previous (1978) elections.

votes obtained by the first-place party and the total number obtained by the second-place party is less than 20% of the first-place party's total number. In this case, each of the two highest parties receives one of the two contested places. When there are three or more seats to be filled, a closed list, proportional representation system is used. Distribution of seats is then effected according to the d'Hondt method.

Within each constituency, an alternate Deputy is elected at the same time as the titular member. The former must be called upon within eight days to fill a vacancy which might arise between general elections.

General Considerations and Conduct of the Elections

The congressional elections were held concurrently with those for President of the Republic and municipalities.

Running for President were four candidates: General Angel Anibal Guevara of the ruling centre-right coalition Popular Democratic Front—a coalition of the Revolutionary Party, the Democratic Institutional Party and the Front of National Unity; Mr. Mario Sandoval Alarcon of the far-right National Liberation Movement (MLN); Mr. Alejandro Maldonado Aguirre of the moderate National Opposition Union (comprising the Christian Democratic and National Renovation parties); and Mr. Gustavo Anzueto Vielman of the Authentic Nationalist Central (CAN).

On polling day, General Guevara obtained 39% of the ballots cast. However, since he had not received an absolute majority of the popular vote, it was for the national Congress to chose the new President. The governing coalition controlled the Congress, and General Guevara's election was therefore a foregone conclusion; the President-elect would take office on 1 July for a four-year term. Although all three opposition parties won congressional seats, they refused to occupy them in protest against what they labelled a fraudulent poll.

On 23 March, a military coup d'Etat took place and a group of army officers announced the formation of a junta to replace the elected Government, claiming they were rising "against corruption following a fraudulent election". The next day, the junta suspended the Constitution, dissolved Congress and banned political parties*. The coup leaders identified themselves as members of the "Young Officers Movement".

*See section *Parliamentary Developments*, p. 13.

Statistics

1. Results of the Elections and Distribution of Seats
in the Congress

Number of registered electors. 2,250,000 (approx.)

Political Group	Number
Popular Democratic Front	33
National Liberation Movement	21
Authentic Nationalist Central.	3
National Opposition Union.	2
Others.	7