

The Election of 1994 in El Salvador

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Results

After voting in two rounds of elections in the Spring of 1994, El Salvadorans elected a president, a vice-president (on the same ticket), 84 legislative deputies and 262 municipal boards. Armando Calderón Sol (a former Mayor of San Salvador) of the rightist ARENA (National Republican Alliance) received 49.03 per cent of the vote on 20 March; having narrowly missed obtaining the required absolute majority of the popular vote (50 per cent plus one), he was forced into a run-off election on 24 April. In this election, Calderón Sol defeated his only rival, Ruben Zamora of the leftist FMLN/CD/MNR (Farbundo Marti Liberation Front/Democratic Convergence/National

TABLE 1. Presidential election results in El Salvador 1994

Party	First round (20 March)		Second round (5 April)	
	%	Number	%	Number
ARENA	49.03	641,108	68.35	818,264
FMLN/CD/MNR	24.90	325,582	31.65	378,980
PDC	16.39	214,277		
PCN	5.39	70,504		
MU	2.41	31,502		
MSN	1.06	13,841		
MAC	0.83	10,843		
Annulled and Invalid Votes and Abstentions		103,663		48,976
Total	100.01	1,411,320	100	1,246,220

Source: For first round, *Proceso* (San Salvador), No. 605 (5 April 1994); for the second round, *Reporte Semanal de la Fundación Flor de Izote* (San Salvador), 15(14) (25 March-13 April 1994). All results are final and are from the Supreme Electoral Tribunal.

Note: ARENA = National Republican Alliance; FMLN = Farbundo Martí Liberation Front; CD = Democratic Convergence; MAC = Authentic Christian Movement; MNR = National Revolutionary Movement; MSN = Movement of National Solidarity; MU = Unity Movement; PCN = National Conciliation Party; PDC = Christian Democratic Party.

TABLE 2. Legislative election results

Party	Number of seats
ARENA	39
FMLN	21
PDC	18
PCN	4
CD	1
MU	1
Total	84

Source: For first round, *Proceso* (San Salvador), No. 605 (5 April 1994); for the second round, *Reporte Semanal de la Fundación Flor de Izote* (San Salvador), 15(14) (25 March-13 April 1994). All results are final and are from the Supreme Electoral Tribunal. Note: Glossary of Party names is contained in the note to Table 1. In legislative elections, the FMLN/CD/MNR ran separate tickets.

Revolutionary Movement) coalition by attracting the support of 68.35 per cent of the voters. ARENA won 39 of the seats in the legislature; by forming an alliance with the conservative PCN (Party of National Conciliation), it created a majority of 43 deputies to cement its control of this branch of government. These results are summarized in Tables 1 and 2.

Despite numerous irregularities, these elections are a watershed in modern El Salvadoran politics. They are one of the most important indicators that the peace agreement negotiated by the Left and Right in the early 1990s remains in effect.

Background

The peace accord, as well as the resulting elections, were made possible by the collapse of communist regimes in Eastern Europe in 1989. The transformation of international politics encouraged the Bush Administration to pressure the ARENA government of Alfredo Cristiani (1989-1994) and a recalcitrant military to reach a settlement with the FMLN guerrillas. After a decade of vicious civil war, both government and armed opposition also came to recognize that the civil war was stalemated. Under UN sponsorship, Left and Right signed what became known as the Chapultepec Accord on 16 January 1992 to reduce the size of the military, to separate it from the police, to create a Truth Commission to investigate past human rights abuses and to reform the constitution and the electoral system. Both the agreement and the supervision of its implementation were entrusted to the United Nations.¹

It was not going to be easy to hold elections in a country where, for example, the Truth Commission documented at least 22,000 killings, mostly committed by the security forces and their paramilitary allies (other estimates run at least twice as high).² Simply organizing for what became known as the "election of the century" in a country where 1,176,900 to 1,606,900 individuals were forced to become internal or external refugees in the 1980s presented logistical challenges.³ Fear of reprisals or of a return to open warfare undoubtedly discouraged many citizens from becoming involved in what hopefully would become genuinely competitive elections. Uncertainty about the electoral strength of the Left unnerved many in government, the military and their conservative supporters. Distrust of the ARENA government and of a military

believed to be responsible for the vast majority of human rights abuses led ex-guerrillas and their supporters to believe that the electoral process would not be completely fair.

Polls conducted in the months before the elections revealed the existence of large numbers of uncommitted voters. In a survey conducted by the Public Opinion Institute of the University of Central America in San Salvador (IUDOP) between 5 and 13 February 1994, 10 per cent of the respondents said they would not vote for any candidate and 23 per cent said they did not know for whom they would vote. The same poll indicated that 35 per cent favored Calderón Sol, 17 per cent preferred Zamora and 10 per cent planned to vote for Fidel Chavez Mena of the PDC (Christian Democratic Party). Most prior surveys disclosed that Calderón Sol was the most popular candidate, but that he did not have enough votes to win the presidential election outright.⁴

The election was fraught with difficulties, despite extensive technical and logistical assistance from ONUSAL (the United Nations Observer Mission in El Salvador), foreign governments and other international organizations. Criticism concentrated upon the electoral registry and the new system of identification cards devised for the election. A poll sponsored by the UN in mid-1993 revealed that 786,000 voters did not have electoral identification cards.

Out of a total of 2.7 million registered Salvadorans (the estimate offered by ONUSAL), 300,000 voters had not received their cards by election day. 75,000 citizens had had their applications rejected, often because their birth certificates were not on file with the Electoral Tribunal. While municipal archives had been destroyed during the war, many citizens were unable to register because Mayors, most of whom belonged to ARENA, did not deliver copies of birth certificates to the Electoral Tribunal. Finally, 300,000 electoral identification cards were never retrieved; according to many opposition sectors, these were not just duplicates or simply belonged to individuals that were deceased or had left the country. They argued that these shortcomings demonstrated that the ARENA-dominated government did not want to hold a competitive and transparent election.

Other problems marred the first and second rounds of voting. According to ONUSAL, approximately 25,000 voters with electoral identification cards were prevented from voting because the numbers of their documents did not correspond with those of the lists of voters contained by polling centers. Other organizations claimed that as many as 100,000 to 250,000 citizens were deprived of their suffrage rights in this manner.

The organization of polling centers and stations also added to confusion on election day. In each voting district, one polling center existed alongside a large number of polling stations; the former distributed lists of voters to the latter, where citizens cast their ballots. Though not a problem in lightly populated areas, this arrangement became cumbersome in large districts, like San Salvador, where 30 per cent of the electorate resides. When combined with the shortage of buses and other vehicles to transport voters, many citizens became disillusioned and were unable to vote on election day.⁶ Voter apathy, registry and polling station flaws led to a turnout rate of 52 per cent in the first election and 46 per cent in the run-off.

How a party associated with death squad activities and the wealthiest social sectors can triumph in elections, challenges sociological theories of voting. One way to begin resolving this puzzle is by recognizing that Calderón Sol is viewed as an efficacious and practical administrator. The pre-election poll cited above discloses that 52 per cent of the respondents stated "he has fulfilled his promises" or that "he does good work." His party's alleged ties with the death squads and links with the wealthy of El Salvador apparently did not taint his effort to become its next president.

It may very well be the case that the political inexperience of the guerrillas, coupled with the collapse of the Marxist-influenced development schemes in the post- Cold War era, made large numbers of citizens nervous. Since it won the presidency in 1989, ARENA has delivered on its campaign promises to end the war and to reignite the economy. And, since its inception in the early 1980s, ARENA has become known for its discipline. In contrast to the PDC, which held the presidency between 1984-1989, ARENA managed, until late 1994, to remain untainted by charges of corruption. Unlike the CD/FMLN/MNR, it also has a large number of seasoned politicians and activists at its disposal to mobilize the electorate. For many undecided and/or centrist voters, Calderón Sol and ARENA, more broadly, represented that most viable alternative with which to maintain economic and political stability.

Electoral Laws

Since promulgation of the constitution in 1983, presidents are elected to serve five- year terms. Re-election of presidents is prohibited by the constitution. If a candidate fails to obtain an absolute majority of the valid vote (which equals the total number of popular votes minus those that are annulled, blank or abstained) in the election, the Supreme Electoral Tribunal will convene a run-off between the two candidates that attract the largest numbers of valid vote. The 1993 Electoral Code stipulates that this second round of voting must be scheduled within 30 days of the official declaration of the first round of voting. The candidate that then obtains the largest number of votes is declared president of the Republic.

According to the Electoral Code, the 84 members of the Legislative Assembly are elected through the largest remainders version of proportional representation. 64 deputies are elected in 14 departments; 20 are elected in a national, at-large district. Legislative Deputies serve 3 year terms and are eligible for re-election. In the aftermath of the elections, ONUSAL and other organizations called on the government to reform the electoral process. The US Citizens Observer Mission (USCEOM), in particular, suggested that a single, national registry be created on the basis of the electoral and the civil registries and that citizens be automatically furnished with a multi-purpose identification card. It also recommended that citizens be allowed to cast ballots in neighborhood precincts and that the Supreme Electoral Tribunal be de-politicized "so that all magistrates and other officials be competent and impartial professionals rather than political party representatives."⁶ Whether and how the Electoral Code shall be reformed remains to be seen.

Notes

1. For the most insightful discussions of the compromise reached in El Salvador, see Enrique Baloyra, "Salvaging El Salvador," *Journal of Democracy*, 3(2) (April 1992); and Terry Lynn Karl, "El Salvador's Negotiated Revolution," *Foreign Affairs*, 71(2) (Spring 1992). The most comprehensive

- book treatment of these issues is: Tommie Sue Montgomery, *Revolution in El Salvador: From Civil Strife to Civil Peace*, 2nd ed. (Westview Press: Boulder, 1982, 1995).
2. Comisión de la Verdad, 1992-1993, *De la locura a la esperanza: la guerra de 12 (Mos en El Salvador)* (San José: DEL 1993), p. 78. Also, see America's Watch, *El Salvador's Decade of Terror: Human Rights since the Assassination of Archbishop Romero*. (Yak University Press, New Haven, 1991).
 3. Estimate is from James Dunkerley, *The Pacification of Central America: Political Change in the Isthmus, 1987-1993* (Verso: London, 1994), p. 47.
 4. *Proceso* (San Salvador), No. 601 (3 March 1994). This survey is based upon a sample of 1,835 adults drawn from the country's 14 provinces. It has a statistical margin of error of plus or minus 4 per cent. Respondents were interviewed in their homes. (IUDOP is the most prestigious of the Salvadoran polling organizations. It began to conduct surveys in the early 1980s, during the height of the civil war).
 5. The ONUSAL estimate and the information about polling centers are from, "Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Observer Mission in El Salvador," UN Report No. S/1994/375 (31 March 1994). All other estimates in this and the prior paragraphs are from, "Post Election Update: Irregularities, Abstentionism and Prospects for Electoral Reform," El Salvador Information Project, Annex 1 (18 June 1994).
 6. "Findings of the Field Teams of the US Citizens Elections Observer Mission," Interim Report (29 April 1994), p. 11.