

A WEB

Assoeiaaioa al World Eleclion B o ï e s

Informe Preliminar del Programa del Visitante Electoral de A-WEB en las Elecciones Presidenciales, Generales y Consulta Popular de la República del Ecuador

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20 de Febrero, 2017 Elaborado por A-WEB

Preliminary Report A-WEB Election Visitor Program (Pichincha)

1. General Feedback

A-WEB would like to thank the CNE for their hospitality and excellent support in the preparation of this program. All observers felt safe and secure while observing the voting, counting and tabulation process and were positively surprised by the welcoming attitude of the coordinators, polling station staff, and members of the military and police who supported the A-WEB observers in understanding the voting process in the Republic of Ecuador. There was no discrimination against any observers and all were granted access to the precincts and polling stations they visited. The general feedback received from A-WEB observers was that citizens were enthusiastic and that voting proceeded peacefully and orderly.

The advance team that arrived in Quito on January 29th began the observation by meeting the CNE to prepare for the observation mission and the participants. The CNE has prepared multiple simulations and training programs for the advance team to ensure that their knowledge of the Ecuadorian electoral system has a strong foundation in order to guarantee that the participants of the mission has a clear understanding of the system. A clear understanding of the system will assist the participants while observing the elections. The training programs were extensive and deep and the advance team was able to learn about the electoral system and ask multiple questions regarding the system.

The 2017 Election Visitor Program (EVP) of Ecuador of A-WEB invited 36 participants from 17 countries to participate in this program. The EVP in Ecuador consisted of a day-long briefing session to train the participants upon their arrival on the electoral system of Ecuador. The participants were handed a checklist that they are required to fill out during their observation of the elections. The participants were required to visit 6 electoral precincts and observe at least 12 polling stations (1 male and 1 female per electoral precinct). The participants were expected to have knowledge on the electoral system of Ecuador in order to better understand the system in order to observe the elections in a neutral manner

2. Opening of Precincts and Juntas Receptoras del Voto (JRV)

Observers were dispatched to 10 Precincts in the Quito cantón to observe the opening process of the JRV. Among the 10 Precincts, 2 opened on time at 07:00hrs, 2 between 07:00hrs and 07:30hrs and the rest after 07:30 hrs in the morning. The two most frequent cited reasons for not opening on time were lack of staff and delay of the setup process due to inexperience of the JRV staff. In addition, the setup of the voting booth/Mallot box often took a lot longer than expected.

All observers noted the presence of military officers as a calming and supporting factor during the opening process. While the presence of military can be intimidating, in this case the officers helped finish the setup process and often advised JRV staff on the correct positioning of the voting booths in order to safeguard the secrecy of the vote. Moreover, in some of the Precincts visited they helped guide voters to their JRV and ensured orderly lines in front of JRVs.

At no visited JRV was electoral material missing and the electoral kits were received in time. The majority of JRVs counted all received ballot papers prior to opening and after finishing the setup one of the setup forms was pasted to the wall of the JRV. There was, however, some confusion as to who had to sign the form and as a consequence some of the forms were missing the necessary signatures.

In conclusion, opening was often delayed but usually proceeded orderly.

3. Voting at the Juntas Receptoras del Voto (JRV)

Voting at the JRVs proceeded orderly and peacefully. In Precincts with many JRVs observers observed long lines, especially in the morning. Nevertheless, the voting process progressed as stated in the applicable laws and regulations. Voters' identification documents were verified, all five ballot papers were handed to the voter and the voter was guided to the voting booth by the JRV staff. In general, the JRV staff seemed more assured with their tasks throughout the voting process than during the setup in the morning.

Some observers noted the absence of delegates from political organizations and national observers in the majority of JRVs visited. Observers found that heightened presence by the above mentioned persons could increase the democratic legitimacy of the electoral process.

The secrecy of the vote was overall preserved. Only in a few JRVs were voting booths placed in a way that secrecy could have been compromised. However, the presence of military officers helped to maintain the secrecy of the vote for each voter. Furthermore, the Help Desks for priority voting (Mesa de Atención Preferente) were mostly equipped with secrecy screens to ensure disabled voters voting outside the JRV could also mark their ballots in secret.

Observers reported isolated incidents at a few JRVs whereby a voter who was not registered at that JRV was allowed to vote or given a second ballot paper after the first one was spoiled. In such cases the JRV staff contacted the Coordinator of the Precinct to ask for advice and the situation was resolved.

The majority of observers evaluated the voting booth/ballot box negatively. The main points of criticism were instability and size. At several JRVs the footing of the voting booth was damaged so that the voting booth became unstable and started leaning towards one side. Insufficient taping of the cardboard construct contributed to that instability. In addition, the two separate ballot boxes could barely hold all the ballot papers of a JRV. The two compartments were already full around noon and JRV staff members had to push the ballot papers down with a stick to ensure more ballot papers could be inserted. Moreover, voters seemed to be insecure as to which compartment to insert which ballot paper and occasionally inserted their papers either into the wrong one or all ballot papers into the same compartment. In JRVs located outdoors voting booths/ballot boxes could sometimes not withstand the windy conditions and fell over.

In addition, the transparency of the ballot box was criticized since it could violate the secrecy of the vote. Especially the marked ballot papers of the first few voters were visible because they often unfolded in the respective compartment. Observers therefore recommend using a semi-translucent or opaque ballot box in the next elections.

Many JRVs were not accessible for disabled voters. Precincts equipped with a Help Desk for priority voting thus helped this category of voters to vote in a location accessible for them. The Help Desk was always manned and staff was easily recognizable thanks to their pink vests. However, disabled voters were at a disadvantage at Precincts without a Help Desk.

4. Closing and Counting

Upon the end of voting and at the sounds of the alarm, JRV staff proceeded to end the voting process and smoothly move on to the counting process. Of the polling stations observed, the A-WEB delegation has observed that the counting process was respected by both the polling station committees and the political party observers. Although the counting process of the ballots were done in a different manner than what was expected, the actual counting procedures followed the electoral law almost exactly.

For most of the polling stations that were observed, the order of counting proceeded as follows: Presidential, Referendum, National Assembly, Provincial seats in the Assembly, and the Andean Parliament. At some polling stations, there appeared to be some confusion as to the order of the counting process, including when to pack the unused ballots and send the counting record (Acta de Escrutinio) to the RTPA. At times, the yellow envelope containing the presidential results would often not go straight to the RTPA for scanning. The observers concluded that there was a lack of consistency between the polling stations. For example, one polling station will be doing everything as stipulated in the Electoral Code by beginning with the Presidential ballots, yet the polling station located right next to them started counting on the Referendum. The observers stated that perhaps it would be more efficient to have a more cohesive counting system that is followed by all the polling stations. However, majority of the closing and counting was done accordingly.

The counting process remained transparent for all stakeholders as the floor was open to any observers that wished to watch over the counting. By requiring the JRV staff to record the votes on a large paper, viewable to anyone in the room, clearly reading the names of the candidate out loud, and showing the stakeholders the actual ballot the transparency of the counting process was guaranteed. One of the most impressive aspects of counting was how timely the entire process started. The alarm that initiates the start of counting guarantees that counting starts at the same time throughout the entire precinct and is a systematic way of letting the voters know that voting has officially ended, which ultimately prevents any confusion amongst the voters. In conclusion, the counting process was a peaceful process that upheld the transparency of the elections and was organized in an orderly manner.

5. Transmission Process

Although the transmission process started a little later than expected, the transmission process was evaluated quite positively. The safety of the police man escorting the counting record (Acta de Escrutinio) to the RTPA ensures that the act is not tampered with. It was suggested by an observer that along with the police man, perhaps someone from the JRV staff accompany the police man on his way to the RTPA. During the scanning process, it was evaluated that the RTPA staff members were quite competent in utilizing the scanner and the program. The protocol of accepting the counting record was done accordingly to the electoral code and the speed and quality of the scanner expedited the transmission process by efficiently scanning the counting record and transmitting it to the CPR.

The CPR proceeded as expected and followed the systematic protocol that was laid out by the electoral code. Upon receiving the physical copy of the counting record, it was scanned and verified in the system established by the CNE and the swift transmission of the counting record with the scanners played a role in getting the results in a timely manner. The digitalization process and quality control located in the CPR proved to be essential in providing the results to the public. The staff in the CPR were properly prepared and knew the procedures well. It was apparent that the workers in the CPR received proper training and had a clear view on their roles in the CPR.

Utilizing the RTS-1000 has helped the processing of the results by utilizing an advanced scanner that allows the counting records to be easily recognized by the text recognition program which assisted with processing the results. The speed and quality of the scanned image plays an important role in processing the results and it appears that the RTS- 1000 scanner has fulfilled its role in doing so.