



NDI
*National Democratic
Institute for
International
Affairs*

USAID Final Report

**PARAGUAY: ELECTION
OBSERVATION
May - June 1993**

**Grant No. LAG-0591-G-00-3014-00
May 1993 - September 1994**

PD-ABN-092

90929

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This program report summarizes the international election observation program that the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) conducted in Paraguay for the 1993 presidential elections. A comprehensive, book-length report on the entire electoral process, including the role of international observers and domestic groups, accompanies this report.

SUMMARY

In May 1993, NDI organized an international election observer delegation to the national elections in Paraguay. The delegation, sponsored jointly by NDI and the Council of Freely Elected Heads of Government and led by former President Jimmy Carter, represented the culmination of a two-month program in support of Paraguay's election process. The potential for a close election and rumors of fraud or military intervention had prompted political leaders in Paraguay to request NDI assistance.

The NDI/Council delegation, comprised of 30 observers from 15 countries arrived in Asuncion, Paraguay, during the week of the elections and met with government officials, political and civic leaders, candidates, military officials and members of the Central Electoral Board. The day before the elections, a majority of the delegation deployed to the interior. On election day, observers visited more than 300 polling sites throughout the country.

BACKGROUND

NDI began work in Paraguay in 1988 during the Stroessner regime. In August 1988, the Asuncion based Center for Democratic Studies (*Centro de Estudios Democráticos*--CED) was established with NDI support to assist political leaders and parties advocating democratic reform. The CED board included leaders of the major opposition parties, as well as democratic opponents of Stroessner within the ruling Colorado Party.

After the February 2, 1989, coup in Paraguay, NDI sponsored two Chileans, who played leading roles in the Chilean plebiscite campaign, to visit Paraguay. With their assistance and a grant from NDI, CED leaders conducted a comprehensive election support program, including a civic education campaign, public opinion survey, pollwatcher training and an independent parallel tabulation (PVT). To complement domestic efforts, NDI sponsored a 19-member international delegation led by Canadian Senator B.A. Graham, Christian Democratic Party President Eduardo Frei of Chile and U.S. Representative Bruce Morrison to observe the elections.

In 1990, NDI provided the CED with a grant that enabled the Center to conduct nearly 200 seminars and 13 panel debates on local government affairs and electoral systems. The program was designed to increase public understanding of and participation in the May 1991 municipal elections. The CED also trained pollwatchers for these elections. The 1991 elections provided the first opportunity for Paraguayans to elect leaders at the municipal level.

For the May 1991 municipal elections, the CED, with NDI support, trained nearly 12,000 pollwatchers from the major political parties in the country. As it did for the 1989 national elections, NDI sent an international observer delegation to monitor the proceedings on election day. Senator Graham, Representative Morrison and Andres Pastrana, former mayor of Bogota, Colombia, led the 16-member delegation.

Shortcomings existed in the administrative preparations for the municipal elections. These were most evident on election day, which was marked by confusion, if not chaos, in many areas. Elections did not occur in 14 municipalities because voting lists or materials did not arrive on time or did not arrive at all. Problems on election day caused 15 more elections to be postponed for one month. International observers concluded that the problems on election day were due more to a lack of administrative experience than to political malfeasance.

The experience of the 1991 elections, the potential for a close election, and rumors of fraud or military intervention prompted political leaders in Paraguay to request NDI assistance for the May 1993 presidential elections. NDI responded by sending a pre-election delegation to meet with political leaders and electoral officials to investigate ways in which NDI could support the process.

Based on the delegation's recommendations, NDI decided to send an international observer delegation to the national elections. These elections were critical to Paraguay because they provided the first opportunity for a fair and competitive national election and a peaceful transfer of power from one elected government to another. With a separate grant from the National Endowment for Democracy, NDI provided financial and technical support to SAKÄ, a consortium of Paraguayan nongovernmental organizations, to conduct a PVT.

The objectives of NDI's 1993 program were to help promote confidence in the electoral process and help deter irregularities through the presence of an international observer delegation.

PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

On May 9, 1993, Paraguayans elected a new president and congress in the most competitive election in their country's history. Juan Carlos Wasmosy of the long-ruling Colorado Party won 40 percent of the votes edging out his closest competitors, Domingo Laino of the Authentic Radical Liberal Party (*Partido Liberal Radical Auténtico* - PLRA) and Guillermo Caballero of the National Encounter Movement (*Encuentro Nacional* - EN). The Liberal and National Encounter candidates won a combined majority in Congress.

The potential for a close election fostered concerns by the opposition parties about government-orchestrated fraud or even military intervention. Indeed, during the Colorado Party primary, the military intervened when a rival candidate appeared to have won the elections. Opposition leaders warned that fraud could also occur before or after election day and noted that the registration list and the counting procedure were particularly susceptible to manipulation. Therefore, political leaders encouraged NDI to provide assistance to Paraguayans to ensure a more transparent electoral process.

NDI responded by sending a delegation of five members to Paraguay in March 1993 to evaluate the possibility of sending an observer delegation for the national elections in May. Members of the delegation included: Sally Shelton, NDI board member; Gabriel Diaz Berbel, a member of the Spanish Parliament; and Pedro Antonio Gomez de la Fuente, the acting director of the Argentine National Electoral Commission. Senior Program Officer Mark Feierstein and Program Officer Steven Griner accompanied the group. Griner coordinated the activities of the group and remained in Paraguay through election day.

The group met with three presidential candidates, members of the election commission, civic organizers, members of the press, the military and the church. In addition to the meetings in Asuncion, the group traveled to two cities in the interior to speak with local election officials and candidates. After listening to the concerns of these leaders, NDI delegates recommended that the Institute provide assistance to political parties on checking the registration list and send an observer delegation on election day to contribute to the transparency of the election process.

Following these recommendations, NDI sent two Panamanian voter registry experts to Paraguay in April 1993 to review the political parties' procedures for checking the registration list. The experts, members of the Panamanian Christian Democratic Party, met with political party members, election officials and members of the OAS observer delegation. While the experts concurred with these officials that the list could be flawed and adequate access was not provided by the Central Electoral Board to check for errors, they also agreed with the opposition leaders that the potential problems in the list were not cause for a postponement of the elections.

On May 5, NDI and the Council sent a 30-member international observer delegation to Paraguay. President Jimmy Carter led the delegation and Senator B.A. Graham from Canada and Rodrigo Carazo, former president of Costa Rica, served as co-leaders. The NDI/Council observers met with candidates, election officials and members of the security forces.

On election day, the delegation observed the balloting and counting in six major cities -- Asuncion, Colonel Oviedo, Ciudad del Este, Concepcion, Encarnacion and Pedro Juan Caballero -- as well as in smaller surrounding municipalities. The leaders of the delegation met with President Andres Rodriguez and key members of his cabinet the morning of the elections, at which time Rodriguez assured the delegation that his administration would honor the outcome, no matter who won. In a lunch meeting on the same day, the three major candidates also pledged to accept the outcome of the elections.

The international observers covered 333 voting tables and surveyed 44 voting sites. Observers spoke with polling-site supervisors who covered 1,865 tables or roughly 21 percent of the voting tables in the country. In the NDI/Council preliminary post-election statement, the delegation noted that the polls were well administered and voters cast their ballots free of intimidation. According to the post-election statement, “[t]he Paraguayans who went to the polls in record numbers affirmed their deep and abiding commitment to the democratic process.” The outcome reflected the will of the electorate.

The delegation also expressed concern about irregularities such as the arbitrary closing of the borders, that may have disenfranchised many Paraguayans, and the sabotage of the telephone lines that SAKÃ utilized to transmit vote count results for its PVT.

CONCLUSIONS

The comprehensive observation mission helped Paraguayan leaders avoid fraud before and on election day and/or overt military intervention in the electoral process. Despite fears that the registration list was flawed and would cause the disenfranchisement of tens of thousands of voters, parties were able to identify their supporters and inform them of where to vote. The efforts of SAKÃ complemented the NDI/Council delegation’s work by providing accurate and timely results and providing a visible presence through its thousands of volunteers, identified by their SAKÃ shirts.

Of the three Paraguayan elections that NDI has observed, the 1993 national elections were the best administered and best organized. The NDI/Council delegation noted that “throughout the country, the elections were generally conducted in a peaceful and orderly manner. Particularly in urban areas, the elections were administered properly, in contrast to the 1991 municipal elections when thousands of voters were unable to locate their voting sites on election day.” The NDI/Council delegation believed that the outcomes of the elections reflected the collective will of the people of Paraguay.

It can be said that the completion of the 1993 national elections marked the end of Paraguay’s transition to democracy. The new political pluralism that emerged from these elections presented a number of challenges to Paraguayan democracy, including the creation of a strong legislative branch to oversee the executive, a greater role for local and regional governments, and civilian control of the military. Paraguay now faces the challenge of democratic consolidation, a process that requires dedication and cooperation among the Paraguayan people and their elected representatives at all levels.