GUATEMALA 2023 ELECTIONS

A Risk Assessment on the Online Information Space
Guatemala 2023 Elections:
A Risk Assessment on the Online Information Space

May 2023

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Guatemala will hold its general elections on June 25, 2023, voting for president and vice president, members of Congress, mayors, councils, and 20 seats in the Central American Parliament.¹ The top two candidates in the presidential race will likely advance to a runoff, scheduled for August 20.²

There are about 30 presidential candidates, but the latest polls have identified four top candidates.³ Some of the top candidates are aligned with and supported by the current administration and President Alejandro Giammattei, who is not eligible to run due to a single-term restriction. Most concerning, the government has used its excessive power over judicial processes to influence decisions and block certain candidates.

These actions have contributed to growing skepticism within the international community regarding the independence of the Tribunal Supremo Electoral (TSE, Supreme Electoral Tribunal), the key agency responsible for the election process. Concerns about the TSE’s independence raise questions regarding whether the election process is free and fair. Corruption and impunity continue to be serious issues.

Facebook is the most popular online platform, with 7.98 million users in Guatemala. YouTube is next, with 7.64 million users. TikTok is becoming increasingly popular, especially among the younger generation; the platform currently has about 6 million users. Instagram and Twitter are next with 2.85 million and 896,000 users, respectively.⁴ Political ads can only run on platforms approved by the election administrator.⁵

Facebook and Instagram are the only ones approved thus far, and both have activated tools that show a disclaimer on political ads.⁶ Campaigns officially kicked off on March 27, 2023. They will last for two months until the blackout period starts 48 hours before the elections, during which candidates are prohibited from campaigning.⁷

Online narratives before the official start focused on discrediting competition, making criminal accusations, and spreading disinformation. For the next two months, disinformation trends are expected to continue, especially targeted attacks on journalists, human-rights defenders, women, LGBTQI+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex) persons, and indigenous communities. Conservative and religious narratives, such as anti-abortion rhetoric, hate speech and populist rhetoric are also expected to surface.⁸

Note: IRI has opted not to name our interviewees to protect the privacy and security of our in-country partners.
Social media companies have not publicly commented on the upcoming Guatemalan elections, both Meta and TikTok have an on-the-ground fact-checking partner in Agence France-Presse (AFP), part of Poynter’s International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN).\(^9\)

Although Guatemalan law guarantees freedom of expression, including freedom of media and press, the government does not always respect this right. **Independent media and journalists have been targeted** for exposing corruption and other crimes. Freedom House rates the level of free and independent media at one point out of four.\(^10\)

**Elections-related violence** has long been an issue in Guatemala. Since its shift to democracy, violent instances have included the assassination of candidates, assaults on election bodies, and voter intimidation. There are higher risks of violence on Election Day after poll closure and during the pre-runoff period.\(^11\)

Threats of foreign interference have not been identified as an issue.

The assessment indicates that Guatemala is up against a difficult two-month election campaign. The risks identified herein pose a significant danger to the credibility of the electoral process. These difficulties underline the importance of remaining vigilant and emphasize the necessity for a collective effort to tackle the vulnerabilities and guarantee a free and fair election process.

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# COUNTRY PROFILE

<table>
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<th>Parameter</th>
<th>Value</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>18,031,570&lt;sup&gt;12&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobile Phone Owners</td>
<td>22.47 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voting Age (18)</td>
<td>10,933,585&lt;sup&gt;13&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet Users</td>
<td>10.86 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Registered Voters</td>
<td>9,097,439&lt;sup&gt;14&lt;/sup&gt; (as of February 18, 2023)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Media Users</td>
<td>8.70 million</td>
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Map of Central America, with Guatemala highlighted.

- **60.4%** Population with Access to the Internet in 2023
- **57.25%** Average Turnout<sup>15</sup>
- **52.9%** Population in Urban Area<sup>16</sup>
- **31** Political Parties

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.
<sup>15</sup> Ibid.
<sup>16</sup> Kemp. “Digital 2023: Guatemala.”
Guatemala has three branches of government: executive, legislative, and judiciary. The president is the head of government and chief of state (current President Alejandro Giammattei was elected in 2019). The executive branch also consists of the vice president and a cabinet of ministers. The country has a unicameral Congreso de la República (Congress of the Republic) with 160 seats. Judicial power is vested in the Corte Suprema de Justicia (CSJ, Supreme Court of Justice), which includes 13 magistrates selected by the Congress for five-year terms. The branch also includes Appellate, First Instance and Peace Courts, as well as the Constitutional Court. Freedom House’s *Freedom in the World* report, which assesses the state of civil and political rights, rated Guatemala as partly free in both 2021 and 2022, though the country’s score declined by two points from 51 to 49.19

The electoral legal framework of Guatemala is governed mainly by the constitution and the Electoral and Political Parties Law (Decree 1-85 and the successive reforms of 1987, 1989, 2004, 2006 and 2016).20 The TSE is the main election administration body. The comptroller general is another key body in the process of ensuring free and fair elections, overseeing the use of public funds and issuing certificates to confirm that those wishing to run for office are not under investigation. The attorney general’s Special Prosecutor’s Office for Election Crimes holds investigative power over infringement of voters’ rights, illegal campaign financing, voter suppression, and other crimes related to the election process. The Supreme Court and the Constitutional Court play an oversight role and, in some cases, make final decisions on candidate eligibility.  

The president is elected to a single four-year term by absolute majority vote. If no presidential candidate wins an absolute majority in the first round, the top two candidates proceed to a runoff. One hundred and sixty members of Congress are elected to four-year terms through a proportional-representation, closed-list (tabulated using the D’Hondt method) system. Of the 160 seats in Congress, 128 representatives are elected directly from Guatemala’s 22 departamentos (administrative regions). The remaining 32 are national-level representatives selected through proportional representation.22

The age for voting eligibility in Guatemala is 18. As of February 18, 2023, there were 9,097,439 registered voters (higher than the 8,150,221 in 2019).23 Eligible citizens need to register through the TSE website. Citizens outside the country can cast ballots for presidential and vice-presidential candidates. The first out-of-country elections were held in 2019, after the reform was passed in 2016.25

Corruption and impunity continue to rise under the Giammattei administration. With the previous president’s closure of the International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG)—the major independent investigative body backed by the United Nations—the government has gained power over anticorruption institutions and the judiciary, creating obstacles to the effective investigation and prosecution of offenses such as corruption and violations of human rights by public officials. Government influence has been used to undermine specific candidates and create a hostile environment for those pursuing justice. Judges, journalists, and activists have fled the country amid fears of violence and prosecution.26

### UPCOMING ELECTION

On June 25, 2023, Guatemala will hold general elections, voting for president and vice president, 160 members of Congress, mayors, and councils in all 340 municipalities and 20 seats in the Central American Parliament. The presidential race is the only one that can advance to runoff if no candidate obtains more than 50 percent of votes. In that case a runoff will be held between the top two candidates on August 20.27

There are around 30 presidential candidates registered with the TSE but, as of May, only four were polling above 5 percent.28 Excluded from these polls are two former top candidates—longtime anticorruption activist and Maya Indigenous candidate Thelma Cabrera and her running mate, former human rights ombudsman Jordán Rodas, and of Roberto Arzú, son of the former President Álvaro Arzú— for whom the TSE rejected the candidate registrations.29 This has caused concern in the international community and doubts about free and fair elections. Registration has closed and the election campaign officially began on March 27. It will run for two months before closing on June 23, two days before the elections.30 With two of the top candidates eliminated, the latest polls from May 3 leave the electorate with the following top four candidates.31

- **Sandra Torres** (former first lady to President Álvaro Colom). Party: National Unity of Hope. 18.4 percent.
- **Carlos Pineda** Party: Citizens Prosperity. 18 percent.

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23 “Republic of Guatemala Election Guide.”
26 “Freedom in the World 2023 Guatemala.”
27 Cuevas. “Calendario de Elecciones Generales 2023 en Guatemala.”
According to the poll, 34.5 percent are undecided and 19.7 percent plan to vote for other candidates.

### Key Dates

**2023**

**January 20**
Call for nominations

**March 25**
Closing of nominations and candidate registration

**March 27**
Beginning of the electoral campaign and closing of voter registration

**June 23**
Closing of the electoral campaign and prohibition on campaign material

**June 25**
Elections take place

**August 20**
Runoff elections

**June 25-30**
Hearing on challenges to election results

### Elections in 2019

President Alejandro Giammattei of the Vamos Party won a runoff in August 2019, gaining 58 percent of the votes against Sandra Torres of UNE. Though the results were deemed credible, Organization of American States (OAS) election observers outlined irregularities including disturbances, ballot burning, voter intimidation, and acts of violence. As in 2023, some of the top presidential candidates were disqualified from the race. The Constitutional Court declared two top candidates, Zury Ríos and Thelma Aldana, ineligible to run for office. Ríos was disqualified based on a law prohibiting her former dictator father’s family members from running for office. Former Attorney General Aldana was barred and forced to flee the country due to death threats and harassment after famously leading the case against former President Otto Pérez Molina. The TSE took Mario Estrada off the ballot after his arrest on drug-trafficking charges in the United States. Election observers reported instances of violence both before and after the elections. OAS reported assassinations of nine political actors and four other violent attacks at the pre-election stage. Violence also erupted after polls closed on Election Day, leaving one partisan dead and nine police officers injured.

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INTERNET FREEDOM AND ONLINE REGULATORY LANDSCAPE

There are no restrictions around internet adoption in Guatemala and access to the internet has been rising since 2000, reaching 60 percent in 2023.\(^{37}\) There have been no reports of government manipulation or censorship of online content or monitoring communications beyond legally authorized instances.\(^{38}\)

The Electoral and Political Parties Law (LEPP), part of the 2016 elections reform, prohibits campaigns from buying ads directly from the media. According to the new regulation, campaigns are required to purchase media time through the TSE, which divides time equally across the campaigns. The new campaign-financing rule sets the private campaign ceiling at $1 to fifty cents USD per registered voter. The state contribution is set at $2 USD for every valid vote that a political party that passed the 5-percent threshold received for presidential and vice-presidential candidates.\(^{39}\) Following the 2016 reform with the agreement 603-2022, the TSE has granted permission for political parties to advertise on two influential social networks: Facebook, which is the primary platform used by internet users in Guatemala, and Instagram.\(^{40}\) Nevertheless, candidates need to register their political accounts with TSE’s Media Monitoring Unit. Twitter, a platform frequently used by politicians and their supporters, does not have authorization for political advertising.\(^{41}\)

In 2019, candidates relied heavily on their personal accounts to promote their campaigns. The significance of social media was further heightened by the revised regulations for securing media airtime, which stipulated that the TSE would only pay broadcasters 20 percent of the prevailing market rate to air campaign ads.\(^{42}\)

PLATFORM POLICIES

1 FACEBOOK

Although Facebook leads with the most users in the country, and its ad reach stands at 44.5 percent of the population in 2023, its potential ad reach in Guatemala has decreased by 5.9 percent (500,000 people) between 2022 and early 2023, according to Meta’s own ad tools.\(^{43}\) According to Meta’s policy, Guatemala is among the countries that require authorization and a disclaimer to run ads on politics or elections.\(^{44}\) Meta’s on-the-ground fact-checking partner AFP is part of Poynter’s IFCN.\(^{45}\) On February 7, 2023, Meta’s Latin America team conducted a virtual training for political parties on Meta’s policies and guidelines.\(^{46}\)

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\(^{41}\) “Acuerdo Número 603-2022.”


\(^{43}\) Kemp. “Digital 2023: Guatemala.”

\(^{44}\) “Availability for Ads about Social Issues, Elections or Politics.”

\(^{45}\) “A List of Our Independent Fact-Checking Partners, by Country.”

2. TWITTER

Journalists interviewed by IRI have expressed concerns regarding the use of Twitter for targeted hate speech and attacks. While in the process of revamping its policies and practice toward elections, Twitter currently does not have a special reporting mechanism for elections-related content. Thus, Twitter has directed Guatemala’s election administration inquiry to its regular reporting systems to address content removal.47

3. TIKTOK

Although TikTok prohibits political ads, its misinformation/disinformation prohibition policy still plays an important role due to the high-level engagement from candidates on the platform.48 Young people are moving to TikTok in increasing numbers.49 Due to a lack of regulatory oversight over its use, TikTok has been utilized by politicians using personal accounts and influencers.50 TikTok’s on-the-ground fact-checking partner is AFP.51 The platform also cooperates with local nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and other partners to identify content that might violate TikTok’s community guidelines. Additionally, TikTok works with the TSE to understand the electoral system, and is planning to launch a search tool that will direct users to authoritative information around the election.

Civil society and media organizations have expressed skepticism regarding social media companies’ willingness to put resources into improving their platforms’ online environment in Guatemala. They believe it is important to implement robust verification tools and have rapid-response mechanisms or channels for reporting inauthentic or malign behavior, as platforms often respond after the damage has already been done.52

CANDIDATE BEHAVIOR

Due to the lack of regulation around TikTok, candidates have been transitioning to the platform and unofficially starting their campaigns before they are legally allowed to do so. The narrative before March 27 (the official start of campaigning) was mostly concentrated toward undermining competition, by spreading rumors and criminal accusations in an attempt to influence institutions to disallow candidates from running for elections. The government’s influence over judiciary and election institutions has led to barring three of the five top candidates from running, thus stifling fair and competitive elections in which a diverse set of candidates can run.

Although the final candidate narratives and behaviors will become clearer as the campaigns progresses, it is safe to assume that major narratives—such as corruption, lack of transparency, and attacks on journalists, women, and LGBTQI+ and Indigenous persons—will continue. With two of the three top candidates being female, growth in sexist and misogynistic rhetoric is expected.53

47 Anonymous representative from Twitter. Email exchange.
49 Anonymous representative from TikTok. Email exchange.
50 “Assessment Report Guatemalan Elections.”
51 “Safety Partners.”
53 Ibid.
MALIGN TRENDS ONLINE

The backsliding of democracy, and attacks on and weakening of democratic institutions, has been a growing trend since President Otto Perez Molina’s term (2012–2015), when the country’s largest corruption scandal to date forced both Molina and Vice President Roxana Baldetti to resign before completing their terms. Corruption continued under President Jimmy Morales (2016–2020) and intensified under the current Giammattei regime. Harassment and online and offline attacks have grown with the closure of the CICIG, which was charged with investigating illegal security groups and clandestine security organizations under President Morales. The main targets of these attacks are journalists, human-rights defenders, women, Indigenous people, and LGBTQI+ groups, and attacks have intensified further in the past two years. Conservative rhetoric has also been identified as one of the main tools for targeting these groups. The conservative and religious agenda has been widely used to promote anti-abortion, sexist, and anti-LGBTQI+ narratives. The ruling elite often uses derogatory names to refer to some of these targeted groups.

CITIZENS MOST LIKELY TO BE TARGETED

Attacks on Journalists

As identified through numerous reports and interviews with local civil-society and media organizations, journalists are primary targets of attacks from the government and pro-government forces. Both major and smaller media outlets, including independent and rural ones, have been subject to attacks from top-level officials in the Guatemalan government, including President Giammattei. The president has publicly accused journalists of soliciting private information about COVID-19 patients, questioned their reporting, and limited their access to government press conferences and events. Interviewed journalists from Laboratorio de Medios have confirmed being denied public information on presidential candidates for the 2023 elections. Although laws regulating these issues are progressive, the influence of the executive branch over the judiciary, including the Constitutional Court, gives the government unchecked power over these activities.

According to the 2022 U.S. State Department report on Guatemala, numerous journalists have disclosed being subjected to harassment and prosecution or were forced to leave the country after publishing critical work about influential individuals. Journalists have reported facing pressure, threats and retaliation from both public officials and criminal groups over their reporting. Independent journalists and media outlets also endured online attacks throughout the year. “These included hacking journalists’ private social media accounts, publishing stolen or falsified personal information, and conducting coordinated attempts to undermine specific journalists and media,” the report found. In the first six months of 2022 alone, “The Journalists Observatory of the Association of Journalists of Guatemala registered 66 cases of abuse of freedom of expression, including violence and restrictions against journalists. The Unit for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders—Guatemala (UDEFEGUA) registered 51 attacks against journalists and communicators during the same period.”

59 Ibid.
**Attacks on Human-Rights Defenders**

During the first two years of Giammattei's government, UDEFEGUA registered 2,057 attacks on human rights defenders and organizations, showing a dramatic increase from previous administrations.\(^\text{60}\) The crackdown on human-rights defenders and organizations has intensified after the new NGO law (Ley de Organizaciones no Gubernamentales para el Desarrollo y del Código Civil) passed in 2021. The law requires NGOs to re-register with the government, requires NGOs and independent media to provide information regarding their funding sources and, through vague rules, gives the government considerable power to close and prosecute NGOs. Instances of digital harassment and surveillance are widespread, frequently perpetrated by trolls and bots linked to the government and private organizations like the Foundation against Terrorism (FCT). Online attacks are often laced with misogyny targeting women's rights advocates. During the first six months of 2022, 45 percent of the attacks reported by UDEFEGUA against human rights defenders in Guatemala were directed toward women, a considerable increase from previous years.\(^\text{61}\)

**Vulnerable Groups**

Conservative rhetoric perpetuated by the ruling forces and their supporters targets women, Indigenous persons, and the LGBTQI+ community. Journalists and human rights defenders falling into those categories are victims of even more scrutiny. Both reports and interviews confirm disproportional attacks against these groups offline and online. Online targeting is often used to undermine these groups through racial slurs, sexist statements and homophobic and transphobic comments.\(^\text{62}\) According to the local journalists interviewed, as well as a U.S. Department of State report, NetCenters—collections of social media accounts that appear independent on the surface but work under one umbrella with the primary goal of spreading disinformation, manipulating online discourse and threatening individuals—are used for harassment and fat-shaming hate speech against women.\(^\text{63}\) Indigenous persons, in particular, face multiple forms of harassment, including disseminating false information and cultural appropriation online. LGBTQI+ individuals are often subjected to hate speech and threats online. The National Observatory for LGBTQI+ Rights reported 29 killings motivated by hate on grounds of sexual orientation or gender identity.\(^\text{64}\)

**INFORMATION INTEGRITY**

Government disinformation and political polarization are on the rise in Guatemala.\(^\text{65}\) Disinformation and smear campaigns are frequently used during elections. Candidates use platforms like Facebook and TikTok to attract supporters and discredit candidates by using influencers.

The groups most influenced by disinformation are those over 65 and under 23, as these groups are thought to lean toward a certain ideology and tend to fall under the influence of messaging curated to their interests. Campaigns are also believed to concentrate their disinformation efforts to further activate their supporters, as opposed to trying to change the minds of other voters.\(^\text{66}\)

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61. “Under Assault in Guatemala.”

62. Ibid.


The use of influencers, bots, and organic characters to spread fake news and disinformation is considered a serious issue, especially for the credibility of traditional and independent media and political actors with opposite views and interests. WhatsApp is also used to spread disinformation in certain communities. For example, in the Q’eqchi area, WhatsApp voice messages were used to spread disinformation in the Mayan language to reach people with low literacy levels. (Per WhatsApp policies, using the chat for election campaigns without permission can cause account bans, and the business version of the platform cannot be used by political candidates and campaigns).

In 2018, after Facebook, Instagram and Twitter removed millions of accounts in connection with spreading disinformation, certain groups have started engaging public figures who share similar views (usually conservative ones) to advance their agendas.

As mentioned, both IRI-interviewed organizations and the U.S. State Department report highlight the existence of NetCenters targeting journalists, independent judges and prosecutors through fake accounts on top social media platforms. NetCenters played a key role in intimidating journalists who reported on corruption in 2022, and remain a crucial part of the election process to discredit the media.

Independent media outlets lack the resources to keep up with the rapid response needed to address disinformation. Due to this, false narratives have become the way citizens are informed. Nevertheless, the alliance of independent media outlets has launched La Linterna, a collaborative journalism investigation project that works to counter misinformation and disinformation. Another organization, Plaza Publica, is running ConPruebas and a new fact-checking project that monitors candidates’ discourse on TikTok. It is aimed at analyzing candidates’ proposals and debunking disinformation and populist narratives. The project concentrates on large narratives, such as the death-penalty initiatives, providing free money to citizens, and false labor/economic opportunities. Although results are shared on all social media platforms, the organization is concentrating on candidate information disseminated through TikTok, as the platform has become more popular among candidates and has become a major source of information for persons between the ages of 16–29.

The Association for Development, Organization, Services and Sociocultural Studies (Doses) is another organization working to combat disinformation and ensure transparency around elections. Doses is committed to measuring traditional and social media trends and overseeing the TSE’s Media Monitoring Unit over equity in media access. Doses is also part of the Electoral Observation Mission (MOE-Gt), a consortium of seven nonprofit organizations dedicated to conducting independent validations of election results.

Organizations have expressed their interest in collaborating with social media platforms to provide data on accounts that are engaging in inauthentic behavior and spreading misinformation and disinformation.

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68 “Assessment Report Guatemalan Elections.”
70 “De-Formation Trend Assessment Report.”
72 “La Linterna Cinco Medios Contra la Desinformacion.” OCOTE, 15 Mar. 2023, agenciaoacote.com/blog/2023/03/15/la-linterna-cinco-medios-contra-la-
desinformacion/”
75 “Elecciones Generales Guatemala 2023: Qué es la Misión de Observación Electoral de Guatemala (MOE-Gt).” Asociacion DOSES, 22 Feb. 2023, asociaciondoses.medium.com/elecciones-generales-guatemala-2023-qu%C3%A9-es-la-misi%C3%B3n-de-observaci%C3%B3n-de-e16d0b3118e8
Guatemalans have been suffering from election-related violence since the country’s shift to democracy. These instances have included the murder of candidates, assaults on election bodies and voter intimidation. These issues have long affected voter turnout and undermined the integrity of election processes. If electoral bodies are perceived as lacking credibility, accusations of electoral fraud by political contestants can easily inflame tensions and fuel acts of violence. According to journalists interviewed, Guatemalans have been actively participating in the first round of elections with an average turnout at 57 percent for decades. But the journalists worry it will not be the case this year, as the current political environment has caused doubts about the credibility and authenticity of the election process. Outbreaks of violence occurred following the first round of elections in 2019, primarily due to technical issues in the transmission of election results and inadequate communication with the public while these problems were being resolved. According to the sources on the ground, there is a high chance of offline violence around Election Day and after. They note the existence of criminal groups (drug traffickers and cartels) linked to candidates, which causes a high level of intimidation, skepticism and fear, and other forms of voter suppression, and possibility impacts people’s choices.

**CONCLUSION**

This assessment has brought to light several vulnerabilities that threaten the upcoming June elections in Guatemala. These vulnerabilities fall into four main categories, each of which poses a significant risk to the integrity of the democratic process and could exacerbate polarization and destabilization within the country.

**Misuse of political power, weakening of democratic institutions, and corruption** continue to rise in Guatemala. The dismantling of the UN-backed anticorruption organization CICIG by former President Morales marked the beginning of the weakening of these institutions, which has allowed the current administration to abuse its power with greater impunity. The government’s recent actions regarding candidate elimination for the 2023 elections have created widespread skepticism and distrust in the election administration, further eroding public confidence in the democratic process.

The growing trend of **attacks against journalists, human-rights defenders, women, Indigenous populations and LGBTQI+ persons** poses severe threats to election integrity and beyond. These attacks are often perpetrated by government officials, politicians and criminal organizations, and have profoundly impacted the independence of the media, which plays a crucial role in ensuring free and fair elections. The flight of journalists and human-rights activists has further emboldened malign actors and undermined democracy in the country.

The rise of social media and the weakening of independent media have led to serious concerns about **information integrity** in the election process. Misinformation and disinformation have become common tactics used by candidates and their supporters, including using fake accounts and bot farms to target vulnerable groups and spread false information about opponents. Finally, there is a worrying trend of **offline violence**, particularly on Election Day and in the following weeks. Distrust in government institutions and the legitimacy of election results has led to violent incidents in the past, posing a serious threat to public safety and the country’s stability.

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Methodology

Overall, the assessment findings suggest that Guatemala is facing a challenging two-month election campaign. The identified risks pose a significant threat to the integrity of the electoral process, particularly in the online space, where vigilance will be crucial. These challenges underscore the need for a concerted effort to address the vulnerabilities and ensure that elections are conducted freely and fairly.

In order to ensure evidence-based information around the pre-election political environment and digital ecosystem in Guatemala, and to create a helpful tool for stakeholders (civil society, tech companies, international organizations, and others) IRI conducted an assessment between March-April 2023 by performing a desk review, interviewing IRI’s country team and local stakeholders, and sharing questionnaires with tech partners.

The desk research involved a review of relevant documents and materials such as country reports, previous human-rights situation analysis, election-reform assessments and demographic datasets. To fill the gaps identified during the desk review, the assessment team conducted interviews with local partners, including civil society, media organizations and journalists. The interviews had a structured approach to cover all relevant issues and validate information gathering during the desk research for greater accuracy.

Based on the desk review and interview results, the team conducted analytical work to evaluate existing data and new information received from the partners. Further, the assessment team performed quantitative analysis of demographic data to identify trends between 2019 (the last election) and 2023, including demographic and internet-penetration changes since 2022.\(^\text{78}\)

These findings were used to develop a report that identifies valuable and reliable information on the pre-election information environment and digital ecosystem in Guatemala. It provides an overview of political systems, online trends, malign risks, the state of information integrity and the most vulnerable groups affected in the process.

Overall, the assessment aims to provide an understanding of Guatemala’s current pre-election online information space two months from Election Day. The report serves as a tool to inform local stakeholders, technology partners and other interested parties to encourage informed decision-making and programming gaps to better prepare for the upcoming elections and manage risks and threats.

\(^\text{78}\) A quantitative dataset comparison was done only with the available data from the same research sources and methodology. Due to the complexities associated with the speed at which demographic changes and internet penetration evolve, figures might be higher than they appear in the assessment.