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FEATURED Q&A

What's at Stake as Guatemala Selects Judicial Officials?

Guatemala has launched a process to select judicial officials as well as an attorney general to replace U.S.-sanctioned Consuelo Porras. // File Photo: Carlos Sebastián via Wikimedia Commons CC BY 4.0.

Q Guatemala this month launched nomination committees for the country's key judicial bodies, initiating an appointment cycle that will shape the institutional framework ahead of general elections in June 2027. Authorities are slated to select new judges for the Supreme Electoral Tribunal and Constitutional Court, as well as a new attorney general to replace U.S.-sanctioned Consuelo Porras, whose term ends this May. What is at stake for Guatemala's democratic institutions as committees begin selecting new authorities for these bodies? How could the replacement of Porras, who has been central to efforts to obstruct President Bernardo Arévalo's agenda, alter Guatemala's justice system? To what extent will these appointments shape the rules, oversight and credibility of the 2027 electoral process?

A **Salvador Paiz, president of Guatemala Visible:** "What is at stake is nothing less than the continuity of Guatemala as a functional democracy. The simultaneous renewal of the Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE), the Constitutional Court (CC), and the attorney general's office (AG) is extraordinary: This convergence occurs only once every 60 years. Together, these institutions define the rules of the electoral game, safeguard constitutional order and determine whether the justice system upholds the rule of law or entrenches impunity. Beyond democratic implosion, the central risk is the sustained effort by organized crime to capture key governance institutions through bribery, coercion or intimidation—plata o plomo. Guatemala's criminal networks have the resources and incentives to influence nominations,

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Families of Two Men Killed in Boat Strike Sue Trump Administration

Family members of two Trinidadian men killed in a U.S. military boat strike in October filed a wrongful-death lawsuit on Tuesday against the Trump administration.

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Mexico's Pemex Halts Oil Shipments to Cuba

Mexican state-run oil company Pemex has stopped shipping oil to Cuba, Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum said Tuesday.

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Asfura Takes Office as President of Honduras

Businessman Nasry "Tito" Asfura, who won a razor-thin election last year in Honduras, took office Tuesday as the country's president. He vowed to create jobs, fight crime and improve social services.

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Asfura // File Photo: U.S. State Department.

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POLITICAL NEWS

Families of Two Men Killed in Strike Sue U.S. Administration

Family members of two Trinidadian men who were killed in a U.S. military boat strike filed a wrongful-death lawsuit on Tuesday against the Trump administration, The Washington Post reported. It is the first such lawsuit against the Trump administration over its campaign of destroying boats that it alleges are carrying illegal drugs. The airstrikes began in early September, and the U.S. military said Monday that 126 people have been killed in the strikes, which have taken place in the in the Caribbean and eastern Pacific. The lawsuit filed Tuesday says Chad Joseph, 26, and Rishi Samaroo, 41, fished in the waters off the coast of Venezuela in order to sustain themselves. They were returning to their homes in Las Cuevas, in Trinidad and Tobago, on Oct. 14 when they were killed in a U.S. military airstrike that targeted their boat, according to the lawsuit, The Washington Post reported. U.S. officials have said that six people were killed in that strike, and President Donald Trump has described those who were killed as "narco-terrorists," adding that U.S. intelligence "confirmed the vessel was trafficking narcotics," The Washington Post reported. The lawsuit says Joseph and Samaroo "were not members of, or affiliated with, drug cartels" and that Trinidad and Tobago's government has said publicly that it has no information that either of them was involved in illegal activities, The Washington Post reported. The plaintiffs in the lawsuit are Joseph's mother, Lenore Burnley, and Samaroo's sister, Sallycar Korasingh, Politico reported. "We know this lawsuit won't bring Chad back to us, but we're trusting God to carry us through this, and we hope that speaking out will help get us some truth and closure," Burnley said in a statement, Politico reported. The lawsuit calls the airstrike that killed Joseph and Samaroo part of an "unprecedented and manifestly unlawful U.S. military campaign." It adds, "These premeditated and intentional killings lack any plausible legal justification." It calls the men's deaths "simply murders, ordered by individuals at the highest levels of government and obeyed by military officers in the chain of command." The family members are seeking an undisclosed amount of money in punitive and compensatory damages from the U.S. government, The Washington Post reported. Lawyers from the American Civil Liberties Union, the Center for Constitutional Rights and the ACLU of Massachusetts, along with Professor Jonathan Hafetz of Seton Hall Law School, are representing the plaintiffs, The Washington Post reported. Representatives at the White House and the Justice Department did not immediately respond to requests for comment by The Washington Post, and the Pentagon told the newspaper that it does not make comments on ongoing litigation.

Asfura Takes Office as President of Honduras

Businessman Nasry "Tito" Asfura, whose candidacy for president of Honduras had the backing of U.S. President Donald Trump, was sworn in Tuesday as the Central American country's leader, the Associated Press reported. In an austere inauguration ceremony before lawmakers, Asfura vowed to create jobs, fight crime and improve social services such as health care and education, the wire service reported. "We have to get to work; work with humility and with the total commitment required to bring real solutions to every corner of our beloved Honduras," Asfura said in his inaugural address to Congress, Reuters reported. "The clock is ticking. There is no time to waste. We have to solve people's problems to serve," he added. A former mayor of Tegucigalpa, Asfura has said he will restore Honduras' diplomatic relations with Taiwan, which his predecessor, Xiomara Castro, severed in 2023, Reuters reported. Election officials in Honduras declared Asfura the president-elect on Dec. 24, more than three weeks after the razor-thin election, in which Asfura defeated former Vice President Salvador Nasralla. [Editor's note: See related **Q&A** in the Jan. 21 issue of the Advisor.]

NEWS BRIEFS

Brazil's Lula Planning Visit to Washington After Call With Trump

Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva spoke by phone on Monday with U.S. President Donald Trump and agreed to visit Washington soon, Brazil's government said in a statement, Reuters reported. Trump and Lula spoke for about 50 minutes and discussed topics including Venezuela, organized crime and Trump's Board of Peace, an alternative multilateral organization to which Trump has invited Brazil.

Colombia Blasts Ecuador's Tenfold Increase in Oil Pipeline Transit Fees

Colombia's energy minister on Tuesday sharply criticized the Ecuadorean government's move earlier this week to increase oil pipeline transit fees for Colombian companies by 10 times, the Associated Press reported. Ecuador's government announced the change on Monday, which comes amid an escalating diplomatic spat between the neighboring countries. Last week, Ecuador imposed a 30 percent tariff on Colombia for a perceived lack of cooperation on drug trafficking, which prompted Colombia's government to halt electricity sales to Ecuador.

Section of Trinidad's Atlantic LNG Terminal Set for Dismantling Next Year

Trinidad and Tobago's liquefied natural gas terminal, Atlantic LNG, is on track to have one of its four liquefaction trains be completely shut down by the end of this year, a representative for the project announced on Tuesday, Reuters reported. Shell, which controls a 51 percent stake in Train 1 of Atlantic LNG, the smallest of the four trains, had indefinitely paused operations at the section in 2024 amid a declining supply of natural gas. The terminal first began shipping cargoes in 1999.

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BUSINESS NEWS

Mexico's Pemex Halts Oil Shipments to Cuba: Sheinbaum

Mexican state-run oil firm Pemex has stopped sending shipments of fuel to Cuba, President Claudia Sheinbaum said Tuesday at her daily press conference, the Associated Press reported. The decision, which is set to last indefinitely, comes amid heightened pressure from the administration of U.S. President Donald Trump for Mexico to stop selling fuel to Cuba. With a U.S. naval blockade in effect for Venezuelan oil tankers destined for the Caribbean island nation, Mexico last month became Cuba's top supplier of fuel products, according to Kpler data. The development caught the ire of the Trump administration, with the president earlier this month saying in a Truth Social post that "THERE WILL BE NO MORE OIL OR MONEY GOING TO CUBA." High-level U.S. government officials have not explicitly requested Mexico's government stop sending oil to Cuba, the AP reported. "Mexico's decision to sell or give oil to Cuba for humanitarian reasons is a sovereign decision," Sheinbaum said on Tuesday, El País reported. Fuel shipments from Mexico to Cuba had already decreased substantially this month, averaging around 7,000 barrels of oil-equivalent per day, down from an average of 20,000 barrels per day during the first nine months of last year, according to the AP. Cuba's electrical grid relies on oil-based products for more than 80 percent of the island's power generation, according to data from the International Energy Agency. Rolling blackouts and fuel shortages have grown increasingly frequent in Cuba in recent years.

Revolut Launches Full Banking Operations in Mexico

Britain-based digital bank Revolut announced Tuesday that it has launched full banking services in Mexico, a move that marks its first bank outside Europe, Reuters reported. The digital bank has capitalized its operations in Mexico with more than $100 million, twice the regulatory minimum, the wire service reported. Revolut's banking license in Mexico will allow it to offer products including high-yield savings accounts; and customers will also be able to hold more than 30 currencies in their accounts and transfer money internationally. The financial technology company had approximately 40,000 clients in Mexico in a trial phase, and 250,000 people on a waiting list ahead of its launch, Juan Guerra, the digital bank's head for Mexico, told Bloomberg News. Revolut was founded in 2015 and was recently valued at approximately $75 billion, Bloomberg News reported.

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rulings and prosecutorial priorities. If successful, they could skew electoral results, weaken constitutional observance and weaponize criminal prosecution, directly shaping electoral outcomes and post-electoral accountability. The public confrontation between President Bernardo Arévalo and AG Consuelo Porras has come to dominate the narrative, but it risks obscuring the deeper challenge: the gradual and often invisible penetration of state institutions by criminal interests. The priority must be to insulate all three bodies from influence by organized crime at this decisive moment. This is where independent oversight is essential. For 16 years, Guatemala Visible has observed 20 nomination and appointment processes with a singular objective: transparency and resistance to criminal capture. As a nonpartisan, independent organization with national and international credibility, GV's work underscores a central truth: The integrity of the 2027 elections will be determined less by personalities than by whether Guatemala succeeds in keeping its democratic checks and balances beyond the reach of organized crime."

Nic Wirtz, independent journalist based in Guatemala: "It is no exaggeration to say that the future of Guatemala's democratic institutions is at stake in the selection of the TSE, Constitutional Court and attorney general. Not least is any chance of President Bernardo Arévalo being able to implement any kind of reform in the final years of his presidency—a presidency that began with attempts to oust him legally, through the TSE, Constitutional Court and via investigations by the attorney general's office. The recent attacks by gang members on police that resulted in 10 deaths shows the lengths some groups will go to, to continue to destabilize the country. Latin American attorney generals have proven adept at taking on political cases to shore up their power base. At the same time, many of the more recent attorney generals in Guatemala, especially Thelma Aldana and Claudia Paz y Paz, have surprised observers with their investigations. Whether the new attorney general has enough power to alter the judicial system will depend on who is backing them but, at the very least, a more criminal and U.S.-interest focus on cases should be expected. Guatemala potentially faces the worst of both worlds for the 2027 election. Initial candidates are a rerun of largely discredited personalities. Should this be backed by a weak TSE, then democratic backsliding to 'old politics' is almost certain. Whatever credibility gained from Arévalo's victory could be wiped out. The X-factors for the election will be the TSE and how Guatemala's youth, politically mature in realizing the country is not working for them, react to aging candidates."

> **"It is no exaggeration to say that the future of Guatemala's democratic institutions is at stake..."**
>
> **— Nic Wirtz,**

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Rachel Sieder, researcher at CIESAS in Mexico City: "As is well known, Consuelo Porras and her team have effectively purged the Public Ministry (MP) and many of the pro-accountability judges in the Constitutional Court (CC) and in the high-impact penal courts since 2018. They have notoriously used their power over the MP to criminalize their opponents, including judges, public prosecutors, members of Arévalo's own party and cabinet, and of course Indigenous and peasant activists who were key in the 2023 mass mobilizations calling for Porras' resignation. The so-called 'pacto de corruptos' of which she is the most public face represents key elite interests who are opposed to Arévalo and who actively tried to prevent him from assuming the presidency. So, everything is at stake in the current round of elections. Porras is standing for the CC, and it is by no means a given that she will not be elected. Walter Mazariegos has been accused of assuming the leadership of San Carlos University, which is key to the nominations process for the CC, through electoral fraud. Mazariegos is an ally of Porras and her supporters. Guatemala's 1985 constitution gives the university votes over the most important institutions of state, including: the MP, the magistrates of the Tribunal Supremo Electoral, Supreme Court magistrates, tax authorities, appeals courts and others. The Junta Directiva of Congress plays a key role in electing TSE magistrates and designating CC magistrates, and it is controlled by parties opposed to Arévalo. Porras and some of her key allies are subject to U.S. sanctions, but with Trump in the White House, the pressure for accountability that could be leveraged from the United States has now radically declined. There are some signs of optimism, but the extremely complex and untransparent nomination processes for the institutional renovations mean that behind-the-scenes horse-trading and pressure applied through criminalization and corruption will continue to determine outcomes of this cycle."

> **"Porras is standing for the Constitutional Court, and it is by no means a given that she will not be elected."**
>
> **— Rachel Sieder**

The Advisor welcomes comments on its Q&A section. Readers can write editor Gene Kuleta.

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