

Warsaw Human Dimension Conference 2024, October, 1st, 2024

Plenary Session 2: Democratic Institutions | Open Dialogue Foundation's Intervention
Integrating Technology into Democracy: Bitcoin Blockchain's Impact in Guatemala

Dear colleagues, and fellow democracy defenders,

I represent the Open Dialogue Foundation, a nonprofit that partners with global freedom defenders to inform policymakers worldwide about the state of fundamental rights and best practices for securing them.

More than ever, governments and citizens are concerned about misinformation and Artificial Intelligence interference threatening election integrity. These raise the question of how we can prove beyond doubt which documents were used in the election.

Let me share an inspiring example from Guatemala, where Bitcoin blockchain technology became one of the key elements in protecting election integrity from these threats¹.

In 2023, Guatemala's Supreme Electoral Tribunal utilized Bitcoin blockchain to secure essential election documents transparently and as soon as they were created, ensuring they remained tamper-resistant. By doing so, they offered society a shared understanding and open access to the data that determined the election outcome. The documents were made publicly available in real time, allowing citizens to audit the process as it unfolded.

What enabled this pioneering solution was the initiative of the Guatemalan Supreme Electoral Tribunal and the immutable nature of the Bitcoin blockchain. It has been acknowledged in the reports of electoral observation missions of Organization of American States², the EU³ and the Association of World Election Bodies⁴, and serves as a compelling model for democracies worldwide.

This case also highlights how decentralized systems can effectively manage public records at large with the solution being also applicable to other important government documents. This is crucial, as finding a form of digital insurance for managing public records is an unresolved issue that will become increasingly important over the next decade.

We inquire whether the OSCE has explored similar approaches and request the organization to explore this innovative example and discuss its benefits with experts and civil society groups.

*delivered by Katarzyna Szczypka

¹ https://en.odfoundation.eu/a/724450_bitcoins-role-in-guatemalas-digitally-safeguarded-democracy/

² <https://www.oas.org/fpdb/press/INFORME-PRELIMINAR---Mision-Electoral-OEA-en-Guatemala-1ra-vuelta-.pdf> & <https://www.oas.org/fpdb/press/INFORME-PRELIMINAR---Mision-Electoral-OEA-en-Guatemala-2da-vuelta.pdf>

³ https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/2023/EU%20EOM%20GT%202023%20FINAL%20REPORT%20SPANISH_0.pdf

⁴ <http://www.aweb.org/eng/bbs/B0000013/view.do?nttld=15825&gubun=1&menuNo=300040>