Global Expertise. Local Solutions.
Sustainable Democracy.

Elections in the Dominican Republic

May 20 Presidential Election

Frequently Asked Questions

Latin America and the Caribbean

International Foundation for Electoral Systems

1850 K Street, NW | Fifth Floor | Washington, DC 20006 | www.IFES.org

May 18, 2012

Table of Contents

When are elections held in the Dominican Republic? 1

What is the Dominican Republic's system of government? 1

What are the main political parties? 1

Who are the presidential and vice presidential candidates? 2

Who will vote? 2

How will the country's international commitment to persons with disabilities impact the election? 3

When will the newly elected government take office? 3

How will votes be counted? 3

Can Dominicans who reside abroad vote in the elections? 3

Is electoral observation allowed? 4

Disclosure:
These FAQs reflect decisions made by the Dominican Republic's election authorities as of May 17, 2012, to the best of our knowledge. This document does not represent any IFES policy or technical recommendations.

When are elections held in the Dominican Republic?

Elections are held every four years, per the latest revision of the constitution in 2010. This year, only the presidential election will take place on May 20.

Prior to the constitutional change in 2010, presidential elections alternated every two years with congressional and municipal elections. This modification unified both the elections.

In order to sync election calendars, the 2010 congressional and municipal elections were for six-year terms, instead of four-year terms. In 2016, Dominicans will vote for their next president, and congressional and municipal candidates at the same time.

What is the Dominican Republic's system of government?

The Dominican Republic is a presidential republic. The president is elected by absolute majority vote through a two-round system, if necessary, to serve a four-year term.

In the Senate (*Senado*) 32 members are elected by plurality vote in single-member constituencies to serve four-year terms. The term of office will be six years from 2010-2016. After that, it will return to four years. This has been done in order to hold one general election instead of multiple elections every two years.

In the Chamber of Deputies (*Camara de Diputados*) 178 members are elected through an open-list proportional representation system to serve four-year terms. The seats are apportioned to 30 multi-member districts (29 provinces and the federal district) in proportion to the population. No district may have less than two deputies. The term of office will be six years from 2010-2016. After that, it will return to four years.

What are the main political parties?

Out of 24 registered parties, the following are the six main political parties:

- Alliance for Democracy (APD, *Alianza por la Democracia*)
- Broad Front (FA, *Frente Amplio*)
- Country Alliance (AP, *Alianza País*)
- Dominicans for Change (DxC, *Dominicanos por el Cambio*)
- Dominican Liberation Party (PLD, *Partido de la Liberación Dominicana*)
- Dominican Revolutionary Party (PRD, *Partido Revolucionario Dominicano*)

Who are the presidential and vice presidential candidates?

Of the six main political parties, four parties have aligned themselves with two main candidates for president and vice president under the PLD and PRD parties:

PLD Presidential Candidate

Danilo Medina Sánchez served as secretary of state during President Leonel Fernández's first two terms, in 1996 and 2004. Medina's campaign stresses a government that serves the people, equal opportunities for all and transparency. His slogan is: "Fixed what is wrong, continue with what is right, and do what has never been done."

PLD Vice Presidential Candidate

Margarita Cedeño de Fernández is a lawyer and the current first lady of the Dominican Republic. She has experience in the private sector while being part of a law firm. From 1996 to 2000 she served as legal counsel to the president.

PRD Presidential Candidate

Rafael Hipólito Mejía Domínguez first served as secretary of state for agriculture from 1978-1982 under former President Antonio Guzman Fernandez. Mejia then ran for president in 2000 and served as president from 2000 to 2004. He attempted to secure a second consecutive term, but was defeated by Leonel Fernandez due to the 2003 economic crisis generated by the collapse of major private banks during Mejia's administration.

PRD Vice Presidential Candidate

Luis Abinader was elected vice president of the PRD's national convention in 2005. He is currently executive vice president of Grupo Sol de Plata, which develops and operates major tourism projects. He is also vice president of the company Cementos Santo Domingo, and a member of several boards in the Dominican Republic.

Who will vote?

All registered Dominican citizens, by birth or naturalization, 18 years of age or older on the day of the election, are eligible to vote with a voting credential issued by the Central Electoral Office (JCE). Currently, the electoral registry has approximately 6 million registered voters.

Members of the armed forces and national police cannot vote by law. Any citizen who is married can vote regardless of age.

How will the country's international commitment to persons with disabilities impact the election?

Since the Dominican Republic has ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, electoral authorities must implement measures to guarantee the enshrined rights to registered voters. The convention has several articles relevant to elections, the most comprehensive of which is Article 29. Article 29 stipulates that "State parties shall guarantee to persons with disabilities political rights and the opportunity to enjoy them on an equal basis with others." This includes:

- The right to information on where and how to vote in accessible formats
- The right to vote in secret
- The right to have equal physical access to the polling station
- The right to full and equal electoral rights for people with intellectual disabilities
- The right to run for office and serve in government

Since 2008, the Dominican Republic's election management body, *La Junta Central Electoral (JCE)*, has been working to improve access to the election process for persons with disabilities. This year the JCE has, once again, sponsored a special tool, called *Plantilla*, which allows voters with visual impairments to vote using the regular ballot, independently. Additionally, the JCE has included a guide in the poll worker training manual on how to administer the vote to persons with disabilities; included persons with disabilities as poll workers and election verifiers; and is encouraging voters with disabilities to get-out-to-vote on May 20 through a special education campaign.

When will the newly elected government take office?

The elected government will take office on August 16, 2012.

How will votes be counted?

The vote count starts at 6:00 p.m. on Election Day. Votes are counted manually by each polling station's polling station board, which is made up of five members: president, secretary, first substitute member to the president, second substitute member to the president and a substitute secretary. Each of the 14,000 polling stations nationwide has this structure.

Can Dominicans who reside abroad vote in the elections?

The Dominican Republic introduced legislation in 1997 to enable Dominican citizens residing abroad to vote in presidential elections. This year, there are approximately 328,000 registered overseas voters eligible to vote at polling stations set up in:

- Canada: Montréal, Quebec
- Spain: Barcelona, Catalonia
- Spain: Madrid, Community of Madrid
- United States: Miami, Florida

- United States: New York City, New York
- Venezuela: Caracas, Miranda

Dominicans overseas will cast their ballots to elect the president and vice president, and for the first time, they will also be voting to elect seven members of congress who will represent them.

Is electoral observation allowed?

Yes. There are several domestic organizations that conduct electoral process observation. *Participacion Ciudadana,* a key local organization, is a civic, non-partisan movement that runs a well-organized nationwide observation mission. The organization's objective is to promote coordination within local organizations and to encourage participation of citizens to achieve political reform, both institutional and democratic, that will result in social development.