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Elections in Panama:

2014 General Elections

Frequently Asked Questions

Latin America and the Caribbean

International Foundation for Electoral Systems

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Frequently Asked Questions

When is Election Day?.....	1
Who are citizens voting for on Election Day?	1
Who can vote in the country?.....	1
What are the nationally recognized political parties of the Republic of Panama?	1
Who are the presidential candidates?.....	1
How many registered voters are there?	2
What is the gender balance within the presidential candidate list?	2
What is the structure of the government?	2
What is the election management body? What are its powers?	2
How many polling places are set up on Election Day?	3
How will out-of-country voting take place?.....	3
When will official results be announced?	3
Who can observe during Election Day?	3
Resources	4

Disclosure:

These FAQs reflect decisions made by the Colombian election authorities, to the best of our knowledge as of May 1, 2014. This document does not represent any IFES policy or technical recommendations.

When is Election Day?

Panamanians will cast their ballots on Sunday, May 4, 2014. Polls will be open from 7:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Who are citizens voting for on Election Day?

Panamanians will be electing the President, the Vice President, 20 Deputies to the Central American Parliament (PARLACEN), 71 Deputies to the National Assembly, 77 Mayors, 648 District Representatives, and seven Councilors with their respective alternates. All of the individuals elected for these roles will serve five-year terms.

Who can vote in the country?

All Panamanian citizens over the age of 18, who are registered to vote, are allowed to cast ballots on Election Day. Panamanian citizens that reside overseas can vote to elect the President and Vice President if registered in the out-of-country voter registry.

What are the nationally recognized political parties of the Republic of Panama?

There are six political parties that will participate in the elections: Revolutionary Democratic Party (Partido Revolucionario Democrático), Popular Party (Partido Popular), Molirena Party (Movimiento Liberal Republicano Nacionalista), Panamanian Party (Partido Panameñista), Democratic Change Party (Partido Cambio Democrático), and Broad Front for Democracy (Frente Amplio por la Democracia). In addition, three presidential candidates will run as independent candidates.

Who are the presidential candidates?

José Domingo Arias, Democratic Change Party (Partido Cambio Democrático, CD) also endorsed by Molirena Party (Movimiento Liberal Republicano Nacionalista): Arias is an economist with experience in the textile industry. During the government of President Martinelli, Arias served as Minister of Foreign Trade and later as Minister of Housing and Land. Arias won CD's primary elections with 67 percent of the votes.

Juan Carlos Navarro, Revolutionary Democratic Party (Partido Cambio Democrático, PCD): Navarro won the primary elections with 95 percent of the vote. Navarro was elected Mayor of Panama City in 1999 and reelected in 2004. In 2008, he ran as a presidential candidate but was defeated by Balbina Herrera, who won the presidential nomination by a 4 percent vote difference. Before entering politics, he worked at the National Association for the Conservation of Nature.

Juan Carlos Varela, Panamanian Party (Partido Pañamenista) also endorsed by the Popular Party (Partido Popular): Varela is the current Vice President of Panama. He is also a former Foreign Minister, Director and former Vice President of the family group Varela Hermanos, and Director of the Arnulfista Party from 1992-1999. He became active in Panamanian politics in 1989. In 1991, he helped organize the Panamanian Party. He has been the Party's President since 2006, after winning the primary election with 54.96 percent of Party votes. In 2013, he won the Party primaries with 99 percent of the vote.

Genaro López, Broad Front for Democracy (Frente Amplio por la Democracia): López worked as General Secretary of the Workers' Union (SUNTRACS) for 20 years. His campaign has focused on supporting the Union, increasing its power and influence, and defending its interests against almost every government-established party affiliation.

How many registered voters are there?

There are a total of 2,457,401 voters (49.9 percent women and 50.1 percent men) registered for the upcoming elections. Included in total number are 5,407 Panamanians (55.6 percent women and 44.3 percent men) registered to vote abroad. The voter registry also identifies 7,416 voters with disabilities listed by province.

What is the structure of the government?

Panama is a representative democracy with three branches of government: executive, legislative and judiciary. The executive and legislative branches are elected by direct vote every five years, and an independent judiciary is appointed by the executive, with the consent of the legislature.

The President has broad powers under Panama's Constitution, but must work with a 78-member unicameral Legislative Assembly. The executive and legislative branches work in coordination, and both play an important role in shaping political, economic and social initiatives. The reelection of the President and Vice President is allowed; after two presidential terms have passed.

Since 1989, Panama has experienced a successful democratic process that has been validated by two national referendums and three national elections.

What is the gender balance within the presidential candidate list?

Currently four out of six candidates running for Vice President are women; however, there are no women candidates running for President. The 2012 electoral reform mandated the nomination of a Secretary of Women, which oversees compliance of the gender quota within internal party nominations. The electoral reform also raised the percentage of quotas for women from 30 percent to 50 percent.

What is the election management body? What are its powers?

The election management body of Panama is known as the Electoral Tribunal (TE), which according to Article 136 of the Panamanian Constitution, has the responsibility to interpret and apply the electoral

law. The TE administers the elections as well as the registration of vital records, deaths and naturalizations, and other legal acts related to citizens' civil status, including the issuance of identity cards.

The TE has national jurisdiction and is comprised by three Magistrates: the President, appointed by the legislative branch; the Vice President, appointed by the Supreme Court; and a Speaker, appointed by the executive branch. The three Magistrates are appointed for ten-year terms. Each Magistrate can appoint two alternate members.

How many polling places are set up on Election Day?

For the 2014 elections, the Electoral Tribunal (TE) set up 2,700 polling centers and 6,630 polling stations. According to Article 284 of the Electoral Code, the TE, in consultation with the National Council of Political Parties, determines the number of polling stations, the location thereof and the number of voters who will vote in each.

How will out-of-country voting take place?

The Electoral Tribunal (TE) provided 5,407 Panamanians registered to vote abroad the option to cast their vote via Internet or by sending a printed ballot via mail to the TE Voting Abroad Committee. Those citizens who opt for sending a printed ballot can do so until May 3. Then on May 4, the TE Voting Abroad Committee will hand to the corresponding poll workers an acrylic ballot box containing the mailed ballots. Similarly, the TE Electoral Voting Corporation will print the votes cast via Internet and will deposit them in an acrylic ballot box that will be located in a public place until May 4.

Those unable to cast their vote by the deadline can still vote in person in Panama.

When will official results be announced?

According to Article 335 of the Electoral Code, on Election Day, the National Scrutiny Board, the Electoral Circuit Scrutiny Boards, and the District and Communal Scrutiny Boards will convene at 2:00 p.m. to receive the results coming from the polling stations and will proceed to begin the general counting. This meeting will be permanent, from the moment it starts until the vote counting concludes with the announcement of the results in accordance with the Electoral Code. The validity of the results is subject to final decision by the Electoral Tribunal.

Who can observe during Election Day?

According to Decree #31 of April 18, 1994, the Panamanian government through the President or the Electoral Tribunal (TE), may extend an invitation to political parties, foreign government representatives, foreign organizations and international organizations to conduct international electoral observation. The TE classifies observers into two categories, official observers and guest observers.

Resources

- [Candidates' profiles](#) by the daily newspaper La Prensa
- Website of the [Electoral Tribunal](#)
- Website of the [Embassy of Panama in the U.S.](#)
- Panamanian [Electoral Code](#)