



DIRECTORIO
LEGISLATIVO

FORTALECEMOS
LAS DEMOCRACIAS
DE AMÉRICA LATINA

STRENGTHENING
DEMOCRACIES
IN LATIN AMERICA

MARCH 2022

Costa Rica

Presidential Elections Pre electoral report



Executive Summary

On April 3, Costa Ricans return to the polls to elect their president. Since none of the 25 candidates running in the February general elections gained the +40% backing for a first-round victory, citizens must pick from the two most voted-for contenders: **José María Figueres**, of the traditional Partido Liberación Nacional (PLN) party, and **Rodrigo Chaves**, representing the new Partido Progreso Social Democrático (PPSD).

As with the general elections, the run-off is hard to call amid polls showing that **Figueres**, who beat Chaves in February, **now trails his PPSD rival with 34.02% support versus Chaves' 44.46%** – but with **16.64%** of the electorate **undecided**.

Campaigning in recent days has seen both camps attempt to woo wavering voters. But it has also seen **joint calls for more citizens to vote**, following February's record abstention rate, over 40%. One survey found that 42% of those abstaining from the first-round did so over **disillusion with the country's politics** – a sentiment apparently widely shared and borne out by the **ruling party failing to get even 1%** support after being in power for eight years.

The winner on Sunday will take up the presidency on May 8. Whoever **wins will lack a majority in power so will need to seek out alliances and cross-party backing for bills**. This will be no easy task especially given the reluctance so far of the major parties to get behind either runner.

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The election in numbers

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ARE THE CANDIDATES RUNNING FOR THE PRESIDENCY OF THE REPUBLIC.

IS THE AVERAGE PERCENTAGE OF VOTING INTENTIONS OF RODRIGO CHAVES, THE CANDIDATE LEADING THE POLLS.

44,46%

10,44%

IS THE AVERAGE VOTE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE TWO CANDIDATES.

THE AVERAGE PERCENTAGE OF UNDECIDED VOTERS.

16,64%

3.542.836

ARE THE COSTA RICANS ABLE TO VOTE. THE PROVINCE OF SAN JOSÉ IS THE MOST IMPORTANT DISTRICT WITH 1,158,110 VOTERS.

IS THE DATE SCHEDULED FOR THE INAUGURATION OF THE NEW PRESIDENT. HE WILL BE IN OFFICE UNTIL 2026.

MAY
8

29

IS THE NUMBER TO HAVE A MAJORITY IN THE ASSEMBLY. NO PARTY REACHES IT SO NEGOTIATIONS WILL BE KEY IN THE LEGISLATIVE BRANCH.

Presidential elections

The new president of Costa Rica until 2026 will be one of two candidates. On the one hand, **Rodrigo Chaves**, who presents himself as an **alternative option to traditional politics** and the status quo. He argues that "doing the same thing [and] expecting different results, is irrational". His rival is the former president **José María Figueres**, who has sought to make the most of **his experience in government**. The latest polls available show the following voter distribution:



Rodrigo Chaves |
Progreso Social Democrático

44,46%

Undecided 16,64%
Blank or Null 4,88%



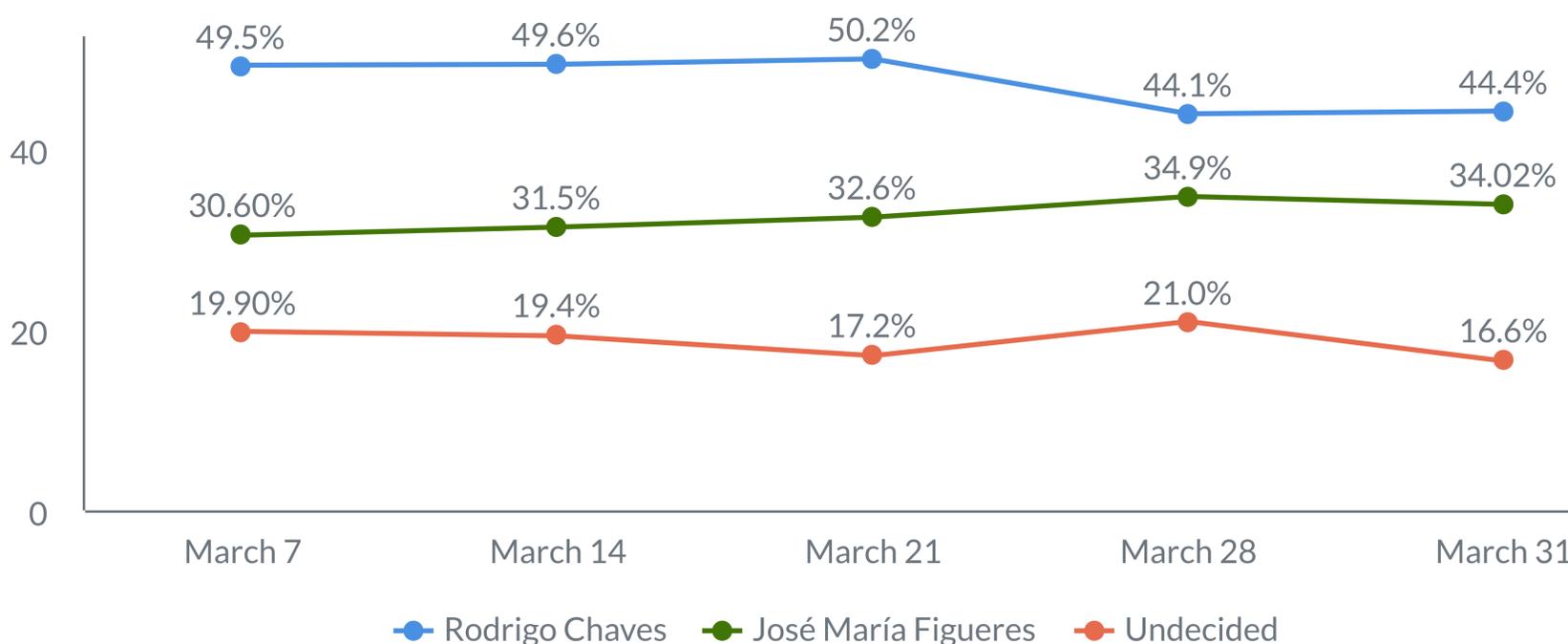
José María Figueres |
Liberación Nacional



34,02%

The **difference of 10.44%** is the **lowest** since the **campaigns for the second round elections began**, as shown in the graph below. Thus, although **Chaves is positioned as favorite**, the percentage of undecided voters means Figueres still in the running.

Evolution of voting intention



Source: Own elaboration based on the same private survey carried out on the dates indicated.

The candidates' profile



Rodrigo Chaves |
Progreso Social
Democrático (PSD)

Age

60 years

Academic background

BA in Economy. He also holds a PhD in the same discipline by the Ohio State University.

Professional background

Minister of Finance (december 2019 - may 2020) under the current administration of Carlos Alvarado. He has also worked for the World Bank.



José María Figueres |
Partido Liberación
Nacional (PLN)

Age

67 years

Academic background

Industrial Engineer by West Point Academy. He holds a master's degree in Public Administration by Harvard University.

Professional background

President of Costa Rica (1994-1998). Minister of International Trade (1986-1988) and Minister of Agriculture (1989-1990), under the presidency of Óscar Arias Sánchez (1986-1990).

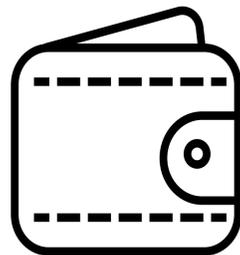
Government plans

Rodrigo Chaves

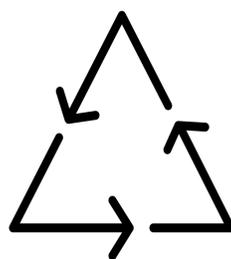


Check his government plan by clicking [here](#).

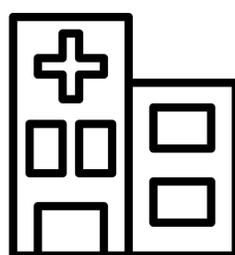
- Promote the total bancarization of Costa Ricans so that every citizen over 12 years old will have a bank account. Promote financial education in schools.
- Issue cryptographic money backed by the Central Bank.



- Promote the measurement of emissions and CO2 capture in all organizations with more 100 employees. The use of green bonds will be promoted.



- Promote the digitalization of all procedures before the Ministry of Health. The positive silence mechanism will also be applied.
- Reduce the costs of medicines by decree.



José María Figueres



Check his government plan by clicking [here](#).

- Promote the use and coverage of electronic means of payment, regulate the fintech industry and cryptoassets, as well as eliminate distortions in the operation of the financial intermediation system.
- His candidate for vice-president proposed to review the impact of the [Usury Law](#).

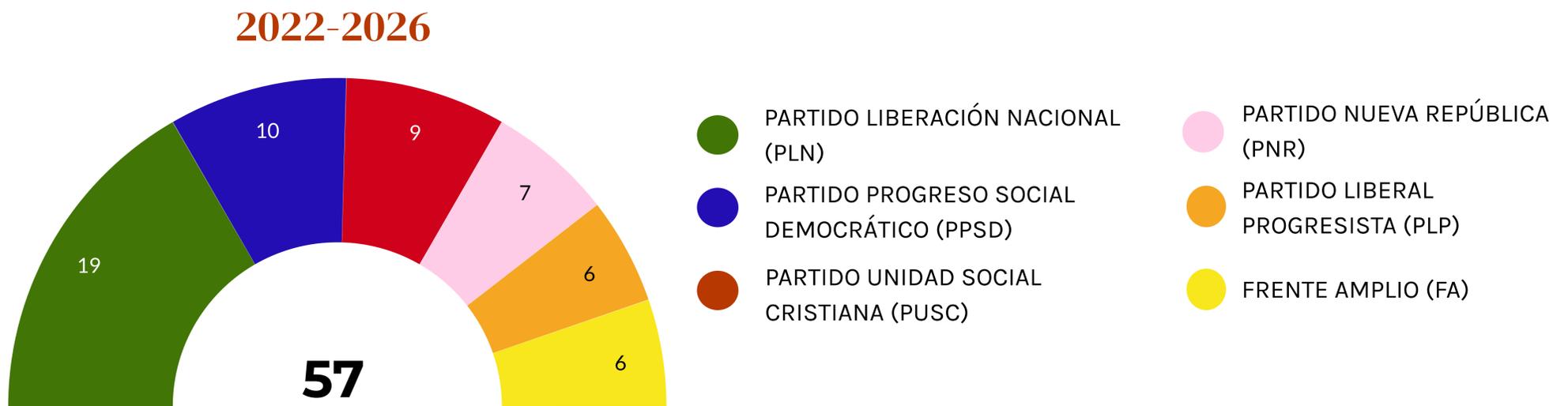
- Redefine the economic system for a regenerative one, eliminating the principle of waste. He will also seek to promote a waste management plan.

- Promote the simplification of procedures such as the registration of medicines and products of health interest. He also proposes to promote telehealth.

- Promote the orange economy by giving tax benefits to private companies.

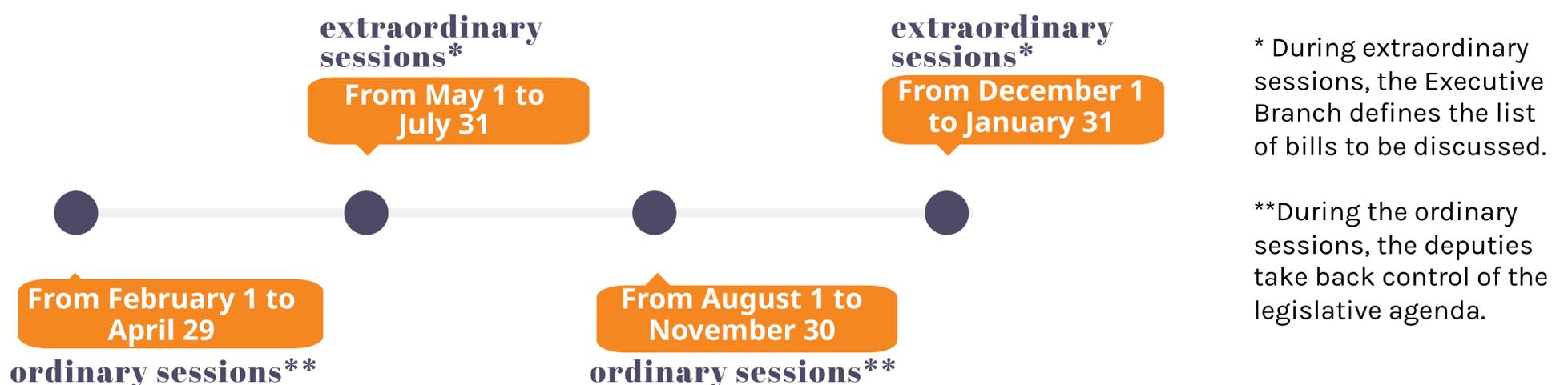
What kind of Assembly will greet the next president?

The composition of the Legislative Assembly has already been defined, and the 57 elected deputies will take office on May 1. Seats are **fragmented across six political parties**, none holding the 29 required to command a **majority of its own**.



Based on the composition of the Legislative Assembly, it is clear that **alliance building will be a priority** for the next president, and right from the word go. In this respect, things could get tricky for Sunday's favorite, **Rodrigo Chaves**, requiring as he does a total of 19 MPs from other parties to support him who, given the bridges he has burnt through his criticism of PLN and PUSC, will realistically need to come from PLP, FA and the conservative PNR; or else he will be forced to instead dial down his anti-establishment rhetoric and mend fences with, and seek support from, the traditional parties. Figueres, on the other hand, would only be 10 deputies shy of a majority and could reach that figure more easily. Against this backdrop, both candidates have pledged a **'conciliatory'** approach to working within the Assembly.

It is important to point out that the new President will start his term of office during **extraordinary sessions**. This means he can dictate the working agenda of the deputies and, therefore, limit it to only bills that are promoted by his government. As a consequence, as long as the president generates the needed cross-party support, **he could advance the government's agenda relatively fast**.



Political Context

The major parties remain "neutral"

In the second round of 2018, the now outgoing president, Carlos Alvarado (Partido Acción Ciudadana-PAC), won thanks to the support of two major parties: the PUSC and FA. However, the resounding **electoral failure of the PAC** in the first round this year (failing to even gain 1% of votes), had an impact on the performance of its allies, mainly the PUSC, which many had thought might reach the runoff but finally came fourth.

Thus far, none of these or other parties have got behind either of the two candidates competing in the runoff. In spite of this, both Figueres and Chaves have shown themselves open to form **cabinets inclusive of figures from other political parties**.

Political discontent and advantage for the "new politics"

Neither of the candidates competing on Sunday **has established himself as a clear favorite**. Partly this is down to **high levels of voter disenchantment and apathy**, which in February saw a record 40.29% of eligible voters abstain.

Several commentators (including a magistrate of the country's Supreme Electoral Tribunal), lay the blame at parties having **'lost their identity'** amid an erosion of traditional political discourse that has distanced many citizens from politics. This is in line with a recent privately conducted survey which found that 42% of those who refrained from voting in the first round did so over a lack of trust of politicians, disillusionment, lack of conviction and also as a means to register protest.

In this climate, the candidate proclaiming a **"new way of doing politics"**, Rodrigo Chaves, should have an edge over his PLN rival. However, not all **polls put Chaves in the lead** (though on average they do) and with 16.64% of voters undecided, nothing is certain come Sunday's ballot.

Mistrust and apathy prevail among the country's voters. According to a private survey, 54% said that "none of the candidates would be a good president"

Financing, undeclared trips and crossed accusations

Although the campaign was characterized by a smooth running, there were **some irregularities and crossed accusations** among the candidates, especially in the presidential debates. Although a priori they would not have a decisive impact on the result, they could **reinforce the feeling of apathy and discontent** already present in the citizenship regarding their political class, deepening the abstentionism on Sunday.

The TSE is investigating two facts. Regarding **Chaves**, an investigation was opened for **the creation of a parallel mechanism for the financing of his electoral campaign**, despite the fact that the legislation establishes the obligation to use only one bank account. As for **Figueres**, he is being investigated for an **undeclared trip** he made to the Dominican Republic, which was not part of his campaign agenda.

In addition to this, Chaves and Figueres exchanged **accusations** for their respective links with the pro-government PAC. While Figueres reminded him of his time in the current government as Minister of Finance, Chaves accused him of having co-governed during these years. Both are trying to get rid of the great citizen rejection that the PAC received at the polls, when it obtained 0.66% of the votes.



Conclusions

Rodrigo Chaves of the PPSD and José María Figueres of PLN have been facing the difficult task of appealing to a **disenchanted electorate**, 54% of whom, according to one poll, **would regard neither as a good president**. With only days before the decisive runoff, no out-and-out favourite has emerged.

An average of the most recent polls does put Chaves in the lead, however. Yet, the **undecided voter percentage of 16.64%** is still large relative to the difference in voter intentions between the two candidates, which is just above 10.44%. Furthermore, some polls predict a victory for Figueres.

The candidates have **struggled to get other political forces on side**, wary of risking precious political capital following the wholesale rejection of the ruling party. In spite of this – or because of it – the **PPSD** and the **PLN** have already stated their willingness **to integrate figures from other political streams** to their cabinets.

This is key since no matter who wins on Sunday, the new president will hold a minority **in the Assembly**. The legislature will be fragmented into six different parties and with none holding a majority of its own. Thus, in order to move forward with his government's plans, the president will have **to negotiate with other parties**. No bill will be able to advance unless it has been agreed upon by at least two other parties.

With this in mind, on Sunday two forms of politics come head to head: **a traditional variety, represented by Figueres, and a more novel proposition driven by Chaves**. Apathy, discontent and lack of confidence in the political class appear to give the edge to the latter, though Sunday's result could still spring a surprise.



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