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LAS DEMOCRACIAS  
DE AMÉRICA LATINA

STRENGTHENING  
DEMOCRACIES  
IN LATIN AMERICA

APRIL 2022

# Costa Rica

## Presidential Elections Post electoral report

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# Executive Summary

On April 3, Costa Ricans voted to elect their new President. **Rodrigo Chaves, of Partido Progreso Social Democrático (PPSD), has won**, obtaining 52.85% of the votes with 98.15% of ballot stations counted. Joining him in office will be Stephan Brunner Neibig as vice-president and Mary Denisse Munive Angermuller as second vice-president.

Despite most polls putting Chaves in front, the outcome was far from certain with his rival candidate, José María Figueres, of Partido Liberación Nacional, having closed the gap in recent weeks. In addition, as many as 17% of the electorate were undecided going into the elections. Chaves, however, staved off the late surge and, at the time of writing, had convinced enough of the waverers to command a **lead over Figueres of 5.7%** having also **won in all but two of the country's seven provinces**.

Given the high voter indecision and apathy, appealing to those yet to make their minds up and jointly calling for a higher electoral turnout were key to both candidates' campaigns. On the latter, at least, neither succeeded. Over 43% of Costa Ricans stayed at home - a sign of widespread disillusion which adds to Chaves' challenges come his **inauguration on May 8**. By then, too, a completely renewed Assembly will be in place, where he faces a difficult task of negotiating the cross-party support he needs to push through his agenda.

## Content

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- The election in numbers

### RESULTS

- Who is the new President of Costa Rica?

### THE ASSEMBLY CHAVES WILL HAVE TO NEGOTIATE WITH

### HIGHLIGHTS OF THE ELECTION DAY

### POLITICAL CONTEXT

### CONCLUSIONS

# The election in numbers

52,85%

IS THE PERCENTAGE OF VOTES THAT RODRIGO CHAVES OBTAINED TO BE ELECTED PRESIDENT.

IS THE PERCENTAGE OF BALLOT STATIONS COUNTED AT THE MOMENT.

98,15%

5,7%

IS THE DIFFERENCE THAT SEPARATED THE PRESIDENT-ELECT FROM HIS OPPONENT. IT WAS SMALLER THAN THE PREDICTED BY THE POLLS.

PERCENTAGE OF PEOPLE WHO DID NOT TURN OUT TO VOTE. THIS IS THE SECOND HIGHEST NUMBER RECORDED IN SECOND RUNOFFS.

43,23%

4

IS THE NUMBER OF YEARS THE PRESIDENT WILL REMAIN IN POWER.

IS THE DATE SCHEDULED FOR THE INAUGURATION. A WEEK AFTER THE NEW LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY TAKES OFFICE.

MAY 8

19

ADDITIONAL NUMBER OF DEPUTIES NEEDED BY RODRIGO CHAVES' PARTY IN THE ASSEMBLY TO ACHIEVE A MAJORITY.

# Results

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**Rodrigo Chaves** has become the **new president of Costa Rica**. In opting for the leader of the Partido Progreso Social Democrático (PPSD), Costa Ricans follow the trend started some eight years ago **of electing alternatives to traditional political parties**. In the case of Costa Rica, it should be said, voters have not backed a president from a traditional political party since Partido de Acción Ciudadana (PAC) came to power in 2014.



**Rodrigo Chaves** |  
Partido Progreso  
Social Democrático

**52,85%**

**José María Figueres** |  
Partido Liberación  
Nacional

**47,15%**



With 98.15% of voting booths counted, the difference between the two candidates is 5.7% – less than that predicted by the polls. With this result, however, Chaves has **sealed a double electoral surprise** – first, on February 6, making it through to the runoff despite not being among the front three favorites; and now, prevailing over the traditional PLN on the back of a party that was created as recently as 2018.

# Who is the new President of Costa Rica?



## Rodrigo Chaves | Partido Progreso Social Democrático (PPSD)

### His profile

#### 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.

### His proposals

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.

# The Assembly Chaves will have to negotiate with

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**.



**Alliance building will be a priority** for the next president, and right away. If he continues or deepens his **criticism of the traditional political establishment** (PLN and PUSC), it will be a lot harder for him to attract the 19 MPs he needs to **secure majorities** for his bills. In that case, he will have no choice but to appeal to the **PLP, FA and the conservative PNR** – not easy given the lack of common ground between FA and PNR in particular.

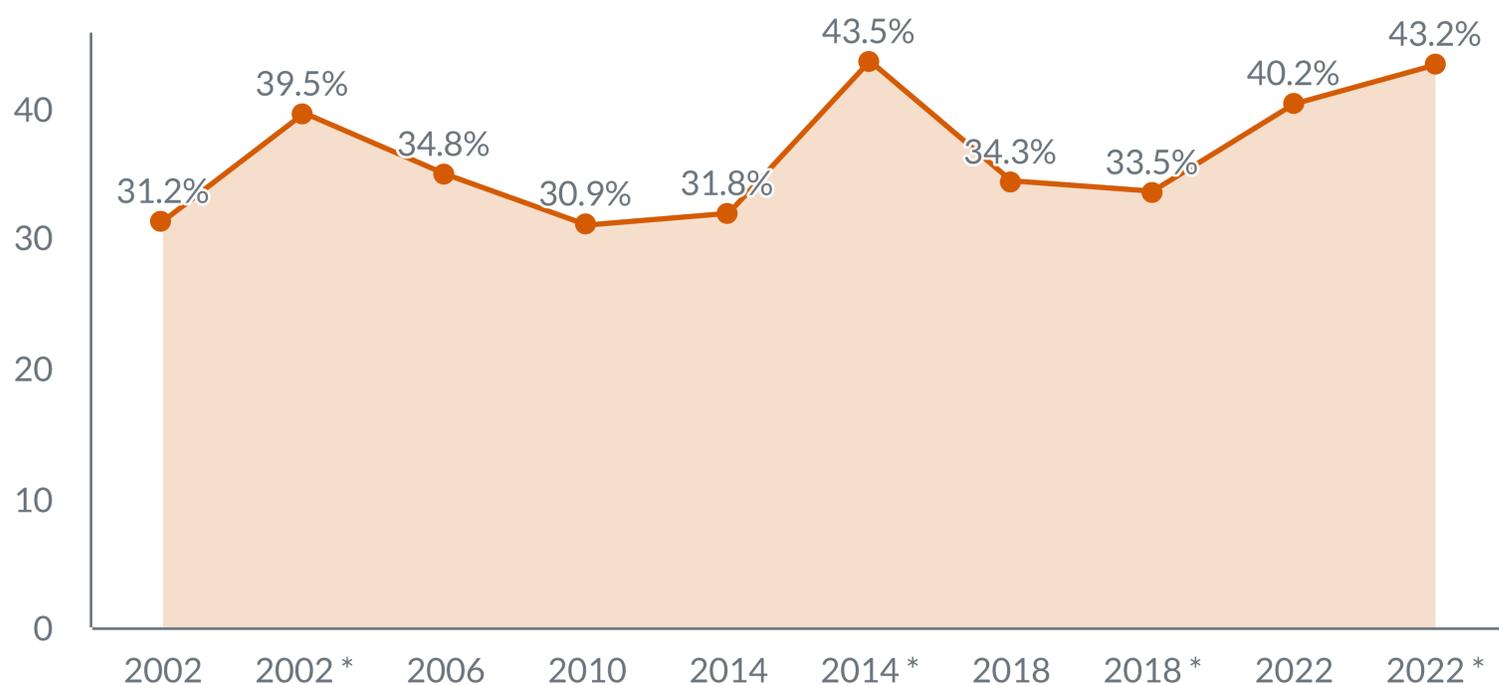
However, the new President has already strongly hinted that his party, the PPSD, will work as a **conciliatory fraction** within the Assembly, so as to build the necessary consensus to promote its reform agenda. Besides, **Chaves** will start his term of office during **extraordinary sessions**. This means he can dictate the **working agenda** of the deputies and, therefore, limit it to only bills that are promoted by his government.



# Highlights of the election day

## High level of abstentionism

This runoff election again registered **very low voter turnout** – evidence that neither candidate, however much he tried, was able to cut through the country's prevailing disaffection with its political class. In his victory speech, Chaves lamented that **abstention had become "the largest political party"** in Costa Rica and vowed to do "the impossible to restore confidence".



■ Abstention rate. The \* indicates it was a runoff election

Source: Own elaboration based on data provided by the Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE in Spanish).

## The candidates accepted the results on election night

During Sunday night, the **candidates accepted the results of the TSE**, as they had promised they would during their campaigns. **Rodrigo Chaves**, the president elect, dedicated part of his speech to send a **message of unity to the remaining parties** to "seek and find joint solutions", "leaving aside party flags".

Meanwhile, **José María Figueres (PLN) conceded defeat and congratulated Chaves** as president elect. The former president said Costa Rica was going through a deep crisis but that it was time to "move forward, **put aside differences** and look for points of consensus".

*"I have called President-Elect Rodrigo Chaves to express my congratulations and to make an orderly transition."*

*- Carlos Alvarado Quesada, outgoing president of Costa Rica*

# Political Context

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## 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) also negatively impacted its allies – especially the PUSC, which many had thought might reach the runoff but which finally came fourth.

None of these or other parties had formally got behind either of the two candidates competing in Sunday's runoff. In spite of this, during his campaign, the new president Rodrigo Chaves showed himself open to form a **cabinet** that is inclusive of **figures from other political parties**. Whether this materialises will be evident in the lead-up to his swearing-in. If he does construct such a cross-party cabinet, this could help him consolidate alliances to help strengthen his position in the Assembly, where, as discussed, he is dependent on attracting broad support in order to promote his agenda.

## Political discontent and advantage for the "new politics"

Sunday's elections came amid **widespread voter apathy and disenchantment** with the country's politics. This was borne out, once again, by a high level of voter abstention that surpassed even the one registered in the first round of February. Sunday's turnout was 56.77%.

According to a magistrate of the country's Supreme Electoral Tribunal, he lays 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 70% of those who said they were not going to vote, confirmed so over rejection or dislike of candidacies, and disinterest or disillusionment with politics.

In this climate, the candidate who proclaimed a **"new way of doing politics"**, Rodrigo Chaves, managed to win the presidency. Again, after the rise of the PAC in 2014, this discourse seems to continue to convince the Costa Rican electorate, who continue to seek **new political alternatives** to overcome the country's problems.

## Conclusions

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**Rodrigo Chaves** of the PPSD has won the runoff and will be the **next president of Costa Rica**. However, his victory owes little if anything to any return of trust or rejuvenation for politics among voters, fully 43.23% of whom abstained in what was a record low turnout for a second-round election in the country.

Thus Chaves approaches the presidency with an already unresounding mandate and with **pressing issues to address**. Among them, responding to citizens' biggest concerns notably the **economy, unemployment, corruption, and negotiations with the IMF**. All the while, as he says he is committed to, rebuilding the public's **confidence in government and politics**.

Key to his success will be whether he consolidates enough power in the **Legislature**, where he is far short of a majority. His options for doing this include dialling down his **anti-establishment** rhetoric to get on-side with the PLN, or instead reaching out to the leftist FA party or the conservative PNR, both of them being ideologically far from each other.

What is certain is that to push through a meaningful part of his agenda, he will need **continual support from other parties**. The PPSD leader's suggestion that he is open to **include political figures from other political camps in this cabinet** is a sign he is readying for the task ahead.

Amid another orderly election that is now characteristic of Costa Rican politics, citizens - albeit in disappointing numbers - have swung behind Chaves' and his **"new politics"** mantra. Now begins the hard work of making the renewal happen.



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