



DIRECTORIO
LEGISLATIVO

FORTALECEMOS
LAS DEMOCRACIAS
DE AMÉRICA LATINA

STRENGTHENING
DEMOCRACIES
IN LATIN AMERICA

APRIL 2023

Paraguay

Presidential and legislative elections Pre-election report



Executive summary

Next Sunday, April 30, Paraguayan citizens will vote in the general elections, where they will elect their president and vice-president for the next 5 years, according to the mandate established in the Constitution. In addition, 45 senators and 80 deputies will be elected, representing the renewal of the entire Congress. Without the possibility of a run-off election, whoever obtains the highest number of votes will become the new president.

The electoral climate is marked by the polarization between the Partido Colorado, the current ruling party, and Concertación Nacional, an alliance of 14 opposition parties that will seek to become president of the country. This coalition seeks to capitalize on popular discontent with the ruling party, which has led Mario Abdo Benítez to approach the end of his term with a 65% negative image, according to our [report](#) that monitors presidential image in Latin America.

In addition, the successive allegations of corruption against key figures of the Partido Colorado, such as vice-president Hugo Velázquez, and former president and current party leader Horacio Cartes, as well as the questioning of the ability to address and respond to the problems of the citizens, weaken the ruling party and even cast doubt on its ability to remain in power.

In elections characterized by a single round, the winning list faces the challenge of obtaining a wide difference with the second place. However, the latest polls show a distance of 10 points between the first and the second option, and the gap may narrow as Election Day approaches. On average, 8.15% of those polled said they would vote blank or had not defined their vote.

Content

- Executive summary
- The elections in numbers
- Basic questions
- Main candidates
- Polls

PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS

- Political context
- Conclusions

The election in numbers

4.782.940 IS THE NUMBER OF VOTERS

IS THE TOTAL NUMBER OF POSITIONS TO BE ELECTED, INCLUDING PRESIDENT, VICE PRESIDENT, LEGISLATORS AND MEMBERS OF DEPARTMENTAL COUNCILS

401

38,25% IS THE AVERAGE NUMBER OF VOTES FOR THE RULING PARTY CANDIDATE, SANTIAGO PEÑA, ACCORDING TO POLLS

AVERAGE VOTING INTENTIONS FOR THE CONCERTACIÓN CANDIDATE, EFRAÍN ALEGRE

28,02 %

13 ARE THE PRESIDENTIAL DUOS RUNNING FOR OFFICE

IS THE NUMBER OF SEATS TO BE RENEWED, THAT IS, THE TOTALITY OF THE CONGRESS

125

66,96% IS THE AVERAGE VOTER TURNOUT SINCE THE 1998 ELECTIONS TO DATE

Basic questions

What is being elected?

President and vice-president, 45 senators, 80 deputies and their respective alternates will be elected. By constitutional mandate, the president and vice-president may not be reelected, unlike deputies and senators who may be reelected.

How does voting work?

The Constitution establishes that the vote is universal, free, direct, equal and secret. Paraguayans and foreigners permanently residing in the country who are over 18 years of age are eligible to vote. Voting is electronic, and the voting machines print a ballot with the citizen's choice, which is then deposited in a ballot box for subsequent counting.

How are they chosen?

The president and vice-president will be elected jointly, by a simple majority of votes and without the possibility of a second electoral round. Meanwhile, deputies and senators are elected in simultaneous elections to the presidential elections and, like the executive offices, will serve a five-year term.

Who are the candidates?

These elections are marked by the strong competition between the Partido Colorado (current ruling party) and the Concertación; the latter being a coalition of parties opposed to the current government that seeks to reach the Executive.

Although there are 13 presidential candidates, the candidates of the Partido Colorado and the Concertación accumulate more than 65% of the voting intentions.

When will the next government take office?

While the president and vice president will take office on August 15, 2023, the renewal of Congress is scheduled for July 1 of this year.

Presidential elections

With a ruling party weakened by numerous allegations of corruption, and with an opposition united in coalition, the elections are presented as a contest between the candidacies of the two proposals that lead in voting intentions: the Partido Colorado and the Concertación Nacional.



Santiago Peña
Partido Colorado
(A.N.R.)



**CONCERTACIÓN
NACIONAL 2023**

Efraín Alegre
Concertación

Although there are 13 presidential duos, the candidates of the Partido Colorado and the Concertación Nacional accumulate more than 60% of the voting intention, according to the average of the available polls.

The Partido Colorado ticket, led by Santiago Peña and with Pedro Alliana for the vice-presidency, has the best chances of winning. They are followed by Efraín Alegre and Soledad Núñez for the Concertación. In third place, with a little less than 20%, is Paraguay Cubas of the Partido Cruzada Nacional.

It is presumed that the difference in votes between the two main proposals will be limited, and that the elected list will assume the leadership of the country with the challenge of building legitimacy.

Main candidates

Santiago Peña | Partido Colorado (A.N.R.)

Peña is an economist graduated from Universidad Católica Nuestra Señora de la Asunción. He was Minister of Finance during the presidency of Horacio Cartes, between 2015 and 2017. In addition, he was part of the board of the Central Bank of Paraguay, a position he held between 2012 and his appointment as minister.

In 2017 he ran as a pre-candidate for the presidency for the Partido Colorado, but lost in the internal elections. Peña has been criticized by some sectors of society due to his links with former president Cartes, accused of corruption by the US government.



Proposals

Although he has not presented an official document with his plan, his intentions have slipped throughout the campaign:

- Create the "Tekopora Mbarete", an increase to the current family subsidy "Tekopora", oriented to the acquisition of products of the basic basket.
- Implement new technologies and agricultural practices to generate higher productivity and crop quality. Peña has referred numerous times to the agricultural sector as a "key" to the economy.
- Incentives for sustainable and environmentally responsible agricultural production.
- Create an infrastructure investment plan, with a focus on improving connectivity and access to basic services in both rural and urban areas.
- Strengthen the health system by improving infrastructure, together with the training of health personnel.
- Development of public policies for the care of the environment, focused on conserving natural resources and promoting clean energy.

Efraín Alegre | Concertación Nacional

A lawyer graduated from the Universidad Católica Nuestra Señora de la Asunción, Alegre has held numerous public positions during his career. In 2008, he was elected deputy for the Partido Liberal Radical Auténtico (PLRA), running for president for the same party in 2013 and 2018. He was Minister of Public Works during the administration of Fernando Lugo, a position that brought him numerous accusations of corruption.

In 2022, he was consecrated as candidate of the Concertación, a coalition of numerous opposition parties to the government that sought to associate with the aim of presenting an alternative to the ruling party. However, the internal elections were marred by accusations of fraud against Alegre.



Proposals

Within the [government program presented](#), the following proposals stand out:

- Implement the "Energy for Work" Plan, which seeks to reduce the cost of energy for the industrial sector, especially MSMEs, allowing them to hire more employees.
- Restructure the transportation system to strengthen the role of the agro-industrial and agro-export sector.
- Create the "Carnet del estudiante" (student's credential), in order for students to obtain a 50% discount on public transportation, as well as discounts in cafeterias, bookstores, electronic stores, seminars, academic activities and training courses.
- Creation of the "Pohã Gratis" program, which consists of free access to a series of essential medicines, in order to address the current dissatisfaction with the health system.
- Strengthening the domestic market to ensure that fruit and vegetable production can be consumed within the country. In addition, it seeks to reduce the cost of energy for agricultural producers.
- Implement the "Wifi nde rógape" program, which proposes greater equity in the population's access to internet connection.

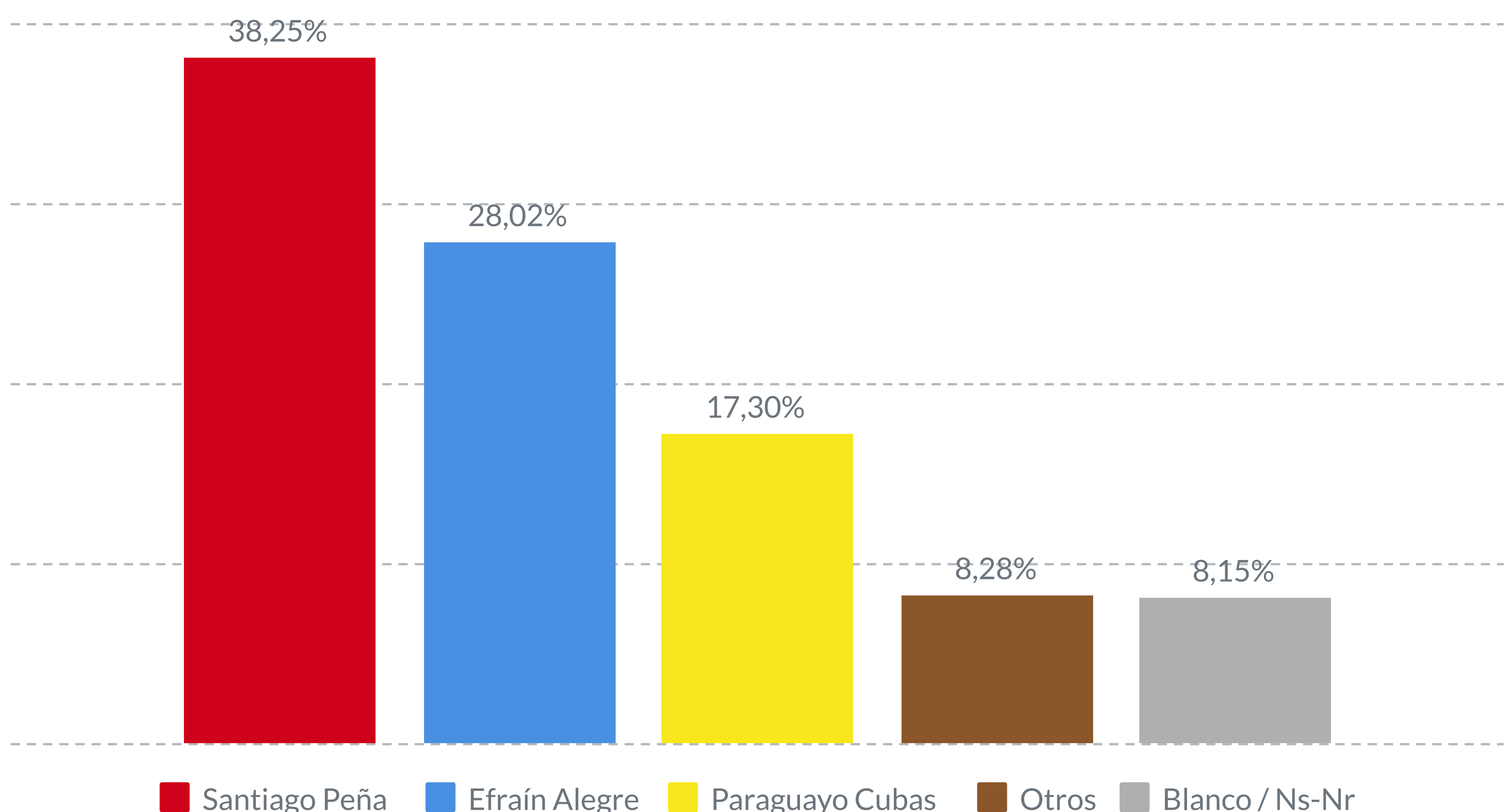
Polls

According to an average of polls conducted by local consulting firms during the months of March and April 2023, the Partido Colorado list headed by Santiago Peña leads the voting intention with 38.25%. It is followed by the Concertación, led by Efraín Alegre, and in third place the Partido Cruzada Nacional, of Paraguayo Cubas, who has had a remarkable growth in the last weeks, although not enough to surpass the Concertación.

The first two options hold more than 65% of the voting intentions. Without the possibility of a second round, and with elections defined by simple majority, this race presents a scenario where the candidate to be elected will come from the proposal of the Partido Colorado and the proposal of the Concertación.

A victory of the former would mean a historical continuity, considering that the Partido Colorado has lost only one election since the return of democracy in 1989. On the contrary, a triumph of the Concertación would imply significant transformations in the political panorama, especially considering that it is an alliance of parties that must generate agreements within itself in order to govern.

Taking into account the unstable presidency of Fernando Lugo (the only president who has not belonged to the Partido Colorado in democracy), a victory of the opposition alliance generates uncertainty about its capacity to rule.



Source: Own elaboration based on multiple polls by local consulting firms between March and April 2023.

Legislative elections

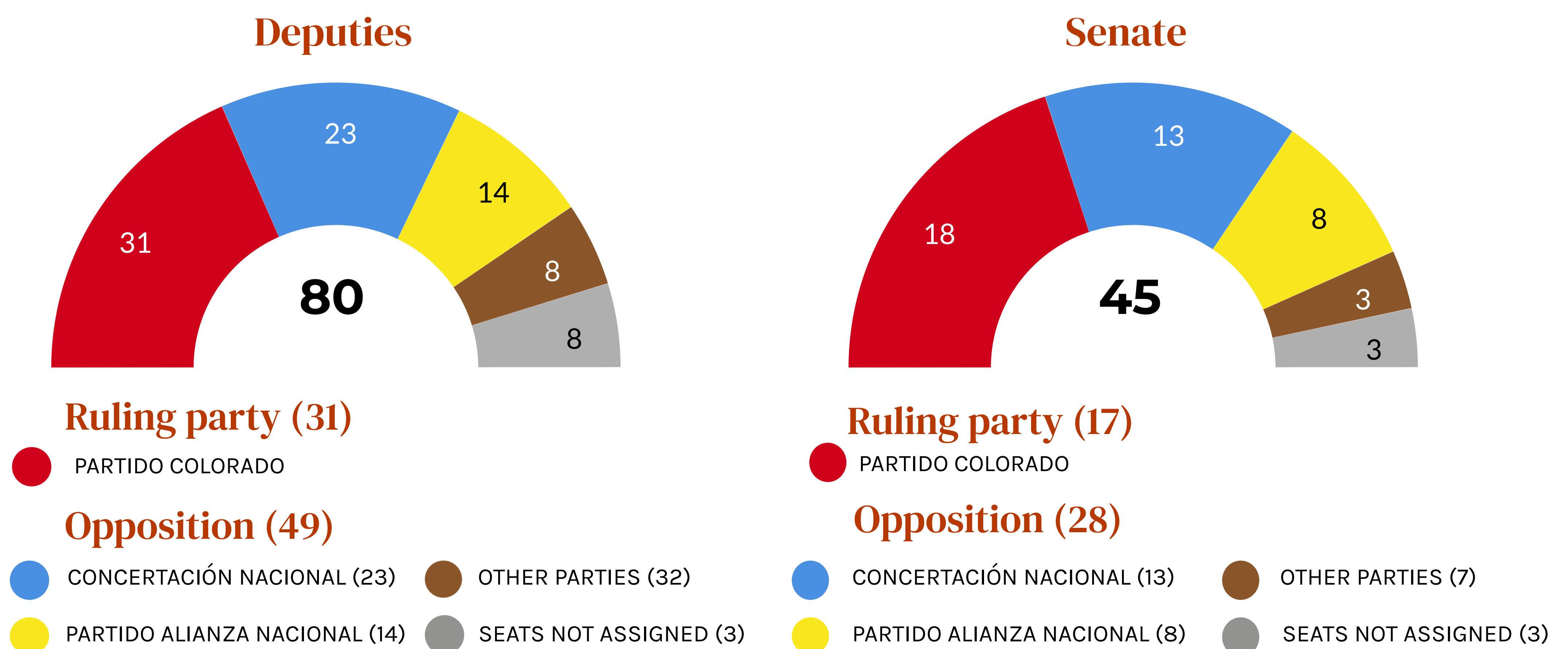
The Congress will be renewed in its entirety, for a term of 5 years until 2028. The new legislators will take office on July 1, with 45 senators and 80 deputies.

How will the Congress be composed after Sunday?

Currently, the Partido Colorado has its own majority in the Chamber of Deputies and the possibility of establishing political agreements in the Senate, which gave viability to the bills presented by the Executive Branch on more than one occasion. However, the administration of President Mario Abdo was also characterized by a division within the ruling party, dividing the party into blocks between legislators supporting the president and legislators supporting Horacio Cartes. This complicated the progress of some initiatives and the electoral organization for this year, although finally the differences were settled and today the party is aligned behind Peña's candidacy.

Regardless of the winning party, if the difference in votes between the first and the second candidate for the presidency remains narrow, the new Executive will have to negotiate agreements between his political party and the other parties with representation, since none of them would reach the majority necessary to promote its own legislative agenda. In this sense, the votes and representation obtained by other forces, such as the party of the candidate Paraguayo Cubas, will be relevant in the structure of the next Congress.

In addition, the Paraguayan voting system leaves open the possibility of a party obtaining more votes for congressional representatives than for the presidential candidate for the same party.



Source: Own elaboration based on projections made from available surveys

Political context

Partido Colorado, currently in government, comes to the elections weakened by two factors: first, the low popularity of President Mario Abdo Benítez, who is approaching the end of his term with a 65% negative image. The second, numerous allegations of corruption that keep the public on edge.



The successive accusations of corruption by the U.S. Embassy in Paraguay against leaders and officials of the Partido Colorado led to the resignation of the current vice-president Hugo Velázquez as a candidate for the presidency. In addition, the current administration went through numerous corruption scandals that led, among others, to the dismissal of the president of the Supreme Court and the general attorney of the State.

For its part, the Concertación also faced obstacles when it came to defining the presidential ticket. The election of Efraín Alegre, representative of the Partido Liberal Radical Auténtico (PLRA in Spanish), was tainted by accusations of fraud, followed by numerous journalistic investigations denouncing acts of corruption during his term as Minister of Public Works during the government of former President Lugo. All this, in a social context marked by the crisis of the social security system and the health system, the population's claims of corruption at all levels of the State and the lack of political agreement to address the problems of the public agenda.

Corruption and U.S. sanctions

In August 2022, the ruling party received a hard blow: the then candidate for president and current incumbent vice president, Hugo Velázquez, was [declared](#) "significantly corrupt" by the U.S. State Department. This meant the resignation of Velázquez from the candidacy, and an arduous work of the Partido Colorado to face the consequences of the accusation, while the main media of the country and the region echoed what happened. A month earlier, in July 2022, former President Horacio Cortes was [indicted](#) by the United States for the same reason.

Already in January 2023, in the midst of the election campaign, both senior officials of the Partido Colorado were further [sanctioned](#) by the U.S. Treasury Department on corruption charges. As a consequence, all properties and interests held by both of them that are in the United States or in the possession or control of U.S. persons are blocked. Additionally, Washington alleges that both Velazquez and Cartes have ties to members of the Hezbollah terrorist organization.

Although Cartes took the decision to withdraw his shareholding from the Cartes Group -a conglomerate that brings together more than 70 companies in the country- as well as to limit as much as possible his public appearances during the electoral campaign, damage control was far from the partisan ideal. A historical referent of the current ruling party, he had been elected president of the Partido Colorado just two weeks before the accusations against him were made public.

In the corruption plot involving Paraguayan politics, the president of the Supreme Court, Antonio Fretes, "left his position indefinitely" in November 2022, after his son was involved in a corruption and drug trafficking scandal.

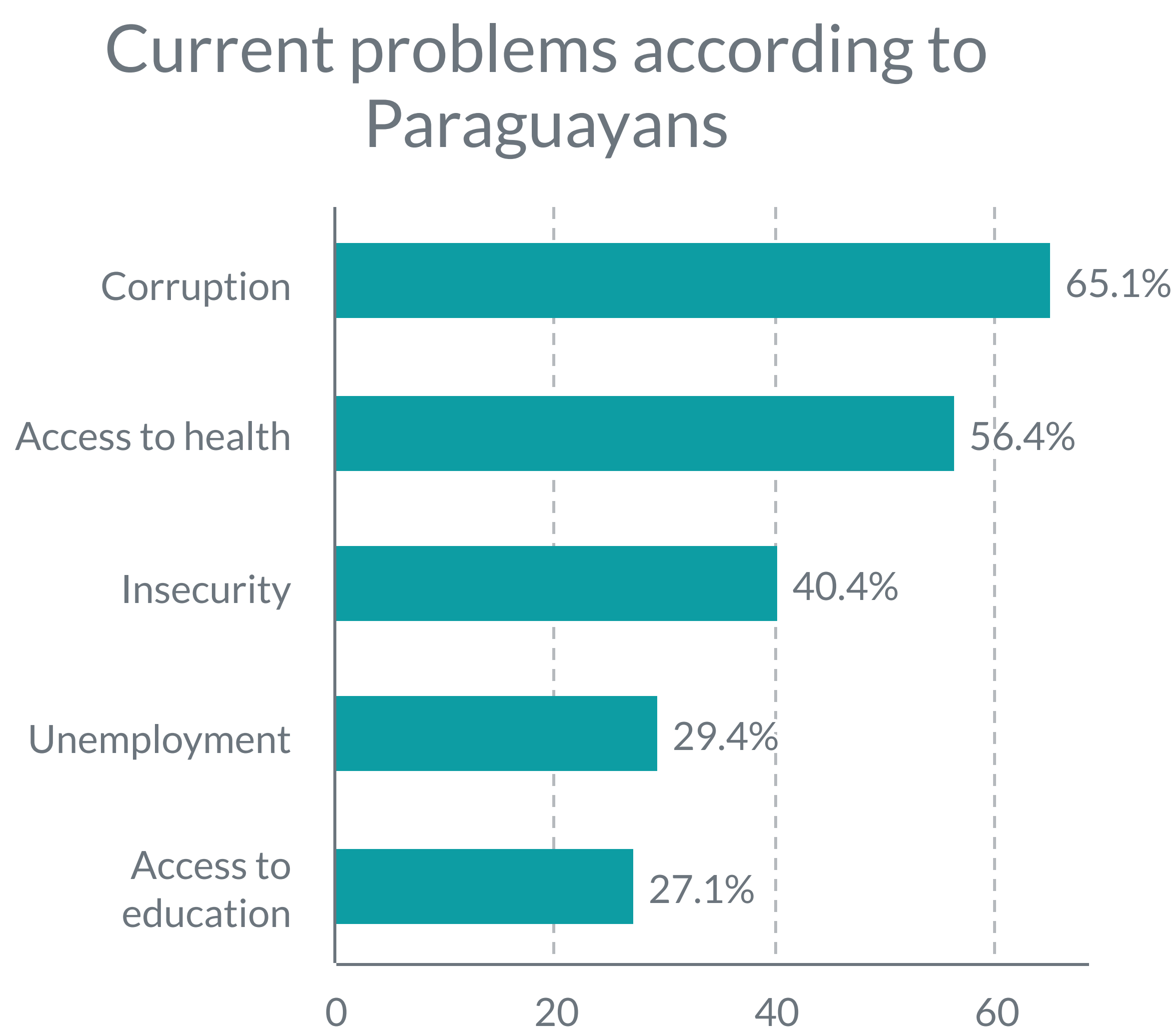


Public Agenda vs. Political Agenda: pending issues

According to private reports, Paraguayan citizens consider corruption as the main problem to confront. However, although the fight against corruption is an issue present in the campaigns of all candidates, other concerns of the population have not reached the political discussion.

Unemployment, together with poverty and inflation, are relevant issues for citizens that are not on the current agenda of the Executive, nor on that of the Congress. Moreover, the campaign proposals of the ruling party and the opposition were far away from these issues.

Addressing these issues will be central for whoever is elected president in the process of building legitimacy and broadening his support base. Whoever assumes the presidency will have to face a country with a 27% poverty rate and security problems such as organized crime, drug trafficking and violence.



Source: Atlas Survey, cited by the Council of the Americas (AS/COA) - March 2023.

Conclusions

The ruling party comes to the elections weakened by different factors, among which are allegations of corruption and sanctions by the United States against members of the Partido Colorado, as well as citizen protests due to dissatisfaction with the way social problems are being addressed. In addition, issues of interest such as poverty and insecurity were kept out of the political discussion during the campaign, despite being among the main concerns of Paraguayans.

In turn, the Concertación Nacional sought to strengthen its position in the citizen criticism of the current administration, positioning itself as the logical option against the proposal of the ruling party. For this reason, the electoral contest seems to be divided between those two spaces, with projections that estimate a difference of 10 points on average between the first and second place, but it could be less.

However, a little more than ten points behind is also the party led by Paraguayo Cubas, the Partido Cruzada Nacional, whose performance in the polls has been improving and, according to projections, would be represented in both chambers. The result obtained by this party cannot be underestimated. This would open the door to a relevant space in the negotiation of the legislative agenda of the next Congress.

Considered individually, some polls indicate that there will be continuity and that the Partido Colorado will remain in power, without breaking its historical dominance over the Paraguayan Executive. While others open the possibility of a break with the traditionally expected, indicating a possible arrival of the Concertación to power. The third proposal, that of the self-proclaimed "anti-system" Paraguayo Cubas, is closely observed due to its rapid growth, which could occur within the framework of citizen discontent with the most traditional political class in the country.

While it is expected that the elected candidate's margin of victory will not be so wide, it is certain that he will have the task of building legitimacy and increasing his support base by addressing the pending issues on the public agenda. In Congress, the lack of majorities in both chambers by either party will make it even more necessary than at present to build consensus with other forces to promote the legislative agenda.



Other reports by Directorio Legislativo

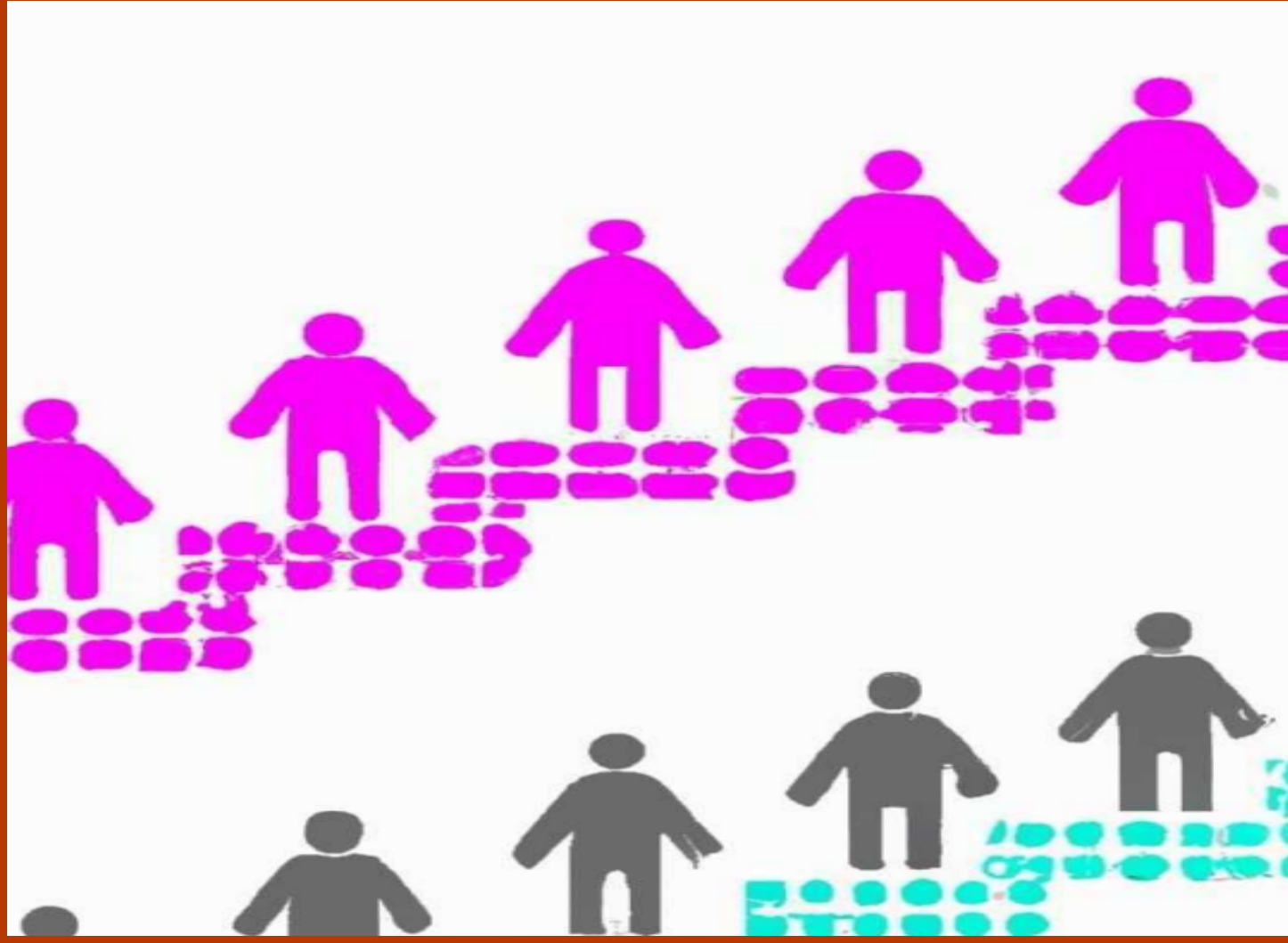


Image of Power
January-February 2023

[SEE MORE](#)



Civic Space Guardian

[SEE MORE](#)



**DIRECTORIO
LEGISLATIVO**

FORTALECEMOS
LAS DEMOCRACIAS
DE AMÉRICA LATINA

STRENGTHENING
DEMOCRACIES
IN LATIN AMERICA

Directorio Legislativo is an independent, non-profit organization working to strengthen democracy and make law- and policy-making in Latin America more transparent, representative and participatory. We achieve this by improving access to public information, and through the creation of spaces for legislators and politicians to engage and be influenced by outside specialists, civil society and the public at large

 info@directoriolegislativo.org



BUENOS AIRES

Av. Entre Ríos 258 3o E
(1079), CABA. Argentina
+ (5411) 5218-4647



WASHINGTON D.C.

1110 13th St NW, Suite 800
Washington DC 20005, USA
+ 1 (786) 828-0875



www.directoriolegislativo.com