May 2024

General Elections in the Dominican Republic
Pre-election report
On May 19, the Dominican Republic will hold general elections to pick its next president and vice-president. Also up for grabs are 32 Senate seats and 190 in the Chamber of Deputies for the period 2024-2028.

Among the nine presidential candidates, incumbent president Luis Abinader of the Partido Revolucionario Moderno (PRM) is emerging as the favorite, with over 60% of popular support according to polls.

To be elected President in the first round, a candidate must obtain more than 50% of the valid votes cast. If none of the contenders reaches this threshold, there will be a run-off scheduled for 30 June.

One of the main challenges for the next government will be the relationship with Haiti, a nation immersed in an acute humanitarian and political crisis. The Dominican Republic's current determination to close its borders for fear of unrest, the deportation of Haitian civilians and the declaration of Haitian Prime Minister Ariel Henry as persona non grata underlines the persistent tensions between the two nations.

The government's aim is to increase its majority in both chambers of Congress. If the results of February's municipal elections are replicated, the vote of confidence in Abinader's party would give it new seats in Congress that would enable it to deepen the reforms that are indispensable to its governmental agenda without the need to negotiate with other parties.
Abinader predicted win re-election

In the latest available polls, Luis Abinader leads with over 60% of support, a trend that has remained constant since November 2023. If these anticipated survey results are replicated on Sunday, it would enable him to secure a second term in office without the need for a runoff election. The projected scenario indicates a significant margin of difference, positioning the president comfortably ahead of his main competitors. Candidates Leonel Fernandez and Abel Martinez trail far behind, with 20% and 11% of voting intentions, respectively.

The sustained support for Abinader has also manifested in the recent municipal elections held in February 2024. His party secured victory in 121 of the 158 municipalities across the country. This confidence in the ruling party resulted in a significant expansion from its previous base of 80 municipalities since 2020. In contrast, the Partido de la Liberación Dominicana experienced a decrease, winning only 16 municipalities compared with its previous 60, while Fuerza del Pueblo managed to secure victory in only 6 municipalities.

*Own elaboration based on the average of data taken from surveys published between November 2023 and April 2024.*
Abinader's strong prospects for reelection can be attributed to widespread citizen support for a political project that promised a departure from traditional Dominican politics. His victory in 2020 marked the end of 16 years of uninterrupted governance by the Partido de la Liberación Dominicana (PLD). Amid the COVID-19 health crisis, Abinader emerged as an alternative to the perceived entrenched political establishment, advocating for transparency and the fight against corruption.

Since assuming office, the president has enjoyed robust backing, with an average approval rating of 70% during his initial six months in power. This support stemmed from his recent election, dissatisfaction with his predecessor Danilo Medina's administration, and a flourishing economy driven by foreign tourism, positioning the island as a pandemic "escape."

Notably, Abinader's efforts in combating corruption, fostering economic growth, and improving living standards, as corroborated by International Monetary Fund (IMF) data, have resonated with Dominicans. Additionally, his restrictive immigration policies, particularly concerning Haitian citizens or their descendants, have bolstered his popularity. As a result, he currently maintains a high level of popular support, exceeding 64% according to recent measurements.
Main candidates

Luis Rodolfo Abinader
(Partido Revolucionario Moderno)

Profile

Luis Abinader holds a Bachelor's degree in Economics from the Instituto Tecnológico de Santo Domingo (INTEC) and has furthered his academic pursuits with postgraduate studies in Project Management at the Arthur D. Little Institute in Cambridge. He has also augmented his expertise with courses in Corporate Finance and Financial Engineering at Harvard University and in Advanced Management at Dartmouth College in New Hampshire, USA.

As a founding member of the PRM, Abinader assumed the presidency of the Republic in 2020. His ascent to power was grounded in a political agenda centered on combating corruption and championing governmental transparency. Throughout his tenure, he has been recognized for his pro-business stance, displaying a resolute commitment to enhancing social spending and fostering economic growth.

Government plan

Among his government proposals, the following stand out:

- Establish a national digital investment framework to optimize the digital transformation processes of state institutions.
- Modernize the legal framework for the digital economy and e-commerce to regulate and protect digital transactions.
- Strengthen the digital economy through the development of advanced digital infrastructures.
- Promote cybersecurity and technological innovation.
- Strengthen the creative industries sector, as well as create jobs and income and promote industrial innovation.
- Develop a national strategic plan for the industrialization of the creative sector for the period 2024-2028.
Leonel Fernández (Fuerza del Pueblo)

Profile
D. in Law from the Universidad Autónoma de Santo Domingo (UASD) and has held the presidency in three previous terms, from 1996 to 2000 and then from 2004 to 2012. His candidacy with Fuerza del Pueblo (FP) is distinguished by its focus on economic stability, institutional strengthening and the defense of citizens' rights.

Fernández began his political career in the 1970s by joining the Partido de la Liberación Dominicana. During his presidential terms, he stood out for his policy of economic openness and his drive to modernize the state, as well as for his role in stabilizing the economy and promoting foreign investment. However, his political legacy was also marked by controversy and criticism, especially in relation to issues of corruption and government management.

Government plan
Among his government proposals, the following stand out:

- Develop policies to ensure price stability and liquidity in the economy.
- Implement policies that limit the risks of crisis in the financial sector and ensure comprehensive management of the challenges faced by financial institutions.
- Establish a fiscal pact and increase revenues equivalent to 2% of GDP.
- Improve the collection system through the implementation of technologies for the management of big data and artificial intelligence.
- Promote cultural industries through alliances and cooperation agreements with official, private and civil society entities.
- Update the General Law of Culture and complete the set of pending cultural laws to strengthen the legal framework in cultural matters.
Profile
He is a Dominican politician with an academic background in Law, graduated from the Pontificia Universidad Católica Madre y Maestra, with a postgraduate degree in Commercial and Corporate Law. Between 2010 and 2016, he served as president of the Chamber of Deputies, highlighting his commitment to public service and his focus on local and regional development.

From 2016 to 2020 and re-elected until 2024, Martinez has served as mayor of Santiago de los Caballeros, one of the most prominent cities in the Dominican Republic. During his tenure, he has implemented various policies aimed at urban development, citizen security and improving the quality of life of the city's inhabitants.

Government plan
Among his government proposals, the following stand out:

- Promote financial education, training on credit management, credit card management and care of credit history.
- Promote the accumulation of funds with contributions for consumption, following the model of pensions for consumption (PENSUMO in Spanish), through agreements between the Banco de Reservas and credit card issuers.
- Simplify the tax system by reducing bureaucracy in the fulfillment of tax obligations.
- Encourage the development of specialized technicians in services related to the film industry.
- Invest in the development and training of national artists in the areas of acting so that they can participate in national film crews.
- Invest in the promotion of the Dominican Republic as a destination for the filming of international productions.
The composition of the current Congress shows clear majorities for the president which has allowed him to advance his agenda without major obstacles. Likewise, in the run-up to the elections, Abinader indicated that although the candidates of his bloc have their "own criteria", they are not going to "hinder the government's major projects in favor of the nation".

For these elections, the president consolidated a coalition with more than 20 parties that supported the PRM's presidential candidacy. The polls and the results of the municipal elections suggest an increase in the number of seats for the ruling party, in addition to the broad coalition of parties with which it is competing. These parties have agreed to support the government's legislative initiatives related to immigration policy, housing, health, education and an integrated transport system. As a result, the current government would not face major challenges in advancing its legislative agenda, including the eventual presentation of a tax reform.

With the current numbers, it is expected that the ruling party will come close to a qualified majority in both chambers. In the Senate, it will only need to increase by four seats to reach 23 of the 32 seats at stake, while in the Chamber of Deputies it needs 16 seats to reach 126 out of a total of 190. This will imply a reduction in the transaction costs involved in negotiating more structural reforms, especially those where the opposition is unwilling to compromise.
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