

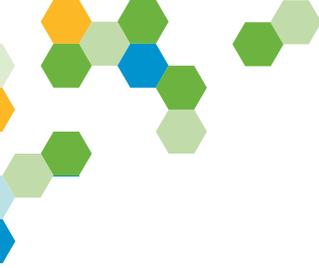


SPECIAL REPORT

# Dominican elections 2016: three processes in one and more technology in their organisation

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## I. INTRODUCTION

On May 15th slightly more than 6.7 million Dominicans will have the chance to go to the just over 16,000 electoral colleges (voting tables) to elect their presidential, legislative and municipal authorities. After two decades of separate elections, further to the approval of the “Carta Magna” (Constitution) of 2016, the presidential, legislative and municipal elections have once again been reunited and so on the third Sunday in May, 4,106 positions will be elected (members of the Central American Parliament, inter alia).

This whirl of figures makes this year’s elections a challenging event whose organisation lies with the Central Electoral Council (JCE), presided over by Roberto Rosario since 2010, and in which almost 80,000 people will be working, without including the delegates and their alternates which the parties will distribute amongst the slightly more than 4,000 polling stations. To put this into effect, the body has said that it will invest around 3,500 million pesos - around 76.2 million dollars.

Votes will be cast in the 32 provinces and overseas. In other words, the Dominicans from the diaspora may also cast their vote although only for the Presidency and its representatives in the Parliament. 50 % of voters are concentrated in five provinces. Greater Santo Domingo, - which includes the province of the same name and the National District - the capital – goes to make up 31.5 % of them. These are followed by Santiago with 10.3 %, San Cristóbal with 5.5 % and La Vega with 4.21 %. However, special attention must be paid to “province 33”, comprising the 384,523 Dominicans eligible to vote outside the country, representing 5.6 % of the total which, in addition to its own members of parliament, will also mark the presidential ticket.

## 2. THE CONTENDERS

Although there will only be eight presidential candidates, the number of parties taking part will be 26. There are two clearly formed blocks, the dominant one being that headed up by the Partido de la Liberación Dominicana (PLD) with which a further 15 parties have become allies to form the Bloque Progresista. The Partido Revolucionario Moderno (PRM) which is competing for the first time as it was formed recently has achieved the support of a further three parties. The others are the Alianza País (ALPAIS), Frente Nacional Progresista (FNP), Alianza por la Democracia (APD), Partido Revolucionario Social Demócrata (PRSD), Partido de Unidad Nacional (PUN) and Partido Quisqueyano Demócrata Cristiano (PQDC).

Of particular note is the fact there is no direct presence of two historic parties: Partido Reformista Social Cristiano (PRSC) and Partido Revolucionario Dominicano (PRD). The former was involved in various races allied with the PLD and on this occasion it decided to go along with the PRM. The PRD, in turn, after the split that took place when the PRM emerged, reached a re-election agreement with the PLD and it is its ally in these elections. Without a shadow of a doubt, they are the two major surprises which have led analysts to say that the political parties are not guided by their ideology but rather by the share of power they can negotiate by seeking integration into other groupings.

The PLD starts off as the favourite to make its mark in the elections in all three voting areas. The PRM, which came about with the idea of being the major opposition party and the chance to make a change after 12 years of PLD governments does not seem to have achieved its objective. In presidential terms, Danilo Medina, the present President and the man who is hoping to gain re-election, modifying the Constitution to this end in 2015, has led the latest polls presented by the media in conjunction with firms like Gallup, Greenberg or Penn & Schoen. Its figures stand at around the 60 % mark, ahead of the 30 % at which Luis Abinader, the PRM candidate, has stalled. Guillermo Moreno is the best of the rest, though with a mere 3 % of voting intentions.

Figure 1. Results of polls regarding election on 15M in the Dominican Republic

	Greenberg-Diario libre April 11th	Mark Penn - SIN April 12th	Gallup - HOY April 25th
<b>Danilo Medina (PLD)</b>	59 %	62 %	63 %
<b>Luis Abinader (PRD)</b>	32 %	29 %	29 %
<b>Guillermo Moreno (ALPAIS)</b>	3 %	3 %	3.2 %
<b>Minou Tavárez (APD)</b>	1 %	1 %	<1 %
<b>Pelegrín Castillo (FNP)</b>	<1 %	<1 %	<1 %
<b>Soraya Aquino (PUN)</b>	<1 %	<1 %	<1 %
<b>Elías Wessin (PQDC)</b>	<1 %	<1 %	<1 %
<b>Hatuey de Camps (PRSD)</b>	<1 %	<1 %	<1 %

The main polls are predicting a victory by Danilo Medina in the first round. Medina has maintained an upward trend in intentions to vote which has consolidated at around 60 % during the last month. By contrast, support for Luis Abinader has been falling since the first polls in January which attributed around 36 % of votes to him until today when he would only attain 30 %. In turn, support for the minority parties seems to have been reduced to less than 5 % of preferences: there are four candidates who would not attain 1% whilst Minou Tavarez would attain 1 % and Guillermo Moreno 3 %.

**“Maxims of the JCE when putting together the process: more efficiency, more security and more transparency”**

### 3. THE PROCESS

The Junta Central Electoral (JCE - Central Electoral Board) is the body responsible for organising the elections. In the event of litigation or appeals, it is the Tribunal Superior Electoral (Higher Election Court) which is responsible for dealing with and ruling on them, a new body which emerged after its inclusion in the Constitution of 2010.

It can be said to have been three maxims of the JCE when putting together the process: more efficiency, more security and more transparency. It has not been without criticism and at the final stage the issues have focused on its decisions regarding the observation of the process on May 15th and on the reliability of the processes and teams involved in elector verification, vote counting and the transmission of results to the counting centre.

The big innovation in these elections has derived precisely from technology. When electors arrive at the voting centres and approach the tables to vote, they will be required to provide their ID card to place it in a device which will read a code on the former. The reader screen will display the biometric data of the ID card holder and will determine whether they are fit to vote or not. As an extra security measure and to avoid identity theft, the fingerprint of the

elector will be read. This process will occur as from the opening of the colleges at 6 a.m. until they close at 6 p.m.

Then the scanners will come into play for the automated counting of the votes. This was going to be the only counting method, but complaints from opposition parties and requests to the JCE to also include manual counting, have led the electoral body to include double counting for the presidential ticket. As regards the legislative and municipal election, according to the presentation made by technicians from the Board to the directors of the country's newspapers, they will be separated into piles per party voted for, involving a kind of counting.

As far as how the scanners work, the paper tickets in the urns will be issued, numbered and signed by the chairman of the table. They will then be placed in groups in the appliances which are going to scan them on both sides in a very speedy process. At the end of the scanning, the screen will display results on valid tickets and defective tickets. The numbers of the latter will be displayed on the screen and the officials at tables and party delegates must find the originals and compare the image on the screen with the oriented ticket in order to take the decision as to whether the vote is valid or not and if it is,

“For decades the Dominican elections have been characterised by the idea that there will always be fraud”

to determine which party to assign it to in which case it will be marked in the appliance to add up the vote for the option chosen. Once this stalemate has been resolved and the scanning closed, a results' report will be printed which must be signed by officials and delegates before being scanned and transmitted to the JCE counting centre for the consolidation of results.

In view of these issues, assuming respect for the law and regulations, and on the premise that the delegates of the political parties involved have been approving the resolutions and decisions issued by the electoral body, the JCE has decided to open each process to the scrutiny of as many people as wish to observe it and thereby comply with one of the three maxims mentioned at the start: more transparency.

#### 4. THE KEYS

For decades the Dominican elections have been characterised by the idea that there will always be **fraud**. With the technology deployed on this occasion, identity theft or counting falsification seem unlikely, although some people believe that the software may have been tampered with or even that the appliances have been hacked to alter the results. In actual fact, the PRM asked to open them to see what they have inside.

It seems that they will be the cause for discussion until the whole electoral process is over. Furthermore, another habitual practise is the cause of controversy: the purchase of ID cards so that electors do not vote. And this is indeed more feasible on the understanding that there is no technology to avoid it. The inclusion in the process of the manual vote in the presidential context leaves room for interpretation of the ticket and even the buying off of party delegates.

The **opposition** is divided. The PRM tried to become the coordinating axis of a movement called upon to get the PLD out of power, but its idea never took off and this is borne out by the presence of six presidential candidates aspiring to the top post in the Executive in an independent manner and perhaps they could have withdrawn in favour of Luis Abinader.

The **PRM** is not only experiencing this failure, but also the fact that the results may end up being well below the expectations that had generated when it announced its formation after which a large group of PRD militants abandoned said party to form a government alternative. Neither its candidate nor its proposal seem to have been taken on board by the population at a level to force a second round, something in which the PRMs still believe, out least outwardly.

“The PLD has been able to handle the internal crisis which emerged between the supporters of Leonel Fernández and Danilo Medina”

Several of the leaders, starting off with their presidential candidate, Luis Abinader, are staking everything on the elections and if they come a cropper this could spell the beginning of their end as political actors even though they manage to put forward arguments that allow them to justify the defeat at the hands of aspects beyond their control such as, for example, the skilful use of State resources by the PLD candidate, the current President of the Republic.

The **PLD**, in turn, if it has been able to handle the internal crisis which emerged between the supporters of Leonel Fernández, the former president of the country, the party’s president and the one called upon to be the candidate in view of the constitutional modification, and Danilo Medina who, despite having said himself and through third parties that he would not stand for re-election – it decided to do so by negotiating the modification of the Constitution. **The dirty washing has been done at home** and everything would suggest –it remains to be seen if resentment is still lingering – that the official candidate will prevail in the elections. This victory must also measure the impact its allies have had and even the candidature of the Vice-president. It is

possible that the percentage which the PRM could be lacking – according to the polls – to achieve results similar to previous elections in which it hasn’t won are those which the PRD is providing to the PLD on this occasion. And the contribution by the candidate to the Vice-president, currently in the position, Margarita Cedeño, the wife of Leonel Fernández, may prove to be important too. Both elements could make the difference between elections with or without a second round.

The polls have been showing the tendency that the results could confirm in the presidential elections. hence, the elections in terms of their **congress and municipal** part become important as they both become scenarios in which the opposition could try and achieve a greater balance of power. Particular attention must be paid to the diaspora and its vote as almost 400,000 of such electors are outside the country.

As regards what will happen in these areas, there is not much certainty in view of the lack of the publication of any polls. This is where, in the event of close results, conflicts could occur with the count and what could be a final process on May 15th may thus be extended into Monday the 16th.

## Author



**Iban Campo** is Managing Director at LLORENTE & CUENCA Dominican Republic. Degree Iban has a degree in Information Sciences from the Universidad de Navarra. He has an excellent career in the Dominican Republic, where he has worked for the American Chamber of Commerce as Manager of Corporate Communications. He was also Director of Communications at the Fundación Global Democracia y Desarrollo (Global Democracy and Development Foundation) (FUNGLODE) and correspondent of the daily El Pais in Spain, Listin Diario Editor and Editor General of El Caribe where he was also Director of Multimedia. Iban combines the best knowledge of the world of the media with the best one in the world of corporate communication.

[icampo@llorenteycuenca.com](mailto:icampo@llorenteycuenca.com)

# LLORENTE & CUENCA

## CORPORATE MANAGEMENT

José Antonio Llorente  
Founding Partner and Chairman  
jallornte@llorenteycuenca.com

Enrique González  
Partner and CFO  
egonzalez@llorenteycuenca.com

Adolfo Corujo  
Partner and Chief Talent and  
Innovation Officer  
acorujo@llorenteycuenca.com

Tomás Matesanz  
Chief Corporate & Brand Officer  
tmatesanz@llorenteycuenca.com

## MANAGEMENT - SPAIN AND PORTUGAL

Arturo Pinedo  
Partner and Managing Director  
apinedo@llorenteycuenca.com

Goyo Panadero  
Partner and Managing Director  
gpanadero@llorenteycuenca.com

## MANAGEMENT - LATIN AMERICA

Alejandro Romero  
Partner and CEO Latin America  
aromero@llorenteycuenca.com

Luisa García  
Partner and CEO Andes' Region  
lgarcia@llorenteycuenca.com

José Luis Di Girolamo  
Partner and CFO Latin America  
jldgirolamo@llorenteycuenca.com

## TALENT MANAGEMENT

Daniel Moreno  
Talent Manager for Spain  
and Portugal  
dmoreno@llorenteycuenca.com

Marjorie Barrientos  
Talent Manager for Andes' Region  
mbarrientos@llorenteycuenca.com

Eva Perez  
Talent Manager for North America,  
Central America and Caribbean  
eperez@llorenteycuenca.com

Karina Sanches  
Talent Manager for the  
Southern Cone  
ksanches@llorenteycuenca.com

## SPAIN AND PORTUGAL

### Barcelona

María Cura  
Partner and Managing Director  
mcura@llorenteycuenca.com

Muntaner, 240-242, 1º-1ª  
08021 Barcelona  
Tel. +34 93 217 22 17

### Madrid

Joan Navarro  
Partner and Vice-president  
of Public Affairs  
jnavarro@llorenteycuenca.com

Amalio Moratalla  
Partner and Senior Director  
amoratalla@llorenteycuenca.com

Latam Desk  
Claudio Vallejo  
Senior Director Latam Desk  
cvallejo@llorenteycuenca.com

Lagasca, 88 - planta 3  
28001 Madrid  
Tel. +34 91 563 77 22

Ana Folgueira  
Managing Director of  
Impossible Tellers  
ana@impossibletellers.com

Impossible Tellers  
Diego de León, 22, 3º izq  
28006 Madrid  
Tel. +34 91 438 42 95

### Lisbon

Madalena Martins  
Partner  
mmartins@llorenteycuenca.com

Tiago Vidal  
Managing Director  
tvidal@llorenteycuenca.com

Avenida da Liberdade nº225, 5º Esq.  
1250-142 Lisbon  
Tel. +351 21 923 97 00



Sergio Cortés  
Partner, Founder and Chairman  
scortes@cink.es

Calle Girona, 52 Bajos  
08009 Barcelona  
Tel. +34 93 348 84 28

## UNITED STATES

### Miami

Erich de la Fuente  
Partner and Managing Director  
edelafuente@llorenteycuenca.com

600 Brickell Ave.  
Suite 2020  
Miami, FL 33131  
Tel. +1 786 590 1000

### New York City

Latam Desk  
Adriana Aristizábal  
Senior consultant  
aaristizabal@llorenteycuenca.com

277 Park Avenue, 39th Floor  
New York, NY 10172  
Tel. +1 917 833 0103

### Washington, DC

Ana Gamonal  
Director  
agamonal@llorenteycuenca.com

10705 Rosehaven Street  
Fairfax, VA 22030  
Washington, DC  
Tel. +1 703 505 4211

## MEXICO, CENTRAL AMERICA AND CARIBBEAN

### Mexico City

Juan Rivera  
Partner and Managing Director  
jrivera@llorenteycuenca.com

Av. Paseo de la Reforma 412, Piso 14,  
Col. Juárez, Del. Cuauhtémoc  
CP 06600, Mexico City  
Tel. +52 55 5257 1084

### Havana

Pau Solanilla  
Managing Director for Cuba  
psolanilla@llorenteycuenca.com

Lagasca, 88 - planta 3  
28001 Madrid  
Tel. +34 91 563 77 22

### Panama City

Javier Rosado  
Partner and Managing Director  
jrosado@llorenteycuenca.com

Av. Samuel Lewis  
Edificio Omega - piso 6  
Tel. +507 206 5200

### Santo Domingo

Iban Campo  
Managing Director  
icampo@llorenteycuenca.com

Av. Abraham Lincoln 1069  
Torre Ejecutiva Sonora, planta 7  
Tel. +1 809 6161975

## ANDES' REGION

### Bogota

María Esteve  
Managing Director  
mesteve@llorenteycuenca.com

Carrera 14, # 94-44. Torre B – of. 501  
Tel. +57 1 7438000

### Lima

Luisa García  
Partner and CEO Andes' Region  
lgarcia@llorenteycuenca.com

Humberto Zogbi  
Chairman  
hzogbi@llorenteycuenca.com

Av. Andrés Reyes 420, piso 7  
San Isidro  
Tel. +51 1 2229491

### Quito

Alejandra Rivas  
Managing Director  
arivas@llorenteycuenca.com

Avda. 12 de Octubre N24-528 y  
Cordero – Edificio World Trade  
Center – Torre B - piso 11  
Tel. +593 2 2565820

### Santiago de Chile

Claudio Ramírez  
Partner and General Manager  
cramirez@llorenteycuenca.com

Magdalena 140, Oficina 1801.  
Las Condes.  
Tel. +56 22 207 32 00

## SOUTH AMERICA

### Buenos Aires

Pablo Abiad  
Partner and Managing Director  
pabiad@llorenteycuenca.com

Daniel Valli  
Senior Director of New Business  
Development for the Southern  
Cone  
dvalli@llorenteycuenca.com

Av. Corrientes 222, piso 8. C1043AAP  
Tel. +54 11 5556 0700

### Rio de Janeiro

Yeray Carretero  
Director  
ycarretero@llorenteycuenca.com

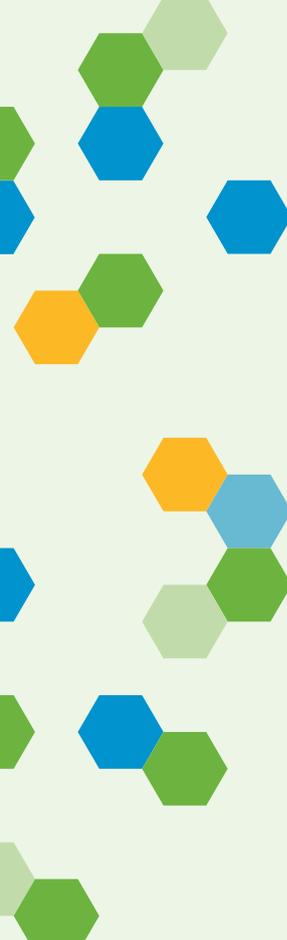
Rua da Assembleia, 10 - Sala 1801  
RJ - 20011-000  
Tel. +55 21 3797 6400

### Sao Paulo

Marco Antonio Sabino  
Partner and Brazil Chairman  
masabino@llorenteycuenca.com

Juan Carlos Gozzer  
Managing Director  
jgozzer@llorenteycuenca.com

Rua Oscar Freire, 379, Cj 111,  
Cerqueira César SP - 01426-001  
Tel. +55 11 3060 3390



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