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PRD Party Wins Midterms

by LADB Staff

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The Dominican Republic's governing Partido Revolucionario Dominicano (PRD) won the legislative and municipal elections May 16. It will control Congress and most city governments. The Partido de la Liberacion Dominicana (PLD), led by former President Leonel Fernandez (1996-2000), trailed far behind, with just a handful of victories.

After the elections, President Hipolito Mejia moved to shut out the PLD by offering a political pact to Joaquin Balaguer's Partido Reformista Social Cristiano (PRSC). By May 20, the Junta Central Electoral (JCE) had counted 96% of the votes and announced that PRD candidates had won Senate seats in 29 of 32 provinces and a majority of the local elections, while the PRSC had won in two and the PLD one.

As of May 23, the JCE had not announced results in the races for the Chamber of Deputies. The one major victory for the PLD was Jose Tomas Perez's capture of the Senate seat for the important Distrito Nacional (Santo Domingo). Perez said his win in the capital boosted the party's chances for the 2004 presidential election. The PRD also took control of 104 of the country's 125 municipalities. The PRSC took 11, the PLD seven, and the Partido Revolucionario Independiente (PRI) three.

President Mejia said from Madrid, where he was attending the Second European Union-Ibero-American and Caribbean Summit, that his party had won a "resounding victory" and that he took it as popular approval of his policies since he became president in August 2000. "We must continue working as we have been," he said. Asked if the election results would bolster those working for his re-election, Mejia only that said he would make a statement in due time. Mejia offers a pact Mejia offered Balaguer and his PRSC a pact by which the two parties would share leadership posts in Congress, with the PRSC managing the Chamber of Deputies and the PRD the Senate.

PRSC leaders said the party would consider some kind of an accord and work with the PRD wherever necessary to improve the situation of the people, but they rejected Mejia's proposal because the party wanted to show it could win the presidency in 2004 on its own. The final decision, however, would be made by party president Balaguer, the only person with the power to negotiate such a pact, they said.

Despite some violence, Organization of American States (OAS) election observer Diego Paz said the Dominican Republic had made "a significant advance in electoral matters" and is now a standard for other countries. This election marks the first use of proportional voting, which allows voters to choose specific candidates rather than a party slate, and of a requirement that one-third of the candidates must be women. The election was not without charges of irregularities.

Fernandez called the election "a colossal fraud," and said votes had been altered and the count tampered with to give the PRD the advantage. He told reporters May 21 that he worried about the

"fragility" of the Dominican electoral system. Among other problems, he mentioned the slowness of the JCE in getting out the vote tallies, misplaced voter lists, and allegations of purchased voter-registration materials.

Despite these accusations, Fernandez conceded that the PRD had won a majority of the votes, and he pledged that the PLD would work as a "firm and responsible" opposition party. Since the PLD won 29% of the vote overall, he said the party had reached its goal of consolidating its place, with the help of an alliance with smaller parties, as the second political force in the country.

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