

COSTA RICA

Date of Elections: February 1, 1970

Characteristics of Parliament

Costa Rica's unicameral Parliament, the Legislative Assembly, consists of 57 deputies, elected for a 4-year term on the basis of 1 to every 30,000 inhabitants.

The elections of February 1970 were held to renew the entire Legislative Assembly upon the normal expiry of the previous legislature.

Electoral System

Every citizen of Costa Rica of either sex who has reached the age of 20, is registered on the electoral rolls of his constituency and who has not been deprived of his civic rights, may cast his ballot. Naturalized citizens may only vote 12 months after acquiring such status. Voting is compulsory.

Every member of the electorate who is Cost Rican by birth or who has resided in the country for a least 10 years after naturalization, is at least 21 years old and in possession of his civic rights, is eligible for the Legislative Assembly. High civil servants and magistrates in office or during the 6 months after relinquishing their duties cannot be elected to the Parliament.

Members of the electorate in each of the 7 provinces elect from 3 to 21 deputies according to the closed list system with proportional representation. The electoral quotient is established in each province by dividing the number of valid votes cast by the number of seats to be filled.

The seats not allocated after this first operation are distributed one by one between the lists classified in decreasing order of their left-over votes, including those lists which received a total number of votes lower than the electoral quotient. The Supreme Electoral Tribunal can award one party's left-over votes to a minor list which polled less votes than the electoral quotient but more than half thereof. This is done so that this list may win a seat in the Parliament.

General Political Considerations and Conditions of the Elections

In Costa Rica, the political scene, which provides an example of stability rarely found in Latin America, is dominated by two large parties: the National Liberation Party (PLN) and the National Unification Party (UN).

The PLN is headed by Mr. Jose Figueres, one of the leading figures of Latin America's democratic reformist movement. In the 1966 elections this party won a very small majority in the Legislative Assembly but its presidential candidate, Mr. Daniel Oduber, was not elected President of the Republic. In fact, the results of the 3 previous elections had revealed the slight but gradual decline of the party. However, various measures taken to improve the structure of the PLN were interpreted as a restoration of the unity which has been jeopardized by internal dissension.

The UN, a Conservative party, was formed as a result of the 1965 coalition between the National Union Party (PUN), the Republican Party (PR) and the Authentic Republican Union Party (PURA). It had won a very narrow victory in the 1966 presidential elections, but the power of its candidate, Mr. Joaquin Trejos, had been greatly restricted throughout his term of office by the opposition of Parliament. Moreover, the controversy caused within the front by the nomination of Mr. Marro Echandi, leader of the PURA, as a candidate running against Mr. Jose Figueres in the presidential elections also held on February 1, 1970, had caused the PUN, under Mr. Ulate, to withdraw. In addition, another group, led by Mr. Virgilio Calvo, left to set up the National Front Party (PFN), usually known as the " Third Front ".

Apart from these 4 formations (PLN, UN, PUN, and PFN), 3 other parties of recent origin, like the PFN, put forward lists of candidates in all the provinces. These parties were the Christian Democratic Party (PDC), led by Mr. Jorge Monge; the Socialist Action Party (PASO), of Communist persuasion and presided over by Mr. Marcial Aguiluz; and the Costa Rican Renovating Movement (MRC), founded by Mr. Joaquin Garro, a former PLN deputy.

The electoral campaign began with sharp personal clashes between the candidates, causing the Supreme Electoral Tribunal to intervene and put a stop to mutual accusations by using the powers vested in it by the electoral code which places very strict limitations on party propaganda. It should be noted that electoral campaigns are subsidized by the State which distributes funds set aside (approx. \$1,800,000 in 1970) between those parties which receive at least 10 % of the valid votes cast. In response to a request of the Supreme Electoral Tribunal, the leaders of the PLN, UN and PFN decided to cancel all rallies during the last week of the campaign, as some had been the scene of violent incidents.

The results of the elections confirmed, on the one hand, the success of the National Liberation Party which won a considerable majority in the Assembly and whose presidential candidate, Mr. Jose Figueres, was elected Head of State, and, on the other hand, the clear trend towards a two-party system.

Statistics

1. Results of the Elections and Distribution of Seats
in the Legislative Assembly

Number of registered voters.	657,285
Voters.	562,766 (83.3 %)
Void or blank ballot papers.	32,351
Valid votes.	530,415

Party	Votes obtained	% of total	Number of Seats in the Assembly
National Liberation Party	269,038	50.7	32 (+3)
National Unification Party	190,387	35.9	22 (-6*)
Socialist Action Party.	29,133	5.3	2 (+2)
National Front Party.	16,392	3.1	—
Christian Democratic Party	13,489	2.5	M+1)
National Union Party.	6,105	1.1	—
Others	5,871	1.1	—
			57

* The Revolutionary Civic Union Party (PUCR), which had 2 seats in the Assembly during the previous legislature, was allied to the UN and put up several candidates on the UN ticket.