

# COSTA RICA

## 2026 PRESIDENTIAL AND LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS PRE-ELECTION REPORT



# ELECTION SNAPSHOT

## The rules of the game

- **Election date:** February 1.
- **Offices at stake:** Presidency, two Vice Presidencies, and the full renewal of the Legislative Assembly (57 seats) for the 2026–2030 term.
- **40% rule:** To win in the first round, a candidate must secure at least 40% of the valid votes.
- **No re-election:** President Rodrigo Chaves is not eligible to run, as immediate re-election is constitutionally prohibited.
- **Runoff election:** If no candidate reaches the threshold, a second round will be held on April 5.
- **Inauguration dates:** **May 1** (Legislative Assembly) and **May 8** (President).

## Who's in the running?

While 20 candidates are running, polling indicates the contest is concentrated among five main contenders.



Laura Fernández



Álvaro Ramos



Claudia Dobles



Fabricio Alvarado



Ariel Robles

The ruling party's candidate, **Laura Fernández (PPS)**, leads vote intention, hovering **around the 40% threshold**. Far behind, **Álvaro Ramos (PLN)** polls at under 10%, followed by a fragmented group including **Dobles, Alvarado, and Robles**, each in the 3%–5% range.

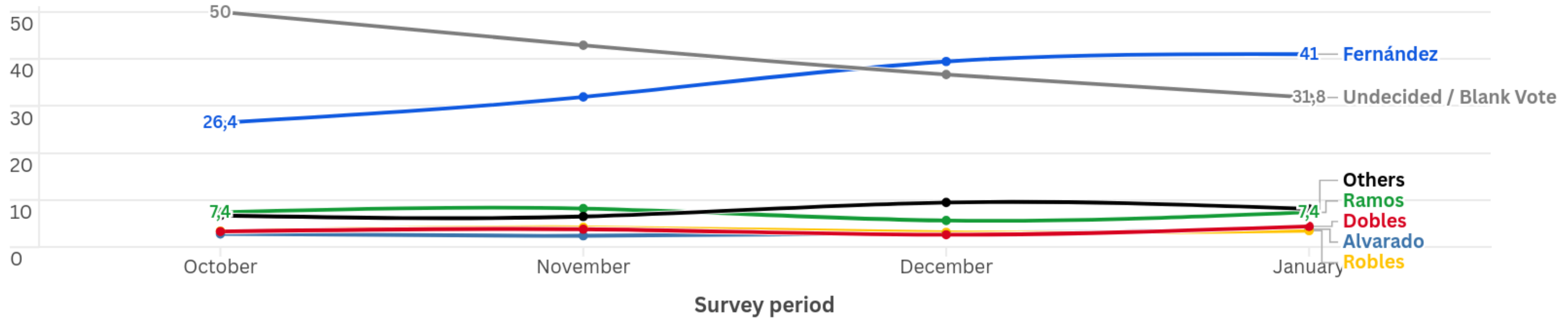
The **outcome** will largely depend on **undecided voters**, who make up over **30%** and will be decisive in determining either a **first-round win or the contenders in a potential runoff**.

The campaign's central issue has been **public security**, amid growing concern about drug trafficking. President Chaves' meetings with Nayib Bukele point to a possible shift toward a tougher security approach.



# WHAT DO THE POLLS SAY?

Percentage (%)



Source: In-house analysis based on private opinion polls

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- **Ruling party lead:** Laura Fernández (PPS) tops the polls with 41%, crossing the first-round threshold and capitalizing on President Rodrigo Chaves' 55% approval rating, despite allegations of irregular fund management and attempts to lift his parliamentary immunity.
- **Fragmented opposition:** In a field of 20 candidates, the opposition remains highly fragmented. The gap with the ruling party is wide, and no opposition candidate has reached double digits. Álvaro Ramos (PLN) leads the opposition bloc with 7.4%, followed by Robles (FA), Alvarado (PNR), and Dobles (CAC), all polling below 5%.
- **The power of undecided voters:** Although trending downward, undecided voters still account for over 30% and represent the second-largest group in the chart. Their final decision will determine whether Fernández secures a first-round victory or who advances to face her in a potential runoff.
- **Volatility precedent:** The 2022 election illustrates why the race remains open. At that time, Chaves was polling in fourth place but managed to reach the runoff by less than a 2-point margin and ultimately won the presidency.

# LEADING CANDIDATES

## Laura Fernández

Partido Pueblo Soberano (PPS)



Fernández holds a Master's degree in Political Science. She previously served as Minister of National Planning and Economic Policy (2022–2025) and as Minister of the Presidency (2023–2025), where she acted as Chief of Staff and liaison with the Legislative Assembly. She resigned to run in the presidential race and presents herself as the continuity candidate of President Rodrigo Chaves' political project.

Key policy priorities include:

- Advancing the “Costa Rica Fintech” strategy, promoting financial inclusion and the development of new banking products. This also includes moving forward with port infrastructure modernization and providing state support to productive sectors in the context of greater trade openness.
- Expanding the use of electronic payments in public transportation, particularly in rural areas. Streamlining tax and customs procedures through the Digital Treasury initiative, and promoting a Cybersecurity Law that includes digital crimes and establishes a regulatory framework for artificial intelligence.
- Promoting lower drug prices and improved access to medicines through greater use of generics, prescriptions by active ingredient, parallel imports, faster regulatory approvals, and stronger market oversight.
- Creating a National Competition Policy, reducing regulatory barriers, promoting simpler legal structures for business registration, and improving the country's use of free trade agreements.
- Pushing for the modernization of labor legislation (including approval of the 4x3 workweek scheme) and introducing incentives for hiring unemployed individuals over 40 and people with disabilities, through private-sector incentives.

# LEADING CANDIDATES

## Álvaro Ramos

Partido de Liberación Nacional (PLN)



Ramos holds a PhD in Economics. He previously served as Vice Minister of Finance (2012), Superintendent of Pensions (2015–2020), and expert at the International Labour Organization (2020–2022). In 2022, he chaired the Board of Directors of the Costa Rican Social Security Fund (CCSS), from which he was removed following a dispute with President Rodrigo Chaves over a proposed wage increase within the institution.

Key\_policy priorities include:

- Launch a “Credit Rehabilitation Program”, focused not on debt forgiveness but on a structured pathway to financial reintegration and inclusion, subject to consultation with relevant regulatory authorities.
- Advance a Circular Economy Law, introducing incentives for improved waste management.
- Implement wage subsidies and promote the hiring of women and young people.
- Redefine the Central Bank of Costa Rica’s mandate toward a dual objective: inflation control and maximizing the productive use of the country’s resources.
- Boost competitiveness through investments in road, port, airport, and digital infrastructure.
- Prioritize food security under a “Smart Food Security” approach: strengthen domestic production, complement it with strategic international trade, and ensure food safety.

# OTHER CANDIDATES

*Architect and urban planner, with a focus on sustainability and climate change. Former First Lady of Costa Rica (2018–2022).*

**Claudia  
Dobles**  
Coalición Agenda  
Ciudadana (CAC)



Policy priorities:

- Create a regulatory sandbox for pilots and innovation in digital finance (fintech, open banking, blockchain, digital assets, and AI); implement a single electronic payment system for all modes of transportation; and modernize the digital and financial framework through reforms in data protection, cybersecurity, and AI regulation.
- Introduce a front-of-pack labeling system to promote healthier food choices, reduce chronic diseases, and increase transparency in the food industry.

**Fabricio  
Alvarado**  
Nueva Republica  
(NR)



*Journalist, Member of Parliament, and political communicator. This is his third presidential bid.*

Policy priorities:

- Integrate fintech companies into the SINPE system to strengthen financial inclusion and position Costa Rica as a regional reference in artificial intelligence.
- Regulate foods high in critical nutrients (fats, sugars, salt, and sodium), with a focus on nutritional labeling, advertising, and marketing practices.

**Ariel  
Robles**  
Frente Amplio (FA)



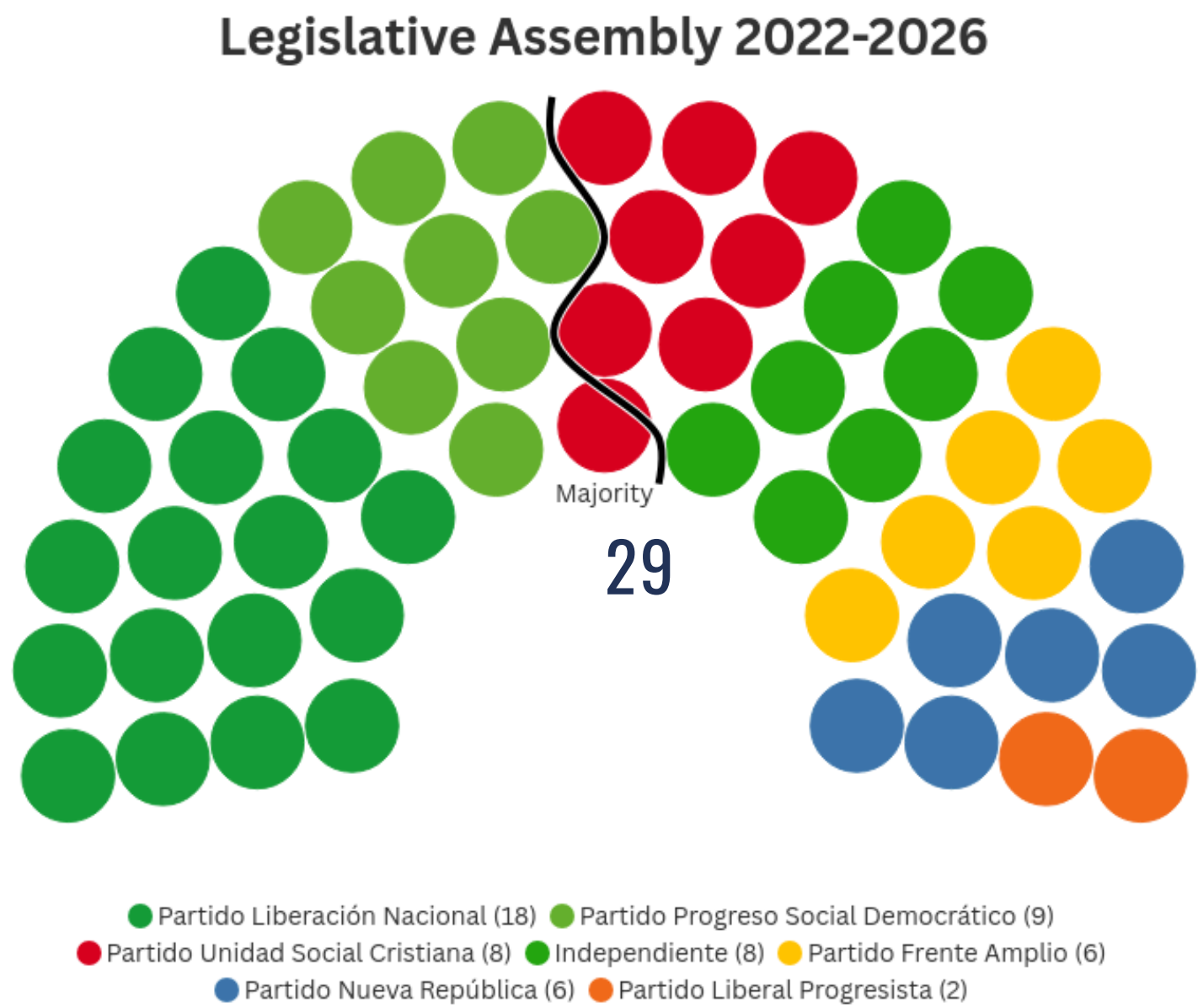
*Holds a Master's degree in Educational Management. Member of Parliament, environmental activist, and social leader.*

Policy priorities:

- Pass legislation to ban additional fees and charges on delinquent loans that push interest rates above the legal cap.
- Promote a 40-hour workweek.
- Mandate consumer labeling and information on foods high in sugar and fat, including GMO identification, and introduce a global minimum tax.

# LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS

All 57 seats in the Legislative Assembly are up for grabs. Fragmentation is likely to remain high, which means the next administration will need to do two things at once: keep 38 lawmakers in the chamber to hold sessions and line up 29 votes to pass bills and move its agenda.



Source: Own elaboration.

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***A fragmented Assembly is the most likely outcome.*** With more than 20 lists in the race, the vote is spread thin. That typically produces small caucuses and makes it unlikely that any single party will reach 29 seats on its own.

***Why established parties tend to benefit.*** Historically, this setup favors parties with strong territorial machines—particularly PLN, PUSC, PNR, and Frente Amplio.

***Governability will hinge on deal-making.*** In a splintered legislature, politics runs on bargains. Without stable working agreements, major legislation tends to move slowly and negotiations become a permanent feature of day-to-day governance.

***High uncertainty going into election day.*** Polling suggests the ruling-party camp is competitive (previously under PPSD, and this cycle under PPS), but a large undecided share (around 40%) could reshape the final seat count.

***Small districts raise the bar for newcomers.*** Seats are allocated by province, and many provinces elect only a handful of lawmakers. That makes it harder for smaller parties to break through. New or emerging forces have their best shot in San José (19 seats) and Alajuela (11), where the effective threshold is lower.

# RISING ABSTENTION

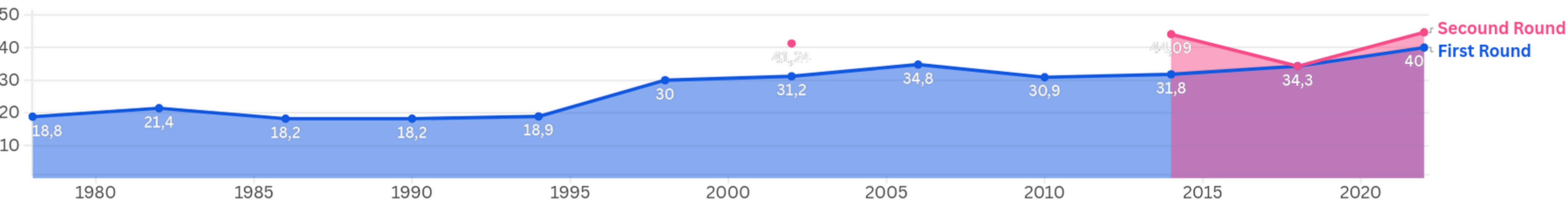
Although **voting is constitutionally mandatory**, weak enforcement has contributed to a sustained erosion in voter engagement. Since 1998, Costa Rica has moved away from historically high turnout—above 80%—**toward a pattern in which abstention sits around 40%** in the first round and rises further in **runoffs**, when **nearly half of registered voters stay home**.

This trend aligns with declining trust in political parties. With public perceptions increasingly negative, the electorate has pushed the system toward greater fragmentation, according to Latinobarómetro (2024).

**Since 2014, runoffs have become the standard route to the presidency.** In parallel, new political groups have emerged, competing for independent voters outside traditional party structures. The result is a **double hit to governability**: presidents entering office with a **weaker mandate and a highly fragmented Assembly**, which raises the political cost of reforms and forces the Executive to negotiate virtually every major bill.

This widening gap between participation and abstention will shape the next president’s ability to build early political legitimacy and consolidate an independent leadership profile.

## Abstention Rate (Elections 1978–2022)



Source: Own elaboration based on data from Costa Rica’s Supreme Electoral Tribunal.

# THANKS!

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