

Uruguay's presidential elections too close to call; final results to be announced



Montevideo, November 25 (RHC)-- Uruguay's Electoral Court announced Sunday night that since preliminary results from the runoff between right-wing National Party candidate Luis Lacalle Pou and leftist Daniel Martinez from the Broad Front are so close, a clear winner won't be announced until Tuesday or Wednesday as scrupulous counting advances.

The President of the electoral body Jose Arocena told Uruguay's *El Pais* that this comes as the amount of "observed votes" is similar to the difference between both candidates. As of Sunday night with 97.7 percent of votes counted, Lacalle leads with 48.8 over 47.4 percent for Martinez.

However, the amount of votes between them is roughly 33,000 while the amount of "observed votes" is 34,413. In Uruguay's electoral system, when a voter can't cast their ballot at the assigned electoral table due to a justified impediment they can do so under the condition of an "observed vote."

This means that the voter will do so somewhere else but that vote will be counted later. Thus the process to incorporate their ballots into the overall election usually takes longer and is not reflected in the preliminary results.

Meanwhile, four major pollsters (Opcion, Equipos, Factum, Cifra) have adjusted their predictions and now are projecting a "technical tie" between the two candidates.

More than 2.6 million Uruguayans were enabled to vote in over 7,100 circuits throughout the country. Voting is mandatory and citizens from 18 years old could participate in one of the tightest races in the last two decades as the left aims to win a fourth term while the renewed right seeks to reinstate a conservative government.

The left-wing Broad Front has won Uruguay's past three presidential contests and has been governing the country for the past 15 years, leading the nation through significant growth in the economy, as well as a reduction of unemployment rates and the levels of poverty and extreme poverty.

Uruguay under the Broad Front has proven to be a successful model to alleviate inequality, reducing poverty to 8.1 percent from 40 percent since 2004 and increasing the educational budget to "more than US\$2 billion."

The leftist governments led by Pepe Mujica and Tabare Vasquez also consolidated a series of labor rights as well as social rights including same-sex marriage, the legalization of abortion under certain circumstances and the expansion of transgender people's rights.

However, and despite these successes, things may be different this time as Ernesto Talvi, the Colorado Party presidential candidate, and far-right retired officer Manini, along with the leaders of two other minor parties, rushed to throw their support behind Lacalle Pou, enabling him to form a right-wing coalition.

Uruguay's Minister of Defense Jose Bayardi denounced Saturday former army general and far-right presidential candidate Manini for inciting confrontations and rebellion of the military against democratic institutions, through a video on social media; as well as threatening that if the right wins, "Marxists" and leftists will be persecuted.

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