

Santiago Peña wins Paraguayan presidential elections

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Paraguayan presidential candidate Santiago Peña celebrates his victory. He is standing with his wife, and running mate. [Agustin Marcarian/Reuters]

Asuncion, May 1 (RHC)-- Santiago Peña has won Paraguay's election, returning the conservative Colorado Party to government after a tightly-contested campaign that had threatened to end its seven-decade hold on power.

The 44-year-old economist and former finance minister had 42.7 percent of the vote with more than 99 percent of ballots counted, a more than 15-point lead over center-left rival Efraín Alegre, a 60-year-old lawyer from the Concertación coalition, according to the electoral body.

Some 4.8 million of the South American country's 7.5 million people were eligible to vote in the election for the president and legislature.

"Thank you for this Colorado victory, thank you for this Paraguayan victory," Peña said. Today, we are not celebrating a personal triumph, we are celebrating the victory of a people who with their vote chose the path of social peace, dialogue, fraternity and national reconciliation.

Conceding defeat, Alegre said simply: "The effort was not enough." Alegre, a lawyer, had a narrow lead in opinion polls heading into the vote, raising the prospect that he might unseat the Colorado Party that has governed almost continually since 1947 — through a dictatorship and since the return of democracy in 1989.

Although they differ on economic and international policy, the two frontrunners were both socially conservative, defending strong anti-abortion rights and anti-gay marriage stances in an overwhelmingly Catholic nation.

Paraguay is among only 13 countries to recognise Taipei over Beijing, and Alegre had promised to reconsider the relationship if he won, while Peña said he would maintain ties.

Honduras shifted allegiance to Beijing in March, following Nicaragua in 2021, El Salvador in 2018, Panama in 2017, and Costa Rica in 2007.

The Taiwanese embassy in Paraguay congratulated Peña on his victory, and said Taipei would continue to work together with Paraguay on their "fruitful" relationship.

Alegre had also campaigned on corruption in the Colorado Party, which has seen two of its top members recently hit with sanctions by the United States over alleged corruption. They include Peña's political mentor and president of the Colorado Party, former President Horacio Cartes.

Paraguay is ranked 137 out of 180 countries on Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index. Other election issues included poverty, social inequality and escalating crime.

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