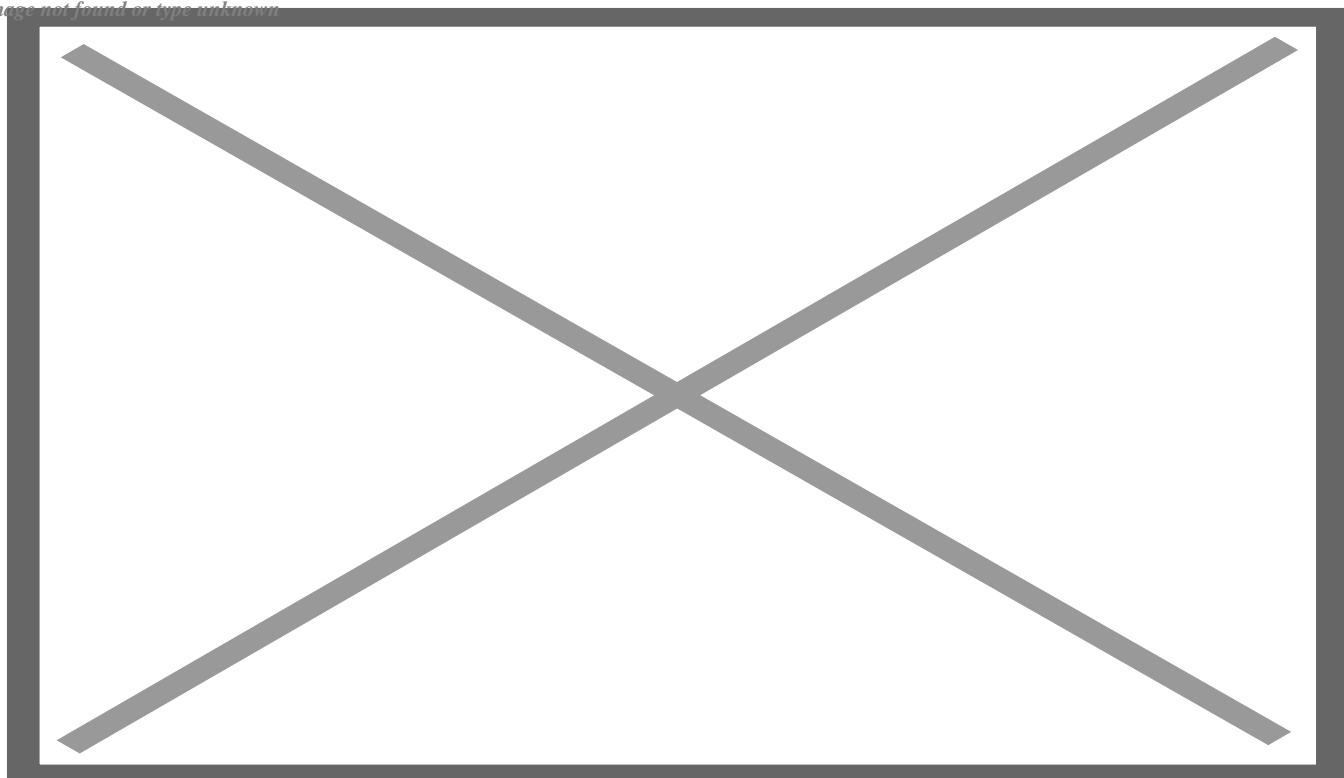


# *Panama: The polls were not wrong*

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By María Josefina Arce

The polls were not wrong this time, and in the general elections held this Sunday in Panama, José Raúl Mulino was elected as the new president of the country, whose candidacy was enabled by the Supreme Court of Justice 48 hours before the polls were scheduled to take place.

A claim of unconstitutionality had been filed in the highest judicial body against the candidate of Realizing Goals and Alliance, for not having been elected in the primaries of those parties, nor having a running mate.

The former Minister of Public Security replaced the initial candidate, former President Ricardo Martinelli, disqualified after receiving a sentence of more than 10 years for corruption cases.

According to the official results, Murilo, with more than 34% of the votes, beat his closest competitor, Ricardo Lombana, from the Other Path Movement, who obtained nearly 25% of the votes.

The other six candidates were left behind, in a general election in which, in addition to uncertainty, surprising events were recorded such as that at the close of his campaign, the independent candidate Melitón Arrocha asked to support Martín Torrijos, although he never presented his resignation and his name. appeared on the ballot.

On this Sunday, which registered a high participation, 20 deputies of the Central American Parliament, 71 legislators of the National Assembly, 81 mayors, 701 township representatives and 11 councilors were also appointed.

On July 1 of this year, Murilo will assume the presidency, who will have an arduous task ahead of him, given the popular discontent due to the prevailing high inflation and the stagnation of the economy, which years ago was among the first in the region.

But the drought exacerbated by the El Niño meteorological phenomenon has reduced the capacity of the Panama Canal, a key piece, according to experts, in the Gross Domestic Product. The authorities estimate losses between 500 and 700 million dollars due to a decrease in operations in that important interoceanic waterway.

The drought has also affected the population's access to drinking water, a problem that is more visible in peripheral and rural areas. A task pending for years is the construction of infrastructure that guarantees the precious liquid to all citizens.

Murilo must also respond to other concerns of citizens. A recent Gallup poll revealed that corruption ranks first, followed by unemployment, poor health care and the high cost of living.

Environmental issues and migration have also marked the process, in which, despite being disabled, Martinelli has been present at all times.

It has undoubtedly been a controversial and peculiar electoral process, given the influence of Martinelli and his support for Murilo, who captured the voters of the former president who continues to be popular, despite having been convicted of corruption and this being one of the concerns of citizens. A phenomenon that many attribute to a favorable economic situation in the Isthmus country during his mandate from 2009 to 2014, and that others see, however, as a stage in which the public treasury was looted.

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