

Trump-aligned candidate wins Costa Rican presidency exposing bankruptcy of Pink Tide

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The first round of Costa Rica's 2026 presidential elections, as reported by the Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE), delivered a resounding victory for Laura Fernández of the ruling Sovereign People's Party (PPSO), with 48.2 percent of the vote, avoiding a runoff.

In the unicameral Congress, the PPSO led by incumbent President Rodrigo Chaves tripled its seats to 31 out of 57, securing a majority and the most right-wing Congress in the Central American country's history.

Fernández served as a stand-in for Chaves, who was barred by constitutional term limits from re-running. She has pledged continuity, even offering Chaves the Ministry of the Presidency. On election night, Fernández shared a video call with Chaves before her acceptance speech, where he confided in her ability to "push back against Communism" and advance free-market policies.

Voter turnout reached a historic high, with abstention dropping to just 30 percent—the lowest in decades. Unlike any recent elections, streets brimmed with political flags and honking drivers, reflecting a sharp polarization between supporters of Chaves's continuity and those opposing it.

The election's result is the political responsibility of the nominal "left", in particular the pseudo-left Broad Front (FA) and its satellite organizations, which entered a de facto alliance throughout the legislative period and electoral campaign with the traditional parties of the local oligarchy in opposition to Chaves.

This coalition included candidates Ariel Robles of the FA, Claudia Dobles, the former first lady under the Citizen's Agenda (CAC, formerly PAC)—Costa Rica's version of the "pink tide"—and Álvaro Ramos of the National Liberation Party (PLN).

While banding together to ostensibly "defend democratic freedoms," none of these candidates made any attempt to address the underlying causes of the authoritarian surge. Why should workers and youth vote for forces directly implicated in defending one of the highest inequality levels in Latin America, synonymous with massive corruption and incompatible with genuine democracy?

A young FA supporter at a Curridabat voting center captured this bankruptcy: "I believe I represent youth when I say the priority is kicking Chaves out of power. I actually feel very comfortable with the fact that Frente Amplio has joined PLN and the old parties for this." Asked about the international push toward dictatorship and relations with the Trump administration, he dismissed it: "I'm not interested in that."

This nearsighted perspective is the product of the pro-capitalist and nationalist politics fomented by the FA, whose roots lie in the Stalinist Vanguardia Popular and its long record of popular-front coalitions with "democratic" sections of the oligarchy.

The ideological closeness between the Chaves-Fernández regime and the Trump administration is unmistakable. US Secretary of State Marco Rubio congratulated Fernández on Monday, stressing Washington's "enduring partnership" with San José.

Early in Trump's term, Rubio visited Costa Rica, meeting with Fernández even after her decision to resign as Minister and begin campaigning for the Presidency, along with ex-Minister Mauricio Batalla. After the meeting drew protests from the electoral body, Rubio said he wanted to "give thanks or all their cooperation. They have been very vocal in support of everything we have discussed today, two people who understand very well the threat that these Chinese companies pose to the economic sovereignty and security of countries."

Fernández centered her campaign around fascistic anti-immigrant poison and the promotion of close cooperation on security with Washington—bolstered by Costa Rica's increasingly militarized police force.

Although there was no open Trump endorsement, unlike in Honduras, Chile and Argentina last year, this was due to widespread repudiation of Trump's policies. Yet Nayib Bukele, Trump's close ally, was among the first to back and then congratulate Fernández. This follows Chaves's visits to El Salvador's CECOT counter-terrorism prison, amid promises to build a similar massive facility in Costa

Rica—open to US deportees.

Those hoping to oppose Trump needed only look to Venezuela to understand that the FA and their partners are not an option. At breakneck speed, the “Bolivarian Revolution” submitted to Trump’s demands, handing over control of oil and the economy.

However, no Costa Rican party even challenged this subordination as Trump pursues Hitlerian ambitions for direct military control over Latin America. For US imperialism, Costa Rica remains—as in the Nicaraguan civil war—a key staging ground for Pentagon and CIA operations, especially defending the Panama Canal.

In her acceptance speech, Fernández vowed to oppose “authoritarianism” while continuing Chaves’s attacks on the press and his pledge to establish a “Third Republic”—with the first marking independence from Spain and the second the 1948 civil war’s abolition of the army.

Such statements go beyond sloganeering. Fernández’s has promised to “change the rules,” which can only mean plans for doing away with what little remains after a decades-long erosion of the right to strike, democratic guarantees, and social conquests like universal healthcare and public education.

Chaves retained high approval, with Fernández drawing broad working class support across ages and genders. This stems from illusory economic stability: low oil prices, a strong colon-dollar exchange rate, and near shoring investments pushed by Trump to relocate production from Asia amid war preparations against China. Poverty dipped to 15.2 percent (INEC 2025), middle-bracket incomes rose 34.4 percent since 2018 and unemployment has dropped to 5.7 percent, the lowest level since 2010. However, 37.7 percent of workers still depend on informal jobs.

In this favorable context, Chaves focused on funneling resources to banks and corporations via free-trade zones and tax breaks, while slashing social spending. Public debt service now consumes 44 percent of the budget—10 percent of GDP—while hospital projects in Cartago and Limón were abandoned. Education spending fell to 5 percent of GDP under Chaves, below the constitutional 8 percent mandate. Recent cuts bankrupted the Red Cross, gutted health research and crippled addiction prevention.

Two elderly Chaves supporters in San José told this reporter: “Costa Rica is still one of the most expensive countries in Latin America. Our pensions of \$1,000 monthly from public-sector careers don’t cover the basics, but at least Fernández won’t touch them.”

As a drug-transit hub, organized crime has driven homicides to record highs (18 per 100,000 in 2025), which has been exploited by all parties to push for “iron fist” tactics akin to those of Salvadoran President Bukele.

The anti-corruption line, now threadbare but still adopted across parties, favored Fernández most. “The president uncovered lots of corruption,” said a Chaves supporter in San José, “but his party was exposed too, including Villalobos,” referring to PPSO candidate José Miguel Villalobos. “Debates were just about personal attacks. Fernández lost support for not defending herself well, but it was clear that all the others had agreed to avoid attacking each other and focus on her.”

While the far-right is now emboldened, Fernández’s triumph reveals that dominant sections of the Costa Rican bourgeoisie and their US imperialist overlords recognize the fragility of this “stability.” The rise of Chaves and Fernández, like that of similar forces internationally, lays the groundwork for a direct confrontation with a working class that is immensely more powerful than at any other time.

Recent decades have seen the arrival of key levers of US industry to the country—including the production of medical devices, microchips and other high-tech products. At the same time, workers have now become an even greater target for Wall Street as it intensifies the exploitation of workers across Latin America and the US itself to counter the crisis of US hegemony and finance preparations for war.

It would be fatal to believe economic tides won’t turn harsh. The Chaves-Fernández regime and the ostensible opposition are equally subordinate to foreign capital and will impose the full burden on the working class and poor to shield the oligarchy.

The Costa Rican working class and youth cannot secure democratic rights or social gains and oppose imperialism through alliances with bourgeois factions. It must seize power through independent action, expropriating the banks, corporations, and imperialist holdings, and forging a socialist federation with their brothers and sisters across the continent as part of the world socialist revolution.

The building of a Costa Rican section of the International Committee of the Fourth International, fighting for this program, is the urgent task facing workers, youth and the oppressed.



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