

Uruguayan run-off elections coming up on Sunday; opposition threatens Broad Front



Montevideo, November 21 (RHC)-- As Uruguayan voters face a second-round election Sunday, candidates Daniel Martinez of the leftist Broad Front and Luis Lacalle Pou of the right-wing National Party are closing their campaigns. In the first round election held on October 27th, voters were divided across four parties, with no presidential candidate reaching an absolute majority as a consequence.

Martinez had won the first round with 39.02 percent while Lacalle Pou came second with 28.62 percent.

In a speech in Montevideo, Martinez called to fight vote by vote until the last day of the campaign. His rally in the capital where he served as mayor from 2015 to 2019, transformed in a huge party of colors and joy in the presence of dozens of artists, musicians and thousands of supporters who convened the event.

"We [The Broad Front] were born to be a political force, and we grew with the Uruguayan people, fueled by work and the effort to do things the right way," Martinez said.

The candidate recalled before the crowd that his party "transformed Uruguay into the richest country per capita in Latin America," adding that the popular origins of the Broad Front "taught us that it's not enough to increase wealth. We must generate wealth but we must also distribute it, it's the historical charge we have." It's the reason why, Martinez said, Uruguay has become "the fairest country in Latin America."

"We were not born as a political force to feed the pride of a few or to work for their privileges. We were born to do politics with the people and with a project that seeks to empower them as you have been empowered," he added before he "very especially" greeted the artists and musicians who organized the event.

The Broad Front has won Uruguay's past three presidential contests and has been governing the country for the past 15 years, achieving to lead 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 \$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 Guido Manini Rios, 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 that threatens a Broad Front victory on Sunday.

As rising crime in the South American country became a top concern for voters over the last years, Martinez's opponent, Lacalle Pou addressed the issue during his campaign's closing rallies. "We are going to go to every corner of the country to fight the industry of poverty, and did you see those places where the State gave up its presence? The famous red zones. Well, these are the first place the next government will go to," the candidate of the National Party said earlier this week.

Lacalle Pou added that on March 2 [when the next president will take office], the police will receive clear instructions: "End the red zones."

Sunday's runoff will take place in an unstable regional context, after weeks of protest and conflict in Bolivia, Ecuador, and Chile.

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