

Mariano Torcal, Leticia M. Ruiz and Gerardo Maldonado. *El votante dominicano: Ciudadanos y elecciones en la República Dominicana*. Santo Domingo: Junta Central Electoral; Fundación Global Democracia y Desarrollo (FUNGLODE), 2017. 253 pp.

Jonathan HARTLYN

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

This book provides both an excellent critical review of current political behavior literature on voting and elections and an acute analysis of electoral behavior in the Dominican Republic. For the latter, it relies on a two-wave panel survey study carried out before and after the 2010 elections for national and Central American legislative seats and municipal posts. These elections were the first after a 2009 Constitutional Reform which put into place non-consecutive presidential re-election and re-unified the presidential, legislative and municipal electoral calendar beginning in 2016. It did the latter by mandating that candidates elected in 2010 would serve for a 6-year term, rather than the normal 4-year term. This enhanced candidate and party interest in the outcome of these elections, though apparently not among voters.

The Dominican Republic is among the few countries in Latin America whose party system remained relatively stable over the 1990s and 2000s, with its population also exhibiting some of the highest levels of partisan identification in the region. The party system has always been deeply marked by personalism. Over the 1960s and 1970s, the country had two dominant parties. One, which evolved in 1984 into the PRSC (Social Christian Reformist Party), was largely a personalist vehicle for the conservative neopatrimonial Joaquín Balaguer, who served as president from 1960 to 1962, from 1966 to 1978 and again from 1986 to 1996. The other party, the PRD (Dominican Revolutionary Party), moderated over this time into a center-left party though it lost programmatic coherence when it gained the presidency between 1978 and 1986. Over the 1980s, the Dominican Liberation Party (PLD) gradually gained a greater electoral presence as it shifted away from its initial leftist quasi-marxist orientation. Leonel Fernández of the PLD reached the presidency with Danilo Medina as his vice-president in 1996 by striking a deal

with Balaguer to defeat the PRD. The PLD continued moving to the right, co-opting the PRSC's electorate and cutting into that of the PRD.

Over the 1990s and 2000s, the country's politics revolved around these three parties, though the PRSC's electoral presence steadily diminished following the death of Balaguer in 2002. And since 1996, Fernández (1996-2000; 2004-08; 2008-12) and Medina (2012-16; 2016-) have occupied the presidency except for the period of Hipolito Mejía of the PRD (2000-04), increasingly making the country a one-party dominant polity. The 2010 elections analyzed in this book marked a decisive victory for the PLD, as it gained 42% of the vote, winning 97% of senate seats (all but one) and 57% of chamber seats; the PRD received 38% of the vote and the PRSC, on the way to extinction, eked out 6% of the vote. Following the PLD's presidential victory two years later, the PRD entered into a severe factional crisis, nearly disappearing as massive defections led to the creation of a new party, the PRM (Modern Revolutionary Party). With these changes, the country's historically high levels of partisan identification have also declined.

El votante dominicano provides a detailed examination of how Dominicans chose to participate in the 2010 elections and decided which party to support. It comprises an introduction, historical-contextual chapter, six empirical chapters examining different aspects of the survey data, and a conclusion. The authors show that voting decisions are largely not driven by group attachments or specific issues, with some exceptions built around ethnic identification, which overlaps with social class. Instead, what play more important roles are generalized views about valence issues filtered through partisan attachments, themselves open to adjustment and in decline in a context of extensive personalism.

The first empirical chapter focuses on electoral participation. The authors find little difference in expressed vote preference between those who said they voted and those who did not. The 2010 participation rate of 54.6% was slightly below that of the two previous legislative-only elections (presidential elections have typically had participation rates above 70%). Most surveys typically reflect a higher participation rate than the actual one, but in this case close to 77% of respondents asserted having voted. The authors find, somewhat surprisingly, that women participated more in these elections than men, that those with no education participated more than those with primary or secondary education (though not more than those with the highest education levels), and that lower SES (subjectively or based on reported income levels) was also associated with higher participation rates. Whether what appear as anomalies in comparative perspective were due to higher response bias in these groups, to clientelism or vote buying, or to other factors could fruitfully have been explored in more details.

Another key take-away is the continued importance of personal outreach. Especially given these were non-presidential elections, it is not surprising only 37% of respondents reported following the campaign with some or much interest. Yet,

42% of respondents recall having been contacted personally by a party member during the campaign, well over half of these by one or more of the candidates, with a positive impact on participation rates. Later in the book, when analyzing vote choice, the authors underscore the importance of discussions with friends and family and especially of personal contacts by political parties during the campaign, an area in which the country ranks well above other Latin American countries.

The subsequent two empirical chapters examine what the authors call long-term factors such as socio-demographic and psychological factors. If found to be impactful, these can provide stability to vote choice and a country's party system. But few were important, and the socio-demographic characteristics of party voters appear to be in flux. The dominant PLD did well across all groups, but disproportionately received votes from women, those with no or lowest levels of education, rural areas, and those with higher expressed religiosity (in a country in which over half of respondents said they attended religious services once a week or more). These results highlight the effectiveness of the PLD in incorporating what had been PRSC voter strongholds. The PRSC's remaining voters, in turn, were disproportionately found among older and the small group of «white» respondents, as well as those with high religiosity. Binomial logistic regressions showed only two factors clearly favoring the PRD over the PLD: urban location and, unsurprisingly since the PLD is the incumbent party, self-reported unemployed status.

The authors provide a particularly interesting analysis of the mutability of partisanship and ideology in chapter 5, employing the survey's panel design. In the first wave, around 63% of respondents assert they feel close to a political party, a figure which climbs to nearly 73% in the second wave. When respondents are asked their degree of closeness (*cercanía*) to different political parties, the percentages change considerably. For example, with the first question, the PLD was identified by 37% of respondents (climbing to 45% in the second wave, due especially to shifts by those who identified with other or no parties or the PRSC in the first wave). However, with the second *cercanía* question (first wave), 20% stated they felt very close to the PLD with an additional 35% stating they felt somewhat close to it. The strength of the PLD lies less in having more hard-core supporters than other parties than in attracting a wider net of weak supporters and limiting those who feel distant from it. PLD partisans are found disproportionately among «whiter» respondents and women, with the opposite the case for the PRD. Unlike what is commonly found elsewhere, and mirroring participation rates, the least educated have the highest levels of partisanship. The authors underscore this may be due to the tremendous personalism and importance of clientelist ties in Dominican politics (p. 124), but the study would have benefitted from more sustained analysis of these issues and their implications for how fixed partisan sentiments are.

The analysis of ideology and self-placement on the left-right (1-10) scale also highlights important challenges analysts may confront in employing this measure

within the country and for wider comparative studies. The correlation of individual self-placements from the first wave to the second wave of the panel study is only 0.30, though the mean placement well to the right of the scale is nearly the same (8.2 and 8.3 respectively). Respondents state nearly all social goods and values, including liberalism, socialism, gender equality, and solidarity, are more rightist than leftist. There is no relationship between ideological self-placement and judgements about economic or social issues. And, with nearly all voters placing themselves on the right, they all also assert the party they identify with is more to the right than the other two major parties. Self-identified PLD voters place their party well to the right of the PRD and less so of the PRSC. In turn, PRD supporters (whose average self-placement is slightly less rightist than PLD voters) place the PRD somewhat to the right of both the PLD and the PRSC. The small group of PRSC voters also place the PRSC well to the right of the PRD and somewhat of the PLD. There is, indeed, little ideological or programmatic coherence, though PLD and PRSC voters see the PRD as being more leftist than rightist. In general, «long-term» factors appear to have little impact on vote choice, with the exception of partisanship, whose own long-term fixity is unclear,

The following three empirical chapters focus on what the authors term short-term factors that can impact vote choice. They provide considerable additional evidence for what they term the country's «enormous ideological and programmatic laxity accompanied by its well-known personalism» (p. 223). Although most respondents hold low opinions of major party leaders, there is a wide variance driven by partisanship rather than programmatic or ideological distinctions. In an analysis of government performance on valence and other issues, they find voters largely do not discriminate across issues. They criticize past literature that emphasizes the importance of attitudes regarding government economic performance for partisanship or vote choice, asserting these attitudes, which they also find to be important, are largely determined by (endogenous to) partisanship. However, they do not appear to take full advantage of their panel survey to further disentangle the extent to which partisanship, which they earlier demonstrate is also mutable, drives both views of economic performance and vote choice (endogeneity argument) or the extent to which views of the economy have an impact on vote choice for the incumbent PLD separate from partisanship (economic vote argument).

In some respects, Dominican electoral behavior is not that different from other countries. They find over-all that being male, more educated, and having more exposure to political information leads to higher levels of political knowledge. They also observe that more knowledgeable respondents were more likely to vote, and to favor the PLD (in spite of the above noted female gender gap, an issue which was not explained). With regard to how Dominicans received information about the campaign, their data show that television was far more important than other media outlets. However, no results were presented about the internet or social

media. With continued growth of internet penetration in the country (from around 39% of the population in 2010 to 57% in 2016), analysts will need to pay increased attention to this, as has also been made apparent in other recent campaigns in the region.

Some other potentially important topics were also not discussed, perhaps because there were not included in the survey instrument. These include issues of crime, corruption, patronage and clientelism, and attitudes regarding Haiti, Dominico-Haitians and discrimination. Also of potential interest are the role of government social programs, which have dramatically expanded, and of the receipt of remittances from overseas on vote choice. The book does indicate where the dataset may be accessed for those who wish to carry out further analyses.

In sum, this is truly an excellent study, one that places the study of electoral behavior in the Dominican Republic in a broader comparative context. One of the main conclusions of the book is that one should not confuse party stability in the country with actual party system institutionalization. With regard to the latter, the Dominican Republic falls short with partisanship closely linked to leadership dynamics and little ideological or programmatic content driving vote choice. As of today, in a context of continued economic growth, this does not appear to have changed as the PLD retains dominance and, according to major cross-national indices, political democracy has partially eroded.

