

Election Watch for the Digital Age



Costa Rica

Preelection assessment

General election set for February 2022

Costa Rican voters, who enjoy a competitive and credible electoral environment, will head to the polls in February to elect their president, two vice presidents, and all 57 Legislative Assembly deputies. The upcoming vote will feature a diverse array of presidential candidates along a wide political spectrum. Thirty parties have registered nationally as of September 2021 and more are registered at the provincial and municipal levels, potentially resulting in a record number of presidential candidates and a legislature composed of more parties than ever (seven parties won legislative seats in the 2018 elections). Registered parties include the historically dominant National Liberation and Social Christian Unity parties, as well as the governing Citizen Action Party and the increasingly popular evangelical National Restoration Party (PRN).

This wealth in electoral choice is partially due to waning trust in leadership from well-established parties. Recurring corruption scandals have contributed to dissatisfaction and distrust in elected officials for over a decade, while the uncertainty caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and related economic pressures have also fostered disillusionment. Indigenous and Afro-Costa Ricans, meanwhile, are underrepresented in the political sphere, though gender parity is generally upheld. Despite these challenges, Costa Rican democracy is buttressed by a long history of stability, robust protections for freedoms of expression and association, and respect for the rule of law.

Freedom House has identified the following as key digital interference issues to watch ahead of election day:

- **Information manipulation:** Online media outlets are largely independent and prominent sources are considered credible. However, the 2018 electoral period featured activity by “cybertroops” who disseminated false or misleading information on social media, particularly Facebook, Twitter, and, increasingly, WhatsApp. Political actors and private individuals—notably conservative politicians linked to the PRN, the New Republic Party, and the National Integration Party—spread xenophobic, homophobic, and populist narratives while making false claims about corruption, government initiatives, immigration, and abortion. Similar efforts to manipulate information ahead of the 2022 elections could present an obstacle for voters seeking to inform themselves and their political choices with factual and objective information.

Costa Rica has a score of 91 out of 100, with 100 representing the least vulnerability in terms of election integrity, on Freedom House’s Election Vulnerability Index, which is based on a selection of key election-related indicators. The score reflects stable political and electoral systems, protections for civil liberties in law and in practice, and one of the world’s most open online environments. The country is rated **Free** in *Freedom in the World 2021*, with a score of 91 out of 100 with respect to its political rights and civil liberties, and **Free** in *Freedom on the Net 2021*, with an internet freedom score of 87 out of 100. To learn more about these annual Freedom House assessments, please visit the Costa Rica country reports in [Freedom in the World](#) and [Freedom on the Net](#).