



The Dominican Republic

Becoming a One-Party State?

AUTHOR
Carl Meacham

CSIS | CENTER FOR STRATEGIC &
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A Report by the CSIS Americas Program
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Executive Summary

Introduction: The Project

This report is the culmination of a six-month effort to evaluate the state of the rule of law, corruption, and judicial independence in the Dominican Republic. The country's opposition parties have launched abundant accusations as to the questionable dominance of the ruling party, and there have been increasing international concerns over the status of Dominican democracy. A CSIS Americas Program team therefore traveled to the Dominican Republic to meet with stakeholders and practitioners from all backgrounds—standing government, opposition, ruling party, civil society, private sector, current and former members of the judiciary, and media—to assess the situation.

Findings: On the Ground in the Dominican Republic

The ruling Dominican Liberation Party (PLD) currently controls the executive branch and holds a majority both in Congress and in the National Council of Magistrates, the body that appoints the country's judiciary and prosecutors. The population's faith in the judicial system is gradually eroding, as allegations of executive influence on the judiciary grow ever more numerous—and better documented. With a judiciary seen as heavily influenced by the PLD, a culture of impunity has taken hold on the Caribbean island, as more and more citizens turn to extrajudicial means to resolve disputes and manage conflicts. The Dominican Revolutionary Party (PRD), the primary opposition to the PLD, has yet to reunify since a 2009 political pact between PRD and PLD leaders that divided the party and rendered it incapable of presenting a coherent platform in opposition to the PLD.¹

Reports of widespread bribery, corruption, and money laundering plague public perceptions of the government—but, in the absence of a viable alternative, electoral support for the PLD remains high. The dominance of a single party, coupled with steadily growing executive power, has left little outside the sphere of presidential influence, fundamentally threatening the country's democratic institutions. Unequal enforcement of the laws in favor of government allies has, when paired with the corruption that has handicapped the formal sector of the economy, led to a ballooning of the informal and public sectors and created openings for transnational criminal organizations' infiltration—particularly in the realm of drug trafficking.

The U.S.-Dominican relationship remains heavily focused on free trade through the Central America–Dominican Republic Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA-DR), immigration northward, drug trafficking, and the status of Haitians living inside Dominican borders. And, with the controversial question of the status of Haitian immigrants in the

¹ It is worth noting here that some see additional significance in the pact. PRD party president Miguel Vargas signed this so-called “blue ties pact” with then-president Leonel Fernández, but the controversial nature of the agreement may then have impacted his performance in the PRD primary leading up to the 2012 presidential elections. Though convention would have suggested that Vargas would run on the PRD ticket in the elections, he was edged out by former president Hipólito Mejía, who then lost to Fernández in the general election. Vargas's campaign cried foul at the primary results, alleging that the PLD financially supported Mejía's campaign and sent droves of its supporters late that day to vote for Mejía, with PLD party leadership believing the former president would be easier to beat in the general election later that year.

Dominican Republic and persistent, systemic inequality at every level of Dominican society, the government faces a set of urgent and daunting domestic challenges moving forward.

Recommendations: Repairing a Damaged System

In light of what we found throughout our assessment, we recommend the following:

1. An inclusive, multiparty conversation on the state of the Dominican judiciary and the particular challenges it faces in the realm of independence and party influence;
2. A review of the “Ley de Partidos” (Law of Political Parties) and its implications for the health of Dominican democracy; and,
3. An inclusive discussion on how the PRD will move forward, given its current disunity and inability to present a viable opposition to the ruling party.

Conclusions: Challenge, Promise, and the Future of Dominican Democracy

The history of corruption and poor rule of law in the Dominican Republic is long—many even refer to a “culture of corruption” that characterizes the country’s political system. But however storied the country’s experience with corruption may be, it cannot be denied that the problem has grown—and quickly—in recent years.

While corruption may, on its own, not seem exceptional, the moment corrupt practices coupled with impunity permeate and begin eroding a country’s democratic foundations, all of that changes. The PLD’s dominance throughout the Dominican government is, at the very least, approaching that line—all in the context of increasingly shaky economic foundations, largely the result of the clientelism that has grown with the PLD’s power.

Perhaps these issues would seem less pressing if it were not for the incredible promise of the Dominican Republic. The largest economy in Central America and the Caribbean and long the beneficiary of its own relatively stable democratic system, the country would be poised to take on a leadership role in the region, expanding its international profile far beyond the greater Caribbean. But as long as the status quo persists—and certainly if the situation worsens—the Dominican Republic will continue to hold itself back.

Its potential is impressive—but realizing it may seem daunting, particularly with the challenges the country currently faces. The question that remains is this: What can Dominican policymakers do to get the country back on track?

The Dominican Republic

Becoming a One-Party State?

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Carl Meacham

Background

Since the beginning of the millennium, the Dominican Republic has seen three heads of state: Hipólito Mejía, Leonel Fernández, and Danilo Medina.

Hipólito Mejía, a Dominican Revolutionary Party (PRD) member, assumed the presidency in August of 2000. Though he presided over one of the country's worst banking, exchange rate, and economic crises, Mejía's efforts to further Dominican development focused on spreading the access to government resources and services to thousands of rural communities throughout the country, rather than concentrating on major urban centers. His administration established the first social-security-type retirement system, providing a social safety net for the first time in the Dominican Republic.

Though the Mejía administration was, at first, blamed for the collapse of the country's second-largest privately held commercial bank on the basis of long-standing corruption, no evidence has ever linked Mejía or his closest advisers to such corruption. While there are reports of governmental corruption during his presidency, neither public perceptions nor hard evidence suggests that it reached the highest levels of government, remaining a lower-level phenomenon rather than a government-wide problem.

Leonel Fernández, of the Dominican Liberation Party (PLD) defeated president Mejía in the 2004 elections, having already served as president in the late 1990s. Fernández headed the Dominican government for two consecutive terms, over the course of which he focused largely on technological and infrastructural development and macroeconomic and monetary stability. He assumed the presidency on the coattails of the deep economic crisis that began under Mejía's administration—and though he successfully stabilized the country's economy, his economic policy, in contrast to Mejía's, was seen as inattentive to social issues and socioeconomic inequality.

Fernández's second term was most notable for his "blue ties pact" and the constitutional and judicial reforms enabled by it. The pact, an agreement between Fernández and PRD party president Miguel Vargas—who Fernández defeated in the 2008 presidential elections—ensured bipartisan cooperation throughout the reform process.¹ It was during this second term that perceptions of Fernández began to shift, with the president increasingly vilified—particularly by the already deeply fractured PRD—and seen as responsible for the opposition's troubles and the apparently growing corruption, weakening rule of law, consolidating PLD power, and eroding judicial independence.

¹ Though the "blue ties pact" did ensure PRD-PLD cooperation through the reform process, it also generated skepticism of the political intentions of Miguel Vargas, as many within his own party took issue with his close work with their primary political rivals.

Fernández's second term was also characterized by increasing concerns in the realm of drug trafficking and the impact of transnational criminal organizations on Dominican rule of law.

Danilo Medina, Fernández's former chief of staff and close confidante, won the presidential election in 2012. Still, the first year of his presidency has been characterized by greater public trust in his transparent leadership than in his predecessor's—and even the opposition generally respects his presidency and priorities. That said, he is seen as having inherited a system already rigged in his and the PLD's favor, perhaps allowing him to benefit from a skewed system without facing the blame for creating it. And even as aspects of Medina's presidency have been well received by the Dominican public, the problem of the increasing presence of transnational criminal organizations and drug trafficking has only grown in recent years. In the first half of 2013, a full 14 percent of U.S.-bound cocaine shipments—totaling about 42 tons—was trafficked through the Caribbean, with the Dominican Republic emerging as a regional hub for such activities.

Rule of Law, Judicial Authority, and Party Politics in the Dominican Republic

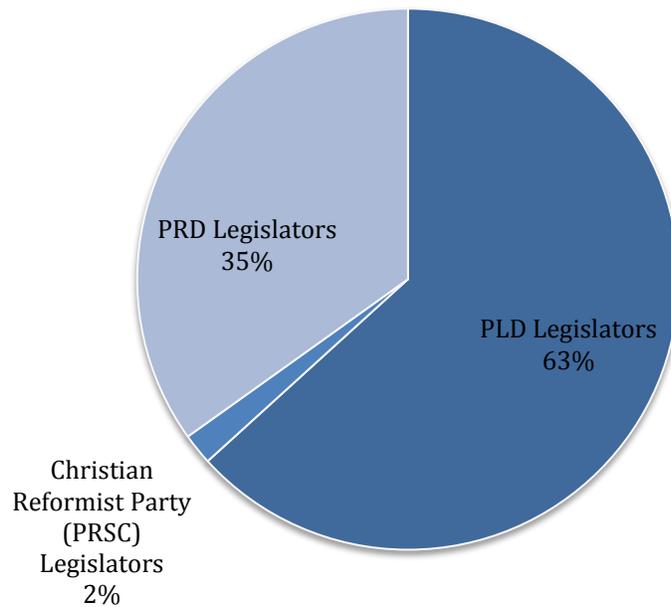
The ongoing dominance of the PLD has raised a number of concerns for the country's governance, its judicial and legislative independence, and the state of Dominican democracy. In addressing those concerns, we observed the following:

The Dominance of the PLD: Electoral Success, a Weak Opposition, and “Single-Party Democracy”

The PLD holds the overwhelming majority of the positions in the Dominican government. Though the most recent legislative electoral cycle, which took place in 2010, saw the PRD garnering 41.7 percent of the popular vote, the election nonetheless brought in 31 PLD senators (out of 32 senate seats) and a nearly 60-percent PLD majority in the House of Representatives. The constitutional reform of 2010, which restructured the entire judicial branch, provided that the judges of all four high courts be appointed by the National Council of Magistrates—a body comprised of the president, the leaders of both chambers of Congress, the president of the Supreme Court of Justice, a second Supreme Court judge, and an additional non-governing party representative from each chamber of Congress. Given the current permeation of PLD power in all branches of government, the majority of the Council is likely to guarantee to support the party's candidates.

The PLD's dominance is bolstered by a fractured opposition, whose lack of cohesion increasingly engenders skepticism about the state of Dominican democracy. When explaining their party's dominance, current PLD leadership cites the chaotic, divided state of the PRD as the reason for their own broad power and electoral success. One senior aide to President Medina expressed his concern for the appearance of democracy when there is no significant challenge to the ruling party, acknowledging the widespread criticism the PLD-controlled government faces for its dominance in every branch of government. Whatever the effect on perceptions of democracy, the PRD's lack of cohesion can largely be traced to the so-called “blue ties pact,” signed in 2009 and promoted by then-President Leonel Fernández of the PLD and PRD president Miguel

Figure 1: Current Party Representation in the Dominican Legislature

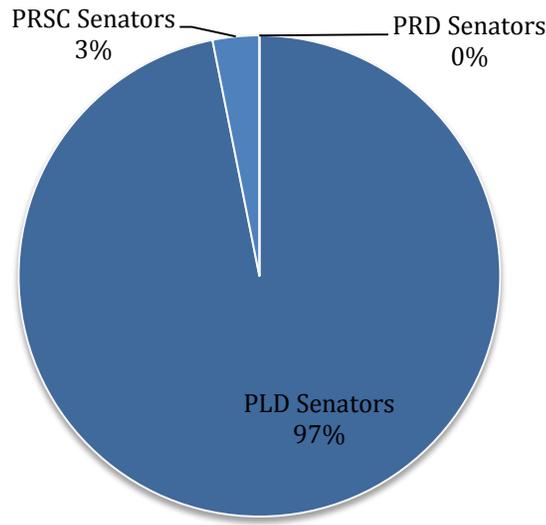


Vargas. The pact, which ensured bipartisan cooperation on sweeping constitutional and judicial reform, divided the PRD—and the party has, to date, failed to reunify.

There are also concerns that by means of its allegedly biased interference in party affairs, the Superior Electoral Tribunal (TSE) has ensured the continued disunity of the PRD. Given its discretionary involvement in preserving Miguel Vargas’s PRD presidency—and its decision not to engage in the party’s expulsion of former president Hipólito Mejía—some fear that the TSE is playing an undue and decisive role in crippling the PLD’s primary opposition. The 2010 pact, largely viewed as Miguel Vargas’s movement to ally with the ruling PLD, in conjunction with the alleged TSE bias, together create the impression of an intentionally divided opposition—to the benefit of the ruling party.

Despite the PLD’s explanation that the weak opposition erodes only the *appearance* of democracy, it seems that democratic institutions in the Dominican Republic are themselves increasingly threatened by the dominance of a single party. To be sure, the Dominican Republic has all the hallmark institutions of democracy. But the reforms enacted under recent administrations have raised doubts, calling into question the institutions’ very legitimacy and democratic nature. According to the opposition, the PLD used the Constitutional Reform of 2010 to gain control over the judiciary and the prosecutors’ appointment process, through a restructuring both of the courts and of the appointment of justices and prosecutors. Of the five judges appointed to the electoral tribunal, for example, three are seen as directly susceptible to PLD influence, and the

Figure 2: Current Party Representation in the Dominican Senate



other two are believed to have ties to the party and its leaders as well. This apparently diminishing judicial independence allegedly made room for the expansion of executive power, turning the state into something of an organization, driven by the powerful, vested interests of the ruling party. Growing executive power, coupled with the (supposedly PLD-aided) absence of a meaningful opposition, has left little outside the sphere of executive influence.

Judicial Independence: The High Courts, Law Enforcement, and a Culture of Impunity

Standing members of the country’s judiciary go to great lengths to assert their sense of independence—both from political parties and from the other branches of government. Many cited the inherently bipartisan nature of the judicial reform process, an outgrowth of the PRD-PLD “blue ties pact,” as evidence of a functioning democratic system. That said, judicial appointments, as a result of that pact, are not subject to legislative scrutiny. The power of the National Council of Magistrates, composed of the highest elected officials in the country, is not *by design* left in the hands of a single party. But the current dominance of the PLD throughout the government ensures that the Council—and, according to the opposition, the judges it appoints—are loyal to the ruling party.

Political corruption corrosive to effective rule of law, legislative and judicial independence, and a robust multiparty system has long existed in the Dominican Republic, albeit to varying degrees. Still, despite years of post-dictatorship clientelism since the fall of Joaquín Balaguer, many in the Dominican Republic view the developments of the past decade as an unprecedented expansion of practices previously kept out of the central operations of government. A so-called “culture of corruption” has, in many ways, taken the place of a political system previously just tinged with corrupt practices. There appears to be little (if any) denial of the presence of corruption under earlier administrations—but it seems, in kind, that few in the opposition would dispute

the far-surpassing breadth and depth of presidential power under recent years' PLD governments.

That “culture of corruption” appears to increasingly apply to the judicial system, as well. The separation and independence of powers, enshrined since the fall of dictatorship and the institutionalization of democracy, were not seen as threatened until the early 2000s. Under President Mejía, for example, the country’s high courts were largely viewed as the legitimate and dedicated protectors of the constitution—much like their counterparts in the United States. This public confidence in the judiciary, however, began to erode under the subsequent Fernández administration. Following the restructuring of the judiciary in 2010, the institution’s autonomy appears to have steadily decreased—and so too has Dominicans’ traditional confidence in the justice system. As one former justice asserted: “The most serious development is that the people are losing their faith in judicial authority—and when confidence in judicial authority is lost, everything”—independence, legitimacy, democracy—“is lost with it.”

The questions surrounding the judicial system advance an additional contradiction in that there are allegedly many laws on the books that are rarely enforced. While there is extensive legislation to assure proper governance, for example, members of the country’s media expressed their assurance that those laws are rarely (if ever) enforced by the country’s judiciary. What’s more, conversations with party leaders raised accusations that high-level party and government officials received payoffs from criminals—among them drug traffickers—to ensure that they would remain beyond the reach of the law.² As faith in the will or ability of the judicial system to uphold the law falters, more and more Dominicans question the motives behind even the soundest decisions the government makes. Increasingly, there is a real concern that people will turn to extrajudicial methods—drug traffickers, mafias, or corruption, for example—to settle problems, thereby further undermining the state and creating a culture of impunity.

Corruption and Its Effects

Part and parcel to the political dominance of the PLD and its apparent permeation throughout the Dominican government is its growing role outside the country’s political party system. Though the party’s majority in both houses of Congress certainly contributes to the far-reaching nature of its power, opposition leaders allege that PLD leaders sit atop a vast patronage network that has developed over the course of the past decade, carrying a host of implications detrimental to the Dominican economy. Our observations are as follows:

Clientelism: Money Laundering, FUNGLODE, and Alleged Impropriety

Through the reforms that began in 2010 and the supposed patronage network that has gradually grown over the past three presidential administrations, the PLD has allegedly ensured that every branch of government responds directly to the executive—thereby securing the party’s place at the apex of Dominican politics. According members of the

² One such example is the alleged donation of US\$300,000 to PRD party president Miguel Vargas's 2012 presidential campaign from Puerto Rican drug lord Jose David Figueroa Agosto. See “Político dominicano recibió dinero de narco,” *el Nuevo Herald*, January 5, 2013, <http://www.elnuevoherald.com/2013/01/05/1378123/politico-dominicano-recibio-dinero.html>.

anti-PLD movement, who have compiled vast tracts of evidence to this effect, through his Global Foundation for Democracy and Development (FUNGLODE), President Fernández and his allies have been accused of laundering enormous sums of cash—to ensure the granting of government contracts.³ And, as the party consolidated its control, the Dominican population increasingly finds itself in a position of relative impotence. Private-sector business leaders cite these contracts and the bribes they claim the contracts entail as a source of primary frustration—and economic inefficiency—to the sole benefit of the ruling party.

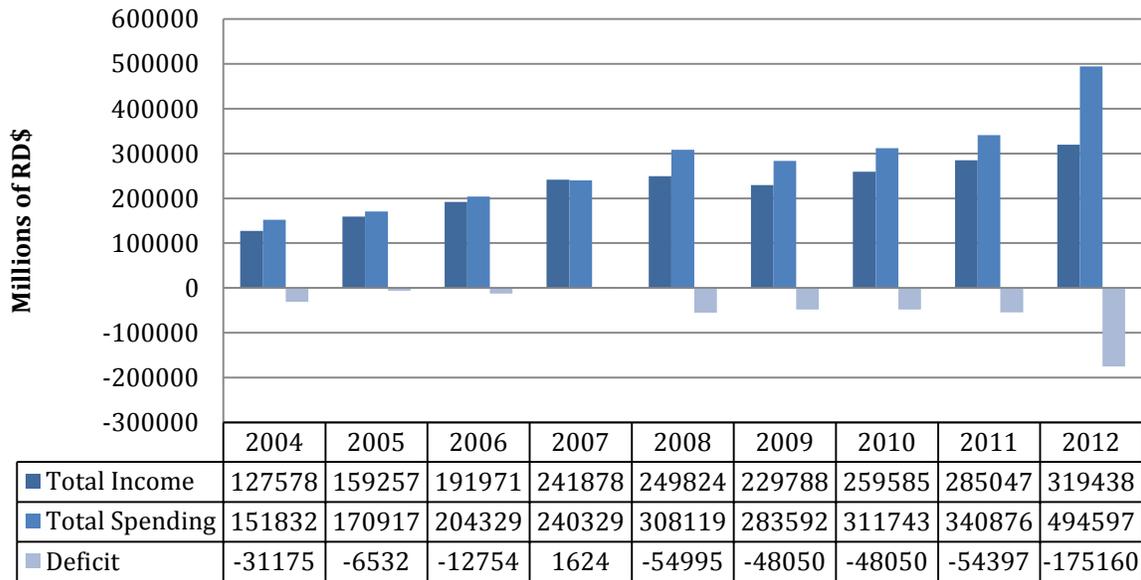
Distortionary Effects: Systemic Inequality, a Suffering Private Sector, and the Dominican Economy

The corruption and clientelism that have only grown in recent years appear to have, in turn, distorted the Dominican economy. Currently, according to members of the Dominican private sector, the informal sector constitutes nearly half of the country's economy, with the corruption of the state and the addition of questionable “fees and licenses” required for formal operations providing little incentive to operate within the formal sector. Illustratively, employment in the (formal) private sector grew just 5 percent over the last decade, while employment in the public sector increased by a staggering 37 percent—apparently speaking both to the effects of PLD policies on the economy and to the ballooning of the federal government.

Increased public expenditure—the result of efforts to boost the economy in the aftermath of the 2008 crisis and fast-growing government spending during the 2008 and 2012 presidential elections—has created a looming fiscal deficit in recent years. The erratic (and electoral-cycle-dependent) budget implies serious weaknesses in the Dominican economy. And with that deficit creeping closer to (and expected to soon exceed) 50 percent of GDP—generally seen as a sign of tough economic conditions moving forward—the government will likely be unable to fall back on a stable and fast-growing economy for the foreseeable future and will face an ever-shrinking ability to borrow money. As part of the government-orchestrated fiscal deficit of 2012, the PLD-run government massively increased state spending in the run-up to the presidential elections—and, unsurprisingly, the deficit exploded, reaching roughly 8 percent of gross domestic product (GDP). Though, according to civil society leaders, such an increase without prior congressional approval is in direct violation of the country's fiscal rules, the judicial branch failed to dole out consequences for the PLD government—seen by the opposition as evidence of the party's influence over judicial rulings. And as the government's budget moves still farther into the red, its negative effects on the economy counteract its formal efforts to boost the productivity of the private sector, boding ill for the Dominican economy moving forward.

³ For more information, see the case brought to the Dominican penal courts by Guillermo Moreno and his attorney, Cristóbal Rodríguez, on the alleged prevarication, perjury, and money laundering of Leonel Fernández by means of FUNGLODE. The judicial proceedings surrounding the case were themselves a source of still more controversy, with Moreno and Rodríguez calling foul on the courts' handling of the case—and suggesting this supposed mismanagement of the case was the result of the judiciary's allegiance to Fernández and the PLD.

Figure 3: Federal Deficit in the Dominican Republic, 2004–2012



The government’s attempts to stimulate the economy have, in addition, failed to address the country’s systemic inequality, which is particularly noticeable on the spectrum of socioeconomic status. According to the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (CEPAL), the top 20 percent of the Dominican population controls over 60 percent of the country’s income, while the bottom 20 percent receives just under 3 percent—solidifying the Dominican Republic’s place among the most unequal countries in the region.

Figure 4: Income Distribution and Economic Inequality in Latin America

Country	Years	Top Quintile	Second Quintile	Third Quintile	Fourth Quintile	Bottom Quintile	Position
Honduras	2009–2010	2.60	6.20	11.60	20.30	59.20	1
Brazil	2008–2011	2.73	6.60	11.00	17.93	61.80	2
Dominican Republic	2008–2011	2.95	6.60	11.25	19.10	60.20	3
Colombia	2008–2011	3.00	6.80	11.35	19.10	59.75	4
Bolivia	2009	2.80	8.20	13.40	21.40	54.20	5
Paraguay	2008–2011	3.10	7.50	12.50	20.00	56.95	6
Panama	2008–2011	3.05	7.50	12.75	20.75	55.90	7
Chile	2009–2011	4.20	7.90	11.70	18.40	57.70	8
Costa Rica	2008–2011	4.00	8.35	12.85	20.55	54.30	9
Nicaragua	2009	4.00	8.60	13.80	21.00	52.60	10
Mexico	2009–2010	4.20	8.20	12.70	19.90	55.00	11
Ecuador	2008–2011	4.20	8.30	13.00	20.35	54.10	12
Peru	2008–2011	4.25	8.85	14.10	21.70	21.10	13
El Salvador	2009–2010	4.40	9.00	13.80	21.00	51.80	14
Uruguay	2008–2011	5.50	9.80	14.40	21.70	48.60	15
Venezuela	2008–2011	5.67	9.93	14.53	21.80	48.07	16

The Challenges Facing the U.S.-Dominican Relationship

In the context of the domestic challenges facing the Dominican Republic, it is pivotal to consider how these challenges will affect the country’s relationship with its most important partner: the United States. The issues most central to the future of the U.S.-Dominican relationship are trade, drug trafficking, immigration, and Haiti. In that vein, we observed the following:

The Dominican Republic plays an important role in various bilateral issues in its relations with the United States—including its promotion of exports to the United States

through the Central America–Dominican Republic Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA-DR) and its role as an important U.S. partner in rebuilding and stabilizing Haiti. Still, the residency of Dominican-born Haitians remains a controversial issue, which may escalate further. And the Caribbean nation’s potential role as a future U.S. stronghold in the fight to stymie Caribbean drug flows from Mexico, Colombia, and Venezuela may well define the bilateral relationship moving forward.

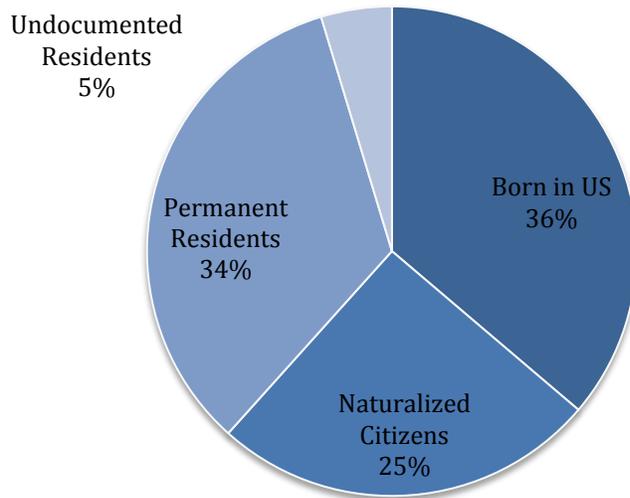
Bilateral Cooperation: Dominican Geography and Counter-Narcotics Efforts

The “fragility” inherent in the Dominican Republic’s geographic position—in the Caribbean, directly en route from Colombia and Venezuela to the southern United States—puts it at a distinct disadvantage, as drug cartels operating in the region increasingly use the country’s ill-policed coast as a point of transit. The strategic positioning of the island in the midst of the illegal Caribbean flow of drugs (as well as goods and persons) makes the effective administration of justice a still higher-stakes game—particularly as judicial independence and confidence in the courts continues to erode. With Mexico and its Central American neighbors as examples of the devastating effects of widespread drug trafficking on even the most robustly democratic political systems, democratic stability and counter-narcotics cooperation are of the utmost importance to the United States in its relations with the Dominican Republic moving forward.

Family Ties: Migration and the U.S.-Dominican Relationship

Because of the close relations and geographic proximity between the United States and the Dominican Republic, migration between the two is essentially a revolving door—given family ties, employment opportunities, and the sheer legal ease of movement. According to City University of New York (CUNY) research, upwards of 1.5 million Dominicans live in the United States, making them the fourth-largest Latin American nationality in the country. In 2000, just 91,000 of those Dominicans did not have legal status. The high number of citizens of Dominican descent (570,000), permanent residents (530,000), and naturalized citizens (400,000) speaks to the ease of movement between the two countries—and, therefore, to the potential for Dominican citizens to view migration as a viable option—an escape valve, essentially, should economic and political conditions worsen at home. These migratory ties make the future movement of persons between the two countries central to the bilateral relationship for the foreseeable future.

Figure 5: Breakdown of Dominican-Americans in the United States



Predictions and Conclusions

The trajectory of Dominican politics moving forward will be determined by a number of factors, likely to include the future of the PLD's dominance, the economy, transnational crime and drug trafficking, relations with Haiti, immigration, and systemic inequality. The looming fiscal deficit and the failure of the Dominican government to address the country's inequality are a pair of serious weaknesses in the country's economy, as well.

The history of corruption and poor rule of law in the Dominican Republic is long. But however storied the country's experience with corruption may be, it cannot be denied that the problem has grown—and quickly—in recent years.

While corruption may, on its own, not seem exceptional, the moment corrupt practices permeate and begin eroding a country's democratic foundations, all of that changes. The PLD's dominance throughout and beyond the Dominican government is, at the very least, approaching that line—all in the context of increasingly shaky economic foundations, largely the result of the clientelism that has grown with the PLD's power.

Perhaps these issues would seem less pressing if it were not for the incredible promise of the Dominican Republic. The largest economy in Central America and the Caribbean and long the beneficiary of its own stable democratic system, the country would be poised to take on a leadership role in the region, expanding its international profile far beyond Hispaniola and the greater Caribbean. But as long as the status quo persists—and certainly if the situation worsens—the Dominican Republic will continue to hold itself back.

Appendix: List of Meetings

Fausto Rosario Adames, *Director, Acento.com.do*

Henry Molina, *Viceministro de la Presidencia de la República Dominicana*

Roberto Álvarez, *Coordinador General, Grupo Participación Ciudadana*

Francisco “Ito” Dominguez Bisonó, *Diputado, Cámara de Diputados*

Orlando Jorge Mera, *Secretario General, Partido Revolucionario Dominicano (PRD)*

Guillermo Caram, *Dirigente, Partido Reformista Social Cristiano (PRSC)*

Guillermo Moreno, *Fundador, Alianza País*

Cristóbal Rodríguez, *Jurista experto en derecho constitucional, Tribunal Constitucional*

Jorge Subero Isa, *Former President, Supreme Court of Justice*

Luis Abinader, *Presidente, Centro de Estudios de Políticas Públicas*

H. Alexander Henegar, *Political Unit Chief, U.S. Embassy in Santo Domingo*

Brian Quigley, *Counselor for Economic and Political Affairs, U.S. Embassy in Santo Domingo*

Hipólito Mejía, *Former President, Dominican Republic*

José Monegro, *Subdirector, El Día*

Milton Ray Guevara, *Presidente, Tribunal Constitucional de República Dominicana*

Mariano Américo Rodríguez Rijo, *Miembro Titular, Junta Central Electoral*

About the Author

Carl Meacham is director of the CSIS Americas Program. He joined CSIS from the Senate Foreign Relations Committee (SFRC), where he served on the professional staff for Senator Richard Lugar (R-IN) for over a decade. He was the senior adviser for Latin America and the Caribbean on the committee, the most senior Republican Senate staff position for this region. In that capacity, he traveled extensively to the region to work with foreign governments, private-sector organizations, and civil-society groups. He was also responsible for managing the committee's relationship with the State Department regarding the Western Hemisphere and overseeing its \$2 billion budget.

Before he joined SFRC, Meacham worked on the staff of two Democratic senators. Prior to his Senate work, he served at the Department of Commerce as special assistant to the deputy secretary, at the Cuban Affairs Bureau of the Department of State, and at the U.S. embassy in Madrid. Meacham is a native speaker of Spanish and was partly raised in Chile, his mother's country of origin. He received his B.A. from the University at Albany, State University of New York, and holds M.A. degrees from American University and Columbia University.

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