

# Political geography in the Dominican Republic, 1978-2000 The decline of regional cleavages

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## Geografía política en la República Dominicana, 1978-2000 El ocaso de los clivajes regionales

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### ABSTRACT / RESUMEN

This article studies the development—and eventual decline—of regional cleavages in Dominican elections from 1978-2000, a period marked by intense electoral competition in a polarized multiparty system. Using census data and official electoral results, it examines seven presidential elections in the Dominican Republic, and identifies geopolitical correlations such as the rural-urban divide, gender ratios, and urbanization rates. The data shows that while there was a political geography of Dominican elections during this period, other factors also came into play, and it presents a nuanced picture of these electoral contests as they played out in different parts of a small, but very diverse country. The article concludes by looking at the eventual decline of regional cleavages, as the country became more integrated through internal migration and urban development, eventually ushering in the current period of electoral dominance by a single party.

### KEYWORDS

Dominican Republic, elections, political geography, regionalism, political parties.

Este artículo estudia el desarrollo—y eventual ocaso—de los clivajes regionales en las elecciones dominicanas entre 1978-2000, un período marcado por intensa competencia electoral dentro de un sistema multipartidista polarizado. Utilizando datos censales y resultados electorales oficiales, examina siete elecciones presidenciales en la República Dominicana, e identifica correlaciones geopolíticas como las divisiones urbano-rurales, proporciones de género, y tasas de crecimiento urbano. Los datos muestran que, aunque existió una geografía política de las elecciones dominicanas durante este período, también hubo otros factores en juego, y presentan una imagen matizada de estos concursos electorales según se llevaron a cabo en diferentes partes de un país pequeño, pero muy diverso. El artículo concluye con una mirada al eventual ocaso de los clivajes regionales, según el país se fue integrando más a través de la migración interna y el desarrollo urbano, eventualmente dando lugar al período actual de dominación electoral por parte de un solo partido.

### PALABRAS CLAVE

República Dominicana, elecciones, geografía política, regionalismo, partidos políticos.

The 2004 presidential election inaugurated a new cycle in Dominican politics; one dominated by the Partido de la Liberación Dominicana (Dominican Liberation Party, or PLD), which has won every presidential contest since then. Originally a leftist political organization that espoused a national liberation ideology, by the mid-1990s the PLD had become a moderate, centrist, status quo party. However, it has not always been like that. From the democratic opening of 1978 to the presidential election of 2000, the Dominican Republic had a competitive multiparty system in which three major parties vied for supremacy and had fairly established regional bases of power. At the turn of the century, I interviewed campaign organizers who admitted to me that certain provinces were *reformistas*, *perredeístas*, or *peledeístas*,<sup>1</sup> and that in spite of their best efforts; it was very difficult for their party to make any significant inroads in them. Though it may seem counterintuitive at first sight to attribute such a weight to regionalism in a small country like the Dominican Republic (with an area of just 48 442 square kilometers), Dominican politicians and campaign strategists considered it a very serious matter. The most poignant example was the traditional drafting of a regionally “balanced” presidential ticket. That is, a ticket in which the presidential and vice presidential candidates were from different regions of the country, particularly the capital (Santo Domingo) and the northerly Cibao region.

The examples above fall perfectly within the realm of the discipline of political geography. As defined by Pacione (1985, p. 1), political geography is “concerned with the geographical consequences of political decisions and actions, the geographical factors which were considered during the making of any decisions, and the role of any geographical factors which influenced the outcome of political actions.” One of the major themes in political geography is the link between voting behavior and the regional characteristics of the population involved,

<sup>1</sup> *Reformistas* are supporters of the Partido Reformista Social Cristiano (Social Christian Reformist Party, or PRSC); a center-right, conservative party. It was known as Partido Reformista (PR) until 1985. *Perredeístas* are supporters of the Partido Revolucionario Dominicano (Dominican Revolutionary Party, or PRD); a center-left, social democratic organization. *Peledeístas* are supporters of the PLD.

also known as electoral geography. Most studies concern themselves with countries in the Global North (e.g., European nations and the United States), where reliable data is easier to obtain, and a few studies have been carried out regarding Latin America (Caviedes, 1993), but practically nothing has been written on the Dominican Republic. While seminal works on Dominican political parties, democratization, and electoral politics are plentiful (Benito Sánchez & Lozano 2012; Brea, Duarte, Tejada, & Báez, 1995; del Castillo 1981, 1986; del Castillo & Cordero, 1982; Duarte & Báez, 1990; Espinal, 1992; Hartlyn, 1998; Jiménez Polanco, 1999; Lozano 2010; Mitchell, 1998; Morgan, Hartlyn, & Espinal 2011; Torcal, Ruiz, & Maldonado 2017), Dominican electoral geography has elicited very little attention from social scientists.

Among Dominican politicians and their campaign staffs, however, regional strategies were a priority. In light of this gap, I believe that Dominican electoral regionalism deserves a deeper scientific examination, because such an analysis offers a more nuanced interpretation of the multiple forces operating in Dominican electoral politics. This article answers three research questions. First and most importantly, was there a scientific basis to the informed opinions of campaigns managers during this period? That is, did geographical variables play a role in Dominican elections from 1978-2000, or were these assumptions only the product of spurious correlations mixed in with plenty of anecdotic evidence? Second, if there was a regional basis to electoral politics in the Dominican Republic from 1978-2000, how did it operate? What were its main characteristics and cleavages? Did regional electoral results reflect the traditional urban-rural cleavage, or did they also represent unique socioeconomic-geographic conditions in certain regions and provinces? And third, what was the significance of regional trends for Dominican politics?

This article deals with these questions in three steps. First, it presents a broad overview of Dominican geography, focusing on regional differences. The Dominican Republic—albeit a small country—has historically been characterized by strong regionalism, a trend later exacerbated by uneven levels of development among the country's main

regions. Second, it crosses electoral and census data to determine if there was a regional or provincial basis to voting patterns from 1978-2000, and what was its nature (if any). Using correlation techniques, variables lying behind regional voting patterns are detected, and then examined to see how strong they are and how they have changed over time. And third, by looking at electoral results in selected provinces, voting tendencies over time are unveiled. The working hypothesis of this study is that regionalism did play a slight role in Dominican electoral politics from 1978-2000, but it was not as significant a factor as most political campaigns believed it to be.

### *Dominican Geography*

The small island of Hispaniola (which the Dominican Republic shares with Haiti) is the most topographically diverse island in the Caribbean archipelago. Geographic diversity gives rise to regionalism, and the latter is often reflected in voting patterns. The main topographic feature of the Dominican Republic is the Cordillera Central, a massive range of mountains (some over 3 000 meters in elevation) which has given rise to several ecological zones and, in turn, led to the historical isolation of different regions in the country. The east-west spine of the Cordillera Central (and related ranges) divides the country into three more or less distinct regions: the North, the Southeast, and the Southwest (Aybar Acosta 2010). These regions do not correspond exactly to topographical divisions; rather, they are based on settlement patterns, cultural similarities (including linguistic patterns), and national/regional myths.

The North—also called the Cibao region—includes the northern flanks of the Cordillera Central and everything to its north and northeast, including the Samaná peninsula. Besides the Cordillera Central (which is sparsely inhabited), the Cibao valley is the most distinctive feature of the region. The Cibao valley is a fertile agricultural region producing food crops and quality tobacco, and it is also the country's most densely populated region. Politically, the Cibao region encompassed fourteen of the Dominican Republic's twenty-nine provinces as of 2000

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MAP 1. Dominican provinces (circa 2000)

(Map 1). The Cibao region—with the exception of its port cities—suffered from centuries of geographical isolation, giving its inhabitants a sense of *cibaño* identity. Additionally, the Cibao region encompasses a variety of subregions with their own peculiar geographical, socioeconomic, and racial makeups. Thus, the term Cibao is little more than a convenient label, as it fails to describe the complexity of the region. The Southeast is the most important region politically, as it contains the country's capital, Santo Domingo, and the majority of the country's population (currently estimated at over ten million inhabitants). The Southeast comprises the vast plains that lie to the east of the Cordillera Central (*Llanos del Este*). In the late nineteenth century, these plains became the hub of the sugar cane industry (which for over a century has been the region's main cash crop) and cattle ranching. The world of sugar was industrial, semi-urban, and proletarian; whereas the world of cattle ranching was

rural, isolated, and based on land tenure. The heart of the Southeast is the capital city of Santo Domingo de Guzmán, a primary city of well over two million inhabitants. Santo Domingo has grown swiftly since the 1960s, aided by migration from rural areas, and it is the political, economic, and cultural center of the Dominican Republic. Because many of its inhabitants are recent arrivals, representing every single province in the country, Santo Domingo is the most diverse city in the country. Administratively, the Southeast contained eight provinces and the National District (Santo Domingo and environs) as of 2000. The Southwest lies to the south of the Cordillera Central. It is the country's poorest and least-inhabited region, but the most geographically diverse. Rainfall, trapped by the Cordillera Central, is scarce, and the climate is hot and dry. Thus, there is little agricultural production without proper irrigation. Politically, the Southwest was divided into seven provinces (Aybar Acosta, 2010). These three regions, while valuable to simplify statistical data, are irrelevant for electoral geography purposes, as the differences within them are as great as those between them. A much more representative census unit is the province (or *provincia*, see Map 1). Dominican provinces—given their small size (1 520 km<sup>2</sup> on average)—provide a much more accurate level of aggregation for electoral and geographical data, thus supplying researchers with fairly homogeneous populations that can be compared and contrasted. Moreover, most census and electoral information available in the Dominican Republic is at the provincial level.

### *Electoral Politics Before 1978*

For most of the twentieth century, the Dominican Republic was under authoritarian rule, including the bloody, highly personalized dictatorship of Gen. Rafael L. Trujillo (1930-1961) (Galíndez, 1956). Trujillo was the archetypal (neo)sultanistic ruler: deeply corrupt, ruling by fiat (while trying to maintain legal pretenses), employing fear and rewards to stay in office, and personally involved in practically everything within his domain (Chehabi & Linz, 1998). Therefore, there were few—if

any—meaningful elections until 1962, one year after the assassination of Trujillo. The December 1962 general elections were not only the first democratic elections in decades, but they also allowed political observers to establish the first relationships between local variables and electoral patterns in the Dominican Republic. For example, Juan Bosch's surprising victory (with 58.7% of the vote) was attributed to his charisma and plain-speaking campaign style, which won him the support of the peasantry (in a country that was overwhelmingly rural) and of the urban lower classes. Recent studies, however, have shown that support for Bosch and his main contender, Viriato Fiallo, was evenly distributed across rural and urban municipalities, but Bosch won because of larger margins in urban areas (Hartlyn, 1998, p. 281). The 1966 presidential election—carried out under U.S. military occupation—reveals even clearer geographical trends. The winner, conservative candidate Joaquín Balaguer (a former puppet president under Trujillo) ran a very effective campaign against a beleaguered Bosch, whose followers were harassed by the Dominican military. Election results showed a clear urban-rural split: Balaguer won in the rural areas, while Bosch emerged dominant among the urban lower classes (del Castillo, 1981, pp. 22-23; Hartlyn, 1998, pp. 90 & 281). The next two elections (in 1970 and 1974) were lopsided contests in which Balaguer was easily reelected with most of the opposition abstaining, because of widespread intimidation from the police and the military. Thus, it was not until the holding of truly competitive elections in 1978 that meaningful data could be collected to analyze spatial electoral trends in the Dominican Republic.

### *Geopolitical Cleavages and Dominican Elections, 1978-1986*

From 1978-2000, elections in the Dominican Republic were characterized by a competitive party system and volatility, with all three major political parties achieving the presidency at least once. Dominican politics was—and remains—a highly personalized affair, and during this period the three main political parties revolved around the figure of

their electoral caudillos.<sup>2</sup> The passing away of the historic electoral caudillos, as well as major socioeconomic changes in the 1990s (spurred by globalization and the reorientation of the Dominican economy towards services), eventually brought about the implosion of the PRSC, the decline and eventual division of the PRD, and an era of PLD dominance that continues into the present (Lozano 2010). For these reasons, this article will focus solely on the 1978-2000 period, when the three electoral caudillos (and their parties) had somewhat defined political bases, which—it was then believed—corresponded with geographical cleavages. Moreover, based on methodological procedures and observed cleavages, it is useful to divide the period under study in two: 1978-1986 (PRD dominance and decline) and 1990-2000 (a truly tripartite system). From a spatial perspective, one of the most obvious cleavages operating in Dominican elections at the time was the rural-urban dichotomy, particularly as the country had experienced a rapid urbanization rate since the 1960s. By 1981, 52% of the Dominican population was urban—a significant demographic tipping point (Oficina Nacional de Estadística, 1985, 1994). During this period, Dominican censuses also collected data on gender ratios, number of households, age, and literacy (among other variables). Using data from the 1981 census, these indicators were correlated with voting data to discern any electoral-spatial trends in the 1978, 1982, and 1986 elections (the closest in time to the census). For the 1990, 1994, and 1996 elections, I employed data from the 1993 census (which was closer in time to these elections). This section examines these first three elections after the democratic opening of 1978, which reflected the major demographic changes going on among the Dominican population at the time. As shown below, the 1978, 1982, and 1986 election results reveal some interesting geopolit-

<sup>2</sup> Joaquín Balaguer was the perennial presidential candidate of the PR(SC); a party that he founded and controlled until his death in 2002. Likewise, Juan Bosch ran for the presidency on the PLD ticket (which he founded) until declining health forced his retirement after the 1994 election. In the case of the PRD, José F. Peña Gómez ultimately emerged as the party's dominant figure, but only started running as the party's presidential candidate after the 1990 election. Personalism—which Trujillo took to extremes—still looms large over the Dominican political system (Benito Sánchez & Lozano 2012).

ical cleavages at work; cleavages that quickly disappeared in the 1990s, as the country underwent major changes.

## The 1978 General Elections

The 1978 general elections pitted incumbent Joaquín Balaguer of the PR against S. Antonio Guzmán of the PRD. Early returns showed a clear lead for the PRD, and then—in what has been described as a virtual self-coup—military authorities stopped the counting of votes. After some thirty-six hours of uncertainty and diplomatic maneuvering, Balaguer announced that the vote counting would resume (Jerez 1995). Final results gave Guzmán the presidency (with 52.7% of the vote) but the electoral authorities awarded four extra provinces to the PR, even though the PRD seemed to have won them—a decision known as the *fallo histórico* (historical ruling), which allowed the PR to retain control of the Senate.

An analysis of election results shows some interesting geopolitical correlations (see Table 1). Using data from the 1981 census (the closest in time to the election), five variables were selected and correlated with voting results for presidential candidates. *Percent* is the percentage of the Dominican Republic's total population represented by each province

TABLE 1. Significant geopolitical correlations,  
1978-1986 general elections

Variable	PR(SC)			PRD		PLD	
	1978	1982	1986	1978	1982	1986	1986
Percent	-.403**	—	—	—	—	—	—
Males	.419**	—	.486*	-.420**	—	—	-.520*
Urban	-.522*	-.797*	-.653*	.549*	.560*	—	.571*
Lit	-.759*	-.603*	-.680*	.758*	—	-.523*	.720*

\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level.

\*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level.

Sources: Campillo Pérez, 1986; Junta Central Electoral, 1978, 1983; Oficina Nacional de Estadística, 1985, 1989, 1990.

(i.e., its demographic weight). Provinces with a greater demographic weight also tend to be urban provinces, such as the National District or Santiago. *Males* is the percentage of males in each province. Provinces with a skewed male-to-female ratio usually reflect an accelerated rural-urban flight. *Urban* is the percentage of a province's population that resides in an urban area. *House* represents the average number of persons per household in each province. Rural households tend to be larger. Finally, *Lit* is the percentage of individuals over the age of five that reported being able to read and write. Literacy rates tend to be higher in urban areas.

Voting patterns for the PR showed strong correlations with four of the five variables. First, there was a negative correlation between PR votes and population size. The PR enjoyed greater support in sparsely populated provinces—typically rural and isolated from the national mainstream. No such correlation was present for PRD votes—an indication of its even, widespread national support. Almost inverse correlations existed for the male-to-female ratio. While the PR had greater support in provinces with higher proportions of males, exactly the opposite happened to the PRD. A correlation of *Males* with *Urban* showed a strong negative relationship (-.460, significant at the 0.05 level), thus indicating that provinces with higher proportions of males tended to be less urban, and confirming the previously observed electoral trend. Not surprisingly, a similar correlation surfaced for the *Urban* variable. The PR fared better in rural environments, while exactly the opposite happened to the PRD. Finally, another near mirror-like correlation took place with the *Lit* variable. Support for the PR was greater in provinces with low literacy rates (usually rural), while support for the PRD was positively related to higher literacy rates. A correlation of *Urban* and *Lit* showed a strong (.532, significant at the 0.01 level) positive relationship. Obviously, an urban environment provides greater opportunities for a basic education. Support for the PR during the 1978 general elections came mostly from rural, under-populated provinces where males tended to be a majority, and literacy rates were low. However, in spite of its strong showing in the rural areas, support for the PR had been declining even in these traditional strongholds, as a com-

parison to 1966 electoral results indicates (Hartlyn, 1998, pp. 281-282). On the other hand, the PRD benefitted from the country's ongoing rapid urbanization by drawing most of its support from urban centers, where literacy rates are usually higher. These tendencies corroborate previous observations made by other researchers (del Castillo and Cordero, 1982, pp. 2-8; Hartlyn, 1998, p. 230).

The PR won in the border provinces, the San Juan valley, and Samaná. It achieved coefficients of dominance<sup>3</sup> of more than ten percentage points in the border provinces of Elías Piña (0.768) and Independencia (0.604); and in Puerto Plata (0.592), Samaná (0.612), and San Juan (0.676). On the other hand, the PRD won in the central Cibao region, in the National District, and in the sugar-growing eastern provinces. It achieved high coefficients of dominance in the country's capital (0.677), and in the semi-urbanized provinces of San Pedro de Macorís (0.669) and La Romana (0.785). In a nation that had already become majority-urban, the PRD obtained major victories in the country's key cities, particularly in Santo Domingo, which had grown monumentally during Balaguer's long tenure in office, and by the 1970s had all the characteristics of a primate city (i.e., it towered over all other secondary and tertiary cities in the country by its size, population, and monopoly over resources). Moreover, the PRD also emerged victorious in the Cibao valley, which includes the large urban centers of Santiago and La Vega (the country's second and third largest cities, respectively). Thus, in spite of the PR's strong grip over some rural provinces, the PRD won where it counted: in the densely populated urban centers. By 1978, the Dominican Republic had become an urban nation, and Guzmán's PRD clearly benefitted from the country's new demographics.

<sup>3</sup> The coefficient of dominance describes, in a range from zero to one, the electoral margin between two contending parties, while omitting the votes obtained by other parties. In this way, a clear picture of victory margins emerges from a head-to-head competition between the two major parties. The formula is  $D = p^1 / (p^1 + p^2)$  where  $p^1$  is the vote of the first plurality and  $p^2$  is the vote of the second plurality. A coefficient of 0.50 represents a virtual tie, a coefficient close to one represents a victory by almost twice the amount of votes, and a coefficient below 0.50 indicates an electoral defeat (Caviedes 1991, 120 n. 2). For this study, I calculated coefficients of dominance by individual parties (without alliances) at the provincial level.

### *The 1982 General Elections*

Given Balaguer's long tenure in power, Guzmán ran on a campaign promise of no reelection, and in 1982, The PRD selected Salvador Jorge Blanco as its presidential candidate. The PRD easily won the elections and achieved a congressional majority, with 46.7% of the vote, against 39.2% for the PR. The PLD, which had accomplished some rapid growth since the 1978 elections, finished a distant third with 9.9% of the vote. Unlike 1978, the 1982 elections took place without major incidents.

As in 1978, the urban-rural cleavage was still very prominent (see Table 1). PR voting showed high negative correlations with the *Urban* and *Lit* variables (even greater than in 1978 in the case of *Urban*), indicating that the PR still had a hardcore constituency among rural voters. In a rapidly urbanizing country, it was not an auspicious trend for the PR's future. Related to this cleavage was the support received by the PR in provinces with low levels of literacy—again, a factor that correlated highly with a rural environment (.532, significant at the 0.01 level). PRD voting only showed significant positive correlations with the *Urban* variable, a fact that attested to the PRD's continuing electoral dominance over the country's major urban centers. On the other hand, the lack of correlation with the other demographic variables shows an even, well-spread support throughout the national electorate for the PRD.

The PRD maintained its dominance over the urban strongholds of Santo Domingo and the sugar-growing East, while making inroads into the deep Southwest—a mostly rural, under-populated area. The PRD not only obtained high coefficients of dominance in Santo Domingo (0.667), La Romana (0.660), and San Pedro de Macorís (0.730)—where it was expected to do so—but also in Barahona (0.603), Independencia (0.605), and Pedernales (0.596). Barahona is the center of sugar production in the Southwest—thus it had a large proletarian sector—and it had been easily won by the PRD in 1978, but the cases of Independencia and Pedernales defied an easy explanation, as they reflected a rapid reversal of political allegiances. The case of Independencia was particularly striking because it went from being a bastion of the PR in

1978, to becoming a strong supporter of the PRD in 1982—in spite of its rural, under-populated, borderlands character. This electoral upset was made possible by an intensive courting of the province's voters through the allocation of lucrative government jobs and other forms of patronage, combined with the implementation of rural development programs (Benito Sánchez & Lozano 2012, p. 206; Morgan, Hartlyn, & Espinal 2011, 7).

Nevertheless, there were signs of upcoming trouble for the PRD. Even though it had gained new voters in former PR bastions, it began to lose its popularity in the central Cibao. The central Cibao had been Guzmán's territory, which may explain its lukewarm support for Jorge Blanco (del Castillo and Cordero, 1982, pp. 9-10). In addition, the country's unfolding economic crisis was slowly swinging the political pendulum back. Besides the PR, the other party that stood to gain from the PRD's decline was the PLD, particularly because it drew voters from the same class segments as the PRD: lower- and middle-class workers. For example, in 1982, the PLD obtained 13% of the vote in the National District, 17% in Santiago, 15% in San Pedro de Macorís, and it finished second in La Romana with 28% of the vote.

### *The 1986 General Elections*

Fortunately for Balaguer and his party (now renamed PRSC), the administration of Jorge Blanco was plagued by corruption scandals as the country sunk into a deep economic morass. As in the rest of Latin America, the Dominican Republic was experiencing the "lost decade" of the 1980s, with its concomitant ills of balance of payments problems, currency devaluation, and exacting IMF debt-renegotiation accords. Moreover, over the years the PRD had become practically divided into two factions: a conservative one, represented by the late president Guzmán and his vice president Jacobo Majluta; and a liberal one, represented by incumbent president Jorge Blanco and Santo Domingo mayor José F. Peña Gómez. After a contested party convention, Majluta emerged as the presidential candidate of a divided, discredited, and somewhat

demoralized PRD. In just eight years, the aura of the PRD had been badly tarnished, whereas Balaguer's image began to look comparatively rosy (Espinal, 1990; Lozano, 1987). Many PRD sympathizers, disenchanted by the party's poor record and its internal bickering, began switching their allegiance to the PLD—a growing trend known as *votos prestados* (literally “borrowed votes,” because they eventually swung back to the PRD).

In this three-way split, Balaguer was able to eke out a narrow victory: 41.5% for the PRSC and allies, 38.8% for the PRD and allies, and 18.4% for the PLD. Balaguer defeated Majluta by a scanty 40 000 votes. His surprising comeback was not only the result of the PRD's disarray; apparently there were also geopolitical factors at play. Since 1982, the PRD had been losing ground in its urban strongholds, a void that the PLD had begun to fill in. Moreover, the PRSC had maintained some of its traditional strongholds in the rural areas, while gaining supporters in urban centers—particularly in the capital. Santo Domingo's rapid growth had been fueled mostly by migration from the Dominican countryside and many of these “new urbanites” carried their conservative political allegiances with them when they moved into the capital.

A cross-examination of census and electoral data shows strong correlations for the *Males*, *Urban*, and *Lit* variables (see Table 1). Once again, support for the PRSC showed a strong correlation to provinces with higher male-to-female ratios, while the opposite trend was visible regarding PLD voting. No such correlation existed with PRD voting. As expected, lower urbanization rates correlated highly with PRSC voting, while higher urbanization rates were related to PLD voting. No significant urban correlation with PRD voting was visible, but its negative sign (-.332) may point to a generalized decline for a party that had been dominant in urban areas. By 1986, it seemed as if the PLD was on its way to displace the PRD as the Dominican Republic's main urban party. The final indicator is the three parties' strong, statistically significant correlations with the LITERACY variable. While PLD voting had a strong positive correlation with higher literacy rates, both the PRSC and the PRD showed strong negative correlations with literacy rates. In the case of the PRSC, it was a long-term trend; but in the case of the PRD, it was a

disturbing, new development. Even more surprising was the strength of the correlation—similar to the PRSC's. In just a four-year period, the PRD lost the support that it formerly enjoyed among voters in the more literate—and usually more urban—provinces, and by 1986 it desperately clung to less traditional constituencies.

The PRSC regained control of some of its traditional bastions. It won handsomely in San Juan and Elías Piña (0.622), as well as in Puerto Plata (0.602), and it obtained huge victories in the rural, cattle-ranching Southeast (0.603 in El Seibo, 0.635 in Hato Mayor, and 0.645 in La Altagracia). These victories underscored the rural character of the PRSC's constituency, but did not tell the whole story, as the PRSC also won in Santiago and in Santo Domingo, two major urban centers where the PRD had always been dominant. Heavy rural migration to the cities during the "lost decade" of the 1980s provided new "urban" votes to the PRSC. The PRD, meanwhile, lost support around the country, particularly in Santiago (where it obtained its lowest voting percentage in the whole country) and in Santo Domingo, where it was slightly edged out by the PRSC. The PLD, on the other hand, kept growing in the urban centers of the Southeast, particularly in La Romana (0.628), and in the central Cibao, particularly in Santiago. With the 1986 elections, the Dominican electoral system became a veritable multiparty contest, with at least two parties (the PRSC and the PRD) that had a national appeal that cut across regions—and (sometimes) even across classes. The 1986 elections also underscored the volatility of regional or provincial electoral support. Only the PRSC could claim that it still had—after three elections since 1978—any sort of a geographical base of support (Espinal, 1992, pp. 198-199).

### *The Waning of Geopolitical Cleavages, 1990-2000*

The discernible geographical cleavages of the 1978-1986 period faded during the second electoral period under study: 1990-2000. In four presidential contests held during this decade (1990, 1994, 1996, and 2000), geopolitical cleavages—if present—were not as clear-cut or as

significant as in previous elections from 1978-1986. The long-term consequences of these changes are also examined in this section.

### *The 1990 General Elections*

Balaguer's return after eight years did not bring about the economic bonanza that voters had expected, and as the 1990 elections neared, no one seriously expected him to win. The PRD had continued its bitter internal struggle, and Peña Gómez eventually assumed total control over a diminished PRD with little strength to challenge Balaguer. The top challenger was now Bosch's PLD, which had been slowly building itself into the main opposition party since the 1978 elections. The 1990 general elections became another three-way race, with Balaguer, Bosch, and Peña Gómez in the running. The results came as a surprise for the PLD, which had expected a comfortable victory. After a long night switching leads, Balaguer edged out Bosch by 1.1% of the votes. Though Bosch initially complained about electoral fraud (Fernández, 1991), the PLD was not able to substantiate its case and Balaguer was officially declared the winner with 35% of the votes. Bosch received 33.9% and Peña Gómez 23.2%.

Results of the 1990 elections were correlated with data from the 1993 Dominican census, as it was closer in time to this contest than the 1982 census. The 1993 census provided five variables: *Percent*, *Males*, *Urban*, *House*, and *Adults*. The first four variables were the same as in the 1982 census, while *Adults* represented the percentage of individuals over the age of eighteen. Unfortunately, literacy rates were not available in the 1993 census. Statistically significant correlations only emerged with two of the variables: *Males* and *Adults* (see Table 2). The PLD apparently benefitted from the female vote more than the other parties did. Another interesting correlation was the one between PLD voting and the *Adults* variable. While PLD voting showed high, positive correlations with this variable, both PRD and PRSC voting also showed significant—but negative—correlations. If one considers that rural populations tend to be “younger,” that is, they usually consist of families with more children,

TABLE 2. Significant geopolitical correlations, 1990 & 1996  
(first round) elections

Variable	PR(SC)		PRD		PLD	
	1990	1996	1990	1996	1990	1996
Percent	—	-.428**	—	—	—	—
Males	—	.618*	—	—	-.376**	-.515*
Adults	-.528*	-.669*	-.573*	—	.709*	.624*

Sources: Junta Central Electoral, 1996; Oficina Nacional de Estadística, 1992, 1994.

\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level.

\*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level.

then this variable may be considered as a proxy measure of urban residence. This trend was in line with popular perceptions of the PLD as a party composed mainly of urban proletarians and middle-class professionals, whereas the PRSC was still a major force in the Dominican countryside. More puzzling was the PRD's significant negative score on this variable, a measure of its declining popularity among its traditional urban constituency.

In this three-way race, no single party obtained more than 50% of the votes in any province. PRSC voting was well distributed across the country; only in the highly-proletarianized province of La Romana did the PRSC falter significantly. On the other hand, the PRSC only obtained a high coefficient of dominance in its traditional bastion of Elías Piña (0.618). In general, PRSC voting hovered in the 20-30% range in all the other provinces, whereas the PRD was effectively displaced from its traditional strongholds by the PLD. This trend is typical of the Dominican political system, where towards the end of the electoral campaign the race becomes a highly polarized contest between the two candidates with a realistic chance of winning. Polarization thus led to an exacerbation of the "borrowed votes" phenomenon, as the population began to perceive that only Bosch had a chance of defeating Balaguer. There was well-spread support for the PLD throughout the nation, except for a few PRSC strongholds in the borderlands and in Samaná. Actually, the PLD achieved high coefficients of dominance in the central Cibao

(0.616 in Espaillat, 0.609 in La Vega, 0.616 in Salcedo, and 0.605 in Santiago) and in La Romana (0.648), both former strongholds of the PRD. Though the PLD won in the densely populated central Cibao and in urban centers, it was not by a margin that was large enough to defeat a well-entrenched incumbent. The PRD and other minor parties took away the votes that could have made the difference, thus diffusing the PLD's potential electoral power. An extremely high abstention rate of 40%—mostly from disenchanting PRD sympathizers—also did not help improve the PLD's chances. If those factors are coupled with Balaguer's adroit use of state resources to foster his candidacy, the establishment of valuable electoral alliances with minor political parties, and the likely use of fraud, then Balaguer's victory was the less surprising (Lozano, 1990).

### *The 1994 General Elections*

If Balaguer's victory in 1990 was controversial, the results of the 1994 elections would be even more widely questioned. Though the economy had improved since the calamitous late 1980s, the political opposition was broadly challenging Balaguer's quest for a sixth presidential term. After a poor performance in the 1990 elections, the PRD regained its momentum under the leadership of Peña Gómez. He managed to strengthen the PRD and to cobble together a broad coalition of minority parties, known as the Acuerdo de Santo Domingo (Santo Domingo Accord), to face off Balaguer. The PLD, on the other hand, suffered a steep decline in its popularity; the "borrowed votes" were now going back to the PRD.

Election Day (May 16, 1994) brought about the first disturbing signs of what eventually would become a long-term crisis: thousands of registered voters were disenfranchised and turned away at the polls because their names were not on the official voter rolls. According to estimates from the Acuerdo de Santo Domingo, some 200 000 citizens were unable to vote as a result (Peña Gómez and Álvarez Bogaert, 1994). To further compound the crisis, initial results gave Balaguer a very slim lead of just 22 000 votes (less than one percentage point) over Peña Gómez. The post-electoral crisis created a major political impasse:

the PRSC acknowledged that the elections had been less than perfect, but it insisted that the irregularities affected all parties equally; while the PRD argued that there had been widespread fraud and that it targeted its sympathizers specifically. The PRD and its allies mounted an international denunciation campaign to force Balaguer to annul the elections or to negotiate some sort of post-electoral compromise. The latter finally took place with the participation of the PLD and the mediation of the Catholic Church. In a gentlemen's agreement known as the "Pact for Democracy," Balaguer's term was shortened to two years and important constitutional modifications were introduced. Presidential elections were separated from congressional and municipal elections, new presidential elections were to take place in 1996, consecutive presidential reelection would be banned (precluding Balaguer from running in 1996), and a majority runoff electoral format (with a 50% threshold) was adopted in order to prevent closely contested outcomes in the future (Hartlyn 1998, pp. 252-255). In early August, electoral results were finally announced and Balaguer's victory became officially recognized by the opposition. Balaguer ended up with 42.3% of the votes, Peña Gómez with 41.5%, and Bosch with 13.1%.

The highly contested nature of the 1994 elections is reflected in three closely related phenomena. First, Balaguer's official margin of victory was the smallest ever: only 22,000 votes out of over three million valid votes. Declining victory margins had become a trend since 1978 (Hartlyn 1998, 244), and in 1994 the trend reached its nadir when the two main political forces seemed to be evenly matched. Second, there were no significant correlations between electoral results and socio-economic variables from the 1993 census, suggesting a very similar distribution of votes for all parties across the national territory. And third, there were no large coefficients of dominance, except for the PRSC's victory in its traditional stronghold of Elías Piña (0.656). Both the PRSC and the PRD obtained results in the 30-40% range in all provinces (except Elías Piña). There was an even distribution of votes for the PRSC and the PRD, but a decline for the PLD, which finished a distant third even in traditional bastions like La Romana, Salcedo, and Santiago. The pendulum

of the “borrowed votes” phenomenon had swung back. Thus, the 1994 elections represent a watershed event in contemporary Dominican politics. Not only were the rules of the political game redefined because of the electoral impasse, but the elections also signaled the twilight of these three political caudillos, who died shortly thereafter, ushering in a new political generation. As posterior events would show, the 1994 elections also marked the start of an electoral realignment; one in which the PLD and the PRD would become the country’s top political forces, with the PRSC acting as a “wild card” ally (Benito Sánchez & Lozano 2012, p. 207). In terms of electoral geography, the 1994 elections also signaled the beginning of the end of geographical factors as seemingly influential in Dominican elections.

### *The 1996 Presidential Election*

As per the terms of the Pact for Democracy, Balaguer could not run in the 1996 presidential election. In his place, the PRSC nominated his vice president, Jacinto Peynado, whom Balaguer did not seem too interested in supporting and he was conspicuously absent from most of Peynado’s campaign activities. After Bosch’s retirement, the PLD nominated his vice presidential candidate, Leonel Fernández. The Acuerdo de Santo Domingo kept its ticket intact, with Peña Gómez as its candidate. The ban on consecutive presidential reelection brought about a new realignment of forces: support for the PRSC declined considerably without Balaguer as its candidate; the PLD gained many of the PRSC, anti-Peña Gómez votes (a new “borrowed votes” phenomenon); and the PRD maintained its preeminent position as the country’s main opposition party (Jiménez Polanco 1999; Sagás 1997). With the majority runoff electoral format now in place, the first round election took place on May 16, 1996. Election Day results were quickly announced in an orderly manner. Peña Gómez and Fernández qualified for the runoff election, with 45.9% and 38.9% of the votes, respectively. Peynado finished a disappointing third, with only 15% of the votes.

Data from the first round of the 1996 election was analyzed with variables from the 1993 census, and some interesting correlations surfaced, which tended to confirm previous trends (see Table 2). For example, the strong negative correlation between PRSC voting and population size, reflecting the still-lingering popularity of the PRSC among voters in the less inhabited, rural provinces. Such is also the case with the *Males* variable, which showed strong correlations with PRSC and PLD voting (though in opposite directions). In the case of the PRSC, it was a trend that dated back to the 1978 elections; whereas in the case of the PLD, the trend dated back to the 1986 elections. Finally, the variable *Adults* was also strongly related to both PRSC and PLD voting—both trends that dated back to the 1990 elections. It is interesting to note that no strong correlations were associated with PRD voting at this time, thus indicating that its electoral support was widespread and pretty even across demographic groups and provinces.

The absence of Balaguer as its presidential candidate, plus his unenthusiastic backing of Peynado's candidacy, led to few PRSC votes across the national territory. The PRSC only won in Elías Piña—its traditional stronghold—and only by a slim margin. Meanwhile, support for the PRD was evenly spread across the country. Though the PRD did not get more than 50% of the votes in any given province, it obtained high coefficients of dominance in twelve provinces. These victories represent twice as many high coefficients of dominance for the PRD than in any other election since 1978. However, most of these easy victories were the result of Balaguer's absence, as they took place in provinces where the PRSC had traditionally been strong (e.g., borderland provinces, the Southeast, and Samaná). In this respect, the first round of the 1996 presidential election was an anomalous event: Balaguer's absence led to easy victories by the PRD in many rural provinces. It was a quick rebound for the PLD after the 1994 elections, with well-spread support across the national territory (except for the borderland provinces) and sound victories in La Romana and Salcedo (home province of the PLD's vice presidential candidate, Jaime David Fernández Mirabal), where the

PLD obtained coefficients of dominance of 0.620 and 0.627, respectively. It also had strong showings in urban provinces, including the capital, La Vega, San Cristóbal, San Pedro de Macorís, and Santiago.

In spite of the PRD's impressive show, two mitigating factors must be kept in mind. First, the PRSC—due to Balaguer's forced absence—was not the strong competitor of the past. And second, in the majority runoff electoral format, the main goal in the first round election is not necessarily to win, but to qualify for the runoff election. With the expectation—based on polling data—that the PRD would not reach the 50% threshold, the PLD bet on finishing second and then seeking Balaguer's support for the runoff election. On June 2, 1996, the PLD leadership (including a senescent Bosch) and Balaguer publicly announced the creation of the National Patriotic Front, a political alliance forged to defeat Peña Gómez. With Balaguer's enthusiastic endorsement, Fernández went on to easily win the runoff election on June 30, 1996, with 51.3% of the votes (Sagás, 1997). The PRD suffered its fourth consecutive defeat; Peña Gómez his third and final one (he died in 1998). The PLD (a former scion of the PRD) now fed its sudden growth on the PRSC—a continuation of the "borrowed votes" phenomenon. Because results for this runoff election were heavily influenced by Balaguer's support of Fernández's candidacy, no statistical analyses were carried out. Doing so would have likely resulted in skewed correlations that did not reflect the PLD's real geographic and socioeconomic base of support.

### *The 2000 Presidential Election*

For the 2000 presidential election, the PRD selected Hipólito Mejía—a popular and non-controversial figure within and outside the party—as its candidate. To round off the PRD ticket, a female vice presidential candidate, Milagros Ortiz Bosch (niece of Juan Bosch), was chosen. The PLD, on the other hand, had a contested nomination process in which two popular pre-candidates, Danilo Medina and Jaime David Fernán-

dez Mirabal, vied for the party's nomination. In the end, the seemingly contrived selection of Medina (Leonel Fernández's right-hand man) left a large sector of the PLD dissatisfied. The PRSC once again nominated Balaguer, then ninety-three years old, blind, and infirm. After a rather uneventful campaign, polls showed Mejía with a considerable lead, though it was considered unlikely that he could reach the required 50% threshold. But election-day results showed Mejía with 49.9% of the vote, Medina with 24.9%, and Balaguer with 24.6%. A runoff election was averted when Medina—after failing to obtain Balaguer's support—declined to participate in a second round (Sagás 2001).

The PRD scored well in every province, and that was the case for the PLD and the PRSC, too (though in lower proportions). No significant correlations emerged between 1993 census data and electoral results. The PRD was victorious in Santo Domingo and all but one of the country's twenty-nine provinces (achieving high coefficients of dominance in twenty provinces and the National District). It only lost in La Romana, the PLD's traditional stronghold. Results for the PLD showed an interesting geographical distribution. The PLD obtained most of its votes in the National District, the Southeast, and the borderlands. In the case of the borderlands, where PLD support had been historically weak, it seems like the PLD was able to co-opt—and retain—former PRSC sympathizers. The PLD—a small party to begin with—had also been weakened by the lack of interest of the supporters of Fernández Mirabal, who felt that they had been cheated, and hesitated to campaign for Medina. The PRSC's performance in this election was mixed. Balaguer, due to his old age and health problems, barely went out to campaign and he was never seriously considered as a potential electoral threat. His candidacy seems to have made a difference only because the PRSC was an electoral vehicle controlled by its creator. However, after the death of Balaguer on July 14, 2002, the PRSC withered.

## Conclusions

Spatial differentiation of voters certainly played a role in Dominican politics between 1978-2000—though it is unclear to what extent. Some regional and socioeconomic cleavages correlated with voting preferences during the period under study (though these correlations do not necessarily imply causation). More specifically, this longitudinal examination of electoral geography in the Dominican Republic unveils three closely related phenomena.

First, there was a clear urban-rural cleavage in Dominican politics from 1978-2000. Whereas the PRD and the PLD were (mostly) the parties of the urban lower and middle classes, the PRSC was the organization most favored by rural folk. In 1978, the Dominican population was almost equally divided between urban and rural dwellers; by 2000, the gross of the population lived in urban areas. Particularly during the “lost decade” of the 1980s, heavy rural-to-urban migration took place. The country’s rapid urbanization led to a decline in the popularity of the PRSC, which tried to reconstitute its base of support to remain competitive throughout the late 1980s and early 1990s. On the other hand, urbanization and modernization nurtured an expansion of electoral support for the PRD, and later, for the PLD. In the case of the former, it not only gained support in the cities, but also in parts of the interior formerly in the hands of the PRSC. As such, the urban-rural divide has been the most important geographical cleavage in Dominican politics since the 1978 democratic transition. However, results since 1994 show that this cleavage has practically disappeared as the country became highly urbanized.<sup>4</sup>

Second, electoral volatility dominated the Dominican political system from 1978-1994. In spite of the country’s rapid urbanization, the PRSC was able to maintain a major quota of power and to make an unexpected comeback from 1986-1996. While geopolitical cleavages increasingly favored Balaguer’s opponents, their bitter personal and tactical divisions, coupled with the poor economic performance of the 1978-

<sup>4</sup> Agriculture remains an important sector of the Dominican economy and thus the urban-rural divide still shows up as a factor in Dominican electoral politics (albeit with a limited effect). For example, see Torcal, Ruiz, & Maldonado (2017, chap. 4).

1986 PRD administrations, facilitated Balaguer's questionable electoral victories. Moreover, since 1986, the Dominican Republic had a multi-party political system, with at least two parties that had a national appeal that cut across classes. During the 1978-2000 period, the PRD won three of seven presidential elections held, Balaguer won another three (consecutive) elections, and the PLD won the remaining one (Jiménez Polanco 1999). Geographically, there was a lack of consistent, long-term regional and provincial support for all three parties. Thus, while spatial-geographical factors played some role in electoral outcomes in the Dominican Republic on a case-by-case (or province-by-province) basis, other electoral factors have often countered or diffused the influence of electoral geography. Factors such as personal charisma, clientelism, campaign issues, economic performance, voter manipulation and fraud, and many others played—and still play—a much larger role.<sup>5</sup> So, while there were spatial correlations to voting patterns in Dominican elections between 1978-2000, causation is hard to determine because of multiple factors at play. In the Dominican Republic, geography is *not* destiny. As such, the evidence does not support the anecdotal claims of Dominican political strategists regarding the pursuit of regional (and provincial) strategies or public perceptions of immutable regional bases of power.

Third, the decline in the geographical basis of electoral outcomes reflected a realignment in Dominican politics. Massive emigration, large-scale foreign investment, and the development of tourism as an economic mainstay globalized the Dominican nation, helping render moot old regional differences. Moreover, with the passing away of the big three electoral caudillos (Balaguer, Bosch, and Peña Gómez) their historic regional bases of power shifted allegiances. For example, without Balaguer and the personal allegiance of his rural caciques and military cliques, the PRSC is no longer dominant in poor, rural areas; without Bosch and his study circles, the PLD is no longer the party of young urbanites; and without Peña Gómez and his charismatic touch, the PRD is no longer the party of the urban masses. Their death also ini-

<sup>5</sup> See Torcal, Ruiz, & Maldonado (2017) for a thorough profile of Dominican voters.

tiated a generational relay in their organizations, which watered down the original orthodox ideological nature of the PLD, led the PRD to further internal schisms, and brought down the PRSC. As a result, with a divided PRD and a PRSC that has become a shadow of itself, a non-ideological, moderate, centrist PLD currently dominates electoral politics in the Dominican Republic, having won every presidential election since 2004 (Benito Sánchez & Lozano 2012).

So, was there really a political geography of Dominican elections? This longitudinal study indicates that at least from 1978-1990, geographical cleavages such the urban-rural divide played a limited role in electoral results. Since the 1994 elections and the disappearance of the three historic electoral caudillos, however, there has been a decline in these factors, which have rarely showed up in statistical analyses of electoral data. Nowadays, electoral geography plays an insignificant role in Dominican politics as the country has become more urbanized and globalized, and these integrative forces work to minimize provincial differences.

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