

“Yes” Victory Likely in Costa Rica CAFTA Referendum

Tico Times Staff
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President Oscar Arias and other supporters of the Central American Free-Trade Agreement with the United States (CAFTA) declared victory last night as results rolled in from a popular referendum, showing a likely win for the “yes” vote.

Nationwide, with 95% of votes counted, 51.6% of voters chose in favor of the controversial trade pact, while 48.4% voted against it. About 60% of eligible voters turned out yesterday, exceeding the necessary 40% necessary for the vote to be binding.

The “yes” camp turned into a celebratory dance party early in the evening, and pro-CAFTA campaign head Alfredo Volio ventured to thank Costa Ricans for the CAFTA victory before all votes were counted.

“Today we’re following the resolve of the TSE (Supreme Elections Tribunal) and trying as of this moment to unite Costa Rica,” he said. “From this moment, we are simply Costa Ricans.”

President Oscar Arias called the decision “time to listen attentively to the message of our country and... Today we have witnessed the birth of a new era in our democratic life, a birth in which we have all taken part and of which we all have the right to feel proud.”

At the “no” headquarters, leader Eugenio Trejos scarcely mentioned the results, instead assuring supporters that “every vote would be scrutinized and recounted.”

Amid angry chants of fraud from the fringes of the crowd, Trejos urged patience, and calm, and called for supporters to look to their community organizations, or *cómites patrióticas*, to voice their frustrations.

Ottón Solís, another “no” leader, said he was impressed with the outcome and the turn out, and refused to concede, citing investigations of possible fraud and constitutional violations.

“Everything is on hold for now,” he said.

Results varied by province. The “yes” vote won in San José, Cartago, Limón and Heredia, while the “no” won in Alajuela, Guanacaste and Puntarenas.

The breakdown: in San José, 51.67% “yes,” 48.33% no; in Cartago, 56.47% voted in favor of CAFTA and 43.53% voted against it; in Limón 55.42% voted “yes” and 44.58% voted “no;” in Heredia, 52.38% voted yes and 47.62% voted “no;” in Alajuela, 48.92% voted “yes” and 51.08% voted “no;” in Guanacaste, 47.31% voted “yes” and 52.69% voted “no;” and in Puntarenas 49.37% voted “yes” and 50.63% voted “no.”