

## Shared government in the public interest

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On Nov. 2, the people of Puerto Rico elected their governor from the Popular Democratic Party (PDP), their representative in Congress from the New Progressive Party (NPP), and the majority of the Legislature also from the New Progressive Party.

Due to the small margin in the race for governor, there will be a recount, which will occupy our attention for a few weeks. Our electoral law provides the procedure and the necessary guarantees to assure us all that the result represents truthfully the will of the people as expressed in the ballot boxes. It is an adversary proceeding, with the checks and balances provided for through the representation of the parties at each stage.

What must be avoided at all costs is to take to the streets in order to influence the process that will be going on within the State Elections Commission or, if necessary, before the courts. Much more so if the result stemming from the recount isn't to our liking.

During the recount that followed the 1980 election, I had to harness the angry *Populares* who, after the recount, felt the election had been stolen from us. I didn't hesitate to do so because it was in the public interest that we not create situations where passions may run out of control and violence may be unleashed among the populace with unpredictable consequences.

Many people remember that when the computers were shut down while I was ahead on election night, I called for the *Populares* to go *a las trincheras*, to the trenches, and they took it as a battle cry for unruly behavior. That is how that incident has gone down in public memory. But what I actually said when the computers were shut down that night and the commission stopped turning out the results, with tens of thousands of votes to be counted, was *a las trincheras de la democracia*, to the trenches of democracy. The trenches of democracy were, and still are, our positions within the electoral machinery and process from which we were, and still are, to defend our votes and the will of the Puerto Rican people as expressed in the ballot boxes.

As a result of the experiences in the 1980 election, the electoral law was amended by the ensuing Legislature. Provisions such as the one that authorized policemen to vote in their headquarters and the one that authorized that the ballots boxes be kept there until the general public had voted were eliminated, providing greater safeguards for the integrity of our electoral results.

Based on my experience with elections, I expect that when the recount is terminated, Anibal Acevedo Vila will be certified as the next governor of Puerto Rico. As a general rule, recounts tend to confirm the results of election night.

I thus turn to my concerns with regard to the governance of Puerto Rico during the next four years, given the division of powers between the PDP in the executive branch and the NPP majority in the Legislature.

Six days before the fateful Tuesday when the people of Puerto Rico rendered their electoral verdict, a very nice old lady from Caguas wrote to me expressing her wish for the divided people of Puerto Rico: “Que ambos partidos saquen el mismo porciento de votos. Ojala que esto sea cierto. Asi el pueblo se sentira ganador. Nadie quiere sentir que ha perdido.” (That both parties obtain the same percentage of votes. I hope this is true. Thus the people will feel they have won. Nobody wants to feel they have lost.)

Her wish was granted, and perhaps we can make the best of it. It is a tremendous opportunity for us to grow beyond the underdeveloped democratic habits of the winner-take-all mentality into the more sophisticated habits of mutual respect, courteous dialogue, keeping one’s word, and compromising to accommodate the other in the public interest.

The task of governing Puerto Rico under the present circumstances is indeed a daunting task. It is a challenge that offers us an opportunity for democratic maturation and that demands from all elected officials a radical change from a partisan government characterized by majority domination to a bipartisan government, which requires dialogue and compromise.

Dialogue and compromise, however, require that certain premises be understood. Under our constitution and our laws, the budget and complementary appropriations, which are the basic tools of government, are initiated by the executive branch, submitted to the Legislature for a critical revision and amendments, and, when approved, implemented by the executive branch.

The priorities of the administration will be reflected in the budget it submits to the Legislature and in the appropriations. These priorities stem from the party’s program and from the requirements arising from the year-to-year operations of government.

Under the present situation, it is to be expected that the Legislature will be much more assertive in reviewing the budget and the appropriations. This may produce a more effective budget and better-directed appropriations, if done in the public interest. The opposite may occur if the Legislature takes it upon itself to divest the budget and the appropriations from the expenditures relating to the priorities of the administration and proceeds to rewrite the budget and appropriations bills. Such behavior not only would trample upon our system of government, designed to function under the initiative of the governor, but also would lead to gridlock.

Shared government can work if it is done in the public interest. From 1969 to 1972, we had such a government. Luis A. Ferre was governor of Puerto Rico and I was president of the Senate. We both were running for governor in the next election. Fortunately, we rose to the occasion, concentrating on governing rather than blaming.

As a result, all the budgets presented by Ferre were approved with minor amendments. Ninety-two and a half percent of his appropriation bills were approved. All of his campaign promises were enacted; 78% of his legislative proposals not related to appropriations were approved; 94% of his appointments were confirmed; and 33% of the bills initiated by the Senate were signed by Ferre.

Government worked. The public interest was served. It can be done again.

