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CRISIS IN THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC: RECORDS OF THE U.S. STATE DEPARTMENT CENTRAL FILES, FEBRUARY 1963-1966



The Dominican Republic has experienced many setbacks on the road to democracy. Dominican political history has been defined by traditions of "personalism," militarism, and social and economic elitism which has undermined its efforts to establish liberal constitutional rule. This collection includes U.S. State Department, U.S. Embassy, and Dominican Republic governmental dispatches, instructions, and miscellaneous correspondence dealing with topics such as political affairs and government; public order and safety; military affairs; social matters (including history and culture); economic conditions (including immigration and emigration); industry and agriculture; communications and transportation; and navigation. The material is in English, making the information contained in these files particularly accessible.

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Detailed Description:

The Dominican Republic has experienced many setbacks on the road to democracy. Dominican political history has been defined by traditions of personalism, militarism, and social and economic elitism which has undermined its efforts to establish liberal constitutional rule.

In December 1962, scholar and poet Juan Bosch Gaviño, elected by the urban lower class, was very much an oddity in Dominican history -- the first freely elected, liberal, democratic president that expressed concern for the welfare of all Dominicans, particularly those whose voices had never really been heard before in the National Palace. The Bosch government supported revisions to the constitution that separated church and state, guaranteed civil and individual rights, and endorsed civilian control of the military. These and other changes, such as land reform, struck conservative landholders and military officers as radical and threatening, particularly when juxtaposed against three decades of somnolent authoritarianism under Trujillo. The Roman Catholic Church also resented the secular nature

of the new constitution, in particular its provision for legalized divorce. The Church, along with the military leadership and the economic elite, also feared communist influence in the republic, and they warned of the potential for "another Cuba." The result of this concern and opposition was a military coup on September 25, 1963.

The military coup effectively negated the 1962 elections by installing a civilian junta, known as the Triumvirate, dominated by the Unión Cívica Nacional. The Triumvirate never succeeded in establishing its authority over competing conservative factions both inside and outside the military; it also never convinced the majority of the population of its legitimacy. The widespread dissatisfaction with the Triumvirate, coupled with lingering loyalties to Bosch, produced a revolution in April 1965.

A combination of reformist military and aroused civilian combatants calling themselves Constitutionals (a reference to their support for the 1963 constitution), took to the streets on April 24, seized the National Palace, and installed Rafael Molina Ureña as provisional president. The revolution took on the dimensions of a civil war when conservative military forces struck back against the Constitutionals on April 25. Despite tank assaults and bombing runs by conservative forces, the Constitutionals held their positions in the capital; they appeared poised to branch out and secure control of the entire country. On April 28, the U.S. intervened in the civil war. President Johnson ordered in forces that eventually totaled 20,000, to secure Santo Domingo and to restore order. Johnson had acted in the stated belief that the Constitutionals were dominated by communists and that they therefore could not be allowed to come to power. The intervention was subsequently granted some measure of hemispheric approval by the creation of an OAS sponsored peace force, which supplemented the U.S. military presence in the republic. Violent skirmishes between Loyalists and Constitutionals went on sporadically as, once again, elections were organized. The OAS-sponsored peace force remained in the country for over a year and left after supervising elections in 1966 won by a repressive military junta led by Joaquín Balaguer.

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