

Nicaragua president Daniel Ortega easily wins third straight term, with wife as VP

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Managua : President Daniel Ortega is in for a third consecutive term with the election results being announced on Monday. This overwhelming victory has put him in a position to govern Nicaragua for a quarter-century.

Nicaragua president Daniel Ortega with his wife

Moreover, Ortega now has his wife alongside him as the official vice president, which would give him an opportunity to cement family control over the country.

With nearly all votes counted, the ticket of the former guerrilla leader and first lady Rosario Murillo captured 72.5 percent, compared with 15 percent for the next-closest finisher among five lesser-known challengers. Their ruling Sandinista party is also poised to retain its domination of congress.

But governing during his new five-year term could prove to be a tougher task.

Opposition leaders, who had accused Ortega of rigging Sunday's election and called for a boycott, disputed the official turnout estimate and claimed many people stayed home in protest, undercutting his mandate.

Meanwhile, the Western Hemisphere's second-poorest country faces an uncertain economic future with key benefactor Venezuela in a deepening crisis and other leftist ideological allies losing power in the region.

"I think the biggest problem that Ortega faces is the legitimacy of the process by which he was re-elected, which causes it to be questioned from within and from without the country because it has not complied with rules of fair play," political scientist Humberto Meza said.

"The expectations of the people who are accustomed to subsidies for transportation, subsidies for the cost of energy, social payouts and everything else are going to increase," he added. "I don't think it's an easy thing."

If the 70-year-old Ortega completes his next five-year term, he will have been in power a total of about 25 years, including a decade or so after his Sandinista revolution toppled dictator Anastasio Somoza in 1979.

- (With AP inputs)