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Elections in Venezuela

2015 Legislative Elections

Frequently Asked Questions

Americas

International Foundation for Electoral Systems

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When is Election Day?

On December 6, Venezuelans will go to the polls for the 2015 legislative elections.

Who are citizens voting for on Election Day?

In the upcoming elections, Venezuelans will be electing Representatives to the 167-member National Assembly, which includes 164 Representatives from federal entities and three indigenous Representatives. The Representatives elected in this vote will serve five-year terms from 2016-2021.

How many registered voters are there?

There are [19,496,296 voters registered](#) and eligible to vote in the December 6 elections.

Who is running in these elections?

According to the National Electoral Council, there are 40 political organizations and nine indigenous organizations participating nationwide in the upcoming legislative elections. There are 1,799 candidates running on December 6 (671 women and 1,128 men).

Why are these elections important?

These are the fourth National Assembly elections since the legislative body was established in 2000, after the dissolution of the old Congress by late former President Hugo Chávez's government. Amid a worsening economic crisis with soaring inflation and lack of basic goods in the country, the upcoming legislative elections are important because they have the potential of changing the balance of power in the country. The elections are fraught with [less than ideal circumstances to ensure a free and fair vote](#), including the gerrymandering of districts where 52 percent of voters, concentrated in pro-opposition areas, will elect just 39 percent of Representatives; and a concocted, pro-regime party with a very similar name to the opposition coalition's has been placed next to it on the ballot.

Yet, according to the latest polls, the opposition Roundtable for Democratic Unity (*Mesa de la Unidad Democrática* [MUD]) is ahead of the official United Socialist Party of Venezuela (*Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela* [PSUV]). The [polls have the opposition leading](#) by up to 35 points. Given the complexity of the Venezuelan electoral system, it is unclear if the opposition can win and by how many points or seats. Nonetheless, it is expected that the opposition will have a majority in the National Assembly come January 2016. If this occurs, it would be the first time that the majority in the Assembly would not be in the hands of the PSUV. The results of the elections have the potential of swaying the government toward change with the opposition or could result in the continuing of the Chavista socialist model.

What is Venezuela's electoral system?

Venezuela has a mixed proportional electoral system to elect its legislature. One hundred thirteen Representatives are elected by majority vote, 51 Representatives are elected by proportional representation and three seats are reserved for indigenous Representatives; all 167 Representatives serve five-year terms.

How is Venezuela organized politically?

Venezuela is a federal republic with five branches of government: the executive, legislative, judicial, citizen and electoral branches. The executive branch is represented by the President, who is both the Head of State and Government. He or she is elected by a simple plurality, or first-past-the-post vote, by direct and universal suffrage. The legislative body, the National Assembly, was originally a bicameral body under the 1961 Constitution. It became a unicameral body of 165 Representatives with the ratification of the 1999 Constitution. Beginning in 2016, after this election, there will be 167 Representatives in the Assembly. Members are elected by popular vote, according to proportional representation, to serve five-year terms; three seats are reserved for indigenous Representatives. The judiciary branch is headed by the Supreme Tribunal of Justice, which replaced the Supreme Court of Justice in 1999 after that year's constitutional referendum. The 32 magistrates who make up the judiciary are each elected by the National Assembly for a single, 12-year term. The citizen branch is comprised of the Moral Republican Council, made up of a Comptroller General, the Public Defender (or Ombudsman) and the Attorney General. The electoral branch, the National Electoral Council, is responsible for elections at all levels. It organizes and supervises everything related to the election of public officials through universal, direct and secret vote. Its members are elected to seven-year terms by the National Assembly.

How is election administration structured in Venezuela?

The 1999 Constitution established the National Electoral Council (CNE) as one of five branches of government and made it responsible for the oversight and authority of the country's electoral processes. The Constitution also granted the CNE administrative and financial autonomy from the other branches.

The CNE's main responsibilities include:

- Drafting electoral laws;
- Developing directives for campaign finance and publicity;
- Issuing sanctions, as needed;
- Nullifying elections or declaring them invalid;
- Maintaining the civil registry;
- Administering and organizing elections; and
- Carrying out other duties dictated by law.

According to the Organic Law of the Electoral Power, the CNE is made up of five representatives said to be unaffiliated with any political entity who serve for seven-year terms. Three of them are nominated by civil society; one is nominated by the faculties of law and political science at national universities; and one is nominated by the citizen branch. The members of the CNE can be reelected for an additional two terms.

Is out-of-country voting allowed?

While Venezuelans residing abroad have the right and ability to vote overseas in the presidential elections, they cannot vote in the legislative elections because these are regional elections rather than national level elections.

Will there be observation during Election Day?

Venezuela is not allowing international observation for the upcoming legislative elections. However, it has an international accompaniment program. The participants of this accompaniment program include representatives of the Union of South American Countries and representatives of the Council of Latin American Electoral Experts; participants include former Spanish President Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero and Martin Torrijó, former President of Panama.

When will results be announced?

The National Electoral Council (CNE) is expected to announce preliminary results on election night once the polls have closed and the votes tallied show irreversible tendencies. According to the electoral law, the CNE is the only official source of results, and anyone who announces the results before the first informational bulletin from the CNE will be sanctioned.

Resources

- [Elecciones Venezuela](#) (Spanish)
- [National Electoral Council](#) (Spanish)
- [Organic Law of the Electoral Power](#) (Spanish)