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# **Elections in Paraguay**

## *2018 General Elections*

Frequently Asked Questions

Americas

International Foundation for Electoral Systems

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April 16, 2018

## Frequently Asked Questions

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### *Disclosure:*

*These FAQs reflect decisions made by Paraguay's election authorities as of April 16, 2018 to the best of our knowledge. This document does not represent any IFES policy or technical recommendations.*

## When are elections held in Paraguay?

Paraguay's general and departmental elections will be held on April 22, 2018. It will be the country's seventh presidential elections since the 1992 Constitution established a democratic system of government.

## Who are citizens voting for on Election Day?

In the upcoming elections, Paraguayans will head to the polls to elect both national and local authorities. They will be choosing:

- A new president and a vice president;
- 45 senators and 30 alternate senators;
- 80 deputies and 80 alternate deputies;
- 18 Mercosur parliamentarians and 18 alternate parliamentarians;
- 17 governors; and
- 17 departmental boards.

## How is Paraguay's electoral system structured?

Paraguay is a presidential republic. The president is elected by simple majority in a plurality voting system and appoints his or her cabinet ministers. The members of the National Congress (Senate and Chamber of Deputies) are elected from closed-party lists using the [d'Hont method](#) of proportional representation.

- **President (*Presidente*)** – The president is the head of the executive branch and chief of state. To be elected president, a candidate must be at least 35 years old and hold Paraguayan citizenship. His or her main functions include administering the country and leading its external relations, preparing the national spending bills, controlling the military, and participating in the legislative process with its veto power over the Congress.
- **Vice President (*Vicepresidente*)** – The vice president is elected with the president, on the same ticket. Citizens do not vote for the vice president directly. Besides being able to replace the president in his or her absence, the vice president also functions as the link between the executive and the legislative branches.
- **Senate (*Cámara de Senadores*)** – The Chamber of Senators, along with the Chamber of Deputies, constitute Paraguay's Congress. Each one of the 45 senators is elected for a period of five years with the possibility of reelection. Senators must be at least 35 years old and hold Paraguayan citizenship. Their responsibilities include protecting the constitution and the law, reviewing drafts of laws related to the approval of international treaties and agreements, and authorizing the employment of military troops abroad.
- **Chamber of Deputies (*Cámara de Diputados*)** – Deputies are elected for a period of five years and can be reelected. Candidates must be at least 25 years old and hold Paraguayan citizenship. The number of deputies each department has depends on the size of its population (currently, the minimum number is one and the maximum is 19). As part of the legislative branch, responsibilities of the *Cámara* include protecting the constitution and the law, reviewing drafts

of laws relating to departmental and municipal legislation, and approving the national spending bills.

- **Mercosur Parliamentarians (*Parlamentarios del Mercosur*)** – Paraguay became the first country to hold direct elections for such positions. The *parliamentarians* are responsible for protecting the rights of the people of the Mercosur states and coordinating regional efforts with different political sectors.
- **Governors (*Gobernadores*)** – Each one of Paraguay's *departamentos* elects a governor for a period of five years without possibility of reelection. Candidates must be at least 30 years old and hold Paraguayan citizenship. Their functions include representing the executive in the departmental context, dictating departmental resolutions, and creating and implementing departmental development plans, programs, and projects.
- **Departmental Board (*Junta Departamental*)** – Each one of Paraguay's 17 *departamentos* also elects a board of seven to 21 members (depending upon the department's population size) for a five-year mandate. Candidates must be at least 25 years old and hold Paraguayan citizenship. The *Junta* is responsible, among other functions, for administering the resources allocated by the departmental government; approving, rejecting, or changing the development plan prepared by the governor; voting on, and implementing, tariffs and fees for public services offered by the departmental government. Differently from governors, *Junta* members can be reelected.

## Who is running in these elections?

For the first time in the history of the country, only two candidates will be competing for the presidential seat. Paraguayan voters will choose between the two tickets below:

- ***Asociación Nacional Republicana - Partido Colorado***
  - Mario Abdo Benítez (president)
  - Hugo Velázquez (vice president)

The [Colorado Party](#) was founded in 1887 and dominated Paraguayan politics until 2008, when it lost the general elections for the first time in 61 years to the opposition *Patriotic Alliance for Change*. The party is considered to be on the center-right of the political ideology spectrum, defending nationalist and conservative principles.

- ***Alianza GANAR (Gran Alianza Nacional Renovada)***
  - Efraín Alegre (president) - Partido Liberal Radical Auténtico (PLRA)
  - Leo Rubín (vice president) - Partido Popular Tekojoja (Frente Guasú)

The [GANAR](#) coalition brought together the opposition parties on the center-left of the political ideology spectrum, namely the Partido Liberal Radical Auténtico (PLRA), Partido Revolucionario Febrerista (PRF), Partido Democrático Progresista (PDP), Frente Guasú (FG), Partido Encuentro Nacional (PEN), and Avancemos País (AP).

## Who can vote in these elections?

A total of 4,241,507 people, around 63.8 percent of the population, will be able to vote. All Paraguayan citizens, by birth or naturalization, 18 years of age or older on the day of the election, are eligible to vote. Voting in Paraguay is in fact mandatory from the age of 18 to the age of 75, but the voter turnout for the last general elections was 68.52 percent. Voters must be registered in the Permanent Civic Registry ([Registro Cívico Permanente](#)).

The youth will represent a large group of eligible voters this year, as 32 percent of voters are between the ages of 18 and 29. Disaggregating by gender, 51 percent of eligible voters are men, and 49 percent are women.

## How will they vote?

Using their national identification number, Paraguayans can learn about their voting location online, on the [Tribunal Superior de Justicia Electoral's](#) (TSJE) website, or by using a text message service made available by the phone company Tigo.

Citizens can vote from 7:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. at their specific voting locations. Voters will choose their candidates marking their preferences on paper ballots and depositing the envelopes in a plastic box. Electronic voting has been implemented before, but was quickly discontinued.

In total, 21,211 polling stations will be organized in 1,081 polling centers around the country. For the Paraguayans voting abroad, 190 tables will be available in 18 polling centers.

## When will the newly elected government take office?

The new president and vice president will take office on August 15, 2018, replacing Horacio Cartes (current president) and Juan Afara (current vice president). Their mandate will expire on August 15, 2023.

## How will votes be counted?

Once the polls have been officially closed, the transmission of the preliminary electoral results ([TREP](#)) starts. According to the Tribunal Superior de Justicia Electoral (TSJE), the system has been implemented so that citizens, the media, and candidates can have access to fast and transparent information. The final count, tabulation and announcement of results are the responsibility of the Electoral Tribunals (*Tribunales Electorales*) of each judicial circumscription.

The TSJE uses two systems of transmission. In polling centers with three or more polling stations and where Internet is available, the results are sent digitally. In locations with fewer than three polling stations and/or where Internet is not available, the results are sent using a system by voice. All officials working at the polling centers must sign the "Certification of Results" to make it valid; observers from political movements can sign the document as well if they want to.

## **Are there any quotas?**

Yes. In the beginning of the 1990s, some political parties in Paraguay began to incorporate gender quotas to their statutes. In 1996, a new electoral law was approved, officially introducing a quota of 20 percent for women candidates, although only around 16 percent of the public offices are actually occupied by women. No other quotas for marginalized groups are in place.

## **How are the electoral authorities guaranteeing equal access to the electoral process for persons with disabilities?**

Individuals living with disabilities, those experiencing temporary physical limitations or who have special needs (including pregnant women and those who are breastfeeding), as well as individuals with “invisible debilitating issues” (e.g., people with cardiac problems, going through oncological treatment, or suffering from psychiatric illness) can benefit from the [Voto Accesible](#) (accessible vote). They can request their inclusion in the *Voto Accesible* list online via the Tribunal Superior de Justicia Electoral’s (TSJE) website, by calling, or by visiting the TSJE district offices in person before the elections (from March 1 to July 31, 2017).

With *Voto Accesible*, voters might benefit from preferential treatment at the polling center, assistance getting to the ballot boxes, access to ballots in Braille, and even voting from home.

## **Can Paraguayans who reside abroad vote in the elections?**

Yes. Paraguay’s 1992 constitution prohibited citizens from voting abroad, but, in April 2011, Paraguay’s Congress voted for an amendment to the constitution to allow out-of-country voting rights for citizens. Paraguayans voted in favor of a referendum to permit out-of-country voting, and the constitutional reform was sanctioned in October 2011. Polling stations will be established in Argentina, Brazil, the United States, and Spain.

As of 2017, an estimated 800,000 Paraguayans lived abroad<sup>1</sup>, but only around 38,000 will be able to vote in these elections (75 percent of whom live in Argentina). In order to be able to vote, these Paraguayans must have a valid national identification card, as an amendment to allow citizens to use their passports to vote failed to pass in Congress.

## **Is electoral observation allowed?**

Yes. Several international organizations are invited to observe and monitor the elections, such as the *Unión de Naciones Suramericanas* (Unasur), the Organization of the American States (OAS) and the European Union (EU). Civil society organizations and political movements are allowed to observe the electoral process and even sign the “Certificate of Results” that validates its authenticity.

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<sup>1</sup> Agencia de Información Paraguaya (August 23, 2017). *Unos 38.000 paraguayos están habilitados para votar desde el exterior*. Retrieved from: <https://www.ip.gov.py/ip/unos-38-000-paraguayos-estan-habilitados-para-votar-desde-el-exterior/>

## **Other interesting facts about the Paraguayan elections**

Paraguay's Tribunal Superior de Justicia Electoral offers informative talks and civic capacity-building courses to voters via its Information, Documentation, and Electoral Education Center ([Centro de Información, Documentación y Educación Electoral](#)) and the Electoral Services Division ([Dirección de Servicios Electorales](#)).

According to Art. 120 of the constitution, foreigners are able to vote in municipal elections in Paraguay, as long as they are registered in the Permanent Civic Registry.

## Resources

- [Americas Society/Council of the Americas](#)
- [Elecciones Generales Paraguay](#) (Spanish)
- [Election Passport](#)
- [Freedom House](#)
- [Justicia Electoral – República del Paraguay](#) (Spanish)
- [Parlamento del Mercosur](#) (Spanish)
- [Partidos Políticos – Paraguay](#) (Spanish)
- [Partidos Políticos y la Participación Política de las Mujeres en Paraguay](#) (Spanish)
- [Political Database of the Americas](#)
- [Resolución Tribunal Superior de Justicia Electoral No. 259/2017](#) (Spanish)
- [The Electoral Knowledge Network](#)