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Elections in Venezuela

April 14 Presidential Elections

Frequently Asked Questions

Latin America and the Caribbean

International Foundation for Electoral Systems

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Disclosure:

These FAQs reflect decisions made by the Venezuelan elections authorities as of April 9, 2013, to the best of our knowledge. This document does not represent any IFES policy or technical recommendations.

When are elections in Venezuela?

According to Article 233¹ of the Constitution of Venezuela, presidential elections are to be scheduled within 30 consecutive days of the President's permanent absence. With the death of President Hugo Rafael Chávez Frias on March 5, 2013, elections have been scheduled for April 14, 2013.

As established in the 1999 Constitution of Venezuela, presidential elections are to be held every six years. The last presidential election was held on October 7, 2012.

Who will Venezuelans elect on April 14, 2013?

Venezuelans who were registered in the electoral roll for the 2012 elections are eligible to elect the next President on April 14. The President will be elected by a single majority vote.

When does the electoral process begin?

The National Electoral Council (*Consejo Nacional Electoral*) sets the date for the election with a public announcement called a *convocatoria*, or summons. This process is in accordance with the constitutional terms set by law. The *convocatoria* took place on March 9, 2013.

Who can vote?

Venezuelans who registered to vote in the October 7, 2012, elections can vote in the 2013 presidential elections. According to the electoral registry, there are 19,119,809 Venezuelans registered to vote, which includes 99,478 registered to vote abroad, and over 40,000 registered to vote in the Miami area and in Spain.²

In order to register, voters must be citizens of Venezuela who are at least 18 years of age.

Voters who were not registered for the 2012 elections, and are not in the electoral roll, will not be able to vote on April 14.

¹ As per Article 233: permanent absences of the President of the republic include death; resignation or removal from office by decree of the Supreme Court of Justice; a permanent physical or mental disability certified by a medical board appointed by the Supreme Court and with approval of the National Assembly; abandonment of office, declared by the National Assembly; and the revocation by popular vote. If the permanent absence of the President of the republic occurs during the first four years of his or her constitutional term, there shall be a new universal, direct and secret election within 30 consecutive days.

² Due to the closing of the Venezuelan Consulate in Miami since January 2012, Venezuelans had to vote in New Orleans for the 2012 elections. [This will be the case for the upcoming elections.](#)

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 simple plurality, or first-past-the-post vote, by direct and universal suffrage.

The legislative branch consists of the General Assembly, or *Asamblea Nacional*. This body was originally a bicameral organization under the 1961 constitution; it became a unicameral body of 165 members with the ratification of the 1999 constitution. Members are elected by popular vote, according to proportional representation, to serve five-year terms. Three seats are reserved for indigenous persons.

The judicial branch is headed by the Supreme Tribunal of Justice, or *Tribunal Supremo de Justicia*, 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, or *Consejo Moral Republicano*, which is made up of the comptroller general, the public defender (or ombudsman) and the attorney general.

The electoral branch, the National Electoral Council, or *Consejo Nacional Electoral*, 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.

What are the main political parties?

Venezuela has 10 main political parties:

1. United Socialist Party of Venezuela (*Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela*, PSUV)
2. Justice First (*Partido Primero Justicia*, PJ)
3. Social Christian Party (*Partido Social Cristiano*, COPEI)
4. Democratic Action (*Acción Democrática*, AD)
5. A New Time, (*Partido un Nuevo Tiempo*, UNT)
6. Homeland for All (*Patria por Todos*, PPT)
7. Communist Party of Venezuela (*Partido Comunista de Venezuela*, PCV)
8. For Social Democracy (*Por la Democracia Social*, Podemos)
9. Movement Toward Socialism (*Movimiento al Socialismo*, MAS)
10. Project Venezuela (*Proyecto Venezuela*, PROVEN)

Who is running for President?

The two main candidates are:

Nicolás Maduro Moros (Acting President): Maduro represents the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (*Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela*, PSUV) and *Chavismo* – the ideology based on socialist reforms implemented by the late President Hugo Chávez.

Maduro assumed the interim office on March 8, following Chávez's death, amid allegations of illegitimacy by the opposition. The opposition believes the interim presidency should be held by President of the National Assembly Diosdado Cabello, also a member of the PSUV, according to interpretations of Article 233 of the Venezuelan Constitution.

In 2012, Maduro was appointed Vice President of Venezuela and played a key role in Chávez's government as Minister of Foreign Relations from 2006-2013, especially in restoring Colombian-Venezuelan relations.

His political career began during his years as trade unionist, and later as a founder of the Movement of the Fifth Republic (MVR). Maduro has served in numerous government and legislative posts, yet has no formal education. His campaign focuses on the continuation of current social policies through the second Socialist Plan of the Nation and Program of the Motherland, presented by Chávez in his political platform in 2012.

Maduro's challenge is to retain the support of *Chavistas*, followers of *Chavismo*, who comprise about 55 percent of the electorate in the most recent presidential elections. His strongest assets to gain the popular vote to remain in power, include his promises to continue with the Bolivarian revolution under Chávez's blessing, who, before his death, urged his followers to support Maduro.

Henrique Capriles Radonski: Representing Justice First (*Partido Primero Justicia*, PJ), a center-right party, Capriles is Maduro's main opponent. He has been Chairman of the lower house of Congress, Mayor of the Baruta municipality of Caracas and Governor of Miranda – one of the most densely populated states in Venezuela.

He ran unsuccessfully in the 2012 presidential elections. However, he accepted his party's nomination to run in the upcoming presidential elections.

Capriles' main message is unity of the Venezuelan people. His campaign focuses on winning the vote and trust of those who did not vote in the October 2012 presidential election, and of those who voted for Chávez, but may not support Maduro. His current discourse questions the first 100 days of Maduro as Acting President and criticizes the Chávez administration for high crime rates, food shortages, corruption, failure to deliver on promises and their control over most of government and civic life.

As a candidate, Capriles has proven to be a strong opponent, and has brought the opposition together. His campaign aims to take down a strong political legacy — funded by oil revenues and supported by a large swath of the general population.

Despite Maduro's popularity under Chávez's image, Capriles' perceived dynamism and youth attracted over 40 percent of voters in the past election.

Other presidential candidates running are: Reina Sequera, Labor Power (*Poder Laboral*, PL); María Bolívar, Democratic Power United for Peace and Liberty (*Partido Democrático Unido por la Paz y la Libertad*, PDUPL); Eusabio Mendez, New Vision for My Country (*Nueva Visión para Mi País*, NUVIPA); Julio Mora, Democratic Unity Power (*Partido Unidad Democrática*, PUD); and Fredy Tabarquino, Popular Patriotic Power (*Poder Popular Patriota*).

What does recent public opinion polling reveal?

A survey conducted by Ipsos Public Affairs in the last year indicates that in a contest between Henrique Capriles and Nicolás Maduro, Maduro would capture 53 percent of votes to Capriles' 41 percent.

As for Chávez's legacy, 52 percent of respondents said they would support Maduro as Chávez's successor. Ten percent said they supported Chávez, but would not support Maduro. Thirty-three percent said they did not support Chávez and would not support Maduro in turn.

In a recent online discussion between IFES Regional Adviser for the Americas Máximo Zaldivar and Ipsos Senior Vice President and Managing Director Clifford Young, Young indicated that mediocre approval ratings of the government, the economy and favorability ratings of each candidate make them more even. However, if a sympathy vote is factored in to include the many voters who will vote emotionally due to the proximity of the poll to Chávez's death, Maduro's chances increase to around 73 percent.

According to Zaldivar, the opposition was eager to call for early elections. However, these early elections might backlash because of the Chávez sympathy vote. He also referenced the shortage of resources possessed by Capriles. This shortage is another advantage for Maduro, making him a more likely winner.

Read more about the [public opinion](#) survey and listen to the [conversation](#) between Zaldivar and Young.

Does support for late President Chávez's movement in Venezuela remain strong?

In January 2013, IFES joined Ipsos Public Affairs Polling to ask the Venezuelan public their opinion of Chávez, his legacy and what will come next.

The survey revealed that while Chávez and the Chavismo movement still enjoy a majority of popular support, equal numbers of Venezuelans believe the country was on the "wrong" track as those who believe it was on the "right" one.

Since September 2012, Chávez's ratings declined in two main areas: crime and food supply – with crime as the single most concerning issue to Venezuelans. Alternatively, a majority of respondents (70%) believed the last elections were fair and transparent.

How is election administration structured in Venezuela?

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

The CNE's main duties include drafting electoral laws; developing directives for campaign finance and publicity; doling out sanctions, as needed; nullifying elections or declaring them invalid; maintaining the civil registry; administering and organizing all acts pertaining to elections; and carrying out other duties as the law dictates.

The CNE is made up of five representatives who are supposed to be unaffiliated with any political entity. Three of them are nominated by civil society; one is nominated by the law and political science faculties at national universities; and one is nominated by the citizen branch. The final two representatives are elected by the National Assembly for seven-year terms.

What mechanisms are in place to include vulnerable populations (persons with disabilities, the elderly and illiterate)?

The Constitution of Venezuela protects the rights of suffrage of all voters without discrimination. Therefore, an elder and/or illiterate voter and/or voter with a disability may cast their ballot in the presence of someone of their choice. Both the voter and his/her companion have to complete a voter companion form by presenting their identification, signing and stamping their fingerprints. A companion can only accompany a voter once. If the voter is illiterate, the voter can stamp his/her fingerprint in lieu of a signature. If the voter is physically impaired, the poll worker will note that in the registry.

Can Venezuelans who reside abroad vote in the elections?

Yes, Venezuelans who have documentation proving legal residence outside the country, as well as personnel attached to embassies or consulates, have the right to vote abroad.

Is electoral observation allowed and regulated?

Official international observation missions are not allowed; however, electoral law does allow international accompaniment missions. Accompaniment missions can attend the electoral event either by official invitation from the National Electoral Council (*Consejo Nacional Electoral*, CNE) or by request.

Recently, IT electoral experts from member countries of the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) and the Inter-American Union of Electoral Organizations (UNIORE) were invited to participate in an accompaniment mission to observe different pre-electoral activities, including a test of the data platform

to measure its capacity, response time and contingency protocols in place for the upcoming election. Experts will also participate in an audit of voter list production and voting machine production.³

National election observation organizations invited by the CNE are: *Asamblea de Educación* (Education Assembly), *Fundación por un Pueblo Digno* (Foundation for a Dignified People), *Observatorio Electoral Venezolano* (Venezuelan Electoral Observatory), *Proyecto Social y Red de Observadores Electorales* (Social Project and Electoral Observers Network). Additionally, each candidate can invite up to 20 guests as part of the international political accompaniment.

When will preliminary election results be released? When will the election results be final?

Citizen verification, or the official counting and auditing of the votes, takes place on Election Day, April 14. In past elections, preliminary, unofficial results were released on election night.

According to the presidential election schedule (*Cronograma Elección Presidencial*) published by the National Electoral Council (*Consejo Nacional Electoral*, CNE), final results will be announced on April 14 or 15. Results will also be published on the CNE website and in the electoral gazette of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela within 30 days of the announcement.

³ http://www.cne.gov.ve/web/sala_prensa/noticia_detallada.php?id=3132

Resources

- Venezuelan Constitution ([Spanish](#), [English](#) – 2006)
- National Electoral Council, *Consejo Nacional Electoral* ([Spanish](#))
 - Electoral System ([Spanish](#))
 - Electoral Law ([Spanish](#))
 - Use of Technology ([Spanish](#))
- Public opinion survey results ([English](#))
- Webcast on Venezuelan public opinion survey ([English](#))
- Ballot for 2013 presidential election ([Spanish](#))