

2020 Parliamentary Elections in Venezuela

Why Observe Elections?

Ever since the election of Hugo Chávez as president of Venezuela on December 6, 1998 in apparent defiance of U.S. hegemony in Latin America, the United States Government has made innumerable attempts to destabilize and even forcibly overthrow the elected Government of Venezuela. Over the course of 25 elections since 1998, among the most extensive exercises in electoral processes in the Americas, the U.S. has increasingly decried these elections to be “fraudulent” and “illegitimate” despite earlier more balanced reports by international observers, including the Organization of American States, the United Nations, the Carter Center.

The day after the National Assembly elections of December 6, 2020, the U.S. Department of State condemned the elections as “fraudulent” which “failed to meet any minimum standard of credibility.” It claimed that “Maduro brazenly rigged these elections in his favor through the illegal seizure of political parties’ names and ballot logos, manipulation of the process by his loyalist electoral council, violence and intimidation, and other undemocratic tactics.”

Canada’s Ministry of Global Affairs asserted without evidentiary basis in a Joint Declaration with a number of other Latin American countries that the elections “lack legality and legitimacy because they were carried out without minimum guarantees of a democratic process, which include freedom, security and transparency, the integrity of ballots, the participation of all political forces, and inclusion of international observation.”

Given the extreme polarization of class politics in Venezuela and the coercive interventions of external actors – such as sanctions, interceptions of ships in international waters, and armed assistance to opposition militias – it is essential that independent neutral election observers verify first-hand whether the elections are free, fair, secure, and have integrity. Accordingly, CODEPINK, a grassroots peace and justice organization centered in North America, assembled a delegation of journalists, activists, and academics from the United States and Canada to travel to Venezuela to observe firsthand and without prejudice the National Assembly elections.



Pre-Election Panorama

On September 16, 2019 the Venezuelan government unveiled a series of agreements with the opposition following a National Roundtable for Peaceful Dialogue to facilitate the National Assembly elections and to deal with the economic crisis. The dialogue produced agreements which included appointment of a new electoral council and electoral guarantees to accompany the processes of voting for the December 6, 2020 elections.

In the months preceding the elections, Venezuela's National Electoral Council (Consejo Nacional Electoral – CNE) sent out more than 300 invitations to international organizations to observe the elections.

Foreign Minister Jorge Arreaza said on Twitter that a letter had been sent to UN Secretary General António Guterres and EU Minister for Foreign Affairs Josep Borrell, outlining "the broad electoral guarantees agreed between the government and opposition for the parliamentary elections," and inviting them to send observers. The European Union declined to send a group of observers because it said "the conditions for a transparent, inclusive, free and fair electoral process" did not exist. The United Nations Secretary General, António Guterres said he didn't have a mandate from the Security Council or the General Assembly to approve sending a mission to Venezuela.

The Permanent Conference of Political Parties from Latin America (COPPAL) also declined the CNE'S invitation "because they were not given accreditation in time".

On March 7, 2020, the warehouse where voting machines, electronic ballots and the biometric readers were stored were set on fire. Much of the voting equipment was destroyed including 49,323 voting machines and 582 laptop computers used to update the civil and electoral register. Then president of the CNE, Tibisay Lucena, said the fire was sabotage to impede the elections. A terrorist group called the Venezuelan Patriotic Front took responsibility for the act in a video posted on social media.

For the past two decades, some sectors of the opposition have shifted between electoral participation and abstention. These elections were no exception and a small section of the opposition, led by Juan Guaidó, supported by the United States called for a boycott of the elections. Other sectors of the opposition, including former presidential candidate Henrique Capriles, criticized the hardline position of Guaidó and encouraged people to turn out and vote.

Appointment of the National Electoral Council Rectors

On June 4, 2020 representatives from six minority opposition parties filed a motion before the Tribunal Supremo de Justicia (TSJ) requesting that the court declare a "legislative omission" and appoint new rectors. The National Assembly is responsible for appointing the CNE Rectors by a two thirds majority vote. However, the opposition-held National Assembly was legally incapacitated after the legislative body violated a previous court order by swearing in three suspended legislators. This led the TSJ to appoint Supreme Electoral Council's rectors. Indira Alfonzo Izaguirre was appointed president, Rafael Simón Jiménez, vice president, Gladys Gutiérrez and José Luis Gutiérrez Parra as chief rectors and Tania D'Amelio was reaffirmed in her position. Rector Rafael Simón Jiménez resigned from his position after two months when he decided to run in the National Assembly elections. Leonardo Morales Poleo was appointed to replace him.



The five CNE rectors – Gladys Gutiérrez, Leonardo Morales, Indira Alfonzo Izaguirre, Tania D'Amelio, and

José Luis Gutiérrez – presenting an election update to the media and international election observers on December 7, 2020. Photos by Sharat G. Lin.

One requirement for being a CNE rector is the person not be an active member of any political party, so that impartiality can be guaranteed.

Since 1999, eight different rectors have been appointed to the CNE, for either a full or partial term; only two of these have been appointed by the National Assembly (2006 and 2009); on five occasions it has been necessary for the TSJ to intervene (2003, 2005, 2014, 2016 and 2020).

On June 30, 2020, the new CNE agreed to increase the number of deputies from 165 to 277. It has the authority to do so under the Venezuelan constitution and such powers are inherent in the Electoral Branch of government. The reforms follow a ruling by the TSJ striking down two articles of the country's electoral law and ordering the CNE to establish new norms for greater proportional legislative representation to ensure more "political pluralism."

Illegal US Sanctions and Economic Blockade

The application of unilateral economic sanctions is an explicit violation of international law protected under the United Nations' and Organization of American States' charters, human rights stipulations. Unilateral sanctions violate the U.N.'s Declaration on the Principles of International Law concerned with friendly relations and cooperation among states.

The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela is facing one of the worst economic and social crises in its history due in large part due to the illegal United States blockade and secondary sanctions. While primary sanctions applied to U.S. entities to prevent them of doing business with Venezuela are damaging enough because of the sheer weight of the U.S. economy in the Western Hemisphere, secondary sanctions applied extraterritorially effectively forbid third-party entities from trading, investing, and otherwise engaging with Venezuela at the risk of being cut off from the U.S. dollar-based global financial system.

While vital medical equipment and life saving drugs are officially exempted from sanctions, they are effectively blocked from entering Venezuela because Venezuela is denied access to the international banking system to pay for the equipment and medicines. An estimated 100,000 people have been killed by U.S. sanctions according to former expert for the United Nations Human Rights Council for the promotion of an international democratic and egalitarian order, Alfred de Zayas.

In addition, the United States government blocked Iranian gasoline deliveries and sanctioned shipping companies whose vessels attempted to ship fuel to the country. This caused gasoline and diesel shortages within the country hampering internal travel and possibly some voters' ability to vote. Fuel shortages also had a tremendous impact on the electoral process, making it logistically difficult to transport items needed for elections such as voting machines, ballots, forms, poll workers, etc.



During the 44th session of the United Nations Human Rights Committee in June 2020, the High Commissioner for Human Rights presented a comprehensive report outlining the impact of the economic blockade on human rights in Venezuela. The report also outlined how sanctions on the oil sector have contributed to a considerable drop in oil production, attacking Venezuelans' purchasing power and affecting the social programs of Venezuelans.

COVID-19 Pandemic

Venezuela has been one of the least affected countries in the region when it comes to COVID-19 in large part due to the preventive measures implemented by the government of Venezuela. These measures include obligatory use of face masks and face shields in public places, widespread use of hand sanitizers, and a radical voluntary social quarantine program with seven working days followed by seven days of quarantine (7+7) which made it possible to flatten the infection curve.

Although, COVID-19 has been relatively well contained in the country, it created an unprecedented electoral environment. The CNE developed and rolled out a detailed set of protocols to ensure the safety of all participating in the electoral process. This included mandatory personal protective equipment, hand sanitizing stations, and physical distancing measures at all polling stations across the country. The 7+7 program also constrained the movement of international election observers who had to enter and exit the country within one 7-day window.



Every person who enters the CNE election tent must pass through an automated biosecurity system.



An election monitor representing a political party volunteers to spray hand sanitizer on everyone who enters a voting precinct at Escuela Francisco Miranda in Victoria, Aragua State.

Interventions in Political Parties

The U.S. Department of State has claimed that the Venezuelan Government rigged the elections in its favor “through the illegal seizure of political parties’ names and ballot logos, manipulation of the process by his loyalist electoral council, violence and intimidation, and other undemocratic tactics.” Here is what actually happened.

The Venezuelan electoral system encourages various political parties to take part in the electoral

process. The Venezuelan constitution recognizes them and sets out criteria to ensure they have legal and democratic structures in keeping with Venezuelan electoral laws.

In the run up to the elections some political parties were subject to interventions following legal rulings arising from cases brought about by internal disputes within the parties. Party members alleged party leaders undertook authoritarian or undemocratic measures and disciplinary actions to remain in power illegally. Parties from both the left and right were impacted.

Tendencias Unificadas para Alcanzar Movimiento de Acción Revolucionaria Organizada (TUPAMARO – Unified Tendencies to Create a Movement of Organized Revolutionary Action): The TSJ's intervention in the far-left TUPAMARO party's leadership structure took place after the organization's general secretary José Pinto was arrested in mid-June 2020. He was accused of being involved in the murder of sixteen-year-old George Soto whose body was reportedly found buried on Pinto's property in Caruao, La Guaira State. The TSJ appointed an ad-hoc board, with Williams José Benavides Rondón as president.

Compromiso País (COMPA – Commitment to Country): In August 2020 the TSJ issued a constitutional order authorizing Olga Alejandra Morey, national coordinator of the left-wing COMPA party to propose candidates in the parliamentary elections.

Acción Democrática (AD – Democratic Action): In July 2020 a ruling by the TSJ temporarily suspended the national leadership of this centrist social democrat party. The case was brought forward by party members Otto Marlon Medina Duarte, Jesús María Mora Muñoz and Bernabé Gutiérrez. All alleged violations of political rights, lack of democratic consultation within the party and authoritarian manner in which state, regional and local leadership boards had been replaced. The court appointed an ad-hoc board led by Bernabé Gutiérrez.

Movimiento Voluntad Popular (VP – Popular Will): This right-wing party's national leadership underwent similar internal turmoil as AD that forced the TSJ to intervene and replace the acting board with an ad-hoc board. The ruling was in response to a request for constitutional protection by party members José Gegorio Noriega Figueroa and Lucila Angela Pacheco Bravo who alleged "abusive and arbitrary" actions by the leadership which violated Voluntad Popular's by-laws regarding the right to party membership and disciplinary measures to expel members. José Brito, was named party president

Patria Para Todos (PPT – Homeland for All): In August 2020, a ruling by the TSJ suspended the left-wing PPT's national leadership, headed by the national general secretary, Rafael Uzcátegui, and appointed an ad-hoc board to begin a restructuring process. The ruling was in response to a request for constitutional protection lodged by national secretary of the party Ilenia Medina and regional secretaries Lisett Sabino and Beatriz Barráez who alleged violations of the internal decision-making process.

Movimiento Primero Justicia (PJ – Justice First Movement): In June 2020 the TSJ suspended the centrist PJ's national leadership, headed by Julio Andrés Borges, Tomás Ignacio Guanipa Villalobos and Edinson Antonio Ferrer Delgado and appointed an ad-hoc board. The ruling was in response to a request for constitutional protection made by José Dionisio Brito and Conrado Pérez who alleged "abusive and arbitrary" actions by the current leadership which violated Primero Justicia's internal by-laws.

It is important to note that individuals impacted by these rulings reject the accusations and point to political interference on the part of the Maduro government, and opportunistic party members who sought political control of the parties. On the other hand, some of these parties have not held primary elections for some time, fueling internal tensions between their memberships and the leadership.



Logos of parties contesting the National Assembly election in Caracas are vividly displayed on a voting machine on exhibit at CNE headquarters.

Electoral and Voting Details

Venezuelans elect members of the National Assembly, the country's unicameral legislature, every five years. There were 29,600 voting precincts (mesas) set up in 14,200 voting centers across the country in 87 constituencies.

The number of Venezuelans registered to vote in the 2020 parliamentary elections was 20,710,421 which was a 6 per cent increase from the 2015 parliamentary elections.

In all, 107 political parties participated in the electoral process representing more 14,480 candidates running for 277 seats in the National Assembly. Out of the 277 seats, 48 were elected on national lists, 96 on regional lists, 130 as individuals (nominal seats), and 3 seats reserved for indigenous deputies.

The Venezuelan voting system is both nominal and proportional representation which assure proportionality and fair representation. With nominal representation, the candidate who receives the largest number of votes wins. In proportional representation, voters elect representatives through a system of closed lists and proportional state-level representation. The 2009 Organic Law of Suffrage enshrines the principal more firmly and describes the way in which the seats in parliament are assigned. This law was used to assign the seats for the deputies in the outgoing Venezuelan National Assembly. It is a fair and equitable system which respects the will of those voting and ensures representativeness.



Upon arriving at a voting center in Maracay, Aragua State, voters look up their voting precinct (mesa) based on the last two digits of their ID card number.



A voter places his thumb on a fingerprint reader that activates the voting machine at Escuela Santiago Mariño in Turmero, Aragua State.

Voting System

Venezuela's elections utilize the latest in secure voting technology to ensure that each vote is counted fairly and cannot be tampered with. It is among the first in the world to implement automated biometric authentication by fingerprint in 2012 voters and activation of the voting machine. Venezuela was the first in the world since the 1998 elections to use electronic voting machines that provide a voter-verified paper audit trail.

Voting steps are as follows:

1. When arriving at a polling center, each voter is directed to the voting table (precinct) in which they are assigned.
2. The voter then goes to that table and presents identification. The voter then places his/her index finger or thumb on a fingerprint scanning device which activates the voting machine via biometric authentication.
3. Once the voting machine is unlocked the voter chooses the candidate and/or list by selecting names on an electronic ballot displayed on the voting machine.
4. Once the 'Vote' option has been selected the machine digitally encrypts, and stores the vote guaranteeing that it remains secret. The machine issues a paper receipt of the vote which is placed into the ballot box by the voter to be audited against the electronic vote totals.
5. Finally, the voter signs and places his/her fingerprint in the election roster to confirm that he/she has voted.



A voter puts a fingerprint in the roster to provide a verifiable paper record that she has voted at a voting center in Los Teques, Miranda State.



A vote signs the roster as further verifiable evidence of having voted at a voting center at Escuela Santiago Mariño in Turmero, Aragua State.

Audits of Voting Software and Machines

The CNE carries out a pre-dispatch audit of voting machines, to validate and replicate all stages of the electoral process, sampling 0.5% of voting mesas. These replicate and validate all the stages of the electoral process, verifying that both the software and data, as well as the operation of the hardware, correspond to what was audited in previous phases. This is done before every election, in the presence of representatives of contesting political organizations.

The CNE technicians and the representatives of the political organizations verify that the code for each machine is being generated and that the machine has all of the functions approved in the software audit.

The political organizations are given drawings of the machine's technology platform and its structure. The machine is taken apart so they can see its components and assure themselves that they are necessary for it to function, they also check to see that the machine has no unnecessary components or any which can perform functions not agreed to and not needed for elections.

This software audit of voting machines was carried out from October 12 to 23, 2020 as specified in the timetable established for the December 6 elections for deputies to the National Assembly. The purpose of this audit, which is one of the 16 performed throughout the election process, is to check the voting machine's hardware, software, and data, all of which entails checking the source codes and software tests to make sure it is operating correctly.

Pre-delivery Audit of Voting Machines and Election Observers

The representatives of the political organizations carry out a check on a random sample of 1% of the machines. This audit checks to see that the machines audited perform the functions they are supposed to during a mock voting exercise which can show if the machines are adding and totalling correctly.

This stage of the election process was carried out November 29, 2020 in the presence of 107 political and technical organizations when 150 voting machines were audited and their installation, activation, operation, scrutiny, totalling and transmitting the vote was assessed.

To make sure that health protocols for preventing COVID-19 were observed, the CNE used videoconferencing so Venezuelan and international election experts could participate actively in all of the audits mandated for elections. The election technicians from the political parties were personally present for these audits.

On November 4, 2020, Vicente Bello, one of the Democratic Unity Roundtable's technicians said that all of the electoral specialists appointed by the opposition had confirmed the effectiveness and transparency of the Venezuelan electoral system in every one of the audits performed.

Technical experts from many political parties took part in these audits. Also present were members of the Latin American Council of Election Experts (CEELA) and technicians from Turkey, Argentina, Russia, Iran, and South Africa were also in attendance.

A total of 1,800 election observers participated and scrutinized the electoral process. They included 1,600 domestic experts and technicians and 200 international observers, political leaders and election experts from more than 17 countries.



A technician performs validation testing on a voting machine at CNE's Strategic Operations Center east of Caracas.



Official international election observers inspect printouts of voting results after the closing the polls at one precinct at Escuela Normal de Maestros Miguel Antonio Caro in Caracas.

Election Results

Voter turnout was 30.5 per cent of all eligible voters . While this figure is relatively low compared to previous elections in Venezuela, it is not entirely due to the boycott by the extreme opposition aligned with Juan Guaidó. First, National Assembly elections historically draw less voter participation than presidential and referendum elections. Second, millions have migrated out of the country in the face of severe economic conditions, made still worse by the blockade and sanctions. Third, the shortage of fuel and day-long gasoline queues presented exceptional challenges to getting to voting centers. Fourth, the COVID-19 pandemic undoubtedly kept some at-risk voters from venturing out in spite of the high-level of bio-security protocols of the CNE.

The final election results reaffirm that there is viable political opposition in the country that will continue to have representation in the new National Assembly:

The ruling coalition, the Great Patriotic Pole (led by the PSUV) – 4,317,819 votes or 69.32 per cent

Alianza Democrática (Democratic Alliance coalition) – 1,101,816 votes or 17.68 per cent

The United Venezuela alliance, obtained 260,604 votes or 4.19 per cent

The Communist Party of Venezuela obtained 170,227 votes or 2.73 per cent

Solutions for Venezuela obtained 99,632 votes or 1.6%

Movement for Socialism obtained 77,301 votes or 1.24%

Ecological Movement for Venezuela obtained 67,547 votes or 1.08%

Union and Progress obtained 53,186 votes or 0.85%

ProCitizens obtained 44,341 votes or 0.71%

Popular Political Unit 89 obtained 19,174 votes or 0.31%

New Vision for my Country obtained 16,043 votes or 0.26%

Of the 277 national assembly seats:

Great Patriotic Pole Coalition won 253 seats (United Venezuela Socialist Party won 219)

Democratic Alliance Coalition won 18 seats (Democratic Action Party won 11)

United Venezuela Coalition won 2 seats (Venezuela First won 2)

Communist Party of Venezuela won 1 seat

Three seats are designated for indigenous.



While voter turnout was light, some larger voting centers still experienced wait times of 10-15 minutes. This outdoor waiting area was nearly full at Escuela Carlos Miguel Escará in Maracay, Aragua State.



Short voter queues were normal at mesas in Escuela Santiago Mariño in Turmero, Aragua State. Physical distancing was maintained by markers on the floor.

Activities of the Delegation

We visited the factory – Centro De Operaciones Estratégicas in Los Mariches, Miranda State – where voting machines were assembled, programmed, tested, certified, and repaired.

Venezuela had been planning to change the voting machines prior to the arson attack. The incident kick-started the need to design and debut a sovereign voting system. National companies were used to assemble the machines from Chinese hardware components, with no private companies involved.

Several security measures and safety protocols have been implemented through this new voting system. For example, the new voting machines have a hard drive of 8 GB and a cloud capacity of 64 GB. While the machine is operated by electricity, it features two internal electricity stabilizers to ensure stable supply. In case of power outages, each machine will revert to the battery, which has a minimum 4-hour battery life.

Modifications to the new system were completed three months before the election. Each machine was audited three times before transfer to the designated voting center.

Voting Centers Visited

- Escuela Normal de Maestros Miguel Antonio Caro in Parque del Oeste Alí Primera, Catia neighborhood, Caracas, Federal District (four visits: setting up voting tables on Dec 4, then on election day at 7:30 am, at 11 am, and for closing the polls at 8 pm)
- Liceo Fermín Toro, El Silencio neighborhood, Caracas, Federal District
- La Guaira High School, La Guaira (on the coast, east of Maiquetía), La Guaira State (formerly Vargas State)
- Embajada de Panamá, La Guaira, La Guaira State
- Maiquetía elementary school (Fundación Regional El Niño Simón), Maiquetía, La Guaira State
- Unidad Educativa Nacional Luís Augusto Machado Cisneros, Caracas, Federal District
- Grupo Escolar República del Peru, Caracas, Federal District
- Liceo Zona 23, Ciudad Hugo Rafael Chavez Frias, Caracas, Federal District
- Escuela Carlos Miguel Escará, Maracay, Aragua State
- Escuela Santiago Mariño, Turmero, Aragua State
- Escuela Francisco Miranda, Victoria, Aragua State
- Instituto Universitario de Tecnología de Administración Industrial, Los Teques, Miranda State
- Additional voting centers in Carabobo State

Delegation Meetings

Members of the Democratic Alliance

On December 5, 2020 the delegation met with eight opposition members from the Alianza Democrática (Democratic Alliance) which included Pedro José Rojas and Oranjel Salas of Acción Democrática (AD), Juan Carlos Alvarado and Felix Freites of Comité de Organización Política

Electoral Independiente (COPEI), Bruno Gallo (Avanzada Progresista), Alfonso Campos and Anibal Sanchez of Esperanza por El Cambio (El Cambio), and Timoteo Zambrano of Cambiemos Movimiento Ciudadano.



The leaders expressed strong criticisms of U.S. sanctions and interference which they felt hurt the average Venezuelan. They expressed concern about U.S. support for and promotion of Juan Guaidó whom they felt had little support within Venezuela and did not represent the opposition in Venezuela.

Members felt they had not been given equal access to public media ahead of the December 6th parliamentary elections.

Bruno Gallo who had spent 10 years working at the CNE looking closely for fraud told us he could not find any evidence of sustained fraud in the electoral process. All opposition members made clear that the elections process in Venezuela was fair, transparent, and secure.

The Popular Revolutionary Alternative

Via ZOOM, the delegation spoke with Paul Dobson from the Alternativa Popular Revolucionaria (APR) the evening of December 5. This political coalition is made up of the Communist Party of Venezuela, Tupamaro Revolutionary Movement, Homeland for All Party, Lucha de Clases (International Marxist Tendency), United left, Revolutionary Bolivarian Movement-200, Compromiso País, and the Autonomous Network of Communards and National Commitment.

Dobson spoke of their opposition to U.S. intervention and criminal blockade against the country which was impacting the economy.

He noted the important advances in the electoral process and democratic proposals implemented by the National Dialogue Table. Dobson also lauded a return of open debate on both state-run and private channels, with one exception. The APR denounced the fact it had been excluded from access to private and public media coverage ahead of the December 6th parliamentary elections.

Key issues highlighted were APR's critique of the government's failure to invest in and develop productive infrastructure such as local petrol, gas and electrical generation which could have alleviated the impact of the international economic blockade.

Dobson expressed concern about the new Anti-Blockade Law – that it was not transparent enough and could leave loopholes to circumvent some labor rights to attract foreign investment.

Carlos Ron, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs for North America

During a meeting the evening of December 7, 2020, Minister Ron stated that he was happy with the turnout levels for the election. For him, what was important about this election is that the opposition in

2015 tried the lawfare approach, followed by sanctions and support for a coup. This moderate opposition is now back to playing politics, and that's very promising.

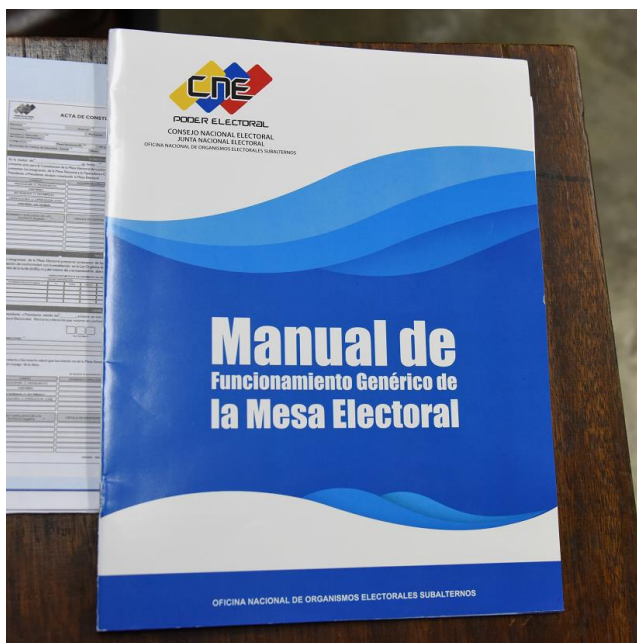
The government victory at the polls represented a loyal popular vote against sanctions and the people advocating for them. The opposition led by Guaidó took CITGO's assets and used these to enrich themselves.

With respect to challenges on the ground in Venezuela, Minister Ron was forthright in acknowledging that without China's help and solidarity in designing the COVID response, the situation would have been much worse in Venezuela. The latest spate of tough sanctions has created new poverty in Venezuela. However, the Plan Pueblo a Pueblo is helping increase the level of internal production. The prices of these goods are about a third of the market price. These approaches to crises have been working, and you can see this clearly in Venezuela today, especially with many more places selling fresh fruit and vegetables than ever before.

With respect to the new voting system, Minister Ron mentioned that this was the first fully automated system in the world. Other technological advances Venezuela is working on including full refurbishment of the subway system, and plans to build a new refinery with the Chinese, Russians, and Iranians.



Having printed paper ballots as well as electronic vote totals provides clear method of auditing the results in the event of narrow margins or contested results.



The written procedures followed by trained poll workers are contained in manuals provided to every voting precinct. The rules and procedures are uniform across the entire country.

Pedro Díaz Blum – Boston Group, Leader of the Democratic Alliance Coalition

The delegation met with Mr. Blum via teleconference after the elections on December 11, 2020, and his overall impression of the election was that it reflected the situation in Venezuela. Given the opposition's poor performance on election day, Blum expressed a desire that the opposition parties recognize their mistakes and overcome their divisions. The opposition will need to be better organized in order to assume power.

Mr. Blum rejected the radical opposition of Juan Guaidó supported by a small minority of Venezuelans and funded by the United States. It is this group which has imported an idea of not participating in the

elections. This radical opposition simply wants to overthrow Maduro. For Blum and his opposition coalition, they believe the government can only be changed via the peaceful electoral route.

Blum also stated he feels free to speak and does not encounter oppression from the government. He also acknowledged that Maduro is undertaking a remarkable effort to return the opposition to the political process. However, because of the existing divisions, no person from the opposition is well-placed to govern.



International election observers witness the unpacking of a sealed voting machine at Escuela Normal de Maestros Miguel Antonio Caro in Caracas on December 4, 2020.



International election observers watching the process of setting up a voting machine, verifying zero votes, and connecting it to the fingerprint reader at the same location.

Observations

From what we observed, the Venezuelan elections were standardized, fair, transparent, and secure. The electoral environment was one of tranquility and peace which allowed Venezuelans to exercise their political voice. We appreciated the methodical planning put into place by the CNE, in terms of health protocols to protect everyone involved in the electoral process.

All electoral workers had a sound understanding of the protocols the National Electoral Council had put in place to support the voting process. Each of the workers we spoke to could answer our questions about the process and were thoughtful and careful in their adherence to strict biosecurity measures, guiding voters through the process, and auditing the vote after the close of polls. Chairs of the election board were available in each voting location to oversee the process and act as a liaison to the international observers. Finally, we were able to verify the presence of witnesses from different political parties observing the process at the voting locations.

We observed on several occasions voters with handicaps being assisted in a very courteous and transparent manner by multiple people, assuring that every voter who shows up at the polls can cast his or her ballot.



Handicapped voter being assisted by a fireman and a family member at a voting center in Escuela Francisco Miranda in La Victoria, Aragua State.



A cardboard privacy barrier around the voting machine ensures a secret ballot for all voters.

In at least one case during the setting up of a voting machine before opening the polls, we observed a poll workers call by mobile phone for technical assistance. The issue was quickly resolved and the voting machine was up and running in good time. The point to be made here is that poll workers are human beings who may not know everything, but they know when to call for assistance and how to resolve technical problems.

We heard positive comments that the new election machines are faster than the previous ones. Moreover, the CNE used a taller barrier this year to hide the voter and the voting machine, which ensured security of the vote, and was appreciated by voters.

There were indications that the voting center at Liceo Fermín Toro opened a bit later than advertised. It was set up and taking voters by 7:20 am, not 7 am.

Voting at Escuela Carlos Miguel Escará, Maracay, Aragua State was interrupted by the governor holding a press conference along with two candidates on the ballot. Although the speeches were not campaign speeches, but rather affirmations of the voting process, the presence of the candidates could potentially influence votes. Such activity should be interpreted as an irregularity under the rules governing potential campaign activity in or near a voting center. Nevertheless, because the voting center was temporarily closed for the entry of voters queued on the street, it is unlikely that the press conference materially affected the results of balloting that morning.

An additional polling center in La Guaira State was visited by its own governor and three other candidates or local politicians, who took the opportunity to publicly stress the importance of the election being conducted for Venezuelan sovereignty, self-determination, independence, and national pride in the face of illegal unilateral coercive measures and direct international political intervention and intimidation. Conversation and questions were taken from CNE observers, as well as a group photo. Venezuelan Special Police (FAES) was also witnessed inside a voting room (mesa) at the location, albeit with no communication with voters or proximity to the voting booth, preserving secrecy of the ballot. This presence has since been reported as having been related to security as it pertained to the attendance of notable local political leaders and candidates.



Voting machines and supplies for each precinct are transported and guarded at all times by army, national guard, and police to ensure integrity of the vote.



International election observers deliberated and came to agreement over the text of a final declaration on overall findings of the approximately 200 observers who served in Venezuela on December 6, 2020.

Conclusion

The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela's legislative elections took place within the constitutional framework and was shaped by two major challenges: illegal US sanctions and economic blockade and the COVID-19 pandemic which created an unprecedented election scenario.

While the narrative repeatedly heard in the United States and Canada is that the opposition led by Juan Guaidó is the only opposition committed to “democratic transition,” on the contrary, it is clear that it is but one of many active opposition groupings and it is one of the very few that is not prepared to participate in a democratic process. The U.S. and Canada remain in denial about pluralism and viable democratic opposition that is completely free to speak, criticize the government, and run for election in Venezuela. This continued failure to recognize political realities on the ground and the essential integrity of the elections, driving in an economic war on the people of Venezuela, can only lead to a totally unwarranted perpetuation of the humanitarian crisis.

The PSUV-led ruling coalition won a supermajority in the National Assembly for the next five years, which will help it develop measures to counter the economic sanctions.

The December 6th Parliamentary elections represent a renewal and normalization of the institutions of governance in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, and strengthening of the plural electoral path as the only way forward for achieving peace and economic stability in Venezuela.

Delegation members:

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