

**OCCASIONAL REPORT ON VENEZUELA'S POLITICAL ELECTORAL
CONTEXT**

CARTER CENTER VENEZUELA

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**WITH PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS CALLED FOR DECEMBER 6, 2015
PSUV HOLDS ITS PRIMARIES*****Executive Summary***

On June 22, the National Electoral Council (CNE) made the rather long awaited call for parliamentary elections, scheduling them for Sunday December 6, 2015 and announcing the respective electoral timetable. In the announcement the CNE formally reiterated its invitation to the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) to participate in international support for the Venezuelan electoral process.

As scheduled, on Sunday June 28 the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV) held its primary elections. The event was prolonged until 10 pm following PSUV pleas to the CNE claiming large voter turnouts at some polling centers. At the close of election day activities, PSUV vice-president Diosdado Cabello expressed his satisfaction at what he termed the population's "historic" participation with a total of 3,162,400 voters.

Even though the PSUV held its primary elections in all 87 of the country's districts, only 98 of the 113 candidates to be elected by nominal vote were chosen in the primary process and the party-list proportional deputies were not voted on. Altogether, 59 percent of all nominees were elected in the primaries. The remaining 69 PSUV candidates will be decided on by political party cadres through negotiation or by consensus with all ten member parties comprising the "Simón Bolívar" Great Patriotic Pole (GPPSB).

Another significant electoral event was the announcement made by the Democratic Unity Table (MUD) of the opposition slate of candidates chosen by consensus for the December 6 elections. This event was tarnished the following day, following the resolution announced by the CNE adopting a gender equality requirement (60%/40%, minimum) applicable to candidates running in the upcoming parliamentary elections.

On the political front, this report describes the hunger strike waged for a month by opposition political actors with demands dealing with the country's electoral and political process. Fortunately, these hunger strikes didn't end up costing the life of any of the protestors and concluded soon after the election date was announced.

In June Venezuela was visited by various celebrities from the world of international politics who support the strengthening of democracy in Venezuela. Former Spanish Prime Minister Felipe González and two missions led by Brazilian senators arrived with the aim of meeting with the country's various stakeholders. González and the first delegation of Brazilian senators left the country without managing to reach

their goals. The second delegation of Brazilian senators, however, did manage to meet with several national-level stakeholders in Venezuelan society.

I. POLITICAL CONTEXT

Hunger strike and demands

On May 23, 2015, *Voluntad Popular* party leader Leopoldo López began a hunger strike with four specific demands: a halt to repression of the Venezuelan people, the immediate release of all political prisoners, the immediate setting of the date for parliamentary elections, and comprehensive, transparent international observation of parliamentary elections. The announcement of this initiative was made by Leopoldo López himself in a video recorded on his cell at Ramo Verde prison and broadcast over the Internet and over the state-run *Venezolana de Televisión* TV channel ([see note](#)). López's decision and production of the video prompted additional punishment for the political leader, i.e., solitary confinement in Ramo Verde prison.

It was subsequently revealed that López had been acting in solidarity with the hunger strike begun the day before by former San Cristobal mayor Daniel Ceballos, in response to the announcement of his transfer to a detention center located in San Juan de los Morros in the state of Guárico.¹ Police sources stated that the transfer of Ceballos was made due to measures taken to “foil an (alleged) escape plot discovered by authorities” ([see note](#)).

By June 10, 19 days into the hunger strike, 70 individuals had joined in the protest in solidarity with both leaders and their demands ([see note](#)). On the very same day, the former presidents of Colombia and Bolivia, Jorge Quiroga and Andrés Pastrana, respectively, sent a letter to President Nicolás Maduro requesting Ceballos' transfer to a clinic where he could be administered the “care needed to preserve his life and afford peace to his wife, their children, and family members” ([see note](#)). Another noteworthy event concerning Ceballos' confinement was the visit that Episcopal Conference of Venezuela President Monsignor Diego Padrón managed to make on June 10 (after repeated requests) at his newly assigned detention center in San Juan de los Morros. Following his visit with Ceballos, Monsignor Padrón indicated that the leader was showing signs of an ailing right kidney, and called on the government to “refrain from turning a deaf ear” to the people and listen to their outcry ([see note](#)). On June 11, upon conclusion of the hunger strike that began on May 22, former San Cristóbal mayor Daniel Ceballos was transferred from Guárico to the headquarters of the Bolivarian Intelligence Service (SEBIN) in El Helicoide, Caracas. His wife, Patricia de Ceballos, thanked Minister of Penitentiary Services Iris Varela, and Monsignor Diego Padrón, for their efforts to bring about Ceballos' transfer to Caracas ([see note](#)).

¹ On the morning of May 22, Ceballos was transferred to the jail that goes by the name *26 de julio* (July 26), which serves as an annex to the General Penitentiary of Venezuela (PGV) in the state of Guárico.

The chapter on hunger strikes was finally brought to a close on June 23, the day after the CNE announcement setting the date for parliamentary elections, and after the release, early that morning, of two students held by the SEBIN, thanks to the Ombudsman's efforts concerning the case of students held in prison because of protests in 2014.² After the end of the hunger strike was announced, Leopoldo López declared a redefining of efforts to keep up pressure on the electoral management body to meet the other demands, i.e., comprehensive, transparent international observation of the parliamentary elections and the definitive release of political prisoners ([see note](#)).

Venezuela visited by foreign dignitaries in support of democracy in Venezuela

In June visits were made by various dignitaries from the world of international politics to strengthen democracy in Venezuela. Some of these visitors were invited by the Venezuelan opposition and others came with the consent of the Venezuelan government.

Felipe González's visit. After several attempts to visit the country, former Spanish Prime Minister Felipe González arrived in Caracas on June 7. The purpose of the former ruler's visit was to serve as technical advisor to assist in the defense of Leopoldo López and Antonio Ledezma. While González managed to meet with the Metropolitan Mayor Antonio Ledezma, who is currently under house arrest, he didn't get to visit López and Ceballos at their respective detention centers. Nevertheless, the former PM did meet with relatives of Leopoldo López and Daniel Ceballos and with political parties in the MUD coalition ([see note](#)). Regarding Felipe González's visit and his intentions to assist in the defense of these mayors, Chief Justice of the Venezuelan Supreme Court Gladys Gutiérrez said in a statement issued the very day of González's arrival that he would not be able to "practice as a legal professional in a criminal case inside our national territory" because, in the court's opinion, this action "would violate the law governing lawyers (*Ley de Abogados*) and the certification of professional qualifications as required by the Constitution to practice this profession within our national territory." Likewise, despite López's defense team expressing its intention for Felipe González to attend as part of the audience in López's defense hearing, the statement issued by the Supreme Court precluded the possibility for this to happen, labelling the endeavor as interventionist ([see note](#)). Eventually, after two days in Venezuela, González left the country on a plane to Bogotá provided by Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos, on June 9 ([see note](#)).

MUD spokespersons characterized Gonzalez's visit as a success. MUD Executive Secretary Jesús Torrealba stated that the former PM's visit revealed international concern over the political and social situation in Venezuela. In turn, *Alianza Bravo*

² Two days after the release of the two young students Gerardo Resplandor and Douglas Morillo on June 23, the Ombudsman announced an alternate release measure for the student Andrés León, who had been serving a sentence in a Carabobo prison since 2014. Upon success of the measure taken on León's behalf, the Ombudsman gave an account of eight people linked to the 2014 protests who had managed to gain release from prison thanks to measures requested by his office and its mediation, initiated in January 2015 ([see note](#)).

Pueblo (ABP) party Secretary General Edwin Luzardo welcomed González's visit to Venezuela and underscored his efforts on behalf of the defense of human rights and the freedom of Venezuelan political prisoners. In the same vein, Miranda Governor Henrique Capriles stated that everybody lending support to Venezuela to help it break away from its current crisis is welcome ([see note](#)).

The national government characterized the presence of the former PM as a "mistake and a fiasco" ([see note](#)). Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro claimed that the reason behind former Spanish Prime Minister Felipe González's visit was to lend support to "extreme right-wing groups" planning to overthrow his government as part of an alleged smear campaign against Venezuela devised by Juan José Rendón, with former Spanish leader serving as its "coordinator." Concerning González's departure on a plane provided by the Office of the President of Colombia, Maduro reported that the Colombian ambassador was summoned by the Venezuelan Foreign Ministry to demand an explanation from him, since he considers the act of "facilitating the use of the presidential plane to a man who came here to disrespect Venezuelan institutions and support extremist groups trying to overthrow me" as exceedingly dangerous ([see note](#)).

Delegations sent by the Brazilian parliament. Two delegations from the Brazilian parliament traveled to Venezuela manifesting their interest in the Venezuelan political process. The first group of senators arrived on June 18 at the invitation of opposition leader María Corina Machado, and by the wives of imprisoned politicians, i.e., Lilian Tintori, Patricia Ceballos, and Mitzi Ledezma Capriles. The aim of the delegation of senators, spearheaded by Senator and former presidential candidate Aécio Neves,³ was to visit López and Ceballos in Ramo Verde prison. The group of senators didn't even get to the capital city due to closure of access roads between Maiquetía Airport and Caracas, and to a protest march by supporters of the ruling party who obstructed the path of their Caracas-bound vehicle.⁴

Opposition spokespersons speculated that both the road closures and the demonstrations, along with the harassment to which the senators were subjected, was instigated by the national government to prevent them from substantiating prevailing circumstances in Venezuela ([see note](#)). In an official press release, the Brazilian

³ The Brazilian delegation consisted of Social Democrat senators (PSDB) Aécio Neves (Senator and former Brazilian presidential candidate), Aloysio Nunes Ferreira (President of the Commission on Foreign Affairs), and Cássio Cunha Lima; José Agripino and Ronaldo Caiado, of the *Democratas* party (formerly the Liberal Front Party); Senator Ricardo Ferraço, member of the Brazilian Democratic Movement Party (PMDB); Senator José Medeiros, member of the Popular Socialist Party (PPS); and Senator Sérgio Petecão, of the Social Democratic Party ([see note](#)).

⁴ The road closure was blamed on several factors. Web portals for the daily newspapers *Folha de São Paulo* and *O Globo* reported that, according to statements made by members of the senators' escort, the road was closed due to the transfer "of a prisoner extradited from Colombia" (in reference to Yonny Bolívar); however, according to a tweet sent by Senator Aloysio Nunes, traffic had been brought to a halt due to an accident on the road. Other senators complained that the bus they were traveling in was attacked by demonstrators blocking the vehicle's path. The aforementioned Brazilian media outlets also reported the presence of roughly fifty protesters shouting slogans in support of late Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez ([see note](#)).

government expressed its regrets over the incidents that occurred during the visit to Venezuela by senators from that country, describing them as “unacceptable hostile acts against Brazilian parliamentarians,” but cautioned in the same communiqué that these senators’ plans could be construed as an attempt to “meddle” in Venezuela’s internal affairs ([see note](#)). Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff herself described the visit as “disgraceful,” pointing out that the senators’ intention of visiting imprisoned opposition party members would have placed the Venezuelan government in some “sort of a trap, and has meant embarrassment for Brazil,” underscoring the senators’ actions as “interference in Venezuela’s internal affairs” ([see note](#)).

In turn, the Venezuelan Foreign Ministry issued a statement on June 19 denying these allegations and labelling the incident as an instance of “media manipulation,” whose “sole purpose is to destabilize democracy in Venezuela and create confusion and conflict among kindred countries” ([see note](#)).

On June 24, days after the incident involving the group of senators, a second delegation from the Brazilian Senate⁵ arrived in Venezuela, comprised of senators from parties allied with President Dilma Rousseff. This delegation was not only able to make it to Caracas, but also managed to hold meetings with several sectors in the country to listen to their perspectives and concerns regarding human rights issues in Venezuela. The senators met with the Committee for Victims of the *Guarimba*; with opposition spokespeople Jesús Torrealba, Henrique Capriles, Fredy Guevara, and David Smolansky ([see note](#)). The delegation also held meetings with the wives of leaders Leopoldo López and Antonio Ledezma ([see note](#)), with Attorney General Luisa Ortega Díaz, National Assembly President Diosdado Cabello, and Foreign Minister Delcy Rodríguez.

When these meetings were over, Senator Roberto Requiao expressed his intention to collaborate in the upcoming electoral process and called for elections to be held in an “atmosphere of plurality and freedom.” Finally, following the series of meetings, the senators stated that all of the groups interviewed concurred with their goal of achieving “an end to the violence.” They expressed their intention to take stock of the lessons learned from their experiences to present them to the Brazilian parliament upon their return. The delegation expressed its desire to lend its support to the elections process in Venezuela, and to guarantee international oversight from within MERCOSUR and UNASUR.

Concerning the results of this visit, the executive secretary of the MUD, Jesus Torrealba asked the senators’ assistance in making qualified observation available for the parliamentary primaries. Meanwhile, national Popular Will Party Coordinator Fredy Guevara reported cases of repression, political prisoners, and persecution ([see note](#)). Ruling party spokespersons welcomed the delegation and stated that relations with the Brazilian government are on the best of terms, reiterating, however, that “Venezuela’s internal affairs are just that, i.e., internal affairs” and that they would tolerate no interference from any nation ([see note](#)).

⁵ The delegation consisted of four senators: Lindbergh Farias of the Workers’ Party (PT), Vanessa Graziotin of the Communist Party of Brazil (PCdoB), Telmário Motta of the Democratic Labor Party (PDT), and Roberto Requiao of the Democratic Movement of Brazil Party (PMDB) ([see note](#)).

II. ELECTORAL CONTEXT

Date set for parliamentary elections

At a special press conference on June 22, Tibisay Lucena, principal rector and president of the CNE, the country's highest electoral authority, announced that parliamentary elections will be held on Sunday December 6, 2015. Together with all the other CNE rectors, Lucena stated that the CNE had agreed on the preliminary steps required for holding these elections, and she announced some important dates in that regard.⁶ Among key aspects of the electoral process highlighted by Lucena was the candidate nomination period, set for August 3-7; the electoral campaign scheduled for November 13 – December 3; and conclusion of voter registration on July 8. Concerning this last point, Lucena said that 504,661 new voters had been added from last February, when the CNE special operation began promoting voter registration and updating the electoral roll, until the end of May, underscoring this as a positive accomplishment ([see note](#)). The official electoral timetable was posted on the CNE's official website the following day ([see timetable](#)), and the accompanying press release highlights two important dates in the electoral process: the first, July 16, for approval of electoral districts and the second, October 18, for an election drill to acquaint voters with the voting process ([see note](#)).

The CNE's call to elections ends a long period of uncertainty and complaints from the opposition over the election date and even the prospect of not even holding elections in 2015. Although guarantees had been made by State institutions that elections would be held,⁷ the CNE's long silence regarding the date for parliamentary elections led to a series of speculations by opposition leaders on possible election dates. Former presidential candidate and current governor of Miranda state Henrique Capriles announced June 18 on his Twitter account that, according to unofficial reports, elections might be held on the last Sunday in September ([see note](#)).

At the beginning of June, the MUD coalition of opposition parties announced a series of protests at major CNE offices throughout the country, demanding that the date for parliamentary elections be set. The MUD decided to take this action after opposition leaders Leopoldo López and Daniel Ceballos started a hunger strike in prison. Among their demands was for the CNE to announce an election date ([see note](#)). Another speculation over the date for parliamentary elections emerged after a professional

⁶ The prior steps mentioned by Lucena include the electoral timetable, rules governing the verification and certification of statements of intent in support of self-nominated candidates for National Assembly deputy positions, and regulations for the formation of voter groups who will be participating in the elections.

⁷ On the first of June, Ombudsman Tarek William Saab stated that after sustained communication with Tibisay Lucena he was able to give assurances that parliamentary elections were going to be held between late November and early December ([see note](#)). Meanwhile, Vice-President Jorge Arreaza said that parliamentary elections would be held in 2015 and that reports that they had been cancelled were part of a barrage of opinions propagated by the opposition ([see note](#)).

baseball team calendar was issued,⁸ showing December 13 as the election date. In response to this, MUD Executive Secretary Jesús “Chúo” Torrealba asserted that the election date issue was “a firm demand we are making with protests made by the political parties, city council members, and people in the streets.” The political leader stated that the national government had no desire to set an election date because this would be tantamount to “setting the date for their own defeat” ([see note](#)).

As part of the opposition’s protests, to pressure the CNE, the MUD held a demonstration in Caracas on June 19 demanding a date be set for parliamentary elections and asking López to end his hunger strike, then in its 27th day. Furthermore, the MUD reiterated all of López’s demands, i.e., participation of international observers in the elections, the release of political prisoners, and an end to repression, persecution, and censorship ([see note](#)).

As thoroughly outlined in the previous section, the day after the CNE pronouncement, Leopoldo López’s wife, Lilian Tintori, announced the end of her husband’s hunger strike, which had lasted 30 days. Tintori emphasized that López will continue the “struggle” until all the demands that motivated him to make his protest are met ([see note](#)).

MUD Candidates

On June 24, the MUD held a press conference in which Jesús “Chúo” Torrealba, together with the heads of the coalition member parties, presented the list of candidates selected by consensus for the December 6 parliamentary elections. The MUD had promised to announce its candidates for parliamentary elections at public events in each respective entity immediately following primary elections ([see note](#)).⁹

The list of candidates announced by the MUD included candidates selected in the opposition primaries, plus candidates chosen by consensus among the different parties in the coalition ([see note](#)).¹⁰ According to Torrealba, the MUD has achieved “a truly perfect alliance.” However, over 60 candidates were missing from the list he submitted (the names of 106 of the 167 candidates were published); among those missing were all the candidates for Zulia state ([see note](#)).

⁸ The team whose calendar set aside December for 13 parliamentary elections was *Caribes de Anzoátegui*, owned by current PSUV mayor of Puerto La Cruz, Maglio Ordoñez.

⁹ The delay in announcements by the MUD was criticized by ruling party spokespersons who, in addition to the delay in announcing candidates, criticized the MUD for failing to include age and gender criteria used to select their candidates ([see note](#)).

¹⁰ For the 2015 parliamentary elections, there is another coalition of smaller parties in the Venezuelan opposition hoping to disrupt the country’s political polarization. This coalition is being spearheaded by the MAS political party and will be announcing their candidates for the December 6 elections in the coming weeks ([see note](#)).

Candidates and gender equality

The “perfect agreement” on the selection of candidates announced by the MUD suffered a major setback a few hours after it was made public, following disclosure of a resolution handed down by the CNE guaranteeing the right of both genders to equal political participation in the electoral race for the National Assembly.¹¹ CNE President Tibusay Lucena explained at a meeting with women political activists¹² that the aim of this resolution was to “do justice with regard to the political participation of women” and that it followed the same path as previous resolutions, such as the one handed down in 2008¹³ in that, according to figures presented by the CNE itself, the standard was met in terms of both proportion and alternation.¹⁴ Specifically, the new resolution stipulates that nominations for elections must be gender balanced (50 percent of each gender), and where this is not possible, nominations must be composed of individuals of at least 40 percent and at most 60 percent for either gender. The resolution approved applies to both principal candidates and alternates, regardless of whether they are party-list proportional or nominal candidates ([see note](#)).

While the issue of gender equality had been debated recently ([see previous bulletin](#)), this resolution’s adoption and enforcement in the parliamentary primaries without it being introduced for broad discussion, sparked rejection and annoyance among opposing forces since most of their candidates for parliamentary elections had already been announced.

In the list of candidates submitted by the MUD (including those selected in the primaries and by consensus) there were only 13 female principal candidates, and according to the resolution adopted, the opposition coalition would need at least 67 female candidates (to meet the 40 percent quota for all 167 positions), or at most 100 candidates (to comply with the maximum of 60 percent of all positions up for election).

¹¹ According to sources close to the Carter Center, the resolution was approved by the CNE, with the dissenting vote cast by principal rector Luis Emilio Rondón.

¹² The CNE’s decision even had the support of feminist groups close to the MUD, such as the National Women’s Front ([see note](#)).

¹³ In 2008, the CNE adopted Resolution No. 080721-658 for that year’s elections in November, establishing the rules regulating the nomination of candidates for state and regional elections that year. Article 16 of the resolution states: “The candidates for Regional Legislative Councilor, Metropolitan Councilor and Councilor to the Apure District High Council to be entered into the electoral race governed by these rules shall consist equally and in alternate fashion of fifty percent (50%) women and men. In cases where enforcement of complete parity is not possible, there must be at least forty percent (40%) and no more than sixty percent (60%) of each gender” ([see resolution](#)).

¹⁴ According to gender issues specialist Evangelina García Prince, while the 2008 resolution was adhered to, its enforcement “was partial and short-lived.” Excerpted from the publication: *La participación política de las mujeres en Venezuela: Situación actual y estrategias para su ampliación* (Political participation of women in Venezuela: Current status and strategies for expansion). Evangelina García Prince. Ediciones Ildis, Caracas, May 2012 ([see publication](#)).

Therefore, the resolution forces the opposition parties to swiftly revise their agreements so that they adhere to required parameters by the date set on the timetable for the nomination of candidates, with the deadline being August 7.¹⁵

MUD Executive Secretary Jesús Torrealba characterized the resolution as “illegal, unconstitutional,” and as an “unlawful change in the rules of the game” following on the heels of the MUD primary elections, right after most of the coalition’s candidates had been announced ([see note](#)). In the same vein, Henrique Capriles asserted that the CNE was aiming to “make the game more complicated” and that Venezuelan women were not looking to “run for office; what they want is a promising future and progress.” Capriles claimed that the current CNE President was “the government’s chief of command” and that the freshly adopted resolution sought to “promote abstention and division” ([see note](#)). Despite statements of rejection due to the abrupt nature of the resolution and the way it was announced, spokespersons for the parties in the MUD coalition said they were not surprised, since they knew that this “issue was coming” and that they should be “prepared for all kinds of complications,” while also asserting that the MUD would fine-tune a slate incorporating the respective changes in their list of nominees ([see note](#) and listen to [audio](#)).

The president of the CNE stated later on that she had informed the MUD about this decision between April and May, so they could have taken appropriate precautionary measures ([see note](#)). On behalf of the Venezuelan government, President Maduro expressed the support of the “patriotic revolutionary forces,” for the CNE’s decision, which he characterized as “historic” ([see note](#)). On behalf of the ruling party, National Assembly Deputy Earle Herrera pointed out that the resolution wouldn’t pose any problem since, in his opinion, the principle is in the constitution and President Hugo Chávez himself had declared the revolution to be “feminist right from its inception,” therefore the CNE-approved resolution was responding to an “outcry of modern society for gender equality in politics” ([see note](#)). Despite backing from ruling party spokespersons (as explained further on), the ruling party also failed to select the minimum number of candidates required by the new CNE resolution to achieve gender equity in their primary elections.

International observation

The presence of qualified, impartial, opportune international observation missions has been a repeated demand of the Venezuelan opposition ([see note](#)). One of Leopoldo López’s demands when he began his hunger strike was for oversight by the European Union (EU) and the Organization of American States (OAS) during the upcoming parliamentary elections ([see note](#)). In her announcement of the date set for parliamentary elections in Venezuela, CNE President Tibisay Lucena stated that the CNE had ratified the invitation of the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) to “put

¹⁵ The MUD ruled out holding new primaries to select candidates since there wasn’t enough time left to carry out this process ([see note](#)).

together an electoral mission to lend support to the process over the remaining months leading up to elections, and on election day, of course” ([see video](#)).

UNASUR, meanwhile, in a statement issued on the same day that Lucena announced the election date, applauded the announcement, underscoring that with these elections the Venezuelan people had an “open path for resolving their differences by democratic means in a framework of understanding and national coexistence.” Lastly, UNASUR expressed that it would get the electoral support mission underway “immediately,” as requested of the foreign ministers of Brazil, Colombia, and Ecuador by Lucena during their recent visits to the country¹⁶ ([see statement](#)). Concerning participation of this mission in the upcoming elections, opposition spokespersons expressed their agreement with it, but added that it would be important for that mission to abide by qualified international observation guidelines and for missions from the OAS and the European Union to be allowed to come also, at least two or three months in advance. Similarly, MUD spokespersons requested that these missions be capable of publishing reports and be guaranteed immunity and freedom of movement ([see note](#)).

Meanwhile, the OAS, in a message posted on the official Twitter account of its newly-elected Secretary General, Luis Almagro, let the country know that the regional body “offered its election observation services” to Venezuela ([see note](#)). The European Union also indicated that it was ready to “explore, together with the National Electoral Council, UNASUR, and OAS, the best way to contribute to inclusive, credible, and transparent elections” ([see note](#)).

Regarding international observation and its importance, CNE Principal Rector Luis Emilio Rondón contended that the international observation provided for by the electoral branch should include additional international organizations other than UNASUR, adding that these organizations should be able to observe the electoral process before, during, and after election day. According to Rondón, long-term observation of the Venezuelan electoral process and publishing of election reports by these organizations could “enhance the credibility of and confidence in the referee and in the process as such.” He likewise expressed that the work of national observers is just as important as the work done by international observers ([see note](#)).

PSUV Primaries

Primaries for the United Socialist Party of Venezuela took place on Sunday June 28, as scheduled in the most recent timetable announced by the CNE in March 2015. Organization of the primary election process was designed by PSUV national leadership and relied upon technical support from the CNE. The procedures followed in the ruling party primaries was similar to those used in the MUD primaries held on May 17, 2015 ([see Carter Center Report for June 2015](#)). According to information provided by Jorge Rodríguez during

¹⁶ As of May 26, 2010, through adoption of regulation number 8 of the Organic Law on Electoral Processes (LOPRE), the National Electoral Council replaced the concept of “international observation” with that of “international accompaniment” ([see note](#)).

the electoral campaign, the CNE only activated 26% (3,987) of the polling centers and operated a total of 5,613 polling stations on election day for the PSUV primary elections; consequently, some voters were redirected to nearby polling centers¹⁷ ([see note](#)).

Preparations for primary elections to select PSUV candidates to parliament

As a first step within the ruling party's organizational framework for primary elections, the grassroots organizations of the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV), known as Bolívar-Chávez Battle Units (UBCH), held internal elections April 19 to choose the party's nominees to run in the PSUV primaries on June 28, 2015 (to view these election procedures, see the [Carter Center's report for March 7 – April 25, 2015](#)). The 13,682 UBCH selected 1,162 nominees, 12 for each of the country's 87 districts plus 12 per district with three deputies up for election ([see note](#)).

After selecting the nominees, PSUV leadership asked them to sign an agreement, pledging, among other things, to unconditionally obey campaign bylaws, to acknowledge the results published by national PSUV leadership and, if not selected, to participate in the campaign for each district in the December 6 elections ([see note](#)).

The PSUV primaries were governed by the "Regulations for selecting candidates of the United Socialist Party of Venezuela to the office of deputy to the National Assembly (NA)." According to the general provisions of these regulations: a) candidates are to be selected in a primary election; b) all Venezuelans registered in the Electoral Roll (ER) will be entitled to vote; c) the CNE would be lending support to the elections (Articles 2 and 4). According to the electoral section of these regulations, the purpose of PSUV primaries is to select principal candidates only and not alternates.¹⁸

The regulations also set the rules for candidates participating in the electoral campaign.¹⁹ The campaign lasted a month, from May 26 to June 26 and was conducted through the so-called "house-to-house" strategy ([see note](#)). On May 25, Jorge Rodríguez, member of the national PSUV leadership and mayor of the Caracas municipality of Libertador spelled out details regarding the campaign process. He explained that during the first week candidates should devote themselves to the face-to-face contact with voters; in the second week, they would be holding meetings with Chávez-Bolívar Battle

¹⁷ Following the primaries, high-level PSUV spokespersons indicated that the number of polling centers activated was under 20 percent.

¹⁸ Article 12 of the regulations stipulates that **alternate deputies** shall be appointed by PSUV National Leadership. The criteria to be used by PSUV Leadership to make this appointment will be "number of votes obtained, equal numbers of candidates under and over 30, gender parity and alliances with the "Simón Bolívar" Great Patriotic Pole (GPPSB)."

¹⁹ Candidates should be standard bearers of "socialist ethics and morals, awareness of their social duty, practice solidarity and love, promoting the Bolivarian ideal and the revolutionary socialist philosophy of our Supreme Commander and Eternal Leader, Hugo Rafael Chávez Frías" (Article 13).

Units (UBCH); in the third week, sectoral meetings would be held, posters would be published and a media presence would be permitted. Finally, the finale would take place during the fourth week ([see note](#)).

According to plans, the PSUV electoral campaign began on May 27 with 87 motorized caravans reaching out to the country's various states and spreading propaganda on behalf of the ruling party candidates ([see note](#)). To ensure a level playing field among candidates, during the campaign, the PSUV used its own funds to print and publish posters for all the candidates using the same style and format. Similarly, the party reported that each candidate would be provided television and radio spots with the same format for all ([see note](#)).²⁰ Party leaders insisted that the aim of their self-funded campaign was for primary candidates "not to have to depend on any contractors who might demand a certain type of conduct contrary to our people's interest" ([see note](#)). Thus, the entire campaign process was centralized and managed by national PSUV leadership.

At a national leadership meeting, PSUV vice-president and current National Assembly president Diosdado Cabello made a proposal for primary winning candidates to sign a letter of resignation in advance for use by the party in the event that any candidate elected as deputy were to "betray the revolution and the people" by attempting to switch party allegiance ([see video](#)).

Despite the PSUV's centralized strategy to ensure fairness in the electoral race, during the primaries, Carter Center consultants managed to observe cases of openly expressed preferences for some candidates on the part of PSUV national leaders. Sources closely associated with the Carter Center indicated that individual instances of support were part of a political strategy whereby candidate profiles were assessed for the purpose of pitting them against a potential opposition candidate, or even due to the position that a candidate held within the party itself. However, in some instances, candidates formed alliances among themselves, and in others, some candidates conceded their candidacy to other candidates ([see note](#)).

PSUV candidate selection and results

PSUV primary day began before polling centers were opened with the traditional playing of reveille.²¹ The event was scheduled to end at six in the afternoon, but after PSUV requests made to the CNE due to the influx of voters at some polling centers, the voting process was extended to 10 pm, after the CNE had postponed poll closing time twice, first to 8 pm and then to 9 pm ([see note](#)). Throughout primary day, the PSUV electoral machine made efforts to promote voter participation while candidates stirred up their supporters, activities that are forbidden because the campaign period ended on Friday June 26. These

²⁰ In these media spots, are going to know the name and surnames of candidates, the number they appear under on the ballot card, the entity and the district where they would run.

²¹ In many parts of the country, reveille is used to summon electors to vote, a practice followed in national elections but not normally in party primaries ([see note](#)).

campaign activities included text messages relentlessly sent to PSUV member cell phones and even to those of people not closely associated with the pro-Chávez camp.²²

Throughout primary day, PSUV leaders issued declarations to encourage voter participation. After casting his ballot, President Maduro stated that the government would have “access to the list of those who voted.” He literally said “We definitely will exercise our right. It is being documented... in the Electoral Roll, everyone who participated in this process” ([see video](#)). This statement, broadcast live by public and private channels, was understood as a form of pressure on voters and raised concerns among citizens about the secrecy of the vote.²³

Early morning Tuesday, June 29, Diosdado Cabello announced the election results.²⁴ Cabello expressed his satisfaction over the population’s participation, which came to 3,162,400 voters.²⁵ He explained that the participation of Chávez supporters doubled that of the opposition in districts where they held their primaries. Citing an example of this, he mentioned that in Carabobo state, with 10 deputies up for election, if results were based on participation in the primaries of the two political camps, pro-Chávez supporters would have elected eight deputies to just two for the opposition. Finally, Cabello apologized to voters for the low number of polling centers activated on PSUV primary day²⁶ ([see note](#)).

As for compliance with the CNE resolution on gender equity, only 29 of the 95 candidates announced in the ruling party primaries were women, i.e., 30 percent of all PSUV candidates²⁷ ([see note](#)). In agreements to be reached between the PSUV and parties in the Great Patriotic Pole to select the remaining candidates, most of them should be women (at least 38 of the remaining 69 candidates) in order to obtain the 67 nominations required (40 per cent overall).

²² Some messages, for example, expressed: “Comrade, you still have time to vote for candidate X. Do it from the heart! Polling centers close at 8 pm”

²³ Regarding the secret ballot issue, one day after the election CNE Principal Rector Socorro Hernández expressed that “...there is no way to know who voted for whom. This is guaranteed. No one doubts that the secrecy of the vote is guaranteed because in the software all measures specifically required to make this impossible have been taken... Knowing who voted and who did not, that is quite another issue.” Hernández confirmed that, to date, neither the MUD nor the PSUV have requested voter data ([see note](#)).

²⁴ While 98 candidates were chosen in the PSUV primaries, the results for candidates in Delta Amacuro state and those of one candidate in Portuguesa state were not disclosed in Diosdado Cabello’s announcement.

²⁵ As in the case of the MUD primaries, there is a discrepancy between figures for votes and those for voters; this is because two candidates were voted on in some districts (11). Diosdado Cabello later confirmed that the figure he provided refers to the number of voters (ID card numbers, he said), not votes ([see video](#)).

²⁶

Internal pacts with the PSUV

While the PSUV held its primaries in all 87 districts of Venezuela, the primary process only selected 98 of the 113 all candidates up for election by nominal vote. Moreover, also not voted on during the primaries were party-list proportional deputies. During the primary process, the equivalent of 59 percent of all candidates for deputy were selected.²⁸ In the case of districts where two NA deputies are elected, Article 10 of the PSUV primary bylaws stipulates that the candidate getting the highest number of valid votes will be the candidate selected, and the second candidate will be appointed by the party's national leadership²⁹ ([see regulations](#)). In the case of districts where three deputies are up for election, the PSUV primaries put two of the three positions up for vote and the party kept the nomination of one candidate to itself, applying the same criteria outlined above.

The remaining 69 PSUV candidates are to be decided by political party cadres through negotiation or by consensus with member parties of the "Simón Bolívar" Great Patriotic Pole (GPPSB). As for minority coalition parties, these have their own internal mechanisms for deciding on the candidates that they will support in these negotiations.³⁰ The Communist Party of Venezuela, for example, reported that it would select 23 potential candidates and negotiate the remaining candidates among all of the parties and the PSUV in order to achieve "perfect unity" ([see note](#)).³¹

Because the GPPSB consists of eleven parties, the PSUV faces the challenge of meeting each group's expectations, given that the ruling party chose over half of the candidates without taking a number of national or regional leaders of the coalition into account. Concerning the PSUV's so-called internal electoral pact, Diosdado Cabello made it clear to the allied parties that there would be no quota-based distribution of candidates, but that the advantages of each particular case would be reviewed individually. He ruled out the possibility of excluding any candidates selected in the primaries in order to

²⁸ The Venezuelan Constitution and the Organic Law on Electoral Processes (LOPRE) define the representation of indigenous peoples in the National Assembly. Indigenous representation in the National Assembly is to consist of three Deputies (see [LOPRE](#), Article 8).

²⁹ Concerning selection of the second (or third) candidate in multi-member districts, Article 12 of the regulations stipulates that in addition to the number of votes obtained, gender parity, age, and alliances with the GPPSB will also be taken into consideration.

³⁰ The parties comprising the Great Patriotic Pole are: Venezuelan Popular Unity (UPV), Fatherland for all (*Patria Para Todos*, or PPT), the Tupamaro Movement of Venezuela, the People's Electoral Movement (MEP), Independents for the National Community (IPCN), *REDES*, *PODEMOS*, NCR, *Joven*, and Authentic Renewal Organization (ORA).

³¹ Some minority political parties in the GPPSB follow a strategy of negotiating candidates with the PSUV and other parties based on results obtained in specific districts where these parties have greater electoral strength and not negotiating a fixed quota at the national level based on the votes that these parties won in previous national elections, according to explanations provided to the Carter Center by members of these parties.

include any others from the coalition. Nevertheless, Cabello himself left open the possibility of offering just alternate positions to some of the allied parties.³²

Reactions to the primaries

As its first vice-president, Diosdado Cabello announced that the PSUV had “delivered to the people,” characterizing participation as “historic.” In reference to the election results, Cabello stated that if the votes obtained by the PSUV were to be compared with those obtained by the MUD in the 33 districts where the opposition coalition held their primaries, the ruling party would have gotten 40 percent more of the votes. Referring to specific cases, Cabello said “If we were to hold elections now, with these results we would elect eight deputies in Carabobo compared to two for the right-wing opposition. Of the eight deputy seats up for grabs in Anzoátegui, PSUV would get seven, and the MUD, one” ([see note](#)). Following the same line of analysis, the chief of command for the PSUV campaign, Jorge Rodríguez, asserted that “in the 33 districts where they (the opposition parties) garnered 543,723 votes, we won 1,287,743... ..this amounts to 70.3 percent versus 29.7 percent, i.e., a difference of 744,000 votes” ([see note](#)).

PSUV primary elections to select candidates for deputy to the National Assembly were accompanied by 21 international political stakeholders from various countries in the Americas and Europe ([see note](#)). At the conclusion of the primary election process, these international political figures held a press conference in which they said that the electoral process had been “clean,” “open,” and “respectful” ([see note](#)).

On behalf of the opposition in Venezuela, MUD Executive Secretary Jesús Torrealba characterized the PSUV primary elections as the “failed elections of the government-controlled party leadership” and said that a “sad” reality had set in during these primaries, stemming from what he termed weak participation on the part of the people. He pointed out that deployment of the PSUV electoral machine was below that of previous elections, citing figures for the number of votes and voters, asserting that the number provided by Cabello (3,162,400) had to do with the number of votes, not voters. In this regard, the opposition leader stated that the figures announced by Diosdado Cabello was probably lower than what the party had achieved in the 2010 primaries ([listen to audio](#)).³³

Meanwhile, Miranda governor Henrique Capriles declared that there was a “lack of people” in the PSUV primaries and challenged the figures provided by the party ([see video](#)). Other opposition leaders said that the “process was null and void,” accusing the government of forcing civil servants to vote and the PSUV of using State resources to rally its people ([see note](#)).

³² Cabello declared “This will be determined by several factors: election results, the presence of allied party leaders, social movements, street organizations.”

³³ In the 2010 PSUV primary elections 2,575,484 voters participated in the country’s 87 districts. At that time, 3,527 candidates were running for office ([see note](#)).

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