

Executive summary: arrangements for Venezuela's 2020 elections to the National Assembly

This Executive Summary of the briefing *Venezuela's 2020 elections for the National Assembly* provides information on the following aspects of the preparations for the elections to the National Assembly taking place on 6 December 2020:

- a) background to the arrangements for the 6 December national elections
- b) increase in the number and mix of parliamentary representatives
- c) the roadmap for the elections and key activities in July 2020
- d) electoral arrangements' transparency
- e) nominations of candidates and the ballot
- f) other activities designed to provide information and establish trust

Background to the arrangements for the 6 December national elections

In September 2019, the dialogue talks between the Venezuelan Government and representatives of opposition parties resulted in an agreement which, among other things, proposed a new National Electoral Council (CNE). In October, the National Assembly started the process of designating a Nominations Committee for the new members of the CNE, which was formally installed on 9 March 2020.

The plenary session of the National Assembly for the election of the new Board of Directors of the CNE was to take place 30 days after that date. However, owing to the Covid-19 pandemic this did not take place. On March 17, the country entered into a mandatory social quarantine due to the first outbreaks of Covid-19, and in May, the Nominations Committee elected by the National Assembly announced that it would suspend its activities indefinitely because of the pandemic.

In order that the process should comply with the 1999 Constitution (Article 336), a number of representatives of opposition political parties introduced a lawsuit before the Supreme Court of Justice (TSJ) for this to be rectified, with the result that the TSJ took on the responsibility for the restructuring of the National Electoral Council.

On 12 June the Supreme Court of Justice swore in the principal and substitute directors of the National Electoral Council and its component bodies, the National Electoral Board, the Civil and Electoral Registry Commission and the Political Participation and Financing Commission. The new CNE includes both government and opposition representatives.

The CNE's Executive Committee first met on 15 June and on 26 June went into permanent session, enabling the CNE to approve – unanimously – the Special Rules for parliamentary elections for the 2021-2026 period.

CNE increases number and mix of parliamentary representatives

The opposition parties' lawsuit to the TSJ also requested an expansion in proportional representation by increasing the number of positions to be elected by the party list mode (Venezuela uses the D'Hondt method which is also widely used in Europe, Latin America and elsewhere). In response, the CNE announced that the

number of National Assembly deputies to be elected would be increased from 167 to 277, or 66% more. Keeping the existing 87 electoral districts intact, 144 of the seats (52%) would be elected by List votes and 133 seats (48%) would be by Nominal votes (voting for individual candidates). Three seats for Indigenous peoples would be elected by nominal voting.

CNE roadmap for the elections and key activities in July 2020

On 1 July the CNE unanimously agreed the Electoral Schedule and the call for the parliamentary elections to be held on 6 December 2020. The schedule consists of several milestones or specific events for the successful development of the parliamentary elections. Key dates in July included:

13 July

Electoral registration commenced, originally until 26 July but extended until 29 July to allow for the impact of preventive quarantine measures taken by the National Executive to protect the health of the population due to the Covid-19 pandemic. 551 registration points were set up throughout the country, staffed by 1,202 operators who registered a total of 808,522 updates to the register.

23 July

The selection of subordinate electoral bodies of the National Electoral Board was carried out with the assistance of the representatives of the national political organisations who were validly registered to participate in the parliamentary elections. The Board is made up of the Regional Electoral Boards, the Municipal Electoral Boards, the Parish Electoral Boards and the members of the electoral polling stations.

The 24 members of the Regional Election Boards, the members of the 335 Municipal Election Boards, as well as the members of the Parish Election Boards and the members of the polling stations were chosen at random - using the previously audited automated system.

24 July

The CNE published on its website (www.cne.gob.ve) the Special Regulations that will govern the election of the Indigenous people's parliamentary representation.

CNE continues to establish electoral arrangements transparently

8 August

The preliminary Electoral Register was made available to the public with the data collected during the 13 to 29 July Special Electoral period. This enabled the 20,733,941 voters on the electoral register to consult and verify it, with any challenges to be made between 9 and 23 August. The new register had 251,398 new voters, with all deceased voters removed. 483,896 people with disabilities were also registered, to help the CNE to develop policies to assist such voters at election time.

10 August

Provisions for the nominations of candidates to the National Assembly were successfully confirmed with the 24 Regional Electoral Boards. The nominations process was previously reviewed and audited by the participating political organisations. The window for nominations was extended on 18 August, first until 26 August and again until 4 September.

An innovation by the CNE has been the establishment of an automated system of nominations for the parliamentary elections, whereby each person authorised by the participating political organisations is given a user name and password to easily register their nominations through the website www.cne.gob.ve during the nominations period.

14 August

The preliminary Electoral Register was audited, attended by representatives of the political organisations participating in the elections.

The audit of the Electoral Register is the second of the 16 audits carried out during the entire electoral process, from beginning to end, to provide a guarantee of integrity to voters, to political parties and to national and international public opinion. Venezuela's automated system is thus the most audited in the region and the world.

The 16 audits (accessible via a live streaming channel at <http://vod.streamingconnect.tv/cnetv/user/>) are:

Audit of the selection of the secondary electoral bodies (carried out on July 17)	Voting machine production audit
Auditing of voter data	Pre-dispatch audit of voting machines
Voting machine software audit	Audit of the zeroing of the totalisation centres
Totalisation software audit	Telecommunications audit Stage 1
Audit of the voting machines archive	Citizen verification audit Stage 1
Audit of voting records	Telecommunications audit Stage 2
Audit of the electoral technology infrastructure	Citizen verification audit Stage 2
	Auditing of Stage 2 Voter Data

Nominations of candidates and the ballot

During the period for nominations, more than 14,000 nominations were received from political organisations, of which more than 3,000 were from established political organisations and their alliances. More than 90% of the expected nominations from political organisations were lodged. A total of 107 political organisations are participating: 30 national organisations, 53 regional organisations, 6 national indigenous organisations, and 18 regional indigenous organisations.

On September 9, it was agreed - together with the national political and indigenous organisations – where the location would be in the electronic ballot to be used in the

6 December parliamentary elections of their respective identifying logos. Regional political and indigenous organisations similarly agreed their respective locations on 11 September.

It is important to note that the choice of position in the ballot was made in accordance with Article 70 of the Organic Law of Electoral Processes, based on the result of the list of votes obtained by the parties in the previous election to deliberative bodies.

Other CNE and government activities designed to provide information and establish trust

CNE workshop on electoral information

The CNE held a videoconferencing workshop to provide information and encourage reflection on and analysis of the electoral processes. The workshop was attended by various sectors, such as journalists and media professionals (including the private media), representatives of public authorities and political organisations, as well as the vice-chancellors of both public and private universities.

CNE workshop on electoral financial information for political organisations

At the headquarters of the National Electoral Council, the Electoral Information Workshop was held to present the details of the Automated Accountability System (SARC) to participating political organisations.

The SARC tool allows for a transparent presentation of the origin and destination of the funding received by the organisations for the operation and execution of their electoral campaigns.

Health protocols

The electoral schedule and arrangements have been devised to comply with all the necessary preventive Covid-19 pandemic health protocols to protect the population from possible infection.

Invitations for election observer delegations

The Venezuelan government has invited both the United Nations (UN) and the European Union (EU) to monitor the December 6 National Assembly [elections](#).

Foreign Minister Jorge Arreaza wrote on [Twitter](#) that letters had been sent to UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres and EU Foreign Policy Chief Josep Borrell explaining the electoral guarantees put in place and inviting them to send observers.

However, the EU has responded that the Venezuelan government so far has not met the “minimum conditions” required to permit the EU to do so, adding that “time is already too short” to deploy a full EU electoral observer mission if the Maduro administration does not delay the vote beyond the current date of 6 December – despite this date having been publicly known since 1 July.

Venezuela Solidarity Campaign, October 2020 www.venezuelasolidarity.co.uk