

National Assembly Elections 6th December 2020: Q & A

On December 6 Venezuela held its twenty-sixth election since Hugo Chávez was elected President in 1998. Venezuelans elected a new National Assembly, with deputies holding office for five years, from January 5, 2021 to January 5, 2026.

What do deputies do? Their responsibilities include passing laws, constitutional reforms, approving public budgets, auditing and/or removing public officials and ministers, authorising foreign military missions in the country, approving international agreements and appointing public powers such as National Electoral Council rectors and Supreme Court judges. The National Assembly is one of five independent branches of the State.

Why were the elections held in 2020? Could they not have been delayed, as the European Union requested? Venezuela's constitution clearly states that elections must be held in 2020 as the current parliamentary term expires on January 5, 2021.

How were the elections conducted and overseen? The National Electoral Council (CNE), reconstituted with both government and opposition representatives, unanimously agreed on 1 July the electoral schedule. All the participating parties agreed with the CNE to a series of electoral guarantees to provide a surety of integrity to voters, to political parties and to national and international public opinion. This included 16 audits (accessible via a live streaming channel at <http://vod.streamingconnect.tv/cnetv/user/>) carried out during the entire electoral process, from beginning to end, attended by representatives of the political organisations participating in the elections. Right-wing opposition candidates were given ample access to public and private means of communication for campaigning.

Who was eligible for voting? 20.7 million people, including 51,398 new voters.

What were the voters' options? 107 political parties participated in the elections, with 14,400 candidates standing (three times more than in 2015). They were principally grouped into five blocs, two from the left and three blocs drawn from opposition parties.

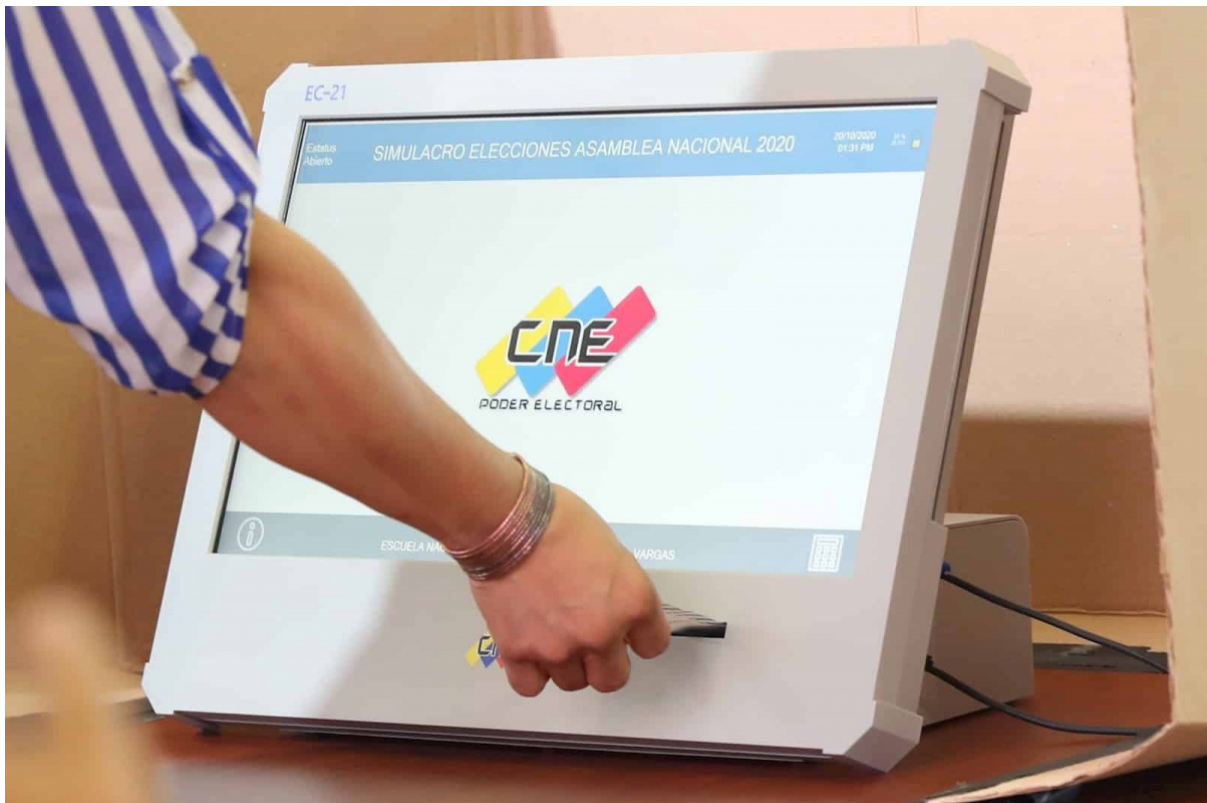


Who did voters elect? 277 deputies, 111 more than in the previous parliament. Forty-eight of these were elected on a newly constructed national list system and 96 on regional lists, both via the [D'Hondt proportional representation method](#). 130 come from the country's constituencies via first-past-the-post systems. Three indigenous deputies were also elected in reserved seats.

Who won the election? According to the National Electoral Council (CNE)'s first call of results, United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV) and allied candidates are projected to win at least 189 of the 277-seat assembly, after netting 68% of the vote with 98.63% counted. Final results are audited – one of the 16 audits mentioned earlier.

What was the turnout and how did it compare with other elections? Only 30.5% of the electoral roll participated in the vote, well below the 74% in the 2015 Assembly elections. However, turnout in Assembly elections has fluctuated considerably, from 25% in 2005 when the entire opposition boycotted the elections to 66% in 2010.

How did election day unfold? People could vote from 7am to 6pm with just their ID card and fingerprint, but electoral authorities could keep voting centres that still had voters waiting open until 8pm. The voting system used new electronic touchscreen machines after over 95% of existing machines were destroyed in an arson attack in February 2020. A paper backup was also produced, allowing for audits of the electronic tallies to be carried out.



The new EC-21 voting machine used in the election. (CNE)

Were there international observers present? To provide confidence in the process, both at home and abroad, a host of multilateral bodies, including the UN, CARICOM and the African Union, were invited, as well as the Council of Latin American Electoral Experts (CEELA). 1,500 observers and 300 representatives from over 34 countries attended the elections, including Spain's former President Jose Rodriguez Zapatero, who commented: "Neither sanctions nor blockades are the answer. There is no better path than democracy. There will be no better tool for solving problems than dialogue and coexistence,"

The EU, however, turned down an invitation in October after its demand that the vote be postponed, giving the excuse that there was insufficient time to organise a mission. Electoral missions will be producing their reports in a matter of days after the election.

How biosecure was the election? What COVID-19 controls were in place?

Facemasks were mandatory and disinfecting stations were incorporated into the voting stations. The touchscreen machines were also disinfected after every vote. Arrangements were made for guaranteeing social distancing in the queues and voting centres, and all electoral staff underwent a prior COVID-19 test. Postal votes were not allowed, but this was offset by the fact that Venezuela has one of the highest number of voting centres compared to its electoral register in the world, as well as a quick voting process, reducing large crowds.

How and when were the results announced? General results were announced by the National Electoral Council (CNE) on Sunday evening, with more specific local ones reported during the course of the night. 99% of the votes were counted by early evening on Monday 7th. Final results are made available on the CNE's website (<http://www.cne.gob.ve>).

What has been the international reaction? As expected, the Trump administration has continued to back the self-declared “interim president” Juan Guaidó, and have already labelled the elections a fraud, declaring that they will not recognise the new parliament (<https://www.state.gov/the-united-states-condemns-venezuelas-fraudulent-legislative-elections/>).

The EU similarly stated it could not recognise the elections as credible, inclusive or transparent (<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2020/12/07/venezuela-declaration-by-the-high-representative-on-behalf-of-the-european-union-on-the-elections-for-the-national-assembly/>).

The UK government’s statement said it considered the election to have been illegitimate and therefore does not recognise the new National Assembly, continuing to recognise the National Assembly elected in 2015 and Juan Guaidó as ‘interim president’ (<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/fcdo-statement-venezuelan-national-assembly-elections>).

Other countries, however, including Venezuela’s key allies China and Russia, are expected to recognise the results and the new National Assembly.

VSC, 9 December 2020