

ELECTION REPORT ☆

Expert Mission to Observe Regional and Local Elections in Venezuela

Final Report

2021

Venezuela

THE
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Introduction

On July 27, 2021, The Carter Center was invited by the National Electoral Council (*Consejo Nacional Electoral*—CNE) of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to send an electoral mission to observe regional and municipal elections scheduled for Nov. 21. This report presents the findings of the Carter Center’s international electoral expert mission, which began its work remotely in October before continuing in person Nov. 7-27 in Venezuela.

The Carter Center signed a memorandum of understanding with the CNE on Oct. 25, 2021, in accordance with guidelines for election observation established in the Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation and the accompanying Code of Conduct for International Election Observers, both of which were broadly endorsed at a meeting held at the United Nations in 2005.¹

The Center assessed the electoral process in the light of the national legal framework and the principles and commitments on democratic elections enshrined in the regional and international instruments Venezuela has ratified. The underlying principles of these instruments require guarantees for all citizens that include: a) the requirement of rule of law and access to justice; b) the right of all citizens to participate in the electoral process – as voters and/or candidates; c) the right to associate and assemble in interest groups and political parties in free movement and campaigns; d) freedom of opinion and expression with access to information to the electoral process; and e) citizen security throughout the electoral process.

The Center’s electoral mission focused on key aspects of the Venezuelan electoral process, including the legal framework for elections; the effectiveness and transparency of election preparations; the environment in which election campaigns were conducted, including freedom of the media and respect for fundamental participation rights; the use of social media, including an analysis of disinformation on social media; and the CNE’s transparency about the electronic voting system, including during vote tabulation.

The expert team was in Venezuela on election day but was not able to evaluate the voting, ballot counting, and tabulation processes because of its limited size and scope.

¹ The Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation can be found at: <https://aceproject.org/electoral-advice/election-observation/declaration-of-principles-for-international>.

Executive Summary

On Nov. 21, 2021, voters selected candidates to fill 3,082 government offices in Venezuela’s regional and municipal elections. Elections were held in all 23 states (for governors and state representatives) and in each of the 335 municipalities (for mayors and councilors). Governors and mayors were elected by simple majority. State representatives and councilors were elected under a mixed-member proportional representation system: 60% based on party lists and 40% by simple majority in single-member districts. Indigenous community representatives were elected on Nov. 26 by indirect voting.

Political Context

The backdrop to the Venezuelan regional and municipal elections was a widespread socioeconomic and humanitarian crisis (aggravated by the COVID-19 pandemic), a pattern of political repression, severely restricted rights to political participation and freedom of expression, the government’s overt use of its incumbent political advantage, and an uneven playing field. However, negotiations between some opposition groups and the ruling party resulted in three major changes in the electoral environment: a concerted reshuffling of the election commission by the National Assembly (*Asamblea Nacional*—AN) that gave the opposition more representation; the presence of international observers; and talks between the government and the opposition that began in Mexico City in August.

Legal Framework

Generally speaking, Venezuela’s election legislation provides a suitable foundation for conducting democratic elections and ensures the right of women, Indigenous peoples, and people with disabilities to participate. However, legal provisions concerning the media and freedom of expression, the registration of candidates, the suspension of political rights, and the financing of political parties and election campaigns do not comply with international standards for democratic elections and agreements signed by Venezuela.

Furthermore, the competitiveness and general transparency of the process were undermined by the failure to enforce national legislation, including campaign rules; the CNE’s reluctance or failure to address blatant legal violations; and the lack of transparency about the criteria used to make key decisions. CNE sessions are not public. Because decisions and other official information are not published on a consistent basis, there is an overreliance on informal channels of information, to the detriment of the principles of transparency, accessibility, clarity, and legal certainty.

Decisions by Venezuela’s Supreme Tribunal of Justice (*Tribunal Supremo de Justicia*—TSJ) and the General Accountability Office (GAO) (*Contraloría General*) directly impacted the legal conditions for the elections, which were marked by the barring of many key opposition candidates and the TSJ’s arbitrary replacement of the executive committees of opposition parties and Chavista dissidents. There also was a general atmosphere of political repression, and more than 250 people are being held as political prisoners.

Election Administration

In May 2021, the National Assembly appointed five officials to the CNE: Pedro Enrique Calzadilla Pérez (president), Enrique Octavio Márquez Pérez (vice president), Tania D’Amelio Cardiet, Alexis José Corredor Pérez, and Roberto Antonio Picón Herrera. These appointments were the result of political negotiations that included the ruling party, opposition groups that do have representation in the National Assembly, and civil society organizations. The five

appointees include three members linked to the ruling party and two with ties to the opposition.

The inclusion of individuals tied to the opposition as magistrates in the CNE opened the door to building broader trust in the independence and credibility of the body. It also generated behavior that provided greater predictability and trust in the rules of competition, greater guarantees for the electorate and opposition parties, and a demonstration of greater independence. In general, the political system and civil society consider the arrangement to be an improvement on the previous election administration situation, although concerns persist. The government still maintains power in the CNE, but the commission is less slanted than it has been in recent decades. That said, its makeup shows a clear disregard for the spirit of the constitution, which demands that the CNE have no ties to political parties.

The CNE's attitude helped defuse tensions and made it possible to hold the 2021 regional elections with the participation of the main political forces, representing a positive shift from recent years. Most of the opposition announced it would participate, after refusing to participate in the 2017 elections and after major sectors of the opposition boycotted the 2018 and 2020 elections.

Voter Registry

The voter registry contained 21,267,813 people, including approximately 108,030 registered voters living abroad. That number is low, given that reports on Venezuela's migratory crisis indicate that by 2021, 5.9 million Venezuelans have emigrated, an estimated 3 million of whom are registered to vote.

Registration of Candidates

The CNE registered a total of 70,244 candidates, largely nominated by the ruling party's Great Patriotic Pole coalition (*Gran Polo Patriótico*—GPP) and five opposition coalitions: the Democratic Alliance (*Alianza Democrática*—AD); the Popular Revolutionary Alternative (*Alternativa Popular Revolucionaria*—APR); the National Independent Coalition (*Coalición Nacional Independiente*); Neighborhood Force (*Fuerza Vecinal*); and the Democratic Unity Roundtable (*Mesa de la Unidad Democrática*—MUD). While the ruling party nominated one candidate per office, the opposition vote was divided between political alternatives. Some sectors of the opposition continued calling for abstention and did not participate.

Electronic Voting System

Venezuela's election system is fully automated, and the CNE audits every phase of the process, including the voter registry list, the software's source code, voting machines, transmission centers, satellite antennas, the Movilnet center,² and other communications and infrastructure elements, as well as the processes of voting, counting, and transmitting and tabulating results. A series of audits were held during and after the election process, in the presence of experts, party representatives, and observers. All auditors agreed that the electronic voting system is secure.

The Campaign Period

The campaign period was marked by the ruling party's overt use of its incumbent political advantage and indiscriminate use of government funds for election purposes. The ruling party exercised its advantage over a divided opposition in a campaign period that was characterized by low voter engagement, lack of funds (particularly for the opposition), and a calm

² Movilnet is a state-owned mobile phone company, whose infrastructure is used for mobile communications to transmit results from polling stations. Results are also transmitted by landline (CANTV) and satellite transmissions.

atmosphere, with almost no incidents or clashes between antagonistic political groups. The electoral period saw coordinated partisan propaganda on social media, primarily by the state apparatus.

In the past 20 years, the Venezuelan government has set up a legal framework that severely restricts freedom of expression and the right of access to information. The media's role in these elections was marked by polarization, lack of resources, and difficulties for journalists covering campaigns. In terms of disinformation, the international warrant for the arrest of Venezuelan diplomat Alex Saab and his subsequent extradition to the United States was the main topic on social media, both before and during the campaign period. Networks of pro-government bots³ played a particularly strong role in spreading the disinformation.

Campaign Finance

The CNE has authority over campaign finance. Candidates and parties must submit monthly financial reports and ledgers with accrued campaign expenses via an automated system. However, campaign finance is underregulated and violates international agreements because there are no legal maximums for contributions or spending and no laws requiring public disclosure of party and candidate finances for public scrutiny. Therefore, the system lacks transparency and fails to ensure accountability and a level playing field.

Women's Participation

There are no legal barriers to women's political participation in Venezuela. The regulatory framework for the 2021 elections established a gender quota of 50% and required that candidate lists follow the principles of parity and alternation. However, the CNE allowed candidate lists that failed to meet gender alternation requirements to be registered. Consequently, many female candidates were relegated to the bottom of the lists, in positions where they had little chance of being elected. Although women constituted 51.4% of the voter registry and 49.4% of assembly and council candidates, and despite the fact that 18% of governor and mayoral candidates were women, women were elected to less than 10% of contested executive offices.

Compared with the 2017 elections, the situation for female politicians in Venezuela worsened: The number of female governors and mayors dropped by 40% and 16%, respectively. At the grassroots level, women were well-represented in election administration and campaigns. However, women in Venezuela remain underrepresented in political life. There also is unequal representation in parties' internal structures, where executive committees continue to be dominated by men. This gap is wider in opposition parties.

Participation of Indigenous Peoples

Indigenous peoples constitute approximately 2.5% of Venezuela's total population of 32.9 million. The political participation of Indigenous peoples at every level of government is protected by law, although there is no registry of Indigenous voters. People who self-identify as Indigenous were able to vote on Nov. 21 and participate in the special elections on Nov. 26 through an indirect voting system involving more than 4,000 spokespersons (*voceros*) elected by Indigenous communities between July 6 and Aug. 13. Although this system is a temporary measure to ensure that only members of Indigenous communities participate in electing their representatives, Indigenous associations and groups argue that these CNE rules are illegal

³ Bots are software programs that work autonomously or in coordination with each other to spread disinformation on social media. Their speed and processing capacity allow them to easily manipulate public opinion, whether by sabotaging conversations with insults and disparagement, or by undermining the reputation of some candidates and artificially exalting that of others.

because they violate the principles of universal and direct voting by secret ballot enshrined in the constitution.

Election Observation

The 2021 election was monitored by both local citizen and international observers. National observers noted that the CNE showed greater openness and more willingness to collaborate. It invited international observers from The Carter Center, the European Union (EU), and the United Nations (U.N.). For the first time in years, these organizations sent electoral observation missions to Venezuela, with varying styles. Along with the invitations, the CNE extended the usual guarantees for these types of missions and therefore addressed the restrictive legal framework for external delegations, known as “accompaniment” (a limited presence subject to certain CNE conditions).

However, despite initial encouraging signs, the CNE imposed a limit on the number of local observers each mission might have. Furthermore, following the elections, the foreign ministry did not allow the extension of visas of EU observers. Therefore, the EU mission left the country after their preliminary report was published.

Election Day

The mission noted that there were no reports of major technical difficulties on election day itself, and voting operations unfolded smoothly in an orderly fashion. While most of the country experienced a peaceful election day, one person in Zulia state was shot to death, and local observers and journalists were assaulted.

International and national observers noted delays in opening and closing polling places, abuses of the assisted voting arrangement, “red points” (*puntos rojos*) near several voting stations, and conspicuous military presence at every polling center. Red points are ruling party-sponsored locations near polling places where voters report before voting. These locations have been criticized by the opposition as a method to track voters and correlate voting with government benefits.

Resolution of Election-Related Disputes

Venezuela’s procedures for appeals and challenges generally are aligned with international agreements and best practices. Electoral legislation establishes the right to reparation of injured parties and the principles of judicial control and appeals. There are two avenues for resolving election disputes in Venezuela: administrative proceedings conducted by the CNE, whose decisions can be contested by filing an appeal with the TSJ, and judicial proceedings conducted by ordinary criminal courts.

Civil society organizations and groups of local observers documented thousands of irregularities and complaints, including campaign rule violations, intimidation, movements of voters to other voting centers, and red points. However, no formal complaints were lodged, which demonstrates a low degree of trust in the system. Furthermore, the Carter Center’s interlocutors pointed to the corruption, imbalance, and discretionary powers of the courts as factors that discourage people from seeking judicial solutions.

On Dec. 14, 2021, MUD candidates for the governorship of Apure and the mayor’s office of San Fernando de Apure challenged the results that awarded victory to candidates of the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (*Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela*—PSUV). The CNE upheld the original results.

Results

Voter turnout was 42.2%. This rate is lower than in previous years but exceeds turnout for the 2020 legislative elections, which only mobilized the pro-government base. The results favored the ruling party. In gubernatorial races, the ruling party won 19 states compared with four won by the opposition (including in Barinas, where the results were nullified, with a repeat election on Jan. 9, 2022). Of these four, MUD claimed three victories (Barinas, Cojedes, and Zulia) and Democratic Alliance one (New Sparta). On the municipal level, the PSUV won 213 mayoral offices, and the various opposition forces won 122.

The strongest opposition factions were MUD, which won 63 mayoral races; Democratic Alliance, which won 22; and Neighborhood Force, with 10 mayoral victories. This distribution of offices did not reflect the country's overall vote totals, in which the PSUV received fewer votes than the combined opposition. This contrast between votes cast and offices won can be explained, first by the fragmentation of opposition candidacies, and second by the fact that the opposition won more votes in more populated districts, such as in the state of Zulia.

Acceptance of Results

Various incidents took place in the days following Nov. 21: looting was reported in five mayoral offices in the states of Zulia, Bolívar, Monagas, and Miranda. The elected mayor and four other members of his team were arrested in the state of Mérida when they tried to prevent the mayor's office from being looted by pro-government supporters who had lost the election. CNE Magistrate Roberto Picón publicly rejected the arbitrary detention. In the state of Guárico, an attempt was made to arrest newly elected mayor Juan Germán Roscio and the judge who conducted his swearing-in.

Repeat Elections in Barinas

On Nov. 29, the TSJ issued a controversial decision ordering the suspension of vote tabulation in the Barinas gubernatorial contest, where the opposition led the ruling party by a small margin, and ordering the CNE to repeat elections in Barinas on Jan. 9, 2022. The TSJ's decision confirms a pattern of intervention by the court, which undermines Venezuela's obligation to conduct genuinely democratic elections. According to accounts from local observers, conditions for the repeat election were stacked against the opposition. The opposition party had difficulties registering its candidate, and the state backed a massive canvassing effort and militarized election day. Despite these conditions, the opposition candidate won by a landslide, and the ruling party's candidate quickly conceded.

Sociopolitical Context

A Country in Turmoil

Venezuela's 2021 regional and municipal elections were held amid one of Latin America's most severe socioeconomic, political, and humanitarian crises of the past 100 years. The economy has shrunk drastically, particularly since 2014. Numerous economic sectors have disintegrated and collapsed, while hyperinflation devalued the Venezuelan bolívar and resulted in the dollarization of certain circuits in an attempt to regain stability. Social impacts have been similarly severe, with a sustained rise in poverty in all its forms and in all segments of society. The decline in public social services affects the most vulnerable groups' access to health care, education, and transportation. The government attempts to soften these blows by distributing food. The combined social and economic crisis has set in motion a mass exodus estimated at 5.9 million Venezuelans, most of whom have emigrated to other South American countries.

Two factors have intensified the recession. First, following the election of Nicolás Maduro in 2018, the U.S. and Europe led members of the international community in imposing sanctions on Venezuela. These sanctions have affected the established ways in which Venezuela participates in the world economy. Second, measures to contain the spread of the coronavirus have further slowed the flagging economy.

Political and Electoral Crisis

Venezuela also has suffered a massive political crisis, in tandem with the socioeconomic crisis and with many overlaps between the two. The political system changed course sharply at the end of 20th century when Hugo Chávez came to power following the collapse of the traditional two-party system, which had consisted of Democratic Action (*Acción Democrática*—AD) and the Social Christian Party (*Comité de Organización Política Electoral Independiente*—COPEI). In 1999, as part of this wave of change, a new constitution – presented as a fresh start for the country – was enacted, together with new election rules, amid a tense and polarized electorate. There were major conflicts, such as when one segment of the opposition refused to acknowledge Chávez's victory in the 2004 recall referendum, or when some opposition parties decided not to participate in the 2005 parliamentary elections.

However, the legitimacy of election processes was later restored with fiercely contested electoral contests, especially between 2012 and 2015. That momentum was lost following the 2015 legislative election, which the opposition won, sparking an intense political and electoral crisis in which neither side recognized the legitimacy of the other. This crisis was characterized by the creation of parallel institutions, dysfunctional electoral mechanisms, and voter apathy.

The government did not recognize the legitimacy of the opposition majority in the National Assembly, which led to the creation of parallel institutions. As a *de facto* way to block the National Assembly, in 2017 the government held an election for a Constituent Assembly, with slanted electoral rules. The opposition did not participate in this election.

Although the Constituent Assembly did not rewrite the constitution in any way, it appropriated legislative powers for itself and ceased operating when a new National Assembly, with a ruling-party majority, was elected in 2020. Parallelism also took the form of “protectorates”: In locations where the opposition elected authorities, the government designated a representative who performed similar duties but had more resources.

In 2018, Maduro was reelected president as much of the opposition decided not to participate because of the lack of democratic procedural guarantees. Then the majority-opposition National Assembly elected Juan Guaidó interim president of Venezuela, challenging Maduro's presidency. Guaidó was recognized by more than 50 countries, including many in Latin America and Europe, as well as by the U.S. and multilateral organizations.

The erosion of the credibility of the electoral system during the 2017 and 2018 processes was evident. For this reason, the opposition did not participate in the 2017 Constituent Assembly, and much of the opposition abstained from voting in the 2018 presidential election and the 2020 legislative election. Under these conditions, governing authorities have enjoyed little legitimacy within the country and limited recognition from international actors.

This political and electoral quagmire, together with the socioeconomic crisis, provoked a profound public disenchantment with the political process, institutions, and political leaders. Opinion polls show that people are deeply discouraged by the state of the country and unmotivated to participate in elections.

Lead-up to the 2021 Regional Election

The legislative election of December 2020 was mired in controversy, and its legitimacy was called into question. The main opposition forces did not participate. However, various organizations affiliated with the ruling party did participate, and some even used acronyms that had previously stood for major opposition parties. They were able to use the acronyms after the electoral justice system transferred legal control of these parties to other political leaders. Organizations then registered candidates under this new leadership. Meanwhile, key opposition figures were barred legally from running for office, and many more were exiled.

Under these conditions, most of the international community did not endorse the election. According to official figures, turnout was 30.5%, a statistic the opposition rejects as inflated. This turnout represents a sharp downturn from the 74.1% of voters who participated in the 2015 elections.

The ruling party, organized around the PSUV, obtained an absolute majority of the vote (69.3%). In terms of seats, this difference was amplified by the electoral system's majoritarian effects, and the government bloc took 253 of 277 seats (91.3%). For the 2020 elections, following a TSJ decision not to apply certain articles of electoral law, the CNE expanded the National Assembly by 86 seats (in 2015 it had 167 seats). The opposition was only able to win about 20 seats, apart from those filled by Indigenous representatives.

Between the disputed 2020 legislative election and the call for the 2021 regional elections, at least three important changes were made to the election environment following negotiations between opposition sectors and the ruling party, in which organized civil society also played a key role.

First, the Legislative Assembly took concerted action to reshuffle the CNE to give the opposition more representation. Second, international election observers were invited, when in recent elections the government only allowed a restricted number of monitors whose movements and access were limited. Third, the government and majority opposition groups started a round of talks in Mexico City, facilitated by Norway.

Conditions for the Election

Despite improvements over previous elections, the conditions for Venezuela's 2021 regional election were fragile. An election's conditions refer to the essential obligations and standards

for a democratic election (The Carter Center, 2016). In other words, they are the guarantees in place for an election, which both include and extend beyond direct participants (election authorities, parties, and candidates). These conditions concern the exercise of freedoms and rights by citizens as a whole and by societal and political actors. Ultimately, these conditions allow power to truly be contested, therefore making alternation possible.

For an election to meet these standards, it must have: a balanced legal framework that is enforced; fairly designed voter districts; an impartial and transparent electoral body; a broad and nondiscriminatory registry of citizens; freedom to campaign for parties and candidates; freedom of the media; free and fair competition; the right to vote by secret ballots that are properly tallied at every stage; opportunities to observe the process; and impartial and effective mechanisms for resolving disputes. This list is not exhaustive, but it illustrates the point that an election cannot be judged on the basis of election day alone. Rather, it is important to examine multiple prior and concurrent processes.

When all political currents enjoy unrestricted participation, in a free contest for power, with clear fair rules, without decisive interference by the government or any other factor that could determine the balance of power, and power is truly at stake, then the conditions are in place for a competitive, pluralistic, and democratic election. However, as these conditions are restricted, an election becomes less democratic, even to the point of losing its democratic quality altogether.

Even prior to the call for the 2021 elections, the conditions for competitive and pluralistic elections in Venezuela faced serious difficulties. In fact, these problems have been present for several years, and many of them are not within the CNE's power to resolve. There is a clear asymmetry between the ruling party's incumbent political advantage and the adversity faced by the opposition or independent actors.

These issues can be grouped into four critical categories: The first is restriction of freedoms that are then only exercised in limited ways. The second is the ruling party's overwhelming advantages. The third concerns legal uncertainty and biased use of the law in the government's favor. The fourth category, which had a major impact on the 2021 election, is the seriously flawed process for authorizing (or barring) parties and candidates. None of these categories represents a new development.

Main Characteristics of the 2021 Regional Election

Government Structure

Venezuela is a federal republic consisting of 23 states and the capital district. In administrative terms, the country is divided into 335 municipalities which, in turn, are divided into 1,136 parishes. Venezuela's constitution establishes five branches of government: executive, legislative, judicial, electoral, and citizen. National elections are held for the president as head of state and head of the government and for a unicameral legislature. At the local level, elections are held for governors, mayors, state representatives, and municipal councilors.

Electoral System

In the 2021 regional and municipal elections in Venezuela, voters selected candidates to fill 3,082 government offices. Elections were held in all 23 states (for governors and state representatives) and in each of the 335 municipalities (for mayors and councilors). A total of 23 governors, 253 state representatives, 335 mayors, and 2,471 councilors were elected. In 2021, the two processes were once again held concurrently (the last gubernatorial elections, in 2017, were held separately from the municipal elections, which took place in 2018).

Governors and mayors were elected by simple majority. State representatives and councilors were elected under a mixed-member proportional representation system. Pursuant to TSJ Decision 68-2020, the CNE ordered that 60% of offices be elected based on party lists and 40% by simple majority in single-member districts. In addition, local Indigenous authorities were elected by indirect voting.

Main Contenders

More than 70,000 candidates ran for office, largely nominated by political parties grouped into five main coalitions. The first is the ruling party's coalition, the Great Patriotic Pole (GPP), whose main member is the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV). Then there are the five opposition coalitions. The Popular Revolutionary Alternative (APR) brought together dissenting elements and former allies of the government. The Democratic Unity Roundtable (MUD) coalition ticket represented the G4 coalition, which is considered the opposition's main faction and consists of Justice First (*Primero Justicia*), A New Era (*Un Nuevo Tiempo*), Popular Will (*Voluntad Popular*), and Democratic Action. The opposition bloc also includes the Democratic Alliance (AD), the National Independent Coalition (CNI), and Neighborhood Power (FV).

While the ruling party nominated one candidate per office, multiple candidates from the various opposition groups competed for the same office. Additionally, certain opposition sectors decided not to participate and called for abstention.

It was not until June 2021 that the CNE reinstated the MUD opposition coalition ticket, which had been declared illegal by the TSJ in 2018.⁴ The brief interval between MUD's reinstatement and election day affected its organizational capacity, especially during initial phases of the process and in registering candidates.

⁴According to the TSJ decision, the MUD unity ticket "openly [violated] the prohibition on dual party membership."

Legal Framework

Venezuela has ratified international and regional treaties on human rights and election standards. These include the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (CCPR) and its optional protocols; the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD); the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD); the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and its optional protocol; and Convention No. 169 on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries (ILO Convention 169).

Venezuela is a member of the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) and the Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR), and is a signatory of the Ushuaia protocol on democratic commitment within MERCOSUR. Venezuela rejoined the jurisdiction of the Inter-American Court on Human Rights in May 2019, six years after having withdrawn from the American Convention on Human Rights in 2012. The constitutional order of priority puts these international treaties above domestic law, and they are directly applicable by courts and bodies of the Venezuelan government, according to the constitution (Article 23). Venezuela left the Organization of American States in 2019.

However, the executive branch's hegemony over other branches and institutions, coupled with ineffective separation of powers, opens the door to arbitrary use of legal provisions for political or partisan ends, and puts opposition and independent actors in a vulnerable position. Laws become a point of reference instead of providing certainty or predictability. Legal uncertainty, which affects the competitiveness of politics and elections, also affects the quality of democracy.

The primary stumbling block is not how laws are drafted, although the wording of certain provisions creates gray areas open to individual judgment. Rather, it is how those laws are interpreted and enforced.

In other words, laws and regulations are freely construed to suit political circumstances, especially the interests of the government, which is the decisive actor because of its control and influence over the institutional structure that accepts or rejects the demands of other stakeholders. Provisions may be enforced loosely or strictly, or disregarded altogether, because there is no authority to offer an effective remedy when a rule is ignored.

Elections

Venezuela's system of laws on parliamentary elections includes the 1999 Constitution of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, the 2009 Organic Law of Electoral Processes (*Ley Orgánica de Procesos Electorales*), and the Organic Law of the Electoral Branch (*Ley Orgánica del Poder Electoral*), supplemented by decisions, instructions, and rules issued by the CNE.⁵

The system of laws generally provides a suitable basis for holding democratic elections. However, legal provisions concerning the registration of candidates, the suspension of political rights, and the financing of political parties and election campaigns, as well as those related to

⁵ Other relevant laws include the 1965 Law on Political Parties, Public Gatherings, and Demonstrations (*Ley de Partidos Políticos, Reuniones Públicas, y Manifestaciones*), the 2002 Organic Law of the Electoral Branch (*Ley Orgánica del Poder Electoral*), and the 2005 Criminal Code.

national and international observation,⁶ do not comply with international standards and agreements signed by Venezuela.

Furthermore, the overall competitiveness of the process has been negatively affected by failure to enforce national legislation (including campaign rules); the CNE's reluctance or failure to address blatant legal violations; the lack of transparency about the criteria used to make essential decisions about the electoral process, such as barring or replacing candidates; and the inadequate or nonexistent access to official information from the CNE on key decisions, which undermined the clarity of the process and legal certainty.

The decisions of the TSJ and GAO also directly affected the election's legal environment. They severely restricted the political plurality and competitiveness of the process by interfering with the executive committees of some parties and by stripping prominent members of the opposition and of the dissenting Chavismo faction of their political rights. These measures were not founded on clear and objective criteria that would justify them, so they are perceived as arbitrary and partisan.

As an explicit obligation in the ICCPR, rule of law is recognized as an essential condition for respecting human rights and representative democracy. International and regional treaties stipulate that states must adopt measures or policies to ensure the fair and impartial administration of justice, bearing in mind that all people are equal under the law and that laws must be applied under equal conditions.⁷ Furthermore, laws must be consistent with international human rights,⁸ and states must perform their treaty-based obligations in good faith. Meanwhile, the provisions of domestic legislation cannot be used to justify failure to fulfill treaty-based obligations. Laws and procedures cannot be applied arbitrarily, and participatory rights cannot be suspended or excluded, except on objective and reasonable legal grounds.⁹

The constitution

The 1999 constitution guarantees fundamental rights and the freedoms of association, assembly, movement, opinion, and press. It also establishes an independent judiciary, guarantees the right to vote and be elected in periodic elections with universal and fair suffrage by secret ballot, and stipulates that parliamentary elections must adhere to the principles of proportional representation and election by simple majority (Articles 63 and 186). The constitution offers an extensive list of human rights and provides formal guarantees for these rights.

Electoral law

The 2009 Organic Law of Electoral Processes describes the electoral system and details key aspects of the process, such as voter and candidate registration. It also addresses electoral campaigns, election administration, and the procedure for election challenges, appeals, and sanctions.

The National Electoral Council (CNE)

The CNE has broad powers, from setting electoral district boundaries to defining the rights and obligations of national and international observers. The general regulations adopted by the CNE in 2013 were revised on May 20, 2021, six months before the elections, as stipulated

⁶ International observation of the 2021 elections was authorized by a special CNE resolution on Oct. 4, 2021. http://www.cne.gob.ve/web/sala_prensa/noticia_detallada.php?id=4016.

⁷ For example, U.N., ICCPR, Article 14 and OAS, American Convention on Human Rights, Article 8.

⁸ As stated in the U.N., ICCPR, Article 2(2) and OAS, American Convention on Human Rights, Article 2.

⁹ As stated in U.N., ICCPR, Article 25 and OAS, American Convention on Human Rights, Article 23(1)(b).

by the constitution. Also, the CNE drafted and updated more than a dozen regulations, manuals, sets of instructions, and resolutions. Although these elections were governed by the same laws as in previous elections, the CNE introduced some positive changes through its regulations. These included, for example, inviting international observer organizations; establishing additional safeguards for assisted voting; introducing a minimum gender quota of over 50% for candidate lists; and, in agreement with the opposition, requiring an academic audit.

The Venezuelan Supreme Tribunal of Justice (TSJ)

The TSJ is the highest authority in the Venezuelan judicial system and, as such, heads the judicial branch. In election matters, the TSJ has jurisdiction to handle appeal proceedings to protect electoral rights, adversarial proceedings related to elections, and challenges to CNE decisions.

For the 2021 elections, the TSJ actively shaped the process through the decisions of its constitutional and electoral chamber. Of particular note, the TSJ's electoral chamber cited a breach of party bylaws to justify its intervention to replace the executive committees of opposition and dissenting political parties with other leadership bodies without offering clear or objective criteria for its decision. In addition, the TSJ's constitutional chamber repealed provisions of the electoral law governing the election of indigenous representatives¹⁰ and ordered the CNE to fill the "legal vacuum" created by the TSJ's own decision, establishing an indirect voting mechanism that undermines the constitutional principles of direct election, universal suffrage, and voting by secret ballot.

The TSJ's recent decision to suspend the tabulation of votes for the governorship of Barinas is the latest example of its interference in the electoral process. The TSJ called for new elections to be held in Barinas state in January 2022, citing the disqualification of the opposition candidate Freddy Superlano, ignoring the presidential decree of Aug. 31, 2020, that pardoned 110 citizens, including Superlano, making him eligible to run for office.

The General Accountability Office

The GAO is a constitutionally autonomous body within the citizen branch that exercises fiscal control to ensure proper use of public funds. This office has the authority to strip public officials of their political rights by imposing administrative sanctions,¹¹ despite the fact that Article 42 of the constitution states that political rights may only be suspended by a final and unappealable court decision. Moreover, universal and regional standards state that a person may only be deprived of political rights if convicted of a serious crime and in keeping with the principle of proportionality.¹² In addition, in Venezuela, political rights are automatically suspended as penalty ancillary to another criminal or civil penalty.

Media

Democratic elections depend on the existence of "a free press and other media able to comment on public issues without censorship or restraint and to inform public opinion."¹³

¹⁰ Electoral Law, articles 174, 175, 176, 177, 178, 179, 180, 181, 182 and 186.

¹¹ Article 105 of the Government Accountability Law (*Ley del Contralor General*) establishes the removal and suspension of the political rights of public officials for up to 15 years. The Anticorruption Act (*Ley contra la Corrupción*) (Article 39) provides for the administrative suspension of political rights for up to 12 months (and the court-ordered suspension of political rights for up to 15 years).

¹² The right to political participation: Article 25 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 23 of the American Convention on Human Rights. The right to a fair trial: ICCPR articles 9 and 14, ACHR Article 25.

¹³ General Comment 34 of Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Paragraph 13.

The constitution recognizes freedom of expression and the right to diverse, truthful, and impartial information (Articles 57 and 58). The 2010 Law on Social Responsibility in Radio, Television, and Electronic Media (*Ley de Responsabilidad Social en Radio, Televisión y Medios electrónicos*) sets out the rights and responsibilities of media and journalists and establishes the National Commission of Telecommunications (*Comisión Nacional de Telecomunicaciones*—(CONATEL) as the principal regulatory authority. Electoral law governs campaigns, political advertising, and social media.¹⁴

However, in the past 20 years, the Venezuelan government has set up a legal framework comprising about 60 laws, decrees, regulations, and court decisions,¹⁵ of which 43 have severely restricted freedom of expression and the right to access to information. Based on former President Chávez’s doctrine of “Communicational Hegemony,”¹⁶ laws have been passed that restrict the actions of private media on the grounds of protecting national security, combating terrorism, or protecting the truthfulness of information. This has led to the shutdown of media outlets, restricted access to resources monopolized by the government (foreign currencies, replacement parts, newsprint, etc.), and criminalized critical opinions, among other consequences.

Furthermore, the ambiguous wording of the laws and regulations allows for arbitrary interpretations and discretionary censorship of media and journalists, without the need for court orders. Moreover, CONATEL has issued directives to black out and censor digital media, and the Law on Social Responsibility on Radio and Television and the 2017 Law against Hatred (*Ley contra el Odio*) give government officials and bodies considerable discretion to restrict reporting and journalism.

Venezuela’s restrictive laws for media; threats against journalists, the confiscation of their equipment, or their arrest¹⁷ (and even the arrest of citizens for “tweeting”¹⁸ opinions critical of the government); intimidation and harassment of journalists and bloggers; and the common practice of blocking websites¹⁹ all prompt self-censorship and further limit the information and analysis available to the public.

Access to public information

Access to public information is a basic precondition for the right to political participation, which is based on decisions that informed citizens must make.²⁰

¹⁴ http://www.cne.gob.ve/web/normativa_electoral/reglamentos/Reglamento_General_LOPRE.pdf
TITLE VI, ON ADVERTISING DURING THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN PERIOD.

¹⁵ The Legal Framework for Communications in Venezuela, 1999-2019 (*Marco Legal Comunicacional en Venezuela 1999-2019*), Lupa Ininco - Global Observatory for Communication and Democracy (GOCD):
<https://www.observademocracia.org/33666-2/>

¹⁶ Various experts, including Marcelino Bisbal (2009), Andres Cañizález (2011), and journalists Alek Boyd, Gonzalo González, and Nelson Bocaranda, have written about the “communicational hegemony” Chavismo imposed in Venezuela in 2007. Shortly after the license of Radio Caracas Televisión (RCTV) was suspended in 2007, former information minister Andrés Izarra stated: “I launched communicational hegemony as a reflective exercise within the process of building socialism.”

¹⁷ An example is the case of journalist Luis Carlos Díaz www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/FFMV/A-HRC-48-CRP.5_SP.pdf, p. 105

¹⁸ CASE 12: Detentions of private citizens for statements on social media perceived as critical of the Government (*Detenciones de ciudadanos privados por declaraciones en medios sociales percibidas como críticas al Gobierno*): [Microsoft Word - A_HRC_45_CRP.11 Revised version FOR REPRODUCTION_Spanish \(ohchr.org\)](https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/FFMV/A-HRC-45-CRP.11_Revised_version_FOR_REPRODUCTION_Spanish_ohchr.org), p.164

¹⁹ Elections under censorship: no access to independent media on #internetVI [Elecciones bajo censura: sin acceso a los medios independientes en #internetVE \(vesinfiltro.com\)](https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/FFMV/A-HRC-45-CRP.11_Revised_version_FOR_REPRODUCTION_Spanish_ohchr.org)

²⁰ Freedom of information is a right in itself, not just a manifestation of the right to freedom of expression of which it is an integral part. In this respect, Article 13-1 of the American Convention states that “[e]veryone has the right to

During the mission, many interlocutors criticized the lack of transparency and the impossibility of accessing information of public interest. As examples, they cited the fact that the Ministry of Health does not publish an epidemiological bulletin, the Ministries of the Interior and Justice do not release data on violence, the Central Bank does not report figures on inflation, and the CNE has not published the budget for these elections. Furthermore, the Office of the Prosecutor General (*Fiscalía General del Estado*) prohibited the publication of information on water quality, and the TSJ prevented attorneys from speaking about certain cases. The government has resubmitted the 2022 Budget Law without explaining its macroeconomic premises, such as inflation, GDP, and crude oil estimates for the next year.²¹

On Sept. 17, 2021, the Transparency and Access to Public Information Act (*Ley de Transparencia y Acceso a la Información de Interés Público*) was passed. Civil society again criticized the restrictions and excessive discretionary power over the right to access to information allowed under the law, in violation of the constitution and international human rights treaties.²² The new law disregarded both Venezuela's 2016 Transparency and Access to Public Information Act and the Model Inter-American Law on Access to Public Information (*La Ley Modelo de Acceso a la Información Pública*)²³ adopted by the General Assembly of the Organization of American States. Neither does the law provide for the creation of a body responsible for making policy to enhance transparency and access to information.

The restricted access to public information and the flawed laws on this issue thwart critiques, frustrate public debate, and violate the principles set forth in the constitution and international legal standards.

Data protection and privacy

The concept of privacy is enshrined in international law. Privacy is based on fundamental concepts of dignity and personal honor as well as the freedoms of expression, thought, opinion, and association recognized by the world's chief human rights systems.²⁴ These concepts are clearly established in Article V of the American Declaration of the Rights and Duties of Man (1948), in Articles 11 and 13 of the American Convention on Human Rights, (Pact of San José) (1969) (Appendix A), and in the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of Violence against Women (Belém do Pará

freedom of thought and expression. This right includes the freedom to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing, in print, in the form of art, or through any other medium." Meanwhile, Principle 2 of the IACHR Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression establishes that "[e]very person has the right to seek, receive, and impart information and opinions freely under terms set forth in Article 13 of the American Convention on Human Rights," and that "[a]ll people should be afforded equal opportunities to receive, seek, and impart information."

https://www.oas.org/dil/access_to_information_iachr_guidelines.pdf

²¹As reported in: <https://talcualdigital.com/delcy-rodriguez-presenta-ante-la-an-de-maduro-la-ley-de-presupuesto-de-2022/>

²²As reported in: <https://espaciopublico.org/asamblea-nacional-aprobo-ley-de-transparencia-y-acceso-a-la-informacion-de-interes-publico/> and <https://www.alianzaregional.net/venezuela-la-alianza-regional-rechaza-la-aprobacion-de-la-denominada-ley-de-transparencia-y-acceso-a-la-informacion-de-interes-publico/>

²³Model Inter-American Law on Access to Public Information

www.oas.org/es/sla/ddi/docs/publicacion_Ley_Modelo_Interamericana_2_0_sobre_Acceso_Informacion_Publica.pdf

²⁴OAS Data Protection Principles:

https://www.oas.org/es/sla/cji/docs/Publicacion_Proteccion_Datos_Personales_Principios_Actualizados_2021.pdf

Convention) (1994). The Inter-American Court of Human Rights also has upheld the right to privacy.²⁵

The universal right to data protection guarantees that every individual's personal data will be protected and handled according to privacy standards.²⁶ Therefore, every single person should be able to decide who can have their personal information, as well as to know who is requesting it, what type of information they have, how to modify or delete their personal information, and what it is being used for.

Venezuela's constitution (Article 28) recognizes citizens' rights to access information and data about themselves, their right to know how their data is used and to what purpose, and their right to petition the relevant court to update, correct, or erase that data. It also establishes the right of citizens to access documents of any kind containing information that may be of interest to communities or groups of people. However, the lack of clear data protection regulations and proper safeguards related to Venezuela's biometric systems exposes citizens to the risks of profiling, surveillance, and discrimination.

Moreover, since there is no overall framework governing how data protection principles are applied, it is difficult for Venezuelans to obtain information on how their personal information is used and to seek reparation for data protection violations. There is no authority tasked with investigating violations of these principles.

Participatory Rights

Participatory rights of women

International treaties establish that women have the same rights as men and that, in some cases, state parties must adopt special, temporary measures to achieve *de facto* equality for women²⁷.

There are no legal barriers to women's political participation in Venezuela. Article 21 of the constitution prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex, and the country's laws do not establish affirmative-action measures. There is no gender parity or gender quotas law in Venezuela, and lawmakers have not amended existing electoral law to explicitly include gender parity or quotas. It is up to the electoral authority to decide whether to implement these kinds of measures. The CNE has issued regulations that seek parity in candidate lists at all levels of government. However, implementation of parity regulations for collegial bodies is *ad hoc*, inconsistent and sporadic, and the CNE is lax in its enforcement of these rules.

The CNE's regulations call for a gender quota of 50% and require candidate lists to follow the principles of parity and alternation.²⁸ Only when parity is impossible may the list of candidates be registered with a minimum of 40% per gender. This formula applies to both principal and alternate candidates. Furthermore, the regulations provide a process for verifying that the quota has been met, with penalties for non-compliance.

²⁵ "[T]he sphere of privacy is characterized by being exempt from and immune to abusive and arbitrary invasion or attack by third parties or the public authorities," Case of the Ituango Massacres v. Colombia, Judgment of July 1, 2006 (Paragraph 149), which appears in

https://www.corteidh.or.cr/corteidh/docs/casos/articulos/seriec_148_ing.pdf

²⁶ As stated in the U.N. (CCPR), General Comment 34, Para. 18 and U.N. (CCPR), General Comment 16, Para. 10.

²⁷ As stated in U.N., ICCPR, Article 3 and CEDAW, Article 3.

²⁸ Special rules guaranteeing rights to political participation with gender parity and alternation of male and female state representatives and councilors in the 2021 regional and municipal elections (*Reglamento especial para garantizar los derechos de la participación paritaria, alterna y política de legisladoras o legisladores y concejalas o concejales en las elecciones regionales and municipales 2021*) and instructions for implementing these rules.

Despite these legal provisions, The Carter Center was informed that candidate lists that did not meet the gender alternation requirement – where women were relegated to the end of lists in positions where they had little chance of being elected – were allowed to be registered. The change in conditions for registering lists was not formalized by the CNE but was allowed.

Women constituted 51.4% of registered voters, and 49.4% of the candidates running for assemblies and councils were women. Of a total of 2,730 candidates for the 335 mayoral posts, 496 were women (18%). Sixty were elected (18% of mayoral posts).²⁹ A total of 183 candidates competed for the 23 governorships, 20 of whom were women, resulting in the election of two female governors (8.7%). Compared with the 2017 regional and municipal elections, the number of women elected as governors fell by 40%, while the number of female mayors elected decreased by 16%.³⁰

At the grassroots level, women were well-represented in election administration and campaigns. No party made an appeal to the female vote, apart from MUD, which in a tweet defined itself as the party of housewives, drawing immediate criticism by many sides for being sexist. Women in Venezuela remain underrepresented in political life, holding just 33% of parliamentary seats. There also is unequal representation in parties' internal structures, where executive committees continue to be dominated by men. This gap is wider in opposition parties.

Participatory rights of people with disabilities

International and regional treaties also stipulate that people with disabilities enjoy equal rights. The specific measures adopted to guarantee *de facto* equality for this group must not be considered discriminatory.³¹

Article 128 of the Electoral Law stipulates that voters exercise their right to vote as individuals, but it also allows assisted voting. People of advanced age, who cannot read, are blind, or have any other disability may be accompanied by a person of their choice while voting. In this process, the CNE implemented a series of innovative measures to promote the participation of people with disabilities. It created a voter registry with a total of 447,593 registered voters with disabilities. It then established a special commission for people with disabilities within the CNE. It reserved every first polling station at voting centers, which is the easiest to access, for voters with disabilities.

Finally, as part of a pilot project, all technical audits were interpreted into sign language. Despite the good intentions of these measures, international and domestic observers noted that the practice of reserving the first polling stations for voters on the special voter registry created problems on election day because the lists of voters with disabilities were not organized by their identification numbers, resulting in lines and delays.

Participatory rights of Indigenous peoples

International and regional treaties include the possibility of adopting special temporary measures for the advancement of ethnic minorities or groups that have been subjected to discrimination in the past, as circumstances may warrant.³² These measures should be discontinued once their intended objectives have been reached, and they should not end up perpetuating unequal rights for different groups. To guarantee equal opportunities for people

²⁹ PSUV: 49; MUD: 2; Democratic Alliance + Let's Change + Neighborhood Power: 7; other parties: 2.

³⁰ As reported in: <https://nimd.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/ParticipacionMujeres2021.pdf>.

³¹ U.N. (CRPD), Article 5.

³² U.N. (ICERD), Article 1.

belonging to minority groups, the treaties recommend that state parties compile disaggregated data.³³

Indigenous peoples constitute approximately 2.5% of Venezuela's total population of 32.9 million people. The constitution recognizes the rights of Indigenous peoples and Venezuela as a multiethnic and pluricultural nation and grants official status to Indigenous languages (Article 9). The political participation of Indigenous peoples at every level of government is guaranteed by law; the national parliament, regional legislative assemblies, and municipal councils have seats allocated for Indigenous representatives in districts with Indigenous populations. However, these populations continue to experience discrimination, marginalization, and profound economic inequality.

There is no specific voter registry for the Indigenous population. People who self-identify as Indigenous could vote on Nov. 21 and participate in special elections on Nov. 26 through an indirect voting system. On May 27, 2021, the CNE issued the election rules for the seats allocated to Indigenous representatives.³⁴ The rules establish an election system similar to that used during the 2020 parliamentary elections, which was widely criticized by Indigenous groups and representatives. A total of 4,334 spokespersons (*voceros*), representatives of Indigenous groups elected in open assemblies (where secret ballots are not guaranteed), selected regional councilors in eight states and a total of 69 municipal councilors on behalf of their communities on Nov. 26.³⁵ Indigenous associations and groups object on the grounds that the rules established by the CNE are illegal because they violate the principles of universal and direct voting by secret ballot enshrined in the constitution (Article 63).

On Nov. 26, elections for Indigenous representatives were held at 74 authorized voting centers, where spokespersons previously elected between July 6 and Aug. 13 were authorized to vote: 318 in the state of Amazonas; 174 in Delta Amacuro; 314 in Anzoátegui; 199 in Monagas; 128 in Apure; 189 in Sucre; 244 in Bolívar; and 2,768 in Zulia. The spokespersons voted by filling out ballots by hand and in secret behind partitions. No significant incidents were reported on election day, and the majority of representatives who won had been put forward by the ruling party.

The Carter Center received complaints of irregularities during these special elections, such as low participation among Indigenous peoples in elections for spokespersons, either because the election was not properly called or was held far from the geographical areas of some groups, who could not afford transportation to participate. Other groups decided not to participate in protest of the indirect voting system. Although this system is presumably a temporary solution until the Indigenous population is registered – its purpose being to ensure that only Indigenous peoples participate in electing their representatives – they believe indirect voting is detrimental because it hampers broader participation.

³³ U.N. (Covenant on Civil and Political Rights), concluding observations on France (2008), Para. 12.

³⁴ Special Rules Governing the Election of State Representatives and Councilors for Indigenous Representation (*Reglamento Especial para regular la Elección de Legisladoras o Legisladores y Concejalas y Concejales para la Representación Indígena*).

³⁵ Amazonas (7), Anzoátegui (12), Apure (7), Bolívar (8), Delta Amacuro (4), Monagas (8), Sucre (3) and Zulia (20).

Obstacles to Participatory Rights

International and regional treaties protect the ability of citizens to participate in the public affairs of their country.³⁶ International and regional treaties protect the right of every citizen to be elected,³⁷ subject only to objective and reasonable restrictions. Unreasonable restrictions include those made for political or other opinions,³⁸ as well as those based on criminal conviction (both blanket disenfranchisement provisions and those disproportionate to the severity of the crime).³⁹

Suspension of Political Rights as an Administrative Penalty

Disqualifications

CNE member Roberto Picón reported on Twitter that between May and Nov. 4, the CNE had been informed of 24 people whose political rights had been suspended by the Government Accountability Office, 17 of whom were candidates nominated for the elections who were unable to be registered by the CNE. Most of those affected confirmed that they did not know the reason for the suspension, asserting that they had not been notified in advance of any penalty imposed by the GAO. Moreover, some candidates claimed that the deadline for barring candidates had already passed but that their registration was rejected all the same.⁴⁰

Furthermore, on Nov. 17, after the period for changing and replacing candidates had ended, the GAO barred another six candidates from the PCV and the APR. The PCV qualified the measure as illegal and late. With 14 candidates barred, the PCV is the party with the largest number of suspensions during this electoral process. A total of 20 barred candidates had to be replaced or had votes for them annulled.

Some of the principal figures of the opposition leadership had their political rights suspended, including Henrique Capriles, Juan Guaidó, Freddy Guevara, Antonio Ledezma, Leopoldo López, María Corina Machado, and Richard Mardo, among others. Between 2002 and 2015, the GAO stripped 1,401 current and former public officials of their political rights. There is no available data on the current number of suspended individuals. The arbitrariness and lack of clarity about the decision-making processes that led to most disqualifications seriously affects the rights of political participation, the latest example being the case of Freddy Superlano in the state of Barinas.

³⁶ U.N. International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), Article 25(a); African Union (AU), African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR), Article 13(1); Organization of American States (OAS), American Convention on Human Rights (ACHR), Article 23(1); and Convention on Human Rights, Article 29(a).

³⁷ U.N. International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), Article 25(b); African Union (AU), African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR), Article 13(1); Organization of American States (OAS), American Convention on Human Rights (ACHR), Article 23(1)(a); Charter of the League of Arab States, Article 24(3-4); Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), Convention on Human Rights, Article 29(b).

³⁸ Organization of American States (OAS), American Convention on Human Rights (ACHR), Article 23; U.N., (CCPR), General Comment No. 25, Paragraph 14; U.N. (CCPR), Concluding observations on the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (2008), Para. 28.

³⁹ U.N. (ICCPR), Articles 2 and 25.

⁴⁰ As reported by *Efecto Cocuyo* in: <https://efectococuyo.com/politica/aspirantes-que-dan-fuera-de-las-megaelecciones-por-estar-inhabilitados/>

Replacement of Opposition Party Leadership by Court Decision

Interference

The executive committees of nine opposition parties and three parties associated with the dissenting Chavismo faction⁴¹ were removed by the TSJ for breaching their own bylaws and were replaced with new leadership bodies more likely to make compromises with the government, leading some opposition to be perceived as pro-government. Through its interference in political party internal processes, the TSJ not only removed original leaders, but also tasked new leaders with selecting party candidates and granted them use of all elements identifying their party, such as logos, emblems, symbols, and colors. This diminished the genuine political options, gravely affecting pluralism and political competition.

Political Prisoners

Political repression aims to stifle views contrary to those of the government. Political persecution is a serious problem in Venezuela. Political prisoners are people who have been arbitrarily imprisoned for political reasons, either in retaliation for antigovernment attitudes, opinions, or political positions—or to preempt such stances. According to the Venezuelan Criminal Forum (*Foro Penal*), as of Nov. 22, 2021, a total of 251 people were classified as political prisoners, and since 2014, there have been 15,749 political arrests. *Foro Penal* insists that there are an additional 9,000-plus people in Venezuela who remain “subject, arbitrarily, to measures restricting their freedom.” In 2021, a total of 42 politically motivated arrests were made, and four of those arrested remain behind bars and 38 have been released. On Nov. 3, 2021, the prosecutor of the International Criminal Court reported that the case known as “Venezuela I” had entered a phase of formal investigation of crimes against humanity allegedly committed since at least 2017.

Restricted Freedoms

Restrictions on freedom are not solely an electoral issue; they affect the very essence of democracy. Despite provisions expounding constitutional rights, the frameworks for the Law on Social Responsibility in Radio, Television, and Electronic Media (*Ley de Responsabilidad Social en Radio, Televisión y Medios Electrónicos*) (RESORTE, 2004), the Law Against Hatred, for Peaceful Coexistence and Tolerance “*Ley contra el odio, por la convivencia pacífica y la tolerancia*” (2017, passed by the Constituent Assembly), and other laws that, in principle, are not meant to govern freedom of expression, in fact create wide-ranging and vague threats that loom over freedom of expression, encourage punitive approaches, and give government agencies disciplinary powers.

Meanwhile, various measures have gradually shrunk the media’s ideological spectrum. For example, foreign news channels have been removed from the programming schedule (NTN 24, CNN) by presidential decisions. Meanwhile, independent media outlets have closed, have been handed over to people or companies with close ties to the ruling party, or have shielded themselves through various forms of self-censorship. There also are considerable obstacles blocking online access to information portals.

These developments reduce the diversity of information sources available to the public, and the remaining sources tend to conform to the government’s party line. Indeed, the government’s media supremacy is vast: in addition to state-sponsored media, which clearly acts in line with government views, there are numerous subservient private media outlets. The

⁴¹ The TSJ interfered with at least nine political parties, including six opposition parties: Democratic Action, Justice First Movement, Popular Will, Red Flag Positive Citizen Action, and Republic Movement, as well as three parties that used to be part of the governing GPP but decided to nominate their own candidates in 2020.

conspicuous imbalance in reporting results in extensive coverage of the authorities and PSUV and minimal opportunities for opposition voices to be heard.

Likewise, there are no guarantees protecting the use of frequencies, which leads private audiovisual media to self-censor. This critical situation has caused many political debates to move to social media. While this trend has been seen in many countries as social media grows in importance, in Venezuela it is also a way to circumvent restrictions on traditional media, although the disadvantages described earlier considerably reduce the scope of this option.

Programa Patria: Social and Territorial Control (Incumbent Advantages)

The government's disproportionate advantage in the media is only one facet of a broader situation: the stark imbalance between the government's resources and those of the opposition, which goes far beyond the usual tendency in Latin America for the ruling party to capitalize on its access to public funds (Carter Center, 2015). In Venezuela, the term "*ventajismo*" (incumbent political advantage) is often used to describe this reality.

In particular, food subsidies and specialized social programs have become key political levers for the participation of vulnerable sectors because the structure of these programs links together the state, the government, and the ruling party at the grassroots level and is subject to meticulous social and territorial controls (*Programa Patria*), ultimately backed by militia groups. In a crisis on the scale of Venezuela's, this government aid is more than just supplemental income and opportunities; it is essential to survival. The most vulnerable and fragile segments of society have little defense against explicit or implicit pressure to align their political actions with the benefits they receive.

Furthermore, the ruling party's supremacy is based on control over other branches of government and institutions, even those that, by their nature (and including by constitutional mandate), must act independently. No government body is able to avoid a relationship of direct subordination to the government, not even the armed forces, which have received numerous benefits and have overstepped the normal bounds of their duties, making deep inroads into civilian spheres, as is evident in outlying regions and state-owned companies.

Election Administration

The international and regional treaties signed by Venezuela, which contain international standards for holding democratic elections, establish guiding principles for how elections are to be administered at every level, from national electoral councils to polling stations. These principles are independence, impartiality, transparency, access to information, non-discrimination, and the right to an effective remedy in the event of voting rights violations.⁴²

Electoral Structure

The National Electoral Council (CNE)

The constitution charges the CNE with organizing electoral processes and grants it the status of an independent branch of government.⁴³ The CNE is controlled by five electoral magistrates elected by a two-thirds vote of the members of parliament for seven-year terms following nominations made by: civil society (three); the schools of law and political science at public universities (one); and the citizens branch (one). Officials must be nonpartisan. Nominations of possible candidates are made by those three groups, but the appointment is made by the National Assembly. The decision on who is appointed is political.

The institution has three primary bodies: the National Electoral Commission (*Junta Nacional Electoral*), the Civil and Electoral Registry Commission (*Comisión de Registro Civil y Electoral*), and the Political Participation and Finance Commission (*Comisión de Participación Política y Financiamiento*). The CNE has one regional electoral office (*Oficina Regional Electoral—ORE*) in each state, run by a director.

The CNE has broad technical, operational, and logistical latitude to perform essential election work: recognizing parties, registering voters and candidates, assigning polling centers, appointing and training people to run polling centers, purchasing and distributing election materials, making sure voting machines work, accrediting local and international election observers, organizing election day activities, and announcing results. It also runs the Civil Registry Office and coordinates with the Administrative Service of Identification, Migration, and Foreigners (*Servicio de Administración de Identificación, Migración y Extranjería—SAIME*), attached to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, to issue identification documents. The sum of these responsibilities makes it one of the most powerful and authoritative electoral bodies in Latin America.

Although weakened by the departure of qualified personnel, the CNE has sufficient trained staff and infrastructure to satisfactorily conduct the technical organization of an electoral process, even given the fact that the process was carried out during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Reshuffling the CNE's composition

In May 2021, the assembly appointed five electoral magistrates, with 10 alternates, to the CNE. The members of the council are Pedro Enrique Calzadilla Pérez (president), Enrique Octavio Márquez Pérez (vice president), Tania D' Amelio Cardiet, Alexis José Corredor Pérez, and Roberto Antonio Picón Herrera. These appointments were made through a process of political negotiations that included the ruling party, the opposition that does not have representation in the National Assembly, and civil society organizations.

⁴² U.N. (CCPR), General Comment No. 25, Paragraph 20. U.N. (CCPR), General Comment No. 25, Paragraph 24.

⁴³ The Venezuelan constitution establishes five branches of government: legislative, executive, judicial, citizens, and electoral.

As a result, three members linked to the ruling party and two linked to the opposition were selected. Their political affiliations are not secret and are referenced openly, even within the CNE. Political and social actors acknowledge and accept this procedure, which created a less unbalanced CNE. This new makeup has meant that, despite sharp divisions, the council has made a notable effort to move forward in a concerted way and signal more openness toward different participants. It also generated institutional behavior that provided greater predictability and trust in the rules of competition, greater guarantees for the electorate and opposition parties.

In general, the political system and civil society consider the arrangement to be an improvement on the previous election administration situation, although concerns persist. Likewise, some sectors of the opposition, despite agreeing that there has been progress, do not acknowledge the CNE because its members were selected by an “illegitimate” National Assembly, or else they criticize it because the ruling party still has a majority vote and is able to impose decisions.

The CNE’s attitude helped defuse tensions and made it possible to hold the 2021 regional elections with the participation of the main political forces, a positive development.

However, the CNE has critical vulnerabilities. The first is a clear disregard for the *spirit* of the constitution, which demands that the CNE have no ties to political parties. The second is that, although to date the five council members have shown a clear desire to make concerted progress as an institution, the political divide may reappear during crucial, high-impact votes. The third is the CNE’s limited autonomy, in real terms. There is no doubt that the CNE freely makes technical decisions, but those with sensitive political implications are routed through channels outside the institution. Ultimately, the rebalancing of the CNE’s national leadership has not filtered down to regional structures, which still have marked ties to the ruling party and few counterbalances.

Designating and training polling station staff

The CNE is responsible for randomly appointing polling center workers from among registered voters. Once the names of regular and alternate members have been drawn, the list is published on the CNE portal. The notification process is poor and inconsistent. National observers reported that while some citizens had been informed by the CNE of their appointment as polling station workers, many others were never notified. On election day, a significant number of polling stations opened late because many polling station workers did not turn up.

Vacancies in polling positions are filled by reserve members, citizens who offer to assume responsibility in the absence of regular or alternate workers. This practice allows parties to have a direct presence at the polling station. Thus, many polling stations are run not by randomly selected citizens but by political party representatives.

Polling station workers received remote training through online modules to minimize pandemic-related risks. Used in combination with in-person systems, this mechanism is useful; used as the *primary* system for training, it is inadequate – even inappropriate. Because this training must reach all levels of society, including rural groups and sectors with low levels of education, computer-based training runs into problems such as people’s unfamiliarity with the technology, limited or no internet connection, the impossibility of getting answers to questions, etc.

Location of polling centers

Polling center placement should be a technical activity meant to encourage voter turnout by choosing central locations that are near where voters live and are easy to access. However, in previous elections, placement was bent to partisan ends. Polling stations for middle-class groups, which have a reputation for forming part of the opposition, were set far from their usual locations and reassigned to distant, working-class neighborhoods to discourage participation.

In 2021, the CNE returned to a system where the proximity of polling centers to the homes of the various social groups was the primary consideration. Restoring that method was good practice in keeping with standards for democratic elections. The CNE set up 30,106 stations at 14,262 voting centers.

Election day simulation

On Oct. 10, 2021, a simulation of election day was carried out. On the day of the simulation, all election-related devices at a limited number of polling centers were tested. This simulation involved CNE officials, military personnel (with a conspicuous, heavily armed presence), and volunteers or interested parties.

People who wished to participate went to the authorized voting center closest to their homes and followed election-day procedures: they displayed their identity documents, had their fingerprints verified, and were authorized to use the machine and vote. At the centers visited by the Carter Center's team in Caracas, the process went quickly and smoothly. Citizens marked the same electronic ballot they marked on Nov. 21. It was unnecessary for the process to be so realistic; it did not contribute to the drill and could generate political mistrust because the CNE has both the lists of participants and the "results" of the simulation.

Voter Registry

Venezuela's constitution guarantees the right to vote to citizens over the age of 18, with the exception of those subject to judicial interdiction or those whose political rights have been suspended (Article 64). According to the constitution, foreign nationals who have legally resided in Venezuela for more than 10 years and are in the voter registry are allowed to vote in regional and municipal elections.

The sole requirement to register to vote is to hold a valid identity document. Voters register their fingerprints and the information from their identity card in the voter registry, and this data is verified during the voting process. The CNE is the body responsible for updating the voter registry and removing people from it, when necessary.

In Venezuela, voter registration is active, permanent, and continuous—a person can register at any time. However, special days with expanded geographical coverage are organized in the lead-up to elections. This practice sparked controversy in previous electoral processes because registration venues tended to be assigned in a biased way and for short periods of time, offering little chance for sectors deemed antigovernment to register to vote.

In 2021, the CNE took a more inclusive approach. Registration ran from June 1 to July 15 for young people and for those filing changes of address, while the review and approval of the voter registry ran from July 18 to 25. This was a long period of time. The commission also sent 1,000 machines all over Venezuela and chose the location of registration venues based more on demographic and geographic criteria than on political criteria. According to the CNE, this important step allowed 430,038 new voters – mainly young people – to register in 2021. This

segment is still thought to be under-registered, although estimates are complicated by the large numbers of emigrants, who are predominantly young. Meanwhile, there were 1,052,118 relocations or changes of address, and 203,473 voters who had died and were removed from the registry.

The voter registry ultimately consisted of 21,267,813 voters, of whom 21,037,954 were Venezuelan citizens and 229,859 were foreign residents authorized to vote in local elections. As in other Latin American countries, women constitute the largest share of the voter registry, at 51.4%.

The CNE's voter registry shows 108,030 registered voters living abroad, despite the fact that reports on Venezuela's migratory crisis indicate that 5.9 million Venezuelans have emigrated in recent years. Many of the Carter Center's interlocutors estimate there are at least 3 million emigrants registered to vote, although there are no official figures.

Registering Candidates

International and regional treaties protect the right and opportunity of every citizen to be elected.⁴⁴ The right to be elected can only be restricted based on objective and reasonable criteria. Unreasonable restrictions include excessive residency requirements,⁴⁵ restrictions when citizenship is obtained through naturalization, and restrictions based on criminal convictions (that are disproportionate to the severity of the offense or provisions that generally suspend the right to vote).⁴⁶ Furthermore, only a ruling by a court or tribunal can suspend a person's right to be elected.

Candidates must be native-born or naturalized Venezuelan citizens (a naturalized citizen must have resided continuously within Venezuelan territory for at least 15 years). They must be at least 25 to run for governor, be a layperson, and be in the voter registry. For gubernatorial candidates, existing legislation does not require residency in the state where they are running for office. However, there are residency requirements to run for a state assembly (four consecutive years of residency in the corresponding state), for mayors (at least three years in the corresponding municipality), and for municipal councilors (at least three years in the relevant municipality preceding the election year).

Venezuela's constitution also describes a wide range of conflicts of interests for official office that require the candidate to withdraw (Article 189).

Minimum residency requirements for candidates and the distinctions made between citizens by birth and by naturalization are not consistent with Venezuela's international commitments and with best practice, as they are considered discriminatory.⁴⁷

The CNE registered a total of 70,244 candidates representing 130 political organizations, including 42 national, 64 regional, six national Indigenous, and 18 regional Indigenous.

⁴⁴ U.N. (ICCPR), Article 25; AU, African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR), Article 13; Organization of American States (OAS), American Convention on Human Rights (ACHR), Article 23; League of Arab States (LAS), Arab Charter on Human Rights, Article 24; Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), Convention on standards of democratic elections, Article 3; Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), Copenhagen Document, Paragraph 7.5.

⁴⁵ See Organization of American States (OAS), American Convention on Human Rights (ACHR), Article 23; U.N. (CCPR), General Comment No. 25, Paragraph 11, with respect to reasonable residency requirements.

⁴⁶ U.N. (ICCPR), Article 25 (b); U.N. (CCPR), General Comment No. 25, Paragraph 3.

⁴⁷ U.N. (CCPR), General Comment No. 25, Paragraph 3.

In June 2021, the CNE reinstated the opposition coalition MUD, which had been declared illegal by the TSJ in 2018. Opposition parties announced that they would participate in the Nov. 21 elections after having boycotted previous elections because of the absence of conditions for holding credible elections.

The CNE granted three extensions of candidate registration at the parties' request. The last phase of registering candidates ended on Nov. 11. Some stakeholders criticized the lack of transparency about the criteria for approving or rejecting candidates and identified problems caused by the automated nomination system when registering candidates. According to some sources, thousands of nominated candidates were transferred from their customary polling place to the place where they had been nominated, without being informed by the CNE.

Automated Voting System

It is increasingly common to conduct important electoral duties by computer in Latin America. In Venezuela this is crucial because of its electronic voting system. Computer systems are highly sensitive and must offer certainty to all stakeholders. Venezuela is one of a few countries that use electronic voting machines for the entire electorate, and, since 2012, it has also introduced biometric devices (fingerprints) to authenticate voters.

Prior to each election, a series of audits are conducted by technical experts from the government, independent institutions, political party representatives, and observers. They review the software's source code and other essential facilities, such as transmission centers, satellite antennas, the Movilnet centers, and other communications and infrastructure elements, according to the electoral timetable. The Carter Center was informed of and witnessed part of this process.

In a new development, representatives from the opposition and the government agreed to conduct an academic software audit. This audit was performed by five government-affiliated experts and five experts selected by the opposition. Its scope and duration (six weeks) were unprecedented.

The comprehensive automated voting system audit, which examined the software used for verifying and authenticating voters, casting votes, tabulating results, and transmitting results, formed part of the 16 audits that the CNE approved for the 2021 regional and municipal elections, thereby encouraging transparency.⁴⁸

Academic experts from both sides expressed satisfaction with the audit and stressed that the report was prepared jointly, with the approval of all parties. At the end of the academic audit, the source code was compiled, and the hash⁴⁹ of the final version was recorded to be used as a

⁴⁸ These were: audit of software for selecting subordinate electoral bodies (*Auditoría Software de Selección de los Organismos Electorales Subalternos*); voter registry audit (*Auditoría del Registro Electoral*); voting machine software audit (*Auditoría del Software de Máquinas de Votación*); audit of voter logs (*Auditoría de Cuadernos de Votación*); voting machine file audit (*Auditoría de Archivo de Máquinas de Votación*); tabulation software audit (*Auditoría del Software de Totalización*); voting machine programming audit (*Auditoría de Producción de Máquinas de Votación*); audit of electoral technology infrastructure (*Auditoría de Infraestructura Tecnológica Electoral*); audit prior to dispatching voting machines (*Auditoría Predespacho de Máquinas de Votación*); reset-to-zero audit of national tabulation centers (*Auditoría Puesta Cero de los Centros Nacionales de Totalización*); Phase I and Phase II telecommunications audit (*Auditoría de Telecomunicaciones Fase I y II*); Phase I and Phase II citizen verification (*Verificación Ciudadana Fase I y II*); and Phase I and Phase II electoral data audit (*Auditoría de Datos Electorales Fase I y II*).

⁴⁹ This is a function that makes it possible to take a unique identifying "fingerprint" for any digital document. Thus, if the document is modified, the hash is completely different. This function is used to mathematically ensure that an electronic file has not been altered.

“baseline” for the audits conducted by the CNE, with participation from political party representatives and independent institutions.

The auditing teams found that the confidentiality, integrity, and accountability of the vote were guaranteed and that the system’s security measures are even stronger than anticipated. However, some stakeholders with whom The Carter Center spoke criticized the CNE for not providing information in advance about the dates and locations where the audits were conducted.

The ballot’s design and the voting procedure facilitate straight-ticket voting but discourage electing individual candidates from different parties for different offices (split-ticket voting). The design reflects the political desires of the ruling party and most of the opposition.

Plan República

Plan República is the military deployment that occurs during every electoral process in Venezuela. Its primary aim is to ensure order and security in the process, but the military also is responsible for transporting and safeguarding all election materials and voting machines across the country. In 2021, Plan República involved 20% of Venezuela’s armed forces, with 356,568 troops deployed and 23,000 vehicles covering 1,920 strategic points, such as electrical facilities, drinking water supply stations, etc. Plan República was launched in June and ended on Dec. 3 with the retrieval of all election materials. The Ministry of Defense is tasked with determining the end of Plan República. On election day, access to polling centers is guarded by security forces. The presence of uniformed, armed personnel inside centers is very visible and may be intimidating.

Measures to Prevent COVID-19

The outbreak of the pandemic posed a great challenge to the world’s electoral processes. In 2020, the pandemic pushed back elections in Latin America, while in 2021 elections stayed on schedule, apart from minor modifications. Venezuela held its November 2021 regional elections on the traditional date according to its institutional calendar. This entailed significant preparations for the CNE in addition to its usual work. The CNE benefited from its experience with the parliamentary election at the end of 2020, which unquestionably facilitated the 2021 election logistics. The CNE followed protocols in line with standard recommendations on this matter, and they appear to be adequate, as they neither imposed excessive precautions nor neglected basic arrangements.

The main measure the CNE took was mandatory masking for both voters and polling station personnel. Likewise, when entering voting premises, voters were instructed to disinfect their hands with alcohol. Finally, people had to stay 1.5 meters apart in waiting lines. In addition, to reduce contact, voters showed their identification documents to polling station personnel by placing them on a device specifically designed for this purpose.

Neither political groups nor civil society actors raised the coronavirus pandemic as an issue with relevance for or impact on the electoral process. This minimization of the pandemic indirectly indicates the predominance of other aspects that were the focus of attention, such as political polarization and the conditions for the electoral process.

Election Campaign

Campaign Finance

Campaign finance is underregulated and violates international agreements⁵⁰ because there are no legal maximums for contributions or spending and no laws requiring public disclosure of party and candidate finances for public scrutiny. The system therefore lacks transparency and fails to ensure proper accountability and a level playing field.

Political parties in Venezuela are financed exclusively with private funds because the constitution explicitly prohibits the use of government funds. The campaign finance rules that apply to political parties are set forth in the constitution, the law governing political parties, electoral law, and CNE regulations. The law prohibits anonymous and foreign donations. Legal provisions also establish the mechanisms for control. However, some of the Carter Center's interlocutors claim that foreign funds regularly bypass these prohibitions through unofficial channels, largely from criminal activities.

The CNE has authority over campaign finance. Candidates and parties must submit monthly financial reports and ledgers with accrued campaign expenses via an automated system. The CNE's Political Participation and Finance Commission (*Comisión de Participación Política y Financiamiento*) may at any time randomly select political parties or candidates and audit their financial reports and accounting records. This commission acts on its own initiative as well as in response to allegations of irregularities.

Backdrop to the Campaign Period

Article 71 of the electoral law defines the campaign period and authorizes the CNE to establish its length. Article 72 clearly defines the principles and rights governing the interpretation of campaign period rules, such as an equal playing field and freedom of association and expression, according to international standards for genuine democratic elections. The campaign lasted three weeks, from Oct. 28 to Nov. 18.

The campaign period was marked by the ruling party's overt use of its incumbent political advantage and indiscriminate use of government funds for election purposes. The ruling party took advantage of its incumbency over a divided opposition in a campaign period characterized by low voter engagement, lack of funds (particularly for the opposition), and a calm atmosphere with almost no incidents or clashes between antagonistic political groups.

However, an understanding of the political advertising for this election cannot be limited to official campaign dates because the propaganda and activism of candidates and organizations by pro-government parties began earlier and had a significant impact.

Prior to the campaign period, the government was dominant. It controlled the editorial line of public media and created a restrictive environment for private media. It also used social programs to strengthen ties between the government and the groups most vulnerable and dependent on government support. This dual system of control generally benefits all those running under the government banner. In 2021, these elements were still in evidence, though less visible than before.

⁵⁰ Article 25 of the ICCPR, U.N. Human Rights Council, General Comment No. 25, Paragraph 19; Article 1 (i) Economic Community of West African States, Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance, 2001.

During the campaign period, citizens showed only modest interest in the elections. Most public opinion polls indicated that a significant percentage of the population feels disillusioned and disenchanted with politics, institutions, and actors, so they give little attention to electoral affairs. Local governments have limited powers and, especially, resources, and this lowers the electorate's expectations. Moreover, the widespread scarcity of goods in the country limits the opposition's campaigning prospects. It was difficult for the opposition to obtain some products essential to mobilization, such as fuel and transportation.

The pandemic has made people wary of large events and physical proximity, but there were still gatherings and rallies with hundreds of people. Finally, political forces took different positions on the electoral process itself. While the ruling party launched major campaign efforts, the stances of opposition leadership ranged from refusal to vote in the elections – which some felt lacked basic guarantees – to active campaigning to win as much support as possible at the ballot boxes.

Media During the Campaign Period

International and regional treaties protect freedom of opinion and expression.⁵¹ Free communication of information and ideas by voters and candidates is essential to genuine elections. It includes the right for everyone – including political parties, candidates, and their supporters – to seek, receive, and impart ideas through any means of their choice, including, but not limited to, writing, speech, print, art,⁵² and the internet.⁵³

Venezuela has experienced a gradual decline in the number, plurality, and variety of its media in the past decade. Many national television and radio broadcasters are owned or controlled by the Venezuelan government, while print media has seen the number of newspapers in circulation fall sharply.⁵⁴ ⁵⁵ The media's role in these elections was marked by polarization, lack of resources, and difficulties for journalists covering campaigns.

More than half of the newspapers that stopped their printing presses in the past decade have moved online, where a few digital media outlets also have emerged. This online publishing set has sharply criticized the government, so it has been the target of technical reprisals and censorship. Many of these outlets reported selective blackouts before and during the election period that forced their readership to use virtual private network (VPN) gateways to circumvent the blackout and access the censored content.

As for audiovisual media, the Carter Center's analysis found what is often described as self-censorship at radio stations that led broadcasters to avoid any sharp criticism of the government and prevented guests from expressing criticism, for fear of receiving a warning or fine that could threaten the station's continued licensing. According to CONATEL data, the

⁵¹ U.N. (ICCPR), Article 19; AU, African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR), Article 9(2); OAS, American Convention on Human Rights, Article 13; League of Arab States, Charter of the League of Arab States, Article 32; Council of Europe, European Convention on Human Rights, Article 10; Commonwealth of Independent States, Convention on Human Rights, Article 11; U.N., Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 19.

⁵² U.N., ICCPR, Article 19.

⁵³ U.N. (ICCPR), General Comment No. 34, Paragraph 12.

⁵⁴ According to a study by the website Prodavinci, the Venezuelan media ecosystem has lost 83% of its printed press: Of the 121 newspapers in circulation in 2013, only 22 remain (16 local and six national). Data on the newspaper crisis in Venezuela. Prodavinci, 2020. <https://datosperiodicos.prodavinci.com>.

⁵⁵ The deterioration of the media ecosystem has resulted in the appearance of what the Press and Society Institute of Venezuela refers to as "information deserts" – areas where the population only has access to information broadcast by radio and television stations, with very little informational content. Atlas of Silence: News Deserts in Venezuela. Press and Society Institute, 2020. <https://ipysvenezuela.org/desierto-de-noticias>

regulatory body filed disciplinary proceedings against 79 radio stations in the past four years for failure to comply with the Organic Law on Telecommunications' (*Ley Orgánica de Telecomunicaciones*) rules on clandestine use of the radio spectrum (Article 165), and against 19 radio and TV stations for violating the Law on Social Responsibility in Radio, Television, and Electronic Media (Article 27). Article 27, known by the acronym "*Ley RESORTE*" in Spanish, prohibits the broadcasting of messages that promote hate and intolerance or incite crime, as well as those that "foment unease among citizens."

Venezuela has experienced an exodus of media professionals in the past five years, prompted by the difficult economic situation, the precarious nature of media companies, and the increasingly challenging climate for journalists. Based on its analysis, The Carter Center views Venezuela as permeated by hostility toward the press, described by some as an "assault on criticism," from both the ruling party and the opposition. This atmosphere has made it difficult to cover a campaign, with complaints of limited access to official sources as well as restrictions on participating in press conferences and receiving credentials for electoral events.

In this regard, initiatives like the Public Information Services (*Servicio de Información Pública—SEIPE*) or Bus TV, a project that takes information to the street, are significant. Not only have these initiatives served to expose Venezuela's media problems, but they also highlight the human and financial resources required to provide independent information.

Assaults against journalists also have been recorded. The National Journalists Association (*Colegio Nacional de Periodistas*) reported several acts of violence against the press on election day. According to this association, reporters were denied access to voting centers in at least 25 instances; in another five, they were required to erase recorded materials; and in another two, attempts were made to confiscate their equipment. The association also reported three threats, two incidents of harassment, and one arbitrary detention.

Shortly before the Barinas election, the government and prominent Chavista figures unleashed a campaign of harassment against independent journalists, which was amplified using Twitter.⁵⁶ In addition, according to the National Press Workers Union (*Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores de la Prensa—SNTP*), censorship in Venezuela intensified during the final phases of the electoral process. Toward the end of last year, the SNTP had already reported that the National Telecommunications Commission (*Comisión Nacional de Telecomunicaciones—CONATEL*) ordered the suspension of broadcasts by radio stations owned by opposition groups. This was the case for two radio stations belonging to Carlos Barrios, opposition mayor of the municipality of Ospino in the state of Portuguesa.

Social Media

The gradual disappearance of the press from Venezuela's media stage in the past decade has compelled its citizens to use social media as their main source of information. However, the country's precarious economic situation and internet access problems have dampened this channel, especially in the past two years, forcing much of the citizenry to choose between using their meager data to communicate with family and conduct personal business or to get their news and information. They tend to choose the former. According to data provided by CONATEL, less than half of the Venezuelan population (47.1%) had internet access in the

⁵⁶ Examples of harassment against journalists by Chavistas figures can be found at the following links: <https://twitter.com/TrapieLlo/status/1479573991308369923>, <https://twitter.com/TrapieLlo/status/1479573619558817792>, <https://www.infobae.com/america/venezuela/2022/01/08/censura-en-venezuela-tareck-el-aissami-lanzo-una-campana-de-acoso-contra-periodistas-venezolanos/>

second quarter of 2021, while two in every three citizens (65%) had subscribed to at least one mobile telephone service during this same period.

Nevertheless, Venezuela has an active network of groups operating from both within the country and abroad to monitor social media and analyze disinformation activity.⁵⁷ These groups often work under adverse conditions because of a lack of staff and funding, limited internet access, and the frequent outages of the national electric power system (*Sistema Eléctrico Nacional*). Even under these conditions, their work during the campaign made clear how important it is to monitor polarized networks in which almost any issue – cultural, sports-related, or otherwise – becomes the subject of political debate.

Disinformation Operations

The electoral period was marked by coordinated propaganda in favor of the ruling party, essentially by the state apparatus through partisan use of its institutions. Every day during the campaign, the Ministry of Popular Power for Communication and Information (*Ministerio del Poder Popular para la Comunicación y la Información*) posted hashtags that would later be shared by other government bodies, such as ministries and official institutes. These hashtags also were replicated by state television, often from the program *Con el Mazo Dando*, hosted by PSUV Vice President Diosdado Cabello. President Maduro appears often on this program. Thus, the entire state apparatus gave a single, amplified voice to slogans that seem innocuous (#FestivalMundialDePoesía, #VenezuelaSevacuna, #LeerIndependiza, #PuebloDignoYSoberano, #VictoriaMusical, #MegaElecciones2021) but often are linked with the ruling party's political propaganda.

The Carter Center's analysis found that to implement this type of campaign, a network of Twitter users act in a coordinated way to post and share propagandistic messages.⁵⁸ This network is difficult to detect because it does not consist solely of groups of bots (computer programs that automatically disseminate messages). It also uses humans organized on social media and paid via their "Homeland Card," (*carnet de la patria*), a Venezuelan government program that supplies food and distributes social benefits. In 2019, Twitter removed nearly 1,200 accounts "engaged in a state-backed influence campaign targeting domestic audiences."⁵⁹ This measure likely weakened, but did not deactivate, the ruling party's propaganda system.

In a preliminary analysis of the campaign on Twitter, The Carter Center found that 7% of users who tweeted or retweeted the main tags of the ruling party were bots. These same bots generated approximately 10% of all interactions of these tags.⁶⁰ This proportion can be considered significant in the context of an election campaign but not decisive in terms of

⁵⁷ Some of the organizations monitoring and combating disinformation campaigns of the governing party and the opposition on social media include: Citizens Watchman (*Guachimán Ciudadano*; <https://web2.guachiman.org/>); the Probox Digital Observatory (*Observatorio Digital Probox*; <https://proboxve.org/>); EsPaja.com (a project of the EU-funded NGO Transparency International); the Venezuelan Electoral Observatory (*Observatorio Electoral Venezolano*; <https://oevenezolano.org/>); and the Observatory on Disinformation, Rumors, and Fake News (*Observatorio de Desinformación, Rumores y Falsas Noticias*) of the Communication Research Institute (*Instituto de Investigaciones de la Comunicación—ININCO*) at Central University of Venezuela (Universidad Central de Venezuela), are some of the organizations monitoring and combatting the disinformation campaigns of the governing party.

⁵⁸ The Rise and Fall of the Venezuelan State's Twitter Squad in times of COVID-19 (*Auge y declive del escuadrón tuitero del Estado venezolano en tiempos de COVID-19*). Víctor Amaya. <https://transparencia.org.ve/caida-del-escuadron-tuitero-presentacion>

⁵⁹ Twitter: *Empowering further research of potential information operations*

⁶⁰ Sample of 2,315,968 interactions – tweets, retweets, quote tweets – made by 51,083 profiles that promoted at least 30 of the principal pro-government hashtags during the campaign. Botometer, a joint project of the Observatory on Social Media and the Network Science Institute of Indiana University (USA), was used for the analysis.

manipulation of public opinion. However, the sample analyzed also reveals that only 10% of the most active users – bots or not – generated 88% of all interactions, an anomalous proportion that fits into the coordinated operation of propaganda that local monitoring groups denounce and that would include both bots and real users.

On Dec. 2, just 11 days after the elections, Twitter announced that it had removed a network of 277 Venezuelan accounts that amplified accounts, hashtags and topics in support of the government and its official narratives. According to the report, published on the social network, some individuals of this network authorized an application called Twitter Patria to manage their accounts for this purpose. These facts, once again, support the complaints of local monitoring groups.

The Álex Saab case

What appears to be a network organized to poison the information well continued to stoke intense online debate on only one issue: the situation of Álex Saab, a Colombian businessman who was detained in Cabo Verde as part of an international money laundering investigation. The drip feeding of news about his captivity has unleashed a sweeping disinformation campaign by the government, according to experts who regularly monitor social media, as well as a campaign of harassment and character assassination of journalists who exposed or reported on this topic.

A sample of 30,000 Twitter accounts that participated in these dissemination campaigns has revealed that 13,788 (45.9%) were bots or accounts manipulated by third parties. To better understand the scope of this operation, The Carter Center conducted a social network analysis of the 100 hashtags most widely shared by botnets every time the Venezuelan diplomat's name appeared during the campaign.



The graphic shows that these botnets widely disseminated the hashtags **#freealexsaab**, **#defendemosasaab**, **#diplomaticosecuestrado**, **#liberenalalexsaab**, and **#secuestradoporeuu**, among others. Just the posting of these hashtags generated between 16,000 and 50,000 Twitter interactions per day, depending on news about the Venezuelan diplomat. Alex Saab's name appeared directly or indirectly in one out of six interactions, or 16% of all political hashtags during the campaign period, between Oct. 28 and election day on Nov. 21.⁶¹ (More details of the Carter Center's social media analysis can be found in Annex: Twitter Analysis of Venezuela's 2021 Regional Elections.)

⁶¹ Data from a sample of 754,676 tweets, retweets, and quote tweets posted on Twitter between Oct. 28 and Nov. 21, 2021, containing the name or hashtag "Alex Saab." Data was compared with a sample of 4,557,749 tweets, retweets, and quote tweets from the campaign's main political hashtags during that same period. Botometer, a joint project of the Observatory on Social Media and the Network Science Institute of Indiana University (USA), was used for the bot analysis.

Electoral Observation

International and regional treaties stipulate that every person has the right to participate in their country's public affairs. The right and opportunity to participate in public affairs are obligations broadly recognized in public international law and include individuals' rights to join NGOs, including election observation bodies. Treaties state that observers, both domestic and international, can improve every aspect of the election process, including those related to candidacies and campaign activities.

National Observation

The 2021 election was monitored by both local citizen observers and international observers. Local accredited entities included: *Asamblea de Educación Red Observación Electoral* (ROAE), *Observatorio Electoral Venezolano* (OEV), *Fundación por un Pueblo Digno*, *Proyecto Social*, *Asociación Venezolana de Juristas*, and *Centro Internacional de Estudios Superiores*.

In general, accreditation of these observers signifies greater openness and a spirit of collaboration within the CNE, in keeping with the electoral authority's greater willingness to adhere to higher democratic standards. This willingness was reflected in early accreditation – even the OEV received accreditation after several elections in which it did not – and faster delivery of credentials, as well as greater openness to dialogue. Observers worked under adverse conditions (gasoline shortages, poor internet connections, high costs for sending materials from Caracas, etc., punitive legislation preventing receipt of funds from abroad, and the CNE's limited openness).

In spite of the greater openness noted above, local citizen observers face a range of hurdles that are inconsistent with their right of participation and that should be addressed before future elections. First, the CNE limits the number of observers in each state. Each organization may accredit a total of up to 700 observers. Second, the accreditation process is cumbersome and expensive because it requires each association to distribute the credentials to its members.

Amid intense polarization and adversity, domestic observation organizations play an important role in giving society a voice in assessing electoral processes without a skewed partisan lens, in evaluating ground lost or potentially regained, in recording the variety of situations on the ground, and in bolstering the importance of the vote to determine who assumes power.

International Observation

In addition, for the 2021 elections, the CNE invited international observers, including the European Union, The Carter Center, and the U.N. This step was accompanied by guarantees for core elements of the work of election observers: access to all phases of the process as well as freedoms of assembly, movement, and expression, which allowed more meaningful and genuine involvement than the restrictive framework for external delegations, known as "accompaniment" (meaning a restricted presence subject to certain CNE conditions). Beyond semantics, the commitments that the country and the electoral authority made to give the missions full freedom were essential to being able to conduct credible observation.

The Carter Center sent an expert mission under the leadership of Jennie Lincoln, the Center's senior advisor for Latin America and the Caribbean. Also on the team were Andrea Nelli Feroci, an associate director in the Center's Democracy Program; Salvador Romero (Bolivia); Merce Castells (Spain); Micheala Sivich (Austria); and Pedro de Alzaga (Spain). The European Union sent a large-scale observation mission led by parliamentarian Isabel Santos. The U.N. sent a

panel of experts responsible for preparing a report for the U.N. Secretary General, which also was submitted to the government of Venezuela. Furthermore, other international actors were invited by the CNE as accompaniment of international visitors.

The invitation to observe the election marked the international community's return to Venezuela's electoral processes after several years of absence. This was an important step, although still limited, given that these conditions were offered only for the 2021 elections. Furthermore, high-profile leaders of the ruling party, such as Diosdado Cabello and President Maduro, made adversarial statements against the missions, particularly the EU mission.

Election Day

On Sunday, Nov. 21, the Carter Center experts visited several polling centers in Caracas and Carabobo. These visits were limited in number and do not provide the basis for evaluating election day processes. However, they did provide the team with general impressions and allowed a comparison to other sources of information from national observation organizations and from the EU's mission. The following findings are based on reports from national and international observers, election day press reports, and the CNE.

Election day took place in a general atmosphere of calm and relative order. However, this characterization does not apply to states like Zulia, where one person was shot to death and a number of local observers and journalists were assaulted.

There were no major technical difficulties on the day of the election itself, and none that kept it from unfolding smoothly. The electronic voting system is well-established and widely accepted. Voters can vote quickly and easily, especially because the system is designed to encourage straight-ticket voting at every level.

In general, both voters and polling station staff followed health safety protocols, especially masking, in an orderly fashion.

However, the assisted-voting mechanism continues to lend itself to abuses of voters' freedoms, particularly in the case of the elderly. Instances of abuses involving assisted voting were not isolated. There was evidence of the same person assisting various voters at up to 29% of polling centers on the morning of election day (data from the EU's preliminary report), while coercive practices that restricted voter freedom were found at 8% of polling centers (data from the OEV's preliminary report).

Furthermore, "red points" run by PSUV members were observed near several voting stations, especially in working-class neighborhoods. Red points are evidence of intricate mobilization mechanisms linking the ruling party, the government, and the state. Voters must check in, and party leaders must fulfill the "1 x 10 promise" – a commitment by grassroots leaders to bring 10 duly identified people prior to election day. After voting, many people go to the red points and sign to prove their participation, which highlights how these stations serve more to control voters than guide them. According to the EU report, 30% of the voting stations had red points at the start of election day, with the percentage rising to 58%. This data is consistent with OEV information.

There was a conspicuous military presence at every polling center. The Armed Forces and Bolivarian Militia overstepped their role of providing logistical support and security and influenced election day itself. Their presence intimidates voters and prevents smooth, independent decision-making by venue coordinators and polling station staff, who tend to request support for their decisions. Likewise, there were reports that military personnel impeded or made it difficult for local observers to access voting centers. The situation in Barinas provided a key example of their interference: Military personnel failed to deliver the final tally sheets, which led to nullification of the electoral process.

Polling stations were closed on a discretionary basis in the absence of clear, set instructions from the CNE. Many centers remained open after 6 p.m., the official closing time, even when no voters were present, and polling station staff did not want to risk closing, with some expressing their fear of proceeding without the consent of the military personnel.

Results were transmitted and selected polling stations were audited without incident; according to the OEV, party-affiliated witnesses received a copy of the tally sheet and filed no complaints.

Official voting hours are 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. However, some polling stations opened late because polling station staff did not turn up and had to be replaced by witnesses or voters. The law states that voting shall remain open as long as voters are waiting to vote. The decision to extend voting hours, without justification, is considered unlawful and is perceived as a last-minute tactic to manipulate the vote, dubbed Operation Top It Off (*Operación Remate*). According to the OEV report, more than half the polling stations closed after 7 p.m. At 6:20 p.m., President Maduro made a final push to mobilize his supporters. At 7:20 p.m., the CNE issued a reminder that only polling stations that had voters waiting in line could remain open.

At a Nov. 21 press conference, the CNE president released an initial official bulletin that showed that 90.2% of results had been transmitted and that PSUV had won 18 governorships and the mayor's office of the city of Caracas, while the opposition groups MUD and Neighborhood Force had claimed victory in the states of Cojedes, Nueva Esparta, and Zulia. The results of Apure and Barinas were pending.

Electoral Dispute Resolution

International and regional treaties state that all people have the right to petition for effective remedy through a domestic court or tribunal in the event that their rights or freedoms are violated.⁶² The right to an effective remedy is essential to guarantee that all other human rights are protected. Therefore, this remedy applies whenever any other fundamental human rights are at stake and throughout the electoral process. Moreover, this right must be recognized within the legal framework. Regional treaties establish a link between the right to an effective remedy, the holding of elections, and the announcement of election results.⁶³ These treaties also state that, when granted, this remedy must be effective. An effective remedy requires that disputes be settled in a timely manner and that states ensure the remedy is enforced when granted.

Venezuela's procedures for appeals and challenges generally are aligned with international agreements and best practices. Electoral legislation establishes the right to reparation of injured parties and the principles of judicial control and appeals.

There are two types of proceedings for resolving election disputes in Venezuela: administrative proceedings conducted by the CNE and judicial proceedings conducted by ordinary criminal courts. The CNE is responsible for overseeing the election process. Therefore, it may act on a petition by an injured party or at its own initiative. Electoral law describes the procedures for challenges at each stage of the election process. Any decision, action, or omission by the election administration may be challenged through the CNE, and the CNE's decisions can be contested by filing an appeal with the Electoral Chamber of the TSJ (Article 195). Electoral law stipulates that failure to comply with election law constitutes an electoral offense to be handled via ordinary criminal proceedings in ordinary criminal courts (Article 198).

Moreover, electoral law establishes the possibility of repeat elections if the CNE is unable to determine the results of an election (Articles 215.3 and 266). The deadline for contesting any act in the electoral process is 15 business days from the date it occurred. To contest election results, the challenge has to be filed within 15 days from the date the election results were announced.

The CNE deployed 2,000 poll watchers nationwide between Oct. 28 and Nov. 18 to monitor adherence to campaign rules. In a tweet, electoral magistrate Enrique Márquez issued a reminder that public officials are not allowed to engage in partisan conduct, political advertising on the job, or political canvassing at government agencies, or use public resources for political purposes.

The CNE says it launched 11 administrative investigations for campaign violations at its own initiative following reports filed by the media monitoring room set up for these elections. The Carter Center had no record of any penalty imposed by the CNE during the mission or while this report was being written.

It is striking that, in a process with such a large number of participants, no formal complaints have been lodged for irregularities or violations of the legal framework during voter registration, candidate registration, or the electoral campaign period. This is a sign of low trust

⁶² U.N., ICCPR, Article 2(3); Organization of American States, American Convention on Human Rights, Article 25(1); Council of Europe, Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, Article 13.

⁶³ African Union, African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance, Article 17(2); Economic Community of West African States, Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance, Article 7.

in the system, indicating that candidates do not consider it a useful channel for resolving disputes. Furthermore, the corruption, imbalance, and discretionary powers of the courts were cited to Center observers as factors that discourage people from seeking judicial solutions. National actors and international bodies denounce the judicial branch's lack of independence and impartiality, and it is perceived as an extension of the executive branch. They also denounce the extreme weakness and even absence of rule of law in Venezuela and urgently demand that the judicial branch be reformed.

Meanwhile, CSOs and local observation groups collected thousands of complaints before, during, and after election day. Significant complaints involved use of public funds during the campaign, political clientelism, intimidation, irregularities in opening polling stations, canvassing at polling stations, red points, acts counter to freedom of expression, and arrests.

On Nov. 29, the TSJ ordered the CNE to convene a new election for governor of the state of Barinas, after having admitted the constitutional appeal of a citizen who requested the suspension of procedures related to the tabulation, adjudication, and proclamation of the race, claiming that MUD candidate Freddy Superlano was not eligible to run. Neither the CNE nor the affected candidate had information about the MUD candidate's ineligibility.

On Dec. 14, MUD candidates for the governorship of Apure and for the mayoral office of San Fernando de Apure challenged the results that awarded victory to PSUV candidates, alleging irregularities, interference, and abuses. They mentioned the high movement of voters from one center to another; the lack of internet connections in at least one-third (120) of polling centers; and CNE officials' failure to recognize the credentials of MUD poll watchers, and other issues.

Results

Turnout

Voter turnout was 42.2%. Emigration has significantly driven up abstention rates, but even this factor does not explain why the figures stalled out at the level of the most pessimistic forecasts. However, turnout was considerably higher than in the 2020 legislative election, which mostly saw participation from the government-leaning electorate because the main opposition forces abstained. The modest percentage cannot be attributed solely to the local nature of the contests, which represent less of a draw for voters than presidential elections. It reflects the disenchantment of large portions of the population with the state of the country and skepticism about the power of the vote. Geographically speaking, turnout decreased in the most populated, more developed states, while it rose in the least populated states at the fringes of the main economic circuits.

Results

The results of the Nov. 21 regional election favored the ruling party. In gubernatorial races, the ruling party won in 19 states, compared with four won by the opposition (including Barinas, where the election was nullified). Of these four, MUD claimed three victories (Barinas, Cojedes, Zulia) and Democratic Alliance one (Nueva Esparta). At the municipal level, the PSUV won 213 mayoral offices, and the various opposition forces won 122. The strongest opposition factions were MUD, which won 63 mayoral races; Democratic Alliance, which won 22; and Neighborhood Force, with 10 mayoral victories.

This distribution of offices did not reflect the country's overall vote totals, in which the PSUV received fewer votes than the combined opposition. In broad terms, of the 8.9 million votes cast, the PSUV won slightly more than 4 million votes, compared with 4.7 million votes for opposition forces. The opposition often ran multiple candidates for positions against a single PSUV candidate.

Apart from abstention, the results reflect two realities. First, the fragmentation of opposition candidacies kept the opposition from winning some governorships and mayoral offices where its strongest candidate fell a few points short of the government representative. On the other hand, the results confirmed PSUV's position of strength in less populated districts.

Acceptance of Results

Various incidents took place in the days following Nov. 21: Looting was reported in five mayoral offices in the states of Zulia, Bolívar, Monagas, and Miranda. The elected mayor and four other members of his team were arrested in the state of Mérida when they tried to prevent the mayor's office from being looted by pro-government supporters who had lost the election. CNE Magistrate Roberto Picón publicly rejected the arbitrary detention. In the state of Guárico, an attempt was made to arrest newly elected mayor Juan Germán Roscio and the judge who conducted his swearing-in.

Implications of the Results

Against a backdrop of profound voter disillusionment with the political process, institutions, and actors, the election results favored the government and the ruling party, which won most governorships and mayoral offices. The results widened the division in the opposition between the bloc reluctant to participate in elections and the political wing that stresses the importance of maintaining an electoral presence and demanding better guarantees.

Post-election Events

The post-election phase was unexpectedly focused on the outcome of the Barinas election, which laid bare serious limitations in the progress made in various areas in 2021 compared with previous elections. It also set a precedent that shakes the foundations of Venezuela's electoral structure and voter confidence.

In Barinas, opposition candidate Freddy Superlano was leading Gov. Argenis Chávez, the brother of former President Hugo Chávez. However, the tabulation of votes was not finalized because soldiers failed to deliver the final tally sheets, which in any case were not numerous enough to change the outcome. Before the count was finalized, the electoral chamber of Venezuela's TSJ nullified the process on the grounds that Superlano had been disqualified by the GAO, a status of which neither Superlano nor the CNE was aware, and which was communicated after election day. A repeat election was ordered by the TSJ – not by the CNE – to be held in Barinas on Jan. 9. MUD had serious difficulties registering its new candidate because Superlano's wife, Aurora Silva, also was barred. Ultimately, Sergio Garrido's candidacy was registered, and he won the governorship.

This chain of events showed, first, the excessive role played by military forces, superseding even that of the electoral authority, which was not able to recover the missing tally sheets. It also confirmed the GAO's arbitrary and biased use of its authority to disqualify candidates, an abuse compounded by its ability to take this action even after election day. To this was added the electoral chamber's strange interference before officials had even finished tallying votes in the state, with a decision completely at odds with protecting or guaranteeing rights.

The presidential order demanding the EU mission's early departure strained the atmosphere even further. This combination of factors converged in a critical situation that exposed how the essential decisions about the electoral process are beyond the power of the CNE, the parties, and the citizens themselves, and instead are under government control.

The implications of the Barinas election overshadowed the usual post-election phase in terms of the potential reconfiguration of the balance of power (between camps or within them), the emergence of new leaders or confirmation of others, the prospects for upcoming elections, etc.

Conclusions

This final report offers the full analysis of the Carter Center’s international electoral expert mission, which began work in mid-October 2021 and was present in Venezuela Nov. 7-27. The objective of the mission was to analyze the general context of the elections and the compliance of the electoral process with international standards, with a look toward future elections in Venezuela.

The backdrop to the Venezuelan regional and municipal elections was a widespread socioeconomic and humanitarian crisis (aggravated by the COVID-19 pandemic), a pattern of political repression, severely restricted rights to political participation and freedom of expression, the government’s overt use of its incumbent political advantage, and an uneven playing field. However, negotiations between some opposition groups and the ruling party resulted in three major changes in the electoral environment: a concerted reshuffling of the CNE by the National Assembly (*Asamblea Nacional*—AN); the presence of international observers; and talks between the government and the opposition that began in Mexico City in August.

The new CNE includes two magistrates (out of five) with ties to the opposition, which opened the door to building broader trust in the independence and credibility of the body. It generated the possibility of greater predictability and trust in the rules of competition, guarantees for the electorate and opposition parties, and a demonstration of greater independence. However, the political and legal decisions of the Electoral Chamber of the TSJ and the GAO undermined any nascent independence of the new CNE. In addition, legal provisions concerning the media and freedom of expression, the registration of candidates, the suspension of political rights, and the financing of political parties and election campaigns do not comply with international standards for democratic elections and agreements signed by Venezuela.

The electoral process took place in a compressed timeframe, with a new electoral administration and a dominant incumbent government with well-developed political machinery that took advantage of state resources against a fragmented opposition that had abstained in recent elections but decided to participate. Voters selected candidates for 3,082 government positions, including 23 governorships, 335 mayoral offices, and state legislature and municipal council memberships. A total of 70,000 candidates registered to compete, and the turnout was 42.2%. Although the ruling party won a majority of the positions, the actual vote total favored the opposition by nearly 10%.

Recommendations

Our core recommendations focus primarily on institutional rather than technical aspects, with the aim of creating guarantees for a genuinely democratic electoral process in all its phases. The country must reinforce the framework of freedoms and rights of all citizens and of the media, whether traditional or digital; reconfigure its branches of government and institutions to free their conduct and decision-making from government influence; ensure that the CNE is always able to act with impartiality and without political interference, particularly from the government; strive to create a more level playing field; and avoid discretionary and biased interference with parties and use of disqualification to the detriment of the opposition and dissenting Chavistas.

Voter Registry

- We recommend that Venezuela **immediately arrange for comprehensive voter registration of its emigrants – without undue restrictions like the current requirement of legal residence abroad – and young voters**. The absence of the emigrant vote was not an issue in the 2021 regional elections because of the nature of the elections themselves, but it will be a relevant aspect in future national elections.

Registration of Parties and Candidates

- The executive committees of 12 parties were stripped of their authority by the TSJ for failing to comply with internal bylaws and were replaced by new decision-making bodies. **We recommend that political organizations hold primary elections so their rank-and-file members can elect their leaders** pursuant to their own regulations, according to the principles of internal democracy in political parties.
- We recommend, as established by the constitution, that **political rights only be suspended by court decisions and in adherence with all appropriate procedural safeguards**, not as an administrative or supplementary penalty. We recommend that the Law of the General Accountability Office (*Ley de the Contraloría General*) (Article 105) and the Anti-Corruption Law (*Ley Anticorrupción*) (Article 39.5) be reformed to align with the provisions of the American Convention on Human Rights (Article 23), the CCPR-ICCPR (Article 25), the CCCPR (Articles 5 and 14), and the ACHR (Article 25).
- We recommend that **criteria established for the right to run for elected office be revised to fully align with international principles and standards and good practices** as described in U.N. CCPR General Comment No. 25 (Paragraph 15), the OSCE Copenhagen document (Paragraph 7), and the Code of Good Practice of the COE Venice Commission (Paragraph 1.1.c).

Electoral System

- We recommend that the current system for electing representatives of indigenous peoples be revised to **include registration and direct voting by secret ballot and universal suffrage** enshrined in the constitution (Article 63).

Participation and Representation of Women

- In Venezuela there is no law governing gender parity or quotas; nor does the electoral law explicitly provide for quotas or parity. The country's laws do not establish affirmative-action measures. Within the regulatory framework, the CNE has created regulations that

seek parity in candidate lists for legislative seats at all levels of government. However, parity regulations for collegial bodies are implemented on an *ad hoc* basis, and the CNE is lax in enforcing them. Women won fewer elected offices in the 2021 elections than in the 2017 elections. In accordance with international standards for democratic elections, we **recommend that special measures be designed to increase the participation of women in politics**. These measures may involve, for example, a legal system of parity or quotas, financial aid and training for candidates, campaigns for equal participation, and expressly recruiting women to be nominated for public office.

- We also recommend **disaggregating data by gender in order to fully assess the extent to which men and women are able to participate in electoral processes on a level playing field**, as established by the U.N. Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, Recommendation No. 25, Paragraph 35.

Election Administration

- We recommend that Venezuela **seek measures to ensure the independence and impartiality of the electoral body at every level and to guarantee that those holding public office are free from any political interference**, as explicitly required by the regional treaties signed by Venezuela.
- We recommend that **CNE sessions be public and that its decisions be promptly and systematically published on its website** to facilitate public access in the interest of the principles of transparency and legal certainty.
- We recommend **enhancing communication so that people who have been randomly selected to serve as polling station staff are aware of their duties** and receive on-site training to make it less common for them to be replaced by persons delegated by parties.

Justice

- The credibility of the electoral process is largely determined by the government's ability to effectively resolve election-related disputes. Laws and procedures must not be applied arbitrarily. Participatory rights may not be suspended or excluded except on grounds that are established by law and which are objective and reasonable in accordance with the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, General Observation No. 25, Paragraph 4. The existence of political prisoners and arbitrary detentions undermines not only electoral rights, but also basic tenets, calling into question the existence of rule of law. We **recommend that courts categorically and immediately cease interfering with the electoral system for political reasons** not subject to the law.

Audits

- We recommend **conducting technology audits as a good practice to boost confidence in the voting process**. Such audits, incidentally, enjoy the consensus of the ruling party, the opposition, and civil society. The CNE must ensure uninterrupted and unimpeded access for all eligible audit participants.

Election Campaign

- **Finance:** Current legislation is inadequate because it does not set a ceiling for spending or contributions; nor does it require public disclosure of party finances for public scrutiny. Therefore, the system lacks transparency and fails to ensure accountability and competitiveness. We **recommend rules that set limits on donations, ceilings for spending, and effective mechanisms for oversight and public disclosure of the parties' financial**

information in order to ensure the transparency of the process, a level playing field, accountability, and penalties in the event of breaches of the international rules established in the ICCPR (Article 25), Comment 25 of the U.N. Human Rights Committee (Paragraph 19), and the U.N. Convention Against Corruption.

- **Monitoring and penalties:** We recommend **strengthening institutional processes and capacities to ensure that election campaign rules are enforced.** Steps should include a ban on using public funds for election-related purposes, measures to address aspects related to campaign spending and the fight against hate speech and disinformation, and allowing the CNE to make an appropriate and timely legal response in the event of a violation.
- **Enforcing applicable law and imposing penalties for flagrant violations:** Use of the incumbent political advantage and public funds for partisan purposes in the election campaign is prohibited. We **recommend the CNE enforce applicable law and penalize unlawful behavior.**

Media: Freedom of Expression

- The **legal framework should be reformed to replace the criminal charges of “defamation” and “spreading false information” with reasonable and proportionate civil liability.**
- Technical restrictions on access to content constitute *prima facie* interference with the fundamental right of all people to exchange ideas and information. We **recommend ending the practice of blocking websites, in particular, as well as blocking the media, political sites, multimedia platforms, and censorship circumvention tools,** among others. We recommend explicitly revoking CONATEL’s authority to censor the internet and ensuring that any actions to block content by order of any independent and impartial court or judicial body, and these orders must be in strict proportion to the intended aim.
- We recommend **ending state-organized campaigns on social media used to manipulate public opinion with fake accounts,** ending the use of public social media for partisan purposes, and giving the CNE tools to monitor social networks.
- **Undue restrictions of freedom of expression should be purged from the legal framework** in order to foster a free campaign environment and ensure that fundamental freedoms crucial to democratic elections are respected.

Election Observation

- Domestic and international observation is subject to restrictions contrary to international standards and good practice for independent observation of all pre-election phases, election day itself, vote counting, tabulation, and the resolution of election-related disputes. In addition, the quotas imposed on domestic observation groups are counterproductive. It is better for each organization to accredit the number of observers it deems sufficient to complete the task. The **rules should be changed to allow international observation teams to be deployed according to customary principles,** eliminating the constrained mode of “accompaniment.”

Election Day

- For the voting process and election day, it is essential to bolster civilian oversight of the armed forces, whose presence should be reduced – in terms of numbers and weaponry. In

particular, **all military interference with electoral decisions must be eliminated**. Voting station staff and CNE officials must have exclusive decision-making authority. The role of the military should be solely one of support and cooperation.

- Likewise, it is necessary to **avoid or set clear limits for mechanisms for social control of voters or that diminish their freedom during the act of voting**, such as the “red points” that verify whether people voted, or assisted voting for elderly people or people with little education.
- We **recommend a clear poll center closing time**. Vague or unspecified voting hours cause confusion at voting stations, arouse unnecessary political suspicions, and feed distrust of the CNE.

Annex: Twitter Analysis of Venezuela’s 2021 Regional Elections

On Nov. 21, 2021, voters selected candidates to fill 3,082 government offices in Venezuela’s regional and municipal elections. Elections were held in all 23 states (for governors and state representatives) and each of the 335 municipalities (for mayors and councilors). Voters chose from among 70,244 candidates, most of whom were nominated by political parties grouped into five main coalitions. The first is the ruling party’s coalition, called the Great Patriotic Pole (*Gran Polo Patriótico* — GPP). The other four are opposition coalitions: the Democratic Alliance (*Alianza Democrática* — AD); the Popular Revolutionary Alternative (*Alternativa Popular Revolucionaria* — APR); the National Independent Coalition with Neighborhood Power (*Coalición Nacional Independiente con Fuerza Vecinal*); and the Democratic Unity Roundtable (*Mesa de la Unidad Democrática* — MUD).

The large number of candidates made social media monitoring difficult, so the Carter Center team had to select a sample that would accurately reflect the overall discourse on social media. The Center selected:

- 66 regional candidate profiles.
- 30 profiles of relevant Venezuelan political parties and stakeholders.
- 26 government institution profiles.
- The top 20 hashtags tweeted by entities associated with the National Bolivarian Armed Forces (*Fuerza Armada Nacional Bolivariana*—FANB).
- 38 hashtags that were political or potentially used for political ends that were trending on Twitter Venezuela during the election season.
- An exhaustive sample of the interactions of the Ministry of Popular Power for Communication and Information (*Ministerio del Poder Popular para la Comunicación y la Informa*).
- An exhaustive sample of interactions related to the arrest and extradition to the U.S. of Álex Saab, a Colombian businessman who was detained in Cabo Verde as part of a money laundering investigation.

The final database has more than 7 million interactions (tweets, retweets, quote tweets, and replies) associated with these profiles and hashtags. These interactions span the entire campaign period, from Oct. 28, 2021, up to and including election day on Nov. 21, 2021.

The Carter Center used this database to analyze:

- The use of bots or organized groups to manipulate election-related discourse on Twitter.
- Interference by public institutions in the election campaign to manipulate public opinion or exert a partisan influence on the political debate.
- Hate speech surrounding candidates, especially sexist, LGBTBI-phobic, racist, or xenophobic speech.
- The spread of disinformation, whether directly on social media or through fake-news outlets.

During the campaign period, Twitter suspended a number of accounts for violating its rules. The Carter Center analyzed the messages these accounts spread before they were suspended and, where relevant, the parties or candidates they helped or harmed.

The Carter Center also met with leading Venezuelan information monitoring groups⁶⁴ to hear their opinion on how social media was used in the country and on the most frequent disinformation techniques.

Artificially Aided Political Propaganda

Twitter's rules prohibit using the platform to "artificially amplify or suppress information."⁶⁵ In politics, amplification or suppression is used to boost certain messages or smear political opponents using automated systems like bots.⁶⁶ But according to some local experts and monitoring groups, people also are used to artificially spread hashtags in Venezuela. Allegedly, citizens enrolled in the Homeland Card (*Carnet de la Patria*) social assistance system followed government dictates to systematically disseminate these messages.⁶⁷

The facts seem to support this theory. The day after the elections, the We Are Venezuela Movement [*Movimiento Somos Venezuela*], a party promoted by President Maduro and with Delcy Rodríguez as its secretary-general, announced on its Twitter account "the presentation of the Mención Award to social media (Twitter) standouts in the @CarnetDLaPatria system [...]."⁶⁸

⁶⁴ Observatorio Electoral Venezolano, ProBoxVenezuela, Cazadores de Fake News, Guachimán Electoral, ProDavinci, Universidad Central de Venezuela, Universidad Católica Andrés Bello, and the Venezuelan chapter of the Internet Society.

⁶⁵ *Twitter.com: Platform manipulation and spam policy*: "[...] commercially-motivated spam, that typically aims to drive traffic or attention from a conversation on Twitter to accounts, websites, products, services, or initiatives; inauthentic engagements, that attempt to make accounts or content appear more popular or active than they are; coordinated activity, that attempts to artificially influence conversations through the use of multiple accounts, fake accounts, automation and/or scripting; and coordinated harmful activity that encourages or promotes behavior which violates the Twitter Rules." <https://help.twitter.com/en/rules-and-policies/platform-manipulation>

⁶⁶ Bots are software programs that work autonomously or in coordination with each other to spread disinformation on social media. Their speed and processing capacity allow them to easily manipulate public opinion, whether by sabotaging conversations with insults and disparagement, or by undermining the reputation of some candidates and artificially exalting that of others.

⁶⁷ Transparencia Venezuela. Espaja.com: "The Rise and Fall of the Venezuelan State's Twitter Squad in Times of COVID-19" ("*Auge y declive del escuadrón tuitero del Estado venezolano en tiempos de COVID-19*") <https://transparencia.org.ve/caida-del-escuadrón-tuitero-una-bomba-de-tiempo-en-twitter/>

⁶⁸ ProBox Venezuela: "#EleccionesRegionales2021: Maduro once again paid to position his message on Twitter" ("*Maduro volvió a pagar para posicionar su mensaje en Twitter*"). <https://proboxve.org/publicacion/eleccionesregionales-maduro-volvio-a-pagar-para-posicionar-su-mensaje-en-twitter>

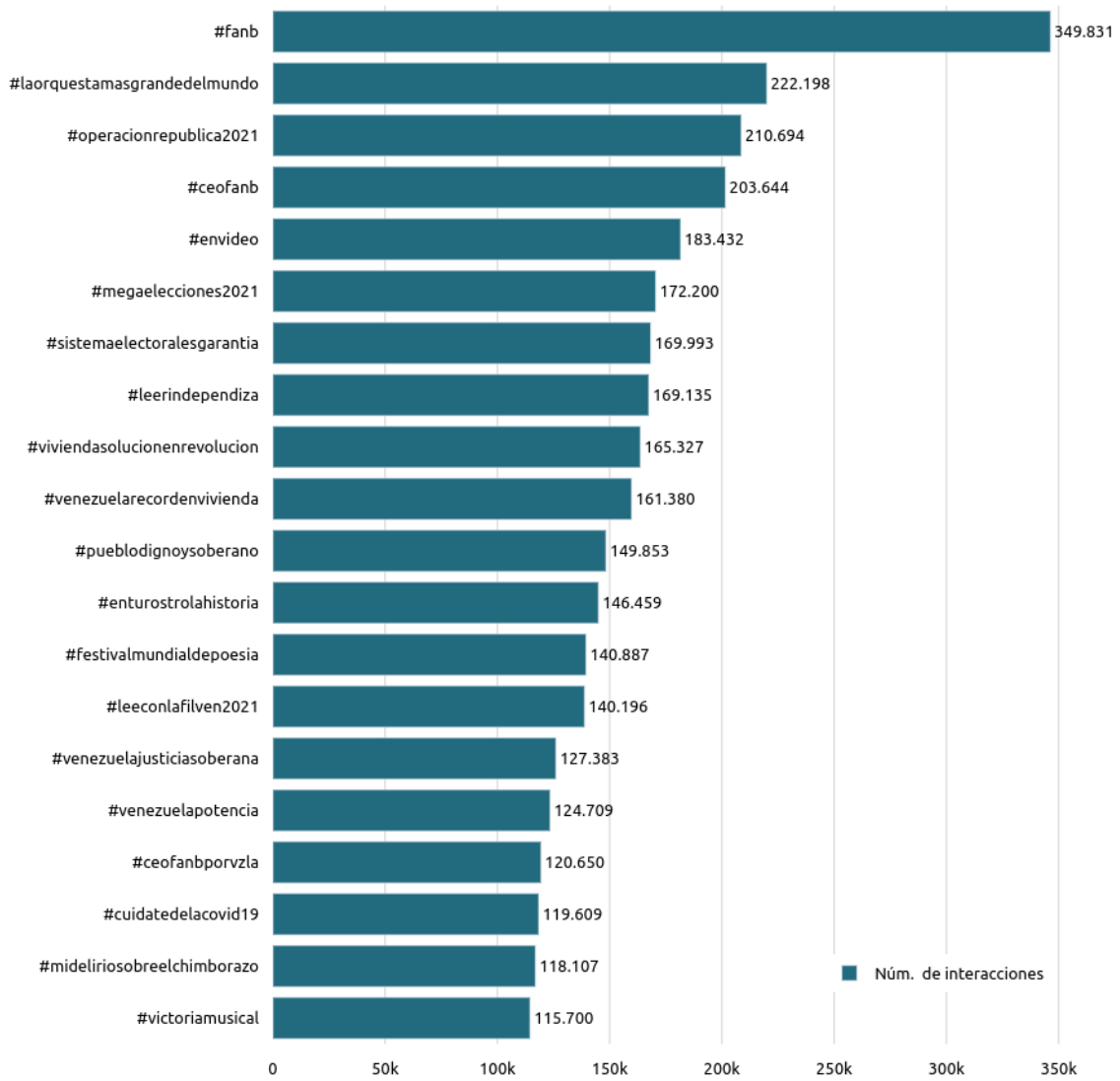


If indeed people rather than programs were used to help artificially disseminate messages, it would be very difficult to detect them using traditional bot detection software systems, and they would not appear in this analysis.

The Election Period's Most Widely Shared Hashtags

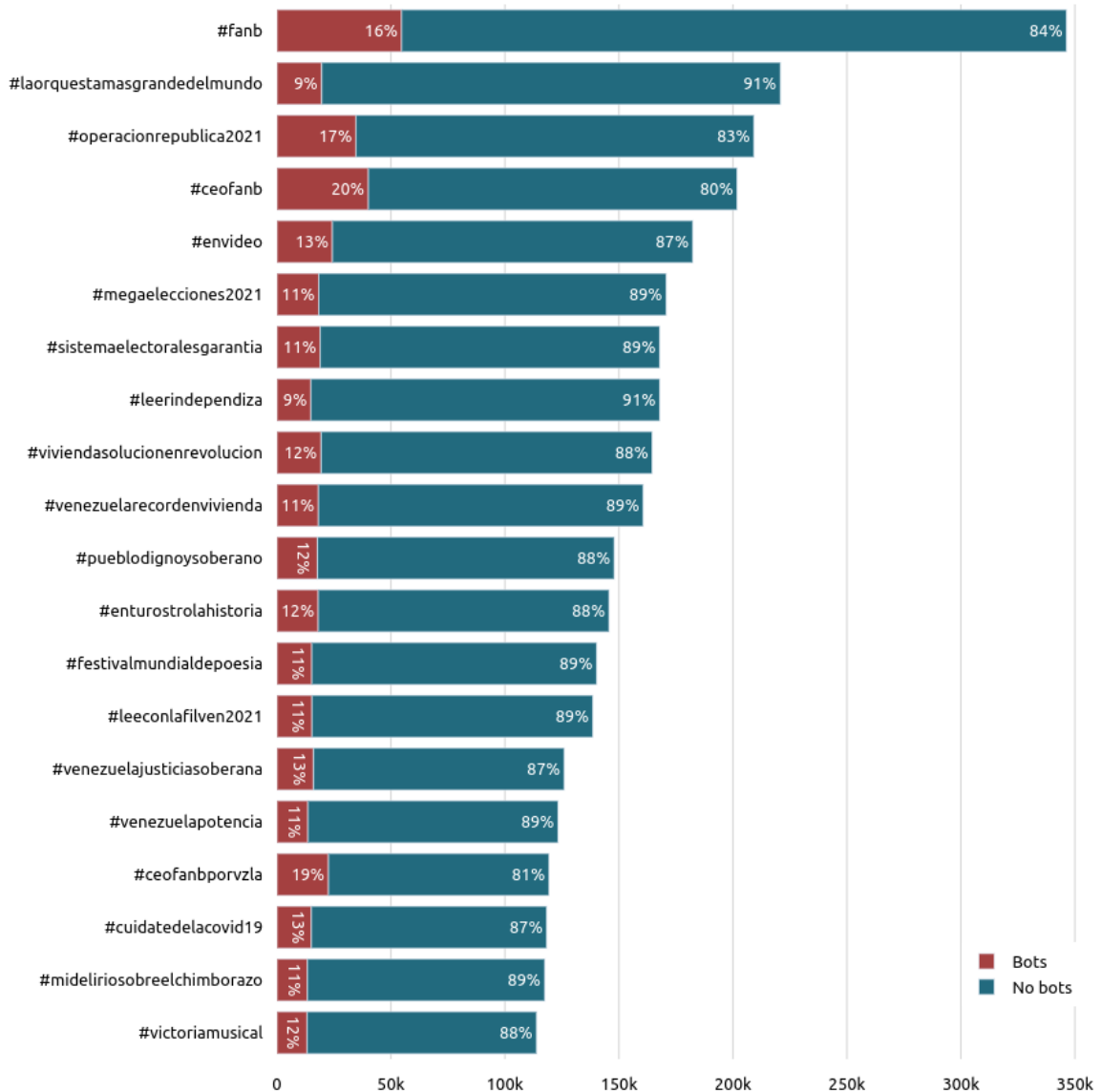
There was a hashtag for every cultural event in Venezuela during the campaign period. These hashtags were shared by government institutions until they topped the daily list of trending topics. Examples include a Guinness record attempt involving an orchestra of more than 12,000 musicians (#LaOrquestaMásGrandeDelMundo), the World Poetry Festival (#FestivalMundialDePoesía), and the International Book Fair (#LeeConLaFilven2021 and #LeerIndependiza). While the health emergency and vaccination campaigns also appeared on the daily trending topics list, the top hashtag for this campaign period was #fanb, the hashtag of the National Bolivarian Armed Forces. As explained below, this institution played a pivotal role on social media.

The Most Shared Hashtags During the Election Period



The first step in the Carter Center’s analysis was to ascertain how many of these hashtags had artificial bot support⁶⁹ and the extent to which this support aided their spread. Military-related hashtags showed the highest bot use: #ceofanb (the acronym for the Operational Strategic Command of the Bolivarian Armed Forces [*Comando Estratégico Operacional de la Fuerza Armada Bolivariana*], with 20% bot support), #ceofanbporzla (19%), #OperaciónRepública2021 (17%), and #fanb (16%, the most widely shared hashtag, since it appears in most tweets posted by military units). All other topics had 9-13% artificial support.

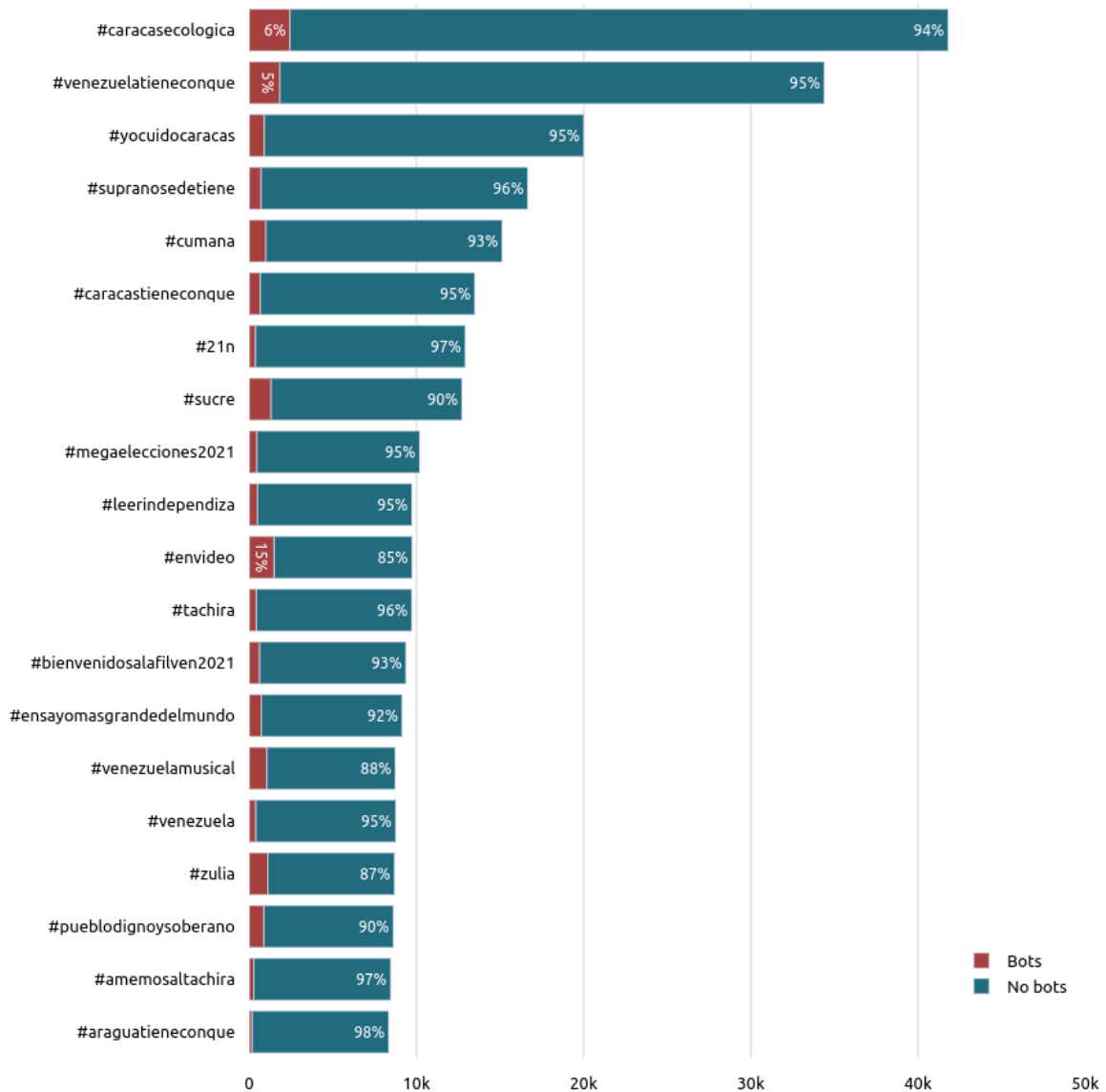
Percentage of Bots in Most Widely Shared Hashtags



⁶⁹ The Carter Center used the Botometer of the Observatory on Social Media and the Indiana University Network Science Institute to analyze the profiles in this annex. The system analyzes the profiles’ various characteristics and estimates how likely it is that they are bots (expressed as a percentage). In this analysis, a profile is considered a bot when the likelihood is greater than 80%.

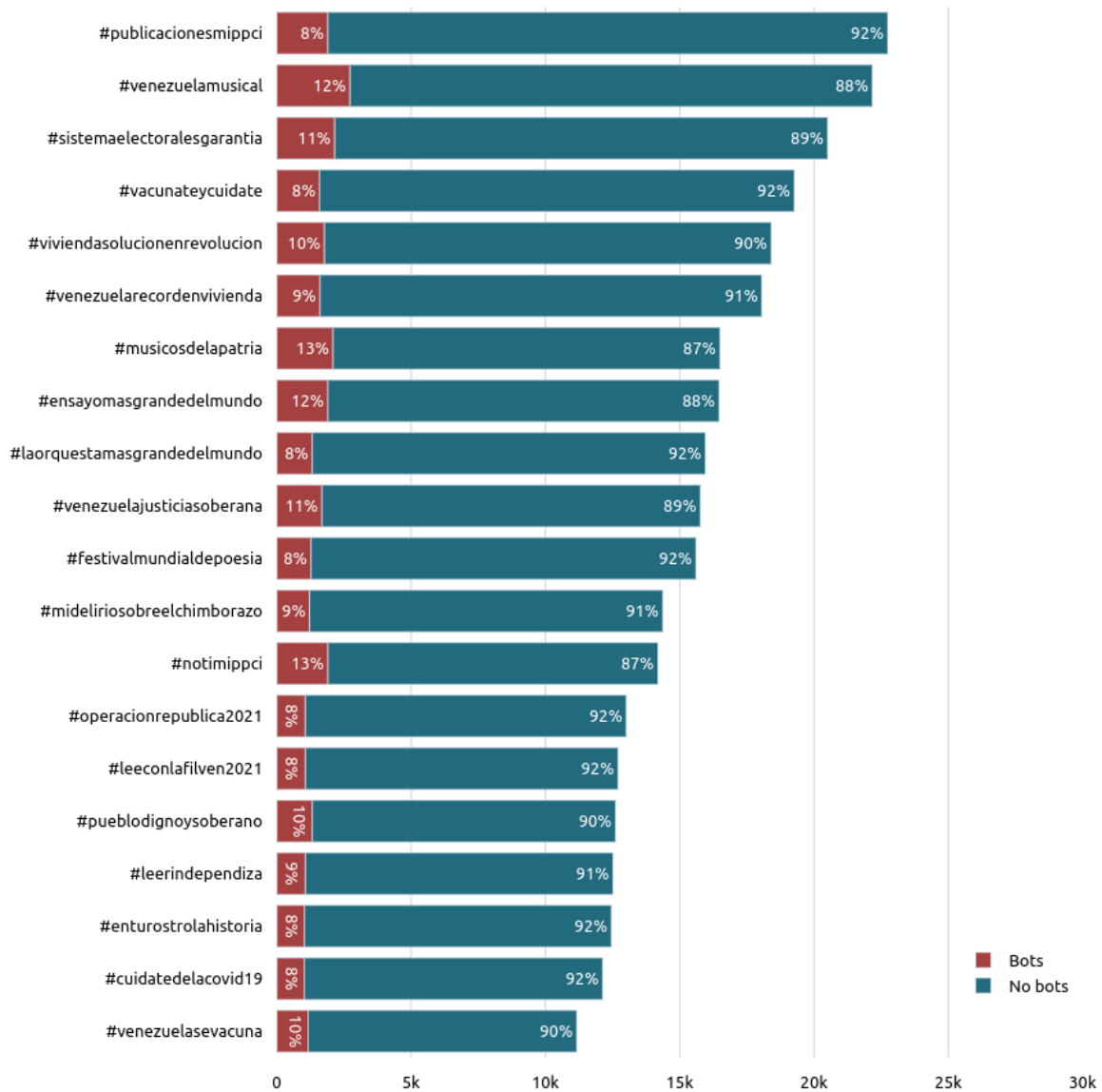
Candidate Discourse

This analysis is based on a sample of interactions by a selection of gubernatorial and mayoral candidates. This type of discourse had a very small percentage of bots—much less than in other official environments, as analyzed below. The hashtags #CaracasEcológica and #VenezuelaTieneConQué (the ruling party’s slogan) were the most widely shared in regional and municipal candidates’ discourse. Meanwhile, the #envideo hashtag was often used for informational pieces from Venezolana de Televisión or for other audiovisual content, which almost always had a pro-government slant.



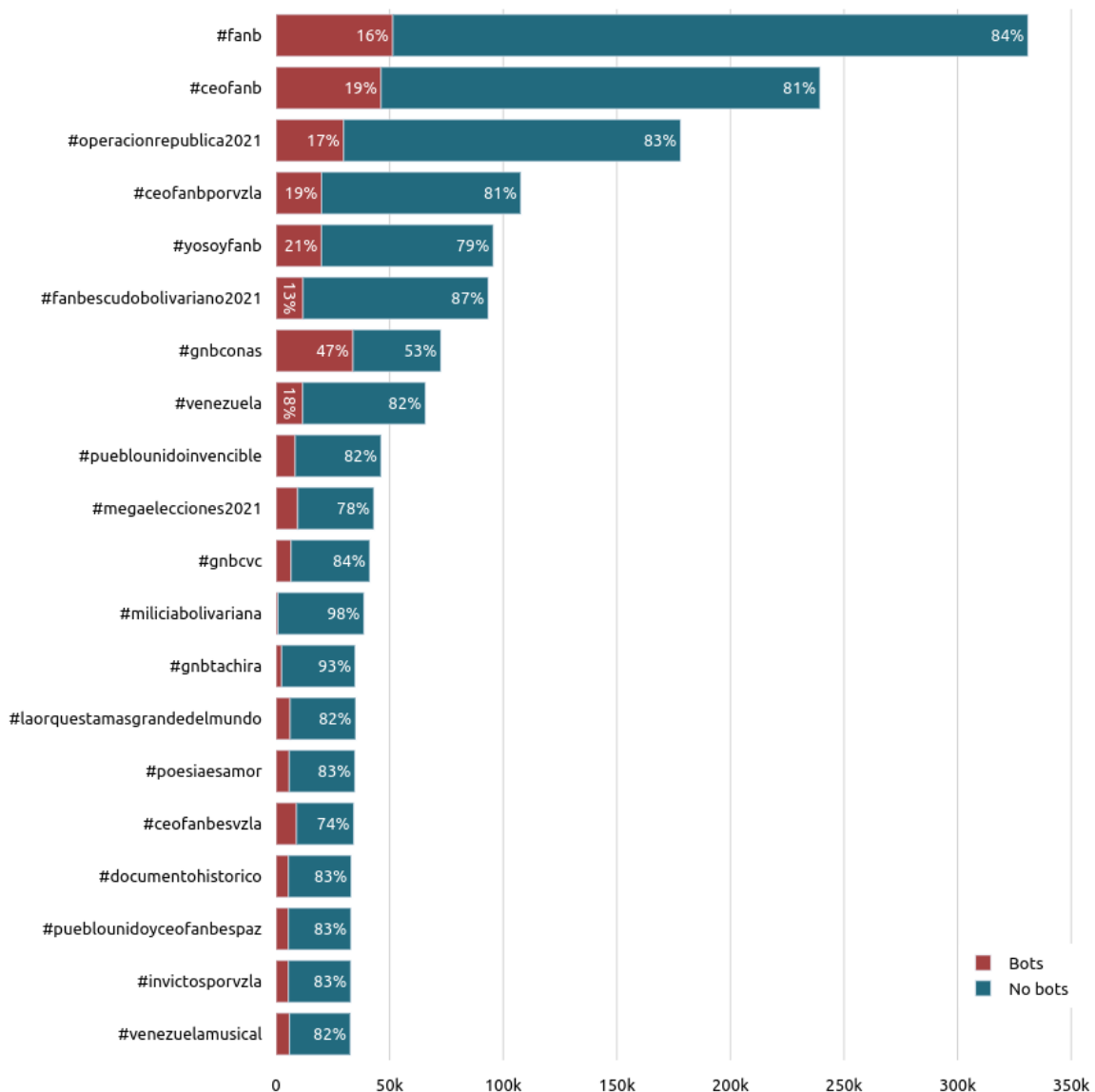
Ministry of Popular Power for Communication and Information (MPPCI)

The ministry, headed by singer and poet Freddy Nájuez, played a leading role in spreading messages on social media. Most of the top-trending hashtags, whether artificially aided or not, were first tweeted by the MPPCI, along with the hashtag #laetiquetadeldía. These hashtags were widely disseminated and had strong support from almost all government institutions. They became trending topics on multiple days, even on election day itself.



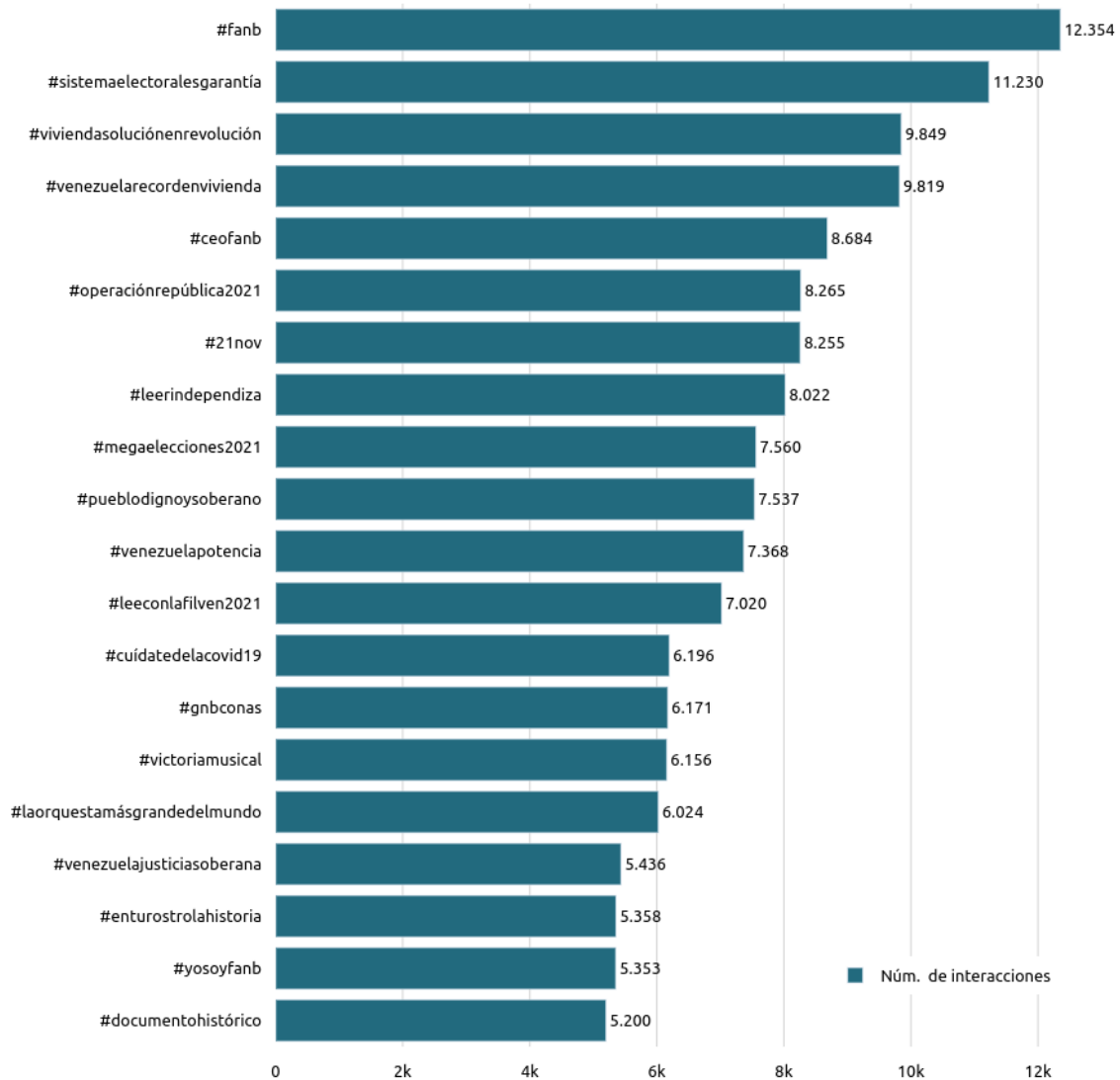
National Bolivarian Armed Forces (FANB)

While the MPPCI hand-picked the messages to be shared, the Venezuelan military was among the stakeholders that most disseminated them. The FANB played a leading role in the campaign on social media, whether sharing content related to its work (#OperaciónRepública2021, #FANBEscudoBolivariano) or on other topics selected by the MPPCI, even cultural topics (#LaOrquestaMásGrandeDelMundo, #PoesíaEsAmor). Army-related hashtags had a higher percentage of bots than other areas of discourse. This is especially true of the #gnbconas hashtag of the National Anti-Extortion and Kidnapping Command of the National Bolivarian Guard, which routinely publishes photographs on its operations.



Accounts Suspended by Twitter

The final analysis of the most widely shared messages examines accounts and interactions that were compiled during the campaign period but then suspended and deleted⁷⁰ by Twitter.⁷¹ The Carter Center stored this information before it was deleted and has analyzed it to determine which hashtags these accounts had promoted before suspension. The result is very similar to that of the previous analyses – the hashtags are essentially the same in almost all cases – suggesting that the accounts were suspended precisely because they violated Twitter’s rules against artificially amplifying messages.



⁷⁰ Twitter periodically eliminates accounts that violate its rules, especially on artificially amplifying messages. After a time, it publishes this information after concealing identifying information.

⁷¹ Twitter.com: *Disclosing state-linked information operations we've removed*
https://blog.twitter.com/en_us/topics/company/2021/disclosing-state-linked-information-operations-we-ve-removed

Spreading Propaganda via Public Institutions

Throughout the campaign period, and especially as election day drew near, various public institutions posted propaganda about the government's achievements on social media. The day before election day, many state institutional accounts tweeted photographs, congratulations, and acknowledgments of public works or other steps taken by the national government or regional and municipal governments. The most popular hashtags were #VenezuelaRecordEnVivienda and #ViviendaSoluciónEnRevolución, paired with photographs of senior government officials inaugurating social housing. Some of these images feature President Maduro.



The Álex Saab Case

Colombian businessman Álex Saab was detained in Cabo Verde after the U.S. government requested an INTERPOL Red Notice to arrest him on money laundering charges. Soon after, Saab was extradited to the U.S.⁷² This episode resulted in his name trending on Twitter during almost the entire election season. A social network analysis (SNA⁷³) of accounts with interactions related to this topic found a large group, likely part of the same community, tweeting hashtags in favor of the Venezuelan diplomat. This community tried to directly or artificially counteract the information posted on this topic. The Saab case was the main element of disinformation in a campaign period without a strong presence of fake news, despite the prevalence of artificial distribution of political propaganda.



⁷² BBC: “Alex Saab: U.S. Justice system withdraws 7 of 8 charges as part of extradition agreement” (“Alex Saab: la justicia de Estados Unidos retira 7 de los 8 cargos como parte del acuerdo de extradición”) <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-internacional-59128553>

⁷³ Social Network Analysis is the Gephi tool’s modularity algorithm. <https://gephi.org/>

Hate Speech

Conversations about candidates were the focus of the analysis of aggressiveness and hate speech^{74 75} in election-related discourse, since it is candidates who bear the brunt of these attacks during election seasons. Of a sample of more than half a million textual interactions (tweets, replies, and quote tweets), only 0.03% contained hate speech: About 0.02% were LGBTBI-phobic; 0.004% sexist; and 0.0006% racist or xenophobic. These figures are low compared with other elections in the region, but the content was qualitatively similar in terms of its severity. The percentage of messages with any type of verbal aggression (2.7%) or threat (1.6%) was somewhat higher.

⁷⁴ The United Nations understands hate speech as “any kind of communication in speech, writing or behaviour, that attacks or uses pejorative or discriminatory language with reference to a person or a group on the basis of who they are, in other words, based on their religion, ethnicity, nationality, race, colour, descent, gender or other identity factor.”

⁷⁵ To detect aggressive messages, The Carter Center used Jigsaw's Perspective service (<https://www.perspectiveapi.com/>) and obtained assistance from Google's counter-abuse technology team. To detect hate speech, it used machine learning algorithms trained on tweets from other election processes.



Jorge
@Jorge2207G

En respuesta a @gestionperfecta y @NicolasMaduro

Vaya a comer mierd... usted también vieja pendeja.
Muerta de hambre, arrastrada, corrupta,

11:16 p. m. · 27 oct. 2021 · Twitter for Android



FIN DE MUNDO
@RonaldJarellano

Respondiendo a @Roside_Gonzalez @Mippcivzla y 8 más

Mira muerta de hambre que anda robando propiedad privada acaso que los ladrones que tanto defiendes no te pagan los suficiente para comprar tu propio apartamento vagabunda es lo que tu eres mejor métete a puta y deja de andar robando ladrona

6:29 p. m. · 11 nov. 2021 · Twitter for Android



Gabriel Sanchez
@GabrielSan05

En respuesta a @delcyrodriguez y @NicolasMaduro

Eres una plaga más que vive chupando del Narcogobierno tu tu hermano y toda la plaga del PSUV que viven bien porque eres una puta descarada saliendo a votar con ropa de marca que el Diabolo te tenga la paila más grande para que te quemes lentamente

4:09 a. m. · 22 nov. 2021 · Twitter for Android



@Jaidy1999_2013

En respuesta a @alanyknarroz21 y @arnaldomoniq

da es asco. Con que moral los gay o Maricos de este país exigen respeto con ese comportamiento, lo peor que el PSUV aplauda e incita a ese comportamiento. Chavez es y sera un Varón un hombre y jamás hubiera permitido mariconería en su gobierno, lo de ahora todo son aguja !

1:35 p. m. · 20 nov. 2021 · Twitter for Android



Timmy O'Toole
@Cocoseco

Quién habrá inventado esta hijueputada, mamaguevos que igual están votando por el chavismo para decir que no votaron PsUv. Cuánto le están pagando a la pendeja esa.

Caesar Augustus. @youreoncbs · 1 nov. 2021

Este 21 de noviembre se renueva el compromiso insoluble entre el pueblo carabobeño y la gestión del ciudadano gobernador, @rafaellacava10.

Ese indiscutible respaldo, manifestado en hordas por las calles, se traducirá en una victoria sin precedentes en la historia

[Mostrar este hilo](#)



5:31 p. m. · 1 nov. 2021 · Twitter for iPhone



José A Trujillo
@JosAlejandroTr

Tu todavía de jala bola? Pensé q te habías salido del psuv puta barata

SUSEJ VERA @susejvera · 21 nov. 2021

Listo!!!! Ya ejercí mi derecho al #voto vamos todas y todos a votar!!! Por la #paz por #venezuela #megaelecciones #yosivotó #megaelecciones2021



Twitter Accounts Analyzed

Political Parties and Stakeholders	Candidates	State Bodies and Institutions
Nicolás Maduro, PSUV	Miguel Rodríguez, PSUV, Amazonas	Armada Bolivariana
Delcy Rodríguez, PSUV	Mauglimer Baloa , MUD, Amazonas	Asamblea Nacional
Jorge Rodríguez, PSUV	Miguel Rodríguez, AD, Amazonas	Cancillería Venezuela
Vladimir Padrino, PSUV	Antonio Barreto Sira, MUD, Anzoategui	Defensor del Pueblo
Cilia Flores, PSUV	Luis José Marcano, PSUV, Anzoategui	<i>Ministerio del Poder Popular para Relaciones Interiores, Justicia y Paz</i>
Remigio Ceballos Ichaso, PSUV	José Brito, AD, Anzoategui	Ministerio del Poder Popular Para la Agricultura Productiva y Tierras
Néstor Reverol, PSUV	Eduardo Piñate, PSUV, Apure	Ministerio del Poder Popular para la Alimentación
Diosdado Cabello R, PSUV	Luis Lippa, MUD, Apure	Ministerio del Poder Popular para la Cultura
Juan Guaidó, FAVL	Ronald Torres, AD, Apure	Ministerio del Poder Popular para Ciencia y Tecnología
Leopoldo López, VP	Luis Eduardo Martínez, AD, Aragua	Ministerio del Poder Popular de Economía, Finanzas y Comercio Exterior
Henrique Capriles, PJ	Karina Carpio, PSUV, Aragua	Ministerio del Poder Popular de Petróleo
Miguel Pizarro, PJ	Henry Rosales, MUD, Aragua	Ministerio Público de la República Bolivariana de Venezuela
Gerardo Blyde, indep	Freddy Superlano, MUD, Barinas	Ministerio del Poder Popular para la Salud
Stalín González, indep	Rafael Rosales Pena, AD, Barinas	Ministerio del Poder Popular para el Proceso Social de Trabajo
Carlos Altamari, PJ	Ángel Marcano, PSUV, Bolívar	Ministerio del Poder Popular para la Comunicación e Información
Julio Borges, PJ	Raúl Yusef, MUD, Bolívar	Ministerio del Poder Popular para las Comunas y los Movimientos Sociales
Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela, PSUV	Tito Jose Oviedo, PSUV, Bolívar	Ministerio del Poder Popular para la Educación
Unidad Venezuela, MUD	Rafael Lacava, PSUV, Carabobo	Ministerio del Poder Popular para la Educación Universitaria
Frente Amplio Venezuela Libre, FAVL	Vicencio Scarano Spisso, MUD, Carabobo	Ministerio del Poder Popular para la Juventud y el Deporte
Voluntad Popular, VP	Javier Bertucci Carrero, AD, Carabobo	Ministerio del Poder Popular de Planificación
Primero Justicia, PJ	Nosliw Rodríguez, PSUV, Cojedes	Ministerio del Poder Popular para la Defensa
Un Nuevo Tiempo, UNT	Alberto Galíndez, PJ (MUD), Cojedes	Prensa Presidencial de la República Bolivariana de Venezuela
Acción Democrática, AD	Dennis Fernández, AD, Cojedes	Viceministerio de Servicios para la Defensa
Enrique Márquez, CNE	Lizeta Hernández, PSUV, Delta Amacuro	Ejército de la República Bolivariana de Venezuela

Roberto Picón, CNE	Carmen Teresa Melendez, PSUV, Distrito Capital	Tribunal Supremo de Justicia de la República Bolivariana de Venezuela
Alexis Corredor, CNE	Tomas Ignacio Guanipa, MUD, Distrito Capital	Vicepresidencia de la República Bolivariana de Venezuela
Tania D'Amelio, CNE	Victor Jose Clark, PSUV, Falcón	
Josep Borrell, UE	Eliezer Ramon Sirit, MUD, Falcón	
Jorge Arreaza, PSUV	Daniel Barrios, AD, Falcón	
Luis Florido, UNT	Jose Manuel Vasquez, PSUV, Guarico	
	Yovanny Salazar, MUD, Guarico	
	Octavio Reinaldo Orta, AD, Guarico	
	Adolfo Pereira , PSUV, Lara	
	Luis Florido, MUD, Lara	
	Henry Falcón, AD, Lara	
	Ramón Guevara, MUD, Merida	
	Jehyson Guzman, PSUV, Merida	
	Jesus Araque Ruiz, PSUV, Merida (Libertador)	
	Héctor Rodríguez , PSUV, Miranda	
	David Uzcátegui, FV, Miranda	
	Farith Fraija, PSUV, Miranda	
	Ernesto Javier Luna , PSUV, Monagas	
	Pierre Maroun, MUD, Monagas	
	Johel Orta, AD, Monagas	
	Alfredo Diaz, MUD, Nueva Esparta	
	Dante Rivas, PSUV, Nueva Esparta	
	Morel Rodríguez, AD, Nueva Esparta	
	Antonio Cedeño, PSUV, Portuguesa	
	María Beatriz Martínez, MUD, Portuguesa	
	José Ruiz Parra, AD, Portuguesa	
	Gilberto Pinto, PSUV, Sucre	
	Robert Alcalá , MUD, Sucre	
	Luis Sifontes, PSUV, Sucre	
	Freddy Bernal Rosales, PSUV, Tachira	
	Fernando Andrade Roa, MUD, Tachira	
	Laidy Gomez Florez, AD, Tachira	
	Gerardo Alfredo Marquez, PSUV, Trujillo	
	Carlos Andres Salinas, MUD, Trujillo	
	Conrado Antonio Linares, AD, Trujillo	
	Biagio Pilieri Gianninoto, MUD, Yaracuy	
	Miguel Antonio Ponente, AD, Yaracuy	
	Omar Prieto Fenandez , PSUV, Zulia	
	Manuel Rosales Guerrero , MUD, Zulia	
	Willy Jackson Casanova, PSUV, Zulia	

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