

VENEZUELA

Date of Elections: December 1, 1968

Characteristics of Parliament

The National Congress of Venezuela is composed of two Houses:

— the Chamber of Deputies, currently comprising 214 members elected for 5 years. This figure varies from legislature to legislature according to fluctuations in the population and to the number of "additional seats" (currently 16) allocated on a nation-wide basis so as to ensure a more accurate representation of political forces.

— the Senate, composed of 42 members — 2 for each of the 20 states plus the federal district — and a variable number of senators holding "additional seats" (10 at present). To these senators elected for 5-year terms are added a number of life senators (3 at present), participating in their capacity as former Presidents of the Republic.

On December 1, the electorate went to the polls to renew both Houses and elect a new Head of State.

Electoral System

All Venezuelan citizens of both sexes who are at least 18 years old and not subject to civil interdiction or political disqualification are entitled to vote, with the exception of those on active military service. All citizens between the ages of 21 and 65 who fulfil these conditions are bound by law to register on the electoral rolls and participate in the poll. Except in certain specified cases, failure to comply is punishable by a fine.

All Venezuelan-born voters are eligible for election to the Chamber of Deputies provided they are at least 21 years old and to the Senate if they are over 30 years old. The President of the Republic, ministers, civil servants and holders of certain offices specified by law are not allowed to stand for Congress.

Candidatures to both Houses must be submitted by a recognized political party or by 5 literate citizens over 21 years old and representing at least 100 registered electors in the relevant constituency.

Most members of Parliament (42 senators and 198 deputies in the current legislature) are directly elected in the 23 constituencies by a simple-majority uninominal vote if only 1 seat is to be filled and under the party-list system, without vote-splitting or preferential vote, for 2 or more seats. In the latter event, the d'Hondt system of proportional representation is applied for the allocation of seats, with the added proviso that, should there be 2 or more identical quotients in respect of the allocation of the last seat, this seat would go to the party with the greatest total number of votes in the constituency concerned.

"Additional seats" (10 in the Senate and 16 in the Chamber of Deputies in the present legislature) are then distributed nationally among the political parties according to the following method:

— For each House, the Supreme Electoral Council establishes a national quotient by dividing the total number of valid votes cast throughout the country by the number of deputies or senators already directly elected.

— It divides the number of votes obtained by each party by these 2 quotients.

— It then allocates to each party a number of additional seats not exceeding 4 for the Senate and 6 for the Chamber of Deputies, corresponding to the difference between the result of this division and the overall number of seats already obtained. The additional deputies and senators are assigned to those constituencies in which

the party receives no seat at all or in which it is the most under-represented, on the basis of the number of votes won.

Candidates not elected serve as substitutes in the order in which they appear on the party list.

In Venezuela, elections for the President of the Republic, members of the National Congress and members of municipal councils take place on the same day in a single operation, by means of 2 separate ballot-papers, 1 for the Head of State and the other for the national and local representatives.

General Political Considerations and Conduct of the Elections

The electoral campaign was marked by a bitter dispute between the Democratic Action Party (AD), following a Social-Democrat line, and the Christian Socialist Party (COPEI). The latter, which had adopted the slogan of change and promised to govern more energetically, accused the former, in power for 10 years, of being incapable of resolving the country's economic and social problems.

A large number of political parties participated in a most lively campaign which, for the first time, employed the broadcasting and propaganda techniques practised in the United States. In addition to those mentioned above, a number of other political groups merit inclusion in this summary: these are the Democratic Republican Union (URD), of Radical-Socialist leanings, which had been the second largest party 10 years earlier, the left-centre Popular Democratic Force (FDP), the right-centre Democratic National Front (FND), the People's Electoral Movement (MEP), set up in 1967 by Mr. Beltran Prieto when he broke away from the Democratic Action Party, and the Revolutionary Party of National Integration (PRIN), likewise formed by dissidents from the AD in 1962. Two new parties also made an appearance: the National Civic Crusade (CCN), a movement launched by supporters of former dictator Perez Jimenez, and the *Union para avanzar* (UPA) of Communist sympathies. (The Communist Party, outlawed since 1963, was later authorized on March 26, 1969.)

The campaign was generally a calm one and it was encouraging to record particularly high participation in the poll.

As a result of the elections, the new Congress was composed of a large number of political groups, none of which had an absolute majority.

Moreover, while the candidate of the Christian Socialist Party, Mr. Rafael Caldera, was successfully elected President of the Republic, the COPEI did not win the strongest position in Parliament.

It was in fact the Democratic Action Party, whose candidate, Mr. Gonzalo Barrios, only just failed to win the presidential race, which again became the leading party in the Congress after having lost its supremacy as a result of a split in December 1967.

The two new political forces, the CCN and UPA, between them carried a substantial number of seats in both Houses, while the MEP's position remained more or less unchanged. On the other hand, the URD, FDN and FDP, which had formed a Victory Front in support of Mr. Miguel Angel Burelli Rivas' candidature for the presidency, suffered from their decision to contest the general elections separately and lost many votes and seats. Finally, the PRIN also lost votes on this occasion and saw its representation in the Chamber of Deputies drop from 6, in the 1963 election, to 4; as for its sole Senate seat, this was also lost.

Parliament's composition was therefore not known until the actual opening of the new legislature. As soon as the Bureau of the Houses had been elected, the COPEI formed an alliance with the MEP, FDP and CCN; thus, the presidency of the Senate went to the COPEI, while the FDP secured that of the Chamber of Deputies.

This formation later split up. Supported by the owner of a powerful Press network which had assisted the COPEI during the electoral campaign, 6 deputies and 1 senator formed a new parliamentary group which was named the Parliamentary Independent Front (FIP). Moreover, the representatives of the National Civic Crusade in the Lower House split into two roughly equal groups of 10 and 11 deputies.

In conclusion, following his investiture in March 1969, Mr. Caldera, the new President of the Republic, formed a Cabinet comprising 6 members of the COPEI and other personalities not belonging to any party.

Statistics

1. *Results of the Elections*

Number of registered voters.	4,053,516
Voters.	3,907,823 (96.4 %)
Void or blank ballot-papers.	229,739
Valid votes.	3,678,084

(Statistical table overleaf)

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Political Group	Votes obtained	%	Number of Seats in Chamber of Deputies		
			Dir. Elec.	Add. Seats	T
Democratic Action Party (AD)	939,759	25.55	66		
Christian Socialist Party (COPEI)	883,814	24.03	56		
People's Electoral Movement (MEP)	475,909	12.94	25		
National Civic Crusade (CCN)	402,351	10.94	20		
Democratic Republican Union (URD)	340,195	9.25	17	1	
Popular Democratic Force (FDP)	194,931	5.30	8	2	
<i>Union para avanzar</i> (UPA)	103,591	2.82	2	3	
Democratic National Front (FND)	96,027	2.61	1	3	
Revolutionary Party of National Integration (PRIN)	88,509	2.41		4	
Socialist-Democratic Party (PSD)	29,920	0.81		1	
National Action Movement (MAN)	24,407	0.66		1	
Others (MDI, MENI and about thirty local groups)	98,671	2.68			
			198	16	2

* To these 52 elected senators should be added the 3 Presidents of the Republic the Senate.

2. *Distribution of Parliamentarians according to Sex*

	Chamber of Deputies	Senate
Men.	210	53
Women.	4	2
	214	55*

* including the 3 life senators