

VENEZUELA

Date of Elections: December 9, 1973

Purpose of Elections

Elections were held for all members of Parliament on the normal expiry of their term of office.

Characteristics of Parliament

The bicameral Parliament of Venezuela, the Congress, comprises the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate.

The Chamber of Deputies currently consists of 203 members elected for 5 years. This total membership varies from legislature to legislature according to fluctuations in the population and to the number of " additional seats " (currently 20) allocated to minorities on a nation-wide basis so as to ensure a more equitable representation of political forces. At least 2 Deputies are elected in each State, whereas one comes from each of the 2 Federal Territories.

The Senate is composed of 49 members: 2 elected from each of the 20 States by universal and direct vote, 2 from the Federal District and a variable number of Senators holding " additional seats " (5 at present). To these Senators elected for 5-year terms are added a number of Senators for life (2 at present), chosen in their capacity as former Presidents of the Republic.

Electoral System

All Venezuelan citizens, of either sex, who have reached 18 years of age and who are not subject to civil interdiction or political disqualification are entitled to vote, with the exception of those on active military service. Citizens fulfilling these conditions are legally bound to register as electors and to participate in the vote. Except in certain specific cases, failure to comply is punishable by a fine.

All voters born in Venezuela and over 21 years of age are eligible for election to the Chamber of Deputies; the age requirement for the Senate is 30 years. Ineligible are officers or employees of public bodies and autonomous institutions, or of enterprises of which more than half of the capital belongs to the public sector, provided that these persons serve in the district in which they

would seek election. Certain public positions deemed incompatible with the parliamentary mandate must be relinquished at least 3 months before the concerned elections.

Candidatures to both Chambers must be submitted by a recognized political party or by 10 literate and registered electors of 21 years of age, who represent a number of citizens equal to that required for the constitution of a regional political party.

Most members of Parliament (42 Senators and 183 Deputies in the current legislature) are directly elected in the 23 constituencies by a simple majority vote if only one 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, it would go to the party with the greatest total number of votes in the constituency concerned.

" Additional seats " (5 in the Senate and 20 in the Chamber of Deputies in the present legislature) are then distributed nationally among the political parties. According to this system, the Supreme Electoral Council establishes for each Chamber 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 then divides the number of votes obtained by each party by these 2 quotients and allocates to each party a number of additional seats, not exceeding 2 for the Senate and 4 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 concerned has received 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, and fill parliamentary seats which become vacant between general elections.

General Political Considerations and Conduct of the Elections

For the fourth time since the overthrow of Marcos Perez Jimenez in 1958, Venezuelans went to the polls to elect a new President and a new Congress for a 5-year term.

The 1973 electoral campaign fought between two large forces was typical, as presidential candidate Lorenzo Fernandez and his ruling Christian Social Party (COPEI) were confronted by Carlos Andrés Pérez of the Democratic

Action Party (AD - *Accidn Democrdtica*) in their battle to succeed President Rafael Caldera.

During the campaign, Mr. Fernandez labelled himself the man of continuity who would pursue the reformist policies of Mr. Caldera, while Mr. Perez pointed to the deficiencies of the outgoing Administration. As the exploitation of the country's oil production was little discussed, issues gave equal time to a personality contest reflected in the costly campaign, which was replete with use of mass media.

Pursuant to voting in a calm atmosphere, polling results — which gave COPEI and AD over 85 % of the popular vote — confirmed the fact that a trend towards a two-party system was evident in Venezuela. Performances of the leftist, extreme-left and extreme-right/Perez Jimenez followers (*perez-jimenezistas*) wing candidates underlined their minor impact. Contrary to the previous 1968 elections, the presidential party also gained an absolute majority of the Congressional seats, heavily increasing its representation in the Chamber of Deputies. In all, owing to the system of additional seats, some 12 parties were to be represented in Congress; 3 of these, however, obtained less than 1 % of the votes, and so will not be eligible to contest the next (1978) elections.

President-elect Perez was due to take office on March 11, 1974, while the term of the new Congress was to commence on March 2.

Statistics

1. *Results of the Elections and Distribution of Seats in the Congress*

Number of registered voters.	4,661,252
Voters.	4,308,703 (92.4 %)
Blank or void ballot papers.172,073
Valid votes.	4,136,630

	Votes obtained	%	Number of Seats	
			Chamber of Deputies	Senate
<i>Action, Democrdtica</i> (AD)	1,833,730	44.32	102 (—) *	29
Christian Social Party (COPEI). . .	1,252,761	30.28	64 (—)	14
Movement towards Socialism (MAS).	216,473	5.23	9 (3)	2 (2) *
People's Electoral Movement (MEP).	207,785	5.02	8 (4)	2 (2)
National Civic Crusade (CCN) . . .	178,089	4.30	7 (3)	1 (1)
Republican Democratic Union (UFvD).	132,780	3.20	5 (2)	1
Popular Democratic Force (FDP). . .	51,347	1.24	2 (2)	—
Venezuelan Communist Party (PCV).	49,455	1.19	2 (2)	—
Left Revolutionary Movement (MIR).	42,186	1.01	1 (1)	—
<u>Others</u>	172,024	4.21	3 (<u>3</u>)	—
			203 (20)	49 (5)

* Figures in brackets denote additional seats allotted to each party.