

## VENEZUELA

**Date of Elections:** 4 December 1983

### **Purpose of Elections**

Elections were held for all the seats in Parliament on the normal expiry of the members' term of office.

### **Characteristics of Parliament**

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

The Chamber of Deputies currently consists of 200 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" allocated to minorities on a nation-wide basis so as to ensure a more equitable representation of political forces. At least two Deputies are elected in each State, whereas one comes from each of the two Federal Territories.

The Senate is composed of 47 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" (2 at present). To these Senators elected for 5-year terms are added a number of Senators for life (3 at present), chosen in their capacity as former Presidents of the Republic.

### **Electoral System**

All Venezuelan citizens, 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 qualified electors born in Venezuela and at least 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 three months before the elections concerned.

Candidatures to both Chambers must be submitted by a recognized political party or by 10 literate and registered electors of at least 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 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 two 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 two 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" 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 two quotients and allocates to each party a number of additional seats, not exceeding two for the Senate and five 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 Considerations and Conduct of the Elections**

The 1983 congressional elections were held simultaneously with those for President of the Republic. While the election campaign officially opened on 11 April 1983, many parties and candidates had begun campaigning earlier. Primary contenders for the congressional seats were the ruling Social Christian Party (COPEI - *Comite de Organizacion Politica Electoral Independiente*) and the main opposition Democratic Action (AD) party. Their candidates for the five-year presidential term were, respectively, Mr. Rafael Caldera Rodriguez (President from 1969 to 1974) and Mr. Jaime Lusinchi. Altogether some 20 parties participated in the elections, either individually or as part of a coalition, and there were 13 presidential candidates.

Although economic problems (especially foreign debt, unemployment) were mainly debated during the campaign, personalities were emphasized as much as policy questions. On polling day, Mr. Lusinchi easily won the presidential race and the centre-left AD also gained a majority in each House, sweeping to victory in all States but one and capturing nearly 50% of the popular vote (to 28.7% for the centrist COPEI). The smaller left-wing parties fared poorly, and the results indicated a further dominance of Venezuelan politics by the two large parties, which have alternated in power for many years.

On 23 January 1984, the new Congress was sworn in; Mr. Lusinchi and his new Cabinet took office on 2 February.

Statistics

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

Number of registered electors. . . . .	7,777,892
Voters. . . . .	86.67%

Political Group	Number of Seats in	
	Chamber of Deputies	Senate
Democratic Action (AD). . . . .	109	27
Social Christian Party (COPEI). . . . .	60	16
Movement to Socialism (MAS). . . . .	10	2
Democratic Republican Union (URD) . . . . .	8	2
Others. . . . .	13	
	200	47