

VENEZUELA

Date of Elections: 3 December 1978

Purpose of Elections

Elections were held for all the 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 199 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 nationwide 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 Political Considerations and Conduct of the Elections

The 1978 congressional elections were held simultaneously with those for President of the Republic.

Primary contenders for the congressional seats were the ruling Democratic Action Party (AD—*Action Democrdica*) and the main opposition Social Christian Party (COPEI—*Comite de Organization Politica Electoral Independiente*). Their candidates for the five-year presidential term were, respectively, Mr. Luis Pinerua Ordaz and Mr. Luis Herrera Campins. The electoral campaign was lengthy and reportedly quite costly, with extensive use of television advertisements.

Polling day was marked by a high turnout of voters. Mr. Herrera Campins—who had promised bold programmes to combat inflation and crime—won the presidential race, in which altogether 10 candidates had participated. Mr. Ordaz's platform had been largely identical, emphasizing struggles against soaring living costs, violent crime, a housing crisis and inadequate public services. COPEI and AD together captured 90% of the congressional seats, confirming the two parties' predominant positions in Venezuelan politics; small left-wing parties won 21 Chamber of Deputies seats.

Mr. Herrera Campins, who succeeded Mr. Carlos Andres Perez of AD, took office on 12 March 1979.

Statistics

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

Number of registered electors	6,223,903
Voters	5,416,928(87.03%)

Political Group	Number of Seats in the Chamber of Deputies	Number of Seats in the Senate
Social Christian Party (COPEI)	88	22*
Democratic Action Party (AD)	88	23**
Movement to Socialism (MAS)	11	2
Others	12	—
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	199	47

* Including one former President of the Republic.

** Including two former Presidents of the Republic.