



Embassy of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to the UK and Ireland

## *Fact Sheet:* **ELECTIONS IN VENEZUELA**

### **Types of elections in Venezuela**

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#### **National elections:**

The President of Venezuela is elected for a six-year term by the people, and is eligible for re-election. The National Assembly (Asamblea Nacional) has 165 members (diputados), elected for five-year terms. The next national elections are due to take place on the 26<sup>th</sup> of September 2010.

#### **Regional and local elections:**

The Venezuelan people elect state governors, metropolitan mayors, mayors and councillors for a four-year term.

#### **Constitutional referenda:**

There have been six constitutional referenda since the election of President Chavez. These referenda have enabled the government to redistribute Venezuela's resources, decentralise political power and deepen democracy.

### **The National Electoral Council**

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The CNE is an independent body which is in charge of overseeing elections. It has several responsibilities, including the following:

- Interpreting electoral law
- Setting campaign periods and financing regulations.
- Applying sanctions when infractions occur.
- Running elections and maintaining a registry of voters.
- Certifying a final vote count in any electoral process.

Opposition parties have also publically recognised that the CNE is functioning as it should be and that the Venezuelan electoral system is trustworthy.<sup>1</sup>

### **Voter Participation**

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The participation of people in politics is stronger than ever in Venezuela. According to "Latinobarometro", Venezuela heads the list of South American countries with high political participation.

Over the past ten years the government has promoted and increased political inclusion through initiatives

such as *Misión Identidad*, a programme that, among other things, has provided millions of Venezuelans with ID cards for the first time in their lives, so they can exercise their rights as citizens, including their right to vote.

The National Electoral Council (CNE) has dramatically increased the number of polling stations over the past seven years. Over the long-term, the CNE plans to increase opportunities for

political participation by having no more than 3,500 registered voters per station and by creating new stations so that a majority of voters have to travel no more than one kilometer in order to vote.<sup>2</sup>

**“[the 2009 referendum was] characterised by strong participation that demonstrates, yet again, the vitality of democracy in Venezuela.”**  
*President Nicolas Sarkozy*

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<sup>1</sup> “Dirigente opositor del MAS reconoció que sistema electoral venezolano es confiable,” *Agencia Bolivariana de Noticias (ABN)*, November 18, 2008,

<http://www.abn.info.ve/noticia.php?articulo=158067&lee=1>

<sup>2</sup> “Poder Electoral democratiza distribución de centros de votación en todo el país”, CNE, February 2006, <http://www.cne.gob.ve/noticiaDetallada.php?id=3622>



## Embassy of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to the UK and Ireland

### Voting Machines

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Voting in Venezuela is conducted entirely through use of electronic voting machines. Although electronic voting has a bad reputation in certain countries, the system in Venezuela has proved to work well. In a hearing on Venezuela held in the U.S. Congress in July, a representative of the Carter Center stated that Venezuela has “one of the most advanced electronic [voting] systems in the world.”<sup>3</sup>

Sample voting machines will also be available across the country prior to Election Day so that voters are familiar with the system and a nationwide voting simulation exercise will take place to anticipate any difficulties.

**“...the [electoral] system developed in Venezuela is probably the most advanced system in the world to date”**  
*EU Election Observation Mission*

more than 59 % of the electoral vote and in 2006 he was reelected with nearly 63 % of the vote. “After 7 years in power President Chavez achieved what can be considered a remarkable political victory anywhere in the world: he obtained 1.7 million more votes than he did when he was first elected in 1998.”<sup>1</sup>

Since President Chavez took office in 1999, Venezuelans have voted in 28 regional and national elections and 6 referenda. They have been to the ballot boxes 12 times since that date. Analysts conclude that “Social progress [in Venezuela] has been accompanied by a dramatic expansion in democracy with more national electoral contests than virtually any other country in the world and respect for the outcomes ...”<sup>4</sup>

### Voting Process

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Voters are fingerprinted to prevent fraud. They are then directed to a voting table, where an official will then direct them to a voting booth. Voters are allocated 3 minutes once inside the voting booth, but can request an additional three minutes should the need arise.

To speed the process up, voters are allowed to bring a voting guide into the booth. After casting their electronic ballots, voters receive a receipt which they can review but are then required to deposit in a secure box.

### Previous Elections

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Hugo Chavez Frias came to power through presidential elections in 1998. With 57 % he achieved the largest percentage of the popular vote in four decades. In 2004 he won a recall referendum with

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<sup>3</sup> Jennifer McCoy, Testimony Prepared for the Hearing on “Venezuela: Looking Ahead” House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere, July 17, 2008,

In response to the 2009 constitutional referendum, President Sarkozy noted that it was “characterised by strong participation that demonstrates, yet again, the vitality of democracy in Venezuela.”<sup>5</sup>

### Election Observation Missions

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A variety of national and international election observers have been invited to view the process such as the Venezuelan NGO Ojo Electoral (Electoral Eye), the European Union, Organization of the American States and The Carter Center. On the 2007 national referendum, Ojo Electoral said “we would like to ... highlight the civic comportment of all of the citizenry on a day that was full of expectations and tensions, which speaks of the democratic mood of Venezuelan society.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Venezuelanalysis.Com, “What Effect has 10 Years Hugo Chavez Had on Venezuela? A Debate”, Feb. 4, 2009, retrieved July 14, 2009,

<http://www.venezuelanalysis.com/analysis/4167>

<sup>5</sup> Venezuelanalysis, “French President Congratulates Chavez, praises Venezuelan Democracy”, Feb. 24, 2009, retrieved July 14, 2009

<http://www.venezuelanalysis.com/news/4245>

<sup>6</sup> VIO, “What International Observers are saying about elections in Venezuela”, retrieved July 14, 2009,



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On the voting machines, the EU Election Observation Mission noted: “The Venezuelan voting system possesses a number of features that are in line with the most advanced international standards of e-voting. In certain aspects, such as the paper trail audit, the system developed in Venezuela is probably the most advanced system in the world to date.”<sup>7</sup>

Following the 2004 recall referendum, the **Carter Center** had this to say: “The unusually high turnout of 73 percent reflects the intense interest in this recall referendum. The Venezuelan people are to be commended for standing in line for hours without incidents, in this demonstration of civic participation and pride... We urge all Venezuelans to accept these results and look to the future.”<sup>8</sup>

All elections have been certified as free, fair and transparent by these observers.

London, May 5, 2010-05-05

### Facts and figures

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- Since 1998, an additional 6 million Venezuelans have been added to the electoral register.
- 7,741 new voting centres have been established over the last decade.
- 85 indigenous communities and organisations have been registered
- Educational materials have been translated into 21 indigenous languages to further the CNEs policies of inclusion.
- The automated voting system is subject to 15 audits that are witnessed and verified by representatives from all the political parties. Routine checks are also carried out before, during and after the election.

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<<http://www.rethinkvenezuela.com/downloads/Electora%20Observers.htm>>

<sup>7</sup> “Final Report: Presidential Elections Venezuela 2006,” European Union Election Observation Mission, 2006.

[http://www.eucomvenezuela.org/pdf/MOE\\_UE\\_Venezuela\\_2006\\_final\\_eng.pdf](http://www.eucomvenezuela.org/pdf/MOE_UE_Venezuela_2006_final_eng.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> “Last Phase of the Venezuelan Recall Referendum” Carter Center Report, August 21, 2004.

[http://www.embavenezus.org/\\_neworleans/index.php?pagina=news.php&nid=435](http://www.embavenezus.org/_neworleans/index.php?pagina=news.php&nid=435)