

THE
CARTER CENTER



Observation of
the 2024 Presidential Election
in Venezuela

July 2024

The Carter Center
Final Report

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	3
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY.....	4
POLITICAL CONTEXT	9
LEGAL FRAMEWORK.....	10
ELECTION ADMINISTRATION	12
VOTER REGISTRATION.....	15
CANDIDATE REGISTRATION	17
CIVIC AND VOTER EDUCATION	19
ELECTION CAMPAIGN	20
CAMPAIGN FINANCE	22
MEDIA AND SOCIAL MEDIA.....	23
ELECTION OBSERVATION	25
ELECTION TECHNOLOGY.....	26
ELECTION DAY	31
ANNOUNCEMENT OF RESULTS.....	33
POSTELECTION DEVELOPMENTS	35
ELECTION DISPUTE RESOLUTION	37
SUBSEQUENT DEVELOPMENTS.....	38
RECOMMENDATIONS	39
ANNEX 1: ELECTORAL TIMETABLE	42
ANNEX 2: ANALYSIS OF ELECTION RESULTS.....	43

INTRODUCTION

The Carter Center has been engaged with Venezuelan elections since 1998, deploying observation missions, as well as expert and study missions, for a range of national and regional elections and national referendums.¹ In November 2023, after being named in the Barbados Accords as one of the institutions, along with the European Union and the United Nations, to be invited to observe the 2024 presidential election, the Center conducted a needs assessment mission to the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and met with the National Electoral Council (CNE), government officials, opposition representatives, and civil society organizations (CSOs), and the international community in Caracas.

On March 7, 2024, The Carter Center received an invitation from the CNE to observe the July 28, 2024, presidential election process. Following a visit by Carter Center representatives to Venezuela in April 2024, the CNE and the Center signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) on May 9, 2024, to guarantee that the Center could observe freely and speak publicly about its findings and conclusions, in accordance with the Center's standard methodology. The commitments that the electoral authority made to give the mission full freedom and access were essential to being able to conduct credible observation. However, on election night and afterward, the Center did not have access to detailed CNE information on the election results. This was not in line with the MoU agreed to prior to the mission's deployment.

On June 29, 2024, The Carter Center deployed an international technical election observation mission led by Jennie Lincoln, senior adviser for Latin America and the Caribbean. The mission consisted of 17 experts and observers, including teams based in Caracas, Barinas, Maracaibo, and Valencia. The mission met with a wide range of stakeholders, including the CNE, candidates, political parties, CSOs, citizen observation groups, media representatives, government officials, armed forces, and election experts.

The Carter Center mission observed technical preparations for the elections, the election campaign, voter education efforts, the use of election technology, citizen observer access, election day operations in 68 locations in four states, the announcement of results, and other aspects of the election process. In accordance with Carter Center election observation methodology, the mission assessed the process against international standards and commitments for democratic elections as outlined in treaties, other international instruments, and documents on electoral good practice.

The Carter Center mission observed the election day process in and around Caracas, Barinas, Maracaibo, and Valencia with six teams. As the mission did not include a full short-term observer delegation, its observations at polling locations were limited in scope and are not necessarily representative of processes across the country. Therefore, this report does not provide a comprehensive assessment of the voting and counting process. However, the mission's observations were generally consistent with reports from independent media and citizen observer groups.

Following the CNE's announcement of results on the night of July 28, 2024, The Carter Center called on the CNE to immediately release the full results from all polling stations, stating that the information contained in the results forms was indispensable for the mission's evaluation of the

¹ The list of Carter Center election observation and other election missions in Venezuela is available at <https://www.cartercenter.org/peace/democracy/observed.html#experts>

election process and fundamental for the Venezuelan people.² The Carter Center withdrew its mission on July 30, 2024, in view of the security situation and the refusal of the CNE to provide transparent election results. The Carter Center issued a preliminary statement on July 30, concluding that “Venezuela’s 2024 presidential election did not meet international standards of electoral integrity and [could] not be considered democratic.”³ At the time of the publication of this final report, the CNE had not published official results of the vote at polling station level.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Venezuelan elections took place in the context of extreme polarization between the government and the opposition, longstanding concerns about the human rights situation, and the continued emigration of millions of Venezuelans due to the economic and political situation. The 2023 Barbados Accords between the government and the opposition were seen as a window of opportunity for the CNE to conduct the presidential election in a manner that could provide for a degree of fair competition and the eventual acceptance of the outcome by all sides.

Despite the agreement reached in Barbados and the requirements of Venezuelan law, the electoral process reflected a clear bias toward the incumbent president. This bias was apparent in the candidate registration process, in the exclusion of most overseas voters from the process, and in the manifestly unequal conditions for campaigning. Nevertheless, the main opposition grouping, the Unitary Platform, was able to nominate a candidate and to get its message to voters. In that sense, the election was competitive, and voters had clear choices when they went to the polls on election day. In addition, the testing and auditing of voting machines was generally transparent in the pre-election period, and all parties met by the Carter Center mission were satisfied that the electronic voting system provided sufficient guarantees for an accurate and transparent vote count and tabulation of results.

On election day, Venezuelan citizens appeared eager to participate in a democratic electoral process. Despite problems in some areas – including reports of a few violent incidents, a tense environment, slow processing of voters, and exclusion of opposition poll watchers – election day was generally peaceful, and voters turned out in large numbers to express their will. In the limited number of polling stations visited by the Carter Center mission, officials appeared to follow procedures correctly for the most part.

However, the process deteriorated rapidly on election night. Amid widespread claims on social media that the opposition had won by a large margin, the CNE announced that President Maduro had won re-election with 51.2%, while Edmundo González Urrutia had 44.2%. The CNE did not provide any polling station results, claiming that the reporting system had been hacked. In the meantime, the opposition began posting online thousands of copies of paper results forms (*actas*) produced by each voting machine at polling station level and collected by its party agents. These results forms demonstrated a clear and convincing victory for the main opposition candidate, González.

Although The Carter Center and others in Venezuela, the region, and around the world called for greater transparency to ensure that the announced overall results matched the evidence provided by each voting machine, the CNE refused to provide any evidence for its announcement. The

² Carter Center Calls on Venezuelan Election Authorities to Release Detailed Results Immediately <https://www.cartercenter.org/news/pr/2024/venezuela-072924.html>

³ Carter Center Statement on Venezuela Election, July 30, 2024, <https://www.cartercenter.org/news/pr/2024/venezuela-073024.html>

CNE did not post any electronic results from polling stations, nor did it make publicly available the paper copies of the results that it received from every polling station.

Due to the extraordinary refusal of the CNE to fulfill the most basic function of accurately reporting the results and the overwhelming physical evidence in the form of *actas* collected at polling station level, The Carter Center concludes that Venezuela's 2024 elections did not meet international standards for electoral integrity and cannot be considered democratic.

In addition to the absence of transparency in announcing the results and the apparent falsification of the outcome, the Venezuelan authorities remained unable to fulfill several fundamental conditions for a democratic election, including a neutral and enforced legal framework; an impartial and transparent electoral body; a comprehensive and nondiscriminatory voter registration; freedom of campaigning for parties and candidates; freedom of the media; free and fair competition; full and equitable opportunities to observe the process; and impartial and effective mechanisms for resolving disputes. While the CNE largely succeeded in the logistical organization of the voting process, these efforts were nullified by a tabulation and results announcement process that did not meet the minimum requirements of transparency. Thus, the election results announced by the CNE could not be independently verified, which constituted a serious violation of electoral principles and Venezuelan law.

Other key findings of the report are as follows:

Political context: Following the political crisis regarding the lack of recognition of President Maduro's term between 2018 and 2024, the path to the presidential elections was marked by a negotiated approach from the international community, providing incentives for the opposition to participate in the electoral route and for the government to create conditions for electoral competition, starting with the 2021 regional elections. The negotiations led to the signing of the Barbados Accord between the government and the opposition Unitary Platform (*Plataforma Unitaria*) that included electoral guarantees for all actors, a timeframe for the elections, freedom to choose candidates, provisions for international observation, and specific guarantees regarding electoral integrity conditions.

The government entered the electoral process with control of the three branches of state, the armed forces, and the electoral management body. Over the past several years, international organizations and domestic civil society groups have denounced the erosion of the rule of law, the closing of public space, and judicial intimidation toward political opponents and human rights defenders.

Legal framework and electoral system: The legal framework was generally in line with international electoral standards and commitments for democratic elections. Nevertheless, the lack of judicial and institutional independence, the erosion of the rule of law, the CNE's selective enforcement of the law, political interference, and the human rights situation created a legal environment that was not conducive to a genuine democratic electoral process.

The legal framework for the 2024 elections remained largely unchanged from the 2021 elections, except for a few amendments, including stricter measures to ensure voter identity at polling stations on election day. As a result, several legal shortcomings identified in previous elections

persisted.⁴ In 2024, the National Assembly considered three new laws that further threatened civic space and restricted the freedom of association and expression.

Candidate registration: The registration of candidates did not meet international standards. The registration of the main opposition presidential candidate was subject to arbitrary decisions by the CNE. The Unitary Platform was not allowed to register the winner of the primary election, María Corina Machado, as its candidate. In an unexplained decision, the CNE then failed to register the opposition's second choice, citing a technological problem. Eventually, the CNE allowed the registration of the Unitary Platform's third choice, Edmundo González Urrutia. In addition to President Maduro and González, eight other candidates also were registered.

The ability of some opposition parties to nominate candidates was affected by the fact that their leadership had been replaced by pro-government leaders through judicial decisions over the past several years. From January to July 2024, 19 opposition leaders and officials were disqualified, including 12 sitting mayors, further impacting political participation. Despite these limitations, much of the opposition coalesced around the candidacy of González, raising expectations of the first competitive presidential election in many years.

Election administration: The CNE has extensive technical, operational, and logistical expertise, ranging from biometric voter registration to the development of voting machines with a robust set of audits. Although the constitution grants the CNE the status of an independent branch of government, most stakeholders who met with the Carter Center mission perceived the current configuration of the CNE as less independent than in previous elections. During the 2024 electoral process, the CNE favored the ruling party. The CNE's inability or unwillingness to enforce the law, its lack of response to allegations of electoral violations, and gaps in transparency undermined the integrity of the electoral process and its overall credibility. The CNE's failure to publish transparent election results shattered any remaining confidence in its professionalism and ability to manage the election process impartially.

Voter registration: The official registry for the 2024 elections totaled 21,392,464 voters. CSOs estimated there were up to 3 million eligible voters in the country – particularly young people – who were not on the electoral roll. This under-registration is at least partly a consequence of the compressed electoral calendar, which resulted in a short timeframe, as well as fewer registration centers and limited official publicity about voter registration. Citizens abroad faced excessive legal requirements to register, some of which appeared arbitrary. This effectively disenfranchised most of the migrant population, resulting in a very low number of voters abroad.

Campaign: The election campaign was characterized by an uneven playing field and unequal access to resources among the candidates. The incumbent president's campaign was well-funded and highly visible through rallies, posters, murals, and street campaigning. In contrast, the opposition candidates had very limited presence due to their lack of financial resources, which limited their outreach efforts and forced them to rely heavily on volunteers.

The Carter Center mission heard numerous reports of the misuse of administrative resources on behalf of the incumbent, including the use of government vehicles, public officials campaigning while in their official capacity, and the use of state-funded social programs to encourage or pressure voters to support the president. Some of these instances were directly observed by Carter Center observers. In addition, the authorities frequently attempted to restrict the

⁴ See The Carter Center, Expert Mission to Observe Regional and Local Elections in Venezuela Final Report, p.13. https://www.cartercenter.org/resources/pdfs/news/peace_publications/election_reports/venezuela/venezuela-final-report-2021.pdf

opposition's campaign activities. This included arbitrary detention of party activists, harassment or intimidation of people who provided services or goods to González's campaign, and restrictions on the freedom of movement of opposition candidates and supporters.

Media: Media coverage throughout the campaign heavily favored the incumbent candidate. The Maduro administration leveraged its control over a significant portion of the media to broadcast the events and messages of its candidate and the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV), effectively dominating the airwaves, and covering the president's events on most public and private television stations. Meanwhile, opposition candidates received minimal coverage, with their visibility further diminished by widespread self-censorship among media outlets. Several candidates reported that many media platforms refused to run campaign advertisements and interviews for fear of government reprisals.

The tone of the campaign reflected the high level of polarization and was marked by a significant escalation of rhetoric as election day neared. While the opposition denounced the persecution against them, Maduro's discourse alleged direct threats to the country's stability in case of defeat and claimed a strategy by the opposition and the international media to reject the election results and incite violence if he won. The PSUV accused the opposition alliance of fascism, and President Maduro warned of "a bloodbath and a civil war" if the opposition won the elections.

Election day: Carter Center observer teams visited 68 polling stations on election day.⁵ Election day was generally calm in locations visited, with few incidents of violence or tension. As polls opened, voter interest appeared to be high,⁶ as Carter Center observer teams noted significant lines of voters in locations visited. In some locations (e.g., Caracas), the lines dissipated throughout election day. In some other locations, long lines persisted through the close of polls, and the opposition alleged a "slowdown" policy in processing voters.

Election officials worked diligently to ensure a smooth voting process in locations visited by Carter Center observers, and a strong presence of party agents and a modest number of domestic observers contributed to transparency. However, a lack of knowledge of procedures among staff was observed in some locations, and there were reports of party agents performing functions for which they were not authorized. There were instances of social pressure on voters, such as ruling party checkpoints near polling stations, known as "red points."

The Carter Center mission observed the closing and counting process in seven polling stations. While there were observations of minor shortcomings in the closing process, the overall impression was that it went smoothly. The citizen verification of results at the polling station level, in which the paper ballot receipts were hand-counted in public view at a selection of polling stations following transmission of the electronic results, was conducted, and party agents were able to sign and receive paper copies of the results at all seven polling stations observed during closing.

Election technology: The electronic voting machine system was robust, and representatives of political parties and civil society expressed a high level of confidence in the electronic voting system. This confidence was the result of a comprehensive set of preelection auditing procedures conducted by the CNE that were carried out in a transparent and effective manner. Additional

⁵ As noted above, these were a limited number of locations, and the findings regarding voting and counting operations are not necessarily representative of these processes across the country.

⁶ The CNE reported a national turnout of 59%. This was consistent with data from the actas collected by the opposition from 81.7% of polling stations, which indicated a turnout of 60%.

voter integrity and transparency elements included voter identification through fingerprint scanning and the generation of paper ballot receipts by the voting machines. The receipts allowed each voter to verify his or her choice, and after the close of polling stations, the receipts served as a verification tool to check the electronic results produced by the machines. Political parties and civil society rightly had confidence in the system's ability to accurately reflect the will of the voters and maintain the secrecy of the vote.

On the other hand, the operation of some auxiliary computer systems caused frustration and complaints among stakeholders. In particular, the system used to register political party agents online suffered from interruptions and software errors that made the process unnecessarily difficult. The online system used to train citizens selected to staff polling stations also experienced problems, particularly with the printing of credentials.

Announcement of results: A few minutes after midnight, with 80% of the votes counted, the CNE declared Nicolás Maduro the winner, with 51.2% of the vote, followed by Edmundo González with 44.2%. The CNE did not publish the results by polling station, claiming – without providing evidence – that a cyberattack had made it impossible to upload the results to its website. However, the CNE did not release the results by any alternative method. The lack of detailed results prevented independent verification of the overall results announced by the CNE. The CNE canceled three postelection audits that could have verified the alleged cyberattacks. This included a second citizen verification exercise. The integrity of the elections was damaged by the lack of transparent information.

In a parallel effort, the opposition – through party representatives, observers, and citizens – collected and published online more than 80% of the results forms produced by the voting machines. According to these results, González received 67.1% of the vote, and Maduro received 30.4%. The Venezuelan government claimed – without providing evidence – that the results forms published by the opposition were forged. However, the result forms published were deemed legitimate by external auditors and academics. The Carter Center reviewed the data in the results forms and found it to be accurate. In addition, the Center found that all the required security elements were present in the result forms it reviewed, both online and several physical copies, indicating that they were the actual copies printed by the voting machines. At the time of publication of this report, the CNE had not published the results from the polling stations.

On July 31, 2024, Maduro petitioned the Superior Court of Justice (TSJ) to conduct a judicial review of the election results. The stated purpose of the complaint was to verify the election results. The TSJ claimed that it performed a forensic examination of electoral material that confirmed the president's victory. However, no opposition observers or independent observers were present for the review, and no evidence was made public. This absence of transparency of this review, the continued lack of public data from the CNE about the detailed results of the election, and the failure to address the evidence contained in the polling station results forms collected by the opposition reinforced the Carter Center's overall conclusion about the conduct of the election.

Based on its findings and assessments, The Carter Center offers recommendations at the conclusion of this report. The Carter Center wishes to thank all the stakeholders who took the time to meet with members of the mission. The Center also thanks the CNE, including the magistrates and staff, for the invitation to observe, the cooperation in facilitating observation accreditation, and responsiveness prior to election day to inquiries from the mission.

POLITICAL CONTEXT

Since Hugo Chavez's election in 1998, the Venezuelan political scene has been dominated by the movement he founded known as "*Chavismo*." This included a new constitution in 1999 that took steps to reduce inequality in the country but also removed term limits for the presidency (as amended in 2007). After Chavez's death in 2013, Vice President Nicolás Maduro assumed the presidency, then was elected in 2013 and re-elected in 2018 in a process boycotted by the opposition due to a lack of confidence in electoral and judicial institutions. This resulted in a new presidential mandate that lacked national and international legitimacy.

In January 2019, the National Assembly, which had an opposition majority, refused to recognize Maduro's new term and instead swore in Juan Guaidó, president of the National Assembly, as the interim president, based on the interpretation of the Venezuelan Constitution regarding presidential succession. Economic and humanitarian conditions on the ground worsened and increased Venezuelan dependence on China, Russia, Iran, and Cuba. Guaidó left the country in 2023. The National Assembly was re-elected in December 2020 because of the confrontation between the government and the opposition that led to its dissolution. The opposition did not participate in those elections, which resulted in an outright majority of the government coalition in the 2021-2025 legislature.

The path to the 2024 presidential elections was marked by a negotiated approach from the international community, providing incentives for the opposition to return to the electoral route and incentives for the government to create conditions for electoral competition. The first steps followed negotiations between the government and the opposition in Mexico City and the opposition's partial participation in the 2021 regional elections. Various international mediation efforts led to the signing of the Barbados Accord between the government and the opposition *Plataforma Unitaria* (Unitary Platform) on Oct. 17, 2023.⁷ This was an important step toward defining minimum conditions for elections in which the opposition could participate, including a tentative timeframe, freedom to select candidates, provision for the presence of international observers – including The Carter Center – and specific guarantees regarding electoral integrity. However, the agreement was fragile, and both sides accused the other of breaching it.

A few days after the signing of the Barbados agreement, the opposition Unitary Platform held its primary elections on Oct. 22, 2023. More than 2 million voters participated, and María Corina Machado won with more than 90% of the vote. This provided the main opposition coalition with a legitimate candidate. After significant problems with the registration of candidates, including the disqualification of Corina Machado, Edmundo González was registered to represent the Unitary Platform, running on the tickets of *Mesa de la Unidad Democrática (MUD)*, *Un Nuevo Tiempo (UNT)*, and *Movimiento por Venezuela (MPV)*. The participation of a united opposition candidate against the incumbent Maduro, in addition to eight other candidates, raised expectations for competitive elections for the first time in many years.

The 2024 presidential election took place in a context of extreme polarization and distrust between the ruling party and the main opposition, with restrictions on some political rights, international sanctions, economic crisis, and an estimated 7 million Venezuelans migrating to other countries in the region. *Chavismo* forces exercised control of all powers of the state. Over the past several years, international organizations and domestic civil society groups have

⁷ [Acuerdo Parcial sobre la Promoción de Derechos Políticos y Garantías Electorales para Todos](#)

denounced the erosion of the rule of law, the closing of public space, and judicial intimidation toward political opponents and human rights defenders.

LEGAL FRAMEWORK

A sound legal framework is essential to administering democratic elections and ensuring that a country upholds its international obligations. According to international commitments, the legal framework for democratic elections should be transparent and readily accessible to the public and should address all the components of an electoral system necessary to ensure democratic elections.⁸ This includes guarantees for an “environment conducive to respect for and enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedom on an ongoing basis, without discrimination and without arbitrary or unreasonable restrictions.”⁹

Electoral System

The president is directly elected by a plurality of votes in a single round (first past-the-post system) for a six-year term. Presidential term limits were abolished by a constitutional amendment in 2007 by referendum, but there is the possibility of holding a recall referendum at any time during the last three years of each presidential term. There is no fixed constitutional date for the holding of elections, only for the inauguration of the presidential term, which was held on Jan. 10, 2025.

International Commitments

Venezuela is a party to the main universal and regional human rights instruments relevant to elections. These include the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and its Optional Protocol (ICCPR), the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), the Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD), the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and its Optional Protocol (CEDAW), and the International Labor Organization Convention No. 169 on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries (ILO Convention 169). Venezuela withdrew from the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) and from the Inter-American Court of Human Rights in 2013 and was suspended from the Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR) in 2017. Pursuant to Article 23 of the constitution, international treaties, covenants, and conventions regarding human rights ratified by Venezuela have constitutional hierarchy, prevail in the internal order, and have immediate and direct application by the courts and other public institutions.

Electoral Legislation

Overall, the legal framework governing presidential elections nominally conforms to the norms and standards relating to genuine, inclusive, and transparent elections. It consists primarily of the constitution (*Constitución de la República Bolivariana de Venezuela*, 1999), the Election Law (*Ley Orgánica de Procesos Electorales*, 2009), and the Election Administration Law (*Ley Orgánica del Poder Electoral*, 2009), supplemented by decisions, instructions, and regulations issued by the CNE.

⁸ ICCPR, Article 2; U.N. Human Rights Committee (HRC), General Comment 25, paras. 5, 7, 9, 19, 20.

⁹ The Carter Center and the Office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights, “Human Rights and Election Standards: A Plan of Action”, December 2017, p. 6, para. 18.

The constitution guarantees fundamental rights and freedoms, including freedom of association, assembly, movement, and expression, and a free media. It establishes an independent judiciary and guarantees the right to vote and to be elected in periodic elections through universal, direct, and secret suffrage ballot. Despite being formally guaranteed by the constitution and the electoral legislation, the fundamental freedoms necessary for the conduct of democratic elections – freedom of association, assembly, movement, and expression – were not fully respected.

The Electoral Law outlines the system and addresses critical aspects of the process, such as voter and candidate registration, campaign regulations, election day procedures, election administration, complaints and appeals, and sanctions. The Electoral Administration Law grants significant powers to a well-resourced election administration headed by the five members of the CNE (supported by five alternates) appointed in August 2023, including regulatory powers and the interpretation of electoral legislation. While statutory laws remained largely unchanged from those applicable to the 2021 elections, there were some changes in the regulatory framework. The General Electoral Law Regulation issued by the CNE in 2013 was updated, and the CNE has revised guidelines to include additional safeguards for legitimate assisted voting, the rationalization of polling station layouts, and measures to protect the integrity of the system by limiting the ability of polling station presidents to circumvent the normal method of voter identification (digital fingerprints).

Despite these improvements, several legal deficiencies remain. Provisions related to candidate registration, the suspension of political rights, party and campaign financing, as well as citizen and international observation, fall short of international commitments for democratic elections. These issues were previously identified by the Carter Center’s expert mission for the 2021 regional elections and have not been addressed.¹⁰

Restrictive Legislative Proposals

In 2024, the National Assembly considered three new laws that fueled further concerns about civil and political freedom and had a chilling effect during the election campaign.

The draft Law Against Fascism, Neo-fascism and Similar Expressions proposes prison sentences for vaguely defined “fascist” behavior or language. This law raised serious concerns among stakeholders about its potential retroactive applications and restrictions on freedom of thought and expression. It was approved in its first reading on April 2, 2024, but was not adopted prior to the election. The Law on Control, Regularization, Operation, and Financing of Non-Governmental and Related Organizations introduces stringent operating requirements for NGOs, including provisions for sanctions and closures based on noncompliance. The ambiguous language used in this legislation has the potential to target organizations that monitor democratic processes. The law was adopted by the National Assembly in August 2024. The Organic Law on the Defense of Essequibo, passed in March 2024, introduced penalties for individuals or organizations perceived as sympathetic to Guyana’s position in the territorial dispute. This law was seen as a potential tool to disqualify opposition candidates or prevent the registration of political parties.

These legislative efforts were viewed by civil society interviewed by the Carter Center team as a direct threat to dissent and democratic participation and were identified as part of a broader pattern of restrictions on civic space that further erode fundamental freedoms.

¹⁰ See the Carter Center’s final report, [“Expert Mission to Observe 2021 Regional and Local Elections in Venezuela”](#)

Challenges to Implementation of the Legal Framework

The legal framework is generally in line with international electoral standards and commitments for democratic elections. However, the lack of judicial and institutional independence, the erosion of the rule of law human rights concerns, the selective enforcement of the legislation, and the political interference have created a legal environment that is not conducive to a genuine democratic electoral process. The prevalence of political interference creates an environment of discretionary decision-making and legal uncertainty.

The erosion of the rule of law and democratic principles in Venezuela stems mainly from the dominance of the executive over other branches and institutions, coupled with a weak separation of powers. The absence of independent judicial and electoral institutions has led to selective and arbitrary application of the law, lack of due process, secret rulings and arbitrary detention. This posed serious challenges to the right to political participation, introduced considerable uncertainty into the electoral process, and undermined the fundamental principles of equal treatment and fair competition. Ultimately, the integrity of the electoral process and the democratic framework were seriously compromised.

ELECTION ADMINISTRATION

An independent and impartial election management body that functions transparently and professionally is essential for ensuring that citizens can participate in a genuinely democratic electoral process.¹¹ It is the responsibility of an election management body to take necessary steps to ensure respect for fundamental rights guaranteed by international principles.¹² The body also should ensure accountable, efficient, and effective public administration as it relates to elections and have the necessary resources to perform its functions effectively. International and regional treaties also establish that access to information is a critical means of ensuring transparency and accountability throughout the electoral process.¹³

Mandate and Composition of the CNE

The CNE is the constitutional body responsible for organizing the electoral process. The constitution establishes independence and impartiality as the fundamental principles of the electoral institutions. The CNE is composed of five members, including the chairperson, for a seven-year term. There are three subsidiary organs: the National Electoral Board (JNE), responsible for administrative and logistical matters; the Civil and Electoral Registry Commission; and the Political Participation and Financing Commission. The CNE has ample experience in organizing elections and broad technical, operational, and logistical expertise, ranging from biometric voter registration to developing voting machines.

The current members of the CNE (*rectores*) took office in August 2023, following the early resignation of the previous CNE – with five years remaining on their term – ahead of the primaries. The resignation of the CNE plenary initially did not have the support of the two opposition members, who were subsequently forced to leave their posts. The selection process for the replacement of the CNE members was the subject of criticism by opposition and civil society groups. Most stakeholders met by the Carter Center mission perceived the current CNE to be less independent than previous groups, as almost all members were perceived to be linked

¹¹ U.N. Human Rights Committee, General Comment 25 on the ICCPR, paragraph 20; U.N., UNCAC, art. 10(a); U.N. ICCPR, art. 19(2).

¹² General Comment 25 to ICCPR, para. 20.

¹³ *Ibid.*

to the government. The most controversial appointment was that of the president, who had previously been the comptroller general.

Decision-making of the CNE

The CNE generally enjoyed stakeholder confidence in its technical capacity to conduct elections. However, the CNE plenary remained consistent in its approach of supporting the ruling party. The CNE's lack of enforcement of legislation, unresponsiveness to complaints of legal violations, and lack of transparency undermined the integrity of the electoral process and compromised its overall credibility. Examples include the manipulation of the online candidate registration process, the approval and accreditation process for citizen observation groups, restrictive requirements for out-of-country voting, and the failure to maintain a level playing field for candidates in terms of campaign conditions or the media coverage. The government's involvement in the work of the CNE was denounced by one member, perceived to be close to the opposition, who publicly stated that the plenary of five magistrates had not met for more than two months and that the CNE chairperson made decisions without consulting the plenary.¹⁴

Transparency of the CNE

Another issue of concern was related to the transparency of the CNE's decision-making process. Its decisions often were not published in a timely manner or made available on its website or institutional profiles on social media. In most cases the CNE limited the information to press releases that did not provide details on the technical aspects of the decision. The CNE's inadequate or nonexistent channels for official, public information regarding key aspects of the process, including the registration of candidates, the criteria for the acceptance of citizen observation groups, and changes to the electoral calendar, undermined the principles of transparency, accessibility, and legal certainty. Various sectors of the opposition indicated that they had problems accessing and communicating with the CNE and that the CNE chairperson seldom responded to official communications and requests for meetings.

Preparation of Elections

Overall, the logistical and operational preparations for the elections were conducted effectively for the most part. Venezuela has a technologically advanced electoral process. The degree of automation that is present in the system covers almost all aspects of the process, including the registration of candidates, voter identification, the counting and transmission of results, and the tabulation of results. The CNE conducted voting simulations throughout the country to test the electronic voting machines, evaluate possible problems, and provide an overall estimate of the time voters would need to cast a ballot. The CNE also implemented mechanisms for voters to find out the location of their polling stations. However, the shortened calendar established by the CNE severely affected activities crucial to the elections, such as the notification and training of polling station staff. The CNE also made biased decisions that affected the conduct of the elections – for example, the installation of additional polling stations in the strongholds of the ruling party. However, the CNE's decisions regarding the transparency of the results had the greatest impact on the integrity of the election (see the section on the announcement of the results).

¹⁴ Efecto Cocuyo, "Rector Delpino: Amoroso viola los derechos de los rectores del CNE al tomar decisiones sin convocar sesiones" June 11, 2024, <https://efectococuyo.com/politica/rector-delpino-amoroso-viola-los-derechos-de-los-rectores-del-cne-al-tomar-decisiones-sin-convocar-sesiones/>

According to international standards for democratic elections, the electoral calendar should indicate an adequate time for implementation of all parts of the electoral process.¹⁵ However, a shorter timetable was established for these elections. According to the Barbados Accord, the election should take place in the second half of 2024. On March 5, the CNE announced that the presidential elections would be held on July 28. The CNE's decision to hold the elections at the end of July, when they are traditionally held at the end of the year, was perceived by opposition sectors and CSOs as a maneuver to favor the ruling party in the face of increasing electoral gains by the opposition. The CNE's decision had a direct impact on the electoral process, leaving much less time for adequate voter education campaigns, training of electoral staff, updating of the electoral register, and the registration of candidates, among others.

For the 2024 presidential election, the electoral infrastructure consisted of 15,797 voting centers with 30,026 polling stations – an average of 1.9 polling stations per center. Some 1,762 new voting centers were installed for this election with 539,696 registered voters, while 105 centers were removed since the 2021 regional elections. Of the new voting centers, 97% had only one polling station.

The CNE informed the Carter Center mission that the increase in the number of voting centers was intended to make voting more accessible. However, electoral experts, CSOs, and the opposition claimed that most of the new voting centers were located in electoral strongholds of the ruling party, increasing the possibility of pressure on voters to vote for the incumbent. Of the new voting centers included in the CNE's database of polling stations, at least 175 (nearly 10%) were in "*base de misiones*," government offices for the delivery of social benefits in working-class communities that serve as a base of electoral support for the PSUV.

An additional factor was the CNE's decision to require for the first time that persons wishing to act as party agents be registered to vote in the polling station where they would perform their activities, thus limiting the presence of opposition party agents in these new centers located in the strongholds of the ruling party. The CNE claimed that all political parties and CSOs could request the establishment of new voting centers, but the criteria for opening new centers were not made public.

The CNE is responsible for the random selection of polling station workers from among registered voters. The CNE informed the Carter Center mission that a text message was sent to each person selected and that more than 60% of those selected were trained. Poll workers were trained almost exclusively online, although in-person training – using the online platform – also was available. Training began on June 28 and continued through July 27, the day before the election. The Carter Center attended some of the in-person training sessions and found the videos to be adequately produced and to contain the basic information for the training. However, the mission team noted delays in the onset of the training, issues with the online training platform, and inconsistent availability for in-person training across the country. The mission also observed that citizens who completed the online training had difficulties printing their accreditation certificates that would allow them to participate in the electoral process.

¹⁵ U.N. Center for Human Rights Handbook on the Legal, Technical, and Human Rights Aspects of Elections, para. 75

VOTER REGISTRATION

International standards require that States must take effective measures to ensure that all people entitled to vote are able to do so.¹⁶ Voter registration is recognized as an important mechanism for protecting the right to vote and should be facilitated to promote universal and equal suffrage. An effective voter registration process upholds these principles while increasing transparency and public confidence in the electoral process.¹⁷ The voter list should be publicly displayed, with adequate time for public inspection, including time for objections and the adjudication of disputes.¹⁸ An effective remedy should be available to all citizens for violations of their rights during the voter registration process.¹⁹

Voter Registration Operations

The voter register in Venezuela is centralized and administered by the CNE, and is continuous, permanent, and voluntary. Between elections, permanent registration centers exist only in state capitals. The usual practice is to hold special voter registration exercises before elections by installing additional registration centers throughout the country.

The official register for the 2024 election totaled 21,392,464 voters and showed an increase of about 623,000 voters during the special registration period.²⁰ About 850,000 voters changed their residence during this period. The CNE noted that there had been a recent short special registration campaign prior to the Essequibo referendum in December 2023, during which 139,000 voters were added to the voter roll and 386,000 changes of residence were registered. These two campaigns should be considered integrated because of the short time between them. However, estimates from CSOs indicated that there were up to 3 million eligible voters in the country who were not registered, particularly young people. This under-registration despite the special registration campaign is at least partly the result of the compressed electoral calendar, which resulted in a short timeframe for voter registration, fewer registration centers, and limited official publicity regarding voter registration.

The CNE announced there would be 315 fixed centers operating from March 18 to April 16. This number was complemented by mobile registration teams across the country, but there was no official information available on their operation. The CSO *Observatorio Electoral Venezolano* (OEV) observed the special voter registration and found the lowest number of points for voter registration for a presidential election in 10 years.²¹ In comparison, the 2018 presidential election had 531 voter registration centers; the 2021 regional elections had 1,000 centers operating for 45 days; and the 2023 Essequibo referendum had 500 centers operating for 11 days. The OEV also found that the CNE staff worked diligently.

According to the OEV, the registration turnout was low due to the CNE's poor promotion for these registration drives. On a positive note, the CNE extended the closing time in the final week due to the increased number of citizens registering. The presence of unidentified people carrying

¹⁶ ICCPR, Article 25(b), UN HRC, General Comment 25, para. 11

¹⁷ UNCAC, Article 5(1)

¹⁸ ICCPR, Article 25(b), CCPR GC 31 para 15

¹⁹ U.N., Human Rights and Elections, 1st ed., para. 114, and Carter Center Election Obligations and Standards, p. 107.

²⁰ These figures are the sum of two registration periods: the preliminary (Electoral Gazette N.1055, April 29) and definitive (Electoral Gazette N.1057, June 1).

²¹ Observatorio Electoral Venezolano, "Observación de la jornada especial del Registro Electoral", April, 2024, <https://oevenezolano.org/2024/04/estudio-observacion-de-la-jornada-especial-del-registro-electoral/>

out a parallel registration of participants in the vicinity of the official voter registration centers was perceived by civil society as a control mechanism from the ruling party.

Audit of the Voter Register

In May 2024, the CNE's technical staff conducted three audits. The first audit involved the validation of the biometric data of the voters processed by the CNE system, using a dactyloscopy method (fingerprints) on a representative sample of voters. The results showed a high degree of accuracy. The second audit focused on verifying the removal of deceased voters from the register for the current year (January-April), by comparing a sample of death certificates issued by the Ministry of Health with the list of deceased voters identified by the National Office of Electoral Registry, a department in the CNE. The published results showed that 100% of the sample had already been identified by the CNE through its current voter roll purging mechanism. The third audit was a phone survey to assess voter satisfaction with their assigned voting centers. According to the CNE, a total of 1,400 voters were contacted, and 97% reported some level of satisfaction with their voting center. Although these audits indicated that the register was accurate for voters included, no official audit was conducted to determine the extent to which eligible citizens were not included in the register.

Registration of Out-of-Country Voters

Although the law provides for voting abroad, most Venezuelans outside the country were unable to participate in this election. According to the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), more than 7.7 million Venezuelans resided outside the country as of June 2024. Of these, an estimated 5.5 million are of voting age.²² The Organic Law of the Electoral Process (Art. 124) requires residency or other legal status for those living abroad. This is a very unusual requirement from an electoral comparative perspective. Venezuelan diplomatic missions applied a restrictive interpretation of the law, requiring citizens to provide excessive proof, such as a valid residence visa in the host country, in order to register, even though many migrants have special status (for example, in Colombia, Venezuelan migrants have been granted a temporary protection status), have different valid documentation, or are undocumented.

CSOs also reported other undue requirements by embassies and consulates during the registration period, such as the embassy in Ecuador requiring permanent visas for Venezuelans living in that country, or in Uruguay, where the diplomatic delegation requested a non-existent certificate from the Uruguayan government. Delays also were reported due to a lack of instructions from the CNE and a lack of registration materials.²³ Additionally, embassies and consulates were reported to have restricted hours of operation and limited the number of people who could be registered per day. These restrictive factors resulted in only 508 new voters abroad being added to the register during the special registration period, a figure confirmed to the Carter Center mission by the CNE. The total number of Venezuelans registered to vote abroad was approximately 69,000 (just over 1% of those potentially eligible). The under-registration both at the national level and abroad resulted in the denial of political participation to a significant number of citizens.

²² Interamerican Commission on Human Rights, <https://www.oas.org/es/CIDH/jsForm/?File=/es/cidh/prensa/comunicados/2024/141.asp>

²³ The Carter Center did not observe voter registration in Venezuela or abroad. However, three domestic organizations published a joint report listing arbitrary requirements for registration at different consulates, such as in Colombia, Peru, Spain, and Argentina: <https://alertavenezuela.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/BARERAS-AL-REGISTRO-ELECTORAL-EN-EL-EXTERIOR.pdf>

CANDIDATE REGISTRATION

International and regional treaties protect the right and opportunity of every citizen to be elected.²⁴ The effective implementation of the right to stand for elective office ensures that voters have a free choice of candidates.²⁵ Any conditions placed on political party and candidate registration processes should be reasonable and nondiscriminatory.²⁶ Individuals are entitled to have decisions affecting fundamental rights reviewed by a competent, independent, and impartial tribunal in a fair and public hearing.²⁷

For the 2024 presidential elections there were 10 registered candidates, all men, supported by 37 political organizations. The two main contenders were incumbent President Nicolás Maduro of the PSUV, supported by 13 political parties in the *Gran Polo Patriótico Simón Bolívar* coalition; and Edmundo González Urrutia of the Unitary Platform, the main opposition coalition supported by three political parties on the ballot.

The registration of candidates for the 2024 election challenged the democratic principles and international standards. The opposition's efforts to present a unified front during the primaries were undermined by subsequent government interventions, including the suspension of primary results and the disqualification of key candidates. These developments, coupled with undue restrictions on candidate eligibility, judicial intervention of political party leading bodies, the CNE's blockage to the registration of opposition candidates, and the government's non-compliance with the Barbados Accord, raised serious concerns about political pluralism, the inclusivity and the overall integrity of the electoral process.

Eligibility Criteria

The constitution requires that a presidential candidate must be a registered voter, a Venezuelan citizen by birth with no other nationality, in full enjoyment of his or her political rights, and at least 30 years of age on election day. Other criteria include not having been convicted by a final court decision and having a secular status (a candidate cannot be an active religious leader or hold an official position within a religious organization). Candidates cannot hold the office of vice president of the republic, minister, state governor, or mayor on the day of their nomination or on the day of the election. The blanket restriction on convicted persons, regardless of the seriousness of the crime committed, and the distinction between citizens by birth and naturalization are not in line with international standards to which Venezuela adheres.

Opposition Primaries

Political parties have the right to choose their candidates freely either by nomination or through primaries. The law requires political parties to register the persons in charge of submitting the names of the candidates to the electoral authority. Additionally, the law establishes the possibility for the CNE to organize primary elections of political parties only upon request of the party.

On Oct. 22, 2023, the Unitary Platform held primary elections that were organized without the support of the CNE. Despite logistical challenges and obstacles by the executive, some 2.4 million Venezuelans participated. María Corina Machado, a prominent opposition leader, won

²⁴ ICCPR, Article 25

²⁵ ICCPR, Article 25(a); UN HRC, General Comment 25, para 15.

²⁶ UN HRC, General Comment 25, paras 15 – 17.

²⁷ UDHR, Article 10; ICCPR, Article 14.1. UN HRC, General Comment 32 notes that a tribunal must be independent of the executive branch (para. 18).

with 93% of the vote. The results were officially announced on Oct. 24, 2023, presenting a united front of the main opposition forces against Maduro's government.²⁸ The establishment's reaction to the primaries was swift and hostile. Questions about voter turnout led to the opening of a criminal investigation on Oct. 25, 2023, against the organizers of the primaries, who were charged with identity fraud and usurpation of authority. On Oct. 30, 2023, the Electoral Chamber of the Superior Court of Justice (TSJ) suspended the results of the primaries, triggering widespread condemnation both nationally and internationally.

In June 2023, just days after Machado formally entered the primary election process, the Venezuelan government announced a 15-year ban on her running for office. The ban was based on allegations that Machado supported U.S. sanctions and was involved in corruption, but the grounds for the decision were not publicly disclosed or made available to her. Machado appealed the decision, which was upheld by the TSJ on Jan. 26, 2024. The decision effectively barred her from registering as a candidate for the presidential election. The disqualification of Machado was interpreted as a violation of the Barbados Accord, in which the Maduro government committed to recognize the right of political organizations to freely choose their candidates.

Registration Process

The electoral law provides for a three-phase registration process that began on March 21 and ended on July 18, 2024, in accordance with the electoral calendar. From March 21 to 25, political organizations could register their candidates online with the CNE. On March 25, Maduro's candidacy for reelection was formally registered. The opposition designated university professor Corina Yoris to replace Machado after the TSJ decision. However, the CNE computer system prevented Yoris's registration until the end of the period, without any apparent reason or justification on the part of the CNE. The MUD party registered Edmundo González Urrutia, its president, as a temporary substitute. González pledged to withdraw his candidacy in favor of another consensus candidate in the second phase of candidate registration. A total of 13 presidential candidates were registered during this phase, including Enrique Marquez, a former electoral magistrate.

The second registration phase took place April 1-23. During this phase, political parties could substitute their candidates.²⁹ However, the CNE required that substitute candidates be on the list of the 13 candidates who had already qualified in the first phase of registration. This interpretation was criticized by domestic election observation organizations, such as OEV and *Red de Observación - Asamblea Educativa* (ROAE). After denouncing new problems with the computer platform, the opposition UNT and MPV parties dropped their candidacies and gave their support to the MUD candidate, González, who also had the endorsement of Machado. During this phase, three candidates withdrew from the race, reducing the list to 10. The final phase of candidate registration ended on July 18, 2024, with no further changes.

Obstacles to Political Participation and Political Pluralism

International standards and principles establish that political rights should only be suspended as a result of a judicial decision, which provides for guarantees and due process and not merely as a result of an administrative decision.³⁰ Article 42 of the constitution establishes that political rights may be suspended only by a final judicial decision; however, subsidiary legislation allows

²⁸ See OEV report on the observation of the primary at [Informe-de-observacion-eleccion-primaria-22-octubre-2023.pdf](#)

²⁹ Articles 62 and 64 of the electoral law.

³⁰ Open letter to Volker Türk, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, July 3, 2024.

for the suspension of political rights as result of an administrative sanction.³¹ The comptroller general disqualified individuals, primarily opposition figures, on administrative grounds, circumventing the judicial process and constitutional safeguards designed to protect political rights.³² Some disqualified persons learned of their disqualification through informal channels, further jeopardizing the principle of due process, and the right to a defense.

The arbitrariness and lack of transparency in the decision-making processes that led to most of the disqualifications severely affected the right to political participation. On Jan. 26, 2024, the same day that the TSJ upheld Machado's disqualification, the chamber also upheld the 15-year disqualification of Henrique Capriles. From January to July 2024, 19 opposition leaders and officials were disqualified, including 12 sitting mayors. Since 2019, other prominent opposition leaders also have been disqualified from holding public office, including Juan Guaidó, Freddy Guevara, Antonio Ledezma, Leopoldo López, Antonio Fernández, and Freddy Superlano, and most recently, Carlos Ocariz, Tomás Guanipa, Elías Sayegh, and José Antonio Fernández.

The TSJ has intervened in the affairs of at least 15 political parties³³ associated with the main opposition groups or dissident factions of the *Chavismo*, suspending executive board members and replacing the leadership with new bodies more inclined to negotiate with the government. As a result of the judicial interventions, some of the traditional opposition parties were perceived as becoming pro-government. The new leaders of these parties were able to select candidates and were granted the use of the party's identifying elements, such as logos, emblems, and symbols. The most recent intervention occurred in August 2023, when the TSJ appointed new leadership for the Venezuelan Communist Party (PCV), which had distanced itself from President Maduro. The PCV denounced the TSJ's decision and said that the party's leadership had been transferred to the PSUV.

As a result, genuine alternative political options have been reduced, undermining pluralism and political competitiveness. The lack of transparency and due process in these disqualifications and interventions also raised concerns about the fairness of the electoral process, and ultimately about the overall integrity of the democratic process in the country.

CIVIC AND VOTER EDUCATION

International and regional treaties indicate that civic and voter education is crucial for ensuring that the electorate has the information necessary to exercise its right to vote effectively.³⁴ It is one of the key roles performed by election management bodies.

The CNE organized a nationwide election simulation on June 30 to encourage voters to familiarize themselves with the voting machines and the process. The CNE also organized voter education fairs at 1,000 fixed points across the country, including sample voting machines and a virtual tour of the voting process through virtual reality headsets.³⁵ CSOs and opposition political parties reported that official voter education campaigns on voting procedures and get-out-the-vote efforts were largely absent in major cities and online. This was consistent with the findings

³¹ Organic Law of the Comptroller General, article 105.

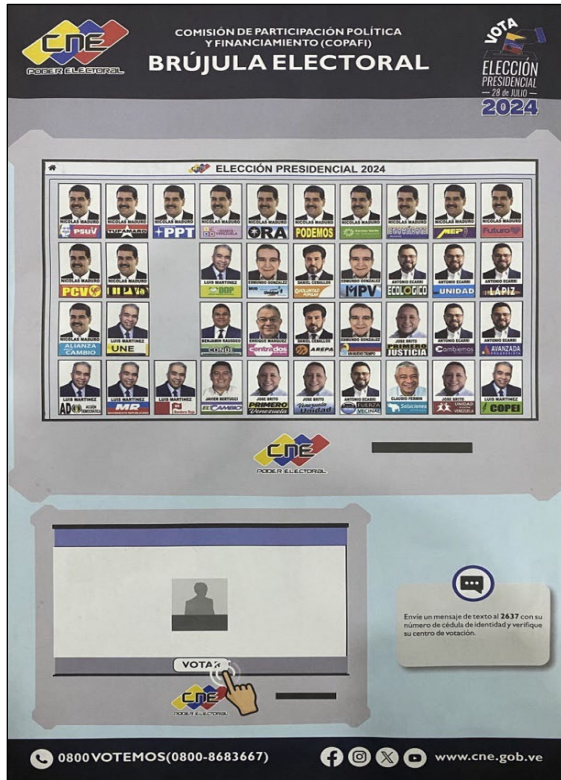
³² ACHR, article 23. Also, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights maintains that disqualifications should only be imposed by judicial conviction, not administratively.

³³ *PCV, Acción Democrática, Movimiento Primero Justicia, Voluntad Popular, Bandera Roja, Acción Ciudadana Positiva, Movimiento Republicano, Por la Democracia Social, Movimiento Electoral del Pueblo, COPEI, Movimiento Ecológico de Venezuela, Tupamaro, Patria Para Todos, Compromiso País, Nueva Visión para mi País, Avanzada Progresista, MIN-Unidad.*

³⁴ U.N. HRC General Comment No.25, paragraph 11

³⁵ http://www.cne.gob.ve/web/normativa_electoral/elecciones/2024/eleccion_presidencial/documentos/puntos_feria_electoral_2024.pdf

of the Carter Center observation teams in Caracas, Barinas, Maracaibo, and Valencia. Despite the CNE staff’s competence in explaining the voting system, observer reports indicated very low attendance at CNE voter education events. Some additional voter education efforts were conducted by the leading political parties. The only CNE voter education material available was the “*brújula electoral*” – electoral compass – which was sparsely distributed at these points.



ELECTION CAMPAIGN

An open campaign environment that enables voters to receive messages from candidates and parties is a critical aspect of democratic elections. Equitable treatment of candidates and parties during the campaign period, as well as respect for the freedoms of expression, assembly, and association, are all vital to democratic practice.³⁶ Political parties and candidates should be able to campaign freely without unreasonable restrictions, and public resources should not be abused in support of any political party or candidate.³⁷ International treaties also state that everyone, including candidates, has the right to freedom of movement within the borders of each state.³⁸

The legal framework defines the principles and rights governing the campaign period rules, such as level playing field and freedom of association and expression. Additionally, on July 3, one day

³⁶ ICCPR, Articles 19, 21, and 25; UN HRC, General Comments 34 and 37

³⁷ The Carter Center, Election Obligations and Standards: A Carter Center Assessment Manual (Second Edition).

³⁸ ICCPR, Article 12

before the start of the official electoral campaign period, the CNE approved specific regulations on the conduct of the campaign and advertising for the 2024 presidential elections.³⁹

The electoral campaign, which ran July 4-25, was marked by repression and the arrests of opposition figures. According to the NGO *Foro Penal* (Criminal Forum), from January 2024 until the end of the campaign, there were 149 arbitrary detentions for political reasons, 135 of which were linked to the campaign of the main opposition candidate.⁴⁰ Notably, 111 of these detentions occurred after the official campaign period had begun. *Foro Penal* also reported that there were 305 political prisoners in Venezuela, including 30 women, and saw these arrests as part of a wider pattern of targeting political opponents. Amnesty International condemned the escalation of repression during the election period, highlighting arbitrary detentions, enforced disappearances, and torture.⁴¹ Other efforts by the authorities to restrict opposition campaign activities included fines and other administrative sanctions against businesses owned by party activists and against individuals providing services to opposition figures, as well as restrictions on freedom of movement.

President Maduro's campaign was dominant, with extensive visibility through rallies and street activities, and a pervasive presence in both traditional and social media. Media experts pointed to both government policy and self-censorship as reasons for the low presence of opposition candidates in traditional media. Abuse of administrative resources on behalf of the incumbent – including the use of state media, social programs, and vehicles, and public officials campaigning while in their official capacity – was observed throughout the campaign. Carter Center observers reported these practices in Maracaibo, Barinas, Carabobo, and Caracas. Center observers also observed public buses being used in Maracaibo to transport citizens to Maduro campaign events.

The OEV carried out a comprehensive observation of the precampaign period throughout the country from June 2 to July 3, 2024, with 674 observers. The OEV reported that 68% of the observers witnessed or knew that officials from the governors' and mayors' offices were campaigning, and 50% reported that civil servants were campaigning in their workplaces, which is a violation of both the electoral law and the law against corruption. Nearly 80% of observers in the precampaign period reported seeing campaign materials in favor of Maduro at a public event, including inaugurations of infrastructure, trade union events, graduation ceremonies, and home deliveries.⁴²

During the official campaign period, Carter Center observers noted the visual dominance of candidate Maduro, with thousands of billboards, posters, and paintings of all sizes on walls and utility poles throughout the cities, in contrast to the very limited presence of the opposition candidates. Opposition parties informed the Carter Center mission that they lacked financial and material resources, which limited their outreach efforts and forced them to rely heavily on volunteer resources. Carter Center interlocutors stated that private-sector companies were reluctant to provide services to the opposition parties due to potential threats and reprisals. Despite these obstacles, the main opposition party managed to convey its message to voters

³⁹ Article 71 of the LOPRE defines the electoral campaign period and authorizes the CNE to establish its length. Article 72 clearly defines the principles and rights governing the interpretation of campaign period rules, such as level playing field and freedom of association and expression, according to international standards for genuine democratic elections. Additionally, the CNE approved specific provisions on campaign conduct and advertising for the 2024 Presidential Elections on July 3, 2024,³⁹ one day before the start of the electoral campaign. *Gaceta Electoral* Numero.1061 Resolución no. 240703-055, mediante la cual se resuelve, dictar la normativa específica sobre campaña y propaganda electoral para la elección Presidencial 2024, a celebrarse el 28 de julio de 2024.

⁴⁰ *Foro Penal* press conference, 26 July 2024. <https://foropenal.com/>

⁴¹ <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/07/venezuela-after-electoral-period-marked-repression-commitment-human-rights-imperative/>

⁴² *Elecciones Presidenciales 2024. Golpe a la soberanía popular. Observatorio Electoral Venezolano. Segundo reporte.*

mainly through rallies, and social media, and through public appearances and messages by María Corina Machado.

A number of opinion polls showed that González was leading by a wide margin. The government's own polling, such as *Hinterlaces*, gave Maduro the lead. In the weeks leading up to the election, the campaign was marked by polarization and tension. While the opposition denounced the persecution against them, Maduro's discourse, which began with promises of change and transformation after 25 years of revolution, turned into warnings about the country's stability in case of his defeat and an alleged strategy by the opposition and the international media to reject the election results and incite violence if he won. Maduro's messages included a statement that an opposition victory could unleash a "bloodbath" in the country.

The campaign period ended on July 25, followed by a two-day period of silence before election day. However, the Carter Center mission observed that the ruling party candidate engaged in prominent public activities during this period, including the inauguration of a hospital, the distribution of keys for public housing units,⁴³ and a two-hour program, "Nico Live,"⁴⁴ featuring the president, on social media platforms. These actions were in clear violation of Venezuela laws, which are designed to preserve the integrity of the election by ensuring a period of reflection for voters without political interference.

The CNE informed the Carter Center mission that it had deployed more than 800 inspectors throughout the country July 4-28 to monitor compliance with campaign regulations and had set up a media monitoring room for this process. There is no public information on the number of complaints filed with the CNE or on the number of administrative investigations initiated for violations of campaign rules. Despite the numerous media reports of misuse of public resources on behalf of the incumbent, unbalanced media coverage, the participation of state officials in campaign activities, and intimidation of opposition supporters by tax authorities and other official agencies, the CNE did not appear to take remedial action. The Carter Center mission did not receive any information that sanctions were imposed by the CNE or that decisions were issued by the courts regarding electoral violations.

CAMPAIGN FINANCE

Regulations to ensure oversight and transparency of political party and campaign financing, as well as their effective and equitable enforcement, are essential features of a democratic election. A spectrum of measures is associated with such a regulatory framework and, where applicable, electoral legislation should provide for the transparency of donations to campaign activities, the standardized presentation of campaign accounts, regular reporting mechanisms, and effective and dissuasive sanctions.⁴⁵

Venezuela's campaign finance system lacks adequate regulation, transparency, and accountability. The constitution states that a law should regulate private financing and contributions, establish control mechanisms, and limit spending and the duration of campaigns.⁴⁶ However, the law has not yet been enacted, and political financing is regulated only by the General Regulation of the Electoral Law (RGLOPRE). The absence of a specific organic law, as

⁴³ From the official presidential X (Twitter) account, <https://x.com/PresidencialVen/status/1817036398676877542>

⁴⁴ <https://x.com/PresidencialVen/status/1817013650109894865>

⁴⁵ U.N. Convention Against Corruption, Article 7(3); UN HRC General Comment 25, para. 19.

⁴⁶ Articles 67 of the Constitution

recommended by the Constitutional Chamber of the TSJ in 2008, leaves the system vulnerable to abuse.

The constitution explicitly prohibits public financing of political organizations, which means that Venezuelan political parties must rely solely on private funding. According to the RGLOPRE, candidates and parties must submit the final accounts of their electoral campaigns through the automated accountability system within 60 days of election day. The CNE's Political Participation and Financing Commission is responsible for overseeing political parties' finances. Despite the detailed financial reports from candidates required by the CNE, interlocutors told the mission that public disclosure of political financing is inadequate and control mechanisms are not sufficient, resulting in the frequent circumvention of the financing rules and the potential infiltration of illicit funds into Venezuela's political and electoral systems through networks of shell companies, offshore accounts, and money laundering, often linked to criminal activities.

The ban on public financing and the lack of legal limits on contributions and spending, coupled with the use of state resources and the absence of effective controls, have created an uneven playing field and further undermined Venezuelans' confidence in the electoral process.

MEDIA AND SOCIAL MEDIA

Free expression of information and ideas by voters and candidates is essential to democratic elections:⁴⁷ the right for everyone to seek, receive, and impart ideas through any means of their choice, including, but not limited to, writing, speech, print, and the internet.⁴⁸ The media play a critical role in the electoral process, raising awareness and providing information, while also serving as an “open forum for public debate and discussion, and providing candidates and parties with an equitable podium for their campaigns.” Journalism, including investigative reporting, keeps citizens informed and helps them make informed choices.

Media Regulation

The Venezuelan Constitution recognizes freedom of expression and access to information,⁴⁹ but national legislation imposes several obstacles to the exercise of these rights. The Penal Code contains articles criminalizing hate speech, defamation, and the dissemination of false information, which have been used to censor and prosecute journalists and media outlets over the past decade. Other administrative measures, such as the suspension of media licenses or the imposition of fines, have led to self-censorship by media professionals. The so-called Hate Law has been invoked to fine and imprison citizens and reporters for publishing “hate messages” in the media and on social media.⁵⁰

Media Environment and Election Coverage

The media landscape in Venezuela is characterized by a concentration of outlets in the hands of the state and of businesspeople with ties to the government. The number of independent newspapers has declined dramatically over the past decade due to economic problems and restrictions on access to government-controlled newsprint distribution. According to the National Association of Journalists of Venezuela, 405 media outlets have been closed in Venezuela over

⁴⁷ U.N., Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 19.

⁴⁸ U.N. (ICCPR), General Comment No. 34, Para 12.

⁴⁹ *Constitución de la República Bolivariana de Venezuela*, Articles 57 and 28.

⁵⁰ *Ley Constitucional contra el Odio, por la Convivencia Pacífica y la Tolerancia* (2017).

the past two decades as a result of government policies against freedom of expression.⁵¹ Intimidation, harassment, and, in some cases, arrests of journalists have been common as the press has carried out its function of informing the public. For example, the National Union of Press Workers denounced the expulsion of 14 international correspondents between July 25 and Aug. 2. On election day alone, the NGO *Espacio Público* (Public Space) registered 29 cases and 30 complaints of violations of the right to freedom of expression against journalists.

Given their precarious situation, more than a hundred journalists and media outlets joined the *#VenezuelaVota* alliance to ensure national coverage of the election. Despite this initiative, the media environment during the campaign was characterized by an imbalance in coverage that heavily favored the incumbent candidate. The Maduro government used its control of a significant portion of the media to broadcast PSUV events and messages, effectively dominating the airwaves and covering its own rallies on most public and private television stations. Opposition candidates received minimal media coverage, and their visibility was further diminished by widespread self-censorship among media outlets. Several of these candidates reported that many media platforms refused to run campaign ads and interviews with them for fear of government reprisals. Press associations reported difficulties in gaining access to official sources and to the government candidate.

Social Media

The internet and social media have become important channels for informing citizens in Venezuela. The country has 17.9 million internet users and 14 million social media users, representing nearly 62% and 48%, respectively, of the country's total population (29 million).⁵² The establishment frequently clashed with social media platforms during and after the campaign, culminating in the announcement of a temporary block on Signal and X in the country. Following election day and the posting of polling station results on the internet by the opposition, Maduro publicly asked Venezuelans to uninstall the WhatsApp application, claiming that opposition leaders had handed over the "database" of Venezuelans to criminals and technological imperialism outlets.⁵³

Selective blocking or shutting down of websites and social media platforms has been another common way to control access to information. The government exercised this censorship during the 2021 regional elections and has since expanded the number and techniques used to shut down the websites of media and CSOs.⁵⁴ These tactics, which include blocking IP addresses or seizing internet domains,⁵⁵ are ordered by government authorities and carried out by the main public and private telecommunications companies operating in Venezuela.⁵⁶ According to the NGO VESinFiltro (Venezuela Without Filter), 62 media and human rights organizations were blocked during the 2024 elections, affecting 86 domains. Technical restrictions on access to content constitute *prima facie* interference with the fundamental right of all people to exchange ideas and information.

⁵¹ CNP: La pérdida de la Libertad de Expresión es un hecho cierto en Venezuela – Colegio Nacional de Periodistas (cnpven.org)

⁵² Data Reportal Digital 2024: Venezuela. <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2024-venezuela>

⁵³ "Fuera WhatsApp de Venezuela": Nicolás Maduro pide que la app sea eliminada de forma voluntaria | WIRED

⁵⁴ Carter Center Final Report: Expert Mission to Observe Regional and Local Elections in Venezuela, 2021.

https://www.cartercenter.org/resources/pdfs/news/peace_publications/election_reports/venezuela/venezuela-final-report-2021.pdf

⁵⁵ The NGO vesinfiltro.org keeps track of these blocks and provides information to citizens on how to avoid or circumvent them as much as possible.

⁵⁶ CANTV, Movistar, Digitel, Inter, NetUno, Airtek y Cable Norte, entre otras, según vesinfiltro.org.

Fact-checking organizations operating in the country also have been subject to these blockades. These NGOs have denounced the increasing difficulty in carrying out their verification tasks due to government censorship, which in some cases forces them to work from abroad, and the obstacles sometimes imposed by the social media platforms.⁵⁷ For years, these organizations have analyzed the disinformation techniques used by the government to discredit the opposition and impose official narratives.⁵⁸ These include mobilizing the social media profiles of government officials, civil servants, members of the military, and citizens to spread false or misleading messages and place them in trending positions on social media platforms. According to ProBox, a digital observer, some actors do this in exchange for benefits such as the payment of food and basic services.⁵⁹

The main pro-incumbent narratives artificially disseminated through social networks focused on an alleged coup d'état by the opposition and foreign interference in the Venezuelan electoral process. The main pro-opposition narratives accused Maduro of preparing electoral fraud and a possible army uprising against the government.

ELECTION OBSERVATION

International and regional treaties affirm the right of every individual to participate in their country's public affairs.⁶⁰ This right, recognized as fundamental in international law, includes the ability to join NGOs.⁶¹ Such treaties emphasize that the involvement of both domestic and international election observers is an established form of citizen participation in public affairs and is a crucial transparency measure to promote confidence in the electoral process.⁶² The transparency provided by observation is an important component of electoral integrity.

Domestic Observers

In a climate of deep polarization and challenge, domestic election observation organizations are crucial for providing an impartial assessment of electoral processes. For the 2024 presidential election, accredited local organizations included: ROAE, *Proyecto Social*, *Asociación Venezolana de Juristas*, and *Centro Internacional de Estudios Superiores* (CIES).

Domestic observers faced numerous obstacles that significantly hindered their ability to effectively monitor the process. The CNE imposed a cap on the number of domestic observers, limiting them to 600 (less than the 700 allowed for the 2021 elections), while delays in issuing accreditations created logistical difficulties in some states and complicated the organization of their missions. Additionally, punitive legislation prohibited the observers from receiving foreign funding, further limiting their operations. Economic and social challenges, such as high prices, gasoline shortages, poor internet connectivity, and high transportation costs for moving materials from Caracas added to the difficulties. In addition, the CNE implemented a new regulation requiring prior approval for the publication of reports, creating a fear of reprisals for

⁵⁷ The X network no longer allows free and open use of its API by researchers and verification entities, hindering their work to counterbalance and denounce disinformation. Meta has partially disabled its CrowdTangle service, which is used to track disinformation.

⁵⁸ Meta and Twitter deactivated in 2021 the account of the program *Con el mazo dando* of the vice president of the PSUV, Diosdado Cabello, for violating these social networks' disinformation policies. According to the fact-checking organization Probox, misinformation was published from this account, which was then massively and artificially replicated. Two years later, X (previously known as Twitter) lifted this ban, and the account returned to operate without restrictions.

⁵⁹ <https://proboxve.org/2024/03/11/bono-por-tuitear-asi-se-paga-por-impulsar-propaganda-y-desinformacion-en-venezuela/>

⁶⁰ International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) - Article 25

⁶¹ UN HRC, General Comment 25, para. 11.

⁶² UN HRC, General Comment 25, para. 20.

documenting the elections and any potential irregularities. These obstacles undermined citizens' right to participate in public affairs as election observers and their right to freedom of speech, and posed significant challenges to ensuring a transparent and fair electoral process.

International Observers

The 2023 Barbados Accord called for the invitation of various international organizations to observe the electoral process, including the European Union, the U.N., the African Union, the Inter-American Union of Electoral Organizations, and The Carter Center. However, on May 28, 2024, the CNE withdrew its invitation to the EU. Instead, the CNE extended invitations to other international organizations and individuals, including CARICOM. Ultimately, The Carter Center was the only independent, long-term international observation mission accredited by the CNE. Also, the U.N. deployed a four-member panel of experts to follow and report on the process.

More than 900 people were invited by the CNE and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to observe on election day, representing more than 100 countries, including China, Russia, Cuba, Turkey, Iran, and Latin American and African Union countries. Their observation activities were organized by the CNE.

A number of international supporters invited by the opposition, including several former presidents from the region, were denied entry into Venezuela by the government, effectively barring them from participating as unofficial observers.⁶³

ELECTION TECHNOLOGY

International good practice shows that whenever electronic technologies are used in an electoral process, the same principles of universality, equality, integrity, transparency, and accountability need to be met. Electronic technologies should operate correctly and be sufficiently secure against fraud, and their functioning must be ensured through an independent body. State practice sources also state that technologies should be introduced gradually, based on prior planning, testing, evaluation, and certification.⁶⁴

Venezuela has been using a fully automated electronic voting system since 2004, which has allowed the CNE to develop expertise in managing such technology. Venezuelan voters also are familiar with using electronic voting. The system used in 2024 was manufactured by ExCle, which has provided biometric ID systems to the Venezuelan state since 2005.⁶⁵ It took over the operation of Venezuela's automated voting system when another supplier, Smartmatic, left the country after a disagreement with the CNE over the announcement of the 2017 election results.

After a warehouse fire in 2020 destroyed almost all of the original Smartmatic machines, the CNE and ExCle jointly designed and manufactured a new voting machine, which was first used in 2021, and was used again in 2024.

Besides the core voting system, the CNE also has auxiliary systems, such as those used to register candidates and party agents, print their credentials, provide election results, and train

⁶³ According to the Panamanian Government, the Venezuelan government blocked the airspace of the country and retained airplanes of Copa Airlines, preventing former leaders of Bolivia, Colombia, Costa Rica, México, and Panamá from entering Venezuela. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cn4v963pzm2o>

⁶⁴ Council of Europe, Committee of Ministers Recommendation (2004)11 on e-voting, Articles 28, 30; and OSCE/ODIHR, Handbook for the Observation of New Voting Technologies, p. 8.

⁶⁵ E.g. for the Civil Registry and Immigration Authority (SAIME) and the "Biopago" fingerprint payment system run by Banco de Venezuela

polling station staff remotely using videos and online exams. These appear to have been developed largely by the CNE's own IT staff.

Electronic Voting Machines

A fingerprint scanner, for biometric voter identification, is wired to a touchscreen direct-recording electronic (DRE) voting machine equipped with a voter-verified paper audit trail (VVPAT) printer.

Fingerprints of voters registered at each polling station are stored locally on the voting machine. Voters present their ID card, the ID number is entered by a poll worker on the scanner's numeric keyboard, and the voter is asked to place their thumb on the scanner. If the scan matches the stored print,⁶⁶ the voting machine is unlocked, the ballot is displayed on the touchscreen, and the voter can cast their vote.

After registering the electronic vote, the machine prints the vote on a VVPAT paper slip.⁶⁷ The voter is asked to verify their choice and then place the paper slip in a separate ballot box. Finally, the voter signs the voter register and marks it with an inked finger to document that they have voted. The entire voting process usually takes a minute or less.

Although the voting machine has audio hardware that could be used to allow blind voters to vote without assistance, the software does not provide such functionality. Voters with disabilities are encouraged to vote with the assistance of a trusted person of their choice.

When the polls close, the machine operator completes the voting process and "closes" the machine. Poll workers and party agents add their signatures by writing with their fingers on the touchscreen of the voting machine. Subsequently the machine prints a paper results slip⁶⁸ – the "acta" – and the signatures are printed on the results slip from their digitally captured images.



⁶⁶ There is no real-time in comparison to an online national biometric register, only local offline matching to locally stored minutiae associated to a voter ID number. For some voters four prints are available (thumbs and index fingers), and for others only two (thumbs). A small percentage of voters remain without registered fingerprints; their prints can be locally captured and stored on the scanner on election day. That way, the voter is still allowed to cast their vote. The new fingerprint images and minutiae are recovered after election day when the machines return to the CNE and are eventually added to the central electronic register. They are audited during a postelection voter data audit.

⁶⁷ Special security paper is used.

⁶⁸ The same security paper as for the VVPAT is used.

For added security, both a voting-machine-specific hash⁶⁹ (at the top) and a digital signature (at the bottom) are printed on the results slip. The results are displayed both in a traditional results form and encoded in a comma-separated values (CSV) format that is included in a QR code at the bottom. The QR code allows quick machine reading of the results with a smartphone for error-free data capture during quick counts and parallel counting exercises.

After the results slip is printed, the operator switches the machine to transmission mode. Depending on the location of the polling center, one of three external transmission devices is connected to the machine:

- A global system for mobile communications (GSM) cellular network modem, operating on the network of state-owned carrier Movilnet.
- A dial-up modem connected to a fixed telephone line, using dedicated lines on the network of the national telecommunications company, CANTV.
- A satellite modem (for remote voting centers), using a satellite communication system that uses very small aperture terminals (VSATs) to transmit and receive data, voice, and video signals.

As a security measure, only phone lines registered on a whitelist maintained by the respective telecom companies can be used for transmission. The transmission is protected by several layers of encryption.⁷⁰ Once connected to one of the two national tallying centers (CNTs) in Caracas, the machine transmits a packet containing the voting results and auxiliary information about the voting session.⁷¹ CNTs 1 and 2 act as a mutual failsafe, so that no votes are lost if one center loses connectivity.⁷²

After successful transmission, additional copies of the results forms are printed and given to political party agents and poll workers at the polling station.⁷³

The final step in the voting process at the polling station is the citizen verification audit. For at least 50% of the voting machines,⁷⁴ the ballot box containing the paper VVPAT receipts is opened, and the receipts are counted publicly. The random selection of the machines to be audited takes place in the polling center, after the polls have closed.⁷⁵ The count can be observed by any interested citizen. The results are announced verbally, noted on a counting sheet, and then printed as a results form (*acta*). The counting sheet of the paper receipts and the results form are included in the electoral materials and returned to the CNE, along with the machines and all

⁶⁹ A number generated through a mathematical procedure which clearly identified a specific version of a digital document. If even small changes are made to the document, the hash will change completely, indicating that a change took place. The hash on the slip is generated from the corresponding electronic vote record stored on the machine.

⁷⁰ VPN tunnels provided by the respective telecom providers, SSL encryption, and file encryption.

⁷¹ E.g., important statistics such as the number of no-match events and overrides, as well as “new prints registered” for the biometric voter ID system. No data identifying voters themselves is transmitted.

⁷² Data packets are replicated and stored redundantly at both CNTs.

⁷³ The voting machine software allows the printing of extra copies of the tally slip also before transmission, as long as the machine has passed to status “closed.” Actual practice on election day varied between voting centers: Some printed witness copies before transmission, some after.

⁷⁴ In 2024, the CNE manual specified the following selection rule: one box to be opened in voting center with one to four voting machines, two boxes in centers with five to eight machines, three boxes in centers with nine to 11 machines, and four boxes in centers with 12 or more machines. In 2024, the number of voting centers with just one machine increased significantly, which explains why the total of voting machines to be audited vs. their box was 55.4%.

⁷⁵ Manually, usually by drawing papers from a hat or similar method.

other election materials under custody of the *Plan República*. Copies of that *acta* are available to political party witnesses.⁷⁶

Process of Results Transmission, Reception, Tallying, and Publishing

The central tabulation system at the CNE receives and processes the incoming data packets from all voting machines. During the transmission period, the system provides statistics on connection health and overall transmission progress that are displayed on monitors in a high-security control room that is separate from the tabulation room. Accredited political party agents have access to this transmission room on election night and can monitor the data, but they cannot see the results as viewed in the tabulation room and are not provided with partial results throughout the evening.

Election results are only available to three CNE officials who make up the *Junta Nacional Electoral* (JNE)⁷⁷ through a separate system module named “*Certeza*,” which is also used to generate partial and final results bulletins. The JNE has at its disposition yet another system module, called “*Forecast*,” that calculates the moment when the overall result becomes irreversible. The JNE also has a publication module that allows the results to be published on the CNE website, reported by polling station. The publishing process is not automatic; the CNE has in the past decided not to publish disaggregated results, such as in the 2017 Constituent National Assembly elections and the 2023 Essequibo referendum.

Confidence in the Voting System Through System Audits

During meetings with the Carter Center mission in the run-up to election day, representatives of political parties and civil society alike expressed a high level of confidence in the automated electronic voting system. This was the result of both the evidence provided by system audits and a change in communication tactics by opposition parties.

In 2024 the opposition chose to emphasize a message of trust in the automated voting system in their campaign communications, expressing confidence in the system to guarantee both the integrity and the secrecy of the vote. Indeed, while both the opposition and CSOs protested the uneven playing field encountered in the run-up to election day, they emphasized the strength of the automated voting system as perhaps the only guarantee that voter choice would be respected, and votes counted as cast.

As for evidence, past confidence stemmed from an extensive series of audits, conducted in the run-up to election day with the participation of political party representatives.

Some of these audits took place before the Carter Center mission arrived. These included an independent comprehensive examination of the voting system software source code conducted by a team of 10 academic auditors from Venezuela’s public university system. These auditors represented both government and opposition parties. The 2024 audit built on an “integral technical audit” conducted by a similar team in advance of the 2021 elections, in which the same 10 experts examined the entire system line-by-line over a six-week period (24 sessions of six hours each). The auditors were satisfied with the security when they reported their findings in 2021 and made suggestions for improvements, some of which were implemented for 2024.

⁷⁶ The Center was not able to confirm in all polling stations in which it observed closure whether this *acta* was obtained by witnesses. In conversations with stakeholders, it was reported that numerous voting center coordinators denied witnesses their copy of this *acta*.

⁷⁷ Consisting of the president and vice president of the CNE, as well as Conrado Pérez Briceño, *rector suplente* of the CNE.

Because the source code was extensively secured with hashes in 2021, in 2024 only system changes needed to be audited, resulting in a shorter audit period.⁷⁸

The audit sessions attended by the Carter Center mission covered the tabulation center software and infrastructure,⁷⁹ transmission networks and whitelists, machine production and predispatch, and “zeroing” (*puesta en cero*) of CNTs.⁸⁰ Most of the sessions took place at the CNE – some of them in the high-security control room to allow configuration of core systems that could not be accessed remotely but only locally. These sessions consisted mainly of “guided tours” of system architecture, administrative tools, configuration files and scripts, and hash checks and generation, performed by system vendor staff for political party representatives. The machine production audit⁸¹ and the preshipment audit⁸² took place at a warehouse facility in the Mariche neighborhood of Caracas. The transmission network audits⁸³ were conducted at CANTV and Movilnet facilities in Caracas.

All audits were characterized by a nonconfrontational and collaborative environment, in which auditors were allowed to request adjustments to procedures, which were often accepted and implemented by the CNE and vendor staff. Questions were answered in a transparent and forthcoming manner.

This environment of openness and collaboration around the verification of election technology changed completely after election day. The three audits still to be performed according to the audit plan – extremely important for assuring results and system integrity – were canceled without explanation.

CNE’s Auxiliary Software Systems

In addition to the core voting system, the CNE also provides auxiliary systems, such as those used to register candidates and party agents and to train polling station staff. Auxiliary systems were not included in the CNE’s audit plan and therefore were not audited by political party representatives. The performance of these auxiliary software systems led to frustration and complaints from stakeholders. During the candidate registration phase, the system used to register candidates experienced an unexplained outage that prevented the registration of opposition candidate Corina Yoris. In the run-up to election day, political parties reported frequent software errors in the online system used to register and print credentials for their polling station witnesses, creating significant logistical challenges. A new online system used to train citizens selected to serve as poll workers also experienced errors in issuing training certificates, causing confusion and making it unnecessarily difficult for them to perform their duties.

⁷⁸ About one and a half days.

⁷⁹ A video of this session can be found at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VejMAfNhmYc>.

⁸⁰ A video of the zeroing session can be found at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SvRqIDHO8fs>.

⁸¹ During 14 days of machine production, a random sample of machines was picked from the production line each day and audited for correct software installation and configuration. A video recording of a session can be found at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FY9BUea-G0Y&feature=youtu.be>.

⁸² Performed on the Sunday prior to election day. A large sample of machines, randomly selected during the 14-day machine production period and stored under custody (replacement machines are configured and dispatched in their stead). The sample machines are subjected to a “mock election,” testing most aspects of operations on election day, including a comparison of votes as stored in the machine, printed on VVPAT and tally sheets, and transmitted to the National Transmission Centers.

⁸³ Consisting mostly of hash verifications and configuration of previously audited whitelists of telecommunication lines.

ELECTION DAY

Voting and counting are the cornerstones of the obligation to provide the free expression of the will of the people through genuine, periodic elections.⁸⁴ The quality of voting operations on election day is crucial to determining whether an election was conducted according to democratic obligations. Holding elections by secret ballot is a core obligation under international law and a recognized means of ensuring that the will of the people is freely expressed.⁸⁵ International standards also establish that voting procedures should facilitate free and equal participation by all groups of voters and call for transparency and integrity of counting and tabulation procedures.⁸⁶

Election day in Venezuela generally went smoothly, with a national turnout of 59%, according to the CNE. *Plan República* was implemented, with more than 230,000 military personnel deployed to provide security during the elections, including full custody of polling centers, voting materials, and voting machines. The military is only permitted inside the polling station at the request of the polling station president.

However, there were some incidents, including clashes and protests around some polling centers reported by media and instances of voter intimidation and coercion reported by civil society. At some polling centers, there were reports of refusal of access for opposition party agents, unnecessary voting delays in historically opposition polling stations, and refusal to provide copies of *actas* to opposition party agents.

Observers from The Carter Center and citizen observer groups reported that some voting stations opened late due to a lack of polling staff. Many poll workers did not show up, and party agents had to fill these official roles, which is allowed by law but is not ideal for maintaining an independent and professional administration of the election. The use of casual polling staff is also problematic because there is no guarantee that they have received adequate training.

In general, the participation of party agents and observers contributed to the transparency of the process. However, opposition political parties reported that in some locations their party agents were not allowed to enter polling stations because the list of party agents had not been provided to the polling officials.

Carter Center observers visited 55 polling locations in and around Barinas, Caracas, Maracaibo, and Valencia, mostly witnessing good civic behavior, with polling station workers and the military acting appropriately. However, a lack of adequate knowledge of procedures was observed among some poll workers, voting center coordinators, party agents, and military personnel involved in *Plan República*. There were reports of party agents performing functions for which they were not authorized, such as coordinating the polling stations and reporting to the voting center coordinator.

The widespread presence of PSUV “red points” (*puntos rojos*) outside voting centers, a recurrent issue in Venezuelan elections, also was noted at several locations. People running these points told Carter Center observers that their role was to monitor who had voted and who had not, writing down people’s names, talking to voters before and/or after they voted, and openly stating that they were organizing the vote for the ruling PSUV party. According to PSUV

⁸⁴ ICCPR, Articles 2, 25(a)

⁸⁵ UDHR, Article 21; ICCPR, Article 25

⁸⁶ UN HRC, General Comment 25, Para 20

representatives, these are social mobilization strategies that are not illegal. In practice, the red points are associated with social control, voter harassment, and inappropriate campaigning.

These forms of social pressure were even more pronounced in some of the new voting centers opened for this election, located in government-built, working-class housing communities, government offices for the distribution of social benefits, and the headquarters of social movements and community centers. Carter Center teams observed a biased and unprofessional atmosphere in some of these locations, marked by irregularities such as the presence of more than one PSUV party agent, and the absence of opposition party agents. Additionally, there often was a close and open relationship between the voting center coordinator and the PSUV workers operating the red points. The mobilization of voters by the community and the electoral authorities in these centers appeared to be intrinsically linked to the goal of securing votes for the PSUV candidate.

In response to the incumbent candidate's red points, this election marked the first appearance of a similar community-level mobilization effort by the opposition, known as "small command centers" (*comanditos*). These centers were registered voluntarily by citizens on an opposition-run online platform, received instructions, and organized election day monitoring in tents near voting centers. Their presence was not as widely observed by the Carter Center teams as the red points, and their capacity for coercion or intimidation was not as great. Media coverage of election day reported a phenomenon known as "Operation Turtle" (*Operación Morrocoy*), characterized by slow processing of voting at centers historically associated with the opposition, resulting in long lines outside these locations. In some instances, this coincided with observations by Carter Center teams. There also were reports of slow responses to technical problems with voting machines, and arbitrary disruptions of the voting process. These tactics were reported on social media and, in some cases, observed by Carter Center teams.

Carter Center observers reported delays in closing polling stations in some centers visited, along with results transmission problems in some sites. After the polls closed and results were transmitted, more than 50% of the country's polling stations underwent a citizen verification process. This is another step in the series of audits of the voting system by counting the paper voter receipts deposited in a box at the polling station. Party agents were entitled to receive copies of the results forms printed by the machines, enhancing the transparency of the process at polling station level. The overall impression of Carter Center observers was that this part of the process went smoothly in the limited number of locations visited, allowing citizens, party agents, and polling staff to leave the polling stations at the end of the day confident that the votes had been fairly counted and correctly transmitted, reflecting the will of the people.

Election Day Observations on Voting Technology

On election day, The Carter Center observed problems with voting machines at 18 of the 55 polling stations visited during the voting process. Problems centered mainly on the fingerprint module, and included machines failing to turn on, frequent rebooting, and printer problems. In the cases observed, the problems took hours to resolve, resulting in long lines of voters and frustration. The technical contingency system provided by the CNE, with initial support by phone, then on-site visits by roaming technicians, and finally replacement of machines from contingency stocks in regional warehouses, was slow to resolve the problems observed in the polling centers. The election procedure states that if a machine cannot be repaired or replaced in time, manual voting will be used.

Another recurrent problem observed at several polling stations consisted of mismatches due to illegible fingerprints, mainly from elderly voters. In 2021, machine operators were able to use the administrator password of the presiding officer at the polling station to repeatedly override the mismatches throughout election day, allowing these voters to cast their electronic ballot.⁸⁷ Concerned that this could be exploited to allow people to vote on behalf of others, the rules were tightened for 2024: Only one such override was allowed with the president's password. For subsequent overrides, a new, one-time password had to be requested from a CNE hotline. Some machine operators were unaware of the new rule and did not request additional one-time passwords, resulting in the disenfranchisement of elderly voters in some locations.

After the polls closed, Carter Center observers witnessed transmission problems at one voting center in Maracaibo. The machines could not connect to the National Transmission Center and were generating error messages. After a considerable delay the problem was resolved, and the machines were able to transmit. The Carter Center's observations are consistent with media reports of initial transmission problems in several states that were eventually resolved, with the transmission successfully completed. This also is consistent with statements made by the chairperson of the CNE, who announced the results shortly after midnight on election day "with more than 80% of the result forms received," indicating that the transmission problems had been resolved.

ANNOUNCEMENT OF RESULTS

The announcement of results constitutes one of the fundamental stages of election day, from both a technical standpoint and the generation of certitude in the electoral process. Transparency, accuracy, and timeliness are key aspects of election principles in announcing results.

In Venezuela, the result from each polling station is transmitted directly to the CNE after the polls close. The transmission process was carried out under strict technological and security conditions that guaranteed the integrity of the results. The election results are available only to the three officials who make up the National Electoral Board (JNE) on election night.

The CNE does not announce any preliminary results until the outcome is determined to be statistically "irreversible." The CNE made its first announcement of results shortly after midnight on July 29, declaring Maduro the winner with 51.2% of the vote, followed by González with 44.2%, based on 80% of the polling station results received. However, it did not provide results by polling station. The CNE usually publishes disaggregated results by polling station on its website. But the CNE claimed that it was unable to upload the presidential election results to its website due to a cyberattack.⁸⁸

According to the opposition, polling station results forms showed that González had won by a large margin. Protests against the CNE's announcement began to take place in Caracas and other areas of the country. The Carter Center issued a statement on July 29 calling on the CNE to immediately publish the presidential election results by polling station.⁸⁹ The CNE refused to do so, and it did not offer a reasonable explanation for not publishing these results.

⁸⁷ The 2021 rule stipulated that a certain number of voters with a correct "match" must precede each "no-match" override, to avoid a scenario in which groups of persons not registered at a particular polling station could vote by impersonating registered voters using overrides in quick succession.

⁸⁸ The CNE website has been offline since July 29, 2024.

⁸⁹ "Carter Center Calls on Venezuelan Election Authorities to Release Detailed Results Immediately," July 29, 2024, <https://www.cartercenter.org/news/pr/2024/venezuela-072924.html>

The lack of transparent information prevented independent verification of the announced results and critically damaged the credibility and integrity of the election. The Carter Center issued a preliminary statement on July 30, concluding that “Venezuela’s 2024 presidential election did not meet international standards of electoral integrity and [could] not be considered democratic.”⁹⁰

The CNE made a second announcement on Aug. 2, confirming Maduro as the winner with 51.9% of the vote, followed by González with 43.1%. The CNE stated that these results were based on 96.8% of polling station results but did not release those results. The CNE’s figures stood in stark contrast to the physical evidence produced by the voting machines and collected by the opposition from more than 80% of polling stations (see analysis below).

Analysis of the implausibility regarding the “irreversibility” of the result,⁹¹ as well as statistical anomalies reported in the percentages of the announced results, circulated widely,⁹² further increasing concerns about the manipulation of the election results.

At the time of publication of this report, the CNE had not yet published disaggregated results by polling station. The CNE also did not publish the final results in the Electoral Gazette as specified in Article 155 of the Electoral Law.

Cyberattack Claimed by the CNE

When the president of the CNE declared Maduro the winner shortly after midnight on election day, he stated that the CNE’s data transmission system had experienced a cyberattack that had caused delays in the transmission of results. He also affirmed that the CNE had nevertheless successfully received 80% of the results from the voting machines nationwide. Whatever problems the transmission system may have had before that moment had therefore apparently been resolved.

It is difficult to know exactly what happened regarding the transmission of results on election night without the telecommunications system. According to the CNE’s own preelection information, the system’s transmission infrastructure was completely isolated from the internet, which made the initial claims of a distributed denial-of-service (DDoS) attack on the voting system itself seem implausible.

The CNE later stated that it was referring to a DDoS attack on its web server, which allegedly prevented it from publishing results disaggregated by polling station. Regardless of this alleged attack, if the CNE had wanted to provide disaggregated election results as soon as possible, even with a nonfunctioning website, it had alternative means at its disposal. For example, it could have delivered the electronic results to the political parties on a DVD or flash drive. However, no such attempts were made.

⁹⁰ Carter Center Statement on Venezuela Election, July 30, 2024, <https://www.cartercenter.org/news/pr/2024/venezuela-073024.html>

⁹¹ The CNE announcement on election night declared the “irreversibility” of Maduro’s victory with 80% of the results forms processed. Maduro was stated to have obtained 5,150,092 votes at that moment, compared with 4,445,978 for Gonzáles and 462,704 votes for “others.” In the second and final bulletin, presented on Aug. 2, the CNE reported a total of 12,335,884 valid votes. From this it can be inferred that when the “irreversible” victory of Maduro was announced on July 29, about 2.3 million votes had not yet been counted according to the CNE. Maduro’s declared lead at that time was 704,114 votes.

⁹²<https://statmodeling.stat.columbia.edu/2024/07/31/suspicious-data-pattern-in-recent-venezuelan-election/> and <https://cnnespanol.cnn.com/2024/08/07/actas-resultados-venezuela-oposicion-cne-comprobar-orix/>

Cancellation of Postelection System Audits

While the preelection audits had been conducted as expected, the CNE postponed and subsequently canceled all three scheduled postelection audits. The CNE did not provide any reasons for the cancellations. The audits had been scheduled as follows:

- The Telecommunications System Audit, Phase 2, scheduled for July 29, 2024 (the day after the election).
- The Citizen Verification Audit, Phase 2, scheduled for Aug. 2.
- The ADES Election Data Audit, Phase 2, scheduled for Aug. 5-8.

Given the transmission problems observed on election day, and the subsequent CNE allegations of a “massive hacking event,” which was presented as the reason for not presenting the disaggregated election results, the telecommunications audit would have been crucial to provide certainty about the conditions under which the transmission of election results was conducted and to clarify whether there was external interference in the process.

Likewise, given the allegations of falsification of election results by the opposition, the citizen verification audit would have been extremely important. During this audit, a random sample of voting machines selected on election day would compare the results stored in the machine’s memory with the results received by the central tallying system, as well as the results recorded on the original results form and the VVPAT paper receipts from the ballot box, both of which were stored with the machine and secured by *Plan República*.

POSTELECTION DEVELOPMENTS

Protests began almost immediately after Maduro’s victory was announced. On July 29, Caracas residents participated in “*cacerolazos*,” banging pots and pans in protest. González and Machado contested the official results announced by the CNE, claiming that the results forms collected by their party agents at the polling stations showed a resounding victory for González over Maduro and that the CNE’s results were therefore fraudulent. Scans of these results forms were posted online.

The international community expressed serious concerns about the integrity of the elections. More than 20 countries and international organizations, including The Carter Center, the EU, and the U.N., called for the publication of the results forms of all polling stations. Complaints from several countries led to the expulsion of members of the diplomatic missions of Peru, Argentina, Chile, Costa Rica, Panama, the Dominican Republic, and Uruguay on July 29.

By mid-August, large-scale protests were organized in more than 350 cities worldwide, including Caracas. Demonstrators demanded the release of complete election results and denounced Maduro’s alleged victory. The government responded with arrests, detentions, suspension of passports, social network shutdowns, threats, and intimidation.⁹³

The Opposition’s Results Forms

The opposition stated that it had obtained more than 80% of the results forms (*actas*) through party agents and citizens working at the polling stations. These results forms were scanned and

⁹³ As of Aug. 20, more than 1,500 illegal arrests had been made, according to *Foro Penal*.

posted online for public scrutiny. Studies conducted by academic experts and others, including The Carter Center, have concluded that the forms are authentic.

Original copies of the results forms reviewed by the Carter Center team possess all the required security features, including being printed on CNE security paper, bearing the signatures of polling station staff and party agents, and containing security hashes and digital signatures. Images of the results forms posted on the opposition website showed the same security features. They also showed the heterogeneity in terms of metadata and photographic quality that would be expected from a massive collection effort distributed among tens of thousands of party agents and volunteers on election night, each taking photos with their personal cellphones. The massive forgery operation alleged by the Venezuelan government is implausible.

In addition, many photos and videos were posted on social media on election night or after, documenting polling station results favorable to the opposition. An initial study by a Venezuelan fact-checking organization compared the results documented in this way with the results forms posted on the opposition website and found them to be consistent.⁹⁴

While the opposition made its material available for verification, the same cannot be said for the results forms in the CNE's possession, nor for the results forms in the possession of PSUV party agents. Neither the CNE nor the PSUV have produced any evidence to support their claims of victory.

Carter Center Analysis of the Results Forms

In the days following the elections, photos of results forms collected by party agents were published on <https://resultadosconvzla.com/>, along with transcribed results data in machine-readable format. As of Aug. 1, 2024, results data and photos of the results forms from 24,533 of 30,026 polling stations (81.7%) were published on the website and available for download. In the absence of disaggregated data published by the CNE, this data is the most credible polling station-level results data available to the public.

The Carter Center conducted an independent analysis of the polling station results data published by the opposition to verify the integrity of the official aggregate results announced by the CNE (see Annex 2). To assess the fidelity and transcription accuracy of the polling station results data, the Center randomly selected a sample of 100 polling stations and found no discrepancies between the transcribed results data and the photos of the results forms. To determine where and how many votes are unaccounted for due to missing results forms, the Center cross-referenced the results data published on the resultadosconvzla.com website with the CNE's polling station list – which includes the number of registered voters per polling station – provided to political party agents and observation group representatives prior to the elections.

According to the data from the results forms of 81.7% of the polling stations, González received 7,156,462 votes and Maduro received 3,241,461 votes, with a voter turnout of 60%. The difference in the number of votes between González and Maduro is 3,915,001 votes. In the 18.3% of polling stations with missing results forms, there are 3,576,544 registered voters. This is less than the difference between the vote totals for González and Maduro.

According to the results data, González received 67.1% of all votes and Maduro received 30.4%. In the highly unlikely scenario that 100% of registered voters in polling stations with missing

⁹⁴ <https://x.com/cazamosfakenews/status/1825168249962594630>

results forms voted and cast their ballots for Maduro, González still would have won a majority of the votes nationwide (50.2%). Consequently, even in the most extreme scenario, the results announced by the CNE are statistically impossible. Even in the implausible scenario of 100% voter turnout on his behalf in the polling stations with missing data, Maduro could have received only 47.8% of the vote (see Table 1 below and Annex 2).

Table 1: Summary of Carter Center Analysis of Results Forms

	# of Results Forms Received	% of Results Forms Received	# of Registered Voters	# of Valid Votes	# of Null Votes	Voter Turnout %	# of Maduro Votes	# of González Votes	Maduro Votes %	González Votes %
Data From Actual Results Forms (81.7% of Polling Stations)	24,532	81.7%	17,745,239	1,065,912	1,139	60%	3,241,461	7,156,462	30.4%	67.1%
Missing Results Forms (18.3% of Polling Stations) <i>Hypothetical Scenario: 100% Turnout for Maduro</i>	30,026	100%	21,321,783	1,423,567	1,139	66.7%	6,818,005	7,156,462	47.8%	50.2%

ELECTION DISPUTE RESOLUTION

Effective electoral dispute resolution mechanisms are an integral part of ensuring that the will of the people is upheld during all stages of the electoral process. International and regional treaties establish that every person has the right to an effective remedy before a competent national tribunal against acts that violate their rights or freedoms. The right to an effective remedy is fundamental for ensuring the protection of all other human rights. Furthermore, this right must be recognized within the legal framework. Regional treaties establish a link between the right to an effective remedy, the conduct of elections, and the announcement of results. They also state that when granted, such a remedy must be effective. An effective remedy requires that conflicts be addressed in a timely manner and that the State ensures compliance with the remedy when granted.⁹⁵

The complaint and appeal mechanism in Venezuela – both the administrative route through the CNE and the judicial route through the ordinary courts – lacks trust and is not considered by participants to be useful for resolving disputes. In addition, corruption, bias, and the discretionary nature of the decisions (or lack of response to complaints) were cited as arguments that discourage the pursuit of solutions through the legal channels provided for by the electoral legislation. Many interlocutors denounced the lack of independence and impartiality of the electoral administration and the judiciary, which are perceived as appendages of the executive branch, and the absence of the rule of law in Venezuela.

⁹⁵ ICCPR, Article 2(3)

Maduro’s Writ of Amparo Before the TSJ

On July 31, 2024, Maduro petitioned the TSJ to conduct a judicial review of the election results. This move came in response to the opposition’s refusal to recognize the election results announced by the CNE and the widespread unrest in the country. Maduro filed a *writ of amparo* – a legal instrument used by citizens who believe their constitutional rights have been violated – with the TSJ. On Aug. 1, the injunction was granted, but the details of the complaint were not made public. Based on a summary shared on X, it appeared that the purpose of the complaint was to conduct a “verification” of the election results. The TSJ has jurisdiction over complaints against the decisions, actions, and omissions of the CNE, but the constitution assigns the task of verifying election results to the CNE. The content of Maduro’s complaint and the parties involved remain unknown.

The TSJ summoned all 10 presidential candidates for hearings. However, there was no clear information about the conditions under which these summons were issued, leaving the candidates uncertain about their role, whether as defendants, plaintiffs, or witnesses. The lack of transparency was further exacerbated by the fact that the TSJ website was shut down, and no related decisions were published. It is unclear why the CNE could not publish the results per polling station but could share them with the TSJ.

TSJ Election Audit Exercise

On Aug. 5, the TSJ initiated what it claimed was a forensic examination of unspecified electoral material provided to the court by the CNE, in response to Maduro’s request to confirm the election results that declared him the winner.

In addition to doubts about the legal and technical competence of the tribunal, the manner in which the investigation was conducted is questionable. No methodology was published, and opposition party agents were excluded from the process. No details of the materials presented by the CNE were made public, and there was no documentation of their chain of custody. In promotional videos posted on social media, masked TSJ staff could be seen reviewing what appeared to be results forms. Sparse commentary suggests that a sample of results forms were compared with electronic results from the CNE’s central tabulation systems, although the statistical design of the sample was unknown.

Following the audit, the TSJ affirmed the CNE announcement of the election results on Aug. 22.

Opposition Challenge to the Election Results

After the TSJ ruling in favor of the electoral result, Enrique Márquez, a presidential candidate, filed a recusal request against the president of the Electoral Chamber of the Supreme Court of Justice, which was declared inadmissible. Marquéz and Antonio Ecarri, another presidential candidate, separately asked the TSJ in September to annul its ruling on the results of the July 28 election. Both requests were refused by the court, which considered the issue *res judicata*, a matter judged.

SUBSEQUENT DEVELOPMENTS

Edmundo González left Venezuela and requested political asylum in Spain on Sept. 8 after receiving information about a possible arrest. María Corina Machado was forced into hiding after being threatened with arrest.

The government has continued to respond to opposition challenges with a crackdown and restrictions on fundamental political rights, including freedom of expression, association, and movement. Human rights organizations, including the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela established by the U.N. Human Rights Council, have documented mass detentions of opposition activists and others, including minors, as well as instances of torture, sexual assault, and death of detained persons.⁹⁶

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Carter Center has consulted with key stakeholders regarding its findings and offers the following recommendations. However, the overall recommendation is for the authorities to demonstrate respect for the will of Venezuelan citizens by allowing a transparent, independent review of the results of the 2024 presidential election.

Legal Framework

1. Ensure that any significant amendments to the electoral legal framework are made well in advance of elections and with broad political consensus aimed to provide certainty of law, adequate opportunity for operational adjustments, and stakeholder awareness.
2. Amend, repeal, or withdraw laws, bills, and regulations that seek to unduly restrict freedom of expression and association, including the Law Against Fascism and Neo-Fascism; the Law for the Control, Regularization, Operation, and Financing of Non-Governmental and Related Organizations; and the Organic Law for the Defense of the Essequibo.

Election Administration

3. Reconsider CNE appointment procedures to ensure greater cross-party and stakeholder support and confidence in the CNE as an independent, impartial, and professional body, reiterating the Carter Center's recommendation in the 2021 IEEM final report.
4. Publish all relevant information promptly and systematically, including CNE decisions and the electoral calendar, and hold regular consultation framework meetings with stakeholders to increase transparency and confidence in the process.
5. Improve the notification system and training for polling staff so they are less likely to be replaced on election day by untrained, partisan individuals.
6. To ensure transparency, publicize the criteria for requesting the establishment of new polling stations and the reasons for granting or rejecting requests.
7. Establish an election calendar in a timely manner that allows for the proper conduct of election preparations.

⁹⁶ See <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/10/un-international-mission-reveals-gross-human-rights-violations-venezuela>

Voter Education

8. Increase the effectiveness and reach of voter education projects aimed at increasing understanding of the electoral process, enhancing confidence in the integrity of the elections, and instructing voters on the use of voting machines.

Voter Registration

9. Enact effective measures to address the under-registration of voters before the next election, as well as plan effectively for special voter registration campaigns. This should include allocating sufficient time and resources to reach all citizens and ensuring timely publication of voter lists at all stages to maximize the inclusiveness of the voter register, as well as public confidence.
10. To increase citizen participation, organize a comprehensive voter register for Venezuelan migrants without unnecessary restrictions based on migration status, reiterating the recommendation included in the 2021 IEEM final report.

Candidate Registration

11. Abolish the comptroller general's power to disqualify citizens from candidacy as an administrative or supplementary sanction, so that political rights are suspended only by judicial decision and subject to all appropriate procedural safeguards, as recommended in the 2021 IEEM final report.

Campaign

12. Ensure compliance with campaign rules through the imposition of sanctions to create more equitable electoral competition, in particular by addressing the misuse of state resources in the electoral campaign.

Campaign Financing

13. Adopt a law that effectively regulates political financing, as recommended in 2021. This law should address donation and spending limits; create mechanisms for monitoring and public disclosure of party financial information to strengthen transparency; establish enforcement mechanisms to ensure a more level playing field, accountability, and sanctions for noncompliance; and lay the groundwork for oversight by an independent body.

Election Observation

14. Remove restrictions contrary to international standards and good practices for independent citizen observation of all stages of the electoral process, guaranteeing freedom of movement and expression and ensuring that election observers can carry out their duties without obstruction.

Media

15. Strengthen the capacity of the CNE to ensure that state media resources are not used for partisan purposes.
16. Implement literacy and verification programs to combat hate speech and misinformation on social networks. To this end, cooperation agreements between the CNE and social media platforms should be established and implemented. Collaborate with civil society organizations on independent, nonpartisan fact-checking initiatives and other methods to proactively identify and counter the spread of disinformation and hate speech.
17. Restrict the practice of blocking websites and blocking of media, multimedia platforms, and censorship circumvention tools, among others, including by ensuring that any action to block content is proportionate to its intended purpose and ordered by an independent and impartial tribunal, as also recommended by The Carter Center in the 2021 IEEM final report.

Election Technologies

18. Establish clear legal requirements for the conduct of preelection and postelection audits and certification of electronic voting machines and electronic voting processes to enhance integrity and confidence in the process. This should include ensuring full transparency of the audit and certification processes for political parties, observers, and the media, as well as the publication of all documentation on the technical specifications of the automated voting system. Adhere to scheduled audits in terms of timing and content and avoid cancellation or undue delays.

Election Day and Announcement of Results

19. Establish clear limits on mechanisms of social control of voters and prevent infringement of voters' rights, such as "red points" to verify that people have voted, reiterating the Carter Center's findings in the 2021 IEEM final report.
20. Ensure timely and full publication of all data regarding declared election results, including results by polling station, and ensure publication of all results forms.

ANNEX 1: ELECTORAL TIMETABLE



CRONOGRAMA AL 18/06/2024

N.º	AUDITORÍA	DURACIÓN	FECHA INICIO	FECHA FIN	HORA	LUGAR
4	DATOS ELECTORALES ADES FASE I	4 DÍAS	25/6/2024	28/6/2024	9:00 am a 4:00 p.m. (Martes, Jueves y Viernes) 9:00 am a 12:00 m (Miércoles)	CARPA
5	ARCHIVO DE CONFIGURACIÓN MV	1 DÍA	26/6/2024	26/6/2024	2:00 pm a 5:00 pm	CARPA
6	CUADERNO DE VOTACIÓN	3 DÍAS	1/7/2024	3/7/2024	7:00 am a 3:00 p.m. (Lunes y Martes) 9:00 am a 12:00 m (Miércoles)	ALMACEN GUARENAS
7	PRESENTACIÓN METODOLOGÍA PARA AUDITORÍA DE PRODUCCIÓN MV (AUDITORES EXTERNOS)	1 HORA	3/7/2024	3/7/2024	4:00 pm a 6:00 pm	CARPA
7	PRODUCCIÓN MV	14 DÍAS	4/7/2024	17/7/2024	7:00 am a 4:00 p.m.	ALMACÉN MARICHE
8	SOFTWARE DE TOTALIZACIÓN	4 DÍAS	9/7/2024	12/7/2024	9:00 am a 4:00 p.m.	CARPA
9	INFRAESTRUCTURA TECNOLÓGICA ELECTORAL	3 DÍAS	15/7/2024	17/7/2024	9:00 am a 4:00 p.m.	CARPA
10	PREDESPACHO	1 DÍA	21/7/2024	21/7/2024	9:00 am a 4:00 p.m.	ALMACÉN MARICHE
11	PUESTA CERO DE LOS CNT	1 DÍA	26/7/2024	26/7/2024	9:00 am a 4:00 p.m.	CARPA
12	TELECOMUNICACIONES FASE I	1 DÍA	27/7/2024	27/7/2024	9:00 am a 5:00 p.m.	CANTV / MOVILNET
13	SORTEO VERIFICACIÓN CIUDADANA FASE II	1 DÍA	28/7/2024	28/7/2024	6:00 pm a 8:00 p.m.	CARPA
14	TELECOMUNICACIONES FASE II	1 DÍA	29/7/2024	29/7/2024	9:00 am a 5:00 p.m.	CANTV / MOVILNET
15	VERIFICACIÓN CIUDADANA FASE II	1 DÍA	2/8/2024	2/8/2024	9:00 am a 4:00 p.m.	ALMACÉN MARICHE
16	DATOS ELECTORALES ADES FASE II	4 DÍAS	5/8/2024	8/8/2024	9:00 am a 4:00 p.m.	UBV

ANNEX 2: ANALYSIS OF ELECTION RESULTS

Based on Data From Available Results Forms (Actas) and Polling Station and Registration Data from Missing Results Forms

State	Expected Actas	Received Actas	% Received	Registered Voters (Actas)	Valid (Actas)	Null Votes (Actas)	Voter Turnout (Actas)	Maduro Votes (Actas)	González Votes (Actas)	Other Votes (Actas)	Maduro % (Actas)	González % (Actas)	Other % (Actas)	Missing Actas	Registered Voters (Missing Actas)
Amazonas	199	108	54.2%	75,761	45,792	3	60.4%	17,374	27,219	1,199	37.9%	59.4%	2.6%	91	44,497
Anzoátegui	1,556	1,338	85.9%	1,034,534	631,645	62	61.0%	194,615	420,075	16,955	30.8%	66.5%	2.6%	218	144,639
Apure	604	533	88.2%	356,838	213,107	27	59.7%	74,842	134,203	4,062	35.1%	62.9%	1.9%	71	32,303
Aragua	1,620	1,509	93.1%	1,204,780	723,599	99	60.0%	212,285	487,938	23,376	29.3%	67.4%	3.2%	111	80,896
Barinas	1,024	945	92.2%	595,600	373,823	35	62.7%	88,668	278,692	6,463	23.7%	74.5%	1.7%	79	31,043
Bolívar	1,565	1,129	72.1%	812,953	471,538	68	58.0%	121,741	337,750	12,047	25.8%	71.6%	2.5%	436	275,169
Carabobo	2,059	1,362	66.1%	1,119,066	650,926	55	58.1%	172,285	459,753	18,888	26.4%	70.6%	2.9%	697	544,876
Cojedes	450	416	92.4%	262,047	173,610	11	66.2%	60,242	109,083	4,285	34.7%	62.8%	2.4%	34	12,897
Delta Amacuro	249	176	70.6%	101,412	56,273	10	55.5%	24,797	30,074	1,402	44.0%	53.4%	2.4%	73	31,779
DTO. Capital (Caracas)	2,260	1,534	67.8%	1,210,692	717,719	93	59.2%	230,649	462,138	24,932	32.1%	64.3%	3.4%	726	508,934
Falcón	1,188	1,062	89.3%	681,627	416,279	54	61.0%	111,637	294,981	9,661	26.8%	70.8%	2.3%	126	56,223
Guárico	856	757	88.4%	519,768	345,187	35	66.4%	116,636	220,995	7,556	33.7%	64.0%	2.1%	99	52,335
La Guaira	416	325	78.1%	248,952	159,251	16	63.9%	57,280	97,042	4,929	35.9%	60.9%	3.1%	91	66,089
Lara	2,017	1,487	73.7%	1,030,354	669,475	58	64.9%	194,738	458,080	16,657	29.0%	68.4%	2.4%	530	336,429
Mérida	953	910	95.4%	627,883	395,027	36	62.9%	84,482	303,767	6,778	21.3%	76.9%	1.7%	43	25,262
Miranda	2,963	2,223	75.0%	1,726,125	989,751	124	57.3%	309,947	649,403	30,401	31.3%	65.6%	3.0%	740	495,007
Monagas	997	767	76.9%	549,067	334,148	50	60.8%	125,364	201,689	7,095	37.5%	60.3%	2.1%	230	143,217
Nueva Esparta	539	507	94.0%	369,879	228,283	16	61.7%	70,605	151,664	6,014	30.9%	66.4%	2.6%	32	19,107
Portuguesa	1,082	984	90.9%	643,733	439,448	57	68.2%	147,673	281,482	10,293	33.6%	64.0%	2.3%	98	48,434
Sucre	1,107	1,039	93.8%	685,505	438,694	33	64.0%	208,962	219,377	10,355	47.6%	50.0%	2.3%	68	31,334
Táchira	1,272	1,229	96.6%	846,069	486,851	45	57.5%	79,224	398,690	8,937	16.2%	81.8%	1.8%	43	17,838
Trujillo	979	909	92.8%	547,998	347,602	32	63.4%	119,730	222,227	5,645	34.4%	63.9%	1.6%	70	18,917
Yaracuy	759	691	91.0%	448,723	297,973	19	66.4%	109,678	180,683	7,612	36.8%	60.6%	2.5%	68	32,074
Zulia	3,312	2,592	78.2%	2,045,873	1,053,127	101	51.4%	308,007	729,457	15,663	29.2%	69.2%	1.4%	720	527,245
Total	30,026	24,532	81.7%	17,745,239	10,659,128	1,139	60.0%	3,241,461	7,156,462	261,205	30.4%	67.1%	2.4%	5,494	3,576,544