

# Venezuelan Election Results: The Electoral System and Democracy

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*The December 6, 2015 election resulted in a clear victory of the opposition over the Bolivarian alliance led by the Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela (PSUV). The opposition won 112 seats, obtaining votes from 67.7% of the approximately 74% of the electorate who voted. The Bolivarian coalition won 55 seats and garnered 42% of the votes. This provides the opposition with one more seat than the minimum 111 needed to be declared a full majority. The 112-seat block holds 20 seats more than a simple majority. This status provides the opposition with the control of the unicameral National Assembly.*

By obtaining two-thirds of the National Assembly (NA), the opposition may approve organic laws, propose reforms and make constitutional amendments, to replace members of the Supreme Tribunal of Justice, the National Electoral Board and other public authorities, but only with the approval of other legal bodies. The NA, to be installed in January 2016, must comply with its powers already enshrined in the Constitution. The system of Venezuela is not parliamentary, but mixed, as there are checks and balances between the five branches of government. The Assembly cannot remove other powers, even with the backing of a two-thirds majority, if there is not a previous ruling by the Supreme Tribunal of Justice, from the Citizens' Power or the authority established for each case. Nor can the NA legislate against the principle known as improving human rights, which states that the rights are improved or left untouched, but never removed or limited.

This is the second time in the 20 elections held since the 1998 election of Hugo Chávez that the Chavista forces have lost. There was peaceful voting at the polls on December 6. This was followed by the results and the immediate acceptance of them by Nicolás Maduro. The respect for the results was never in doubt. What does this show? It indicates once again that the Venezuelan electoral system is not only fair but one of the best in the world. It provides proof for the world to view the electoral system as being solid and transparent. In this sense, it is a so-called "victory"; it is, however, a pyrrhic one.

This is because, it seems, one cannot declare that it was victory for democracy. The electoral system as mainly a legal process is one thing, while the concept of democracy is something else. Democracy cannot be assessed in the abstract. Democracy in the Venezuelan context means the political power of the people in a Venezuela that is sovereign and independent in the face of US imperialist attempts to gain control of the country of Bolívar once again. Who and what forces represent this people's political power? It is the political alliance led by the PSUV. Most importantly, people's power springs from the concept that political power resides in the hands of the people as enshrined in the Constitution: "Sovereignty resides untransferably in the people [cannot be transferred], who exercise it directly in the manner provided for in this Constitution and in the law, and indirectly, by suffrage, through the organs exercising Public Power. The organs of the State

emanate from and are subject to the sovereignty of the people” (article 5). Thus, the situation is very complex both for the opposition and the Bolivarian revolutionary forces.

Taking this into account, democracy today is based on the approximately 42% of the electorate. It voted, in general, to continue the Bolivarian Revolution. Moreover, voting day is for the Bolivarian force just one day in their daily ongoing struggle for their social, economic, cultural and political rights for the poor and others. Voting day is just a part of the participatory democracy that Venezuelan leaders from Chávez to Maduro have been striving to develop. In fact, it is successful to the extent that the new experiments in participatory democracy in Venezuela constitute a basis for its further development, even since December 6. This is so despite the shortcomings the new situation has to face. It still offers lessons to other countries as well.

However, this force in favour of people’s power or democracy lost to those who seek to turn the clock back on recent Venezuelan history since December 1998. As such, it was a major defeat for democracy. The opposition is fiercely against the Bolivarian Revolution and in favour of the Venezuelan oligarchy and further US penetration and control. This is in flagrant violation of democracy. Yet, the opposition easily won.

Nevertheless, the democratic force of millions of Venezuelan revolutionaries has become, and is today, a material force. Under certain conditions, consciousness can be converted into a material force. It does not consist merely of ideas. Even though its numbers have drastically fallen, it is still a solid force despite being the minority. Many of those inside and outside of Venezuela who support the Bolivarian Revolution do not think very highly of those among the most disadvantaged sections of the society who voted for the opposition. This sentiment is understandable and justified.

However, there is the other side of the coin. While important sections at the base were duped by the media war against the Chavistas, those who were not stood up very strongly and resisted the media terrorism. This highlights that those millions of Venezuelans, while now a minority, should be considered more solid than ever. They have to be appreciated more now than before December 6. Their December 6 option represents a heroic resistance to the all those Venezuelan and international forces that targeted the Bolivarian Revolution in an attempt to bury it. The revolution is not dead. December 6 is not even a nail in the coffin of the revolution.

The Bolivarian Revolution as the bearer of democracy in Venezuela is a democracy in motion. It has its ups and downs. Although December 6 represents a serious downswing, it challenges the revolutionary forces to further innovate and improve the notion that sovereignty resides in the people and cannot be transferred. Its first task is to resist all attempts to roll back the gains of their revolution, as Maduro has pointed out. As for those who voted for the opposition, but should not have, they can also learn by the positive example of the democracy in motion in the streets, neighbourhoods, workplaces and educational institutes. This is bound to contrast with their experience alongside the opposition forces that now control the National Assembly.

Compared to this compact material force, based on a clear ideology tempered in battle since 1998, what does the opposition represent today? It is a mixed bag of different outlooks and classes. This shaky coalition is based first and foremost on the determined efforts of the oligarchy and their ideology, which revolves around capitalism and dependence on the US.

This is relatively solid and will not change significantly until they are eventually overthrown by the further development of the Bolivarian Revolution.

On the other hand, the forces from the base that adhered so massively for the first time to the oligarchy on December 6 did so for a variety of reasons. They mainly stem from the economic war and its accompanying media war led by the US and its allies in Venezuela. These forces probably did not all vote to “punish” the Maduro government. Rather, many were animated by a general dissatisfaction resulting from the economic war. This materialized in a vague hope of seeking relief, for example, from the seven-hour lineups to obtain necessities at increasingly higher prices.

This opportunist electoral alliance is no match in the long run for the forces of the Bolivarian Revolution. It has a huge responsibility at this time. There is, of course, the domestic situation. However, December 6 is also a direct challenge to maintaining, let alone further developing, the regional integration of Latin America and the Caribbean, one of the greatest legacies of Hugo Chávez. It is also a threat to international cooperation such as demonstrated by PetroCaribe, which is based on the use of the oil industry for the people of Venezuela and neighbouring countries. Given this, the results also defy the new developing multipolar world in resistance to the unipolar one led by the US.

Can the Bolivarian Revolution successfully face up to these momentous domestic and international challenges? In the long run, yes. Seventeen years is a relatively short period in a revolution that is continuously developing. One cannot underestimate the Venezuelan base. After all, this incipient democracy in motion was largely responsible for defeating the 2002 US-inspired coup d’état against Hugo Chávez. He was brought back to power and democracy was reinstated in the main by the masses in the street.

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