

OCCASIONAL REPORT ON VENEZUELA'S
POLITICAL ELECTORAL CONTEXT



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MARCH 7 – APRIL 25, 2015

2015 PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

PREPARATION FOR PRIMARY ELECTIONS IN THE CONTEXT OF POLITICAL CONFLICT

Executive Summary

National and international reactions to President Barack Obama's executive order, which, in addition to sanctioning Venezuelan officials for alleged human rights violations, declares Venezuela a threat to the national security of the United States, dominated the political context in Venezuela throughout the reporting period covered in this bulletin. Characterizing this decree as an act of "aggression" toward Venezuela, the Venezuelan government went ahead with a series of initiatives to counter the White House's decision. Among other efforts, President Nicolás Maduro launched a national and international campaign to advocate for repeal of the executive order, directed implementation of a series of civic-military exercises, requested and obtained passage of an "anti-imperialist enabling act" from the National Assembly, allowing him to legislate on security matters until the end of the year.

Rejection of President Obama's decree by international governments and organizations compelled the US government to clarify, by the President's own admission, that Venezuela did not actually pose a threat to the national security of the United States; notwithstanding, the White House took it upon itself to make it plain that the decree is irreversible. As part of the Seventh Summit of the Americas, held in Panama City April 10 and 11, President Maduro reiterated the Venezuelan government's demand for repeal of the decree, and while this request had the support of some presidents of the American States, the Summit ended without issuing a joint statement on the matter.

Regarding electoral matters, even though the National Electoral Council had yet to set the date for the upcoming parliamentary elections at the time this newsletter was issued, the EMB continued working on preparations to hold the primaries for the country's two major political forces, the *Mesa de la Unidad Democrática* (Democratic Unity Table-MUD) and the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV). The climate for preparation of these elections was marred, however, by controversy over the National Assembly's decision to remove PARLATINO deputies from the list of offices to appear on the ballot in the next parliamentary elections and the CNE's decision to change the number of offices up for election in each district.

I. CONTEXT OF THE COUNTRY

Barack Obama's executive order

The executive order issued by President Barack Obama on March 9 to block the accounts and assets of seven Venezuelan officials in the United States because of alleged links to human rights violations made an enormous impact on Venezuela. The fact that this order declares Venezuela an “unusual and extraordinary threat” to the national security of the United States triggered a series of fierce reactions from the highest levels of government. Characterizing the order as a “serious act of aggression” against Venezuela,¹ President Nicolás Maduro requested and obtained passage of an “anti-imperialist enabling act” from the National Assembly, allowing him to legislate on security matters until the end of the year. Meanwhile, the Venezuelan government launched a large-scale signature gathering operation calling for repeal of the US decree, activated joint civic-military exercises in “defense of sovereignty,” and deployed an aggressive international campaign.

National Assembly President Diosdado Cabello warned that resolutions such as this have been issued by the United States whenever it was preparing to “attack a nation” ([see note](#)). The Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, the Ombudsman, the Attorney General of Venezuela, and the President of the National Electoral Council and National Assembly Leadership jointly expressed their stern rejection of the contents of President Obama’s executive order ([see note](#)). The head of the CNE even suggested that the ultimate purpose of these sanctions was to “undermine” chances for parliamentary elections to take place, as well as processes associated with primary elections ([see note](#)).

Enabling Law. In a speech aired on a national blanket television broadcast, President Nicolás Maduro announced that he would be asking the National Assembly to pass a “special, extraordinary” enabling law to defend “the peace, the integrity, and the sovereignty of the country against imperialist aggression.” The sanctions levied against the seven officials designated by the US government, said Maduro, were actually tantamount to an “imperial decoration ceremony.” To illustrate his point, he forthwith appointed one of the individuals sanctioned as Minister of the Interior, Justice and Peace ([see note](#)).²

Five days later, with votes from the ruling bloc and the support of Alliance for Change party Deputy Ricardo Sánchez, the National Assembly conferred special powers upon the President for nine and a half months, thereby exceeding the six-month period formally requested by the Executive Branch. Therefore President Maduro will wield absolute authority to legislate on defense matters, without National Assembly approval, until December 31, 2015 ([see note](#)).

National and international campaign. Meanwhile, the national government launched a forceful national and international campaign dubbed “;Obama deroga el decreto Ya!” (Obama, repeal the decree Now!). The campaign, led by Jorge Rodríguez, mayor of the municipality of Libertador and member of the National PSUV Leadership, proposed collecting the signatures of ten million individuals opposing Obama’s presidential order, to be submitted to President Obama by President Maduro at the Summit of the Americas ([see note](#)). Though the government stated that this goal had been reached, in a ceremony at Miraflores Palace, with Bolivian President Evo Morales in attendance, President Maduro announced that the boxes containing these signatures would be left at

¹ In his speech, President Maduro pointed out that President Obama had perpetrated “the most egregious assault ever against Venezuela in its entire history.”

² This was Gustavo González López. On April 7, President Maduro appointed two additional officials sanctioned by the executive order to important positions. Katherine Harrington was appointed as Deputy Minister of Criminal Investigation and Manuel Pérez Urdaneta as Deputy Minister of Public Prevention and Safety ([see note](#)).

the headquarters of the Ombudsman.³ Later on, in Panama, President Maduro indicated that the signatures would be forwarded on to the US President through diplomatic channels ([see note](#)).

On the international front, Foreign Affairs Minister Delcy Rodríguez denounced the US presidential order before the Organization of American States (OAS) as an “act of aggression.” The goal of this legal instrument, she said, was actually to gain control of the national oil company, stressing that these kinds of decrees usually served as precedents to justify military interventions ([see video](#)).

Civic-military operation. The Venezuelan government’s repudiation efforts included military exercises with the participation of the National Armed Forces of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. These exercises, dubbed “Bolivarian Shield” (*Escudo Bolivariano*), were conducted for ten days straight, beginning on March 14, featuring civilian participation ([see note](#)).

Reaction of the MUD to the sanctions

The Venezuelan opposition, represented by the Democratic Unity Table (MUD), unanimously rejected the declaration of Venezuela as a threat to the security of the United States. In a statement issued on March 10, the opposition coalition said that just as it had rejected “blatant Cuban intervention” it likewise opposed any other kind of foreign intervention ([see statement](#)). Meanwhile, Lara state governor and MUD member Henri Falcon issued an open letter to President Obama calling for immediate repeal of the White House order, a position for which President Maduro publicly thanked him ([see letter and note](#)).

In their statements, however, opposition leadership took care to stress the distinction between “sanctions against individuals” and “sanctions against governments.” Several spokespersons for the opposition pointed out that the US government’s actions were intended to punish corrupt officials accused of human rights violations, and not the nation of Venezuela overall. In that vein, the opposition called into question the National Assembly’s passage of the enabling law, noting that its real purpose was to make the government “more powerful” and to “persecute dissidents and everyone else who thinks differently” ([see note](#)). Meanwhile, The Human Rights Center at the Andrés Bello Catholic University (CDH-UCAB) made an appeal to the government to avoid using its special powers to “escalate a militaristic trend” by applying the domestic enemy rationale “typical of national security doctrines” ([see note](#)).

International reactions

The US government’s executive order sparked rejection among governments and organizations worldwide sympathizing with the position of the Venezuelan government. The Union of South American Nations (UNASUR), at a special meeting held March 14, rejected the United States’ presidential order as an “interventionist threat to sovereignty and the principle of nonintervention in the internal affairs of other States,” joining in with the Venezuelan government’s demand for repeal of the order ([see communiqué](#)). In a separate statement issued the very same day, UNASUR reiterated that it would continue to lend its support to political dialogue in Venezuela and to the process leading up to parliamentary elections ([see communiqué](#)). The Community of Latin American and Caribbean States, CELAC, ([see communiqué](#)), issued a statement along the same lines, while the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of our Americas (*Alianza Bolivariana para los Pueblos de Nuestra América-ALBA*) followed suit, using more forceful language ([see declaration](#)). Several other governments also

³ The closing ceremony for the signature gathering campaign was attended by the CNE president herself, Tibisay Lucena, who certified the signatures gathered. On April 9, a CNE statement expressed that it “verified consistency among 98.7 percent of the data pertaining to the citizens who had signed.” This was the response given by the CNE to the request made by Jorge Rodríguez, who had asked the CNE to certify the data of those who signed ([see note](#)).

manifested their solidarity with Venezuela.⁴ The Chilean Foreign Ministry spoke out against unilateral measures, pledging its firm support of dialogue among the political actors in Venezuela ([see note](#)). The Colombian foreign minister, meanwhile, stated that the United States should apply the same philosophy in Venezuela being followed by Obama with respect to Cuba, according to which both nations had begun to “resolve their differences” ([see note](#)).

The US government defended the White House’s decision through various spokesmen. Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs Roberta Jacobson expressed her “disappointment” that other countries weren’t defending the sanctions, which, in her opinion, were not intended to “harm” Venezuelans or the Venezuelan government overall, but rather to target individual officials. Jacobson criticized statements of Latin American leaders as “demonizing” the United States, “as if it were the source of Venezuela’s problems” ([see note](#)). Later on, the US government had to admit, however, first through White House Deputy National Security Advisor Ben Rhodes, and then through President Obama himself, that the US government did not actually consider Venezuela a threat to its national security. The content of the executive order, they stated, used the standard wording required in these legal instruments ([see note](#)). In general the US government spokespersons took care to emphasize that the order had already been implemented and, as such, could not be repealed ([see video](#)). During the Summit of the Americas, Jacobson added that the decree did not mean that the United States was planning to invade Venezuela or to “change the Venezuelan government in an extra-constitutional manner,” as suggested by the Venezuelan government.

The Seventh Summit of the Americas

The historic meeting between President Barack Obama and his Cuban counterpart, Raúl Castro, as part of the Seventh Summit of the Americas in Panama City April 10 and 11, relegated the debate over Venezuela - US relations to the back burner. Despite support from the leaders of Cuba, Bolivia, Argentina, Brazil, and Ecuador for President Maduro’s demand for repeal of the executive order ([see note](#)), the summit concluded without any joint statement on the matter.⁵

Although no meeting had been scheduled between the presidents of Venezuela and the United States, it came to light that the two leaders engaged in informal dialogue for a few minutes during a “hallway encounter.” The meeting, said President Maduro later on, was “serious, frank, and cordial,” while he also believed that it could open up, “in days to come,” the possibility for a process of talks between the two governments, as well as “progress toward a relationship of respect” ([see note](#)).⁶

Declaration of Panama. In the days leading up to the summit, 26 former Ibero-American presidents signed the “Declaration of Panama,” alerting the international community to the “severe

⁴ President Maduro asserted that all 138 countries belonging to the G77, plus China, had declared their solidarity with Venezuela, expressing opposition to Obama’s executive order ([see note](#)).

⁵ Speaking at the summit, President Maduro announced his government’s four demands to the government of the United States: a) recognize Venezuela’s independence and the Bolivarian Revolution, b) repeal the decree through diplomatic channels, c) dismantle the psychological warfare apparatus operating out of the US Embassy in Caracas, d) take legal action to arrest the “conspirators against Venezuela” operating out of Miami and New York ([see note](#)).

⁶ Days before the Summit of the Americas, US State Department Counselor Thomas A. Shannon Jr. visited Caracas, where private meetings were held with President Maduro and Foreign Affairs Minister Delcy Rodríguez, together with representatives of the MUD. President Maduro reported that during his meeting with Shannon had been conveyed the hope that “doors to a new phase of relations respectful of Venezuela’s dignity may be opening up, with respect for Venezuelan socialism” ([see note](#)). Venezuelan opposition, meanwhile, announced that during the meeting of their representatives with Shannon, he had stated that a critical situation in Venezuela would adversely affect the entire region and that after the summit a “more active US presence” would be ushered in, “coordinated with the foreign ministers representing UNASUR and other actors, in terms of a peaceful electoral solution to the Venezuelan crisis” ([see note](#)).

crisis of democracy in Venezuela” while also asking the Venezuelan government to reach negotiated solutions to the crisis, freedom for political prisoners (including Antonio Ledezma, Leopoldo López, and Daniel Ceballos), along with assurances regarding upcoming parliamentary elections.⁷ In this document, Latin American leaders denounced the human, political, and social rights situation in Venezuela, stressing, among other factors, the Judiciary’s lack of independence, the atmosphere of impunity, and widespread persecution of political dissidents ([see note](#)).

Felipe González joins in the defense of López and Ledezma

On March 23, amid reactions to Obama’s executive order, former Spanish President Felipe González announced his intentions of joining the team spearheading the defense of Metropolitan Caracas Mayor Antonio Ledezma and political leader Leopoldo López, both being held at Ramo Verde military prison on charges of “incitement and conspiracy.” González also announced his intentions of helping to form a front comprised of international leaders to advocate for the release of Venezuelan opposition leaders. A group of nine former Latin American presidents expressed their willingness to join the team to defend López, Ledezma, and Ceballos, together with González ([see note](#)).⁸

The Venezuelan government’s reaction was immediate. President Maduro called Felipe González a “lobbyist” in the “campaign against Venezuela” ([see video](#)). Foreign Minister Delcy Rodríguez, meanwhile, announced that González was not authorized to practice law in Venezuela or to “meddle in the country’s internal affairs,” an opinion concurred with by Ombudsman Tarek William Saab ([see note](#)). On behalf of the opposition, MUD Executive Secretary Jesús Torrealba reminded attendees at a press conference that Felipe González was once decorated with Cuba’s highest honor by none other than Fidel Castro himself,⁹ thereby denouncing statements made by official spokesmen as part of a “dreadful” campaign to discredit him ([see note](#)).

II. MAJOR ELECTORAL DEVELOPMENTS

While President Obama’s executive order and the Venezuelan government’s subsequent reaction to it dominated public discourse for the duration of March, uncertainty over the date to be set for upcoming parliamentary election and preparations for the MUD and PSUV party primary elections continued to figure rather prominently on the national agenda.

In press releases, MUD technical representative to the CNE Vicente Bello summarized the demands of the opposition to the EMB body into five points: i) setting the election date, ii) publishing the Electoral Roll (so that the MUD may apprise itself of newly registered voters, data on relocated and deceased voters),¹⁰ iii) revocation of the resolution creating 46 new polling centers, the majority of which would be located in Housing Mission buildings in Caracas, Guárico, and Zulia, iv) elimination of the use of buildings for polling centers currently operating as community council offices, town halls or collective organizations known as “colectivos” and v) publishing of the electoral districts to be used in parliamentary elections.

⁷ Other former presidents subsequently joined in, raising that the number of signatories to 31.

⁸ So far, nine former leaders have joined in defense of Ledezma and López: Felipe González and José María Aznar (Spain), Fernando Henrique Cardoso (Brazil), Andrés Pastrana (Colombia), Sebastián Piñera (Chile), Felipe Calderón (Mexico), Alán García and Alejandro Toledo (Peru) and Luis Alberto Lacalle (Uruguay).

⁹ Referring to the Order of José Martí, issued in Cuba to Felipe González in 1986.

¹⁰ The latest update, at the time these statements were issued, was in December 2014.

Added to these demands by Venezuelan Progressive Movement Secretary General Simón Calzadilla were regulation of blanket presidential broadcasts, the presence of international observers during the elections and activation of additional voter registration sites throughout the country, among others ([see note](#)).

PARLATINO deputies to be picked by the National Assembly

Compounding the controversy over having no date scheduled for parliamentary elections is a request to eliminate elections for deputies to the Latin American Parliament (PARLATINO), normally held simultaneously with parliamentary elections.¹¹ The PARLATINO is a permanent regional unicameral body comprised of national parliaments in Latin America, whose members are elected by popular vote ([see note](#)). Since 1998, Venezuelans have voted to elect members of the Latin American Parliament during elections for deputies to the National Assembly ([see results](#)).¹²

The initiative to scrap elections for deputies to the PARLATINO began with National Assembly President Diosdado Cabello, who, in his weekly television program aired on March 18¹³ characterized the direct, universal election of deputies to the PARLATINO as an “anomaly.” The most fitting individuals to fill these positions, he said, were National Assembly members themselves. To date, he added, it had been the National Assembly that had appointed representatives to the PARLASUR and other regional parliaments, such as the Indigenous Parliament of America and the Amazonian Parliament. According to Cabello, these appointments have helped to promote discussion over regional issues taking place in plenary sessions of the National Assembly, “the quintessential hub for debate” ([see video](#)). In line with these statements, on April 14 Cabello asked the CNE by means of an “urgent motion” to withdraw the deputies to the PARLATINO from the ballot for public office in the upcoming parliamentary elections.¹⁴

Several opposition spokespersons called the move unconstitutional, alleging it was motivated by “fear among the ruling party” over the possible outcome of parliamentary elections ([see note](#)). Enrique Naime, the first vice president of COPEI, even termed the move “a prelude to other similar decisions” designed to replace direct vote with other electoral mechanisms “that could even promote the elimination of elections for the National Assembly” ([see note](#)). In a meeting with the president of the CNE, a committee of the MUD spearheaded by its secretary general, Jesús “Chúo” Torrealba demanded that the EMB establish an “institutional position” on the announcement made by President of the National Assembly. Nevertheless, Lucena avoided making any comments on the issue, pointing out that the CNE has no authority to eliminate direct elections for deputies to the PARLATINO, and that the National Assembly alone can make any such changes ([see note](#)).

Principal Rector Luis Emilio Rondón took the position, however, that Venezuelan representatives to the PARLATINO should be voted in directly by the electorate, according to Electoral Processes Law (LOPRE), Article 191.¹⁵ Rights recognized in this law are irrevocable, said

¹¹ Elections for deputies to the MERCOSUR Parliament (PARLASUR) have yet to be held. PARLASUR is the representative body of the citizens of MERCOSUR member countries ([see the PARLASUR constitutive protocol](#)). Venezuela, a full member of this organization as of 2013, has yet to hold direct elections for these representatives.

¹² The most recent election for PARLATINO deputies was held in 2010.

¹³ *Con el Mazo Dando*, March 18, 2015.

¹⁴ The ruling party bloc in the National Assembly adopted the motion on April 14 ([see note](#)).

¹⁵ According to this article, “When international agreements or treaties legally signed by the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela require elections to be held to select representatives to governing bodies with international jurisdiction, they are to be organized, supervised, and run by the National Electoral Council. To accomplish these purposes, the process is carried out simultaneously with the elections for deputies to the National Assembly, using the party-list method, including respective indigenous representation and according to the electoral rules issued about the National Electoral Council.”

Rondón. Violating them, he added, may limit the political rights of citizens, particularly the right to vote ([see note](#)).

Organizing the elections

Even though the CNE had yet to announce the date of parliamentary elections at the time this report was released, it continued its work on organizing them. On March 9, the CNE announced completion of its audit of software to be used in the public drawing of citizens to serve on subordinate electoral bodies rendering electoral service in 2015. The process of selecting these members was conducted on March 19 with the participation of political party representatives and the presence of media outlets ([see note](#)).¹⁶

Electoral districts. The parliamentary elections preparation process was marred, however, by the CNE's decision to modify the number of seats up for election in each electoral district. At a press conference on April 15, CNE President Tibisay Lucena said that even though these districts would remain as they were in 2010, the electoral body had decided to change the number of representatives to be elected in each district based on recent changes in the population, according to estimates issued by the National Statistics Institute (INE) ([see note](#)).

While the Executive Secretary of the MUD applauded the decision to leave electoral districting design unchanged, he also denounced the CNE's population projections for calculating the number of deputies to be elected in each district as "false." Using those figures, he said, mostly hurts the opposition ([see note](#)). Nevertheless, on April 21 the National Assembly approved the INE's proposed estimated population index, with the CNE ratifying the changes announced five days earlier.

Opposition sectors, however, noted a number of inconsistencies between the population index used by the INE to justify changes in the number of deputies to be elected and projections for 2015 published on the INE's own web page. In a letter sent by the MUD to the CNE, it submitted a sample of eight such cases where the CNE uses data published by the INE on its website ([see letter](#)). The coordinator of the Center for Political Studies at the Andrés Bello Catholic University (CEP-UCAB), Héctor Briceño, pointed out that population estimates made by the CNE "contradict those made by the government's statistics institute," revealing that these calculations as biased in favor of the ruling party ([see note](#)). The civil society organization Súmate adopted this same stance in a paper on this topic ([see report](#)).¹⁷

Sectors within the ruling party argued that some of the changes in population figures were due to the effects of the Housing Mission,¹⁸ which they say raised the population over the last three years in the districts where deputies were added ([see note](#))

Primary elections for the MUD and the PSUV. Concerning the organization of primaries for the two major political forces, the CNE announced that it had conducted an engineering test on March 27 as part of implementation of its internal technical protocol, which authorizes the CNE to examine how the technological platform to be used in the primary elections is working ([see note](#)).

¹⁶ There are 480,828 members altogether in these organizations, according to the CNE. They are divided among the Regional Electoral Boards (432 members), the two Metropolitan Electoral Boards (36 members), 335 Municipal Electoral Boards (6,030 members), the 71 parish boards (1,278 members), and 39,421 polling stations (473,052 polling station members). Electoral service lasts for one year from selection date. On March 25, the CNE posted the results of the drawing on its website so that voters could establish whether or not they were selected to render electoral service for the one-year period ([see note](#)).

¹⁷ Preliminary Report "Population data manipulation favorably influences National Assembly makeup for the PSUV" ([see PDF file](#)).

¹⁸ A government plan to build housing for low-income individuals.

Prior to this, CNE Rector Socorro Hernández had announced a joint review of “issues crucial to the primary elections” by the National Electoral Board (JNE) and the MUD electoral commission. This review pointed out that technicians at both organizations had studied the issues involved in the support to be provided to the opposition by the National Electoral Council to conduct their primary elections ([see note](#)).

MUD primaries

Unlike the PSUV, which will be holding primaries in all the districts on the entire electoral map, the MUD primaries will be holding them only in 35 of the country’s 87 districts to select 42 deputies altogether. Consensus will be sought to select candidates in the remainder of the districts. According to electoral expert Eugenio Martínez, the districts where primaries are to be held are those where the opposition has traditionally had a hard time winning elections. According to Martínez, candidates selected by consensus will therefore have a greater chance of winning a seat in the next parliament than those selected through the primary process ([see note](#)).

The MUD’s decision not to hold primaries across the board nationwide was criticized by some opposition sectors. The Radical Cause party deputy Andrés Velásquez asked the opposition alliance to rectify this decision. “Not rectifying it would be a huge blunder on the part of the Democratic Unity Table,” he said ([see note](#)). Meanwhile, María Corina Machado, chosen by consensus as an opposition candidate to represent Miranda state, said that the decision of the MUD to hold primaries for only 25 percent of the positions is a “mistake.” Seventy-five percent of all candidates should not be “arbitrarily” appointed, she said ([see note](#)). In Mérida state, where the MUD will not be holding primaries, a constellation of local political parties, student groups and personalities decided to conduct their own primary elections in all of the districts there, requesting technical support from Súmate in order to do so ([see note](#)).

Rules governing MUD primaries were issued on March 7 ([see rules](#)). According to these rules, voters will have the right to be nominated and selected as candidates as long as they comply with the requirements laid down in these rules.¹⁹ Candidates not nominated by political parties must submit an endorsement in the form of voter signatures from at least one percent of the electoral roll in their respective districts.²⁰ As in the case of the PSUV primaries, opposition primaries will be open elections. Therefore, all citizens meeting the eligibility requirements set forth in the rules may vote.

According to information provided on March 19 by José Luis Cartaya, director of the MUD Primary Election Commission (CEP),²¹ 110 nominations for candidates were submitted by the end of the nomination period. Cartaya also noted that districts where primaries would be held were cut back from 38 to 35 because only one candidate had been registered in two of these districts and no candidate was recorded in another.²² Cartaya also said that the opposition coalition had decided to accept the nominations for opposition members who are currently under arrest or had been so until recently, as in the case of former San Cristóbal Mayor Daniel Ceballos, former San Diego Carabobo Mayor Enzo Scarano, and former San Diego Municipal Police Director Salvatore Lucchese.

¹⁹ Articles 29-36.

²⁰ Article 30.

²¹ To organize matters dealing with the holding of primary elections, on February 26 the MUD formed a seven-member ad hoc committee, called the Primary Election Commission (CEP). The CEP consists of the following leaders: José Luis Cartaya (Commission President), Fernando Paredes, Vicente Bello, Pablo Durán, Alejandro Plaza, Enrique Naime and Carlos Melo. For the time being, the Commission’s technical support team will consist of these leaders: Abdón Vivas O’Connor, Roberto Abdul, Ana Paula Deniz, Lepervanche Diego, Roberto Picón, and Beatriz Macero ([see note](#)).

²² Districts where only one candidate was registered are district 3 in Trujillo state and district 2 in Zulia state. The district with no candidate whatsoever was district 2 in Portuguesa state ([see note](#)).

Although opposition parties had not applied gender and age quotas, coalition representatives reported that 30 percent of all their nominations are female and 30 percent of them are under 40 ([see note](#)).

According to the timetable established for the MUD by the CEP, the electoral campaign formally began on March 31. During this period, which lasts until May 14,²³ promotion of candidates with advertising or propaganda over national, regional or community radio and television is prohibited. The electoral commission asked candidates to make their campaigns “austere, consisting of direct contact with the people,” pointing out that campaign efforts should be conducted “within the rules governing ethics in the universal sense of democracy” ([see note](#)). Regarding costs for the primaries, candidates nominated by parties or who are running on their own should “contribute to the payment of election-related costs,” according to Article 7. To do this, MUD representative to the CNE Vicente Bello said that individuals planning to run in the MUD primary must contribute 150,000 bolivars ([see note](#)).²⁴ The decision requiring candidates to pay for their nominations was criticized, however, by some opposition members, such as former leader Claudio Fermín, and The Radical Cause party deputy Andrés Velásquez ([see note](#)).

Though the MUD formally requested CNE technical support to hold its primary election, coordination between these two organizations has not been tension-free. One of the most important controversial issues has to do with the EMB’s use of the Integrated Authentication System (fingerprint capturing device, or SAI). The MUD had originally asked the electoral body not to use this system so as to protect the privacy and identity of voters ([see note](#)). The CNE, however, at the time that this newsletter was published, had not yet acquiesced to this condition. MUD Political Action Plan Coordinator Aníbal Sánchez said that the opposition coalition is studying two voter identity protection proposals. One, he said, would be to “neutralize the Integrated Authentication System with incident erasing software.” The second would be to create “a program that can activate the voting machine while also bypassing the SAI” ([see note](#)).

PSUV primaries

As with the MUD primaries, all voters registered in the Electoral Roll may vote in the PSUV primary elections ([see note](#)). Those planning to compete in ruling party primaries, however, must be nominated by the party’s grassroots organizations, the Bolívar Chávez Battle Units (or UBCH). Consequently, there will be no self-nominations.

The rules governing how the ruling party primaries are to be conducted were issued on March 2 by the mayor of the municipality of Libertador and PSUV National Leadership member, Jorge Rodríguez. In 14 articles or steps, these regulations describe the methodology set forth by the PSUV for carrying out this process ([see rules](#)).²⁵ As announced by President Maduro in 2014, the nomination process must meet gender and age quotas ([see note](#)). Each UBCH²⁶ ([see note](#)) must therefore nominate two women and two men per elected office. Two of them (one man and one woman) must be under 30. In the districts to be represented by more than one deputy (multimember districts),²⁷ one of the positions must be made available to the National Leadership to include candidates nominated by the parties that comprise the Great Patriotic Pole (*Gran Polo Patriótico* -

²³ According to Article 37 of the regulations, the election campaign is to last 45 days.

²⁴ José Luis Cartaya characterized this figure as a “wizard’s guess” ([see note](#)).

²⁵ This publication, however, only covers the process of candidate selection by the rank and file and the national leadership of the party, leaving out the description of further steps, such as those dealing with the electoral campaign, applicable time periods and candidate behavior, among others.

²⁶ According to the PSUV’s official website, there are about 13,683 UBCHs in the country.

²⁷ In the 2010 parliamentary elections there were 19 multi-member districts.

GPP).²⁸ So far, parties in this alliance have sought to negotiate participation in the next Assembly by means of the 52 deputy positions to be selected by the party-list proportional method, thereby bypassing the primaries²⁹ ([see note](#)).

The names of the contenders winning the highest number of votes at each UBCH assembly will be entered into a database. Lists submitted to primary elections will consist of candidates winning the highest number of votes in each district. In the case of districts electing one or two deputies, the list must consist of 12 contenders (six men and six women, six of which must be under 30). For districts where three deputies are elected, the list must consist of 24 contenders (12 men and 12 women, 12 of which must be under 30).³⁰ The party's National Leadership may veto the nomination of officials holding public offices deemed crucial to development of the "revolutionary process" or the nomination of individuals who, according to the party, fail to meet the "ethical, moral, and political" requirements for the performance of their duties.³¹ The final lists for each district must be approved by the PSUV National Leadership.

Although NA president and PSUV first vice-president Diosdado Cabello had indicated earlier that the deadline for nominating candidates would be March 29 ([see note](#)),³² PSUV vice-president of Electoral Affairs Organization Francisco Ameliach, indicated later on that this time period had been extended to April 19 ([see note](#)). Ruling party sectors attributed this deadline extension to the fact that the national government had to focus on gathering signatures from individuals opposing the executive order issued by the President of the United States ([see note](#)).

PRIMARIES	MUD	PSUV
Date held	May 17, 2015	June 28, 2015
Eligible voters	All voters registered in the Electoral Roll	All voters registered in the Electoral Roll
CNE Technical Support	Yes	Yes
Candidate nomination method used	Self-nominees and/or individuals nominated by an MUD member political organization. Must meet the requirements set forth in CEP regulations.	PSUV member nominees proposed by the rank and file of the Chavist movement (UBCH) and approved by the party's National Leadership.
Scope (districts)	Of the 87 existing districts in Venezuela, the MUD will choose its candidates through primaries held in 35 of these districts. Candidates will be selected by consensus in the remainder of the districts,	In the country's 87 districts, but in those districts with representation by more than one deputy, one seat is "reserved" for the National Leadership to appoint as candidate to run in the parliamentary elections.
Participation quotas in terms of gender and age	Not taken into account	50 percent of the candidates must be women and 50 percent of the candidates must be under 30.
Candidate participation costs	Covered by contributions from the nominees	Covered by PSUV contributions

²⁸ Article 7 of the rules.

²⁹ Each state in Venezuela elects two deputies. In the case of Zulia, Miranda, and Carabobo states and the Capital District, three deputies will be running if the districts are kept the same as in the 2010 parliamentary elections.

³⁰ Article 11 of the rules.

³¹ Article 13 of the rules.

³² Cabello explained that the preliminary timetable for PSUV primaries had provided for nominations to be carried out on March 22. However, since the primary election date was postponed one week, from June 21st to the 28th, the PSUV decided to modify its timetable accordingly.

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