

How did Chavismo win 92% of the National Assembly?

January 5, 2021



On December 6 took place the election of the members of the National Assembly (AN), the unicameral Venezuelan parliament. The campaign was almost non-existent in much of the country and few voters went to the polls. In many places the lines to buy petrol were much longer than the lines to vote. According to official figures, the abstention was 69.5%. Pollsters estimated that the actual abstention would be **between 80 and 90 percent**. Venezuelan, Russian and Iranian state media, as well as Chavista media in the US and Europe, presented the result as an epic victory for Maduro. Without a doubt, it is a new turn of the screw of the Venezuelan bourgeois dictatorial regime, upon taking control of the last institution that it did not totally control. But the electoral result was guaranteed before the vote. Let's see the mechanisms by which a popular support that **barely reaches 14%** was translated into a 92% majority of the National Assembly.

The election of a parliament without functions

The high abstention indicates that the working majority understood the irrelevance of the election. Voting could not have any impact on the disastrous national situation because the parliament had been de facto deprived of all its functions for several years.

The last election in which there was any kind of contest was held in 2015. The punitive vote of millions of Venezuelans from the popular barrios, who repudiated the impoverishing economic austerity plan applied by Maduro, who cut food imports and salaries to pay off foreign debt, as well as rejection for the growing repression, gave two thirds of the National Assembly to the center-right opposition coalition, the Democratic Unity Table (MUD).

Chavismo decided to circumvent the electoral result, using the Supreme Tribunal of Justice (TSJ) under its control to annul the election of the four deputies of the Amazonas State, thus liquidating the two-thirds majority. Through rulings by the TSJ, including a declaration of "contempt", it annulled all the powers of the parliament, from drafting laws to questioning government officials. In fact, it carried out a coup and concentrated those powers in the Executive. The government removed constitutional guarantees leaning on the support of the Armed Forces, whose power increased considerably.

The MUD capitulated to the decisions of the TSJ and even conceded that the government block the holding of a recall referendum in 2016, a procedure contemplated in the Venezuelan constitution that would have removed Maduro from power by means of the votes. That whole year was dedicated to shady negotiations with the government. But in March 2017, Maduro, confident of the passivity of that opposition, decided to assume the power to legislate and deliver oil concessions directly. He went too far and provoked popular protests that totally surpassed the opposition parties and transformed into an authentic popular rebellion. Maduro crushed it in blood and fire after three months of mobilizations, looting and confrontations with the repressive military and paramilitary forces. **More than a hundred people were killed**, thousands more were arrested and hundreds tortured.

The MUD's betrayal of the protests, opting to negotiate with the government and condemning the most radicalized actions of the people, such as looting, plunged it into such disrepute that it dissolved shortly thereafter. The government took advantage of its bloody victory to impose a new dictatorial body, the National Constituent Assembly (ANC), a supra-constitutional body composed solely of members of the official party. It was the result of the first fraudulent election, without opposition, and became the model for the following ones. Incredible as it may seem, to this day the detailed results of that election have not been published. By establishing a quota of members to be elected by Chavista corporations, such as the ultra pro-bosses' Central Union of Bolivarian Socialist Workers (CBST), as well as over-representation of the rural districts, the government ensured in advance an absolute majority of members even if it obtained a small minority of the votes.

The ANC did not draft any new constitution, as was its stated aim, in the three years it was in operation. Instead, it removed and appointed authorities, raided the parliamentary immunity of AN deputies, drafted laws to restrict the democratic rights established in the constitution, such as the so-called "**Law against Hate**", laws to enable massive **privatizations** and concessions of natural resources to national and transnational private companies, called fraudulent elections and modified electoral rules. It was an arm of Maduro's dictatorial power.

The fact that the AN was completely emptied of its functions and had superimposed on it an ANC of unlimited powers already made the December 6th election a complete farce. It was in this context that most of the opposition, both the sector represented in the outgoing AN and the extra-parliamentary and leftist opposition, boycotted the election. A sector of the center-right, headed by Capriles, tried to negotiate electoral conditions to participate but did not obtain significant concessions from the government. The ANC was only dissolved once the government was able to fraudulently take over the AN.

The government chooses the official candidates and its "opponents"

Since 2016, the government has deepened its policy of banning candidates and opposition parties from participating in elections. Between the 2015 and 2020 elections, the number of national parties on the electoral card was reduced from 35 to 26. But this figure alone is misleading. In fact, in the 2015 elections, the opposition parties chose to use a single card, with more than 50 parties having electoral legality. In this election, the only party that ran candidates outside of government control was the Communist Party of Venezuela (PCV), which despite supporting Maduro, launched dissident Chavista candidates. This limited dissidence was met with persecutions, dismissals, arbitrary arrests and police harassment.

Eight parties were part of the official alliance, half of which were handed over to government agents by means of judicial interventions to prevent the possibility of dissident Chavista candidates running, as in the case of the PCV (this is the case of the PPT, Podemos, Tupamaro and MEP parties). The remaining 17 electoral cards correspond to opposition organizations that have been intervened[*] by

the TSJ or that have capitulated to the government. For example, the “Democratic Alliance” is made up Acción Democrática and Copei, traditional bourgeois parties intervened in by the TSJ, Avanzada Progresista, an organization led by former Chavista Henri Falcón and which capitulated to the government, and the extreme right-wing evangelicals of Esperanza por El Cambio, also linked to Chavismo by corrupt businesses like **fuel trafficking**. The “United Venezuela Alliance” was formed by Venezuela Unida and the Popular Will, both of which were intervened, and Primero Venezuela, an organization linked to Luis Parra, an opposition deputy who proclaimed himself president of the AN in January of this year with the support of Chavismo and was enabled by the TSJ for this election. It presented itself with the same colors and font of the logo of Primero Justicia, an opposition organization that did not participate in the election.

Most of the pseudo-opposition candidates were totally unknown to most of the population. Their only function was to give the process the appearance of a multi-party system.

The extortion of hunger

In addition to preventing independent participation in the elections and discouraging the majority that repudiates the dictatorship from using the vote as a form of political expression, pressure still had to be exerted on the few voters who attended. Iris Varela, former minister for the penitentiary service and candidate for the AN, coined the slogan “**whoever does not vote, let them be kicked out**”, calling for the dismissal of public employees.

The president of the ANC, the military officer Diosdado Cabello, issued a warning, **cynically disguised** as a joke, during a campaign event in the state of Carabobo: “He who does not vote, does not eat. For those who do not vote, there is no food”.

In Venezuela, a large part of the population depends on subsidized food allocations to supplement their increasingly restricted diet due to the reduction of the minimum wage to one dollar per month. Thirty percent of children have **low height due to malnutrition** and 79% of households cannot cover the cost of the food basket. With an accumulated economic contraction since 2013 of more than 75%, more and more Venezuelans depend on these increasingly meager state subsidies.

The government systematically installed awnings near voting stations and used the “Homeland Card” to control that recipients of the CLAP program of subsidized food were voting. This extortion brought some of the few voters of the day to the polls.

Non-proportional representation

The National Electoral Council (CNE), appointed by the TSJ and not by the National Assembly as required under the Constitution, increased the number of seats from 167 to 277, but did not improve the proportional representation. The 69.2% share of the votes obtained by the Chavista coalition were over-represented in 256 deputies, 92% of the disputed positions. The pseudo opponents of the Democratic Alliance and the United Venezuela Alliance obtained 18 and 2 deputies, respectively, while the dissident Chavista alliance headed by the PCV obtained one deputy.

Shamelessly, the CNE modified the results after they were published to favor two pseudo oppositionists who had been left out, Luis Parra and Timoteo Zambrano.

If abstention is considered, Chavismo’s vote is equivalent, according to official figures, to 20% of the total voters in the electoral roll. The real figure is even lower.

The collapse of the pro-US opposition

In January 2019, taking advantage of the fraudulent nature of the 2018 presidential election, the president of the AN proclaimed himself “interim president”, sponsored by the Trump government. The almost unknown Juan Guaidó raised expectations among a large part of the population, but they soon vanished. For a long time, Guaidó focused his speech on hopes that the U.S. and “the international community” would save the country, people just had to wait. He supported the application of oil sanctions that increased the misery millions already suffered as a consequence of the policies of plundering and semi-slavery applied by Chavismo. Together with his mentor, Leopoldo López, he attempted a coup d’état which was actually to be **executed by the Chavista military itself** and which foreseeably failed. Then came the failed adventure of the US mercenaries in May of this year. The Washington Post published the **contract with the mercenaries** signed by Guaidó and had access to a video recording the moment of its signing. In addition, the “interim president” was involved in all kinds of **corruption scandals**, which even linked him to sectors of the Bolibourgeoisie.

Surveys have reflected the collapse of support for Guaidó and that the rejection of US economic sanctions **exceeds 70%**.

Guaidó’s response to the electoral farce of December 6 was to carry out an electronic consultation in order to disregard the election, prolong the outgoing parliament’s extinguished mandate and request greater foreign interference. This event did not attract the interest of the popular majority either.

Against imperialist interference and the civil-military dictatorship

There were no major protests against the electoral farce of December 6. But the civil-military dictatorship is far from enjoying a stabilization of its rule. The country is in ruins, with rampant inflation and national production in free fall. Criminal gangs control much of the country. Every week there are dozens of protests scattered throughout the territory.

Among Maduro’s international allies are reactionary butchers like the Syrian dictator Bashar Al Assad, the extreme right-wing theocratic regime of Iran, Recep Erdogan of Turkey, or the gangster Vladimir Putin. Ironically, a part of the international left also supports Maduro and validates his anti-worker and anti-popular policies under a false “anti-imperialist” and even “socialist” discourse. There is nothing further from socialism than the policy of privatizations and looting carried out by Maduro and his corrupt military, with its consequences of extreme social inequality.

As the **Socialism and Freedom Party** puts it, from the left opposition: “the Venezuelan people have only one path left, that of struggle and mobilization. It is an imperative to organize ourselves in the communities, factories, workplaces and universities. To unite the different struggles that the workers have been waging, and to try to bring together the protests that the communities have been making against the terrible situation of the public services”.

From the revolutionary and democratic sectors, we must continue to denounce the economic sanctions of Trump that are bleeding the country, without ceasing to defend the democratic freedoms of the Venezuelan people, starting with the elementary right to food and to receive a salary that is not merely symbolic in exchange for a workday. It would be of great value for the US left to disassociate itself from the “progressive” tourists that visit the country to write praises to the dictatorship and to take selfies in luxury restaurants. Those who claim to be anti-imperialists should denounce US and European companies like Chevron and Total, that pay wages of less than \$15 a month to Venezuelan oil workers, taking advantage of the semi-slavery labor conditions imposed by Maduro. Let’s raise our voices for political prisoners like **Rodney Alvarez**, a worker who has been imprisoned for more than 9 years without the right to a trial, for imprisoned oil workers like Bartolo

Guerra, Aryenis Torrealba and Alfredo Chirinos, and for leftist activists who have been victims of forceful disappearance, like **Alcedo Mora**, for the indigenous leaders murdered by the Chavista police, like **Sabino Romero**, or for the thousands of young people extrajudicially executed each year by the Chavista **death squads**.

This article originally appeared on venezuelanvoices, Dec. 31, 2020.

[*] Judicial intervention consists of the government-controlled supreme tribunal (TSJ) designating the leadership of a political party. This has been done both in the case of opposition parties and Chavista parties. The result is that these parties keep appearing on the ballot but actually are represented legally by government agents designated by the TSJ.