

**Venezuela's 1998
Presidential, Legislative, and Gubernatorial Elections
Election Observation Report**

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**Venezuela's Legislative and Gubernatorial Elections
November 8, 1998**

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I. Executive Summary

Hugo Chávez Frías was elected to Venezuela’s presidency by a landslide on December 6, 1998. His 16-point margin of victory — coupled with the election’s impressive 64 percent voter turnout — suggests a strong mandate for change. Analysts agree that popular support will prove crucial to President Chávez as he strives to keep his far-reaching campaign promises. Prominent among these are pledges to convene a constituent assembly to revise the constitution, to mount new efforts to fight corruption and poverty, and to rein in the spending of the vital state-owned oil company, *Petroleos de Venezuela S. A.* (PDVSA).

The election of President Chávez marks the culmination of a decade of political change and electoral reform in Venezuela. In addition to the presidential vote on December 6, elections were held November 8 for every legislative post in the country — including the Senate, the Chamber of Deputies, and the state legislatures — as well as all 23 governorships. The current electoral cycle will conclude in June 1999 with municipal elections, though Venezuelans will vote in a referendum on whether to convene a constituent assembly before then (probably on April 25 or May 2).

Venezuela’s electoral system has undergone major changes in the past year and a half. The new election law promulgated in December 1997 and revised five months later called for the use of automated voting machines, an expensive and complex initiative. In addition, the new law mandated that pollworkers and many other election officials would be selected at random from the voter registry, ending the traditional practice of recruiting political party representatives to administer the vote.

However, Venezuela’s political upheaval has proven to be even more dramatic. Chávez is the first Venezuelan president in forty years with no direct ties to the country’s two traditional political parties, the center-left *Acción Democrática* (AD) party and the social Christian party known as COPEI. Indeed, the idea that united Chávez’s *Polo Patriótico* — a disparate alliance of 14 mostly leftist parties — was opposition to the traditional parties. On November 8, the pro-Chávez alliance won eight governorships and roughly one-third of the vote in legislative balloting, making it the largest faction in Congress. In contrast, AD and COPEI garnered just 24 percent and 12 percent of the vote in Congressional balloting respectively. Both parties abandoned their presidential candidates in the week before the December 6 vote, opting to throw their support behind Henrique Salas Römer, a maverick former governor. But polls suggest the endorsement of the two traditional parties hindered rather than helped Salas Römer.

IRI obtained financing from the U.S. Department of State’s Economic Support Fund (disbursed via the U.S. Agency for International Development) to dispatch a 27-member international observer delegation to monitor the December 6 vote. The delegation included specialists in election law, international affairs, campaigns, and communications. IRI was invited to observe Venezuela’s elections by the National Electoral Council (CNE), which provided official credentials for all members of the delegation. In addition, a nine-member IRI delegation monitored the November 8 elections as part of a program funded by the National Endowment for Democracy (NED). NED also supported the efforts of IRI and two Venezuelan civic groups to increase youth participation in the elections by organizing a series of candidate forums and conducting a “get out the vote” campaign.

Prior to both elections, IRI's observers received extensive briefings on the challenges faced by the leaders of Venezuela's political and electoral institutions. Representatives of the CNE, political parties, polling firms, and civic groups discussed the election with IRI delegates in Caracas and in the states where they monitored the vote. On November 8, IRI observers deployed to six states; on December 6, IRI monitored the balloting in 14 states. On both occasions, the delegates scrutinized the vote count in automated and manual voting centers. They also monitored the procedures used at the vote-count facilities in the state capitals as well as in Caracas.

This report offers an evaluation of Venezuela's 1998 elections, including specific recommendations for reforms to improve the transparency and efficiency of the electoral system. While none of the shortcomings documented by IRI's observers compromised the basic integrity of the vote, this report offers the following recommendations:

- The CNE should consider reallocating its funds to devote additional resources to the voter registry, pollworker training, and voter education.
- The ballots should be redesigned in order to reduce the extremely high percentage of spoiled ballots.
- The CNE should devote more of its energies to pollworker preparation, above all adhering to the deadlines appearing in the official electoral calendar.
- The CNE should take steps to ensure that party pollwatchers have unfettered access to the voting centers and that they receive copies of the official tally document.
- Venezuela's newly elected leaders should weigh the possibility of requiring runoff elections for the presidency.

To support these recommendations, the report provides a detailed analysis of the electoral process, reviewing key aspects such as recent electoral reforms, the voter registry, voter education, the organization of voting centers, voting machines, the vote count, and procedures for resolving electoral disputes. The report also examines the election environment, focusing on voter participation, the media, campaign finance, and the role of the security forces. The final section addresses the political situation facing Venezuela's newly elected officials and attempts to place this election in its historical context.

II. Recommendations

IRI has dispatched observation missions to 70 separate national elections since 1983. On the basis of this body of experience, IRI has developed a methodology for evaluating elections based on four stages in the electoral process. The first is the pre-election phase, in which candidates and parties representing a range of political views should be able to compete in an environment free of intimidation, and an electoral council should be formed capable of drafting rules to provide for a transparent electoral process. The second stage is election day, when the voters choose their preferred candidate in the secrecy of the voting booth. Third, the votes must be counted and tallied in an accurate and transparent fashion, and the contending parties must be given the opportunity to challenge specific aspects of the conduct of the vote. Finally, during the post-election phase, the election's results are reflected in the formation of a new government.

IRI observers found that a number of positive features distinguished Venezuela's November 8 and December 6 elections:

- X Candidates were able to campaign in an atmosphere generally characterized by freedom of expression.
- X IRI observers were impressed by the civic duty Venezuelans demonstrated by voting in such large numbers. Turnout was 64 percent on December 6 and 54 percent on November 8, a notable increase over previous elections.
- X Despite delays in procuring and deploying the new voting machines, they generally functioned well. This was especially true on December 6, when the pollworkers and technicians charged with operating the machines were able to draw on the experience they gained on November 8.
- X Recent electoral reforms mandated that pollworkers and many other election officials would be selected at random from the voter registry. Despite delays in the selection, accreditation, and training of pollworkers, IRI found that most of these citizens performed their duties with a laudable sense of responsibility.
- X The members of the Venezuelan armed forces who provided support to the CNE successfully mounted a highly complex logistical operation. They were mostly polite and well informed about their responsibilities, and at no time did IRI observers see any indications of partisan bias on the part of military personnel.

IRI's observers did find room for improvement in the conduct of the election. While none of these difficulties compromised the basic integrity of the vote, IRI offers the following recommendations for improvements to the electoral system:

1 Allocation of Funding

While the Venezuelan government appropriated ample funds for the administration of the 1998 elections, there is room to question the CNE's allocation of these resources. For example, huge sums were spent on the voting machines. On the other hand, too little was done to prepare pollworkers (see below), improve the accuracy and completeness of the voter registry, or educate voters on how to cast a ballot. For example, most of the CNE's television spots through the end of the campaign simply urged citizens to vote. Democracy would perhaps have been better served if less money had been spent on the automation project and more on these other vital tasks.

2 Ballot Design

Given other major changes in the electoral system, it is understandable that the CNE chose to alter the traditional ballot design as little as possible. However, the number of spoiled ballots in both the November 8 and December 6 elections was extremely high by international standards. In some legislative contests it exceeded 20 percent; even in the relatively simple presidential balloting the share of spoiled ballots was 6.5 percent. IRI's experience suggests that spoiled ballots should in no case account for more than five percent of the votes cast.

To address this serious problem, IRI recommends that the ballot be redesigned. The ballot itself should specify clearly the number of ovals that should be marked (which they consistently fail

to do) and the offices being contested (which they fail to do in some legislative contests). It will be challenging to include this additional information on the ballots while keeping the design as simple as possible. It may prove necessary for the parties to abandon the flag-like banners they have traditionally used in favor of simpler symbols.

3 Support for Pollworkers

Most of the Venezuelan citizens chosen for electoral service complied admirably with this civic responsibility, but the CNE should have done more to support them in their labors. Serious delays plagued the selection and training process at every step, and deadlines appearing in the CNE's official electoral calendar were violated repeatedly. Many citizens never received any official notification that they had been selected; training began so late that some citizens attended the obligatory class on the eve of the November 8 elections; and credentials and wages were delivered late.

The CNE should devote a larger share of its resources to supporting the citizens chosen for electoral service. Greater efforts should be made in the future to notify those citizens who are selected, to train them in their duties, to deliver credentials in a timely manner, and to pay their wages expeditiously. Above all, the official calendar should be adhered to rigorously.

4 Support for Party Pollwatchers

IRI observers found that political party pollwatchers were present in large numbers at nearly all voting centers. In many instances, they demonstrated a clearer understanding of the rules governing the elections than the citizen pollworkers, and their vigilance contributed significantly to the integrity of the process. In a few locations, however, party pollwatchers were barred from observing the opening procedures, and in most voting centers the number of copies of the official tally document was insufficient to provide one to each accredited party pollwatcher.

IRI recommends that the CNE revise its voting center procedures and the training provided to pollworkers to ensure that party pollwatchers have unfettered access to the site. Also, all pollwatchers — and, for that matter, accredited nonpartisan observers — should receive copies of the official tally document. A comprehensive official publication detailing the rights and responsibilities of party pollwatchers would help avert conflicts in the voting center and would also assist parties as they train their pollwatchers.

5 Rules on Media and Finance

Venezuela's election law should be amended to provide greater clarity in the areas of media access and campaign finance. The articles in the Organic Law on Suffrage and Political Participation on these issues are alternately too rigorous or too vague. For example, Venezuela's Congress should consider amending the article that limits candidates to two minutes of television advertising per channel per day. IRI bases this recommendation on the principle that the rule of law is ill served when laws are not enforced.

6 Runoff Elections

With the election of President Chávez, efforts are underway to devise a new constitution. Among the political reforms that should be examined is the possibility of requiring runoff elections for the presidency in the event no candidate receives at least 50 percent of the vote. While a runoff would not have been necessary in this election in such circumstances, they are employed in many countries in Latin America and elsewhere, often leading to increased political stability.

The municipal elections due in mid-1999 will provide an opportunity for the CNE to address these difficulties, and the remainder can be addressed before the next electoral cycle. It may even be practical to implement some of these recommendations before the upcoming referendum on whether to convene a constituent assembly to write a new constitution. IRI will continue to monitor these developments closely and stands ready to assist the CNE and Venezuela's elected leaders as they seek to strengthen their electoral system.

III. Election Administration

Recent Electoral Reforms

President Rafael Caldera signed Venezuela's Organic Law on Suffrage and Political Participation on December 13, 1997. The new election law introduced two sweeping changes in the way elections are administered. First, it called for the use of voting machines to automate the elections. Second, the law curbed the influence of political parties within the country's election institutions.

Automation quickly became the CNE's top priority. As early as 1996, the electoral council issued a report calling for automation of the entire voting process using machines that would (1) verify the voter's identity, (2) allow the voter to cast an electronic ballot, (3) tally the votes cast, and (4) send the totals electronically to a central counting facility. The CNE eventually opted for a less ambitious alternative: automation of the vote count (steps 3 and 4 in this list).

After a long and controversial bidding process, the CNE reached agreement on June 10, 1998, with a Spanish firm, Indra, to automate the vote. Caracas newspapers reported that Indra's initial bid of \$262 million was the most expensive of those received, but later reports indicated the fee (and the scope of work) was reduced to approximately \$175 million. Nonetheless, other firms underbid Indra by tens of millions of dollars; Unisys, for instance, placed a bid for \$132 million, though its proposal covered a smaller geographical area. Under its contract, Indra managed the voting machines (which the CNE chose to buy rather than lease) and provided technical assistance for both the November 8 and December 6 elections. In addition, Indra will probably be invited to provide assistance to the CNE for Venezuela's June 1999 municipal elections.

The second major innovation mandated by the new election law was the depoliticization of the election administration apparatus. Previously, Venezuelan leaders had worked to ensure fair elections through multi-party representation in all election institutions, from the Supreme

Electoral Council (as the CNE was known until December 1997) to the six-person teams that staff the voting tables where ballots are cast. In this respect, Venezuelan elections were similar to those in a number of other Latin American countries (e.g., El Salvador).

Under the new system, Congress elected the seven members of the CNE in early 1998. In practice, the parties with the largest representation in the legislature reached consensus on the composition of the electoral body. In accordance with the election law, none of the seven is affiliated with a political party. However, commentators have been critical of the lack of experience of most of the council members, though many of the CNE's 2,000 staff members have spent years with the institution.

While the term of the current members of the CNE was to expire on January 23, 1999 (the date of the installation of the new Congress), the postponement of the municipal elections to June 1999 forced an extension of their mandate. The existing CNE also has been charged with overseeing a referendum due in April or May on whether to hold a constituent assembly to revise the constitution as well as elections for the assembly itself (in the event of a positive outcome in the referendum). After the municipal elections, Congress must elect a new CNE to administer the next electoral cycle. CNE President Rafael Parra Pérez has stated he will not seek reelection, but some other CNE members have said they would like to retain their posts.

Citizens were selected at random from the voter registry to serve as members of the 23 State Electoral Councils (*Juntas Regionales Electorales*) and the 333 Municipal Electoral Councils (*Juntas Municipales Electorales*). The same method was employed to choose pollworkers for the country's 20,201 voting tables. The citizens chosen for electoral service in late 1998 were charged with administering the November 1998 legislative and gubernatorial elections, the December 1998 presidential elections, and the June 1999 municipal elections. As described below, IRI found that most of the confusion surrounding the November 8 vote had dissipated by December 6, in part due to the increasing knowledge and confidence of the citizen pollworkers. On the other hand, it remains to be seen what effect a six-month hiatus in the electoral cycle will have on the conduct of the June 1999 municipal elections.

Educational requirements for pollworkers were instituted; for instance, an effort was made to choose at least one lawyer for each State Electoral Council, and illiterates were excused from electoral service. However, complaints about the lack of professional qualifications among the members of the state and municipal councils were common, and more than a few illiterates wound up staffing voting tables.

A third major change to the electoral system came on May 28, 1998, when Venezuela's Congress amended the new election law to separate the upcoming elections into three rounds in order to simplify the voting process. Prior to this amendment, balloting was to be held on December 6 for every elected office in the land, with a total of 3,362 posts to be filled. After a month of debate, however, both chambers of Congress offered broad support for electoral reforms advanced by the Convergencia party and supported by deputies from AD and COPEI. Elections were held November 8 for the entire Congress (189 deputies and 48 senators were elected directly), 23 state governors (including Vargas, a new state carved out of the Federal District), and state legislatures (a total of 374 state deputies). The presidential vote was held

December 6, and elections for mayors and other municipal officials are now slated for June 1999.

Some of the smaller parties and independent candidates objected to the change in the electoral calendar, saying the proposal to separate the national and local elections came too late and was designed to strengthen AD and COPEI. They argued that if the elections were held as planned, the traditional parties would lose seats in Congress as well as several important governorships and mayoralities. In the event, both parties lost ground in Congress anyway.

The Voter Registry

Voting is mandatory in Venezuela, and citizens are automatically inscribed in the voter registry (*registro electoral*) upon obtaining the official identification card (*cédula de identidad*). During the registration period that ended July 26, 1998, the CNE added 900,000 new voters (mostly Venezuelans who had recently reached voting age, which is 18) to the registry, pushing the total number of registered voters to 10.9 million. The CNE also eliminated from the list the names of 500,000 people who had either died or moved.

Nonetheless, the CNE's registration effort — and the integrity of the voter registry itself — has been subject to intense criticism. It is widely agreed that as many as two million citizens are unregistered. In addition, commentators writing in leading newspapers repeatedly charged that the CNE, allegedly influenced by representatives of the traditional political parties, purposefully limited its registration drive to prevent pro-Chávez voters from participating in the elections. Underscoring the CNE's poor record keeping in this department, newspaper reports in early November indicated that six dead people appeared on the ballot as candidates.

The *cédula de identidad* — either current or expired — is the only form of identification accepted at polling stations. Without it, a citizen is not permitted to vote. In addition, if a person's name does not appear in the voting center's list of registered voters (*cuaderno de votación*), he or she will be barred from voting. Venezuela's election law includes no provisions to allow a person who is away from home on election day to vote at a voting center other than the one indicated by the voter registry.

Members of the armed forces on active duty may not vote. Prisoners who are awaiting trial may vote if they advise the CNE officials overseeing the voter registry of their status before the end of the registration period. Relatively few did so prior to the recent electoral cycle. Foreigners living in Venezuela for more than 10 years can vote in municipal elections, such as those due in June 1999, but not in legislative or presidential contests.

Voter Education

The CNE's voter education efforts were also widely criticized, in part because cost overruns in areas such as automation delayed and reduced funding. It was only in October that the CNE began airing spots featuring a young woman known as Danielita urging Venezuelans to vote. Only a few television spots provided information on how to fill out a ballot (*tarjetón*), but even these explanations failed to provide much detail. Prior to the November 8 elections, for

example, voters were never told that they would have the opportunity to vote in six separate contests using two ballots. IRI observers found that CNE posters providing instructions on the voting process were on display in just half of all polling stations; in Sucre state, the posters were still in storage at the offices of the State Electoral Council on November 8.

The CNE's critics highlighted the need for better voter education because of the complexity of the two ballots in use on November 8. On the ballot for Congressional posts, voters were instructed to fill in one oval indicating their party preference for the Senate, a second oval indicating their party preference for the Chamber of Deputies, and a third oval by the name of a candidate for the Chamber of Deputies standing in the voter's district. On the ballot for state offices, voters were to fill in one oval indicating their preference for the governorship, a second oval indicating their party preference for the state legislature, and a third oval by the name of a candidate for the state legislature standing in the voter's district. (In an odd twist, the results of the Congressional balloting were used to elect Venezuela's delegates to the Andean Parliament and the Latin American Parliament, a fact unknown to all but a handful of Venezuelans.)

The ovals need not be entirely filled in to be accurately read by the voting machines, but the ballots' failure to specify the number of ovals that should be marked left many voters understandably confused. Moreover, the ballots failed to identify the office being contested in the case of the Chamber of Deputies and the state legislatures. The percentage of spoiled ballots (*votos nulos*) in these contests surpassed 20 percent in some jurisdictions, though it was below 10 percent in some large cities. About five percent of ballots were spoiled in the gubernatorial contests. While these figures underscore the need to design a simpler ballot, they are comparable to those in previous elections: in 1993 and 1995, the proportion of spoiled ballots in legislative contests varied from 17 to 24 percent. Ironically, CNE officials avoided changing the overall design of the ballots used in previous elections, ostensibly to avoid confusing the voters. The only new feature on the ballots was the ovals.

The proportion of spoiled ballots was 6.5 percent on December 6, much worse than the 3.6 percent registered in the 1993 presidential election. Casting a ballot in a presidential contest is extremely straightforward, and the fact that the share of spoiled ballots nearly doubled underscores the need to simplify the ballot design.

Voting Centers

Venezuela's electoral districts (*circunscripciones*) are divided into precincts (*vecindades electorales*), most of which have between 300 and 2,000 registered voters. All the voters in a given precinct cast ballots at a single voting center (*centro de votación*). Voting centers with more than 500 voters feature multiple voting tables (*mesas electorales*), each of which services an average of approximately 700 voters.

A total of 16,738 of the country's 20,201 voting tables — 83 percent — were equipped with voting machines. The percentage of voters using voting machines was over 90 percent, however, as most of the 3,463 manual voting tables were in remote locations with fewer voters per voting table. Most automated voting centers featured at least three voting tables, with voters from as many as three tables using a single voting machine.

The phrase used to describe the duty of citizens to serve as pollworkers — obligatory electoral service (*servicio electoral obligatorio*) — is reminiscent of that used in Spanish to describe military conscription. Under this new system, each voting table is staffed by six people, two of whom (including the president) are chosen randomly from a list of local educators. Two more (including the secretary) are selected randomly from a list of local students, and the final two are drawn from the voter registry itself. Twelve more people are chosen from these lists as alternates to serve as pollworkers in the event one or more of the six principal members fails to show up. If an adjoining voting table has unneeded alternate pollworkers, they may be required to stand in for an absent principal member. A quorum is achieved with a simple majority (i.e., three members).

The selection process described above was subject to numerous delays. With a total of 18 names drawn per voting table (six principal members and 12 alternates) and over 20,000 voting tables in the country, over 360,000 citizens should have been trained to staff the voting tables. However, the CNE sent just 233,000 citizens the official notification telegram advising them of their selection for electoral service. Many of those chosen learned that their names had been drawn by word of mouth on the eve of the election. In addition, the delivery of pollworker credentials — a simple letter from the CNE — in most areas did not begin until the afternoon of November 6. Many pollworkers received their credentials on the day before the election, or even in the pre-dawn hours of November 8.

Delays also were evident in pollworker training, which consisted of a single three-hour class in which a video was presented. The entire training effort was executed by Simón Rodríguez University. According to a report issued November 7 by the university's rector, Andrés Pastrana, only 176,000 of those chosen for electoral service had received training by the day before the election. The CNE and Simón Rodríguez University extended training classes until the evening before the vote, pushing the total number of trained pollworkers to about 200,000. This figure suggests that an average of 10 pollworkers were trained for every voting table — short of the 18 prescribed by the election law but well above the six required.

Whether a sufficient number of trained and credentialed pollworkers would report for work on election day was a matter of some concern in the days before the November 8 vote. If a vacancy has yet to be filled at 10 a.m., the election law instructs pollworkers to incorporate party pollwatchers (*testigos*) as accidental members (*miembros accidentales*) of the voting table. Prior to the November 8 vote, many Venezuelans expressed worries that the voting tables would be staffed largely or even exclusively by party pollwatchers. This concern was voiced with particular vigor by representatives of the smaller political parties, which deployed fewer pollwatchers across the country. Nonetheless, IRI observers found on November 8 that less than 20 percent of all voting tables incorporated party pollwatchers as members, and in most of these cases only one or two pollwatchers were required to give the voting table its full complement of six pollworkers.

For the December 6 election, the number of party pollwatchers recruited to serve as pollworkers appeared to drop significantly, with over 90 percent of voting tables fully staffed by non-partisan citizens. Greater interest in serving as a pollworker may have improved the

attendance of the citizens chosen for electoral service.

The complexity of the voting process on November 8 meant that people took longer to vote than anticipated, creating long lines outside voting centers. While polls may close as early as 4 p.m., the election law requires voting centers to stay open as long as people are standing in line to cast ballots. IRI observers across the country saw hundreds of people (over one thousand, in one case) standing in line at 4 p.m. on November 8, and most voting centers were obliged to stay open until at least 7 p.m. At a few locations, people were still voting as late as 11 p.m.

In contrast, the relative simplicity of the presidential vote allowed for shorter lines, and the CNE reported that the last voting center closed at 5:30 p.m. on December 6. As noted, the same citizens who staffed voting tables on November 8 reported for electoral service again on December 6. Their experience with the relatively complex voting procedures in place for the legislative and regional elections seemed to allow the balloting in the presidential contest to proceed more smoothly.

Despite delays in the selection, accreditation, and training of pollworkers, IRI observers found that most of these citizens performed their duties with a laudable sense of responsibility. Like the voters who waited hours in line for the opportunity to vote, most pollworkers responded to mechanical difficulties and the sometimes slow pace of the voting process with a mixture of good will and stoicism.

Voting Machines

The voting machines were manufactured in the Philippines by an Omaha-based company, Election Systems & Software. Each of the 7,000 voting machines cost \$5,500. Under its contract with the CNE, Indra was responsible for providing a trained technician to run the machine at each voting center during both the November and December elections. Regulations stipulate that the technician is the only person allowed to touch the machine.

Each machine comes equipped with a pair of keys which must be turned simultaneously to start the machine and to perform other operations, such as transmitting results. CNE and Indra officials indicated that one key is for the technician and the second is for one of the voting table presidents, but IRI observers noted that many technicians either kept both keys or gave one to the senior military official providing security for the voting center.

The election law stipulates that voting should begin at 6 a.m., but IRI observers found that problems with the voting machines delayed the opening on November 8 until at least 9 a.m. at most voting centers (and as late as 11 a.m. in a few). Significantly fewer problems were reported on December 6, probably due to the technicians' accumulated experience and additional training provided during the interim.

One common mechanical problem sprang from the Okidata printer attached to the voting machine, which in many cases balked at printing the official opening document showing that no votes had yet been registered. Once this document had been printed, most machines accepted ballots easily. Another problem arose when the ballot box (*urna*) under some voting machines

was filled to capacity late in the day. Some pollworkers responded by rocking the ballot box back and forth in an effort to force the ballots to settle to the bottom. In several instances, IRI observers saw pollworkers remove ballots from the ballot box, a violation of norms that was nonetheless performed without ill intent. This problem was less pronounced on December 6, when voters used just one ballot instead of two.

According to Juan Navarro, the director of Indra's election operations in Venezuela, 537 of the 7,000 voting machines in place on the morning of November 8 failed to function properly. This figure represents just under eight percent of all voting machines and conforms closely to the experience of IRI's observers. Ten percent of the voting machines monitored by IRI on November 8 either failed to perform or ceased functioning during the course of the day, obliging pollworkers at those voting centers to switch to manual voting. The number of voting machines that failed to function on December 6 was reduced to 60, a figure representing less than one percent of the total.

Vote Count

Venezuela's new voting machines are fairly simple. When a voter inserts a marked ballot into the machine, it records the vote electronically and stores this information for transmission later in the day. A single voting machine can be programmed to receive ballots from up to three voting tables, but each machine is programmed to accept only ballots from those specific tables. While ballots from different tables are mixed in the ballot box under the machine, the machine's electronic records are sufficiently sophisticated to generate separate official tally documents (*actas de escrutinio*) for each individual table.

Official closing procedures indicate that the voting table president and the Indra technician must simultaneously turn their keys to allow the machine to transmit the results. The actual transmission of results via modem requires less than a minute once a satisfactory connection is made. IRI observers found on November 8 that repeated attempts to achieve a connection were necessary in quite a few instances, but in the end the transmission of results proved to be easier than suggested by trial runs. As in many other features, the December 6 vote was characterized by noticeable improvements in the ease of transmission *vis-à-vis* the November 8 balloting.

According to CNE procedures, results are transmitted to the corresponding State Electoral Council's counting center (*centro de totalización*), and thence to the CNE's central counting facility in Caracas. Once the results are transmitted, the voting table president and the machine's technician are instructed to turn their keys again to allow the machine to print the official tally document. Each machine prints two original copies of each voting table's tally document, each of which produces four carbon copies (for a total of ten per voting table). This process is repeated for each table at the voting center. Copies are provided for the CNE, the State Electoral Council, the voting table president and secretary, and accredited political party pollwatchers. IRI observers saw several voting center closings at which these ten copies proved insufficient given the large number of party pollwatchers, leading to a number of acrimonious exchanges.

Only after results are transmitted and official tally documents are printed is the ballot box opened and its contents transferred to an official storage box. Copies of the various official documents produced during the day, including the official tally document, are placed in a pair of envelopes together with the machine's Flash Card, the storage device upon which the machine electronically records election results. At this point, military personnel assume responsibility for transporting the election materials to central collection facilities at the state and national levels (see "Election Environment: Security Forces," below).

As noted, Venezuelans voted manually at some 17 percent of voting tables representing roughly 10 percent of the electorate. By all accounts, the procedures for counting ballots manually were slow and tedious. This is largely because the marked ballots, which are identical to those used at automated voting tables, are difficult for the human eye to read.

The fact that many voting centers remained open late on November 8 forced the CNE to delay the release of its first bulletin until 11:30 p.m. On a positive note, the CNE continued to compile results in the intervening hours, and the bulletin presented election returns representing fully 45 percent of ballots counted. In contrast, the last voting centers closed on December 6 at 5:30 p.m., and the television networks proclaimed a victor before 7 p.m.

Challenges

When a political party pollwatcher decides to challenge (*impugnar*) a given aspect of the electoral process or an alleged irregularity, a formal protest document is issued. On election day, challenges issued by party pollwatchers are noted on the official tally document (*acta de escrutinio*) and referred to the State Electoral Council. However, because the people staffing the state election bodies have little election experience or legal expertise, most challenges are referred to the CNE. The CNE's legal investigative chamber (*Sala de Sustanciación*) reviews challenges and makes recommendations to the seven members of the CNE, who may accept or reject its findings. The election law requires the CNE to issue a ruling within 20 days.

The overwhelming scale of Hugo Chávez's victory left many party pollwatchers with little desire to challenge the particulars of the electoral process at the voting center level. As a result, the number of formal challenges was significantly lower than in recent electoral cycles.

IV. Election Environment

Voter Participation

Voter turnout rose significantly in the 1998 elections, reversing a two-decade trend toward lower participation. Turnout in the December 6 elections was 64 percent, and the corresponding figure for November 8 was 54 percent. In the case of the November balloting, the complexity of the voting process meant that people took longer to vote than anticipated, forcing some voting centers to remain open as late as 11 p.m. It seems very likely that many citizens returned to their homes without voting rather than wait in line for hours under the hot sun. The amount of time the average voter had to wait in line on December 6 was significantly less.

Interest in the 1998 elections was high for several reasons. Analysts agree that Hugo Chávez succeeded in inspiring large numbers of disenchanted Venezuelans to participate in the democratic process. By the same token, many Venezuelans — whether rightly or not — came to fear a Chávez victory and turned out to vote in large numbers for Henrique Salas Römer, his strongest adversary. In addition, many Venezuelans were curious about the new voting machines and wanted to see them at work.

Another factor contributing to voter turnout was a project conducted by IRI and Fundación Participación Juvenil (FPJ), a Venezuelan civic group. The two organizations carried out a media campaign designed to increase participation by young Venezuelans in the 1998 elections. The project employed television, radio, newspapers, and the Internet, and approximately \$3.4 million in air time was donated by Venezuelan television stations (and some other media outlets) to broadcast the campaign's public service announcements.

The Mass Media

Venezuela's mass media are extremely diverse. Four television networks, 30 individual television stations, and 400 radio stations are currently on the air. One television station and one radio station are owned by the state. The largest television network, Venevisión, typically captures over 60 percent of all viewers and exports its soap operas and comedies around the world. The network is owned by Gustavo Cisneros, whose Cisneros Group is also the largest shareholder in Univisión, the leading Spanish-language network in the United States. With holdings in 39 countries, Cisneros is often described as one of the most influential men in Latin America.

In addition, approximately 100 newspapers are currently operating in Venezuela. Two respected dailies, *El Universal* and *El Nacional*, are published in Caracas and enjoy large readerships. While IRI did not conduct a methodical study of the news coverage provided by these papers or by the television networks, both major newspapers printed reports on all the major political parties and presidential candidates on a daily basis during the campaign. Venezuelan newspapers generally do not endorse a specific party or candidate.

Several of the television networks — most notably Venevisión — conducted exit polls on both November 8 and December 6. However, broadcasters are barred from releasing results of exit polls until the CNE issues its first bulletin. On November 8, the extension of voting hours in some locations to 11 p.m. delayed the release of the CNE's first bulletin until 11:30 p.m. The fact that official results based on a large proportion of the total number of ballots cast were made available at that time rendered the exit polls less useful. On December 6, the networks announced the Chávez victory before 7 p.m., well before the CNE issued any results. It was unclear whether the CNE had approved this action.

Organizations other than parties also produced television and radio spots to influence voters. One non-governmental organization, known as The People are the Change (*La gente es el cambio*), aired a series of television advertisements urging caution regarding the Chávez campaign's key proposal to convene a constituent assembly. The People are the Change reportedly received generous donations from the Venezuelan business community.

Campaign Finance

Campaign finance is little regulated in Venezuela. In one of its few specific statements on the subject, the election law prohibits anonymous contributions (article 202). According to Rafael García Borges, the CNE's second vice-president, the intent of this article is to prevent the use of public funds or laundered money in election campaigns. The election law also requires parties to keep records indicating how funds are spent (article 203). These records must be made available to the CNE upon request, though the CNE has rarely audited campaign expenditures in the past.

The new election law promulgated in December 1997 created the CNE's National Office of Finance for Political Parties and Electoral Campaigns and charged it with monitoring compliance with the campaign finance rules laid down by the election law and CNE resolutions. However, a director has yet to be appointed for the office, highlighting the lack of attention paid to the question of campaign finance.

A Venezuelan civic group, *Queremos Elegir*, issued a study of compliance with the election law's campaign finance rules in October 1998. The study placed particular emphasis on article 212, which limits a candidate to two minutes of television advertising per channel per day. Moreover, the law holds that air time may not be accumulated by foregoing advertising on a given day. According to *Queremos Elegir*, a number of presidential candidates violated this norm on an almost daily basis during September (though the Chávez campaign did not). However, sources in Venezuela's advertising industry pointed out to IRI observers that article 212 is widely held to refer to paid advertising, and broadcasters will typically transmit a spot free of charge at least once for each segment of air time purchased.

The Security Forces

The Venezuelan armed forces regularly provide security and logistical support to the CNE. Since 1963, the armed forces have conducted operations under the name *Plan República* to support the electoral council in administering elections; *Plan República VIII* was the Venezuelan military's operation to support the December 6 election. The election law stipulates that the CNE is entitled to such support, which is coordinated by the military's highest authority, United Command No. 1 (CUFAN No. 1).

Under *Plan República*, the armed forces coordinate the distribution of election materials and provide security to the CNE, its dependent institutions at the state and municipal levels, and voting centers. On election day, members of the armed forces control access to the voting center to ensure public order, prohibit access to people who lack valid credentials or are carrying firearms, and respond to altercations as requested by voting table presidents. They also ensure that pregnant women, the elderly, the blind, and the handicapped gain immediate access to the voting center. After the polls close, military personnel are instructed to transport the marked ballots and other election materials to designated collection sites and to provide security at the voting center until Indra representatives remove the voting machines.

IRI observers found that the military personnel placed at voting centers on November 8 and December 6 were mostly polite and well informed about their responsibilities. At a few voting centers military personnel displayed a somewhat exaggerated sense of caution, thoroughly frisking everyone entering the locale and temporarily confiscating cigarettes, matches, and cellular phones, though it is unclear whether these items are prohibited.

In general, however, IRI's observers judged that the armed forces played a vital supporting role in the conduct of the elections. Touring the *Plan República* command center on November 7, IRI staff concluded that the armed forces had successfully mounted a highly complex logistical operation. At no time did IRI observers see any indications of partisan bias on the part of the members of the armed forces executing *Plan República*.

Reports indicated that the armed forces had made preparations to respond to any threat to public order during the elections. For example, IRI staff met with military officials on the eve of the November 8 elections in the large oil-producing state of Zulia, where a close gubernatorial race and heated rhetoric generated worries about possible post-election violence. The official in charge described how the armed forces had devised a contingency plan called *Plan Soberanía* (sovereignty) to respond to potentially violent public demonstrations after the November 8 or December 6 elections. With military personnel placed at all voting centers and a sophisticated communications system, he said, the armed forces could respond quickly to any disturbance. In the event, both the November 8 and the December 6 elections were conducted in an atmosphere of calm.

V. Political Situation

"I swear before God, before the fatherland, and before my people — and upon this moribund constitution — that I will complete this democratic transformation and give the republic a new constitution appropriate to a new age." Venezuela's iconoclastic new president, Hugo Chávez Frías, took liberties with his country's traditional oath of office when he was sworn in February 2, 1999. But after he captured 56 percent of the vote in the December 6 presidential election, popular support for President Chávez's plans is not in doubt.

It was not the first time Chávez had defied the established order, but on this occasion Venezuela's long-governing elites stood by and watched — and, in some cases, cheered. Rafael Caldera, the 83-year old outgoing president who had come to personify Venezuela's discredited political class, watched impassively. The new president of the Senate, Luis Alfonso Dávila, who assisted Chávez in his 1992 coup attempt, was visibly moved. And the Supreme Court, represented at the inaugural by its president, Cecilia Sosa Gómez, had just two weeks earlier issued a ruling clearing the way for Chávez to act on his principal campaign promise: to give Venezuela a new constitution. One hour after his inauguration, President Chávez signed a decree ordering the National Electoral Council (CNE) to hold a referendum within 90 days on whether to convene a constituent assembly to write a new constitution.

Chávez was born in the rural state of Barinas in the southwest of Venezuela in 1954. In 1975, when he was 21, he graduated from the Venezuelan Military Academy, an institution he

describes as the key force that has shaped his life. Over the course of his 17 years of service in the Venezuelan armed forces he rose to the rank of lieutenant colonel and was given command of a paratrooper battalion.

During the first week of February 1992 — exactly seven years before his inauguration as the elected president of Venezuela — Chávez led an armed revolt against the government of President Carlos Andrés Pérez. Chávez's followers launched a second coup attempt in November 1992, but it too failed. President Caldera, who was elected in 1993, pardoned Chávez in 1994, a move widely viewed as an effort to win the sympathy of Chávez's many supporters.

Chávez has justified the coup attempts by arguing that the existing democratic government was wholly corrupt and could not be reformed. Opinion polls taken in 1992 indicated broad popular support for the coup attempts, with most Venezuelans agreeing with Chávez's evaluation of the Pérez government. (President Pérez was subsequently removed from office and jailed on corruption charges. He remained under house arrest until his election to the Senate on November 8, 1998.) Chávez continues to express pride in his leadership of the rebellions, and he purposefully postponed the military parade traditionally held at presidential inaugurations from February 2, the day he was sworn in, to February 4, the seventh anniversary of the first coup attempt.

Second place in the presidential election went to Henrique Salas Römer, a former governor of Carabobo state and founder of a new party called *Proyecto Venezuela*. In the last months of the campaign, Salas Römer effectively positioned himself as the candidate with the best chance of defeating Chávez. In the end, however, many Venezuelans came to view him as beholden to the widely disparaged political establishment — an ironic fate for a politician with a long record as a maverick. A frequent critic of AD, it was Salas Römer who ousted the party from the governorship of Carabobo state. By the same token, many leaders of COPEI have long regarded Salas Römer, a former *copeyano* himself, as a traitor to the party.

In the end, Salas Römer suffered the same fate as Irene Sáez, the former mayor of the wealthy Caracas district of Chacao and a former Miss Universe. Sáez topped opinion polls in late 1997 and early 1998, but by October her support had fallen to single digits. Analysts agreed that her biggest mistake was her decision to accept the presidential nomination of COPEI. In doing so, Sáez abandoned the stance that made her popular with the Venezuelan public, namely, that of an outsider defying the existing political order. Running an effective campaign without the support of an established political party is an imposing task in a country twice the size of California, a fact that makes Sáez's decision to accept the COPEI nomination easy to understand. However, opinion polls show the erosion of her support accelerating after COPEI adopted her as its candidate.

In the same way, Salas Römer was hindered rather than helped by the embrace of the two traditional political parties. With just one week remaining before the presidential vote, AD's leadership asked its candidate, Luis Alfaro Uceró, to renounce the candidacy, but the 76-year old *caudillo* refused. Alfaro Uceró gave a televised interview in which he defied the party's leadership and asserted that the candidacy could not be taken from him. In response, AD's National Executive Committee voted overwhelmingly to repeal the nomination given to Alfaro

Ucero, expel him from the party, and embrace Salas Römer as its candidate.

The leadership of COPEI waited to see how the drama within AD would play out before proceeding, but the outcome was the same. On November 30, the National Directorate of the social Christian party announced that it was withdrawing its support for Sáez, who chose to accept her removal more gracefully than Alfaro Ucero. She remained the candidate of several small parties, including her IRENE movement, and ultimately garnered just under three percent of the vote. Sáez is running for the governorship of Nueva Esparta in a March 14 special election called after the death of the state's recently re-elected governor. In a surprising development, the *Polo Patriótico* has adopted her as its candidate.

Chávez was quick to criticize the last-minute jockeying by AD and COPEI, arguing that Salas Römer had become the candidate of the political establishment. Tracking polls from the last week of the campaign showed that support for Salas Römer fell by over five percentage points in the days after he was endorsed by the traditional parties. Many of those voters cast ballots for Chávez.

On the stump, Chávez constantly attacked Congress, an institution long controlled by the traditional political parties. But the new legislature elected on November 8 is a far cry from its immediate predecessor. Chávez's *Polo Patriótico* captured roughly one-third of the vote in legislative balloting, a share that gave it the largest faction in Congress. (See Appendix III for details.) Retired Colonel Luis Alfonso Dávila, a key figure in the 1992 coup attempts, was elected to the Senate's presidency. Dávila represents the largest party in the *Polo Patriótico* coalition, *Movimiento V República* (MVR). Enrique Capriles, a 26-year old COPEI deputy, was chosen to lead the Chamber of Deputies as the result of an understanding between the social Christian party and the *Polo Patriótico*. AD was locked out of all leadership positions for the first time in 40 years. The *Polo Patriótico* also won eight governorships on November 8; the father of President Chávez, Hugo de los Reyes Chávez, was elected governor of the family's home state.

Early indications are that the policies of President Chávez will be more moderate than those promised by Candidate Chávez. On the campaign trail, Chávez issued socialist promises of more generous government handouts and nationalist curbs on foreign capital. At times he suggested he would nationalize new foreign oil installations and suspend international debt repayments. In his first week in office, the new agriculture minister revealed new measures to protect the agricultural sector from imports, and other officials announced the creation of military brigades to take part in economic development activities ranging from health to road construction.

As he prepared to take office, however, Chávez appeared to embrace some policies championed by reformist leaders elsewhere in Latin America. He announced on January 27 that he might use an "enabling law" being debated by Congress to enforce cuts in Venezuela's bloated public sector and to introduce a value-added tax. Chávez announced that he would attempt to renegotiate Venezuela's foreign debt with the Club of Paris creditor governments, but he insisted his administration would take no unilateral action. And he promised to respect all existing agreements and contracts under which Venezuela's oil sector has been opened to foreign

multinationals.

Nonetheless, the new administration's economic policies seem bound to disappoint a population longing for the easy prosperity of the 1970s, when Venezuela enjoyed an unprecedented oil boom. Analysts have suggested that President Chávez — in an effort to distract an anxious populace — will attempt to focus national attention on his plans for political reform. This strategy may be in play, but the seriousness of the new president's desire to re-engineer Venezuela's basic political institutions is not in doubt. The January 22 Supreme Court ruling that cleared the way for a referendum on whether to convene a constituent assembly to draft a new constitution was unexpected, but it has allowed political reform to rise to the top of the agenda.

Venezuelans are surprisingly united in their desire for political reform. After months spent describing the proposed constituent assembly as the mechanism by which Chávez would install a dictatorship, the traditional parties have recently changed their tune. COPEI's National Directorate voted on January 18 to support Chávez's call for a referendum on a constituent assembly to draft a new constitution. The social Christian party's about-face apparently played a key role in the election of COPEI's Enrique Capriles to the presidency of the Chamber of Deputies. AD also has climbed aboard the reform bandwagon. On February 3, AD's Congressional delegation proposed a set of ground rules for the referendum and the eligibility of prospective members. Members of Chávez's *Polo Patriótico* may disagree with some details of AD's proposal, but its general thrust differs little from that of the new president's initiative.

Relations between Venezuela's new government and the United States have gotten off to a warmer start than anticipated. Shortly after Chávez's landslide victory at the polls, the Clinton administration granted the president-elect the U.S. visa that it had denied him out of concern over his role in the 1992 coup attempt. Chávez met briefly with President Clinton on January 27; White House aides later told the press that the two men had "good chemistry." On a more substantive note, the U.S. and Venezuela signed a landmark tax treaty on January 25. Capping eight years of negotiations, the treaty — if ratified — would eliminate double taxation on U.S. companies operating in Venezuela and vice versa. The accord would also reduce taxes for multinationals and facilitate the repatriation of profits. The agreement is the first of its kind between the U.S. and a South American country. An investment treaty between the U.S. and Venezuela is also expected to be signed this summer, which would guarantee capital mobility, compensation in case of expropriation, and international arbitration of trade disputes.

Nonetheless, the international economy is unlikely to do President Chávez any favors as he begins to move from promises to policies. The sharp drop in world oil prices in 1998 hit Venezuela hard, leaving the government — which depends on oil revenues for some 60 percent of its revenues — awash in red ink. The fiscal deficit may reach nine percent of gross domestic product in 1999, and inflation is near 30 percent. The recent collapse of the Brazilian currency has heightened pressure on the *bolívar*, which Goldman Sachs recently declared the most overvalued currency in the world. President Chávez may have no choice but to devalue and place the blame squarely on his predecessor. "The president is going to receive more of a disaster than a crisis," according to Ali Rodríguez, the new energy minister.

Regardless of how skillful President Chávez's economic team turns out to be, the largely poor and disenchanted Venezuelans who voted for him are unlikely to prosper in 1999. According to opinion surveys cited by analyst Roberto Bottome, 82 percent of Venezuelans believe their country is the richest in the world; another recent study found that more than 85 percent of Venezuelans feel cheated out of the benefits of the oil boom. In this view, the country's widespread poverty is attributed to corrupt officials who abscond with the state's oil earnings. Corruption is indeed widespread in Venezuela, but analysts agree that the fall in living standards since 1982 is largely due to the collapse of world oil prices. President Chávez today enjoys the good will of nearly all Venezuelans, but it remains to be seen how he can restore the country's lost prosperity — or explain to his fellow citizens that the petroleum-based prosperity of the 1970s may be gone forever.

Appendix I

The International Republican Institute in Venezuela

Since 1994, IRI has supported the efforts of Venezuelan citizens to strengthen the country's democratic institutions, with particular emphasis on increasing youth participation in the political system. Since that year, IRI has conducted three successful projects with a Caracas-based civic group, Fundación Pensamiento y Acción (FPA), with funding from the National Endowment for Democracy (NED). The first IRI/FPA project — entitled Sustaining Economic Reform in Venezuela — culminated in a February 1995 conference at which experts from Venezuela, Latin America, and the United States addressed the “Challenges and Social Benefits of Economic Modernization.” The panelists addressed specific issues such as inflation, social security, and privatization. Afterwards, FPA conducted follow-up workshops, one of which dealt with the liberalization of the country's petroleum industry. This particular workshop was held the same week Venezuela's Congress began debating that issue.

In 1995 and 1996, IRI and FPA, in conjunction with Consultores 21, a Venezuelan polling firm, sponsored a public opinion poll devised to provide an overview of how Venezuelans view democracy in their country. The poll showed that a significant majority of Venezuelans believe in democracy, but many lack understanding of the rights and responsibilities of the citizenry in a representative democratic system.

In 1997, IRI and FPA coordinated a series of workshops and training events in four states to educate promising young leaders about democratic values and mechanisms for boosting civic participation. Over 200 people participated in this intensive training program, including representatives of the media, state and local government, business organizations, political parties, civic and religious groups, universities, and secondary schools. The *Democracia Activa* manual developed for the project also had a “train the trainers” component, so that many participants have been able to replicate the workshops within their own organizations.

Most recently, IRI and another Venezuelan civic group, Fundación Participación Juvenil (FPJ), conducted a pre-election project designed to increase participation by Venezuelan citizens in the 18-30 age bracket in the 1998 elections. IRI and FPJ designed a pathbreaking “get out the vote” campaign targeting younger voters in Venezuela's largest cities. With innovative video and audio spots, the project's wide-ranging media campaign employed television, radio, newspapers, and the Internet. Crucial to the success of the project was \$3.4 million worth of in-kind donations from media outlets, with Venezuela's two largest television networks leading the way. In addition, IRI and FPJ held a series of televised forums bringing together young Venezuelans and some of the leading presidential candidates, including Henrique Salas Römer and Irene Sáez (Hugo Chávez declined to participate). These encounters provided a unique opportunity for candidates to address issues important to youth.

Appendix II
Results of Venezuela's Presidential Elections:
December 6, 1998

Candidate	No. of Votes Received	Percentage of Votes Received
Hugo Chávez Frías	3,673,685	56.20
Henrique Salas Römer	2,613,161	39.97
Irene Sáez Conde	184,568	2.82
Luis Alfaro Uceró	27,586	0.42
Miguel Antonio Rodríguez	19,629	0.30
Alfredo Ramos	7,275	0.11
Radamés Muñoz León	2,919	0.04
Oswaldo Sujú Raffo	2,901	0.04
Alejandro Peña Esclusa	2,424	0.04
Doménico Tanzi	1,900	0.03
Ignacio Quintana	1,256	0.02
TOTAL	6,537,304	—

Source: CNE, <http://elecciones98.cantv.net/>

Appendix III
Results of Venezuela's Legislative and Gubernatorial Elections:
November 8, 1998

Political Party	Presidential Candidate	Governors	Deputies	Senators
Polo Patriótico (total for coalition)	Hugo Chávez	8 ¹	69	18
Movimiento V República (MVR)		3	46	12
Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS)		3	17	5
Patria Para Todos (PPT)		1	6	1
Acción Democrática (AD)	Luis Alfaro Ucero ²	8	62	19
COPEI	Irene Sáez	5	27	7
Proyecto Venezuela (PV)	Henrique Salas Römer	1	20	4
La Causa Radical (LCR)	Alfredo Ramos	1	6	1
Convergencia	none	1	3	2
Apertura	Miguel Rodríguez	0	3	1
IRENE	Irene Sáez	0	2	0
Renovación	Claudio Fermín ³	0	2	0
Others	—	0	9	0
TOTAL	—	23	203	52

Source: CNE, <http://elecciones98.cantv.net/>

¹ This figure includes Francisco Arias Cárdenas, who was re-elected governor of Zulia as the candidate of La Causa Radical (as well as a number of other parties). A longtime Chávez supporter, he assisted in the 1992 coup attempt. As a political party, however, La Causa Radical did not join the pro-Chávez coalition.

² AD withdrew its support for Luis Alfaro Ucero less than one week before the presidential vote, throwing its support behind Henrique Salas Römer. COPEI abandoned Irene Sáez a day later and also backed Salas Römer. At the request of AD and COPEI, the CNE ruled on December 4 that ballots cast for these two parties would count for Salas Römer — despite the fact that the ballot showed Alfaro Ucero as the candidate of AD and Sáez as the candidate of COPEI.

³ Claudio Fermín withdrew from the race in mid-November, but, like Alfaro Ucero and Sáez, his picture did appear on the ballot.