

Election 2018

Further assurances for the sake of democratic coexistence

Next May 20, Venezuelans are getting ready to vote their next president for 2019-2025 and local legislators. As in every election held in Venezuela, this one will count on the voting assurances system established in 2004, granting voters full security, transparency and reliability of results that will be, one more time, the faithful expression of people's will.

Multiple assurances have been added to this event; they are enshrined in two legal instruments entered into by political stakeholders, endorsed by the National Constituent Assembly (ANC) and assumed as such by the National Electoral Council (CNE).

First one is the outcome of a round of discussions, better known as Santo Domingo Round Table, between the Venezuelan government and opponents. The sessions were held from December 2017 through February 2018. The President of the Dominican Republic, Danilo Medina, spearheaded the negotiations, with the mediation of the former Head of the Spanish Government, José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, and Latin American foreign ministers. Eventually, opposition representatives abstained from signing the final agreement prepared at the Round Table, albeit subscribed by Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro.

Second agreement was executed, under the CNE aegis, by political parties and candidates running for president.

Both agreements contain the requirements from opposition political parties, on the understanding that many such requirements have long formed part of the voting assurances system and enforced by the CNE for a fair while.

The Santo Domingo Compact

This document, entitled *For democratic coexistence*, covers six election-related topics included by the CNE as part of voting. One of them referred to holding the election for president on April 22, 2018, a date assumed by the CNE.

Election-related topics include, among others:

1. “Government and opposition agree to request the United Nations Secretary General to establish an election accompaniment and observation delegation, as well as a representation of accompanying countries, signatories of this agreement.”

✓ *On February 19, the CNE extended an invitation to the UN Secretary General for the setup of an election accompaniment and observation delegation.*

2. “On the date of the call for the election, national polling stations shall be returned to their original sites; voters shall be apprised of it to the largest extent possible.”

✓ *On February 20, the CNE reported on the reestablishment of polling stations to their original sites. Earlier, by the election of the National Constituent Assembly, some polling stations had been moved elsewhere as a result of the turmoil lifted by political parties and in order to safeguard voters.*

✓ *The whole list of polling stations has been posted on the CNE website.*

3. “All technical audits shall be conducted on the set standards, not inferior to the standards used in the elections of October 7, 2017 and December 6, 2015. Particularly, the aforementioned technical audits shall cover all the system components, including protocols and international observation.”

✓ *The schedule for the audits of the automatic voting system is in place.*

✓ *Last March, an agreement was entered into by and between the CNE and the Latin American Council of Poll Experts (CEELA) for the involvement of a mission of the latter in the audits.*

4. “Poll workers shall be timely chosen by lots under the appropriate supervision of the electoral power and notified accordingly.”

✓ *In the original schedule for the presidential election on April 22, 2018, poll workers needed to be chosen on March 15. Following reschedule and the incorporation of the election of local legislators, the draw was also deferred.*

5. “The register of voters shall remain open until its update both in and out of Venezuela, from February 8 through February 15.”

✓ *Special workdays for enrollment and changes in and out of Venezuela, envisaged by the CNE as part of the election schedule were set and accomplished on February 10-20. In view of the reschedule of the presidential election, this special activity would remain effective until March 10.*

The Caracas Compact

On March 1, under the CNE auspices, political parties and candidates running for president executed an agreement on election assurances. The parties to the agreement required concurrent election of the Venezuelan president and local legislators the second half of May. In light of such requirement, the CNE set May 20 for the election. As an agreement between the parties concerning the actions expected from the parties, many items do not directly involve the CNE. Furthermore, the agreement reasserts some matters raised under the Santo Domingo Compact and already addressed by the CNE.

Signatories arrived at the following arrangements:

1. “Government and opposition shall require the United Nations Secretary General to establish an election accompaniment and observation delegation, as ample and qualified as possible to cover all the election stages, in addition to any other delegations from any other international organizations and agencies, as mutually agreed. For such purposes, a joint commission of the parties shall meet with the United Nations Secretary General.”

2. “Equitable access to domestic and foreign, public and private mass media and social networks during the election campaign. The parties promise to strictly observe sensible access to public and private mass media.”

✓ *On March 10, the CNE approved the regulations on the election campaign.*

✓ *In accordance with the Electoral Processes Organic Law, mass media have a duty to make a sensible coverage and strike a balance in terms of time and space when reporting the activities of candidates.*

3. “By the date of the call for the election, polling stations shall be moved back to their original sites; voters shall be apprised of it to the largest extent possible.”

✓ *The CNE had reported on the reestablishment of polling stations well in advance, on February 20. By early March, all polling stations had been moved back to their original sites.*

✓ *The whole list of polling stations has been posted on the CNE website since April 09.*

4. “All technical audits shall be conducted on the set standards, not inferior to the standards used in the elections of October 7, 2017 and December 6, 2015. Particularly, the aforementioned technical audits shall cover all the system components, including protocols and international observation.”

✓ *Upon reschedule of the election and the relevant activities, the CNE resolved to repeat the audit of the register of voters, completed previously, on February 26, in order to include the movements recorded until March 10. By late March, the CNE had completed some customary audits that form part of the voting assurances system. Poll experts from the Latin American Council of Poll Experts (CEELA) witnessed the audit.*

5. “Poll workers shall be timely chosen by lots under the appropriate supervision of the electoral power and notified accordingly.”

✓ *Last March 19, poll members and state and municipal boards were chosen by lots from the data base of the register of voters.*

✓ *Data base of the register of voters and software used for this step were audited and certified on March 14.*

✓ *The CNE approved dissemination by means of a poster of the steps to establish polling stations.*

6. “Backup sites of political parties for the election of May 20 shall be located in proximity no nearer than 200 meters from polling stations.”

✓ *The CNE resolved on April 10 that backup sites of political parties may not be located less than 200 meters from polling stations.*

7. “The parties shall require the CNE a renewed term to open the register of voters in and out of Venezuela ahead of the election for the Venezuelan president in May 2018.”

✓ As soon as this agreement was signed on March 1, the CNE instructed reschedule of all activities, including reactivation of the special workdays for enrollment and update of data in the register of voters, through March 10.

8. “During the election campaign, the national government shall abstain from nationwide compulsory simultaneous TV and radio broadcasts.”

9. “Properly enrolled candidates and their supporting political parties shall hold, severally, coordination meetings with the military command of Plan República to seek and receive assurances of security and free movement.”

10. “A high-ranking team shall be created to deal with unexpected events and ensure the smooth running of the election. The taskforce shall be composed of one representative from each candidate and supporting political party.”

✓ Last April 10, the CNE set up the High-Level Team including representatives of the political parties that back each one of the five candidates running for president.

11. “The CNE shall set a reasonable schedule for the election of state and municipal legislative councils.”

✓ In embracing this agreement as of its own, the CNE, besides rescheduling the presidential election, approved as well the concurrent election of legislative councils.

12. “The parties represent and warrant to acknowledge the election results produced by the CNE in the upcoming election of May 20.”

The National Electoral Council, a public branch of the Venezuelan government, took on the contents of these agreements, countersigned by the National Constituent Assembly, as the best means to help restore democratic coexistence and ensure Venezuelans settlement of disagreements in peace and relying on a secure, trustworthy and transparent voting system.