

**OCCASIONAL REPORT ON VENEZUELA'S
POLITICAL ELECTORAL CONTEXT**

**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 ³aggression'

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 were 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

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 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: isubsequ 3 Tmposiing

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

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

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 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

Although opposition parties had not applied gender and age quotas,

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 in

, DIRECTOR,
AMERICAS PROGRAM, THE CARTER CENTER

, PROGRAM COORDINATOR,
THE CARTER CENTER, VENEZUELA

, EXTERNAL CONSULTANT,
THE CARTER CENTER, VENEZUELA

, PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE,
THE CARTER CENTER IN VENEZUELA

, ADMINISTRATIVE COORDINATOR,
THE CARTER CENTER, VENEZUELA

, EXTERNAL CONSULTANT,
THE CARTER CENTER, VENEZUELA