

# YOUTH VOTER REGISTRATION COSTS & CHALLENGES VENEZUELA

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# This case study contains a comprehensive description of one of the central elements of any electoral process: voter registration. It analyses the specific registration challenges faced by young Venezuelans.

According to Carlos Alberto Urruty Navatta, specialist in Latin American electoral law and president of the Electoral Court of the Uruguayan Republic until 2010, “[t]he organisation of a reliable electoral roll constitutes the basic pillar on which the entire electoral structure rests and, when examining a country’s electoral process, is a decisive factor in assessing its credibility.”<sup>1</sup> The voter register must also be an accurate snapshot of the population, reflecting variations and growth over time.

In Venezuela, the right to vote is guaranteed by the Constitution for all 18-year-old citizens without distinction.<sup>2</sup> However, as Venezuela has an active model of voter registration, citizens who are, or will be, of voting age at the time of an electoral event need to register to be able to vote. The National Electoral Council (Consejo Nacional Electoral – CNE) has legally mandated responsibility for the voter register. Registration is voluntary and optional, while the registration and updating process is permanent and continuous, requiring the CNE to: allow all citizens who turn 18 to register anytime prior to the announced cut-off point for specific elections; and regularly publish the voter register cut-off, whether there is an electoral process underway or not.

This active model does not, however, generate a voter register which accurately reflects the voting age population. There are large discrepancies between the number of first-time voters in the voter register and population data on this age cohort. These discrepancies are due to two factors. First, there are insufficient concrete measures in place to facilitate voter registration, especially for first-time voters. Second, Venezuelan emigrants are greatly under-represented in the voter register. According to the Interagency Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants in Venezuela (R4V), as of June 2024, there were more than 7.7 million Venezuelans residing out-of-country, of whom at least 3.3 million are estimated to be people of voting age who have never registered to vote.<sup>3</sup>

Currently, there is no official data on the cost of elections nor detailed cost estimates undertaken by civil society organisations (CSOs). The latest available data is from 2015. In terms of costs to the voter, no fee or payment is required for registration, but travel is required to one of the CNE regional offices located in state capitals or to special registration points. The

transportation costs, whether tickets for public transport or fuel costs for a private vehicle (on average between €0,90 and €5 a litre), have to be met by the voter.

This is the main obstacle to youth voter registration. The CNE has failed to increase the number of pre-election registration sites across the country and, more generally, does not effectively promote the inclusion of young people. This disincentivises the youth vote, which is seen as unfavourable to the government.

A series of recommendations are offered, primarily for action and advocacy by civil society. There are also recommendations in relation to the facilitation of registration (addressed to the CNE). Even though voter registration is far from the most pressing issue for Venezuelans, it deserves greater support, especially as CSO registration campaigns are achieving results - some 600,000 first-time voters registered to vote in 2024.

*This case study does not cover the period following the 2024 presidential elections, and therefore does not include analysis or contextual information regarding the events and political developments that took place thereafter.*

1 Carlos Alberto Urruty Navatta, “Los Registros Electorales”, in *Tratado de derecho electoral comparado de América Latina*, ed. Nohlan (et al), (México: Fondo de cultura económica, 2007), 463.

2 Constitución de la República Bolivariana de Venezuela (1999, revised 2009), art. 64. [English translation available here.](#)

3 “Refugiados y migrantes”, [La Plataforma de Coordinación Interagencial para Refugiados y Migrantes \(R4V\)](#).

# Background

The National Constitution is the fundamental text in relation to voter registration, together with organic laws, which provide for the execution of the constitutional mandates in relation to each component of the electoral process. The most relevant for voter registration are the 2002 Law on the Electoral Branch and the 2009 Organic Law on Electoral Processes, which regulate the voter register and other key aspects of the electoral process and establish that the “administration of the electoral register is the competence of the National Electoral Council”.<sup>4</sup> In addition to these two laws, there are other relevant regulatory acts, such as the Regulation of the Organic Law on Electoral Processes, which establishes norms regarding the publication of the voter register. The CNE’s responsibility for the administration of the voter register is shared with other public authorities.<sup>5</sup>

The Organic Law on Electoral Processes defines the voter register as “[t]he database containing the registration of all citizens who, in accordance with the Constitution and Venezuelan law, can exercise the right to vote”.<sup>6</sup> Voter registration is continuous, which means that new voters can be registered at any time of the year and at any stage of the electoral cycle.<sup>7</sup> The voter register is also permanent and public registration can never be legally interrupted. All Venezuelans have the right to register or update their data at any time, regardless of whether there is an election upcoming. The CNE is responsible for publishing the voter list

every three months in both election and non-election years.<sup>8</sup>

There is, however, a cut-off point before elections in order for the CNE to establish eligibility, but this does not require the closure of the voter register and is only relevant to the electoral process in question.

There are two ways of registering in Venezuela. First, the standard registration process, which is only available at the CNE regional offices in the state capitals, and is available anytime of the year. And the second, during the special process before elections, which takes place in various parts of the country. There are 23 regional CNE offices (one in each state capital). The number and location of special registration and data review sites varies depending on the electoral process. During the 2024 presidential elections there were 315 registration sites in addition to the regional CNE offices.

Given that the voter register is public, the CNE does not need to share it with political parties. All political parties can access the register when it is published in the electoral bulletin, but it is only available in a hard copy. The voter register does not contain any age identifiers – only gender, state and municipality.

Safeguards for the voter database are technologically advanced. The system is digital and is automatised, with new registrations and changes added

directly to the system. Online registration is not, however, envisaged. As a safeguard to prevent double registration, thumbprints are biometrically verified.<sup>9</sup> Since 2020, the entire electoral database, which includes the voter register, is managed by a controversial Argentinian software company, EXCLÈ, which was sanctioned by the US Office of Foreign Assets Control in 2020 and accused by Venezuelan parliamentarians of improper collection of biometric data in 2021.<sup>10</sup>

The Venezuelan model of active registration depends on the willingness of new voters to register. Registration is not compulsory and must be done in person in the capital cities of each federal state.<sup>11</sup> The legal voting age is 18, although citizens who will turn 18 by the scheduled date of an upcoming election are entitled to register in advance. To register, a citizen is required:

- to have turned 18 or to turn 18 before election day,
- to possess an original, laminated identity document, regardless of its date of expiry,
- to present a request in person at the Regional Electoral Office in the region of residence or at special registration sites, when and where these are activated,
- to provide a valid address for polling station assignment (not a legal requirement),
- where appropriate, to demonstrate a legal out-of-country residency document issued by the host-country.

4 Ley Orgánica de Procesos Electorales (2009), art. 31. [Text is available here.](#)

5 Ibid., art 18.

6 Ibid., art 27

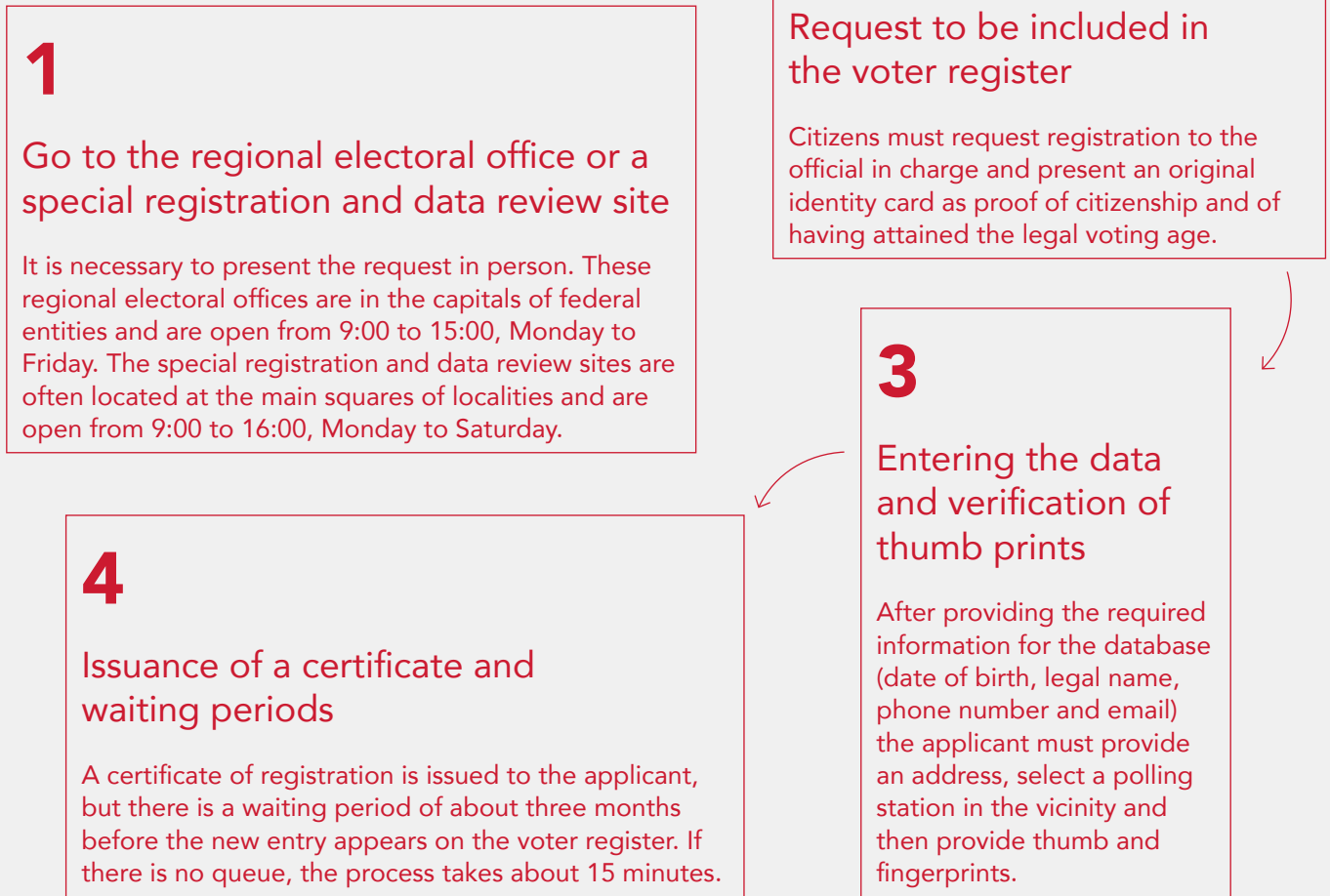
7 Ibid., art. 27.8 Ibid., art. 28.

9 Ibid., art. 27.

10 See complaint by parliamentarians against EXCLE for improper data processing.

11 Constitución de la Republica Bolivariana de Venezuela, art. 64.

The four steps in the voter registration process:



According to the latest (2011) demographic estimates and household surveys (2023) conducted by the National Statistics Institute (INE),<sup>12</sup> by 2025 it is estimated that Venezuela will have 26,345,108 citizens of voting age. There are, however, only 21,392,464 Venezuelans registered to vote according to the latest voter register update (April 2024). As the CNE does not provide data disaggregated by age, all estimates of unregistered voters are unofficial and are based on the full voter register, population growth and the number of young people in possession of an identity card.

Since 2020, there have been significant discrepancies between the number of new voters included in the

voter register and the total population. There are two reasons for this:

- The high number of young people in Venezuela who are not registered to vote,
- The under-representation of Venezuelan emigrants in the voter register. Venezuelans residing out-of-country face two main barriers: some are registered voters but have not updated their residency data since leaving Venezuela, while others have reached voting age but cannot register due to restrictive registration requirements.

In 2023, for the first time in three years, the number of newly registered voters was greater than the number of

persons removed from the register. This was the result of the unprecedented mobilisation by civil society organisations (CSOs) and political parties, including those historically inclined to boycott, during the 2024 presidential election. The following table presents an analysis of the new entries and the removal of registrations from the voter register.<sup>13</sup>

Millions of Venezuelans residing abroad were prevented from voting in the 2024 presidential elections because of the imposition of extra-legal requirements by Venezuelan consulates, in particular proof of residence abroad for a period of three or five years. It was also reported that registration was not possible in some countries where Venezuelan consulates failed to facilitate the process.

12 Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas, “La transición demográfica de la República Bolivariana de Venezuela 2000- 2050”, 2024, 11.

13 The variations were established according to the following methodology: **Increase:** if the value of “Total” is higher than the value of the date before, **Decrease:** if the value of “Total” is lower than the value of the date prior to.

Date of the Voter List	Number of persons registering to vote in Venezuela	Number of persons registering to vote out-of-country	Number of immigrants registering to vote in local elections (non-Venezuelan)	Total	Percentage change	Voter register status
15/07/2021 (preliminary)	21,052,882.00	108,030.00	108,030.00	21,391,620.00	0.00%	Decrease
15/07/2021 (Final)	20,929,987.00	107,967.00	107,967.00	21,267,813.00	-0.58%	Decrease
31/01/2022	20,891,952.00	107,945.00	107,945.00	21,229,389.00	-0.18%	Decrease
30/04/2022	20,876,141.00	107,927.00	107,927.00	21,213,454.00	-0.08%	Decrease
31/07/2022	20,821,198.00	107,904.00	107,904.00	21,158,016.00	-0.26%	Decrease
31/08/2022	20,793,027.00	107,892.00	107,892.00	21,129,519.00	-0.13%	Decrease
30/09/2022	20,758,507.00	107,878.00	107,878.00	21,094,629.00	-0.17%	Decrease
31/03/2023	20,675,478.00	107,836.00	107,836.00	21,010,514.00	-0.40%	Decrease
31/05/2023	20,639,399.00	107,670.00	107,670.00	20,973,127.00	-0.18%	Decrease
31/07/2023	20,614,880.00	107,619.00	107,619.00	20,948,155.00	-0.12%	Decrease
31/08/2023	20,606,304.00	107,607.00	225,599.00	20,939,510.00	-0.04%	Decrease
2/10/2023	20,694,124.00	107,496.00	225,500.00	21,027,120.00	0.42%	Increase
31/01/2024	20,699,007.00	107,591.00	225,493.00	21,032,091.00	0.02%	Increase
29/02/2024	20,769,160.00	107,706.00	228,291.00	21,105,157.00	0.35%	Increase
29/03/2024	21,333,031.00	69,189.00	228,707.00	21,630,927.00	2.49%	Increase
16/04/2024	21,324,253.00	69,211.00	228,241.00	21,620,705.00	-0.05%	Decrease

Figure 1. Overview of voter registration (Source: Electoral gazettes published on the CNE website from 2021 to 2024)<sup>14</sup>

Where registration was possible, it was delayed by about two weeks.<sup>15</sup> According to the Interagency Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants in Venezuela (R4V), as of June 2024, there were more than 7.7 million Venezuelans living abroad of which at least 5 million are estimated to be potential voters. Of this number, 3.3 million are estimated to be young people who have never registered to vote.

To this figure must be added the potential voters resident in Venezuela but not registered as voters. At the conclusion of the 2024 registration campaign, this group of mostly young people was estimated to number between 2.9 and 3 million. Failure to register is due in part to the location of registration sites (see below), but also, since 2021, to the absence of CNE voter education campaigns to promote youth voter registration. According to CSO representatives, most young people are unaware of registration requirements.

With regard to those in pre-trial detention, the Observatorio Venezolano de Prisiones (a leading local human rights organisation) notes that there are multiple barriers to the exercise of the right to vote due mainly to the failure of prison authorities to issue permits to allow detainees out to register or to vote.<sup>16</sup> There are no polling stations in detention facilities. In addition, many pre-trial detainees lack identity documents. According to the Observatory's findings, a significant number of detainees are not registered to vote, despite the fact that at least 70% of people in prisons and 85% of people in detention facilities have not been sentenced and therefore enjoy the right to vote. In 2023, the Observatorio Venezolano de Prisiones estimated that there were 29,565 people in detention facilities,<sup>17</sup> but no official data is available. The last time the CNE provided data on detainees was during the 2015 parliamentary elections and, despite requests from CSOs, no updates were provided for subsequent elections (2020, 2021 and 2024).

Trans or intersex persons cannot register with their new names. Venezuela has yet to legally recognise gender identity and name changes. As a result, many trans or intersex people cannot register to vote in accordance with their gender identity. The Venezuelan Observatory Against LGBTI Violence considers this a form of violence.<sup>18</sup>

Venezuelan indigenous communities are recognized as citizens of Venezuela, but since 2020, the CNE has downgraded their electoral regime to a second-grade election, without a direct, secret vote.<sup>19</sup>

For these above reasons, the current voter register cannot be considered a true reflection of the Venezuelan population. The CNE is partly responsible for this situation by raising barriers to voter registration and by failing in its duty to provide voter information for first-time voters. These concerns have been raised internationally and the UN Human Rights Committee has provided pertinent recommendations in its 2023 country report.<sup>20</sup> The European Union's 2021 Electoral Observation Mission also noted these concerns.

14 CNE, "Gacetas Electorales", 2020 to 2024. Following the 2024 presidential election, the webpage of the CNE was shut down following alleged hacking. To access the information, follow the link.

15 "Barriers to access to the electoral register for Venezuelans abroad", Alerta Venezuela, April 30, 2024.

16 Observatorio Venezolano de Prisiones, *Informe Anuale 2021* (Caracas: Observatorio Venezolano de Prisiones, 2022), 111-112.

17 Observatorio Venezolano de Prisiones, *Informe Anuale 2023* (Caracas: Observatorio Venezolano de Prisiones, 2024), 41.

18 "Visibilizando la violencia transfóbica", Observatorio Venezolano de Violencias LGBTIQ+, March 31, 2024.

19 "Pueblos indígenas en Venezuela pierden su derecho al voto secreto y directo", Acceso a la Justicia web (blog), August 7, 2021.

20 UN Human Rights Committee (HRC), Concluding observations of the Human Rights Committee: Venezuela, CCPR/C/VEN/CO/5, (Geneva: HRC, 2023), 11.

## Case Study

Elena, a young woman living in the Puerto Ordaz municipality of Bolivar state, wants to register to vote in the presidential elections, but there is not much information available. After asking around, she realises that she has to go to the electoral office in Ciudad Bolivar, which is two hours away by public transport. In total, the journey will take four hours. She realises that, depending on the day, she will have to take unpaid leave from work or miss classes at university and spend at least half a day travelling to register. She plans the trip so that it does not clash with the day in which her community has water. Finally, she decides to travel on Tuesday and realises that she will have to spend at least five dollars on public transport for the round trip and asks her family for help to cover the fare.

Elena leaves her home at 7 am to be among the first to arrive at the electoral office when it opens at 9 am. She has to change buses halfway to Ciudad Bolivar because of a breakdown. The trip is getting longer and more expensive for Elena, but, finally, she arrives at the electoral registration office at 10 am and is told by the others waiting in line that the registration has been suspended due to an electricity blackout – everyone has to wait for the electricity to come back on. At 1 pm, the power comes on, however the CNE staff have left for lunch and the process is paralysed for another hour. At 2:15, registration resumes, and Elena manages to register at 3 pm. After registering, Elena heads for home excited and tired, she still has not had lunch and must finish her university homework. On the way back, Elena encounters a protest that blocks traffic and it takes her three hours to get home. In total, the process has taken her a full working day. She will now have to wait another three months before being able to verify that her details were uploaded correctly and, if not, she is not sure if she will have the chance to travel again. Her family needs her help at home.

José, a young man who lives in Caricuao, a populous municipality, in the Venezuelan capital, Caracas, decides to register to vote in the presidential elections. He learns that there is a special registration and data review site in the main square of Chacao municipality and, since it is on his way to his work, he decides to go. The trip should take him about forty minutes from his home. He takes the metro to the special pre-election registration site, but José has to leave the metro and take a bus because of yet another breakdown. When he finally arrives at the special registration and data review site, it is 11 am and he is told that there are no officials available to process his registration so will have to come back another day. José goes to his work disillusioned and unregistered. On his way to work, he wonders whether voting is worth all this.



# Voter Registration Costs

The constitution establishes that the CNE, the electoral management body, is responsible for determining the voter register budget through a decision of its board.<sup>21</sup> The CNE presents its general elections budget to the National Assembly as part of the General Budget of the Nation. The Civil Registry and Voter Registration Subcommittee submits budget requests to the CNE board of directors for the approval of budgetary resources.

The electoral administration has not published the election-related budget since 2015, even though the Organic Law on Public Administration establishes transparency as one of the principles governing public authorities. There are currently no cost estimates for electoral processes from official sources or projections from civil society organisations and the last available budget for elections is from 2015, the year in which the preparations for the 2016 regional and local elections took place.<sup>22</sup> In that year, the CNE requested the National Assembly to allocate US\$501,111,387 (approximately €459,950,000) from the annual budget. Of that total, US\$271,101,000 (around €248,830,000) was for expenses related to the 2016 elections, of which only US\$60 million (€55 million) was allocated to the organisation of voting, the remaining budget was used for voter awareness campaigns, voter registration, deployment of military personnel and the costs associated with the UNASUR electoral observation mission. Costs for voter registration are not a separate budget category.

Since 2016, the CNE has not made its budgets public, nor has the National Assembly. In addition to budgetary opacity, Venezuela has been de facto dollarized since 2019, the year in which

the reference rate ceased to be the bolivar (Bolívar Fuerte). The US dollar, initially an informal means of coping with the country's severe hyperinflation, has become the most widely used currency, but, as it is not legal tender, there is a significant gap between actual costs and costs expressed in bolivars.

The electoral management body does not require any fee or payment to register to vote. Since, however, voter registration takes place at the regional CNE offices in state capitals, first-time voters face transport costs. In the case of young Venezuelans who live outside the state capital, travel can take between one to eight hours.

There is currently no consistent, institutionalised policy to alleviate distance and travel barriers to voter registration. On the contrary, young first-time voters often have to take several buses to get to their state capital. On average it takes from one to five hours to travel to the voter registration centre, but in Bolívar state, the largest in Venezuela, the journey can take up to eight hours on public transport. While costs vary from state to state, in the best of cases, it would cost the equivalent of \$2 (€1.70) in public transport. For those living further away, the cost might rise to the equivalent of \$4 (€3.50) to \$7 (€6.00). For reference, the minimum wage in Venezuela is \$4 a month, (approximately €3.60)<sup>23</sup> and continues to decrease every month due to hyperinflation.

Special measures such as temporary registration and data correction sites across the country are activated with varying degrees of efficacy in different elections, but when not available, there is no alternative to the offices in the state capitals.

## Technical support for voter registration

In 2006, The Carter Centre published a document proposing technical support for improvements in the Venezuelan electoral process.<sup>24</sup> The organisation noted shortcomings and suggested amendments to the legal framework focusing mainly on enhancing confidence in the automated voting system. The proposals, some of which were addressed in the lead-up to the amendment of the Organic Law on Electoral Processes, included establishing a legal deadline within which political parties and citizens could obtain authentic and accurate copies of the voter lists, a mechanism to facilitate the integration of the civil register and the voter register, clarification of legal and administrative remedies available to citizens excluded from the voter register and the development of better education programmes for the electoral administration based on their years of service. Establishing a legal deadline by which political parties and citizens can obtain copies of the voter register was addressed by requiring the CNE to publish voter register updates every three months and the proposal on the development of better education programmes for the staff was also implemented.

In accordance with the 2009 amendments to the Organic Law on Electoral Processes requiring that the civil register be automated to enable transmission of data to the voter register, in 2021, a technical test for the integration of the civil and voter registers was conducted by the CNE. The test addressed the deletion in the voter register of those recorded as deceased in the civil register. In 2022, testing was conducted on the incorporation

21 Constitución de la República Bolivariana de Venezuela, art. 238.

22 Eugenio Martínez, "El voto en Venezuela es uno de los más baratos del mundo", Puzkas.com, October 5, 2016.

23 "El salario mínimo en Venezuela se estancó en 2023 en menos de 4 dólares", Voz de América, December 16, 2023.

24 Carter Center, *Reflexiones y aportes para la reforma de la legislación electoral venezolana*, (Atlanta: The Carter Center, 2006).

of address verifications in both registers. However, following the changes to the CNE board in 2023, the process of integration was halted and has yet to resume. The automatic transmission of data from the civil register to the voter register would significantly reduce the number of unregistered young people and would ensure greater participation in elections.

## Electoral participation

The voter register is not disaggregated by age or demographic group, only gender, federal state and municipality. Similarly, the electoral management body does not disaggregate by age in the publication of partial updates on voter turnout. Therefore, most available data on youth participation has been collected by civil society organisations during accredited or ad hoc election observation.

It is also important to note that electoral regulations allow Venezuelans abroad to vote only in presidential elections or constitutional referendums. Although the regulatory framework requires the updating of the out-of-country voter database, the register was not fully updated for the 2024 presidential elections, which resulted in an estimated 5 million potential electors being either denied registration or the possibility of updating their data. The out-of-country voter register has not been available since 2018. Furthermore, contrary to the provisions of the constitution, the Organic Law on Electoral Processes requires out-of-country voters to have either a legal or a permanent emigrant status, excluding short-term or temporary modifications of the register for out-of-country voters. It is estimated that there are more than 7.7 million Venezuelans living abroad, of whom at least 5 million are of voting age.<sup>25</sup>

In terms of voter turnout, this analysis focuses on the three elections that took place between 2020 and 2023. At the time of writing, no official turnout figures have been published for the July 2024 presidential elections.

During the December 2020 parliamentary elections, 21,048,398 people were registered to vote of whom 229,489 were out-of-country voters. As these voters cannot vote in parliamentary elections (only presidential elections and referendums), this number must be subtracted from the total number of voters. The 86,809 citizens disqualified from voting should also be subtracted. Finally, the number of deceased persons should also be deducted from the total. Consequently, the total number of eligible voters for the 2020 parliamentary elections was 20,710,421.<sup>26</sup> A total of 6,251,080 Venezuelans voted in these elections, which corresponds to a turnout of 30.18% of registered voters.<sup>27</sup>

Since 2020, electoral observation groups and CSOs have raised concerns about the substantial number of young people not included in the voter register as well as the Venezuelans residing abroad who should have been able to update their data but were prevented from doing so by the closure of the out-of-country voter register. At the time, it was estimated that approximately 1,500,000 young people of voting age were not included in the voter register.<sup>28</sup> By 2023, the estimate had reached 3,500,000. This is of great concern as the current voter register does not accurately reflect the number of eligible voters.

During the local and regional elections of November 2021, the total number of people registered to vote was 21,159,846 of whom 229,859 were out-of-country voters who could not vote in these elections and should be

subtracted from the total. After also subtracting the 819 citizens disqualified from voting, the total number of persons eligible to vote stood at 20,929,987.<sup>29</sup> A total of 8,942,150 Venezuelans voted in these elections – a turnout of 42.72%.<sup>30</sup>

Although there was no election that year, the 2022 voter list at the cut-off date for the three-month period established by the electoral law, indicates that there were 21,094,629 registered voters.<sup>31</sup> In 2023, during the consultative referendum on the territorial delimitation of the area claimed by Venezuela, known as Guyana Esequiba, the number of citizens registered to vote was 21,027,120.<sup>32</sup> The voter turnout for this event is strongly disputed. In a first report, the CNE claimed that more than 10 million votes were cast. Given that voters had to vote for five separate referendum questions, it was understood that 2.1 million voters participated. In a second report, however, the president of the CNE stated that 10 million people had voted. To date, the number of voters has not been clarified, nor have any detailed results been provided to clarify whether the figure of 10 million corresponds to votes cast or people turning up to vote.<sup>33</sup>

The first increase in the voter register for many years, albeit small, was noted in 2023, with a larger increase in 2024. This is attributable to the promotion of the registration of first-time voters by CSOs and the focus on the presidential election of that year.

25 “[Cifras Clave](#)”, La Plataforma de Coordinación Interagencial para Refugiados y Migrantes (R4V), December 31, 2023.

26 CNE, “[Gacetas electorales](#)”, August 7, 2020.

27 “[CNE presentó Segundo Boletín correspondiente a Elecciones Parlamentarias 2020](#)”, CNE Poder Electoral, December 8, 2020.

28 Deisy Martínez, “[Organizaciones llaman a jóvenes a inscribirse en el Registro Electoral porque es un derecho](#)”, Efecto Cocuyo, May 25, 2021.

29 CNE, “[Gacetas electorales](#)”, August 26, 2021.

30 “[Participación electoral 2021](#)”, CNE, December 2, 2021.

31 CNE, “[Gacetas electorales](#)”, January 23, 2023. See footnote 14 above.

32 CNE, “[Media declaration](#)”, October 30, 2023, accessed June 4 2024.

33 Victor Amaya, “[Confusión sobre la participación en el referendo del Esequibo](#)”, RFI, December 4, 2023.

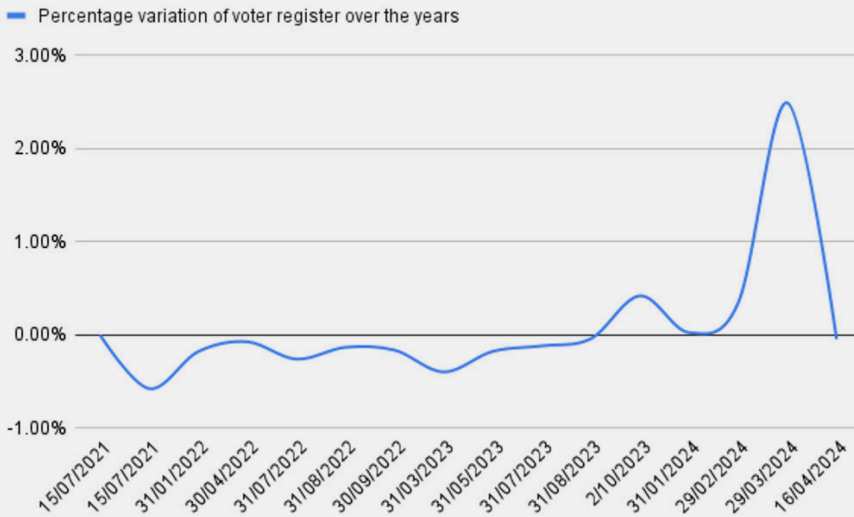


Figure 2. Voter registration trends (Source: Electoral gazettes published on the CNE website from 2021 to 2024)<sup>34</sup>

Although not an official, national election, it is important to consider the register of voters for the primaries conducted by the opposition in which a total of 20,948,155 Venezuelans were eligible to vote,<sup>35</sup> including in-country and out-of-country voters. This calculation was made using the in-country voter register and the data from the special registration process conducted for Venezuelans resident abroad. Of these, an estimated 2.1 million Venezuelans voted, representing a turnout of 10.02%.<sup>36</sup>

For the 2024 presidential election, the voter list issued by the CNE established that 21,620,705 Venezuelans were eligible to vote. Of these, and despite estimates that at least 5 million eligible Venezuelans reside abroad, only 69,211 out-of-country voters were registered. According to the second update, issued by the CNE president in a statement to the media, voter participation in the elections was 59.97%, corresponding to 12,386,669 voters.<sup>37</sup> This statement was based on 96% of tallied results. The results of these elections were, however, contested, and the opposition coalition published a parallel vote count indicating that with 83.5% of results tallied, the voter turnout was 60.08%, which corresponds to 10,888,475 voters.

Year	Electoral process	Total registered voters	Number of new inscriptions	Estimated demographic growth	Voter list	Electoral turnout
2020	Parliamentary elections	21,048,398.00	251,398.00	2,713,440.00	20,710,421.00	6,251,080.00
2021	Regional and Municipal elections	21,159,846.00	388,759.00	2,732,484.00	20,929,987.00	8,942,150.00
2022	No electoral process	21,094,629.00	2,507.00	2,713,440 (projection until 2020)	Not applicable	Not applicable
2023	Referendum on the Esequibo	21,027,120.00	139,784.00	2785875 (projection until 2025)	20,801,620.00	Still unclear
2023	Unity platform primaries	20,948,155.00	Not applicable	2785875 (projection until 2025)	20,948,155.00	2,452,996.00
2024	Presidential elections	21,620,705.00	11,131.00	21,392,464.00	12,386,669	21,392,464.00

Figure 3. Comparative voter turnout: 2020 to 2023 (Source: CNE; INE; Comisión Nacional de Primarias)

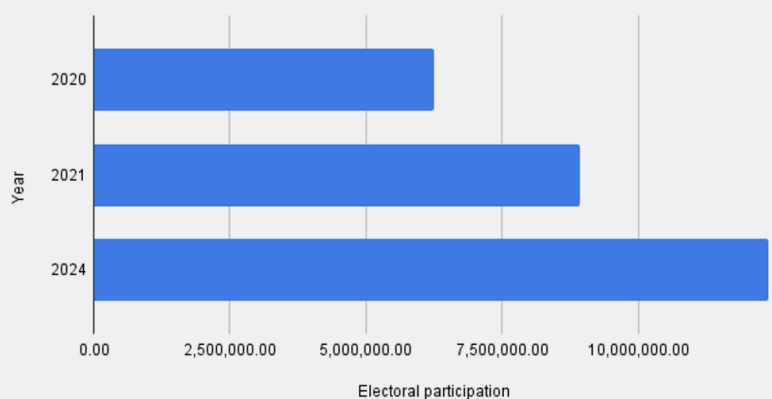


Figure 4. Voter turnout (Source: CNE)

34 CNE, "Gacetas electorales" from 2020 to 2024.

35 "Informe de observación elección primaria", Observatorio Electoral Venezolano (OEV), October 22, 2023.

36 Comisión Nacional de Primarias (@cnprimariave), post, Oct 25, 2023, 5:59 a.m.

37 Luigino Bracci, "Elvis Amoroso lee segundo boletín con resultados de elecciones presidenciales", YouTube video, 10:04, posted by "lubrio", August 2, 2024.

# Barriers to Youth Voter Registration

Between the 2010 and 2015 elections, the CNE conducted special voter registration and voter register update operations, which lasted approximately five months and were carried out continuously in more than 1,500 sites distributed throughout all 335 municipalities. These special days were accompanied by effective communication campaigns to promote the registration of new voters.

However, since 2015, there has been a significant decline in these types of activities. After the 2015 parliamentary elections, the number of personnel recruited by the CNE to register voters before electoral cut-off dates decreased considerably as did the number of registration sites. In this period there were between 200 and 500 registration sites available, but many of them were not easily accessible to the public. There was also very little active promotion through institutional media.

The results of the electoral update periods organised by the CNE between 2017 and 2020 were more limited. The most significant comparison can be made with the 2015 parliamentary elections, for which the CNE held 157 days of special voter registration

update operations.<sup>38</sup> This operation also included 1,568 registration sites to facilitate the completion of the administrative procedures. From 2017 onwards, the CNE has reduced the number of operational days as well as the available sites. Compared to the 157 days for the 2015 parliamentary elections, the CNE only had 10 days for the 2017 regional elections, 20 for the 2018 presidential elections and 17 for the 2020 parliamentary elections. This decrease in the number of days available is mirrored by the decline in the number of registration sites activated, from a high of 1,568 for the 2015 parliamentary elections to 200 for the 2017 regional elections, 531 for the 2018 presidential elections and 551 for the 2020 parliamentary elections.<sup>39</sup>

The exception to this downward trend was the 2021 regional and municipal elections, when a special registration and data update period was approved with 1,500 registration sites authorised across the country. Some were, however, established in unpublicised locations and the 45 days allocated proved insufficient for the estimated two million unregistered young people.

In 2023, 500 registration sites were

approved throughout the country for a 40-day update period in preparation for the 2024 presidential election. This special registration period was set up by the Civil Registry and Voter Registration Sub-Committee of the CNE in response to more than 1,700 requests from CSOs and youth movements. All of the approved registration points were mobile, meaning that they did not have a fixed site, moving from one place to another without information being provided on dates and times. In most cases, the registration points were located at the headquarters of political initiatives linked to the ruling party. When the referendum on Guyana was called, the registration process was suspended on 20 October after only 14 days. A combination of initial delay, the lack of information on the location of mobile registration points and the cancellation undermined the efficacy of the process.

For the recent presidential elections of July 2024, only 315 fixed sites were approved for registration and data updates over a limited 29-day period. Over 50 of these points were relocated throughout the process. Significantly, the CNE did not conduct a communication campaign to promote the activity and did not provide sufficient information to the public.

The overall result is that the total number of citizens of voting age not included in the voter register has increased to unprecedented three million citizens, according to CSO estimates, and that Venezuelans who have changed their place of residence (or have emigrated) have not been able to update their polling station location. In addition, the register has not been adequately

Fixed points for registration and data update over the years

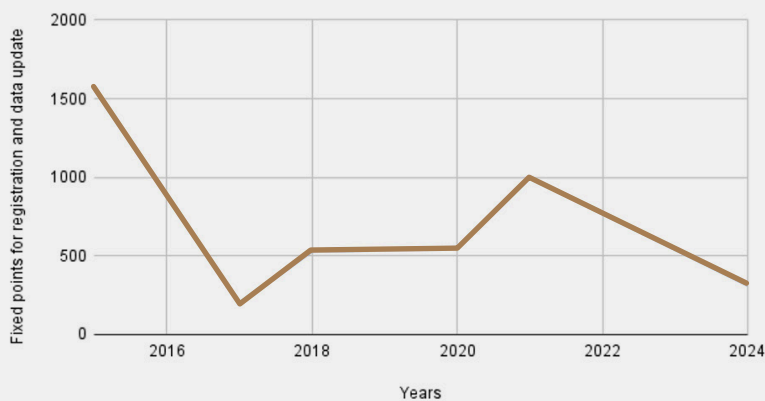


Figure 5. Number of fixed voter registration sites activated (Source: CNE)

38 “Registro Electoral Débil”, Observatorio Global de Comunicación y Democracia (OGCD), October 8, 2019.

39 Red Electoral Ciudadana, “Informe 3er Ciclo del Examen Periódico Universal VENEZUELA”, May 20, 2020.

revised to correct errors. As stated above, the current voter register does not reflect the reality of the Venezuelan voting-age population.

Undoubtedly, the main barrier faced by first-time voters remains institutional opacity. The CNE has failed to develop constructive policies to guarantee the effective inclusion of young people by increasing the availability of registration sites or the roll-out of information campaigns. This has not only resulted in millions of unregistered young people being unable to exercise their right to vote, but it has also created barriers for voters of all age cohorts in up-dating their registration data.

## Communication barriers

Since 2017, the CNE has failed to promote voter registration and voter data update processes effectively as shown by the limited duration of the 2018 and 2020 special registration and review periods and the inadequate number of available registration sites. During these periods, there was no voter education relating to registration on either state-owned or private media. In its report on the 2017 regional electoral process, the CSO alliance Red Electoral Ciudadana noted that messages and press statements from the CNE were “practically non-existent”.<sup>41</sup> The only way for citizens to find out where to register or update their data prior to every election since 2017, has been by accessing the CNE’s web portal, where data was often incomplete or hard to find. There has not been a CNE communication campaign since 2021, when information was provided on the issue of gender-based violence.<sup>42</sup>

As a result, young Venezuelans have insufficient information about voter registration requirements, or about where to go to register. More importantly, they have not developed an understanding of the importance of voting. The lack of institutional campaigns to inform and educate the Venezuelan

Years	Fixed registration and review sites in Venezuela	Period (days)
2024	315	29
2023	500	14 <sup>40</sup>
2021	1000	45
2020	551	17
2018	531	20
2017	200	10
2015	1568	157

Figure 6. Fixed voter registration sites and length of the review period (Source: CNE)

population about their political rights has had a profoundly negative impact on overall political participation and leads to increased apathy.

## Geographical barriers

In implementation of article 28 of the Organic Law on Electoral Processes, which establishes that registration is a permanent process, Venezuelan citizens can register to vote in an upcoming election (prior to the cut-off of the voter register) at the regional electoral offices (Oficinas Regionales Electorales) located in federal state capitals. The CNE currently operates 23 regional offices throughout the country, which is a relatively limited offering given the population. Furthermore, this spread does not consider the varying demographics across the 23 states. Thus, states with a higher population density have the same number of offices (one) as states with significantly lower population.

The barriers to the registration of young people are related to travel time, which, depending on the location of the relevant regional electoral office, involves between one to five hours travel time, as well as the cost of the transport.

## Financial barriers

In order for young people to travel to the regional electoral offices they may have to spend the equivalent of \$2 (€1.70) in public transport. This cost can rise to the equivalent of \$4

(€3.50) to \$7 (€6.00) for those whose itinerary is longer or more complex. This is a significant cost given that the minimum wage in Venezuela is equivalent to \$4 (€3.50) per month, the value of which decreases monthly due to hyperinflation. It is also necessary to point out that in most cases, young people would need to ask for a day off work to register, which normally means foregoing payment.

## Structural barriers

State institutions are not exempt from the ongoing crisis in Venezuela. They also face power outages, lack of internet service and even sewage problems, all of which can prevent people from accessing these services. Additionally, while official opening hours are set from 9 am to 3:00 pm, they are often not respected with office opening times at the discretion of the office concerned.

## Political identity barriers

Currently, political programmes do not effectively consider the needs and priorities of young Venezuelans. Both government and opposition political parties tend to develop adult-centric narratives and their leadership structures fail to attract the interest of younger voters. Voto Joven’s youth report showed that, following the 2021 election, only 3.5% of elected representatives were young people between the ages of 21 – the minimum age to run for office.<sup>43</sup>

41 Red Electoral Ciudadana, “Informe Especial REC Jornada de Inscripción y Actualización del Registro Electoral” (Caracas: REC, 2020).

42 CNE, “Registro Electoral 2021,” YouTube video, 1:00, posted by “CNEVenezuelaOficial,” March 14, 2021.

43 Voto Joven, “Informe Juventudes: una visión de la apertura de espacios políticos para formar nuevos liderazgos juveniles”, July 2020, 28-38

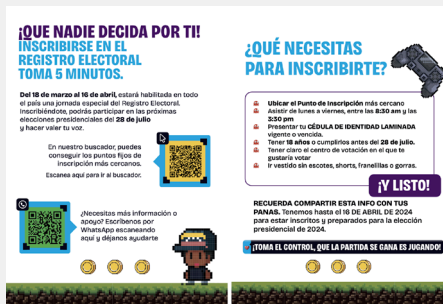
# Youth Voter Registration Initiatives

There are several organisations promoting the electoral participation of Venezuelan youth, but their impact is moderate to low due to limited outreach.

There have been no nationwide institutional voter registration campaigns since 2021, when three television advertisements providing details on the electoral process were broadcast. Consideration should be given to making these campaigns a permanent feature of the voter registration process.

As of 2024, numerous CSOs and youth initiatives have demonstrated a commitment to promoting voter registration, including Hagamos La Tarea, Toma el Control, Movimiento Vamos, Hola Tú insíbete RE, JuventudesXVenezuela, Misión Venezuela Joven and Voto Joven. Their initiatives, to some extent, address the gap created by the lack of voter information from the CNE. The following is a brief summary of the main voter registration activities carried out by these organisations.

Hagamos La Tarea (Let’s Do the Homework) emerged as an initiative of students from the Central University of Venezuela, who used their wide reach on social networks to encourage youth participation and provide information on the 2024 special registration and data update period, including the location of special registration and data review sites and the voter registration requirements. Their user-friendly bot on Telegram kept track of young people who had registered and allowed them to share their experiences of registration, successfully connecting with young people through social media.<sup>45</sup>



Toma el control, promotion of voter registration, 2024.

↑ **Toma el Control** (Take Control) was an initiative that used gamer aesthetics and dynamics to get the attention of young people to enhance participation in the presidential elections. Throughout the electoral process, different challenges were set, turning voter participation into a game.<sup>46</sup>



Movimiento Vamos, promotion of voter registration, 2024.

↑ **Movimiento Vamos** (Let’s Go Movement) is a group of young people from universities in Caracas organised to promote youth participation. Their activism mainly takes the form of informing, orienting and mobilising young people both to register and to vote through face-to-face activities in universities, squares and transport hubs throughout the country.<sup>47</sup>



Hola tú insíbete RE, promotion of voter registration, 2024.

↑ **The Hola Tú insíbete RE** (Hi! Get Registered) initiative grew out of a group of young people from different political parties who came together to share, via social media, information about voter registration. The initiative started in 2023 and has made it possible for politically-active young people to conduct joint strategic actions to enhance youth voter registration.<sup>48</sup>

45 “hagamoslatareave”, Instagram

46 **Toma el Control**, Instagram

47 **VAMOS**, Instagram

48 **Hola Tú, insíbete RE**, Instagram



## Lessons Learned

**The main lesson learned is the need to develop narratives to overcome the polarisation and politicisation around voter registration in order to present voting rights as integral to demands for youth rights, irrespective of political allegiances.**

Recent experience underlines the evident benefits that derive from developing creative alliances for youth outreach. A key factor in generating positive results in youth registration was the inclusion of universities and the education sector, political parties and the business community in the campaigns.

The experience with innovative learning-through-gaming activities underlines the importance not only of gamification but also of the use of socialisation codes and expressions particular to young people in gaining engagement and acceptance. Rather than lecturing young people on the responsibilities of citizenship, it is more productive to treat them as citizens capable of making demands and offering proposals. A narrative of self-expression which gives voice to

young people's opinions needs to be developed. Young Venezuelans want to be listened to, not manipulated.

Regarding communication campaigns, the main lesson learned was the importance of using interactive videos and images to engage young people with the content rather than imposing narratives of accountability. Campaigns that made use of POV (point of view) videos and tutorials on how to sign up were the most successful. Young people respond best to advice from people their own age, who understand their experiences and their aspirations. As senior political leaders do not speak in a way that appeals to young people, there is scope for more engagement on the part of the youth wings of political parties across the ideological spectrum in promoting youth participation.

Voto Joven successfully mobilised young people to register to vote with friends or in groups. Young people often lack motivation or feel uneasy entering regional electoral offices on their own and are more willing to participate when there is a social dimension (for example, registering together with friends, classmates, workmates or neighbours). Voto Joven's achievement was to make registration a collective rather than an individual experience.



# Recommendations

## Institutional

- The CNE should regularly conduct special voter registration and data update operations in all 335 municipalities as well as for out-of-country voters. Registration sites should be made available in proportion to population density and for an extended period of time: at least 180 days, which is the period of time that recent data suggests is required for all unregistered voters to register, with the current resource allocation.
- It is important to increase the number of registration and data review sites to overcome the main barrier to youth registration: the need to travel to the regional offices. Past experience has shown that the establishment of mobile points in municipalities motivates young people to register.
- First-time registration and updating of citizen's voter register data should be carried out continuously at municipality level as well as in state capitals. This would ensure access for citizens residing in more isolated areas.
- In-depth audits of the voter register should be conducted in order to delete the records of deceased voters and improve voter register accuracy. Audits should be carried out every time there is a cut-off date for the voter register and should include the participation of independent technicians. To enhance voter confidence, the results should be made public in a timely manner.
- The 2009 transitory provision to the Organic Law on Electoral Processes establishing that the civil register be automated should be implemented and the testing, initiated in 2021-2022, should be resumed. Linkages with the civil register would facilitate voter registration and would make it possible for the CNE to send personalized SMS invitations to first-time voters. Data from the civil register could also be used to make it possible for recipients of the SMS invitation simply to confirm or validate their registration.
- Partnerships should be developed with businesses and private companies to allow young employees to take the day off to register to vote without loss of pay or threat of dismissal. Consideration should be given to offering incentives for those businesses and companies which allow workers time-off to register.

## Legislation

- The law should be amended to permit the development of a system for updating voter registration details online. This would be particularly useful for Venezuelans living abroad, including young people.
- The law regulating out-of-country voting should be amended to remove the requirement to demonstrate legal, regular migratory status. This would enable Venezuelans under international protection programmes to exercise their right to vote.

- Consideration should be given to transitioning from an active to a passive voter registration model, where eligible citizens are automatically registered upon reaching voting age. This would significantly reduce barriers to participation and enhance the accuracy and inclusiveness of the voter register.

## Education

- Special programmes should be created for high schools and universities where CNE representatives explain the electoral process and how to register.
- Consideration should be given to conducting mock voting exercises in educational institutions to enhance young people's understanding of the process, the role of polling station staff and their overall familiarity with voting. As 62.1% of Venezuelans have access to a smartphone, such programmes should also be made available online.
- Consideration should be given to opening up the training programmes for polling station staff to interested citizens during the non-election phases of the electoral cycle. This would give citizens a deeper understanding of the electoral process and increase engagement in the elections.
- Consideration should be given to creating opportunities for youth CSOs to engage with students in educational institutions to support youth participation in the electoral process.

## Communication

- CSO voter registration awareness campaigns should use narratives and communication codes that resonate with young people. It is also recommended that such campaigns incorporate a voter registration information component.
- The CNE should conduct information campaigns in the media to publicise the locations, deadlines and procedures for first-time registration or updating of voter register data, with a particular focus on young people. Such campaigns should be made a permanent feature of voter registration.
- Youth wings of political parties should play a more active role in promoting youth participation and voter registration using both social media and activism.

## Alliances

- An official networking space could be created where CSOs can develop shared strategies to enhance and reinforce voter registration. The important achievement of 2024 was the promotion of voter registration by relevant CSOs and public figures utilising a common communication narrative. These synergies, developed in an organic manner due to an unprecedented desire for political change, could be sustained by the provision of such support.
- Private companies have a role in the facilitation of youth voter registration. It is a significant disincentive if young employees are required to take a day off or unpaid leave in order to register. The Venezuelan government and the CNE should build alliances with employers and private companies to make it possible for young people to take time off for the purposes of registration, without negative consequences such as dismissal.



This report is supported by an EU-funded project, WYDE Civic Engagement, led by EPD, the European Partnership for Democracy. The WYDE project is a component of the European Commission's Women and Youth in Democracy Initiative (WYDE). The aim of the project is to strengthen the participation of young people in democratic processes at national, regional and global levels.

This case study was conducted by Voto Joven, bringing in-depth local expertise and insight into the analysis. Voto Joven is a Venezuelan civil society organization founded and led by young people that seeks to promote democratic participation and protect electoral rights, particularly among younger generations. The organization develops civic education initiatives and nationwide campaigns aimed at encouraging voter registration and increasing participation in the electoral registry, with a special focus on youth who are reaching voting age. Through outreach, research, and advocacy, Voto Joven works to reduce barriers to political participation and strengthen youth inclusion in democratic processes.

In addition, Voto Joven carries out citizen electoral observation, with a particular emphasis on monitoring the broader electoral environment. Its observation efforts analyze conditions before, during, and after elections in order to document factors that may affect electoral integrity and participation. This work contributes to the production of evidence-based assessments of electoral processes while reinforcing the role of youth-led civil society in promoting transparency, accountability, and democratic engagement.

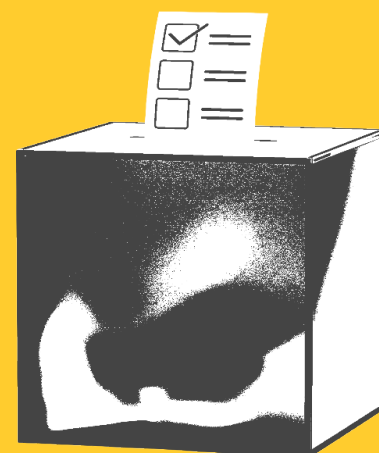
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# YOUTH VOTER REGISTRATION COSTS & CHALLENGES VENEZUELA



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