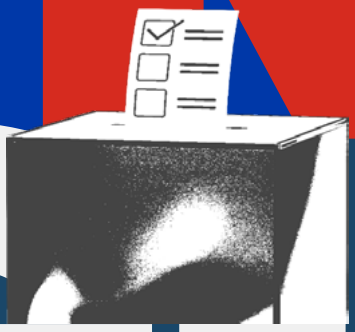






YOUTH VOTER REGISTRATION COSTS & CHALLENGES PARAGUAY

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Civic Engagement

The Paraguayan electoral management body is one of the few in Latin America that enjoys high levels of trust, in particular, for its independence and impartiality.

Central to establishing and maintaining the reputation of this institution since the democratic transition has been the development of an accurate and reliable voter register.[1]

After 20 years of using an active voter registration model, Paraguay adopted a passive system in 2012 that authorised the automatic inclusion of all 18-year-olds, including those who turn 18 at least one day before the election date.

As a result of the new system, records of first-time voters are imported into the voter register from the national ID card database, including the full name, age and address of citizens. Accordingly, in the 2023 general election, 187,464 young people between the ages of 18 and 25 cast their votes for the first time. The move to a passive model has effectively removed the main barriers to youth voter registration.

Nonetheless, several obstacles remain. Chief among these is the high rate of inaccurate address information: around 4% of those automatically registered have Incomplete, incorrect or out-of-date address records. This makes it difficult, often impossible, to assign polling stations. In such cases, voters are allocated to a polling station in their district of birth. Voters registered at a location distant from their place of residence face a strong disincentive to participation. The requirement for in-person rectification of voter data presents an additional logistical hurdle, particularly for young and first-time voters. Compounding this issue is a reduced focus on voter registration awareness and education – a direct consequence of the success of the passive model. Furthermore, indigenous communities and illiterate youth continue to face systemic barriers, including difficulties in obtaining official identification and the absence of culturally relevant and accessible registration and education processes.

Overcoming these residual barriers requires renewed voter education efforts to encourage first-time voters to check and, where necessary, update their data in the voter register. It also requires the streamlining of mechanisms for verifying voter register data. Media and civil society need to increase their engagement alongside civic education and electoral information activities in schools and universities provided by the electoral management body as well as the ad hoc campaigns targeting upcoming elections.

To address these challenges, a set of targeted recommendations has been proposed. These include improving coordination between the electoral authority and the Ministry of Interior's Identification Department to address the root causes of inaccurate address records and to simplify the processes for data correction. Enhancing civic and democratic education is also recommended, including the revision of the national curriculum to integrate experiential learning and the promotion of democratic values across both formal and informal education.

Additionally, special attention should be given to marginalised groups by adopting measures that simplify the issuance of identification documents and by employing culturally sensitive and accessible educational strategies for indigenous communities and illiterate youth.

Electoral authorities should develop a comprehensive communication strategy tailored to voter registration procedures – especially for first-time voters. It is also essential to ensure that information on the official website of the election management body is accurate, user-friendly and georeferenced. To further promote civic engagement among youth, school-based programmes should be strengthened, audiovisual competitions on democratic participation launched and support provided for youth-led electoral observation in cooperation with civil society. Finally, a sustainable framework for inclusive democratic participation should be established through a competitive funding mechanism for civil society organisations to implement voter education initiatives targeting underserved communities.

1 Fernando Barrientos del Monte, Gestión Electoral Comparada y Confianza en las Elecciones en América Latina (Mexico: Instituto Nacional de Administración Pública, 2011).

Background

In the late eighties, Paraguay's 35-year dictatorship came to an end, and with it, the institutional-legal framework, including the problematic electoral management body.[2] The 1992 National Constitution created a new electoral management body, Justicia Electoral, the electoral justice authority,[3] composed of the Superior Tribunal of Electoral Justice (Tribunal Superior de Justicia Electoral – TSJE) and its associated courts and tribunals.[4] Within this framework, a register of Paraguayan voters was developed, known as the Permanent Voter Register (Registro Cívico Permanente – RCP).

The legal framework for voter registration is established by the National Constitution, the Electoral Code and subsequent legislation, including the Law on the Permanent Voter Register (Law no. 772/1995)[5], subsequently amended (Law no. 5583/2016)[6]. Particularly significant for this study is Law no. 4559/2012,[7] which established automatic registration for first-time voters. However, those who turned 18 before this law came into force are required to register in person, or online if residing abroad.

In accordance with the provisions of the National Constitution, all those who have reached the age of 18 have the right to vote, whether citizens by birth,[8] naturalised citizens[9] (residing in or outside the country) or resident foreigners.[10] The categories of persons who cannot vote, as defined by law, include those imprisoned by a court order, conscripted soldiers and members of the armed forces and the police (and students of military and police training institutes), those detained or deprived of their freedom by order of a competent judge, those sentenced to imprisonment or subject to electoral disqualification for electoral crimes as well as those declared rebels in a civil or military criminal case. Article 91 of the Election Code[11] was amended by Law no. 6971/2022 to extend voting rights to hearing and speech-impaired individuals unable to make themselves understood.

Voting is compulsory, with a fine of Gs 98.00 (€12), equivalent to the average daily wage, for non-compliance.[12]

Paraguay has minimum age requirements for election to public office. To become president, vice president or a senator, it is required to be at least 35 years old (in accordance with articles 223 and 228 of the National Constitution). To become a member of the Chamber of Deputies, a citizen must be 25 years old (article 221). To be elected as governor, a candidate must be 30 years old (article 162), whereas the minimum age for election to the departmental assembly is 25 years (article 162). The Municipal Organic Law (3966/2010) sets the minimum age for mayors at 25 years old and for municipal councillors at 23 years old. As Paraguay does not have a gender parity law, these age limits apply to both male and female candidates.

Position	Minimum age for candidacy
President and Vice-President	35
Senator	35
Member of the Chamber of Deputies	25
Governor	30
Departmental councillor	25
Mayor	25
Municipal councillor	23

Figure 1. Overview of age requirements (Source: Paraguayan constitutional and electoral legislation)

The following is a list of the different positions for which Paraguayan citizens may run for office and the minimum age required on the date of entry into office.

The move to a passive system of voter registration in 2012 is clearly the most significant recent development affecting to the participation of young people.

Automatic voter registration requires inter-institutional cooperation and extensive data sharing. The Voter Registration Department (under the electoral management body) annually registers those who turn 18 in partnership with two institutions: the General Directorate of the Civil Registry (Ministry of Justice) and the Department of Identifications (National Police), which provide personal and address data of young people who are eligible to vote.

2 Herib Caballero Cambios, "Breve reseña histórica de las elecciones en Paraguay," El Nacional, April 30, 2023.

3 Justica Electoral is the Spanish term for the specialised judicial body responsible for electoral management in Paraguay. This case study uses the terms "electoral justice authority", "electoral administration" or the initialism TSJE for the Tribunal Superior de Justicia Electoral – the electoral management body.

4 There are 10 Electoral Tribunals (Tribunales Electorales) and 17 Electoral Courts (Juzgados Electorales) in addition to the TSJE. For further information, see the video "25 Años del TSJE" available here.

5 Available here.

6 Available here.

7 Available here.

8 Citizens by birth are those persons born in the territory of Paraguay, the children of a Paraguayan mother or father born abroad when one of both parents were in the service of the Republic, children born abroad of a Paraguayan mother or father permanently residing in the Republic and the children born in the territory of the Republic of unknown parents. These citizens are eligible for all public offices.

9 Naturalised citizens are foreigners who obtain Paraguayan citizenship by naturalisation if they are of legal age, have been residing for at least three years in the national territory, exercise a profession, trade, science, art or industry and demonstrate good conduct as defined by law

10 Foreign nationals residing in the country may vote and are eligible for office in municipal elections.

11 Available here.

12 This measure is yet to be implemented, but is currently being developed by the electoral administration together with the Ministry of Economy.

Other institutions involved in the process are the National Directorate of Migration (Ministry of the Interior), the Paraguayan consulates abroad (Ministry of Foreign Affairs), the General Directorate of Penal Institutes (Ministry of Justice) as well as the Ministry of Education and Science, the Ministry of Public Health and Social Welfare, the judiciary and the armed forces, all of which provide information relative to registration and voter eligibility.

From the data provided by these institutions, the electoral administration collects information on residential addresses, which is crucial for assigning polling stations. Other relevant information is extracted from documents such as death certificates issued by the district civil registry offices, judicial communications on those serving custodial sentences and the list of cadets, trainees and members of the armed forces and police – all of whom are disqualified both as voters and candidates in all types of elections.

All eligible voters who turn 18 in a given year are registered as voters. In an election year, this includes those who will turn 18 at least one day before the election date.[13] Active registration is still in place for eligible voters who have not been registered automatically. In-person registration during the annual registration period (March to December)[14] requires a visit to one of the 287 electoral registries located in the municipalities.[15] Travel to some of these offices can be difficult for people in isolated rural areas.

There are three main voter register operations: registration, updating and deletion. Registration is the initial entry of voter data into the system. Updating is the correction of personal data to reflect vital events (typically births, deaths and marital status) and changes of residence. Deletion is the process of removing people from the register of eligible voters if they are disqualified from voting or deceased. While registration is ongoing and permanent, updates and deletions are paused during the 90 days before and 30 days after an election to allow for the preparation of voter lists for specific elections.

Before all elections, citizens are requested to verify their personal data and addresses before the deadline for inclusion in the voter lists – normally one year before the election. Correction of personal data and polling station allocation requires the presentation, in person, of a written request to the General Directorate of the Electoral Registry at the TSJE headquarters in Asunción. In practice, written requests are accepted at the local registries. Changes requested after this deadline are not reflected in the voter lists for the upcoming elections. Political parties act as mediators between citizens and the electoral authorities to facilitate this process, but their involvement is often problematic.

In-person registrations and data corrections are conducted on the basis of printed paper forms, and all such requests must be accompanied by a photocopy of the applicant's national identity card. There is no fee payable to the electoral administration, but the renewal of identity cards costs Gs. 8,500 (€1.10)[16] and is necessary every 10 years. The police (Identification Department) is responsible for the issuance of identity cards.

There is no fee payable for reinstatement to the voter register after being subject to disqualification. However, in addition to a photocopy of the identity card, the form must be accompanied by a photocopy of the judicial resolution, authenticated by the relevant court or tribunal. The approximate cost is Gs. 50,000 (€6.4). The certificate of life and residence required to correct an erroneous listing of a voter as deceased is issued free of charge by the Justice of the Peace in the person's location of residence.

Since 2015, a pilot project is underway in Asunción for a computerised system that does not use paper booklets. Although people still need to visit the voter registrars, this system allows officials to access the data entered by the police (Identification Department), which must be validated by two registration officers to prevent corrupt practices related to the improper transfer of voters.[17]



13 Key informant interview, Ae1 (November 23, 2023) – see Annex I for overview of interviews.

14 International IDEA, Participación política de los pueblos indígenas en Paraguay (Stockholm: International IDEA, 2023).

15 Information about the location of registration centres can be found here.

16 Throughout this study the exchange rate used is that of the Central Bank of Paraguay (9 October 2023): 1 Euro = G 7,714.90.

17 Key informant interview, Ae6 (November 6, 2023).

Case Study

The voter registration process from the perspective of a young male urban voter.



Miguel is 20 years old and is registered to vote in the rural polling station where he used to live, but has since moved to an urban area. In order to correct his address record, the procedure requires him to present a written request at one of the district electoral registry offices, but Miguel finds that there is no street address provided on the electoral administration website for the office. By persistent asking around, he manages to get hold of the address. The office is located, as always, in the district capital. Another challenge is planning the trip by public transport: fares are constantly rising, there are no fixed departure times and the journey can be time-consuming. It takes Miguel quite a long time to work all this out.

Once he gets to the office, the staff explain how to fill in the form and Miguel completes it from the data on his identity card. Miguel is pleasantly surprised – the process is less bureaucratic than he expected and the staff are helpful and efficient. Once the administrative procedure is complete, Miguel verifies the update of his data online and checks the new polling station allocation and number. It is perfect – a school near his current address.

The voter registration process from the perspective of a young female indigenous voter.



Zulma is a young woman who lives in one of the indigenous communities of the western region of the country known as the Paraguayan Chaco, a vast territory with low population density, minimal provision of public services and almost no public transportation.

Zulma had no access to formal education and her native language is Qom. Although she has some knowledge of the Guarani language, she does not speak or understand Spanish.

The leader of her community, who had come into contact with members of a traditional political party, provided the identity cards of those young people who had just turned 18 in exchange for favours for himself and for the community. The political party undertook to register these youngsters both as voters and as members of the party. Zulma and a number of other young people from her community are now registered voters and party members, despite having little knowledge about how elections work and their rights as voters.

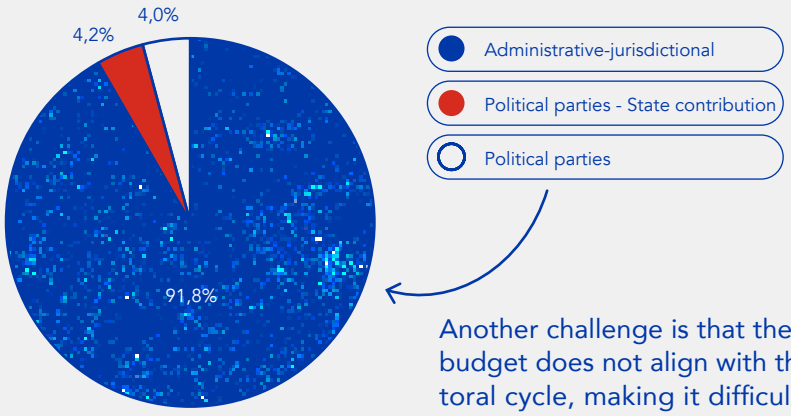
From now on, every time there is an election, the community leader tells Zulma and the others who to vote for in exchange for benefits provided by the political party. For Zulma and other young people like her, voting takes place in the context of clientelism whereby, through informal and often coercive networks, political support is provided in exchange for material benefits.

Voter Registration Costs

The election-related budget forms part of the government's annual spending plan, which is drafted by the Ministry of Economy and Finance and is approved by both houses of parliament: the Chamber of Deputies (80 members) and the Senate (45 senators). The budget becomes law when it is signed by the President of the Republic, who has the power of veto.

As with all state agencies and entities, the electoral administration submits its draft budget to the Ministry of Finance and Economy. This is incorporated into the draft budget to be submitted to parliament for approval or modification. The fiscal year begins on 1 January and ends on 31 December of each year. For 2023, when national and departmental elections were held, the electoral administration had a budget of Gs 671,111,137,948 (equivalent to €78,954,251). The budget is broken down into two main types of expenditure: administrative and jurisdictional costs and, secondly, political party expenses. The administrative and jurisdictional management was assigned a total of Gs 616,153,438,101 (€72,488,639), accounting for 91.8% of the total, and the political parties were assigned Gs 54,957,699,847 (€6,465,611), the remaining 8.2% of the total.[18]

The political financing system is mixed with two types of public funding: a state contribution, which funds regular activities carried out by the parties outside election time, and an electoral subsidy, which covers electoral campaign expenditure.[19]



Although state institutions at both central and decentralised levels are involved in voter registration, estimating the specific total cost of the process remains challenging. This is primarily due to the lack of disaggregated financial data from the electoral administration – costs are not broken down by programme, project or operational unit. Furthermore, available public service data does not allow for a clear identification of the personnel allocated specifically to voter registration tasks, making it difficult to determine the full extent of the human resource costs.

Another challenge is that the annual budget does not align with the electoral cycle, making it difficult to establish budgets for specific elections, which occur in April/May (national and departmental elections) or October/November (municipal elections).

The electoral administration, however, provided the costs for out-of-country voting in the 2018 national and departmental elections: Gs 856,000,000 (€100,705) for a total of 8,425 voters, which results in an average of Gs 101,602 (€11.9) per voter.

The following is an overview of the budgets of electoral administration for the five years in which national and departmental elections were held:

	2003	2008	2013*	2018	2023
Registered voters	2,405,108	2,816,940	3,516,275	4,241,507	4.782.940
Total voters	1,497,880	1,872,073	2,410,917	2,504,547	3.021.069
Voter turn-out (%)	62.3%	66.5%	68.6%	59.0%	63,2%
Budget in Guaraníes	142,206,606,679	264,824,062,388	663,607,220,049	507,831,111,212	671.111.137.948
Budget in Euros	18,432,721	34,326,311	86,016,308	65,824,717	86.988.961

Figure 3. Overview of electoral budgets 2003 to 2023 (Source: TSJE budget and electoral statistics)

The budget increase between 2018 and 2023[20] is due to additional expenses incurred following the September 2022 fire, which damaged the headquarters of the electoral administration and destroyed equipment, including approximately 8,500 voting machines, which were due to be used for the 2023 elections.[21]

18 Law no. 7050/2023, available here.

19 See the 1996 Paraguayan Electoral Code.

20 "Presupuesto de la Justicia Electoral 2023 tiene una mínima variación en comparación a este año," Justicia Electoral TSJE, October 10, 2022.

21 "Incendio fatal en TSJE: un muerto y 8,500 máquinas de votación destruidas," ABC Color, September 29, 2022.

* The 2013 national and regional elections were conducted with automatic registration of first-time voters and out-of-country voting.

Barriers to Youth Voter Registration

The introduction of passive voter registration in 2012 greatly simplified the registration process for young people and removed the significant barriers to electoral participation associated with the active model. The automation of the voter register contributed to an increase in the number of registered voters, with 969,626 new voters registered in 2023.[22]

Between the general elections of 1998 and 2003, the number of registered voters increased by 14.7% and between 2003 and 2008, by 15.9%. After moving to the passive voter registration model, there was a 18.6% increase in new registrants. Improved access to identity cards in rural areas also contributed to the increase in registered voters. In 2013, only 88.4% of the rural population possessed an identity card, as compared with 96.5% of the rural population in 2024.[23]

Electoral registration and turnout
2013, 2018 and 2023 general elections

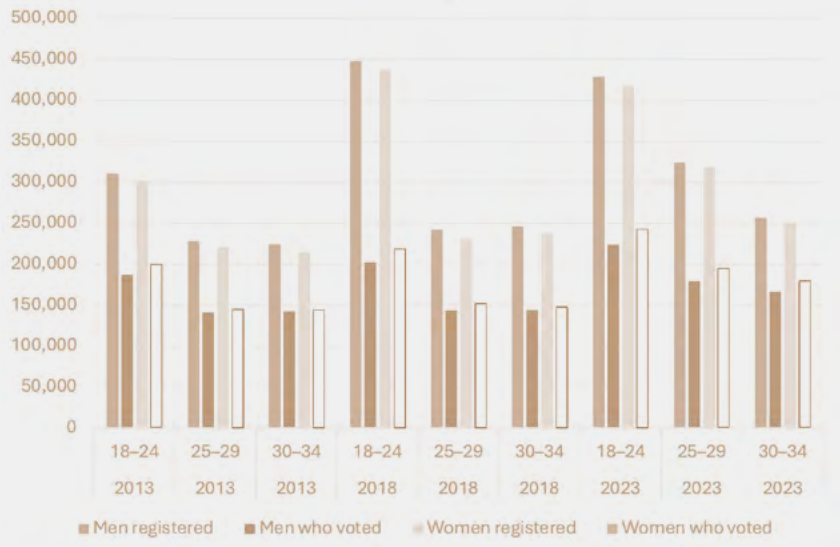


Figure 4. Electoral registration and turnout. (Source: TSJE budget and electoral statistics)

The following graph shows the number of young people registered and the proportion of those who voted in the past three general elections.

An examination of the electoral data from Paraguay's 2013, 2018 and 2023 general elections reveals notable trends and discrepancies among men and women aged 18 to 34. Across all age groups, the number of registered voters increased significantly over time, particularly among the youngest cohort. For instance, between 2013 and 2018, the number of men aged 18 to 24 increased from 310,554 to 447,693, a 44% rise, while the number of women in the same age group rose from 301,441 to 437,234, a 45% increase.

However, by 2023, registration among the 18- to 24-year-old age group declined slightly, whereas young people in the older age groups (25- to 29-year-olds and 30- to 34-year-olds) showed varying changes.

Despite these registration gains, youth voter turnout has remained relatively low. In 2013, approximately 60.2% of men and 65.8% of women aged 18 to 24 cast their votes. By 2018, turnout among these young voters declined sharply to 45.2% for men and 50.1% for women, even as registration surged following the introduction of the passive system. This trend indicates disengagement among first-time or newly registered voters. In 2023, youth turnout rebounded somewhat, reaching 52.1% for men and 57.9% for women, though it still fell short of 2013 levels. In contrast, older sections of the youth cohort showed steadier participation, with men aged 25 to 29 voting at rates between roughly 55–61%, and women at 65–66%. Those aged between 30 and 34 maintained turnout rates of 58–63% for men and 67–71% for women. Across all age groups, women consistently voted at slightly higher rates than men.

Gender differences are particularly striking. Even when registration numbers are comparable, women consistently surpass men in actual voter turnout. In 2023, for example, 418,123 18- to 24-year-old women registered, of whom 242,215 voted. Meanwhile, 429,329 men in the same age group registered, but only 223,703 voted. This pattern suggests that women in these age groups are generally more politically engaged than their male counterparts. Additionally, men's turnout appears more sensitive to age-related fluctuations: the most significant proportional drop occurred among men aged 18 to 24 in 2018, indicating that factors such as political apathy, first-time voter disengagement or limited outreach may disproportionately affect younger men.

A particularly notable anomaly occurred in 2018. The number of young

22 TJSE, Reseña Informativa: Elecciones Nacionales y Departamentales Paraguay 2023 (Asunción: TSJE, 2023),

23 Instituto Nacional de Estadística (INE), "Población con tenencia de cédula de identidad por año de la encuesta, según área de residencia, 2010 - 2022. Serie comparable" (Asunción: no date).

registered voters surged, but this increase was not reflected in turnout. This gap may be due to the introduction of passive registration without sufficient youth-targeted outreach. The voter pool expanded without boosting engagement, leaving first-time voters less informed or less motivated. It may also indicate political dissatisfaction. By 2023, youth turnout had partially recovered, although it had not returned to 2013 levels, particularly among men.

In summary, the data highlights several key patterns. Registration growth outpaced turnout among young voters, particularly in 2018. Women are consistently more likely to vote than men across all age groups, while young voters at the older end of the spectrum (those aged 25-34) maintain higher and more stable participation rates.

Despite the success of the move to passive registration, some challenges remain. Firstly, information received from the police does not always contain updated addresses, with around 4% of young people having to correct or update this data.[24] This can only be done in person at one of the 283 electoral registry offices,[25] which may constitute a significant obstacle for young people from rural areas or indigenous communities, where access to public transportation is limited.[26] Paraguay is currently implementing a comprehensive programme led by the Ministry of Information Technologies and Communications (MITIC) to digitalise government procedures. Central to this effort is the "Paper Zero" initiative, which aims to fully digitalise all public services within five years and replace physical documents with online platforms. As part of this transformation, the national digital services portal (Portal Paraguay) already offers over 300 citizen-facing government services online.[27]

The involvement of political parties in updating addresses in the voter register demonstrates the significance of this barrier to participation and necessitates a response from the authorities. Details of this "service" provided by parties to their members emerged from key informant interviews with party representatives: the checking and correction of address data are carried out in cooperation with electoral administration officials, who are typically members of the same political party. To expedite the process, political party representatives normally request a photo of the voter's identity card and an indication of their preferred polling station via WhatsApp.[28] This practice is open to abuse and can result in unverified data being included in the voter register or changes being made without proper consent. There is an evident risk of fraudulent changes of voter addresses. Such abuses have been reported to the police and are punishable by law.[29]

The principle of mutual control – an institutional mechanism designed to ensure transparency, impartiality and political balance within the electoral administration – is a contributing factor. This principle is reflected in the composition of the administration at all levels, where representatives of the major political forces are included to prevent any single party from exercising exclusive control over electoral decisions. In accordance with the 1996 Electoral Code, representatives of parliamentary political parties are integrated into the electoral administration, and it is these officials who collaborate with the parties in carrying out the problematic voter registration procedures described above.[30]

A 2021 study shows that 6% of the indigenous people surveyed cited access to personal identity cards and voter registration as barriers to participating more fully in politics. According to the study, this creates opportunities for the violation of the rights of indigenous peoples through corrupt practices such as vote buying and affiliation to political parties without proper consent.[31] Election-related abuses, such as the forced confinement of indigenous people in corrals on private ranches in the Chaco have also been reported.[32]

Another barrier identified by young people is the limited public information available in languages other than Spanish. The two official languages recognised by the constitution are Spanish and Guarani. According to a 2021 survey conducted by the National Institute of Statistics, 33.4% of the population aged five years or older spoke Guarani as their first language, 34.7% spoke both Guarani and Spanish and 29.6% spoke only Spanish. Additionally, the survey found that 140,039 people in the country belong to one of the 19 ethnic groups that speak one or more of five additional linguistic families: Tupi Guarani, Enxet-Maskoy, Mataguayo, Zamuco and Guaicurú.

Most public information is provided in Spanish, with the Secretariat of Linguistic Policies mandated to provide public information in Guarani. Consequently, in 2013, the electoral administration conducted a joint initiative with the Secretariat to translate the Electoral Code into Guarani and to disseminate electoral information materials in this language.[33] Building on these efforts, the newly established Indigenous Peoples Coordination reported that, during the 2023 elections, informative materials were also distributed in the five language families present in Paraguay.[34] Information must continue to be provided in these languages, especially as interviewees stated that political parties and candidates contact leaders of indigenous communities who do not speak Spanish or Guarani to offer "translations" of administrative procedures. Interviewees report that cultural differences and illiteracy within

24 European Union (EU), EU Election Observation Mission Paraguay: Final Report, 2023 (Brussels: EU, 2023), 10.

25 TSJE, Memoría y Estadistica Electoral 2023 (Asunción: TSJE, 2024).

26 Key informant interview, Sc1 (November 2, 2023).

27 "Gobierno apunta a digitalizar el 100% de los trámites gubernamentales", Ministerio de Tecnologías de la Información y Comunicació, November 9, 2023.

28 Key informant interview, Pp2 (November 23, 2023).

29 "Denuncian traslados irregulares de más de 600 votantes en Félix Pérez Cardozo," La Nacio, December 12, 2022.

30 "De 5.000 funcionarios de la Justicia Electoral, ni uno de ellos concursó," Ultma Hora, January 29, 2024.

31 Semina para la Democracia, Percepciones de los grupos minoritarios y subrepresentados en el ámbito político sobre las barreras para la participación electoral (Asunción: Semina para la Democracia, 2021), 14.

32 "NYTimes fue testigo de compra de votos a indígenas en el Chaco, " Ultima Hora, May 16, 2023

33 "Traducirán en guaraní Ley electoral y afiches," ABC Color, February 24, 2013.

34 Key informant interview, Ae8 (May 9, 2025).

35 Key informant interview, Pp1 (November 27, 2023).

indigenous communities result in a diminished understanding of democratic processes and concepts.[35]

Illiteracy or functional literacy[36] constitutes an obstacle to the effective communication of electoral information. Paraguay's educational deficit has been documented by the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), which has found that the country's scores are below those of Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries in reading, mathematics, and science.[37] The National Student Achievement Assessment System (Sistema Nacional de Evaluación del Proceso Educativo – SNEPE) of the Ministry of Education revealed a considerable disparity in Spanish language competence between students in the capital city and those in deprived areas, such as the Paraguayan Chaco.[38] According to data from 2020-2021, 5.3% of the population is illiterate, with rates ranging from 3.5% illiteracy in urban areas to 8.6% in rural areas.[39] In 2022, the indigenous population aged 15 years and older had an average of only 4.3 years of education[40] compared with 9.9 years of education in the rest of the country (for men, 9.8 years and 10.06 for women).[41] To address the problems of illiteracy and functional literacy, the electoral administration publishes audiovisual materials on its YouTube channel.[42] Although this measure is insufficient, it serves as a temporary remedy. The responsibility for overseeing and delivering educational services lies with the Ministry of Education and Culture (MEC), not the Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSJE). The TSJE's role is limited to conducting educational campaigns to inform citizens about how and where to vote.[43]

The so-called digital gap in both national infrastructure and Internet use (mainly messaging platforms and social networks) is a barrier for older age cohorts but not for young people.[44] According to 2021 data from the National Institute of Statistics, young people (between 20 and 34 years old) are the population group with the highest Internet usage (90%), whereas the rest of the population (from 35 years old) has a much lower average rate of Internet usage (62.8%).[45] The electoral administration utilises the Internet for the verification of voter register data (name, the department, district and zone where voters live and the assigned polling station) by means of its website.[46] For those without Internet access, a free landline is provided for voter registration enquiries.[47]

Remedies are in place to overcome barriers to the electoral participation of people with disabilities, who, according to the government, constitute 5.3% of the population.[48] Since 2013, the electoral administration has been implementing an inclusion policy (Voto Accesibile)[49] to guarantee the right to political participation for people with physical, sensory or socio-cultural difficulties, including the provision of ballot papers and electoral materials in Braille.[50] The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), a body of the Organisation of American States, has explicitly highlighted the practices developed in Paraguay to ensure accessibility for persons with disabilities. In a report published in December 2018, the IACHR recognised as positive practices those implemented in Paraguay, including accessible polling stations, the possibility of receiving assistance within the voting booth and public campaigns to raise awareness about the electoral rights of persons with disabilities.[51]

The following graph provides disaggregated data on registration and participation of young people with disabilities.[52]

Age	Registered voters	% Turnout
18 - 24	56	64.3
25 - 29	200	70.0
30 - 34	212	76.4

Figure 5. Electoral registration and turnout voters registered for disability access in polling centres (Source: TSJE budget and electoral statistics)

As data provided by the electoral administration is not disaggregated by age, there is limited information on the involvement of young people in the complaints and appeals process. Complaints and appeals can only be lodged by representatives of the movements and political parties, which, in theory, could include young people.[53] In practice, however, the technical expertise and electoral experience required for this highly specialised work tend to privilege older people.[54]

36 "PISA: revelan que 7 de cada 10 estudiantes paraguayos no comprenden lo que leen," ABC Color, December 5, 2021.

37 OECD, PISA 2022 Results (Volume I and II) – Country Notes: Paraguay (Paris: OECD, 2023).

38 "Revelan bajo nivel de aprendizaje en el país en todas las áreas," Ultima Hora, November 15, 2018.

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40 Instituto Nacional de Estadística (INE), Primeros Resultados Finales del IV Censo Nacional de Población y Viviendas para Pueblos Indígenas 2022 (Asunción: INE, 2023).

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43 Key informant interview, Ae7 (May 9, 2025).

44 "La conectividad digital en Paraguay se reduce en WhatApp y redes sociales," La Tribuna, February 11, 2023.

45 Instituto Nacional de Estadística (INE), Tecnología de la Información y Comunicación en el Paraguay EPHC 2015-2021, (Asunción: INE, 2022).

46 The official website for verification is https://padron.tsje.gov.py/. See also media coverage on updating of data in the Permanent Civic Registry: "El TSJE insta a los ciudadanos a actualizar sus datos en el Registro Cívico Permanente," La Nación June 16, 2023.

47 Violeta Morinigo, "Habilitan línea baja gratuita para consulta de padrón," TSJE, April 6, 2013.

48 Government of Paraguay, Atlas on Disability in Paraguay, 2024.

49 Within this framework, Voto Accesibile includes initiatives such as "Vote at Home" (Voto en casa),"Accessible Voting Booth" (Mesa Accesible) and "Preferential Vote" (Voto preferente). The "Vote at Home" registers individuals with physical disabilities in a dedicated electoral roll; registration takes place at the person's residence in the presence of medical personnel to certify the condition. In 2023, 567 people used this service, including 11 young people aged 18 to 34. The "Accessible Voting Booth" initiative designates the first table at each polling station (Mesa N°1) for voters with disabilities. These booths are located in accessible areas and adapted to meet the needs of this electorate. Registration is typically conducted over a three-month period, one year prior to the election. In 2023, 5,598 people accessed this service.

50 Key informant group interview, Ae2 (October 12, 2023).

51 "IACHR Notes Progress on the Right to Vote for People with Disabilities in the Americas", OAS, December 3, 2018.

52 TSJE, Memoría y Estadística Electoral 2023 (Asunción: TSJE, 2024), https://www.tsje.gov.py/libros/.

53 Key informant interview, Ae3 (October 5, 2023).

54 Key informant interview, Pp2 (November 23, 2023).

Youth Voter Registration Initiatives

Institutional

Following the transition, the new electoral administration carried out a large-scale registration campaign for the new voter register, which replaced the electoral roll used under the dictatorship. The campaign calling on citizens to register received significant coverage in the mass media of the time, particularly on television and radio.

With the shift to passive voter registration in 2012, the scale of registration campaigns decreased significantly[55], but campaigns encouraging voters to check and update their data are still conducted on the TSJE website and social networks, targeting citizens living both in Paraguay and abroad as well as permanent residents.

Civic education is included in the curriculum by the Ministry of Education and Science (MEC) for primary and secondary schools as well as in the lifelong learning programmes (for those over 16 who failed to conclude their studies at the expected age) within the subjects of "Ethical and Citizenship Education" and "Social Sciences and Technology". Specific information on registration[56] and the procedural aspects of democracy is provided.[57] There are additional initiatives by other state institutions, such as the National Congress, which gives talks on civic education and the role of the legislative branch aimed at university students, but these are sporadic rather than systematic and take place during the pre-electoral or electoral phases of the electoral cycle.[58]

Civic education and electoral information activities are also conducted in schools and universities.[59] Since 2015, the initiative "Electoral Justice in my School" (Justicia Electoral en mi Colegio) has been providing civic education and electoral information for students in their final year of secondary school to encourage them to verify their data in the voter register. Two visits are usually scheduled by the technical team of the electoral administration: an introductory visit followed by a second visit where registration, checking and updating are carried out for students in possession of identity cards.[60] From 2017 to 2019, the initiative trained a total of 11,385 students (6,890 in 2017, 1,546 in 2018 and 2,949 in 2019). Training activities were suspended in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Although the exact number of schools involved is not available, this represents a significant level of penetration into the secondary school population.[61]

This strategically important focus on direct engagement with students in their final year of school prepares future voters to participate responsibly in upcoming elections. The annual training figures before the pandemic suggest strong demand. However, without detailed follow-up data on voter registration rates or shifts in civic engagement, it is difficult to fully evaluate the programme's effectiveness quantitatively. Among the various civic education activities carried out by the TSJE, Justicia Electoral en mi Colegio is notable for its structured, hands-on approach and its emphasis on voter registration accuracy. The direct engagement with young, soon-to-be voters and the number of participants involved make this one of the TSJE's most significant civic education initiatives.

Between 2018 and 2022, the European Union-funded project "Democratic Impulse. Political and Citizen Participation for Young People" (Impulso Democrático), implemented by the electoral administration with technical expertise from International IDEA, promoted youth participation through photo and essay contests, train-the-trainer workshops using the BRIDGE methodology (Building Resources in Democracy, Governance and Elections) and a series of conferences across the country. Impulso Democrático effectively encouraged political and civic engagement among young Paraguayans, involving over 200 participants from 2018 to 2019. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the programme shifted online, then receiving also support from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), offering two-hour training sessions that received around 800 social media likes. The Democratic Impulse project demonstrated that structured, participatory methodologies such as BRIDGE effectively foster critical thinking, dialogue and civic engagement among young people. Its transition from in-person workshops to online sessions during the pandemic showed adaptability, broadening reach while maintaining engagement.

Collaboration with International IDEA, the UNDP and European Union (EU) funding highlighted the value of multi-stakeholder partnerships. Key lessons learned emphasise the importance of continuing and expanding such initiatives, as they reinforce the TSJE's role in fostering youth dialogue, enhancing political inclusion and strengthening institutional ties to support democratic governance in Paraguay.

55 Key informant interview, Ae4 (November 23, 2023).

56 Jose Maria Castillo Vega, "Competencia ciudadana en el sistema educativo paraguayo. Una mirada desde la educación media," Revista Innova Educación, 5, no. 2 (2023): 45-61.

57 Key informant interview, Ac1 (November 27, 2023).

58 "Invitan a participar de un ciclo de charlas por el Sesquicentenario del Poder Legislativo," Honorable Camara de Senadores, July 15, 2021.

59 Key informant interview, Ae5 (November 29, 2023).

60 Key informant interview, Ae2 (October 12, 2023).

61 "Programa: Justicia Electoral en mi Colegio", Justicia Electoral, (no date) 2015

for women leaders conducted by the Gender Unit of the TSJE, has offered training for young women on the political system, the electoral system and electoral law with an emphasis on electoral offences and crimes, political financing, political movements and parties as well as elections and technology.[62] To date, the programme has had 15 editions[63] and has trained approximately 700 women across the country. Various international partners have supported the programme over the years, including UNDP, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the European Union and, currently, the Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation (AECID). Widely regarded as a best practice and a valuable model for future civic education and empowerment projects, the initiative has proven effective in strengthening women's leadership and political participation, with many alumni running for office or taking active roles in political life.[64]

The electoral administration has also cooperated with other institutions in a range of voter education campaigns. The innovative campaign Elegí Vos[65], developed in 2021 with the National Secretariat of Youth, used a game of noughts and crosses to train young voters to make informed choices after scrutinising the candidates and their backgrounds. It emphasised that an informed vote is a way to exclude those who engage in corrupt practices from the political arena.[66]

"My First Vote" was an initiative of the electoral administration implemented for the 2023 elections in cooperation with public and private universities. Students enrolled in these universities could present their voting certificates to access academic benefits.[67] In the context of the project "DemocratiCamp" implemented jointly by the UNDP and the National Youth Secretariat, the electoral administration and the Ministry of Education and Science signed an inter-institutional cooperation agreement to offer civic-electoral "internships" to train secondary school students to raise awareness on electoral matters, including voter registration. Electoral authorities reported that offering academic incentives and civic internships increased young voters' interest in the electoral process. They have also noted that inter-institutional collaboration contributed to inspiring institutional trust, while practical experiences provided students with a greater understanding of electoral procedures.[68]

Political Parties

Political parties are the main actors in verifying and updating the voter register data of their members and supporters. However, the mass parties (the Colorado Party and the Liberal Party) and the so-called cadre parties have different operational modalities. The two mass parties, both founded in the nineteenth century, have nationwide presence, with the Colorado Party counting 2,616,424 members[69] and the Liberal Party 1,548,023 members[70]. These parties conduct massive ongoing party-affiliation campaigns throughout the country, during which party representatives verify the registration of young voters to proceed with party affiliation as members. Electoral administration staff are usually on hand to facilitate registration and the correction or updating of voter register data.

The newer parties are referred to as cadre parties and are characterised by a localised territorial presence, concentrated in urban centres, with a more limited membership ranging from 5,000 to 150,000. These parties make use of applications based on voter lists provided by the electoral administration for each election. These lists serve as a source of information for members and citizens on polling stations and other aspects of the electoral process. The Equipo Joven (Youth Team) application for young people of the Christian democratic party, Patria Querida, uses the official database for the verification of personal data in the voter register, together with street art.[71]

In the 2023 general elections, some youth coalitions developed artistic interventions that were performed in the streets and shopping centres. These were planned with the support of applications developed from the electoral register database provided by the electoral administration to encourage the electoral participation of young people.[72]

Political party representatives do not usually reveal the costs of their activities, but concede that the costs incurred cover mobilisation (fuel) and, in the case of affiliation campaigns in remote parts of the country, the cost of lodging and food for participants is usually included as part of the state funding for political parties.

In line with the Electoral Code, active membership of political parties is limited to those who have turned 18, but some parties informally include adolescents in their youth wings.[73]

62 "Crearán Escuela de Liderazgo Político para Mujeres apoya USAID/CEAMSO", La Nación, September 19, 2017.

63 "XV Edición de la Escuela de Formación Política para Mujeres Líderes inicia el 11 de febrero", Ministerio de la Mujer, (no date) 2025.

64 "Forjando líderes para el futuro con más de 600 egresadas de la Escuela de Formación Política", UNDP - Paraguay, October 24, 2024.

65 "Secretaría de la Juventud junto con el TSJE lanzan campaña «Elegí Vos»", Radio Nacional del Paraguay, October 5, 2021.

66 Key informant interview, Pp3 (October 25, 2023).

67 "TSJE presenta la campaña "Mi primer voto", incentivando el voto joven," La Nacion, April 26, 2023, .

68 Key informant interview, Ae8 (May 9, 2025).

69 "ANR vuelve a habilitar su padrón con 2.616.424 afiliados que pueden votar", Asociación Nacional Republicana, October 4, 2022

70 "PLRA supera los 1,5 millones de afiliados", ABC Color, June 4, 2022.

71 Key informant interview, Pp4 (November 7, 2023). Websites for these initiatives were not provided.

72 Key informant person, Pp2 (November 23, 2023).

73 International IDEA, Participación de las juventudes en los partidos políticos paraguayos (Stockholm: International IDEA, 2023. Available at.

Political parties are legally required to offer civic education activities financed by the public funds they receive. Most parties have training programmes and youth sections, and the majority hold elections for youth representatives.[74]

Civil society

There has been relatively limited civil society engagement on voter registration since the introduction of automatic registration in 2012.

It is worth noting that Paraguay has a long history of civic education, citizen participation and electoral information initiatives developed by civil society organisations, which peaked in the 1990s during the democratic transition. These organisations have sought to resume their activities in this field in recent years, focusing on gender equality and inclusion.[75]

One of the few recent interventions was in 2022, when the NGO Alma Cívica conducted the campaign Activá tu poder (Activate your Power), which combined information on verifying voter register data with civic education talks. This project was privately funded by the NGO's founder.[76]

Increased attention has, however, been paid to the voting rights of indigenous people since the implementation of the National Plan for Indigenous Peoples began in 2014. The National Plan was developed following Paraguay's adherence to the 2007 United Nations (UN) Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the 2014 Final Document of the UN World Conference on Indigenous Peoples. Paraguay is a beneficiary of support from the Secretariat of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and was selected as one of the six countries to participate in the initiative "Political Dialogue between Indigenous Peoples, Governments and the United Nations System". This led to various institutional initiatives in support of the political rights of indigenous peoples. Between 2015 and 2017, USAID, with the technical assistance of the Federation of Production Cooperatives, provided financial support to the relevant institutions to issue identity documents to nearly 50,000 people belonging to indigenous groups, enabling voter registration for this section of Paraguay's population.[77] Subsequently, the EU funded civil society organisations (Tierraviva and Diakonia) to provide technical support for the civil and voter registration of these indigenous communities.[78] The EU electoral observation mission for the 2018 general election reported an increase in the number of voters belonging to indigenous groups as a result of these registration campaigns carried out under the auspices of the Civil Registry and the National Institute of Indigenous People.[79]

The NGO Semillas para la Democracia (Seeds for Democracy), which promotes the political engagement of underrepresented groups, in cooperation with NGO Tesai Reka, implemented the school-based training project to reduce inequality in the exercise of political citizenship by improving young people's knowledge of the electoral cycle. The "Search for Democracy" (Democracia Reka) initiative was implemented between 2017 and 2018 and focused on rural areas and indigenous communities.[80]

Citizen election observers

Civil society organisations conducting citizen election observation initiatives often involve young people as election observers. The most notable of these groups is Sakã (Transparency), a consortium that has engaged young people as observers since the first municipal elections of the democratic era in 1991.[81] Significantly, the NGO Alma Cívica included a section on youth participation in its final election observation report for the 2021 municipal elections as well as the results of an opinion poll on youth candidates and the importance of youth participation.[82] Although the electoral campaign and election day are the primary focus of election observation, increasing attention is being given to the gender perspective and the inclusion of underrepresented groups, such as members of indigenous communities and people with disabilities.

74 In terms of education and training, the Asociación Nacional Republicana (Partido Colorado) founded the Centro Superior de Capacitación Técnica "Gral. Bernardino Caballero", which provides technical and professional courses. The Instituto José P. Guggiari, affiliated with the Authentic Radical Liberal Party, offers programmes such as the Leadership Training Program for Public Service. The Febrerista Revolutionary Party manages the Universidad Popular Humberto Garcete, offering lectures on Paraguayan history, civic education and current affairs. The Patria Querida Party runs La Academia, a political education project supported by the Feliciano Martínez Foundation, which is linked to the party. Other political parties also offer training programmes, both within Paraguay and abroad.

75 During the 2023 general elections in Paraguay, the NGO Decidamos launched the campaign "Truthful Information for a Safe and Tolerant Society", which trained young people in areas such as disinformation, social media, content creation, data use and advocacy methods. In collaboration with the Coordinadora por los Derechos de la Infancia y la Adolescencia (CDIA), Decidamos also conducted training sessions on monitoring online hate speech and fake news. Furthermore, it tracked political commitments made by candidates to enable youth organizations to follow up once they assumed office. The initiative was part of the "Women and Youth in Democracy Initiative (WYDE)" of the European Union, supported by the European Partnership for Democracy (EPD).

76 Key informant interview, Sc2 (October 19, 2023).

77 "More 50,000 indigenous people will have access to identity documents, public services and social programs," IP Paraguayan Information Agency, September 5, 2016.

78 "Se inició campaña de documentación oficial para poblaciones indígenas," Tierraviva, April 21, 2021.

79 European Union (EU), EU Election Observation Mission Paraguay: Final Report, 2018 (Brussels: EU, 2018), 20.

80 "Democracia Reka," Semillas para la Democracia, (no date) 2018.

81 International IDEA, Reconocer la observación electoral ciudadana en Paraguay: Un análisis normativo con perspectiva regional (Stockholm: International IDEA, 2023),

82 Alma Cívica, La observación electoral ciudadana y la participación activa de los jóvenes (Asunción: Alma Civica, 2022).

The electoral administration has not always recognised citizen election observation and has not always been equanimous in its approach to these organisations. For example, in 2018 the TSJE provided institutional support to the initiative "National Election Observation by University Students," launched by the Polytechnic and Artistic University of Paraguay and the Foundation for Citizen Promotion of Paraguay but did not acknowledge other civil society initiatives. Subsequently, in the 2021 municipal elections, the NGO Alma Cívica reached an agreement with the TSJE to conduct nationwide election observation. In the lead-up to the 2023 general elections, the TSJE issued a resolution recognising the role of citizen election observation and initiated an inclusive accreditation process,[83] which was not implemented due to the alleged failure of civil society to comply with some of the requirements. Impartiality was, however, a problem for the electoral administration. They questioned the presence of opposition candidates on the NGO Alma Cívica's board of directors and declined to approve a parallel vote tabulation proposed by the consortium Saka.[84]

Corporate sector

The corporate sector has also implemented initiatives on civic education and electoral information, such as training on voting machine usage and encouraging participation to strengthen democratic engagement democracy. One example is the label "Vote!" used by the company Nutrihuevos on its product packaging. Furthermore, the electoral administration was invited to provide practical training on using voting machines for the company's staff and to assist with the verification of assigned polling stations. Other companies have inquired about the possibilities of carrying out similar activities. The experience of cooperation with the electoral administration was described as straightforward and non-bureaucratic.[85]



83 TSJE, Resolution TSJE 21/2023.

84 "Sakã lamenta la decisión del tsje de no otorgarle la acreditación como organización de observación electoral", Decidamos, April 21, 2023.

85 Key informant interview, Em1 (November 16, 2023).

Lessons Learned

1

Since coming into force in 2012, the shift to a passive system of registration has largely removed the barriers to the registration of young people as voters. The cost-effective procedure requires extensive inter-institutional collaboration between the TSJE and the other entities responsible for population registration, the address register and the issuance of personal identification documents. The main barrier remaining concerns the relatively high number of new registrants with missing, inaccurate or out-of-date addresses. The requirement that data be updated in person is problematic for many voters and has led to informal modalities that, in some cases, are not fully in line with the law.

2

The databases of voter lists shared with political parties assist in registration and verification efforts and in creating user-friendly applications that allow party members and the general public to check their personal data and assigned polling stations.

3

The TSJE's initiative "Electoral Justice in my School" has proven effective in providing civic education for first-time voters.[86]

4

The development of civic education materials and electoral information targeted to specific groups has proven effective in removing barriers to registration and participation, particularly through the use of accessible audio formats and material translated into Guarani.

5

The development of election materials in Braille helps to eliminate linguistic barriers.

86 For example, for the last General Election held on April 30 2023, all those citizens turning 18 years old up to April 29 were eligible to cast a vote and were entered in the Permanent Civic Registry automatically. This procedure is conducted by the TSJE every January 16. Those young people interested in registering earlier, could have done it earlier, by taking advantage of the TSJE activities in schools or by visiting their nearest registration centre.

Recommendations

The accuracy and accessibility of the voter register should be enhanced through coordinated efforts with the Identification Department of the Ministry of Interior. This should involve a comprehensive review to simplify procedures for updating voter data and to identify the underlying causes of inaccuracies in voter address information. Streamlining these procedures will reduce bureaucratic hurdles and help prevent corrupt practices related to voter register verification and correction. Additionally, targeted outreach and education campaigns should be launched, especially for first-time voters, to encourage timely verification of their registration details and identification documents.

The TSJE should consider the potential of the government's broader digital transformation strategy, led by the Ministry of Information Technologies and Communications (MITIC), to align voter registration processes with this emerging e-government infrastructure. This could improve efficiency, reduce administrative burdens and make it easier for citizens to access registration services, while supporting the long-term goal of enhancing transparency and institutional coordination in public service delivery.

Priority should be given to enhancing the quality of education as a means of strengthening democratic culture. This should be a key structural priority for the State, especially in tackling ongoing issues such as illiteracy. In this context, the Ministry of Education and Science should review and improve the national curriculum at all levels to include both theoretical knowledge and practical learning about electoral processes, democracy and citizenship.

Furthermore, a comprehensive approach to civic and democracy education should be developed, reaching citizens through formal, non-formal and informal learning pathways. Such an approach must be firmly grounded in human rights and promote gender equality, intercultural diversity and social inclusion.

Systemic barriers faced by indigenous populations need to be addressed by facilitating the issuance of official identification documents and ensuring inclusion in the voter register. Accessible, culturally appropriate registration processes should be developed to promote equitable electoral participation, including, where feasible, extending automatic registration to indigenous communities. At the same time, a comprehensive democracy education strategy should be devised to meet the specific needs of indigenous peoples and illiterate youth, promoting informed and active citizenship. All forms of learning – formal, non-formal and informal – should be utilised.

The electoral authorities should develop a comprehensive communication, education and citizen information strategy regarding the electoral process and its various procedures, paying particular attention to first-time voters. It is important that voter education and information be provided in both official and minority languages.

The TSJE must ensure that information on the opening hours, location and georeferencing of voter registration offices provided on its website is comprehensive, accurate and regularly updated.

Support from the Ministry of Education and Science for student centres and school councils should be strengthened by including education on citizenship and democracy within the framework of the "Electoral Justice at my School" initiative, utilising technical assistance from the TSJE.

Consideration should be given to organising audiovisual contests on citizen and democratic participation for adolescents and young people in secondary education. This could be carried out within the national education system through collaboration between the electoral administration and the Ministry of Education and Science, in cooperation with civil society organisations with relevant experience in this field.

Support should be provided for citizen electoral observation initiatives by civil society organisations that are either youth-led or encourage youth engagement.

The electoral administration should establish a fund for citizen education initiatives, which would be allocated to NGOs through a competitive process at both national and local levels. The primary focus should be on indigenous people and illiterate youth.

Annex

Key informant interviews

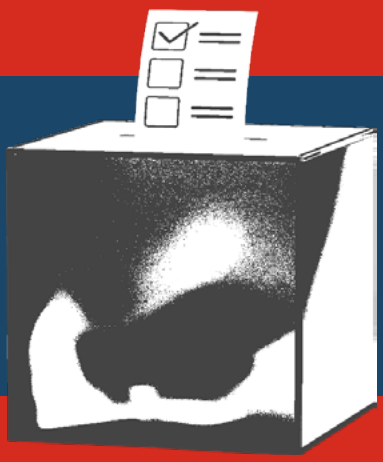
Sector	Number	Reference in footnotes
Electoral administration	8	Ae
Political party	5	Pp
Civil society	3	Sc
Academy	1	Ac
Entrepreneurship	1	Em

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. The findings and recommendations of this report are based on the authors' assessments only and do not in any way reflect the official position of the European Union.

This case study was conducted by the **CDIAI-Coordinadora por los Derechos de la Infancia y la Adolescencia**, bringing in-depth local expertise and insight into the analysis. The CDIA is a national platform made up of 28 civil society organisations in Paraguay, founded in 1993, with the purpose of promoting, advocating for, and defending the human rights of children and adolescents. It works toward a democratic and inclusive society, grounded in rights, in which children and adolescents play a leading role, and where public policies incorporate objective and scientific evidence, with approaches based on gender, diversity, and interculturality.

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YOUTH VOTER REGISTRATION COSTS & CHALLENGES PARAGUAY

Powered by European Union
Produced by EDGE FOUNDATION cdia
Led by European Partnership for Democracy
Under the project WYDE Civic Engagement