

# Projecting a Range of Possible Results in the December 2015 Elections for National Assembly in Venezuela

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# Introduction

On December 6, Venezuela will hold legislative elections in which all 167 seats of the country's National Assembly will be contested. Polls indicate that the governing party is significantly less popular than it was during the last legislative elections of 2010, and that the opposition coalition of parties, known as the Democratic Unity Roundtable (*Mesa de Unidad Democrática*, or MUD, in Spanish), could possibly win a majority of seats for the first time since the late president Hugo Chávez was first elected in 1998.

Some commentators, politicians, and analysts have stated that the opposition is virtually certain to win a majority and would likely gain a “supermajority” of three-fifths or two-thirds of total seats.<sup>1</sup> They also suggest that, should the opposition not win a majority or a large majority, then the government will surely have been guilty of “election rigging.”

In this paper, we simulate — based on the 2010 results — the 2015 election under various assumptions regarding the government's share of the vote and the degree to which the opposition is fractured among different coalitions. This simulation allows us to see how disproportional representation of smaller states and a unified pro-government coalition may continue to favor pro-government parties.

## 2010 vs. 2015

In the previous elections for Venezuela's National Assembly in 2010, the pro-government United Socialist Party of Venezuela (*Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela*, or PSUV) received 48 percent of the vote and won 96 seats. Including two affiliated indigenous seats, the government held 59 percent of 165 total seats. Since 2010, population growth has led the National Electoral Council (*Consejo Nacional Electoral*, or CNE) to expand and reallocate seats in five districts based on projections of population change by Venezuela's National Statistics Institute districts; however, no districts have been redrawn since 2010.

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<sup>1</sup> Under Venezuela's 1999 constitution, these supermajorities allow the National Assembly to exercise special powers beyond those that exist for a simple majority. For instance, a 3/5 supermajority allows National Assembly members to remove ministers and executive vice-presidents and a 2/3 supermajority allows members to remove Supreme Court justices and appoint members of the National Electoral Council.

It is important to understand that the difference between the percentage of the vote and the percentage of seats received by a party or coalition is not the result of “gerrymandering” or any other manipulation of districts, as is sometimes suggested in the media. Like the United States and many other countries, Venezuela has a system of representation that gives disproportional representation to states with smaller populations. In the U.S. this is done through allocating two Senators to each state, regardless of population. Thus Wyoming, with a population of 584,000, has the same number of Senators as California, which has more than 39 million people.

Venezuela has a single-chamber legislature, so the disproportionate representation of smaller states does not translate into nearly as much disproportionate political power as in the United States. However, there is an element of the same disproportionality as in the U.S. For example, the state of Amazonas (population 160,548) will send three representatives to the National Assembly while Falcón (population 1,052,748), which has more than six and a half times as many inhabitants, will send six representatives, and Zulia (population 4,111,832), with over 25 times the population of Amazonas, will send 15.

Also since 2010, parties have realigned. In particular, the Fatherland for All (*Patria por Todos*, or PPT) party now affiliates with the PSUV rather than running independently, and the PODEMOS party (literally “We can,” an abbreviation of *Por la Democracia Social*, or For Social Democracy) has moved from the MUD coalition to the current pro-government coalition, known as the Simon Bolivar Great Patriotic Poll (*Gran Polo Patriótico Simón Bolívar* or GPPSB). Of course, a party that shifts from one coalition to another may not bring with it in 2015 the votes that it had received in 2010. If party votes did not change, then such realignment might have brought the government 18–30 additional seats. However, polling numbers do not favor the government, and so the opposition has, for the first time in 16 years, a real chance of winning a majority of seats in the Assembly. But for reasons that are explained below, their expected percentage of Assembly seats is not likely to correspond closely to the nationwide polling.

The expansion and reallocation of seats will by itself have very little effect on the composition of the National Assembly. Using the actual 2010 votes for each coalition by district, the expansion and reallocation, if it had been implemented before the 2010 election, would have given the government 98 seats — exactly the same number that they actually received in 2010 — and would have resulted in two additional seats for the opposition.

If, on the other hand, the party coalitions in 2010 had looked like those of 2015, the 2010 results would have been more favorable to the government. If we take the 2010 vote by party in each

district as given, but reassign these votes to the coalitions to which these parties now belong, then the 2010 vote breaks down as in **Table 1**, below.

**TABLE 1**

Voting Results as They Would Appear Under Current Party Alliances (number of votes)					
GPPSB (6,105,591)					
PSUV	5,113,121	PPT	340,566	PODEMOS	298,311
PCV	162,919	TUPAMARO	152,829	<i>Others</i>	37,845
MUD (4,075,442)					
UNTC	998,606	MPJ	974,358	AD	924,339
COPEI	580,458	PRVZL	339,853	LA CAUSA R	103,367
CUENTAS CLARAS	75,723	<i>Others</i>	78,738		
GANA (412,559)					
MIN-UNIDAD	204,163	<i>Others</i>	208,396		
APR (18,312)					
PODER LABORAL	9,065	<i>Others</i>	9,247		
-OTHER- (697,241)					
ABP	91,408	<i>Others</i>	605,833		

Source: Consejo Nacional Electoral (2010) and author's calculations, see Technical Appendix.

Thus, if 2015 voting patterns were consistent with those of 2010, the realigned parties would weigh much more heavily in favor of the government. Parties currently in the GPPSB accounted for 54 percent of the 2010 vote by list. Based on the 2010 vote and with 2015 districting, the support of PPT and PODEMOS would have yielded an overwhelming supermajority of 128 seats for the government. Even a more unified opposition, with “-OTHER-” parties such as ABP and MR all throwing in with the MUD, the number of government seats would fall only to 116 — still beyond a two-thirds supermajority.

On the basis of the government's new coalition, then, it would appear that the government has a considerable advantage in the 2015 election — with the potential to win 69 percent of seats in the National Assembly with only 54 percent of the vote. However, at a national level the government is polling very poorly in advance of the 2015 election and its advantage shrinks considerably as overall support for the government falls.

## Simulating a Range of Election Results

To see how weaker support for the government translates into weaker electoral results we adjust down the percentage of votes for the GPPSB until the government no longer holds a majority, and then further so that the opposition obtains a three-fifths and then two-thirds supermajority in the National Assembly.

As we make these adjustments, there is an additional range of possibilities that should be considered, depending on whether or not non-coalition parties in the “-OTHER-” category throw their support behind candidates from the MUD coalition, as has occurred in past elections. To take into account this additional variable, we will examine a range of potential results that fall between what we can call a “unified opposition” scenario, where all parties in the “-OTHER-” category support MUD candidates, and a “fractured opposition” scenario, where none of these parties support MUD candidates.

If, for example, a “fractured opposition” coalition increases their vote total by 60 percent relative to the 2010 elections, then the GPPSB’s resulting 42 percent vote share will net them only 83 seats, or just under a majority. If we consider “unified opposition” as described above then the opposition could take a majority of the seats with only a 50 percent increase in its votes, despite a 9 percent increase in voting for the GPPSB parties. To get a super-majority, with this “unified” opposition — shown in **Table 2** as 55 seats for the government, or just under one-third of the Assembly — the opposition would need a 71.8 percent increase in votes, with the government losing 10.8 percent of its votes at the same time.

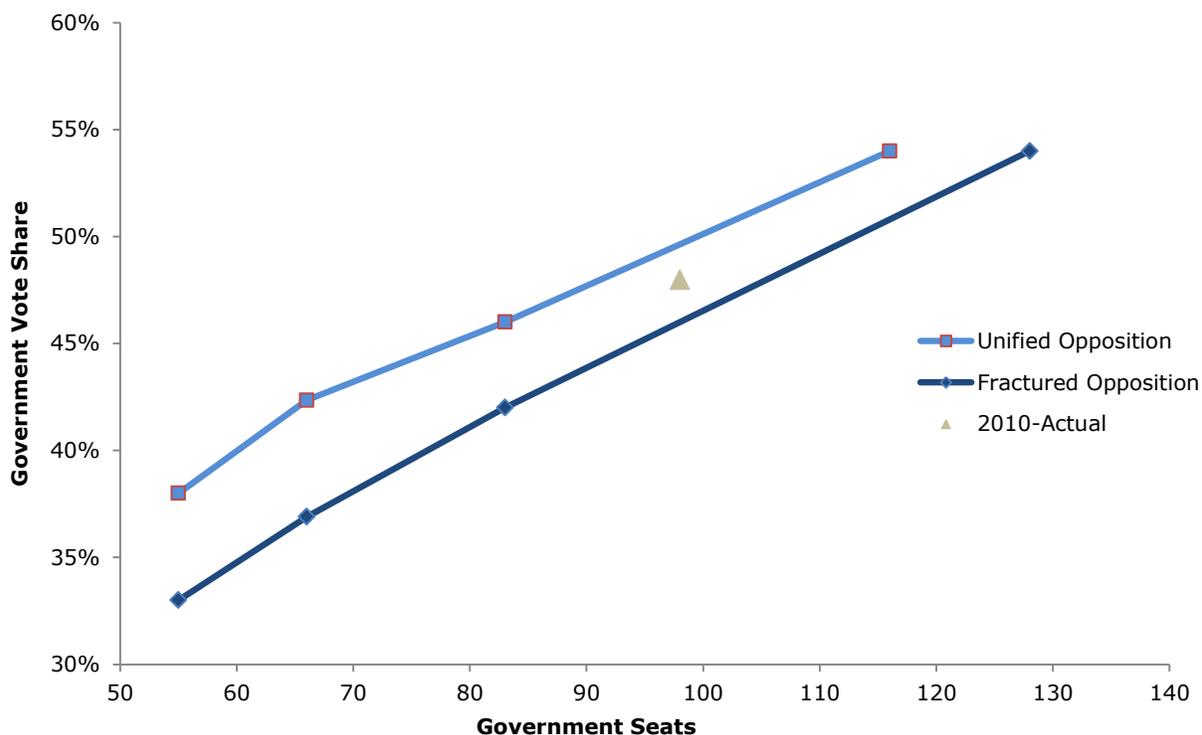
**TABLE 2**

Simulated Range of Election Results Leading to Opposition Simple Majority, and 3/5 and 2/3 Supermajorities				
Opposition	Government Votes	Opposition Votes	Percent Government	Seats (of 167)
	-0.8%	+60.7%	42%	83
<b>Fractured</b>	-12.9	+74.8	37	66
	-22.1	+85.6	33	55
	+8.6	+49.6	46	83
<b>Unified</b>	0	+59.7	42	66
	-10.3	+71.8	38	55

Source: Author's calculations, see Technical Appendix.

**FIGURE 1**

**Overall Share of Votes for Government by Number of Assembly Seats**



Source: Author’s calculations, see Technical Appendix.

It is difficult at this stage to make predictions about the percentage of votes that each coalition might get in these elections. While a number of polls show pro-government forces losing decisively, the latest polls, as well as recent statements by pollsters such as Luis Vicente León of Datanalysis, suggest that support for the government has been increasing over the last few weeks.

A September 2015 poll from the Venezuelan Data Analysis Institute (IVAD) showed the government with 17 percent and the MUD with 38 percent of the vote and 28 percent for others.<sup>2</sup> This fractured outcome would likely result in a two-thirds supermajority for the opposition. A MUD victory of this size will require a very large shift in voting patterns. The GPPSB parties would have to lose some 57 percent of their support while the MUD increases its support by 45 percent.

A mid-November poll, commissioned by the financial consulting firm Ventuari partners, and led by polling expert Germán Campos, shows the PSUV with 35 percent of the vote, the “*Oposición*” polling at 30 percent and another 11 percent supporting independents.<sup>3</sup> Seventeen percent of those

<sup>2</sup> Gutiérrez (2015).  
<sup>3</sup> Ventuari Partners (2015).

polled indicate that they are still undecided. If these undecided voters are split equally among the three aforementioned categories, then the government would expect about 46 percent of the final vote and a supermajority of 104–109 seats. On the other hand, if the government picks up only one in four of the undecided votes then it could receive 42 percent of the final vote and a simple majority of 85–90 seats. Thus, every percentage point for the GPPSB translates into roughly five seats in the National Assembly.

Thus, within a certain range of outcomes, disproportional representation of smaller states and a unified pro-government coalition will continue to favor pro-government parties in the National Assembly.

Given the variance of current polling data, a wide range of outcomes are possible, as well as a range of disparities between the division of the popular vote and the government and opposition coalitions' representation in the National Assembly.

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# Technical Appendix

Starting from the reported 2010 election results<sup>4</sup> we assembled the vote count for each National Assembly race by party. These races included each state's races by name and by list as well as the three regional races for indigenous representation.

We assigned to each party a coalition as in Table 1 (where the “-OTHER-” coalition may be treated as separate, as part of a grand coalition with GANA and APR, or as part of the MUD depending on the simulation.) We next adjusted the vote count by a fixed factor for each party so that the total number of votes cast nationwide in the races by list came to 66 percent of the 19,504,106 eligible<sup>5</sup> — or 12,872,710 — and that the coalition vote shares match the desired national outcome.

Finally, the coalition winner(s) for each race were decided based on the resulting vote counts. In races by list, we determined the number of winners for each coalition via the outlined legal process. Briefly, the coalition with the most votes wins both of two seats in a race if it receives two-thirds of the two-way vote with the runner-up — otherwise they will split. A race with three seats is more complex, but the top coalition will sweep all three seats if it receives three-fourths of the two-way vote with the runner-up.

The simulations presented in Table 2 are as follows: the set of “Fractured Opposition” simulations treats “-OTHER-” as a distinct coalition; “Unified” treats it as part of a grand coalition with the MUD. We adjusted the vote shares for the GPPSB to be as large as possible while still keeping the number of seats won by the GPPSB to the target. (That is, while still allowing the rest of the seats to represent simple, three-fifths, or two-thirds majorities.)

The simulations corresponding to a specific poll vary by “Fractured” and “Unified” as with Table 2, but the vote shares are determined directly from the poll. We always ignore respondents declaring intent to abstain; in determining shares, we split the undecideds among the coalitions. Specifically, in one set of simulations we split the undecided in proportion to their polled vote, and in another we assign the GPPSB one-fourth of the undecideds, with the remaining three-fourths split among the rest in proportion to their votes.

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4 Consejo Nacional Electoral (2010).

5 Consejo Nacional Electoral (2015).