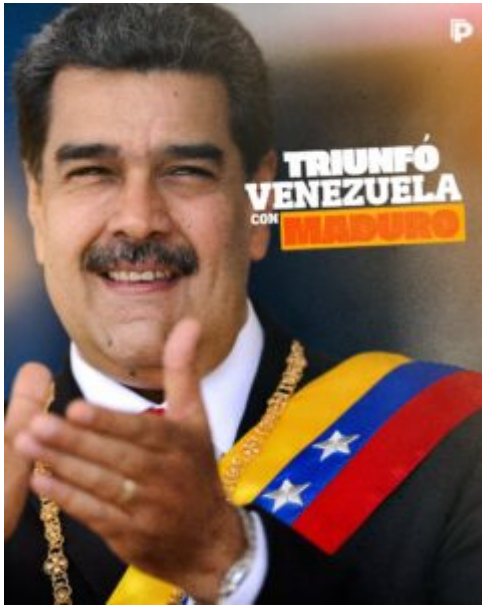


Venezuela's emancipatory cycle slams shut

written by Alexander Hall Lujardo | August 12, 2024



Nicolás Maduro claims to have won the Venezuelan presidential election, though he hasn't provided the proof.

Protests erupted after the July 28 presidential election as soon as the National Electoral Council (CNE) announced that Nicolás Maduro had won another six-year term. Media reports indicate that as of July 31, 2024, dozens of protesters have died and more than a thousand have been arrested.

In different parts of the country, demonstrators toppled statues of Hugo Chávez, marking the end of the Bolivarian emancipatory cycle. These actions underscore the symbolic bankruptcy of the anti-imperialist project that empowered the country's poorest sectors, carried out dozens of social missions that dignified common people and significantly reduced poverty through a transformative project that enjoyed an level of popular support that was unprecedented in Venezuela's history as a republic. The current leaders steered the process toward oligarchy, militarism and corruption, sustained by influence peddling, crude rentierism and privatization with socialist characteristics.



Nicolás Maduro's photo appeared thirteen times on the ballot-his opponent's just once.

The organization of presidential elections in Venezuela on July 28, 2024, took place after several rounds of talks between the government and the opposition, who reached an accord known as the Barbados Agreement. This led to a relaxation of the sanctions that the United States has imposed on Venezuela.

The electoral process began under a restrictive framework characterized by delays in the provision of updated voter registries that impacted those living abroad, especially those who emigrated for economic and political reasons. Authorities ratified the disqualification of opposition candidates, as was the case of liberal candidate María Corina Machado, who won the primaries for the right-wing coalition, Mesa de la Unidad Democrática, with 92.5 percent of the vote. Being a liberal in the twenty-first century, given the challenges of representative democracy, economic inequality and the disaster of neoliberalism implies complicity with hegemonic, conservative thinking. Machado shares perspectives with right-wing conservatives and has taken positions aligned with Christian fundamentalism and Israeli Zionism.

Authorities also disqualified the candidacy of Corina Yoris, a well-known academic who received the support initially thrown behind Machado as well as from an important sector of anti-Chavista militants. In the end, the opposition selected former diplomat and professor Edmundo González Urrutia as its candidate. He promised to rebuild Venezuela's economy, rescue democratic institutions and carry out a massive privatization plan.

Some leftwing critics of the ruling class, including the Communist Party of Venezuela, stated that they were stripped of the right to participate in the election. The Supreme Court of Justice and figures allied with the government prevented the Communist Party from taking part in order to ensure that President Maduro would be the only leftwing candidate.

Opacity and secrecy defined the electoral process. On May 29, 2024, the CNE revoked the European Union's electoral observation mission. Then, only four days before the election, Brazil's federal court said that it would not send observers due to Maduro's disparaging comments about the democratic

system in Brazil and Colombia.

Voting in the Dark

Election day, July 28, took place in relative calm in most of the country, although there were complaints about delays in the opening of some polling stations and restrictions imposed on witnesses in some voting centers. In the evening, there were reports of acts of violence and intimidation by groups traveling by motorcycle as well as delays in the transmission of voting data.

Equally concerning was that authorities prevented opposition observers from accessing the CNE's vote counting room, according to opposition representative Delsa Solórzano. In addition, in a country with more than 7.7 million emigrants due to the economic crisis and authoritarianism, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), only 6,528 of 69,000 Venezuelans registered to vote from abroad were able to exercise this right.

CNE President Elvis Amoroso announced in an initial press release that Maduro had won the election with 51.2 percent of the vote, followed by González Urrutia with 44.2 percent, while the rest of the candidates received 4.6 percent between them.

The CNE's failure to publish tally sheets within the 48 hours, as required by the Electoral Processes Law, constituted a particularly flagrant irregularity. The Carter Center and other organizations overseeing the fulfillment of democratic guarantees demanded the publication of disaggregated tallies. This organization, which has observed more than 124 elections in 43 countries around the world, stated that the election "did not meet international standards of electoral integrity at any of its stages and violated numerous provisions of its own national laws."

Popular classes expressed their outrage as soon as authorities announced the official result, given the strong indications of irregularities in the process. Governments from across the political spectrum demanded transparency, including Argentina, Chile, Costa Rica, Uruguay, Panama, Dominican Republic and Peru, to which the Bolivarian regime responded by ordering the immediate departure of its diplomatic personnel. The United States, Canada, Ecuador, El Salvador, Paraguay, Brazil and Colombia made identical demands of the Venezuelan government. For their part, the leaders of Nicaragua, Cuba, Honduras, Bolivia, Russia, China, Syria and Iran recognized Maduro as the victor.

Maduro's Political Machine

Venezuela's institutional leadership affirmed Maduro's reelection. There were statements from Tarek William Saab, the Attorney General; Vladimir Padrino López, the Minister of Defense and Jorge Rodríguez, President of the National Assembly among others. They alleged that there had been a "coup attempt" with foreign—imperial—support, claiming to have dozens of pieces of evidence, including the confessions of those arrested, of such a conspiracy. Threats against Machado and Gonzalez Urrutia continue. Authorities blame the two for an alleged cyber attack originating in North Macedonia the government says caused the delay in the announcement of the election results.

The complex post-electoral situation, marked by internal violence and a diplomatic crisis, has prompted long-time supporters of the Bolivarian project on the Latin American left to make critical statements. This includes Cristina Fernandez, Luiz Inacio Lula de Silva and Gustavo Petro, highlighting the authoritarian, repressive and alienating character of post-Chavismo.

The crisis aggravates the structural inadequacies of the reformist left, given Venezuela's economic

dependence on the export of raw materials and the failure to achieve a regional integration that could confront predatory practices in economic, commercial and financial affairs.

In this context, social discontent is on the rise, and the dynamics of representative democracy offer no other path forward beyond police repression, the criminalization of protest and the policing of political dissidence. Maduro called those who demonstrated in the streets terrorists, drug addicts, criminals and delinquents. His statements fit squarely within this repressive logic. Militarization, concessions to private businesses and agreements with foreign transnationals, especially from Russia and China, have put popular sovereignty under siege.

Political and economic instability created by the authoritarianism of the United Socialist Party of Venezuela is terrible news for democracy, Latin American integration and leftists seeking to promote social change.

The repressive nature of Maduro's regime has ruined the democratic, participatory and popular legacy that Chávez oversaw for years, with elections that were widely regarded as clean. Today, organizations that had once approved Venezuela's elections now condemn them. This scenario stokes the interventionist yearnings of the United States, which has revived long held dreams of control over Venezuela's natural resources.

This article was originally published in Ojalá:

Venezuela progressive government Protest Repression Elections



Born in Havana, Cuba in 1998, Alexander Hall Lujardo has a BA in history and is a Black activist working toward democratic socialism.