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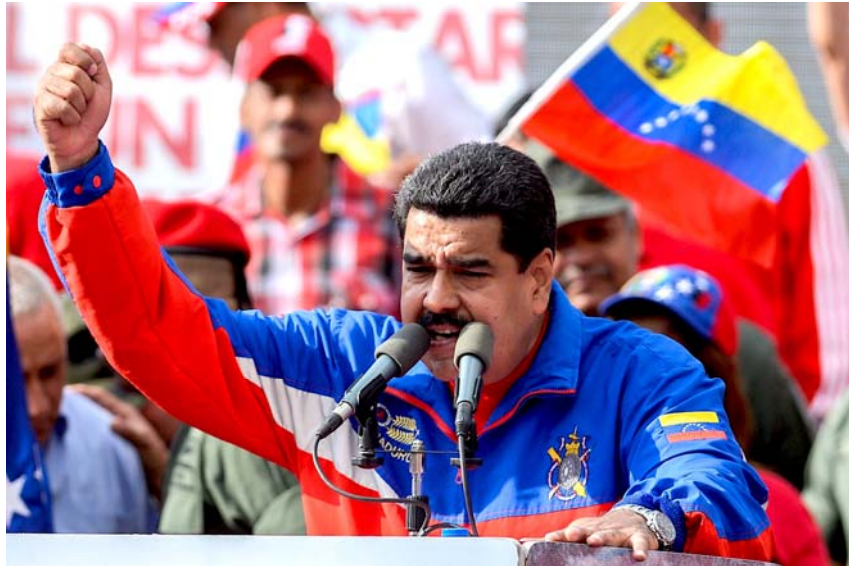
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Alan MacLeod

Venezuela: As US Leaders Call Fraud, US Observers Endorse Results

Western media appeared as eager as the U.S. government to undermine the elections in Venezuela and agitate for political strife, writes Alan MacLeod.



Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro in 2017. (Jeso Carneiro, Flickr, CC BY-NC 2.0)

Much to the chagrin of the U.S. government, socialist candidate Nicolas Maduro won a third successive term in office on Sunday, convincingly beating his U.S.-backed opponents, Edmundo Gonzalez and Maria Corina Machado, by seven points.

Almost immediately after the results were announced, American officials began decrying the elections as a farce. “We commend [the Venezuelan people’s] courage and commitment to democracy in the face of repression,” Secretary of State Antony Blinken said in a speech on Sunday evening, adding:

“We have serious concerns that the result announced does not affect the will or the votes of the Venezuelan people. It is critical that every vote be counted fairly and transparently. That election officials immediately share information with the opposition and independent observers without delay, and that electoral authorities publish the detailed tabulation of votes. The international community is watching this very closely, and will respond accordingly.”

Senator Marco Rubio, a longtime Venezuela hawk, went further, stating, “Everybody knows massive voter turnout like the one today in Venezuela would result in a massive loss by Maduro. The ONLY way he wins is with massive fraud.”

He went on to say that Maduro should have lost by 40 points and would immediately institute a communications blackout across the country in an effort to cement his rule (something that did not happen).

Statements like these completely contrast with the accounts and testimonies of dozens of American electoral observers in Venezuela, many of whom spoke with *MintPress News*.

“I don’t agree with Marco Rubio,” said Wyatt Souers, a representative of the International People’s Assembly, explaining that:

“The U.S. has tried to destabilize and undermine the legitimacy of basically every Venezuelan election in recent memory. Ahead of the election, they always put out statements and media pieces, declaring the election a fraud before it even happens. But what we have witnessed this week is tons of support for the Maduro government amongst the people here.”

Souers visited several polling stations in the Caracas area and noted that turnout was “massive”, with hundreds of people inside the voting stations at any given time.

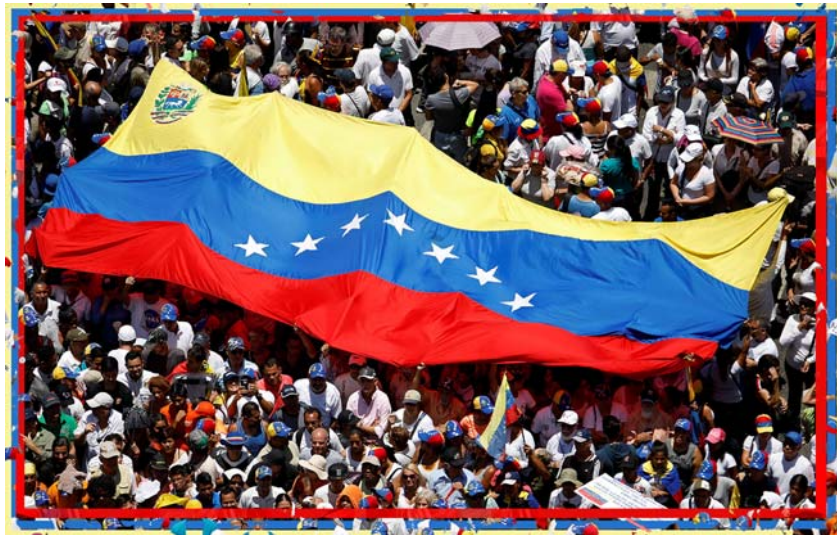
“We got to go in and see the voting process. Everything was happening according to protocol. And so, I would say it seems like these elections are legitimate, and we fully support the right of the Venezuelan people to determine their own future.”

Roger D. Harris, an observer from Task Force on the Americas, spent the day observing electoral centers in Miranda State. He and others told *MintPress* that opposition supporters were perfectly happy to publicly announce their allegiances and express their grievances with

the government. Despite their opposition to socialism, most retained confidence in the electoral system. As Harris noted:

“I spoke to a person who is voting against Maduro, a professional who studied psychology in San Francisco. She was hopeful for change. But what was very significant was that she thought that the electoral process is free and fair. Overall, our impression of going to the various polling places was that people were very welcoming to us international observers, and were very proud to be out there voting for their country.”

No Comparison with US



Independence Day in Venezuela on July 5, 2021. (A.Davey, Flickr, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

Many U.S. observers who spoke with *MintPress* were quick to compare the Venezuelan system favorably with their own. “I am actually kind of blown away by how advanced this system is, particularly compared to the backward nature of the U.S., so I am completely impressed,” Jodi Dean, a professor and political scientist, said.

“We witnessed several polling stations, and we did not see any irregularities or anything that would point to any type of fraud or illegitimacy. The voting process here is much more rigorous than in the United States,” Souers told *MintPress*. “They have a very good process here.”

Elizabeth Burley, a representative of Unión de Vecinos, a Los Angeles tenants’ union, spent election day monitoring voting in La Guaira state and noted a number of superior features of Venezuelan democracy, including that the polling system is automated and completely consistent between localities.

Furthermore, she said, Venezuelan elections are held on Sunday rather than midweek as they are in the U.S., allowing more people to participate. Burley noted that she was able to go

inside stations and observe everything and that there were witnesses from both government and opposition parties present. Apart from a few verbal exchanges between left- and right-wing voters, she said, events proceeded in a state of calm.

MintPress, however, witnessed a crowd of over 100 opposition supporters arrive at a voting center in central Caracas at 6 p.m., attempting to force polling stations to close exactly on time. The crowd tried to block latecomers from voting but without success. One opposition supporter blocking the door said, “Nobody should be allowed to vote unless they are from our side.”

Media Undermines a Trustworthy Process

Western media appeared as eager as the U.S. government to undermine the elections in Venezuela and agitate for political strife. “Venezuela’s Autocrat Is Declared Winner in Tainted Election,” ran *The New York Times* headline. The BBC described Maduro’s celebration party as “choreographed,” implying he does not enjoy widespread support. Elon Musk, the billionaire owner of X, formerly Twitter, retweeted a call from far-right Argentinian President Javier Milei to the Venezuelan military to stage a coup against Maduro. “Shame on dictator Maduro,” Musk said.

Fake news abounds on social media as well, as images circulate of thieves supposedly stealing election boxes full of ballots. What can clearly be seen in those videos, however, are people taking huge air conditioning units. Ballot boxes in Venezuela are made of brown cardboard and are barely larger than a shoebox. The giant white appliances thieves drag out with them in the video bear zero resemblance to ballot boxes.

Hoax pictures, supposedly showing National Electoral Council (CNE) headquarters with screens all showing the “real” result (an opposition victory), went viral, as did a screenshot from a TeleSUR infographic that incorrectly stated that three minor opposition parties received 4.6 percent of the vote each, instead of combined. This meant the entire vote on TeleSUR’s graphic added up to 109 percent. That relatively minor data entry error was enough for the image to go viral around the world, supposedly proving a gigantic fraud, despite the fact that its source was merely a TV channel rather than the CNE itself.

In reality, the Venezuelan electoral system is perhaps the most advanced in the world. To cast a ballot, voters must present their national identification card. They also have their fingerprints scanned. If both the I.D. card and fingerprint match those on the national database, they can vote on a touchscreen electronic voting machine. The electronic vote is sent to the National Electoral Commission headquarters in Caracas, and a paper ballot is printed. Voters must check the ballot and place it in a box. Afterward, they must put their

thumb on an ink blot and stamp it next to their name on an electoral roll to prove they have voted. They then physically sign their name beside the fingerprint.

When polls close, paper ballots are counted in front of witnesses from all parties and compared to the electronic vote count. If there are any discrepancies, a full audit is conducted. In 2013, the electronic vote was 99.98 percent accurate. This was because, across Venezuela, 22 people who had voted on the machines failed to put their paper ballot in the box.

In 2012, President Jimmy Carter (whose Carter Center regularly monitors elections worldwide) described the Venezuelan process as “the best in the world.”

“Everything has been calm to the point of boring,” Dean said of the election process, adding: “People are happy and welcoming tons of foreigners to look and see what they are doing and explain it patiently, with confidence and real enthusiasm for democracy. Actually, I think that one of the reasons that there is so much cynicism in the United States about democracy is that people don’t trust the system. And here, part of their enthusiasm is that they have a lot of confidence in their system, that their voice will be heard.”

An Economic, Political & Psychological War

Nicolas Maduro came to power in 2013 in a similarly heavily-monitored election. The results were endorsed globally, almost without exception; the United States was the only country to refuse to recognize his victory.

Since his rise to power, Washington has waged a relentless economic war on Venezuela in an attempt to strangle his administration. There are currently over 900 U.S. sanctions against the country. The effect has been devastating: under the weight of the American blockade, Venezuela’s oil industry collapsed, causing it to lose 99 percent of its international income. Under threats of secondary sanctions, countries and businesses refused to trade with Venezuela, causing massive shortages of food and other necessary goods.

A report published by the Center for Economic and Policy Research, a D.C. think tank, found that, between 2017 and 2018, the U.S. blockade had killed more than 40,000 people. An American United Nations official who visited the country described the situation as akin to a “Medieval siege” and declared the U.S. guilty of crimes against humanity.

The economic war is mirrored by a political war, as Washington has attempted to isolate Venezuela internationally. Media, too, have played their part, constantly demonizing Venezuela as a failed state presided over by a dictatorship. In his victory speech on Sunday evening, Maduro claimed the results were a victory of truth over lies and decried the “dirty war” against Venezuela being played out in the press and on social media.

The U.S. has supported multiple coup attempts against Maduro and his predecessor, Hugo Chavez. It has also spent tens of millions funding opposition groups, including NGOs, student organizations, and political parties. Marina Corina Machado is a case in point. The opposition leader's "human rights" group, Súmate, was bankrolled by the C.I.A. front group, the National Endowment for Democracy.

Fighting US Imperialism

Venezuela has been a target because it offers an alternative vision of how society should be organized. Under Hugo Chavez, Venezuela nationalized its vast oil industry and used the profits to fund massive social welfare programs, including free healthcare, education and housing.

Under Chavez, poverty was reduced by half, and extreme poverty was reduced by three-quarters. Illiteracy was eradicated, and the student population grew to become the fourth largest in the world.

Venezuela became an inspiration around the globe, especially as it led the movement for a more multipolar world, offered unqualified support for Palestinian liberation, and gave its oil away for free to poor countries and communities, including black and Native American populations in the U.S. who had their homes heated for free or at heavily discounted rates courtesy of the Venezuelan government.

U.S. sanctions have devastated the country. But the Maduro administration appears to have successfully weathered the worst of the storm. Stores are full again, inflation has been tamed, and Venezuela now produces 96 percent of the food it consumes.

On top of that, Maduro's signature housing policy, Misión Gran Vivienda Venezuela, just celebrated the building of its five-millionth apartment. "Venezuela is healing" is a common slogan across the country.

While the likes of Antony Blinken and Marco Rubio condemn the electoral process in Venezuela, their positions are not supported by the dozens of Americans who were actually on the ground in Venezuela last week. It is doubtful, however, that those observers' words and testimonies will be heeded by those in power. After all, for the U.S. Empire, some issues are too important to let the truth get in the way.

Alan MacLeod is senior staff Writer for *MintPress News*. After completing his PhD in 2017 he published two books: *Bad News From Venezuela: Twenty Years of Fake News and Misreporting* and *Propaganda in the Information Age: Still Manufacturing Consent*, as well as a number of academic articles. He has also contributed

to FAIR.org, *The Guardian*, *Salon*, *The Grayzone*, *Jacobin Magazine*, and *Common Dreams*.

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By **Alan**

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