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BY VIJAY PRASHAD

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## *The Venezuelan People Stay With the Bolivarian Revolution*



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On July 28, the 70th birthday of Hugo Chávez (1954-2013), Nicolás Maduro Moros won the Venezuelan presidential election, the fifth since the Bolivarian Constitution was ratified in 1999. In January 2025, Maduro will start his third six-year term as president. He took over the reins of the Bolivarian Revolution after the death of Chávez from pelvic cancer in 2013. Since the death of Chávez, Maduro has faced several challenges: to build his own legitimacy as president in the place of a charismatic man who came to define the Bolivarian Revolution; to tackle the collapse of oil prices in mid-2014, which negatively impacted Venezuela's state revenues (over 90 percent of which was from oil exports); and to manage a response to the unilateral, illegal sanctions deepened on Venezuela by the United States as oil prices declined. These negative factors weighed heavily on the Maduro government, which has now

been in office for a decade after being re-elected through the ballot box in 2018 and now in 2024.

From Maduro's first election victory in 2013, the increasingly far-right opposition began to reject the electoral process and complain about irregularities in the system. Interviews I have held over the past decade with conservative politicians have made it clear that they recognize both the ideological grip of *Chavismo* over the working class of Venezuela and the organizational power not only of Maduro's United Socialist Party of Venezuela but of the networks of *Chavismo* that run from the communes (1.4 million strong) to youth organizations. About half of Venezuela's voting population is reliably wedded to the Bolivarian project, and no other political project in Venezuela has the kind of election machine built by the forces of the Bolivarian revolution. That makes winning an election for the anti-Chávez forces impossible. To that end, their only path is to malign Maduro's government as corrupt and to complain that the elections are not fair. After Maduro's victory—by a margin of 51.2 percent to 44.2 percent—this is precisely what the far-right opposition has been trying to do, egged on by the United States and a network of far-right and pro-U.S. governments in South America.

### **Europe Needs Venezuelan Oil**

The United States has been trying to find a solution to a problem of its own making. Having placed severe sanctions against both Iran and Russia, the United States now cannot easily find a source of energy for its European partners. Liquefied natural gas from the United States is expensive and not sufficient. What the U.S. would like is to have a reliable source of oil that is easy to process and in sufficient quantities. Venezuelan oil fits the requirements, but given the U.S. sanctions on Venezuela, this oil cannot be found in the European market. The United States has created a trap from which it finds few solutions.

In June 2022, the U.S. government allowed Eni SpA (Italy) and Repsol SA (Spain) to transport Venezuelan oil to the European market to compensate for the loss of Russian oil deliveries. This allowance revealed Washington's shift in strategy regarding Venezuela. No longer was it going to be possible to suffocate Venezuela by preventing exports of oil, since this oil was needed as a result of U.S. sanctions on Russia. Since June 2022, the United States has been trying to calibrate its need for this oil, its antipathy to the Bolivarian Revolution, and its relations with the far-right opposition in Venezuela.

### **The U.S. and the Venezuelan Far-Right**

The emergence of *Chavismo*—the politics of mass action to build socialism in Venezuela—transformed the political scenario in the country. The old parties of the right (Acción

Democrática and COPEI) collapsed after 40 years of alternating power. In the 2000 and 2006 elections, the opposition to Chávez was provided not by the right, but by dissenting center-left forces (La Causa R and Un Nuevo Tiempo). The Old Right faced a challenge from the New Right, which was decidedly pro-capitalist, anti-Chavista, and pro-U.S.; this group formed a political platform called La Salida or The Exit, which referred to their desired exit from the Bolivarian Revolution. The key figures here were Leopoldo López, Antonio Ledezma, and María Corina Machado, who led violent protests against the government in 2014 (López was arrested for incitement to violence and now lives in Spain; a U.S. government official in 2009 said he is “often described as arrogant, vindictive, and power-hungry”). Ledezma moved to Spain in 2017 and was—with Corina Machado—a signatory of the far-right Madrid Charter, an anti-communist manifesto organized by the Spanish far-right party, Vox. Corina Machado’s political project is underpinned by the proposal to privatize Venezuela’s oil company.

Since the death of Chávez, Venezuela’s right wing has struggled with the absence of a unified program and with a mess of egotistical leaders. It fell to the United States to try and shape the opposition into a political project. The most comical attempt was the elevation in January 2019 of an obscure politician named Juan Guaidó to be the president. That maneuver failed and in December 2022, the far-right opposition removed Guaidó as its leader. The removal of Guaidó allowed for direct negotiations between the Venezuelan government and the far-right opposition, which had since 2019 hoped for U.S. military intervention to secure them in power in Caracas.

The U.S. pressured the increasingly intransigent far-right to hold talks with the Venezuelan government in order to allow the U.S. to reduce sanctions and let Venezuelan oil go into European markets. This pressure resulted in the Barbados Agreement of October 2023, in which the two sides agreed to a fair election in 2024 as the basis for the slow withdrawal of the sanctions. The elections of July 28 are the outcome of the Barbados process. Even though María Corina Machado was barred from running, she effectively ran against Maduro through her proxy candidate Edmundo González and lost in a hard-fought election.

Twenty-three minutes after the polls closed, U.S. Vice President Kamala Harris—and now a presidential candidate in the November elections in the United States—put out a tweet conceding that the far-right had lost. It was an early sign that the United States—despite making noises about election fraud—wanted to move past their allies in the far-right, find a way to normalize relations with the Venezuelan government and allow the oil to flow to Europe. This tendency of the U.S. government has frustrated the far-right, which turned to

other far-right forces across Latin America for support, and which knows that its remaining political argument is about election fraud. If the U.S. government wants to get Venezuelan oil to Europe it will need to abandon the far-right and accommodate the Maduro government. Meanwhile, the far-right has taken to the streets through armed gangs who want to repeat the *guarimba* (barricade) disruptions of 2017.

*This article was produced by [Globetrotter](#).*

*Vijay Prashad's most recent book (with Noam Chomsky) is [The Withdrawal: Iraq, Libya, Afghanistan and the Fragility of US Power](#) (New Press, August 2022).*

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