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How the US Could Have Won the Venezuelan Election

Don't ask what business the US had in backing a candidate in Venezuela's July 28 presidential election. Certainly that was not a question that the corporate press ever asked. Of course, the US should never have been meddling in Venezuelan elections in the first place. But given the machinations of the hemisphere's hegemon, it is instructive to examine why and who Washington backed.

Insurrectionary rather than democratic strategy

It came as no surprise that the US-backed opposition called the 2024 Venezuelan presidential election fraudulent when they lost. They had announced that intention before the election.

Cries of fraud have been the far-right's practice in nearly every one of the 31 national contests since the Bolivarian Revolution began a quarter of a century ago, except for the two contests lost by the Chavistas, the movement founded by Hugo Chávez and carried on by his successor Nicolás Maduro.

That is because this far-right opposition, funded and largely directed by Washington, pursues an insurrectionary strategy, rather than a democratic one. Neither they nor the US have recognized the legitimacy of the Venezuelan government since Maduro was first elected in 2013.

The US-backed opposition boycotted the 2018 election in anticipation of what appeared to them as an imminent governmental collapse under US assault. But in 2024, they were compelled to contend in the presidential contest. Conditions had changed with the successes by the Maduro administration in turning around the country's economic freefall,

largely precipitated by US unilateral coercive measures. In addition, Washington had failed to diplomatically isolate Venezuela by such stunts as recognizing the self-proclaimed “interim presidency” of Juan Guaidó.

US picks its candidate

The reentry of the US-backed opposition into the electoral arena was not based on democratic participation that recognized the constitution or the institutions of the Venezuelan state. The US-backed opposition’s “primary” was not conducted by the official Venezuelan electoral authority, the CNE, as had previous ones. Rather, it was a private affair administered by the NGO [Súmate](#), a recipient of US National Endowment for Democracy (NED) funds, a CIA-cutout.

Washington’s prechosen candidate, Maria Corina Machado, won in a crowded field of 13 candidates with an incredulous 92%. When some of the other candidates in the primary called [fraud](#), Machado had the ballots destroyed. She could do that because Súmate was her personal organization.

Ms. Machado was despised by much of the other opposition. A faux populist, she is a member of one of the richest families in Venezuela, went to Yale, and lived in Florida. While the populace suffered under US unilateral coercive measures, she championed them and even called for military intervention. Internationally, Machado has strong ties with the international far-right, notably Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel.

Washington backed Machado knowing full well that in 2015 she had been [barred](#) from running for office. Back then, while she was a member of the National Assembly, she had accepted a diplomatic post with a foreign country in order to testify against her own country. Such treason is constitutionally prohibited in Venezuela as it is in many other countries.

For the US, Machado’s disbarment was a bonus. The State Department could [claim](#) that its candidate was unfairly disqualified, when that was a given to begin with. Washington’s intent was not to encourage a free and fair democratic process, but to delegitimize the one already in place.

Disbarred, Machado then personally chose her surrogate, Edmundo González. The former diplomat from the 1980s was completely unknown and with no electoral experience. The infirm surrogate literally had to be propped up by Machado at campaign rallies, although most of the time he convalesced in Caracas while she barnstormed the country.

An alternative strategy

Contrary to the nonsense in the corporate press of a “[unified opposition](#),” the non-Chavista elements have been anything but unified. Had they been, they may have made the most of the 48% of the electorate that did not support Maduro according to the [count](#) by the CNE. The assertion by Machado/González that they had won the 2024 election by a [margin](#) of 70% lacks credibility. That seven out of ten Venezuelans supported them was not proven in the streets. Machado [called](#) her followers out on the 3rd and again on the 17th, but the turnout was [smaller](#) than even her pre-election rallies. Meanwhile [pro-Maduro](#) rallies dwarfed the [opposition's](#). This was an indication of the high level of organization and popular support for the Bolivarian Revolution.

Still, in retrospect, the US could have tried to galvanize support for an alternative project. There were politically moderate state governors and legislators, who might have unified the fractious opposition. Instead, the US, anticipating a Maduro victory, obstinately clung to the disqualified Machado with her surrogate González.

The Machado/González platform was not a popular one, calling for extreme neoliberal privatization of education, health care, housing, food assistance, and the national oil agency. A far more attractive and winning platform would have been to retain the social benefits of Chavismo with the promise of relief from US unilateral coercive measures.

In backing someone as unattractive, unknown, and unpopular as González, the US showed its disinterest in a good faith engagement in the democratic electoral process.

The real obstacle to free and fair elections in Venezuela

That brings us to the heart of the matter. Truly free and fair elections in Venezuela were impossible – not due to the supposed conspiracies of the ruling Chavistas – but because of conditions imposed by Washington by their hybrid war against Venezuela.

The 930 unilateral coercive measures imposed on Caracas by Washington – euphemistically called sanctions – are no less [deadly](#) than bombs, causing over 100,000 casualties. This form of collective punishment is [illegal](#) under the charters of the UN and the Organization of American States (OAS) and even US law.

In short, the Venezuelan people went to the polls on July 28 with a [gun](#) aimed at their heads. If they voted for Maduro, the coercive measures would likely continue and even be intensified. This fundamental reality was ignored by the Western press and other critics.

The narrative on Venezuela has been shifted by Washington and echoed in the corporate press. The paramount interference of US's coercive measures was ignored, while attention was shifted to the intricacies of Venezuelan electoral law. The larger picture got [lost](#) in the

statistical weeds. This shifted narrative is designed to place the burden of proof on the sovereign government to prove its legitimacy.

Solutions are being proffered by [outside actors](#) calling for new elections in Venezuela and establishment of a “transitional government.” However, there are no constitutional mechanisms for doing that in Venezuela. Nor are there any such mechanisms in most countries, including the US. More importantly, this is a gross violation of Venezuelan sovereignty. Even the far-right opposition in Venezuela [rejected](#) these as unacceptable.

The CNE has by law 30 days after the election to release the official results. Meanwhile in response to the accusations of fraud, the Maduro administration turned the matter over to the Venezuelan constitutional institution designed to adjudicate such matters, which is the Electoral Chamber of the Venezuelan Supreme Tribunal of Justice (TSJ).

On August 22, the TSJ [affirmed](#) the CNE’s count, confirming Maduro’s victory. A Hinterlaces poll found that 60% of Venezuelans [trust](#) the CNE’s results.

President Maduro [commented](#): “Venezuela has the sovereignty of an independent country with a constitution, it has institutions, and the conflicts in Venezuela of any kind are solved among Venezuelans, with their institutions, with their law and with their constitution.” The US [responded](#) with a call for a regime-change “transition.”

Insistence on its *right to defend* national sovereignty in the face of continued US imperial aggression will make for tumultuous times ahead for Venezuela.

Roger Harris is on the board of the [Task Force on the Americas](#), a 32-year-old anti-imperialist human rights organization.

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