

Politics | Elections

Venezuela's Opposition Disputes Claim of Maduro Election Victory

- Maduro blamed delay on hack on electoral transmission system
- US, Chile among nations expressing concerns about tally



WATCH: Venezuela's electoral council has declared President Nicolas Maduro the winner of the election. Crayton Harrison reports. *Source: Bloomberg*

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Political tensions in Venezuela soared anew after President Nicolás Maduro was declared the winner of Sunday's election and the opposition, rejecting that claim, called on the military to enforce what it said was the will of the people.

After a lengthy delay following the closing of polls, Venezuela's electoral center said Maduro won 51.2% of the vote, compared with 44.2% for rival Edmundo González. But opposition leader María Corina Machado, who was barred from running, said her coalition had gained access to 40% of the tabulated votes and had González winning 70% of the vote so far.

Machado told reporters after the announcement that Venezuela's armed forces "have a duty to ensure that the popular sovereignty expressed in the vote is respected." González, who relied on a network of roughly

30,000 volunteer witnesses at polling stations, urged supporters to avoid protests and said he'd advise them on next steps.

As the results were announced, a pro-government crowd that had gathered in front of Miraflores, the presidential palace, burst into applause. Fireworks could be heard throughout the city, along with people banging on pots and pans – a popular form of protest in Latin America.

Venezuela's dollar bonds due in 2026 fell 0.9 cents to 20.7 cents on the dollar, underscoring already-low investor confidence in the South American nation.

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The dispute leaves Venezuela, which has faced bouts of hyperinflation and seen its oil industry implode under Maduro's watch, at risk of more turmoil. Sunday's election was seen as one of the opposition's best chances at unseating Maduro since he succeeded the late Hugo Chavez in 2013.

They were bolstered by an exit poll conducted by US firm Edison Research, which had González winning by more than 30 percentage points.

The declaration of a Maduro victory prompted the US and some other nations to quickly express doubts about the official tally.

The US has “serious concerns that the result announced does not reflect the will or the votes of the Venezuelan people,” Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Monday while on a visit to Tokyo. Chilean President Gabriel Boric called the results “difficult to believe,” saying his country wouldn't recognize unverifiable totals. Traditional Maduro allies in Cuba and Nicaragua, on the other hand, congratulated the president.

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Despite the Maduro government regularly being accused of undermining democracy to ensure its survival, the opposition was buoyant, if realistic,

heading into the vote. Victory appeared within reach to the enthusiastic supporters of Machado and González gathered in Caracas late on Sunday.

In Miami, a bastion of anti-Maduro exiles, a giant Venezuelan flag was draped between concrete pillars of an overpass. On a stage in a park, a big screen played scenic views of the country while speakers rallied the crowd. Despite a summer storm dousing the city, people erupted in applause when the screen flashed to a newscast of Machado and they began chanting “liberty.”

Questions about the vote grew when, several hours after the close of voting, there was still no official announcement.



Maria Corina Machado and Edmundo González hold a press conference following election results in Caracas on July 29. *Photographer: Gaby Oraa/Bloomberg*

In remarks after the results were announced, the 61-year-old Maduro blamed the delay on a hack of the electoral authority’s transmission system and said the public prosecutor would investigate the cause and “make justice.” Public Prosecutor Tarek William Saab said he will host a news conference on Monday morning.

That will likely do little to assuage Maduro’s critics.

“The Maduro regime has opted to announce a result at odds with all exit polls and early indications of an opposition victory, indicating their intent to stay in power,” said Ryan Berg, director of the Americas Program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington.

Turnout was 59% of eligible voters, the election agency said. That would be higher than the 2018 vote, which the opposition boycotted, but significantly below the more than 70% turnout in elections in 2006, 2012 and 2013. González had said earlier Sunday that turnout had been “massive.”

Maduro now faces the challenge of legitimizing the vote to his people and the rest of the world, given his government’s history of repression. González was running in the place of Machado, who experienced a meteoric rise in popularity even after the government banned her from seeking public office.

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Venezuela’s military leadership, which has long backed Maduro but can act independently, could still choose to intervene in some way.

International pressure from allies including Brazil and Colombia might also play a role.

A small mission of observers from the [Carter Center](#) is expected to release preliminary findings on Tuesday. A similar team from the [United Nations](#) is observing the vote, but per tradition, will not present their findings to the public. Venezuela withdrew an invitation to observe the vote from a more robust [European Union](#) group.

If they won, González and Machado aimed to dismantle government controls on the economy, privatize the oil industry and reunite families torn apart by the exodus of 7.7 million Venezuelans.

Maduro's third consecutive term, if it starts as planned in January 2025, would be a challenging one.



Nicolás Maduro speaks to members of the media after casting a ballot during the presidential election in Caracas, Venezuela on July 28. *Photographer: Andrea Hernandez Briceno/Bloomberg*

Guaidó's Bid

Since the economic crisis that stretched from 2013 to 2020, the president has led a remarkable transition away from Chavez's policies, easing restrictions on businesses, price controls and regulations, and most significantly, allowing the US dollar to circulate legally. He has withstood crippling US sanctions meant to weaken his government, and prevailed over Juan Guaidó, who sought to unseat him after being recognized in 2019 as the legitimate president of Venezuela by the US and dozens of allied nations.

Assuming the results stand, he will now have to navigate a path toward growth for the still-ailing \$102 billion economy, find a way toward sanctions relief and negotiate a \$158 billion debt restructuring.

Any questions of the legitimacy of his electoral victory, however, would make it difficult for Maduro to be recognized internationally as the country's president and secure much-needed sanctions relief.

– *With assistance from Marcelo Rochabrun, Marcus Wong, Anna J Kaiser, and Daniel Flatley*

(A previous version of this story corrected the spelling of the US secretary of state's name.)

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