

A decisive electoral result will drive change in Venezuela

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"The greatest danger for most of us is not that our aim is too high, and we miss it, but that it is too low, and we reach it." – Michelangelo

A clear and decisive electoral result in the upcoming presidential elections in Venezuela could act as an effective "penetrating lubricant", loosening the seemingly immovable structures of power controlled by Maduro's regime, including the Supreme Court of Justice, the National Assembly, the PSUV, and the National Bolivarian Armed Forces.

Even though an adverse result for Nicolás Maduro's regime might not immediately result in a total loss of power, it would undoubtedly signal the Venezuelan people's unequivocal desire for political change. This scenario is comparable to historical examples like Violeta Chamorro's victory in Nicaragua in 1990 (55%) after 11 years under Daniel Ortega, Lech Walesa's win in Poland (74%) following the fall of communism, and the "NO" vote in Chile's 1988 referendum (56%) that ended Augusto Pinochet's military dictatorship.

There are evident contradictions within Maduro's ranks regarding how to handle a potentially adverse election result.

The option of not ceding power by the ruling faction, known as the "Banda de los Cinco", would greatly diminish with a significant victory margin by the democratic candidate, Edmundo González Urrutia. If the margin is too wide, it will be challenging to justify a mega electoral fraud on that day before the national and international public opinion.

Given that Maduro's regime is aware of the electoral trends well in advance through its own surveys, it might consider suspending the elections if an "electoral massacre" seems imminent. However, this option appears unlikely due to the international costs, including the potential reinstatement of sanctions on Venezuela.

Last week, the head of the Southern Command, the U.S. Secretary of State, and the CARICOM countries expressed their support for Irfaan Ali's government in response to a false positive—purported Guyanese aggression against Venezuelan military targets—strategically disseminated by Maduro's administration. It would allow for a declaration of a state of exception and, consequently, the postponement of the elections. These three warnings were a direct message to the Minister of Defense and the Venezuelan Military High Command.

Resorting to a conflict with Guyana could end up like the Falklands case, an undeclared war between Argentina and the United Kingdom in 1982 over the sovereignty of the islands. This war precipitated the fall of the Argentine civic-military dictatorship, leading to an unconditional power handover.

Within the National Bolivarian Armed Forces (FANB), there are varying positions regarding these potential scenarios, from the rank and file to high-ranking officers. Among the troops, voices have been heard expressing their willingness to defend a possible victory by Edmundo González Urrutia, even in a context of violence provoked by a faction linked to illicit activities such as mineral smuggling, fuel trafficking, and drug dealing. In contrast, higher-ranking officers, such as colonels and lieutenant colonels, assert that an act of disobedience within the FANB could be justified as upholding the Constitution that reflects the will of the Venezuelan people should radical groups linked to the “Banda de los Cinco” refuse to accept a González Urrutia victory.

Therefore, the regime is left with instilling fear to paralyze voters and dissuade them from exercising their right to vote, hoping to narrow the margin of their defeat. They shut down businesses and hotels and seized trucks, sound systems, canoes, and outboard motors from people who support María Corina Machado, the political change hopeful. Moreover, they fail to fulfill their commitment to the Barbados Agreement to invite international observers.

The official narrative is that no matter what is done, it will not change their decision to remain in power. Thus, they promote that voting is only worth voting if it counts. To sustain this narrative, they publish manipulated surveys, which no one believes, projecting their electoral victory. However, they know that if the margin is too large—most polls indicate a difference of 30 to 40 points—the nation will accept the results. A transition process will begin to reduce the regime’s negotiation conditions and guarantees.

Consequently, if Maduro’s regime continues to deny the intention of change expressed by most of Venezuelans, the costs of an eventual power exit will increase. These costs include appointing new officials in key positions, losing control over state media, changes in the military leadership, and restructuring public powers. So, more than winning the elections is required; a transitional process and negotiated power transfer are required to ensure governability by the new majority.

In conclusion, a decisive electoral result in the upcoming presidential elections in Venezuela could drive the much-desired change. This decisive result would have the potential to destabilize Maduro’s entrenched power structures, creating a new political landscape in the country. Despite the evident contradictions within the regime regarding how to face a potential defeat at the polls, it is crucial to consider the costs involved in an eventual power transition, including appointing new officials and restructuring key institutions.



The possibility of an “electoral smack” by the Maduro regime not only presents a risk to its legitimacy but could also trigger unpredictable consequences that might further weaken its position. Ultimately, Venezuela’s political future is at stake, and how the challenges and decisions are managed in the next eight weeks will be decisive for the country’s direction.