

## **A new dawn of democracy in Venezuela**

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*"Men are driven chiefly by two principal impulses: either by love or by fear". - The Prince, Niccolò Machiavelli, 1532*

Venezuela, long a melting pot of political diagnoses, stands at a crucial crossroads. A country defined by polarization, where what some view as an authoritarian regime, others label as a criminal organization, and a few, increasingly faint voices, insist on describing it as a misunderstood democracy. In this nation, political prisoners are as tangible a reality as the omnipresence of Maduro's influence across all state institutions.

However, amidst this backdrop of seeming immobility, a recent event has shaken up the political landscape: over two million Venezuelans, braving everyday hardships, cast their votes in a primary election that conferred on María Corina Machado the original legitimacy to challenge Nicolás Maduro or any candidate from the regime in the 2024 presidential election.

The outcome of the primaries caught not just the Maduro supporters off guard but also surprised observers across the political spectrum. María Corina, once marginalized by the presence of other opposition leaders, has re-emerged with overwhelming support that has unsettled the ruling party and reshaped the contours of the democratic forces. Her selection isn't just a mere bureaucratic process; it represents the heartbeat of a society that, despite all repression, yearns for political change.

The United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV), accustomed to maneuvering freely in a political playing field of its design, faces an unexpected challenge. The political invalidation of Machado, a ploy with more semblance than legal substance, is a clear indication of the fear her leadership instills in the regime. Nevertheless, this repressive strategy seems to be fading in the face of the resolve of a leader who, far from seeking a "plan other than a democratic one", urges the acknowledgment of the popular mandate expressed last October 22nd.

The massive turnout that led to the victory of the Vente Venezuela leader in the primaries is a phenomenon that demands attention. It wasn't an isolated act of dissent but a collective demonstration of a thirst for freedom, evidence that even in the most Chavez-supporting corners, there's a cry for a "state at the service of the citizen". It isn't just the victory of the opposition; it's the reflection of a country ready to close a 25-year cycle and embark on a new path. A state that intervenes only where the market and society cannot efficiently provide goods or services; one that restores the independence of powers to prevent abuse of authority

and promotes accountability. Smaller and more efficient, with fewer ministries and bureaucracy. A country where family reunites, and work allows living with dignity and freedom.

October 22nd, initially perceived as a day unable to challenge the established order, became, through a shared conviction of its significance, a catalyst with the potential to profoundly transform the political landscape. The popular belief that the vote for María Corina Machado could bring about a significant turn makes that collective action a force capable of exerting tangible influence on the political future of the nation.

The upcoming strategy to reach the “Venezuela Land of Grace” is complex. Because María Corina faces a regime that has been explicit in its intention to remain in power indefinitely, it employs fear and oppression to deny the primary. But the opposition leader is clear that the consolidation and expansion of the social movement - across political parties - that has backed her are essential to ensure a fairer and more competitive electoral process. Collaboration with Latin American governments and the international community is crucial to apply the necessary pressure to allow an orderly and sustained transition.

Yet, Maduro’s supporters are fearful, leading them to place a Damoclean sword over Machado’s candidacy, marking it as a red line. But red lines have been crossed before, and the politics of accomplished facts can turn against those who practice it. The Barbados agreement and the stance of international actors such as the United States, which have linked the lifting of economic sanctions on the state-owned oil company PDVSA and Minerven to the fulfillment of various democratic commitments by the regime, are signs that the Venezuelan board is in motion.

The agents of change face a historic precipice; to fall would be to disregard the mandate of October 22nd. The road to the 2024 elections is winding and fraught with obstacles but also lit by the hope of change. In this context, the figure of María Corina Machado emerges not just as a candidate of unity but as the symbol of a Venezuela that may be at the dawn of a democratic rebirth.

The journey will be challenging, and uncertainty will be a constant. Nevertheless, commitment to justice and democracy, political cunning, and solidarity among Venezuelans and with the international community will be the tools with which María Corina and the Venezuelan opposition will fight to turn the longing for freedom into a tangible reality, altering the balance of political power in the Bolivarian country. The appointment with history is set, and Venezuela’s democratic awakening, albeit nascent, is a flame that nobody can no longer ignore.