

María Corina Machado: hope and challenge in Venezuela

Antonio De La Cruz

Executive Director

02/Nov/2023

"You have to believe in yourself". - The Art of War, Sun Tzu, 6th century BC.

The recent primary election bore witness to a political phenomenon that surpassed all expectations. Initial projections predicted a turnout of 1.4 million, but over 2 million voted, accounting for just over 10% of the electoral registry. This turnout is significant, especially given the political climate. Nicolás Maduro's regime undermined the election from the get-go, culminating on the day with an information blackout and server crash by the state-run telephone and internet service provider in Venezuela, Cantv.

On a recent episode of *Con Maduro+*, the regime's "first combatant" criticized the elections. "Those responsible for this primary's fraud must answer to the authorities for their crime!" declared Cilia Flores, Maduro's wife. It reminded many of the autocratic ways of Hugo Chávez, who would command the judiciary orders that the judges hastily followed without due process. Jorge Rodríguez also claimed that there's ample evidence of a "mega-fraud" in the democratic forces' primaries. Their aim seems to be to assure the few Maduro-supporting voters left. However, their repeated "mega-fraud" narrative only underscores the regime's vulnerability and defensive stance in light of the electoral outcome.

María Corina Machado's support was both resounding and historic. She emerged as the leading opposition figure, backed by 9 out of 10 Venezuelans voting in the primaries, showcasing a genuine emotional connection with voters. Such a bond was pivotal for past political leaders like Carlos Andrés Pérez and Hugo Chávez.

Furthermore, support for Machado transcended social and political boundaries. She drew voters from various social classes, affiliations, and notably from traditionally Chavista areas. Even amid logistical challenges, high turnout in some areas led to ballot shortages and technical issues with Cantv delayed vote tallying.

Machado's victory and her subsequent speech focusing on governance reflect her dedication to unity and addressing challenges historically faced by Venezuelan democratic forces.

The challenge for Maduro supporters is unmistakable. Machado, with her rising political clout, is now a tangible threat to the criminal enterprise in Miraflores.

If the 2024 presidential election is free, fair, and competitive, Machado could be the frontrunner. Yet, in the face of this challenge, Maduro and his allies aim to sideline her through a move by the General Comptroller's Office (GCO), which reveals a series of legal contradictions and further erodes trust in the judicial system.

According to the civil association Access to Justice, there are five blatant flaws in the legal action against Maria Corina Machado:

- False pretense: The legal framework is clear. Without administering or receiving public funds, the GCO has no jurisdiction.
- Timing issues: The statute of limitations is crucial for any legal action. The GCO has been overlooked.
- No right to defense: The principle of due process has been ignored.
- Double penalty: One cannot be penalized twice for the same offense.
- Overreach in disqualification: This administrative tool contradicts constitutional principles and international treaties.

Conclusion:

María Corina Machado stands not only as an emerging political leader but also a beacon of resistance and hope in Venezuela, striving for democracy and justice. Challenges faced in the primaries, from technical glitches to delegitimization attempts, highlight the courage and determination of Venezuelans eager for change. Moves to disqualify her and baseless accusations only reinforce the perception that Maduro's supporters fear a genuine, transparent electoral process in the 2024 presidential election.

Machado, with her authenticity, trustworthiness, and intelligence, has undeniably impacted Venezuelan politics. However, the real battle is not just political but lies in the hearts and minds of Venezuelans. The nation must remain vigilant and committed to its democratic ideals, fighting against any attempts to suppress the democratic voices that dream of a graceful Venezuela.

History is unfolding, and I am confident the nation will once again overcome challenges, as it did on October 22, and restore freedom and democracy. We must believe in ourselves.