

## Popular sovereignty: a beacon of hope in Venezuela

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*"In Venezuela, popular sovereignty is the guiding light for change, illuminating the hope for a just future as the regime collapses under the weight of its repression and abuse."*

After 25 years in power, 21st-century socialism faces an imminent electoral defeat for the first time due to the unpopularity of Nicolás Maduro's regime, the plundering of the country that has led to a deep crisis, and, consequently, the flight of more than 7 million Venezuelans seeking a minimum quality of life. To legitimize his political project, Hugo Chávez presented his government as the embodiment of the Venezuelan people's popular will and sovereignty. However, this sovereignty now stands as the beacon guiding the change most Venezuelans desire (8 out of 10). This principle, placing power in the hands of the people, is not just an abstract idea but the backbone of a legitimate and just government.

The recent tour of María Corina Machado to the Andean states of Mérida and Táchira clearly showed where popular sovereignty lies. Despite Maduro's regime's repressive actions, including road destruction, gasoline rationing, motorcycle confiscation, threatening graffiti, business closures, and sound equipment seizures, they could not stop the opposition leader's crusade.

Machado said intimidation attempts do not deter the people, highlighting the resistance and determination of the people of Táchira. An indomitable spirit, showcased extensively on social media, remains undaunted by the intensified political persecution against the opposition. Access to Justice reported 46 arbitrary political detentions, including members of María Corina's party, Vente Venezuela. Last week, a crowd prevented the attempted arrest of the mayor of Ortiz in Guárico state, Franco Gerratana, while other mayors and council members have faced detentions, disqualifications, and removals.

Repression also extends to commercial establishments. So far, 16 restaurants and hotels have been closed or sanctioned for serving María Corina Machado and her team during their nationwide tour. The regime knows the backlash these actions generate and has not hesitated. It is the unchecked repression of Venezuela's "beautiful revolution". However, democratic forces have shown remarkable resilience. Without transportation and gasoline, people mobilize by motorcycle or on foot. The election campaign avoids traditional media propaganda, spreading information through social media and word of mouth. Without logistics funds, resources come voluntarily from communities. Gatherings lack adequate sound systems, but people listen with their hearts, and participants create their signs with personal and emotional messages.

Symbols of hope abound at these gatherings. Banners show the support and dreams of attendees, who express to María Corina, often with tears, their trust in her to achieve a better future. No electoral promises are made, and no material goods are distributed; people offer their work and express their love, demonstrating a genuine emotional connection with their leader. María Corina is seen as one of the people who has suffered the same rights violations as other Venezuelans, enduring public service failures, health crises, and starvation wages.

Chavismo, initially supported by poor and rural voters, has lost its popular base due to national plundering, reducing it to a minority. Discontent with Maduro's government has led many former Chavismo supporters to back the opposition actively. These large-scale mobilizations against the regime across the country reflect a popular consciousness and action that defy traditional analyses based on new and authentic experiences.

It recalls the color revolutions in post-Soviet and Balkan countries in the early 21st century, driven by discontent with corruption, lack of democracy, and electoral fraud. Often led by opposition figures and youth movements, Protesters used nonviolent resistance and mass mobilization tactics to demand political changes and fair elections. Similarly, the Arab Spring saw a series of popular uprisings, protests, and rebellions in countries under authoritarian regimes that suppressed free expression, political rights, and civil liberties. These movements, spanning much of the Arab world from late 2010 to early 2011, were marked by mass demonstrations, strikes, and, in some cases, armed conflicts.

An example of popular sovereignty was last week's Freedom Caravan, escorted by thousands of people and motorcycles. It culminated in a video call from opposition candidate Edmundo González Urrutia, who expressed optimism about victory in four weeks.

In conclusion, popular sovereignty in Venezuela manifests as a powerful and hopeful force. The people's adaptability and resilience form the foundation for a better and more just future, an evolution in popular consciousness and action in the face of the regime's repression and abuse.

Hope for a better future guides Venezuelans in their struggle for a legitimate and just government, which is expected to materialize on July 28.

The people's stance against regime repression and intimidation is a current reality in Venezuela's political struggle, enjoying broad support.

Popular sovereignty is a beacon of hope in Venezuela as Maduro's regime crumbles.