

Venezuela 2024: Electoral struggle against Maduro's repression

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"In an age of universal deceit, telling the truth is a revolutionary act." - George Orwell

Despite significant constraints in Venezuela's complex political landscape, the opposition stands united around a candidate with considerable public support. This unity is not a plot but a strategic commitment to the electoral path to challenge Nicolás Maduro's regime in the upcoming presidential elections.

The Maduro regime's recent claims of five plans to overthrow him reflect a strategy of desperation. These alleged assassination attempts, also reported by his attorney general and defense minister, mark a shift from 2017. Unlike then, when he convened the Constituent Assembly – dubbed a "dictatorial ambition" by former attorney general Luisa Ortega Diaz and enjoyed more military and social support – he now finds himself compelled to suppress any hint of dissent, including the demotion of military officers. Consequently, growing social discontent and demonstrations, harder to control now, have prompted the regime to drop its facade and advance its political agenda of repression.

The regime's conspiracy allegations, implicating the CIA, DEA, and Colombian intelligence services, are seen as desperate measures in the face of the opposition's growing influence, particularly the candidacy of María Corina Machado.

Who can believe such a conspiracy theory, especially when Maduro has an ally in Colombia's President Gustavo Petro and is in negotiations with the Biden administration?

The Venezuelan democratic forces have chosen the electoral route to overcome the country's political crisis. However, Maduro's regime is playing all its cards to stay in power, attempting to hold the presidential election under a state of exception, which it sought to justify with the Esequibo claim – the Guyana–Venezuela territorial dispute is an ongoing territorial dispute between Guyana and Venezuela over the Essequibo region, also known as Guayana Esequiba in Spanish, a 159,500 km² (61,600 sq mi) area west of the Essequibo River.

The Maduro regime's fear of María Corina's leadership and its conspiracy to retain control reveal its weakness. Repression, public opinion manipulation, and accusations against opposition figures, journalists, human rights defenders, and military personnel are tactics intended to turn the path to this year's presidential election into a difficult journey. Yet, according to recent polls,

these maneuvers seem to have limited impact on a weary, discredited Maduro, whose popularity remains stagnant.

Faced with imminent electoral defeat and unable to transfer power to María Corina Machado in free and fair elections, Maduro resorts to this conspiracy strategy to block a peaceful transition in Venezuela.

Other historical contexts have observed this pattern. In South Africa, Frederik de Klerk hindered the transition to Nelson Mandela's inclusive government. Similar situations occurred in Poland and Czechoslovakia, where communist regimes resisted democratic change led by Lech Walesa and Václav Havel, respectively.

In Venezuela, the political transition must result from a complex national and international negotiation with multiple actors and forces. The involvement of the United States in direct talks with the regime and the need for genuine Venezuelan negotiations are crucial to achieving a lasting solution that ensures the country's governance.

The mobilization of the democratic forces on January 23, launching the Grand National Alliance (GAN, an acronym in Spanish) to promote freedom and democracy in Venezuela, has enabled the establishment of a broad electoral infrastructure. This network, comprising 600,000 volunteers, including representatives from 25 political parties, education and health professionals, students, retirees, mothers, and religious movements, is organized to manage over 50,000 polling stations during the presidential election. Despite the regime's attempts to instill fear, this effort represents a shift in the Venezuelan political landscape.

The Venezuelan society displays a spirit of resistance and harbors hopes in the leadership of María Corina Machado. A reality the Maduro regime fails to comprehend or accept, attempting in vain to suppress her leadership. Concurrently, the White House, focused on issues such as managing Venezuelan migration and fuel prices during an election period in the United States, might consider backing a consensus opposition candidate, believing that the unity of political parties is the solution.

However, this approach could overlook the Venezuelan people's aspirations, as expressed in the October 22 primaries. This stance by the Biden administration could compromise its moral obligation to Maria Corina Machado, jeopardizing the hopes for the much-desired democratic change among Venezuelan citizens.

Conclusions

Venezuela's political panorama is at a critical juncture in its recent history, characterized by the opposition's resolve and the repressive tactics of Maduro's regime. The opposition's unity around María Corina Machado, a candidate with widespread support, is a clear commitment to the electoral route to overcome the political crisis. This strategy contrasts with the regime's desperate response, including unfounded conspiracy accusations and repression, highlighting its growing weakness and lack of credibility.

The situation in Venezuela mirrors patterns observed in other historical contexts, like in South Africa, Poland, and Czechoslovakia, where transitions to democracy faced similar resistances. In Venezuela, Maduro's regime, unable to accept potential electoral defeat against Machado, resorts to conspiracy strategies to hinder a peaceful transition.

A solution to the national crisis requires complex, authentically Venezuelan negotiations supported by international actors, including the United States. However, decisions and strategies by external actors, such as the White House, must align with the Venezuelan people's will to avoid undermining the legitimacy and hope of the democratic process.

The activism and mobilization of the opposition forces, demonstrated in protests and preparations for the presidential elections, indicate a significant shift in the political landscape. Despite the regime's fearmongering efforts, Venezuelan society remains resilient and hopeful for genuine and democratic leadership.

This historic moment in Venezuela thus represents a confluence of challenges and opportunities, where the people's resilience and the international community's coherence will play crucial roles in establishing a democratic and just future.