

Venezuela's sham election: remarks and lessons

Antonio De La Cruz

Executive Director

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The electoral results of Venezuela's sham election reveal the weakness of Nicolas Maduro's regime, pointing out some remarks and lessons.

The first observation is that Nicolas Maduro definitely lost the support of the people. The voter turnout was reduced by a little more than 50% compared to the votes obtained in 2013 (7,587,579 votes), considering the data collected by the polling firm Meganalisis and the Strategic Operational Command of the Armed Forces (**CEO** for its Spanish initials) and the model developed by Inter American Trends. This model shows a deviation of 2.78 percent from the results announced by CNE's (National Electoral Council) president, Tibisay Lucena. Incidentally, the turnout numbers presented by the CEO match with the data obtained by polling firms, particularly in the effective voters -those "very sure" or "very willing" to vote- the week before the sham election (30.5 percent).

| | Inter American Trends Calculations | | CNE Results | | Meganalisis Exit Poll | | Turnout according to CEO | |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------|------------|-------------|------------|-----------------------|------------|--------------------------|------------|
| | % | Voters | % | Voters | % | Voters | % | Voters |
| Electoral Registry | 100 | 20,374,829 | 100 | 20,527,571 | 100 | 20,750,809 | 100 | 20,527,571 |
| Willing to Vote / Voted / Turnout | 49 | 9,983,666 | 47 | 9,706,257 | 17 | 3,594,040 | 32 | 6,466,185 |
| Voting intention for N. Maduro | 60 | 5,990,200 | 60 | 5,823,754 | 60 | 2,156,424 | 60 | 3,879,711 |

This result shows that the approval ratings of Nicolas Maduro last Sunday reached the highest point of disapproval (79.7 percent) since May 2013, when he was elected president. According to the firm Datanalisis, there is a positive correlation, 0.88, between the results announced by the CNE and the votes obtained by Hugo Chavez and Maduro in the presidential elections. Thus, the increase in Maduro disapproval numbers allows us to think that the party machine of the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (**PSUV**) didn't succeed in mobilizing "grassroots" Chavistas.

Maduro and his party, Somos Venezuela Movement, knew that turnout was a critical success factor in this sham election since Sunday's election has turned into a referendum. So, Maduro needed to obtain a simple majority of people voting. Besides, since 1958 turnouts in the Venezuelan presidential elections have been above 60 percent.

The sanctions by the Office of Foreign Asset Control of the Treasury Department of the United States to the Cabello Family and his figurehead Rafael Sarria, two days before the elections, confirmed Maduro's decision to separate the Cabello Family from his Administration. Hence Maduro and his party leaders knew that Diosdado Cabello -vice president of PSUV- and his brother -head of SENIAT (the Venezuelan tax agency)- would react to it. On Sunday the Cabello brothers got their revenge, the PSUV militancy depending on them did not vote. Maduro tried to do damage control early Sunday morning, appealing to the image of Chavez in the press conference after voting, and also dressing in Chavez's trademark red again. Even so, the result of the "Cabello effect" was 670,000 votes less for Maduro, according to calculations using the

turnout data from the CEO.

Another remark is that not all the Venezuelans that consider useful having the Carnet de la Patria (Homeland Card), 5,807,250 people, voted for Maduro, only 3 out of 10. And from the 14 million of people with the Homeland Card, 7 out of 10 did not show up to vote. Therefore, people depending on the CLAP box -a food package containing basic products such as rice, pasta, lentils corn flour and oil- to feed their families challenged the Maduro regime that uses the food package to coerce Venezuelans. In this sense, 10,284,313 Venezuelans with the Homeland Card boycotted the sham election. On the other hand, the data shows, that of those who received cash transfers from the Government, 6 out of 10 went to vote for Maduro.

Other aspect of last Sunday's sham election is that two-thirds of Venezuelans did not cast their votes. The vast majority stayed at home, as suggested by some opposition leaders and the international community. In this occasion, the international community instills the idea of a better future without Maduro. Sanctions from the Trump Administration to the Cabellos two days before the sham election ratified this. The leaders from the Mesa de la Unidad Democrática (**MUD**, the main opposition coalition) have lost credibility and competence in leading with a roadmap towards Maduro's ousting. Past Sunday faith and trust were put in Luis Almagro, Donald Trump, Mike Pence, Marco Rubio, Mike Pompeo, John Bolton, Sebastian Piñera, Mauricio Macri, Juan Manuel Santos, Ivan Duque Marquez, Chrystia Freeland, Federica Mogherini, among others. Putting the Venezuela democratic future only on the hands of the international community is idyllic since the unity of the opposition leadership is needed to assure a transition to a democratic government, in which all factions against the regime are essential. Their faith [Venezuelans] in the international community is such that 68 percent of people who didn't vote on the sham election would accept a foreign military intervention to get rid of the terrible crisis in Venezuela.

Therefore, the lessons learned from this sham election were:

- No turnout is a way of voting
- There is a silent majority willing to protest safely;
- The voters with Homeland Cards are not afraid of coercion anymore; and
- The international community has a significant share of the leadership that moves the majority of the Venezuelan people to get rid of Maduro's dictatorship and be free again.