

Venezuela's struggle: Machado vs. Maduro's regime

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"The power of the people is the greatest power of all." - Alexei Navalny

Since 2018, leading global democracies have denounced Nicolás Maduro as an illegitimate leader of Venezuela due to questionable electoral integrity. His manipulation of the democratic framework, including commandeering opposition parties for his allies, has solidified his illegitimate standing internationally, resulting in both personal and economic sanctions. This crisis of legitimacy has propelled Venezuela into turmoil, prompting a significant number of its citizens to flee in pursuit of a safer and better life.

Looking ahead to the 2024 presidential elections, Maduro and his circle view it as an opportunity to cement their rule, attempting to gain the legitimacy they lacked in 2018. Conversely, for most Venezuelans, these elections represent a glimmer of hope and a chance to restore the eroded democracy and the rule of law after a quarter-century of decline.

Amidst this tumultuous political climate, María Corina Machado stands out as a beacon of resistance against authoritarian measures designed to suppress the people's voice, as demonstrated in the primaries on October 22. Her unwavering commitment to running in the presidential elections embodies her dedication to leading Venezuela through a peaceful transition, starkly contrasting with a regime intent on crushing democratic aspirations. "They will not steer us away from our electoral path (...) I am prepared to do everything necessary. We will not give up", asserts the determined leader of Vente Venezuela.

Maduro has strategically targeted Machado, viewing her widespread popularity and ethical leadership as directly threatening his power. He has resorted to purported disqualification, endorsed by a judiciary and electoral authority that merely echo executive commands, to undermine her candidacy. This fear-driven tactic is a response to overwhelming support for Machado, with polls indicating that eight in ten Venezuelans back her. Her significant following not only affirms her moral integrity but empowers her, alongside the Venezuelan people, to challenge and possibly overcome the regime's obstacles.

In light of this disqualification, Maduro has escalated his oppressive measures to turn off Machado's campaign to clear the path for a more pliable contender in the presidential race. He has even suggested stepping down if faced with the governor of Zulia state, a figure not actively involved in the primaries, as its electoral opponent. Additionally, Maduro has compressed the electoral timeline, hoping to coerce Machado into a hasty decision.

Nevertheless, Machado remains resolute, mobilizing support across the nation. Her ability to draw large crowds at rallies cements her political legitimacy and offers protection against governmental repression. "Today, the humble, the poor, and the exploited are casting their votes for a white woman, a mantuana - rich and powerful children of Spaniards, but born in Venezuela Colonial Society -; indeed, this is a revolution", comments historian Elías Pino Iturrieta, highlighting the profound societal shift her candidacy represents.

The continued standoff promises inevitable conflict and its attendant fallout. The moment has arrived to pursue a peaceful, democratic transition.

Global and local stakeholders capable of swaying the direction away from tyranny should advocate for revoking Machado's unjust disqualification rather than pressuring her to nominate a successor. They should also champion dialogue toward establishing a new governance structure in Venezuela, ensuring both sides can coexist peacefully as adversaries, not enemies. This pivotal period offers a unique opportunity for Venezuelans to embrace peace following an electoral showdown between Machado and the illegitimate incumbent.

Machado's influence and support are essential for Venezuelans to heal from over a decade of Maduro's governance, marked by abuses and mismanagement.

Overlooking the public's demand for change will only exacerbate repression, deepen the humanitarian crisis, and fuel further mass exodus. Under such a regime, akin to those in North Korea, Cuba, or Nicaragua, nobody is safe, not even those who once supported the rise to power.

The time is ripe for dialogue between Machado and Maduro for the sake of the nation and future generations. Failing to reconcile could plunge Venezuela into a cycle of vengeance and conflict, challenging the very fabric of its society.