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ELECTORAL**



Presidential Elections in Venezuela 2024: Competing Under Authoritarian Conditions

IV ELECTORAL REPORT

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Executive Summary

The Venezuelan Presidential Election of 2024 is a clear reflection of an electoral process within an authoritarian framework. Significant violations of active suffrage are evident, including the prevention of the registration/update of millions of Venezuelans who, due to forced migration, now live outside national borders. Additionally, political pluralism is compromised by barring the candidacies of María Corina Machado, who was elected in the 2023 opposition primary, and Corina Yoris, the consensus figure to replace Machado. Obstacles were also placed against the registration of Edmundo González and the subsequent support from the Un Nuevo Tiempo Contigo and Movimiento por Venezuela parties.

The election process is marred by high and increasing levels of political violence since the election was called, escalating further during the campaign period. This violence includes arbitrary detentions and forced disappearances of opposition leaders and common citizens linked to the democratic opposition, harassment, closures, and sanctions on establishments, psychological violence, death threats, and persecution of media outlets, journalists, and news portals, among others. Despite the gravity of these actions, the National Electoral Council has remained silent.

The electoral campaign highlights the institutional advantage of Maduro's government, evident in the use of public resources, officials, and agencies in clear violation of constitutional and legal mandates. Nevertheless, a significant gap exists between the substantial mobilizations of the democratic opposition and the increasingly sparse officialist gatherings. Moreover, a survey war was attempted through the falsification and manipulation of polls to favor the officialist candidate Nicolás Maduro, contributing to a surge in fake news concerning the Venezuelan electoral process.

The statement by CNE Principal Rector Juan Carlos Delpino raised concerns about the institutional management of the National Electoral Council. The lack of regular sessions for months, unilateral decisions by the Council President Elvis Amoroso, and external interference in decision-making processes indicate a highly politicized and un-institutional operation of the CNE. This behavior is further confirmed by their interactions with the United States and the European Union, demanding recognition of the 2024 Presidential Election results, and extreme opaqueness in their informational and communication policies, which have affected citizens' rights and nearly all political organizations in matters such as the electoral schedule, party enablement, electoral group formation, special registration and update sessions for the 2024 electoral registry, and overseas voting, among others.



Modifications to the Electoral Schedule

In the III Report on the Venezuelan Presidential Election 2024, a pattern of violations of the electoral schedule was identified. This update reveals the existence of a second electoral schedule issued by the CNE to political parties. This second schedule includes several audits whose dates differ from the official schedule published in the Electoral Gazette and the CNE website. This constitutes a clear transgression of electoral rules, as the schedule is part of the electoral law principles.

Modifications to the Electoral Schedule include:

- **Activity 71:** Electoral Data Audit (ADES), Phase I. Scheduled between June 24-26 in the Official Schedule but carried out between June 25-28 according to the second schedule, extending the period from 3 to 4 days.
- **Activity 72:** Voting Machine Configuration File Audit. Scheduled for June 25 in the Official Schedule but reported to be conducted on June 21 according to the second schedule; it ultimately took place on the original date, considered a postponement.
- **Activity 77:** Voting Notebook Audit. Scheduled between June 30-July 2 in the Official Schedule, it was carried out between July 1-3 according to the second schedule.
- **Activity 79:** Totalization Software Audit. Scheduled between July 5-9 in the Official Schedule, it was conducted between July 9-12 according to the second schedule, reducing the period from 5 to 4 days.
- Additionally, the Complementary Selection Public Draw Audit for Subordinate Electoral Bodies was not included in the Official Schedule nor announced by the CNE at the time of execution. This audit and selection were results of adjustments following the publication of the definitive electoral registry, the creation of new polling stations, and the exceptional mandatory electoral service process.




Maduro amenaza con guerra civil si gana la oposición

Electoral Violence

Despite the absence of murders, attempted murders, or firearm incidents during electoral events, various manifestations of electoral violence are verifiable. According to the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), electoral violence includes random or organized acts intended to intimidate, physically harm, destroy public or private property, or otherwise influence the electoral process. Marco adds actions such as murders, assaults, arson, looting, property damage, kidnappings, threats, sexual assault, and invasion of competitors' offices as electoral violence.

Recent examples of electoral violence include:

- **Arbitrary Detentions and Forced Disappearances:** Cases include the detention of youth activist Jeancarlos Rivas, members of Vente Venezuela Luis López and Juan Iriarte, businessman Ricardo Albacete, singer Wilmer Álvarez, and UNT-Monagas leader Ángel Aristimuño. Foro Penal reported 102 arrests related to opposition mobilizations in 2024, 77 during the campaign period starting July 4.
- **Harassment:** Arbitrary detention of a bus transporting participants in an event with candidate Edmundo González, blocking the NGO Espacio Público's website, and attacks by official leaders at La Encrucijada Restaurant in Carabobo.
- **Death Threats:** Instances include threats against María Corina Machado by Tren del Llano in Guárico and threats in Táchira during her mobilization there.
- **Psychological Terrorism:** Nicolás Maduro warned of civil war if the opposition wins, while PSUV Vice President Diosdado Cabello and National Assembly President Jorge Rodríguez made similar threatening statements.

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- **Media and Journalist Attacks:** Incidents include the blocking of news verification portals, closing 15 radio stations in 2024, and detaining journalists Julio Rojas and Luis López.
 - **Obstruction of Opposition Mobilization:** Examples include incidents in Carabobo and Portuguesa.
 - **Sanctions and Closures:** Instances of economic sanctions and closures of hotels and restaurants serving the opposition.
 - **Disqualifications and Dismissals:** Involves disqualifications and dismissals of opposition-linked officials and elected authorities.
 - **Asset Seizures:** Includes confiscations of property used by the opposition.
 - **Normative Threats:** The approval of the Law Against Fascism, Neofascism, and Similar Expressions in April 2024.



International and National Electoral Observation

The situation regarding international and national electoral observation has been ambiguous. Publicly, the CNE has accredited organizations such as the Council of Latin American Electoral Experts (CEELA) and the Office of Strategic Planning for Regional Integration (OPEIR), which are government-aligned and have issued positive reports on fraudulent Venezuelan elections. Other international figures have participated remotely via platforms like Zoom.

The Carter Center and the United Nations will participate as expert panels, observing the electoral process but not making their findings public. Despite limited representation, their presence could provide a technical perspective and potentially deter malpractice by the Venezuelan regime.

According to Venezuelan Foreign Minister Yván Gil, 635 international observers have confirmed their participation, although the specific observers are unknown. This observation is not rigorous but consists of "foreign visitors," electoral authorities, and specialists arriving days before the election to visit polling centers.

In the case of national electoral oversight, the situation is even more ambiguous and serious. Two organizations have participated remotely in some of the audits: Education Assembly Observation Network and Social Project. However, as of the date of writing this report, eleven days before the elections, they have not yet been accredited. The Chief

Electoral Rector of the CNE, Aimé Nogal, reported on July 17 in a media outlet: “between today and tomorrow the national oversight agreement will be signed with four Venezuelan non-governmental organizations.” It is important to note that it is unknown which are the other two organizations mentioned by the Electoral Rectorate and the terms of the national electoral oversight (maximum number of observers, distribution, etc.).

The monitoring of audits remotely, and not on site, significantly limits the rigorous and exhaustive monitoring, to which we must add that in the last two weeks there were two audits simultaneously, last week the Production Audit of Machines Voting together with the Totalization Software, on July 9, 10 and 11 and this week, the Voting Machine Production Audit together with the Electoral Technological Infrastructure, on July 15, 16 and 17, which it makes it even more difficult to follow them and carry out the proper review.



Start of the Electoral Campaign

The electoral campaign for the Venezuelan Presidential Election 2024 officially commenced on July 4 and will extend until August 2. In this period, there is a pronounced asymmetry between the ruling party's and the opposition's activities.

The official campaign of Nicolás Maduro leverages substantial state resources, including media, logistical support, and financial backing from public funds. This violates both the Venezuelan Constitution and the Electoral Law, which prohibit the use of state resources for electoral purposes. Public employees are also coerced into participating in rallies, contributing to an inflated sense of support.

In contrast, the democratic opposition, led by Edmundo González, faces significant challenges. Despite these obstacles, they have managed to hold mass rallies in various regions, demonstrating considerable public support. The opposition's campaign is primarily funded by private donations and volunteer efforts, emphasizing grassroots mobilization.



Training for Polling Station Members

The National Electoral Council (CNE) initiated the training process for polling station members on July 12. This training is critical to ensure the proper functioning of polling stations on election day. However, there have been reports of insufficient training materials and inadequate preparation time for these members. Additionally, there is a concern about the impartiality of some trainers, who may have affiliations with the ruling party.

The training covers various aspects, including the setup of polling stations, handling of electoral materials, voter identification processes, and the procedure for counting votes. Ensuring that all polling station members are well-trained is essential to maintain the integrity of the electoral process.



Discrimination against Venezuelan Voters Abroad

One of the most significant violations of electoral rights in this process is the discrimination against Venezuelan voters residing abroad. Millions of Venezuelans, forced to migrate due to the country's crisis, face numerous obstacles in exercising their right to vote.

The CNE has not provided adequate facilities for Venezuelans abroad to register or update their electoral data. As a result, many are effectively disenfranchised. This exclusion not only undermines the democratic principle of universal suffrage but also significantly impacts the election's outcome, given the large diaspora population.

Conclusions

The Venezuelan Presidential Election of 2024 is taking place under highly irregular and authoritarian conditions. The National Electoral Council has demonstrated a clear bias, favoring the ruling party through various means, including the manipulation of the electoral schedule and the use of state resources for campaign purposes.

Political violence and intimidation tactics are rampant, targeting opposition leaders, activists, and media. The lack of genuine international and national electoral observation further compounds the process's credibility issues.

Despite these challenges, the democratic opposition continues to mobilize significant support, reflecting the Venezuelan people's desire for change. The international community's role will be crucial in ensuring that the electoral process is as fair and transparent as possible under the current circumstances.

Ensuring a credible electoral process is vital for Venezuela's future. The country faces a critical juncture, and the outcome of the 2024 Presidential Election will significantly impact its path towards democracy and stability.

