

Chavismo Wins: Nicolas Maduro, the New President of Venezuela

By [Stephen Lendman](#)

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Venezuela's spirit of democracy lives. Celebratory fireworks followed Maduro's win. They were more subdued than last October. Chavez won then by 11 points.

Sunday's results were much closer than expected. Polls had Maduro way ahead. With 99.2% of the vote counted, his victory margin was 1.6%.

He'll be inaugurated on April 19. His term runs six years. He'll serve until January 2019. More on that below.

After his 2006 reelection, Chavez told supporters:

"Today we gave another lesson in dignity to the imperialists. It is another defeat for the empire of Mr. Danger."

"Another defeat for the devil. We will never be a colony of the US again."

"Long live the socialist revolution."

"Destiny has been written."

"Socialism is human. Socialism is love."

Following Chavez's October 2012 triumph, he said:

"Viva Venezuela! Viva the fatherland!"

"Today we've shown that Venezuela's democracy is one of the best democracies in the world, and we will continue to show it."

"Venezuela will never return to neoliberalism and continue in the transition to socialism of the 21st century."

"I want to make a recognition to the whole Venezuelan people, the whole Venezuelan nation. Today the country of Bolivar was reborn."

In response, supporters chanted, "Viva Le Patria! "Ooh Aah, Chavez won't go!"

On March 5, he died. He's gone. Chavismo lives. Maduro promised to deepen Bolivarianism. It transformed Venezuela from oligarch-controlled privilege to participatory democracy of, by and for everyone.

There's no going back. Despite Maduro's narrow victory, most Venezuelans depend on Bolivarian benefits. They support them. Chavez promised to advance them to the next stage.

It's Maduro's responsibility to do so. Building socialism in the 21st century takes time. Important achievements were accomplished. Much more remains to be done.

Last December, Chavez endorsed Maduro. He did so in case he'd be unable to serve, saying:

"My firm opinion, as clear as the full moon - irrevocable, absolute, total - is that you elect Nicolas Maduro as president."

"I ask this of you from my heart. He is one of the young leaders with the greatest ability to continue if I cannot."

Amherst College political science professor Javier Corrales calls him "one of the PSUV's most convinced leftist, anti-imperialist radicals. (He's also) "soft-spoken and conciliatory."

At the same time, he called his victory "the most delicate moment in the history of Chavismo since 2002." He referred to the aborted two-day April coup.

"With these results," he added, "the opposition might not concede easily, and Maduro will have a hard time demonstrating to the top leadership of Chavismo that he is a formidable leader."

After winning, he told supporters:

"We have a just, legal, constitutional and popular electoral victory."

"I'm here to assume my responsibility with courage. The fight continues."

A new era in the "Bolivarian Revolution" begins. It's more proof that Chavez "continues to be invincible, that he continues to win battles."

He added more saying he's targeted by a "dirty war. There is an international operation to attack Venezuelan democracy. I will show no weakness against those who meddle with this country's sovereignty."

At around 11:20PM Sunday, "first bulletin" results were announced. National Electoral Council (CNE) president Tibisay Lucena called them "irreversible." She added that Venezuela's electoral system is "safe and ironclad."

Voter participation was 78.71%. It was slightly less than last October's 80.4%. Maduro received 7,505,338 votes. His victory margin was 50.66 to Capriles' 49.07%.

Capriles got 7,270,403 votes, 234,935 fewer than Maduro. Pre-election, he promised to recognize election results. Straightaway Sunday night he cried foul. He demanded an audit.

"They want an audit, we welcome the audit," said Maduro. "I formerly request the National Electoral Commission to carry out an audit."

Capriles refused to sign a CNE document. He doesn't recognize election results. His representative, Carlos Vecchio, submitted a different one. It commits to "respect the popular

will.”

At the same time, it demanded Maduro “cease his abuse of the use of public resources to promote his candidature.” It accused him of “intimidating public servants.”

It said he “tak(es) advantage of the needs of the poor.” It claimed it’s “to bribe them with the delivery, or not, of social missions, and in that way, obtain their votes.”

It called the CNE “negligent.” It warned that “we will be vigilant before....any alteration that is attempted on the electoral results.” It suggested that biased electoral power favors PSUV governance.

Maduro signed CNE’s document, saying:

“I’m going to sign it in the name of peace for the country and respect for the people. This signature is worth my own life. I respect the results of the people....I swear it before God. I swear it before the people, and I swear it on the memory of Hugo Chavez.”

National Assembly Speaker Diosdado Cabello called for “self-criticism,” adding:

“It’s contradictory that some among the poor vote for those who always exploit them. Let’s turn over every stone to find out faults, but not put the fatherland or the legacy of our commander (Chavez) in danger.”

Early Sunday, Venezuelans began queueing to vote pre-dawn. According to the [Venezuela Solidarity Campaign](#):

“3,435 national electoral observers, 170 international accompaniers, 40 accompaniers from the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR), 30 from the Inter-American Organizations (UNIORE), and 40 accompaniers from different political parties” participated as monitors.

Scottish parliamentarian spoke for others, saying:

“From the opening of the polls this morning, we have observed a very efficient, secure and sophisticated electoral system.”

“The people of all parties who we spoke to praised the way the election was run and raised no concerns. The poll was free, fair and robust.”

European unionist Adrian Weir said:

“Nothing I have seen suggests anything other than a Nicolas Maduro win. The ballot was free and fair. The count was equally transparent and signed off by party witnesses including those of the Capriles’ coalition, the MUD. I’ve witnessed a robust system.”

Actor/screenwriter Andy de La Tour added:

“The international observers are satisfied that the election has been free, fair and transparent. Voting went smoothly and the opposition witnesses in the polling stations told us they that they were satisfied that the voting had been fair.”

Venezuela Solidarity Campaign’s Francisco Dominguez said:

“Once again, Venezuela has shown to the world that it has a vibrant and healthy democracy where both sides can air their views. Capriles and his MUD coalition should accept that the people have again given their verdict.”

“When the results go the opposition’s way, they quickly accept them, as Capriles did when he was elected as a state governor just last December. But when they lose they often reject them. That is not a serious approach to democracy. Capriles and his allies should respect the will of the people.”

“Governments around the world should accept the results, call on the Capriles to accept the result and certainly should avoid giving Capriles any encouragement to disregard the choice of the majority of Venezuelans.”

Most likely will. Perhaps Washington won’t. Later Monday we’ll likely know. Capriles called them “completely illegitimate.” Obama officials may echo his sour grapes. It won’t surprise.

Stephen Lendman lives in Chicago. He can be reached at lendmanstephen@sbcglobal.net.

His new book is titled “Banker Occupation: Waging Financial War on Humanity.”

<http://www.claritypress.com/LendmanII.html>

Visit his blog site at sjlendman.blogspot.com.

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Articles by: [Stephen Lendman](#)

About the author:

Stephen Lendman lives in Chicago. He can be reached at lendmanstephen@sbcglobal.net. His new book as editor and contributor is titled "Flashpoint in Ukraine: US Drive for Hegemony Risks WW III."

<http://www.claritypress.com/LendmanIII.html> Visit his blog site at sjlendman.blogspot.com. Listen to cutting-

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