

Venezuela Election Observer: 'The Majority Have Chosen the Path They Want for Venezuela'

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More than 300 international representatives from organisations such as the African Union, the Caribbean Community and the Electoral Experts Council of Latin America, as well as former heads of states, parliamentarians, trade unionists and solidarity activists, were present for Venezuela's May 20 presidential vote. Among them was Eulalia Reyes de Whitney, a Venezuelan-born activist with the Australia Venezuela Solidarity Network (AVSN). She spoke to Federico Fuentes about her experience.

You were present in Venezuela for the entire election campaign and as an accredited international observer for the vote on May 20. What were your impressions of the elections?

I had a great experience during the campaign and on polling day. Not only did I get a chance to feel, see and live through the many challenges that Venezuelans live through, I also had the opportunity to participate as an official observer representing AVSN.

What I saw was Venezuelans doing what they have been doing since the beginning of the Bolivarian Revolution [kick-started by the election of former president Hugo Chavez in 1998]. Every time an election is called, they go out to vote even though it is not compulsory. This time was no different.

I visited six different voting centres on May 20 in the state of Anzoátegui: one was an Indigenous voting centre; another was a voting centre in a rural town; and the other four were in urban areas of varying characteristics. At every centre I visited, I saw the people's enthusiasm and determination to vote and be part of deciding the fate of the country.

During the whole campaign there was a great atmosphere. It seems to me that Venezuelans love elections and that they are keen to share their process with the world. They were very appreciative of the visitors who came to witness the evolution of this process.

In the rural areas, there seemed to be even more engagement with the process. Given that transportation was difficult, I noticed how many people refused to be held back by these obstacles and instead sought innovative ways to resolve this difficulty. For instance, many people were happy to travel standing up and in great numbers on the back of big trucks to be able to get to the voting centre.

Inside the voting centre, they were very appreciative and thankful to the international observers. They wanted to make sure the observers understood the meaning of the revolution to the country.

During the campaign, there was a call from the opposition to boycott the vote to

delegitimise the results. In the end, Nicolas Maduro was re-elected for the presidential term of 2019-25 with more than 6.2 million votes (67.8%).

The election process was a journey of participation, and a clear signal that the majority have chosen the path they want their country to go down — and that is socialism.

From what you observed, how credible is the Venezuelan voting system? What do you say to claims outside Venezuela that the elections were fraudulent? Has any evidence of fraud been presented?

Venezuela's voting system has been classified as one of, if not the most, secure and transparent in the world, including by former United States president Jimmy Carter, who is the founder of the Carter Center, an institution that monitors electoral processes in many regions of the world.

It is also important to remember that this was the 25th election held during the 19 years of the Bolivarian Revolution and the fourth election in the past 9 months. The process was open to numerous observers that came from every latitude of the globe.

It was very interesting to see the whole process of how the voting centres and machines were installed and put into action on the day. As an international observer, we were provided with an induction course on all the procedures that are followed through the whole process and the contingency plans in case of any problems arising.

There are no doubts about the transparency of the system. I witnessed the voting process in all the centres I visited and can give faith to the credibility, transparency and security of the system.

In terms of those people who have cried fraud: for Venezuela this nothing new. The same thing has happened after almost every election — except when the opposition has won. In these cases, there has never been any doubt cast about the results, and they have been accepted by all parties, including the government.

On the night of the elections, opposition candidate Henri Falcon surprised many when he appeared on TV half an hour before the results were announced and produced a list of complaints and accusations regarding the way the vote had been conducted.

He accused the National Electoral Council (CNE) of not fulfilling accords that had been agreed to by all parties during the election campaign, in particular focusing on the location of "Red Points" that should have been more than 200 metres away from the perimeter of voting centres. He also accused the CNE of favouring the re-election of Maduro and called for another election to be held before the end of the year.

However, Falcon did not produce any proof for these allegations, nor did he talk of any fraud in terms of the actual vote or result.

The other main candidate from the Hope for Change Party, Javier Bertucci, who won 10.8% of the votes, has recognised the results.

In the end, no one has come forward with evidence of fraud or even called for an audit of the vote.

Despite this, the vote is being audited, as this is a normal part of the electoral system. Every election in Venezuela obligatorily involves a series of audits during and after the election, always in the presence of witnesses from all parties contesting the elections and international observers.

On top of this, Maduro, in his speech after the results were announced, requested a complete audit of every single vote, not just the random sample of 53% of voting machines that is normally required in the auditing process.

The auditing process is open for all to view and can be followed on the CNE website.

What was the sentiment like the day after the elections, in light of the results and the international response? What impact has the result had on the mood of the people and their hopes for the future in light of the extremely difficult situation in Venezuela today?

People in the country are mostly happy, relieved and empowered by the results. The sense of accomplishment and of being on the right path exists across the whole of the country.

The Venezuelan people are today more conscious of their historic role, of the need to defend the legacy of Hugo Chavez and to work together to defy the criminal attacks the country has suffered from the enemies of their revolution.

Venezuelans from all corners of the country have spoken and given their president a mandate. Venezuelans want peace for everyone. The hopes and desires for a better future exist. The country and its people are looking forward to better times. They are also clear on who are the country's enemies.

The international response has made its presence felt. Plenty of governments, allies and friends of Venezuela have recognised the results of the elections.

There was an international contingent of about 300 political leaders, journalists, academics, analysts, activists and representatives from different institutions and organisations, along with 2000 national and international observers, who were present in the country to express their support for the electoral process.

Organisations such as the Non-Aligned Movement, the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our Americas (ALBA), the African Union, and countries such as Palestine, Russia, China, India, Bolivia, Nicaragua, El Salvador, etc. have recognised the vote. Others, however, such as the United States, the European Union, and the Lima Group [which included 13 right-wing Latin American countries and Canada] have refused to accept it and threaten more sanctions.

The day after Maduro was re-elected, the US administration implemented new, more severe sanctions. In response, Maduro expelled two leading diplomats from the US Embassy, Chargé d'Affaires Todd Robinson and head of political affairs Brian Naranjo, on May 22.

The president is calling on everyone to contribute their ideas and to come together for change. Maduro has also called on those Venezuelan youth that have left the country and that today are suffering from xenophobia in many places around the region to return and help move the country forward.

Venezuelans expect the government to move quickly to start changing the situation in the

country. The hope for a genuine economic revolution exists.

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