

Venezuela's authoritarian leader Nicolás Maduro declared election winner

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Venezuela

Opposition cries foul after state-controlled election body blames sabotage for delayed results



President of Venezuela Nicolas Maduro celebrates after being declared the winner at Miraflores Palace in Caracas, Venezuela
Alfredo Lasry/Getty Images

Michael Stott and Joe Daniels in Caracas

6 hours ago

Venezuela's state-controlled election authority has declared authoritarian leader Nicolás Maduro the winner of Sunday's presidential vote, with the opposition refusing to accept the result and complaining of serious irregularities in the count.

Opinion polls before the vote and quick counts on the day had [forecast a big opposition win](#). But Elvis Amoroso, president of the National Electoral Council, announced that Maduro had secured 51.2 per cent of the votes with 80 per cent counted, while his main opposition challenger, Edmundo González, had managed 44.2 per cent.

Amoroso described the results as "overwhelming and irreversible" and swiftly congratulated [Maduro](#) on his victory, blaming "terrorist acts" of sabotage against the voting system for delaying the results for several hours. The leaders of Cuba and Nicaragua sent congratulations to Maduro as his supporters celebrated outside the presidential palace.

María Corina Machado, the main opposition leader who was banned from standing in the election and ran González as a surrogate candidate, said after the official results were announced that González was Venezuela's legitimate president, stating that he had won 70 per cent of the vote in ballots that her office had reviewed. "We have not only defeated them politically, morally and spiritually, today we defeated them with our votes in all of Venezuela," she told a news conference.

Delsa Solórzano, the main opposition representative at the National Electoral Council, said earlier that at a "significant number of voting centres, they are removing our witnesses [and] others where they are refusing to transmit the results".

[Venezuela](#)'s law states that independent witnesses have the right to remain at polling stations until they have verified the count and been given a printed copy of the result. The opposition said they had received results from only 30 per cent of polling stations.

Both sides had painted the election as a turning point for the once-wealthy oil-exporting nation whose economy has collapsed over the past decade as a result of government mismanagement and tight US sanctions, triggering the exodus of a quarter of the population and the biggest migration crisis in the Americas.

Voters had turned out peacefully in large numbers to cast their ballot on electronic machines at more than 15,000 polling stations, with some waiting patiently for hours in the heat. But problems emerged after voting ended, when there was silence from the election authority for more than six hours before an announcement was made.

"I am Nicolás Maduro Moros, the re-elected president of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela," the former bus driver and union activist said in a combative victory speech outside the Miraflores presidential palace in Caracas.

Wearing a tracksuit jacket emblazoned with the national flag, Maduro accused the US of meddling in Venezuela's election, saying: "It's not the first time that they try to weaken the peace in Venezuela."

Maduro said the election council was the target of a cyber attack by "demons" and vowed an "iron fist" to crush "terrorists" who plotted against the government. He mocked the opposition, which had warned of the risk of electoral fraud before the vote.

Maduro's contested victory amid accusations of fraud presents Washington with a dilemma. The Biden administration had negotiated secretly with Maduro to try to secure guarantees of a competitive election in return for sanctions relief.

Speaking to reporters in Tokyo, US secretary of state Antony Blinken voiced "serious concerns that the result announced does not reflect the will or the votes of the Venezuelan people".

Maduro had become increasingly belligerent as opinion polls showed the opposition lead widening in the weeks before Sunday's vote. He [threatened a "bloodbath"](#) should the opposition win and painted Machado, the main opposition leader, as a dangerous fascist, as well as calling González a "coward" and a "puppet of the extreme right".

González, a 74-year-old retired diplomat, was running in place of Machado, who won an opposition primary in October but was banned from standing by the government-controlled Supreme Court in January. Maduro's government took numerous steps to hamper the opposition campaign, including arresting dozens of activists and aides.

In Petare, a poor neighbourhood in Caracas once considered a bastion of support for former president Hugo Chávez, Marvin Velasco, 52, waited in the sun for four hours to vote on Sunday.

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Velasco had once supported Chávez, Maduro's populist predecessor, but voted on Sunday for the opposition.

"People can't go on hungry and living with water outages, he said, standing across from a mural depicting Maduro, Chávez and independence hero Simón Bolívar. "There has to be a change."

Of roughly 30 people asked by the Financial Times in Petare, none said they were voting for Maduro.

Amid concerns that Maduro might attempt to manipulate the count or impede access to voting stations, the opposition ran a parallel count and signed up tens of thousands of witnesses to monitor the election. International observers were largely absent after the government rescinded an invitation to the EU to monitor the election and refused to accept a mission from the Organization of American States.

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