

# Venezuela: Crucial Test for Bolivarian Revolution

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While on the surface it may appear to be a simple electoral battle, something much different is at stake on November 23.

On that day, Venezuelans will go to the polls to elect 22 governors, 328 mayors, as well as 233 legislators to the state legislative councils and 13 councillors to district committees — including indigenous representation — making a total of 603 positions.

Once again, the intricate process of the Bolivarian revolution will put in play its strengths and weaknesses in the form of an electoral contest.

## Deepening the revolution

What is at stake is the dynamic of an economic, social and political revolution that, since 2006, has unequivocally declared its will to leave capitalism behind and build 21st century socialism.

To continue down this path implies a very rapid and energetic deepening of measures to adapt the state apparatus to the necessities of radical transformation.

Will the Venezuelan people express, with sufficient participation and a majority weight, their will to accelerate the revolution?

There is no historic precedent of a struggle of this type ever being resolved through elections — much less in the era of corporate monopoly over information and the shameless manipulation of opinion by the media.

But, as has been the case since the beginning, this process demonstrates features dictated less by Venezuelan particularities than by the never-before-seen historic context within which it is occurring.

And the fact is that, in the middle of October, opinion polls done by opposition companies, as well as those sympathetic to the government, augur a new and clear electoral victory for the revolution.

If this occurs, it will be a real feat of perseverance in defence of a strategic program.

Since December 12, 1998 — when President Hugo Chavez was first elected — up until the referendum on reforming the constitution last December, Chavez won countless elections of all types, each time with more voter participation and by a greater margin.

On December 2, the constitutional reform proposal that would have allowed Chavez to take

indispensable steps towards deepening the program of changes in the direction of socialism, was put to the vote.

The massive abstention by the revolution's support base produced something more grave than simply the first electoral defeat (by the tiniest of margins) for Chavez.

It called into question the sustained viability of a genuine revolution via the ballot box and with universal participation with full democracy for all — including those staunch enemies that, backed by the US government, did not hold back from using Colombian paramilitaries to sow anxiety and spent millions of dollars to confuse the citizens.

## **Balance sheet**

By mid-2008, the opposition had lost their post-December 2 triumphalism.

Immediately after their narrow victory, an avalanche of propaganda attempted to transform this event in order to destroy Chavez.

The propagandists of the right explained that it was the beginning of the end of Chavez and announced the certainty of an overwhelming victory for their candidates in at least 12 of the 24 states in the November poll.

This self-interested prophecy even penetrated into the ranks of “chavismo-lite” — provoking something close to a state of panic in certain sectors.

But the counter-offensive immediately launched by Chavez began to bear fruit by April. Halfway through the year, the more sensible spokespeople of the opposition reduced their expectations for victories to half a dozen governorships.

By October, that figure dropped by half.

The shift was due to three principal factors: the surprisingly organic and massive rise of the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV) in the electoral campaign; the solutions to — or frontal and efficient attacks on — pressing problems that had contributed to the December 2 defeat (food shortages, crime); the decision by Chavez to take the campaign into his own hands and, with the PSUV in full stride, stage events across the country to personally and emphatically back his candidates.

This reversed the climate that, for a moment, had become predominate in the ranks of the revolution — at the same time reviving differences within the opposition and disarming their campaign, reducing them to little more than a media spectacle.

Such was the demoralisation by the middle of October that one polling company at their service, Hinterlace, with a tone of desperation, advised: “The implementation of the social missions, housing construction in the poorest zones in the country and the fomenting of cooperatives to promote endogenous development, are initiatives that generate a perception that the government is really doing something in favour of the most needy.

“It seems recommendable to not attack these government policies, but instead formulate superior initiatives within the framework created by the missions and the social programs, without displacing them completely.”

How to formulate superior initiatives? This the polling company did not clarify, instead warning that “it can be perceived that the President has fomented a greater consciousness within the population around social and political issues. Determined action has to be followed and talked up by the candidates of the opposition.”

Such an indication is backed by the most eloquent data in the Hinterlace report: Chavez enjoys “levels of support that oscillates between 45% and 55% of the Venezuelan electorate”.

Other, more reliable, polls point out that since the middle of the year this level has oscillated between 60-70%.

### **PCV-PPT**

The two parties that did not go over to the opposition but also did not integrate themselves into the PSUV — the Homeland For All party (PPT) and the Venezuelan Communist Party (PCV) — ended up breaking the alliance with the PSUV in six states, putting forward their own candidates against the PSUV.

The rupture that this signifies will bring with it consequences.

It is clear that both formations, often with valid arguments, do not understand the significance of this electoral confrontation, which is not over candidates but rather something qualitatively different: the possibility — or not — of taking a decisive step towards a rupture with the capitalist system through democratic elections.

The PPT and PCV also do not seem to understand the magnitude of the world crisis, placing them on a divergent path from the socialist character of the transformation underway.

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