



Written by [Alex Newman](#) on October 8, 2012

## Amid Accusations of Fraud, Socialist Chávez Wins Election

Amid an imploding economy, runaway inflation, shortages of basic goods, electricity blackouts, surging violence, and widespread accusations of voter fraud in Venezuela, socialist strongman Hugo Chávez allegedly won a narrow victory in Sunday's presidential election, according to the nation's National Electoral Council (CNE). Though the Venezuelan regime has a ban on publishing the results of exit polls, a [widely cited survey](#) conducted by the consulting firm Varianza showed opposition candidate Henrique Capriles ahead by a slim margin as the vote was coming to an end.



News reports and accounts from witnesses in Venezuela indicated that Chávez had ordered tanks and over 100,000 AK-47-wielding troops into the streets as fears about potential violence grew — the despotic self-styled socialist revolutionary had previously warned of civil war if he lost the election. On Twitter, meanwhile, angry Venezuelans accused Chávez of blatant voter fraud and threatened to leave the country or form their own. The phrase [#FraudeEnVenezuela](#), or Fraud in Venezuela, was one of the top worldwide trends on the social networking service by Monday morning.

"How long are they going to maintain this fraud?" [wrote](#) a user named Mariu Pereira in Venezuela, one of countless individuals alleging that the election was stolen by Chávez and his minions. "We'll go into dictatorship if we don't do anything about this FRAUD! CAPRILES WON! If Capriles did not give up the presidency, Chávez was going to establish a self-coup!"

More than a few citizens also alleged that votes cast by Venezuelans overseas — many of whom traveled hundreds of miles to vote — were not properly counted. Other activists in Venezuela complained of irregularities with the controversial electronic voting system closer to home, saying there was no way Chávez could have won their city or state despite official results to the contrary. A [popular tweet](#) by Daniel Montoya said Chávez had ordered troops into the street when he realized Capriles was set to win by about five percent.

Countless citizens suggested that Capriles knew about the wide-scale fraud but decided to stand down in an effort to avoid a massacre or even the civil war Chávez had warned about. Capriles, a leftist Catholic who united the opposition and touted freer markets but promised to expand the sprawling welfare state if elected, quickly conceded defeat despite calls from his supporters to fight on.

"The people have spoken, and their word is sacred," Capriles said after the CNE declared that Chávez had secured about 54 percent of the vote, giving the cancer-stricken ruler another six-year term in power. The opposition leader urged his supporters to be patient, however, noting that "God's timing is perfect" and that he was only 40 years old. "We have planted many seeds across Venezuela and I know that these seeds are going to produce many trees."

When a former lawmaker declared that there had been vote fraud shortly after the official tally was announced, Capriles claimed he did not believe it. "Radicalism has always damaged Venezuela," he



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[responded](#). “I am never going to mess around with our people, or subject them to instability. The other side obtained more votes and that’s democracy.”

Meanwhile, pro-Chávez forces responded to allegations of vote fraud by pointing out that their “commandante,” as the autocratic ruler styles himself, had already warned that his opponents would make that allegation. Throughout the campaign, the Chavez camp attempted to paint anyone opposed to socialist tyranny as puppets of the “rich,” the “Zionists,” or the “Yankee Empire,” the despot’s term for the United States. Capriles was referred to as the “fascist” or the “sycophant.”

One reason Chávez has managed to hold on to any significant support, analysts say, is that he has poured hundreds of billions of public dollars into handing out everything from houses to appliances. With an estimated \$1 trillion in oil revenues during his nearly 14 years in power, in the months before the election, the regime stepped up the wild spending spree, showering public funds on people hoping to garner their support.

“I think he just cranked up the patronage machine and unleashed a spending orgy,” [explained](#) Michael Shifter, president of a Washington-based think tank known as Inter-American Dialogue. Other analysts also noted that with most of the media now directly controlled by the regime — and much of the rest either shut down by force or terrified of being arrested for criticizing the despot — Chavez had the advantage of being able to appear on television or radio whenever he wanted.

“The revolution has triumphed!” a sword-wielding Chávez told throngs of supporters after the election results, claiming Venezuelans had “voted for socialism.” Since taking power, the socialist leader has [nationalized](#) vast [swaths of the economy](#), plunging Venezuela into an economic and social catastrophe that continues its accelerating downward spiral.

Even in the capital city of Caracas, rolling blackouts of electricity and shortages of basic staples have become the norm. Despite [half-baked price controls](#), inflation rates in Venezuela are now among the highest in the world as Chávez blames “capitalists” for the erosion of citizens’ purchasing power. In terms of economic freedom, the nation is now close to the bottom worldwide.

However, despite the problems plaguing Venezuela, Chávez has spent enormous amounts of money propping up the communist Castro dictatorship in Cuba and fellow socialist tyrants throughout the region. As a key member of a powerful but shadowy network of Latin American socialist forces known as the Foro de São Paulo (São Paulo Forum), Chávez and his petrodollars have [played a crucial role in the so-called “Pink Tide” sweeping over](#) much of Central and South America and the Caribbean.

During his reign, murder rates have skyrocketed across the country, too, with Caracas now having the dubious honor of being one of the most dangerous cities in the world. In response, the socialist regime [teamed up with the United Nations to disarm](#) the few remaining law-abiding citizens with a “permit” to own weapons. The [judiciary](#), the [press](#), and [every conceivable source of potential opposition](#) to his despotic rule have come under ruthless assault as well.

Still, it is true that Chávez still has a significant base of support in Venezuela, much of which comes from the “free” goods and services he has lavished on poorer Venezuelans. After the election, his supporters were a visible presence on the streets, waving flags and chanting pro-Chavez slogans. Many of his victims and opponents, meanwhile, had already fled the country or been [arrested on bogus charges](#).

Whether Chávez’s victory was legitimate or not, it still offers important lessons. First of all, individual rights should be protected by law, not subject to the whims of a tyrant — even an elected one. Also, the



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coercive machinery of government must be limited to prevent the emergence of demagogues who feel that because they can garner majority support by promising to spend other people's money, they can terrorize, rob and oppress the minority. That is why America's Founding Fathers [abhorred democracy and preferred a constitutional Republic under the rule of law](#).

Of course, even opposition forces in Venezuela are hoping to avoid open violence or all-out civil war. Many Capriles supporters hope to capitalize on the latest election — the closest presidential contest yet during Chávez's long rule [despite the despot losing the popular vote in corrupt legislative elections in 2010](#) — to do better in six years, assuming the strongman's cancer does not strike first. Whether the embattled and divided nation can even survive that long, however, is another question entirely.

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*Photo: Venezuela's strong man Hugo Chávez waves a Venezuelan flag as he greets supporters at the Miraflores presidential palace balcony in Caracas, Venezuela, Oct. 7, 2012: AP Images*



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