



Written by [Alex Newman](#) on October 3, 2010

Corrupt Venezuelan Election Still a Blow to Regime

Despite spending government money on propaganda, shutting down the independent media, arresting dissidents, intimidating voters, and blatantly gerrymandering electoral districts, Venezuela's "President" Hugo Chavez and his cohorts still received a loud message on election day: enough is enough. But despite losing the popular vote, incredibly, the regime still controls almost two thirds of the seats in the legislature.



The opposition Venezuelan Unity coalition, which boycotted the election in 2005 due to a lack of faith in the election system, won more than half of the popular vote on September 26 — 5.7 million to 5.4 million, according to [news reports](#). But Chavez refused to admit defeat, calling the results a "solid victory" for marching forward with the socialist "revolution."

Preposterously-concocted districts and the end of proportional representation allowed Chavez to maintain a fairly solid, if illegitimate, grip on power in the unicameral National Assembly. But his United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV) no longer controls the necessary two thirds of the legislature required to rule completely unilaterally. The opposition will now have at least some say on judicial appointments, for example, and other important matters.

However, Chavez may still be able to muster the 99 out of 165 votes needed to pass an "enabling" statute allowing him to rule by decree. Plus, the "lame duck" legislative session, which goes until the end of the year, could allow outgoing legislators to rewrite the rules, increase the executive's power even more, and ram through more unpopular changes.

Instead of speaking from the "People's Balcony," as is customary, Chavez responded to the election results with a [twitter message](#). "Well, my dear compatriots," he tweeted, "it has been a great election day and we have obtained a solid victory: enough to continue deepening Bolivarian and democratic socialism. We need to continue strengthening the revolution!" In a press conference with foreign reporters, Chavez called the results a "triumph" for the revolution.

But some observers are forecasting potential retaliatory action from the embattled "President." "It's not in Chavez's nature to take this threat lying down," Heritage Foundation Latin America analyst Ray Walser told the Bloomberg news agency. "He will likely take a retaliatory step."

In a recent report cited in the Bloomberg article, Goldman Sachs economic analyst Alberto Ramos said he would not be surprised if Chavez reacted to the election by "radicalizing the policy approach and eroding even further the remaining institutional checks and balances." One option would be to strengthen so-called "community councils," local bodies largely aligned with the regime.



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Analysts, however, still congratulated the opposition on its success. “Despite the government’s use of violence, a politicized judiciary, the shutting down of media critical of the president, the misuse of public funds for the president’s party, the cult of personality financed by the state, the use of imprisonment to go after political opponents, the presence of a fear-inducing Cuban intelligence apparatus, and the abuse of federal emergency management laws to control the airwaves for several hours a day to spread political propaganda, the democratic elements in Venezuela are to be commended,” [wrote](#) Thor Halvorssen, president of the Human Rights Foundation and founder of the Oslo Freedom Forum. “What they pulled off on Sunday is extraordinary.... Imagine what the results would have been had there been an equal playing field.”

Halvorssen also explained why it is imperative for Chavez not to lose power: “This would lead to charges of murder, drug-trafficking on a global scale, corruption charges unlike anything seen in the hemisphere’s history, and — most problematic due to the crimes against humanity element — charges of collaborating with Colombia’s FARC terrorists.”

The next presidential election will be held in 2012, and analysts say it is increasingly likely that the opposition could unite behind one candidate to defeat the current regime and oust Chavez, who has ruled for over a decade. But as long as Chavez rules, he will be “untouchable.” Hence the despotic tactics used to stop his opponents: “He has disqualified Leopoldo Lopez, a candidate that has outpolled him, forced Manuel Rosales, the last candidate that challenged him, into exile, and opened judicial investigations into those on the electoral horizon,” Halvorssen explained. Chavez hopes to remain in power for another two decades, and seems determined to do whatever is necessary to achieve that goal.

Voter outrage in Venezuela is certainly understandable. The popular vote was largely predicted to be anti-Chavez, especially since, under his rule, crime and inflation have skyrocketed, the economy is collapsing, and water and electricity shortages continue to plague even the capital. But Chavez is not alone in his quest to spread socialism in Venezuela and throughout the region, as reported by *The New American* magazine in an article entitled [‘Resurgent Communism in Latin America.’](#)

A powerful cabal known as the Foro de Sao Paulo — founded by Brazilian President “Lula,” communist despot Fidel Castro, and the Sandinistas — now dominates about two thirds of all Latin American governments. Consisting of over 100 political parties, various “social movements,” narco-trafficking terrorist groups, and other assorted leftists, the group uses petro-dollars and drug money to finance its revolution.

The outcome of the Venezuelan election, despite its obvious shortcomings, was widely hailed as a positive sign by analysts and investors. But how Chavez reacts in the coming weeks and months will undoubtedly play an important role in the future development of Venezuela.

Photo of Hugo Chavez: AP Images



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