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Venezuelan Election Sparks International Skepticism as Maduro Claims Third Term

World leaders demand transparency and independent audits as opposition claims 70 percent of votes for González, with Maduro loyalists accused of manipulating results

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Venezuela election results-fueled protests.

There is widespread skepticism among world leaders following the announcement by Venezuela's electoral authority that Nicolas Maduro has secured a third term as President of the country. Exit polling across the country had reportedly pointed to substantial opposition support before the National Electoral Council's (CNE) declaration, and opposition leaders claimed victory despite the announcement of Mr. Maduro's electoral win.?

Sunday's presidential election was between Mr. Maduro and opposition candidate Edmundo González. The former diplomat came to represent the country's anti-Maduro political wing after opposition leader Maria Machado and her alternate were both banned from registering as candidates. Following the announcement of Mr. Maduro's win, Ms. Machado contended that it was Mr. González who garnered the majority of votes – as much as 70% of ballots cast were for him, she declared.

“The Venezuelans and the entire world know what happened,” said a defiant Mr. González, a sentiment shared by several world leaders. In South and Central America, the presidents of Chile, Uruguay, Argentina, Guatemala, and Costa Rica joined Peru's foreign minister in questioning the validity of the results announced by CNE. The leaders of Bolivia, Honduras and Cuba have all congratulated Mr. Maduro on his victory.

The United States and the European Union have joined the ranks of the skeptics, with U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken expressing “serious concerns” that the announced results reflect the will of the Venezuelan people. EU Foreign Policy chief Joseph Burrell added his voice to calls for complete transparency from CNE, which is accused of being staffed up by Maduro loyalists. The agency is being asked to release all voting tallies calculated by individual voting machines so that independent organizations are able to verify the results.

President Maduro's first speech after the announcement of his victory included praise for the CNE's “high level of trust, security and transparency.” He also denounced what he said was a failed large-scale hack against the electoral agency by a foreign actor, which he did not identify.

On Monday afternoon, thousands of opposition supporters took to the streets to denounce what they claim is a fraudulent electoral outcome, toppling at least two statues of Venezuela's revolutionary leader Hugo Chavez. At least one person has died in the state response to the protests, while scores have been arrested.

As of Monday evening, the government's story has coalesced into a tale of an attempt at mass interference by unnamed foreign actors and local opposition forces, which was rebuffed. No evidence for this narrative has been presented, while opposition figures claim that paper records from voting machines prove that Mr. González had earned an unbeatable majority – over 70% – of the vote.

One of the few independent observer organizations allowed in Venezuela for the elections, the Carter Center, called for the CNE to publish station-level results, which it still has not done. Meanwhile, members of the international community are calling for an independent audit into the voting tabulations – something which is unlikely to occur, given President Maduro's history regarding elections. Unless there is a foundational shift in the status quo — signs of which are apparent as Venezuela citizens take to the streets in mass protests — Nicolas Maduro looks set to preside over Venezuela's crumbling society until 2031.