

# Venezuela's 2024 Presidential Election

Updated August 2, 2024

On July 28, 2024, Venezuela held presidential elections that most [international observers](#), including the U.S. Department of State, concluded did not meet international standards. Many observers, including the U.S. Administration, allege that the government of President Nicolás Maduro failed to uphold the democratic standards for the election it had committed to in an [October 2023 agreement](#) with Venezuela's opposition alliance, the Unitary Platform (PUD). On July 29, Venezuela's National Electoral Commission (CNE) [claimed](#) that Maduro won 51.2% of the vote, compared with 44.2% for Edmundo González Urrutia, the PUD candidate endorsed by opposition leader María Corina Machado. These results contradict preelection polling, [exit polls](#), and precinct-level vote tabulations [published](#) by the opposition.

The [United States](#), and many [other](#) governments, called on the CNE to publish ballot records to corroborate the announced results. Secretary of State Antony Blinken [recognized](#) González's victory, called for a "peaceful transition" to a new government, and criticized the Maduro government's attempt to use repression to retain power. U.S. officials may impose [targeted sanctions](#) on individuals who have engaged in election fraud or postelection repression. Biden Administration officials, wary of unrest in Venezuela potentially fueling irregular migration, may [resist](#) calls from [some in Congress](#) to reimpose sectoral sanctions.

## Preelection Polling

Preelection [polls](#) indicated majority support for González, a career diplomat and academic. González was put forth as the opposition candidate after the Maduro government [banned](#) María Corina Machado from running. Machado had won a PUD primary in October 2023 with [93%](#) of the vote, but the Venezuelan Supreme Court [upheld](#) a [widely criticized](#) June 2023 ruling barring her from office.

## Electoral Process

Following negotiations led by the Norwegian government, in October 2023 the Maduro government and the opposition signed the [Barbados Agreement](#). The agreement included commitments related to the timing and conduct of the election (see [Figure 1](#)). The Maduro government fulfilled pledges to set an electoral calendar and invite [international observers](#). At the same time, the government [arrested](#) opposition campaign staffers and human rights defenders, [used](#) government resources to benefit Maduro, and [canceled](#) its invitation to EU electoral observers.



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Election officials reportedly [barred](#) some domestic observers from entering polling stations on July 28 to observe the tallying process.

**Figure 1. Selected Alleged Maduro Government Violations of the Barbados Agreement**

 <b>PLEDGES</b>	 <b>VIOLATIONS</b>
Authorization of All Presidential Candidates	Ban of Opposition Candidate Elected in Primary
Authorization of All Political Parties	Ban of Opposition Parties from Candidacy
Security and Freedom of All Candidates	Arrest of Opposition Campaign Staffers
Peaceful and Fair Political Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Arrest of Human Rights Defenders</li> <li>• Anti-Fascism Law</li> <li>• Expulsion of UN Human Rights Officials</li> </ul>
Invitation of United Nations, European Union, and Carter Center as International Election Observers	Rescission of Invitation of European Union Electoral Observers

**Source:** CRS graphics, data from the Associated Press, *El País*.

## Election Results

A number of observers, including the opposition, the [Inter-American Commission of Human Rights](#), and the [Carter Center](#), alleged widespread fraud before and on election day. According to the opposition, precinct-level vote count tallies indicate that González [won](#) the election with 67% of votes, while Maduro captured 30% of votes. As of August 2, 2024, the CNE had not released official vote counts to prove Maduro's victory over González.

The governments of China, Russia, Cuba, and Iran, among several others, have congratulated Maduro on his victory. The United States, Colombia, Brazil, and most other Latin American countries have called on the Maduro government to provide definitive proof of its claimed victory. On July 31, 2024, Organization of American States (OAS) member states [failed](#) to pass a resolution requesting that the Maduro government allow for an independent investigation of the election. On August 1, the U.S. Administration [recognized](#) González's victory.

## Response to Postelection Protests

Tens of thousands of people have peacefully protested throughout Venezuela since the election. As of July 31, 2024, security forces have detained at least [670 people](#), including opposition politician Fredy Superlano. Clashes between security forces and opposition protesters reportedly have resulted in at least [11 deaths](#). Some Maduro allies have [called for](#) the arrest of Machado and González; opposition campaign offices reportedly have been [ransacked](#).

The [U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights](#), the [OAS](#), and [international organizations](#) have expressed serious concerns about human rights violations committed by security forces against protesters.

## U.S. Policy

U.S. policy in Venezuela aims to [support free and fair elections](#) leading to a return to democracy. For much of the past decade, U.S. policy sought to achieve those ends through [sanctions](#) and efforts to diplomatically isolate Maduro. The Biden Administration has [supported](#) Maduro-opposition negotiations,

however, by providing relief from U.S. sanctions, including six-month [general licenses](#) allowing transactions with Venezuela’s gold and hydrocarbons sectors; engaging in [prisoner swaps](#); and using direct talks and multilateral diplomacy to urge Maduro to uphold his Barbados Agreement pledges.

In response to Maduro’s violations of the Barbados Agreement, the Biden Administration [revoked](#) the gold sector general license in January 2024 and [did not renew](#) the oil sector general license in April 2024. The Administration has continued to permit individual companies to seek specific licenses to work in Venezuela. While U.S. officials [have indicated](#) the Administration is unlikely to revoke existing licenses, the Administration reportedly has considered [targeted sanctions](#) to punish electoral fraud and postelection repression.

On August 1, 2024, Secretary of State Blinken issued a statement [asserting](#), “it is clear that Edmundo González Urrutia won the most votes in Venezuela’s July 28 presidential election.”

It is unclear what further steps the Administration or other countries may take to encourage Maduro to negotiate peacefully with González Urrutia and Machado and to discourage the use of violence in response to ongoing protests.

## Congressional Considerations

In addition to conducting oversight of the Administration’s efforts to respond to the presidential election and its aftermath, Congress may consider legislative measures to address the political situation in Venezuela. Bills to reauthorize targeted sanctions on individuals who engage in corruption, human rights abuses, and/or antidemocratic actions under the Venezuela Emergency Relief, Democracy Assistance, and Development (VERDAD) Act (P.L. 116-94, Division J), which expired in December 2023, have been ordered to be reported in the House (H.R. 6831) and introduced in the Senate (S. 3363). Congress could place additional conditions on democracy assistance to Venezuela in the House-passed and Senate-introduced versions of the FY2025 Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Appropriations Act (H.R. 8771/S. 4797). Congress also could consider other bills to authorize various sanctions (e.g., S. 995, H.R. 5670) or resolutions recognizing González Urrutia’s victory (e.g. S.Res. 804).

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