

The US Should Focus on Democracy at Home, Not in Venezuela | Common Dreams

Brian Garvey Aug 18, 2024 Common Dreams 5 : 7-8 minutes : 8/18/2024

There is now widespread controversy surrounding the Venezuelan presidential election on July 28th. The National Electoral Council says that current President Nicolás Maduro was reelected with a 51% majority. The opposition, led by Maria Corina Machado, claims that its candidate, Edmundo González, won with an overwhelming majority of the votes cast. The primary questions being asked in the media are “who really won?” and even “how can Maduro be made to step aside?”

Instead the question US observers should be asking is, “what business is this of ours?”

The United States government constantly criticizes elections around the world that it deems to be undemocratic. It claims to support an “international rules based order” and maintain a foreign policy with human rights at its center. But the United States of America isn’t exactly a fair arbiter. It is without question the most hyper-interventionist country in the history of the world. It has repeatedly intervened in the internal affairs of governments it doesn’t like, often invading and overthrowing them, ostensibly, for the cause of democracy. It does not, however, criticize the antidemocratic behavior of its allies, like apartheid [Israel](#) or the absolute monarchy that rules Saudi Arabia. As in Orwell’s famous novel, America may claim that all animals are equal. But it’s clear that it believes some animals are more equal than others.

On July 27th, a day before the Venezuelan election, [the People’s Forum, a New York City movement incubator, released a letter](#) warning that, “a Western media narrative is already being spun to present the election as inevitably fraudulent – and pave the way for a new regime change operation if the right-wing opposition does not prevail at the ballot box.”

That letter has come under criticism for asserting that, “the campaign has seen energetic participation all across the country and vigorous, democratic debate,” and that since 2002, “Venezuela has held over 30 elections that have been conducted professionally and impartially.” In the days after the most recent election international organizations like [Amnesty International](#), [Human Rights Watch](#), and [a fact-finding mission from the United Nations](#) have disagreed, citing reports of politically motivated arrests, assaults, intimidation, and even deaths. The governments of [Colombia, Mexico, and Brazil are calling for more transparency](#).

But the credibility of Venezuela’s elections should not be the main issue in question. The main issue is that criticism is used as an excuse to promote US intervention and regime change or to justify more deadly sanctions that kill Venezuelan people. True to form, on Thursday August 1st the [U.S. State Department announced](#) that it recognized González as the winner.

In one egregious example of media promoting intervention, [a July 31st editorial in the Boston Globe](#) called on the Biden Administration to intervene, saying, “It’s in U.S. interests for the Biden Administration to help deliver the regime change Venezuelans have voted for.” It endorsed the policy of former President [Donald Trump](#), suggesting that President Biden should revive the office of special representative to Venezuela and later quoted the man who held that office under Trump, Elliott Abrams.

But it failed to provide extremely important context about Mr. Abrams. In 1991 Elliott Abrams, who still serves in government, [pled guilty to two counts of lying to the US Congress about his knowledge of the Iran-Contra affair](#), a secret deal to illegally sell arms to Iran and use the proceeds to fund right-wing militias trying to overthrow the left wing government of Nicaragua. Congress had explicitly forbidden military assistance for the purpose of overthrowing the Nicaraguan government. A man who was deeply involved in the attempted overthrow of a Central American government is not a credible voice on Venezuelan democracy.

The United States has a terrible record when it comes to supporting self determination, globally, in Latin America, and in Venezuela specifically. The U.S. has interfered with the affairs of Cuba, Nicaragua, Mexico, Brazil, Chile, Panama, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Bolivia, Venezuela, and more. Focusing on Venezuela alone there are multiple instances of interference just in the 21st century.

In 2002 [the Bush Administration sanctioned a coup attempt against Maduro's predecessor Hugo Chavez](#). In March of 2015 the Obama Administration unilaterally levied harsh economic sanctions on Venezuela. [President Obama declared](#) that Venezuela posed an “unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security and foreign policy of the United States.” The effects of such sanctions, and even more punitive ones imposed by the Trump Administration, [were studied by the Government Accountability Office in 2021](#). They found that the sanctions have already killed tens of thousands of people in Venezuela, due to restricted access to food and medicine.

In 2019 the Trump Administration recognized 35 year old opposition leader Juan Guaidó as the legitimate president of Venezuela, despite the fact that he never ran for the office. They then handed over control on Venezuela's assets in the United States to Guaidó, a move that the *New York Times* called, [“one of Washington's most overt attempts in decades to carry out regime change in Latin America.”](#)

Given the exhaustive record of U.S. interference and intervention in the politics of Latin American countries, it's just common sense to be skeptical about pronouncements from Washington regarding Venezuela's election. That's asking the fox's opinion on the management of the henhouse. To be clear, this is not to say that the Venezuelan government is perfect or to endorse the fairness of the July 28th election. It is to say that Venezuelan political disputes should be settled by Venezuelans, not by the United States.

With its own presidential election less than three months away, the U.S. has enough on its plate. The recent history of presidential elections in the United States is less than stellar. Two of the last six presidential elections were won by the candidate who received less votes (George W. Bush in 2000 and Donald J. Trump in 2016). In 2000 Bush had a co-chair of his campaign purge 173,000 voters from voting rolls as Florida Secretary of State, in a key election decided by 500 votes. Trump tried to stay in power after losing the 2020 election to President Joe Biden. His followers famously stormed the Capitol Building in an effort to stop the certification of that election on January 6th 2021.

The bottom line? We have authoritarianism at home. When it comes to taking action abroad to “defend democracy” America would do well to adhere to the motto recommended by Founding Grandfather Benjamin Franklin: “Mind your business.”