

## Venezuela's Maduro faces opposition after close election results

BY HANNAH WALLER  
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Nicolas Maduro, Hugo Chavez's hand-picked successor, was sworn in as president of Venezuela last Friday and will now serve the rest of Chavez's six-year term.

Maduro won the previous Sunday's election with only 50.8 percent of the vote, raising controversy amongst Venezuelan voters and dividing the country.

Maduro's opponent, Henrique Capriles, won a close 49 percent of the vote causing the opposition to call for a recount. Maduro firmly defends his victory.

"We have a just, legal, constitutional and popular electoral victory," said Maduro.

"Here there is no majority," said Capriles. "There are two halves."

Maduro has been acting president since Chavez's death in March, only months after Chavez himself defeated the same Capriles with 55 percent of the vote in Venezuela's October 2012 presidential election.

In one of his last public appearances, Chavez announced his endorsement of Maduro as his successor.

"My firm opinion, as clear as the full moon — irrevocable, absolute, total — is ... that you elect Nicolas Maduro as president," said Chavez. "I ask this of you from my heart. He is one of the young leaders with the greatest ability to continue, if I cannot."

Maduro has revealed his intention to follow Chavez's plan

for Venezuela and continue building twenty-first century socialism.

The leadership change has come at a difficult time for Venezuela's economy. Inflation is expected to exceed 30 percent in the coming year, and economists predict Venezuela may be heading for a recession.

Venezuelans are struggling with food and medicine shortages as well as blackouts that have been going on for years.

Maduro has already made changes to the Venezuelan Cabinet, appointing Jesse Chacon in response to the blackouts and Nelson Merentes, former president of the central bank, to face the task of reducing inflation. Maduro has voiced plans to make Jorge Arreaza, Venezuela's science and technology minister and son-in-law to Chavez, executive vice president.

Venezuela's relationship with the U.S. has been especially tense in recent years.

As president, Chavez was known for his negative views of the U.S. Being Chavez's protege, it is unclear how Maduro will proceed in international relations with the U.S.

According to The New York Times, Maduro told former New Mexico Governor and Representative of the Organization of American States Bill Richardson that he wants to improve Venezuela's relationship with the U.S.

"The result as reported is extremely close," said White House spokesperson Jay Carney about the

election's results. "The opposition candidate and at least one member of the electoral council have called for an audit, which ... in our view, seems like an important and prudent step to take."

Since the election, there have been widespread protests by the opposition. According to the Venezuelan government, this has resulted in eight deaths already.

In response to the controversy, there will soon be an electronic audit of 100 percent of the presidential vote. The audit is expected to take nearly one month.

"We will not let something that aims to verify whether the system worked be turned into a sort of public impeachment that tries to question the results," said deputy head of the National Electoral Council Sandra Oblitas. "As always, when the NEC announces results to the country, it is because they are irreversible."

"The electoral power is making this decision in order to preserve a climate of harmony between Venezuelans, but also to isolate violent sectors that are irresponsibly trying to harm democracy," said Tibisay Lucena, president of Venezuela's NEC.

Capriles claims satisfaction with the NEC's plan to electronically audit the election results, expressing his larger goal of truth for the Venezuelan public.

"This fight has not finished," Capriles said. "I am sure that sooner rather than later the truth will come out."



(Above) Former Venezuelan leader Hugo Chavez's chosen successor **Nicolas Maduro** won the Venezuelan election by 50.8 percent. (Left) His opponent, **Henrique Capriles**, took 49 percent of the vote, causing a controversial recount. The country remains divided on the issue, citing problems like inflation as well as shortages of food and medicine.

## Pakistan's election fever heated as Taliban commit numerous suicide bombings

BY CHRISTIANNA VAN DALSEN  
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Pakistan has election fever.

A crumbling economy, due to the energy crisis and the currently ostracized government, is turning up the heat as the election next month draws near. The most pressing issue in the election remains the violent actions of the Pakistani Taliban, who have been rebelling against the Pakistani government for the last five years.

"It has come up a lot with the recent Boston bombings," said part-time Mathematics Lecturer Dani Moran. "A lot of comparisons have been drawn that there are a lot of bombings that have been as bad or worse."

The violence includes attacks on one of the anti-Taliban parties running in the campaign, the Awami National Party. At one of the party's small election meetings, a Taliban suicide bombing killed 17. The Taliban have also attempted three lethal attacks on ANP candidate Arbab Ayub Jan.

"We are trying our best that we will bring peace one day," said Jan to the BBC. "We are not going back, and we are determined and we will fight against terrorism."

However, the Taliban have severely hindered their campaign by issuing threats. The campaigns have been quiet, drawing out only loyal party voters, while the general public is too frightened to attend.

"This time, we are totally handicapped and, in my opinion, this is the biggest setback we can face going into

an election campaign," said ANP candidate Haroon Bilour to the BBC. Bilour's father, a senior ANP leader, was killed by a Taliban suicide bomber in December.

Along with the violence, many civilians have protested on issues like the economy and religious policies of the state. The Taliban are interested in enforcing Islamic law in Pakistan.

"Pakistan was originally intended to be a place for Muslims like myself, and it should be a better place than it is," said Early College junior Rabab Husain. "Even though the Taliban and all the people in power in Pakistan think what they are doing is Islamic, they have no right to call

themselves an Islamic government or an Islamic society. Islam is their excuse, not their religion. They are corrupt."

Despite the multiple bombings the Taliban have inflicted upon the public, some people still do not view the Taliban as an issue.

"To some extent, I have a hard time mustering the same kind of ire toward the Taliban as other people because I am a Muslim and because there has been a history of other countries getting involved in Pakistan," said Ahmad Tejan-Sie, a student who takes classes at Guilford. "I feel that kind of environment where you constantly have other countries involving in this country's business often stokes ire and that kind of violence that occurs."

As the May 11 election day draws near, Pakistan's highly volatile political climate winds closer to what might be the end of a long period of unrest and violence.



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