

**Written Testimony of**  
**Greg Howell, Senior Deputy Assistant Administrator for Latin America and the Caribbean**  
**Before the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere**  
**“Maduro Stole the Elections Again: The Response to Fraud in Venezuela”**  
**September 20, 2024**

Thank you, Chair Salazar, Ranking Member Castro, and members of the Subcommittee, for the opportunity to testify today. The fight for democracy in Venezuela is *the* critical issue for the country’s development. It is vitally important for stability and prosperity throughout South America. It is also a test for the international community and our collective commitment to democracy. Now is the time when we must rally behind the brave Venezuelans who have risked so much to express their strong desire for change.

On July 28, the Venezuelan people went to the polls en masse to let their voices be heard. Their message was unequivocal: by historic margins they chose Edmundo Gonzalez, a former diplomat, to bring about a new era of change and democratic governance to Venezuela. In doing so, they exposed that Nicolas Maduro does not have popular legitimacy nor credibility with the Venezuelan people.

Maduro has gone to great lengths to avoid acknowledging the will of the Venezuelan people or recognizing the election results. Since July 28, he has wielded his control of the National Electoral Council to announce fake election results, without presenting a shred of evidence. He has also wielded his control over the Supreme Court in an attempt to grant a veneer of legitimacy to the National Electoral Council’s lies.

Venezuelans, of course, want the results of the election to be respected, but they are living in constant fear for their safety. Since the elections, Maduro has unleashed an unprecedented wave of repression. He has unjustly detained journalists, political actors, and human rights defenders. Even ordinary citizens face the threat of detention by Maduro-aligned security forces. Ordinary citizens live in fear that they will be detained by security forces when they go to buy food or visit the clinic. Most notably, Maduro has directed baseless charges and intimidation at Edmundo Gonzalez, causing him to flee the country.

Maduro is implementing tactics from authoritarian playbooks, sending police to arbitrarily check citizen phones for remotely political content. Maduro has also established citizen reporting networks where neighbors can anonymously accuse anyone, at any time, of working for democracy and freedom. Far from denying these kinds of repressive actions, Maduro and his closest allies blatantly promote them frequently on Maduro-controlled television and radio networks as well as on social media.

We all know that these peaceful protesters and others who were arrested are not criminals. They are political prisoners held in inhumane conditions and frequently subjected to torture. Tragically, many are minors.

These brave political prisoners are among the millions of Venezuelans from all walks of life – shopkeepers and lawyers, farmers and students, youth and elderly – who took extraordinary risks to participate in the July 28 elections. These Venezuelans came out to vote, not because they were naive, but because they were courageous. They knew that Maduro controlled Venezuela's institutions and was likely to try to suppress the will of the Venezuelan people so that he could gain power. They sought out information and participated in rallies, despite the threats, arrests, and broadcast media blackout that aimed to silence the Gonzalez campaign. On July 28, they voted for change and hope, for accountability, and to bring about the economic and democratic conditions that would enable their relatives outside of the country to return home.

Despite the dire situation in Venezuela today, we cannot lose sight of the fact that Venezuelan voters, democracy activists, candidates, and political parties have achieved something truly extraordinary. Long divided by ideology and personality, the Venezuelan opposition came together last summer in a primary election to choose Maria Corina Machado by overwhelming margins and with stunning participation rates. When Maduro blocked Machado from running, the democratic coalition remained united, ultimately following her lead to support Edmundo Gonzalez as their candidate for President. As the election approached, civil society and democracy activists informed and registered voters as Maria Corina Machado campaigned alongside Edmundo Gonzalez.

On election day, opposition poll watchers risked their lives to remain in voting centers and demand election result tally sheets from each polling center as stipulated in Venezuela's election law. In the days after the election, they compiled enough tally sheets to prove that Edmundo Gonzalez beat Nicholas Maduro by a margin of over 35 percent. They did what Maduro and his Electoral Council have refused to do. They made the results public, on [resultadosconvzla.com](http://resultadosconvzla.com). By doing so, they made the will of the Venezuelan people known to the entire world. Because of their efforts to promote transparency, we now know that a vast majority of the Venezuelan people rejected Maduro's repression, corruption, and economic mismanagement and voted for change.

In the days after the election, we have seen countries across the world and, critically, across this hemisphere, rally for the cause of Venezuelan democracy. We have seen leaders

from across the political spectrum call for transparency and refuse to echo Maduro's claim to be the winner of the election. Several have joined the United States in acknowledging Edmundo Gonzalez' overwhelming victory.

Shamefully, Maduro has ignored the international community's call for transparency. In fact, he constantly attacks the international community and insinuates that the efforts of civil society, independent media, or human rights defenders are in service of an international conspiracy against him. This is false. It is the Venezuelan people who are working tirelessly to document the truth and defend their democracy, and they are doing so because they want a brighter future for their own country.

USAID is proud to support democratic actors in Venezuela. We work to support their ability to organize internally; broaden their democratic coalition; exercise their freedoms of expression and peaceful assembly; and defend democratic principles. Our programs also enhance the Venezuelan people's access to uncensored information by supporting independent news reporting. At this critical time, our programs are focused on strengthening civil society and human rights organizations' capacities to report effectively on the dire human rights situation in the country, including freedoms of expression and peaceful assembly, and to carry out oversight of the activities of Maduro and his representatives.

If Maduro continues to ignore the will of the Venezuelan people, there is a real concern that many more Venezuelans will begin to leave their country soon in addition to the nearly eight million who have already fled, with significant impacts to the region. As the Venezuelan people continue to fight for democracy, it is vitally important that we continue building international support for a democratic transition in Venezuela. At this critical time, we must ensure that the international community does not turn away from the Venezuelan people, who have risked so much to make their voices heard and their votes counted.