

Why the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV) Won the Election

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Introduction

Every major newspaper, television channel and US government official has spent the past two years claiming that the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV), founded by the late Hugo Chavez, had become a marginalized political party, supported only by ‘*hard core Chavistas*’ and public employees. The US government, under Presidents Obama and Trump, backed gangs of violent demonstrators, who rampaged through the streets, as ‘the true democratic representatives’ of the will of the voters. Secretary General of the Organization of American States Luis Almagro, a veteran running dog for Washington, railed against the President Nicholas Maduro, denouncing him as a ‘dictator’ and openly demanded that the Venezuelan people and neighboring Latin American regimes unite to oust him – even through violence. President Trump imposed brutal economic sanctions designed to strangle the economy and guaranteed Washington’s support for the rightwing opposition, the self-styled Democratic Unity Roundtable, (*‘Mesa de la Unidad Democratica’* - or MUD).

MUD took advantage of the economic crisis facing Venezuela with the sharp decline of the price of its main export oil. *MUD* has spent the past three years attacking the government and mobilizing its supporters through street violence and parliamentary maneuvers to paralyze the government’s socio-economic agenda. Vital public services, like power stations, were frequent targets of *MUD*-orchestrated sabotage, even leading to the assassination of public employees, like police and firefighters.

MUD rejected the government's proposal for peaceful negotiations with the opposition. President Maduro asked for a dialogue with the US, which was sponsoring *MUD*, but President Trump replied with his usual bombast and threats of violent intervention.

The economic blockade and drop in oil prices had devastating consequences: Inflation hit triple digits in Venezuela. There were increasing food shortages, long lines and valid consumer complaints. As a result, the opposition coalition won the Congressional elections of 2015 and immediately tried to impeach President Maduro. Rather than using their electoral mandate to govern and address the country's problems, they focused exclusively on forcing 'regime change'. This monomania led to voter dissatisfaction with *MUD* and, contrary to Washington's hopes, predictions, threats and sanctions, the PSUV won the gubernatorial elections by a wide margin in October 2017.

The opposition was decisively defeated. Over a thousand independent outside observers, who had monitored the Venezuelan elections and voting procedures, declared the elections to be the free and valid expression of the citizens will. The opposition immediately rejected the result. The entire US-EU press predictably converged on Caracas, screaming 'fraud', and echoing the rabid right-wing politicians in the US, the OAS and Europe. They saw no need to back their claims with '*evidence*'.

In truth, the Opposition-*MUD* was roundly defeated: They had secured only 39% of the vote and only 5 of the 23 governorships. The PSUV, for its part, increased its voter support from 44% in the 2015 to 54% in October 2017.

The real question, which is being ignored, is how the PSUV won and the Opposition lost, given the enormous outside support for *MUD* and the economic crisis in Venezuela? Why did the opposition lose 2.7 million votes in two years following their much-ballyhooed parliamentary victory? How could the US, the OAS and the EU miss this trend and waste their money and credibility?

Ten Reasons for the Socialist Victory and the Rightist Defeat

Understanding the reasons for the Socialist victory requires that we first analyze the strengths and weakness of the *MUD*.

1. The PSUV retained its committed and loyalist core, despite hardships endured by the masses of Venezuelans, because of the socialists long-term, large-scale socio-economic programs advancing the citizens' welfare over the previous decade and a half.
2. Many low-income voters feared that, once in power, the rightwing extremists in *MUD* would reverse these social advances and return them to the pre-Chavista era of elite domination, repression and their own marginalization.
3. Many right-of center-voters were appalled by *MUD's* support for violence and sabotage, leading to the destruction of public buildings and private businesses and paralyzing public transportation. They decided to abstain and/or vote for the PSUV, as the *party of law and order*.
4. Many independent voters supported the PSUV as the greater defender of Venezuelan sovereignty. They were appalled by the opposition coalition – *MUD's* endorsement of

Washington's economic sanctions and blockade and President Trump's brutal threats to intervene to force 'regime change'.

5. Probably most decisive for the shift to the left by many former *MUD* voters was the right-wing opposition's failure to offer any positive alternative. Apart from promoting violence and dismantling the Chavista social programs, *MUD* lacked any concrete program or policies to address the ongoing economic crisis. It was clear to voters that *MUD*'s constant harping on the 'failures' of the PSUV offered no viable way out of the crisis.
6. The *MUD* was not able to use its electoral majority in Congress to obtain overseas economic aid to provide social services, or to arrange trade deals or loans. Washington was only willing to subsidize *MUD*'s campaign for violent regime change but not to support any opposition congressional proposals for Venezuela's schools or its health system. *MUD* was stuck in a self-perpetuating cycle, telling people what they already knew, with no serious proposals to address the people's everyday problems.
7. *MUD* constantly denigrated the memory of President Hugo Chavez, whose legacy represented the 'best of times' for millions of Venezuelans. Many voters recalled the decade of Chavez's Presidency – his generous welfare policies, his own humble origins, his courage, his folksy sense of humor and his links to the grassroots. This was in stark contrast to the *MUD* leaders' 'Miami mentality', their fawning over US consumerism and Washington's militarism, their servility to the upper class's cultural elitism and contempt for the dark-skinned mestizo population.

8. The *MUD* congressmen and women focused their time in Congress with sectarian political name-calling when they weren't busy plotting regime change in the posh upper class salons of the Caracas' elite. They failed to articulate any realistic grassroots solution to everyday problems. Their complaints over '*dictatorship*' carried little weight since they held the majority in Congress and did nothing for the electorate.
9. The *MUD*'s unsuccessful attempts to incite a military coup among Venezuela's patriotic military officers alienated moderate liberal-democrats, some of whom either 'jumped ship' to support the Left or, more likely, abstained in October's election.
10. President Maduro's moves toward negotiating favorable trade and investment deals with Russia, China and Iran encouraged voters to imagine that viable alternatives to the crisis were on the government's agenda.

Many voters may have placed more trust in Maduro's promise of serious new programs and policies to revive the economy. But more significantly, the PSUV's established programs and future prospects were more appealing than *MUD*'s predictable denunciations of election fraud; and almost two-thirds of the electorate chose to participate in October's elections. These '*fraud*' charges only worked with *MUD*'s true believers who had either abstained, virtually ensuring a victory for the Left, or had voted and therefore made themselves '*accessory to electoral fraud*', which they had denounced.

Conclusion

The *MUD* lost the state governor elections of October 2017, less than 2 years after they had won the congressional elections, by demonstrating their incompetence, their propensity for

violence against serious democratic adversaries and their incapacity to fulfill any programmatic promises.

The PSUV won because of the Chavez legacy, the decision by middle-of-the-road voters to support a pragmatic '*lesser evil*' over a violent opposition '*greater evil*' promising chaos. Many voters are desperate for new and better policies to address Venezuela's current economic challenges. Finally, many Venezuelans rejected US President Trump and OAS President Almagros' blatant, arrogant assumption that they knew what was best for the people of Venezuela – even if it meant blood in the streets.

In the end, the Chavez legacy of successful class and national struggles carried more weight with the voters than the negative, chaotic impotence of a subservient opposition. The US/Venezuelan mass media's efforts to undermine the government were defeated because the people responded to the socialist message that US-led economic warfare, and not government mismanagement, was the key cause of their social and economic decline. They had experienced more than a decade of independent foreign policy and Bolivarian socialist programs to compare with the chaos of 'regime change' promised by Washington and the opposition.

The Left won the battle for now but the war continues.