

María Corina Machado or how to win the primaries, and nothing else

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In Venezuela, in the shadow of the region political and media attention, which looked towards more relevant processes such as the general elections in Argentina, the opposition candidate María Corina Machado won a questionable primary to define the representative of the anti-Chavista side in the upcoming presidential elections to be held next year.

With just over 1.4 million votes, more than 92% of the votes counted, Machado resurfaces on the map of the Venezuelan opposition as a reference figure. But to assess her success, and the implications that it may have in the future, some elements must be put into context.

First of all, Machado must be recognized as one of the few opposition figures who have remained consistent with her discourse and political stance against Chavismo. The problem is that her discourse had been translated more than once into actions of civil disorder, complaints for her involvement in violent plans, failure to fulfill her responsibilities as a

deputy of the National Assembly, or for demanding economic and military sanctions against Caracas. Consequently, she is currently disqualified from holding public office until 2038.

That might not be a problem if, as part of the dialogue process resumed—for the umpteenth time—between the government and the Venezuelan opposition, the former agrees to rehabilitate politicians who, for various reasons, were sanctioned and cannot currently hold office. The irony is that Machado has historically rejected all types of negotiations, dialogues and has even disregarded the current government.

Machado positioned herself at a time when the opposition was led by figures from traditional parties such as Henrique Capriles and Julio Borges in Primero Justicia, Leopoldo López in Voluntad Popular, Henry Ramos Allup in Acción Democrática, among others. It was, in some way, the moment of greatest structural strength of the right wing in that nation, which even allowed them to win the National Assembly in December 2015, after having lost by a narrow margin in the 2013 presidential elections.

In this context, Machado, who was always considered an out-sider, with a party limited in national organization (Vente Venezuela), managed to maintain political and media spaces by dint of radical and confrontational stances. Years before, Chávez immortalized the phrase “the eagle does not catch fly” to put her in her place.

Back in 2023, the Venezuelan opposition has a totally different panorama, since many of its former leaders enjoy a happy self-exile in Colombia or Miami. They simply enjoyed their time of glory and their political capital had its time, or they are serving prison for more serious crimes. Machado has managed to re-emerge in such circumstances due to the insufficiencies of the other opposition parties, and not due to personal political merits.

The votes obtained by her, and in fact, the turnout of voters in these primaries, do not exceed 10% of the Venezuelan electoral roll, and conform to a traditional hard opposition vote. The result achieved is explained by the fidelity that Machado has maintained in her political

projection among equally radical electoral bases, and by the lack of leadership present in the primaries.

Machado has several challenges ahead. Among them, to convince voters she can be a leader of unity, negotiate (because she cannot build or organize) a political structure of national partisan support, propose a convincing country agenda as an alternative to the Bolivarian government and above all, get her disqualification removed.

If I had to make the call, I would allow her to participate in the presidential elections against the Chavismo candidate. With everything we have discussed, she continues to be a vulnerable candidate, not very credible and who does not connect with the popular bases. Chavismo will have nothing to fear with her as the candidate, so Maduro can enjoy of six more years in the Miraflores Palace.

Oh, and about the lack of confidence in the Electoral Council that organized these opposition primaries, which determined that led several candidates to refuse to participating, we will talk another day, because that 1.4 million votes that Machado obtained are very suspicious...Yet, María Corina is not ready for this talk.

Translated by Sergio A. Paneque Díaz / CubaSí Translation Staff
