

EN ESTE DOCUMENTO LES ENVIO COBERTURA INTERNACIONAL SOBRE EL FRAUDE ELECTORAL (ARTICULOS POST VOTACION Y PREVIOS A ESTA):

ARTICULOS EN INGLES

<http://daniel-venezuela.blogspot.com/>

Tuesday, August 17, 2004 posted by Daniel 3:48 PM

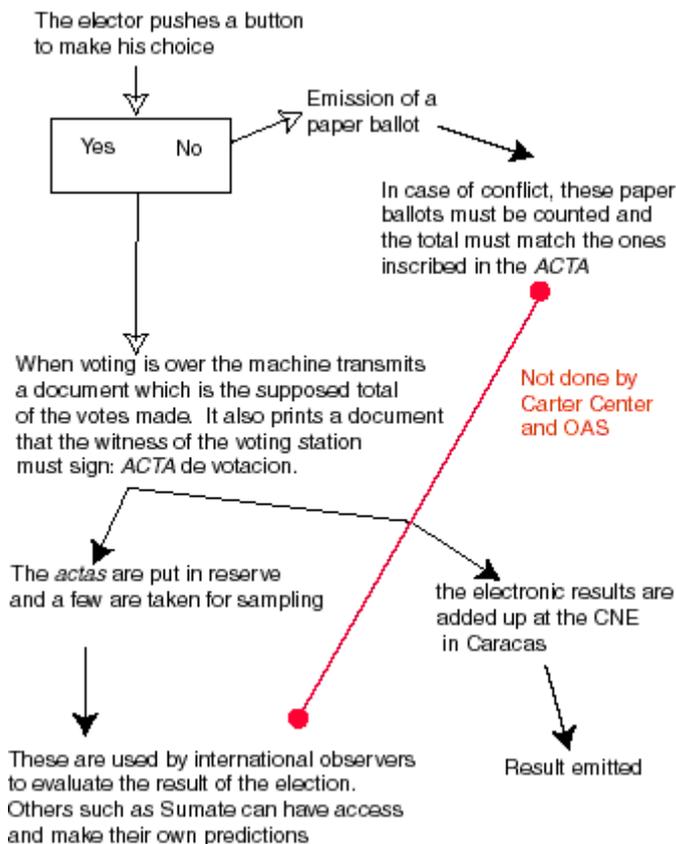
Electoral fraud or not electoral fraud?

I have been mesmerized by Carter and Gaviria pretty much backing up the results shown by the CNE. In spite of the way that it was done, which criticism still stands as I write. **That is too many lose ends, to many things done in the dark, too many unverified things.**

So what could have possibly happened? How could exit polls, several of them, be so far out of touch with the results?

1) Hypothesis one. The Coordinadora Democratica lost the election, did lousy exit polls and now is trying to claim foul. If indeed they are doing such moves and have cheated to the point that this bloggers (and many others bloggers and seasoned journalists) fell for it, then the opposition deserves to go to political hell. Unfortunately we will accompany them as unfortunate sacrificial victims.

2) **Hypothesis two. Unfortunately there are other elements. Gaviria and Carter had not lifted their behind from the chair that Quiros Corradi, the technical manager of the opposition campaign pointed out the missing link not addressed by Carter and Gaviria. I have taken the pain to make a diagram, which I hope is self explanatory. The CRUCIAL control to verify that the machines indeed have worked as planned HAS NOT BEEN DONE IN THE PRESENCE OF OBSERVERS AND THE OPPOSITION. This is pointed by the red connecting dot.**



Quiros Corradi has gone one step further: if the Carter Center and the OAS do not demand that the CNE allows for a random sample of the ballot containing boxes within the next 24

hours, there will be ample opportunity to tamper them as they are in the hands of the military and nobody can watch to make sure that nothing is happening to them. Then it will not be possible to do a significant audit of the process.

I find a little bit strange that the Carter Center and the OAS will certify a result without making that last verification. Why is it so? Why the hurry when they could have waited yet another day? I better not speculate at this point.

PS: as I am writing this Rodriguez is supposedly addressing this point. But he is not giving all the details. We'll see.

<http://daniel-venezuela.blogspot.com/>

Tuesday, August 17, 2004 posted by Daniel 1:12 PM

An update on the possible electoral fraud in Venezuela

Let me start first by saying, now that spirits are cooling some, that I had contemplated a possible Chavez victory a few days ago, and gave the reasons why Chavez could win. Thus I am intellectually prepared to accept that Chavez could have survived the Recall Election.

Unfortunately as the hours keep passing there is more and more questions arising, and no answers coming. It does not matter what is the alleged margin of victory of Chavez if the opposition does not recognize it. It does not matter what the Carter Center and the OAS say if they cannot convince the opposition to accept it. I will talk about their actions in a later post, one that I am sure will not please them since until yesterday I have been a strong defender of Carter even when he was vilified by most of the opposition.

Right now there is only one point that I want to stress ([Francisco](#) has a whole litany of possible fraud elements that you can consult, I hate redundancy). As I am writing [the CNE stands firm in its refusal to allow for any manual recounting of paper ballots](#), **THE ONLY THING THAT COULD ESTABLISH ONCE AND FOR ALL THAT THE RESULT WAS FAIR**. There is no other way to settle the issue and **IT HAS TO BE DONE TODAY AS ALREADY TAMPERING OF THE BALLOT BOXES IS POSSIBLY TAKING PLACE AS I WRITE**.

I do not know about you, but for me the CNE is acting EXACTLY as if it were cheating and trying to cover the evidence. Period.

It is the duty of the CNE to play clean, or the blood spilled in Venezuela will be its fault. For those who saw the pitiful and almost hysterical presentation of Jorge Rodriguez yesterday, you should be convinced now that there is a problem, that he looks more like a man on the run than the assured statesman he would like us to believe he is. How un-shrink like, no?.

http://www.usatoday.com/tech/world/2004-07-12-venezuela-evote_x.htm

Posted 7/12/2004 3:56 AM

Doubts over touchscreen tech choice for Venezuela recall

By Alexandra Olson, Associated Press

CARACAS, Venezuela — Despite an electronic voting fiasco in 2000 and the furor over e-voting in the United States, Venezuela is using untested touchscreen computers for its recall referendum on Hugo Chavez's presidency.

Critics fear touchscreen voting machines in the Aug. 15 vote could fail spectacularly, exacerbating a crisis over Chavez's rule that has polarized the world's No. 5 oil exporter and killed dozens in sporadic political violence.

The touchscreen machines on which a third of the U.S. electorate will vote in November are dangerously vulnerable to hackers, rigging and mechanical failure, computer scientists generally agree.

That didn't deter the Chavez-dominated Venezuelan Elections Council from choosing Smartmatic, a little-known Boca Raton, Fla.-based company, to provide similar technology — albeit with a printed record of each vote — for the referendum.

Smartmatic has never tested its machines in an election. And there has been no independent analysis or certification of its touchscreen system, although the council says the system will be audited before the vote.

In the United States, touchscreen computers are partly an attempt to eliminate hanging chads and other problems associated with the disputed U.S. presidential election results in Florida in 2000. Chavez often cites the Florida debacle to question George W. Bush's presidential credentials.

Yet in Venezuela, an electronic voting system produced that very same year what is widely known as the "mega-flop."

The biggest election in Venezuela's history was supposed to take place on May 28, 2000. More than 6,000 public offices were up for grabs, and Chavez, elected in 1998, was seeking re-election.

But two days before the vote, the Supreme Court postponed the election because of problems with computer software needed to tabulate votes and register more than 36,000 candidates. It was humiliating for election officials who had insisted things were going smoothly.

The Omaha-based software provider, Election Systems & Software, blamed constant changes by election authorities in posting thousands of candidates.

E-voting did take place in July 2000 with few problems. But the postponement prompted authorities to reject any new deal with ES&S and to retire machines from the Spanish company Indra.

This year, a pro-Chavez majority on the five-member elections council voted to sign a \$91 million contract with Smartmatic and its two partners, Venezuelan software company Bitza, and CANTV, Venezuela's ...

"Smartmatic is a company that hasn't tested its system anywhere in the world — and it's going to test it here in Venezuela in a process as important as the recall referendum," complained Luis Planas, a member of the opposition COPEI party.

Suspicion deepened after *The Miami Herald* reported in May that a Venezuelan state industrial development fund had invested in Bitza, whose role is to integrate manual votes into the electronic system. Some 10% of voters, mostly in rural areas, will cast manual ballots.

Bitza quickly announced it would buy back the government's 28% stake.

Smartmatic President Antonio Mugica, who also co-founded Bitza, insists his firm is apolitical, and he brushed aside concerns about Smartmatic's inexperience. ...

A square piece of paper popped out of the computer, a physical record of his vote. That, Mugica insists, is the system's primary safeguard against fraud: A paper trail that allows for a recount of any contested election. ...

Mugica, an engineering graduate from Caracas' Simon Bolivar University, founded Smartmatic in 2000 with three other Venezuelans. The software firm handles its finance and sales in Boca Raton but does most research and development in Venezuela. It reported sales of \$1.47 million for the six months ending June 30, 2003, according to Dun & Bradstreet.

Mugica said the firm began developing its electronic voting system in 2001, inspired partly by Venezuela's 2000 elections. He said the data storage and transmission will be encrypted, which should frustrate tampering.

But U.S. computer experts have found numerous security flaws in touchscreen machines, including incorrect use of cryptography, said Aviel D. Rubin, a computer science professor at Johns Hopkins University.

"Computers can be made to produce any outcome that you want without anybody really knowing that's what was done," Rubin said.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A10283-2004Aug18.html>

Venezuela to Hold Partial Audit of Recall

By ALEXANDRA OLSON

The Associated Press

Wednesday, August 18, 2004; 4:12 AM

CARACAS, Venezuela - Hoping to defuse new political tension in Venezuela, former President Jimmy Carter and other international election monitors promised to double-check some voting results from a referendum that failed to oust Venezuela's leader, Hugo Chavez, after the opposition claimed the balloting was rigged.

On Wednesday, they will be witnesses as local election officials check a random sampling of results from 150 voting stations - a rare follow-up move to an election they have already said looked clean.

"We have no reason to doubt the integrity of the electoral process nor the accuracy of the referendum results," Carter asserted at a news conference Tuesday. ...

Carter and Gaviria on Monday endorsed results of Sunday's referendum, in which Venezuelans voted by almost 58 percent to keep the leftist firebrand in office.

Leaders of an opposition coalition immediately cried fraud and called for mass demonstrations. Gunmen fired on an opposition demonstration later Monday, wounding seven people including a woman who died in a hospital on Tuesday. ...

Unwilling to simply pack up and go home after giving their blessing, Carter and Gaviria decided they needed to stick around.

On Wednesday, they and members of the OAS and the Carter Center staff will watch, along with representatives of the opposition, as national election officials compare electronic and paper ballots.

The referendum was carried out on touch-screen voting machines, which produced a paper receipt of each vote, much like an ATM. Voters then deposited the receipts into a ballot box.

Amid charges that the electronic machines were rigged, the monitors will be checking the results from the machines against the paper ballots to make sure there are no major discrepancies. The paper ballots will be checked at election offices while votes recorded in the machines will be examined at an army base.

Carter made clear that the opposition would look foolish if it keeps crying foul after the audit, which he said should be completed by Thursday.

"It should be sufficient to address the remaining concerns that have been expressed by the opposition," Carter said at the nationally broadcast news conference.

In Washington, the State Department said the referendum should end this South American nation's political crisis. ...

Strengthened by his victory, Chavez is now setting his sights on centralizing power, including exerting control over the courts, local police and the nation's broadcast stations. ..

Chavez said after his latest electoral victory that it will give his government a "catalyzing energy" to carry out its initiatives, including "completing the transformation of the judicial branch."

Congress, which is controlled by Chavez supporters, recently approved a measure allowing that body to remove and appoint judges to the Supreme Court. One Supreme Court justice has already been ousted for allegedly falsifying his resume, a charge he denied.

The government is also seeking to exert control over TV and radio stations, many of which are deeply critical of Chavez. The government plans to submit a bill to Congress that would allow the government to ban programming it sees as slanderous or an incitement to violence and to punish violators.

The government is also studying the possibility of unifying municipal and state police forces into a national police force, wresting control from mayors and governors, many of whom are Chavez opponents.

Chavez's drive to centralize power has stoked worries of authoritarianism among some of his critics. Human Rights Watch recently issued a statement expressing worries about the independence of Venezuelan institutions such as the courts.

Although unemployment is about 15 percent, Chavez has a strong following among the poor majority in this nation of 24 million people after pouring revenues from the state-run oil monopoly into health, education and food programs. Venezuela has enjoyed a bonanza from record-high oil prices.

<http://www.swissinfo.org/sen/Swissinfo.html?siteSect=143&sid=5152250>

August 18, 2004 7:00 AM

Venezuela to audit ballot results

By Patrick Markey

CARACAS, Venezuela (Reuters) - International observers say they will conduct a sample audit on results from Venezuela's referendum to clear up opposition charges President Hugo Chavez won the recall vote by fraud.

Electoral authorities said Chavez won 58 percent of the votes to survive Sunday's recall, but opposition leaders accused the government of manipulating electronic voting machines to overturn what they believe was a victory for them.

Former U.S. President Jimmy Carter and Organization of American States chief Cesar Gaviria, who led a mission to observe the vote, have endorsed the president's referendum victory and

dismissed accusations of tampering so far.

But they agreed Tuesday to accept an opposition proposal to carry out additional checks against confirmation paper ballots printed by the voting machines.

"This audit will remove any doubts about the accuracy of the electronically transmitted data of the referendum result, as compared with the paper ballots," Carter told reporters.

"There is no evidence of fraud and any allegations of fraud are completely unwarranted," he said.

Left-winger Chavez, who was first elected in 1998, hailed his victory as an endorsement of his populist "revolution" that aims to more fairly distribute the oil wealth of the world's fifth-largest crude exporter.

But his opponents, who condemn him as a bullying autocrat, are demanding a vote-by-vote manual recount of the print-outs.

They say Chavez has tightened his grip over the courts and electoral authority in an attempt to stay in power.

The audit, which will start Wednesday and could last two days, will compare results from the electronic vote against print-out ballots in 150 voting centers chosen at random.

The observers and representatives from the government and opposition will monitor the checks.

"In our opinion this procedure responds to all the legitimate questions that have been presented," said Carter, who added the checks could reveal small disparities but not enough to change the result.

The international community hoped the referendum would end more than two years of bitter confrontation over the former army officer's rule. But the dispute over the results may once again inflame the country's deep political divisions.

Story from BBC NEWS: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/1/hi/world/americas/3575146.stm>

Published: 2004/08/18 03:07:33 GMT. © BBC MMIV

Venezuela to audit ballot result

The Venezuelan electoral authorities are to take an audit of Sunday's referendum result which confirmed President Hugo Chavez in office.

The audit follows allegations of fraud by opposition leaders who have still to accept defeat in their attempt to have the leftist leader recalled.

Jimmy Carter, the former US president who has been observing the poll, said such charges were unwarranted.

But a random check will be held on Wednesday in the presence of monitors. ...

Opposition leaders say they have proof of irregularities but have yet to come up with much in the way of concrete evidence, the BBC's James Menendez reports from the capital, Caracas.

'No reason for doubt'

Announcing the audit, Mr Carter told journalists that he and the Organization of American States had suggested the move to allay fears over the validity of the result.

Doubts were raised over the accuracy of the electronic voting machines used for the first time on

Sunday.

Mr Carter said the electronic results of a sample of 150 machines would be checked against the paper record of each vote in the presence of international observers and witnesses from both the opposition and the government.

"The results... should be sufficient to address the remaining concerns that have been expressed by the opposition," said Mr Carter.

He stressed that he himself had "no reason to doubt the integrity of the electoral process or the accuracy of the referendum itself".

US acknowledgment

Mr Chavez has urged the opposition to have the "grace" to accept the result and called for national reconciliation.

Opposition leader Henry Ramos Allup has dismissed the result as a "gross manipulation". ...

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A9287-2004Aug17.html>

Venezuelan Officials Agree to Audit Sample

By **FABIOLA SANCHEZ**

The Associated Press

Tuesday, August 17, 2004; 6:31 PM

CARACAS, Venezuela - Venezuelan election officials agreed Tuesday to conduct a partial audit of the results of a recall referendum won by President Hugo Chavez, amid opposition charges of election fraud, officials told The Associated Press.

The National Elections Council along with the U.S.-based Carter Center and the Organization of American States audit votes from 150 polling sites, said Nelson Rampersad, the opposition's representative in the council. An OAS official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, also confirmed the audit plan.

The audit will compare the results produced by touch-screen voting machines and paper receipts of each vote, the officials said. No date for the audit has been set.

Chavez won Sunday's referendum by almost 58 percent according to official results endorsed by the OAS and Carter Center. But the opposition has refused to accept the outcome, alleging massive fraud. Opposition leaders have demanded a recount.

The audit came at the request of the OAS and Carter Center, the OAS official said. Earlier Tuesday, OAS Secretary-General Cesar Gaviria said an audit would help calm the country.

Story from BBC NEWS: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/1/hi/world/americas/3570672.stm>

Published: 2004/08/17 01:27:27 GMT

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In quotes: Venezuela poll reactions

Venezuela's President Hugo Chavez has claimed victory after the release of results indicating he won a referendum on his rule.

But Mr Chavez' opponents - who mounted a sustained campaign to get the vote held - rejected the partial results as a fraud, insisting they had won.

Here are some of the responses so far to the outcome:

...Henry Ramos Allup, leader of the Democratic Co-ordinator coalition of opposition parties

We categorically and absolutely reject these results.

The National Elections Council has committed a gigantic fraud...

For Venezuela, for the people, for the huge number of men and women who risked it all, believed in the democratic and electoral system, we have to continue this struggle.

Those of us who continue believing in the constitutional, peaceful, democratic and electoral solution, in spite of everything, not even fraud and gross manipulation such as these will make us give up a single inch of our convictions.

Long live the people, long live Venezuela, the struggle goes on. ...

US State department spokesman

We note the OAS and Carter Center announcement that their quick count was consistent with the National Electoral Council's preliminary results.

We also note their offer to work with the opposition to conduct a full audit of the results and to examine any concerns that have arisen.

We encourage the National Electoral Council to allow a transparent audit to address any concerns and assure Venezuelan citizens that the referendum was free and fair. ...

<http://www.venezuelanalysis.com/articles.php?artno=1252>

Chavez Wins Big and the Opposition Refuses to Recognize the Obvious Tuesday, Aug 17, 2004 By: Gregory Wilpert – Venezuelanalysis.com

Chavez won and he won big. According to preliminary results, which have been ratified by all international observers, the lead over the opposition was about 15% - 58% in favor of Chavez and 42% against. Of course, the opposition, as a result of being misled by some of their leadership, is convinced that Chavez managed to steal 3.5 million votes in the most transparent, secure, and fair vote of the country's history. Not only that, it broke its promise to recognize the results if international observers ratify it. What happened?

In few countries in the world would ten million people stand in line for up to ten hours, in the blazing sun, to cast a simple ballot that merely says "yes" or "no." The long lines, however, were unnecessary. The National Electoral Council (CNE) miscalculated terribly, thinking that it could manage the anticipated large turn-out, the 2.5 million new voters, and voting technology that Venezuela had never used before. Originally the CNE had intended to increase voting centers, since the poorest neighborhoods, the barrios, had as few as one tenth the voting centers per capita as some middle class neighborhoods. The plan, however, was scrapped out of fear that people would not know where to vote and due to a lack of time. It thus was no surprise that these "mega voting centers" had to field kilometer-long lines and 12-hour waits in some cases.

... The main bottleneck did turn out to be the fingerprint scanners that were supposed to prevent people from voting more than once, using false identification cards of other voters. However, the reason the fingerprint checking slowed things down had nothing to do with technology. ... The reason it slowed the process down was that apparently an exceptional number of people assigned to staff the fingerprint scanners never showed up. Thus the lack of operational scanners slowed the process down tremendously.

.... The only serious incident, if one can call it that, was the spread of rumors, from relatively minor ones that suspected the other side being responsible for the delays, to perhaps the most serious one, which said **already at noon that Chavez was losing 60 to 40.**

But how could anyone know that? The answer is exit polls. In the days leading up to the vote, the opposition coalition Democratic Coordinator had announced that it would present results of its exit polls in the course of the recall referendum day. Nonetheless, the opposition, via various important spokespersons, spread the rumor, particularly to any journalist who would listen, that Chavez was losing, according to "very reliable sources." At one 1 am the Democratic Coordinator even sent out an e-mail to foreign correspondents, making this claim.

A closer examination of their exit polling technique, however, seems to show that it was extremely unprofessional. Voting centers in the wealthy Altamira district, for example, had up to twenty pollsters, while not a single one was spotted in the barrios. ...

Rather than being an accurate and honest measure of how people voted, the exit polls appear to have had the function creating a public opinion climate among observers, media, and the international community, which would help the opposition to discredit the official results once they were released.

When the official results were released, at about 4 am in the morning, electoral council president Francisco Carrasquero read off the results, saying that the "no" vote, against the recall of president Chavez, had gathered 58.25% of the vote and that the "yes" vote, in favor of the president's recall, had gathered only 41.75% of the vote.

... So, when, three hours after most voting centers had closed, the CNE did announce the results, pro-opposition electoral council board members said that they rejected the preliminary results essentially because they felt they were rushed. **Thus, the combination of the pro-opposition board members' rejection of the preliminary results, the highly questionable exit polls, and the absolute conviction among members of the opposition that Chavez would lose, ended up convincing the opposition that the results were fraudulent.**

Immediately following the electoral council announcement of the preliminary results, a group of opposition leaders said that they did not believe the council's results and that their exit polling data indicated that the opposition had won, 59% to 41%. So, even though the electoral council is supposed to be the country's final arbiter over elections results, everyone was now anxiously waiting to hear what the international observers had to say, specifically the Carter Center and the Organization of American States, which had the largest and most sophisticated delegations in the country.

Finally, about ten hours after the electoral council had announced its first results, former US president Jimmy Carter and OAS General Secretary Cesar Gaviria held a press conference and released the tension by telling the country what they thought of the results. They stated unequivocally that they agreed with the electoral council's figures for the referendum: Chavez had won with a lead of about 15% over the opposition. Carter, when asked how he reconciles this with the opposition's statements, said, "All Venezuelans should accept the results, unless the results are wrong, and we have not received any evidence for that." The OAS and Carter Center reached their conclusions not just by failing to observe any evidence of fraud, but they conducted their own "quick counts" of selected voting centers, which verified the official results.

However, the opposition still says that there was fraud. **Fraud not just of a minor sort, where a close vote against a candidate is turned into a close vote in their favor, but a massive fraud, where a 20% win for the opposition was supposedly turned into a 15% loss. That would mean a theft of 3.5 million votes (35% of 10 million) – a presumably unprecedented amount in the history of elections.**

Opposition websites and statements from opposition leaders are now full of claims that a massive fraud has been perpetrated. The amazing thing about such a claim is that the opposition does not have even the slightest shred of proof or even circumstantial evidence for making such a claim. Their entire claim is based on their own highly questionable exit polls. (The pro-government campaign also conducted exit polls, by the way, which reflect the official results.) So the opposition is now demanding that the vote be audited down to every single paper ballot. In principle, some pro-Chavez electoral officials have indicated a willingness to do so.

In all of this one should keep in mind that the voting machines and the entire voting procedure are designed in such a way that if there had been fraud committed, the point at which it occurred would be detected almost immediately. The system is filled with redundant security mechanisms, including printed ballots, which would immediately show exactly where the vote had been altered.

It appears that the most likely consequence will be that the opposition will divide into a sector that will continue to insist that there was fraud and one that will recognize the reality of their loss and will work with the government. The sector that continues to insist on fraud will probably be made up of small parties that have little to lose, either in the upcoming regional elections or in business with the government, such as *La Causa R*, *Primero Justicia*, and *Movimiento al Socialismo*. The ones that will work with the government or will at least recognize the results, are the chamber of commerce and *Accion Democratica*, which is one of the few parties that still has a chance to win posts in the regional elections. There is a third sector of the opposition, the radical far right, which is the sector that has sponsored terrorist attacks and paramilitary activity within Venezuela, which will probably use the fraud claims of the small parties as an excuse to re-launch their violent campaign.

Despite all of this, the Chavez government has been re-legitimized and is now stronger than ever. The opposition has now not only lost its military base, due to the coup, its oil base, due to the oil industry shut-down, but now it will have also lost every last shred of credibility if it continues to insist that it won the recall referendum.

Story from BBC NEWS: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/1/hi/world/americas/3571350.stm>

Published: 2004/08/17 04:12:08 GMT © BBC MMIV

Observers endorse Venezuela vote

International observers in Venezuela have confirmed President Hugo Chavez's victory in a referendum on whether he should be removed from office.

The former US president, Jimmy Carter, said Mr Chavez had won fairly, and the Organization of American States said it had not found any element of fraud.

With nearly all the votes counted, Mr Chavez has 58% backing him.

But his opponents insist the result was a "gigantic fraud" and have called for a manual recount.

Hundreds of Chavez opponents held demonstrations in the capital on Monday night. At one demonstration an elderly woman died and at least six other people were injured when gunmen on motorbikes opened fire.

Mr Chavez said those responsible for the killing would be tracked down and punished, whether or not they were his supporters.

Mr Carter, who helped monitor Sunday's vote, said his team of observers had concluded there was a "clear difference in favour" of Mr Chavez.

The head of the Organization of American States, Cesar Gaviria, also said his monitors had not

found "any element of fraud".

"Until elements of fraud emerge we are not going to put the results in doubt," he said.

But the US has declined to back Mr Chavez's apparent victory.

The US state department said it "noted" and praised the work of the observers, but said it would be premature to describe the outcome as a victory for Mr Chavez until the final result was announced.

A state department spokesman said the burden was on the Venezuelan opposition to produce evidence of misconduct during the vote - and if they did offer proof, the US wanted the claims thoroughly investigated by the country's election authority.

The BBC's state department correspondent Jill McGivering says Washington's priority is to prevent Venezuela descending into political chaos, not least because of the impact that might have on oil supplies and US petrol prices.

But she says Chavez supporters may also read something else into this delayed US reaction - a lack of enthusiasm for the political survival of someone they do not count as a friend.

Tally 'correct'

In Caracas, the BBC's James Menendez says the endorsement of the international observers will make it difficult for the opposition to take their grievances much further.

Mr Carter and Mr Gaviria have backed official results showing that with 94% of ballots counted, Mr Chavez had 58% of the vote.

Mr Carter said a "quick count" by his team of observers "coincided with the partial returns" announced by the National Elections Council. ...

But a spokesman for the Democratic Co-ordinator opposition coalition, Henry Ramos Allup, said fraud and "gross manipulation" had taken place. ...

His opponents, who are mostly white, middle-class and control most of the media and business, say he is authoritarian and has managed a rich economy badly.

Despite the country's oil wealth, 80% of Venezuelans are poor but Mr Chavez has won the hearts of many with extensive school and health programmes, analysts say. ...

Story from BBC NEWS: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/1/hi/world/americas/3571860.stm>

Published: 2004/08/17 06:44:10 GMT © BBC MMIV

Analysis: Venezuela at a crossroads

By James Menendez, BBC correspondent in Caracas

When Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez stepped out on to the "people's balcony" of the presidential palace to make his victory speech, he could barely contain his delight.

The referendum had been hanging over him for more than a year. But now he had defeated the attempt by his opponents to force him out of office.

This was his moment, proof that he had the majority of the people on his side.

Mr Chavez had always insisted he would win. He had predicted it would be a crushing defeat for

his opponents.

But did he really believe the margin of victory would be so great?

Just a few months ago, most polls put his support at about 30%. In the referendum, he scored 58%.

That is an extraordinary turnaround, and one that defies easy explanation.

Tide of support

Certainly the Chavez campaign was extremely well-funded and highly visible. Posters, flags and banners covered the city. Newspaper, radio and television adverts boasting of the government's achievements were repeated constantly.

It clearly had an impact. On the basis of the referendum result, President Chavez is as popular now as when he was re-elected in 2000.

For the opposition, it is highly suspicious. Before the first results were released, opposition leaders appeared on television to thank their supporters for turning out and, in some cases, spending the whole day waiting to vote.

They were not allowed to give predictions, but the broad smiles said it all. One prominent figure even raised two fingers to indicate victory. They were convinced they had won. Privately, they believed they had defeated Mr Chavez by a significant margin.

Instead, it was the other way round. The opposition is now crying foul, accusing the government of "gigantic fraud".

They point to alleged irregularities in the way the votes from each polling station were collected and added up.

But that is sounding rather hollow now. A team of international observers led by former US President Jimmy Carter has said it found no evidence of fraud.

Opposition conundrum

That leaves the opposition in a difficult position. If they now accept that judgement, they will have to wait until presidential elections in 2006 for the next opportunity to try and remove President Chavez.

If they do not accept it, they risk inflaming an already tense situation and possibly losing their credibility.

Either way, there is likely to be considerable upheaval within the Democratic Co-ordinator, the loose coalition of political parties, business leaders, trade unions and interest groups that make up the opposition.

They just about managed to maintain a united front leading up to the referendum, but without a common goal, that coalition may well just collapse. That would leave Mr Chavez's opponents even weaker.

The question now is whether the president will try and bridge the deep divide that has emerged in Venezuela in the last few years, or whether he will take advantage of their weakness to pursue his own agenda even more aggressively.

http://www.economist.com/agenda/displayStory.cfm?story_id=3102178

Chávez wins, his opponents cry foul

Aug 17th 2004

From The Economist Global Agenda

Venezuela's electoral authorities say President Hugo Chávez has won a referendum called by his opponents in an attempt to force him out. Opposition leaders are crying foul but it looks like Mr Chávez and his incompetent "Bolivarian revolution" will roll on

... Before daybreak on Monday, the CNE said that, with counting almost complete, 58% of voters had said "no" to the proposition on the ballot paper—put forward by an alliance of opposition groups—to ditch the president. Soon afterwards, a victorious Mr Chávez appeared on the balcony of the presidential palace in Caracas to sing to the cheering crowds of supporters below.

His opponents quickly denounced the results as a "gigantic fraud". Henry Ramos Allup, one of the opposition alliance's leaders, said they would begin gathering evidence to show that the results had been faked. However, later on Monday, César Gaviria, the secretary-general of the Organisation of American States, and Jimmy Carter, a former United States president, called a joint news conference to announce that the teams of observers that each had sent to monitor the referendum had verified the CNE's figures. So it looks like Mr Chávez has comfortably seen off his opponents and will continue governing the South American oil-producing country until at least 2007...

Furthermore, the president has remained popular among Venezuela's poorest, despite the way his policies have impoverished the country. Since he was first elected six years ago, Venezuelans' average income has fallen by around a quarter. The recent surge in oil prices has showered the government in oil revenues, allowing Mr Chávez to introduce some populist social programmes that may have swung him the vote. But these handouts are unlikely to compensate fully for years of steep economic decline, nor for roaring inflation (around 30% last year).

Mr Chávez, a former army colonel, had tried to seize power in a failed coup in 1992, before winning it democratically in 1998 (and again in 2000). Since becoming president he has pursued what he calls his "Bolivarian revolution", inspired by Simón Bolívar, the Venezuelan-born general who led the Andean region's fight for independence from Spain in the early 19th century. Also partly inspired by Fidel Castro's communist regime in Cuba, Mr Chávez has sought to wrest Venezuela's main institutions—from the courts to the state oil company—from the hands of the elite "oligarchy". This has led to violent clashes between opponents and supporters of the president.

Emerging victorious from the recall vote, Mr Chávez promised that his government would continue pumping oil, to help stabilise the world market. Venezuela is the world's fifth-largest oil exporter, providing around 13% of America's oil imports. So, though Mr Chávez, with his fierce anti-capitalist rhetoric, is hardly a market trader's pin-up, his soothing comments were welcomed, and brought American light crude down from the record high of \$46.91 a barrel it had reached shortly before the results were announced.

Against reform, in favour of democracy

Mr Chávez's apparent victory may be another manifestation of poorer Latin Americans' loss of faith in the free-market reforms that swept the region in the 1980s and 1990s. These lifted many people into the middle classes but failed to reach some of those at the bottom of the heap. ...

But despite their disillusionment, the region's voters do not want a return to the military dictatorships that ran much of Latin America until the 1980s. The Latinobarómetro poll shows that Venezuelans are among the region's strongest supporters of democracy, with 74% agreeing that it is preferable to any other kind of government, a rise of 12 percentage points

since a similar poll in 1996. What is now needed for the voters' faith in the ballot-box to be vindicated is for Mr Chávez's opponents to accept the referendum result (assuming it is verified) and for the president himself to stop stirring up strife and start doing a better job of running the country.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/venezuela/story/0,12716,1284994,00.html>

Press review

'A fraudulent farce'

Jeremy Lennard gauges the press reaction to Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez's referendum victory

Tuesday August 17, 2004

The victory of Venezuela's leftwing president, Hugo Chávez, in a national referendum on his rule was greeted with scepticism both at home and abroad.

In the Caracas press, dominated by the country's opposition movement, there is much wailing and gnashing of teeth, not to mention a hefty portion of sour grapes. Writing in the independent daily [El Mundo \(Spanish\)](#), the commentator **Isa Dobles** opens her piece positively enough. She writes: "Yesterday was a day of glory. Enormous numbers took to the streets to immerse themselves in democracy. A tide of humanity waited endlessly at polling stations to exercise their free will ..."

But, by the second paragraph, her tone changes: "So it took some work this morning to accept once again a fraudulent farce, a vengeful oppression, mediocrity and aggression talking ... Is this not just another perverse strategy by Chávez?"

Alberto Jordán Hernández in [El Universal \(Spanish\)](#) is more mild-mannered, but the message is the same. "It should be enough just to mention the fraudulent manipulation of the electoral register, the replacement of electoral officials not considered 'effective' and the shameless operation which left Venezuelans waiting up to 12 hours in endless queues," he writes, before concluding - contrary to the findings of the Carter Centre and the Organisation of American States - that the whole thing was a con.

Relations between Chávez and his rightwing counterpart Alvaro Uribe in neighbouring Colombia have not been easy, and Colombia's only national daily, [El Tiempo \(Spanish\)](#) is reluctant to endorse the election result, raising the question of whether Chávez's stated policies are, in fact, a smokescreen behind which he is centralising power in his own hands and muddying the separation of the legislature and the judiciary. ...

In the United States itself, the major newspapers give prominent coverage to the referendum result, but, in terms of opinion, they seem to be following the White House line in declining to comment for the time being.

Not so in Spain, where both left and right leaning papers try to look beyond the implications for Chávez himself. [ABC \(Spanish\)](#) is scathing. In an editorial entitled Venezuela, Divided by Chávez, the paper lays the blame for the country's political crisis firmly at his feet. "The real question is whether Chávez's post-communist regime is itself a farce, and whether any amount of effort to sustain it will eventually lead to the socioeconomic collapse of the country," the paper says.

"For now, Chávez can count on high oil prices, which came to his help in organising his electoral campaign. But, one day, the massed poor who live in the hillsides around Caracas and who are the main source of his strength, will come down to the Miraflores [presidential] palace not to congratulate him like last night, but to reclaim the thousands of millions of dollars in oil wealth that have evaporated in the enormous inefficiency of this Bolivarian illusion Chávez calls revolution."

An editorial in [El País \(Spanish\)](#) takes a similar but gentler line. "The real question is whether the referendum will allow the country to emerge from the deep political and social crisis in which

it has been mired for the past two years," the paper says, before asserting that "the first signs suggest that despite the impressive victory of the Venezuelan president over his opponents - his eighth at the polls in less than six years - that situation is not about to resolve itself".

"Over the past few years, and at times on the edge of an abyss of economic paralysis and social unrest, Venezuelans have wasted a large part of their energies in polemics over the regime installed by the former parachutist and coup leader. For the opposition, the time has come to reorganise itself for the parliamentary elections next year, and for all Venezuelans - pro or anti-Chávez - it is an opportunity to rescue their country from a prostrate position in which more than two thirds of the population are touched by poverty despite the river of money that has flowed from the oil bonanza," El País adds.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A4208-2004Aug16.html>

Chavez Defeats Recall Attempt

Monitors Endorse Venezuelan Vote; Margin Is Wide

By Mary Beth Sheridan

Washington Post Staff Writer

Tuesday, August 17, 2004; Page A01

CARACAS, Venezuela, Aug. 16 -- President Hugo Chavez was declared the winner of a national recall referendum by a substantial margin on Monday, and said he had won a fresh mandate for the highly centralized, populist style of government that has stirred fierce opposition at home and irritated the Bush administration.

About 58 percent of the voters in the Sunday ballot said "no" to a recall of Chavez, while 42 percent said "yes," according to nearly complete returns from the national elections council. Officials said that at least 8.5 million of the country's 14 million registered voters participated in the referendum.

Leaders of the coalition against Chavez, who has governed the country since 1999, summoned followers to the streets to protest what they said was vote fraud. But former president Jimmy Carter and a team of international monitors said the voting appeared fair and accurate. ...

Isolated clashes between the president's supporters and opponents were reported following his victory. Four Chavez opponents were wounded by gunfire, according to news media reports.

Despite the violence, the referendum clearly strengthened Chavez, a charismatic populist who has proclaimed a "revolution of the poor" in this nation of 25 million, championing like-minded movements throughout Latin America and maintaining close ties with Cuban President Fidel Castro. ...

"We recognize the existence of the other," Chavez said, referring to the opposition in a speech at the presidential palace.

"You have our respect and our recognition," he added, seated in front of a Venezuelan flag and a portrait of Latin American independence leader Simon Bolivar.

But Chavez blasted opposition leaders who refused to recognize his victory. He said the substantial vote in his favor indicated support for his policies, which include increased anti-poverty spending, social and health programs for the disadvantaged, and solidarity with Latin American protest movements. ...

In Washington, State Department spokesman Tom Casey did not mention Chavez by name in a statement about the recall. "We want to congratulate the Venezuelan people for the extraordinary civic spirit they demonstrated during yesterday's referendum," Casey said at a

news briefing. He said the Bush administration, which has often harshly criticized Chavez, was awaiting final results and a report from election monitors. ...

Oil prices on the New York Mercantile Exchange reached a record high of \$46.91 per barrel for U.S. light crude on Monday. But the price slipped to \$46.30 after the report of Chavez's victory. ...

The opposition coalition received the results with disbelief, saying that its exit polls had predicted Chavez would suffer a stinging defeat in the recall.

"One result doesn't match the other," said Alberto Quiros, a spokesman for the coalition known as the Democratic Coordinator. He and other opposition leaders said they wanted a manual recount of the votes.

"We can't say to Venezuelans who came out to vote in massive numbers and who are being robbed of a huge victory that we are going to think for 24 hours," said opposition leader Antonio Ledezma. "We have to take to the streets."

Opposition supporters held small demonstrations in Caracas in the afternoon, yelling "Fraud!" and waving signs denouncing the results.

But analysts said the opposition would eventually have little option but to accept the results because the international monitors endorsed the process.

"With this, they are isolated," said Margarita Lopez, a professor at the Central University of Venezuela. "It would be political suicide to try to maintain this attitude."

Already, she said, some political parties and business executives have indicated they want to open talks with the government.

Many analysts said Chavez's victory had as much to do with the opposition's weakness as his strengths. As a loose-knit group, including conservative businessmen and former communist guerrillas, the coalition lacked effective leadership and a concrete program to convince voters, analysts said.

Chavez was also a formidable opponent. He has remained in power despite opposition from the United States and nearly every powerful group in Venezuela -- business leaders, oil workers, media executives, the Catholic Church and labor unions.

In the past year, the president has used the country's windfall from record oil prices to boost his popularity, funding a broad network of literacy programs, subsidized food stores and medical clinics in poor neighborhoods. He has welcomed hundreds of Cuban doctors and sports trainers to work in such programs.

A master communicator, Chavez has convinced many voters that the country's overall woeful economic performance during his presidency is the fault of opposition leaders associated with past politicians who are still reviled for their alleged corruption.

"There's no other politician in Venezuelan history, and no other politician in Latin America, who has been as skillful and effective," said Moises Naim, a Venezuelan-born economist who is editor of the journal *Foreign Policy* and has been a Chavez critic. "The tragedy is he has a blank check in many ways."

In fact, many of the president's detractors worry that a strengthened Chavez could tighten his grip on more of the country's institutions, as he has done with the judiciary, the military and

the state-run oil company. He has concentrated power in the presidency, partly through public referendums.

Michael Shifter, an analyst at the Inter-American Dialogue in Washington, said the Venezuelan leader had enough money to aid like-minded movements in the hemisphere, but said he doubted the Chavez effect would catch on.

"Most people in Latin America recognize that his record has been pretty bad as president of Venezuela," he said. "I don't think this is the new hope, or the new way."

U.S. officials have expressed concern that Chavez could be emboldened to step up his activism in Latin America, where he has embraced anti-American groups in El Salvador, Ecuador, Bolivia and other countries. Chavez has denied any interest in exporting his policies.

<http://www.classicfm.co.za/website/docs/reutersSHOWStory.jsp?ID=44632>

Venezuela's Chavez Claims Victory; Foes Cry Fraud

By Jason Webb

CARACAS, Venezuela (Reuters) - Venezuelan leftist President Hugo Chavez on Monday declared victory in a referendum on his rule but the opposition called the results 'a gigantic fraud.'

According to National Electoral Council President Francisco Carrasquero, Chavez won backing from 58 percent of voters with 94 percent of electoral rolls counted in the referendum on whether to recall him before his term ends.

But the opposition said it had won by almost the same margin and called the official results a fraud engineered through the use of electronic voting machines.

'We firmly and categorically reject the result ... we're going to collect the evidence to prove to Venezuela and the world the gigantic fraud which has been committed against the will of the people,' a senior opposition leader, Henry Ramos Allup, told a news conference.

He said the opposition, a loose coalition of political parties, unions and business groups united by their distaste for Chavez, would ask international organizations to investigate.

International observers, including former U.S. President Jimmy Carter, praised proceedings as voting got underway on Sunday but have still to give their final verdict on the referendum.

Oil prices fell from record highs near \$47 a barrel on news Chavez had won and would serve out his term until 2007. It calmed market fears of disruptions to supply from the world's fifth-largest oil exporter.

Chavez, dressed in the red of his self-styled 'revolution,' appeared on the balcony of his Miraflores presidential palace in downtown Caracas and led hundreds of supporters in singing the national anthem before dawn.

TYRANT OR HERO?...

Chavez, who tried to seize power in a coup in 1992 but won a presidential election in 1998, is detested by Venezuela's traditional ruling elite. The opposition says he is a tyrant who is squandering the world's largest oil reserves outside the Middle East. ...

Chavez sees himself as standard-bearer of a leftist, anti-capitalist movement he hopes will sweep Latin America in the footsteps of independence hero Simon Bolivar. But he has been careful to guarantee oil supplies to the United States.

Turnout was massive for the referendum, which began on Sunday morning and dragged on past midnight as Venezuelans voted in droves, overwhelming polling booths equipped with new touch-screen voting machines.

There have been fears that a disputed outcome, especially if former paratrooper Chavez lost, could trigger violence.

Chavez said he would accept the result whatever it was but also fanned fears of a backlash by saying soldiers and oil workers would not accept a government formed by his enemies.

<http://www.classicfm.co.za/website/docs/reutersSHOWStory.jsp?ID=49283>

Referendum Win Energizes Chavez, Foes Lick Wounds

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By Pascal Fletcher

CARACAS, Venezuela (Reuters) - Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez has gained fresh energy for his left-wing populist 'revolution' and new democratic credentials with his resounding victory in Sunday's referendum.

His stunned opponents, who had focused their campaign on portraying him as an inept dictator afraid of elections, are now licking their wounds. They must repair their battered image if they hope to challenge Chavez in the next presidential election in 2006.

'This is a triumph for Chavez. It certainly renews his credentials in the short term, but he will have to work on his economic and oil policies, reducing political polarization and seeking a rapprochement with the private sector,' said Michael Penfold, a political analyst at Caracas' IESA business school.

Basking in international recognition of his victory, the Venezuelan leader is promising to accelerate his policies to spread the petro-dollar riches of the world's No. 5 oil exporter more fairly among its largely poor population.

'Venezuela has changed for ever. There is no turning back,' Chavez said after winning 58 percent of the vote in Sunday's poll.

The opposition polled 42 percent, a crushing disappointment for a broad but fractious coalition that had staked all on unseating the voluble former paratrooper who dismisses them as a rich but selfish minority.

Already suffering from internal recriminations over their defeat, opposition leaders are crying fraud, although international observers have endorsed Chavez's victory.

Opposition leaders are accusing the government of manipulating voting machines to overturn what they assert was a win for the anti-Chavez vote. They demand an exhaustive one-by-one count of all the confirmation paper ballots produced by the voting machines.

The United States, Venezuela's biggest oil client, considered the referendum 'an important end to Venezuela's political crisis,' State Department spokesman Adam Ereli said in Washington.

The United States supported the idea of investigating the opposition's allegations of fraud so any doubts could be cleared up, he added.

A State Department official, who asked not to be named, complained the opposition had not sought to substantiate their claims. 'The bottom line is the opposition should put up or shut up,' he said.

OIL PRICE WINDFALL ...

On media talk shows, frustrated anti-Chavez voters are already venting their anger against the opposition leadership. Many criticize them for spending more time talking on television than campaigning in poor slums and hamlets.

The opposition's calls for protests have received a muted response among a population weary of political feuding. ...

<http://narcosphere.narconews.com/story/2004/8/16/12437/2917>

Top Ten Fraudulent Claims of Fraud in Venezuela

By **Al Giordano**,

Posted on Mon Aug 16th, 2004 at 12:43:07 PM EST

The losers of yesterday's referendum vote in Venezuela are not accepting the results that, according to official numbers, give a landslide mandate to President Hugo Chávez to push on with his Bolivarian revolution.

However, news reports that repeat these claims of election "fraud" are, not surprisingly, thin on details or hard facts to back up the claims.

Therefore, as a public service, Narco News has conducted an exhaustive search across the Internet and throughout the news media for the concrete accusations of those who claim "fraud" in yesterday's historic, record-turnout, vote. We present them to you,...

All quotes guaranteed verbatim from the blogosphere and online news sites!

Top Ten Fraudulent Claims of Fraud in Venezuela

10. "Something rings funny in his (Chávez's) voice. I do not buy it."

- Daniel Duquenal, *escualido blogger*, *petroleumworld.com*

9. "They assigned us a number of votes that is inferior to that which we collected to request the referendum."

- Henry Ramos, spokesman, "Coordinadora Democratica," on Univision TV...

6. "It doesn't seem logical... The silence of the observers draws notice... ..."

- Teodoro Petkoff, editor, *Tal Cual*, on Union Radio, according to Christina Toro, *Caracaschronicles.com*

5. "Directors Sobella Mejias and Ezequiel Zamora were not present."

- Aleksander Boyd, *Vcrisis.com* (see footnote A)

4. "There is no way ... I walked all around Caracas, Talk to People on the street and Cleary Chavez was revoked. We need to SCREAM FRAUD !!!"

- Leo, *Caracaschronicles.com*

3. "The exit polls are showing a 20pt lead for the SI, and a source within the CC tells me that in 23 de enero the SI is running ahead 54/46; every single middle class neighborhood in Caracas is totally congested with voters who haven't voted yet (my companion just got out after 9.5 hrs in the line at Santa Paula, starting at 5:45am) and a chavista friend tells me he voted in 45 minutes -- the barrios populares have NO trouble voting....and still the poor voters are voting down the NO."*

- Eric (Ekvall?), *Caracaschronicles.com*

2. "I saw how big the marcha was Aug. 12th... After that I knew that the SI vote had the numbers required..."

- Joe Summers, *Caracaschronicle.com*...

ARTICULOS EN FRANCES

<http://www.lefigaro.fr/international/20040818.FIG0252.html>

Caracas : de notre envoyée spéciale Lamia Oualalou

[18 août 2004]

L'opposition conteste la victoire de Chavez

L'opposition vénézuélienne continuait hier de rejeter les résultats du référendum de dimanche, le non à la révocation de Hugo Chavez ayant officiellement rassemblé près de 58% des suffrages, contre 42% pour le oui. Alors que les capitales d'Amérique latine et Madrid ont félicité le président pour le résultat, Paris optait pour la prudence en déclarant «prendre note des premiers résultats (...) et des déclarations de l'Organisation des Etats américains et du président Cartem». Ces derniers, présents au Venezuela au titre d'observateurs internationaux, estiment que le scrutin s'est déroulé sans fraude. **Washington leur a demandé**

de mener «un audit transparent» mais a déclaré hier avoir pris «note» des résultats du référendum, reconnaissant la victoire de Hugo Chavez.

... Tous ces efforts, ces pétitions signées et resignées pour obtenir l'organisation d'un référendum révocatoire, ces manifestations sous un soleil de plomb, tout cela pour s'entendre dire aujourd'hui que Chavez restera président jusqu'en janvier 2007 ? Impossible : 58% des Vénézuéliens ne peuvent pas désirer que cet homme continue à diviser le pays. Le gouvernement a forcément manipulé les résultats !

L'absence de communication entre partisans et adversaires du leader bolivarien est telle que les deux camps se disaient, à la veille du scrutin, sincèrement persuadés de l'emporter. Seule une «mégafraude» pourrait leur souffler la victoire. La Coordinadora Democrática, qui rassemble l'essentiel de l'opposition, a, dès l'annonce des résultats, embrassé cette rhétorique : «Nous étions un million jeudi dernier à Caracas, lors de la dernière manifestation de soutien au «sí», nous ne pouvons pas avoir seulement 42% des voix !», argumente D'Lsa Solorzano, en charge des questions juridiques au sein de la Coordinadora. «On ne peut pas imaginer que les partisans du président soient majoritaires partout dans le pays. Des Etats comme Carabobo ou Zulia, notoirement antichavistes, seraient, selon les résultats, contre la révocation du président ?», renchérit le diplomate Julio Cesar Pineda.

«Plus que des preuves, nous avons des doutes», tempère l'opposant Hiram Gaviria. «Ce qui est sûr, c'est que les autorités électorales sont en faveur du gouvernement», ajoute ce déçu du chavisme pour lequel cette victoire, «obtenue dans de telles conditions, délégitime un peu plus Chavez et prouve qu'en sus du pouvoir exécutif, il contrôle le judiciaire et l'électoral». Pour l'opposition, la décision de l'Union européenne de ne pas envoyer d'observateurs prouve l'absence de transparence du processus. La Commission a en effet regretté que les règles imposées par le Conseil national électoral soient incompatibles avec ses normes. Toutefois, elle fut également la première, trois heures après l'annonce des résultats, à se féliciter d'une «grande victoire pour la démocratie»...

Que faire, d'ailleurs, des déclarations du centre Carter pour la paix et de l'Organisation des Etats américains (OEA), principaux observateurs, selon lesquelles les résultats officiels du scrutin «coïncident totale ment» avec leurs informations ? Seraient-ils incompetents ou, pire, complices du gouvernement ? Dans les couloirs de la Quinta «Unidad», siège de campagne de l'opposition, les dirigeants arborent une mine gênée à cette question... et se rabattent sur la théorie d'une «fraude technologique».

«Tout s'est bien passé dans les bureaux observés par les envoyés de l'OEA et le centre Carter, c'est après, dans la transmission des données, que les résultats ont été trafiqués», explique Julio Cesar Pineda, l'air peu convaincu. «Le travail du centre Carter et de l'OEA était trop partiel pour détecter les fraudes», ajoute Asdrubal Aguiar. Même les Etats-Unis ont demandé un audit transparent sur la question, mais ils ont déclaré hier avoir pris note des résultats du référendum reconnaissant la victoire du président Chavez.

Des résultats qui ont déclenché, comme c'était prévisible, une crise de pouvoir au sein de la Coordinadora Democrática, le parti de l'opposition. Son leader, le gouverneur Enrique Mendoza, est sous le feu des critiques, même si, officiellement, tous se disent «à ses côtés». Son absence de réaction, pendant près de vingt-quatre heures après la publication des résultats, en a irrité plus d'un. Depuis, le débat fait rage entre les «duros», qui prônent «la désobéissance civile», et les «blandos», qui préconisent la reconnaissance des résultats. «Les déclarations de Carter nous ont mis dans une posture difficile : nous avons réclamé son arbitrage et promis de nous ranger à ses conclusions. Alors même si le jeu a été faussé, nous en avons accepté les règles», reconnaît Julio Cesar Pineda.

L'attitude radicale pour laquelle a finalement opté Enrique Mendoza en dénonçant «une atteinte massive à la volonté des électeurs» est d'autant plus difficile à tenir que Chavez multiplie depuis sa victoire les discours de réconciliation. «Je me proposais d'inviter à déjeuner

dès lundi midi tous les dirigeants de l'opposition qui admettraient leur défaite, pour dialoguer», a rappelé le président lors d'une conférence de presse. «Aucun n'est venu, et le déjeuner est froid. Les personnes qui ont voté «si», un choix que je respecte, méritent mieux que ces irresponsables», a-t-il grondé, tout en laissant la porte ouverte : «Un repas, ça se peut se réchauffer très vite, les micro-ondes sont là pour ça.»

Une main tendue qui ne trompe personne : le chef de l'Etat est déjà en campagne pour les élections municipales et régionales de novembre. Un scrutin susceptible d'être fatal à de nombreux partis de l'opposition s'ils persistaient dans les querelles intestines. Et d'ouvrir un boulevard à Hugo Chavez, jusqu'en 2007.

<http://www.lemonde.fr/web/article/0,1-0@2-3222,36-375838,0.html>

Washington reconnaît la victoire du président Chavez

LEMONDE.FR | 18.08.04 | 08h33

L'opposition estime que les observateurs internationaux, qui ont reconnu la victoire du président vénézuélien au référendum de dimanche, seront obligés de changer d'avis lorsqu'ils auront pris connaissance des fraudes électorales.

Le département d'Etat américain a pris "note" mardi 17 août des résultats du référendum de dimanche au Venezuela, reconnaissant la victoire du président Hugo Chavez ...

M. Erelí s'est abstenu de toute félicitation au président Chavez, en froid avec Washington qui lui reproche notamment son style populiste, sa rhétorique anti-américaine et ses sympathies pour le dirigeant cubain Fidel Castro. Le porte-parole s'est borné à "féliciter le peuple du Venezuela pour la manière dont il a géré" ce référendum...

Pour couronner l'ensemble, la principale organisation patronale du Venezuela, qui a toujours été un membre actif de l'opposition, a aussi reconnu la victoire du chef de l'Etat.(?????)

FRAUDES ÉLECTORALES SELON L'OPPOSITION

L'opposition, quant à elle, estime que les observateurs internationaux seront obligés de changer d'avis lorsqu'ils auront pris connaissance des fraudes électorales.

"Les démocrates vont fournir aux organisations internationales des preuves claires et incontournables qui les contraindront à demander à nos côtés la révision du vote", a affirmé le principal responsable de l'opposition Enrique Mendoza.

M. Erelí a évoqué les plaintes de l'opposition sur des fraudes en affirmant qu'il "reste des inquiétudes sur des questions relatives au vote" et a demandé aux observateurs internationaux de mener "un audit transparent" sur ce sujet.

Mais l'annonce par Jimmy Carter de la victoire de M. Chavez a porté un coup fatal à l'opposition dès la proclamation des résultats du vote - 58,25 % voix pour le "non" à la révocation du mandat d'Hugo Chavez contre 41,74 % pour le "oui".

"Au Venezuela il y a eu un attentat massif contre la volonté des électeurs, mais cela ne se prolongera pas longtemps et la joie de ce gouvernement ne va pas durer", a prévenu M. Mendoza.

L'opposition est aussi divisée. Ainsi un autre responsable de l'opposition, le gouverneur de l'état de Zulia (est) Manuel Rosalesa, a reconnu la victoire de Chavez.

Comme le patronat, le gouverneur de l'état de Miranda (centre du pays) exige le dépouillement et le décompte des scrutins sur papier pour comparer les résultats avec celui des votes automatiques...

Pour prouver à l'opposition qu'il n'y a pas eu de fraude électorale, Jimmy Carter a annoncé mardi soir à Caracas que les autorités vénézuéliennes allaient organiser dans les deux jours un audit du référendum sur la révocation du mandat du président Hugo Chavez. "Les résultats de cet audit devraient donner une réponse aux inquiétudes de l'opposition", a expliqué le Prix Nobel de la paix lors d'une conférence de presse. "Nous allons dépouiller un échantillon de 150 tables de vote en présence de représentants du gouvernement, de l'opposition et des observateurs internationaux", a expliqué M. Carter.