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## FEATURED Q&A

# Will Venezuela's Vote Next Month Be Legitimate?



Governors across Venezuela are to be elected Oct. 15. President Nicolás Maduro warned earlier this month that state governors who are elected "must submit" to the will of the country's new "constituent assembly" or be dismissed. // File Photo: Venezuelan Government.

**Q Venezuelan election authorities set Oct. 15 as the date of the long-awaited gubernatorial elections. The country's opposition forces are favored to win in many races, though concerns over fraud could cast doubt on the legitimacy of the elections. Elections scheduled for last year were scrapped as the country's economic crisis mounted and polls indicated Venezuelans highly favored removing President Nicolás Maduro from office. Why has the Venezuelan government decided to press on with scheduling elections now? Will the results be legitimate? What are the expected outcomes of the vote, and what will they mean for Maduro's government?**

**A David Smilde, Favrot Professor of Human Relations at Tulane University and senior fellow at the Washington Office on Latin America:** "Scheduling regional elections helps the Maduro government in a couple of ways. First, they give the international community a sign that democracy still exists. It is hard to call a country a dictatorship when it has elections on the docket. More importantly, these elections served to demobilize the opposition protest movement. On the one hand, elections are a classic means to move political conflict from the streets to institutions. On the other hand, whether or not to go to elections has predictably caused turmoil within the opposition. While the electoralists dominated the opposition coalition from 2006 to 2015, the entire opposition agreed with abstaining from the constituent assembly election because they considered it illegitimate. The opposition was also unified in denouncing the CNE for committing fraud in that election. This has strengthened the abstentionists, especially among the

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## TODAY'S NEWS

### POLITICAL

## Death Toll Rises to 230 in Mexico Earthquake

Among the dead were at least 21 schoolchildren, who were in the Enrique Rebsamen school, which collapsed south of Mexico City.

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### POLITICAL

## Hurricane Maria Leaves Puerto Rico Without Electricity

The entire island was without electricity after the powerful storm pummeled the U.S. territory. Overnight, Maria picked up speed and was upgraded to a Category 3 hurricane.

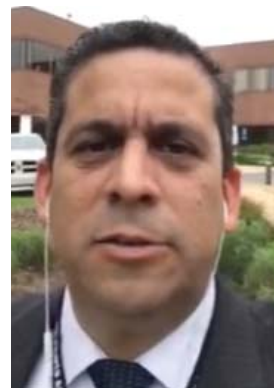
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### BUSINESS

## Avianca Pilots Begin 60-Day Strike

The union that represents more than half of the Colombian airline's pilots began a strike after the two sides failed to reach agreement on salary increases. Union leader Jaime Hernández said the airline's pilots in Colombia are not fairly compensated.

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Hernández // File Photo: Acdac.

## POLITICAL NEWS

## Death Toll Rises to 230 in Mexico Earthquake

The death toll from the powerful 7.1-magnitude earthquake that rocked central Mexico on Tuesday rose to 230, including 21 schoolchildren, ABC News reported. Rescue crews worked Wednesday night amid reports that at least one girl and perhaps other children were trapped beneath the rubble of the collapsed Enrique Rebsamen school, south of Mexico City. Two students and a teacher remain missing, said Education Minister Aurelio Nuño. In Mexico City alone, rescue crews have pulled 52 people alive from damaged buildings, according to city officials. On Wednesday, U.S. President Donald Trump called Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto to extend condolences and to offer assistance, including search and rescue teams, which are being deployed.

## Hurricane Pounds Puerto Rico, Island Without Electricity

Puerto Rico was completely without power on Wednesday as Hurricane Maria pummeled the island, tearing roofs off buildings and filling homes with water, The Washington Post reported. The hurricane is the most powerful storm to hit the island in more than 80 years. "Definitely, Puerto Rico—when we can get outside—we will find our island destroyed," said the U.S. commonwealth's emergency management director, Abner Gómez. He added that the island's electricity was down for the entire island. "The information we have received is not encouraging. It's a system that has destroyed everything it has had in its path." Officials said they would have clearer details of the extent of the damage caused by the storm once conditions improve. No deaths have been reported in Puerto Rico as a result of Hurricane Maria as of yet. Recovery efforts in Puerto Rico and the nearby

U.S. Virgin Islands will also include attempting to restore power as quickly as possible, but in a way that makes the electricity grids less vulnerable to similar natural disasters, FEMA Administrator William Long said. The power grid "is a fragile system in both territories. It's going to be a long and frustrating process to get the power grid up." Early this morning, the

**“It is nothing short of a major disaster.”**

— Ricardo Rosselló

storm had regained "major hurricane status," said the U.S. National Hurricane Center, which upgraded Maria to a Category 3 hurricane, The New York Times reported. As of 2 a.m. Eastern Time, the storm had maximum sustained winds of nearly 115 miles an hour, and Maria was expected to strengthen over the next day or so, the National Hurricane Center added. Puerto Rico Governor Ricardo Rosselló announced a curfew from between 6 p.m. and 6 a.m. until Saturday. "The damage is very extensive," Rosselló told CNN late Wednesday. "It is nothing short of a major disaster." The hurricane was expected to pass the northern coastline of the Dominican Republic early today before heading toward the Turks and Caicos Islands and the southeastern Bahamas tonight and Friday, The New York Times reported.

## Brazilian High Court Approves Charges Against Temer

Brazil's Supreme Court voted Wednesday to send new corruption charges against President Michel Temer to the lower house of Congress, the Financial Times reported. The lower house would have to vote with a two-thirds majority in order for Temer to be put on trial. Last week, Temer was charged with graft-related offenses for the second time in three months. He was accused of receiving some \$190 million in bribes in exchange for influence and political favors, charges he denies.

## NEWS BRIEFS

## Nicaragua to Join Paris Climate Accord

Nicaragua is "soon" planning to sign the Paris climate accord, President Daniel Ortega told state media, Bloomberg News reported Wednesday. That would leave Syria and the United States as the only two countries refusing to support the pact to fight global warming. Nicaragua had refused to join the accord, saying its goals were too weak. The United States signed the pact last year under then-President Barack Obama, but current President Donald Trump has begun the process of withdrawing from it, calling it a "bad deal" for the United States.

## Ruling Party Lawmakers Ask Court to Allow Fourth Term for Bolivia's Morales

Lawmakers from Bolivia's ruling Movement Toward Socialism, or MAS, party have asked the country's Constitutional Court to allow President Evo Morales to run for a fourth term as president, despite the Constitution barring him from doing so, BBC News reported Tuesday. The request came a year and a half after Bolivians in a referendum voted against ending constitutional term limits. At the time, Morales had said he would respect the outcome of the referendum.

## Unit of China's Shougang to Invest \$1.5 Billion in Peru's Marcona Mine

Iron ore miner Shougang Hierro Peru, a unit of China's Shougang Group, said Wednesday it plans to invest some \$1.5 billion in expanding its processing capacity and building a desalinization plant at its Marcona mine, Reuters reported. Raúl Vera, the company's general manager, said the company will spend approximately \$500 million on a new plant that will process tailings that will allow it to boost its output at its operations in southern Peru.

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base, and made going to elections a tough sell. However, the opposition is right about calling the government's bluff and going to elections, as voting is the most effective way to confront an authoritarian project. The government cannot possibly win a vote, and under fair conditions the opposition will sweep the elections, simply due to the unpopularity of Chavismo and the people's exhaustion. The Maduro government will likely nibble away at electoral conditions, disqualify candidates, not recognize their attributions when they win, or simply suspend the elections like it did a year ago. But it is better to make the government suffer the political costs of carrying out obnoxious, authoritarian actions than quietly conceding power to them by abstention."

**A** **Eva Golinger, attorney, author and former advisor to late Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez:** "To vote or not to vote? In Venezuela, that is the question. The contentious ballot on July 30 that elected a National Constituent Assembly (ANC), a self-declared supreme power, may have been riddled with irregularities that could have compromised the integrity of future elections in Venezuela. Or maybe not. Leaked internal documents from Venezuela's national elections council (CNE) and testimony from CNE employees and Smartmatic, the company that owned and oversaw the elections machines, alleged that the final vote count on July 30 was inflated to produce a higher tally than an unofficial anti-government plebiscite that had taken place two weeks prior. Even if the numbers were fudged, the actual voting process may not have been tampered with. Elections continue to be the only legitimate, democratic and peaceful way to resolve the severe political and economic crisis the country is facing. Venezuela's elections system could still be reliable so long as all the checks and balances are guaranteed with transparency. The opposition should participate, and international observers

should be present to witness the process and provide further protection against any potential irregularities. The government is proceeding with these elections because it has confidence it will win a majority on

**“ In a democracy, real change takes place through elections, not war, and this must be the path forward for Venezuela.”**

— Eva Golinger

Oct. 15, and it needs to regain credibility on the international stage. There is, however, a caveat. Participating implies recognition of the ANC, and Maduro has said any winning candidates who fail to bow before the all-powerful ANC will be deposed. Still, in a democracy, real change takes place through elections, not war, and this must be the path forward for Venezuela."

**A** **Phil Gunson, senior analyst for the Andes region at International Crisis Group:** "The Maduro government developed a severe allergy to elections after losing control of the National Assembly two years ago and has used a variety of pseudo-legalistic maneuvers to avoid them ever since. But despite the installation of the all-powerful 'constituent assembly' (ANC) in early August, which in theory could abolish elections altogether or drastically change the rules, it seems to lack the confidence, or the inclination, to declare an outright dictatorship. By announcing elections for governor immediately upon the installation of the ANC, it sought to take advantage of the opposition's disarray and lack of strategy, as well as of the demoralization of large parts of the opposition's electorate. It may have calculated that the extremely adverse conditions (including the banning of key candidates) would lead to the MUD's re-

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## ECONOMIC NEWS

## Chilean Central Bank Revokes Credit Line With Venezuela

Chile's central bank announced Wednesday that it had revoked a reciprocal credit line with Venezuela's central bank, saying the Andean nation's government has failed to repay its debts, Reuters reported. The Chilean monetary authority said the line would be canceled within 10 days, adding that Venezuela's central bank owed it \$2.1 million. Venezuela had made "intensive use" of the credit line in recent years, Chile's central bank added.

## BUSINESS NEWS

## Avianca Pilots Begin 60-Day Strike

The union that represents more than half of Colombian airline Avianca's pilots initiated a 60-day strike on Wednesday after the two sides failed to agree on a salary increase for pilots, The Wall Street Journal reported. The airline called the decision by the Colombian Association of Civil Aviators, or Acdac, "an illegal act that affects clients and the connectivity of the country." "Unfortunately, the union aspires for a global pay increase of 60 percent, far from the financial reality of the company," Avianca said. As of Wednesday morning, the strike had forced the company to cancel more than 90 scheduled flights. More flights are likely to be canceled as a result of the strike. More than 700 of Avianca's 1,300 pilots are members of Acdac, which has been in talks with the airline since 2013. The union is demanding that Avianca pay Colombian pilots the same salary as it pays pilots employed by Avianca who live in other countries. "This is about ending discrimination," said union leader Captain Jaime Hernández. Avianca said pilots' salaries are adjusted for the cost of living.

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fusal to take part. As it is, a segment of the MUD has broken away, saying to participate is to 'legitimize' the ANC and betray the civil disobedience mandate of the July 16 informal referendum, but the main parties will take part. The campaign playing field is more tilted than ever in favor of the government, but with the MUD participating it will be harder for the government to falsify the vote count. The opposition ought to take as many as 18 of 23 states, but internal disputes and government dirty tricks will no doubt reduce that. If the government retains as many as half, that may be counted a victory. Opposition governors will in any case find it virtually impossible to govern effectively."

**A** **Julia Buxton, professor of comparative politics at the School of Public Policy of Central European University in Budapest:** "Whatever the reasons for rescheduling the December 2016 gubernatorial elections, the ruling PSUV has only delayed an inevitably severe electoral reckoning. If the motivation was to claw back diminishing popularity in the midst of economic and broader policy calamity, little tangible advantage was gained. The Maduro government goes into these elections—assuming they go ahead—in an even more dire economic context. It is expected that the PSUV will see setbacks after a strong performance in the last gubernatorial contest of December 2012. In that election, the PSUV nearly swept the board, riding the coattails of Chávez's presidential re-election and in a strong show of support

for the physically ailing president. But retaining the 20 of the 23 state governors will be a challenge, even if the opposition MUD alliance is as fractious and policy-free as usual. Maduro faces strong international and

“**The ruling PSUV has only delayed an inevitably severe electoral reckoning.**”

— Julia Buxton

regional pressure to reverse deterioration of Venezuela's democracy, be this of the liberal or socialist variety. Political and economic isolation will have figured in the decision to move ahead with the contest, and participate in renewed negotiation efforts. Nudges from sympathetic states will have been influential as the legitimacy and sovereignty of the government becomes more indefensible. Despite setbacks, the election process (if not the political environment) is still relatively free and fair, and any claims of fraud from either party will be balanced by gains and a reticence to discredit the outcome. The MUD will see major advances, but a landslide will be offset by an ongoing lack of popular confidence in the MUD."

*The Advisor welcomes comments on its Q&A section. Readers can write editor Gene Kuleta at [gkuleta@thedialogue.org](mailto:gkuleta@thedialogue.org).*

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