

2017 Venezuela: the vitality of Chavismo

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After midnight on Sunday, the digital edition of Clarin daily (Buenos Aires) didn't say a word about the results of the Venezuelan elections. But, La Nación, in turn, entitled what happened in Venezuela this way: "Resounding victory of Chavismo in the regional elections, results that the opposition does not accept". In an absolute ostracized case of the news: the event did not exist; in the other one, manipulation of the news, because the emphasis is placed on the fact that, as was foreseeable, the opposition does not accept its defeat. El Nuevo Herald (Miami) is more cautious, and says, "Chavismo wins 17 of 23 state governorships; Venezuelan opposition denounces possibility of fraud in the elections". What is provided as a fact by La Nación becomes a possibility of fraud for the newspaper in Miami. The Caracas National also highlighted the 5 governorships won by the MUD vs. the 17 ones of the PSUV. When I finished writing these notes, the situation in Bolivar state hasn't been defined yet, although it might not alter the electoral scenery. In Argentina, almost all news programs of today's morning (Monday), declared party-liner or shameful ones, only spoke about the fraud. To substantiate such a serious accusation they interviewed irreproachable whistleblowers, all of them fierce opponents to the Bolivarian government who said, without providing a single proof, that the elections had been fraudulent. I repeat: for those pseudo-journalists –actually treacherous propaganda agents of the right– the remarks by furious losers of Sunday's elections are more than enough proofs to dismiss the verdict of the polls.

It's obvious that the result registered in Venezuela on Sunday is a hard blow for the right, not only in that country, but across Latin America as well. A setback for

the coup and removal plans obsessed with overthrowing Nicolas Maduro and thus to seize Venezuelan oil, which is the only thing Washington cares about. This result is, likewise, an exceptional case in which a government viciously attacked from abroad: media offensive, economic warfare, diplomatic aggression (OAS, European governments, etc) intervention threats from the government of the United States (statements by Donald Trump, Rex Tillerson, Mike Pompeo, and other minor characters) and that causes numerous sufferings to the population, manages to prevail in the polls. I do not remember another similar case where a government surrounded by this perverse constellation of destabilizing factors has managed to come out victorious in the polls with an absolute majority of votes, around 54 percent. Salvador Allende achieved a similar feat. Confronted with a very persistent attack, although it was not as strong as the one inflicted on Venezuela, he obtained a great result in the March 1973 parliamentary election, after winning with 44.2 percent of the votes, preventing the right-wing opposition from getting the needed two-thirds in the Senate to remove the Chilean president. Even so, he is far from the figure achieved by Chavismo. And Winston Churchill lost the elections convened at the end of WWII vs. Labor Clement Attlee: 49.7 percent vs. Churchill's 36.2 percent. The shortages of a war, declared or not, aversively affect ruling parties and Churchill suffered it in the flesh, so it additionally highlights the significant victory achieved by Chavismo in Sunday's regional elections.

Of course, as was foreseeable, the right speaks about a fraud: Had there been such a thing in Zulia, Táchira, Mérida, Nueva Esparta and Anzoátegui, where the opposition won? In other words, there was no fraud where it won, but a clean public consultation; and there was fraud, where it lost. Nonsense. Those are very important states, and curiously the government of "dictator" Nicolás Maduro accepted the electoral defeat without a word. The rejection of the right and its allies outside Venezuela in the face of the repeated defeats suffered vs. Chavismo is a vicious practice that is dragged on since Hugo Chávez won the December 1998 presidential election. As it is well known, the relations between the right and democracy have always been strained. Their story is the story a dysfunctional marriage that gives cause for "an unhappy relationship". The former only accepts the latter when it favors it, something that does not happen with the left, which invariably accepted the adverse verdict of the polls, as Venezuelan history demonstrates it in the last eighteen years. The victory in the red state of Miranda, snatched from Henrique Capriles, is a real symbol of the vitality of Chavismo, notwithstanding the huge difficulties that Venezuelans face in their daily life as a main result, although not exclusive, of the huge foreign aggression. Because of the size of its electorate, Miranda is the second district of the country. But Chavismo also won in Lara, Carabobo and Aragua, which are the three states that follow it due to the dimension of their electoral body. But the defeat of the officialdom in the so-called "half moon": Zulia, Táchira and Mérida, border states with Colombia, is worrying and cannot only be measured in electoral terms. They shelter sectors encouraged by a strong secessionist spirit that, if the internal conditions manage to deteriorate, might become a crucial beachhead to enable

some foreign intervention in Venezuela.

Despite the sabotage against the electoral process and the early denunciations of fraud, released with the aim of discouraging popular participation in the elections, the 61.14 percent that went to the polls –a bit more than 10 million citizens– surpasses the historical average for this kind of state elections and are a source of some envy for more than one country whose democratic credentials have never been questioned by the dominant ideology. For example, Chile, where barely 41.9 percent of the electoral roll participated in last presidential elections between Michelle Bachelet and Evelyn Matthei. In spite of this, the press mob does not stop characterizing the Bolivarian government as a “dictatorship”. Very strange, as Eduardo Galeano used to recall: with elections every year –22 taking into account those held on Sunday– and accepting defeats whenever they happened. Without a doubt, a tough puzzle for establishment political experts and publicists who must deal with a very rare “dictatorship” addicted to elections. To summarize: Chavismo, which had 20 governorates previously, now loses 3 and keeps 17. But the recovery of Miranda and Lara states has a very special political significance, because they reconquered two strongholds, where the right-wing was planning to relaunch their presidential hopes.

What is coming does not seem difficult to discern. Desperate for its electoral frustration a right-wing sector, spurred by its US masters, announces its willingness to “warm the streets” for the third time and to bet on criminal violence as a way to put an end to Chavismo. Something they could have done anyway, because a victory like the one that slip through their hands and that they longed with so much (unfunded) hope, would have emboldened them “to go for more” and demand Maduro’s resignation and a call to early presidential elections. That is, disregard of the elections whatever its results. As they lost, their very weak democratic thickness would have completely liquefied and –I hope I am wrong– we will surely see the sudden resurgence of the terrorist wave that ravaged the country for more than three months. In that case, the government will have the non-delegable responsibility to guarantee public order isolating the terrorist sectors and preventing them from heading the opposition with their excesses and “intransigence”. But in order to avoid this from happening, it will not only be necessary to firmly prevent violence break-in but also to strengthen the channels of dialogue with the political forces that bet on democratic institutionalism and won 5 governorates. Venezuela cannot go back again to the nightmare suffered between April and July this year. Its people do not deserve the reiteration of such a big punishment and the Bolivarian Revolution should not walk again alongside the edge of the abyss as it happened during those grim months. In short: an important victory of Chavismo, significant achievements of the opposition in some states of great economic and geopolitical importance, and the hope that, this time, authorities can avoid the relapse in the spiral of political violence persistently promoted by the right-wing, with the push offered by the White House and the complicity of media oligarchies that misinform and brutalize the populations of Our America.

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