

Venezuela's Maduro proposes early elections for opposition-held National Assembly

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Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro has proposed holding early elections to restock the National Assembly, currently headed by opposition leader and self-declared interim president Juan Guaido backed by US.

Maduro made this call in a speech in Caracas on Monday. He also talked about an early election in February of this year. If elections are not held before then, Venezuelans will vote on the makeup of the National Assembly next year.

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In 2017 the body saw its powers somewhat limited after the establishment of the Constituent Assembly, entirely staffed with Maduro loyalists, in 2017. The two legislatures have functioned in parallel since.

Maduro's announcement comes on the anniversary of his reelection to the Latin American country's presidency last year. Guaido, along with the United States, has called the election "illegitimate."

If defeated at the ballot box, Guaido would lose his claim to legitimate power. Despite Washington's backing, Guaido's efforts to mobilize popular anger and oust Maduro have thus far failed, and the Venezuelan president still commands the support of the country's military and remains safely in power.

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Venezuela remains economically blockaded by the United States, following several rounds of harsh sanctions. Sanctions targeting the country's oil industry have exacerbated the country's economic crisis, and have dealt "serious economic damage and suffering" to the Venezuelan people, the country's oil minister said on Sunday.

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