

## Summary

The upcoming presidential election in Venezuela on July 28 has the potential to shift the political landscape of the country, prompting the government of President Nicolás Maduro to do everything it can to suppress the opposition in order to ensure victory. Crackdown on opposition activists and the barring of the main oppositional presidential candidate from the election serve as recent examples. Therefore, the new presidential candidate Edmundo González has in advance refused to accept the election results in case of defeat, citing election fraud concerns.

### Recent events and developments

On July 28, presidential elections will take place in Venezuela. The election has the potential to pose a serious challenge to the long-standing government of President Nicolás Maduro as the main opposition parties have decided to put their differences aside and unite, backing a common candidate. At the moment, it is Edmundo González after the previous candidate, Maria Corina Machado, was prohibited from participating in the presidential race on January 26. The run-up to the election has been riddled with obstacles and repression against government opposition. A crackdown on opposition figures persisted in June, as four activists were arrested on suspicion of “instigating hate and conspiracy”, bringing the total amount of detained opposition activists to 34. Furthermore, the Venezuelan electoral authorities have reduced external observation of the elections by rejecting the EU observation mission on May 28. However, in June it was confirmed that small election observation teams from the NGO Carter Center and the UN, along with BRICS+ countries including China and Russia, were invited to monitor the voting process. Nevertheless, worries about election legitimacy persist. Therefore, on June 20, Maduro and other candidates signed an agreement to respect the election results; however, Edmundo González refused. The opposition leader is leading in the polls with 50 points and stated that the government is creating a “hostile environment” for the election. However, no protests have been reported throughout the campaign.

### Impact assessment

The upcoming election is seen as a potential turning point for Venezuela as 66% of polled Venezuelans hope that the election will bring change to the country. The unity and rapid rally behind Edmundo González pose a threat to the government. To increase his chances for reelection, President Maduro may potentially take further steps by banning the candidacy of Edmundo González or opposition parties themselves. Further crackdowns on activists, manipulation of election conditions, and election fraud all pose a possibility in the upcoming election. Allegations of election fraud have already been made during previous presidential elections in 2018 and parliamentary elections in 2020. With this history in mind, the opposition will be reluctant to accept the election results in case of a loss which has already manifested by the refusal to sign the post-election agreement by Edmundo González. The described situations are likely to heighten tensions among opposition supporters, potentially leading to protests that could become violent. Clashes, in this case, between President Maduro supporters, González supporters, and security services are likely. The country has an extensive history of political violence and protests due to the poor living standards in the country which the government is blamed for. For example, in 2019, massive protests led Venezuelan security services to use violence to disperse the crowd, resulting in the death of 26 people. Protests are mainly expected in Caracas as previous protests have also been mainly held in the capital.

### Advice from Forth Global

- Ensure that all employees travelling to Lebanon receive a three-day HEAT training prior to deployment.
- Employees should avoid all protests and other public gatherings.
- Employees should refrain from sharing their opinions on the political situation in Venezuela.
- Closely monitor the local and international media and liaise with local partners for updates on the political situation and potential protests.

### Customized advice

Please contact us for specific advice:

+31 (0) 35 543 04 37  
christiaan@forthglobal.com

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