

## Slide 1

Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro has announced his plan to move Christmas to October in a bid to distract the public from ongoing political turmoil following the disputed presidential election.

"It's more evidence that he is desperate to distract people from the fraud he committed on Election Day and the horrible repression we've seen in the month since," Daniel Acosta Rivas, a political analyst from Venezuela stated.

"It's not enough that he oppresses us, he also has to mock us," Rivas said. "Just like he can declare himself winner of the election without evidence, on a whim he can decree that Jesus was born on Oct. 1 and that's when we should celebrate. He is desperate, or he is mocking us – or both."

Maduro made the bizarre announcement during his weekly television appearance on Monday, calling the decision a "tribute" to the people of Venezuela.

"It's September, and it already smells like Christmas," Maduro said. "That's why this year, as a way of paying tribute to you all, and in gratitude to you all, I'm going to decree an early Christmas for October 1."

Whatever joy Maduro hoped to bring with his tactic, he prompted the opposite. One office worker from the capital Caracas told The Associated Press that "without money and with his political crisis, who can believe that there will be an early Christmas?"

Jorge Jraissati, a Venezuelan foreign policy expert and president of the Economic Inclusion Group, said that he was "tempted to believe that Maduro's irrational mind urged him to start Christmas in October," but that he could not "deny that stories like this portray Maduro as an idiotic character, refocusing people's attention from the real problems of our country: the fact that our political institutions are hijacked, our economy is destroyed, and millions of people have left our country seeking a normal life."

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The announcement also follows international condemnation of Maduro's decision to pursue an arrest warrant for his opponent, Edmundo Gonzalez, whom the international community continues to support as the true winner of the July 28 election despite Maduro and his party's insistence to the contrary. "Maduro and his representatives cannot indefinitely suppress the legitimate aspirations of the Venezuelan people and maintain power by force," U.S. State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said in a press release. "The will of the people and their rights must be respected."

"We reiterate our call for the immediate and unconditional release of those who have been unjustly detained," the statement said. "The path forward should be a peaceful, transparent, and inclusive democratic transition process that puts the well-being of Venezuelans at its center."

Venezuela is engulfed in a political and economic crisis which has led to more than 7.7 million people leaving the country since 2015. How did this oil-rich country become so troubled?

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Since 1999, Venezuela has been run by two men from the same party. Hugo Chávez was president from 1999 to his death in 2013 and was succeeded by his right-hand man, Nicolás Maduro.

Their socialist PSUV party (United Socialist Party of Venezuela) has, over the past two decades, gained control of key institutions, including much of the judiciary, the electoral council and the Supreme Court.

As a result, the role of the president has become much more powerful and the system of checks and balances has been severely weakened.

Not long after Mr. Maduro was elected, global oil prices plummeted and Venezuela - which relies almost entirely on oil revenue for its income - went into a seven-year recession.

Inflation skyrocketed and shortages of basic goods became widespread. Waves of anti-government protests in 2014 and 2017 fizzled out after a police crackdown.

Millions of Venezuelans left the country to escape economic hardship and political repression. Amid growing discontent, Mr. Maduro was re-elected in 2018 in a presidential election widely dismissed as neither free nor fair.

Millions of Venezuelans have emigrated, many braving the dangerous Darién Gap, an expanse of jungle between Colombia and Panama

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With the executive and the judiciary under the control of the PSUV, Venezuela's divided opposition in January 2019 united behind the only major institution where they were still influential: the National Assembly and its speaker, Juan Guaidó.

Arguing that Mr. Maduro's re-election was not valid and the presidency was therefore vacant, Mr. Guaidó, with the backing of the National Assembly, declared himself "interim president".

And while more than 50 countries, including the US and the UK, recognized Mr. Guaidó as Venezuela's legitimate leader, Venezuela's military stayed loyal to Mr. Maduro and - with the continued support of China and Russia - he remained firmly in charge of the country.

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Extreme poverty remains shockingly high and many of those without access to foreign currency continue to struggle.

Disillusioned with the failure of Juan Guaidó to seize control of anything more than some Venezuelan embassies and assets abroad, the majority of opposition parties withdrew their support from him in December 2022 and dissolved his "interim government".

In October 2023, the opposition organized a primary to choose a unity candidate to take on the government candidate in the upcoming presidential election.

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Former lawmaker María Corina Machado won it by a landslide, despite having been banned by the comptroller-general, an ally of President Maduro, from holding public office.

After her appeal against the ban was rejected, she threw her weight behind ex-diplomat Edmundo González as the unity candidate to take on President Maduro in the presidential election on 28 July.

The US secretary of state has said there was "overwhelming evidence" Venezuela's opposition won the recent presidential election.

In a statement Antony Blinken said it was clear Edmundo González, had won the most votes - despite incumbent president Nicolás Maduro declaring a disputed victory.

"Given the overwhelming evidence, it is clear to the United States and, most importantly, to the Venezuelan people that Edmundo González won the most votes in Venezuela's 28 July presidential election," Mr Blinken said.

The electoral council, which is government-controlled, announced President Maduro had won the election for a third term.

The opposition has said its own vote tally shows it won the election by a wide margin. Opinion polls ahead of the election had suggested a clear victory for the challenger.

President Maduro has previously accused foreign governments of interfering in the election.

He has strongly denied electoral fraud and has said the opposition has instigated a coup by disputing the result.

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The announcement of President Maduro's victory set off deadly protests in Caracas.

It has also attracted global criticism, with many governments around the world demanding the Venezuelan government release proof of the result.

The result has been recognized by Venezuelan allies China, Russia and Iran. But, the US, European Union and other G7 countries have called on President Maduro's government to release detailed voting data.

That is why this election was so important!

Venezuela gives China, Russia and Iran a foothold in the Americas.

Posting on social media, Mr Blinken said: "Electoral data overwhelmingly demonstrate the will of the Venezuelan people: democratic opposition candidate Edmundo González won the most votes in Sunday's election.

"Venezuelans have voted, and their votes must count."

Tom Phillips, The Guardian

Maduro's refusal to quit – despite growing international consensus that the recent election was stolen – throws up a complex and troubling question for a country already reeling from one of modern history's worst peacetime economic and humanitarian meltdowns: what next?

Those who know Venezuela offer bleak projections, with Brazil's former foreign minister last week warning a "very serious conflict" was possible. "I don't want to use the expression civil war – but I feel very afraid," Celso Amorim told the Brazilian channel GloboNews.

Tom Shannon, a veteran US diplomat, saw two possible futures: the Nicaragua model or the Romania model.

## Nicaragua Model

“The Nicaragua solution is that Maduro and his government just give a finger to the world and, as [President Daniel] Ortega has ... [and] just move ahead with repression, arrests, expulsions [and] de-naturalizations in an effort to assert complete and utter control,” said Shannon.

## Romanian Model

“The Romanian solution,” Shannon continued, “is that people become so profoundly frustrated that they turn on the government in a very violent way.”

In December 1989, Romania’s communist dictator, Nicolae Ceaușescu, and his wife were chased from the presidential palace and fled by helicopter after a military crackdown sparked a popular uprising against his brutal and corrupt 24-year rule. The pair were later convicted at an impromptu show trial and shot by a military firing squad.

Speaking in the days after Venezuela’s 28 July election – in which voters appeared to have overwhelmingly opted for change - Shannon judged the first outcome more likely. Two weeks after the vote, with Maduro launched an Ortega-style crackdown that has seen more than 1,300 people jailed and 24 killed.

Activists have been seized at home or while trying to fly abroad. Social networks such as X and Signal have been blocked. “Maduro has unleashed a campaign of terror,” María Corina Machado – the banned opposition leader who claims her replacement candidate, Edmundo González, defeated Maduro – said from hiding last week.

Maduro’s crackdown – which authorities call Operación Tuntun (Operation Knock Knock) – has grim echoes of political repression in China, where government critics routinely disappear into secret jails after getting a knock at the door.

**It is support from China and neighboring Russia that experts say has been key to Maduro’s ability to survive years of economic turmoil, hyperinflation, social unrest and sanctions.**

Shannon predicted Beijing and Moscow would continue to back Maduro: “For both of those countries having this dumpster fire burning almost within sight of the United States is valuable.”

But Maduro’s recent behavior has cost him key friends, including the leftist presidents of Brazil, Colombia and Mexico, who have not recognized his claim to victory. Some hope the Latin American trio could use their connections to Caracas to help promote a peaceful negotiated transition.

“The fraud was so blatant “It puts Colombia, Brazil and Mexico in a situation in which they can’t continue to claim that they defend democratic principles if they defend Maduro.”

In the recent election, the opposition parties first came out with claims that they had obtained 70% of tally sheets showing the district-by-district results – all of which allegedly showed Gonzalez had won with double the votes Maduro had received, rather than the supposed 51% victory the Electoral Council had announced.

Maduro countered by ordering the Venezuelan Supreme Court, which he and his party also controls, to conduct an audit of the results. Ultimately – and perhaps unsurprisingly – the court ruled in Maduro’s favor.

The court’s ruling certified the results and only further inflamed opposition. Gabriel Boric, the leftist president of Chile and one of the main critics of Maduro’s election scam, blasted the high court’s certification.

"Today, Venezuela’s Supreme Court has finally consolidated the fraud," Boric said. "The Maduro regime obviously welcomes with enthusiasm its ruling... there is no doubt that we are facing a dictatorship that falsifies elections."

<https://www.venezuelablog.org/taking-stock-of-chinese-russian-relations-venezuela/>

Now here is the real problem we face.

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On June 28, the Maduro government celebrated 46 years of “fruitful” and “unbreakable” diplomatic relations between Venezuela and China, praising the Chinese government for its defense of Venezuelan sovereignty.

This came just a few weeks after Nicolás Maduro, in the face of heightening pressure from the United States, publicly thanked allies including China, Russia, Iran, and Cuba, referring to those countries as Venezuela's "true friends in the world," for their efforts to provide assistance to mitigate Venezuela's humanitarian crisis.

Russia and China have long been allies to Venezuela, though the Maduro government's failure to repay its debts to the two countries has strained these relations over the years. With Venezuela's state-owned oil company in approximately \$34.5 billion of debt, and the Maduro government failing to pay interest on its past loans, Venezuela's national debt is now higher than its GDP, with the two biggest creditors being Russia and China.

Russia and China continue to import Venezuelan oil as a form of debt repayment.

China and Russia have also continued to trade food, medicine, and other goods that are otherwise scarce in Venezuela in exchange for oil, in many ways profiting off of the country's humanitarian crisis.

Russia has also continued to play a key role in helping Maduro to evade U.S. sanctions while continuing to import Venezuelan oil through other means.

Since 2019, Russian tankers have taken action such as turning off transponders while en route to Venezuela or changing the flags on their vessels to avoid detection and conceal the source of transported oil.

Russian oil company Rosneft has acted as a strategic middle man to assist in shipping Venezuelan oil to other countries: India, the UAE, and Turkey are among those who have purchased Venezuelan crude using joint ventures and offshore subsidiaries of Rosneft.

China has similarly evaded U.S. sanctions, often with the assistance of these Russian subsidiaries. China continued to import Venezuelan crude from Venezuela with the assistance of a Geneva-based subsidiary of Rosneft.



Investigation by Reuters found that this subsidiary assisted China to transfer oil between tankers and conceal the true origin of these shipments, making it appear as if the oil was coming from Malaysia rather than Venezuela.

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### **Russia**

In addition to economic assistance, Russia has provided important political support to the Maduro government. In fact, following the uprising on April 30, 2019, U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo claimed that Maduro was prepared to flee to Cuba but reversed his plan after Russian authorities convinced him otherwise.

Throughout 2019, as Maduro's leadership faced challenges from the opposition coalition, Russia continued to offer support to the Maduro government and significantly increased its presence within Venezuela. Following the opposition's proclamation of an interim government in January 2019, Moscow heightened its military presence in Venezuela, sending a military technical contingent and up to a hundred Russian military specialists to Caracas.

Additionally, Rosneft reportedly became more involved in the day-to-day operations of Venezuela's state-owned oil company in 2019, providing maintenance and technical expertise to Venezuelan refineries.

Reports emerged in May 2019 indicating that, ahead of a meeting between Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and Vladimir Putin, the Russian president was interested in negotiating with the U.S. to propose an exchange of sorts: the U.S. government would back off support for Ukraine, which the U.S. has supported since Russia invaded in 2014, and Russia would in exchange cut support for Venezuela.

U.S. officials swiftly rejected this possibility, refusing to abandon a NATO ally to use Venezuela as a geopolitical bargaining chip.

Russian authorities have also met publicly with Maduro several times in recent years. Nicolás Maduro himself met with Putin in Moscow in September 2019 in lieu of attending the 2019 session of the UN General Assembly.

In February 2020, shortly after Guaidó made a surprise appearance at the State of the Union in Washington D.C., Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov visited Caracas in a demonstration of support to the Maduro government, openly denouncing the U.S. pressure policy towards Venezuela.

While the Maduro government's struggles to repay its debts, coupled with the ongoing U.S. sanctions campaign, makes Venezuela a particularly high-risk trading partner and political ally, the Russian government has consistently supported the Maduro regime.

This is in part because Venezuela is an extremely strategic political and economic partner that presents opportunities for Russia to advance its long-term goals as a global superpower.

For Moscow, Venezuela presents not only an ideological foothold in the Western Hemisphere, but a source of massive crude reserves that can help Russia to advance its long-term goals in expanding throughout Latin America and the world as a major global energy supplier.

Under an opposition government, Russia's future in the country is not so secure. Venezuela's opposition coalition has continuously criticized the Russian government for its support to the Maduro regime.

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### **China**

While China too has been a critical political ally to the Maduro government, the Chinese government has different incentives in Venezuela and has generally been less outspoken than Russia in its support for Maduro.

However, as a permanent member of the UN Security Council, China has been firm in its stance against UN interference in Venezuela's crisis.

China has also provided the Maduro government with technological assistance and intelligence to implement systems to track and monitor citizen behavior.

In fact, Venezuela's *carnet de la patria*, a 'homeland card' connected to a database that tracks daily activities such as buying gasoline, food, and medicine, was inspired in part by China's own 'social credit' system.

The same Chinese telecom giant, ZTE Corp, that created China's system of social control was hired in 2018 to build what is now the *carnet de la patria*.

Since its conception, the *carnet de la patria* system has been heavily denounced by human rights activists as a system designed to control social and political behavior and deepen citizens' dependency on the regime.

The COVID crisis had a significant impact on politics both within Venezuela, where Maduro became more popular due to his swift response to the outbreak, and on Venezuela's relationship with China.

The Maduro government opened talks with China to seek financial support and humanitarian assistance amid the pandemic. China sent 6 shipments of medical supplies to support Maduro's COVID-19 response, and Chinese officials have openly spoken out against the U.S.'s decision to uphold sanctions on Venezuela amid a global health emergency.

Given the global and geopolitical changes of recent months, and an opposition coalition within Venezuela that is more divided and less popular than ever, China stands firmly behind the Maduro government.

However, the relationship between Venezuela and China is primarily an economic one, and is therefore subject to change depending on external factors.

While Russia's alliance with Venezuela is rooted deeply in ideology, China is believed to be primarily concerned with financial stability and the government's ability to repay its outstanding debts.

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## **Iran**

In April, President Biden wisely chose to revoke temporary sanctions relief against Venezuela's energy sector. But in the six months while sanctions were waived, Washington discovered that Nicolás Maduro's regime was allowing Iranian agents to use Venezuela as a staging ground to plan attacks on U.S. soil.

In February, the FBI issued an alert for an Iranian spy who had plotted assassinations against U.S. government officials and worked to gather intelligence on domestic targets.

The FBI noted that the Iranian intelligence operative “has ties to or may visit Iran and Venezuela,” and was recruiting individuals to kill current and former American officials as revenge for the U.S. killing Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) Quds Force Commander Qasem Soleimani, and for “surveillance activities focused on religious sites, businesses, and other facilities in the United States.”

The disturbing and dangerous ties between Iran and Venezuela aren't new. The Islamic Revolutionary Guard, a U.S.-designated Foreign Terrorist Organization, has become increasingly intertwined in Venezuela's security and intelligence apparatus since 2010, when Force operatives were already increasing their presence in the country under Hugo Chavez.

That year, Force members were reportedly transported to Venezuela on so-called “Aeroterror” flights, which also facilitated the transfer of explosives, weapons, Iranian intelligence operatives, and members of Hezbollah and Hamas between Caracas, Damascus and Tehran.

More recently, Iran's foreign minister offered an Islamic Revolutionary Guard unit to the Maduro regime to help maintain the legitimacy of the socialist dictator domestically, with the guard unit assisting Venezuela's National Guard to keep opposition at bay.

As Iran and Venezuela have further integrated their intelligence and espionage operations, so too have the regimes integrated their energy and financial assets, in defiance of U.S. sanctions.

Since 2008, the U.S. Treasury has identified Venezuela-based Banco Internacional de Desarrollo and the Iran-Venezuela Bi-National Bank as supplying financial services for Iran's Ministry of Defense and Armed Forces Logistics.

After the U.S. sanctioned Venezuela's state-run oil company Petroleos de Venezuela in 2019, the Maduro regime bypassed use of the U.S. dollar by shipping gold bars to Tehran as payment for Iran's ongoing assistance in restoring Venezuela's gas refineries.

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In his national address during the Cuban Missile Crisis, President John F. Kennedy called the Soviet Union's decision to position strategic weapons on America's doorstep "a deliberately provocative and unjustified change in the status quo which cannot be accepted by this country, if our courage and our commitments are ever to be trusted again by either friend or foe."

The principle that Kennedy put forward — that the foundation of the United States's credibility around the world is our ability to defend ourselves in our own hemisphere — is instructive.

Just as Cuba served Soviet interests during the Cold War by projecting power and ideology into the Americas, Venezuela now plays a similar role for Russia, Iran, and China, challenging U.S. supremacy and serving as a beachhead for operations that undermine or threaten our national security.

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I know that we have talked about this resource before, but our Five Major Dailies from ProQuest are perfect for keeping up with issues internationally and domestically. Each new issue of the *Chicago Tribune*, *Los Angeles Times*, *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, and the *Washington Post* is available by 7 am CST. Plus... Jim, as a professor, you know how valuable it is to find resources when writing papers for college or even high school. And for those of you who have taken classes, you know how frustrating it is to write a paper and find a newspaper article you want to use but find that you have reached the allotted number of free articles you can read. With ProQuest's five major dailies, you get the latest issues for free and search full-text articles from the 1980s to the present. All you need is your library card.

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Did you know that each of our CCLD library branches offers at least one book club a month?

The Camdenton Library has the Big Niangua Book Club that meets on the 4<sup>th</sup> Wednesday of each month at 12:30 pm, or for those like me who can get confused when you hear the 4<sup>th</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup>, whatever of the month, their next meeting is on Wednesday, September 25<sup>th</sup>. They will discuss Isis Crawford's book, "A Catered Tea Party."

Also, the Camdenton Library is starting two new book clubs in October, the first READiculous Teen Fiction is for teens 12 to 14 years old, and it begins on Friday, October 4, at 4 pm. They will meet on the first Friday of each month.

The second new book club, The Book Fest Club, begins on Wednesday, October 9, at 4 pm and is a fiction-based book club that will explore a wide range of storytelling tastes from comedies to fantasies to dramas, thrillers, historical fiction, and beyond. This is open to adults 19 and older.

The Climax Springs Library's book club, the Overbooked Book Club, meets on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Wednesday of the month at 2 pm. For their October 16<sup>th</sup> meeting, they invite participants to read monster books and ask that you interpret that as you will.

The 1<sup>st</sup> Reads Book Club meets on the first Wednesday of each month at 2 pm. Their next meeting happens on Wednesday, October 4<sup>th</sup>, and they will discuss Jodi Picoult's book, "A Spark of Light."

The Osage Beach Library's Hooked on Books Book Club meets on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Thursday of the month at 11:30 am. As a matter of fact, they meet today to discuss Amanda Cox's book, "He Should Have Told the Bees."

The Stoutland Library's Cookie Bookies Book Club meets on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Tuesday of the month at 6:15 pm.

The Page Turners Book Club at the Sunrise Beach Library meets on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Wednesday of each month at 1:30 pm. Their next meeting will be on October 16<sup>th</sup>, and they will discuss "Crow Mary" by Kathleen Grissom.

If you follow our Instagram and Facebook, we share what each book club reads for the month and when they meet.

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Jim, did you know that 30% of women globally experience violence in their lifetime? Even more shocking is how the World Health Organization worded it: 1 in 3 women. The Camdenton Library is offering a Women's Personal Safety Class with Doug Kratz on Monday, September 23, from 6 to 9 pm. Women will learn simple, yet highly effective safety tips to protect themselves and their loved ones safe, and avoid looking like an easy target. Registration is required for this event and can be done by calling the Camdenton Library at (573) 346 – 5954.

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Looking for more entertainment? How's your singing voice? 'Cause the Osage Beach Library is hosting a Karaoke Night at the Library on Wednesday, September 25, from 6:30 to 8:30 pm. Registration for this event is appreciated and can be done by calling (573) 348 – 3282.

### **Slide 17 & 18**

You know the spooky season is right around the corner, right? The Camdenton Library is running two contests to get your spooky on! Starting October 1<sup>st</sup>, you can pick up entry forms for the Pumpkin Decorating Contest and the Halloween Costume Contest.

For the pumpkin decorating contest, participants can decorate a real pumpkin, NO carving or puncturing please, with paint, markers, construction paper, fabric, etc. When you bring in your decorated pumpkin, please don't put your name on it; we will assign it a number. One prize will be awarded to each of the following age groups: Ages 4 – 6, Ages 7 – 11, Ages 12 – 18, and Adults 19+.

The second contest at the Camdenton Library is the Halloween Costume contest. Visit the Camdenton Library dressed in your Halloween costume, and we will take your picture. Please do not wear obscene or inappropriate costumes; library staff will determine if your costume is acceptable.

Both contests end on October 31<sup>st</sup>. Voting will be done by patrons who visit the library. Voting will run from November 1<sup>st</sup> through November 9<sup>th</sup>. Winners for both contests will be announced on November 12<sup>th</sup> on our social media pages.

## **Slide 19**

Are you bored? The Sunrise Beach Library invites you to join them every Saturday beginning October 5 for a fun morning, challenging friends, family, and other attendees to different board games. We will have games set up on the back table and will be ready for play from 10 am to 12 pm. Enjoy games like Scrabble, Yahtzee, Battleship, and more. Or bring your own to share!