

Latin America: 2024 Elections and Immigration News

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Migration trends suggest increasing intra-LATAM restrictions on business travel, while foreign investment and skilled worker movement from outside the region continues to grow.

Venezuela

BACKGROUND

Venezuela is a federal republic comprised of an executive branch in the form of a president, who is the head of government and chief of state serving a six-year term, along with a cabinet (Council of Ministers) appointed by the president. The legislative branch is a unicameral congress whose members serve five-year terms and a judicial branch that includes a 32-member Supreme Court that is elected by congress and hold 12-year terms. Venezuela was largely controlled by democratically elected governments until 1999, when Hugo Chavez implemented authoritarian control over the three branches of government until 2013. Authoritarian control was reinstated in 2018 by Nicolás Maduro when he claimed a second presidential term that was reported as a fraudulent election.

Maduro is a part of the Chavista regime (the United Socialist Party), a socialist-inspired political movement that has turned authoritarian. He ran against 10 presidential candidates, including Edmundo González, a former diplomat who is replacing the former opposition leader, María Corina Machado. Machado won the primary election held in October, but Venezuela's highest court later officially banned her from holding office based on fraud and corruption allegations she has denied. González is the opposition's surrogate candidate.

Maduro has consolidated political power in recent years and holds strong influence over the country's legislature, military and the national election council, as well as the justice system. Maduro sought another six-year term in the most consequential presidential election in over a decade.

OUTLOOK

On July 29, Venezuela's National Electoral Council (CNE) stated that Maduro had been reelected to a third term as president despite reported irregularities. The CNE stated Maduro won 51% of the vote and Edmundo González received 44%; however, they did not release the tallies from each polling location. González disputed the result and has claimed that Maduro lost the election by more than a

2-to-1 margin. Multiple Latin American leaders, including the opposition led by González, have refused to recognize Maduro's victory in the July 28 vote. The process was filled with allegations of foul play in an election where opposition figures were arrested and key leaders were banned from running. Speaking in Tokyo on July 29, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said that U.S. officials "have serious concerns that the result announced does not reflect the will or the votes of the Venezuelan people."

Since the election results have been released, criticism has mounted against Maduro involving deadly protests across the country. As a result of this growing domestic and international pressure, Maduro asked the country's Supreme Court to conduct an audit of the election on July 31.

Hundreds of thousands of Venezuelans have sought asylum in the United States in recent years, directly impacting the irregular migration at the U.S. border in what has become a top issue politically in the U.S. presidential election this fall. Maduro's presidency has presided over a complex political, social and economic crisis that has driven over 7 million people to migrate abroad, and western nations' economic sanctions on the Latin American nation have had a significant economic impact on Venezuela's oil industry and economy as a whole. Only time will tell the lasting and permanent impact the Venezuelan presidential election will have on the global political landscape and the immigration debate in 2024's most significant election — the U.S. presidential election in November.

LATEST IMMIGRATION NEWS

Ongoing protests in Venezuela are limiting access to government offices, delaying the processing of immigration-related applications filed in country. The Venezuelan government has ordered diplomatic personnel in Argentina, Chile, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Panama, Peru and Uruguay to return. Applications at consular posts are experiencing processing disruptions until further notice as well as flight disruptions.

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security [recently announced](#) the extension and redesignation of Venezuela for Temporary Protected Status. The redesignation allows Venezuelans to access temporary protection from removal and the opportunity to apply for employment authorization in the United States. In announcing the extension/redesignation, DHS Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas cited "extraordinary and temporary conditions in Venezuela that prevent individuals from safely returning" at this time.

Finally, as of last year more than 7 million people have left the country as a result of political and economic turmoil and have been displaced. The world's greatest displacement crisis has a direct impact on the U.S. and the November elections. U.S. immigration policymakers are currently debating an effective solution for the migration crisis at the U.S. border, as a Maduro third term could mean more migrants seeking asylum and a continued complex situation between the two nations with lasting effects throughout Latin and North America.

El Salvador

BACKGROUND

El Salvador's constitution instituted a democratic republic divided into three branches. The executive branch is headed by the president, who is elected by direct vote and remains in office for five years with no reelection but can be reelected after nonparticipation for one electoral period. The other two branches are the legislative branch, made up of the unicameral Legislative Assembly, and the

judiciary branch, which is headed by the Supreme Court composed of 15 judges.

General elections were held on Feb. 4 to elect the president and all 84 deputies of the Legislative Assembly. The current president is Nayib Bukele, who assumed power in June 2019. He defeated the two main political forces at that time in El Salvador's multiparty system that included the Nationalist Republican Alliance (ARENA) and the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN).

The results of the February 2021 legislative election two years later caused a major change in the politics of El Salvador and specifically the relationship between the president and the Legislative Assembly. The new allied party of Bukele, Nuevas Ideas (New Ideas), won the biggest congressional majority in the country's history at the time. Since then, Bukele has consolidated his power and disrupted the foundational checks on executive power, including replacing all the magistrates of the country's Constitutional Court and the attorney general. The Constitutional Chamber of the Supreme Court ruled in 2021 that Bukele was permitted to seek reelection despite constitutional concerns, and he announced in September 2023 that he planned to seek a second five-year term. Bukele is highly popular among Salvadoreans because of his harsh crackdown on street gangs, but he is considered controversial internationally.

OUTLOOK

Bukele garnered 83% of the vote in the Feb. 4 election, and he was sworn in for a second term on June 1. Bukele's recent victory should strengthen his perceived mandate and may lead to additional constitutional reforms in the future. According to his government, the administration has reduced migration 60% to the U.S. since he took office in 2019.

As the presidential campaign intensifies in the United States, the relationship between Latin American countries and the U.S. will become more important than ever. The U.S. has been leaning on the governments of Mexico and Central America to address the root causes of the irregular migration situation, and the outcome of several recent presidential elections in the region will have a tremendous impact the flow of migrants to the U.S. and, in turn, U.S. immigration policy in the future. The U.S. has had an uneasy relationship with the self-described "world's coolest dictator," and Bukele's relationship with the next U.S. president will have a direct impact on the global migration policies for decades to come.

LATEST IMMIGRATION NEWS

With nearly 1.4 million immigrants, El Salvador accounts for the second-largest Latin American group in the United States after Mexican nationals. U.S. immigration policies of the past three decades, as well as the Salvadorean government's efforts, have led to growing numbers of people leaving the country, with the majority traveling to the United States. In June 2024, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services [announced](#) that it was extending the validity of certain employment authorization documents for Temporary Protected Status beneficiaries from El Salvador. Washington's policy toward the Central American nation has changed in recent years, and concerns tied to immigration are a key issue in this year's U.S. presidential election.

There is a shortage of employment opportunities in El Salvador, and in 2023, the unemployed population grew to 161,400. The government recently launched a new Freedom Visa program for entrepreneurs and high-income individuals to relocate and be granted lifelong residence and Salvadorean citizenship. According to the government, the new program and the contributions made by investors will go toward economic development and social programs. Bukele is also initiating other

policies designed to promote relocation of highly skilled workers. In April 2024, he announced a new policy that would offer free passports to 5,000 “highly skilled scientists, engineers, doctors, artists and philosophers from abroad,” which would provide “full citizen status, including voting rights.” Other policies, such as adopting Bitcoin as a legal tender alongside the U.S. dollar and approving a migration law meant to expedite citizenship to foreigners who support social and economic development programs by donating Bitcoin, represent some of the significant immigration reform efforts under Bukele’s leadership.

Recent immigration news

Brazil has not yet recognized Maduro as the winner of Venezuela’s presidential election.

On Oct. 6, Brazilians will vote to elect officials for the 5,500 municipalities in a midterm test for left-wing President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva. Lula da Silva is governing for the third time after defeating former far-right President Jair Bolsonaro in the 2022 national elections.

In São Paulo, Brazil’s economic capital, Guilherme Boulos of the Socialism and Liberty Party (PSOL) MP hopes to unseat the current right-wing mayor, Ricardo Nunes, from the Brazilian Democratic Movement (MDB).

In the wake of recent events in Venezuela and El Salvador, the local elections in Brazil will be a test of democratic principles and a referendum on Lula da Silva and left-wing policies in South America.

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National Law Review, Volume XIV, Number 241

Source URL: <https://natlawreview.com/article/latin-america-2024-elections-and-immigration-news>