



By: TA | AP Insight

Venezuela's opposition leader Machado returns after months in exile



Opposition leader and Nobel laureate María Corina Machado reappeared in Venezuela Sunday for the first time since December, returning from exile at a time when doubts about the country's democratic future — and the role of the U.S. — are growing.

It was her first appearance since the U.S. military deposed the country's then-President **Nicolás Maduro**, replacing him with an interim president who has exceeded the time she was **authorized to serve**, with no election scheduled.

Machado announced her arrival on social media, writing, "I am here. With you."

Another leading figure in the Venezuelan opposition, Edmundo González, wrote on X confirming that Machado had arrived and that he would be next to her "very soon."

"Today is a very important day for Venezuelans. Our sovereign voice returns with her to lead and guide this process!" he wrote. "You know it, this is until the end."

Venezuela run by Maduro ally backed by the Trump administration

On Sunday afternoon, Machado strode into a church in the state of Lara, west of Caracas, to the applause of dozens gathered there as they shook her hand and hugged her, with cellphones aloft to record her return.

"María! María!" someone cried out, as another shouted, "Welcome to Venezuela!"

"Long live freedom, damn it!" a man yelled.

One woman wiped away tears and called it "a miracle" while another woman's hands flew to her face as she saw Machado enter the church.

Asked by reporters Sunday about Machado's return to Venezuela, U.S. President Donald Trump said, "I don't know anything about it, but I think she's a very nice woman. She gave

me her Nobel Prize. So how can I say anything else? And I hope she's safe. She's a very nice woman. But we're doing really well in Venezuela."

Machado and her allies have been demanding a date for a presidential election in Venezuela, but U.S. officials have emphasized economic stabilization first

Since Maduro's ouster, Venezuela has been run by acting President **Delcy Rodríguez**, a longtime Maduro ally who received the Trump administration's blessing to succeed him.

Rodríguez was initially supposed to serve only 90 days as acting president, but has **remained in office** and has made no move to call an election.

Machado was briefly detained in January 2025, following a protest against Maduro's planned swearing-in ceremony, and went into hiding in Venezuela for 11 months.

After making a clandestine escape from the country, she reappeared that December in Norway, where she was awarded the **Nobel Peace Prize** for her peaceful challenge to Maduro's authoritarian government.

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Credible evidence shows the opposition won the last election

In October 2023, Machado won an opposition primary and intended to challenge Maduro in the 2024 presidential election, but the government barred her from running for office.

González took her place on the ballot, and ample credible evidence showed that he defeated Maduro by more than a 2-to-1

margin.

But the National Electoral Council, which is stacked with ruling-party loyalists, declared Maduro the winner.

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The lead-up and aftermath of the election were marked by widespread government repression, including forced disappearances, torture and other human rights violations.

More than 2,000 people, including poll workers, were detained in the days after the vote.

In January, the U.S. military captured Maduro in Caracas and whisked him to New York to face drug-related charges, which he has denied.

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Machado has demanded a date for a presidential election

Machado had repeatedly vowed to return to Venezuela and, according to her party, she made seven unsuccessful attempts.

One of the efforts would have seen her take a charter boat, but the operator canceled the trip, alleging the vessel was unfit for navigation.

In another attempt, her team said, Machado tried to fly to the Caribbean island of Curacao, from where she could take a speedboat to Venezuela, but her plane was denied landing permits.



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Others have also questioned whether the Trump administration has also been involved in the efforts to stop her from returning.

Trump administration officials deny they are holding Machado back but have said that, on some occasions, they have advised her against returning due to safety concerns.

After Maduro was deposed, Venezuela's highest court said Rodríguez could serve as acting president for up to 90 days — an interim appointment that could be extended by the National Assembly for an additional 90 days. But the ruling party-controlled assembly never voted to extend her term.

Machado and her allies have demanded that the Rodríguez government set a date for a presidential election.

Rodríguez told the U.N. General Assembly in September that Venezuelans will determine the "right moment" for the next election.

U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio has argued that before holding new elections, Venezuela must stabilize its economy and rebuild its institutions, including its courts and electoral council.

But he said in a news conference earlier this month that Machado has "every right to enter

her country whenever she wants to return.”

Supporters of Machado have held demonstrations in Caracas demanding her return.