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02.09.2016

Venezuelans stage mass protest demanding recall to oust president

Protesters want a recall referendum to oust President Maduro, and they want it before a key date in January. If Maduro loses a recall vote before January 10, there will be a snap election.

Venezuela's political opposition says Thursday's mass demonstration - dubbed the "taking of Caracas" - against President Nicolas Maduro brought one million people into the streets demanding political change.

They vowed to keep up the pressure until Maduro is ousted.

"It's going to fall, it's going to fall, the government is going to fall," chanted the protesters as many of them carried Venezuelan flags.

Opposition leaders Jesus Torrealba, of the Democratic Unity Roundtable said it was the "biggest rally in recent decades" with "between 950,000 and 1.1 million people" taking part.

"This is a historic march," he said. "Today begins a definitive stage in this struggle."

Dozens of city blocks were choked with people angry about growing food shortages and an inflation rate that is expected to top 700 percent this year.



The alternative website El Diario de Caracas said more than a million people had taken part, posting an impressive visual image of the demonstration to boot.

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One tweeter posted a picture of the demo from above, with the words "Nothing can divide us."



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Tensions had mounted before the protest as Maduro's government threw well known activists in jail, deployed forces around the city and warned of potential bloodshed. One small group of protesters, reportedly wearing masks, pelted riot police with rocks, and police responded with tear gas and several arrests.

Maduro's counter protest

Maduro led a comparatively small counter rally of hard-core supporters, many of them state workers. The number of participants was estimated at fewer than 30,000.

Maduro claimed he and his supporters had prevented a coup from taking place

He told them that political opponents, armed with plastic explosives, were plotting a coup, like the one that briefly toppled his late predecessor Hugo Chavez in 2002.

"Today we've defeated a coup attempt that sought to fill Venezuela and Caracas with violence and death,"



Maduro told his supporters, without substantiating the claim. "We're still looking for several criminals that paid to massacre the people."

Political analyst Dimitris Pantoulas said Maduro's "warlike" language appears to have energized opponents who might otherwise have been standing in long lines for food.

"The government made a big mistake by throwing fuel onto the flames," Pantoulas said from Caracas. Demonstrations of solidarity with the anti-Maduro marchers took place in other cities, including New York.



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The opposition announced plans for two more nationwide protests - one at electoral offices on September 7, and another one on "national mobilization day," on September 14. They are pushing for a recall vote of

Maduro, and they want it before January 10, to ensure a snap election if Maduro loses. Were Maduro to lose a referendum after January 10, he would be allowed to appoint his own successor.

[Several foreign journalists were denied entry into Venezuela ahead of the rally.](#)

Anti-government protests in 2014 led to 40 people being killed, but those rallies never brought such large crowds into the streets.

"We either come out to march or we will die of hunger," said one demonstrator, Ana Gonzalez, 53. "We are no longer afraid of the government."

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