

Macedonia del Norte: Irony in the Face of Oppression

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In a global context where democracy faces significant challenges, a young Venezuelan migrant has found an ironic way to promote digital activism on the platform macedoniadelnorte.com. Through technology, he seeks to defend human rights in Venezuela, transforming satire into a tool for awareness and citizen participation.

When the Venezuelan dictatorship attempted to justify its electoral defeat by blaming an alleged hacking operation from North Macedonia, Giuseppe Gangi,¹ a Venezuelan programmer based in Spain, decided to transform that excuse into a symbol of resistance and citizen action. Using his skills, he enhanced the tool created by the Comando Con Venezuela, adding features that strengthened the data presented to promote greater transparency. His platform enabled Venezuelans from anywhere in the world to verify voting records, view precise results, and consolidate evidence of irregularities. In this way, North Macedonia ceased to be just a country and became a tool for citizen empowerment,

¹ This interview was conducted on December 20, 2024 and updated on January 7, 2025, so it compiles the data available up to that date.

challenging the official narrative and demonstrating that technology can be a powerful weapon in the service of democracy.

This project has mobilized thousands of people both inside and outside Venezuela, from those who collected voting records and evidence to those who provided technical support or massively disseminated the information. For Giuseppe, macedoniadelnorte.com represents hope, collective action, and proof that, even far from home, it is possible to make a difference and contribute to change.

–Tell me a little about yourself. Who are you, and what do you do?

I am a programmer specializing in software development. I have been living abroad for nearly nine years. Initially, I spent six years in Germany working for tech companies, and now I have been living in Spain for three years. I have always been deeply concerned about Venezuela. I feel a strong sense of helplessness about what our country is going through and have constantly sought ways to help and overcome that frustration. Throughout my career, I have worked on software projects aimed not only at being practical but also at making a positive impact on society.

–North Macedonia is a relatively unknown country. On July 28, it became significant for Venezuela for reasons that seem straight out of a fiction book. However, North Macedonia is now something else entirely for you and for Venezuela. Tell

us what it is, how it came to be, and what inspired you to create this project.

Indeed, North Macedonia is a country, but after July 28, it took on a whole new meaning for me, and hopefully for Venezuelans as well. That day marked the presidential elections. The day proceeded relatively normally until the polling stations closed, when many centers began reporting irregularities. That's when we realized something wasn't right. Once the polling stations close, vote counting, citizen verification, and result transmission begin. At a certain point, witnesses designated by the MUD reported being denied entry to the central tallying room at the CNE, and that the transmission of results had been interrupted. As hours passed, at 12:08 a.m., Elvis Amoroso, the principal rector of the National Electoral Council, gave a press conference announcing a supposed cyberattack on the CNE's transmission systems and presenting preliminary results showing Maduro as the winner. In the following hours, María Corina Machado, Edmundo González, and the parties of the MUD rejected this announcement, leading to what I consider the most significant demonstration of citizen organization in recent years in Venezuela. We'll discuss that in more detail later, but first, let me explain why the project is called *Macedonia del Norte*.

On July 29, Attorney General Tarek William Saab declared in a press conference that the attack on the CNE servers originated from North Macedonia, and that was why the CNE could not provide the disaggregated results. However, this hacking or attack never actually took place. Many experts in information technology have issued reports refuting these claims. In fact, the North Macedonian government itself released a statement rejecting the accusations.

Venezuelans love to joke around by nature and often use humor as a form of protest. This time was no exception. We took these statements as rather unserious, and I decided to use that name to call my website.

Continuing the timeline, at 6:00 p.m. on July 29, the opposition rejected the bulletin and published a plan that had been months in the making: a website where scanned voting records generated by the machines at the closure of the voting tables are published. These records contain the total number of votes cast at each table and the results by candidate. Additionally, these records feature a unique QR code, making them singular and irreplaceable. If there is one thing the Chavismo has been correct about, it is that Venezuela's automated voting system is highly secure and transparent from a technical standpoint.

For the first time, the opposition was prepared for a scenario like this and devised a plan to counter it. To this day, the witnesses managed to collect, store, and send voting records that account for 85% of the votes cast. The opposition successfully published them on a website in record time: by 6:00 p.m. on July 29, just 24 hours after the voting tables closed, there was a website where you could look up how your table had turned out and the total results of the election. These records were gradually uploaded in the following days, but the structure and records were already in place; it was just a heavy and labor-intensive task. It's incredible to think that results were visible to all, with scanned records and a search function by ID number.

However, the high volume of people trying to access the site caused it to crash. That's when I saw the opportunity to contribute. I am a Venezuelan migrant, and of course, sleep hours were few

during those days. The anxiety and frustration of not being able to contribute were overwhelming, but I came up with the idea of using my programming skills to support this citizen verification effort that the *Comando Con Venezuela* was undertaking.

The first thing I did was create a mirror of what they already had, essentially a copy of the existing site. This was for two reasons: first, to help divide the traffic that the main site was receiving, and second, to back up the site in case it somehow disappeared and the voting records were lost.

As the hours passed, because everything was happening on the go, I wanted to add more features, like showing both the disaggregated and total results. In other words, people could check the records for each available polling center, but I also wanted them to see how the results were progressing by municipality, state, and nationally, using the vote counts from the scanned records. Additionally, I wanted to include the other candidates' vote counts to give greater transparency and provide more detailed information.

Today, the website also includes videos from some polling stations where witnesses or poll workers read the results and posted them on social media in real time. This represents a third step in the transparency and citizen verification process that we've been building. Now, *macedoniadelnorte.com* is the result of the contributions of thousands of people worldwide who have not only provided records but also shared videos, photos of citizen verification boards, and other audiovisual elements.

–As a software developer and digital activist, you know that 21st-century dictatorships have used technology for political and social control. Countries like China are constantly developing new surveillance mechanisms for domestic use and to export to allied nations. Because of this, there is a perception that technology can be harmful to democracy. However, there are other ways to use technology to strengthen democracy or promote civic engagement. This project is a prime example. What does a project like this mean for democracy in Venezuela and the world?

I believe that the main thing is to use technology to motivate people to participate and demonstrate that their voices can be heard. María Corina Machado referred to all of this as an example of what citizens should do after an election. It's not just about voting; it's about voting, seeing how far your vote goes, and making it count.

While dictatorships use it for surveillance and control, we can use digital tools to connect, inform, and mobilize people. For Venezuela, it means giving people back the ability to participate in the search for freedom. It's a way to show that even though technology has been used to oppress, it can also be used to liberate.

Not only macedoniadelnorte.com, but technology, in general, can also be a space to bring citizens together and create a kind of oversight of what happens in each of our countries, making the most of it to support democracy.

–In this same line, what do you think is the biggest challenge for civil society and democracy when it comes to the use of technological tools?

I believe the biggest challenge is misinformation. Combating fake news is becoming increasingly difficult. Too many technological tools can be used to distort the truth, like creating fake videos with artificial intelligence. It's becoming harder and harder to find the truth amid so much information, but at the same time, I think the antidote is citizen organization. Bringing people together and engaging in debate, returning to human interaction, which allows us to discern what is true and what is false.

I believe this is also a lesson that Venezuelan society has been learning. More and more people see a headline and are motivated to search for another source because they are not convinced. Political leaders and civil organizations must emphasize this point to the people.

–How do you see the future of digital activism in the coming years? What would you like to see in the near future in the technological field and its relationship with politics?

I would like to see more technological tools that unite ordinary people and have no objective other than supporting democracy, without trying to gain political advantage. I would like to see tools that seek ways to gather and spread more truthful information, allowing each person to form their own opinion on what is happening. I believe digital activism should move in that direction: spreading the truth, backing it up with evidence, and creating spaces for debate among citizens.

–What has moved you the most throughout this process?

What has moved and motivated me the most is knowing how connected Venezuelans are to their country and their longing for freedom and democracy, even those who have lived abroad for many years. I feel there is a citizen reconnection in the fight against injustice.

It has deeply moved me to see people, including myself, crying for Venezuela but also wiping away our tears and saying, “I will see how I can contribute because my desire for a better country is greater.”

Since day one, I have received hundreds of messages from Venezuelans saying, “Hey, I do this. How can it help you?” “How can I support the country if I do such and such?” These messages range from high-level technological contributions to coffee producers in Venezuela offering to send me a pack of coffee. I think that connection and intention to support are truly moving.

–Lastly, I want to ask you something personal, as a Venezuelan migrant. What does *macedoniadelnorte.com* mean to you?

For me, *macedoniadelnorte.com* symbolizes hope and connection. It is a reminder that, even though we are far from home, we can always do something for our country and our people. This project is my way of contributing from a distance and keeping the fight for democracy alive. It represents a bridge between the dreams of change and the concrete actions we can take to achieve it.

The great lesson of the last few months is that it doesn't matter how small you think the impact of your actions will be. If you can already help a few people improve something, perhaps their vision of what is happening, that is already more than enough, and it's better to do a little than to do nothing.

–How can our readers contribute to your efforts?

There are many ways to show support. The first and most important is to spread the word about macedoniadelnorte.com. By sharing, you not only reach more people and keep them informed, but you also enable feedback. For instance, thanks to the massive dissemination in recent months, we've continued to gather records and videos that strengthen the information we've published. As a result, nearly six months after the election, we're still updating and adding new material.

Another way to support is by contributing through <https://buymeacoffee.com/giuseppe.gangi>. The donations made there help cover infrastructure costs, such as server fees and website maintenance.