

Election Campaign in Venezuela: Chavez Opposition Disintegrating

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Global Research, September 29, 2012

Region: [Latin America & Caribbean](#)

On October 7, voters get to choose Venezuela's next president. It's all over but the cheers, postmortems, and perhaps opposition planned disruptions.

Chavez remains overwhelmingly popular for good reason. He's a shoe in for reelection.

In modern times, no previous Venezuelan leader included popular interests on his agenda. Chavez prioritizes them. Why give up a good thing! Why return to the bad old days!

Vital social benefits include universal free healthcare and education, affordable housing, subsidized food, land reform, indigenous rights, and much more.

Gasoline for a Chevrolet Suburban's 39-gallon tank costs \$3.51. In Norway, it's \$394.68. Why indeed sacrifice beneficial changes.

[Polls](#) show what looks like a sure thing. In mid-September, 11 had Chavez ahead by 13 – 28%. Throughout the campaign, they've been relatively unchanged. One or two right wing ones faked it. They claim a close race.

With tongue in cheek perhaps, the Washington Post days earlier said although most polls show Chavez ahead, "one survey last month put the two candidates roughly even."

The Post omitted explaining how great a lead Chavez has. Instead it claimed opposition candidate Henrique Capriles Radonski promises to fight crime, create jobs, and provide better electricity and water services.

He'll also end years of vital social change. He wants wealth and power interests running Venezuela. He wants ordinary people on their own sink or swim.

Expect Venezuelans to resoundingly reject him for good reason. He a corporate scoundrel they want no part of.

Earlier, The New York Times said Chavez replaced Fidel Castro as Washington's main Latin American bete noire. He's the leading regional opponent of US policies.

The Times rarely misses a chance to vilify him. It shouldn't surprise for a broadsheet totally supportive of America's worst policies.

On September 13, the [Venezuela Solidarity Campaign](#) (VSC) headlined "One month before Venezuela's Presidential election, polls show huge leads for Hugo Chavez," saying:

At this time, he looks unbeatable. Capriles is way behind. "There is little evidence to support

the claims by the opposition that ‘undecided voters’ could still determine the situation.”

Capriles’ spin about polls shifting his way doesn’t wash. According to VSC:

“Comparing those pollsters that undertook polls published in both July and August, there is no uniform pattern of the lead narrowing.”

“More importantly, even where there has been a slight narrowing – which on average was by just 1% – this is insignificant given Hugo Chávez’s huge lead.”

VSC’s Lee Brown added:

“Hugo Chávez clearly has a convincing lead according to the overwhelming majority of pollsters.”

“The evidence from looking at the full range of polls, rather than cherry picking, does not back up the claims of the campaign of Henrique Capriles Radonski that the race is close or that Capriles is ahead.”

“Nor is there any evidence that Capriles is making any real inroads into Chávez’s lead as they’ve also claimed.”

“Hopefully these statements from the right-wing opposition are just the kind of things that get said in the cut and thrust of a campaign.”

“But the bigger worry is that it’s part of an orchestrated claim by the opposition to give the impression of an impending victory and then to claim fraud on 7 October should they lose, as the polls suggest is very likely.”

An earlier article highlighted the possibility. In late August, Chavez warned about opposition forces planning to declare victory before electoral results are announced. They’ll say they won, reject official National Electoral Council (CNE) results, and claim fraud.

Perhaps violence and other destabilizing disruptions will follow. They’re capable of anything, said Chavez. He’s seen plenty since taking office in February 1999. He stayed there because Venezuelans want him.

Each time he ran he won impressively. It’s no surprise. On October 7, he’ll do it again for another six-year term. Expect dark opposition forces to cry foul. It never washed before and won’t now.

Venezuela’s elections are closely monitored. Independent observers agree. The process is open, free and fair.

The Carter Center monitored earlier elections. On September 24, its web site [headlined](#) “Carter Center Conducts Study Mission to Venezuela Elections,” saying:

It’s “conducting an independent study mission to follow the campaign, with political and electoral analysts interviewing political actors and technical experts on the ground.”

Post-election, a report will follow. It’ll discuss “Venezuelan perceptions of the electoral process and the results.”

This year it won't send technical experts to assess the automated voting system. It said:

"The most important role in monitoring any electoral process belongs to the national citizens, including the political parties, national observer organizations, and the voters themselves."

"Voters can participate in the verification of the electronic vote counts on election night when the paper receipts are counted, national observer groups are organizing to monitor election day, and the political campaigns are expected to field party witnesses in each voting site."

"Local universities and NGOs are monitoring campaign conditions and media access during the campaign. The Carter Center will use all of this information, in addition to interviews, in its report."

Since 1998, it observed four Venezuelan elections and referenda. All were open, free and fair.

On September 22, [Venezuela Analysis](#) headlined Former US President Carter: Venezuelan Electoral System 'Best in the World,' saying:

At an annual Carter Center event, he said:

"As a matter of fact, of the 92 elections that we've monitored, I would say the election process in Venezuela is the best in the world."

He added that America's is "one of the worst....because of the excessive influx of money."

True enough, but he left unexplained the full extent of a corrupted, dysfunctional, farcical system. It has no credibility whatever. No wonder half the electorate opts out. Why bother when corporate run machines vote. People have no say. Money power decides results, not voters.

Venezuelans get the real thing. Their franchise is respected. Before Chavez took office, less than half of Venezuelans were registered to vote. They couldn't participate in choosing officials.

Chavez promised change. He focused on voter access and rights. He eliminated earlier electoral fraud. In 2003, he initiated Mision Itentidad (Mission Identity).

It implemented Article 56 of Venezuela's Bolivarian Constitution, stating:

"All persons have the right to be registered free of charge with the Civil Registry Office after birth, and to obtain public documents constituting evidence of the biological identity, in accordance with law."

The mission constituted a combined mass citizenship/voter registration drive. Millions of Venezuelans got national ID cards. They assured their right to vote. Over five million Venezuelans were enfranchised for the first time.

They included qualified immigrants and indigenous people. They never had voting rights before. They and other Venezuelans take full advantage. On October 7, expect turnout to be

high. Venezuela's democracy shames America's fraudulent process.

Reports suggest Chavez's opposition is in disarray. In mid-September, a video showed top Capriles aid [Juan Carlos Caldera](#) accepting a 40,000 bolivars (\$9,300) bribe. It was given to arrange a meeting between Capriles and an unknown businessman.

"We want it to be a monthly affair," said Caldera. Access has a price. It works the same way in America. You have to pay plenty to play.

In response, Caldera was sacked. He's a parliamentary deputy for Capriles' First Justice (PJ) party. He was also his Roundtable of Democratic Unity (MUD) coalition representative to Venezuela's National Electoral Council (CNE).

Plans are for a National Assembly investigation to follow. United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV) legislator Julio Chavez called the video "overwhelming proof that compromises the acts of some leaders of the Venezuelan opposition."

He accused Caldera of "bribery." He said he may have broken Venezuela's law on political parties and another on organized crime. He suggested perhaps the money was intended to destabilize pre and/or post-electoral activities.

On September 17, [VCS](#) headlined "Four opposition parties withdraw from right-wing coalition," saying:

They include Vota Piedra, Cambio Pana, Unidad Democratica, and Mano pro Venezuela. They withdrew from MUD. Ballots will exclude them.

Vota Piedra representative Leonard Chirinos said secret privatization plans led to the decision and much more. MUD's document calls for deregulation, mass privatizations, and slashing or eliminating social services.

David de Lima was the first opposition figure to go public. He said MUD is "falling to pieces." He predicted "more declarations. This is the start of a series of statements that there'll be in the country against....Capriles."

On September 18, opposition candidate Yoel Acosta Chirinos withdrew. He declared support for Chavez. Another, Hermann Escarra, publicly called MUD's government plan "unconstitutional."

He's the third opposition figure to denounce it. [William Ojeda](#) did earlier. He criticized MUD's "hidden agenda." His political party, Un Nuevo Tiempo, expelled him.

He said "Democrats in Venezuela don't accept hidden agendas...or neoliberal obsessions." He called failure to recognize social policies Chavez instituted "an act of blindness....No neoliberal policy on anyone's agenda will (work) because the people don't accept" it.

[Escarra](#) accused MUD of "attack(ing) the constitution in a very serious way....It's the gravest thing I've ever read." It's "savage capitalism."

It wants public pensions abolished, Venezuela's state oil company, PDVSA, privatized, and other measures violating constitutional provisions.

"If this (plan) were to happen," he added, "we'd have to go out into the street. We can't allow such a huge step backwards."

Escarra helped write Venezuela's Bolivarian Constitution. At the same time, he's been an opposition spokesman. He'll now maintain ties as an independent.

A Final Comment

Days ahead of October 7, Bolivarianism looks sure to win. Imagine if America and EU countries prioritized its principles. Instead of neoliberal austerity-caused hard times, prosperity might be just around the corner or perhaps firmly established.

Socially beneficial policies help everyone. No one's excluded. Just societies do things that way. Neoliberal ones leave most people on their own out of luck. Record high misery index readings show America's dire state. It also reveals bipartisan indifference.

Bolivarianism is mirror opposite. On October 7, expect Venezuelans to extend its mandate overwhelmingly for another six years. They can't imagine another way for good reason.

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