

Trudeau Government Seeking to Oust Venezuela's President Nicolas Maduro

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Alongside Washington and Venezuela's elite, the Trudeau government is seeking to oust President Nicolás Maduro. While Ottawa's campaign has recently grown, official Canada has long opposed the pro-poor, pro-working class Bolivarian Revolution, which has won [19 of 21](#) elections since 1998.

Following a similar [move](#) by the Trump Administration, Global Affairs Canada sanctioned 40 Venezuelans on Friday. In a move that [probably violates](#) the UN charter, the elected president, vice president and 38 other officials had their assets in Canada frozen and Canadians are barred from having financial relations with these individuals.

In recent months foreign minister Chrystia Freeland has repeatedly criticized Maduro's government. She accused Caracas of "[dictatorial intentions](#)", imprisoning political opponents and "[robbing](#) the Venezuelan people of their fundamental democratic rights". Since taking office the Liberals have supported efforts to [condemn](#) the Maduro government at the Organization of American States (OAS) and promoted an international mediation designed to weaken Venezuela's leftist government (all the while staying mum about Brazil's imposed president who has a [5% approval](#) rating and [far worse](#) human rights violations in Mexico).

Beyond these public interventions designed to stoke internal unrest, Ottawa has directly aided an often-unsavoury Venezuelan opposition. A specialist in social media and political transition, outgoing Canadian ambassador Ben Rowswell told the *Ottawa Citizen* in August:

"[We established](#) quite a significant internet presence inside Venezuela, so that we could then engage tens of thousands of Venezuelan citizens in a conversation on human rights. We became one of the most vocal embassies in speaking out on human rights issues and encouraging Venezuelans to speak out."

(Can you imagine the hue and cry if a Russian ambassador said something similar about Canada?) Rowswell added that Canada would continue to support the domestic opposition after his departure from Caracas since "Freeland has Venezuela way at the top of her priority list."

While not forthcoming with information about the groups they support in Venezuela, Ottawa has long funnelled money to the US-backed opposition. In 2010 the foremost researcher on U.S. funding to the opposition, Eva Golinger, claimed Canadian groups were playing a growing role in Venezuela and according to a 2010 report from Spanish NGO Fríde, "[Canada](#)

is the third most important provider of democracy assistance” to Venezuela after the US and Spain. In “[The Revolution](#) Will Not Be Destabilized: Ottawa’s democracy promoters target Venezuela” Anthony Fenton details Canadian funding to anti-government groups. Among other examples, he cites a \$94,580 grant to opposition NGO *Asociación Civil Consorcio Desarrollo y Justicia* in 2007 and \$22,000 to *Súmate* in 2005. *Súmate* leader Maria Corina Machado, who Foreign Affairs [invited](#) to Ottawa in January 2005, backed the “[Carmona Decree](#)” during the 2002 coup against President Hugo Chavez, which dissolved the National Assembly and Supreme Court and suspended the elected government, Attorney General, Comptroller General, governors as well as mayors elected during Chavez’s administration. (Machado remains a leading figure in the opposition.)

Most Latin American leaders condemned the short-lived coup against Chavez, but Canadian diplomats were silent. It was particularly hypocritical of Ottawa to accept Chavez’s ouster since a year earlier, during the Summit of the Americas in Québec City, Jean Chrétien’s Liberals made a big show of the OAS’ new “[democracy clause](#)” that was supposed to commit the hemisphere to electoral democracy.

For its part, the Harper government repeatedly criticized Chavez. In April 2009 Prime Minister Stephen Harper responded to a question regarding Venezuela by saying,

“[I don’t take](#) any of these rogue states lightly”.

After meeting only with opposition figures during a trip to Venezuela the next year Peter Kent, minister of state for the Americas, said:

“[Democratic space](#) within Venezuela has been shrinking and in this election year, Canada is very concerned about the rights of all Venezuelans to participate in the democratic process.”

The Bolivarian Revolution has faced a decade and a half of Liberal and Conservative hostility. While the NDP has sometimes challenged the government’s Venezuelan policy, the party’s current foreign critic has echoed Washington’s position. On at least two occasions Hélène Laverdière has demanded Ottawa do more to undermine the Maduro government. In a June 2016 [press release](#) Laverdière bemoaned “the erosion of democracy” and the need for Ottawa to “defend democracy in Venezuela” while in August the former Foreign Affairs employee told CBC

“[we would](#) like to see the (Canadian) government be more active in ... calling for the release of political prisoners, the holding of elections and respecting the National Assembly.”

Conversely, Laverdière stayed mum when Donald Trump [threatened to invade](#) Venezuela last month and she has yet to criticize the recently announced Canadian sanctions.

NDP members should be appalled at their foreign critic’s position. For Canadians more generally it’s time to challenge our government’s bid to undermine what has been an essentially democratic effort to empower Venezuela’s poor and working class.

Yves Engler is the author of [A Propaganda System: How Canada’s Government](#).

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