

Venezuela: Electoral Warfare by the Book

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To understand what has been going on in Venezuela over the past few weeks, you have to realize two things: one, that the presidential elections there took place in the “backyard” of the U.S. and two, that the country is following a “leftist course”.

All countries in the region that have followed such a leftist course in the past twenty years have been confronted with attempts at destabilization and regime change, ranging from military coups, lawfare, institutional coups to attempted color revolutions. For an overview of these, see the annex, below the article.

Hybrid War

Venezuela is no exception to this rule, on the contrary. As a leader in the development of a multipolar world in which the West can no longer assert its superiority, Venezuela is the most targeted country in the region. Since Chávez was elected president in 1999, the empire has pulled out all the stops in efforts to sabotage this leftist experiment.

These efforts include two coups, an assassination attempt on the president, military provocation through development aid, murderous street blockades, a lockout by oil bosses, diplomatic isolation, hoarding of essential goods to create scarcity, heavy economic sanctions, freezing of foreign assets and making financial transactions impossible.

When we think of war, we immediately think of bombs and missiles. In Venezuela, those are not deployed; war is waged in a different way. The aggressions against the country listed above are all examples of what is called hybrid warfare. Each of those tried strategies was planned or financed from the US.

The events of the past few weeks in Venezuela before, during and after the presidential elections fit perfectly into that picture and can be described as electoral warfare.

Carefully Crafted Script

Nothing that happened before, during and after the elections was a coincidence or came out of the blue. Everything was well thought out. In fact, what was about to happen was announced in advance by the far-right opposition.

A few weeks before the election, the US supported “far-right” opposition candidate Edmundo González, announced that he would not accept the results if he lost. In the past, this led to riots and the infamous roadblocks (guarimbas) in Venezuela. It was written in the stars that this would happen again now.

The far-right opposition’s maneuvers followed a [carefully crafted script](#). The most important elements of it were even [published](#) in advance by Mark Feierstein, an expert in

psychological warfare and disinformation. This man was also a [key figure](#) in the dirty war against Nicaragua in the 1980s and in the coup against President Fernando Lugo in Paraguay.

We list the most important elements of his script.

1. Use economic sanctions in a clever way. According to Feierstein, the devastating economic sanctions must be used as leverage in forcing the left-wing government to make concessions. In addition, the sanctions are an excellent tool for electoral blackmail: vote left and the sanctions are continued; vote right, they will be abolished. It is a strategy that was successfully applied in the 1990 elections in Nicaragua.

In any case, the sanctions have had a devastating effect on the economy and living conditions. They have exhausted Venezuelans and a part of the population expects and hopes that Washington will stop its economic strangulation if Maduro is no longer president.

2. Unite the opposition under US impetus. In the past, the opposition was deeply divided, and for that reason it had little chance against Maduro and before that against Chávez. This time, Washington had done everything it could to unite the opposition. With reasonable success.

Washington's influence is undeniable. The actual opponent was Maria Corina Machado who had been personally received by President Bush Jr. at the White House in the past. Two days after the elections there was [a meeting](#) between the far-right opposition and a top advisor to Biden to map out the strategy for the near future.

3. Infiltrate and pressurize the National Electoral Council. The National Electoral Council, which organizes the elections (CNE) and is responsible for the results, is an independent body that does not depend on the government, but on parliament. Feierstein suggests infiltrating it and also calls on countries in the region to put pressure on the CNE.

4. The opposition must come up with its own results before the electoral council announces the official results. In point 8 we describe how manipulated polls and false exit polls were intended to impress upon Venezuelans and the outside world in advance that the opposition would win anyway and that the official results would be the result of fraud if Maduro won.

Without explicitly stating this, Feierstein indicates that it is best to confirm these polls and exit polls by means of so-called 'own counts' carried out by the opposition. That gives them an almost official character.

For this to happen, it was necessary to delay the official results. That was the result of a massive cyber-attack (point 9). In addition, it would be urgently necessary to publish the "own" results This required a website of one's own (point 10).

5. Appeal to countries in the region. Feierstein is well aware that the US is not the most suitable player for influencing the army and the National Electoral Council - the two crucial players in the election. In Venezuela some of the right-wing elements think direct interference by Washington something delicate and it would not be beneficial elsewhere in the world either.

Therefore, it is better to involve countries from the region. This strategy has only been

partially successful. A number of Latin American countries that [align themselves with US foreign policy](#) have not recognized the official results.

However, important countries such as Brazil, Mexico and Colombia have indicated that they will recognize Maduro's victory if it is confirmed by the competent authorities of the country. These countries also oppose US interference in these elections.

6. In case there are riots, put pressure on the military. It is hardly possible for an official like Feierstein to openly incite riots, but a dog whistle conveys the message just as clearly. Feierstein implicitly indicates that there will be (or should be) riots if Maduro wins. The US has a long tradition and is experienced in organizing such riots.

He does realize that there is great loyalty among the armed forces toward the leftist government. But he still hopes to convince a part of the army, especially conscripts and lower-ranking officers, to side with the rioters.

Mauricio Macri, the right-wing ex-president of Argentina, has shown himself willing to collude with the US for this part of the script. Before the official results were known, he called on the armed forces in a tweet to turn against President Maduro. A former head of a foreign state calling on the army to rebel against a president, that is very far-reaching.

La mayoría de los venezolanos hablaron fuerte y claro: Maduro debe dejar el poder. Ahora las Fuerzas Armadas de Venezuela tienen la oportunidad de ponerse del lado correcto de la historia y garantizar que se respete la voluntad del pueblo.

Llamamos a la comunidad internacional,...

— Mauricio Macri (@mauriciomacri) [July 29, 2024](#)

Additional Elements

Feierstein's script leaves little to the imagination. But there are a number of elements missing because it is difficult to put everything on the table in such an open on-line document. The missing elements are the following:

7. Media war against the Bolivarian project and Maduro. The media in Venezuela are still largely in the hands of powerful capital groups that are aligned with the US and are virulently against the leftist government. Both in the domestic and foreign press, a real smear campaign has been waged against the Bolivarian project for years. They remain coyly silent about the crushing economic sanctions while blaming the government of Venezuela for the economic problems.

Although Maduro managed to keep his country going in extremely difficult circumstances, he is portrayed as incompetent, corrupt, a drug trafficker, and even a little crazy. Such a context of cognitive warfare is anything but favorable to go to the elections.

8. Manipulated polls and exit polls. In the run-up to the elections, polls were [used as a weapon](#). The polls conducted by the US (Datanálisis, Delphos, Consultores 21 and ORC Consultores) presented a story that opposition candidate Edmundo Gonzalez had a 20 to 30 percentage point lead over Maduro.

These polls were eagerly taken up by the mainstream media, including ours. Thanks to these polls, Venezuelans and world citizens were [already convinced](#) that Maduro could not win unless he committed fraud.

These so-called polling agencies are often nothing more than camouflaged [ideological war machines](#), investing fortunes to manipulate people's minds. [Links with the CIA](#) or its front organizations are never far away.

In contrast, the Western media kept silent on polls by Hinterlaces, Paramétrica and Ámbito, which gave Maduro an edge over opposing candidate González. This strategy is not new. Even when Hugo Chávez was very popular, polling firms 'predicted' that he [would lose](#) the elections.

Same tactics in the exit polls. The prestigious [Hinterlaces](#) gave Maduro 54.6 percent and González 42.8 percent at noon, very close to the official result. The CIA-linked [Edison Research](#) gave González 65 percent and Maduro 31 percent.

☐ Elecciones Presidenciales 28 de Julio ☐☐

HINTERLACES
EXIT POLL / 12:00 mediodía

☐ Participación proyectada: 61,5%

☐ Nicolás Maduro: 54,57%
☐ Edmundo González: 42,82%
◦ Otros: 2,61% pic.twitter.com/PEtFijomsD

— Hinterlaces (@Hinterlaces) [July 28, 2024](#)

This scenario bears many similarities to the maneuverings surrounding the [2019 elections in Bolivia](#), which ultimately led to the bloody coup in that country and the seizure of power by the far-right Jeanine Áñez.

9. Destabilization of electronic voting. In Venezuela, voting is done electronically. The counting is done automatically, and is double-checked by a paper copy of the electronic vote that is kept in boxes.

On the night of 26 July, two days before the elections, there was an attempt to sabotage a large power station. [A commando](#) had entered the station with all kinds of explosives. The attack could be foiled. If it had succeeded, seven provinces in the west of the country would have been without electricity for days, thus preventing electronic voting from going ahead.

On election day, there was a [massive cyberattack](#) from [Colombia and the US](#) on government institutions, including the National Electoral Council. This delayed the counting of votes by hours. This gave the opposition the opportunity to come up with their own results before the official results were available.

10. Present own results. To present its own results, the far-right opposition created its [own website](#) the day before the elections. On it, they allegedly published 23,000 official reports or about 80 per cent of the total. According to those data, González would have won

the election with 63 per cent of the vote against 30 per cent for Maduro.

However, the site only contains a good [9,000 reports](#), so fewer than a third of the actually existing number. Many names are incomplete or only show initials. In addition, many of the persons mentioned are deceased... It is also remarkable that the distribution of the votes in the cities and in the countryside, in the Amazon region and in the highlands, all give exactly the same percentages. That is totally improbable.

In other words, these are fabricated data, and compiled in a fairly amateurish way. But this is acceptable to the right-wing constituency just as it apparently is for the mainstream media in the West.

Sovereign Democracy

Together, these ten mechanisms form a powerful playbook. They make it clear that the right wing and Washington are not at all interested in democracy or fair elections. They are only interested in a regime change that will bring the country back into line with the Venezuelan oligarchy, the US and the West.

They are not interested in democracy, human rights, peace or international law.

What they are interested in is Venezuelan oil, in aligning Venezuela with their logic of war and plunder and in keeping the world in a "jungle" to preserve their "garden."

Sacha Llorenti



This playbook makes sovereign elections virtually impossible and also leads almost inevitably to violence. If these mechanisms were applied to the next US presidential election, it could trigger a civil war. The storming of the Capitol on 6 January 2021 may have given us a foretaste of this.

One might wonder how useful it is to call elections in such circumstances. In Western countries, there is already hysteria about possible interference in our elections by Russia. But, if there were any, it would be peanuts compared to the massive interference and aggression that Venezuela has to endure.

How can a political system protect itself from so many external and internal hostilities without undermining its democratic content? Building such a 'sovereign democracy' is no easy task. In Venezuela, they have succeeded for the time being through the solid development and mobilization of popular organizations.

But it does not prevent the polarization in the country from being and remaining very high, and from organizing elections in the context of electoral warfare being a very risky undertaking. The Bolivarian project faces huge challenges and needs our solidarity more

than ever.

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Marc Vandepitte is member of the Network of Intellectuals and Artists in Defense of Humanity and was an observer during the presidential elections in Venezuela.

Notes

[1] "Skillful leveraging of economic sanctions".

[2] In Nicaragua, it was a dirty war being waged from neighboring Honduras by terrorist brigades (called 'Contras') hired by the US. By voting for the opposition, Nicaraguans hoped that this dirty war would stop. It worked; Violetta Chamorro narrowly beat Daniel Ortega...

[3] "... unprecedented cohesion in the opposition coalition ... also a result of artful US diplomacy"

[4] "A good place to start might be the National Electoral Council. ... The council ... might be subject to influence from counterparts in the region ... The United States could help encourage that regional outreach."

[5] "The González campaign should receive printed copies of the results at nearly all polling places ... That would also permit the opposition and independent observers to conduct so-called quick counts ... that could reveal the likely winner before the regime has an opportunity to lie about vote tallies or discredit the process."

[6] "The United States might not be the most effective actor to reawaken the Venezuelan military's democratic instincts. But Washington could encourage outreach by military commanders in the region that have maintained ties to senior Venezuelan officers. ... For that reason, the United States and its partners in Europe, Brazil, Colombia, and other democratic nations should emphatically signal their repudiation of any additional measures that undermine González's candidacy."

[7] The most important ones are: Argentina, Chile, Peru, Guatemala, Ecuador, El Salvador, Uruguay, and Costa Rica.

[8] "It is not clear that rank and file conscripts and low- and mid-level officers would repress demonstrators on behalf of a president the electorate had just roundly rejected. There might also be an opportunity to convince the military command to protect the rights of voters."

[9] The concept of 'sovereign democracy' was conceived by Russian politician Vladislav Surkov. It was developed in response to Western interference in the electoral processes in the former Soviet Union countries. See Hiro D., *After Empire. The Birth of a Multipolar World*, New York 2010, p. 101-103.

Featured image [source](#)

Annex: Destabilization and Coups Against Left-wing Governments in Latin America Over the Past 20 Years

Argentina (2022): lawfare against Vice President Cristina Kirchner, preventing her from running in the 2023 presidential elections.

Bolivia (2019): coup that forces President Evo Morales to leave the country.

Brazil (2016): Lawfare against former President Lula and incumbent President Dilma Rousseff. Lula is thrown in jail and Rousseff is impeached.

Colombia (2023-4): President Gustavo Petro is accused of illegally financing his election campaign.

Cuba (2021): Digital campaign aimed at provoking riots in the country.

Ecuador (2010): Attempted coup to oust President Rafael Correa. In 2020, he is accused of bribery, which makes him politically incapacitated.

Honduras (2009): after a military coup, President Manuel Zelaya is expelled from the country.

Mexico (2018): digital campaign to prevent leftist Andrés Manuel López Obrador from being elected president.

Nicaragua (2018): Major protests erupt after President Daniel Ortega's decision to cut pensions and increase social security contributions.

Paraguay (2012): Institutional coup that ousts President Lugo.

Peru (2022): Coup that ousts President Castillo.

Venezuela (2002): Coup against President Chávez. Lockout of the oil industry. (2014 and 2017): Violent roadblocks block the country. (2017): Heavy economic sanctions by the US. (2018): Assassination attempt against President Maduro. (2019): Military provocation through development aid. (2019): Recognition by the US and the EU of an unelected interim president. (2020): Failed military coup.

The fact that Chile is not on this list probably says a lot about the course the Boric government is taking.

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