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FEATURED Q&A

What Will a Split in the Opposition Mean for Venezuela?



Venezuelan opposition leader Henrique Capriles, pictured last December, said he would support participation in the December legislative elections in a split from opposition leader Juan Guaidó. // File Photo: Facebook page of Henrique Capriles.

Q **Venezuelan opposition figure Henrique Capriles, who unsuccessfully ran twice against President Nicolás Maduro, has said he would support congressional elections scheduled for December, a break from National Assembly President and opposition leader Juan Guaidó, who has vowed to boycott the vote citing concerns that Maduro's government will rig it in its favor. Capriles' announcement came days after Maduro's government said it would pardon more than 100 imprisoned and exiled political opponents. What will result from Capriles' break from the Guaidó-led faction of the opposition? What are the reasons behind Maduro's decision to pardon political rivals? Should the opposition participate in the legislative vote, and does it stand a chance at victory if it remains divided?**

A **Betilde Muñoz-Pogossian, director of the Department of Social Inclusion at the Organization of American States:** "Venezuelans are once again faced with the dilemma of whether to participate in elections. A democratic election requires that it be fair, free and competitive. None of these standards are met in the case of Venezuela's Dec. 6 elections. If we add the effects of gasoline shortages, hyperinflation and Covid-19 on the organization and administration of elections, the situation becomes even more severe. The critical issue is that participating in an electoral process that everyone knows will not meet the minimum standards for democratic elections means being functional to the Maduro regime, and the opposition cannot afford it. When it comes to releasing political prisoners, we must all support Capriles and others' discussions on their behalf. However, we must draw a line

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TODAY'S NEWS

ECONOMIC

Claver-Carone Elected as First U.S. Citizen to Head IDB

Mauricio Claver-Carone won election to become the first U.S. citizen to head the Inter-American Development Bank. His election breaks an unwritten rule that the institution is to be headed by someone from Latin America or the Caribbean.

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BUSINESS

Colombian Court Temporarily Halts Loans to Avianca

A Colombian court ordered the temporary withholding of \$370 million in government loans to Avianca until the airline guarantees it will be able to repay the money.

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POLITICAL

Peru Lawmakers Vote to Open Impeachment Hearings

Peru's Congress voted to open impeachment hearings against President Martin Vizcarra.

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Vizcarra // File Photo: Peruvian Government.

ECONOMIC NEWS

Claver-Carone Elected as First U.S. Citizen to Head IDB

Mauricio Claver-Carone, the current senior director for Western Hemisphere affairs at the U.S. National Security Council, on Saturday won election to be the next president of the Inter-American Development Bank. Claver-Carone, whom U.S. President Donald Trump nominated for the post in June, will be the first U.S. citizen to lead the 61-year-old institution, and his election breaks an unwritten rule that the IDB would always be headed by someone from Latin America or the Caribbean. But despite the controversy surrounding his nomination, Claver-Carone won the support of a majority of countries in the region, Reuters reported. Thirty of the IDB's 48 governors voted for Claver-Carone, giving him 66.8 percent of the vote, a spokesman at the National Security Council told the wire service. Sixteen countries abstained, Reuters reported, citing three unnamed sources familiar with the vote. The governments of Argentina, Mexico, Chile and Costa Rica initially attempted to delay the vote but did not garner enough support to do so. On Saturday, the Argentine foreign ministry thanked Chile, Mexico, Peru, Trinidad and Tobago and European Union nations for supporting its decision to abstain from the vote, and it pointed out more than 31 percent of the votes were abstentions. Former Costa Rican President Laura Chinchilla earlier this month dropped her candidacy to lead the IDB. On Saturday, the Central American nation's government said it decided to vote for Claver-Carone after he committed to some policies Chinchilla had proposed. Before the vote, Claver-Carone told IDB governors that he would be a "passionate advocate" for the bank, Reuters reported. He added that he would work with IDB member nations to "strengthen the bank, respond to the needs of the region and create opportunities for shared prosperity and economic growth." Claver-Carone's term begins Oct. 1, and he has said he will serve only one five-year term. The

IDB lends approximately \$13 billion annually to Latin American and Caribbean countries, making it a major source of funding in the region, Politico reported. Over the next few years, it is expected to grow in importance as countries struggle with recessions that the Covid-19 pandemic has worsened. [Editor's note: See related [Q&A](#) in the June 25 issue of the Advisor.]

POLITICAL NEWS

Peru Lawmakers Advance Push to Impeach Vizcarra

Peru's Congress on Friday voted to open impeachment hearings against President Martín Vizcarra over allegations that he obstructed justice, a move that could potentially push him out of office just as the Andean nation struggles amid one of the world's worst coronavirus outbreaks, The New York Times reported. The newest political crisis in Peru began last week when audio recordings surfaced that appear to show the president ordering officials to lie about an influence-peddling scandal. It is the latest conflict between Vizcarra and the divided legislative body, which was voted into office in a snap election in January after the president dissolved it last year in an attempt to push forward his anti-corruption agenda. Vizcarra has no party representation in Congress. The president has said the audio recordings were manipulated, denying any illegality. "This is a lie that seeks to destabilize democracy and take control of the government," Vizcarra said, The New York Times reported. "If you want to impeach me, here I am, with my conscience at ease," he added. If Vizcarra is ousted, Manuel Merino, the president of Congress, would become the country's president. For that to happen, 87 lawmakers of the 130-member body would need to vote in favor of ousting Vizcarra. Merino is a right-wing businessman who opposes Vizcarra. The vote is scheduled for Sept. 18. However, the push seemed to lose some traction over the weekend, after key political leaders rejected the move, Reuters reported.

NEWS BRIEFS

Colombian Defense Chief Apologizes for Death That Sparked Violent Protests

Colombian Defense Minister Carlos Holmes Trujillo on Friday apologized on behalf of the police following the death of Javier Ordóñez, a detained 46-year-old civilian, which prompted several nights of protests in Bogotá and the nearby municipality of Soacha that left at least 13 dead and hundreds injured, Reuters reported. "The national police apologize for any violation of the law or ignorance of regulations by any members of the institution," Holmes Trujillo said in a video message. Also on Friday, President Iván Duque said the deaths would be investigated and that no abuse by police would be tolerated.

Eighteen Nicaraguans Testify About Abuses by Security Forces

Eighteen Nicaraguans who have accused the country's security forces of torture and sexual abuse last week testified to a panel of legal and psychological experts in Costa Rica, the Associated Press reported Friday. The testimonies are part of an attempt to build a case to eventually take to regional and international courts. The alleged abuses occurred during months of protests in 2018 against the government of Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega, which were met with stark repression by state police forces.

A.M. Best Downgrades Ratings of Insurer XL Seguros México

A.M. Best has downgraded its financial strength rating and long-term issuer credit rating of insurer XL Seguros México to B++ from A+ and to bbb+ from aa-, respectively, the credit ratings agency announced Friday. The action followed a request for a portfolio transfer from XL Seguros México to AXA Seguros.

César Acuña, the leader of the second-largest party in Congress and a potential candidate for the 2021 presidential elections, said ousting Vizcarra would “aggravate” the country’s situation. Twenty-one of the 65 legislators who voted to begin impeachment hearings were members of Acuña’s Alianza para el Progreso party. Peru has the highest number of deaths per capita in the world and is facing a dire economic outlook, with a 12 percent contraction expected this year.

BUSINESS NEWS

Colombian Court Temporarily Halts Loans to Avianca

A Colombian court has ordered the temporary withholding of \$370 million in government loans to Avianca Holdings until the airline guarantees it will be able to repay the money, Reuters reported Saturday. The Ministry of Finance last month announced it would help in the restructuring of Colombia’s flagship airline with the loan, after Avianca earlier this year began a restructuring process under Chapter 11 U.S. bankruptcy laws amid coronavirus-related lockdowns that forced it to ground its planes. The government’s announcement sparked concerns that the airline would not be able to repay the loan, with a judicial action presented to the administrative tribunal of Cundinamarca requesting that the loan be suspended. The government, which previously defended its decision to issue the loan, did not immediately comment on the court’s decision. Avianca said it would present the court with all the information necessary to show that the loan would benefit the country, *El Tiempo* reported. “Avianca in upcoming days will provide [the court] with information that, with the government’s response, will show that Colombia’s participation in the DIP (debtor-in-process) financing will be a beneficial transaction for the country,” the company said in a statement. “The Colombian government will have repayment priority over other creditors,” it added.

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on the issue of elections. Venezuela is not in a position to hold democratic elections, and while Capriles’ intentions to change the game and bring about a change in the dynamics to break out of the current political inertia are commendable, those conditions must still be met. We should wait to see how he will play the cards to turn this around, but it may be a dangerous game that could bring the country back into the political inertia he was trying to get it out of. Indeed, if Capriles fails in changing the game, Maduro will consolidate his stay in power, weakening the democratic forces in the restoration of democracy for Venezuela.”

Alejandro Velasco, associate professor at New York University: “A new opposition split should surprise no one: for as long as chavismo has been in power, unity has bedeviled Venezuela’s fractious and diverse anti-chavista coalition. More surprising is that it took this long. Guaidó’s strategy was always high-risk and time-bound, premised on quick results and founded on faulty assumptions about Maduro’s strengths and weaknesses. As Guaidó’s strategy grew increasingly stale, erratic and desperate, it was a matter of time before his internal support splintered. Yet this latest break is remarkable because it presumes an existential struggle in the opposition. Guaidó’s legal legitimacy rests on his leadership of the National Assembly, whose mandate expires in January. But the opposition’s moral legitimacy rests on its adherence to democratic values. By indicating that he intends to remain interim president indefinitely, Guaidó risks sacrificing both legal and moral legitimacy. Capriles’ move should be understood in this light: as a bid to reclaim democratic legitimacy against authoritarian rule. But it is a move fraught with risk, and he faces two key challenges. One is redefining ‘victory’ to mean not just Maduro’s ouster, but laying the groundwork for doing so democratically. The opposition will likely

lose elections. But seeing them as one step in a longer struggle may articulate support for future bids and bolster its democratic credentials, a strategy that brought Capriles to within two points of the presidency in 2013 and won the opposition control of parliament in 2015. The second challenge is



A new opposition split should surprise no one...”

— Alejandro Velasco

holding the line against Maduro. Like many autocrats, Maduro craves both power and a semblance of legitimacy. Pardoning rivals signaled—especially to the European Union—that he is willing to make some concessions in the pursuit of some legitimacy via elections. But Capriles must push for more and be prepared to pull out if Maduro refuses. Otherwise, the opposition will be left without eggs or the basket, and Venezuelans will be left with no one to turn to.”



Jesús Seguías, president of Venezuelan pollster DatinCorp:

“What the opposition must do is discuss the definitive route that Venezuelans (not just the opposition) must take to overcome the mega-crises that are shaking the nation. When they do so, analyzing the scenario objectively and without ‘magical realism,’ they will have to rule out the insurrectionary and military route as unfeasible. Then, they will discover that the imperfect electoral route is the most ‘perfect’ of all—it is less expensive and more secure. Venezuelans must overcome the strategy of futile confrontation and begin to rehearse a new dimension of politics based on consensus and democratic tolerance. There is no other way. Undoubtedly, this rupture in the opposition is the logical consequence of the failure of the insurrectionary and military route that the opposition established seven

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years ago. Today, the opposition is nowhere. And the country is worse off—total chaos. Some leaders dared to break the rules and decided to explore new paths. That is the new scenario to which Capriles belongs, while the rest are still clinging to the impossible. Maduro is acting with great pragmatism in the face of the huge crisis he faces (and without real possibilities of success). He needs to free the game that was blocked by the severe sanctions of the international community, especially the United States. Maduro wants to win the sympathy or neutrality of Europe and isolate the Trump administration. He needs to legitimize a new parliament, removing Guaidó and Leopoldo López from the game.”

A **Maria Velez de Berliner, managing director of RTG-Red Team Group, Inc.**: “Maduro’s pardon is nothing more than an effort to continue undermining the opposition. Capriles demonstrated twice that he had the capacity to unseat Maduro had those elections been fraud-free. Whether Capriles and his followers could succeed in December’s parliamentary elections remains to be seen. However, Capriles’ and María Corina Machado’s defection from Guaidó’s opposition-created ‘government in waiting’ confirms the historical fractiousness and divisiveness of Venezuela’s opposition, which Guaidó failed to overcome. His failure makes it clear that Guaidó lacks the capacity and countrywide support to unite and lead Venezuela in its dire conditions of today; conditions that will remain for years to come because Maduro has ample support among those he and his

regime favor. Moreover, Maduro’s supporters will not leave power quietly or peacefully. Venezuela’s opposition already learned that electoral abstention is not a winning strategy. But the divided opposition does not stand a chance against the fraudulent



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— Maria Velez de Berliner

shenanigans of Maduro and his acolytes. The opposition needs to close ranks around Capriles against Maduro, even if Capriles loses. By losing, the opposition will further corroborate the fraudulence of Maduro’s regime and begin making effective inroads toward the presidential election, when it comes. If Guaidó thought Capriles, Machado, his mentor Leopoldo López, Antonio Ledezma and others who put life and limb on the line to depose Chávez and Maduro were going to let Guaidó jump to the front of the presidential succession line, he was sadly misinformed. That misinformation contributed, along with the fractured opposition, to keeping Maduro in power to the detriment of suffering Venezuelans and the dismay of opposition supporters.”

The Advisor welcomes comments on its Q&A section. Readers can write editor Gene Kuleta at gkuleta@thedialogue.org.

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