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## Maduro's Regime is Sabotaging the Elections

By Carlos Vecchio

What if President Obama were to use his executive power to ban the ten most popular Republican candidates from participating in the Republican primary, leaving only those who were never likely to win the nomination let alone defeat the Democratic candidate? Imagine if he were then to limit or prohibit the Republicans — and not the Democrats — from campaigning in swing states by restricting political rights under an artificial state of emergency. And then imagine if he prohibited widely watched television stations from broadcasting the Republican debates.

Could the election conducted under these circumstances be viewed as democratic?

Sadly, this hypothetical is actually the reality in Venezuela. As my country's Dec. 6 parliamentary elections approach, President Nicolás Maduro is acting to prevent the participation of the most popular opposition candidates, including recently arrested Manuel Rosales and María Corina Machado.

Now I am the latest target in Maduro's campaign to repress dissent, as his regime has banned me from running against Diosdado Cabello, the president of the National Assembly and one of the chief architects behind Venezuela's repressive state. It was Cabello who deployed military personnel to arrest Leopoldo López, my fellow activist and founder of Voluntad Popular, and wanted the same for me, as well. In fact, there is currently an outstanding warrant for my arrest on the same baseless charges that were made against López.

Despite my nomination having been accepted by the appropriate authorities on Aug. 11, the government recently informed me that it has been canceled on the absurd basis that my intention was not to represent my state, but rather to gain parliamentary immunity and thus avoid my arrest warrant.

The rejection of my electoral nomination also coincided with the decision to convict and sentence López to 14 years in prison in a clearly politicized persecution that has been met with international outrage. Even López's lead prosecutor has now defected to the United States and reaffirmed what had been known throughout — that the evidence created to prove the charge that López used “subliminal messages,” to inspire people to violence was fabricated.

No election can be said to meet democratic standards if opponents are behind bars or arbitrarily disqualified.

As if this were not sufficient, Maduro has used the judiciary to intervene with two opposition political parties by illegally replacing their board of directors. His actions are an attempt to generate confusion among voters by manipulating symbols and images in the electoral ballot. Maduro has also declared a state of emergency, allowing for militarization and restriction of political rights, in several border-states, in an alleged attempt to combat the serious shortages we are facing.

If these measures continue, they could affect approximately 40 seats in the parliament, as the opposition is barred from campaigning in areas affected by these decrees.

Moreover, the control over the media is so strong that the directors of the last three independent news media outlets have been sued by Diosdado Cabello and ordered to appear in court for merely having mentioned a report by two U.S. newspapers that revealed a drug trafficking investigation against him. And finally, in a move indicative of the high level of corruption and electoral interference, Maduro has also refused to allow independent and qualified monitoring of the December elections by international observers from the Organization of American States and the European Union.

All polls show that the opposition should win by a large margin in a democratic election, but the Maduro regime is hard at work to ensure that the upcoming elections are anything but democratic.

If the regime succeeds in sabotaging the elections, the situation in Venezuela will only continue to decline. To prevent a major crisis in our country and move forward as a democracy, we need firm and decisive international support for fair elections — and we need it now.

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