Venezuelan National Assembly

Asdrúbal Chávez

**Character Overview:**

I am Asdrúbal Chávez, cousin to former president Hugo Chávez (1999-2013) and a Pro-Chavista member – Gran Polo Patriótico Simón Bolívar (Great Patriotic Pole). I am a Venezuelan political chemist and engineer from Santa Rita, Barinas, graduating university as a chemical engineer. Just after graduating, I began my career in the oil industry refineries, working in both Venezuela and the United States. I reached several executive positions including the executive board of PDVSA (Venezuelan state-owned oil and natural gas company), director of Citgo and president of PDV Marina. On September 3, 2014, appointed by President Nicolás Maduro, I replaced Rafael Ramírez as Minister of Petroleum and Mining, and I am currently still holding that role (Bloomberg, 2016).

**Topic 1: Safety and Security in Venezuela**

Regardless of inaccurate accusations of violence from the opposition, our government has in fact made reducing violence and crime a top priority. Our concerns are evident in our recent meeting with opposition mayors to find ground on which to cooperate, and our goal to seek peaceful implementation of our six year plan to socialism (Plan de la Patria). According to the document itself, the plan is “an updating of the strategic chart that should guide us through the transition towards Bolivarian socialism of the 21st century, and includes five historical objectives” (Cetri, 2014). One of the five main objectives is preserving “peace on the planet and...the human species” (Venezuelanalysis, 2013). Chávez’s honest and realistic proposal talks about socialism, imperialism, and capitalism freely, whereas Capriles’ plan is dishonest, and does not refer to any sort of economic system or ideology. Chavez’s plan is also based on projects, initiatives, and ideas that are already being implemented, if not universally, and is therefore the more appropriate and desirable plan to follow.

Developing solutions to the criminal activity in Venezuela first requires knowledge of its origins. Criminal factors attributed to the pervasive criminality include: poor pay, poor training, under-equipment, and often corrupt police force; an inefficient and politicized judicial system; a system of violent and largely overcrowded prisons that are under the control of prison gang leaders; and country-wide availability of millions of illegal weapons (OSAC, 2016). A majority of violent crime in Caracas—and Venezuela in general—occurs in barrios, and criminal “ownership” of some of these neighborhoods often prevents police from entering. The freedom with which many of these gangs operate is due to a lack of police presence in the barrios, also high levels of vehicle ownership and the negligible cost of fuel permit criminals the mobility to operate more widely in affluent areas so that wealthier victims may be targeted. In November 2008, a Commission for the Police System (Comsipol) was established to increase the effectiveness of authority. These included the creation of a National Police and the Experimental Security University in 2009 to specifically train officers in human rights and emphasize crime prevention (WOLA, 2016). Other plans to address the issues include a motion to increase police funding and a disarmament plan, both launched in 2014 to reduce violence by making it harder for citizens to obtain guns. Furthermore, our most recent “National Pacification Plan”, announced in 2015, took in over 150,000 citizen proposals to increase security and reduce violent crime. These proposals will help us recognize the wishes of our citizens so we can move forward to an agreeable solution unified and violence-free.

**Topic 2: Venezuela’s Economic Crisis**

During the last decade, our country, with the largest oil reserves in the world, has also become the country with the highest inflation rate and devastating economic decline. As an essential part of the 21st Century Socialist Project implemented by my cousin Hugo Chávez in the early 2000s to deal with these rising issues, several interventionist economic practices were put into place. Two of our most influential economic policies are foreign exchange controls and price controls of certain basic necessities, including milk, cooking oil, rice, sugar, and others (BBC, 2009). These price controls are aimed at stabilizing the prices of essential necessities to keep them affordable by establishing a fixed rate at which stores can legally sell the items. Additionally, prizes should usually be celebrated, however, our recognition from the UN FAO on reducing child malnutrition in 2013 aroused anger in our citizens who struggled to acquire basic items in grocery stores. Subsequently, our government has been focused on addressing the symptoms of the crisis after the falling oil prices and extreme pressure on the official exchange rate. Dealing with the symptoms will help treat the anger and violence steaming from this crisis, eliminating the chaos and thus allowing us to address the root causes after. Thus, President Maduro installed 20,000 finger scanners in Venezuelan supermarkets in an attempt to decrease and eliminate hoarding and panic buying (WSJ, 2015).

Moreover, Venezuela suffered from the “oil curse”, moving the country into a renter and unproductive society. As a result of the rapid increase in oil revenues from the beginning of Venezuela’s oil discovery, the nation's currency became stronger compared to currencies of other nations (IAEE, 2011). The oil curse also caused massive internal migrations and foreign immigrations to principal cities, creating poverty belts, collapsing social services and rampant crime. The country is completely dependent on us for all economic activity since we are the state that controls foreign currency for imports of spare parts and finished goods. The opposition may attempt to cut public spending, but we still retain control over it. Ultimately, the best way for our government to remedy the economic crisis with innovative policies is to diversify the economic sectors by expanding the agricultural sector and reconciling policy with realism.

**Topic 3: Social Division and Venezuelan Politics**

Ever since 1998, Venezuela has been characterized by a polarized society, conflictive politics, and an unstable democratic system. There is clear division amongst the different socioeconomic classes. While a large number of Venezuelans continue to support us, the Bolivarian government of Nicolás Maduro, there is an increasing number of Venezuelans who strongly criticize the performance of the leftist regime, demanding a change of policies and even a new government. The rise of the Bolivarian Revolutionary Movement, which brought my cousin to power, was largely based on the dissatisfaction of Venezuelans with the performance of the parties and the rampant corruption. From 1998 to 2008, the opposing parties remained largely divided and unable to gather significant support to challenge the Bolivarian government (CATO, 2008). As a result, Venezuelans who did not support the government were limited in expressing their opinion for change through the political system. Until 2008, opposition parties came together to form the Mesa de la Unidad Democrática (Democratic Unity Roundtable, MUD), creating a unified voice for the Venezuelan dissent. The 2015 National Assembly Election in which the opposition won the majority of seats shows the power of a unified opposition, potentially bringing major political and social change to the country (Washington, 2016).

In contrast to many claims made by the opposition, we honor and abide by the 1999 Venezuelan Constitution recognizing fundamental political, civil, social, and environmental rights. PSUV (Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela), one of the major political groups, incorporates the different pro-Bolivarian leftist parties and presents a unified vision of the revolutionary movement in Venezuela (PSUV, n.d.). With the newly elected National Assembly largely composed by members from the MUD, who claim to bring democracy back to Venezuela, more conflict and chaos will rise. A strong, centralized power will keep all other branches in check, and once that authority is successfully established, political unrest will be eliminated and stability in the system will be reclaimed. If we have to channel all of our focus on showing the Venezuelan people who should be in power, we as a nation cannot become unified and we will lose valuable time, energy and resources when the answer is already clear how the government will work best.

Resources:

**Overview:**

* (Bloomberg, 2016) http://www.bloomberg.com/research/stocks/private/person.asp? personId=13697646&privcapId=3545150

**Topic 1:**

* (Cetri, 2015) http://www.cetri.be/Venezuelan-government-shows?lang=fr
* (Venezuelanalysis, 2012) https://venezuelanalysis.com/analysis/7091 (6 year plan)
* (Venezuelanalysis, 2013) https://venezuelanalysis.com/news/10214
* (OSAC, 2016) https://www.osac.gov/pages/ContentReportDetails.aspx?cid=19065

**Topic 2:**

* (BBC, 2009) http://news.bbc.co.uk/ 2/hi/americas/7923073.stm
* (ABC, 2013) http://abcnews.go.com/ABC\_Univision/News/congratulates-venezuela-reducing-hunger-widespread-food-shortages/story?id=19421963
* (WSJ, 2015) http://www.wsj.com/articles/venezuela-to-install-finger-scanners-to-tackle-shortages-1425775667
* (IAEE, 2011) http://www.iaee.org/documents/2011SummerEnergyForum.pdf.

**Topic 3:**

* (Washington, 2016) https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/global-opinions/wp/2016/10/28/venezuelas-crisis-has-birthed-an-unlikely-miracle-a-united-opposition/
* (CATO, 2008) https://www.cato.org/publications/commentary/corruption-democracy-venezuela
* (PSUV, n.d.) http://www.psuv.org.ve/psuv/