

Capriles: hidden strategies and the future of venezuelan democracy

Antonio De La Cruz
Executive Director
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Just two Sundays before the primary elections to choose the Unified Platform's candidate, Henrique Capriles decided to bow out. In a public letter, he stated his reasons: "Discussion and debate shouldn't lead to my ineligibility, but rather to the genuine chance to implement policies that can translate into tangible improvements in the quality of life for all Venezuelans. This can only be achieved through democratic participation and voting". It's the third time he has let down his followers.

His first withdrawal was in 2013, when he won the presidential election but failed to claim victory. He asked his thousands of supporters on the streets to return home, effectively canceling the planned march to the National Electoral Council to demand a 100% vote recount, including the scrutiny of ballots, records, and voting logs. He lacked the courage - or "guts", as Americans would say - to stand up to the Bolivarian regime till the end.

The second instance was during the 2016 presidential recall referendum. When a considerable march was being organized with the aim to "cover Venezuela from end to end" and get the CNE to overturn its suspension decision, Capriles called it off. Pope Francis had reached out, proposing a dialogue between Maduro's regime and democratic forces. Again, Capriles didn't see it through, missing another chance to restore democracy in the nation.

By his recent actions, pulling out of this primary race, he leaves his party, Primero Justicia (PJ), in the lurch, and those from Un Nuevo Tiempo (UNT) who had chosen to back him.

At a time when most Venezuelans believe that the October 22nd election is crucial and see it as a critical path to challenge Maduro's regime, even if the 2024 presidential election turns out to be unfair, the former governor of Miranda state chose to retreat.

Isn't he aware that the agreement of candidates sanctioned by the Republic's General Comptroller is vital for Maduro to gain acknowledgment from democratic nations like the United States, the United Kingdom, the European Union, Japan, Canada, and Australia?

In fact, his representative in the Mexico negotiation table has informed him that this is one of the points to be agreed upon between Maduro's regime and the Unified Platform. His withdrawal might be because his candidacy – the last to register during the extension period –

didn't gather enough support to lead the change most Venezuelans yearn for (as indicated by 8 out of 10 in opinion polls). Besides, recent surveys place him third in electoral preferences.

He believes that by exiting the electoral primary, he can preserve his political capital and remain a prominent figure among democratic forces. With his move, he hopes to weaken María Corina Machado's leadership, who has an 80% voting intent among highly motivated primary voters, according to ORC consultants.

Capriles' intent behind his decision is to encourage abstention in the primary. This is based on the assumption that the political machinery of the PJ and UNT parties, currently without a candidate, play a crucial role in voter mobilization. It could lead to a drop of around 700,000 votes in turnout. If this materializes, María Corina's victory would be weakened. With a lower vote count, she might lose her status as the opposition's leading figure fighting for the country's democratic restoration. It could pave the way for leaders from other parties to consider running in the 2024 presidential elections.

Additionally, Capriles' decision should be viewed in light of Manuel Rosales' recent announcement during an interview with Román Lozinski last week. The governor of Zulia state – curiously not disqualified – indicates possibly running for president in 2024, seeing himself as “a palatable opposition figure to Nicolás Maduro's regime”. In the context of general elections next year, the Capriles-Rosales pact foresees Venezuela's presidential candidacy for Rosales, Zulia's governorship for PJ, and Maracaibo's mayor for UNT.

Sources from UNT suggest that, at the last moment, Capriles and Rosales are pushing for Carlos Prospero, AD's candidate, to also pull out of the primaries. Their aim might be to neutralize any threats that prevent them from maintaining power, personified in this case by María Corina Machado.

In conclusion, Henrique Capriles stepping away from the primary poses an additional challenge on the road to October 22nd. An event to confront Maduro and his accomplices, even if the 2024 elections don't turn out to be fair, free, and competitive. The Venezuelan situation demands a robust and determined position to defeat the regime and counter the Capriles-Rosales pact.

Therefore, it's imperative to challenge this functional opposition leadership and actively participate in the primary. Only then can the new benchmark for democratic forces be determined, leading to the change most Venezuelans desire, fighting until the end.