



By: TA | AP Insight

Venezuela's ruling party unity cracks as Delcy Rodríguez shifts Chávez- era policies



It's a slogan that's long encapsulated the unique ability of **Hugo Chávez's** fiercely nationalistic revolution to stay in power in Venezuela for 27 years: "United, we will win!"

The young, the old, ruling party leaders and propagandists alike shout it at official events, street demonstrations and on state television, pumping their fists to show loyalty to the self-described socialist government — and its traditional antipathy toward the United States.

Even when confronted with overwhelming truths that defy such bravado, the diverse coalition of military, ideological and opportunistic hangers-on has acted in lockstep.

But cracks in that unity have emerged after the stunning **U.S. military operation** that captured then- President Nicolás Maduro in January.

Longtime loyalists are airing disagreements with the government of acting President Delcy Rodríguez and even discussing publicly rumors that an insider's betrayal helped the U.S. depose Maduro.

A warming relationship with the US draws criticism

Rodríguez, has done away with some of Chávez's policies, complied with U.S. demands and shuffled the government to her liking, removing ministers, pushing legislation through the National Assembly to overhaul the nation's oil industry and releasing **political prisoners**.

Supporters of Chavismo are making their disapproval known. Many criticize the warming relationship between **Rodríguez's government** and the White House, whose occupant, regardless of party, Chavismo has historically seen as its main adversary.

May's **deportation of a former minister** to face criminal investigations in the U.S. and Rodríguez's recent authorization for the **U.S.**

military to conduct a training exercise in Venezuela's capital laid bare internal divisions.

Mario Silva spent years spreading pro-government propaganda as the host of a program on state TV before being removed from the airwaves after Maduro's capture.

Silva questioned the legality of the deportation of Alex Saab, a close ally of Maduro's, arguing that it violated a constitutional ban.

He contended that Rodríguez is not governing freely, as some decisions "are being made in the U.S. Embassy."

The most important thing is to prevent this occupation and this colonial administration to which a nation like Venezuela is being subjected from becoming normalized - Elías Jaua

"The imperialists don't negotiate. They conquer, test and probe — until our country shatters," Silva said in a livestream. "Nobody is safe right now. And that is a concrete, terribly dangerous fact."

On May 23, a few dozen people in Caracas protested the training that saw two Marine Corps Osprey aircraft land at the U.S. Embassy.

They held a Venezuelan flag with the message, "No to the Yankee drill" written over it. Participation was minimal, which stood out in a city used to frequent demonstrations with attendance in the thousands.

Elías Jaua, who served as Chávez's vice president and in Maduro's cabinet in his first years in office, repudiated the exercise on social media.

He later told The Associated Press he was speaking up to raise awareness among Venezuelans of the "humiliating" situation facing the country.

"At this stage, the most important thing is to

prevent this occupation and this colonial administration to which a nation like Venezuela is being subjected from becoming normalized,” Jaua said.

Chávez and Maduro — as well as Rodríguez, in her previous roles as vice president and communications and foreign affairs minister — had long prophesied that the U.S. would use force to take control of Venezuela’s oil industry, which has opened up to **private capital** after Maduro’s capture.

The Trump administration oversees oil sales and administers revenues as part of its **phased plan** to turn the troubled South American country around.

Maduro's ouster prompts power struggle

The social, political and economic crisis that took hold when Maduro became president in 2013 drove more than 7.7 million people to leave Venezuela and pushed millions of others into poverty. It also led to rounds of anti-government protests and U.S. economic sanctions, both of which the ruling party survived.

Party stalwarts celebrated a Maduro victory in a 2024 election despite overwhelming evidence showing he had lost.



Self-interest is creating division - Andrés Izarra

They also echoed the party leadership's denial of a surge of migration. Their loyalty was often rewarded, be it with food and basic goods for

the poor or multimillion-dollar contracts and bodyguards for the better-off.

Andrés Izarra, a communications minister under Chávez and tourism minister under Maduro, said the fractures are not based in ideology or a defense of Chavismo, which he believes ended when its founder died in 2013.

Maduro's interest, he said, was in enriching himself and remaining in power at all costs. Self-interest, he said, is creating division.

“Since there is no ideological foundation, it is simply a struggle for power, money, positions, and survival. Do you think (he) would be protesting if he’d kept his bodyguards, or if they’d kept his little salary, or his share of power?” Izarra, who lives in exile since becoming a government target last decade, said of one critic of change under Delcy. “If they had an ideological interest, they would have spoken much earlier.”

Loyalists discuss possible betrayal of Maduro

Criticism even aired on state television last month, when a Colombian leftist leader sitting in the audience of Interior Minister Diosdado Cabello's show stood up and questioned Venezuela's efforts to free Maduro and first lady Cilia Flores from U.S. custody.

“We’ve seen a very weak campaign for Cilia and Nicolás’s freedom,” Manuel Caicedo said before a visibly stunned Cabello.

A government insider had helped the U.S. oust Maduro - Iris Varela

Another devout Chavista, lawmaker Iris Varela, told a podcaster she believed a government insider had helped the U.S. oust Maduro.

The idea has widely rumored since President Donald Trump announced that the authoritarian leader had been captured on Jan. 3, but no evidence has emerged.

"Of course there's a betrayal," Varela said. "I say that every Christ has a Judas. If our Lord Jesus Christ knew he was going to be betrayed and yet he let Judas kiss him on the cheek, ... won't a traitor emerge for Maduro?"