

The Washington Post

Echoes of Trump's threats to U.S. Elections in Maduro's Venezuela

This letter is in response to the July 29th article, World leaders, ordinary Venezuelans protest Maduro's reelection claim and the July 31 article, At least 16 reported dead as Maduro meets Venezuelan protests with force. Nicolás Maduro's factitious claim of victory in the face of significant evidence to the contrary is now causing chaos and violence throughout Venezuela. This is a stark warning to our country.

I could never have imagined the U.S. might follow a political path similar to the Venezuela I visited several times from the early 1970s to 1995. My Cuban-born husband loved Venezuela, where he spent much of his childhood. We often visited his family in those years. I enjoyed these trips, but I often silently thought how grateful I was the U.S. had a more stable, democratic system. Each visit, I felt the stark differences between the "haves" and the masses of "have nots". I was not surprised when in 1999, Hugo Chávez won the presidency on a populist platform even though he had been convicted and imprisoned for two earlier unsuccessful coup attempts. His populist victory felt almost inevitable. After Chávez's death in 2013, his protégé Maduro was elected president. Within months, the Venezuelan Supreme Court, dominated by Maduro appointees, dissolved the National Assembly and wrote a new constitution which set no limit on the number of terms a president could serve. Maduro has since run an authoritarian regime in line with Venezuela's allies -- Russia, Cuba, Iran, Syria and North Korea.

I am now facing the reality that we have way too much in common with Venezuela's autocratic regime: a nation gravely affected by a corrupted judiciary; disregard for institutions and tradition; the mantle of the presidency on a man who was convicted of serious crimes; and an incumbent who wrongly claims victory, causing chaos, division, violence and an uncertain future. I wish I were back in the blissful -- and arrogant -- state of assuming these travesties could never happen here.

There is one huge difference between the U.S. and Venezuela. We have an excellent opportunity to hold onto our democracy if we fight hard to elect Kamala Harris as our next president and Democrats in Congress to support her.

Julie Hunter Galdo

Falls Church, VA 22043

Submitted August 1, 2024