



Venezuela Is a Stark Warning to the U.S. – Once an Autocrat Is in Power, It Is Difficult To Win Back Democracy.

"We have a real opportunity right now to hold onto our democracy if we elect Kamala Harris and enough

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I visited Venezuela several times from the early 1970s to 1995. I could never have imagined the U.S. might one day follow a political path similar to that country. My Cuban-born husband loved Venezuela, where he spent much of his childhood. We often visited his family in those years. I enjoyed the trips, but I always felt grateful that the U.S. had a more stable, democratic system and more opportunity for its people. Every visit, I shuddered at the stark differences between the “haves” and the masses of “have-nots.” It was not a shock 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 seemed almost inevitable, driven by the extreme poverty and inequality.

We must heed the lessons Venezuela is teaching us. A society built on severe income inequality is weak. Rulers who disregard institutions and the long-held traditions of a civil society can destroy a nation. Incumbents who lie and wrongly claim victory will cause violence and chaos that lead to devastation. Fighting to have the chance to reestablish a democracy can take decades of struggle.

There is one huge difference between the U.S. and Venezuela. We have a real opportunity right now to hold onto our democracy if we elect Kamala Harris and enough Democrats to Congress to support her. It is clear that this perilous crossroads presents us with an almost sacred duty to make that happen.

If you are getting tired; or you don't think your role in this fight makes much difference; or you are annoyed by the endless emails, letters, texts and phone calls asking for money, think of Venezuela. They are showing us how difficult it can be to regain a democracy once it slips into autocracy. We are the fortress between our country and their fate.