
5 Venezuela Opposition Leaders Who Took Part in 2002 Coup

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As in 2002, right-wing figures continue to try to topple the democratically-elected government in Venezuela.

During Venezuela's April 11, 2002, right-wing coup attempt against popular President Hugo Chavez, main figures who now lead the opposition were not mere bystanders as the coup-leaders led an attack on the presidential palace leading to the deaths of dozens, squashed rights, attacked ministers and annulled all legislation.

teleSUR looks at five current key opposition leaders who participated in the failed coup.

1. Henrique Capriles Radonski

Co-founder of right-wing Primero Justicia — a party set up with funding from the U.S. National Endowment for Democracy and the International Republican Institute — Capriles was mayor of the upper-class district of Baruta in Caracas during the April 2002 failed coup against Chavez.

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When a violent group of protestors tried to forcefully enter the Cuban embassy, located within the municipality, as they believed that Bolivarian leaders were hiding inside, Capriles joined them and jumped over the fence — violating diplomatic territory.

After a confrontation with Cuban diplomatic staff, Capriles told the crowd he could not find out

whether Bolivarian state officials were hiding, sparking further violence against the embassy. The embassy's electricity and water supply were cut off, windows smashed and diplomatic cars attacked.

2. Leopoldo Lopez

In April 2002, Lopez, then mayor of the wealthy Caracas district of Chacao, was among those who led an opposition march which was re-routed toward the Miraflores Palace, where thousands of Chavez supporters were also demonstrating. Dozens of people were killed in the ensuing clashes, which have been shown to be a premeditated, orchestrated massacre to justify the coup and kidnapping of President Chavez.

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In the days that followed, Lopez participated in a witch hunt for officials from the Chavez government, including the illegal detention of Minister of Interior and Justice Ramon Rodriguez Chacin. It is astonishing to recall that Lopez did this while still occupying the office of mayor.

Lopez also led the 2014 violent guarimbas, for which he is serving a sentence of almost 14 years, after being convicted of crimes of public instigation, property damage, and arson.

3. Henry Ramos Allup

The former president of the national assembly is closely associated with the old guard of politicians, hailing from the Democratic Action party, one of two parties that would alternate power for 40 years between 1958-1998 after having signed a formal agreement, the "Punto Fijo" pact.

Henry Ramos Allup was one of the leaders of the 2002 coup. Videos show him running from the Miraflores presidential palace before Chavez's return. In 2011, he revealed in an interview with Ciudad CCS that the executive order that set up the "de facto" government was prepared one week before the coup against Chavez and that the owners of the mainstream media were also directly involved in covering the event.

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Shortly after being elected to office on Dec. 6, 2015, Ramos Allup criticized the 1999 constitution, calling it a "disaster," and signaling his desire to have it reformed. He praised the 1961 constitution that allowed only two parties to govern as "civilized."

Ramos Allup has stated that the main priority of the opposition national assembly is "a change of government," referring to the stated goal of right-wing legislators to remove President Nicolas Maduro from power.

4. Maria Corina Machado

Machado, just like Capriles Radonski and Lopez comes from Venezuela's business elite and was vice president of right-wing party Sumate and an opposition lawmaker when the coup against Chavez occurred.

Machado signed the decree evoked by Ramos Allup, which broke the constitutional order and dissolved state institutions for two days.

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Machado is still allegedly devising plans to undermine the Venezuelan government, according to Venezuelan investigative journalist Eva Golinger, in 2013 she met USAID official Mark Feierstein, along with other leading figures of the Venezuelan opposition.

She was also among the most prominent promoters of the 2014 opposition violence that claimed the lives of 43 people.

5. Julio Borges

A lawmaker since 2000, Borges founded the right-wing Justice First party and currently leads the opposition MUD coalition. He was chosen as the new president of the national assembly for the 2017 session, even though his tenure is not recognized by the Supreme Court.

After the 2002 coup attempt against Chavez, Borges demanded the entire government resign and played a major role in the subsequent campaign for a recall referendum — which Chavez won.

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Borges was again elected to the national assembly in 2015, where he continued to play a major role in attempts to overthrow Maduro's government. In February 2015, Air Force General Osvaldo Hernandez, who was accused of participating in a plot to launch a coup against Maduro, said Borges was involved in the plot as well.

In October 2016, Borges led the failed — and constitutionally illegal — initiative to put Maduro on trial, arguing that the democratically-elected president had staged a "coup," consistently appealing to the Washington-based Organization of American States to intervene in Venezuela.