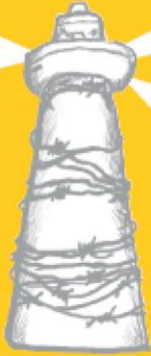


Syracuse University
College of Law



**IMPUNITY
WATCH**

2014 Desk Reporters Write-On Competition Packet



IMPUNITY WATCH

Syracuse University
College of Law



SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY COLLEGE OF LAW
IMPUNITY WATCH

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What is *Impunity Watch*?

“Had I only known . . .”

Impunity Watch provides unbiased, objective reporting on impunity issues throughout the world. *IW* aims to expose and examine human rights and impunity issues from both a grassroots as well as an academic perspective.

The goal of *IW*'s web-based presence is to immediately alert the world to impunity issues as they arise and to provide open access to thoughtful and cutting-edge academic debate about impunity issues.

Impunity Watch was created through the efforts of a dedicated group of students and Professor David Crane. The website was launched in October 2007 during a special ceremony held in the atrium of the Syracuse University Barclay Law Library. Henry T. King, former Nuremberg prosecutor, attended the ceremony. *IW*'s staff has now grown to approximately 40 active law student members.

IW participates in events such as the International Humanitarian Law Dialogs and works with other human rights organizations. NGOs, government officials (including U.S. State and Defense Department leaders), international lawyers (including Serge Brammertz and Luis Moreno-Ocampo) and persons around the world regularly visit the *IW* website. *IW*'s newsfeed has over 200 daily subscribers, and the website has been read in 212 different countries and territories. Thanks in large part to our dynamic news reporting, we are proud to note that we are the most widely read law review in the country.

As a professional organization, we have high standards. Accurate, unbiased, and objective reporting requires an in-depth knowledge of specific regions of the world. We hold ourselves responsible for knowing about a region's key political players, differences in beliefs between the majority and minority populations, and current developments. All members of the staff are dedicated to doing excellent, professional, and timely work.

Join us in the fight against impunity.

www.impunitywatch.com

What is “impunity”?

In a report presented to the Commission on Human Rights¹, impunity has been defined as:

the impossibility, de jure or de facto, of bringing the perpetrators of violations to account - whether in criminal, civil, administrative or disciplinary proceedings - since they are not subject to any inquiry that might lead to their being accused, arrested, tried, and if found guilty, sentenced to appropriate penalties, and to making reparations to their victims.

Impunity arises from a failure by States:

- to meet their obligations to investigate violations;
- to take appropriate measures in respect of their perpetrators, particularly in the area of justice, by ensuring that those suspected of criminal responsibility are prosecuted, tried and duly punished;
- to provide victims with effective remedies and to ensure that they receive reparation for the injuries suffered;
- to ensure the inalienable right to know the truth about violations; and
- to take other necessary steps to prevent a recurrence of violations.

a weekly summer reporting requirement of one article a week beginning on May 27th.

Time commitment: between 3-8 hours/week.

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ASSOCIATE ARTICLES EDITORS

***** NOTE: We will begin accepting materials for the Write-On Competition for Associate Articles Editors on the day that LCR appellate briefs are due. All application materials will be due on Friday, April 25, 2014 at 5:00 pm.**

Complete regular staff assignments and spot and address technical corrections, including proper bluebook formatting, necessary for adequate public viewing of academic journal articles chosen for publication (also known as weekly Form and Accuracy (F&A) assignments. Submit final edits on article to their respective Senior Articles Editor for publication and uploading onto *Impunity Watch*. Report to your particular Senior Articles Editor and attend meetings as designated by Senior Articles Editors. Complete a 10 page student law review note of publishable quality. Complete 2 office hours per week.

Time commitment: between 3-8 hours/week.

TECHNICAL ASSISTANTS

*****NOTE: More information on this position, including writing requirements and any additional procedures for applying will be available soon. An update will be sent out through the 1L listserv and information will be available on www.impunitywatch.com as soon as possible.**

Work directly with the Technical Director to maintain the IW website as well as various online networking tools (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and others). Constantly monitor *Impunity Watch* for appropriate comments. Guidelines for what signifies appropriate comments will be established the Editor-in-Chief,

Managing Editor, and Senior Desk Officers. Work on the technical side of the blog under the direction of the Technical Director. The Technical Director will designate responsibilities. Complete two office hours per week.

Time commitment: between 2-5 hours/week.

PLEASE NOTE the following if you are applying for both the Lead Articles Editor and the Desk Reporter positions:

If your application to be a reporter is denied, you will still be given full consideration for the Associate Articles Editor positions. You will be notified in early May whether or not you are accepted as a Desk Reporter.

If you are offered and you accept a position as a Desk Reporter, your application to be an Associate Articles Editor will still be given full consideration. If you are then offered an Associate Articles Editors position, you will be notified of this offer and be given the option of either remaining in your position as a desk reporter or switching over to the journal side as an Associate Articles Editor. However, if you choose to become an Associate Articles Editor, *you must still complete your summer reporting requirements*— This is necessary to ensure the integrity, professionalism, and continuity of our news reporting.

5

2014 Desk Reporter Write-On Competition Policy and Procedures

Applicants for the Reporter position **must** participate in the write-on competition. The procedures for the 2014 Reporter write-on competition are as follows:

1. Applicants will access this competition packet online at www.impunitywatch.com beginning Wednesday, April 16, 2014. There is no hard copy of this packet available.
2. All materials are **due by 5:00 pm on Friday, April 25, 2014** (this is the same deadline as the journal side). Applications submitted after the deadline will not be considered.

Each page submitted in your application packet must be marked with your SU ID # in the upper left corner. Do not submit any materials with identifying information (such as your name).

3. Each Applicant will compose and submit a mock IW report as follows:
 - a. This packet contains five news reports (*see* Pages10-23). **Applicants should compose a news story between 400 and 500 words in length based on**

these reports. No further research is necessary or expected. The purpose of this exercise is to demonstrate Applicants' ability to compose an IW news story. Please see www.impunitywatch.com for examples of IW reporting.

- b. The Applicant's mock news report must have a title.
 - c. The news story formatting shall be as follows: 12 point, Times New Roman font, and 1-inch margins. The news story must be marked with the Applicant's SUID # in the top left corner.
4. Applicants will submit a **letter of interest** using our online submission process, indicating:
- a. Applicant's interest in the Desk Reporter position (this is also will you will indicate if you are also applying to be an Associate Articles Editor and/or a Technical Assistant)
 - b. Any experience relevant to the position(s) applied for (e.g., editing, writing, journalism, undergraduate coursework, international law, foreign language skills).
 - c. Preferred regional desk(s) (Options: Africa, Asia, Europe, Middle East, North America + Oceania, South America).
- 6
- d. If you are applying to be a reporter, but will NOT be able to serve as a summer reporter due to other obligations you must note this here. If possible, we will still consider your application when making final offers during the summer. *Please note that all reporting is done online and, thus, you can report from nearly all corners of the globe.
5. Applicants will submit a **resume**. Please do not include law class rank, law GPA or similar grade-based information. Please redact your name, and write your SU ID # on your resume.
6. **ALL** applicants must submit their **LCR Appellate Brief or ILCR Memorial** by the deadline (YES, THIS INCLUDES ALL DESK REPORTER APPLICANTS). However, for Desk

Reporters, while we will review your brief or memorial, *the Mock News Report will be the primary means by which we select Reporters.*

NOTE that you are NOT permitted to make any changes to your brief or memorial before you submit it (it must be the exact same version that you submitted for your LCR course).

7. Applicants must also submit an **index card**, with the following information about the Applicant (We will only access this information after we have made our final application decisions):
 - a. Syracuse University Identification Number*;
 - b. Full name;
 - c. Preferred name (nickname, etc. as you like to be addressed on a daily basis);
 - d. Full name as you would like it to appear on the Impunity Watch masthead.
 - e. **Syracuse University** E-mail address (DO NOT submit non-SU email address); f. Telephone number;
 - g. Local address;
 - h. Summer address, if known.

*Information for (a) is used for identification purposes only, and will not be retained by the Journal.

8. The IW Editor-in-Chief will contact selected News Reporters on Monday, May 7, 2014.
9. 2014 - 2015 Reporters will have a mandatory training session on Thursday, May 9th, with the time and location to be determined (this date was chosen to avoid interfering with any finals, and to allow you to begin summer plans as soon as possible).
10. **2014 - 2015 Reporters will begin reporting for an IW regional desk on May 27, 2014.**

11. A Submission of Your Write-On Documents

To submit your Mock News Article and all other documents, you will turn in your submissions at the **Impunity Watch Office.**

If you have any questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,

Abbie Reese, Editor-in-Chief
alreese@syr.edu

Kathryn Ryan, Managing Editor, News
Kmryan04@syr.edu

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Applicant Checklist

Your submission should contain the following pages, each with your SU ID in the upper left corner:

- Mock News Article (see step 3, above) ○ Letter of Interest (see step 4, above) ○ Resume (see step 5, above)
- LCR Appellate Brief or ILCR Memorial (see step 6, above) ○ Index Card with appropriate personal information (see step 7, above)

All applications are due by 5:00pm on Friday, April 25, 2014.

REPORT #1

Venezuelan Mayors Are Jailed Amid Protests

The New York Times; 20 March 2014

<http://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/21/world/americas/venezuelan-mayors-are-jailed-amid-protests.html>

CARACAS, Venezuela — The authorities have jailed the mayors of two cities that have experienced some of the most intense unrest in a wave of protests that has shaken the country in recent weeks. The arrests came as the National Assembly called for a criminal investigation of a prominent opposition lawmaker on charges related to the demonstrations.

The intelligence police on Wednesday arrested Daniel Ceballos, the mayor of San Cristóbal, a city near the western border with Colombia where the protests began in early February. Many parts of San Cristóbal have been virtually shut down for weeks by demonstrators manning barricades, and clashes between residents and security forces are common.

Mr. Ceballos was arrested during a trip to Caracas, the capital. The justice minister, Miguel Rodríguez, said that the mayor had been taken into custody on a judicial order after citizens filed court papers accusing him of failing to take appropriate measures, like picking up garbage, to keep the city functioning during the protests.

Mr. Ceballos belongs to the Popular Will party, headed by Leopoldo López, a former mayor of a wealthy section of Caracas. Mr. López was jailed on President Nicolás Maduro's orders over a month ago on charges of instigating violence.

The other mayor, Enzo Scarano, who leads a municipality within the nation's third-largest city, Valencia, was also jailed on Wednesday after the Supreme Court ruled that he had not carried out an order to remove barricades set up by protesters. The court sentenced him to more than 10 months in jail and ordered him removed from office.

In a televised speech, Mr. Maduro vowed, "There will be justice here, and no one and nothing is going to undermine the will for justice of the Venezuelan state and society."

Mr. Maduro calls the protesters fascists and has taken to mocking them and opposition politicians with references to the horror movie character Chucky, a murderous doll. On Thursday he referred to a group of opposition leaders, including Mr. López, in this way: "This man who is in prison, Chucky-crazy, Chucky-prisoner, the other Chucky, Chucky-chucky, Chucky-chucka, this Chucky, Chucky-lookie."

He called Mr. Ceballos "this murderer we now have in prison" and accused Mr. Scarano of openly supporting a coup.

Also this week, the National Assembly, which is controlled by Mr. Maduro's Socialist Party, asked the national prosecutor to investigate the opposition lawmaker María Corina Machado, a close ally of Mr. López's.

The protests began with student demonstrations over violent crime and soon expanded to express complaints about a crippled economy and frustration over the Socialist Party's monopoly control of all branches of government.

Students held a rally in Caracas on Thursday to protest the arrests of the mayors. When they tried to march to a nearby university, they were blocked by the police and soldiers.

"By arresting the mayors, the government is throwing more fuel on the fire," said Gabriela Sariegui, 22, an engineering student.

REPORT #2

Venezuela Protests Are Sign That US Wants Our Oil, Says Nicolás Maduro

The Guardian; 8 April 2014

<http://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/21/world/americas/venezuelan-mayors-are-jailed-amid-protests.html>

In an exclusive interview with the Guardian, Venezuela's president claims the Obama administration is fomenting unrest with the aim of provoking a Ukraine-style 'slow-motion' coup

Venezuela's president has accused the US of using continuing street protests to attempt a "slow-motion" Ukraine-style coup against his government and "get their hands on Venezuelan oil".

In an exclusive interview with the Guardian, Nicolás Maduro, elected last year after the death of Hugo Chávez, said what he described as a "revolt of the rich" would fail because the country's "Bolivarian revolution" was more deeply rooted than when it had seen off an abortive US-backed coup against Chávez in 2002.

Venezuela, estimated to have the world's largest oil reserves, has faced continuous violent street protests – focused on inflation, shortages and crime – since the beginning of February, after opposition leaders launched a campaign to oust Maduro and his socialist government under the slogan of "the exit".

"They are trying to sell to the world the idea that the protests are some of sort of Arab spring," he said. "But in Venezuela, we have already had our spring: our revolution that opened the door to the 21st century".



Nicolás Maduro has remained defiant after months of protests against his government, which he describes as 'a revolt of the rich'. Photograph: Juan Barreto/AFP/Getty Images

The conflict has claimed up to 39 lives and posed a significant challenge to Maduro's government. On Monday, the

Venezuelan president agreed to a proposal by the South American regional group Unasur for peace talks with opposition leaders, who have up to now refused to join a government-led dialogue.

The US denies involvement and says Venezuela is using the excuse of a coup threat to crack down on the opposition. Human Rights Watch and Venezuela's Catholic hierarchy have also condemned

the government's handling of the protests, while [Amnesty International has alleged human rights abuses by both sides](#).

Maduro claimed Venezuela was facing a type of "unconventional war that the US has perfected over the last decades", citing a string of US-backed coups or attempted coups from 1960s Brazil to Honduras in 2009.

Speaking in the Miraflores presidential palace in Caracas, the former bus driver and trade union leader said Venezuela's opposition had "the aim of paralysing the main cities of the country, copying badly what happened in Kiev, where the main roads in the cities were blocked off, until they made governability impossible, which led to the overthrow of the elected government of Ukraine." The Venezuelan opposition had, he said, a "similar plan".

"They try to increase economic problems through an economic war to cut the supplies of basic goods and boost an artificial inflation", Maduro said. "To create social discontent and violence, to portray a country in flames, which could lead them to justify international isolation and even foreign intervention."



Venezuelan police clash with demonstrators in Caracas last month. Photograph: Santi Donaire/EPA

Pointing to the large increases in social provision and reduction in inequality over the past decade and a half, Maduro said: "When I was a union leader there wasn't a single programme to protect the education, health,

housing and salaries of the workers. It was the reign of savage capitalism. Today in Venezuela, the working class is in power: it's the country where the rich [protest](#) and the poor celebrate their social wellbeing," he said.

Venezuela's protests have been fuelled by high inflation, which reached a peak of 57% [but has now fallen to a monthly rate of 2.4%](#), and shortages of subsidised basic goods, a significant proportion of which are smuggled into Colombia and sold for far higher prices. Opposition leaders accuse the government of mismanagement.

Recent easing of currency controls appear to have had a positive impact, and the economy continues to grow and poverty rates fall. But Venezuela's murder rate – a target of the protests – is among the highest in the world.

About 2,200 have been arrested (190 or so are still detained) during two months of unrest, which followed calls by opposition leaders to "light up the streets with struggle" and December's municipal elections in which Maduro's supporters' lead over the opposition increased to 10%.

Responsibility for the deaths is strongly contested. Eight of the dead have been confirmed to be police or security forces; four opposition activists (and one government supporter) killed by police, for which several police officers have been arrested; seven were allegedly killed by pro-government *colectivo* activists and 13 by opposition supporters at street barricades.

Asked how much responsibility the government should take for the killings, Maduro responded that 95% of the deaths were the fault of "rightwing extremist groups" at the barricades, giving the example of three motorcyclists killed by wire strung across the road by protesters. He said he has set up a commission to investigate each case. The global media was being used to promote a "virtual reality" of a "student movement being repressed by an authoritarian government", he argued. "What government in the world hasn't committed political or economic mistakes? But does that justify the burning down of universities or the overthrow of an elected government?" The protests, often led by students and overwhelmingly in well-off areas, have included arson attacks on government buildings, universities and bus stations. From a peak of several hundred thousand people in February, most recent demonstrations have dwindled in size and are restricted to **opposition strongholds, such as Tachira state on the Colombian border.**

A hardline opposition leader, Leopoldo López, who participated in the 2002 coup, and two opposition mayors have been arrested and charged with inciting violence. **Another backer of the protests, María Corina Machado, was stripped of her post in parliament.**

This was not "criminalising dissent", Maduro insisted. "The opposition has full guarantees and rights. We have an open democracy. But if a politician commits a crime, calls for the overthrow of the legitimate government and uses his position to block streets, burn universities and public transport, the courts act." Critics, however, insist the courts are politicised.



Leopoldo López is escorted by Venezuela's national guard after surrendering in Caracas. Photograph: Juan Barreto/AFP/Getty
Last month, the US secretary of state, John Kerry, claimed Venezuela was waging a "terror campaign" against its own citizens. But the Organisation of American States and the South American Unasur

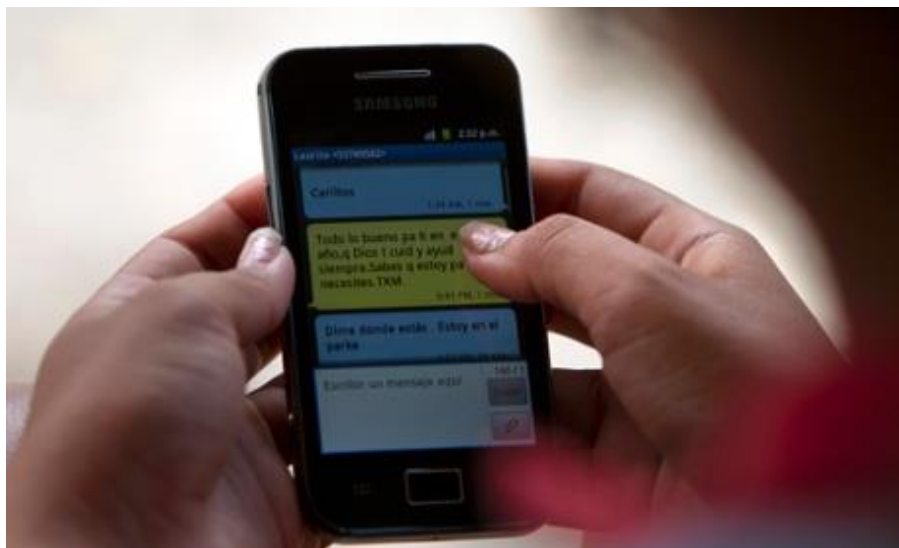
and Mercosur blocs of states backed the Venezuelan government and called for political dialogue.

Asked for evidence of US intervention in the protests, the Venezuelan president replied: "Is 100 years of intervention in Latin America and the Caribbean not enough: against Haiti, Nicaragua, Guatemala, Chile, Grenada, Brazil? Is the coup attempt against President Chávez by the Bush administration not enough? Why does the US have 2,000 military bases in the world? To dominate it. I have told President Obama: we are not your backyard anymore".

Maduro pointed to evidence of past and present US intervention in Venezuela in Wikileaks cables, the whistleblower Edward Snowden's revelations and US state department documents. They include cables from the US ambassador outlining US plans to "divide", "isolate" and "penetrate" the Chávez government, and extensive US government funding of Venezuelan opposition groups over the past decade (some via agencies such as USAid and the Office for Transitional Initiatives), including \$5m (£3m) of overt support in the current fiscal year.

Maduro's allegations follow last week's revelation that USAid covertly funded a social media website to foment political unrest and encourage "flash mobs" in Venezuela's ally Cuba under the cover of "development assistance". White House officials acknowledged that such programmes were not "unique to Cuba".

Maduro has called a national peace conference – though opposition parties have so far refused to participate, arguing it will be skewed to endorse the government.



USAid covertly funded a social media website to foment political unrest in Cuba. Photograph: Franklin Reyes/AP

The president also says he will agree to Vatican conciliation if the opposition condemns violence. But he rejects criticism that he and the Chavista movement have been too polarising. "I don't think polarisation in a democracy is

something wrong. That seems to be trendy now, to try to turn polarisation into some sort of disease. I wish all democratic societies would polarise. A democracy can only truly function if its society is politicised."

"Politics is not only for the elite, for centre-right and centre-left parties, while the elites distribute power and wealth among themselves", Maduro said. "Venezuela has a positive polarisation because it is a politicised country where the large majority take sides over public policies. There is also negative polarisation that doesn't accept the other and wants to eliminate the other – we must get over that with national dialogue." Venezuela has been central to the radical political transformation of Latin America over the past decade, and Maduro insists that regional process will continue. When Chávez said "the 21st century is ours" in 1992, he says "it was a romantic idea. Today it is a reality and no one is going to take it away from us".

Challenged over whether Venezuela's 2009 referendum to abolish limits on the number of times presidents can stand for election meant he would like to continue indefinitely, Maduro countered that Venezuela had a right to recall elected officials, unlike in Europe. "In the UK, the prime minister can run as many times as he wants to, but not the royals. Who elected the queen?"

"The people will decide until when I can be here. Be certain that if it is not me it will be another revolutionary. What will be indefinite is the popular power of the people".

REPORT #3

For Venezuela Opposition, Meeting with President Maduro Could Further Expose Rifts

The Washington Post; 10 April 2014

<http://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/21/world/americas/venezuelan-mayors-are-jailed-amid-protests.html>

CARACAS, Venezuela — Venezuelan opposition leaders began a late-night meeting with President Nicolás Maduro and his cabinet Thursday in a possible first step toward ending two months of anti-government protests and street clashes that have left at least 41 dead.

The meeting was broadcast live on Venezuelan television and radio, at the insistence of the opposition, and was attended by mediators from Brazil, Ecuador, Colombia and the Vatican. The representative of the Holy See in Venezuela, Aldo Giordano, opened the meeting by reading a written statement from Pope Francis urging both sides to put aside differences and summon the courage to reach an agreement.

[Maduro](#) followed, speaking for more than half an hour, and insisted that the encounter was a “dialogue,” not a negotiation. “I’m willing to debate all of the country’s problems,” he said. “But we need to join together in condemning violence as a way to force political change.”

With 11 members of the opposition and 11 members from the government side scheduled to speak, it appeared likely that the meeting would stretch well past midnight. Both sides indicated that future meetings would be required to work out the biggest sticking points between the two sides, especially the fate of jailed protesters. Henrique Capriles, the opposition standard-bearer who narrowly lost to Maduro in last April’s president election, was the most prominent figure on the anti-government side.

While the encounter allowed opposition leaders an unusually open platform to speak directly to a national audience and the president himself, it was also notable for the absence of the opposition’s more hard-line anti-Maduro wing.

That’s the branch that has been in the streets battling national guardsmen and blocking traffic with flaming barricades, and it may be unwilling to heed any agreements that emerge from the talks with Maduro.

María Corina Machado, the congresswoman who has emerged as the most prominent opposition voice in recent weeks after the arrest of fellow anti-Maduro hard-liner Leopoldo López, boycotted the event, saying no meeting with the president should be occurring while protesters and opposition leaders remain in jail.

“We won’t accept a dialogue to stabilize the dictatorship,” she wrote on Twitter, referring to Maduro’s government. “We cannot have dialogue with students detained, mayors detained and [López] detained, and while there’s repression.”

The statements pointed to the same deficiency — divided leadership — that has hampered Venezuela's opposition since the protests began as well as throughout much of Hugo Chávez's 14-year rule.

Once more, an inability to present a united front has left the anti-government movement weaker, analysts say.

“The Venezuelan opposition has had a repeated tendency to fall into a trap of its own making,” said Christopher Sabatini, director of policy at the Council of the Americas, a New York-based policy organization focusing on Latin America.

Since the protests began in February, Maduro, a former bus driver, has outmaneuvered the opposition's top figures one by one or simply run them over.

Early in the protests, he arrested López and locked him up at a military garrison on charges of inciting violence and other crimes. Maduro has also jailed Daniel Ceballos, the popular mayor of San Cristobal, the opposition stronghold where the protest movement first caught fire among students.

When Machado attempted to take on a bigger leadership role, she was kicked out of parliament and threatened with arrest.

Meanwhile, Maduro has delighted in mocking the masculinity of Capriles, a moderate state governor, playing to the image of Capriles as “weak” among frustrated Venezuelans who want a more confrontational approach and have been inspired by López and Machado.

Though opposition leaders do not feud in public, they don't do enough to coordinate strategy or unite forces, either, enabling Maduro to foil them, analysts say.

“The entire opposition is in crisis,” said Caracas political analyst Carlos Raúl Hernández. “At the moment, there are as many divisions within the opposition as there are between the opposition and the government.”

Some of the disagreements among anti-Maduro forces have been tactical - over the wisdom of blocking traffic with street barricades, for instance. Others are more philosophical, with some sectors of the opposition wanting a more sweeping repudiation of the socialist model built by Chávez.

But above all, the divisions appear to stem from personality clashes, as Capriles, López and Machado lead their own, smaller political parties or civic groups. At times, their supporters seem to occupy their own camps and, in some extremes, remain so mutually distrustful that they don't speak to one another.

The result is a protest movement that has often appeared uncoordinated and incoherent, analysts say. And if anything, the events of the past two months have further polarized the two branches of

the opposition, bolstering López and Machado, said Margarita López Maya, a historian and political analyst.

“The more radical sector of the opposition, led by Leopoldo López and María Corina Machado, has been strengthened, while the moderate wing is weaker,” López Maya said.

Such disunity was supposed to be Maduro’s undoing, not the opposition’s.

When Chávez died last year, many predicted that a power struggle would ensue between his two most powerful deputies: Maduro, his chosen successor, and Diosdado Cabello, the leader of Venezuela’s parliament and a figure with closer ties to the military.

Instead, the two men have stayed in lock step, at least publicly, even as Maduro warns of shadowy “coup plots” against him and ordered several air force officers arrested last month.

At the same time, Maduro has taken more decisive steps to address some of the [problems that generated the protests](#). He has set up a new foreign exchange market that appears to be strengthening the national currency against the U.S. dollar and could ease the region’s worst levels of inflation.

Maduro says he wants opposition leaders to work with him to battle crime and boost economic productivity. Opposition leaders have previously said they want amnesty for protesters and others jailed during the demonstrations, and the item could be a sticking point for the two sides from the outset.

Even if Thursday’s talks start the country on a path out of its political crisis, Maduro’s image has suffered more than any opposition leader’s, experts say. His heavy-handed tactics, especially against largely peaceful [student demonstrators](#), left him looking far more repressive and intolerant than Chávez.

Meanwhile, Venezuela’s other big problems persist, including unchecked crime, sporadic electrical blackouts and shortages of basic goods.

Polls suggest that Maduro’s support has dipped in recent weeks, but unhappiness with his leadership hasn’t led to a popularity surge for any single opposition figure.

“There may be more people opposed to the government, but they don’t follow any one particular leader,” said Venezuela historian Tomás Straka, in Caracas. “It appears the protests are being driven by their own dynamic.

“If that continues,” Straka said, “it’s a panorama that favors the appearance of new leadership.”

REPORT #4

Venezuela's Maduro and Opposition in Landmark Crisis Talks

BBC World News; 11 April 2014

<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-26985114>

Opposition supporters held a rally late on Thursday as the talks began.

Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro has met opposition leaders in crisis talks aimed at quelling weeks of protests.

Mr Maduro met his bitter rival, opposition leader Henrique Capriles, for six hours. More talks are scheduled for Tuesday.

The meeting was brokered by foreign ministers from South American nations.



Protests erupted over soaring crime rates in February, but have snowballed into wider anti-government rallies. Some 40 people have been killed.

Mr Maduro, who says the protests are part of a "fascist" US-backed plot against him, told the meeting that there would be no deal with the opposition.

"There are no negotiations here.

No pacts. All we're looking for is a model of peaceful coexistence, of mutual tolerance," he said.

Nicolas Maduro insisted there would be no deal with the opposition

He has said any kind of formal deal with the opposition would make him a "traitor to chavismo", the socialist platform of his predecessor Hugo Chavez.

Mr Maduro called on the opposition to renounce violence.

'Builders of peace'

Mr Capriles, who was narrowly defeated in last year's presidential election, insisted that the opposition did not want a coup against the government.

"We don't want a coup d'etat. We don't want an explosion on the streets," he said.

"Either this situation changes, or it bursts. I hope it changes because I don't want violence."

Mr Capriles also accused Mr Maduro of being disrespectful to the Venezuelan people.

"How are you going to ask the country to accept you if you call half the country fascists or you threaten them?" he asked. "I think it is very difficult to govern a country where half the people are against you."

The talks were broadcast live on television.

Pope Francis sent a letter giving his support to the talks.



"I urge you not to get stuck in the conflict of the moment but open yourselves to one another to become true builders of peace," the Roman Catholic leader said, in a letter read out at the meeting.

Venezuela is sharply divided between supporters and opponents of Mr Maduro, who narrowly beat Mr Capriles to the presidency last year.

The oil-rich country's economy has hit the buffers in recent years, with food shortages and rising inflation causing increasing dissent.

Venezuela's Maduro Meets Opposition As Death Toll from Protests Rises

Reuters; 11 April 2014

<http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/04/11/us-venezuela-protests-idUSBREA3A07S20140411>

(Reuters) - Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro cautioned opposition leaders to keep their expectations modest on Thursday as he hosted them for mediated talks intended to stem two months of deadly political unrest.

Maduro has held similar meetings previously but this was the first to include Henrique Capriles, who Maduro narrowly beat in last year's presidential election, and the first to be brokered by foreign ministers from the Unasur bloc of South American governments.

The six-hour meeting coincided with violence that raised the death toll from the protests against Maduro's rule to 41, and Capriles warned the unrest would escalate in the absence of political reforms.

"The road here was long and complicated, but it was worth it," Maduro said earlier in lengthy opening comments. He cautioned against unrealistic expectations.

"There are no negotiations here. No pacts. All we're looking for is a model of peaceful coexistence, of mutual tolerance."

Pollsters say approval levels for both Maduro and the opposition have fallen during the crisis, while an already slowing [economy](#) has suffered a further drag from the impact of violent clashes on businesses and transport.

Dozens of anti-Maduro demonstrators remain in jail and some hardline opposition groups, including the party of jailed protest leader Leopoldo Lopez, boycotted the talks, which took place at the Miraflores presidential palace in Caracas and were broadcast live on every TV channel.

Authorities said on Thursday a policeman was shot dead during a protest in western Barquisimeto city, and opposition activists said a woman died in hospital almost a month after being hit by a car while demonstrating in central Valencia.

Those fatalities brought the death toll to 41.

About 650 people have been injured since the protests broke out in early February, officials say, and more than 2,000 people have been detained. Of them, more than 170 are still behind bars.

'WE DON'T WANT A COUP'

Capriles, defeated in last year's election to replace late socialist leader Hugo Chavez, was one of the last to speak, well after midnight.

He told the foreign ministers of Brazil, Colombia and Ecuador that [Venezuela](#) was crippled by violence, economic misery and political polarization.

"We don't want a coup d'etat. We don't want an explosion on the streets," Capriles said. "Either this situation changes, or it bursts. I hope it changes because I don't want violence."

The volatile political atmosphere was illustrated in the reactions of National Assembly boss Diosdado Cabello who, sitting across the table from Capriles, described him as "the fascist assassin" on his Twitter account.

"He doesn't understand he lost the election in April (2013). It looks like he's missing something," Cabello also tweeted.

Both sides are due to meet again on Tuesday. They have both asked the Roman Catholic Church to be a "good faith" witness.

On Thursday the Vatican's envoy to Venezuela read a letter from Pope Francis who said the talks were the only path to peace.

"It's a long and difficult road, which requires patience and courage, but it's the only one that can bring peace and justice," the pope said, according to a copy of the letter distributed by the Vatican on Friday.

"For the good of the entire population and the future of your children, I ask you to have this courage."

Maduro, who calls himself the "son" of Chavez and is seeking to preserve the OPEC state's popular oil-funded welfare policies while tinkering with his predecessor's statist economic model, said ahead of the meeting that he would talk but not negotiate.

He would be a "traitor," he added, if he began negotiating away the gains of Chavez's revolution.

Hardline protesters have openly sought to provoke a "Venezuelan Spring" that would force him from office, but failed to bring the millions onto the streets they hoped for. The demonstrators have proved persistent, however, with sporadic roadblocks, marches and other protest tactics in some cities.

Maduro says that if the opposition wants to get rid of him, it would have to be via the ballot only. His foes could force a presidential "recall referendum" in 2016 if they garner about 4 million signatures for it. Maduro's six-year term ends in 2019.

Venezuelans across the political spectrum are fed up with violent crime and economic problems including an annual inflation rate that is pushing 60 percent and shortages of basic products from milk and flour to toilet-paper and car batteries.

Liborio Guarulla, the opposition governor of southern Amazonas state, told the meeting people should not think the start of talks would solve problems overnight.

"We won't make miracles with this. The economy won't improve by tomorrow," he said. "But we are building something."

