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978-0-521-14557-2 - Dismantling Democracy in Venezuela: The Chavez Authoritarian Experiment

Allan R. Brewer-Carias

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DISMANTLING DEMOCRACY IN VENEZUELA

The Chávez Authoritarian Experiment

Since the election of Hugo Chávez Frías as president of the Republic of Venezuela in December 1998, and during the past decade, the country formerly envied for its democratic accomplishments over the second half of the twentieth century has suffered a tragic setback regarding democratic standards, suffering a continuous, persistent, and deliberate process of demolishing institutions and destroying democracy, which had never before been experienced in the constitutional history of the country. The 1999 Constitution, although considered by some of its drafters as one of the best constitutional texts in contemporary Latin America, has been constantly violated by all branches of government, and more seriously by the Supreme Tribunal of Justice and its Constitutional Chamber. The chamber, completely controlled by the executive, has molded and accepted as legitimate all the constitutional violations that have occurred. Worse, the process has been conducted by defrauding the Constitution and the representative democratic regime in the name of a “participatory democracy” designed to be controlled by the central government. The result has been the complete lack of all essential elements of democracy, as defined by the 2001 Inter-American Democratic Charter: namely, access to power and its exercise subject to the rule of law; periodic, free, and fair elections based on the universal secret vote as an expression of the sovereignty of the people; a plural regime of political parties and organizations; separation and independence of branches of government; and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

This book covers the Chávez authoritarian experiment on dismantling democracy, which has influenced other countries, like Ecuador, Bolivia, and Honduras. It is based on a series of essays written as the facts were occurring during Venezuela’s decade of authoritarian government (1999–2009).

Allan R. Brewer-Carías has been Professor at the Central University of Venezuela since 1963. He also has been Simón Bolívar Professor at the Law Faculty of Cambridge University (1985–86), where he was Fellow of Trinity College; at the University of Paris II (1990); and at Columbia University, where he has been Visiting Scholar and Adjunct Professor of Law (2002–4, and 2006–7). He is Vice President of the International Academy of Comparative Law, and he is a member of the Venezuelan National Academy of Political and Social Sciences, where he served as President (1997–99); he was also Senator for the Federal District, Minister for Decentralization, and an elected member of the 1999 National Constituent Assembly.

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