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Trends. Hugo Chavez and Loyalty: What Venezuela Can Teach Us About Ourselves

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After the recent elections in Venezuela, President Hugo Chavez continues to be attacked for choosing members of his political team not for their area of expertise--e.g., health, education, economics--but for their loyalty to him. His opponents assert that only a government based on a meritocracy with little, if any, concern for personal relationships and alliances can attempt to solve Venezuela's many economic problems. However, there are problems with this position.

First, organizations must and do rely to an extent on loyalties and other personal relationships--even if these relationships are labeled as professional. This is but intrinsic to organizational functioning. The question is how these relationships are factored into the welter of political decision making, not whether they should be. Second, the meritocracy approach reinforces inequities and power imbalances in a nation-state historically favoring quality education for socioeconomic elites. A so-called good-government agenda can too easily lead to bad consequences for too many. Third, President Chavez has been quite open about this intentions and has received significant support in procedurally fair, democratic elections. Elites favoring meritocracy often and conveniently ignore or discount this point.

In their haste to jump on the anti-Chavez bandwagon, well-meaning commentators must consider the real world and not be victimized by abstract subjugating discourse. (See Consolidating power in Venezuela. (August 2, 2000). *The New York Times*, p. A26; Djupe, P.A. (2000). Religious brand loyalty and political loyalties. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 39, 78-89; Helwig, C.C. (1998). Children's conceptions of fair government and freedom of speech. *Child Development*, 69, 518-531; Mitchell, G., Tetlock, P. E., Mellers, B. A., & Ordonez, L. D. (1993). Judgments of social justice: Compromises between equality and efficiency. *Journal of Personality & Social Psychology*, 65, 629-639; Salazar, J.M. (1984). The use and impact of psychology in Venezuela: Two examples. *International Journal of Psychology*, 19, 113-122; Slote, W.H. (1996). Conflict in action: A psychosocial study of a Venezuelan revolutionary. *Political Psychology*, 17, 229-251; Wilson, P.A. (1995). The effects of politics and power on the organizational commitment of federal executives. *Journal of Management*, 21, 101-118.) (Keywords: Elections, Loyalty, Venezuela.)