

## **Freed Venezuelan Political Prisoners Baffle Opposition, Announce Mayoral Candidacies**

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Nicolás Maduro's regime in Venezuela freed two political prisoners unexpectedly this past weekend — Yon Goicochea and Delson Guarate — and both of them have just as quickly and unexpectedly turned their backs on the opposition principles that landed them there. Goicochea and Guarate, each originally from the opposition party Popular Will, have announced they will run in December's municipal elections that many expect to be fixed.

Popular Will had already decided not to participate in December elections due to the electoral fraud that have defined the multiple elections organized by Nicolás Maduro's regime this year. Yet mere hours after their release early Saturday, both Goicochea and Guarate announced they would be running.

Goicochea will be a candidate for the Advanced Progressive party in the El Hatillo municipality. He's been lauded as a young, emerging member of a new political generation, and recognized as a key player in the 2007 Venezuelan Student Movement that prevented a Constitutional Reform being pushed by former President Hugo Chávez.

In 2008, the Cato Institute awarded him the Milton Friedman Prize for the Advancement of Freedom. He returned to Venezuela in 2016, was detained, and subsequently released under these strange circumstances.

The other recently released opposition member, former Mayor Delson Guarate, has received support from A New Time, the party whose loyalty to the opposition has also been questioned of late. Party leader Manuel Rosale recently won the governorship in the state of Zulia after the winner of the election, Juan Pablo Guanipa, was dismissed for refusing to swear in with Maduro's National Constituent Assembly.

The two former political prisoners' decision to run reportedly caught members of Popular Will by surprise.

“The position of Popular Will is that (the National Electoral Council) has not met our conditions for participating in the municipal elections, and no member of the party will receive our support,” Deputy and opposition leader Juan Andrés Mejía said. “We are facing a regime that blackmails and pressures its citizens, and unfortunately this is happening again.”

Guarate and Goicochea's release and subsequent registration for an election most of the opposition has denounced has generated suspicion. Some have speculated that the two officials

negotiated their freedom with the regime or were pressured into agreeing to a deal. Goicochea is scheduled to hold a press conference in the coming days.

*Tweet: "From Popular Will, consistent with our public position recently presented to the Venezuelan people, we reaffirm that we have no formal or covert candidates for the fraudulent municipal elections scheduled by the regime for December 10."*

"I am not the one to judge the decisions of someone who has suffered imprisonment for political reasons, but this saddens me a lot," journalist Nehomar Hernández tweeted.

Other Venezuelans have taken to social media to express their disapproval and disappointment.

"Honestly, I'm sad because this boy Goicochea has disappointed me. I thought he was a promising part of a better Venezuelan future," Jesús Petit Da Costa said.

*Tweet: Goicochea has been in jail for so long that he has forgotten about his principles, and has lost his dignity. Treason by way of incarceration.*

*Tweet: Strange candidates.*

*Tweet: Between the lines: Yon Goicochea (and his family) might still be prisoners of the regime. He might be being coerced into running.*