

## Four Government-paid surveys smeared across the world in key media

# Venezuelan Government Prepares World to Accept Massive Fraud

- Cuban-Venezuelan international PR and lobby in high gear previous to Sunday's high-profile presidential elections, creating a spin that could allow President Chavez to disavow unfavourable results.
- International and domestic surveys that show opposition candidate Manuel Rosales tied or ahead of Hugo Chavez are not reflected in American and international media.
- Only government-paid surveys that show Chavez with a dubious lead are commented in international press, radio and TV.
- AP, CNN, Spain's TVE and other media accused of coverage slanted in favour of the Chavez government.
- Opposition wary of tricks in an electoral system sandbagged by Chavez loyalists and questionable machines.

A week ahead of Sunday's crucial Venezuelan Presidential election, many serious surveys –international and national– show the race as being either a tie or have opposition candidate Manuel Rosales ahead; these surveys report fiery President Hugo Chavez' support as waning and Rosales as surging quickly and starting to pull away from the incumbent President.

However, the only surveys that are being printed in international newspapers and commented on radio and TV around the world are four surveys that show Chavez ahead by twenty or more points over Rosales.

What's really going on, why these seemingly inexplicable differences, and who is the American and international public to believe?

Two weeks ago, respected American pollsters ***Penn Schoen & Berland*** reported Chavez with 48% of the electorate and Rosales with 42%, but with Chavez trending downward and Rosales surging, thus predicting a Rosales victory on December 3<sup>rd</sup>. In his presentation of the survey results, Douglas Schoen described the method used, with anonymous respondents approached on the street and handed printed questionnaires which were filled in and returned in a way that guaranteed the person's anonymity. In explaining why the company had adopted this system, Schoen described a "fear factor" that had appeared for the first time in Venezuela, and that if not taken into account seriously distorted the results. Mr. Schoen asserts that this fear factor is not at all present in Mr. Chavez' backers, only in opposition voters.

A poll conducted in the first half of November by ***Gaither International*** –the surveyors that as early as 1997 predicted Chavez' 1998 election victory– showed Chavez at 52% and Rosales at 44.3%, but again with Chavez falling fast and Rosales surging. A company spokesman reported, also, that for the first time they had found tension and fear surrounding a Venezuelan presidential election, with many citizens considering that they might be victims of government reprisals if it were known that they wanted to vote for Mr. Rosales.

The **Hannah Arndt Observatory** places the election at a dead heat, again emphasizing that their pollsters had to overcome an important fear factor in order to weed out an approximation to the truth of what Venezuelans citizens really are thinking.

**Angus-Reid Global Monitor** reports a survey by respected pollsters **Survey Fast** –whose main clients are the Venezuelan banking community– as having Mr. Chavez leading with 49%, followed closely by Mr. Rosales with 47.6%, with Chavez falling fast and Rosales rising equally fast, and predicting a Rosales victory in December by over five percentage points.

Highly respected Swiss-Venezuelan pollster **Alfredo Keller**, president of **AKSA Partners**, reported at the beginning of this month that Hugo Chavez' support was 52%, down from over 65% two months earlier, with Rosales at 48% and rising. Mr. Keller reports that Mr. Chavez' hard-line support was down 9 points to 22% and falling, while Rosales' was 29% and growing, predicting that a Rosales victory on December 3<sup>rd</sup> was very possible.

And, **CE.CA.**, another respected Venezuelan pollster, reported last week that their polls show Rosales ahead for the first time, at 45.8%, with Chavez trailing at 35.3%. Once again, as in all of the previous polls, fear has been found to be a major factor hindering the freedom of expression by Venezuelans.

Contrasting with these poll results are those of four polls recently unveiled: **Zogby International**, **Evans-McDonough**, one reported as being authored by Madrid's **Complutense University**, and **AP-Ipsos**. All of these polls have been loudly celebrated by the Chavez campaign, but have become highly suspect for different reasons.

The poll by **Zogby International**, a firm run by John and James Zogby, is suspect because James Zogby participated two years ago –with Noam Chomsky– in a forum where one of the themes to be discussed was the "defense" of the Chavez regime. The Zogby brothers have been identified with extreme issues: John Zogby signed a New York Times advertisement on March 13, 1988, headlined: "*The Time Has Come: End All Aid to Apartheid Israel!*", declared that "*Israel is an apartheid state, found on pillage and predicated on exclusivity,*" and that it has "*a quintessentially racist character*". The ad proposed "*dismantling the apartheid state and replacing it with a democratic secular Palestine.*" Interestingly, Chavez recently retired his ambassador to Israel in protest for the recent war in southern Lebanon. To date, Zogby has not revealed who paid for the Venezuelan poll.

**Evans-McDonough's** pollsters did reveal who paid for their survey: Venezuela state oil company **PDVSA**, whose President became universally known last month for an infamous speech telling his state oil company workers that the whole institution was pro-Chavez, that they were "red, red" (Chavez party colors) and that anybody who wasn't in agreement should leave or be literally kicked out.

Regarding these two polls, *Investors Business Daily* stated the following:

*"In another sign that he [Chavez] won't go willingly, the Venezuelan government seems to be sponsoring pro-Chavez polls of dubious merit. One is from Zogby, which gave Chavez an odd double-digit lead over Rosales but refused to say who paid for it. Now there's a new one by a San Francisco pollster, Evans-McDonough, which claims Chavez is 22 points ahead of Rosales, countering other polls. It may be reported in the mainstream media as news, but Evans-McDonough has been in the pay of Venezuela's government in the past. The San Francisco Chronicle profiled it two years ago as a Chavez supporter. This survey was paid for by PDVSA, the oil firm where workers were intimidated into voting for Chavez for fear of losing their jobs."*

Madrid's **Complutense University** disavowed the survey publicized as theirs, saying only that one of their professors, **Carolina Bescansa**, was involved. Ms. Bescansa was recently hired and paid by the Venezuelan government to do an investigation on "health and drugs". An investigation has turned up that the person who ordered and paid for the survey is **Roberto Viciano-Pastor**, a member of the Spanish Communist Party who was under hire as an "advisor" to Venezuela's Congress in the critical two-year period between 1999 and 2000, when the constitutional assembly forged Venezuela's present constitution. Not surprisingly, Mr. Viciano-Pastor was seen at Bolivia president Evo Morales' inauguration, and local press reported that Peruvian leftist presidential candidate Ollanta Humala "was greeted by Spanish citizen Roberto Viciano-Pastor, advisor to Venezuela's National Assembly and an extremist who has defended the Basque separatist movement". During that trip, Mr. Viciano-Pastor served as host, guide and advisor to Humala, a Chavez ally, who was soon to be defeated by now-President Alan García.

The **Associated Press-Ipsos** poll is the most curious one of all, presenting the race as a blow-out with Chavez at 59% and Rosales at a lowly 27%. William H. Klemme, in his article *Fear Factor Biases Associated Press Poll in Venezuela*, reports that the AP-IPSOS poll was based on face-to-face interviews in people's homes, differentiating it from the Penn, Schoen and Berland poll method. According to an investigation conducted by Per Kurowski, once inside the person's home, Ipsos asked a detailed series of questions about Chavez government projects:

- 14) *Now I'm going to read you a list of projects, programs and initiatives by Hugo Chavez's government. Please tell me if you have heard of each one of these [different government-sponsored social programs]: Misión Ribas, Misión Madres de Barrio, Misión Vuelvan Caras, Misión Barrio Adentro, Misión Habitat, Misión Milagro and Misión Mercal.*
- 14 a) *Which of these projects, programs and initiatives of Hugo Chavez's government do you consider most important for you and your family? And in second place? And in third place?*
- 14 b) *Have you or someone in your family benefited from these programs?*
- 14 c) *Aside from yourself or someone in your family, do you know anyone who has benefited from these programs?*

Immediately following these questions –made in the person's home, in a national environment of fear and mistrust–, the pollster then asked for what candidate they were thinking of voting!

The only justification for a mistake of this magnitude would be that the Ipsos pollsters were unaware of this fear factor. However, those same citizens' answers to their questions numbers 26, 27 and 28 disavow any such ignorance:

26. *54% expressed some distrust in how the votes will be counted (30% were not very or not at all confident).*
27. *58% expressed some concern about that their vote will not be kept secret (31% were not very or not at all confident).*
28. *71% expressed some concern about that people could face reprisals for their vote in the upcoming elections (57% were somewhat or very concerned).*

Curiously, only these pro-Chavez surveys have been picked up and reported widely in American and international media. Organizations such as AP, Reuters, CNN, BBC and Spain's TVE, to name just a few, constantly refer to Chavez' "huge lead", and either neglect or downplay the other, serious and scientific surveys, creating a belief that the Venezuelan presidential election is a shoo-in for incumbent President Chavez, when the truth is quite the contrary: The President is in big trouble.

Is the Chavez government simply whistling in the dark, are they trying to influence voters putting themselves as winners when reality is quite different, or is there some other agenda going on? In response to these questions, the Investors Business Daily article previously cited states the following:

*"The potential aim of all this is to put enough polls out there to suggest that Chavez is popular, letting him get away with outrageous fraud. Should a fraud-tainted election happen on Dec. 3 and cause an outcry, Chavez could point to government-sponsored pre-election polls as cover for the inevitable outrage in the streets."*

Regarding the electoral climate surrounding the elections, Gustavo Coronel, a Venezuelan oil expert and political analyst, states,

*"...the regime feels terrified of the results of the election. Chavez controls four of the five members of the National Electoral Council and for the last two years has been beefing up the electoral registry with foreigners who will vote for him in exchange for quick nationalization. Colombian narco-terrorists have been known to be registered and have voted for Chavez in past elections. The company that supplied the electronic voting machines, Smartmatic, received a controversial contract from Chavez and has had a murky history. It is currently being investigated in the U.S. The electoral registry is deeply corrupted, having at one point in time over 39,000 voters more than 100 years old and 2,000 living at the same address. Chavez utilizes the state-owned media at his total discretion, while limiting the time of the opposition candidate in private stations and barring him from using the state-owned media that should be available, by law, to all citizens".*

Investors Business Daily concludes:

*"Make no mistake: Chavez's lies and intimidation don't sound like the actions of a political leader who's secure in a coming re-election victory. As vast crowds gather in the streets of Caracas, it's going to get more important to note their role in countering a potentially rigged vote in a Potemkin democracy that could only fool election observer Jimmy Carter."*

What seems obvious to independent observers is that the Cuban-Venezuelan propaganda machine is in full swing internationally. These international "pollsters" are being used to create a climate where international public opinion would disregard any opposition claim that the election process was fraudulent, if and when Chavez faces defeat on December 3<sup>rd</sup> and decides to use his clout within the Electoral Council to electronically switch enough votes to give him the victory.

Examples of the effectiveness of this international propaganda machine can be seen in the way some report the Rosales and Chavez political rallies this past weekend in Caracas: Independent observers place Rosales supporters at 950,000, and Chavez' at 225,000.

CNN's Spanish network channel reported the Rosales rally with impressive television shots showing the huge mass of people, spoke of hundreds of thousands of people, only to finish ascertaining that Chavez was ahead by thirty points in the surveys.

The Associated Press included the following in its account:

*"The crowd appeared to number in the hundreds of thousands. Organizers claimed more than 1 million people attended. ...Despite the revived opposition movement, Chavez remains hugely popular among the poor, especially those who see benefits from oil-funded social programs ranging from free health care to heavily subsidized government grocery stores... Ernesto Galindez, a 58-year-old butcher who backs Chavez, said he was surprised by the size of Saturday's march, but predicted Rosales would lose. 'They*

are going to have to wait six more years because Chavez is still very strong, and he's not going anywhere,' said Galindez, grinning."

AP's coverage of the Chavez rally the next day included the following:

*"Sunday's rally was the largest in support of Chavez since campaigning began in August and appeared to number in the hundreds of thousands. There were no official estimate by police...His rally came a day after hundreds of thousands of Rosales supporters flooded a major highway in one of the largest anti-Chavez demonstrations in years. Rosales, a state governor who favors a free-market economy, trailed Chavez by a wide margin in an AP-Ipsos poll earlier this month."*

On November 4<sup>th</sup>, Investors Business Daily, AP and Reuters had markedly distinct angles to report that day's massive Rosales rally:

*IBD reported as follows: "Not since 2002 has Caracas seen the likes of Saturday's 15-mile presidential campaign rally for Chavez's rival, Manuel Rosales, ahead of the Dec. 3 election. Dragging through the capital, the march crossed through the eastern and western slums that are supposedly Chavez's political stronghold.*

*As many as half a million people showed up, one out of 12 residents of Caracas, making Chavez's claims of continuing popularity farcical. The march was a big sign of voter rejection of Chavez and his "revolution." It's telling that there have been no comparable pro-Chavez rallies of this size. And don't think Chavez isn't worried.*

*The mood in the Caracas streets reflects a Nov. 2 AKSA Partners poll putting Chavez just four points ahead of Rosales, 52-48, with momentum shifting to the challenger."*

Reuters titled "**Huge march in Venezuela for Chavez opponent**", speaking of "hundreds of thousands of people" that marched in Caracas... ; "Most polls released in recent weeks show Rosales far behind Chavez despite having united a fractured opposition";

AP titled: "**Opposition's top presidential challenger leads march across Venezuela's capital**", speaking of a march "*drawing tens of thousands into the streets*". The AP reporter smugly interjected, "*Still, a recent survey by Zogby International showed Chavez with a 59 percent to 24 percent lead over Rosales. The face-to-face survey of 800 registered voters was conducted between Oct. 1 and Oct. 16 and had a 3.5 percent margin of error.*"

However, Reuters also has fallen into the Chavez survey trap. On November 24<sup>th</sup> it reported the following:

*"Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez has 60 percent support from likely voters ahead of a December 3 election, outstripping his rival Manuel Rosales by 29 points, a poll said on Friday. The survey, conducted by U.S. pollster Zogby International in collaboration with the University of Miami, surveyed 800 likely voters between November 12-18 and had a margin of error of 3.5 percentage points. Zogby showed Rosales slightly narrowing the gap with Chavez from its previous survey, which was conducted between October 1-16 and showed the president with a 35-point lead. The poll is generally in line with most independent surveys that show Chavez has a clear lead."*

Spanish TVE, which **Olympus Consulting** accused of slanting its coverage towards Kerry in the past U.S. Presidential campaign, and of only reporting surveys that showed Kerry tied or leading President Bush, recently aired a program that spoke of Chavez' supposed "huge lead" in terms nothing but favourable towards his campaign.

Along with Fidel Castro's undying friendship and strategic might, Hugo Chavez inherited a potent and well-greased Cuban PR and lobbying apparatus well experienced in denying the undeniable and defending the indefensible. This apparatus is now working at full steam, because Hugo Chavez has come to realize that eight years of government with few results at great cost not only have wasted away the passion the poor had for him for so long, but have turned a majority of them adamantly against him.

He's scared. He controls the electoral council. What does he do? For now, he's pouring the coal onto the international PR machine, trying to convince the world that he can't lose.

investigation and reporting by

John Salas and Thor Halvorssen