

Gunmen Attack Opponents of Chávez's Bid to Extend Power

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CARACAS, [Venezuela](#), Nov. 7 — Masked gunmen shot into a group of students on Wednesday at this country's most prestigious university. The students were returning from a march here protesting changes to the Constitution proposed by President [Hugo Chávez](#) that could allow him to remain in power indefinitely.

At least eight people were injured in the mix of gunfire and rock-throwing at the Central University of Venezuela, including two who were shot, according to Antonio Rivero, the national director of civil protection. The violence followed a march by tens of thousands of students to the [Supreme Court](#).

“At the moment the students arrived, they were attacked by others wearing hoods,” Mr. Rivero said in comments broadcast on the radio here. “We do not know what faction they belong to,” he said of the assailants.

Protests and counterprotests intensified throughout Venezuela ahead of a referendum on the president's 69 amendments scheduled for a Dec. 2 vote. The National Assembly, controlled almost entirely by followers of Mr. Chávez, approved the entire package on Friday.

Since then, Gen. Raúl Isaiás Baduel, the retired army commander, has broken with the president and condemned the proposed charter, giving new vitality to Mr. Chávez's opponents. This week, Mr. Chávez called General Baduel a “traitor,” denouncing the man who in 2002 helped put him back in power after a brief coup.

Buoyed by General Baduel's break with Mr. Chávez, the students marched to the Supreme Court on Wednesday to ask it to suspend the referendum. Such a ruling seems unlikely, since all of the court's 32 justices are believed to be supporters of Mr. Chávez.

The president's supporters also control the federal bureaucracy and every state-controlled company and are trying to exert greater control over universities, touching a nerve among an increasingly defiant student movement. Students also protested Wednesday in interior cities, including Mérida, Barquisimeto and San Cristóbal.

Cable broadcasters updated viewers throughout the day on the march against the proposed amendments and the ensuing violence, but state-controlled news media here offered a different view.

The main government television channel interspersed coverage of the clash with images of a pro-Chávez march in the city of Maracay. The official news agency said anti-Chávez students had attacked pro-Chávez students with tear gas canisters and threatened them with lynching.

Speaking at a land-reform ceremony in Carabobo State, Mr. Chávez said he would press ahead with campaigning for the new charter, which would abolish term limits for the president, but not for governors and mayors, and give him the authority to appoint rulers for new administrative regions to be created in the country