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12 Left-Wing Populists in Power

Venezuela's Experience

Margarita López Maya

Introduction

In 1998, Hugo Chávez Frías won the presidential election in Venezuela, and inaugurated a new era in the country's political history, shaped by a discourse and exercise of power that were both populist and leftist in nature. His triumph was facilitated by widespread disenchantment with representative democracy, and a yearning for political change that would solve Venezuela's persistent economic and political institutional crisis. Chávez implemented innovative participatory policies in the social sphere, while undermining the institutions and values of the liberal democratic system.

In its second administration, which began in 2007, the political system known as *Chavismo* replaced its political project of "participatory and protagonist democracy" with "socialism of the 21st century," which was designed to extinguish the liberal institutions and principles included in the 1999 constitution. The strategy of regime change used the president's charisma to push past legal restraints on the exercise of executive power. After his death in March 2013, the populist stage of Venezuela's recent history came to a close and Venezuelan society saw a political order shift towards an authoritarian regime presided over by Nicolás Maduro. The Maduro autocracy was an almost inevitable derivative of the populist form with which Chávez exercised power for thirteen years.

To support this argument, this chapter is divided into five parts. In the first, I characterize the emergence of the populist phenomenon in the 1998 electoral campaign and point out the socioeconomic and political imbalances that led to what is known as a populist rupture. In the second part I characterize Chávez as making use of a populist exercise of power since the beginning. He implanted a polarizing official discourse contemptuous of principles and institutions of representative democracy. In the third part, I analyze the communication policy and the social agenda, and their impacts on the opinion of the majority. In the fourth section, I discuss the results of oil prosperity and its contribution to ensuring popular acceptance of Chávez's socialist project. In a closing reflection, I explain how these developments allow us to

understand that the current dictatorship of Maduro is a legacy of the populist exercise of power of Chávez.

This chapter was nourished by a long and continuous line of research begun in the nineties on the Venezuelan socio-political process, within numerous publications. Particularly in my trilogy of books dedicated to understanding the Chavista phenomenon, as well as in some academic articles, those interested will find an abundant bibliographic newspaper, documentary and interview documentation that I have collected and analyzed this dramatic process over almost three decades.¹ Therefore, in this chapter, the references will be minimal, and I will refer to that corpus.

Hugo Chávez and the 1998 Electoral Campaign²

Since the late seventies, Venezuelan society, was framed by an economic crisis of a structural nature, abruptly revealed by the decline and instability of oil prices in the world market. Since the eighties, neither the society nor its elites seemed to understand, or failed to find satisfactory alternatives to overcome, the import substitution model prompted by oil revenues that could reignite the country's economic growth (Gómez Calcaño and López Maya, 1990). Economic indicators, as well as the social and cultural achievements of democracy during the previous several decades, went into sharp decline. In the nineties, the inability to stem this deterioration contributed to the political crisis of the second government of Carlos Andrés Pérez (1989–1993). This crisis was incubated by the *Caracazo* of February 1989, a virulent social outburst triggered by a rise in gasoline prices as part of a package of neoliberal adjustments adopted by the newly inaugurated government. This was followed by the coup d'état promoted by a group of mid-ranking military personnel led by Chávez in February 1992. By 1993, without social and political stability being restored, the former leader Pérez was put on trial on charges of embezzlement of public funds, which eventually led to his impeachment, and the appointment by Congress of a provisional president to complete the presidential term. By 1994, Venezuelan democracy was wounded and in need of vigorous therapy.

The economic and political crisis bred discontent by growing inequality, abruptly impoverishing sectors of the middle strata, and destroying the hopes of the poor for upward social mobility. These developments facilitated the emergence of a polarizing, dichotomous populist discourse in the 1998 presidential campaign, which portrayed a good and suffering people as being exploited by powerful corrupt, insensitive, and stateless (*apátridas*) elites. The neoliberal adjustment policies of the Pérez-2 (1989–1993) and Caldera-2 (1994–1999) governments aggravated existing levels of poverty and social inequality, creating an explosive situation.

Chávez, a lieutenant colonel, head of the failed coup d'état of 1992, was dismissed on charges of conspiracy by President Caldera in 1994, and was released from jail. He threw himself into the political arena and then into

the electoral competition of 1998 using populist discourse.³ Chavez offered unhappy Venezuelans a new beginning, where the leaders and parties responsible for the debacle would be displaced from power, in order to implement a project of a shared future, that would overcome the structural crisis, punish corruption (the main cause of the crisis and impoverishment according to his speech) and deepen democracy.

In his electoral campaign, the leader of the so-called Bolivarian Movement embraced proposals to introduce a form of participatory democracy. These had been discussed since the eighties among civil society groups and opposition parties, and in institutional spaces, such as the Presidential Commission for State Reform (COPRE) and the National Congress, where some decentralization reforms and mechanisms of direct democracy had been approved (Gómez Calcaño and López Maya; Kornblith, 1989, 1994). These measures did not satisfy Venezuelans suffering from the deterioration of their quality of life, and the growing repression applied by the Pérez and Caldera governments in response to growing socio-political turbulence.

It was on this explosive stage that Chávez used an aggressive populist discourse. He blamed the crisis and impoverishment on the established political parties, particularly the Democratic Action (AD) and Social Christian Copei (Copei) parties, which had alternated in power between 1958 and 1992. In his narrative, events of the nineteenth- and twentieth-century Venezuelan history were united by the victimization of the masses by the ruling oligarchs, which in the twentieth century were embodied by the parties. The oligarchy and the parties were one and the same, so a "revolution" had to be made in Venezuela, starting from scratch. Chávez attacked the main party, the social democratic Acción Democrática (AD) with particular virulence. Among his notable phrases during the campaign was: "The heads of the *adecos* have to be fried in oil," and he continually alluded to the party as "a plague."⁴ The strategy was successful, and he won the presidential elections in December 1998 with 56% of the valid votes.

A *populist rupture* had occurred. The new political forces with their charismatic leader at the helm offered a new beginning for the country, inaugurating a new historical era with the promise of well-being and inclusion. Enthusiasm spread and Venezuelans lined up "behind a man on horseback", like the children of *crazy Luz Caraballo* from Andrés Bello's poem, which alluded to the tragic charm of Latin American caudillismo.⁵

Chávez: Populism in Power⁶

The Chávez government, which began in 1999, made polarization a hallmark of the official discourse, disrupting the existing discourse of peace and social harmony characteristic of the democratic era (Coronil, 1997). The Chávez leadership also sought to modify the relations between state and society to make them less mediated by professional political organizations, and to establish a more direct relationship between the leader and his base. These

relationships in left-wing populism have a directionality “from above” and exhibit personalistic, affective, paternalistic, and messianic traits (Levitsky and Roberts, 2011). Additionally, the authoritarian tendencies of Chavez’s populism were expressed, among other examples of institutional erosion, by the advancement of a system of control of media content and media buyouts. In addition, a vast network of social organizations was created, which through the years underwent different transformations. Officially many were formally democratic – founded to promote autonomy and empowerment from below – and then they were readjusted to the statist and authoritarian model of Soviet- and Cuban-type socialism that has been imposed in the country since 2007.

From the beginning, the first actions of the Chávez government sought social and institutional change, both symbolic and real, through the convening and installation of a National Constituent Assembly. The new constitution that emerged from it⁷ was hastily discussed and approved by a popular referendum in December 1999. At Chávez’s insistence, the name of the republic was changed to the *Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela*, and Venezuela’s representative regime became a *participatory and protagonist democracy*, a term that sought to give the new political order a different name to distinguish it from the previous one. However, the constitutional text did not break with the liberal architecture of the 1961 Constitution, maintaining the principles and institutions of representative democracy, but introducing a wide range of mechanisms of participatory and/or direct democracy. These mechanisms had already been formulated in proposals of various Venezuelan socio-political actors since at least the eighties.⁸

Although the emerging political regime was a hybrid of representative and participatory democracy, its official discourse tended to stress direct and participatory institutions to the detriment of the representative ones that Chávez depicted as inferior or antagonistic. Based on this idea of expanding participation over representation, in the early years, participatory institutions flourished. These included technical committees for diverse purposes (water, gas, telecommunications, etc.), urban land committees, social consortia, self-managed community organizations, cooperatives, Zamora collective farms, and others. These innovations, where the participation of communities and organized social groups were a central aspect, created an atmosphere of enthusiasm and mobilization, especially among groups that had felt excluded and/or impoverished by the earlier crises or had always been marginalized. The communities were created in co-management with public officials, to solve the serious problems of services that afflicted the urban and rural poor sectors.⁹ Likewise, some mechanisms of direct democracy were put in place,¹⁰ including popular recall, such as the presidential recall of August 2004, where Chávez won a clear victory.

Simultaneous to the improvements in participatory democracy, Chávez undermined key aspects of representative democracy, such as the separation of powers, including the independence of the judicial branch, political

tolerance for different opinions, and the civil and political rights of the citizenry, including freedom of expression.¹¹ In his exercise of power, the president made use of the atmosphere of political polarization, which in turn created hostile responses by social and political forces who lost their hegemonic positions and saw their interests threatened. This triggered an atmosphere of almost permanent confrontation and violence in the country.

Official political discourse stigmatized the regime opponents – politicians and parties opposed to the government, unions attached to the traditional Confederation of Workers of Venezuela (CTV), businessmen organized in Fedecámaras and other associations, professionals, technicians and managers of the state oil industry, Petróleos de Venezuela, S.A. (PDVSA), as well as those identified as civil society groups, as bad guys, *pitiyanquis*, *squalids*, or traitors of the homeland. All of them constituted what Chávez coined with contempt as actors of the years of the “fourth republic.” In contrast, the “good guys” included grassroots popular organizations and unions that followed Chávez and his party. These included the Fifth Republic Movement (MVR), as well as the Patriotic Pole parties, a political platform of left-wing parties that supported him in the 1998 elections, such as the Communist Party of Venezuela (PCV) and the Patria Para Todos party (PPT). Chavez also garnered strong, though not universal, support among the military.¹²

In what we could call the first stage of the Chavista era, society was the stage for a fierce struggle for political hegemony between these two sides. The confrontation was most intense¹³ from 2001 to 2005, with massive and frequent mobilizations for and against the president, which sometimes ended in violence. In 2002, there was an attempted coup d'état, where Chávez was ousted from power for a few hours. This attack was led by the business organization Fedecámaras, and the owners of some private media companies, among other powerful actors. Also occurring that year was a PDVSA oil strike, organized by the management of the state-owned company, which rose up against its owner. This strike began in December and lasted until February 2003, when the government managed to get the company back up and running, and fired most of the management cadres. Despite the so-called *guarimbas protests*,¹⁴ led by members of the middle class, as well as more insurrectionist protests, the government emerged triumphant, strengthening Chávez's legitimacy and practically weakening all political and social opposition.

Despite the defeat of the opposition forces throughout these events, the confrontation continued until 2004, when, with the mediation of the OAS and the Carter Center, the government accepted the holding of a presidential recall referendum, a mechanism of direct democracy contemplated in the new constitution. Chavez triumphed in this new institutional procedure. Finally, in 2005, in the parliamentary elections scheduled for that year, Chávez and his political alliance captured all the seats of the National Assembly for the period 2006 to 2011, when the opposition parties withdrew in the

The permanent state of confrontation and mobilization in the face of a powerful adversary fortified the emerging Bolivarian movement, while Chávez personally concentrated power and weakened institutional counterweights. By 2003, when the PDVSA company (the national oil company) was renationalized by the government with the support of the military, pensioners and grassroots organizations, Chavez's hegemony began to consolidate. With its establishment, he began to implement a new political and economic model.

Communicative Hegemony and the Social Agenda

Polarization, mobilization, and permanent electoral campaigns with a plebiscitary logic and verbal violence, were some of the characteristics that revealed the deep populist imprint of Chávez's exercise of power. Another aspect was his centrality in the country's media space, both in the written press, as well as in audiovisual and radio communication. From the onset, the president focused all public communication around his person, continuously using the public channels, including a Sunday program that would become iconic, *Aló Presidente*, where he entertained viewers for hours, making government announcements, distributing resources for different projects and social programs, while stigmatizing his opponents, singing, dancing, and scolding ministers.

By 2004, a complex state communication policy was taking shape. Chavez's centrality was reinforced by taking control of the media space through the purchase of radio and television stations. Large investments occurred, designed to make the media and content of the so-called *Public Media System* cover and predominate throughout the national territory. The influence of private media, including the periodical press, was reduced by their purchase from the emerging Chavista, businessmen, and various bankruptcies triggered by actions such as blocking access to the foreign currency necessary to purchase paper, equipment, and other necessary supplies. During Chavez's second term, communicative hegemony was consolidated, diminishing the freedom of expression and access to independent information.

Another dimension of Chavista populism was the charismatic personalization of social policy. Public social programs were no longer presented as the fruits of the democratic state but were described as benefits personally granted by the leader. The launch of these so-called *social missions* began in 2002 and had the purpose of consolidating Chávez's popularity, while seeking to solve urgent basic needs of a population that had been impoverished and excluded by two decades of on-and-off crisis, exacerbated by neoliberal austerity. These social missions were initially thought of as temporary programs aimed at alleviating serious social ills such as illiteracy, deficient public health, and the high cost of food. Only later did they become permanent. There were more than twenty-five such programs by the end of Chavez's second term. In their early years, the programs registered meaningful gains in social indicators of

social welfare and education, reinforcing the aura of Chávez as a leader capable of addressing the crisis and restoring the country's past prosperity.

Among the most effective and popular social missions were: programs to ease access to birth certificates and national identity cards; to increase adult literacy; providing subsidized basic food items; the opening of clinics staffed by visiting Cuban doctors; and other medical programs (e.g. free operations to alleviate cataracts).

By 2005, Chavez, triumphant over the opposition and more popular than ever, announced a change from participatory democracy to a socialist regime. He offered an *unprecedented socialism* that, however, ended up as a pale copy of the same Marxist-Leninist dogma that had so recently failed in the Soviet Union and its satellites. The participatory innovations described above, which were promoted in the initial years of Chavismo, would be increasingly modified and/or replaced by organizational forms directed from above, either directly by the presidency or vice presidency, or linked to the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV) that Chávez founded in 2007. These drastic changes in the participatory content of the social programs and the organizations they promoted revealed the authoritarian drift in the new political project.

The centralized statist concept, which was not contemplated in the 1999 Constitution, was explicit in the laws of the Communal Councils (2006 and 2009), the Organic Law of the Communes (2010), and in general in the so-called "socialist laws" approved after 2010. The new "participatory" institutions were to serve the execution of the centralized policies decided by the national government under the leadership, in many cases, of the PSUV party. These organizations – or rather their community leaders or coordinators – also received resources for community projects from the oil tax revenues, which Chávez personally dispensed, without any pretense of accountability. Additionally, similar to the Cuban model, the organizations were also assigned the task of social control within their communities, and defense of national *sovereignty* by law.

Populism with Ten Years of Oil Prosperity

The second stage of the Chávez Era corresponded to his second term, which began in 2007. In 2005, the president strengthened his legitimacy and, in the absence of adversaries with the ability to confront him or control his arbitrariness, announced his desire to overcome capitalism, offering a third way via a new *Socialism of the 21st century*.¹⁶ Despite the rhetoric of novelty, the socialism of the Chavista project was similar to other socialist models, particularly the Cuban one. The most relevant changes included the end to term limits on the re-election of the president, the creation of a Popular Power not elected by universal suffrage and renaming of the Armed Forces as "*Bolivarian*," adding that they were "an essentially patriotic, popular and anti-imperialist body."¹⁷ The referendum took place in December and was

rejected by popular vote. Chávez, despite acknowledging his defeat, put the constitutional reform into practice through other mechanisms of dubious legality and/or legitimacy. To this end, he relied on legal interpretations of the judiciary that he had already managed to subordinate to his revolutionary political interests.

In the years of this second administration, the authoritarian nature of the Chavista project became clear. Rejected by popular vote, the proposal moved forward by increasingly resorting to the charismatic legitimacy of Chávez and the support provided by oil-export revenues, which the Chávez government was able to distribute to buy support, since the institutional counterweights had been dismantled.

Since 2003, Chávez had overcome the resistance of PDVSA's managers and employees. In doing so, the government had controlled the main source of fiscal revenue and the motor of the national economy. With absolute dominance over the Legislature since 2005 and over PDVSA's board since 2003, there were no restrictions on Chavez's power and no other power to call him to account. During these years, the minister of energy and petroleum, Rafael Ramírez, was also the president of PDVSA, blurring the boundaries between the interests of the state and the company. Both interests became identical to those of Chávez and his political coalition. And they represented years of a prolonged and historic boom in oil prices.¹⁸

Chávez ordered the diversion of resources from PDVSA's investment plan to fund various social missions. He even made use of buildings and company officials for policies that had nothing to do with oil, such as when he used the company and its resources to build roads or distribute food. This way of governing, which failed to solve the chronic problems of the Venezuelan economy, was seen in some sectors as a viable and successful model (Guerra, 2013). State enterprises, social missions and popular organizations were transformed into patronage networks, where access to resources was a reward for loyalty to Chávez and his project. Public money flowed to meet needs, but also whims, with almost no accountability. The discretionary use of PDVSA's resources, and the failure to meet its training and investment needs, led to its bankruptcy under Chavez's successor, Maduro.

Final Comment: The Dictatorship of Nicolás Maduro as Chávez's Legacy

This brief review of the Chávez era has highlighted a set of processes that incrementally and relentlessly eroded the values, principles, and institutions of a modern representative democratic regime. With Chávez in the presidency of the republic for thirteen years, political polarization was embedded in official discourse, dividing society into antagonistic and irreconcilable poles. The political game followed a friend-or-enemy logic. The response of opposition social and political actors was equally polarizing, giving rise to a confrontational and violent dynamic, which contributed to the ongoing decline of the economic, social, political, and institutional life of the country.

After the 2005 parliamentary elections, Chávez emerged triumphant over his opponents in a zero-sum game. It was then that the tensions between the rational-legal domination of Venezuelan democracy and the charismatic one exercised by Chávez to accumulate forces in his goal of producing political change were resolved in favor of the latter. The future was increasingly designed according to the thought and urges of the messianic leader, unchecked by the existing institutions.

The initial political project of the Bolivarian movement was ideologically vague and short in its concrete proposals to overcome the crises that had plagued the Venezuelan society and economy since the late twentieth century. Chávez manipulated symbolic and historical resources, which presented his leadership as being of epic significance and as a continuation of the emancipatory project of the Venezuelan nineteenth century. In his first term, he embraced proposals previously elaborated in institutional, political and civil society spaces. Participatory democracy was articulated as a new constitutional regime, which collected and deepened many demands and aspirations present in debates and documents of the last decades of the twentieth century. The term "protagonist" embodied the idea of empowering the population to make them responsible for the decisions that affected them.¹⁹

However, the "21st Century Socialism" that Chávez articulated in the campaign of his 2006 re-election, had little in common with the rhetoric of the new constitution. The proposal to reform the constitution failed to secure the necessary votes in the referendum, denying it democratic legitimacy. That defeat triggered a turning point for the Chavista project; from that point on it relied on the charismatic legitimacy of the leader to impose it, and on the distribution of windfall oil revenues to secure loyalty to the leader and his project.

Populism has been regarded as a historical phenomenon that opposes liberal democracy (Pappas, 2019). Populism is usually defined in antagonism to liberal democracy, but according to those who defend it as an *illiberal* democracy, it is located halfway between liberal democracy and autocracy, never finding political balance or stability. Eventually it tends to fall on one side or the other of the spectrum, sometimes towards liberalism, most often towards authoritarianism. According to this literature, it is democratic because it recognizes that sovereignty resides in the people, and respects electoral competition and outcomes. But popularism also plays on polarization and is willing to twist the rules to benefit majority rule. In its illiberalism, it embraces charismatic leadership, political moralism and clientelist politics. In 2007, Chávez's lack of respect for the popular will that rejected his socialist constitution, definitively put his political movement and his government on the road to autocracy.

After that year, Chávez continued to win electoral processes, which, unlike elections in representative regimes, were conducted with a strong plebiscitary logic. His political support was decreasing, but was still considerable. Despite the unfair and uncompetitive nature of these elections, he consistently bested

opponents by a margin above the ten points. The large oil resources were his greatest lever to persuade the population of the benefits of the vague socialism he advocated. During this period, the nationalization of companies, and the nationalization and confiscation of land accelerated. Many times, land was confiscated without compensation to the owners. Forms of popular organization also expanded, such as communal councils, but they lacked political pluralism due to their links to the government or the ruling party, and their deployment in support of Chavez in elections. The dismantling of the country's liberal democratic institutions was accompanied by the construction of a sophisticated public media system, which promulgated a distorted pro-regime narrative of reality.

In this way, late Chavismo revived what a Venezuelan anthropologist has called the magical state (Coronil, 1997), an imaginary, all-powerful state capable of working wonders thanks to its almost infinite flow of available money from the export of oil. Venezuelans were once again subjected to the delusional excesses of their elites when the world oil market once again sent *black gold* prices to rise.

Chávez's death in March 2013 precipitated the end of the magical dream. Minus the charisma of the leader, the socialist model began to unravel at the seams. Soon after Chavez's death, oil prices crashed, once again catapulting the Venezuelan economy from boom to bust. Since 2013, prices have stagnated, and earlier social and economic achievements have been reversed to the point that the country has fallen into the most complex humanitarian crisis since 2016 (WOLA 2020, HRW 2019).

Chávez's legacy is the authoritarian government of Maduro (López Maya, 2021), with totalitarian and sultanic features. Maduro did not come to power via fair competitive elections. Relying on the emotional impact of the death of Chavez and the patrimonial tools available to the state, Maduro won a narrow victory in April 2013 over opposition leader Henrique Capriles Radonski. Since then, he has resorted to repression, the rhetoric of radical revolution, and the spinning of conspiracy theories about enemies both foreign and domestic, in order to retain power.

In mid-2018, faced with conflict from an opposition in control of the National Assembly since 2016, Maduro first convened a National Constituent Assembly without complying with constitutional procedures, and then held an early presidential election also plagued by irregularities. The National Electoral Council overlooked his abuses, and he scored a victory. Since then, the government's dictatorial nature has become clearer, while the purpose of the government devolved into maintaining itself in power at the expense of all other interests. The exit costs faced by this elite are very high – due to rampant corruption and systematic violations of human rights – and so they have coalesced around the dictator in self-defense. The ability of Maduro and his government to sustain themselves has been made possible in large part due to the destruction of democratic institutions, the discourse of stigmatization of the principles and values of representative democracy, and contempt for

tolerance of differences and civil ways of life. This discourse is a direct legacy of the left-wing populism that Chávez practiced in power.

Notes

- 1 The trilogy is López Maya (2005, 2016 and 2021).
- 2 This part is supported by research results published in López Maya (2005).
- 3 For an analysis of Chávez's populist discourse in the campaign and his early years see: López Maya and Panzarelli (2012).
- 4 See <https://threadreaderapp.com/thread/1146043780350566400.html> by journalist José Antonnetti, posted on 2-07-2019 and downloaded on 06-09-2021.
- 5 The poem by Venezuelan Andrés Eloy Blanco can be seen in: www.sierranevadaemerida.com/poemadelalocaluzcaraballo/ downloaded on 06-09-2021.
- 6 This part is supported by research results published in López Maya (2011, 2016 and 2021)†
- 7 See, among others, Vinciano Pastor and Martínez Dalmau (2001); Combellas (1999).
- 8 For an analysis of the principles, laws and institutions of participatory democracy, see López Maya (2011). Since the eighties, institutional actors such as COPRE, or parties such as the La Causa R, have been fighting for the incorporation of direct democracy mechanisms. The 1999 Constitution incorporates them but also retains its institutions of liberal democracy.
- 9 On mechanisms and institutions of Venezuelan participatory democracy, see López Maya (2021).
- 10 Here we use the term "mechanisms of direct democracy" as Altman (2011) points out, when it implies universal, direct and secret suffrage (plebiscites, referendums, etc.).
- 11 Over the years much has been published about the gradualism that Chávez applied to undermine the autonomy of the public powers. See among others: Corrales and Penfold (2011), Smilde (2021) and Brewer Carías (2021).
- 12 The "fourth republic" according to Chavez began with the dismemberment of Gran Colombia into three countries in 1830. For Chavista, though, there was no difference between the caudillist, oligarchic, militaristic or democratic systems of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. All obeyed interests alien to those of the people. With him begins a "fifth republic".
- 13 In López Maya (2005) several chapters are devoted to the polarized confrontations of the years of Chávez's first government.
- 14 Operations *guarimbas* are a form of street protest, consisting of blocking traffic routes with various objects (garbage, tires, stones, sticks, campfires, etc.). When the repressive bodies arrive, those who lead the protest retreat to their homes, or to safe places, where they cannot be reached. *Guarimba* is a Venezuelan indigenous word, used in a children's game, whose meaning is a home or safe place, where one cannot be caught or harmed. Some *guarimbas* have become violent. The main goal was to create such instability as to force the military to intervene and lead a coup against Chávez (Smilde 2021).
- 15 These developments and those that follow below can be seen in detail in López Maya (2016). More recent analyses of the opposition, its errors, and authoritarian tendencies can be seen in Jiménez (2021).

- 16 The third way referred to a concept coined by Anthony Giddens that contained a proposal for the renewal of social democracy through a middle way between market and state, seeking productivity with social justice.
- 17 Chapter 7 of López Maya (2016) is entirely dedicated to the contents and processes of the failed constitutional reform.
- 18 Average Annual Price of Venezuelan Oil (2002–2015)

<i>Year</i>	<i>Dollar Price</i>
2002	21.95
2003	24.82
2004	32.88
2005	46.15
2006	56.96
2007	65.13
2008	89.08
2009	56.93
2010	71.73
2011	101.00
2012	103.44
2013	99.79
2014	88.54
2015	44.77

Source: Ministry of People's Power of Petroleum and Mining [or its equivalent as it has changed its name several times], several years.

- 19 "The heart of democracy is the leading participation of the people in the decisions that affect them. Now they only have the vote, but we are going to open all the channels for the people to be protagonists" (Nuñez Tenorio, 1997).

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