

## Unpacking Democratic Transitions: The Case of Venezuela

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## Executive Summary

Richard Bent

The death of Hugo Chávez has led Venezuela into a transitional period. Chávez was the face of the country since taking office in 1999 until his death on March 5<sup>th</sup>, 2013. His death led to the election of Nicolas Maduro who was the vice president under Chavez and has continued the socialist policies implemented during Chavez's regime. Since taking office, Maduro has had to deal with two major issues affecting the country. The first is the struggling economy, which is experiencing high rates of inflation and low economic growth (stagflation) and the second issue, is the continuous rates of violence, especially amongst the youth.

Economically, Venezuela is an oil dependent country. Their oil exports make up over half of the governments revenue and over three quarters of the country's exports. As noted earlier, the current economic ideology follows one that is socialist. Despite this, Venezuela still operates with relatively low income tax rates. If the country hopes to solve its problem of stagflation, look for the government to raise taxes rates to gain more revenue. The reason why Venezuela is experiencing stagflation is because under the Chavez regime, most of the revenue from the Oil sales was put back into economy by subsidizing basic goods. However, with the government spending mass amounts of money, this led to an increase in the price of all other goods. To stop this, Chavez implemented price controls, which negatively effects business opportunity.

The Military of Venezuela is built primarily from the Chávez era, as he held an aggressive approach to military acquisitions. Analysts sometimes refer to the military as the "Praetorian Guard" since it is under direct control of the president and not the armed forces. Chávez redefined what the militaries actions were and since taking over Maduro has continued this notion. The important aspect to take away from this section is that the military has had a successful hand in completing multiple coups against the government. This could be something to keep in mind as the uncertainty continues.

International relations regarding Venezuela and its foreign policy are closely tied to its natural resources and economic trade. Despite the United States (U.S) being its biggest trading partner, their relationship has been quite complex. The U.S met the election of Chavéz with critical response, while Chavéz met the "War on Terror" critically. Venezuela's relationship with China has been much more favorable compared to that of the United States. This in due in part to China assisting Venezuela in infrastructure development, including a railway joint venture worth 7.5 billion. Continuing on, Venezuela's relationship with Russia is another positive relationship. Russian president Vladimir Putin was quoted as saying, "Our companies have vast investment plans valued at over \$20 billion." Locally, Venezuela's relationships with its two biggest South American neighbours are strikingly different. Historically, Venezuela's

relationship with Columbia has been vacillate and currently still is, with Columbian president Juan Santos supporting Henrique Capriles, Maduro's strongest challenger. Conversely, its relationship with Brazil has been quite constructive, mostly due to the countries agreeing on a new energy policy, which includes a joint oil refinery.

Although brief, this summary has given the reader an insight into the changing paradigm within Venezuela. The issues discussed seem to be dividing the nation and with the recent anti-government protests, the divergence between the two groups only seems to be increasing.

## Political Systems

Sean Sanderson

Venezuela is a Constitutional Republic; officially known as the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. The government is separated into five components, the Executive branch, the Legislative, the Judicial, the Citizen and the Electoral. The Executive branch is headed by the President who serves a six year term with no term limits and is filled out by the cabinet called the Council of Ministers whose members are appointed by the President, with 31 separate ministries. The Legislative branch is a unicameral body whose members are elected by popular vote by a party proportional system; there are 136 members who serve five year terms also without term limits. Both the Legislative and Executive branches can propose legislation. The Judiciary is appointed by the President for non-renewable 12 year terms and they are selected from a nominee pool that is proposed by the Committee of Judicial Postulation, which is an independent body. The Citizen component of the government is the Moral Republican Council which is made up of the Comptroller General, the Public Defender and the Attorney General. The purpose of this Council is to “prevent, investigate and punish acts that violate public ethics and administrative morals.”<sup>11</sup> Finally, the Electoral branch is an independent non-partisan body which organizes and supervises everything related to the election of public officials through universal, direct and secret vote. The voting age in Venezuela is 18 and voting is not mandatory. These are turbulent times in Venezuelan politics. Former Vice-President Nicolas Maduro won a specially held Presidential election after the death of President Hugo Chavez on March 8th. It was a tight race and despite calls from the opposition of irregularities, internationally it was perceived as being legitimate. Maduro has big shoes to fill as Chavez had been the face of his country since he took power in 1999 and drastically changed the shape of Venezuelan politics and implemented a socialist policy shift using Latin American hero Simon Bolivar as an influence and rallying point. Maduro is the head of United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV), a formation of parties that united in 2006 who support Chavez and his Bolivarian ideology. In his election, Maduro faced tough competition from a united opposition who had followed the government’s lead in forming a unified party. The Democratic Unity Movement (MUD) was founded in 2009 and consists of 26 parties with varying ideological outlooks.

There are a few key issues being debated in Venezuela right now, among them are the economy and crime. Venezuela’s economy has slowed considerably, growing only 1.4% so far this year<sup>2</sup>, far below the government’s projection of 6.6%. Another problem is the country’s

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<sup>1</sup> Consejo Moral Republicano. "About Us - Moral Republican Council." Poder Ciudadano. <http://www.cmr.gob.ve/index.php/nosotros?showall=&start=1>.

<sup>2</sup> Ellsworth, Brian. “Venezuela Central Bank Denies Transactions with Wall Street.” Reuters, November 28, 2013. <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/11/28/us-venezuela-economy-idUSBRE9AR0JG20131128>.

rapidly rising inflation, reaching 58.5% in October.<sup>3</sup> The government has decided to combat this by imposing price slashes on many businesses, especially electronics ones. This move has sparked vehement outcries by the opposition who fear the effects on the economy. Crime is the other big issue facing Venezuelan politicians right now. The country's overall, youth and violent crime rates have all risen in the past 10 years and unrest because of the lack of improvement is growing. This coupled with the government's policy on keeping official national crime statistics secret from the public have drawn fire from the opposition.

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<sup>3</sup> Andriavano, Anna. "Venezuela after Chavez: An Economy on the Verge." Cnbc.com. Last modified November 26, 2013. <http://www.cnbc.com/id/101219760>.

## Socio-Economics

Andrew Green and Kurt Weech

The economic paradigm of Venezuela relies solely on the production and export of oil. According to the Annual Statistical Bulletin 2013, the value of Venezuela's exports is \$97.34 billion, and petroleum exports account for \$93.57 billion of total exports.<sup>4</sup> Venezuela is extremely reliant on the oil industry, and being a net exporter, is very sensitive to the needs and desires of the economies and demands of the United States and China, who purchase their oil.<sup>5</sup> Venezuela is a perfect example of a country dependent on resources. Oil income accounts on average for 61% of total government revenues, over 88% of exports and 14% of GDP.<sup>6</sup> Without the resource of oil, Venezuela would not be in the economic position it is today. Due to this large percentage of oil revenue for the government, Venezuela generally forgoes taxing citizens.<sup>7</sup> With that being said, Venezuela still operated with a net loss as a country in 2012. The government in 2012 had revenues of \$116.3 billion (USD), compared to expenditures of \$175.3 billion.<sup>8</sup> This loss ultimately takes away from allowing Venezuela to provide more for its citizens through social institutions. Furthermore, even with high oil revenues, the economy in Venezuela remains stagnant. Venezuela faces high levels of inflation, as well as misallocation of government spending into things other than infrastructure, education, and staffing respectable health systems. Inflation in Venezuela is 21.1%,<sup>9</sup> meaning prices are subject to immense fluctuation and constant change, thus affect the purchasing power of citizens and the ability for them to obtain basic goods and societal needs.

Prior to Chavez's rule, Venezuela was locked into Neoliberal reforms during the 1990s, which devastated the social welfare system. Under Chavez, the government turned away from austerity and embraced a local approach for social services. The major turning point was in 2001 when Chavez was able to take control of the oil company and use its profits to fund social

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<sup>4</sup> "Annual Statistics Bulletin 2013," OPEC, accessed November 19, 2013, [http://www.opec.org/opec\\_web/static\\_files\\_project/media/downloads/publications/ASB2013.pdf](http://www.opec.org/opec_web/static_files_project/media/downloads/publications/ASB2013.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> "Venezuela Overview," Revenue Watch Institute, accessed November 19, 2013, <http://www.revenuewatch.org/countries/latin-america/venezuela/overview>.

<sup>6</sup> Pedro Rodriguez, José Morales, and Francisco Monaldi, "Direct Distribution of Oil Revenues in Venezuela: A Viable Alternative?," Working Paper 306 (Center for Global Development, 2012), [http://www.cgdev.org/sites/default/files/1426486\\_file\\_Rodriguez\\_et\\_al\\_Venezuela\\_OTC\\_FINAL\\_0.pdf](http://www.cgdev.org/sites/default/files/1426486_file_Rodriguez_et_al_Venezuela_OTC_FINAL_0.pdf) (accessed November 19, 2013), pg 1.

<sup>7</sup> Rodriguez, "Direct Distribution," pg 1.

<sup>8</sup> "Venezuela: Economic Profile," Index Mundi, accessed November 19, 2013, [http://www.indexmundi.com/venezuela/economy\\_overview.html](http://www.indexmundi.com/venezuela/economy_overview.html).

<sup>9</sup> "Venezuela," World Factbook, accessed November 19, 2013, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ve.html>.

services.<sup>10</sup> The two main goals were to introduce and universal health care and education system. Chavez embraced a local approach to health care that has been extremely successful. His program Mission Barrio Adentro (Inside the Neighbourhood) has reached many poor people in the countryside who would not otherwise have access to healthcare. Both the World Health Organization and UNICEF have lauded the approach and it shows in Venezuela's statistics. The infant mortality rate has gone from 20 per 1000 live births in 1999 to 13 per 1000 live births in 2011.<sup>11</sup> Education was another important part of Chavez's social policy. He built many new schools in small communities and made. Thanks to large investments made in secondary and post-secondary education, more Venezuelans are staying in school longer. Venezuela has been consistently improving its UNESCO EDI (Education for all Development Index) jumping 5 spots in three years.<sup>12</sup> Perhaps Venezuela's proudest achievement has been the reduction in poverty thanks to investments in social programs. Since 1998, the percentage of people living at or below the poverty line has been cut in half, from 50% to 25%.<sup>13</sup> While Hugo Chavez may have mixed economic records, his achievements in making life better for the poor are a clear indicator on why he remained so popular.

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<sup>10</sup> Sujatha Fernandes, "Social Policy in Chávez's Venezuela: A Radical Alternative or More of the Same?," *ReVista Harvard Review of Latin America* (Fall 2008), <http://revista.drclas.harvard.edu/publications/revistaonline/fall-2008/social-policy-chavez-venezuela>.

<sup>11</sup> Ami Sedghi, "How did Venezuela change under Hugo Chavez?," *The Guardian*, March 6, 2013, accessed November 19, 2013, <http://www.theguardian.com/news/datablog/2012/oct/04/venezuela-hugo-chavez-election-data#data>.

<sup>12</sup> Tamara Pearson, "UNESCO: Education in Venezuela Has Greatly Improved," *VenezuelaAnalysis.com*, January 27, 2010, accessed November 19, 2013, <http://venezuelanalysis.com/news/5107>.

<sup>13</sup> Chris Carlson, "What the Statistics Tell Us about Venezuela in the Chavez Era," *VenezuelaAnalysis.com*, November 30, 2013, accessed November 19, 2013, <http://venezuelanalysis.com/analysis/7513>.

## Foreign Affairs

### Ashley Audette

Venezuela's foreign affairs can be described as both rocky and complex. Despite its often hostile relations with some major global powers, it can be seen that Venezuela still maintains its strong trading ties around the world, most notably, its relations with the United States. In 2006 while gathered at the General Assembly, Hugo Chavez referenced President Bush as 'the devil', while also implying the UN is 'worthless'.<sup>14</sup> "The devil came here yesterday", Chavez said of Bush's address to the Assembly the day before, "and it still smells of sulfur today." Coupled with this remark, Chavez continued, calling the UN "merely a deliberative organ that meets annually", implying no real progress ever came from the UN meeting, calling them pointless.<sup>15</sup> He also criticized the veto power shared by the permanent members of the Security Council, calling them undemocratic.<sup>16</sup> Despite these comments, Chavez still ensured that the United States remained a strong trading partner, with a relationship that totaled \$341 billion from 199-2011.<sup>17</sup> Although Venezuela is seen as anti-American, it relies on sales to the US market, and cannot risk losing access to said market, being the 4th largest supplier to the US in oil.<sup>18</sup>

Venezuela continues its relationships built on market sharing with Canada China. China and Venezuela's relationship stems off of China assisting Venezuela in Infrastructure and Technological advancements, providing funding and materials, in exchange for an increase in oil sales. Another market Venezuela relies on heavily, not only in oil trade but also for technology, is China. In July of 2009, Venezuela underwent a railway joint venture with China worth \$ 7.5 billion.<sup>19</sup> Chinese Railways Engineering Corporation (CREC) would hold a 40% stake in the project, and the Venezuelan government would own the rest, as noted by the Infrastructure Minister Disdado Cabello.<sup>20</sup> With this project, came the generation of 7500 jobs, and was completed in 2011. In October of 2008, Venezuela was able to build and launch its first satellite, built with Chinese technology, and launched from China.<sup>21</sup> Even with this satellite launch, the US had wanted to suspend the launch, which Chavez described as the US's obsession to conquer the world. Despite Washington's wishes, the launch was complete.

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<sup>14</sup> CNN International, 'Chavez: Bush 'devil'; U.S. 'on the way down', September 2006.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Patrick D. Duddy, Foreign Affairs: Council on Foreign Relations 'Venezuela', September 2012.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Reuters, 'China and Venezuela sign \$7.5 bln railway deal', July 2009.

<sup>20</sup> Sanskar Shrivastava, The World Reporter 'Hugo Chavez' Foreign Policies and International Relations', March 2013.

<sup>21</sup> AFP, 'Venezuela launches first satellite with Chinese technology', October 2008.

Venezuela also has strong ties with its neighboring countries in South America, specifically Brazil. In 2010, Venezuela pledged a closer trade and energy relationship with Brazil, which included building a new oil refinery in Brazil.<sup>22</sup> The refinery will be owned 40% by Venezuela's state oil firm PDVSA, while Brazil's national oil firm Petrobras will hold the rest.<sup>23</sup> Brazil's ties with Venezuela consist of a growing rate of exports, rising to 3.8 billion in the first 10 months of 2007, and up to 30% per year.<sup>24</sup>

An additional foreign relationship established by Venezuela would be that with Russia. Relations with Russia have been positive since Soviet times, and ties have grown better once Venezuela became the third nation to recognize the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. In October 2010, Russia approved a \$2 billion loan to Venezuela for an increase in arms and military strength.<sup>25</sup> They also conducted together a naval exercise in the Caribbean, which to the US was seen as a response for its support to Georgia in the Russo (Georgia War, 2008). Russia also signed a deal with Venezuela to assist in building Venezuela's first nuclear power plant, but this idea was shut down after the Japanese radiation spill as a result of the 2011 tsunami.<sup>26</sup>

Despite continuous tensions with the US and its supporters, Venezuela's strategic securing of trade relationships is what enables it to remain a strong global supplier of oil, as well as a consistently growing nation.

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<sup>22</sup> BBC News, 'Brazil and Venezuela link trade', December 2007.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Sanskar Shrivastava, The World Reporter 'Hugo Chavez' Foreign Policies and International Relations', March 2013.

<sup>26</sup> Sanskar Shrivastava, The World Reporter 'Hugo Chavez' Foreign Policies and International Relations', March 2013.

## International Relations

Sean Sanderson

Venezuela's relations with the rest of the world vary widely country to country. When it comes to the country's relations with its Latin American neighbours they are mostly friendly or the relationship is on the mend. The relationship with Brazil, their largest neighbour, is very friendly despite the ideological differences of their governments. Brazil is Venezuela's largest Latin American trading partner. Venezuela's relations with Guyana, its eastern neighbour, are for the most part friendly. The only dispute between the two is one over the coastal shelf border where there have been plans to drill for oil. A preliminary deal has been agreed upon that will see the issue dealt with in four months' time. Lately relations with Colombia have not been too good, this stemming largely from the decision of Colombian President, Juan Santos, to support Maduro's strongest challenger, Henrique Capriles, in the recent elections. Venezuela has been working as a facilitator in peace talks between Colombia and the FARC rebels but has threatened to abandon this. In 2010 relations hit a historic low with both countries recalling their ambassadors; this was the result of accusations that Venezuela was aiding rebels on their side of the border. The two countries recently have been trying to patch the relationship, in July the two Presidents met and agreed to set up inter-country committees on trade, energy and security among other things.<sup>27</sup>

Relations with the US have been shaky over the past decade, since the election of Hugo Chavez who was very critical of the United States. This was most apparent during the Bush Presidency, a man whom Chavez once called "the devil." Chavez was very critical of the US 'War On Terror' and as a result of the uncooperative stance Venezuela has been listed since 2006 as one of the countries where US arms cannot be sold.<sup>28</sup> The Americans have also been very critical of Venezuela's purchases of arms from Russia and especially Venezuela's close relationship with Iran. Prior to this the relations between the two have been strong and the trade ties between them are a testament to these earlier times. The US is still Venezuela's biggest partner in both imports and exports, relying heavily on the Americans to buy their crude oil. Trade between the two countries topped \$37 billion in 2012.<sup>29</sup>

Venezuela's relationship with China is friendly and built primarily on trade. Behind the US, China is the country's biggest trading partner with imports and exports totalling almost \$10 billion<sup>3</sup>, most of what's exported is crude oil. Chinese investment in Venezuelan infrastructure has surged with projects for a high speed rail line and the country's first satellite under way and

<sup>27</sup> BBC. "Venezuela and Colombia Agree to Mend Strained Relations." BBC News. Last modified July 22, 2013. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-latin-america-23415378>.

<sup>28</sup> Congressional research Service, Venezuela: Political Conditions and US Policy, Rep. (2008).

<sup>29</sup> "Trade in Venezuela." The Observatory of Economic Complexity. <http://atlas.media.mit.edu/country/ven/>.

many more deals in the works. Venezuela has also been purchasing arms from China. Since the election of Chavez, ties to Russia have been growing. This relationship has also been based largely off trade, with arms sales being the most notable. Russia has also supported Venezuela militarily by running joint naval exercises in the Caribbean. Plans for Russian investment in Venezuela have been growing as well with Russian President Vladimir Putin claiming that "Our companies have vast investment plans valued at over \$20 billion."<sup>30</sup> Venezuela and Canada have kept diplomatic relations since 1948, with both countries keeping embassies and ambassadors in the other. Trade reached its highest point between them in 2010, totalling slightly under \$1.5 billion.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> "‘Inherited Love’: Russia - Venezuela Economic Ties to Remain Tight, Mutual Investment Plans Estimated at \$20 BN." RT. Last modified July 2, 2013. <http://rt.com/business/russia-venezuela-energy-finance-545/>.

<sup>31</sup> Government of Canada. "Canada - Venezuela Relations." Canada International. [http://www.canadainternational.gc.ca/venezuela/bilateral\\_relations\\_bilaterales/canada\\_venezuela.aspx](http://www.canadainternational.gc.ca/venezuela/bilateral_relations_bilaterales/canada_venezuela.aspx).

## Military Relations

Elizabeth Zeppa & Juliana Greco

An analysis of military relations in Venezuela will require both a domestic and foreign approach. The domestic stance deals specifically with the Chavez era, and foreign military relations briefly looks at Venezuela's relationship with the US and Russia. The military in Venezuela is primarily built upon past leader Hugo Chavez, up until his death in 2013, Chavez held an aggressive policy of military acquisitions. This aggressive policy is said to stem from the fact that Chavez himself served in the army, which possibly attributes to the inequality within the military's structure, as he has placed more time and significance on the army of Venezuela as opposed to the air force. Venezuelan analysts claim that the militia is seen more as Chavez "Praetorian Guard" since it is under the direct control of the president and not the armed forces. From this we can see that the Venezuelan government is closely linked with military relations and regards this aspect of the country a defining characteristic.<sup>32</sup> The close relationship between the two has been disturbed by coups in the past in years: 1945, 1958 (note the next year Venezuela adopted a democracy: 1959), 1992 and again in 2002. The coup in 1992 sprung from the beliefs of corrupt political power, this one failed however it did bring about questions about military control. The coup in 2002 occurred specifically due to the Chavez rule, this coup deals with foreign military relations as the US played a big role in backing up the attempt.<sup>33</sup> Currently there is a suspected coup attempt titled "The Rolling Coup" in line for 2013 due to political allegations with new president Maduro, which the US is also highly involved in. Russia also plays a big part in foreign military relations as well as president Chavez purchased massive amounts of Russian made weaponry to assist in the efforts of building a strong military.

Currently the Venezuelan military has 115,000 men: an army of 63,000, a navy of 17,500 (including an estimated 7,000 marines), and an air force of 11,500 and a National Guard of 23,000. In October 2009 legal status was accorded to a fifth unit of the armed forces, the Bolivarian National Militia, and in February 2010 the creation was announced within the National Militia of a peasant force.<sup>34</sup> There was also an army reserve numbering 8,000. Military service is selective and the length of service varies by region for all services. The President

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<sup>32</sup> Norden, Debroah L. "Democracy and Military Control in Venezuela: From Subordination to Insurrection." *Latin American Research Review*. no. 2 (1998): 143-165. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2504065> (accessed February 11, 2014).

<sup>33</sup> Blough, Les. Center for Research on Globalization, "Documented: US Coup Plan for Venezuela 2013." Last modified 11 08, 2013. Accessed December 11, 2013. <http://www.globalresearch.ca/documented-us-coup-plan-for-venezuela-2013/5357432>.

<sup>34</sup> Defense (Venezuela), in *Europa World online*. London, Routledge. University of Western Ontario. Retrieved 11 February 2014 from <http://www.europaworld.com/entry/ve.dir.560>.

Nicolas Maduro is Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces. The overall military defense budget is 21,300 million bolívares (latest update in 2012). The current Commander-General of the National Guard is Maj.-Gen. Justo Noguera Pietri. The military aspect of the Venezuelan government is and will be portrayed in the shadow of Chavez's huge military installment connected and accessed through the government. Overall Chavez's idea is that the military should not be something completely separate and isolated from the rest of society. Rather, the military should be integrated into society, so that it may take up social responsibilities that go beyond the defense of the nation.<sup>35</sup> Chávez redefined the meaning of national defense to include social dimensions, such as food security and the people's well-being, and now Maduro has to uphold his position as president with this idea implemented into the system, in regards to Chavez's military establishment and vision.

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<sup>35</sup> Wilpert, Gregory. "Venezuela: Participatory Democracy or Government as Usual?." *Socialism & Democracy*. no. 1 (2005): 7-32. 10.1080/0885430042000338408 (accessed February 11, 2014).

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