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*The Evolution of Authoritarianism in Venezuela under the Chavista Regime*

*Section I: Introduction*

In 2008, former interior minister and political mentor of Chavez, Luis Miquilena, claimed “we are in the presence of a dictatorial government which has given a coup d’etat to the constitution.”<sup>1</sup>

Miquilena’s statement may be tainted by his relationship with Chavez or it may be why he spoke with such certainty because he knew Chavez better than most. Either way the idea that Venezuela was a dictatorship or an authoritarian regime in 2008 is contrary to much of the literature about Venezuela’s type of government during the Chavista regime.<sup>2</sup> This essay explores authoritarianism in Venezuela since Chavez’s rise to power. By examining differing views on the Chavez-Maduro regime, providing context for the rise of this government, as well as insights into both Chavez and Maduro, the people they represented, and the policies each of these presidents implemented. This essay then claims that the 1999 - 2002 era of the Chavez regime was a fragile democracy. Between 2002 and 2006 the Chavez government became a competitive authoritarian regime. Subsequently Chavez's government transitioned into authoritarianism from 2007 to 2009. Once Maduro became president in 2013 and had massive crackdowns on the opposition protest movement in 2014, the Maduro government became a military strongman authoritarian regime. This essay combines literature about authoritarianism, competitive authoritarianism, executive aggrandizement, authoritarianism with elections, and military authoritarianism to come up with an understanding of the different phases of the Venezuelan government. The

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<sup>1</sup> Jose de Cordoba and Darcy Crowe, “In Enacting Decrees, Chavez Makes New Power Grab: President Creates Militia, Expands Control of Industry,” *Wall Street Journal*, Aug 06, 2008.  
<https://www.proquest.com/newspapers/enacting-decrees-chavez-makes-new-power-grab/docview/2638093945/se-2>.

<sup>2</sup>Benedicte Bull and Antulio Rosales, “The Crisis in Venezuela: Drivers, Transitions, and Pathways,” *European Review of Latin American and Caribbean Studies / Revista Europea de Estudios Latinoamericanos y Del Caribe*, no. 109 (2020): 1–20; David J. Myers, “Review of Liberal Democracy, Populism, and Beyond,” *Latin American Research Review* 49, no. 3 (2014): 231–45; Laura Gamboa, “Plebiscitary Override in Venezuela: Erosion of Democracy and Deepening Authoritarianism,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 712, no. 1 (March 1, 2024): 124–36; Maryhen Jiménez, “Contesting Autocracy: Repression and Opposition Coordination in Venezuela,” *Political Studies* 71, no. 1 (May 21, 2021): 47–68.

methodology used in this paper was the collection of sources, from 1999 to the present, books, documentaries, journal articles, newspaper articles, interviews, election data, economic data, YouTube videos, TED talks, and speeches. In order to study political strategy in contemporary Venezuela, this paper draws on sources from across the Venezuelan political spectrum, including the Chavista movement, the opposition movement, and the different points of view within each of these movements.

### *Section 2: Defining Authoritarianism*

To grasp whether or not a regime is authoritarian one needs to understand the concept of a competitive authoritarianism. Competitive authoritarianism is a term that describes a government that is not entirely democratic or authoritarian but something in between. A more comprehensive definition based on Steven Levitsky's work on competitive authoritarianism; is a regime in which the criteria of democratic regimes (free and fair elections, all adults have political rights and civil liberties protected, and the elected authorities possess real authority to govern) are violated enough to create an uneven playing field between the government and the opposition.<sup>3</sup> This means that even if elections are without major fraud, opposition politicians are threatened or barred; journalists are threatened or imprisoned; and the system of checks and balances is continuously weakened.<sup>4</sup> To put it more simply, competitive authoritarianism is a system with electoral norms, where the checks on power have been undermined significantly and the political field is heavily skewed in favour of the ruling elite.<sup>5</sup>

Elections are a key component of democracy, and of the criteria for competitive authoritarianism mentioned above, one of the most difficult in establishing fraud or wrongdoing.<sup>6</sup> Elections are free and fair when overseen by a neutral authority; competent precautions are taken against fraud; the courts, military and police treat all candidates impartially; public media is accessible to all; independent

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<sup>3</sup> Steven Levitsky, and Lucan A. Way, "Elections Without Democracy: The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism," *Journal of Democracy* 13, no. 2 (2002): 51-65.

<sup>4</sup> Levitsky, "Elections Without Democracy," 51-65.

<sup>5</sup> Bull, "The Crisis in Venezuela: Drivers, Transitions, and Pathways," 1-20.

<sup>6</sup> Larry Diamond, "Thinking about Hybrid Regimes," *Journal of Democracy* 13, no. 2 (April 2002): 21-35; Levitsky, "Elections Without Democracy," 51-65.

monitoring is allowed; the procedures of counting and organizing the vote are transparent; essentially all adults can vote; and there is a protection of the secrecy of the ballot.<sup>7</sup> Elections in competitive authoritarian states are unsuccessful in meeting some of these criteria; however, elections in authoritarian states fail to meet any of these criteria.<sup>8</sup>

Competitive authoritarianism is at the same time a failed democratic state and a failed authoritarian state.<sup>9</sup> How does competitive authoritarianism fall short of full scale authoritarianism? The ruling elite in competitive authoritarian regimes are unable to reduce formal democratic rules to a facade or entirely eliminate them.<sup>10</sup> In a competitive authoritarian regime the ruling elite use tax authorities, legal harassment, bribery or co-optation when dealing with the opposition.<sup>11</sup> Whereas in authoritarian regimes, more open violation of democratic norms by the ruling elite are used, such as the repression or banning of media outlets and opposition.<sup>12</sup>

So why do some authoritarian regimes still hold elections? This is done as a means to hang onto power and increase control.<sup>13</sup> Elections in the hands of the authoritarian are a tool that can be used to divide opposition forces, through the construction of divided structures of contestation.<sup>14</sup> This creates factions within the opposition between those barred from running and those allowed to run for office, who have more to gain and become more invested in the authoritarian regime.<sup>15</sup> Elections also provide important demographic data to the authoritarian, who can then use this information to punish, intimidate or buy off supporters of the opposition.<sup>16</sup> Lastly, large electoral victories are used by authoritarians to demonstrate to the regime elite that opposition is pointless.<sup>17</sup> The point here is that elections can not just

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<sup>7</sup> Diamond, "Thinking about Hybrid Regimes," 21-35.

<sup>8</sup> Diamond, "Thinking about Hybrid Regimes," 21-35; Levitsky, "Elections Without Democracy," 51-65.

<sup>9</sup> Levitsky, "Elections Without Democracy," 51-65.

<sup>10</sup> Levitsky, "Elections Without Democracy," 51-65.

<sup>11</sup> Levitsky, "Elections Without Democracy," 51-65.

<sup>12</sup> Levitsky, "Elections Without Democracy," 51-65.

<sup>13</sup> Jennifer Gandhi and Ellen Lust-Okar, "Elections Under Authoritarianism," *Annual Review Political Science* 12 (2009): 403-422.

<sup>14</sup> Gandhi, "Elections Under Authoritarianism," 403-422.

<sup>15</sup> Gandhi, "Elections Under Authoritarianism," 403-422.

<sup>16</sup> Gandhi, "Elections Under Authoritarianism," 403-422.

<sup>17</sup> Gandhi, "Elections Under Authoritarianism," 403-422.

be tools in democratic and competitive authoritarianism but also for authoritarian governments to further their control.<sup>18</sup>

In order to determine whether or not the Chavista Regime is authoritarian, it is necessary to first define authoritarianism and its different forms. Scholars like Mitchel Dean have defined an authoritarian regime as a system of government that concentrates power in the hands of an individual leader or a group of elites. It is a system that limits pluralism, and suppresses opposition movements.<sup>19</sup> Authoritarian governments restrict individual liberties, most importantly, the freedom of speech. Lastly, authoritarianism disregards democratic norms, specifically a system of equality under law with checks and balances.<sup>20</sup>

One type of authoritarian regime is military rule. Military rule is a form of governance in which the prominent leader or leaders specialize in order and military force instead of political affairs.<sup>21</sup> Military rule can be represented in the form of a singular military officer as the dictator (rule by military strongman) or as a group/coalition of officers that rule the country (rule by military institution).<sup>22</sup> Military rulers do not tend to represent the rich or upper classes in contrast to notable theories about civilian dictatorships which understand these autocrats as representatives of the rich.<sup>23</sup> Common characteristics of military rule are that military rulers are more likely to abuse their citizens than civilian dictators and military rulers make the decision to abuse citizens quicker than non military autocracies.<sup>24</sup> Military rulers

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<sup>18</sup> Gandhi, "Elections Under Authoritarianism," 403-422.

<sup>19</sup> Mitchell Dean, "The Concept of Authoritarian Governmentality Today," *Global Society* 39, no 1 (10 Jun 2024): 16-35; "Authoritarianism - ECPS," *European Center for Populism Studies*, Accessed 20 December 2025, <https://www.populismstudies.org/Vocabulary/authoritarianism/>; Marlies Glasius, "What Authoritarianism Is ... and Is Not: a Practice Perspective," *International Affairs* 94, no. 3 (May 1, 2018): 515-33; Horizons Project, "Authoritarianism: How You Know It When You See It," *The Commons*, September 18, 2025, <https://commonslibrary.org/authoritarianism-how-you-know-it-when-you-see-it/>; Gábor Attila Tóth, "Authoritarianism," *Oxford Constitutional Law*, February 2017. <https://oxcon.oup.com/display/10.1093/law-mpeccol/law-mpeccol-e205#>, Lincoln Allison, "Authoritarianism," Oxford Reference, <https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803095435698#>; Robert Benson, "How Democracies Defend Themselves Against Authoritarianism." *American Progress*, April 9, 2025, <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/how-democracies-defend-themselves-against-authoritarianism/>.

<sup>20</sup> Dean, "The Concept of Authoritarian Governmentality Today," 16-35; ECPS, "Authoritarianism.,"; Glasius, "What Authoritarianism Is," 515-33; Horizons Project. "Authoritarianism.,"; Tóth, "Authoritarianism.,"; Allison, "Authoritarianism.,"; Benson, "How Democracies Defend Themselves Against Authoritarianism," 2025.

<sup>21</sup> Barbara Geddes, Erica Frantz, and Joseph G. Wright, "Military Rule," *Annual Review of Political Science* 17, no. 1 (2014): 147-62.

<sup>22</sup> Geddes, "Military Rule," 147-62.

<sup>23</sup> Geddes, "Military Rule," 147-62.

<sup>24</sup> Geddes, "Military Rule," 147-62.

are quicker to violence due to their attitudes and training impeding compromise with their opposition.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, military strongmen have a greater propensity for hostility and aggression towards their opposition, often opting for utilising force, starting wars and resisting a democratic transition.<sup>26</sup> This is because military strongmen in contrast to military rule by institution are less constrained by others and face greater risk of assassination, imprisonment, exile, and execution.<sup>27</sup> Therefore, scholars like Barbara Geddes make the point that military autocracies are different from civilian autocracies, and within military autocracies there are differences between rule by institution and rule by military strongman.<sup>28</sup>

### *Section 3: A Brief History of the Maduro Chavez Regime*

#### *Rise of Chavez and the Chavista Regime (1958-1999)*

This section contextualizes the rise of Chavista movement to provide insight into the Chavez-Maduro regime. The rise of Chavez and the Chavista regime can be contextualised by two concurrent political factors: the Venezuelan communist movement and the corrupt oligarchy of the established political parties. For context, Venezuela's period of forty years of democracy began after a coalition movement in 1958 was formed to remove military dictator Perez Jimenez from power.<sup>29</sup> This coalition was led in large part by academics, journalists, and intellectuals, who were communist leaning in collaboration with armed forces, students, moderate forces, and centrist parties.<sup>30</sup> Once the revolt occurred, a democratic government was established to replace the dictatorship. This was agreed in the Punto Fijo Pact signed in October 1958 by COPEI (center-right political party), Accion Democratica

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<sup>25</sup> Geddes, "Military Rule," 147–62.

<sup>26</sup> Geddes, "Military Rule," 147–62.

<sup>27</sup> Geddes, "Military Rule," 147–62.

<sup>28</sup> Geddes, "Military Rule," 147–62.

<sup>29</sup> Michael Derham, "Introduction," *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 21, no. 2 (2002): 191–98; Manuel Anselmi, *Chavez's Children: Ideology, Education, and Society in Latin America*, New York: Bloomsbury Publishing USA, (2015): 52-59; Fernando Coronil, *The Magical State : Nature, Money, and Modernity in Venezuela*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, (1997):201-234; for more on the resistance coalition against Perez Jimenez and the politics of the 60s read: Alejandro Velasco, *Barrio Rising : Urban Popular Politics and the Making of Modern Venezuela*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015);68-101, 103-129, 130-150.

<sup>30</sup> Anselmi, *Chavez's Children*, 52-59; George Ciccariello-Maher, *We Created Chávez : A People's History of the Venezuelan Revolution*, Durham: Duke University Press, (2013): 22-44; Coronil, *The Magical State : Nature, Money, and Modernity in Venezuela*, 201-234; Velasco, *Barrio Rising : Urban Popular Politics and the Making of Modern Venezuela*, Berkeley: University of California Press, (2015); 68-101.

(center-left political party), the Venezuelan trade union, the Venezuelan Catholic Church, and the Fedecamaras (an industrial association).<sup>31</sup> All these groups agreed to exclude the extreme left-wing and the Venezuelan communist party. Soon after the agreement was signed, the left-wing guerrillas and the communist party were made illegal.<sup>32</sup>

The Venezuelan Communist Party and left-wing guerrillas understood the Punto Fijo pact to be an act that betrayed the resistance coalition movement against Perez Jimenez.<sup>33</sup> As a result, the Communist Party developed guerrilla factions such as the Armed Forces of National Liberation (FALN).<sup>34</sup> The FALN had financial support from Fidel Castro, who sent military advisors, weapons, money, and transmitted large amounts of left-wing radio propaganda.<sup>35</sup> The communist guerrillas were able to kidnap a US colonel, assassinate police officers, sabotage oil pipelines, and bomb the American embassy, a Roebuck warehouse, and a Sears department store. The FALN orchestrated two failed insurgency attempts with the help of Castro.<sup>36</sup> After a government crackdown in 1964, the communist groups abandoned the idea of insurgency and guerrilla warfare.<sup>37</sup> Several leaders of this movement, Douglas Bravo, Teodoro Petkoff, Guillermo Garcia Ponce, and Luis Miquilena, became Hugo Chavez's mentors and laid the foundation for the Chavista movement and Chavez's eventual rise to power.<sup>38</sup>

Within Venezuela's democracy, a two-party system was established between the Christian democratic party, Comité de Organización Política Electoral Independiente (COPEI), and the social

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<sup>31</sup> Anselmi, *Chavez's Children*, 52-59; Ronald D Sylvia and Constantine P. Danopoulos, "The Chavez Phenomenon: Political Change in Venezuela," *Third World Quarterly* 24, no. 1 (2003): 63-76; David J Myers, "Review of The Struggle to Legitimate Political Regimes in Venezuela: From Pérez Jiménez to Maduro," *Latin American Research Review* 52, no. 4 (2017): 711-19; Yannis Stavrakakis, Alexandros Kioupkiolis, Giorgos Katsambekis, Nikos Nikisianis, and Thomas Siomos, "Contemporary Left-Wing Populism in Latin America: Leadership, Horizontalism, and Postdemocracy in Chavez's Venezuela," *Latin American Politics and Society* 58, no. 3 (2016): 51-76; Coronil, *The Magical State : Nature, Money, and Modernity in Venezuela*, 201-234.

<sup>32</sup> Anselmi, *Chavez's Children*, 52-59; Coronil, *The Magical State : Nature, Money, and Modernity in Venezuela*, 201-234.

<sup>33</sup> Anselmi, *Chavez's Children*, 52-59; Coronil, *The Magical State : Nature, Money, and Modernity in Venezuela*, 201-234.

<sup>34</sup> Brian A Nelson, "The Education of Hugo Chavez: Unraveling Venezuela's Revolutionary Path," *The Virginia Quarterly Review* 87, no. 2 (2011): 174-87.

<sup>35</sup> Nelson, "The Education of Hugo Chavez," 174-87.

<sup>36</sup> Nelson, "The Education of Hugo Chavez," 174-87.

<sup>37</sup> Myers, "Review of The Struggle to Legitimate Political Regimes in Venezuela," 711-19.

<sup>38</sup> Nelson, "The Education of Hugo Chavez," 174-87.

democratic party, Acción Democrática (AD), alternating turns in power.<sup>39</sup> In this period of democracy, Venezuela experienced high rates of growth, primarily in the 1970s, and affluence within Latin America, driven by oil production.<sup>40</sup> The production of oil has been central to the development of social and political values across all social, political and economic classes in Venezuela throughout its history as an independent country.<sup>41</sup> Even more so, after the oil boom in 1973, the oil industry became the fuel for dreams of a greater Venezuela, in the words of President Carlos Andres Perez “La Grand Venezuela.”<sup>42</sup> Carlos Andrés Pérez saw this boom in oil revenue as an opportunity to fund social programs, ultimately nationalizing the oil industry and creating PDVSA during the middle of his term as President.<sup>43</sup> However, this dream faded; widespread corruption, clientelism, and the increase in Venezuelan debt, resulting from oil rent, would lead to the slow deterioration of this democracy.<sup>44</sup> The rise in corruption in the late 70s can be understood as being fostered by Venezuela’s rentier economy.<sup>45</sup> The Venezuelan economy could not absorb further rent surpluses from oil exportation to increase productivity. Rather, to increase profitability, surpluses were invested abroad in different crony-capitalism dynamics developed in primarily inefficient and protected sectors.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Sylvia, “The Chavez Phenomenon,” 63–76; Stavrakakis, “Contemporary Left-Wing Populism in Latin America,” 51–76; Henning Suhr, “Run Down: Venezuela’s Road to Ruin,” in *Rise and Fall of Regional Powers*, edited by Gerhard Wahlers (Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, 2016), 57-70; Yordan K. Kutiyski and André Krouwel, “Narrowing the Gap: Explaining the Increasing Competitiveness of the Venezuelan Opposition,” *Latin American Politics and Society* 56, no. 4 (2014): 71–97.

<sup>40</sup> Stavrakakis, “Contemporary Left-Wing Populism in Latin America,” 51–76; Suhr, “Run Down: Venezuela’s Road to Ruin,” 57-70.

<sup>41</sup> Miguel Tinker Salas, *The Enduring Legacy : Oil, Culture, and Society in Venezuela*, Durham: Duke University Press, (2009):viii-xiii, 1-14; for more on the influence of oil on Venezuelan culture and society read: Miguel Tinker Salas, “Cultura, Poder y Petróleo: Campos Petroleros y La Construcción de Ciudadanía En Venezuela,” *Espacio Abierto Cuaderno Venezolano de Sociología* 15, no. 1/2 (2006): 343–67.

<sup>42</sup> Coronil, *The Magical State : Nature, Money, and Modernity in Venezuela*, 1-18.

<sup>43</sup> Coronil, *The Magical State : Nature, Money, and Modernity in Venezuela*, 1-18.

<sup>44</sup> Stavrakakis, “Contemporary Left-Wing Populism in Latin America,” 51–76; Kutiyski, “Narrowing the Gap,” 71–97; Sara C. Motta, “Populism’s Achilles’ Heel: Popular Democracy beyond the Liberal State and the Market Economy in Venezuela,” *Latin American Perspectives* 38, no. 1 (2011): 28–46; Bull, “The Crisis in Venezuela: Drivers, Transitions, and Pathways,” 1–20; Coronil, *The Magical State : Nature, Money, and Modernity in Venezuela*, 321-366; for further reading if interested in how corruption fueled chavismo populism read chapters 4 and 5 in: Kirk A. Hawkins, *Venezuela’s Chavismo and Populism in Comparative Perspective*, Cambridge University Press, (2010): 86-130, 131-165.

<sup>45</sup> Bull, “The Crisis in Venezuela: Drivers, Transitions, and Pathways,” 1–20; Coronil, *The Magical State : Nature, Money, and Modernity in Venezuela*, 321-366.

<sup>46</sup> Bull, “The Crisis in Venezuela: Drivers, Transitions, and Pathways,” 1–20; for more information on the impact of oil rent on the Venezuelan economy read chapters 6 and 7 in Coronil, *The Magical State : Nature, Money, and Modernity in Venezuela*, 237-285, and 286-320.

The decrease in the price of oil in the 1980s led to a financial crisis, in addition to the fact that the two-party system economically ensured that oil and mineral reserves were being managed in abeyance with the interests of US corporations, leading to a massive transfer of financial resources abroad.<sup>47</sup> There was a clear impoverishment that occurred in the 1980s and 1990s in Venezuela.<sup>48</sup> In 1980, the percentage of houses classified as poor was around 20 percent, and in 1996, the percentage of houses classified as poor was 60 percent. Between 1984 and 1985, extreme poverty rose from 11 percent to 36 percent, and the percentage of people classified as poor rose from 36 to 66 percent.<sup>49</sup> In 1989, poverty rose from 46 percent to 62 percent, and extreme poverty was in the thirties. At the end of the 90s, purchasing power was only 40 percent of that of the 1980s in Venezuela.<sup>50</sup> From 1980 to 1999, the informal economy increased by 18.5 percent (34.5% to 53%).<sup>51</sup> An estimated six hundred thousand farmers and farmhands lost their jobs between 1989 and 1999. Unemployment within the urban workforce increased from 6.6 percent in 1980 to 15.4 percent in 1999. In 1989, the socioeconomic composition in Venezuela was 58 percent working class, 38 percent middle class, and 5 percent upper class.<sup>52</sup> In 1999, the socioeconomic composition of Venezuela was: 84 percent working class, 13 percent middle class, and 4 percent upper class.<sup>53</sup>

To understand the chavista movement, one needs to go beyond the political factors and observe the Venezuelan people's response to their lived realities. This can be demonstrated in el Caracazo in 1989.<sup>54</sup> The Caracazo was a wave of protests and riots that occurred as a result of the adoption of neoliberal reforms in agreement with the IMF by President Carlos Andres Perez.<sup>55</sup> Perez's reforms

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<sup>47</sup> Anselmi, *Chavez's Children*, 52-66.

<sup>48</sup> Anselmi, *Chavez's Children*, 52-66; Ciccariello-Maher, *We Created Chavez*, 218-233.

<sup>49</sup> Anselmi, *Chavez's Children*, 52-66.

<sup>50</sup> Anselmi, *Chavez's Children*, 52-66.

<sup>51</sup> Anselmi, *Chavez's Children*, 52-66; Ciccariello-Maher, *We Created Chavez*, 218-233.

<sup>52</sup> Anselmi, *Chavez's Children*, 52-66; Ciccariello-Maher, *We Created Chavez*, 218-233.

<sup>53</sup> Anselmi, *Chavez's Children*, 52-66; Ciccariello-Maher, *We Created Chavez*, 218-233.

<sup>54</sup> Ricardo Combellas, "El Proceso Constituyente Y La Constitución De 1999," *Politeia* 30, no. 30, (2003).

<sup>55</sup> Anselmi, *Chavez's Children*, 63-65; Ciccariello-Maher, *We Created Chavez*, 88-103; Sylvia, "The Chavez Phenomenon," 63-76; Kutiyski, "Narrowing the Gap," 71-97; Steve Ellner and Miguel Tinker Salas, "Introduction: New Perspectives on Politics and Society," *Latin American Perspectives* 32, no. 3 (2005): 3-7; Velasco, *Barrio Rising: Urban Popular Politics and the Making of Modern Venezuela*, 215-248; María Pilar García-Guadilla and Ana Mallen, "Polarization, Participatory Democracy, and Democratic Erosion in Venezuela's Twenty-First Century Socialism," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 681, no. 1 (2018): 62-77.

eliminated price controls and subsidies that decreased the prices of many consumption goods and public services.<sup>56</sup> The increase in the price of gasoline by 30 percent was what ignited the large-scale violent revolt.<sup>57</sup> The government responded with a violent military crackdown. According to official sources, there were only 300 dead, while others have said the figure could be as high as 5,000 dead.<sup>58</sup> The Caracazo led to two coup attempts orchestrated in 1992 by Lieutenant Colonel Hugo Chavez in February and then by his co-conspirators in November.<sup>59</sup> Mounting public pressure led to the impeachment of President Carlos Andres Perez in 1993 for misappropriation of public funds. Then, in 1994, Venezuela was hit by a banking crisis.<sup>60</sup> Hugo Chavez was released from prison in 1994 and reformed his image slightly to run for politics, and was considered the people's candidate in large part because he was one of the only candidates campaigning in the interior and poorer parts of the country.<sup>61</sup> Chavez was elected in 1998 and became president in 1999 with 56% of the vote.<sup>62</sup>

### *Chavez Period (1999-2013)*

Chavez came to office promising to put an end to the corrupt politics represented by the Punto Fijo era. However, the politics that he embraced was not static, and depended on a broad coalition within

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<sup>56</sup> Anselmi, *Chavez's Children*, 63-65.

<sup>57</sup> Anselmi, *Chavez's Children*, 63-65; Kutiyski, "Narrowing the Gap," 71-97.

<sup>58</sup> Anselmi, *Chavez's Children*, 63-65; Stavrakakis, "Contemporary Left-Wing Populism in Latin America," 51-76;

<sup>59</sup> Anselmi, *Chavez's Children*, 66-72; Ciccariello-Maher, *We Created Chavez*, 88-103; Sylvia, "The Chavez Phenomenon," 63-76; Nelson, "The Education of Hugo Chavez," 174-87; Kutiyski, "Narrowing the Gap," 71-97; Ellner, "Introduction: New Perspectives on Politics and Society," 3-7; Marco Aponte-Moreno and Lance Lattig, "Chavez: Rhetoric Made in Havana," *World Policy Journal* 29, no. 1 (2012): 33-42; Damarys Canache, "From Bullets to Ballots: The Emergence of Popular Support for Hugo Chavez," *Latin American Politics and Society* 44, no. 1 (2002): 69-90; Myers, "Review of Liberal Democracy, Populism, and Beyond," 231-45; if interested in the how political members of the Punto Fijo regime understood the phenomenon of Chavez read: Paulina Gamus, "Venezuela," *The American Jewish Year Book* 107 (2007): 308-23.

<sup>60</sup> Myers, "Review of The Struggle to Legitimate Political Regimes in Venezuela," 711-19; Kutiyski, "Narrowing the Gap," 71-97; Ellner, "Introduction: New Perspectives on Politics and Society," 3-7.

<sup>61</sup> Aponte-Moreno, "Chavez: Rhetoric Made in Havana," 33-42; Canache, "From Bullets to Ballots," 69-90; Myers, "Review of Liberal Democracy, Populism, and Beyond," 231-45; Steve Ellner, "Class Strategies in Chavista Venezuela: Pragmatic and Populist Policies in a Broader Context," *Latin American Perspectives* 46, no. 1 (2019): 167-89; Ricardo Vaz, "Chavez and the Sowing of Values: A Conversation With Ana Sofia Cabezas," *Venezuelanalysis*, June 19, 2025. <https://venezuelanalysis.com/interviews/chavez-and-the-sowing-of-values-a-conversation-with-ana-sofia-cabezas/>. According to the vice-president of the Hugo Chávez Foundation, Ana Sofia Cabezas discussed Chavez campaign leading up to the 1998 presidential elections specifically campaigning in the poorer, more rural areas of Venezuela.

<sup>62</sup> Sylvia, "The Chavez Phenomenon," 63-76; Aponte-Moreno, "Chavez: Rhetoric Made in Havana," 33-42.

the country. In this section, I will discuss what Chavez advocated for and who he represented. With this in mind I will look at the evolution of Chavez's policies and support.

Hugo Chavez represented three big ideas: populism, Bolivarianism, and Socialism of the 21st Century.<sup>63</sup> First, Chavez campaigned and governed on a populist and anti-elitist message targeting individuals who profited during the Punto Fijo regime, such as oil businessmen, politicians, and industrial leaders, among others.<sup>64</sup> Additionally, Chavez and his movement opposed those they referred to as the "world elite," which they understood to be Western imperialist nations.<sup>65</sup> Second, Chavez promoted Bolivarianism, which is a nationalistic project designed to defend Venezuela from foreign interests, in particular US imperialism.<sup>66</sup> One focus of Bolivarianism was oriented toward social justice and improving democracy for historically excluded groups such as the Afro- and Indigenous-Venezuelan communities.<sup>67</sup> Lastly, Chavez created a distinct form of socialism inspired by Simon Bolivar, left-wing ideas, Fidel Castro, and Marxism, which he termed Socialism of the 21st Century.<sup>68</sup> In practice, Socialism of the 21st

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<sup>63</sup> Stavrakakis, "Contemporary Left-Wing Populism in Latin America," 51–76; Hugo J. Faria, "Hugo Chavez Against the Backdrop of Venezuelan Economic and Political History," *The Independent Review* XII, (2008): 519-534; Gabriel Hetland, "From System Collapse to Chavista Hegemony," *Latin American Perspectives* 44, no. 1 (2016): 17–36.

<sup>64</sup> Sylvia, "The Chavez Phenomenon," 63–76; Stavrakakis, "Contemporary Left-Wing Populism in Latin America," 51–76; Margarita Lopez Maya, "View of Venezuela Today: A 'Participative and Protagonistic' Democracy?" *Socialist Register*, (2009): 160-179, <https://socialistregister.com/index.php/srv/article/view/5880/2776>; for more information on Chavismo populism read: Hawkins, *Venezuela's Chavismo and Populism in Comparative Perspective*, 15-49 (Chavismo populist movement), 50-85 (Chavismo populist discourse).

<sup>65</sup> Maya, "View of Venezuela Today," 160-179; for more on this topic from the perspective of the supporters of Chavez: Cira Pasqual Marquina, "Venezuela's Participatory Democracy and the Struggle Against Imperialism: A Conversation With Alison Bodine," *Venezuelanalysis*, May 30, 2025. <https://venezuelanalysis.com/interviews/venezuelas-participatory-democracy-and-the-struggle-against-imperialism-a-conversation-with-alison-bodine/>. Cira Pasqual Marquina, "Venezuela, a Beacon Against Fascism: A Conversation With Javier Couso," *Venezuelanalysis*, October 4, 2024. <https://venezuelanalysis.com/interviews/venezuela-a-beacon-against-fascism-a-conversation-with-javier-couso/>. Supporters of Chavez, like Alison Bodine and Javier Couso, see Chavismo as a democratic movement.

<sup>66</sup> Suhr, "Run Down: Venezuela's Road to Ruin," 57-70; Iselin Åsedotter Strønen, "'A Civil-Military Alliance': The Venezuelan Armed Forces Before and During the Chavez Era," *CMI - Chr. Michelsen Institute*, (2016): 8-26; Thomas Posado, "The Authoritarian and Conservative Turn of Nicolás Maduro," *In Latin America's Pendular Politics*, edited by Olivier Dabène, Switzerland: Springer International Publishing AG, (2023): 341–57.

<sup>67</sup> Anselmi, *Chavez's Children*, 52-66; Sylvia, "The Chavez Phenomenon," 63–76; Myers, "Review of The Struggle to Legitimate Political Regimes in Venezuela," 711–19; Stavrakakis, "Contemporary Left-Wing Populism in Latin America," 51–76; Suhr, "Run Down: Venezuela's Road to Ruin," 57-70; Bull, "The Crisis in Venezuela: Drivers, Transitions, and Pathways," 1–20; Myers, "Review of Liberal Democracy, Populism, and Beyond," 231–45; Ellner, "Class Strategies in Chavista Venezuela," 167–89; Vaz, "Chavez and the Sowing of Values,"; Strønen, "'A Civil-Military Alliance'," 8-26; for more on this topic from the supporters of Chavismo, see: Steve Ellner, "Venezuela's Social-Based Democratic Model: Innovations and Limitations," *Venezuelanalysis*, September 27, 2011. <https://venezuelanalysis.com/analysis/6519/#>. Cira Pasqual Marquina, "Afro-Venezuelan Memory, Struggle and Liberation: A Conversation With Fita González," *Venezuelanalysis*, August 10, 2025. <https://venezuelanalysis.com/interviews/afro-venezuelan-memory-struggle-and-liberation-a-conversation-with-fita-gonzalez/>.

<sup>68</sup> Canache, "From Bullets to Ballots," 69–90; Myers, "Review of Liberal Democracy, Populism, and Beyond," 231–45; Faria, "Hugo Chavez Against the Backdrop," 519-534; Ellner, "Venezuela's Social-Based Democratic Model,"; John Bellamy Foster, "Chavez and the Communal State: On the Transition to Socialism in Venezuela," *Monthly Review*, September 8, 2025.

Century was the representation of a popularly supported, democratically elected movement, which established a mixed economy, nationalising certain sectors while still maintaining private property and the private sector in certain industries.<sup>69</sup> Chavez's form of economic planning, funded by oil rents, involved local state structures such as communes and local councils, which built power at a grassroots level.<sup>70</sup>

Hugo Chavez's largest base of support was from the poor who were excluded from the Punto Fijo regime and benefited from Chavez social missions.<sup>71</sup> This includes rural, Black, and indigenous populations in Venezuela who were disenfranchised and disregarded by the prior elitist system.<sup>72</sup> Another section of Chavez's stronghold of support was the military for two reasons: one being Chavez's military background, along with his Bolivarian nationalistic rhetoric and ideas.<sup>73</sup> This is because most of the Venezuelan military come from lower social classes.<sup>74</sup> However, wide appeal for Bolivarianism within the military occurred after the 2002 coup, once all officers who supported the coup were removed from their positions.<sup>75</sup> At different moments, some upper and middle-class populations in Venezuela were part of Chavez's broad coalition. These were individuals who were intrigued by Chavez's new political order that

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<https://monthlyreview.org/articles/chavez-and-the-communal-state>; Daniel Hellinger and Anthony Petros Spanakos, "The Legacy of Hugo Chávez," *Latin American Perspectives* 44, no. 1 (July 7, 2016): 4–16; if interested in a Marxist, Leninist, Trotskyist perspective on Chavez read: "Venezuela: Chavez Vs. Working Class," July 2007, <https://www.marxists.org/history/etol/newspape/socialistvoice/venezuela80.html#>:

<sup>69</sup> Sylvia, "The Chavez Phenomenon," 63–76; Kutiyski, "Narrowing the Gap," 71–97; Bull, "The Crisis in Venezuela: Drivers, Transitions, and Pathways," 1–20; Myers, "Review of Liberal Democracy, Populism, and Beyond," 231–45; Maya, "View of Venezuela Today," 160-179; Ellner, "Venezuela's Social-Based Democratic Model,"; Foster, "Chavez and the Communal State,"; "Venezuela: Chavez Vs. Working Class."

<sup>70</sup> García-Guadilla, "Polarization, Participatory Democracy, and Democratic Erosion," 62–77; Kutiyski, "Narrowing the Gap," 71–97; Bull, "The Crisis in Venezuela: Drivers, Transitions, and Pathways," 1–20; Maya, "View of Venezuela Today," 160-179; Hetland, "From System Collapse to Chavista Hegemony," 17–36; Ellner, "Venezuela's Social-Based Democratic Model,"; Marquina, "Afro-Venezuelan Memory, Struggle and Liberation,"; for another pro Chavez perspective focused on the communes read: Cira Pasqual Marquina, "Venezuela's Communal Project: A Conversation With Ángel Prado," *Venezuelanalysis*, August 15, 2025, <https://venezuelanalysis.com/interviews/venezuelas-communal-project-a-conversation-with-angel-prado/>.

<sup>71</sup> None Noam Lupu, "Who Votes for Chavismo?: Class Voting in Hugo Chavez's Venezuela," *Latin American Research Review* 45, no. 1 (2010): 7–32.

<sup>72</sup> Vaz, "Chavez and the Sowing of Values,"; Marquina, "Afro-Venezuelan Memory, Struggle and Liberation,"; Marquina, "Afro-Venezuelan Memory, Struggle and Liberation,"; Marquina, "Venezuela's Communal Project,"; Lupu, "Who Votes for Chavismo?" 7–32; García-Guadilla, "Polarization, Participatory Democracy, and Democratic Erosion," 62–77; Hetland, "From System Collapse to Chavista Hegemony," 17–36; if interested in social movements of Afro, Black, Mestizo, Indigenous Venezuelans, Women and students within the Chavista movement read: Ciccariello-Maher, *We Created Chávez : A People's History of the Venezuelan Revolution*, 105-125 (student movement), 126-145 (Women's movement), 146-165 (Afro and indigenous Venezuelan movement).

<sup>73</sup> Stavrakakis, "Contemporary Left-Wing Populism in Latin America," 51–76; Strønen, "'A Civil-Military Alliance'," 8-26; Hetland, "From System Collapse to Chavista Hegemony," 17–36.

<sup>74</sup> Strønen, "'A Civil-Military Alliance'," 8-26.

<sup>75</sup> Gamboa, "Plebiscitary Override in Venezuela," 124–36; Jiménez, "Contesting Autocracy," 47–68.

could terminate the inequality and instability of the Punto Fijo regime and develop a newer, fairer democracy.<sup>76</sup>

Now, regionally, where were Chavez's strongholds of support? Based upon who supported Chavez, his support was regionally distributed across working-class urban neighborhoods and rural areas.<sup>77</sup> A basic contextualization of Chavez and his electoral presence across Venezuela is that in the 1998 election Chavez's strongholds that voted 60 percent or higher for him were Barinas, Portuguesa, Aragua, Vargas, the Capital District, and Anzoategui.<sup>78</sup> In the 2000 presidential election, Chavez's regional strongholds that voted 60 percent or higher for him were Barinas, Portuguesa, Trujillo, Lara, Carabobo, Aragua, Vargas, the Capital District, Amazonas, Anzoategui, Sucre, Delta Amacuro, and Bolivar.<sup>79</sup> In the 2006 presidential election, Chavez's regional strongholds that voted 60 percent or higher for him were Apure, Anzoategui, Barinas, Portuguesa, Cojedes, Guarico, Trujillo, Lara, Yaracuy, Aragua, Vargas, the Capital District, Carabobo, Falcon, Monagas, Sucre, Delta Amacuro, Bolivar, and Amazonas.<sup>80</sup> In the 2012 presidential election, Chavez's regional strongholds that voted 60 percent or higher for him were Apure, Portuguesa, Cojedes, Guarico, Trujillo, Vargas, Delta Amacuro, and Sucre.<sup>81</sup> Chavez's strongest area of support was in the region known as los Llanos or the plains. These are divided into the Central Plains (Guarico and Cojedes States), the Southern Plains (Apure State), the Western Plains (Portuguesa and Barinas States), and the Eastern Plains (Anzoategui and Monagas States).<sup>82</sup> These

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<sup>76</sup> Stavrakakis, "Contemporary Left-Wing Populism in Latin America," 51–76; Lupu, "Who Votes for Chavismo?" 7–32.

<sup>77</sup> Lupu, "Who Votes for Chavismo?," 7–32; Velasco, *Barrio Rising: Urban Popular Politics and the Making of Modern Venezuela*, 249–258.

<sup>78</sup> Politizados.com (@Politizados\_com), "#Elecciones2024 | El Mapa Electoral De Las Presidenciales En #Venezuela Desde 1998," Twitter, July 21, 2024, 3:37 p.m., [https://x.com/Politizados\\_com/status/1815108962569670828?lang=en](https://x.com/Politizados_com/status/1815108962569670828?lang=en); Alex Kireev, "Venezuela. Presidential Election 1998," *Electoral Geography 2.0: Mapped Politics* (blog), September 12, 2007, <https://www.electoralgeography.com/new/en/countries/v/venezuela/venezuela-presidential-election-1998.html>.

<sup>79</sup> Politizados.com, "El Mapa Electoral De Las Presidenciales" Alex Kireev, "Venezuela. Presidential Election 2000," *Electoral Geography 2.0: Mapped Politics* (blog), September 12, 2007, <https://www.electoralgeography.com/new/en/countries/v/venezuela/venezuela-presidential-election-2000.html>.

<sup>80</sup> Politizados.com, "El Mapa Electoral De Las Presidenciales"; Alex Kireev, "Venezuela. Presidential Election 2006," *Electoral Geography 2.0: Mapped Politics* (blog), September 12, 2007, <https://www.electoralgeography.com/new/en/countries/v/venezuela/venezuela-presidential-election-2006.html>.

<sup>81</sup> Politizados.com, "El Mapa Electoral De Las Presidenciales."; Alex Kireev, "Venezuela. Presidential Election 2012," *Electoral Geography 2.0: Mapped Politics* (blog), October 13, 2012, <https://www.electoralgeography.com/new/en/countries/v/venezuela/venezuela-presidential-election-2012.html>.

<sup>82</sup> Politizados.com, "El Mapa Electoral De Las Presidenciales."; Kireev, "Venezuela. Presidential Election 2012."; Kireev, "Venezuela. Presidential Election 2006."; Kireev, "Venezuela. Presidential Election 2000."; Kireev, "Venezuela. Presidential Election 1998."; H. Micheal Tarver, *The History of Venezuela*, Second edition (Westport: Greenwood, 2018), 1–6.

states are primarily based around agriculture and are more rural; however, the Anzoategui and Monagas states are both significant in the gas and oil industry.<sup>83</sup>

With Chavez, it is also important to understand the growth of his base of support; the absolute number of supporters for Chavez rose from 1998 to 2012, from 3.6 million to 8.1 million voters.<sup>84</sup> Chavez really only suffered one electoral defeat, which was a constitutional referendum in 2007.<sup>85</sup> International authorities certified Venezuelan elections from 1999 to 2006 as irregular but free and fair.<sup>86</sup>

Going further in depth on Chavez's social justice and communal organization policies, which helped maintain and further cultivate his popularity. Chavez created communes and communal councils, which are grassroots entities designed to direct self-administration with the goal of empowering indigenous, mestizos, and Afro-Venezuelans.<sup>87</sup> The communes were built to be the foundation of the Venezuelan socialist state.<sup>88</sup> Other policies within this realm of social justice were the creation of Banco de Desarrollo de la Mujer (Banmujer, Women's development bank) and el Instituto Nacional de la Mujer (Ina Mujer, National women's organization).<sup>89</sup> Furthermore, within the Chavista movement, civil society organizations such as FaldasR in 2011 emerged to defend sexual and reproductive rights.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Tarver, *The History of Venezuela*, 1-6; E. Willard. Miller, "Population Growth and Agricultural Developments in the Western Llanos of Venezuela: Problems and Prospects," *Revista Geográfica*, no. 69 (1968): 7-27; Joshua C. Dickinson, "Development Planning at the Interface of Mountain and Plain a Venezuelan Case Study," *Mountain Research and Development* 2, no. 3 (1982): 317-26.

<sup>84</sup> Kutiyski, "Narrowing the Gap," 71-97.

<sup>85</sup> Kutiyski, "Narrowing the Gap," 71-97; Myers, "Review of Liberal Democracy, Populism, and Beyond," 231-45; Barry Cannon, "As Clear as MUD: Characteristics, Objectives, and Strategies of the Opposition in Bolivarian Venezuela," *Latin American Politics and Society* 56, no. 4 (2014): 49-70; Gamboa, "Plebiscitary Override in Venezuela," 124-36; Jiménez, "Contesting Autocracy," 47-68.

<sup>86</sup> Gamboa, "Plebiscitary Override in Venezuela," 124-36.

<sup>87</sup> García-Guadilla, "Polarization, Participatory Democracy, and Democratic Erosion," 62-77, Stavrakakis, "Contemporary Left-Wing Populism in Latin America," 51-76, Marquina, "Venezuela's Communal Project,"; for a pro Chavez perspective read: Cira Pasqual Marquina, "'We're Building a New Way of Life': A Conversation With National Assembly Candidate Albanys Montilla," *Venezuelanalysis*, May 24, 2025. <https://venezuelanalysis.com/interviews/were-building-a-new-way-of-life-a-conversation-with-national-assembly-candidate-albanys-montilla/>; Cira Pasqual Marquina, "Venezuela's 2025 Elections, Electoral Safeguards and Constitutional Reform: A Conversation With Oliver Rivas," *Venezuelanalysis*, April 18, 2025. <https://venezuelanalysis.com/interviews/venezuelas-2025-elections-electoral-safeguards-and-constitutional-reform-a-conversation-with-oliver-rivas/>; for more information on the working class and social movements within Chavismo read Ciccariello-Maher, *We Created Chávez: A People's History of the Venezuelan Revolution*, 180-199

<sup>88</sup> Stavrakakis, "Contemporary Left-Wing Populism in Latin America," 51-76; Myers, "Review of Liberal Democracy, Populism, and Beyond," 231-45; Marquina, "Venezuela's Communal Project,"; Marquina, "Venezuela's 2025 Elections,"; García-Guadilla, "Polarization, Participatory Democracy, and Democratic Erosion," 62-77.

<sup>89</sup> Myers, "Review of Liberal Democracy, Populism, and Beyond," 231-45.

<sup>90</sup> To understand a pro Chavez perspective, looking at the feminist movement within the Chavismo movement read: Cira Pasqual Marquina, "Pending Tasks for Chavista Feminism: A Conversation With Roraima Rivas-Liendo." *Venezuelanalysis*,

Another civil society organization that Chavez created is the Cumbe Nacional, which creates space for collective deliberation, political education, and organization for Afro-Venezuelans.<sup>91</sup> Lastly, social programs made Hugo Chavez incredibly popular with the Venezuelan populace. Chavez spent \$716 billion from 1999-2013 on social programs, or as they were known, social missions funded by oil profits, reduced poverty, improved the education system, subsidized food, and built up the healthcare system.<sup>92</sup> More specifically, under these social programs, poverty decreased from 50.4 percent in 1998 to 19.6 percent by the end of 2013, and extreme poverty from 20.3 percent to 5.5 percent in the same time span.<sup>93</sup> In 2004, Chavez redistributed two million hectares of land to over 130,000 families from state-owned lands.<sup>94</sup> Chavez was able to establish these social programs in conjunction with an over 3 percent increase in GDP for several years post-2000.<sup>95</sup>

Chavez's emphasis on populism, Bolivarianism, and Socialism of the Twenty-First Century helped create an electoral coalition centered on the urban working class, the rural poor, women, Afro and Indigenous Venezuelans.<sup>96</sup> Therefore Chavez's strongholds of support were in states like Delta Amacuro and the Llanos where there are large populations of Black Venezuelans and agriculture is the primary economic means within the state.<sup>97</sup> Nevertheless, Chavez was able to maintain a diverse coalition together based all around Venezuela involving members from every social class and sector due to his social

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September 1, 2025.

<https://venezuelanalysis.com/analysis/pending-tasks-for-chavista-feminism-a-conversation-with-roraima-rivas-liendo/>.

<sup>91</sup> Marquina, "Afro-Venezuelan Memory, Struggle and Liberation."

<sup>92</sup> Stavrakakis, "Contemporary Left-Wing Populism in Latin America," 51–76; Suhr, "Run Down: Venezuela's Road to Ruin," 57-70; Kutiyiski, "Narrowing the Gap," 71–97; Ellner, "Class Strategies in Chavista Venezuela," 167–89; Vox, "The Collapse of Venezuela, Explained," August 25, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S1gUR8wM5vA>; Third Way. "Country Brief: Venezuela," *Third Way*, 2019, 1-7; if interested in an in-depth analysis and reflection of the social missions read: Hawkins, *Venezuela's Chavismo and Populism in Comparative Perspective*, 195-230.

<sup>93</sup> Stavrakakis, "Contemporary Left-Wing Populism in Latin America," 51–76; Kutiyiski, "Narrowing the Gap," 71–97.

<sup>94</sup> Ciccariello-Maher, *We Created Chavez*, 200-217.

<sup>95</sup> Kutiyiski, "Narrowing the Gap," 71–97.

<sup>96</sup> Lupu, "Who Votes for Chavismo?," 7–32; Velasco, *Barrio Rising : Urban Popular Politics and the Making of Modern Venezuela*, 249-258; if interested in social movements of Afro, Black, Mestizo, Indigenous Venezuelans, Women and students within the Chavista movement read: Ciccariello-Maher, *We Created Chávez : A People's History of the Venezuelan Revolution*, 105-125 (student movement), 126-145 (Women's movement), 146-165 (Afro and indigenous Venezuelan movement).

<sup>97</sup> Politizados.com, "El Mapa Electoral De Las Presidenciales.," Kireev, "Venezuela. Presidential Election 2012.," Kireev, "Venezuela. Presidential Election 2006.," Kireev, "Venezuela. Presidential Election 2000.," Kireev, "Venezuela. Presidential Election 1998.," 1-6; Minority Rights, "Afro Venezuelans in Venezuela," December 2024, <https://minorityrights.org/communities/afro-venezuelans/#>. For more on the llanos read: H. Micheal Tarver, *The History of Venezuela*, Second edition (Westport: Greenwood, 2018).

programs, charisma and political philosophy.<sup>98</sup> However after his death in 2013, the Chavista movement would fracture and change in ways it had not under Chavez.

### *Maduro Period (2013-Present)*

Hugo Chavez died in 2013 due to cancer, and was succeeded by his vice president, Nicolas Maduro.<sup>99</sup> To fully understand the transition of Chavez to Maduro, there needs to be a basic understanding of how the Chavista movement viewed Chavez. In the Chavista movement, Hugo Chavez is held up in a similar stature as Simon Bolivar, a revolutionary who liberated their people, in Bolivar's case from Spanish colonialism and in Chavez's case from the oligarchic, corrupt, elitist Punto Fijo democratic regime.<sup>100</sup> So when the transition takes place from Chavez to Maduro, there is this loss of this iconic figure within the movement, and the beginnings of a massive economic crisis.<sup>101</sup> For context, I will discuss some background on Maduro, the type of politics Maduro advocated for, and what he represented. In addition to the people he represents, the sectors of the Venezuelan population, focusing on class, and region, among other factors. Through this context, I will look at the differences between Chavez - Maduro policies and support.

To understand Nicolas Maduro, context needs to be brought with respect to how he became Hugo Chavez's successor. Maduro was a bus driver for the Caracas Metro Company for many years, where he created an unofficial trade union, becoming a union leader.<sup>102</sup> In the early 90s, Nicolas Maduro joined the

<sup>98</sup>Stavrakakis, "Contemporary Left-Wing Populism in Latin America," 51–76; Lupu, "Who Votes for Chavismo?" 7–32.

<sup>99</sup> Suhr, "Run Down: Venezuela's Road to Ruin,"; Myers, "Review of The Struggle to Legitimate Political Regimes in Venezuela," 711–19; Vaz, "Chavez and the Sowing of Values,"; Cannon, "As Clear as MUD," 49–70; Castilla, César, and Ninna Nyberg Sørensen, "Venezuelans Flee Accelerating Collapse: Latin America's Evolving Migration Crisis," *Danish Institute for International Studies*, (2019):2-5; Gabriel Hetland, "Capitalism and Authoritarianism in Maduro's Venezuela," *New Labor Forum* 34, no. 2 (2025): 62–69; Aaron Kappeler, "Tropical Leninism or The Eighteenth Brumaire of Nicolás Maduro?" *Dialect Anthropol* 48, (2024): 459–474.

<sup>100</sup> Anselmi, *Chavez's Children*, 33-43, 66-72; Kappeler, "Tropical Leninism or The Eighteenth Brumaire of Nicolás Maduro?" 459–474.

<sup>101</sup> Stavrakakis, "Contemporary Left-Wing Populism in Latin America," 51–76; Bull, "The Crisis in Venezuela: Drivers, Transitions, and Pathways," 1–20; Vaz, "Chavez and the Sowing of Values,"; Kappeler, "Tropical Leninism or The Eighteenth Brumaire of Nicolás Maduro?" 459–474; for a pro Chavez perspective read: Cira Pasqual Marquina, "Chavez, Spirituality and Celebration: A Conversation With Joel Suárez (Part II)," *Venezuelanalysis*, December 20, 2024. <https://venezuelanalysis.com/interviews/chavez-spirituality-and-celebration-a-conversation-with-joel-suarez-part-ii/>.

<sup>102</sup> Jonathan Watts and Virginia Lopez, "Who Is Nicolás Maduro? Profile of Venezuela's New President," *The Guardian*, April 15, 2013. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/apr/15/nicolas-maduro-profile-venezuela-president>; CNN Editorial Research, "Nicolás Maduro Fast Facts." CNN, November 25, 2025, <https://www.cnn.com/world/americas/nicolas-maduro-fast-facts>; Olivier Dabene, "Portrait of Nicolás Maduro - President of

MBR-200, the Revolutionary Bolivarian Movement, a social political movement created by Hugo Chavez.<sup>103</sup> Maduro campaigned for Chavez's release from prison and was a part of the founding of the Movement of the Fifth Republic, which was the first political party that Chavez created.<sup>104</sup> Maduro, as a part of the MVR ticket, became a member of the National Constituent Assembly in 1999.<sup>105</sup> This was a constitutional convention created to design a new constitution.<sup>106</sup> In 2000, Maduro was elected to the National Assembly, and in 2005, he became President of the National Assembly. In 2006, Chavez appointed Maduro as Minister of Foreign Affairs, becoming an important voice in shaping Venezuelan foreign policy.<sup>107</sup> In 2012, Maduro was appointed Vice President and named the successor by Hugo Chavez.<sup>108</sup>

The type of politics Maduro represents can be grouped into three conceptual categories: the continuation of the Chavismo movement, economic policies, and social justice programs and policies.<sup>109</sup> First, Maduro presented himself as a continuation of the Chavismo movement, which included the political system, ideology, and movement established by Chavez. Maduro's continuation of the Chavismo movement has mainly been through socialist rhetoric, and the attempt to hold together the coalition that propelled the Chavismo movement to power and its hegemony over political power in Venezuela. As a part of this continuation of the movement, Maduro and the Chavistas promoted the deification, martyrdom, and sanctification of Hugo Chavez.<sup>110</sup> An example of the deification of Chavez, is Maduro's

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Venezuela," *Institut Montaigne*, December 21, 2018, <https://www.institutmontaigne.org/en/expressions/portrait-nicolas-maduro-president-venezuela>.

<sup>103</sup> Watts and Lopez, "Who Is Nicolás Maduro?"; CNN Editorial Research, "Nicolás Maduro Fast Facts"; Dabene, "Portrait of Nicolás Maduro."

<sup>104</sup> CNN Editorial Research, "Nicolás Maduro Fast Facts"; Dabene, "Portrait of Nicolás Maduro"; Virginia Lopez, "Nicolás Maduro: Hugo Chavez's Incendiary Heir," *The Guardian*, December 13, 2012, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/dec/12/hugo-chavez-heir>.

<sup>105</sup> CNN Editorial Research, "Nicolás Maduro Fast Facts"; Dabene, "Portrait of Nicolás Maduro";

<sup>106</sup> Combellas, "El Proceso Constituyente."

<sup>107</sup> CNN Editorial Research, "Nicolás Maduro Fast Facts"; Dabene, "Portrait of Nicolás Maduro"; Editing Board, "Nicolás Maduro, El Presidente De Una Nación Dividida," *BBC News Mundo*, April 15, 2013, [https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias/2012/12/121207\\_venezuela\\_perfil\\_nicolas\\_maduro\\_az](https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias/2012/12/121207_venezuela_perfil_nicolas_maduro_az).

<sup>108</sup> CNN Editorial Research, "Nicolás Maduro Fast Facts"; Dabene, "Portrait of Nicolás Maduro";

<sup>109</sup> BBC News, "Venezuela's Nicolás Maduro: Dictator or Defender of Socialism?," *BBC News*, January 28, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-20664349#>; for a Marxist Leninist perspective on Chavez read: The Communist Party of Venezuela (PCV), "The Neoliberal Turn of Maduro's Government in Venezuela," *Marxism Leninism Today*, September 9, 2024, <https://mltoday.com/the-neoliberal-turn-of-maduros-government-in-venezuela/>.

<sup>110</sup> BBC News, "Venezuela's Nicolás Maduro"; Virginia Lopez, "Nicolás Maduro Claims Chavez Had Divine Role Over New Pope," *The Guardian*, March 15, 2013, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/mar/14/nicolas-maduro-chavez-pope>; Isabelle Leon Graticola, "Rhetoric as a

claim that Chavez had a divine role over the selection of the first South American Pope.<sup>111</sup> Another instance of Chavez's deification was a version of the Lord's prayer that ended a Socialist party workshop, replacing God with Chavez.<sup>112</sup> Instead of "Our Father who art in heaven" the prayer was said "Our Chavez who art in heaven".<sup>113</sup> Maduro has maintained Chavez's socialist rhetoric, attempted to hold together the Chavista coalition and deified Hugo Chavez to continue this movement of Chavismo.

Furthermore, even though the rhetoric remains socialist, Maduro has adopted many neoliberal policies in response to the economic crises that occurred shortly after Chavez death.<sup>114</sup> These policies included cuts to social spending, leading to a progressive privatization of certain services and industries.<sup>115</sup> The Maduro government has given out licences to multinational companies such as Chevron in the oil sector.<sup>116</sup> In addition, the Maduro government has encouraged the use of the dollar, dollarization, and the liberalization of prices.<sup>117</sup> Lastly, President Maduro created special economic zones that have decreased regulations meant to attract foreign investment.<sup>118</sup> When discussing economic policy Maduro has represented a conservative shift within the Chavista movement.

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fundamental pillar of Nicolás Maduro's regime," *Universidad de Navarra*, <https://www.unav.edu/web/global-affairs/detalle/-/blogs/rhetoric-as-a-fundamental-pillar-of-nicolas-maduro-s-regime-2> Hannah Strange, "Sainly Hugo Chavez Replaces God in Socialist Lord's Prayer," *VICE*, September 4, 2014, <https://www.vice.com/en/article/sainly-hugo-chavez-replaces-god-in-socialist-lords-prayer/>; Charlie Devereux and Jose Orozco, "Maduro Says Chavez as a Bird Blessed His Bid to Head Venezuela," *AS/COA*, April 2, 2013.

<sup>111</sup> Lopez, "Nicolás Maduro Claims Chavez Had Divine Role Over New Pope."

<sup>112</sup> Strange, "Sainly Hugo Chavez Replaces God in Socialist Lord's Prayer."

<sup>113</sup> Strange, "Sainly Hugo Chavez Replaces God in Socialist Lord's Prayer."

<sup>114</sup> Hetland, "Capitalism and Authoritarianism in Maduro's Venezuela," 62–69; The Communist Party of Venezuela (PCV), "The Neoliberal Turn of Maduro's Government in Venezuela"; John Polga-Hecimovich, "Maduro Strengthens His Hold Over Venezuela," *GIS Reports*, September 14, 2022, <https://www.gisreportsonline.com/r/venezuela-maduro-strengthens/#/>; Steve Ellner, "Neoliberal and Authoritarian? A Simplistic Analysis of the Maduro Government That Leaves Much Unsaid," *Links*, May 18, 2025, <https://links.org.au/neoliberal-and-authoritarian-simplistic-analysis-maduro-government-leaves-much-unsaid/>; Chris Slee, "Venezuela: Opposing the Blockade Is Our Main Task," *Links*, October 17, 2024, <https://links.org.au/venezuela-opposing-blockade-our-main-task/>; Gabriel Hetland, "Political Report 1466: A Debate on the Left Over the Nicolás Maduro Government," *Latin American Perspectives*, April 19, 2025.

<https://latinamericanperspectives.com/political-report-1466-a-debate-on-the-left-over-the-nicolas-maduro-government/>; Posado, "The Authoritarian and Conservative Turn of Nicolás Maduro," 341–57.

<sup>115</sup> Posado, "The Authoritarian and Conservative Turn of Nicolás Maduro," 341–57.

<sup>116</sup> The Communist Party of Venezuela (PCV), "The Neoliberal Turn of Maduro's Government in Venezuela,"; Polga-Hecimovich, "Maduro Strengthens His Hold Over Venezuela,"; Ellner, "Neoliberal and Authoritarian?";

<sup>117</sup> The Communist Party of Venezuela (PCV), "The Neoliberal Turn of Maduro's Government in Venezuela,"; Polga-Hecimovich, "Maduro Strengthens His Hold Over Venezuela,"; Posado, "The Authoritarian and Conservative Turn of Nicolás Maduro," 341–57.

<sup>118</sup> The Communist Party of Venezuela (PCV), "The Neoliberal Turn of Maduro's Government in Venezuela,"; Posado, "The Authoritarian and Conservative Turn of Nicolás Maduro," 341–57.

Moreover, in terms of social policies, Maduro inherited Chavez's Bolivarian missions, which, as mentioned previously, had their funding reduced.<sup>119</sup> However, Maduro has instituted the CLAP program, meant to distribute subsidized food packages to millions of Venezuelans implemented initially during the 2016 food shortages.<sup>120</sup> As well as the bonus scheme linked to the Carnet de la Patria (Fatherland Card) electronic system, meant to help public workers and pensioners deal with high inflation by providing sporadic financial payments.<sup>121</sup> However, in regard to reproductive rights and the LGBTQ+ community, even though Nicolas Maduro has openly been for these rights, he has claimed that it is up to the legislature to enact these rights.<sup>122</sup> At the same time, the Maduro regime seems to be trying to gain support from the rising evangelical movement in Venezuela.<sup>123</sup> This puts into question the fragility of Maduro and the Chavista regime's hold, as they need to change their agenda depending on different social movements to counter the opposition movement.<sup>124</sup>

Maduro's base of support is people living in rural areas, the working class, specifically people from these classes who are loyalists to the Bolivarian revolution, and Maduro has strong support from the

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<sup>119</sup> The Communist Party of Venezuela (PCV), "The Neoliberal Turn of Maduro's Government in Venezuela," ; Posado, "The Authoritarian and Conservative Turn of Nicolás Maduro," 341–57.

<sup>120</sup> Magdalena Defort, "Venezuela's Missions: Mechanisms of Corruption," *Small Wars Journal by Arizona State University*, July 14, 2020. <https://smallwarsjournal.com/2020/07/14/venezuelas-missions-mechanisms-corruption/#>; "A Dangerous Assignment," *PBS Frontline*, Official Site Documentary Series, August 15, 2025, <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/documentary/a-dangerous-assignment-uncovering-corruption-maduro-venezuela/>; for a chavista perspective read: Paul Dobson, "US Hints at Sanctions Against Venezuela CLAP Food Programme as Maduro Incorporates Militia," *Venezuelanalysis*, May 29, 2019, <https://venezuelanalysis.com/news/14514/#>.

<sup>121</sup> Dobson, "US Hints at Sanctions,"; Ryan Mallett-Outtrim, "New Venezuelan Welfare Scheme to Benefit 4 Million Homes: Maduro," *Venezuelanalysis*, January 18, 2018. <https://venezuelanalysis.com/news/13605/#>; AFP - Agence France Presse, "Venezuela's Maduro Increases Pensions and Welfare Bonuses," *Barrons*, May 1, 2025, <https://www.barrons.com/news/venezuela-s-maduro-increases-pensions-and-welfare-bonuses-d1ac2bab>; "Patria," *Patria*, Plataforma Patria Del Pueblo Venezolano, November 3, 2025, <https://www.patria.org.ve/>.

<sup>122</sup> Elisabeth Jay Friedman, "Seeking Rights From the Left: Latin American LGBTQ+ Politics," *Harvard University*, November 22, 2023, <https://revista.drclas.harvard.edu/seeking-rights-from-the-left-latin-american-lgbtq-politics/>; "Venezuela 2024," Amnesty International, 2024, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/americas/south-america/venezuela/report-venezuela/>; Florantonia Singer, "Venezuela's Regime Embraces Ultraconservative Religious Movements," *EL PAÍS English*, July 26, 2023. <https://english.elpais.com/international/2023-07-26/venezuelas-regime-embraces-ultraconservative-religious-movements.html#>; John Otis, "Venezuela's Leftist Leader Maduro Makes a Play for Evangelical Voters," *NPR*, February 7, 2024. <https://www.npr.org/transcripts/1226975641#>; Hana Amdeta, "Compass Gender: Maduro Supports Legalization of Same-Sex Marriage in Venezuela," *The Caravel*, November 12, 2024, <https://www.thecaravelgu.com/blog/2020/11/12/maduro-supports-legalization-of-same-sex-marriage-in-venezuela#>.

<sup>123</sup> Singer, "Venezuela's Regime Embraces Ultraconservative Religious Movements,"; Otis, "Venezuela's Leftist Leader Maduro Makes a Play for Evangelical Voters,"; For more context about the evangelical movement in Venezuela see: David Smilde, and Daniel Hellinger. *Venezuela's Bolivarian Democracy: Participation, Politics, and Culture under Chávez*. Durham: Duke University Press, (2011): 315-339.

<sup>124</sup> If further interest in the fragility of Maduro's power read: Posado, "The Authoritarian and Conservative Turn of Nicolás Maduro," 341–57; Kappeler, "Tropical Leninism or The Eighteenth Brumaire of Nicolás Maduro?" 459–474.

military.<sup>125</sup> However, Maduro was not able to maintain the broad coalition that Chavez had, which included the middle and some of the upper class.<sup>126</sup> With respect to regional strongholds in the 2013 presidential election that voted 59-60 percent or higher in favor of Maduro were Apure, Guarico, Portuguesa, Cojedes, Trujillo, and Delta Amacuro.<sup>127</sup> This continues Chavez stronghold in los Llanos, including Apure, Guarico, Portuguesa, and Cojedes.<sup>128</sup> In addition to Delta Amacuro, which according to the 2011 census has the largest population of self-identified Black Venezuelans.<sup>129</sup> Interestingly the states with the two next largest populations of self-identified Black Venezuelans are Apure and Guarico.<sup>130</sup> During Maduro's regime, there was a steady decrease in voter turnout in his first two elections.<sup>131</sup> In 2013, 7,587,579 people voted for Maduro out of a total of 14,990,543 votes; in 2018, 6,248,864 people voted for Maduro out of a total of 9,387,449 votes.<sup>132</sup> This might demonstrate another difference between Maduro and Chavez with respect to policy, as Chavez focused on increasing voter registration.<sup>133</sup> Also, it is important to note that during Maduro's presidency, an estimated 8 million Venezuelans left the country, which could explain why voter registration decreased.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> Katsumi Watanabe, "Maduro and the Support of the Armed Forces: A Civil-military Relations Perspective," *Universidad De Navarra*, October 31, 2024. <https://en.unav.edu/web/global-affairs/maduro-y-el-apoyo-de-las-ffaa-una-perspectiva-desde-las-relaciones-c%C3%ADvico-militares#>; Regina Garcia Cano, "Venezuelan Leader Maduro May Seem Desperate, But His Loyalty Vs Punishment Strategy Is Hard to Crack," *Queen City News*, November 30, 2025. <https://www.qcnews.com/news/politics/election/ap-venezuelan-leader-maduro-may-seem-desperate-but-his-loyalty-vs-punishment-strategy-is-hard-to-crack/#>; for a chavista perspective see: Julia Buxton, "Venezuela After Chávez," *Venezuelanalysis*, July 13, 2016, <https://venezuelanalysis.com/analysis/12082/#>;

<sup>126</sup> Kappeler, "Tropical Leninism or The Eighteenth Brumaire of Nicolás Maduro?" 459–474; Buxton, "Venezuela After Chavez,"; Catherine Ellis, "'Proud to Be a Revolutionary:' How Maduro Appeals to His Dwindling Base," *Al Jazeera*, July 25, 2024, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/longform/2024/7/25/proud-to-be-a-revolutionary-how-maduro-appeals-to-his-dwindling-base#>.

<sup>127</sup> Alex Kireev, "Venezuela. Presidential Election 2013," *Electoral Geography 2.0 - Mapped Politics* (blog), April 15, 2013, <https://www.electoralgeography.com/new/en/countries/v/venezuela/venezuela-presidential-election-2013.html>.

<sup>128</sup> Politizados.com, "El Mapa Electoral De Las Presidenciales,"; Kireev, "Venezuela. Presidential Election 2013."

<sup>129</sup> Minority Rights, "Afro Venezuelans in Venezuela."

<sup>130</sup> Minority Rights, "Afro Venezuelans in Venezuela."

<sup>131</sup> Third Way, "*Country Brief: Venezuela*," 1-7; "IFES Election Guide | Elections: Venezuela Presidency 2013 General," August 2, 2023, <https://www.electionguide.org/elections/id/2271/>; "IFES Election Guide | Elections: Venezuela Presidency 2018 General," June 19, 2018, <https://www.electionguide.org/elections/id/2765/>.

<sup>132</sup> "IFES Election Guide | Venezuela Presidency 2013,"; "IFES Election Guide | Venezuela Presidency 2018 General."

<sup>133</sup> Kutiyanski, "Narrowing the Gap," 71–97; Myers, "Review of The Struggle to Legitimate Political Regimes in Venezuela," 711–19.

<sup>134</sup> IOM UN Migration, "Regional Response to the Situation of Venezuelan Migrants and Refugees," March 28, 2025. <https://www.iom.int/regional-response-situation-venezuelan-migrants-and-refugees#>; Ryan Dubé, "Venezuela's Maduro Sworn in for Third Term, but He's Never had Less Legitimacy; Few World Leaders Attend Inauguration as Biden Administration Increases Bounty for Maduro's Arrest," New York, N.Y.: Dow Jones & Company Inc, 2025. <https://www.proquest.com/blogs-podcasts-websites/venezuelas-maduro-sworn-third-term-hes-never-had/docview/3153799366/se-2>.

#### *Section 4: Interpretation of Chávez-Maduro Regime*

I provided contexts and laid out arguments that provide detail about the Chavez-Maduro regime. Now, I will explain my interpretation of the Chavez- Maduro Regime based on the definitions I established, which will then provide insight into how I view the Venezuelan opposition. The Bolivarian Revolution is the child of democratic decay, which oftentimes leads to competitive authoritarianism.<sup>135</sup> The leader of the Bolivarian revolution, Hugo Chavez, used methods of executive aggrandizement, such as changing the constitution and putting in place referendums, a slow process, but over time led to a significant structural change in government power.<sup>136</sup> An argument by Maria Corina Machado, the current leader of the Venezuelan opposition movement, is that through the new constitution, Chavez gave himself and his party increased executive powers and control over the legislative branch.<sup>137</sup> Chavez contributed to the fragility of the Venezuelan democracy, however, it was not until after the 2002 coup attempt and the 2003 oil strikes that the Chavez regime entered a phase of competitive authoritarianism.

#### *Competitive Authoritarianism (2002-2006)*

The 2002 coup attempt paved the way for the Chavez regime to transition into a competitive authoritarian regime.<sup>138</sup> This essay argues that Chavez's regime became a competitive authoritarian regime from 2002 to 2006. All elements of a competitive authoritarian government can be observed in the post-2002 Chavez regime.<sup>139</sup> This is due to Chavez's restructuring of the judicial, military, and business

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<sup>135</sup> Anselmi, *Chavez's Children*, 30-72; Stavrakakis, "Contemporary Left-Wing Populism in Latin America," 51-76; Kutiyanski, "Narrowing the Gap," 71-97; Motta, "Populism's Achilles' Heel," 28-46; Bull, "The Crisis in Venezuela," 1-20.

<sup>136</sup> Suhr, "Run Down: Venezuela's Road to Ruin," 57-70; Bull, "The Crisis in Venezuela: Drivers, Transitions, and Pathways," 1-20; Myers, "Review of Liberal Democracy, Populism, and Beyond," 231-45; Nancy Bermeo, "On Democratic Backsliding," *Journal of Democracy* 27, no. 1 (2016): 5-19; For an opposition perspective on Hugo Chavez presidency see: Maria Corina Machado "TEDxYaleWorldFellows - Maria Corina Machado - Democracy: Use It or Lose It," *TEDx Talks*, July 21, 2011. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GA0WBQJXR8Y>; for more on the creation of the 1999 Venezuelan Constitution and executive aggrandizement by Chavez through the constitution read: Allan R. Brewer-Carías, *Dismantling Democracy in Venezuela: The Chávez Authoritarian Experiment*, Cambridge University Press, (2010):33-164.

<sup>137</sup> Suhr, "Run Down: Venezuela's Road to Ruin," 57-70; Myers, "Review of Liberal Democracy, Populism, and Beyond," 231-45; Machado, "Democracy: Use It or Lose It."

<sup>138</sup> Gamboa, "Plebiscitary Override in Venezuela," 124-36.

<sup>139</sup> Levitsky, "Elections Without Democracy," 51-65; Gamboa, "Plebiscitary Override in Venezuela," 124-36; Machado, "Democracy: Use It or Lose It,"; Aponte-Moreno, "Chavez: Rhetoric Made in Havana," 33-42; Suhr, "Run Down:

sectors; his new posture towards the opposition and civil society; as well as the executive aggrandizement and weakening of the legislative branch, which he had started previously.<sup>140</sup> After the 2004 and 2005 regional and parliamentary elections, Chavez gained greater control over subnational and legislative offices. Chavez was then able to fully co-opt oversight agencies and the judicial system.<sup>141</sup> Chavez politicized the military after the 2002 coup; he had the excuse and the information to be able to eliminate the military of opposition voices. Chavez created a militia that worked in service to him and directly reported back to him.<sup>142</sup> In 2005, the Organic Law of the Armed Forces Services was passed in the National Assembly, cementing Chavez's control over Venezuela's military.<sup>143</sup> After the oil strikes in 2003, Chavez fired 60 percent of the high and mid-level managers working for PDVSA who opposed his vision.<sup>144</sup>

Chavez discredited civil society and universities to weaken his opponents. One example is in 2005, when Maria Corina Machado and other members of Sumate (an NGO focused on election monitoring) were charged with conspiracy against the government.<sup>145</sup> Members of Sumate were charged with conspiracy because, in 2004, this NGO led the effort to gather the total number of signatures required to hold a recall referendum vote on Chavez's presidency as stipulated in the constitution.<sup>146</sup> According to Machado, the 3.5 million Venezuelans who signed the petition were placed on government lists, used to fire workers and discriminate in the receiving of government benefits.<sup>147</sup> This is backed up by the fact that after the recall referendum vote happened, a Chavista representative in the national

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Venezuela's Road to Ruin," 57-70; Stavrakakis, "Contemporary Left-Wing Populism in Latin America," 51-76; Myers, "Review of Liberal Democracy, Populism, and Beyond," 231-45; Jiménez, "Contesting Autocracy," 47-68.

<sup>140</sup> Gamboa, "Plebiscitary Override in Venezuela," 124-36; Machado, "Democracy: Use It or Lose It,"; Aponte-Moreno, "Chavez: Rhetoric Made in Havana," 33-42; Suhr, "Run Down: Venezuela's Road to Ruin," 57-70; Stavrakakis, "Contemporary Left-Wing Populism in Latin America," 51-76; Myers, "Review of Liberal Democracy, Populism, and Beyond," 231-45; Jiménez, "Contesting Autocracy," 47-68; For more on executive aggrandizement through constitutional reforms read: Brewer-Carías, *Dismantling Democracy in Venezuela*, 165-262.

<sup>141</sup> Gamboa, "Plebiscitary Override in Venezuela," 124-36.

<sup>142</sup> Myers, "Review of Liberal Democracy, Populism, and Beyond," 231-45; Gamboa, "Plebiscitary Override in Venezuela," 124-36; Jiménez, "Contesting Autocracy," 47-68; de Cordoba, "In Enacting Decrees, Chavez Makes New Power Grab."

<sup>143</sup> Myers, "Review of The Struggle to Legitimate Political Regimes in Venezuela," 711-19.

<sup>144</sup> Gamboa, "Plebiscitary Override in Venezuela," 124-36.

<sup>145</sup> For American center right journalism on Venezuelan politics read: Mary Anastasia O'Grady, "Americas: A Young Defender of Democracy Faces Chavez's Wrath," *Wall Street Journal*, Jun 10, 2005, Eastern edition, <https://www.proquest.com/newspapers/americas-young-defender-democracy-faces-chavez/docview/398979963/se-2>.

<sup>146</sup> O'Grady, "Americas: A Young Defender of Democracy Faces Chavez's Wrath."

<sup>147</sup> O'Grady, "Americas: A Young Defender of Democracy Faces Chavez's Wrath."

Assembly named Luis Tascón released a list of the people who voted for the recall, increasing suspicions of unfair play with respect to the voting procedures.<sup>148</sup> This period from 2002 to 2006 is when Chavez gained significant control over the legislative, judicial, and military branches of the government and the business sector, while harassing civil society organizations with threats of imprisonment; as well as members of the chavista movement conducting dubious actions after elections, creating suspicions of unfair play.

A response to my claims is that my interpretation of Hugo Chavez and the Chavista regime is incorrect, and that Chavez was the epitome of a democratic leader. Hugo Chavez was popularly elected with a significant majority in three presidential elections (1998, 2000, 2006), instituted a new constitution which was popularly elected by referendum in 1999, and resoundingly defeated a recall referendum in 2004.<sup>149</sup> From 1999 to 2006, media organizations were able to use their freedom of speech to criticize the government; opposition political parties were allowed to form and engage in elections; and chavista mayors and national assembly members were popularly elected.<sup>150</sup> The social missions Chavez developed in this period of time helped to empower previously discriminated and disenfranchised communities.<sup>151</sup> In 2005, Chavez created communal councils designed to be the grassroots foundation for greater democratic participation, again to empower those previously disenfranchised to impact local level politics.<sup>152</sup> Lastly, scholars like Steve Ellner and Yordan Kutiyiski discuss that Chavez's more aggressive policies in the business, military, and judicial sectors could be a reaction to hostile, antagonistic opposition actions, for

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<sup>148</sup> “HRF Condemns Fraudulent Election Results in Venezuela,” Human Rights Foundation, July 29, 2024, <https://hrf.org/latest/hrf-condemns-fraudulent-election-results-in-venezuela/>; “A Decade Under Chavez: Political Intolerance and Lost Opportunities for Advancing Human Rights in Venezuela: II. Political Discrimination,” *Human Rights Watch*, 2008, <https://www.hrw.org/reports/2008/venezuela0908/2.htm>; Alfredo Meza, “Maduro Purges Public Servants Who Supported Recall Referendum,” *EL PAÍS English*, August 24, 2016, [https://english.elpais.com/elpais/2016/08/24/inenglish/1472044111\\_961124.html](https://english.elpais.com/elpais/2016/08/24/inenglish/1472044111_961124.html); Columbia Global Freedom of Expression, “San Miguel Sosa V. Venezuela - Global Freedom of Expression,” *Global Freedom of Expression*, February 8, 2018, <https://globalfreedomofexpression.columbia.edu/cases/san-miguel-sosa-v-venezuela/>; for a Chavista perspective see: Sarah Wagner, “Venezuela’s Black List Will Be Taken To Court,” *Venezuelanalysis*, May 20, 2005, <https://venezuelanalysis.com/news/1136/>.

<sup>149</sup> Barry Cannon, *Hugo Chávez and the Bolivarian Revolution : Populism and Democracy in a Globalised Age*, Manchester University Press, (2009):111-139.

<sup>150</sup> Cannon, *Hugo Chávez and the Bolivarian Revolution*, 111-139.

<sup>151</sup> Stavrakakis, “Contemporary Left-Wing Populism in Latin America,” 51–76; Suhr, “Run Down: Venezuela’s Road to Ruin,” 57-70; Kutiyiski, “Narrowing the Gap,” 71–97; Ellner, “Class Strategies in Chavista Venezuela,” 167–89.

<sup>152</sup> Stavrakakis, “Contemporary Left-Wing Populism in Latin America,” 51–76; Myers, “Review of Liberal Democracy, Populism, and Beyond,” 231–45; Motta, “Populism’s Achilles’ Heel,” 28–46; Cannon, “As Clear as MUD,” 49–70.

example, the 2002 coup attempt and the late 2002, early 2003 oil strikes.<sup>153</sup> Therefore, if from 1999 to 2006, elections were free and fair, referendums that changed institutions were popularly supported, freedom of speech was respected; and policies were enacted to empower people's political participation, then how was the Chavez regime from 2002 to 2006 competitively authoritarian?

My response, without repeating the points mentioned above, is that there were elements of democracy within the Chavez regime from 2002 to 2006, which is why I understand the regime to be competitively authoritarian rather than purely an autocratic regime. However, the communal councils meant to empower individuals can also be seen as decreasing the power that states have, further centralising power for Chavez.<sup>154</sup> In addition, the fact that referendums that hinder democratic institutions were popularly elected does not mean that the policies enacted are not harmful to a democracy. In my view, the argument that Chavez's aggressive policies were a reaction to opposition hostility does not actually address the core issue, which is the weakening of the democratic institutions regardless of the reason why. I would even grant that from 2002 to 2006, both the opposition and Chavez weakened the democratic institutions, furthering the idea that the government became a competitive authoritarian regime in this period of time. My final point is that the elections within this era, understood to be free and fair, are not entirely correct. A forensic analysis of the Venezuelan elections during Chavez presidency by Raul Jimenez and Manuel Hidalgo found anomalous statistical patterns typical in hypothetical electoral fraud in the 2004 recall referendum, and all elections from 2006 onwards.<sup>155</sup> This would include Hugo Chavez presidential election in 2006, which Chavez won with over 60 percent of the vote. For all the reasons listed in my response, I remain unconvinced that Chavez's regime from 2002-2006 was entirely democratic rather than a competitive authoritarian regime.

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<sup>153</sup>Kutiyski, "Narrowing the Gap," 71–97; Ellner, "Class Strategies in Chavista Venezuela," 167–89.

<sup>154</sup>Myers, "Review of Liberal Democracy, Populism, and Beyond," 231–45

<sup>155</sup>Raúl Jiménez, and Manuel Hidalgo, "Forensic Analysis of Venezuelan Elections During the Chávez Presidency," *PLoS ONE* 9, no. 6, (2014): 1-17.

*Authoritarianism (2007-2013)*

In 2007, Chavez suffered his only electoral loss. My interpretation is that this loss was at the beginning of the process of becoming an authoritarian regime from 2007 to 2009. Chavez continued to increase his executive powers, exerting control over the legislative, judicial, and military institutions; however, in this period from 2007 to 2009, Chavez went further down the path to authoritarianism by eliminating term limits, barring members of the opposition from running for office, and closing down or co-opting critical media. Utilizing the framework discussed in section 2, based on Steven Levitsky's work, in contrast to competitive authoritarian regimes, the ruling elite within full authoritarian regimes use more open violation of democratic norms, such as the repression or banning of media outlets and opposition.<sup>156</sup> Therefore, the Chavista regime evolved into an authoritarian regime through the barring of opposition leaders such as Leopoldo Lopez, and the banning and shutting down of critical radio and TV stations.<sup>157</sup>

Chavez's transition to authoritarianism had three main components, shift in policy towards the media, opposition politicians, and continual institutional degradation.<sup>158</sup> A forensic analysis of the Venezuelan elections during Chavez presidency by Raul Jimenez and Manual Hidalgo concluded that all elections from 2006 onwards in Hugo Chavez time as president had anomalous statistical patterns typical in hypothetical electoral fraud.<sup>159</sup> This conclusion is not definitive, however it furthers the idea that democratic norms were being disregarded within this period of Chavez presidency. In 2007, Chavez closed down RCTV, one of the largest and most critical networks against the Chavista movement.<sup>160</sup> In 2009, 34 radio stations critical of the Chavez administration were closed for the apparent failure to hand in their registration papers on time.<sup>161</sup> By 2012, Chavez controlled over 60 percent of the radio and TV

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<sup>156</sup> Levitsky, "Elections Without Democracy," 51-65.

<sup>157</sup> de Cordoba, "In Enacting Decrees, Chavez Makes New Power Grab,"; if interested in Leopoldo Lopez perspective on his barring check this video out: Leopoldo Lopez, "How to Defend Democracy — and Fight Autocracy" TED, November 4, 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YP-iH-7WRLI>.

<sup>158</sup> For more on institutional degradation in this period read: Brewer-Carías, *Dismantling Democracy in Venezuela*, 263-365.

<sup>159</sup> Jiménez, "Forensic Analysis of Venezuelan Elections During the Chávez Presidency," 1-17.

<sup>160</sup> Aponte-Moreno, "Chavez: Rhetoric Made in Havana," 33-42; Cannon, "As Clear as MUD," 49-70; Jiménez, "Contesting Autocracy," 47-68.

<sup>161</sup> Aponte-Moreno, "Chavez: Rhetoric Made in Havana," 33-42.

spectrum in Venezuela.<sup>162</sup> Chavez forced propaganda to be displayed by public and private media organizations.<sup>163</sup> In 2008, Hugo Chavez, through his comptroller general, initially barred 400 candidates on charges of corruption, then decreased this to 272 candidates, mainly from opposition parties, from running in the regional elections.<sup>164</sup> In 2009, Chavez succeeded in taking away term limits through a referendum election.<sup>165</sup> From 2007 to 2009, Chavez openly defied democratic norms in a way he had not previously done so, enabling him to gain even more power and influence, which is why I understand this period to be the transformation of a competitive authoritarian state to an authoritarian state. This state of authoritarianism continued till Chavez's death in 2013.

As mentioned in the introduction of this paper, several scholars understand Chavez to have only gone as far as the leader of a competitively authoritarian regime, but not as far as to say that he was a dictator or authoritarian.<sup>166</sup> There is nuance to this view. Some scholars, such as Benedicte Bull, believe that from 2006 onwards Hugo Chavez led a competitively authoritarian government, whereas Laura Gamboa recognizes that Venezuela transitioned into a competitive authoritarian regime from 1999 to 2006. Then from 2008 to 2015, she defines the chavista government as an electoral autocracy.<sup>167</sup> However, Gamboa believes that Venezuela transitioned fully to authoritarianism in 2016, as does Bull.<sup>168</sup> Bull's argument that the Chavez regime was competitively authoritarian is that basic electoral norms were maintained, even in the face of checks and balances significantly undermined, and the political field heavily in favor of the ruling elite.<sup>169</sup> Bull argues Venezuela became authoritarian in 2016 because the

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<sup>162</sup> Aponte-Moreno, "Chavez: Rhetoric Made in Havana," 33–42.

<sup>163</sup> Machado, "Democracy: Use It or Lose It,"; Aponte-Moreno, "Chavez: Rhetoric Made in Havana," 33–42; Myers, "Review of Liberal Democracy, Populism, and Beyond," 231–45.

<sup>164</sup> de Cordoba, "In Enacting Decrees, Chavez Makes New Power Grab,"; "Venezuela: Political Conditions and U.S. Policy, 2003-2009," *CRS Reports*, July 28, 2009, <https://www.everycrsreport.com/reports/RL32488.html#>.

<sup>165</sup> Cannon, "As Clear as MUD," 49–70; Gamboa, "Plebiscitary Override in Venezuela," 124–36; Jiménez, "Contesting Autocracy," 47–68; "Venezuela: Political Conditions and U.S. Policy, 2003-2009,"; For more on how Chavez cemented his authoritarianism through the institutions and constitutional referendum from 2007 onwards read: Brewer-Carías, *Dismantling Democracy in Venezuela*, 263-365.

<sup>166</sup> Bull, "The Crisis in Venezuela: Drivers, Transitions, and Pathways," 1–20; Gamboa, "Plebiscitary Override in Venezuela: Erosion of Democracy and Deepening Authoritarianism," 124–36; for more on this topic read: Hawkins, *Venezuela's Chavismo and Populism in Comparative Perspective*, 15-85.

<sup>167</sup> Bull, "The Crisis in Venezuela: Drivers, Transitions, and Pathways," 1–20; Gamboa, "Plebiscitary Override in Venezuela: Erosion of Democracy and Deepening Authoritarianism," 124–36.

<sup>168</sup> Bull, "The Crisis in Venezuela: Drivers, Transitions, and Pathways," 1–20; Gamboa, "Plebiscitary Override in Venezuela: Erosion of Democracy and Deepening Authoritarianism," 124–36.

<sup>169</sup> Bull, "The Crisis in Venezuela: Drivers, Transitions, and Pathways," 1–20.

majority did not have the ability to recall or elect the government.<sup>170</sup> A consequential part of Bull's argument of authoritarianism starting in 2016 is the rise in influence and power of the military.<sup>171</sup> Gamboa's argument is not dissimilar to Bull's that Venezuela had unfair elections, but they were competitive elections; opposition candidates had highly obstructed access to media outlets, and resources but ultimately had the ability to participate in electoral contests.<sup>172</sup> Gamboa also argues that in 2016 the Chavista regime became fully authoritarian because of the increased involvement of the military, the escalation of repression against the opposition, and the government's further limitations on elections.<sup>173</sup>

My response to Bull and Gamboa's argument is that the level of violence is not necessarily a distinction between competitive authoritarian regimes and authoritarian regimes, but a distinction between the type of authoritarianism.<sup>174</sup> The claim that the checks and balances were significantly undermined is an understatement; they were entirely undermined. Hugo Chavez consolidated control over the judicial, legislative, and military branches, dismantling the process of checks and balances.<sup>175</sup> He closed down the most critical radio and television stations, and threatened journalists with imprisonment, forsaking the freedom of speech.<sup>176</sup> Chavez barred hundreds of opposition candidates, openly violating democratic norms.<sup>177</sup> In addition to all this, a forensic analysis of the 2012 elections irregular statistical variations were found in the electoral roll, which could have overturned the election if known at the time.<sup>178</sup> My point in bringing this all up is that Chavez was authoritarian; he disregarded electoral rights, freedoms of speech, disassembled the checks and balances in Venezuela, openly violating democratic norms. However, Chavez was also charismatic and a smart leader able to hold together, or at least appear to hold together, a movement much better than his successor, Nicolas Maduro. It is not enough to explain

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<sup>170</sup>Bull, "The Crisis in Venezuela: Drivers, Transitions, and Pathways," 1–20.

<sup>171</sup>Bull, "The Crisis in Venezuela: Drivers, Transitions, and Pathways," 1–20.

<sup>172</sup>Gamboa, "Plebiscitary Override in Venezuela: Erosion of Democracy and Deepening Authoritarianism," 124–36.

<sup>173</sup>Gamboa, "Plebiscitary Override in Venezuela: Erosion of Democracy and Deepening Authoritarianism," 124–36.

<sup>174</sup>Geddes, "Military Rule," 147–62,

<sup>175</sup>Myers, "Review of Liberal Democracy, Populism, and Beyond," 231–45; Gamboa, "Plebiscitary Override in Venezuela," 124–36; Jiménez, "Contesting Autocracy," 47–68; de Cordoba, "In Enacting Decrees, Chavez Makes New Power Grab." For more on institutional degradation in this period read: Brewer-Carias, *Dismantling Democracy in Venezuela*, 263–365.

<sup>176</sup>Aponte-Moreno, "Chavez: Rhetoric Made in Havana," 33–42; Myers, "Review of Liberal Democracy, Populism, and Beyond," 231–45.

<sup>177</sup>de Cordoba, "In Enacting Decrees, Chavez Makes New Power Grab,"; Levitsky, "Elections Without Democracy," 51–65; "Venezuela: Political Conditions and U.S. Policy, 2003–2009."

<sup>178</sup>Jiménez, "Forensic Analysis of Venezuelan Elections During the Chávez Presidency," 1–17.

Chavez's lack of authoritarianism through comparison to Maduro's military regime. They were both authoritarian leaders though their circumstances, style of leadership, and ultimately form of authoritarianism differed.

### *Military Rule (2014-Present)*

It is my view that Chavez's death, the emerging economic crises in 2013, and the 2014 La Salida protest movements were factors in the transition from authoritarianism to military rule by institution under President Nicolas Maduro.<sup>179</sup> After Chavez died, an interesting phenomenon arose, which was the growth of military influence in the government.<sup>180</sup> In order to secure the loyalty of the military, Maduro had to grant more benefits and privileges to the military.<sup>181</sup> Maduro entrusted the military with sixty public companies, a quarter of the ministries, and a third of the governorates.<sup>182</sup> The military was also given its own supply systems of food and medicine, a bank at its disposal, a TV station, and its own oil and mining company with exclusive control.<sup>183</sup> In 2014, Carmen Meléndez, a former defence minister, described the military as the “backbone of the government”.<sup>184</sup>

The dictatorship became much more violent in its conduct, with increasing military crackdowns shown by the 3,500 political prisoners detained in 2014 and several deaths.<sup>185</sup> The classification of

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<sup>179</sup> Geddes, “Military Rule,” 147–62; Stavrakakis, “Contemporary Left-Wing Populism in Latin America,” 51–76; Bull, “The Crisis in Venezuela: Drivers, Transitions, and Pathways,” 1–20; Cannon, “As Clear as MUD,” 49–70; Jiménez, “Contesting Autocracy,” 47–68; Gamboa, “Plebiscitary Override in Venezuela,” 124–36; García-Guadilla, “Polarization, Participatory Democracy, and Democratic Erosion,” 62–77.

<sup>180</sup> Posado, “The Authoritarian and Conservative Turn of Nicolás Maduro,” 341–57; Suhr, “Run Down: Venezuela’s Road to Ruin,” 57–70.

<sup>181</sup> Posado, “The Authoritarian and Conservative Turn of Nicolás Maduro,” 341–57; Suhr, “Run Down: Venezuela’s Road to Ruin,” 57–70.

<sup>182</sup> Posado, “The Authoritarian and Conservative Turn of Nicolás Maduro,” 341–57.

<sup>183</sup> Suhr, “Run Down: Venezuela’s Road to Ruin,” 57–70.

<sup>184</sup> Posado, “The Authoritarian and Conservative Turn of Nicolás Maduro,” 341–57.

<sup>185</sup> Vox, “The Collapse of Venezuela, Explained,”; Stavrakakis, “Contemporary Left-Wing Populism in Latin America,” 51–76; Kutiyski, “Narrowing the Gap,” 71–97; Castilla, “Venezuelans Flee Accelerating Collapse,” 2–5; Third Way, “Country Brief: Venezuela,” 1–7; Jiménez, “Contesting Autocracy,” 47–68; Gamboa, “Plebiscitary Override in Venezuela,” 124–36; Ellner, “Class Strategies in Chavista Venezuela,” 167–89, 124–36; Cannon, “As Clear as MUD,” 49–70; García-Guadilla, “Polarization, Participatory Democracy, and Democratic Erosion,” 62–77; Prodavinci, “5 Claves Para Entender Las Protestas Estudiantiles En Venezuela,” February 10, 2014, <https://web.archive.org/web/20170808125933/http://prodavinci.com/2014/02/10/actualidad/5-claves-para-entender-las-protestas-estudiantiles-en-venezuela/>; Andrea González, “12F: A Siete Años Del Inicio De “La Salida”, ¿Dónde Están Los Protagonistas?” *Runrun.es: En Defensa De Tus Derechos Humanos*, February 12, 2021, <https://runrun.es/rr-es-plus/436039/12f-a-siete-anos-del-inicio-de-la-salida-donde-est-an-los-protagonistas/>; “Quién Es Antonio Ledezma, El Alcalde Opositor Arrestado Por El Gobierno De Venezuela,” *BBC News Mundo*, February 20, 2015, [https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias/2015/02/150219\\_perfil\\_antonio\\_ledezma\\_en](https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias/2015/02/150219_perfil_antonio_ledezma_en).

military rule is perhaps not a perfect fit in description because Nicolas Maduro has had no military experience and is a civilian. However, the rhetoric used, the increased influence of the military in government affairs, the violent conduct of the military, and the fact that the original leader of the regime was Hugo Chavez, a member of the military who attempted a military coup, are some of the reasons for viewing the current regime as a military rule by institution.<sup>186</sup>

The increase in the influence of the military in Maduro's regime is in large part as a result of the growth of the opposition, both at the electoral and grassroots level. When looking at the different points of the opposition in elections against the Chávez-Maduro regime, there is a clear growth in support for the Venezuelan opposition movement in the presidential elections.<sup>187</sup> In 1998, the candidates running against Chavez got 2.6 million votes total; in 2006, the opposition got 5 million votes; in 2012, the opposition got 6.59 million votes, and in 2013, the opposition got 7.2 million votes.<sup>188</sup> In the 2006 presidential election, Manuel Rosales lost to Chavez by 25.94 percent of the vote.<sup>189</sup> In 2012, Henrique Capriles lost to Chavez by 10.75 percent of the vote, and in 2013, Henrique Capriles lost to Maduro by 1.5 percent of the vote.<sup>190</sup> This 1.5 percent was a margin of 220,000 votes.<sup>191</sup> This demonstrates the growth in support for the opposition and the increasing fractures within the Chavista movement, which is a reason why Maduro needed to secure the loyalty of the military.<sup>192</sup>

The previously mentioned grassroots movement La Salida, born from frustration about the economic crisis and perceived electoral injustice in the last two presidential elections, led to violent military crackdowns in 2014.<sup>193</sup> The following year, in the parliamentary elections, the Venezuelan

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<sup>186</sup> Aponte-Moreno, "Chavez: Rhetoric Made in Havana," 33–42; Sylvia, "The Chavez Phenomenon," 63–76; Ara Marcen Naval, "Militarisation, Corruption, and Democracy in Venezuela," Transparency International Defence & Security, August 1, 2024, <https://ti-defence.org/venezuela-elections-2024-military-corruption-democracy/#>.

<sup>187</sup> Kutiyiski, "Narrowing the Gap," 71–97; Cannon, "As Clear as MUD," 49–70.

<sup>188</sup> Kutiyiski, "Narrowing the Gap," 71–97; "IFES Election Guide | Venezuela Presidency 2013," "IFES Election Guide | Elections: Venezuela Presidency 2012 General," October 7, 2012. <https://www.electionguide.org/elections/id/2248/>.

<sup>189</sup> "IFES Election Guide | Elections: Venezuela Presidency 2006 General," December 3, 2006. <https://www.electionguide.org/elections/id/2031/>.

<sup>190</sup> Kutiyiski, "Narrowing the Gap," 71–97; "IFES Election Guide | Venezuela Presidency 2013," "IFES Election Guide | Elections: Venezuela Presidency 2012."

<sup>191</sup> Kutiyiski, "Narrowing the Gap," 71–97.

<sup>192</sup> Posado, "The Authoritarian and Conservative Turn of Nicolás Maduro," 341–57.

<sup>193</sup> Vox, "The Collapse of Venezuela, Explained,"; Stavrakakis, "Contemporary Left-Wing Populism in Latin America," 51–76; Kutiyiski, "Narrowing the Gap," 71–97; Castilla, "Venezuelans Flee Accelerating Collapse," 2–5; Third Way, "Country Brief: Venezuela," 1–7; Jiménez, "Contesting Autocracy," 47–68; Gamboa, "Plebiscitary Override in Venezuela," 124–36; Ellner,

opposition won a supermajority.<sup>194</sup> This electoral victory in the national assembly brought several challenges to Maduro's power. The most noteworthy one was the Juan Guaidó presidential challenge. Guaidó, who was president of the national assembly through a constitutional clause, claimed the presidency.<sup>195</sup> Guaidó and his mentor Leopoldo López had meetings with officials within the Maduro regime to create a transition to democracy; however, the military stayed by Maduro, and the opposition was unsuccessful in removing the Chavista regime.<sup>196</sup>

In response to the opposition winning 112 out of 167 seats in the 2015 parliamentary elections, the Chavista influenced supreme court invalidated the elections of three congressmen from the state of Amazonas without calling for new elections.<sup>197</sup> This whittled down the opposition supermajority to a majority.<sup>198</sup> The Supreme Court declared that the national assembly was in contempt, thereby blocking

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“Class Strategies in Chavista Venezuela,” 167–89, 124–36; Cannon, “As Clear as MUD,” 49–70; García-Guadilla, “Polarization, Participatory Democracy, and Democratic Erosion,” 62–77; Prodavinci, “5 Claves Para Entender Las Protestas Estudiantiles En Venezuela,”; González, “12F: A Siete Años Del Inicio De ‘La Salida’,”; “Quién Es Antonio Ledezma.”

<sup>194</sup> Jiménez, “Contesting Autocracy,” 47–68; Gamboa, “Plebiscitary Override in Venezuela,” 124–36; Posado, “The Authoritarian and Conservative Turn of Nicolás Maduro,” 341–57.

<sup>195</sup> Gamboa, “Plebiscitary Override in Venezuela,” 124–36; “El Tribunal Supremo De Justicia De Venezuela Declara ‘Inconstitucional’ a La Asamblea Nacional,”; Leon, “Prensa De La AN,”; Third Way, “Country Brief: Venezuela,” 1-7; Castilla, “Venezuelans Flee Accelerating Collapse,” 2-5.

<sup>196</sup> Associated Press, “AP: US Missed Chance to Woo Venezuela Generals,” *Voice of America*, May 3, 2019, <https://www.voanews.com/a/ap-us-missed-chance-to-woo-venezuela-generals/4903239.html#>; Vivian Sequera, Angus Berwick, and Luc Cohen, “Venezuela’s Guaidó Calls for Uprising but Military Loyal to Maduro for Now,” Reuters, May 1, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/world/venezuelas-guaido-calls-for-uprising-but-military-loyal-to-maduro-for-now-idUSKCN1S60ZG/#>; Philip Reeves, “U.S. Directs Blame at Cuba for Guaidó’s Failed Military Uprising in Venezuela,” *NPR*, May 5, 2019, <https://www.npr.org/2019/05/05/720376148/u-s-directs-blame-at-cuba-for-guaid-s-failed-military-uprising-in-venezuela>; for liberal American reporting on Venezuela read: “Leopoldo López En Conclusiones: Desde El Exilio, Revela Por Qué Falló El Intento De Derrocar a Maduro.” CNN, October 30, 2020, <https://cnnespanol.cnn.com/2020/10/30/leopoldo-lopez-en-conclusiones-desde-el-exilio-revela-por-que-por-que-fallo-el-intento-d-e-derrocar-a-maduro/>; For American center right journalism on Venezuelan politics read: Juan Forero, José de Córdoba, and Kejal Vyas, “Venezuela’s Opposition Came Close to Ousting the President—but the Plan Fell Apart; Regime Insiders in Talks with Opposition are Said to have Lost Confidence in the Bid to Remove Maduro.” New York, N.Y.: *Wall Street Journal*, 2019, <https://www.proquest.com/blogs-podcasts-websites/venezuelas-opposition-came-close-ousting/docview/2219332247/se-2>; For American center left journalism on Venezuelan politics read: Anthony Faiola, “Maduro’s Ex-Spy Chief Lands in U.S. Armed with Allegations Against Venezuelan Government: Gen. Manuel Ricardo Christopher Figuera Emerged from Hiding in Colombia to Allege Cubans in the Palace, Foreign Fighters in the Countryside and Rot in Maduro’s Inner Circle.” Washington, D.C. WP Company LLC, *The Washington Post*, 2019, <https://www.proquest.com/blogs-podcasts-websites/maduro-s-ex-spy-chief-lands-u-armed-with/docview/2246032169/se-2>; For American center left journalism on Venezuelan politics read: Anthony Faiola, “How a Plot Filled with Intrigue and Betrayal Failed to Oust Venezuela’s President: Opposition Leaders Said their Elation Turned to a Mad Scramble on Tuesday as a Plan Hatched during Weeks of Secret Meetings with Top Maduro Loyalists Abruptly Collapsed,” Washington, D.C., WP Company LLC, *The Washington Post*, 2019, <https://www.proquest.com/blogs-podcasts-websites/how-plot-filled-with-intrigue-betrayal-failed/docview/2219385684/se-2>.

<sup>197</sup> Jiménez, “Contesting Autocracy,” 47–68; Gamboa, “Plebiscitary Override in Venezuela,” 124–36; Posado, “The Authoritarian and Conservative Turn of Nicolás Maduro,” 341–57.

<sup>198</sup> Posado, “The Authoritarian and Conservative Turn of Nicolás Maduro,” 341–57.

any initiatives and legislation the opposition assembly would bring up.<sup>199</sup> Maduro, through the guise of economic emergence and state of exception, took control over legislative duties, creating a whole other legislative body to take the place of the National Assembly.<sup>200</sup> As a response to opposition pressure, Maduro and the chavista regime reorganized the institutional levers of power, further increasing their open defiance of democratic norms and even defying the idea of maintaining a facade of democracy.<sup>201</sup>

Most recently, the Maduro regime's reaction to the 2024 presidential election results informs the type of government he governs. The Maduro regime responded with a violent crackdown on the Venezuelan opposition after the 2024 elections due to differences over who won the elections. Part of this crackdown was the imprisonment of an estimated 150 adolescents, some of whom were tortured and kept in prison for months.<sup>202</sup> The Maduro regime arrested over 50 foreign passport holders to use as bargaining chips with the US, other Western, and Latin American nations that have publicly supported the Venezuelan opposition.<sup>203</sup> The final strand of the crackdown strategy was the detainment of economists reporting on the Venezuelan economic situation and individuals working for Venezuelan cryptocurrency websites or Monitor Dolar, which reported on the exchange of Venezuelan bolivares for US dollars.<sup>204</sup> This led to an increase of 250-300 political prisoners before the elections to 2,000-3,000 political prisoners after the elections.<sup>205</sup> The 2024 presidential election is a recent piece of evidence that demonstrates in my view that Nicolas Maduro is currently leading a military strongman regime.

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<sup>199</sup> Jiménez, "Contesting Autocracy," 47–68; Gamboa, "Plebiscitary Override in Venezuela," 124–36; Posado, "The Authoritarian and Conservative Turn of Nicolás Maduro," 341–57.

<sup>200</sup> Jiménez, "Contesting Autocracy," 47–68; Gamboa, "Plebiscitary Override in Venezuela," 124–36; Posado, "The Authoritarian and Conservative Turn of Nicolás Maduro," 341–57.

<sup>201</sup> Posado, "The Authoritarian and Conservative Turn of Nicolás Maduro," 341–57.

<sup>202</sup> For American center right journalism on Venezuelan politics read: Juan Forero and Ryan Dubé, "Venezuela Never had so Many Political Prisoners. Seven of them are Teens. Adolescents are among 2,200 People the Regime Said it Arrested during July Protests Over the Disputed Presidential Election," New York, N.Y.: Wall Street Journal, 2024.

<https://www.proquest.com/blogs-podcasts-websites/venezuela-never-had-so-many-political-prisoners/docview/3151574417/se-2>.

<sup>203</sup> For American center right journalism on Venezuelan politics read: Kejal Vyas, "Venezuelan Regime Hunts for Foreign Hostages to Pressure its Rivals; Maduro has Turned Up the Heat on the Incoming Trump Administration by Recently Seizing 50 Foreigners, several of them American Passport Holders," New York, N.Y.: *Wall Street Journal*, 2025. <https://www.proquest.com/blogs-podcasts-websites/venezuelan-regime-hunts-foreign-hostages-pressure/docview/3151573990/se-2>.

<sup>204</sup> For American center left journalism on Venezuelan politics read: Genevieve Glatsky, "Venezuela's Authoritarian Government has a New Target: Economists" New York: *New York Times Company*, 2025. <https://www.proquest.com/blogs-podcasts-websites/venezuela-s-authoritarian-government-has-new/docview/3231767037/se-2>.

<sup>205</sup> *PBS Frontline*, "A Dangerous Assignment."

*Section 5: Conclusion*

The Chavez-Maduro regime has not been static, it has evolved over time with distinct phases of how it operated. Once, defining authoritarianism, competitive authoritarianism, and military rule and providing context on both Chavez and Maduro, I developed my own understanding of the Chavista regime. Based upon these previously established definitions and the policies put in place by Chavez and Maduro I created my own interpretation of the phases of the Chavista regime. Therefore, this essay asserts that from 2002 to 2006, the Chavez regime became a competitive authoritarian government. From 2007 to 2009, the Chavez regime became entrenched in authoritarianism. From 2014 to the present moment, the Maduro regime has been authoritarian by military rule, specifically by a military strongman. This interpretation provides a nuanced look at how the Chavista movement has changed, and the different ways in which one should think about the Chavista movement.

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