



# Democratization



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SEPTEMBER 2019

# Technology as a social control and oppression mechanism in Venezuela

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## I. Introduction

The use of technology as a mechanism to implement and deepen totalitarianism has been one of the greatest fears of those who have studied the basic concepts of democracy. George Orwell, in his famous novel, 1984, crystallized how the supervision of people's daily lives and their submission via technology was an extremely plausible risk, which would open the doors to the consolidation of authoritarianism. This has been qualified as "post-modern totalitarianism" in which individuals appear to be free in their day-to-day lives, yet the State controls and censors information flows while compiling data about the person's political and social credibility<sup>1</sup>.

These facts not only have relevance in day-to-day analysis, but also have a direct impact on the fundamental rights of people. These measures of state supervision come into direct tension with the right to privacy. Furthermore, this information can be used as a direct or indirect mechanism of control over society and the restriction of other people's rights.

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1 Diamond. L., *The Road to Digital Unfreedom: The Threat of Postmodern Totalitarianism*, *Journal of Democracy*, Volume 30, Number 1, January 2019, pP.23.

In Venezuela, these tensions derived from the use of technology are part of the present. There are innumerable complaints that correlate technology and social control with the violation of human rights. The purpose of this essay is to make visible some technological measures used by the Venezuelan State that may have an impact on the rights of the people and on the State's ability to dominate the population.

Based on the information recorded, it will be concluded that since 1999, under the regimes of Hugo Chávez and Nicolás Maduro, technological mechanisms were gradually incorporated that exacerbated the ability to control information and even the manipulation of the Venezuelan population, thus violating constitutionally and internationally recognized fundamental rights in favor of people.

## **II. The case of the “*captahuellas*”<sup>2</sup> machines in vote exercise and manipulation**

During different electoral processes in Venezuela, “*captahuellas*” were incorporated as a mandatory step to exercise the right to vote<sup>3</sup>. According to the National Electoral Council (CNE<sup>4</sup>), these machines would validate the correlation between each voter

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2 *Captahuellas* are machines designed for biometric authentication through fingerprints, used in Venezuelan elections since 2012.

3 Consejo Nacional Electoral, Tecnología Electoral en Venezuela, available in: [http://www4.cne.gob.ve/web/sistema\\_electoral/tecnologia\\_electoral\\_descripcion.php](http://www4.cne.gob.ve/web/sistema_electoral/tecnologia_electoral_descripcion.php); TELESUR, *Conozca cómo se vota en Venezuela con la herradura electoral*, December 5th, 2015, available in: <https://www.telesurtv.net/news/Conozca-como-se-vota-en-Venezuela-con-la-herradura-electoral-20151205-0016.html>, Youtube, CNE presentará un nuevo sistema de autenticación integrado, April 23rd, 2012, available in: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5A5n5amZ9RA>

4 The Spanish acronym for *Consejo Nacional Electoral*.

and their biometric data, which would ensure the personal character of the vote, and that each registered citizen vote only once in each election<sup>5</sup>.

Notwithstanding, these machine have been a source of controversy regarding its role in the electoral process *vis a vis* the degree of uncertainty it generates regarding the possibility of knowing who each person votes for. In fact, when incorporating their use in the electoral process, a general distrust feeling was denounced on several occasions with people believing that it was possible to know who they'd voted for through this device. The *captahuella* would identify each person, and activate, in turn, the machine through which electronic voting is exercised, facilitating a possible identification between someone and their vote.

Therefore, *captahuellas* are associated with a mechanism of intimidation and coercion of voters due to popular fear of violation of the right to confidentiality of suffrage, and possible reprisals as a result, such as losing government subsidies or public office if a stance contrary to government interests was revealed<sup>6</sup>.

This situation must be read together with the innumerable complaints that exist about violation of suffrage confidentiality in Venezuela. For instance, in 2013, Nicolás Maduro himself

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5 OEA, Discurso Del Embajador Jorge Valero Ante El Consejo Permanente Sobre El Informe De La Misión De Observación Electoral De La OEA, Elecciones Parlamentarias, December 4th, 2005, available in: [http://www.oas.org/es/centro\\_noticias/discurso.asp?sCodigo=06-0012](http://www.oas.org/es/centro_noticias/discurso.asp?sCodigo=06-0012).

6 Infobae, ¿El voto es secreto en Venezuela?, September 4th, 2012, available in: <https://www.infobae.com/2012/09/04/1055740-el-voto-es-secreto-venezuela/>.



acknowledged having identified 900,000 people who voted against him in the electoral process held that year<sup>7</sup>.

Even if the right to confidentiality is not violated, the *capta-huellas* gathers data on who votes, regardless of their choice. This is relevant given there are precedents in which public officials are forced to vote during electoral processes, regardless of whether they wish to do so, under threat of being dismissed or having restrictions on access to a public service.

Regardless of whether the machines actually violate confidentiality or serve as a mechanism to verify who voted, these instruments violate the appearance of transparency and, on the contrary, facilitate an atmosphere of intimidation to the detriment of voters who intend to vote against government interests. In this regard, it has been indicated that:

With this scythe hanging over the heads of citizens, in a country that has lost confidence in the electoral system, and where technological literacy leaves much to be desired, some people have pointed to a kind of subconscious connection between the possibility of providing food and the exercise to vote. Venezuela's deeply paternalistic economic system is built for the dependence of an all-powerful government that "grants" privileges and royalties on its own terms ("grants" houses, food at affordable prices, in exchange for quasi-religious allegiance), and, quite like a vengeful god, withdraws

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7 El Nuevo Herald, Maduro admite que el voto no es secreto en Venezuela, May 18th, 2013, available in: <https://www.elnuevoherald.com/noticias/mundo/america-latina/venezuela-es/article2023161.html>.

those privileges when mortals have fallen out of grace<sup>8</sup>. (Own translation).

The latter is particularly consistent with the threats that Nicolás Maduro made after the results of the 2015 parliamentary elections, in which he reproached his voters for not supporting him, and threatened to withdraw the social benefits to which people normally have access.

The foregoing must be framed in the principle of freedom of vote. International instruments such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognize that electoral processes must be free. One of the guarantees for the protection of the freedom of vote is confidentiality, to the extent that the latter seeks to protect the voter from any external interference in the exercise of their conscience. Indeed, as the Human Rights Committee has indicated:

States should take measures to guarantee the requirement of the secrecy of the vote during elections, including absentee voting, where such a system exists. This implies that voters should be protected from any form of coercion or compulsion to disclose how they intend to vote or how they voted, and from any unlawful or arbitrary interference with the voting process<sup>9</sup>. (Own translation).

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8 Digital Rights LAC, Tu huella digital por un kilo de harina: biométrica y privacidad en Venezuela, 16 de December 16th, 2015, available in: <https://www.digitalrightslac.net/es/tu-huella-digital-por-un-kilo-de-harina-biometrica-y-privacidad-en-venezuela/>.

9 Human Rights Committee, General Comment No. 25, CCPR/C/21/Rev. 1/Add.7, parr.. 20.

A less obvious assumption than the one anticipated by the Human Rights Committee is crystallized in the Venezuelan case: *the lack of certainty about the secrecy of the vote*, as a form of *coercion*, with technology being the means to perpetuate that pressure. The appearance of no confidentiality in vote, derived from the use of *captahuellas*, deepened an absence of a sense of freedom in suffrage.

These assessments add to external pressures led by the regime itself during and after electoral processes. As a more representative example: in a speech after 2015 parliamentary elections, in which the opposition won a majority, Maduro lashed out and reproached the population for the results, stating: “you voted against yourselves”, “I wanted to build 500,000 homes next year, deliver 100,000 taxis bought from China, but now I have doubts that I can do it with an assembly dominated by fascism; I asked for your support and you did not give it to me”<sup>10</sup>.

Prior to that, during the presidential elections in 2013, the Minister of the Popular Power of Housing and Habitat, Ricardo Molina, affirmed: “I do not care at all what the labor norms say; in this situation, I do not care. To the personnel that are part of our institutions and that are on the opposite political sidewalk, zero belligerence. I do not accept people that come here to speak ill of the revolution. No one come to me to criticize Nicolás or to speak ill of President Chávez, I do not accept it. I do not accept fascist party militants. Those who want to be militants of that *Voluntad*

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10 El País. Nicolás Maduro pide la renuncia de su Gabinete y endurece su discurso, 9 de diciembre de 2015. Available in: [https://elpais.com/internacional/2015/12/09/america/1449633338\\_743523.html](https://elpais.com/internacional/2015/12/09/america/1449633338_743523.html).

*Popular* party, that fascist party, resign, because if you do not resign, I'm going to dismiss you myself" <sup>11</sup>.

Meanwhile, the Sports Director of the Government of the state of Zulia, Leonet Cabezas, said: "Those who passed the 1x10, who thought that we were not going to call them, that we called and they told us that they were going to vote for Capriles, we have you identified and we are going to take you out". This also took place in the Ministry of Planning and Finance, the headquarters of SENIAT <sup>12</sup> in Valencia and La Guaira, and PDVSA <sup>13</sup>.

The reprisals for voting for Capriles would also extend to the social subsidies granted by the Government. The PSUV <sup>14</sup> deputy, Odalys Monzón, for instance, said: "I'm keeping an eye here in Vargas. To those who are in Social Missions and institutions of the State banging pots and pans <sup>15</sup>: *¡no pidan cacao* <sup>16</sup>! In subsequent messages, she stated the process would be radicalized, and the delivery of houses reviewed <sup>17</sup>.

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11 El Nacional, El Ministro de Vivienda amenazó con despedir a empleados opositores, April 22nd, 2013, available in: [http://www.el-nacional.com/economia/ministro-Vivienda-despedir-empleadosopositores\\_0\\_176982302.html](http://www.el-nacional.com/economia/ministro-Vivienda-despedir-empleadosopositores_0_176982302.html).

12 The Spanish acronym for *Servicio Nacional Integrado de Administración Aduanera y Tributaria*

13 The Spanish acronym for *Petróleos de Venezuela, S.A.*

14 The Spanish acronym for *Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela*. It is the political party founded by Hugo Chávez and of which Nicolás Maduro is a member.

15 Referring to a popular form of social protest in Venezuela, namely, *cacerolazos*, were people bang on pots and pans.

16 Venezuelan idiom meaning someone in a vulnerable position must request favors from those in power.

17 El Universal, Denuncian despidos por razones políticas en Vargas, April 17th, 2013, available in: <http://www.eluniversal.com/caracas/130417/uncian-despidos-por-razones-politicas-envargas>.

These threats, then, consolidate popular belief: *captahuellas* *can* be used to know who I voted for, and *can* bring retaliation for it, either in my work (public officials), or in access to social guarantees or subsidies.

It is worth noting that there are no clear, explanatory and transparent elements to sustain the role of these machines in the suffrage process. The lack of an explanation about the functioning of this machine, rather, the opacity and discretion with which the State handles its use, despite the multiple complaints about fear in the exercise to vote when fingerprints are recorded, deepen the impact that this machine has on the freedom of suffrage. People vote with fear, and, therefore, elections are not free.

In any case, considering the innumerable public complaints that have been filed regarding these machines, the State should at least consider alternative measures to validate the correlation between the citizen who shows up to vote and their biometric data recorded, as other nations do. The lack of consideration on the part of the government consolidates the argument that *captahuellas* are a mechanism that serves to instill fear in society, as opposed to guarantee freedom of vote recognized in instruments for the protection of fundamental rights.

### **III. The case of “*captahuellas*” in obtaining information regarding access to goods and services**

Following a similar dynamic, in 2014 a new form of social technological control was created, by imposing what was considered by the government as a biometric system for food safety in supermarkets, aimed at regulating the acquisition of certain goods. With this system, a person would be prevented from

buying beyond a maximum number of products during the same week, both in public and private local chains. Moreover, this measure was imposed with further restrictions regarding the days each citizen would be allowed to purchase these goods, where people could only access them on days associated to identity card numbers. These measures applied to necessity goods regulated by the state, such as milk, sugar, coffee, oil, diapers or laundry soap<sup>18</sup>.

The system was interconnected among all the institutions that sold these goods, in such a way that the restrictions operated at the national level<sup>19</sup>. It was administered by the CNE, and implied that the people who were going to buy these basic goods would have to record their fingerprints into a system, to verify that they had not exceeded the weekly limit<sup>20</sup>. Specifically, it required that people handed proper documentation to the cashier, give their full name, telephone number, address, date of birth, and recorded both their thumb's fingerprints in a device: the emblematic *capta-huellas*<sup>21</sup>.

The practical consequence of the implementation of this system, aside from the regulation on the amount of products that

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18 VOA noticias, Venezuela: Más restricciones en compra de alimentos, May 9th, 2015, available in: <https://www.voanoticias.com/a/venezuela-gobierno-afina-control-captahuellas-compra-alimentos/2759966.html>.

19 Telesur, En Detalle: Así funcionará sistema biométrico en Venezuela, August 28th, 2014, available in: <https://www.telesurtv.net/news/Asi-funcionara-sistema-biometrico-en-Venezuela-20140828-0039.html>.

20 El Estímulo, La lista de la captahuella, October 14th, 2014, available in: <http://elestimulo.com/blog/la-lista-de-la-captahuella/>.

21 Digital Rights LAC, Tu huella digital por un kilo de harina: biométrica y privacidad en Venezuela, Diciembre 16th, 2015, available in: <https://www.digitalrightslac.net/es/tu-huella-digital-por-un-kilo-de-harina-biometrica-y-privacidad-en-venezuela/>.

can be acquired, is the suspension of access to them through regular means, forcing people to turn to “irregular” markets. These measures constitute obstacles imposed by the State in the access of goods necessary for the satisfaction of economic, social and cultural rights recognized in different international treaties, such as the right to health and the right to food.

However, it is not clear how the information obtained from this system is used or who administers it<sup>22</sup>. It has been stated in this regard that:

The implicit risk in the use of biometric technologies comes from the ability of governments to use them for surveillance purposes. In cases like this, biometric data are part of a multimodal system, being combined with other information points, such as date of birth, address, national identity number. The more data points there are about a user, the easier it is to implement full surveillance. Just thinking about the total dimensions of the information accumulated by the government is overwhelming: our identity card is required to acquire a telephone line; we are required to give our tax information number for any interaction with the public administration<sup>23</sup>. (Own translation).

This necessarily leads to analyzing discussions about surveillance, and its relationship with international human rights law.

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22 Digital Rights LAC, Tu huella digital por un kilo de harina: biométrica y privacidad en Venezuela, December 16th, 2015, available in: <https://www.digitalrightslac.net/es/tu-huella-digital-por-un-kilo-de-harina-biometrica-y-privacidad-en-venezuela/>.

23 Digital Rights LAC, Tu huella digital por un kilo de harina: biométrica y privacidad en Venezuela, December 16th, 2015, available in: <https://www.digitalrightslac.net/es/tu-huella-digital-por-un-kilo-de-harina-biometrica-y-privacidad-en-venezuela/>.

Indeed, Article 12 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Article 17 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights recognize the right to privacy, which protects all types of information about the private lives of all people. Although it is a right that admits regulations, any regulation that involves the collection of information by state authorities requires to be foreseen by law, which is necessary in a democratic society and proportional to the purpose sought<sup>24</sup>.

The collection of information by the CNE as a result of the use of these fingerprints becomes arbitrary, given the imposition to provide private information (what does each person habitually consume?) without legal basis or reasonable justification.

Beyond that, the mystery about the collection and use of this information is alarming. The State's knowledge of each detail about the degree of consumption of each person goes beyond what the law admits, and submitting people to deliver this information to acquire a product becomes an obstacle over information. Indeed, as recognized by the Human Rights Council through a recent resolution:

The right to privacy is not only impacted by the examination or use of information about a person by a human or an algorithm. Even the mere generation and collection of data relating to a person's identity, family or life already affects the right to privacy, as through those steps an individual loses some control over information that could put his or her privacy at risk. In addition, the mere existence of secret

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[www.digitalrightslac.net/es/tu-huella-digital-por-un-kilo-de-harina-biometrica-y-privacidad-en-venezuela/](http://www.digitalrightslac.net/es/tu-huella-digital-por-un-kilo-de-harina-biometrica-y-privacidad-en-venezuela/).

24 On this regard, see Human Rights Committee, General Comment No. 16, 1988.



surveillance amounts to an interference with the right to privacy<sup>25</sup>.

Even if the indicated measures do not have an end, the collection of said information generates an additional risk on the rights of the people, as was pointed by the Human Rights Council itself in that same resolution:

States and business enterprises increasingly deploy systems relying on the collection and use of biometric data, such as DNA, facial geometry, voice, retina or iris patterns and fingerprints. Some countries have created immense centralized databases storing such information for a diverse range of purposes, from national security and criminal investigation to the identification of individuals for purposes of the provision of essential services, such as social and financial services and education. State actors around the world deploy closed-circuit television cameras in cities, train stations or airports that use facial recognition to automatically identify and flag persons. Biometric-based technologies are increasingly used to control migration, both at borders and within countries. **The creation of mass databases of biometric data raises significant human rights concerns. Such data is particularly sensitive, as it is by definition inseparably linked to a particular person and that person's life, and has the potential to be gravely abused. For example, identity theft on the basis of biometrics is extremely difficult to remedy and may seriously affect an individual's rights. Moreover, biometric data may be used for different purposes from those for which it was collected, including the unlawful**

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25 Human Rights Council, Right to privacy in the digital age, A/HRC/39/29, August 3rd, 2018, Parr. 7.

**tracking and monitoring of individuals.** Given those risks, particular attention should be paid to questions of necessity and proportionality in the collection of biometric data. Against that background, it is worrisome that some States are embarking on vast biometric data-based projects without having adequate legal and procedural safeguards in place<sup>26</sup>. (Own highlights).

Finally, the practical and arbitrary limitations with which this system was implemented should be taken into account. For instance, access to products was prohibited for those whose ID cards were expired<sup>27</sup>. There is also a precedent for a person prevented from purchasing goods for not having arms<sup>28</sup>. Although this matter lies outside the scope of this study, it should be noted that this situation constitutes discrimination to the detriment of people who have been barred from accessing goods and services as a result of this measure.

#### **IV. The *carnet de la patria*<sup>29</sup>: discrimination with a technological foundation**

Probably the most important technological mechanism of social control at the present time is the *carnet de la patria*. This

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26 Human Rights Council, Right to privacy in the digital age, A/HRC/39/29, August 3rd, 2018, parr. 14.

27 La Verdad, No dejan comprar comida con la cédula vencida, September 30th, 2015, available in: <http://www.laverdad.com/economia/83816-n-o-dejan-comprar-comida-con-la-cedula-vencida.html>.

28 Perfil, Venezuela | Le impiden comprar alimentos porque no tiene brazos, July 15th, 2015, available in: <https://www.perfil.com/noticias/internacional/venezuela-le-impiden-comprar-alimentos-porque-no-tiene-brazos-20150715-0043.phtml>.

29 Or “homeland card”, is an identification document used in Venezuela since 2016 for streamlining government subsidies and mission benefits.

card is an identity document for citizens who receive some type of social assistance from the government. Its purpose, according to the State, is to know the socioeconomic status of the population and streamline social assistance programs. Only those who have this document can request any type of social benefit from the government<sup>30</sup>. The card works through a QR code that is scanned when acquiring subsidized goods and services<sup>31</sup>. ZTE, whose largest shareholder is a Chinese state company, is the company leading technology design for these cards. Their contracts with the Venezuelan government show that this relationship is aimed at “building a database and creating a mobile payment system to use with the card”<sup>32</sup>. In this regard, it has been indicated that:

The advantage regarding the traditional identity card is that the latter becomes a simple plastic-coated paper that does not incorporate any element that allows data reading, call it QR code - fast response -, bar code, magnetic stripe, or chip. Through the QR, the *carnet de la patria* allows any operator, with a cell phone that has a camera and an installed application, to quickly raise all the information about the relationship a citizen is having with the State and/or Chavism: initially, its strictly personal data, but it can be crossed with other sources of information: someone’s voting site, if they’d cast

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30 BBC, Qué es y cómo funciona el carnet de la patria que permitirá seguir comprando gasolina a precio subsidiado en Venezuela, August 14th, 2018, available in: <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-45182511>.

31 Perfil, Maduro lanzó el “Carnet de la Patria”, que regulará el acceso a la comida, January 5th, 2017, available in: <https://www.perfil.com/noticias/internacional/maduro-lanzo-el-carnet-de-la-patria-que-regulara-el-acceso-a-la-comida.phtml>.

32 Reuters, Como ZTE ayuda a Venezuela a implementar un control social al estilo chino, November 14th, 2018, available in: <https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/venezuela-zte-es/>.

a vote on an election day, access to social programs, social security registration, quote in a saving fund, knowledge on whether they have a passport, a child in a public school, if their parents receive a pension, if they've been fined. Someone's entire life. The possibilities of population control are potentially unlimited<sup>33</sup>. (Own translation).

The *carnet de la patria* favors a situation of discrimination, in which the holder is a citizen of the first category against those who do not have it, who as a consequence lacks access to most social programs. This situation of discrimination is clearly reflected in the most recent report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, who indicated that:

Additionally, at the end of 2016, the President announced the creation of the "*Carnet de la Patria*", a card through which all the programs would be delivered from then on, including the new system of direct money transfers to the families. The list of beneficiaries of these programs is managed by the local structures of the official party, rather than by government institutions. The people interviewed reported that the members of these local structures monitor the political activity of the beneficiaries.

Women, who mostly care for their homes and family, are the main group benefited by health, housing and food programs. They also constitute 72 percent of the membership of the Communal Councils. However, discrimination based on political motives and social control through the cards has a

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<sup>33</sup> El Estímulo, Carnet de la Patria, código de control social, February 21st, 2017, available in: <http://henriquecapriles.com/carnet-de-la-patria-codigo-de-control-social/>.

differentiated impact on the ability of women to assert their rights. In 2018 and 2019, women led many of the local and peaceful protests, demanding access to basic goods and services. They also participated in anti-government marches. OHCHR gathered testimonies from women, including local women leaders, who have been singled out for their activism, threatened by other community leaders and by pro-government civilian armed groups (the so-called “colectivos armados”), and excluded from the social programs. Women reported that they sometimes preferred not to demand their rights, including the right to speak out against the government, for fear of reprisals<sup>34</sup>. (Own translation).

The High Commissioner reported on facts based on innumerable sources. There have been several and recurrent complaints on how this mechanism constitutes blackmail in the access to the services provided by the State and in the exercise of the rights of the people<sup>35</sup>. For example, the *carnet de la patria* has been used to monitor the people who participate in certain election processes. After each electoral process that took place since then –elections governors, mayors and 2018 presidential election– dozens of “*puntos rojos*”<sup>36</sup> were located outside voting centers, where each owner of a *carnet de la patria* reported their personal data, including the

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34 Human Rights Council, Informe de la Alta Comisionada de las Naciones Unidas para los Derechos Humanos sobre la situación de los derechos humanos en la República Bolivariana de Venezuela, A/HRC/41/18, July 4th, 2019, parr. 23 and 24.

35 Reuters, Como ZTE ayuda a Venezuela a implementar un control social al estilo chino, November 14th, 2018, available in: <https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/venezuela-zte-es/>.

36 Refers to gatherings of people identified as pro-government.

social missions of which they are beneficiaries<sup>37</sup>. It has even been denounced that the document could be used to buy votes, with the promise that those with a *carnet de la patria* that voted would receive economic bonuses<sup>38</sup>. In the mayoral elections held in 2017, Nicolás Maduro expressly called voters to use their *carnet de la patria*<sup>39</sup>.

There are also investigations that show how, despite having a *carnet de la patria*, some people do not receive social benefits unless they are registered in the PSUV, and/or are not included in the Tascón and Maisanta Lists<sup>40</sup>. Cases have been documented of people registering for the *carnet de la patria* to obtain medicines that they do not receive later, or to request passport renewal, or to access a subsidized food box (CLAP)<sup>41</sup>. “That is called extortion. It means that if we do not support the Government or we do not

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37 El Comercio, Carnet de la patria, el documento del control social en Venezuela, September 2nd, 2018, available in: <https://elcomercio.pe/mundo/latinoamerica/carnet-patria-documento-control-social-venezuela-noticia-553071>.

38 BBC, Elecciones en Venezuela: qué son los puntos rojos y por qué Henri Falcón acusa a Maduro de “compra de votos”, May 21st, 2018, available in: <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-44192915>

39 Infobae, El régimen de Maduro usará el “Carnet de la Patria” para saber quién votará en las elecciones a alcaldes, December 9th, 2017, available in: <https://www.infobae.com/america/venezuela/2017/12/09/el-regimen-de-maduro-usara-el-carnet-de-la-patria-para-saber-quien-vota-en-las-elecciones-a-alcaldes/>.

40 Observatorio de Derechos Humanos de la Universidad de Los Andes, Carnet de la Patria y otros medios de exclusión social por razones políticas, available in: <http://www.uladdhh.org.ve/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/informe-web.pdf>.

41 Infobae, Promesas y mentiras del Carnet de la Patria, el documento de control social del régimen de Nicolás Maduro, February 25th, 2018, available in: <https://www.infobae.com/america/venezuela/2018/02/25/promesas-y-mentiras-del-carnet-de-la-patria-el-documento-de-control-social-del-regimen-de-nicolas-maduro/>.

have the card for any reason, then we do not have the right to eat; we are second-rate Venezuelans; or that the *carnet de la patria* is worth more than the identity card itself”, denounced a citizen<sup>42</sup>. Likewise, it was announced that the card would be necessary to obtain benefits such as housing<sup>43</sup> and pensions<sup>44</sup>. It would also be required to purchase gasoline at a “subsidized”<sup>45</sup> price, and it is proposed that it be used for the payment of public transport<sup>46</sup>.

Furthermore, there is no information regarding its purposes, who handles the information, or what data is documented based on the card. This is particularly important considering the aforementioned considerations regarding the right to privacy versus the collection of information. In this sense, *the lack of a legal regulatory framework that monitors the gathering of information through the carnet de la patria, added to the*

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42 El Pitazo, Exigen carnet de la patria como requisito para comprar cajas Clap en el Sur del Lago, April 25th, 2019, available in: <https://elpitazo.net/occidente/exigen-carnet-de-la-patria-como-requisito-para-comprar-cajas-clap-en-el-sur-del-lago/>.

43 Con el mazo dando, Sepa cómo será el registro de vivienda con el Carnet de la Patria, March 22nd, 2018, available in: <https://www.conelmazo-dando.com.ve/sepa-como-sera-el-registro-de-vivienda-con-el-carnet-de-la-patria>.

44 Global Voices, El control social impuesto en China podría exportar pronto una versión venezolana, December 18th, 2018, available in: <https://es.globalvoices.org/2018/12/18/el-control-social-impuesto-en-china-podria-exportar-pronto-una-version-venezolana/>.

45 Teletica, Qué es y cómo funciona el carné de la patria para comprar gasolina a precio subsidiado en Venezuela, August 14th, 2018, available in: [https://teletica.com/201869\\_que-es-y-como-funciona-el-carne-de-la-patria-para-comprar-gasolina-a-precio-subsidiado-en-venezuela](https://teletica.com/201869_que-es-y-como-funciona-el-carne-de-la-patria-para-comprar-gasolina-a-precio-subsidiado-en-venezuela).

46 Descifrando, Transporte público podrá pagarse con el carnet de la patria, June 23rd, 2018, available in: <http://www.descifrado.com/2018/06/23/transporte-publico-podra-pagarse-con-el-carnet-de-la-patria/>.

*lack of clarity regarding the purposes for which this information is used, puts the right to privacy of people at risk on itself.*

The association of this information with access to social services provided by Nicolás Maduro's regime makes the *carnet de la patria* an even more macabre input, since, as has been proven, "bad behavior" (independent exercise of freedom of expression, association or political rights) verified through a citizen's card, may lead to the elimination of the person's access to any social service provided by the regime. The degree of arbitrariness that exists is deepened, given that the State does not administer the management of the *carnet de la patria*, properly speaking, but rather the partisan political structures of Nicolás Maduro and his political organization. This situation, in general, has generated a sort of citizen categorization: those who submit to the *carnet de la patria* system receive certain rights, while those who do not, forfeit on those rights.

In conclusion, as has been stated by *Transparencia Internacional*:

The *carnet de la patria* can be seen in two ways. First, as a mechanism of political discrimination, since being linked to the National Government party, it generates the immediate rejection of a sector of the population that, rejecting the ideas and postulates of such a party, will not choose to obtain the document. Thus, it seeks to directly exclude that sector of the population from social programs that have been implemented, as well as access to goods and services that by law correspond to the State.

Second, it becomes a coercive mean to the population that does own the *carnet de la patria*, because, (...) this document



is being used to intimidate and get people to do everything through this mechanism, instilling fear in the people under the threat of being excluded and discriminated, since they will not be able to receive CLAP bags or boxes, access medicines, education, housing, work, among other rights<sup>47</sup>.

## **V. Blockages to Internet websites by the State**

Finally, reference should be made to website blockages by the Nicolás Maduro regime, as a mechanism to control the information available in Venezuela, particularly in times of heated conflict. Maduro's regime has also imposed speed reductions to the Internet or blockades in different opportunities, sometimes in general, or to certain web pages, both in extended or established time periods.

In 2016, the Press and Society Institute carried out a study where results showed at least 43 different blocked websites in the country. The report explained that 44% of blocked websites are related to currency in the black market, 19% are related to the media, 12% are blogs critical of the governing party, and 9% regard betting. Some URL shorteners, anonymization and circumvention tools, as well as hosting services, were also found blocked<sup>48</sup>. Measures were mainly adopted through the modifica-

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47 Transparencia Internacional, *el Apartheid Revolucionario*, available in: <https://transparencia.org.ve/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Carnet-de-la-patria-2018-TV.pdf>, P.37

48 El Espectador, *Estos son los sitios web que más bloquean en Venezuela*, May 25th, 2016, available in: <https://www.elespectador.com/tecnologia/estos-son-los-sitios-web-mas-bloquean-venezuela-articulo-634276>, e Instituto de Prensa y Sociedad, *Principales hallazgos de la navegación en Venezuela*, available in: <https://ipysvenezuela.org/navegarconlibertad/tag/sitios-web-bloqueados/>.

tion of DNS records, which were implemented sporadically and irregularly among Internet access providers (ISP)<sup>49</sup>.

In 2018, however, not only was access to the IP addresses of Tor network nodes blocked, but also some less used within it to avoid connections in censorship contexts, rivaling the practice in other countries with more trajectory and sophistication in handling and blocking of Tor network traffic<sup>50</sup>. Likewise, restrictions were imposed on the web portals of *El Nacional* and *La Patilla*<sup>51</sup> in 2018<sup>52</sup>.

By 2019, as Wikipedia announced Juan Guaidó as interim president of Venezuela, access to the website was impossible through CANTV's<sup>53</sup> services, as it was blocked through SIN-based HTTPS filtering<sup>54</sup>. With that same technique, also during January 2019, Twitter, YouTube and Instagram were blocked as well<sup>55</sup>.

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49 Derechos Digitales, #Venezuela: ¿Qué está pasando con los bloqueos en internet?, January 24th, 2019, available in: <https://www.derechosdigitales.org/12791/venezuela-que-esta-pasando-con-los-bloqueos-en-internet/>.

50 Derechos Digitales, #Venezuela: ¿Qué está pasando con los bloqueos en internet?, January 24th, 2019, available in: <https://www.derechosdigitales.org/12791/venezuela-que-esta-pasando-con-los-bloqueos-en-internet/>.

51 Both news sites typically publishing dissident content.

52 El Nacional, El bloqueo de Internet, otra violación de derechos humanos, January 15th, 2018, available in: [http://www.el-nacional.com/noticias/columnista/bloqueo-internet-otra-violacion-derechos-humanos\\_240006](http://www.el-nacional.com/noticias/columnista/bloqueo-internet-otra-violacion-derechos-humanos_240006).

53 State-run Internet and telephone provider.

54 Derechos Digitales, #Venezuela: ¿Qué está pasando con los bloqueos en internet?, January 24th, 2019, available in: <https://www.derechosdigitales.org/12791/venezuela-que-esta-pasando-con-los-bloqueos-en-internet/>.

55 Derechos Digitales, #Venezuela: ¿Qué está pasando con los bloqueos en internet?, January 24th, 2019, available in: <https://www.derechos->

Similarly, after a protest in January 2019, restrictions were detected on Instagram, Twitter and YouTube in Venezuela, on the day military men urged Venezuelans to disclaim Nicolás Maduro's government. It was noted that there was an interruption in the YouTube platform after videos of the events featuring men dressed in olive green (military uniform), some armed, flooded social networks<sup>56</sup>.

In March 2019, restrictions were recorded on YouTube, Google and Facebook. These measures were met with rejection by international organizations and entities<sup>57</sup>. In particular, the Special Rapporteur of the United Nations on freedom of opinion and expression, David Kaye, and the Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression of the IACHR, Edison Lanza, expressed their profound alarm over the mechanisms of censorship and blockades of platforms, social networks and online media arranged by e authorities<sup>58</sup>. There were also restrictions reported to Soundcloud and Twitter<sup>59</sup>.

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digitales.org/12791/venezuela-que-esta-pasando-con-los-bloqueos-en-internet/.

56 VOA, NetBlocks: Reporta bloqueo a redes sociales tras protesta de militares en Venezuela, January 21st, 2019, disponible: <https://www.voanoticias.com/a/netblocks-reporta-bloqueo-a-redes-sociales-tras-protesta-de-militares-en-venezuela/4752264.html>.

57 CIDH, Expertos en Libertad de Expresión de un y CIDH Expresan Alarma por Expansión de Mecanismos de Censura que se Aplican en Venezuela, March 8th, 2019, available in: <http://www.oas.org/es/cidh/expresion/showarticle.asp?artID=1133&IID=2>.

58 CIDH, Expertos en Libertad de Expresión de un y CIDH Expresan Alarma por Expansión de Mecanismos de Censura que se Aplican en Venezuela, March 8th, 2019, available in: <http://www.oas.org/es/cidh/expresion/showarticle.asp?artID=1133&IID=2>.

59 Fayer Wayer, Activistas digitales acusan censura de Twitter y Soundcloud en Venezuela por regreso de Juan Guaidó, March 4th, 2019, available

Between April and May of 2019, after Guaidó's call for a general strike, several social networks such as YouTube and Periscope were also restricted, as well as some Google and Microsoft programs<sup>60</sup>, as well as Bing and Hangouts<sup>61</sup>.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights conclusively found in its July 2019 report that Internet speed was gradually decreasing, including due to the lack of investment in infrastructure, and also recognized government blockages on independent news websites as well as regular blocks on major social networks<sup>62</sup>.

All these restrictions are particularly relevant in Venezuela, given that, as noted by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Internet and social networks have become the main means of communication and information for the people, limiting access to independent information even more for people without Internet access<sup>63</sup>. The use of these restrictions comes into tension with the right to freedom of expression and access to

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in: <https://www.fayerwayer.com/2019/03/venezuela-twitter-sound-cloud-juan-guaido/>.

60 El Universo, Sigue censura de internet en Venezuela, denuncia NetBlocks, May 1st, 2019, available in: <https://www.eluniverso.com/noticias/2019/05/01/nota/7311965/sigue-censura-internet-venezuela-denuncia-netblocks>.

61 Infobae, Varios servicios de internet están restringidos en Venezuela: cómo evitar la censura, April 30th, 2019, available in: <https://www.infobae.com/america/tecno/2019/04/30/vari-servicios-de-internet-estan-restringidos-en-venezuela/>.

62 Human Rights Council, Informe de la Alta Comisionada de las Naciones Unidas para los Derechos Humanos sobre la situación de los derechos humanos en la República Bolivariana de Venezuela, A/HRC/41/18, July 4th, 2019, parr. 28.

63 Human Rights Council, Informe de la Alta Comisionada de las Naciones Unidas para los Derechos Humanos sobre la situación de los derechos

information through the media, recognized in Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. As the United Nations Human Rights Committee has argued:

States parties should take account of the extent to which developments in information and communication technologies, such as Internet and mobile based electronic information dissemination systems, have substantially changed communication practices around the world. There is now a global network for exchanging ideas and opinions that does not necessarily rely on the traditional mass media intermediaries. States parties should take all necessary steps to foster the independence of these new media and to ensure access of individuals thereto<sup>64</sup>.

More precisely, the Committee referred to the compatibility of blockages of web pages with international instruments, in light of the provisions of article 19.3 of the Covenant<sup>65</sup>, determining that:

Any restrictions on the operation of websites, blogs or any other internet-based, electronic or other such information

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humanos en la República Bolivariana de Venezuela, A/HRC/41/18, July 4th, 2019, parr. 28.

64 Human Rights Committee, General Observation No. 34, CCPR/C/GC/34, September 12th, 2011, parr. 15.

65 Article 19 fully states:

1. Everyone shall have the right to hold opinions without interference.
2. Everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of his choice.
3. The exercise of the rights provided for in paragraph 2 of this article carries with it special duties and responsibilities. It may therefore

dissemination system, including systems to support such communication, such as Internet service providers or search engines, are only permissible to the extent that they are compatible with paragraph 3. Permissible restrictions generally should be content-specific; generic bans on the operation of certain sites and systems are not compatible with paragraph 3. It is also inconsistent with paragraph 3 to prohibit a site or an information dissemination system from publishing material solely on the basis that it may be critical of the government or the political social system espoused by the government<sup>66</sup>.

Based on this, the restriction on access to a web page or search engine without legal basis in order to prevent access to information during situations such as those previously described, of obvious public interest, make all the aforementioned blockages clear violations of the rights to free expression and free access to information.

Beyond the legal controversies raised, the limitations on access to information are an instrument of domination over society, preventing the empowerment of the people with sufficient information to adopt measures to exercise their rights and meet their needs. It is a mechanism of oppression to keep citizenship

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be subject to certain restrictions, but these shall only be such as are provided by law and are necessary:

- (a) For respect of the rights or reputations of others;
- (b) For the protection of national security or of public order, or of public health or morals.

<sup>66</sup> Human Rights Committee, General Observation No. 34, CCPR/C/GC/34, September 12th, 2011, parr. 43.

in the dark<sup>67</sup>. Affecting freedom of expression and access to information is nothing more than upsetting the democratic state of a society. In the case of blockades, these measures are intended to prevent society from informing themselves regarding crisis situations through digital media that, to date, are the most important means of communication within Venezuelan territory, given the manipulation and control over information services or media.

## **VI. Conclusion: Authoritarianism and technological controls**

The regimes of Hugo Chávez and Nicolás Maduro have adopted several measures through which, using technology, they have sought to manipulate or even dominate the exercise of the rights of Venezuelans. The regime has been able to directly influence the people's free vote, restrict access to goods and services necessary to satisfy their rights, promote their political ideology and subject them to adhere to it in order to access social governmental benefits, to isolate those who disagree with that ideology or those who manifest their disagreement with the regime, and restrict access to information. Furthermore, there are indications showing the Government's attempt to gather data on each citizen, with unclear purposes, yet no less dangerous.

These restrictive measures constitute violations of people's fundamental rights. It is pertinent to remember that these rights aim to defend the people against States who abuse their power. By identifying the total and absolute abuse of these guarantees

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<sup>67</sup> Lister, G., *Free Speech and Access to Information: Key to citizen empowerment and sustainable development*, available in: <https://en.unesco.org/Free-Speech-Access-to-Information-Gwen-Lister>

Technology as a social control and oppression mechanism in Venezuela

without any control by the State, clear indicators of authoritarianism exercised by the Venezuelan government can be identified.



## Conclusions

Lech Walesa, the first President of Poland after communism, offered a conference at the FAES Foundation on May 24, 2005. In his speech, he shared details about his political experience. In the Q&A session, a person from the audience asked about the differences between Francisco Franco's Spain and the USSR Poland. With the simplicity that characterizes him, the labor leader offered the following example: Imagine two fish tanks. In the first one, the water is cloudy, but the fish still swim. In the second, there is no water and the fish are suffocated. Spain was a fish tank with dirty water, so changing the water was enough for the fish to swim again. Poland was an empty fish tank, without oxygen. We, the fish, were dry.

The Walesa example clearly illustrates the main motivation of the first volume of *Democratization*. We dedicate our initial efforts to study the autocratic nature of the Bolivarian Revolution to know the situation of "our fish tank". We believe that this work is useful and necessary because it will allow us to identify two important aspects: 1. The starting point of an eventual political change in terms of pre-democratic conditions and 2. The reformist capacity that could exist –or not– within those who today lead the Bolivarian Revolution.

The conclusions presented below are divided into three parts. First, we will list the particular findings of each of the articles included in this volume. Next, we will offer general conclusions

and, finally, we will present the directions that our research will take in the future.

I.

The first issue of *Democratización* includes 4 articles. Below we list the main findings of each of them.

*El problema del nacimiento y desarrollo de dos ordenamientos jurídicos nacionales separados en Venezuela*<sup>1</sup>, by Dr. Miguel Monaco, is a description of the constitutional dismantling that Venezuela experienced as of 2007. His research yields three central conclusions:

1. *The Laws of Popular Power and “the constitutional emptiness”*. The constitutional reform proposal promoted by the Bolivarian Revolution in 2007 was defeated at the polls. However, before the electoral failure, their promoters decided to impose their political ends through the so-called “Laws of Popular Power.” In this way, *Chavismo continued*<sup>2</sup> progressively emptying the contents of the Magna Carta and advanced in the creation of a parallel legal system.
2. *The National Constituent Assembly and the emergence of a new factual and illegitimate legal system*. The unconstitutional call

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1 *The birth and development of two separate national legal systems in Venezuela*

2 We recommend seeing the chronological description offered by the Dip. Juan Miguel Matheus in his article included in this issue. The author specifies the constitutional and institutional irregularities that allowed the Bolivarian Revolution to repeal the 1961 Constitution and initiate the constitutional process of 1999. In this way, we identify that the “constitutional emptying” described by Dr. Mónaco is the extension of the progressive dynamic of democratic erosion that has marked the political performance of the Bolivarian Revolution.

of the National Constituent Assembly in 2017 constitutes the emergence of a new legal system that becomes dominant due to its factual application and coexists simultaneously with what survives of the 1999 Constitution.

3. *On the need for negotiation as a political solution to the conflict.* For the author, the optimal and least costly solution in human and political terms for the Venezuelan conflict is a negotiation and/or agreement between the parties involved.

*La tecnología como mecanismo de control social y opresión en Venezuela*<sup>3</sup>, written by Edward Pérez, describes the main technological measures used by the Bolivarian Revolution to dominate citizens. The author dwells in the case of the *captahuellas*<sup>4</sup> as an instrument to manipulate the vote and as a mechanism for obtaining information regarding the access of goods and services. Finally, it offers an analysis of the operation of the so-called *Carnet de la Patria*. Below we list their main findings:

1. *Technology as a mechanism of social control configures an environment in which suspicion and fear predominate.* The Bolivarian Revolution uses technology as a mechanism of social control, which generates an undemocratic environment marked by suspicion and fear. This situation could limit the political articulation capacity of democratic forces.
2. *Technological domination is leveraged in global autocratic solidarity.* Larry Diamond, in *Ill winds* (2019), describes the expansive nature of the autocratic modes of China and Russia from cooperation in military, economic and financial matters<sup>5</sup>. Technological assistance in surveillance,

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3 *Technology as a mechanism of social control and oppression in Venezuela*

4 fingerprint reader

5 Larry Diamond. *Ill Winds* (New York, Penguin Press, 2019)

communications and repression of these countries to the Nicolás Maduro regime contributes to the strengthening of their autocracy.

3. *Technological controls at the service of the rationing of goods and services favor the emergence of mafias.* Pérez accurately describes the operation of food and goods rationing through the *captahuellas*. It also emphasizes the emergence of mafias that control food distribution and the consolidation of powerful corruption networks. The description of these dynamics will correspond to future investigations related to the gangster state<sup>6</sup>.

*Configuración ideológica de la Revolución Bolivariana*<sup>7</sup>, a study conducted by Dip. Juan Miguel Matheus is an analysis of the ideology that guides the autocratization process initiated in Venezuela in 1999. Using philosophical and political science categories, the Doctor of Constitutional Law identifies the dynamism of the ideological configuration of autocratic systems and distinguishes two mobility modes: (i) Ideological reconfiguration and (ii) Ideological disfiguration.

After exposing the theoretical foundations of his study, the author identifies the six features that ideologically shape the regime inaugurated by Hugo Chávez in 1999: militarism, left-marxist language, Bolivarianist delirium, democratic instrumentality, internationalization and castro-communism, and populist constitutionalism. Next, the author examines the permanence or mutation of these features to determine if the ideological

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6 See Larry Diamond. *Ill Winds* (New York, Penguin Press, 2019). The chapter dedicated to kleptocracy describes the gangster dynamics of autocracies

7 *Ideological configuration of the Bolivarian Revolution*

identity of the Revolution has been subject to a process of reconfiguration or ideological disfiguration.

Finally, Matheus concludes that the terms of the ideological reconfiguration of the Bolivarian Revolution constitute an obstacle to advancing in a process of democratic transition either agreed or negotiated. His main findings include:

1. *Ideological configuration, capacity for internal reform and negotiated transition.* The author identifies that, currently, there is little capacity for internal reform in the Nicolás Maduro regime. Negotiated and/or agreed transitions are possible when the parties involved are able to minimize exit costs and open doors to the democratization process. In the Venezuelan case, we find that the aforementioned “exit costs” may be associated with intangible assets related to a conception of the world based on firm ideological positions that shape existential political positions. In this sense, the offers of a material nature or postponement of justice that could be negotiated in an eventual negotiation process could be insufficient to satisfy the regulatory preferences of the dictatorship actors.
2. *On populist constitutionalism and the dismantling of constitutional democracy.* The dismantling of constitutional democracy is channeled more quickly when promoted from a specific ideological configuration that serves as justification and framing of a supposed historical legitimacy.
3. *Political culture and democratization:* The democratic transition in Venezuela will be a cultural problem. Their concrete times and ways will necessarily be conditioned by the wounds of the ideological configuration that the

Bolivarian Revolution has left in the political soul of the Venezuelan nation.

*Revolución Bolivariana y desarrollo del Estado gangsteril en Venezuela*<sup>8</sup>, by Dr. Paola Bautista de Alemán, is a study that describes the emergence of the gangster state in Venezuela and identifies the challenges that this reality imposes on an eventual democratization process. The author offers a theoretical approach to the concept of a gangster state, then describes the entropic development of this phenomenon in the country and concludes that Venezuela is a gangster state of entropic nature that is currently in a state of collapse. Her main findings include:

1. *On the particularity of the entropic nature of the emergence of the gangster state in Venezuela.* After studying the development of these phenomena in other latitudes, the author states that the Venezuelan State was not colonized by international organized crime. On the contrary, organized crime emerged from the socialist state to guarantee political power.
2. *On the singularities of a process of political change agreed or negotiated.* Considering that the starting point for political change in Venezuela is multidimensional and includes the gangster dimension, she proposes that any process of negotiated change must be carried out in several bands or sides. While in the agreed transitions of the 20th-century negotiations were made between politicians who aspired democracy and politicians who exercised power away from justice, in this type of processes politicians seeking

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8 *Bolivarian Revolution and development of the Gangster State in Venezuela.*

democracy must deal and negotiate with criminals who have built a state according to their kleptocratic interests.

3. *On the compatibility between gangster State and constitutional democracy.* The gangster nature of the Bolivarian Revolution imposes unfair and illicit structures that make it incompatible with constitutional democracy. However, any process of negotiated or agreed political change involves concessions with the autocracy that seeks to open itself towards democracy. Considering this reality, the author asks if a political exit could be negotiated without intending to dismantle the gangster state. How to avoid restarting the vicious circle described by Hirschfeld<sup>50</sup> -State weakness, political instability, collapse and new gangster State- in this scenario.

## II.

After specifying the main findings of each of the articles, general conclusions will be offered with the purpose of contributing to the understanding of the political process that Venezuela is experiencing:

1. *Progressive autocratization dynamics.* The autocratization process that began the Bolivarian Revolution in 1999 has gained ground progressively using democratic instrumentality to empty the contents of the Constitution and to install in fact a supposed new legal order. Identifying the progressive dynamics of the Bolivarian Revolution can contribute to the understanding of the phenomenon of democratic erosion that Venezuela experienced and can provide inputs for current studies on populism. Given the performance of *Chavismo-Madurismo*, we can affirm that

the progressivity used as a political tool facilitates autocratic rebalancing and power adjustments that offer resilience to those who exercise power far from justice.

2. *The socialism of the 20th century is an anachronism and a syncretism.* The Chavista ideology is an anachronism and a syncretism. We can affirm that it is anachronistic because, in its aspiration of total domination, it is related to the totalitarianisms of the 20th century (communism, fascism, and Nazism) and, in that sense, it is a setback in the world of political ideas. On the other hand, we consider it a syncretism because it tries to reconcile highly technological modes of domination, typical of the 20th century, with aspirations of total domination that were thought defeated with the fall of the Berlin Wall. It is, therefore, appropriate to ask ourselves about the essential and the accidental in autocratic natures. Perhaps the desire for total domination corresponds to the former and the ways of executing them refer to the latter. That is to say: the nature of evil remains, while its forms advance with technology.
3. *Ideological reconfiguration is less susceptible to democratic reform than ideological deconfiguration.* We understand by ideological reconfiguration what was expressed by Deputy Matheus in his article. It is a partial mutation in the body of ideas that guides the autocracy where an ideological stronghold remains that is preserved with flexibility of action and adaptation to circumstances. The ideological disfiguration is different: it is a reset of the original framework and the emergence of a new ideological identity. The empirical reference of ideological reconfiguration is Cuban Castroism and that of ideological disfiguration is state capitalism in China. In the processes of ideological



reconfiguration, strong ideological principles that constitute obstacles for political change and limit the capacity for internal reform within the autocracy remain. On the other hand, although ideological disfiguration may allow a “reset to the original framework” of ideas, we do not mean a democratic easing. In both cases, it is an autocratic rebalancing.

4. *On the need and the real possibility of a negotiation process.*  
The Venezuelan situation is a source of imbalance for the entire region. The consequences of structural collapse are expansive and the American continent experiences the worst migration crisis in its history. National and international political actors have denounced the need to find a solution for this situation and when analyzing the possible ways out of the problem, a negotiation is presented as the most desirable option.

While a fruitful negotiation is the least costly path in human and political terms, it is worth asking whether the desirable can be real or possible. The exercise of identifying the main obstacles that separate us from the desirable -negotiation- has the purpose of discovering (or creating) mechanisms that allow us to remove or make them more flexible. The study that ends with these lines identifies that the firmness of the ideological commitment of the political actors that currently lead the Bolivarian Revolution, together with the gangster dynamics and the support of the autocracies of the world, are the main obstacles that prevent the development of a negotiation process that allows opening the doors to democracy.

We can affirm that these three conditions -ideological stubbornness, gangster dynamics, and autocratic solidar-

ity- are the pillars that feed the autocratic resilience of the Bolivarian Revolution.

### III.

The first edition of *Democratización* offers an analysis of the autocratic nature of the Bolivarian Revolution and its implications in an eventual process of political change. In the next installments, we will continue to fathom those variables that could influence the process of democratic liberation. In the immediate future, it will be necessary to dwell on the international dimension of the Bolivarian Revolution. As we observe in the development of the articles, the support of world autocracies is a fundamental element in the survival of the autocracy.