



Democratization



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Ideological configuration of the Bolivarian Revolution

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The goal of this article is to investigate the ideological foundations of the autocratization process initiated in Venezuela in 1999 with the arrival of Hugo Chávez to the Presidency of the Republic. After twenty uninterrupted years wielding power, it becomes convenient to deeply understand -and from a historical perspective- the ideological pillars that have sustained this process and how these have created an identity for the Revolution. The practical implementation of the original postulates of *Chavismo*¹ will be verified in order to, consequently, identify the level of “originalist orthodoxy” with which these ideological foundations are currently present in the Bolivarian Revolution.

The investigation will be divided into three parts. In the first part, the definition of ideology, ideological identity and ideological configuration of an autocratic regime will be discussed. Secondly, the distinctive features of the ideological configuration of the autocratic regime inaugurated by Hugo Chávez in 1999 will be presented. In the third part, as a conclusion, the mutability and immutability of those distinctive features over time will be analyzed, as well as the turning points that have meant a greater or lesser ideological strengthening of the Revolution, and several ideas about the ideological identity of the Revolution, associated

1 *Chavismo* is the political ideology based on the ideas and government style of Hugo Chávez.

with the implications that it brings to an eventual democratic transition in Venezuela.

Ideology, ideological identity and ideological configuration of an autocratic regime

The methodological starting point of this research is to conceptually define what is understood as ideology and the ideological identity of an autocratic regime. The application of both categories for the understanding of the political reality of the Bolivarian Revolution will depend on this starting point.

Ideology

The controversies and connotations that historically swarm around the concept of ideology are sufficiently known². Academics and men of action have witnessed paradigm shifts regarding the world of ideas and their relationship with politics. From the revolutionary effervescences of 18th-century France, the so-called “political ideas”, which naturally had encouraged power struggles at all times, began to be systematically articulated under the expression “ideology”³. Karl Marx played a decisive role in this, as the generalization of the expression can be attributed to him. And, of course, it is also due to Marx that the concept has been discredited or, at least, associated with the system of thought that was then coined under the label of “Marxism”.

But starting in the 20th century, ideologies began to expand beyond the spheres of Marxism. The 20th century was, for better

2 Joseph S. Roucek, “Historia del concepto de ideología”, *Revista Mexicana de Sociología*, Vol. 25, No. 2, 1963, pp. 665-694.

3 Daniel Miguel López Rodríguez, “En torno a la idea de ideología”, *El Basilisco: Revista de materialismo filosófico*, N° 51, 2018, pp. 19-29.

or worse, the century of ideologies, first with the emergence of the interwar ideologies –those that John Paul II called “ideologies of evil”⁴ and Tismaneanu, “the devil in history”⁵: Marxism, Nazism, and fascism–. Nevertheless, after the desolation of the two great wars, the political parties of the democratic systems of continental Europe and Latin America assumed the expression “ideology” to point out their programs of action and their itineraries towards power: Christian democrats, social democrats, liberals, radicals, etc. Ideologies thus had a kind of democratic redemption. And this to such an extent that even after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the change in the bipolar world and Francis Fukuyama’s preannounced and well-known “end of history”, ideologies continued to be a very important conduit of social legitimization of the political parties, became action platforms in favor of genuinely democratic causes and –in general– were assumed as guidelines which brought about actions.

Ideological identity

Nevertheless, ideologies became much more than a political controversy or a legitimation factor. Contemporary philosophy, deeply rooted in idealism and German thinkers, facilitated intellectual speculation about ideologies and about the existence of ideologies⁶. The fundamental worldviews of historical existence were divided into two: right and left, both as final explanations of everything that exists and as quasi-necessary channels of human

4 Juan Pablo II, *Memoria e identidad*, Editorial La Esfera de los Libros, 2005, Barcelona, 236 pp

5 Vladimir Tismaneanu, *The Devil in History: Communism, Fascism and Some Lessons of the Twentieth Century*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2012, 320 pp

6 See Louis Dumont, *German Ideology: from France to Germany and Back*, The University of Chicago Press, 1994, 250 pp.

action. This is the phenomenon that Robert Spaeman called “right and left ontology”⁷. It is essentially the political religion that Talmon envisioned as the germ of “political messianism”⁸ and that, *mutatis mutandis*, faced Augustine of Hippo against the supposedly sacred character of the Roman Empire⁹. It is the Gnosticism that Eric Voegelin criticized again and again¹⁰. And it is, in short, the pure and hard terrain of the dictatorship of relativism upon which the once-named Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, today Holy Father Benedict XVI, attracted attention¹¹.

Thus, the ideologies of the twentieth century were generalizing, embracing and penetrating everything. There was no human aspect that could not find a final explanation, almost anthropological and/or metaphysical, in the redoubts of ideology. And that generalizing character provided a principle of radical identity: the being was the ideology. In other words, the person was whatever their ideology was, the party was whatever their ideology was and the State was whatever the dominant ideology in the social conglomerate was.

7 Robert Spaemann, “Sobre la ontología de derechas e izquierdas”, *Anuario Filosófico*, Vol. 17, number 2, 1984, pp. 77-88.

8 J.L. Talmon, *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy*, Mercury Books, London, 1919, pp. 17 and following pages.

9 Augustine of Hippo, *Political Writings*, Cambridge University Press, 2001, especialmente en lo referido a los “Obispos y las autoridades civiles”, pp.133 and following pages.

10 Eric Voegelin, “Science, Politics and Gnosticism”, in “*Modernity without Restraint*” (*Complete Works*), University of Missouri Press, 2000, 336 pp.

11 Joseph Ratzinger, *Verdad, valores, poder: piedras de toque de la Sociedad pluralista*, Editorial Rialp, Madrid, 1995, 112 pp.

Ideological configuration of an autocratic regime

Here, attention should be drawn to a particular aspect: the exacerbated rationalism of ideological constructs becomes an unsuspected danger to human existence if it intermingles with the phenomena of power. And even more in the case of autocratic power, because the principle of radical identity of ideologies and the autocratic will to power are the bases of totalitarian systems, which are born when the following formula is configured: total-power machinery at the service of a total ideology. Consider, for example, Soviet power at the service of Marxism, and Germanic power at the service of National Socialism: is the configuration of an ideological identity that is consubstantiated with an autocratic regime not evident?

The answer to the previous question is clear. However, the issue must be explored more profoundly. It is necessary to specify that is understood by ideological configuration of an autocratic regime, which will be constructed under the following premises:

Ideological configuration of an autocratic regime is understood as:

1. The articulation of a set of ideas that acquire a systemic, worldview and key character for the interpretation of all reality,
2. (...) that becomes the action guide that historically justifies the performance of a power structure far from justice,
3. (...) and that tends to impose itself -even through violence and lies- on every person and on every component of the social body. Moreover, the ideological configuration of an autocratic regime is a dynamic process. It mutates with

time since the factors that most influence this dynamism are the search and the effective exercise of power. This becomes important because it recalls two concepts with their own entity, but closely connected with the phenomenon of the ideological configuration of an autocratic regime. These are concepts that will allow to better understand the deployment of the ideological configuration of the Bolivarian Revolution as an autocratic regime: *ideological reconfiguration* and *ideological deconfiguration*.

Ideological reconfiguration supposes the readjustment, rearrangement or partial mutation in the bases of ideas that encourage an autocratic regime, which allows zigzags in historical performance. However, this does not mean that the autocratic regime loses its original ideological identity, but rather the existence of an ultimate ideological redoubt that is preserved with flexibility of action and adaptation to the circumstances. An example, in this case, could be Cuban Castroism¹², which continues to be essentially Marxist/communist: it has preserved the ultimate redoubt of its initial ideological configuration, but subsists with flexibility of action and adaptation to new circumstances, especially after the decline of the Soviet empire.

Ideological deconfiguration implies a “reset” in the original framework of ideas and a new configuration. The search or exercise of power leads to a new ideology scheme that is different from the original one, giving rise to a new identity. This occurs regardless of the discourse or the propaganda, rather being defined by actions and facts imposed in reality. An example could be the Chinese regime: it abandoned its old and orthodox Maoist

12 An overview of the topic can be found in Max Azicri and Elsie Deal, *Cuban Socialism in a New Century: Adversity, Survival, and Renewal*, University of Florida Press, 2004, 363 pp

revolutionary schemes (deconfiguration) to gain a new ideological identity: state capitalism or market socialism, as preferred. It is a new autocratic nature, with a new ideological configuration¹³.

**The ideological features of the regime inaugurated
by Hugo Chávez: the ideological configuration
of the Bolivarian Revolution**

On December 6, 1998, Hugo Chávez was elected President of the Republic of Venezuela. His immediate antecedent before being a presidential candidate was a military uprising against constitutional democracy on February 4, 1992, which is what brought him to the public eye, both nationally and internationally. After the failure of the coup attempt, Chávez was arrested and later released through the procedural institution of the dismissal of criminal cases and thus began his rise to power.

In this section, the elements that ideologically shaped the Bolivarian Revolution in its origins will be established. Also, the moments when these configurator elements arose will be determined. For the purposes of the present study, the temporal spectrum to be considered as the ideological configuration of the Bolivarian Revolution will be the ascent and seizure of power by Chávez. That is the timeline that oscillates between the attempted coup d'état of February 4, 1992, and the approval of the new national Constitution on December 15, 1999.

To further explain, the proposed timeline includes the elements that configured Chávez ideologically, as the coup d'état of February 4 reflects the **militarism** of the Bolivarian Revolu-

¹³ Daniel Vukovich, *Illiberal China: the ideological Challenge of the People's Republic of China*, Palgrave Macmillan, Singapore, 2019, 250 pp.

tion, but as a substratum of that militarism, the **indoctrination of lefts and Marxist language** infiltrated the Armed Forces long before February 1992, as well as the **Bolivarianist delirium**. Once released from prison, Chávez changed his pre-understandings about the participation of the elections of the democratic system. He went from an abstentionist position to a position of **democratic instrumentality**, which reached its maximum materialization with his triumph in the presidential elections of December 1998. Once in power, he revealed his **civic-military union** by the hand of Argentine sociologist and political scientist Norberto Ceresole. He also undertook one of the alliances that would most define his future: the relationship with Fidel Castro. Two crucial elements for the Bolivarian Revolution would derive from this relationship: the strengthening of Marxist postulates in a **castro-Cubanization** stand and the **internationalization of the Revolution**. All that, in relation to the 1999 Constitution -Chávez's main electoral promise during the 1998 presidential campaign- was the starting point for the progressive dismantling of constitutional democracy and the beginning of the imposition of **populist constitutionalism**. Thus, once the 1999 Constitution was approved, the process of practical implementation of the ideological configuration of the Bolivarian Revolution began.

Let us examine each of these elements separately.

Militarism

The republican history of Venezuela is marked by a militaristic propensity, a kind of over-dimensioning of the role of the military and the Armed Forces in the political life of the country. On this phenomenon, there is abundant literature and multiple explanations. In general terms, the military component has been

considered –and in practice– as the historical support of autocratic governments and democratic governments. Autocracies have been marked by military governments, like those that followed the separation of Venezuela from Great Colombia. And when it comes to democratic governments, such as those of the period of the Civil Republic between 1958 and 1998, there has always been the risk of a military asylum or a militaristic regression. In any case, we want to emphasize that the *center of the militarist propensity is the assumption of force as a principle that organizes power relations and the exercise of government*.

This baggage of political culture largely explains the militarism embodied by Hugo Chávez. To better understand the phenomenon, the circular causality theory of Dieter Nohlen could be considered: the effects influence the causes and vice versa¹⁴. In this way, the militaristic propensity helped to cause Hugo Chávez

¹⁴ Dieter Nohlen points out that although the analytical scheme that is often applied in Political Science is directed (artificially) to isolate and identify variables and preferably in the dichotomous order, we must not lose sight of the fact that the relationship we study is, on the one hand, multicausal and, on the other, circular. This last characteristic consists in that the factor considered as dependent can be co-determinant for the factor thought as independent; for example, first, in the choice and implementation of an electoral system by the political parties and, second, because of the influence of the party system structure on the effects caused by an electoral system in it (in the system of parties). Given this situation, I prefer to talk about a circular cause-effect relationship (in German: Wirkungszusammenhang) that does not dissolve the classic relationship in the study of causality between an independent and a dependent variable, but adds to its analysis –from a systemic perspective– the context. Dieter Nohlen, *Ciencia Política y Democracia en su contexto. Justicia electoral y democracia. Tribunal Contencioso Electoral*. Quito, 2010, p. 28.

as a concrete political effect and this, in turn, enhanced or deepened the militaristic propensity of Venezuelan political culture.

When Chávez appears on the public sphere with the attempted coup d'état of February 4, 1992, he stands by the worst form of the Venezuelan military propensity: the possibility of force as a principle that orders power and government relations, intermingled with militarism, utopian passion, and political messianism¹⁵. After that coup attempt, he promoted the belief that constitutional democracy was –or at least allowed– a great social disorder: administrative corruption, economic inequalities, human rights violations, etc¹⁶. As a consequence, the yearning for a strong government that turned order into chaos in the country was also enthroned, the desire for a savior who would enter the system to reform democracy from within, and even by force consented by citizenship. Or, in other words, and insisting on the phenomenon we want to describe: a protector who assumed strength as the principle that ordered power relations in democracy and in a democratic government.

This was a configuration element of the Bolivarian Revolution ideology. February 4, 1992, was considered the milestone that divided history into a before and after. On the other hand, both in the public figuration of Hugo Chávez and in the creation of the political movements that accompanied him: the military and the element of force were always essential realities for the Revo-

15 We have dealt with the issue of political messianism and the people's propensity for utopia in Juan Miguel Matheus, *Ganar la República Civil: reflexiones sobre la reconstrucción nacional y la crisis de la hora presente*, La Hoja del Norte, Caracas, 2015, pp. 23-37.

16 Aníbal Romero, "Rearranging the Deck Chairs on the Titanic: The agony of Democracy in Venezuela", *Latin American Research Review*, Vol.32, N 1, pp. 7-36.

lution: in speeches and stories, in programmatic contents, in the ways of accommodating internal relations within the elites that favored Chávez, in the conception of international relations, etc., and certainly the civic-military union.

An idea that allows us to better apprehend the ideological configuration of Chavismo is the fact that the Bolivarian Revolution is militaristic, but it is not a unique and exclusively military Revolution, nor a single and exclusively force movement. And the governments of the Revolution -both Chávez and Maduro- have been militarists in the sense described above, but not governments of the Armed Forces.

Left-Marxist language

The Bolivarian Revolution is essentially leftist¹⁷. That is the political spectrum to which 21st century Socialism belongs, as people who share that ideology and others who do not coincide. However, the difficulty lies in finding its ideological specificity within the left. That is, what defines it most in that trench of struggle. That which sculpts its physiognomy and informs its actions.

17 Guillermo Tell Aveledo explains that the Socialism of the 21st century is a coherent, although little systematized, set of political ideas. This systematization, however, is not necessary, since the Chávez-political language fits into the long tradition of Venezuelan socialism, in its insurrectional and authoritarian Marxist current. After the death of Chávez, there has not been a turn from that affiliation, but rather it has been recently reaffirmed. Guillermo Aveledo, *Los fundamentos ideológicos del sistema político chavista en Desarmando el modelo: las transformaciones del sistema político venezolano desde 1999* by (Ed) Diego Bautista Urbaneja, Visión Venezuela, Instituto de Estudios Parlamentarios Fermín Toro and Fundación Konrad Adenauer, 2017, pp.50.

Because even in the case of a *sui generis* left, it is important to identify the identity of that nature, which is unique and unrepeatable.

In this sense, the Bolivarian Revolution causes controversy within the world of the left. On the one hand, social democracy denies it. Chávez was not a social democrat and his socialism was not democratic. On the other hand, the historical, orthodox left refers to the Bolivarian Revolution as a company of mere ambition of power without any ideological foundation that defines it or directs it.

We believe that the most accurate is to describe the ideological configuration of the Revolution from a left framework that points to the formal use of language and of Marxist categories¹⁸. However, it will not be done in an attempt to fully understand Marx and to sculpt his ideas concretely in the field of political and social reality. The Revolution is manifestly leftist, with Marxist language, but peripheral and rhetorical. This does not subtract the gravity or substantivity of the identity that characterizes Chavism, but, as will be seen later, makes it a more voluble ideological configuration, more prone to reconfiguration.

Let us identify what are the elements of this left which is ideologically configured with the Marxist language:

1. Total left: one of the most characteristic features of the leftism of the Bolivarian Revolution is its total character. Its aspiration for domination encompasses every person and everything in the human person, that is, body and soul. Francisco Plaza has studied the phenomenon and refers to

¹⁸ On the communicational conceptions of Chavismo, see Paola Bautista de Alemán, *A callar que llegó la Revolución*, (Caracas, La Hoja del Norte, 2014), 202 pp.

it as a reality of deep totalitarian vocation and semi-spiritual quality¹⁹. In the psychology of Hugo Chávez, the revolution was born at a specific moment in history to transform human nature. Therefore, it is not a mere approximation of structural transformation of economic and social realities. It is something deeper. The Bolivarian Revolution was born, fundamentally, as an anthropological revolution aimed at reaching the new man, the new Venezuelan²⁰.

2. Class consciousness: the Bolivarian Revolution supposedly has a social character. According to the regime's account, it is the expression of the proletarian Venezuela suffering, subjugated by the bourgeois regime of Puntofijo democracy. That is why it boasts itself as a proletarian movement for the vindication of social justice.
3. Anti imperialism: Marxist language has been used since the genesis of the Revolution to identify the enemy in history. The struggle of Hugo Chávez was a universal struggle because his enemy was also the "American imperialism". And the struggles of all post-Chávez revolutionaries is also a struggle against the United States of America and its power structures.
4. The evil in history: the Bolivarian Revolution assumes Marxist language to identify that the evil in history is capital. That is why the construction of the economic order points to the control of the means of production, to the

19 Francisco Plaza, "Beyond Tyranny: The Totalitarian Spirit of the Venezuelan Regime", *The Political Science Reviewer*, Volumen 42, Number 1, (2018): 1-33

20 Francisco Plaza, *El silencio de la democracia* (Caracas: Libros El Nacional, 2011), 93

destruction of capital structures and to the rupture of the bonds that economically oppress the working and popular classes: a Marxist theory of real socialism of the 19th century, screened according to Caribbean modes and Venezuelan anthropology²¹.

Bolivarianist delirium

Bolivarian theology typical of Venezuelan political culture found fertile ground in the Chavista Revolution²². Perhaps that Bolivarianism, so innate to the Creole character, increased exponentially by being confused with the nationalism characteristic of military academies and military environments in which Hugo Chávez's personality developed. The truth is that Chávez confessed to being a furious follower of the legacy of El Libertador²³. And this to such an extent that he conceived himself as the historical heir of Simón Bolívar and he saw the Bolivarian Revolution as a lieutenant of the glorious forging-freedom army.

It is difficult to explain what Bolivarianism means in particular. In fact, it is impossible to sustain the rationality of Bolivarian theology. Far from being an attempt to cement the foundations of a nation according to a republican ideal, in an ideal legal architecture or in a collection of traditions, Bolivarianism does not even exceed the category of a mere cult of personality. It is true that it is the cult of a fascinating personality, of undoubted human qualities and undeniable historical merits, but the root problem is that rational human coexistence requires more institutional substrates

21 José Guerra, *El mito del socialismo bolivariano* (Caracas, Editorial Dahbar, 2019), 157

22 Luis Castro Leiva, "El historicismo político bolivariano", *Revista de Estudios Políticos*, Número 42, (1984): 71-100

23 Simón Bolívar.

and fewer personal substrates. However, Bolivarianism was assumed as an ideological feature that has shaped the Bolivarian Revolution, even becoming its namesake.

How does Bolivarianism contribute to the ideological configuration of the Revolution?

1. A moral in history: Bolívar's doctrine is the source of the goodness or evil of the historical performance of Venezuelans. It is good or bad according to whether or not it is Bolivarian. Both individually and collectively, the thermometer of patriotism is precisely Bolivarianism.
2. Historical justification: Chávez and the Revolution are, as we have said before, heirs of Bolívar and his family. The cause of Bolívar is the cause of Chávez in perfect historical continuity. There is no continuity solution. It is an unfinished work that must be updated in time.
3. Personality cult: Bolivarianism leads directly to the cult of personality. The leader or charismatic leader is licensed to place himself above the law, the Law and even of the whole society.
4. Historical antagonism: Chávez and the revolution, as heirs of Bolívar, are also heirs of the sympathies and historical antipathies of El Libertador. That is why the Bolivarian Revolution divides humanity between friends and enemies, and the subsequent right to "privilege" friends and "harm/annihilate" enemies.

As noted, for the purpose of the Revolution, Bolivarianism is perfectly subsumed in the categories of Marxist thought²⁴. For Hugo Chávez, Bolivarianism was a Marxist (and subjective) interpretation of the life and work of Simón Bolívar²⁵: it was the opportunity to condition the appreciation of history with his own ideas and try to make the State and society march in the direction marked by his interpretations²⁶.

Democratic instrumentality

The initial instinct of Hugo Chávez to enter power was armed struggle²⁷. In order to do so, he directed the Venezuelan Army with the coup attempt of February 4, 1992. His hypothesis of ascent to power was violence. In this sense, he was orthodoxly Marxist and orthodoxly Leninist. However, after the experience of the prison, several politicians of the former Venezuelan left became an important part of his environment. They convinced him to insert himself in the democratic system to, taking advantage of its cracks and mechanisms, make the revolution from within. That is, they convinced him to assume the Gramscian hypothesis of the rise to revolutionary power.

A first consideration regarding this change in the hypothesis of ascent to power is related to unfair action within the democratic

24 On the constant ideologization of Bolívar see Inés Quintero, "Bolívar de izquierda-Bolívar de Derecha", *Historia Caribe*, Number 7, (2002): 77-92

25 Juan Carlos Rey, "El ideario bolivariano y la democracia en el siglo XXI", *Revista Venezolana de Ciencia Política*, Number 28, (2005): 167-191

26 Anatolio Medeiros Arce, "Historia e ideología bajo Hugo Chávez", *Diálogos: Revista Electrónica de Historia*, Universidad de Costa Rica, Vo. 13, Number 2 (2012): 141 and following pages.

27 Damarys Canache, "From Bullets to Ballots: The Emergence of Popular Support for Hugo Chávez", *Latin American Politics and Society*, Vol. 44, Number 1, (2002): 69-90

system. Hugo Chávez was never a loyal actor to the constitutional democracy system. On the contrary, as derived from the thought of Juan Linz²⁸, he was an unfair actor who assumed the formal rules of democracy to destroy democracy itself. It could also be said, following Letvisky and Ziblatt²⁹, that Hugo Chávez subverted democratic institutions in Venezuela through a progressive and non-traditional coup d'état. To a large extent, Lieutenant Colonel took advantage –as Larry Diamond observes³⁰– of the lack of commitment of fundamental actors and the general population to build a Revolution amid a democracy with faint roots.

A second consideration has to do properly with the substantivity of power and the instrumentality of democracy. In this, there is a prevalence or primacy of the ambition of power. Never a precompression of democracy as a fair political order that is worth creating and maintaining over time. In the ideological configuration of the Bolivarian Revolution, there is an end and middle relationship between power and democracy, conceptualizing the latter as an adjective reality. Formal democracy is instrumentalized as it is a means to achieve and/or preserve power. But if democracy ceases to be useful for the fulfillment of the purposes of power of the Revolution, then it is changed by any other lawful or illegal means that assure them.

28 Juan Linz, *La quiebra de las democracias*, (Madrid, Alianza Universidad, 1987), 312. On the same idea see Scott Mainwaring and Aníbal Pérez-Liñán, *Democracies and Dictatorships in Latin America: Emerge, survival and fall* (New York, Cambridge University Press) 353

29 Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt, *Cómo mueren las democracias* (Editorial Ariel, 2018), 9 and following pages.

30 Larry Diamond, *Saving Democracy from Russian Rage, Chinese Ambition and American Complacency* (New York, Penguin Press, 2019), 35.

Thus, it can be concluded that the DNA of the ideological configuration of the Bolivarian Revolution makes it an unfair actor in a constitutional democracy.

Civic-military union

Fascism is a perfect alloy of militarism and populism: two terribly toxic metals for the health of any political order that wants to be democratic. They are merged to obtain the exaltation of national identity in a corporate entity. This is the essence of this autocratic nature. One of its most defining characteristics is the civic-military union, as a bidirectional phenomenon. In one direction, the popular is militarized. Logic and military forms penetrate all the recesses of the subjective reality called people (mass). In the other direction, the military is popularized. The national feeling of the people (mass) becomes the soul of the military. The catalyst that harmonizes the alloy is, of course, the charismatic leader: the leader who serves as a hinge to integrate the popularized Armed Forces and the militarized people into a unit of action.

That *caudillista*³¹ hinge was Hugo Chávez, and for the purposes of the Revolution, whoever acts as Chávez. His social extraction and military training made him the charismatic leader pointed out by history to corporately articulate the Armed Forces and the people of Venezuela, as Simón Bolívar and Ezequiel Zamora did once. Both gave rise to an epic struggle that fueled the itinerary of ascent to the power of Chávez. In this sense, the fascism of the convergent civic-military union in Chávez, which was theorized by the controversial Argentine sociologist Norberto Ceresole³²,

31 *Caudillismo*: despotic leadership in which the armed group is used as an element of power

32 On the influence of Norberto Ceresole on Hugo Chávez and on the fascist conception of the civic-military union for the Bolivarian Revolution see

was expressed as follows in the original ideological configuration of the Bolivarian Revolution:

1. The civic-military union is a historical mandate: a demand of history for every revolutionary.
2. The civic-military union is a mold forge for revolutionary souls. The cast was created by Hugo Chávez himself on February 4, 1992, but it was an inheritance for the formation of subsequent revolutionaries. A revolutionary must embody the military even if it is not formally, and it must be mass even if it does not come from it.
3. Once the power is taken, the Armed Forces are part of the government. That translates into the colonization of the State and Public Administration by the Armed Forces. It doesn't matter if it's civil charges or reserved for civilians.
4. Once the power is taken, the military turns to the social demands of the mass. They have to relieve the pain that the masses suffer from social iniquities. This was intended to be done with the Bolívar 2000 Plan, which was the largest and earliest expression of a civic-military union in the supposed search for a solution for structural social problems.

Internationalization and Castro-Cubanization

Hugo Chávez and the Bolivarian Revolution are phenomena posterior to the fall of the Berlin wall. They coincide with the wave of neo-leftism and populism that Latin America experienced during the 2000s. The Kirchners, Evo Morales, Rafael Correa,

Paulina Gamus, "Venezuela", *Thor American Jewish Year Book*, Vol. 107, (2007): 308 and following pages.

Mujica, Lula, Ortega, and Fernando Lugo: all were heads of state in their respective countries, ideologically leveraged in the Sao Paulo Forum and developed politically under the mentorship of Fidel Castro³³. During the years of Chávez, Latin America turned left. And in one sense, “the commander” became the leader and visible face of that movement³⁴. The once democratic importance of Venezuela, oil resources, and its communicational histrionism allowed him to place himself at the forefront of a new attempt at universal revolution.

That universality is an essential feature in the ideological configuration of the Revolution. The personality of Hugo Chávez and his deep awareness of the universal character of the “proletarian struggles” made it possible for *Chavismo* to be configured with a universal vocation and aspire to internationalize rapidly³⁵. Chávez’s youth and formation was always stalked and influenced by Castro-communism, especially through his brother Adam Chávez and guerrilla leader Douglas Bravo³⁶. In addition to this, as soon as he was released from prison, Hugo Chávez traveled to Havana in 1994 to meet with Fidel Castro. He was accompanied by Luis Miquilena. It was a definitive episode in which the Castro-Chávez alliance was resolved³⁷, the seeds of populist

33 Isidro Sepúlveda, “La nueva geopolítica latinoamericana”, *Política Exterior*, Vol. 21, Number 116, (2007): 149-162

34 Javier Corrales, “Hugo Boss”, *Foreign Policy*, Number 152, (2006): 32-40

35 Carlos Alberto Patiño, “Más allá del realismo mágico: Hugo Chávez y su reinención del mundo”, *Cuadernos de Pensamiento Político*, Number 39, (2013): 61-81.

36 Brian A. Nelson, “The Education of Hugo Chávez: Unraveling Venezuelan’s Revolutionary Path”, *The Virginia Quarterly Review*, Vol. 87, Number 2, (2011): 174-187.

37 Max Azicri, “The Castro-Chávez Alliance”, *Latin American Perspectives*, Vol. 36, Number 1, *Cuba: Interpreting a Half Century of Revolution and Resistance*, (2009): 99-110.

rhetoric began to grow years later³⁸ and served as the basis for initiatives of International Public Law through which the Latin American revolution was intended to be institutionalized, such as ALBA, CELAC and the attempt to colonize UNASUR. Chávez gave Castro a second chance in Latin America³⁹ and Castro gave Chávez an important element for the ideological configuration of his Revolution.

But what is the deepest sense of castro-Cubanization as an element that configures Chávez ideologically? Let's try to sketch it in a few words:

1. An emotional foundation: The relationship struck between Fidel Castro and Hugo Chávez involved complex political personalities, but it was, above all, an emotional, psychological and paternal-filial link, and Chávez transmitted this to the structures and forms of his revolution.
2. A historical foundation: For Chávez, freedom and the independence of Venezuela and Cuba are the same thing. There is a substantial unity between the Venezuelan people and the Cuban people. And there is a vicarial character in that process of destiny: Chávez was the vicar of Bolívar, and Castro was vicar of Martí.
3. A principle of international action: A principle of autocratic solidarity was set between Chávez and Fidel, which expanded throughout Latin America. It is also the same principle by which Chávez's heirs in the Bolivarian Revolution expect support from other autocratic powers in the

38 Marco Aponte-Moreno and Lance Latting, "Chávez: Rethoric Made in Havana", *World Policy Journal*, Vol. 29, Number 1, (2012): 33-42.

39 Daniel P. Erikson, "Castro and Latinamerica: A Second Wind?", *World Policy Journal*, Vol. 21, Number 1, (2004): 32-40.

world such as Russia, China, Iran, North Korea, Turkey, etc.

4. Ideological obstinacy: Fidel Castro created and led the “resistance” revolution. And that was transmitted to the Bolivarian Revolution. Chávez went on the attack against his national and international enemies. But he also conceived an ultimate core of resistance of his Revolution. A sort of firm autocratic will to hold on to power, wait for the right moment to destroy enemies and consolidate their strategic positions.

Populist constitutionalism

The ideological configuration of the Bolivarian Revolution in constitutional matters has been well studied by Political Science and Comparative Law⁴⁰. It could be synthesized as follows: *Constitution without constitutionalism*⁴¹, *populist constitutionalism*⁴² or *constitutionalism in an authoritarian regime*⁴³.

Plato’s idea, which states that the worst of all injustices is being unfair and not looking like it, is well known. And that is precisely the constitutional project of the Bolivarian Revolution: act unconstitutionally and simulate constitutionality. In this sense, for the Bolivarian Revolution, the Constitution is not a program of

40 Allan Brewer-Carias, *Asamblea Constituyente y ordenamiento constitucional* (Caracas, Biblioteca de la Academia de Ciencias Políticas y Sociales, 1999), 328.

41 The idea is a transversal constant in the work of Walter Murphy, *Constitutional Democracy*, (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2006)

42 David Landau, “Populist Constitutions”, *The University of Chicago Law Review*, Vol. 85, Number 2, (2018): 521-544

43 Tom Ginsburg and Alberto Simpser, “Introduction: Constitutions in Authoritarian Regimes”, in *Constitutions in Authoritarian Regimes*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014): pp. 1-17.

republican values. It is a source of formal legitimacy to take on the appearance of justice actions aimed at achieving and maintaining the supreme revolutionary end: power⁴⁴.

To better explain the statements made above, facts should be offered. Let us look at the legal-political itinerary that culminated in the approval of the 1999 Constitution, which has been badly called the Chávez Constitution or the *Chavista* Constitution. The facts are:

1. 12-06-1998: Chávez triumphs with 56.2% (3,673,685 votes) in the presidential elections. The abstention was 36.55%.
2. 01-19-1999: Judgment of the Political-Administrative Chamber of the Supreme Court of Justice. The Speaker was Humberto J. La Roche and left the way open to call a National Constituent Assembly, although this was not allowed by the then-valid Constitution of 1961. The fundamental thesis of the sentence was the supra-constitutionality of the constituent power over power constituted and on the Constitution.
3. 01-23-1999: The parliamentary section of the then-President Hugo Chávez, Fifth Republic Movement, promotes debate within the National Congress on the opportunity and feasibility of convening a National Constituent Assembly and drafting a new Constitution.
4. 02-02-1999: Chávez is sworn in by the outgoing President Rafael Caldera in the Senate Chamber. Chávez does not swear to defend the Constitution, but promises to destroy

⁴⁴ Juan Miguel Matheus, *Situación actual y perspectivas de la democracia en Venezuela*, (Caracas: Instituto Latinoamericano de Investigaciones Sociales, 2012): 10

it: "I swear before God, before the Fatherland and before the People that, on this dying Constitution, I will promote the necessary reforms to elaborate a Magna Carta appropriate for the new times"⁴⁵.

5. 04-25-1999: Based on what is stated in the supra-constitutional ruling (01-19-1999), the Consultative Referendum is carried out to determine if the people of Venezuela, "in the exercise of national sovereignty", want to convene a National Constituent Assembly in order to write a new Constitution and refound the Venezuelan State. The questions consulted were the following:

Do you convene a National Constituent Assembly with the purpose of transforming the State and creating a New Legal Order that allows the effective functioning of a Social and Participatory Democracy? YES or NO.

Do you agree with the bases proposed by the National Executive for the call to the National Constituent Assembly, examined and partially modified by the National Electoral Council in session dated March 24, 1999, and published in its full text, in the Official Gazette of the Republic of Venezuela No. 36,669 dated March 25, 1999? YES or NO".

The Referendum is won by "YES" with 71% of the votes. Abstention was 55%.

6. 07-25-1999: The election of the members of the National Constituent Assembly is made. Chávez wins 124 of the 131 seats. "The key of Chávez" or "Kino de Chávez", which

⁴⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cnSIJrhzeJc>

was the electoral system illegally adopted for the election, allows Chávez to obtain 95% of the representation with 60% of the vote.

7. 08-15-1999: The National Constituent Assembly is dominated by the “Patriotic Pole” and chaired by Luis Miquilena. It is a National Constituent Assembly that generates doubts about its representativeness and writes the constitutional text draft in only three and a half months.
8. 12-15-1999: The Referendum approving the Constitution drafted by the National Constituent Assembly is held. The “YES” wins with 81.74% of the votes, against the “NO” that registers a voting percentage of 12.75%. Nevertheless, the abstention was 62.35%.

Given all of the above, it is worth assessing these facts related to the Constitution to systematize how they reveal the political will of Hugo Chávez and his attempt to ideologically configure the Bolivarian Revolution:

1. The struggle for a new Constitution was present from the days after Hugo Chávez’s release, once his prison time was completed. The account of the exhaustion of the 1961 Constitution was created. It was assumed that this constitutional text had expired in time and did not represent the country since it was the product of the democracy of the Puntofijo Pact that supposedly excluded the historic left. Later, when the moment of the rise to power arrived, the drafting of a new Constitution became the main electoral promise of Hugo Chávez.
2. The inspiration of the new Constitution was the doctrine and thought of Simón Bolívar, as interpreted by Hugo

Chávez under the Marxist lens. This resulted in the new constitutional text formally calling the Republic of Venezuela “Bolivarian” that contained in its article 1 the reference to the doctrine of Simón Bolívar as the basis of the republican order.

3. The constitutional “mind” of the Bolivarian project was Hugo Chávez himself, who directly influenced all the work of the National Constituent Assembly. Another sample of messianism and Bolivarianist delirium.
4. The formal legitimation of the Constitution was highly questionable. As seen in the list of facts, it was a process outside the provisions of the then-current Constitution of 1961, implementing a fraudulent electoral system for the election of constituents and with very low levels of citizen participation.
5. The constitutional account acquired a propaganda character since the 1998 election campaign. First, the new Constitution was a historical claim for inclusion and for social justice. And secondly, it meant the starting point against corruption and clientelism of Puntofijo democracy⁴⁶.

Conclusions: Permanence and mutation of the ideological elements of the Bolivarian Revolution, reconfiguration or deconfiguration?, democratic transition

So far it has been reviewed what is understood by ideological identity and configuration of an autocratic regime. The features that ideologically shaped the Bolivarian Revolution have also

⁴⁶ On the subject it is essential to consult Manuel Caballero, *La gestación de Hugo Chávez. 40 años de luces y sombras en la democracia venezolana* (Madrid, Editorial Los Libros de Catarata, 2000), 208

been examined. The permanence or mutation of these features in time must also be studied in order to determine if the ideological identity of the Revolution has been subject to a process of reconfiguration or disfiguration. Then, the implications that all this brings in regards to an eventual process of democratic transition are analyzed as a form of conclusion.

Permanence and mutation of the ideological elements
of the Bolivarian Revolution

1. **Militarism:** the original militarism of the Bolivarian Revolution is maintained and deepened. Force remains the principle that orders power relations and the exercise of government. This has been mediated by several facts. First, the experience of the power vacuum in April 2002. Since then, one of Hugo Chávez's firm purposes was to further bend the Armed Forces⁴⁷, subject them to higher levels of partisanship and ideologization. Second, the Cubanization of military institutions with subjects of Castro-communism who exercise intelligence and counterintelligence in all components of the armed forces. Third, the use of brute force and repression by the FANB to the civilian population. 2014 and especially 2017 were years of exacerbated political and social conflict, and very serious human rights violations. And fourthly, as a phenomenon contradictorily associated with militarism, a deepening of the role of paramilitary collective groups whose *raison d'être* is intimidation and the sowing of terror in society.
2. **Left-Marxist language:** the representatives of the Revolution continue to assume their leftist status and use Marx-

⁴⁷ Harold Trinkunas, *Crafting civilian control of the military in Venezuela: a comparative perspective* (The University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 297

ist language. Certainly, this language does not penetrate the bulk of Venezuelan society. The economic chaos is socially imputed to the Revolution and the left rhetoric lost power after the death of Hugo Chávez. All of this has been enhanced by the failure of the *Plan de la Patria* and the mechanisms of social control of *Chavismo* such as the card of the country and the distribution of food through CLAP boxes. But none of this has prevented the propaganda and indoctrination apparatus of the regime from continuing to operate and the categories that originally shaped the Revolution are intended to be deepened.

3. **Bolivarianist delirium:** After twenty years of exercising power, the Bolivarian Revolution has deepened its Marxist interpretation of the Bolivarian corpus. But, beyond propaganda, it does not seem that they have achieved the goal of penetrating Venezuelan political culture further. On the contrary, it seems that in academic environments and in the general population, conditions to review the so questionable Bolivarian theology are being created as a pendulum effect.
4. **Democratic instrumentality:** this characteristic has been deepened radically within the Bolivarian Revolution. The year 2015 meant an internal reshaping within the nature of *Chavismo*. The defeat brought by the Democratic Unity Roundtable⁴⁸ to the ruling party in the parliamentary elections of December 6, 2015, pushed the regime to more radically unveil its undemocratic nature. Such defeat was a sort of autocratic learning for the Revolution. Since then, and before the possibility of losing the real power, the Bolivarian Revolution broke the Venezuelan electoral system.

48 Mesa de la Unidad Democrática.

It has never competed again in electoral processes, not even in questionable conditions of electoral justice. This explains the election of the fraudulent National Constituent Assembly, the steamroller of the 2017 regional elections and the electoral farce of May 20, 2018, from which the usurpation of Nicolás Maduro Moros derives. In this sense, after December 6, 2015, the Bolivarian Revolution ceased to be a hybrid regime or a competitive authoritarianism and instead turned into a pure and hard autocracy without appearance or simulation of electoral justice.

5. **Civic-military union:** the death of Hugo Chávez weakened the logic of the charismatic leader who served as a hinge to articulate the Armed Forces and people of Venezuela. The lack of military conditions of Nicolás Maduro has led to this. However, there has been a process of greater exposure of military leaders of military components to Venezuelan society, especially from the Minister of Defense, General Vladimir Padrino López. The civic-military union continues to be a definitive feature of the Revolution.
6. **Internationalization and Castro-Cubanization:** the internalization of the Revolution has led to exponential levels the solidarity of the autocratic powers of the world with the Bolivarian Revolution. These powers have been lent to simulate some legitimacy of the Chávez regime before international organizations. But above all, the dictatorships of the world have been key so that Nicolás Maduro can resist the economic asphyxiation derived from the sanctions scheme led by the United States of America and

the European Union, thus seeking an autocratic rebalancing process.

And the Castro-Cubanization has been refined in such a way that the repressive apparatus of the Venezuelan State is directly directed by Havana.

7. Populist constitutionalism: the appearance of constitutionalism has faded over time. Even the Bolivarian Revolution has proven willing to discard the 1999 Constitution, an alleged legacy of Chávez. The installation of the fraudulent National Constituent Assembly as a strategy to get out of the political crisis of 2017 is proof that the text of the Constitution and its fulfillment were never the ends of the Bolivarian Revolution. Perhaps Hugo Chávez was honest and, for the revolutionaries, the 1999 Constitution has been nothing more than “*la bicha*”, just as the Commander himself referred to the Magna Carta⁴⁹.

Reconfiguration or deconfiguration?

From the previous considerations, it can be concluded briefly that the postulates that ideologically shaped the Bolivarian Revolution remain the same. But the weight of reality, the democratic struggles of the people of Venezuela, the support of the countries of the free world, the passage of time and the net ambition of power have led the Revolution to readjust its ideological configuration. **A reconfiguration process has worked internally by virtue of which, even having the same ideological identity,**

49 Rogelio Pérez Perdomo, “Venezuela 2002: crisis política y Derecho”, *Revista de Derecho Político*, Number 57, (2003): 311 and following pages.

***Chavismo* has made more flexible the implementation of its original postulates to maintain the exercise of power.**

The ideological reconfiguration of the Bolivarian Revolution and the eventual democratic transition

Finally, we can conclude the following regarding the implications that the ideological reconfiguration of the Bolivarian Revolution brings in regards to an eventual democratic transition in Venezuela:

1. *On the capacity for internal reform and the weight of the ideological variable.* The highly ideological mood of the Revolution makes this a structure not very prone to internal democratizing reforms⁵⁰.
2. *On the possibilities of an eventual liberation of a negotiated and/or agreed nature.* The exit and democratization costs of the regime's officials are higher than in a traditional dictatorship. To the economic interests must be added the ideological obstinacy, that is, the firm determination to die in power⁵¹.
3. *On the expansive nature of the elements that shape the Bolivarian Revolution ideologically.* The elements that shaped Chávez ideologically have taken deep roots. Unfortunately, there is a kind of cultural deformation in this sense, which is perceived inside and outside the Revolution. A lot of the

50 Jeane Kirkpatrick, "Dictatorship and double standards", *Commentary Magazine*, 68:5, (noviembre 1979): 34-45.

51 Humberto García Larralde, "La ideología como obstáculo a la alternancia democrática en Venezuela", *Cuadernos del CENDES*, Año 34, Número 96, Tercera Época, (Caracas, 2017): 1-36.

corruption that began as part of the Bolivarian Revolution today is also of the Venezuelan society.

4. *On the impact of the ideology of the Bolivarian Revolution.* The ideological imposition of the Revolution is part of a phenomenon of circular causality: the *Chavista* regime has been nourished decisively by the Cuban influence. And Cuba has consolidated itself autocratically thanks to the resistance of the Bolivarian Revolution.
5. *On the ideologization of the Armed Forces.* The ideological configuration of the Revolution has lasciviously penetrated all the components of the Bolivarian regime. But it is especially worrying how these elements have found fertile ground in the National Armed Forces⁵². This, coupled with the militaristic propensity, hurts the republican and civilist tradition of Venezuela more deeply. It also predictably overestimates the role of the Armed Forces in the democratic transition process.
6. *Regarding the dynamics of autocratization in Venezuela.* The free world must observe the Venezuelan process to build new mechanisms of Public International Law that allow safeguarding nations from emerging autocracies. No country, no matter how strong its institutions are and how mature its political culture is, is vaccinated against autocracy or against populism.
7. *Regarding the Gangster State.* In particular, Public International Law must establish legal remedies against orga-

52 Harold A. Trinkunas, "The Transformation of the Bolivarian Armed Force: Venezuela", in *The Routledge handbook of civil-military relations* (New York, 2013): 123 y and following pages.

nized crime and terrorism as evils that can colonize States and become what is now Venezuela: a Gangster State⁵³.

8. *On populist constitutionalism and the dismantling of constitutional democracy.* The dismantling of constitutional democracy is catalyzed more quickly when pushed from a specific ideological configuration that serves as justification and framing of supposed historical legitimacy.
9. *On social control and ideology.* The Venezuelan experience teaches that people can oppose the ideological configuration of an autocratic regime, and yet, it can live under its schemes and domination.
10. *Political culture and democratization.* The democratic transition in Venezuela will be, above all, a cultural problem. Their concrete times and ways will necessarily be conditioned by the wounds that the ideological configuration of the Revolution has left in the political soul of Venezuela. And the transitional accommodations should arrive with prudence and realism to the moral core of the people of Venezuela, because that is where Venezuelans should be healed.

⁵³ Although the Gangster State has not been analyzed in this article, it is a concept which should be well understood. In this regard, we recommend reading the article by Paola Bautista de Alemán, included in this issue, dedicated to the study of the Gangster State and its implications.

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*¹, 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*² 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

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*³, 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*⁴ 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 matters⁵. Technological assistance in surveillance,

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 state⁶.

*Configuración ideológica de la Revolución Bolivariana*⁷, 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

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*⁸, 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

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 Hirschfeld⁵⁰ -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.