

Democratization



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A problem of two centuries, by way of introduction

Venezuela, as a State, was born out of a representativeness crisis. Although there were many variables that set forth its independence process and the establishment of its nation-State, the immediate trigger was the need to respond to the institutional collapse that Spain suffered in 1808. The abdication of two kings, who mutually surrendered and took the crown from each other and the unconsulted surrender of sovereignty to a third party could not but demolish the legitimacy of all those involved. That which at first glance seemed like a tragedy or a farce (surely both) forced the people to seek another form of legitimacy. In the beginning, it was sought within the same legal and institutional parameters in which they had been operating for centuries, but very soon the pursuit broke, to a greater or lesser extent, all –or at least much– of the preceding forms. The cumbersomeness of the abdications showed that the problem was not that a certain king was, or was not, legitimate. Rather, it proved that the entire institution of the Crown was rotten and it was necessary to reform or suppress it. The Constitution of Bayonne and the Cortes

of Cádiz were the two most important responses that were given in Spain. The same was done in America, establishing congresses and drafting constitutions throughout the region, either to reform the monarchy or to suppress it.

In this context, the Congress in Caracas in 1811 was the first to take things as far as possible: declare broken ties with the Spanish Crown, create a State of its own, and adopt a republican form. In his famous and very influential study on the crisis of the Hispanic world at the beginning of the 19th century, François-Xavier Guerra affirmed that the process consisted largely of the assumption of political modernity on both sides of the ocean, with everything that it brought on¹. The Venezuelan case confirms it. Abandoning the idea of traditional representativeness and assuming the modern one is one of the most important and influential legacies of everything that was done in those days.

The Congress meeting in Caracas, which was carried out in order to seek a way out of the crisis, considered that neither the series of abdications staged by Carlos IV and Fernando VII, nor the surrender of the crown to José I, were in accordance with the law. Especially the surrender of the crown to José Bonaparte, which was made without consulting subjects. Consequently, the deputies concluded that the pact with the Spanish Crown had been broken. The problem was not that they had decided to separate, but rather that the kings had fled the court and left an impostor in their place. Consequently:

We, the Representatives of the United Provinces of Caracas, Cumaná, Barinas, Margarita, Barcelona, Mérida and Trujillo, who form the American Confederation of Venezuela in the

¹ François-Xavier Guerra, *Modernidad e independencias* (Madrid, Mapfre, 1992).

Southern Continent, meeting in Congress, and achieving full and absolute possession of our rights that we have just and legitimately recovered on April 19, 1810, as a result of the Bayonne Day and the occupation of the Spanish Throne by the conquest and succession of another new dynasty constituted without our consent².

Accordingly, José Bonaparte and his group were "the intrusive governments that abrogated national representation". And since there was no legitimate government in the metropolis, they remained "independent of all forms of government of the peninsula of Spain"³. The next 22 years of war show how

2 Own translation. "Independence Act of Venezuela" (http://www.ucv.ve/fileadmin/user_upload/BicentenarioUCV/Documentos/Acta_de_la_independencia_de_Venezuela_de_1811-1_1_.pdf) (Retrieved February 2, 2021)

3 They were sworn in with the following formula: "Do you swear to God, in the name of the Holy Gospels that you will touch, and do you promise the Homeland to preserve and defend its rights and those of Mr. Don Fernando VII, without the least relationship, or influence with France; independent of all forms of government of the peninsula of Spain; and without any other representation than that which resides in the General Congress of Venezuela; oppose any other domination that seeks to exercise sovereignty in these countries, or prevent their absolute and legitimate independence, when the Confederation of their Province deems it convenient to keep our Sacred Religion pure, unharmed and inviolable, and defend the Mystery of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary Our Lady: to promote directly or indirectly the general interests of the Confederation of which you are a part, and the individuals of the district that has constituted you; respect and obey the laws and provisions that this Congress sanctions and promulgates; subject yourselves to the economic regime that it establishes for its interior government; and fulfill exactly the duties of the council that you are going to exercise? " (quoted by Manuel Pérez Vila, "Congress of 1811", <https://bibliofep.fundacionempresaspoler.org/dhv/entradas/c/congreso-de-1811/>) Retrieved February 1, 2021). The term "independent from all forms of government of the Spanish peninsula" referred to José I Bonaparte and the Regency, understanding that the only legitimate

difficult it was to convince a good part of Venezuelans about these conclusions, and perhaps the next 200 years are proof of how difficult it has been to put it into practice when it is finally imposed politically and militarily. But the point is that, with the progressions and setbacks, with the changes in political ideas and languages throughout two centuries, with how much is still to be done, one thing was clear from everything proclaimed by those deputies of 1811: Ultimately, sovereignty rests with the people and it is exercised through the vote.

The following pages present a fairly brief summary of the emergence of this idea of representation. Due to the extent of the subject, it is only possible to dive into this initial moment and point out the paths by which it can be projected into the future. In this sense, this text should be read as only the gateway for what could be a broader inquiry. That is why the references of other studies have been pointed out at the foot of each page, many of which are available on the Internet, where those interested can further research.

From traditional to modern representation

Let's go back to François-Xavier Guerra's thesis. What exactly are we talking about when we refer to *political modernity*? As it often is in these cases, we are dealing with a complex category, but Guerra stands at a cornerstone: it is a form of representation that is not *corporate*, but based on an idea of the people conceived as a set of *free individuals*. The deputies of 1811 did not represent corporations, but constituencies defined by the number of these individuals. However, they still have one foot in each of

sovereign was Fernando VII. As can be seen, in the course of three months, it was concluded that his abdication in Bayonne had been voluntary and that therefore he broke the pact of fidelity.

the conceptions, which illustrates well their displacement. When they claimed that the pact with the King had been broken due to non-compliance on his part, the traditional form of representation in the Hispanic world was being considered. In it, for the King to be king, he had to receive the oath of the people, who were ultimately the depositary of sovereignty. This oath marked a pact in which the people delegated their sovereignty to the King. This is usually called *pactism*.

The pact was solemnized in an act called the *Swearing*, in which the representatives of the people symbolically delegated sovereignty to the monarch. Those representatives were not officials elected by general vote, but the members of a corporation, the *Cabildo*, or Town Hall. It was the legitimate representation of the people, and the one which gave thus legitimacy to the King. This explains why the people of Caracas (and those of Santa Fe, and those of Santiago and Buenos Aires) could consider José I illegitimate: if they had not agreed with him, it was not legitimate for him to want to rule as King of Spain. Now, who made up the Cabildo? Each locality was a republic, in the classical sense, which could be a *republic of Spaniards* or a *republic of Indians*, and in it the Fathers of the Family gathered in an assembly elected a Cabildo. *The People* was not formed by all the inhabitants, but only by the Father of the Family, that is to say, by men with next of kin and properties. The rest was *the crowd or promiscual crowd*, in which basically the Greco-Roman model was also being followed⁴.

During the Swearing, the King was represented by the Royal Standard. It is not fortuitous that to this day Caracas continues to use it as the flag of the city (although the royal arms were

4 The Synodal Constitutions of 1687 clearly specifies this. For an explanation, see Elías Pino Iturrieta, *Against lust, chastity. Stories of sin in the Venezuelan 18th century* (Caracas, Editorial Alfadil, 1992), 28 and ss.

replaced with the coat of arms of Santiago de León de Caracas). This is due to various reasons, but largely to the place occupied by the Cabildo of Caracas when in 1810 it organized a *Junta*, or gathering, to address the emergency of the power vacuum in Spain. It is beyond the limits of this study to determine how much this worked as an excuse to then continue towards independence (although everything indicates that a large part of the promoters had that in mind), or how true the power vacuum was. The fact is that the Cabildo of Caracas led the formation of a *Junta* faced with the lack of control over the imprisonment of Fernando VII and the illegitimacy of José I, who was publicly and loudly rejected by the city in a tumult in July 1808. This *Junta* was called *Supreme Conservative Gathering of the Rights of Fernando VII* (or *Junta Suprema de Caracas*) and began to rule in his name. It even assumed Highness attribution, and it had to be referred to as her Highness. Once again, the typical Hispanic path of the other Juntas that were formed in Spain and America was followed, but it shows what was really intended: to do, in the absence of the King, what he used to do⁵.

Up to this moment, the problem of representativeness was being covered according to the legal and institutional channels of the Old Regime. There could be a discussion about whether or not there was a power vacuum in Spain (Maracaibo and Guayana believed that this was not the case and started a civil war “against Caracas”), but there was no further discussion as to what should be done in the case that there was indeed a power vacuum. But this changed quickly both in Venezuela and in Spain. This is where

5 On Venezuelan Juntismo: Gustavo Vaamonde, *Los novadores de Caracas: la Suprema Junta de Gobierno de Venezuela, 1810-1811* (Caracas, National Academy of History / Bancaribe Foundation, 2009); y Carole Leal Curiel, *La primera revolución de Caracas, 1808-1812: del juntismo a la independencia* (Caracas, Andrés Bello Catholic University, 2019).

the events took a turn. Many of those who acted like this just followed the rules and traditions, but already thought differently. Their idea of how the representation of the people should be chosen, even the people themselves, was already modern. And it is they, on both sides of the Ocean, who end up taking control of the *Juntista* movement.

Ultimately, when the Junta Suprema called elections for a Congress to meet, which in turn would decide what to do in the midst of the power vacuum, it marked a turning point, one that literally demolished traditional representativeness⁶. *The Regulations for the election and meeting of deputies who are to compose the conservative body of the Rights of Mr. Don Fernando VII in the provinces of Venezuela*⁷, drafted in 1810 by Juan Germán Roscio for the elections that took place in October of the same year, ended corporate representation and replaced it with the sum of individuals with the right to vote, regardless of the caste, state and corporation to which they belonged. Few things have been more revolutionary in Venezuelan history⁸.

Thus, if the deputies considered that the King had broken the pact according to the criteria of traditional representativeness, when they claimed to exercise the “representation” of the Venezuelan people, they already did so based on modern representativeness.

6 A fundamental study on the subject: Ángel Rafael Almarza, *Por un gobierno representativo. Génesis de la República de Colombia* (Caracas, National Academy of History / Bancaribe Foundation, 2011).

7 *El Reglamento para la elección y reunión de diputados que han de componer el cuerpo conservador de los Derechos del Señor Don Fernando VII en las provincias de Venezuela*

8 On this regulation, see: Carole Leal Curiel, “El Reglamento de Roscio y las elecciones de 1810: una convocatoria a la igualdad”, *Argos*, 30, 59: 136-157 (http://ve.scielo.org/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S0254-16372013000200008&lng=es&nrm=iso), Retrieved January 30, 2021).

Between anarchy and tyranny, or the tribulations of representation

15 years and almost 5,000 kilometers from the Venezuelan Congress of 1811, those who met in Chuquisaca to discuss the destinations of Upper Peru had a lot of experience. The time and the territories that separated both congresses had caused very profound changes. Once again some deputies met to affirm that a certain population was a nation and thus create a new State, but the "miserable King Fernando VII" (as we read in the Bolivian independence act) was a minor issue, in comparison with the most urgent issue, which would determine integration with Peru or prolonged attachment to the Río de la Plata, or taking an independent path. The latter was chosen, giving the country the name of Simón Bolívar, *Bolivia*, and designating the Liberator as its President and Protector.

Although Bolívar declined the honors, leaving the opportunity for Antonio José de Sucre, he did take the chance to try out the constitutional ideas that he had been thinking about for at least five years. The Venezuelan anarchy, with its social and racial war, the difficulties to establish the Republic of Colombia (conventionally known as Gran Colombia), the also anarchic situation in Peru: everything had made Bolívar a man who desperately sought order, although without abandoning profound revolutionary transformations. A very complicated combination, which at the time got out of hand, and which in posterity has made Bolivarian thought so ductile to be assumed by all movements, from the extreme left to conservatism, each taking what suits them best.

It is no wonder that its famous draft constitution proved controversial to all. For some, the lifetime presidency, almost traced back to the British crown, was too aristocratic. To others,

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the abolition of slavery and the extension of the right to vote to almost all men seemed extreme radicalism. But it is the result of the search for a middle point, which the Liberator himself explains in his also very famous speech to the Constituent Congress of Bolivia:

Legislators! Your duty calls you to resist the collision of two monstrous enemies that are fighting each other, and both will attack you at the same time: tyranny and anarchy form an immense ocean of oppression, surrounding a small island of freedom, perpetually overwhelmed by the violence of the waves and of the hurricanes, that drag it without ceasing to submerge it. Look at the sea that you are going to sail with a fragile boat, whose pilot is so inexperienced⁹.

Over the next two centuries, the legislators of the Hispanic world have had to confront the two monsters of anarchy and tyranny. It is the turbulent sea –as suggested by Bolívar's metaphors– through which modern representation has been navigating since it was first imposed in Caracas. It even seems that the legitimacy crisis of 1808 could not be resolved, at least fundamentally, until the first half of the 20th century (although with much later blows in many places). In Venezuela, it was a disaster in the first years (and in the following years it has been sometimes, or has come close to it in many cases). The Congress of 1811-12 and its weak Executive were followed by six dictatorships in three years. That must be some kind of world record. Let's see: the commissary dictatorship that Francisco de Miranda received from the same Congress in 1812, the one implemented by Domingo Monteverde between 1812 and 1813, those of Simón

9 Simón Bolívar, "*Discurso del Libertador al Congreso Constituyente de Bolivia*" (<http://revistas.pucp.edu.pe/index.php/pensamientoconstitucional/article/view/3386/3234> Retrieved February 2, 2021)

Bolívar in the West of the country (Estado de Venezuela) and Santiago Mariño in the West (Estado de Oriente), between 1813-1814; the very brief one imposed by José Tomás Boves in 1814, together with the equally brief one by Manuel Piar and José Félix Ribas in that same year.

Other cases could be mentioned, or it could be discussed whether Piar and Ribas really became a government, or if the Bolívar of 1813 can be defined as a dictator. But one cannot avoid the fact that, in any case, between blows (from Monteverde and Boves to their captains on the royalist side; from Piar and Ribas to Mariño and Bolívar; and to some extent from the young officers to Miranda) and generalized violence (wars, looting, massacres), the new representation ceased to exist in practice, almost as spectacularly as it had happened with the traditional one, and the successful military figure who overthrows everything took its place. The histories of all Hispano-America and of Spain until well into the 20th century show how deeply these roots took hold. That is why Bolívar knew quite well what he was saying when he talked about *tyranny* and *anarchy*, as Miranda knew when he uttered his apothegm of "*bochinche, bochinche*"¹⁰! These people can do nothing but *bochinche*!"

Nevertheless, and this is an important fact, the *bochinche*, tyranny and anarchy did not mean that the Republicans stopped feeling that something more than weapons was needed to be legitimate. Whoever believes that, because of the praetorianism and caudillismo that began then, the Hispanic Americans do not give any importance to representation, is misguided. The search for legitimacy has always accompanied caudillos and praetors, sometimes as a simple cover, or sometimes legitimately.

¹⁰ In Venezuela, bochinche is used to refer to tumult, commotion, uproar or riot.

The mere necessity of setting up a congress and calling for elections shows that they have some power, even symbolic. The Miranda dictatorship can be left out of this group because it was a commissioner, appointed by Congress, as stipulated by law. As Dictator, he preferred to leave things as they were and signed a capitulation with Domingo Monteverde, who was head of the King's armies that advanced against the Republic from Maracaibo and Coro. It was an honorable peace, which would respect life and property, but Monteverde did not comply, as in reality, he did not comply with everything else: he did not respect the authority of his superiors, he did not implement the Constitution of Cádiz, he declared himself Captain-General and he decided to govern by what he called the "Law of Conquest", that is, with extra-constitutional powers that were not based on anything other than his weapons. So the real start of the dictators' saga in Venezuela must be in Monteverde.

This situation was the argument with which Simón Bolívar invaded Venezuela from New Granada in 1813. His mission was to reunite Congress and thus restore legitimacy. Not being able to do so, because the deputies were imprisoned, in exile, or dead, he then began to rule *de facto*. It was a legal problem that he understood very quickly. He had neither been elected by anyone, nor was he even a Venezuelan citizen (he had been nationalized from New Granada), nor did he lead, in the strict sense, an army of the country, but of the United Provinces of New Granada. How can this be even given an appearance of legitimacy? The proposal that he declared himself the successor to the Miranda dictatorship, whose extinction was nullified when Monteverde failed to comply with the capitulation, did not prosper. In the end, with the country once again on fire with pro-monarchic rebellions, in January 1814, Bolívar convened an Assembly in

Caracas, whose representativeness has never been very clear, so that it would grant him special powers.

In this way, the royalists were able to call Bolívar a *tyrant* just as the patriots called Monteverde a *tyrant*. But it was only the beginning of the whirlwind. In a few months, José Tomás Boves finished off the States of Venezuela and the East (the country had been divided into two) at the head of a popular insurrection, entered Caracas, and took action without paying any attention to the Captain-General sent from Spain, Juan Manuel Cajigal. Thus, facto governments were found on both sides. Once Bolívar and Mariño, they are disregarded by their subordinates Ribas and Piar and sent into exile. Ribas faced Boves, who died in battle, while Ribas was defeated, captured and executed. That is the scene in which Pablo Morillo found himself in 1815 when he arrived from Spain with an army that had the objective of bringing order to both the patriots and the royalists. It becomes wearisome to talk about all the vicissitudes that the republican rebels tried in order to reorganize the republic, but as quickly as in 1816 their guerrillas took shape in the East, and a year later they manage to take all of Guyana after a succession of military successes, especially lead by Manuel Piar. This is where we approach what we are interested in: What was the first thing they thought of? Reorganizing the republic through the convocation of Congresses. This is no small detail for understanding its role in granting legitimacy.

The Congress of Cariaco of 1817 –contemptuously called by the Bolivarian tradition *Congresillo de Cariaco*– partly wanted to redirect the institutionality of 1812, and it was also partly a move to weaken Bolívar's power, incorporating him into a triumvirate with Mariño (that is, Eastern leaders) and Father José Cortés Madariaga, who was more or less a direct link with the first Congress. But Bolívar, almost better in politics than on the battlefield, knew how

to act smartly: his loyal military men disregarded this Congress as a usurpation (another one!), making it self-dissolve, while he called elections to convene another congress, that of Angostura, which met in 1819. It was a maneuver that killed Mariño's aspirations to share power, and that once again called the issue of legitimacy into question. The elections from which his deputies came out were still controversial and were carried out primarily in the headquarters since most of the country was still in royalist hands¹¹. They produced the most important royalist document of the period: *the Manifesto of the Provinces of Venezuela to all the civilized nations of Europe*, dated in Caracas on April 6, 1819, and translated into English and French. It is basically the response of traditional representativeness, expressed in the city councils of the Spanish and Indian cities of the country in royalist hands, to the modern representativeness that somehow was taking place in Angostura. The true representatives of the people, they claimed, were they, and they remained loyal to the King¹². What was happening in Angostura was considered a farce just to enthrone Bolívar.

The *Manifesto* does not put into question whether the elections were fair and competitive. For the *Manifesto*, the problem was the idea of representation itself that it embodied. For these Venezuelans

11 See: Ángel Rafael Almarza, *Los inicios del gobierno representativo en la República de Colombia, 1818-1821* (Madrid, Marcial Pons/Universidad Michoacana de San Nicolás Hidalgo, 2017); and Germán Guía Caripe, "El voto militar de 1819: instituido durante las vicisitudes de la Guerra de Independencia", *Heurística*, 11, 2009 (<http://www.saber.ula.ve/bitstream/handle/123456789/30632/articulo7.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y> Retrieved February 3, 2021)

12 The manifesto can be found on the Internet, but it is also reproduced at: Tomás Straka, "Ideas contra un proyecto nacional: los realistas venezolanos, 1810-1821" in Asdrúbal Baptista (Editor), *Suma del pensar venezolano*, Tomo II, Libro 1 (Caracas, Empresas Polar Foundation, 2015) 115-130.

–and there were many– the conclusions of the 1811 deputies were not correct. The representation was corporate and if any congress were to meet, it would have to be that of the councils, or in any case the delegates they appointed. If there were no other tests to confirm to what extent the crux of the independence dispute was institutional, this document would not be needed to prove it.

The Second Congress of Venezuela and the Republic of Colombia

The Second Congress of Venezuela or Congress of Angostura ran with much better fortune than the first. Basically, it took place when the war took a turn towards republican victory. That immediately erased the issue of the legitimacy of their representation raised by the royalists, the doubts about the elections in the barracks, the fact that there were deputies for constituencies where elections could not be held or a notable fact that the *Manifiesto* did not indicate: that being the Congress of Venezuela, it had deputies for Casanare, a province of Nueva Granada. And even more: that in a few months it would decree all of New Granada under the administration of the Venezuelan Congress, dissolve it, self-dissolve Venezuela and declare a new republic, Colombia, now known as Gran Colombia.

Undoubtedly, the enormous success of the Battle of Boyacá and the capture of Santa Fe and the entire center of Nueva Granada allowed such audacious adjustments. The Fundamental Law of Colombia promulgated on December 17, 1819, reads:

The Sovereign Congress of Venezuela, to whose authority the people of New Granada, recently liberated by the arms of the Republic, have voluntarily wanted to submit, and considering:

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1. That united in a single Republic the provinces of Venezuela and New Granada have all the proportions and means to rise to the highest degree of power and prosperity;
2. That constituted in separate Republics, no matter how close the ties that unite them, far from taking advantage of so many benefits, would hardly consolidate and enforce its Sovereignty;
3. That these truths, highly penetrated by all men of superior talents and an enlightened patriotism had moved the Governments of the two Republics to agree at their meeting, which the uncertainties of the war made it impossible to verify.

For all these considerations of necessity and reciprocal interest and in accordance with the report of a Special Commission of Deputies of New Granada and Venezuela, in the name and under the auspices of the Supreme Being, the following Fundamental Law of the Republic of Colombia is decreed:

Article 1.- The Republics of Venezuela and New Granada are from this day united in one under the glorious title of Republic of Colombia¹³.

Already in 1813 Bolívar had proposed setting up a Congress that would integrate representatives of Venezuela and New Granada. Although the fact that he was a citizen of New Granada and a very successful officer of the United Provinces in the civil war could have operated in this, the truth is that the idea of some kind of confederation had already been raised by the Caracas and

13 Ley Fundamental de Colombia, 17 de diciembre de 1819 (http://www.cervantesvirtual.com/obra-visor/ley-fundamental-de-colombia-1819--0/html/ff6c28b0-82b1-11df-acc7-002185ce6064_2.html Retrieved February 2, 2021).

Bogotá boards. In fact, what could be called the first international agreement of Venezuela was the Treaty of Alliance and Federation between the States of Cundinamarca and Venezuela, of May 28, 1810. According to this treaty, Venezuela and Cundinamarca become Co-States, “members of the same political body”, a General Confederation in which they would have similar rights, and to which Popayán, Quito, and Cartagena were expected to join¹⁴.

The project could not be carried out due to the rapid fall of the Venezuelan Republic and the New Granada civil war. Even Cartagena proposed another confederation with Caracas, but now excluding Cundinamarca, with which it was at war¹⁵. Ultimately, the old Viceroyalty was being revived, with whose eastern provinces the Captaincy General of Venezuela had been created three decades earlier. Likewise, a similar conclusion had been reached in Madrid, when Morillo's expedition placed Venezuela and New Granada under its command (although in civil matters, a Captain General and a Viceroy were appointed respectively).

But as there were things that united, others caused the opposite. The intrinsic problem of representativeness and legitimacy that the Angostura Congress had would not take long to charge Colombia for part of its successes. By May 1821, when the new Congress met in the Villa del Rosario de Cúcuta, Colombia already controlled almost all of Nueva Granada, a good part of Venezuela, Maracaibo and Panama (which voluntarily decided to

14 Treaty of Alliance and Federation between the States of Cundinamarca and Venezuela, *Relaciones diplomáticas de Colombia y la Nueva Granada. Tratados y convenios, 1811-1856* (Biblioteca de la Presidencia de la República, Bogotá, 1993), 1-3.

15 A study on the union process between 1810 and 1819: Daniel Gutiérrez Ardila, “De la Confederación de la Tierra Firme a la República de Colombia”, *Anuario de Estudios Bolivarianos*, 15, 2008, 9-50.

join it), but knowing that this was not enough to be legitimate, elections were organized to be much more transparent in 1820. This congress, known as the Cúcuta Congress, was the first (and actually only) Colombian congress since the Angostura Congress was Venezuelan. Its legislative work was very important, and it gave way to the Constitution of 1821 (which is why it is known as the Constitution of Cúcuta). However, once more, the problem of representation did not take long to appear. Caracas and Guayaquil were incorporated into Colombia in the following two years. For both, the process was traumatic, because they were territories with a strong pro-independence vocation, which found themselves with the *fait accompli* of being part of a new State in whose construction they had had little involvement (or none at all, in the case of Guayaquil).

Caracas was incorporated into Colombia after the battle of Carabobo, in June 1821. Although in the beginning, Bolívar's victory quelled any displeasure, when his municipality swore the Constitution of Cúcuta on Christmas Day 1821, it did so by expressing its reservations about certain articles and indicating that it would promote reforms (which were not stipulated in the legal text until 1831, ten years after its promulgation). Later on, the issue of the illegality and illegitimacy of Cúcuta and Angostura would again be brought to light by the separatists. The case of Guayaquil was even more complicated because it involved an independent state that Bolívar basically annexed, occupying it with the army. There were, certainly, other interpretations and the Liberator's motives were not unfounded, but even today the most critical and autonomous Guayaquilists continue to accuse him of having struck and carried out an invasion.

It is not surprising, therefore, that Caracas (1826) and Guayaquil (1827) were the ones that started the two separatist movements in Colombia. Of the two, the first –known as La Cosiata– was the one that would lead the entire republic to an institutional crisis from which it could not recover. While Guayaquil could be subdued by surrounding it with the army and finally occupying it without major problems, Venezuela quickly escalated to another level. Bolívar himself had to go to his native land and display all the skills of a seasoned politician that he was. He understood that there were only two options: either war, in a large country very used to fighting; or make concessions to see if something could be saved. He opted for the latter. First, he granted a frank autonomy, which in reality was nothing more than giving a veneer of legality to what already existed. Thus he named José Antonio Páez, who had become the leader of the rebellion, Superior Military and Civil Chief of Venezuela. It was a position invented to suit him, that is, a recognition of his power. On the other hand, and contrary to what is established by the Constitution, he agreed to call an assembly to make reforms.

These events set off a true chain reaction that would end Colombia in two years. The Ocaña Convention, which was called to reform the constitution and ended in a resounding failure, was a maneuver that led to the proclamation of the Bolívar dictatorship in 1828, and then to the assassination attempt and civil war (uprisings of Obando and de Córdoba), to the war with Peru, which was a bitter victory (it could almost be said that it ended in a draw), and in 1830 to the final action: the secession of Venezuela, the resignation of the Liberator, the *coup d'état* and the dictatorship of Rafael Urdaneta, while Venezuela and later Ecuador were organized as independent states.

The long representative tradition, by way of conclusion

Colombia ended up succumbing to tyranny and anarchy. Its last years were too similar to the Venezuelan and Neo-Granada outbursts of 1812 to 1815. But the fact that this has been tried to be resolved –and in its own way– with the invocation of national representation, indicates that at least this principle was among the things that remained clear after everything that happened. It is true that during the crisis, flashes of the idea of traditional representativeness reappeared, such as Bolívar's appeal to the request of many municipalities to assume the dictatorship in 1828 or Páez's call in November 1830 for Venezuelans to meet in assemblies to express their ideas about what the destiny of the country should be. We have continued to see that in Venezuela, until the days of the Federal War. But the case was what Páez did with the opinion of the most important of the assemblies, the one that took place on November 25 and 26, 1829 in the church of San Francisco de Caracas (and therefore known as the Assembly of San Francisco). As expected, it proposed the separation of the Bogotá government. In response, on January 13, 1830, Páez published several decrees in which he organized the government and called elections for his own Congress, which met in Valencia on May 6 (known as the Valencia Congress)¹⁶.

Once again, the Venezuelan State was born from the meeting of a congress of the representatives of the nation. And once again, it was done in confrontation with other representatives who were outside the country, in this case, the Admirable Congress that would meet in Bogotá on January 20, and those who were no longer considered legitimate. Unlike 1811 or 1819, the nature of

16 About this topic: Elena Plaza, *El patriotismo ilustrado o la organización del estado en Venezuela, 1830-1847* (Caracas, Universidad Central de Venezuela, 2007).

representation is no longer discussed, which is definitely the modern one. But it is clear, once again, that: a) Venezuela is constituted as a State, in the two moments in which it did, based on the principle of representativeness; b) that no matter how much it would be beaten in the next two centuries, and that even continues to be so today, national sovereignty expressed through the vote is the basis of all legitimacy; c) and that this is one of the most important ethical legacies that our founding period left us, the deep root of all aspiration to a representative and democratic government.

Conclusion: organization, unity, and representation

The tenth issue of *Democratización* ends. It was dedicated to the study of political representation and featured articles by Tomás Straka, Héctor Briceño, Guillermo Aveledo Coll and Pedro Pablo Peñaloza. By way of conclusion, we share three ideas that can contribute to the analysis of the current moment:

1. **Organization and representation:** Tomás Straka, in “We, the Representatives”, establishes the relationship between organization, representation and legitimacy. The author highlights that those who carried the weight of our independence on their shoulders faced anarchy and tyranny by resorting to tools of territorial political organization –Congresses– that allowed the creation of formal mechanisms of representation –the vote– that gave political legitimacy to the triumphs achieved with arms. This legacy of our national history reaffirms the importance of political organization as a ferment of real representation that can offer legitimacy to the actors and their decisions. This key can be useful when those who today usurp power in Venezuela have hijacked our right to choose and we face the challenge of promoting a real representation that rescues the mechanisms –the vote– that allow the democratic system to recover.
2. **Mechanisms of representation:** Héctor Briceño, in “Society, parties and elections: how to rebuild political representation?”, described the autocratic advance of

the Chavista revolution in electoral matters. The author explains that after the parliamentary defeat of 2015, the Nicolás Maduro regime further limited the conditions of electoral justice and Venezuela became a traditional, closed, or hegemonic dictatorship (depending on the political terminology that you want to use). This autocratic consolidation took away our vote and has meant a substantial setback in our democratic tradition. In this sense, Chavismo has turned out to be a leapfrog for more than 200 years in our republican history, and the democratic forces in Venezuela today fight for the same thing that the “representatives of 1811” defended: the right to choose and own our own destiny.

3. **Unity and representation:** Urgent calls to rebuild the unity of the opposition are frequently heard in everyday, academic and political environments. Certainly, it is urgent to join forces to resist and, as far as possible, to advance in the liberation of our country. However, after twenty years of the Chavista dictatorship and considering the current situation in Venezuela, it is convenient to ask ourselves about the foundation of unity and its scope. I do not pretend to be exhaustive in this reflection, but I place this premise on the table: the recomposition of the unit must be accompanied by the reconstruction of the capacity for political representation of the forces that comprise it, with organization and political formation as the main working tools. If the institutions that make up the unit are empty shells that do not represent the wishes of the country, the agreements reached will be artificial and will not be reciprocated with obedience by the entire society. Without real representation, there will hardly be efficient unity.