

Democratization



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Three features of the gangster State in Venezuela

Paola Bautista de Alemán

In the previous publication¹, we laid out the theoretical foundations of our research on the gangster State in Venezuela. We developed the ideas that guide our study and we approached the emergence of the phenomenon in Venezuela. In this article, we will identify the features that characterize it and offer partial conclusions related to the possibility of an eventual process of political change in the country.

First and foremost, we must bear in mind the concept of gangster state offered by Professor Katherine Hirschfeld in *Gangster states: Organized crime, kleptocracy and political collapse*. The author says:

Gangster-states are defined here as chimeric, transitional political economies that temporarily formalize the extractive economic monopolies of racketeering over marked geographic territory. Once territorial boundaries become established, the racket resembles a rudimentary kleptocratic state, with the security forces repurposed beyond monopoly enforcement into activities more typically associated with government. These may include the organization of economic production, conflict resolution and territorial defense. Gangs-

1 Paola Bautista de Alemán, "Revolución Bolivariana y el desarrollo del Estado gangsteril", *Democratización*, (September 2019), 50-75

ter-state territories are not fixed or static, as kleptocratic elites will seek to colonize surrounding territory if conditions are favorable. On the other hand, the extractive core of racketeering creates an impetus for conflict with neighboring groups as well as exhaustive depletion of resources that may ultimately lead to political-economic decline or collapse².

Three features describing the nature of the phenomenon can be found in Hirschfeld's concept: (i) The advanced expansive dynamics by those who are part of the State and by individuals who are associated with it but who do not formally integrate it; (ii) The diversity of illicit activities executed through national and/or regional State structures; (iii) The propensity to collapse and its capacity for regeneration. The dissection of the term sets a study path that helps to sort the information and overcome methodological limitations associated with this type of research³. Each feature in current day Venezuela is discussed below.

I. On the advanced expansive dynamic of the gangster State in Venezuela

In *Organized crime and States: The hidden face of politics*, Briquet & Favarel-Garriges analyze the cases of Pakistan, Turkey, Indo-

2 Katherine Hirschfeld, *Gangster states: organized crime, kleptocracy and political collapse*. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015) 68.

3 In *Gangs in uniforms in Turkey: Politics at the articulation between security institutions and the criminal world*, Elise Massicard highlights the methodological difficulties that science faces when it tries to understand illegal phenomena. The author explains that the main obstacles are information opacity, the sensitive nature of the subject and localism. We reiterate the difficulties highlighted by Massicard and even include the difficulty to validate information that is publicized as true without an official basis. Thus, researchers must be rigorous and systematic. Elise Massicard, "Gangs in uniforms in Turkey: Politics at the articulation between secu-

nesia, Bulgaria, and Belize, as well as others from sub-Saharan African countries⁴. The Science Po (Paris) professors describe the tendency of criminal organizations whose activities are promoted⁵ or protected⁶ by the State to spread. The authors' analysis allows to understand that this expansion can occur in three dimensions: (i) in size, (ii) in extension and (iii) in diversity. The first dimension refers to the number of members of the organization; the second, to the territorial scope that its operations reach; and the third, to the type of illegal activities they carry out.

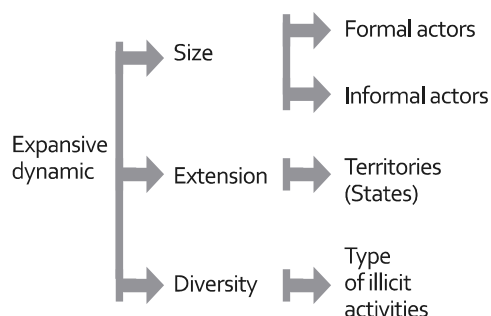
To understand the expansive dynamics, the first dimension specified above is reviewed. We will therefore classify actors involved in the gangster State in Venezuela according to size. We will restrict ourselves to mentioning them; future investigations will have to specify their level of participation and influence. For methodological reasons, particular emphasis will be placed on

rity institutions and the criminal world" in *Organized crime and States: The hidden face of politics* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010) 41-72.

- 4 Rosaleen Duffy, "Shadow States: Globalization, Criminalization, and Environmental Change" in *Organized crime and States: The hidden face of politics* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010) 97-116.
- 5 When the State promotes the creation of illegal organization that are part of its formal structure, it will be identified as an "entropic development" of the gangster State. As is explained in "*Revolución Bolivariana y el desarrollo del Estado gangsteril*", the origin of this phenomenon in Venezuela can be traced back to 1998, and even much more so to 2002.
- 6 When the State protects the actions of criminal organization that are not part of its formal structure, it will be identified as an "extropic development" of the gangster State. At first, it consists of a parasitic relationship between the State and criminal organizations, in which redoubts of the former can resist the advances of the latter. Nevertheless, there is a risk that a gangster State can be installed if criminal organizations colonize all State structures and establish a symbiotic relationship. (Peter Lupsha, "Transnational organized crime versus the Nation-State", in *Transnational Organized Crime*, (Spring 1996). In Latin America, the most relevant cases are Colombia and Mexico.

“extension” (territorial space) and “diversity” (of illicit activities) in the next section of this article.

Figure 1: Expansive dynamic of the gangster State



On the actors of the gangster State in Venezuela

We understand the actors of the gangster State in Venezuela as the individuals who maintain a formal or informal relationship with the illegal activities developed by the criminal organizations that coexist and/or are part of the Venezuelan State. They will be classified into two categories according to their relationship with the State, in order to better comprehend the map of actors:

- 1) *Formal actors*: A formal relationship with the State implies individuals leading or being a part of the national government or local administrations⁷. Peter Lupsha⁸ considers

⁷ The political and territorial division in Venezuela corresponds to states and municipalities. Governors are the maximum authority in the former, while mayors are the maximum authority of the latter. Both charges, as well as the members of the Legislative Councils (state deputies) of each state and the members of the Municipal Councils (councillors), must be elected through popular, free and fair elections.

⁸ Peter Lupsha, “Transnational organized crime versus the Nation-State”, in *Transnational Organized Crime* (Spring, 1996).

that this relationship between these actors and the State is symbiotic.

- 2) *Informal actors*: An informal relationship with the State entails that the individual has no links with State institutions. According to Peter Lupsha⁹, the relationship between these actors and the State is initially parasitic, with a propensity to become symbiotic. Informal actors may get involved in institutional mechanisms (participation in elections or appointments and free removal) to formally insert themselves into the State's structure.

The *formal actors* of the gangster State in Venezuela are hereby named:

Executive power

Title 5 of the Constitution of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (1999) specifies the organization of the National Public Power. Chapter 2 refers to the National Executive Power and establishes that it is composed of the President, Vice-president, Ministers and Attorney General of the Republic¹⁰.

Gaining access to an updated list of the current personnel in the Executive Branch in Venezuela is a challenge: official web pages are not updated and the Official Gazettes are not easily accessible. After researching and validating information, we iden-

9 Peter Lupsha, "Transnational organized crime versus the nation-State", in *Transnational Organized Crime* (Spring, 1996)

10 For the purposes of this investigation, those who hold executive positions of election or by appointment and free removal were considered official actors, regardless of their democratic legitimacy, which would be the subject of another analysis.

tified forty (40) Ministers in the country, of which eight (8) are presided by members of the Armed Forces:

1. General Vladimir Padrino López (Army), Minister of the Popular Power of Defence
2. Coronel Jorge Elieser Márquez (National Guard), Minister of the Presidency and Director of CONATEL
3. General Néstor Reverol (National Guard), Minister of the Popular Power of Interior, Justice and Peace
4. Admiral Gilberto Pinto Blanco (Navy), Minister of the Popular Power for Mining and Ecological Development
5. General Manuel Salazar Quevedo (National Guard), Minister of the Popular Power of Petroleum and President of PDVSA
6. General Raúl Alonso Paredes (National Guard), Minister of the Popular Power of Public Works
7. Comandante Carlos Leal Tellería (Militia), Minister of the Popular Power for Food
8. General Gerardo José Izquierdo (Army), Minister of State for the New Peace Frontier

The offices held by men of arms deal with matters of national security and management of extractive and productive resources. As will be discussed later, *these are sensitive and strategic spaces of power which are related to the development of illegal activities*. It is interesting that none is in the hands of Aviation members.

When reviewing the profile of civil ministers, the figure of Simón Alejandro Zerpa, who chairs the Ministry of Economy,

stands out. Zerpa's father has been Ambassador of Venezuela in China since 2013 and maintains a close relationship with the Asian country. This link may be understood as the one which could lead Venezuela towards "authoritarian capitalism"¹¹. The presence of people trained in leftist schools near Cuba, such as Foreign Minister Jorge Arreaza, Vice President Delcy Rodríguez and the Minister of Popular Power of Industries and National Production Tarek El Aissami is also striking.

Judicial Power

Title 5 of the Constitution of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (1999) specifies the organization of the National Public Power. Chapter 3 refers to the judiciary and justice system. Article 253 establishes that the Judicial Power is constituted by the Supreme Court of Justice, other courts determined by law, the Public Prosecutor's Office, the Public Defender's Office, criminal investigation organs, the auxiliary and civil servants of justice, the prison system, alternative means of justice, citizens involved in the administration of justice in accordance with the law and authorized lawyers.

The Supreme Justice Court is composed of five (5) chambers. Their directors and members are listed below:

Table 1: Members of the Supreme Justice Court

President to the Supreme Justice Court	Maikel Moreno
First Vice-President to the Supreme Justice Court President to the Electoral Chamber	Indira Maira Alfonzo Izaguirre

¹¹ We recommend to read the article by Deputy Ángel Alvarado included in this issue, p. 94.

Second Vice-President to the Supreme Justice Court President to the Constitutional Chamber	Juan José Mendoza Jover
President to the Administrative Political Court	María Carolina Ameliach Villarroel
President to the Court of Civil Cassation	Yván Darío Bastardo Flores
President to the Court of Social Cassation	Marjorie Calderón Guerrero
President to the Court of Criminal Cassation	Maikel Moreno
Vice-President to the Court of Criminal Cassation	Elsa Janeth Gómez Moreno
Court of Criminal Cassation	Francia Coello González
Court of Criminal Cassation	Juan Luis Ibarra
Court of Criminal Cassation	Yanina Beatriz Karabín de Díaz
Court of Criminal Cassation	Jesús Manuel Jiménez Alfonzo
Court of Criminal Cassation	Edgar Gavidia Rodríguez
Court of Criminal Cassation	Mónica Gioconda Misticchio Tortorella
Court of Criminal Cassation	Danilo Antonio Mojica
Vice-President to the Electoral Court	Malaquías Gil Rodríguez
Electoral Court	Jhannett Madriz Sotillo
Electoral Court	Fanny Márquez Cordero
Vice-President to the Court of Civil Cassation	Francisco Ramón Velazquez Estévez

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Court of Civil Cassation	Guillermo Blanco Vázquez
Court of Civil Cassation	Marisel Valentina Godoy Estaba
Court of Civil Cassation	Vilma María Fernández González
Vice-President to the Constitutional Court	Arcadio de Jesús Delgado Rosales
Constitutional Court	Carmen Zuleta de Merchán
Constitutional Court	Gladys María Gutierrez Alvarado
Constitutional Court	Luis Fernando Damiani Bustillos
Constitutional Court	Calixto Ortega Ríos
Constitutional Court	Lourdes Benicia Suárez Anderson
Vice-President to the Administrative Political Court	Marco Antonio Medina Salas
Administrative Political Court	Bárbara Gabriela César Siero
Administrative Political Court	Inocencio Antonio Figueroa Arizaleta
Administrative Political Court	Eulalia Coromoto Guerrero Rivero

Electoral Power

Title 5 of the Constitution of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (1999) specifies the organization of the National Public Power. Chapter 5 encompasses the Electoral Power. Article 292 states that the National Electoral Council exercises the Electoral Power as its governing body. Its directive is listed below:

Table 2: Board of Directors of the National Electoral Council

President to the National Electoral Council	Tibisay Lucena
Vice-President to the National Electoral Council	Sandra Oblitas
Chairman of the Political Participation and Financing Commission	Luis Emilio Rondón
Member of the National Electoral Board	Socorro Hernández Hernández
Member of the Political Participation and Financing Commission	Tania D'Amelio
Secretary General	Xavier Antonio Moreno Reyes

Civil Power

Title 5 of the Constitution of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (1999) specifies the organization of the National Public Power. Chapter 5 refers to the Civil Power and Article 273 states its organs: the Ombudsman's Office, the Public Ministry, and the General Comptroller's Office of the Republic. Their members are listed below:

Table 3: Members of the Civil Power

Ombudsman	Alfredo José Ruiz Angulo
Attorney General of the Republic	Tarek William Saab
General Comptroller of the Republic	Elvis Amoroso

National Bolivarian Armed Forces

Title 7 of the Constitution of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (1999) refers to the Security of the Nation. Chapter 3 refers to the Armed Forces, and Article 328 established that it is made up of the Army, Navy, Aviation and National Guard, which function in an integral way within the framework of their competence and for the fulfillment of their mission, with its own integral social security regime, as determined by each organic law. We must emphasize that, in Venezuela, there is a fifth military force called the “Militia”, which has no constitutional rank and was created via Presidential Decree by Hugo Chávez (Number: 338.084 of April 4, 2005).

The leading members of the National Bolivarian Armed Forces are hereby named:

Table 4: Members of the Military High Command

Minister of the Popular Power for Defense	General Vladimir Padrino López (Army)
Strategic Operational Commander of the Bolivarian National Armed Forces	Admiral Remigio Ceballos Ichaso (Navy)
Army Commander	General Jesús Suarez Chourio (Army)
Navy Commander	Admiral Giuseppe Alessandrello Cimadevilla (Navy)
Aviation Commander	Mayor General Pedro Juliac Lartiguez (Aviation)
Commander of the Bolivarian National Guard	Mayor General Jesús López Vargas (GNB)
Commander of the Militia	Mayor General Carlos Leal Tellería (Militia)

Governors¹²

The Constitution of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (1999) divides the country –territorially and politically– in twenty-four (24) states. As will be further discussed, it is appropriate to list their governors because of the role they play in the operations of the gangster State. Governors and their political party are hereby identified.

Table 5: List of state governors and their political inclination

Amazonas	Miguel Rodríguez (PSUV)
Anzoátegui	Antonio Barreto Sira (AD)
Aragua	Rodolfo Marco Torres (PSUV)
Apure	Ramón Carrizales (PSUV)
Barinas	Argenis Chávez (PSUV)
Bolívar	Justo Noguera Pietri (PSUV)
Carabobo	Rafael Lacava (PSUV)
Cojedes	Margaud Godoy (PSUV)
Delta Amacuro	Lizeta Hernández (PSUV)
Falcón	Víctor Clark (PSUV)

¹² Venezuela is made up of 24 states. Twenty governorates are in the hands of the PSUV (United Socialist Party of Venezuela) and four in the hands of AD (Democratic Action). Regional elections were held in 2017. The democratic opposition denounced fraud and its results were controversial. We recommend reading the following article for further insight: https://elpais.com/internacional/2017/10/16/america/1508122348_405331.html

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Guárico	José Vázquez (PSUV)
Lara	Carmen Meléndez (PSUV)
Mérida	Ramón Guevara (AD)
Miranda	Héctor Rodríguez (PSUV)
Monagas	Yelitze Santaella (PSUV)
Nueva Esparta	Alfredo Díaz (AD)
Portuguesa	Rafael Calles (PSUV)
Sucre	Edwin Rojas (PSUV)
Táchira	Lady Gómez (AD)
Trujillo	Henry Rangel Silva (PSUV)
Yaracuy	Julio León Heredia (PSUV)
Vargas	Jorge Luis García Carneiro (PSUV)
Zulia	Omar Prieto Fernández (PSUV)

Constituents

The National Constituent Assembly is made up of 503 members. The current board of directors is hereby listed for the purposes of this investigation.

Table 6: Board of Directors of the National Constituent Assembly

President	Diosdado Cabello (PSUV)
First Vice-President	Tania Díaz (PSUV)
Second Vice-President	Gladys Requena (PSUV)

United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV)¹³

The PSUV is the political organization for electoral purposes of the Bolivarian Revolution. Hugo Chávez Frías founded it on December 16, 2006, with the intention of bringing together all the leftist ideologies in the country. Nicolás Maduro currently presides it, while Diosdado Cabello is its first vice president. Its development is associated and leveraged in the national State and in local administrations.

Here forth, the *informal actors*¹⁴ of the gangster State in Venezuela are reviewed.

¹³ In Spanish: *Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela*. We have decided to classify PSUV as a formal actor since its national directives occupy national and/or local government positions, and its regional, municipal, parish and zonal cadres distribute food and/or consumer goods of first need in partnership with informal actors such as ELN or FARC. We recommend to read the following articles for further insight: <http://www.psuv.org.ve/psuv/directiva/> and <https://efectocucuyo.com/la-humanidad/guerrilla-colombiana-distribuye-cajas-clap-en-estados-fronterizos-denuncia-la-fundacion-redes/>

¹⁴ This classification corresponds to the one proposed by *Insight Crime* (*Centro de Investigación de Crimen Organizado*) in “Venezuela: ¿Un Estado Mafioso?” (Mayo, 2018). Available in: <https://www.insightcrime.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Venezuela-Estado-mafioso-InSight-Crime-Observatorio-de-crimen-organizado.pdf>

Colectivos

The *colectivos* (collectives) are armed paramilitary organizations created after the events of April 11, 2002¹⁵. President Hugo Chávez promoted and strengthened them with the purpose of surveilling and politically intimidating people in urban areas, especially in the Libertador Municipality (Caracas). At first, they were funded by the National Government. Subsequently, the incursion into illegal activities offered them territorial and financial autonomy.

According to *Insight Crime*, there are 18 armed *colectivos* operating in Caracas. Despite having territorial and financial autonomy, these organizations are at the political service of the Bolivarian Revolution. They are responsible for suppressing popular demonstrations with firearms, and they work in coordination with the National Armed Forces to perform this task. This procedure has been consolidated in the country for 18 years and has been extended to different regions in Venezuela. It is estimated that these types of organizations operate in 21 states and fulfill the functions described above.

Pranes¹⁶

Pranes are criminal chiefs in the Venezuelan prison system who in fact have close personal relationships with Iris Varela, Minister of the Popular Power of Prison Affairs. They manage illicit activities (common crime, homicides, extortion, drug traf-

15 Most *colectivos* were created after April 11. Before 2002, *La Piedrita* and *Tupamaros* were the only ones in Caracas.

16 *Pran* is a Venezuelan slang referring to a prison leader. There may be one or several in each prison, whether male or female. The population of each sector is accountable to its *pran*.

ficking and mining control) from prisons. It is estimated that in Venezuela there are between 12 and 16 “megabands”, with operation centers within detention centers.

FARC, ELN and FBL

Initially, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC¹⁷), the National Liberation Army (ELN¹⁸), and the Bolivarian Liberation Front (FBL¹⁹) were located on the Colombian-Venezuelan border. Over time, its operations have expanded into the Venezuelan territory, where they have diversified their illegal activities and now participate in illegal exploitation of gold.

State security forces responsible for border protection allow them to travel freely throughout the country. The relationship between the Bolivarian Revolution, the FARC and the ELN dates back to the early 2000s, when Hugo Chávez publicly claimed their nature and recognized them as “true armies”²⁰.

On August 30, 2019, the Colombian magazine *Semana* published the report “El vecino peligroso: así se mueven las disidencias y el ELN en Venezuela”. The publication stated the presence of FARC and ELN camps across the Venezuelan territory, where military trainings in guerrilla war tactics and strategies for the militias and *colectivos* take place. They signal Nicolás Maduro’s laissez-faire politics, which allows them to derive millions

17 In Spanish: *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia*.

18 In Spanish: *Ejército de Liberación Nacional*.

19 In Spanish: *Frente Bolivariano de Liberación*.

20 Hugo Chávez Frías claimed that the FARC and the ELN were not terrorist groups, but rather armies: true armies that occupied Colombia, a space in Colombia, who had to be acknowledged. He also said they were insurgent forces with a respected Bolivarian political project (January 11, 2008). See: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=czGWXpK67ww>

of dollars from activities that range from drug trafficking to the illegal exploitation of minerals by collecting fees extortion and kidnapping, as proven by more than a few articles with real evidence²¹.

Venezuela has become a refuge for irregular Colombian groups who find there a safety net to further and diversify their illegal activities. “Gold and grief in Venezuela’s violent south”²² (Crisis Group) describes the territorial and criminal expansion of the FARC and the ELN in Venezuela under the protection of the National Armed Forces. These groups have expanded their activities. Now, they participate in illegal mining in addition to drug trafficking. The information of Crisis Group coincides with the complaint made by Deputy Carlos Paparoni on October 4, 2019. The representative of the state of Mérida said that Nicolás Maduro gave \$1,357,266,000 to the Colombian guerrillas. He declared:

*Esta cifra (1.357.276.000 dólares) va al financiamiento de grupos narcoterroristas, solamente en el ejercicio del arco minero venezolano. Recordemos que se han extraído cerca de 168 toneladas de oro, de ellas, 33.190 kilogramos han sido destinados a los grupos disidentes de las FARC, ELN, para el financiamiento del terror no solo en Venezuela y Colombia, sino en toda la región*²³.

21 Full article available in: <https://www.semana.com/nacion/articulo/venezuela-refugio-del-eln-y-disidentes-de-las-farc/629946>

22 Full article available in: <https://www.crisisgroup.org/latin-america-caribbean/andes/venezuela/073-gold-and-grief-venezuelas-violent-south>

23 “This amount finances narco-terrorist groups, and only in the Venezuelan mining arc. Remember that about 168 tons of gold have been extracted, of which 33,190 kilograms have been allocated to the dissident groups of the FARC, ELN, for terrorist financing not only in Venezuela and Colombia, but across the region”. Deputy Carlos Paparoni’s full statement is

Hezbollah

Colin P. Clarke, from *Foreign Policy*, states:

Hezbollah is well-entrenched in Venezuela, where the Shiite terrorist group has long worked to establish a vast infrastructure for its criminal activities, including drug trafficking, money laundering, and illicit smuggling. For example, Margarita Island, located off the coast of Venezuela, is a well-known criminal hotbed where Hezbollah members have established a safe haven. Under the regime of former Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez, the government took a more active approach to offering sanctuary to Venezuela-based supporters of Hezbollah²⁴.

According to research conducted by Nicholas Casey for the *New York Times*, the presence of the Hezbollah terrorist group in Venezuela is associated with drug trafficking and the efforts of Tarek El Aissami (current Minister of Popular Power of Industries and National Production) and his father, a Syrian immigrant close to the organization²⁵.

available in: <http://www.somostuvos.net/asamblea-nacional-venezuela/carlos-paparoni-maduro-financia-con-oro-a-las-farc-y-el-eln/>

24 Colin P. Clarke in "Hezbollah Is in Venezuela to Stay". Available in: <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/02/09/hezbollah-is-in-venezuela-to-stay/>

25 We recommend to read the following article for further insight: "Secret Venezuela Files Warns About Maduro Confidant". Available in: <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/02/world/americas/venezuela-maduro-hezbollah-drugs.html>

Table 7: Approach to the formal and informal actors of the gangster State in Venezuela

Formal actors	Executive Power Judicial Power Electoral Power Civil Power High Military Command Governors Constituents PSUV
Informal actors	Colectivos Pranes FARC, ELN and FBL Hezbollah

II. On the diversity of illegal activities and their territorial extension

The actors that could execute or contribute to the expansion of the gangster State activities in Venezuela have been specified and classified as *formal or informal actors*. Now, the dimensions of (i) diversity and (ii) expansion will be explained. “Diversity” refers to the illegal activities that nourish the system, while “expansion” refers to the territorial space where formal and informal actors operate.

Arcay & Oliveros²⁶ point out that “black economies” arose in Venezuela as a result of the destruction of the oil industry and

²⁶ Guillermo Arcay & Asdrúbal Oliveros. *Impactos de los incentivos de la corrupción. Análisis cuantitativo de las principales actividades económicas ilícitas en Venezuela. Informe corrupción 2018*. (Caracas: Transparencia Internacional Venezuela, 2019). Available in: <https://transparencia.org.ve/>

the drop in oil prices²⁷. There certainly is a temporary coincidence between both events, yet the emergence of illegal activities is also related to politics.

Based on the reviewed studies and researches out by Non-Governmental Organizations (Fundaredes, Transparencia Internacional Venezuela, Observatorio de Delito Organizado and Paz Activa), media, and unofficial sources seven illegal activities that take place in Venezuela can be identified:

1. Drug trafficking
2. Illegal exploitation of gold
3. Oil smuggling
4. Human trafficking
5. Homicides
6. Extortion and kidnapping
7. Money laundering

Research on the development of these activities show that those that offer the greatest profits are drug trafficking, oil smuggling and illegal exploitation of gold. The chart below summarizes the type of activity, the states in which they are developed, and its related informal actors.

project/impactos-de-los-incentivos-de-la-corrupcion-analisis-cuantitativos-de-las-principales-actividades-economicas-ilicitas-en-venezuela/

²⁷ Arcay & Oliveros state that, given the partial disappearance of the main source of income in the country, groups that profited from the sector, whether directly or indirectly, were forced to migrate to other sources of illegal income. Thus, black economies such as illegal mining and gasoline smuggling have flourished. Their report quantitatively analyzes both sectors. *Impactos de los incentivos de la corrupción. Análisis cuantitativo de las principales actividades económicas ilícitas en Venezuela. Informe corrupción 2018*. (Caracas: Transparencia Internacional Venezuela, 2019) 3.

Table 8: Illicit activities, territorial location and presence of informal actors

State	Activity	Informal actors
Amazonas	Drug trafficking Presence of clandestine tracks Oil trafficking Homicides Extortion and kidnapping	ELN FARC
Anzoátegui	Homicides Extortion and kidnapping Money laundering	FBL <i>Colectivos</i> <i>Pranes</i>
Aragua	Drug cultivation and processing Homicides Extortion and kidnapping	FBL ELN FARC <i>Colectivos</i> <i>Pranes</i>
Apure	Drug trafficking Presence of clandestine tracks Drug cultivation and processing Oil trafficking Homicides Extortion and kidnapping	FBL ELN FARC <i>Colectivos</i> <i>Pranes</i>
Barinas	Drug trafficking Presence of clandestine tracks Drug cultivation and processing Oil trafficking Homicides Extortion and kidnapping	FBL ELN FARC <i>Colectivos</i> <i>Pranes</i>
Bolívar	Drug trafficking Presence of clandestine tracks Homicides Extortion and kidnapping Illegal exploitation of gold	FBL ELN FARC <i>Colectivos</i> <i>Pranes</i>

Carabobo	Drug cultivation and processing Homicides Extortion and kidnapping	ELN FARC <i>Colectivos</i> <i>Pranes</i>
Cojedes	Homicides Extortion and kidnapping	FBL <i>Colectivos</i> <i>Pranes</i>
Delta Amacuro	Drug trafficking Oil trafficking Homicides Extortion and kidnapping	ELN FARC
Falcón	Homicides Extortion and kidnapping	ELN <i>Colectivos</i> <i>Pranes</i>
Guárico	Presence of clandestine tracks Drug cultivation and processing Homicides Extortion and kidnapping	FBL ELN FARC <i>Colectivos</i> <i>Pranes</i>
Lara	Homicides Extortion and kidnapping	FBL ELN <i>Colectivos</i> <i>Pranes</i>
Mérida	Drug cultivation and processing Homicides Extortion and kidnapping	FBL ELN <i>Colectivos</i> <i>Pranes</i>
Miranda	Drug cultivation and processing Homicides Extortion and kidnapping	FBL ELN FARC <i>Colectivos</i> <i>Pranes</i>
Monagas	Presence of clandestine tracks Homicides Extortion and kidnapping	ELN FARC <i>Colectivos</i> <i>Pranes</i>

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Nueva Esparta	Homicides Extortion and kidnapping Money laundering	ELN Hezbollah <i>Colectivos</i> <i>Pranes</i>
Portuguesa	Homicides Extortion and kidnapping	FBL ELN <i>Colectivos</i> <i>Pranes</i>
Sucre	Homicides Extortion and kidnapping Drug trafficking Human trafficking	FBL <i>Colectivos</i> <i>Pranes</i>
Táchira	Drug trafficking Drug cultivation and processing Oil Trafficking Homicides Extortion and kidnapping	FBL ELN FARC <i>Colectivos</i> <i>Pranes</i>
Trujillo	Homicides Extortion and kidnapping	FBL ELN <i>Colectivos</i> <i>Pranes</i>
Yaracuy	Homicides Extortion and kidnapping	FBL ELN <i>Colectivos</i> <i>Pranes</i>
Vargas	Homicides Extortion and kidnapping	ELN <i>Colectivos</i> <i>Pranes</i>
Zulia	Drug trafficking Presence of clandestine tracks Drug cultivation and processing Oil trafficking Homicides Extortion and kidnapping	FBL ELN FARC <i>Colectivos</i> <i>Pranes</i>

Source: Fundaredes, Insight Crime, and own sources

Informal actors in 24 states of the country were identified, most located in Aragua, Apure, Barinas, Bolívar, Guárico, Miranda, Nueva Esparta, Táchira, Trujillo, Yaracuy, Sucre and Zulia. The states with more diversity of illegal activities, or “black economies”, are Amazonas, Apure, Barinas, Bolívar, Sucre, Táchira and Zulia.

During the course of this research, we were able to observe that the behavior and interaction between formal and informal actors as well as their illegal activities varies by location. *It is a decentralized and autonomous power dynamic that maintains a formal and informal relationship with the central power and with the world through State institutions.*

III. On the propensity to collapse and the capacity for autocratic regeneration

Hirschfeld²⁸ relates the decline of gangster States with the corrosive nature of their economic activities, and indicates that their extractive performance inevitably leads them to collapse. These are unstable political systems that are not sustainable over time. In the cases studies by Hirschfeld, “chaos”, far from paving the way for democratization, offered conditions for autocratic rebalancing. Rosaleen Duffy²⁹ reaches the same conclusion when referring to the case of Belize.

As Ángel Alvarado explains in the article included in this issue, Venezuela is currently in a situation of collapse. The Obser-

28 Katherine Hirschfeld, *Gangster states: organized crime, kleptocracy and political collapse*. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

29 Rosaleen Duffy, “Shadow States: Globalization, Criminalization, and Environmental Change” in *Organized Crime and States: The hidden face of Politics*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 97-116.

vatorio Venezolano de Servicios Públicos³⁰ conducted a study in June 2019 which estimated the quality of water, electricity, gas, Internet, and cell phone service in 7 cities in the country. Their results are shown in the table below:

Table 9: Quality of water, electricity, gas, Internet, and cell phone service in Caracas, Maracaibo, Valencia, Barquisimeto, San Cristóbal and Ciudad Bolívar (June 2019).

	Water	Electricity	Gas	Internet	Cell phone service
	<i>Percentage of people without water service</i>	<i>Percentage of people with daily blackouts</i>	<i>Percentage of people without gas cylinders in their community</i>	<i>Percentage of people who report service failures every day</i>	<i>Percentage of people who report service failures every day</i>
Caracas <i>Distrito Capital</i>	9 %	8 %	21,2 %	55,1 %	34,4 %
Maracaibo <i>Estado Zulia</i>	30 %	89 %	83,3 %	52,2 %	53,6 %
Valencia <i>Estado Carabobo</i>	8 %	93 %	60,7 %	49,8 %	45,9 %
Barquisimeto <i>Estado Lara</i>	11 %	81 %	56,4 %	46,2 %	27,2 %
Barcelona <i>Estado Anzoátegui</i>	8 %	52 %	65,1 %	56,6 %	46,2 %

³⁰ Venezuelan Public Services Observatory. We recommend visiting their webpage: <http://www.asoesda.org/>

San Cristóbal <i>Estado Táchira</i>	20 %	93 %	72,7 %	47,6 %	30,4 %
Ciudad Bolívar <i>Estado Bolívar</i>	27 %	27 %	70,1 %	48,3 %	48,4 %

Source: Observatorio Venezolano de Servicios Públicos (June, 2019)³¹

These results show a significant *territorial inequality of the collapse, and its distance from the center of power, the capital*. The deterioration of public services in Caracas is significantly less than in the rest of the country, which seems to be a strategic decision to avoid social conflict in the city.

The situation of collapse in each State is specific. The depth of the decline can be related to the distance that separates each locality from Caracas, and to the decentralized dynamics that we refer to in the previous section. That is to say: *the farther a city is from Caracas, the greater the collapse and the lower the political cost for autocracy*³².

In the Venezuelan collapse, the propensity to decline that Hirschfeld proposes is partially validated. Moreover, *the decline can encourage a critical juncture only as it is close to the center of power*.

³¹ Results from the research date from 6 months back. To date, the collapse in public services has worsened.

³² This situation may explain the phenomenon of internal migration in the country. Entire families are moving to Caracas fleeing the collapse in their places of origin. Quantitative data is not yet available, however, for Caracas inhabitants it is clear that the city's population has significantly grown in recent months. The most notable indicator is the increase in traffic, which had decreased as a result of the exodus. We recommend consulting the following report on the matter: <https://talcualdigital.com/index.php/2019/10/21/tuve-que-mudarme-a-caracas-la-forzosa-migracion-interna-crece-en-venezuela/>

While the autocracy continues to isolate the collapse in territories which are farther away, it will be able to keep its domain, as it will not be forced to make relevant changes that allow its rebalancing.

IV. Three considerations and future research

This article intends to identify the features that characterize the gangster State in Venezuela and to offer ideas about an eventual political change. It is an approach that seeks to offer methodological tools for future research in order to further fathom on each of the features described previously. As a conclusion, we will share three reflections:

- *The gangster State is a structure of domination that is imposed on those who inhabit it.* This investigation identified a network of formal and informal actors that participate in activities in which the border between the lawful and the illegal is blurred. Three types of relationship between the State and illicit activities were found: (i) The State as a promoter and executor of illicit activities (exploitation of gold); (ii) The bureaucracy at the service of illicit activities (drug trafficking and money laundering); and (iii) Criminal organizations that carry out illegal activities with the complicity of the State (oil trafficking). These activities create favorable scenarios for political and economic domination. Those who live in the territories colonized by these dynamics submit to the mandates of the gangster State and its allies to survive. In Locke's terms: there is consent. It is a structure of evil that nobody can evade. In this sense, it is important to emphasize that these are not neglected spaces in which the State lost territorial control and the monopoly of violence nor a "no-man's land"; on the contrary, they are spaces controlled by State security forces and their

criminal allies, where the former abandoned their constitutional commitments and now operate as mercenaries in the service of kleptocratic interests.

It is necessary to complement our findings with exhaustive studies that describe the interaction and evolution of the actors that make up the gangster State in Venezuela. Knowing the dependency relationships between them and the level of state bureaucracy would enrich the analysis and offer ideas that could explain the autocratic resistance of the Bolivarian Revolution. This information would also shine a light on the dimensions of the transformation that eventual democratization will require. Studies on political change from situations similar to Venezuela's today reveal that critical junctures, far from opening doors to democracy, tend to benefit autocratic rebalancing. This "resilience" is associated with the incompatibility between the activities carried out by the actors that sustain the gangster State and liberal democracy.

- *The gangster State in Venezuela has a decentralized dynamic.* The approach to the actors involved in the execution of illegal activities in Venezuela reveals the decentralized and autonomous dynamics of each region. This reality limits the generalization of our findings and becomes an invitation for us to conduct studies on each state, especially those that are part of the electoral corridor. Actors of different political inclinations inside and outside the country have proposed legislative elections in the short term (2020) as an instrument of autocratic liberation for the country. It is possible to achieve democracy progressively, building electoral majorities that become a legitimate political power capable of institutionally defeating the dictatorship. This

option is not addressed on this paper, yet we suggest that political, economic and institutional collapse of the states -or municipalities- with greater electoral weight should be included in the analysis, together with the traditional demands of electoral justice. We must remember that studies on elections in collapse situations reveal that decline favors autocratic forces.

- *Collapse, sense of urgency and liberation.* The complex humanitarian crisis manifests itself unevenly in the national territory. Caracas remains relatively isolated from the decline, while the rest of the country is severely affected by the lack of electricity, water, medicines, and food. This inequality in the distribution of misery partially explains the apparent “tranquility” in the capital, and the crystallized “tension” elsewhere. The sense of urgency towards a political change diminishes in places closer to Miraflores³³. Therefore, we raise two questions regarding the possibility of an autocratic liberation associated with social mobilizations: Is it necessary for the complex humanitarian crisis to reach the capital in order to equalize the sense of urgency amongst the population and to promote mobilizations that contribute to a political change in the country? Are opposition forces able to operate in a situation of chaos in Caracas and articulate social mobilizations that channel the desire for change?

As we advance, our research shows the complexity and particularity of the phenomenon under study. The relevance and

³³ Miraflores is the seat of the Executive Power in Venezuela. It is located in the center of the city of Caracas, bordering on popular sectors. *Insight crime* points out that 18 armed groups make life around it, fulfilling duties in coordination with State Security Forces.

clarity of Hirschfeld's gangster State concept is also confirmed. For those of us who live in Venezuela, the installation of a "rudimentary kleptocratic state" which reuses "security forces beyond the application of a monopoly in activities that concern it" and ensures an economy that produces "resource exhaustion" is evident. It is therefore necessary to overcome intuitive and existential knowledge: information must be systematized in order to reveal what we face in reality. And that is our task.

Conclusions

The second issue of the magazine *Democratización* concludes with these ideas. In this edition, we deepen the objective we set out in the previous one: to determine the autocratic nature of the dictatorship of Nicolás Maduro¹. We understand that knowledge itself leads to action, and scholars' duty goes beyond study, they must intervene². We seek to encourage our practical disposition and that of those who read us. This chapter is divided into two parts: (i) Summary of the findings, and (ii) challenges for democratic liberation.

I.

The articles by Juan Miguel Matheus, Rogelio Pérez Perdomo, Ángel Alvarado and Paola Bautista de Alemán –together with those published on our first issue– delve into essential features that shape the current regime and offer a definition of its autocratic nature. We find that the *dictatorship of Nicolás Maduro is a gangster, failed State, and of Marxist rhetoric*.

The efforts to find a true diagnosis for the political illness we suffer allowed us to identify one of its essential components: *Gradualness*, a concept developed by Juan Miguel Matheus in his

1 Just as was explained in the first issue of this magazine “...Following the contributions of Samuel Huntington, it is understood that there may be a relationship between the autocratic nature of political systems and the possible development of a democratization process. In this sense, typifying the Bolivarian Revolution is an indispensable task to advance in the analysis of the process of political change and evaluate the possible outcomes”. “Introduction”, *Democratización*, (septiembre 2019), 3.

2 Tzvetan Todorov, *La experiencia totalitaria* (Mexico: Galaxia Gutenberg, 2014), 68.

article, “The gradual nature of the dismantling of the rule of law in Venezuela”. The term refers to the progressive development of a destruction logic and the autocratic potential of the Bolivarian Revolution, who seek to preserve –or rather abuse– power, simulating renewed forms of legitimacy.

Matheus identifies five elements that define gradualness: (i) as the principle of action of the Bolivarian Revolution, (ii) as disarticulation of the legitimately established legal and political institutions, (iii) as a logic of destruction by degrees, (iv) as a means to preserve power, and (v) as a simulation of renewed sources of legitimacy.

The installation of a *gangster, failed and Marxist rhetoric State* in Venezuela has brought devastating consequences for the country and the continent. The articles by Rogelio Pérez Perdomo and Ángel Alvarado describe this from two complementary perspectives. The former emphasizes the impact on political and institutional culture. Pérez Perdomo offers clues to reflect on the consequences of the dismantling of the State and the emergence of autocracy. The testimony of those who grew up in democracy and have seen the installation of the dictatorship are interesting and enriching. The essay rescues the cultural foundations that can contribute to the reconstruction of the State and the Law in the country. His contribution is hopeful.

Ángel Alvarado's findings in “Economic structure in Venezuela and its path to democracy” are in tune with the concept of *gradualness* and with the identification of a “black economy”. The article accurately describes the Venezuelan economic system prior to 1999 and tidily synthesizes the destruction of the oil economy, a fact that opened doors to the predominance of illicit dynamics. Deputy Alvarado points out that the complex human-

itarian emergency Venezuela is currently experiencing, far from being a consequence of economic sanctions, is a product of the destruction of the economic system.

Paola Bautista de Alemán continues the line of research from the first issue of *Democratización*. The author makes efforts to identify the features that define the *gangster State* with the purpose of discovering its dynamics and rebalancing tools of the autocracy. Its main contribution is the preparation of a methodology that allows ordering the data and identifying the relationship between actors, illegal activities and territories that serve as input for political analysis.

The relationship she proposes between the decentralized efforts of power and how this condition generates inequality in the structural collapse of the country, affecting the sense of urgency of political change, is interesting. This finding, together with the concept of *gradualness* and the regime's repressive capacity –official and unofficial–, can help understand why the complex humanitarian crisis has not triggered a social commotion to pursue regime change.

II.

We wonder how the traits identified in our investigation affect the process of democratic liberation in our country. When studying the itinerary of the struggle for democracy in Venezuela in the last two decades, we find that all roads have been traveled and all internal and external means have been used. If we recourse to the studies on the fall and survival of regimes, we find that a dictatorship without popular support, with low economic performance and internationally fenced, should tend either to break or to its internal reform, but not towards stability. However, the Bolivar-

ian Revolution has managed to overcome each crisis and emerge even stronger from the junctures.

The publications that our research accumulates can help understand the capacity of autocratic resilience that the dictatorship has in Venezuela. Thus, two concepts must be highlighted: (i) *gangster State*, and (ii) *gradualness*.

The identification of the gangster State, its bureaucratic structure and the normative preference of its members (Marxist rhetoric) can explain the stubbornness of those currently leading the Bolivarian Revolution. We propose, as a hypothesis, that the dictatorship grant historical and existential dimensions to their political project. They cling to power for reasons that transcend economic benefits and cyclical power. We do not mean to downplay their lucrative advantage, which is the product of corruption and illegal operations. Certainly, in the map of actors of the dictatorship, the degrees of commitment to non-material matters may vary. But we must warn that the *strength* that the system has shown so far may be associated with the non-material values (maybe ideological) of the actors and the *resilience capacity* may be related to the complex bureaucracy that they have developed from within the State to channel the sources of illicit enrichment.

On the other hand, *gradualness* enlightens a pattern of action that has allowed the autocracy to firmly advance despite resistance from society. In Venezuela, this dynamic allowed political actors with autocratic potential to advance their projects without igniting national and international democratic alerts. They propagated with a veil of legality that allowed them to hide their regulatory preferences and simulate renewed forms of legality. It was the *long agony* of institutions and individual freedoms. Our

exhaustion has been so long that it is difficult to determine when democracy died and when we woke up in dictatorship.

The elements pointed out by the author can also explain the difficulties faced by academic, intellectual and political environments to understand and timely identify the autocratic nature of the Bolivarian Revolution. We believe that these findings are of special relevance for the international community –especially for Chile, Colombia, Mexico and Spain– where populist and/or rupturist phenomena threaten to come to power with electoral support in order to gradually dismantle the democratic systems that gave them access to decision-making positions.

The concept identified by Juan Miguel Matheus also specifies the dynamics that allow the dictatorship to adjust to adversities and set the means to achieve its ends. It is what we have called *autocratic resilience*. Under these operating schemes, time tends to play in favor of those who have the ability to strengthen themselves in the face of clockwise progress. Autocracies that progress gradually are like the blades of a well-forged sword: they can bend without breaking. Undoubtedly, this quality represents a challenge for the forces that resist it.

Identifying and describing the gangster State and its gradualness impose challenges on democratic forces. Both phenomena feed the resilience of the regime. Our findings seem to indicate that medium or long-term liberation strategies tend to benefit the dictatorship because they could deplete opposition forces and offer opportunities to rebalance the regime. The challenge is, therefore, to find ways of autocratic liberation that limit the

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regime's resilience and protect the democratic forces from fatigue, not sacrifice, which seems inevitable.