

Democratization



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These pages approach authoritarian resilience from an international perspective as a continuation of a prior article¹, now deliberately emphasizing the current state of both influences and resources or mechanisms² that encourage authoritarian resilience as well as those that promote the democratic cause. Henceforth, the expression “democratic cause” designates the demand for the restitution of the rule of law, the full validity of the Constitution and, necessarily, of the guarantees of human rights, and the effective democratic institutionality (which requires but is not limited to holding free and competitive elections), while immediately

1 Elsa Cardozo, “Democratización y resiliencia autoritaria: oportunidades del desafío y riesgos de la permisividad”, *Democratización* 1, N° 3, (Caracas, 2019), 87-115. Text that serves as a conceptual and empirical framework regarding the characterization of the international pro-authoritarian incidence. Some bibliographic references necessary for precisions will be used again in this paper.

2 The analysis of measures will be linked, in its international dimension, to the mechanisms identified by Juan Miguel Matheus in “La resiliencia de la Revolución Chavista”, *Democratización* 1, N° 4, (Caracas, 2019), 66-91.

tending to the humanitarian emergency now aggravated by the immediate impacts of a pandemic of unforeseeable consequences.

This study does not intend to present an exhaustive balance, but rather to outline an analysis that could be useful to understand the two facets of international incidence and the density of their conjunction in Venezuela. Firstly, the current state of international incidence is described, while particularly critical issues that received external attention are identified. Then, the international influence as well as measures taken upon these issues in their different modalities and aspects are examined, in order to contrast and evaluate them. Final thoughts and proposals for action are lastly outlined.

Facets of international advocacy: critical moments and issues

Once the well-known incidence of the international field in the multidimensional Venezuelan crisis, both in its development and in its prospect for continuity or solution³, is acknowledged, it is worth dwelling on some considerations that have made it increasingly complex, in at least two ways. On the one hand, the effect of international actors (international but also transnational, governmental, intergovernmental and non-governmental), whose commitment is -to varying degrees- vague or predominantly pragmatic and potentially changing, must be considered when distinguishing and evaluating influences and measures that favor the prolongation or change of status. On the other hand, the incidence of relations between international actors must also be considered in the distinction of those who support authoritarian

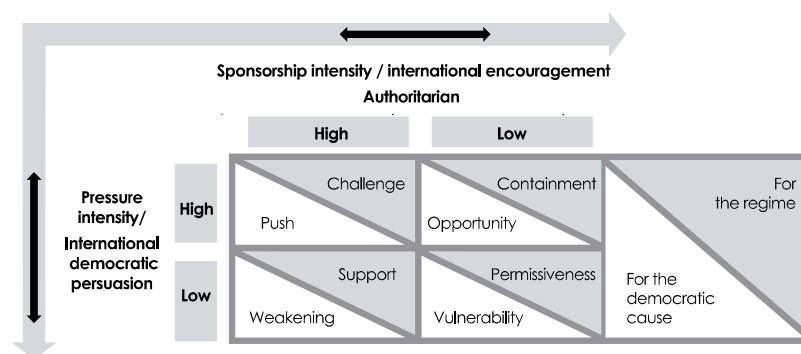
3 Elsa Cardozo & Félix Gerardo Arellano, "El desafío internacional: comprender y cooperar", *Revista de Occidente*, N° 458-459 (July-August, 2019), 13-34.

continuity or democratic reconstruction with different degrees of commitment and pragmatism, manifested by their positions, interests and initiatives when facing national actors, whether it can be attributed to a desire of cooperating or competing among each other –due to their interests in Venezuela and for the their particular geopolitical balances of influence–, thus facilitating or complicating democratization. The latter adds a new layer ties, tensions and negotiations to the balance. Both considerations have become more visibly important and largely critical between the end of 2019 and the first quarter of 2020.

This brings forth Oisín Tansey's⁴ proposed matrix mentioned in the previous article, now emphasizing the intensity of democratizing pressure and persuasion, and including the study of the incidence of pressure and persuasion among international actors interested in Venezuela's evolution. The density added by the quantity and variety of internal and external obstacles to the democratic cause is not denied, and, therefore, resource asymmetry between the regime and the democratic actors is considered. The expanded table introduces these confluences very simply, regarding what high or low intensity of democratic or authoritarian incidence means for both the regime and the democratic cause.

4 Oisín Tansey, *The international politics of authoritarian rule* (Great Britain: Oxford University Press, 2016), 13.

Table 1. Modified Tansey matrix



The relations between the actors whose interests surpass Venezuela incorporate the characteristics of a multi-level game into the national situation⁵: among and within the national democratic actors and those linked to the regime, as well as with international actors that support the democratic cause or encourage authoritarian continuity in a more or less active way and answering to their own interests. Among the latter, as represented by the arrows in the table, there are also interactions in regard to the Venezuelan crisis, with more or less competition or cooperation, within (in black) and between (in gray) the two sets of actors (authoritarian and democrats).

Using as reference this table of links and incidents, the environment during the first quarter of 2020 oscillated between, on the one hand, the quadrant of a challenged, but persistent regime –even amid significant pressure and loss of international

⁵ Diplomacy development in Robert Putnam's classical essay "Diplomacy and Domestic Politics. The Logic of Two-Level Games", in *International Bargaining and Domestic Politics. Double-Edged Diplomacy*, Peter Evans, eds. Harold K. Jacobson & Robert D. Putnam (Berkeley-Los Angeles-London: University of California Press, 1993), 431-470.

margin of economic and political maneuver- and that of an opposition group encouraged by the renewed international support for its leadership, but limited by the persistent repression and institutional manipulations of the regime. The second set of actors, although seriously harassed, re-launched a renewed roadmap with the challenge of recovering democratic national capacities for mobilization and pressure. This has happened amid crises and uncertainties for democracy in regional and global settings⁶, from political changes in the priorities of neighboring governments, economic slowdown and regional social and political protests, to challenges to foreign policies from Europe and the United States and between them.

It is, of course, pertinent to note the urgencies and changes in priorities that those who have supported the regime -through diverse measures and with different motivations- have been confronting, such as the cases of Cuba -specifically because of its almost existential economic and political ties with the Bolivarian revolution- and Russia, China, Turkey or Iran.

Furthermore, the enormous global impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, its effects and consequences, are just beginning to be manifested in all areas, including that of the multidimensional Venezuelan crisis.

6 The *Journal of Democracy* (vol. 31, N°1, January 2020), 30 years after the celebration of the third democratic wave, gathers the characteristics of the challenges faced by democracy in several articles, including an authoritarianisms which are less well disguised and which are more willing to penetrate democratic societies. Among them, the texts of Francis Fukuyama ("30 Years of World Politics: What has Changed", 11-21) and Yascha Mounk ("The End of History Revisited", 22-35) stand out. Available in: <https://www.journalofdemocracy.org/>

During the beginning of 2020, national and international events and actions revealed changes in an environment in which the balance between the democratic and authoritarian incidences, given the setbacks of the national democratizing agenda during 2019, placed the regime between containment and permissiveness. In this context, democratic influences displayed, on the one hand, the continuity of international expressions of support and the willingness to evaluate very significant aspects of the crisis, not only with statements of concern but with reports and initiatives of political and humanitarian support; while, on the other, manifested a very unequal disposition to apply sanctions as well as general difficulties in coordinating actions to become more efficient to and articulated with the national democratic strategy. Meanwhile, the regime did not stop seeking support from related governments and nationally taking decisions to avoid the fracture of its coalition –particularly in the military sector, between surveillance, punishments and perks– under the pressure of sanctions and making arrangements to evade some of them and to procure economic resources through formulas that did not jeopardize their political control. The latter translated into decisions and omissions to lower economic pressure, already very visibly in early 2020, allowing and encouraging a disorderly open market, dollarization (without investments, national production, generation of decent jobs or productivity), the delivery of operations in strategic sectors to companies from allied countries, with the persistence and aggravation of opacity and the great shadow of illegality⁷. The challenges of unstoppable inflation, the unconstrained deterioration of public services and, since March,

7 Asdrúbal Oliveros & Guillermo Arcay , “Impactos de los incentivos de la corrupción. Análisis cuantitativo de las principales actividades económicas ilícitas en Venezuela”, *Transparencia Venezuela* (Informe Corrupción 2018), available in: https://www.coalicionanticorruptcion.com/images/informes/Impactos_de_los_incentivos_de_la_corruptcion.pdf

the fall in oil prices to levels reminiscent of the early 1990s with a collapse in production reminiscent to the 1940s aggravated the already complicated governance scene, managed by the regime with measures of repression and intimidation and with the use of increasingly limited socio-economic resources for political control.

In order to identify changes in the environment and their significance for authoritarian or democratic international advocacy, facts and events will be categorized in five dimensions that are especially significant for the international responses they elicited, as well as for their usefulness to, later on, organize the analysis of international reactions and interactions.

In the **humanitarian dimension**, the continuation and aggravation of the emergency from all angles continued to be the focus of international attention, due to its human significance (including the use of government programs as an instrument of social control), but especially and undoubtedly due to how accumulated and foreseen migratory movement impacts other countries. Faced with this matter, authoritarianisms of various kinds limit to keeping silence or defining it as a matter caused and aggravated by those who nationally and internationally support the democratic cause. The emergency caused by the COVID-19 pandemic emphasized the urgency and complexity of the humanitarian issue amid a global crisis that, as such, has led to the prioritization of resources and attention to the containment of the epidemic, yet without displacing the extreme vulnerability of countries like Venezuela, which is still pondered in different ways by international democratic actors, human rights defenders and those linked to humanitarian assistance, as well as –although

with less initiative– by authoritarian actors and –somewhat more visibly– by critics of the sanctions regime.

The **regional and hemispheric security** issues which are aggravated by the Venezuelan government have continued to be an object of international concern, from those linked to military mobilizations, crime and illegal activities, to those related to environmental degradation⁸. Meanwhile, the authoritarian perspective, both national and international, especially among sanctioned regimes, continues to define the regime as a victim of threats, measures and sanctions that endanger national sovereignty and international law⁹.

The critical **economic situation** –a result of policies, decisions and omissions of the regime– is another very relevant dimension in the configuration of the current environment, both for the theses and measures of the regime in response to sanctions, as well as for the relationships that have been resorted to in order to evade them, particularly those linked to opaque arrangements in which corruption and illegal businesses thrive¹⁰.

The **human rights situation** is a matter of particular relevance that has placed and kept the Venezuelan crisis on the international agenda, which has evidenced the sharp contrast between the

8 Reporte, estudio oro de sangre ICC, Transparencia, Control ciudadano, Ruth Diamint in Agenda Pública

9 Such as the Venezuelan government, which has been presenting the case before the International Criminal Court, the World Trade Organization and the United Nations Human Rights Council of which it has been a part since February 2020.

10 Oliveros & Arcay, “*Impactos de los incentivos de la corrupción. Análisis cuantitativo de las principales actividades económicas ilícitas en Venezuela*”; International Crisis Group, “El peso del oro: violencia en el sur de Venezuela” (February 28, 2019), available in: <https://www.crisisgroup.org>.

positions of democratic and authoritarian governments. In accordance with the latter, the Venezuelan government continues to excuse itself –as autocratic regimes usually do– with allegations of sovereignty and criticism of international interference, disregarding the supranational principles and international treaties that the current Constitution incorporates¹¹. In the midst of the restrictions of rights that the pandemic enforces, this issue becomes critically important, on its own and due to the political, social and economic implications of its early visible overflow, which finds fertile ground in the imbalance between the search for security and the limitation of freedoms that the situation itself encourages, even in contravention of international principles and norms¹².

Finally, but of critical importance, still the **political dimension** –although with renewed momentum– highlights the contrast between international democratic and authoritarian intentions and positions. This part of the agenda includes the recognition of the National Assembly and its President as such and as President-in-Charge, the call for parliamentary and presidential elections and the necessary conditions for them to be free, aside from other critical issues on the political agenda (releasing political prisoners,

org/es/latin-america-caribbean/andes/venezuela/073-gold-and-grief-venezuelas-violent-south

11 This is evidenced, once again, by the criticism and disqualifications of the evaluations presented as updates to previous reports (July, September and December 2019) by High Commissioner Bachelet before the United Nations Human Rights Council between February and March 2020.

12 A recent report by the NGO Human Rights Watch has summarized the norms of international law that govern emergency situations regarding the State's obligations and limitations on the restriction of rights: *Dimensions of COVID-19 Response* (March 19, 2020), available in: https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/03/19/human-rights-dimensions-covid-19-response#_Toc35446577

empowering parties and leaders, respecting the constitutional powers of the National Assembly).

All these issues have become particularly visible in recent events, and have enticed positions and measures that favor continuity or that support democratic recovery to be expressed. For the time being, it is sufficient to anticipate the importance of addressing the asymmetries between one and the other, manifested internationally in the unequal effort of democratic and authoritarian advocacy, as will be analyzed beginning with the following considerations on recent critical events in each of the five dimensions and the international responses they have received.

Critical events, responses and international interactions

The worsening of the humanitarian emergency has not been disguised by the supposed economic normalization based on an informal and unregulated dollarization as well as an openness to imports amid the prevailing opacity and lower but sustained and always high levels of inflation¹³. Between the end of 2019 and the beginning of 2020, important international institutions and global organizations released data that reveals the severity of the situation regarding food, health, access to fundamental services and working conditions¹⁴. It is thus not by chance that in the

13 Venezuela has accumulated 28 months of hyperinflation, since its inception in November 2017, occupying the fourth place among the longest lasting hyperinflation processes registered. Ecoanalítica, “Casi en el podio hiperinflacionario” (February 12, 2020), available in: <https://ecoanalitica.com/graficodelasemana-casi-en-el-podio-hiperinflacionario/>

14 Programa Mundial de Alimentos, Venezuela-Evaluación de seguridad alimentaria: primeros hallazgos (February 23, 2020), available in: <https://reliefweb.int/report/venezuela-bolivarian-republic/wfp-venezuela-evaluaci-n-de-seguridad-alimentaria-principales>; Cáritas Venezuela, *Ma-*

midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, beginning in 2020, Venezuela occupies one of the three places among the American countries least prepared to deal with the emergency¹⁵, with national and international effects and consequences that various analyses have anticipated¹⁶.

The persistence of the crisis is also manifested in the largest flow of forced emigration in regional history, a displacement crisis that continues to be among the most serious in the world¹⁷. The

pas y Boletines de Nuestra Acción (2016-2019), available in: <http://caritasvenezuela.org/mapas-y-boletines-de-nuestra-accion/>; Oficina de Coordinación de la Asistencia Humanitaria de las Naciones Unidas (OCHA), *Venezuela. Informe de situación* (February 17, 2020), available in: <https://reports.unocha.org/es/country/venezuela-bolivarian-republic-of>; Human Rights Watch, *Venezuela. Eventos de 2019* (2020), available in: <https://www.hrw.org/es/world-report/2020/country-chapters/337313>; Amnistía Internacional, *Informe Anual 2019 de Amnistía Internacional: Capítulo Venezuela* (February 26, 2020), available in: <https://www.amnistia.org/ve/noticias/2020/02/13725/informe-anual-2019-de-amnistia-internacional-capitulo-venezuela>; Organización Internacional del Trabajo, *Informe de la Comisión de Encuesta* (September 30, 2019), available in: https://www.derechos.org.ve/web/wp-content/uploads/wcms_722037.pdf

15 Global Health Security Index 2019 (October 2019), available in: <https://www.ghsindex.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/2019-Global-Health-Security-Index.pdf>, p. 307

16 Kathleen Page & Tamara Taraciuk Broner, "Venezuela's Health Care Crisis Now Poses a Global Threat", *Foreign Policy* (March 12, 2020), available in: <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/03/12/venezuela-health-care-crisis-poses-global-threat-coronavirus-maduro-sanctions/>; Latin American Risk Report, "Venezuela and Coronavirus - March 2020. Venezuela already had a crisis. Coronavirus will make it worse" (March 18, 2020), available in: <https://boz.substack.com/p/venezuela-and-coronavirus-march-2020>

17 UN Office for the High Commissioner for Refugees, on the flow and situation of Venezuelans abroad -*Situación en Venezuela*, available in: https://www.acnur.org/situacion-en-venezuela.html?gclid=CjwKCAjwmKLzBRBeEiwACCVihkamUAcrRtRm9o7rQDWHFjk0CCR6KEbNZ4Y8rawROG7FZfgvFQxYSUxoCq9cQAvD_BwE-y sobre el apoyo a

complexity of this challenge is magnified, continually politicized by a regime that, having hindered the free entry of international humanitarian assistance offered, has endeavored to control its distribution –partly including the opacity of business or barter with allied countries or willing partners– to administer it directly within their economic, political and social control schemes. A good illustration of the official distortion of the sense of assistance are the deals denounced in March 2020 that, far from being an institutionalized oil-for-food program, have been a way to evade sanctions and to control the national administration of basic supplies¹⁸. Not meeting the conditions of an institutionalized, independent and transparent program not only summarizes the authoritarian will to politicize assistance and the obstacles that it therefore imposes on many initiatives, but it evidences the level of concern of the regime towards the humanitarian emergency. Since the end of 2019 and throughout the first months of 2020, the allegation that sanctions are the cause behind the humanitarian emergency has become more persistent in the discourse of senior spokesmen of the regime: on international tours, at the UN and with its demands to the ICC and the WTO. The issue of humanitarian assistance, both for emigrants and for Venezuelans in national territory, has not stopped receiving international attention in meetings and forums that promote it, but it has not been sufficient nor does it stop encountering obstacles in its processing, which

actividades en Venezuela, Venezuela (enero 2020), disponible en: https://www.acnur.org/es-es/op/op_fs/5e5ecadb4/acnur-venezuela-hoja-informativa-enero-de-2020.html. La Organización Internacional de Migraciones

18 Mariana Párraga & Ana Isabel Martínez, “Empresa mexicana toma millones barriles crudo venezolano en intercambio petróleo por alimentos”, Reuters (March 5, 2020), available in: <https://lta.reuters.com/articulo/politica-mexico-venezuela-idLTAKBN20T046-OUHLT>

is only partially attributable to the overcompliance of regime sanctions, a regime that expressly does not restrict these flows¹⁹.

Recent reports reiterate the problems of national and international insecurity²⁰ that are multiplied with the loss of the State –even in its military institutionality– and the land gained by illicit and criminal activities²¹ in which transnational links are present, businesses that provide resources to the regime and include opaque transactions of strategic resources with allied governments²², but which also generate international concern

19 It has been explicitly and repeatedly communicated as such in each sanction issued by the European Union and the United states. The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights referenced this issue when she expressed that humanitarian exemptions unrelated to sanctions must be applied widely and effectively, quickly and flexibly authorizing the provision of equipments and medical supplies. Bachelet pide que se atenúen las sanciones para facilitar la lucha contra el COVID-19 (24 de marzo 2020), available in: <https://www.ohchr.org/SP/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25744&LangID=S>

20 Junta Internacional de Fiscalización de Estupefacientes, *Informe 2019* (February 27, 2020), 92, available in: https://www.incb.org/documents/Publications/AnnualReports/AR2019/Annual_Report/Spanish_ebook_AR2019.pdf; Insight Crime, Venezuela Profile and News (sf), available in: <https://www.insightcrime.org/>; Insight Crime, Venezuela: A Mafia State? (2019), available in: <https://www.insightcrime.org/investigations/venezuela-mafia-state/>

21 See Paola Bautista de Alemán's articles in previous issues of the magazine: "Revolución Bolivariana y el desarrollo del Estado gangsteril", *Democratización* 1, N°1 (Caracas, 2019), 65-66; "Tres rasgos del Estado gangsteril en Venezuela", *Democratización* 1, N°2, (Caracas, 2019), 70-102; "Venezuela: perspectivas político electorales para un Estado gansteril, fallido y parcialmente colapsado", *Democratización* 1, N°3 (Caracas, 2019), 61-86.

22 Oliveros & Arcay, "Impactos de los incentivos de la corrupción. Análisis cuantitativo de las principales actividades económicas ilícitas en Venezuela"; International Crisis Group, "El peso del oro: violencia en el sur de Venezuela"; Observatorio Venezolano de violencia, *Informe*

regarding both the spaces and resources that non-demobilized Colombian and guerrilla groups find. This threatens a still very fragile peace process, as well as the conflict, violence between groups (criminals, guerrillas, military) that could possibly escalate as they struggle for the riches of the so-called Mining Arc, a struggle that already has incalculable costs in terms of the environment, health, human life and the uncontrolled flow of resources. These are aspects that concern democracies, due to their institutionality, stability and security, but which seem to matter little to authoritarian partners interested in economic benefits and gains in geopolitical presence or influence.

The economic issue has also been very visible on the international agenda in connection with Venezuela, partly due to the already mentioned opaque and illegal aspects, but also due to the contrast between, on the one hand, the officially intended impression of normality and the disorderly conjunction of measures with which the regime has responded to the accelerated material deterioration –from the chaotic de facto dollarization to the influx of imported goods– and, on the other hand, the high cost of these products, sustained inflation, scarcity of water, continuous power cuts, sustained stagnation of national productive sectors, and the increase in preventable diseases, malnutrition and mortality rates²³. While the argument of the regime and some of its partners is that sanctions are the cause of the Venezuelan ruin and crisis, the sequence of government decisions and policies places the

Anual de Violencia 2019 (December 27, 2019), available in: <https://observatoriodeviolencia.org.ve/news/informe-anual-de-violencia-2019/>

²³ Venezuela is no longer shown in the World Bank or the IMF's data, due to lack of information, although the former states that economic and social conditions in Venezuela continue to be terrible. *Global Economic Prospects. Slow Growth, Policy Challenges* (January, 2020), 96, available in: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/publication/global-economic-prospects>.

origin of the disaster precisely in the imposition at all costs of its own orientation and management controlling resources, without checks and balances, as illustrated by reports on corruption²⁴ and on the sale of gold reserves by the Central Bank²⁵. Meanwhile, democratic governments and international organizations have made proposals for reconstruction and financing plans that justly and necessarily imply a change in the prevailing political orientation.

Between 2019 and 2020, the international human rights claim was especially present, based on the 2019 report and the updates presented by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. Its concise references to the situation in Venezuela in February and March 2020, during the 43rd Session of the Human Rights Council²⁶, were, like those of 2019, criticized and disqualified by the regime. It briefly reported –as these updates usually do– the lack of guarantees and behavior that violates the entire human rights spectrum, now as a result of the permanence

24 Transparencia Venezuela, *Venezuela es el país más corrupto en América y el Caribe según el Índice de Percepción de la Corrupción 2019* (January 23, 2020), available in: <https://transparencia.org.ve/venezuela-es-el-pais-mas-corrupto-en-america-y-el-caribe-segun-el-indice-de-percepcion-de-la-corrupcion-2019/>

25 Corina Pons & Mayela Armas, “Gobierno de Venezuela retira otras seis toneladas de oro del banco central: fuentes” (March 12, 2020), available in: <https://lta.reuters.com/articulo/venezuela-oro-idLTAKBN20Z3JH>

26 Michelle Bachelet, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, *Oral updates and introduction to country reports of the Secretary-General and the High Commissioner (Colombia, Cyprus, Eritrea, Guatemala, Honduras, Iran, Nicaragua, Sri Lanka, Venezuela, Yemen)* (February 27, 2020), available in: <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25624&LangID=E>; Actualización oral sobre la situación de los derechos humanos en la República Bolivariana de Venezuela (March 10, 2020), available in: <https://www.ohchr.org/SP/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25699&LangID=S>.

in Venezuela, since June 2019, of a team designated by the Office of the High Commissioner that Bachelet chairs²⁷. It is also worth noting that the Venezuelan regime achieved its election to the Human Rights Council in late 2019 with 105 votes in the General Assembly, despite the very visible and fresh background of the report of the High Commissioner on July 4²⁸, its update on September 9²⁹ and the Resolution of the Human Rights Council that on September 27³⁰ approved establishing an independent international fact-finding mission. In this area of high international visibility, authoritarianism does not usually have substantive arguments to oppose and, as the Venezuelan regime does, they limit themselves to claiming respect for sovereignty –turning their backs on the supranational nature of the human rights protection regime consecrated in the Venezuelan Constitution– and accusing others, as has been done repeatedly regarding sanctions.

27 It includes attacks and arrests of leaders, protesters and journalists in political acts by security forces, government supporters and alleged members of armed groups; impediment of entry of the deputies to the National Assembly headquarters; raid of a political party headquarters and media offices; threat of legislation to sanction human rights organizations for receiving international financing; harassment of university authorities and restrictions on freedom of association; cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment at the headquarters of the General Directorate of Military Counterintelligence; the cases of need for transplants, treatments and resources for the care of children, the high levels of food insecurity revealed by WFP studies, the volume of migrants and the discourses that can justify or incite xenophobia; the problem of over-compliance with regime sanctions and its effect on the procedures for the arrival of medicines, food and supplies for humanitarian action.

28 Available in: <https://www.ohchr.org/SP/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=24788&LangID=S>

29 Available in: <https://www.ohchr.org/SP/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=24958&LangID=S>

30 Available in: <https://undocs.org/A/HRC/RES/42/25>

In the political aspect, since the beginning of 2020, acts of violence and aggressions when entering the Federal Capitol were also committed, such as on January 5, when it was attempted to prevent the swearing-in of the Board of Directors of the National Assembly. Its effective realization had to take place in another venue, where members showed their unanimous support for the reelection of Juan Guaidó as its president and as President in Charge with 58 international recognitions, and his international tour between January 19 and February 11 that took him to Colombia, four European countries, including his presence at the Davos Forum, Canada and the United States. Meanwhile, between January 15 and 22, Foreign Minister Arreaza visited China and Iran, and between January 21 and 23, Vice President Delcy Rodríguez landed at Madrid's Barajas airport in violation of European Union sanctions, later traveling to Turkey.

Everything described so far contributed to reigniting international interest in the continuation and exacerbation of the crisis in all its dimensions, as well as the significance of the international impact on the Venezuelan situation and the interaction between the most relevant international actors around it. It is worth pausing briefly on the latter, represented by the arrows on Table 1, because as the international significance and spillover of the Venezuelan crisis increases, the importance of the geopolitical dynamics that surrounds it has become more remarkable. This translates, on the one hand, into influences that support the continuity of the regime or that support the democratic cause; on the other, in the placement of the Venezuelan crisis on a larger context in which competition is greater than consensus within and between actors on either side.

Balance, asymmetries and proposals

The whole of what has been characterized up to now, trying to present both what favors the authoritarian permanence and what encourages the democratic cause, can be briefly summarized in a kind of balance of resources or mechanisms that mobilize or play in favor of either party³¹.

The following table summarizes the international resources mobilized by the regime as well as those mobilized for the democratic cause. It is an adaptation, perhaps rather a reinterpretation, of six of the seven mechanisms defined by Juan Miguel Matheus³² as means that favor the regime's resilience, now for a more international-focused analysis and to compare with democratic efforts. Resilience was defined by the author as the ability to recover an initial state once a disturbance has been overcome. In this case, it is meant as a concept closer to that of

31 This analysis outline is based on the literature on "sharp power" resources: Larry Diamond, Mark F. Plattner & Christopher Walker (eds.), *Authoritarianism Goes Global* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016); Larry Diamond, Ill Winds. *Saving Democracy from Russian Rage, Chinese Ambition and American Complacency* (Nueva York: Penguin Press, 2019); Francis Fukuyama, "30 Years of World Politics: What has Changed"; Yascha Mounk, "The End of History Revisited"; as well as in the mechanisms identified specifically for the Venezuelan case by Juan Miguel Matheus, "La resiliencia de la Revolución Chavista", *Democratización* 1, N° 4, (2019), 66-91.

32 Sources and appearance of legitimacy, ideological reconfiguration, gangster state, autocratic solidarity, errors of democratic resistance, regional political instability and inculturation of the autocratic forms of the Chavista revolution. The latter, which was not included in this adaptation –the international and the comparison of the pro-authoritarian and the pro-democratic– would be contained partly in the change and diffusion of the supporting ideas and partly in the way of taking advantage of the changes in the international context.

resistance, that is, it does not imply the restoration of an initial state, but rather it refers to the adaptation of resources (we prefer this term as opposed to “mechanisms”, as it includes capacities, strategies and means).

Table 2. Resources of the authoritarian regime
and the democratic cause

RESOURCES	
Supporting ideas	
Authoritarian regime	Democratic cause
Democratic re-founding in Bolivarian revolution, 21st century socialism and civil-military regime, in an increasingly pragmatic adaptation to its needs for external support and legitimization.	Recovery of the rule of law and democracy based on the full guarantee of human rights and the human, material and institutional recovery of the country.
Sources of legitimization	
Electoral processes of decreasing integrity, without international observation –rather accompanied–, cultivation of support from related regimes and an absolute conception of sovereignty that inspires the distancing and rejection of international principles, practices, procedures and organizations regarding human rights, elections, commercial exchanges, security.	Participation, defense and demand of integrity of electoral processes, with international observation; respect and demand for respect for the institutional framework (since January 2016, of the National Assembly as a legitimately constituted power); cultivation of links with democratic actors and international institutions and forums whose support, scrutiny and processing strengthens the possibilities of democratic recovery.

Statehood	
Authoritarian regime	Democratic cause
Contrast between centralization and control of power, increasingly by force, on the one hand, and, on the other, the willingness to yield or inability to maintain control over spaces where activities are carried out that threaten the security and integrity of people and national and international goods.	In the midst of a situation of great vulnerability in the face of pressure, threat and repression: defense of the recovery of statehood –institutional and material capacity– as a necessity for Venezuelans and to cultivate trustworthy and mutually beneficial relationships with the world.
Basis for solidarity	
<p>The regime: initially ideological and fed with abundant economic facilities, but increasingly pragmatic and linked to burdensome guarantees and strategic business delivery.</p> <p>Their allies: fundamentally pragmatic (quasi-existent for Cuba) but also of geopolitical support in the competition between powers and for strategic resources (as with its significant variations in the cases of Russia and China, Turkey and Iran).</p>	<p>The democrats: of legal-political principles, in the face of the humanitarian emergency with the conviction and promise of democratic stability, willingness and ability to govern and to fulfill legitimately concluded international commitments.</p> <p>Their allies: also of principles, of humanitarian sensitivity, as well as reasons of security and regional and hemispheric stability, especially and notoriously for the US, as well as for the neighbors closest to the overflowing Venezuelan crisis.</p>

Authoritarian resilience and the venezuelan democratic cause:
resources and asymmetries

External mistakes	
Authoritarian regime	Democratic cause
Opposition errors have weighed in favor of the regime in its international projection, be it in specific situations (e.g. 2019 by the call for military support on April 30 against La Carlota air base in Caracas), or of conditions of organizational and strategic inconsistency that the regime itself encourages.	The mistakes of the regime also weigh in favor of the opposition, yet differently, precisely because of the ideas and the nature of the legitimacy that the democratic cause cultivates. E.g., the aforementioned violence against deputies, especially since January 5, 2020, disadvantages the regime, while strengthening the operation of the National Assembly.
Movement efficiency in the international context	
Regionally: faced with the loss of allies and the weakening of forums, taking (at least discursive) advantage of situations of instability. Hemispheric and globally: cultivation and diffusion of ties with Russia, China, Turkey, Iran, and support in the United Nations as a whole (e.g. its election in the Human Rights Council) in a moment of worldwide authoritarian advances.	Regionally: cultivation and diffusion of ties with governments of the Lima Group, due to the expansion of support in the OAS and the non-polarization with Argentina and Mexico. Hemispheric and globally: care for links with the US, Canada (which is part of the Lima Group) and Europe (including the International Contact Group).

This schematic balance could be enriched with a more precise development of what the last row indicates about the incidence of international actors in both causes, but also of the tensions and difficulties regarding initiatives among those who favor the democratic cause. However, this general approach shows

important asymmetries at the different levels of international incidence, now within an epidemic that places the Venezuelan emergency on a scale of greater social, economic and political, as well as geopolitical severity and complexity. Even if it's hard to anticipate how this context will accentuate asymmetries, the initial imbalance seems to favor authoritarian resilience.

Based on Table 2, the balance of support and the sources of legitimation continue to favor the democratic cause internationally, in the sense that conceptually it is difficult to oppose them; but politically they have been assumed, by related actors or pragmatically related to the regime, as matters that only concern internal politics. Something similar occurs with statehood: although conceptually –and practically– it is convenient to recover all those who want to maintain stable relations with Venezuela, it is part of political calculations –as well as economic given illicit opportunities– in which a certain level of certainty is sufficient³³. Moreover, the weight of an exacerbating emergency now hangs over said uncertainty, on a statehood that has failed, nationally and internationally, in which the government seeks to strengthen itself through management of the epidemiological crisis with

³³ Like the one that would have been attempted on January 5, with the obstacles to the swearing-in of the directive of the National Assembly and the fraudulent swearing-in of a directive parallel to that which followed the increase in pressure and blockades of the legitimate National Assembly. That convenience was credibly associated, in various analyzes, with the message from the Russian Finance Minister, Sergey Storchak, who declared that **his country was betting on the political stabilization Nicolás Maduro's government, without Juan Guaidó as an annoying counterpart, to proceed to send more advisers and help Venezuela.** Stepan Kravchenko & Andrey Biryukov, *Russia Awaits Venezuela Power Shuffle Before Sending Advisers* (December 31, 2019), available in: <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-12-31/russia-awaits-venezuela-power-shuffle-before-sending-advisers>

the imposition of emergency and control initiatives mounted on a dilapidated health system, to the point that indispensable international cooperation is hampered.

The bases of solidarity also bear the global impact of growth loss, stagnation or economic decline as well as now that of the pandemic with fearsome effects and incalculable consequences. In this context, the Venezuelan crisis is relocated in the world: in the complex equation of competition between powers for their spaces and areas of influence³⁴ in the midst of an extreme global emergency, and in the national emergency that compromises policies and resources. This does not imply international abandonment of the Venezuelan crisis, but contributes to its international stagnation in terms that, unless they favored a substantive political agreement that would facilitate the democratic transition, tend to favor the regime, which *de facto*, even if limitedly –due to its lack of legitimacy, resources and efficiency–, maintains decision and repression capacities. The claim against sanctions, even though the crisis in the Venezuelan health system and the destruction of the oil industry are clearly prior, is repeatedly presented by the regime searching for solidarity as well as accusing supporters of those measures of treason and inhumanity. Meanwhile, those who have imposed sanctions insist that there are no restrictions on the flow of food, medicine or humanitarian assistance. However, the pressure to lessen these sanctions, even before the epidemic, has not stopped.

As for the margins of error, on the other hand, it is the regime that is most exposed, particularly due to the way of exercising power in the pandemic emergency, in which the violent imposition

34 Graham Allison, "The New Spheres of Influence. Sharing the Globe With Other Great Powers", *Foreign Affairs* (March-April, 2020), 30-40.

of restrictions, the absence and even penalization of specialized spokespersons, as well as the militarization and politicization of initiatives and responses, not only violates human rights³⁵ but also hinders the effectiveness in the containment of infections in a collapsed health system. The biggest mistake of democrats may be inaction or continuing to act as if the pandemic had not noticeably changed the situation: not just in the humanitarian and social sense, but in the political and geopolitical sense.

In relation to the latter, and regarding the efficiency of movements in the international context, at least in its first months, the pandemic has not modified the prevailing environment of competition between powers: not between the US and Europe, nor between them and China and Russia; nor among authoritarian powers, on which there are plenty of examples. Regardless, each one in their field and space tries to ensure their influence, but that can change direction at a time when the imperative to contain contagion encourages isolation and prioritization of national issues. It remains to be seen if the border proximity between Latin American countries compels some frank forms of cooperation –so underdeveloped in the last decade to say the least–, and if the political agenda on the Venezuelan crisis in which the G-3 had been so active in its declarations, proposals and initiatives, finds new encouragement in the OAS in the second term of Secretary General Luis Almagro, won after a campaign that seems to have called for greater prudence and efficiency, with a qualified majority of 23 supports.

Finally, in the midst of the current situation, there is a risk that the asymmetries between the legitimacy of the democratic cause and the illegitimacy of the authoritarian regime, as well as

³⁵ Human Rights Watch, *Venezuela. Eventos de 2019* (2020).

between the limited resources of the former and those arbitrarily arranged by the latter, The Venezuelan crisis approaches the lower right quadrant of Table 1, that is: that the regime achieves a large margin of international permissiveness, while the democratic cause, with little effective external support, remains in a situation of extreme vulnerability. Both reflection on the management of resources and asymmetries on both sides and national and international democratic initiatives should be directed to prevent this.

It is worth concluding with just a few general thoughts on the issues that seem relevant for the analysis and proposals on how to maintain and improve international democratic advocacy, as has been discussed:

1. Internationally strengthen, sustain and defend supporting ideas, sources of legitimacy and bases of solidarity of the democratic cause: in reflection and orientation, declarations and initiatives in the face of the emergency and for the long term.
 - Regarding the pandemic: encourage and facilitate all proposals for international cooperation that, in a transparent and effective way, with supervision and guarantees of compliance, contribute to reducing the weaknesses of the health system and provisions and to protecting its personnel as soon as possible.
 - Regarding the claims on the cost of sanctions: insist on demanding conditions that protect the entry of food, medicine and humanitarian assistance, and the ceasement of overcompliance of practices that hinder the distribution of these basic products.

- Regarding human rights: encourage the scrutiny of non-governmental and international organizations on restrictions of rights during and after the emergency.
2. Keep denouncing regime actions and omissions as well as corrective and alternative proposals that show concern, willingness and building capacities to act nationally and cultivate efficient international articulations.
 3. Continue working, reflecting and advising on the difficulties and resources required in the transition to democracy in the Venezuelan case, in a context of loss of statehood.
 4. Keep encouraging and supporting initiatives in international forums and with democratic allies to work nationally on a renewed roadmap that leads to free elections, contemplating the pressures, supports and mediations necessary for each step to be taken amid national material and institutional destruction.
 5. Cultivate, with clarity of principles and realism, international ties that do not make part of the competences between democratic actors, forums and organizations to the democratic cause.

Conclusions

To conclude the fifth issue of *Democratización* magazine, we offer three general considerations.

Firstly, the appearance of COVID-19 among the national and international political scene will affect Venezuela's path to freedom. In the academic and intellectual field, mechanisms that allow to know its real repercussions and to assess its political impact must be created. Overcoming the propaganda of the regime and recognizing the presence of the virus in the country are pressing challenges. In the political field, we consider it urgent to find actions that respond to Professor Cardozo's warning: "that the regime achieves a large margin of international permissiveness and the democratic cause, with little effective external support, remains in an extremely vulnerable situation". It greatly concerns us that the Chavista autocracy may be leveraged in the "good spirit" of a sector of the international community to settle deeper into power and to increase political repression with impunity.

Secondly, the National Assembly elected on December 6, 2015, emerged as the only independent power that had survived the autocratic expansion of the Chavista revolution. Thus, its outbursts were mainly focused towards it. Since its installation, it has been attacked, harassed and dismembered. Still, it remains an oasis in the middle of the desert we live in. Perhaps, the immediate judgment on its performance may be marked by political frustration. Many of us placed the hope of a peaceful and constitutional political change upon it, but that expectation was not met. Carlos García Soto's article offers a set of reasons that explain this. The author identifies and describes the institutional,

moral, and physical attacks against democracy. His analysis is a starting point, as it is an issue that demands in-depth studying. We trust that time will help to evaluate and let us see, with the peace that freedom offers, all the contributions of the members of the National Assembly for the democratic cause.

Thirdly, the regime of Nicolás Maduro relies on force. It is a fierce dictatorship that, although not military, leverages itself in the Armed Forces to cling to power. Pedro Pablo Peñaloza's article identifies the reasons behind the loyalty of the National Bolivarian Armed Forces: the partisanship of the Armed Forces, the presence of officers on the Executive, the creation of a military business network and excessive corruption. In future investigations, it would perhaps be convenient to delve into the first point and the importance of the ideological component. Regarding the reasons that encourage loyalty, we ask ourselves what is more influential: ideological stubbornness or personal enrichment?