

How was Voluntad Popular formed?

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Voluntad Popular (Popular Will) is a democratic movement that emerged during a dictatorship. Starting with this fact is key because it sets the context for a political party born to rescue democracy in Venezuela.

On December 5th, at the Valencia Forum, *Voluntad Popular* was presented to the country in a large gathering of thousands of activists who reaffirmed their commitment to being a part of a vanguard organization representing democratic values.

Voluntad Popular was born with a fundamental belief in being an organization that practices democracy internally and externally, where popular participation and the selection of its authorities through nationwide open voting are paramount, allowing all Venezuelans to participate in the decisions and actions carried out by VP.

Plurality is the framework for articulation, where a fundamental value is that all rights are for all people, as stated by Leopoldo López, founder, and leader of the organization. This pillar is crucial because, for *Voluntad Popular*, it is a faithful reflection of the vision of a plural society. It is a decisive value, as plurality and democracy reflect a modern framework that sought to involve Venezuelans, with their particular characteristics, in a common space that represents their plurality based on the belief

that democratic and participatory spaces generate a free society that debates ideas.

This debate must be carried out from a social leadership perspective, a pillar of the organization, as *Voluntad Popular* promotes that its members should play a fundamental role in understanding society, interacting with it, creating spaces for encounter, and fostering a connection to the reality of what we are and, above all, what we want to achieve. A member of *Voluntad Popular* is called to be a leader in all spaces, to promote participation, discussion, and debate on how we perceive Venezuela.

Our leader Leopoldo López has always expressed a thought that has become a maxim within the party: “To be a political leader, one must first be a social leader”. It is a reality that goes hand in hand with the concept of political leadership promoted by the party. It is through grassroots participation that a strong foundation is built, capable of generating transformative changes in society.

All these elements define how *Voluntad Popular* believes in a leadership that, as a reflection of society, manages to have the values of plurality and respect for the rights of all Venezuelans as its roots. It may seem obvious, but in a dictatorship, seeking respect for all rights is crucial to carry out a political and social movement that becomes an enemy of the dictatorship by the mere fact of believing and living by such values.

The main element that defines *Voluntad Popular* and its purpose is the rescue of democracy. In a context like the one we are in, where there is repression, human rights violations, and disregard for private property, where people are humiliated, subjected to control, and persecuted, the fight to rescue democracy

becomes fundamental. When the regime acts the way it does, when the references that the dictatorship wants to promote are what they are, and when Venezuelans are subjected to terrible conditions in the country, with millions having to emigrate, fleeing the crisis generated by that perverse system, that is when promoting democracy and its rescue makes the most sense. It is precisely in this context that the fight for democracy must become a fundamental pillar, as it is today for *Voluntad Popular*, in order to build the best Venezuela, a prosperous Venezuela that promotes what we have been speaking about, a plural Venezuela where all rights are for all people and where participation is not a crime but a way to organize society.

In this context, promoting these values is a crime. We are the most persecuted party in the country, with a large part of our leadership in exile, including our National Coordinator and leader Leopoldo López, along with many other prominent figures who have had to leave the country. Many others are detained, and unfortunately, some have been killed for believing in what we believe and, promoting it in a country controlled by those who see anyone who fosters democracy, plurality, and respect as an enemy.

Voluntad Popular envisions a different way of doing politics, free from traditional schemes. Promoting the social aspect as a form of political engagement is necessary to represent the social leadership we believe in. This is reflected in small details in our conduct. We are the only country that elects all its authorities through periodic elections, even in this context of dictatorship that has sought to pulverize political organizations and, above all, the belief in Federalism. This is demonstrated in our highest decision-making bodies, the EFA or *Encuentro Federal de Activistas* (Federal Meeting of Activists) and the ANA or *Asamblea Nacional*

de Activistas (National Assembly of Activists), where activists from across the country participate in the party's decisions. There are clear examples where regional perspectives debate positions alongside the national leadership. This is an example of our belief that shaping the country's vision must be achieved by all regions participating in discussions and decisions.

Another characteristic that sets *Voluntad Popular* apart from the rest is the creation of mechanisms to attend to the millions of Venezuelans who have left the country. With a diaspora already reaching approximately 7 million people, it is difficult to conceive a representative organization that promotes participation without providing these individuals with forms and mechanisms to engage. Nowadays, 2 out of every 10 Venezuelans are not in Venezuela, and the role of any political organization should be to create spaces that bridge and connect rather than separate. That is why *Voluntad Popular* has been creating spaces and mechanisms that allow Venezuelans and leadership abroad to participate and continue supporting the rescue of democracy and the party's activities. We firmly believe that Venezuelans who are abroad, forced to flee by the dictatorship, must be a fundamental part of the fight for democracy.

Many mistakes have been made, and actions and strategies will always be criticized. *Voluntad Popular* has always presented itself as a confrontational party in the face of the dictatorship, which some more moderate voices may label as "radical." In this case, we are convinced that we are facing perverse schemes that cannot be dealt with in half measures. Years of struggle have taught us that the regime advances if it is not pressured, that it leaves no room for democratic spaces if they are not defended, and that our forms of participation are crucial to preventing these abuses from continuing.

The concept of *Voluntad Popular* has been much more than a mere electoral card. Illegalized by the CNE for years, with the dictatorship even handing over the party's name and colors to other authorities through the hijacked judicial power, *Voluntad Popular* remains an organization with a presence inside and outside the country. It has a global leadership that does not normalize this crisis and profoundly believes in political and social participation to mobilize Venezuelans. This historical moment has prompted organizations to aspire to be more than just electoral movements, which is why *Voluntad Popular* has always encouraged all forms of participation and activism, from street protests and organized citizens to international strategies that recognize the democratic fight and shed light on the dictatorship's abuses before the ICC and democratic governments around the world.

An important challenge for *Voluntad Popular* at this moment is to lead the democratic forces in Venezuela. It is not easy to establish strategies for fighting and political paths for generating change without being willing to be the main actors. Perhaps it is due to this characteristic and the commitment to the rescue of democracy that the party's activists hold that *Voluntad Popular* has been subjected to the attacks it has endured.

The rescue of democracy is essential to build a better Venezuela, and we are convinced of that. A change of government is necessary to transform Venezuelan society and overcome this deep crisis we are experiencing.

The question then becomes, “What is a better Venezuela?”

To answer this question, we must start with the fundamental values that our organization represents today, as well as from the

profound crisis our kidnapped democracy is going through and the immense needs of the Venezuelan people.

Thus, oil must be the fundamental pillar of the country's development. In Venezuela, the problem is not PDVSA; the problem lies in the petroleum model managed by the regime, which only allows a few to engage in business and enrich themselves without truly benefiting the country. This primary issue must be addressed so oil, driven by a well-managed state-owned company and institutionally oriented petroleum policies, can truly generate the wealth needed to rebuild the devastated nation.

One of the main proposals developed by Leopoldo López has been the concept of an “energetic Venezuela”. It is an important source of leverage aimed at recovering oil production in the country and making it the cornerstone of economic reactivation and development, which has been denied to the nation due to corruption that currently affects the oil sector at all levels.

But we must also support Venezuelans who are in immense need, those Venezuelans who, due to years of poor governance, lack access to public services, education, and financial instruments to support their entrepreneurial endeavors. The government should be a tool to develop them rather than control them. Today, it is crucial to address the enormous emergency millions of Venezuelans face, as some pretend to sell them the idea that “Venezuela is fixed” and attempt to cover up these problems with salaries that barely cover basic needs, and in many cases, not even that.

Freedom and democracy are essential to creating a pluralistic Venezuela that allows each person to achieve their development,

knowing that their rights do not depend on their political alignment.

Our organization truly believes in grassroots participation and promotes this vision from the state level. Therefore, through our social movements, we envision a better Venezuela where Venezuelans can come together and organize around their concerns, engage politically in the exercise of politics, and generate proposals based on their interests to bring about the necessary changes. We prioritize ensuring that all rights are for all individuals, especially for vulnerable groups, and strive for their advancement, eliminating discrimination, ensuring accessibility, and promoting sustainability.

The comprehensive vision of the country conceives a state where citizens actively participate, where respect allows for pluralism and recognition, and where the development of all groups and individuals that make up the country is part of the economic revival that guarantees a future for those who currently see it outside our borders and stability for those who have dedicated their lives to working for the country.

This party was born to build a better Venezuela. This party believes in each of its activists and in the fact that all Venezuelans are necessary to construct it, achieve political change, and of organizing themselves to rebuild democracy during this process, enabling a Venezuela where all rights are for all individuals, without exclusion or privileges.