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What Is Happening
to All of Us

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and Education

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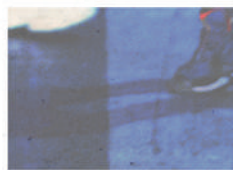
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Verónica Chópite Abraham

What Is Happening to All of Us

“I have a pain here, on the side
of my homeland”

Cristina Peri Rossi

Venezuela is living under a dictatorship. Perhaps saying this in 2026 is not exactly a revelatory statement. We live under a dictatorship, and inflation confirms it; the total amount of external debt tells us that, in addition to living under a dictatorship, Venezuelan society is suffocating under an economic earthquake compounded by the humanitarian and cultural crisis, with the (non)functioning of the healthcare system and the ineffectiveness of the education system. The pieces of that country are obvious evidence that we live under a dictatorship —one that lacks the capacity, whether because of the education of its members, the nature of their ideas, or simply a lack of will, to make the country even remotely functional.

The other pieces of the country are those that cannot be quantified, those that lie beneath the indicators and figures that Chavismo has worked so hard to conceal, even as the social and political sciences have exerted equal effort to name them:

authoritarianism, repression, pax bodegónica,¹ gangster state,² political violence, human rights violations –did I mention dictatorship?

Regardless of what they are called, the common thread running through all these forms of political order is pain, and, as has been seen in the Venezuelan case, it is human, animal, ecological, and spiritual pain. Since at least 2002, taking April 11 of that year as a starting point, Chavismo has developed a capacity for repression by making use of mechanisms embedded within the state as well as other extrastate apparatuses that have been used –initially– to repress those who dissent. But because this proved insufficient to generate social control, that repressive capacity was eventually extended to anyone perceived as opposing the system or anyone who could be useful in sustaining the narrative of the external enemy that has characterized Chavismo since its origin.

If the expansion of education under democracy fostered social mobility and created a robust social fabric, the violence and poverty brought about under Chavismo have likewise spread consistently across all social sectors. This has occurred as most of the institutions of socialization that foster individual and collective development have been hollowed out, both operationally and normatively.

The widespread nature of violence and the crisis by design therefore reveal the Venezuelan state’s willingness to cause harm.

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- 1 Raúl Stolk, Tony Frangie Mawad, “Is the Pax Bodegónica Coming to an End?,” *Caracas Chronicles*, September 1, 2022. <https://www.caracaschronicles.com/2022/09/01/is-the-pax-bodegonica-coming-to-an-end/>
 - 2 Cfr. Paola Bautista de Aleman, “Tres rasgos del Estado gangsteril en Venezuela”, *Revista Democratización*, n. 2, October 2019.

These are not mistakes or excesses. After 27 years, a pattern has become evident that defines the functioning and identity of Chavismo: they exist because they cause harm; they cause harm because they exist.

Pain is not inflicted in the abstract; as a political instrument and means of social control, it constitutes and transforms the lives of its victims. Speaking of a country of victims is not something that naturally empowers them in and of itself. They require coordination and organization in order to be recognized, have their rights restored, and remember their losses. But none of this can happen without acknowledging that this population exists, that they were indeed affected and even erased through the State's actions, omissions, and expediency.

From this perspective, the regeneration of the social fabric must therefore begin with something more fundamental: recovering a *modus vivendi*, that is, the basic elements of coexistence grounded in the revolutionary idea that no one should die for the ideas they defend.

A society organized around pain therefore means not fleeing from it. This may seem counterintuitive, but the widespread presence of victims at different levels and in different manifestations also requires understanding that merely institutional solutions are necessary, but insufficient, to address the diverse forms of suffering that we have experienced as a society during the Chavista dictatorship.

Denialism, revictimization, trivialization, and instrumentalization –which are already beginning to manifest themselves, albeit to a lesser extent, in public discourse– are elements that cannot be comprehensively addressed by policies developed

within the framework of reparation, such as special justice and memory policies.

It is up to us not to flee from pain, but to confront it and learn to live with it in the healthiest way we can, without this entailing a transformation of the political conflict into another form of generating suffering. Otherwise, we will not achieve the cultural transformation of a society that fosters the development of freedoms. To achieve this, we must build ecosystems —that is, interactions based on the recognition of our diverse existences and capacities— that promote cooperation rather than merely negative competition.

That is where the difference with egosystems lies: they are, rather, a set of highly personal and individual interests. This becomes relevant when we consider that one of the main consequences of the spread of fear and pain throughout Venezuelan society has been isolation. As a result, “sites” of pain are formed, all of which is a planned effect systematically carried out against broad sectors of society.

I have nothing more than my intuition and the pattern that has unfolded over 26 years of dictatorship, repression, and persecution to presume that there is no Venezuelan who has not personally suffered some expression of the crisis, and none of these experiences competes with another. Whether physical, economic, or emotional, pain has an equalizing capacity: it does not establish hierarchies. No one experience makes one person more of a victim than another, makes us more “pure,” or makes us better or worse than others affected by the political crisis.

That hierarchy does, however, risk emerging in the pursuit of justice, insofar as existing disparities in victims' communicative, economic, relational, and other capacities may prove decisive in the face of a weak institutional system. This inequality in the ability to demand and enforce rights falls under the definition of privileges, arising from conditions of origin and accumulation, based on the agency capacities with which victims exercised their lives prior to and following the painful event.

In this way, an inversely proportional relationship emerges between privilege and being a victim: the fewer privileges one enjoys, the greater the risk of experiencing further victimization. This inequality can create a gap that hinders reparation processes and can lead to the instrumentalization of pain, insofar as groups of victims with greater privileges will then gain greater access to the restitution provided through these special justice mechanisms.

The management of memory and reparation where this logic prevails also carries the potential for more privileged actors to conceive of their pain as making them deserving of even more significant political, social, and economic spaces —spaces that have nothing to do with the reparation of the violence perpetrated, in the Venezuelan case, by the State. The persistence of that aspiration is nothing other than resentment, and it cannot be settled publicly, nor should these institutional avenues be used to resolve interests that appear to stem more from an egosystemic aspiration.

Pain in Venezuela today is distributed along a normal curve, and those at its extremes —those who have suffered direct repression, on the one hand, and those who do not even acknowledge it, on the other— must also accompany the process of reparation and memory without promoting denialist practices,

nor, conversely, glorifying victims as martyrs, given that this is a culture that validates itself through tragic death.³

At the same time, centering this conversation on reconciliation and forgiveness would itself constitute a form of revictimization, since these belong to another stage of the process. This is all the more important because these two elements are now becoming part of a narrative originating from those in power, as a means of promoting impunity for those who direct the structures of the Venezuelan State, and from which the fact that forgiveness is a deeply personal act is rejected, despite its public implications, which are decisive for the development of a social pact that fosters freedom.

Ultimately, in defense of the victims, it is their decision whether to offer forgiveness, and for that reason, it is also a privilege that no one may demand of them.

3 Marjane Satrapi. *Persepolis Persepolis: The Story of an Iranian Childhood*, Pantheon Books, New York, 2003.

Fernando Vizcaya Carrillo

Democracy, Schools, and Education

“A genuine educating society means more than a society of good schools. Among other things, it means a society with a healthy sense of what is good for the community and with a memory of its own cultural past.”

Educar ciudadanos, Concepción Naval¹

Abstract

What is the relationship between schools and a democratic model for civic life? This may be the purpose of the present work, which seeks to be, essentially, a study in the field of education. We face a series of difficulties in government and in democratic life; hence the question of whether we are democrats or not —not because we deny it, but because of the evident facts. We seek to approach concepts of the citizen and citizenship, and to identify within the curricular structure of our schools possible formal difficulties, whether in the curriculum itself, in the conception underlying the creation

1 Concepción Naval, *Educar Ciudadanos*, EUNSA, Pamplona, España, 1995, 13.

of these institutions, or in the framework of laws that do not lead us toward the development of democracy. In general, at the end of this paper, we venture to offer, very briefly, some recommendations for school structures and teacher training.

Introduction

Initiating research into democracy using indicators from the formal educational process requires a set of basic premises that relate not only to pedagogy as a science, but also to a disposition of the spirit known as justice.

Justice has to do with kindness, tolerance, recognition of merit, proportionality, solidarity, balance, honesty, integrity, responsibility —in short, everything related to respect for and the exercise of human dignity. It is not an option to be considered only by charitable and sensitive people in their efforts to help others, but rather a disposition that should compel every person to recognize the inherent worth of every other human being. In this sense, we are in the realm of ethics and, on the side of the school, in that of moral development as one of the necessary aims of schooling.

Moral development is addressed within formal school settings because it is necessary to cultivate habits of behavior and thought in order to educate the kind of citizenship required by the times. Rubio Carracedo (1999) states this clearly in one of his publications:

We have still not found the formula for reconciling, or at least for avoiding tensions between, ethics and politics without irreparably damaging one or the other. This does not mean that the Enlightenment project has failed, as McIntyre (1981) believes; it is likely that we have not found such a formula

precisely because it does not exist, because such tensions are inevitable and may even be a source of fecundity for both.²

In the following pages, we will attempt to explain the relationship between education and a system of government—democracy—which some authors define as a way of life and which, therefore, requires habits of conduct and customs deeply rooted in citizens, known as citizenship.

The various circumstances to which we have been subjected in the country in recent years prompt us to investigate, from the perspective of the intentional process of transmission, how this form of government is achieved.

Some Definitions, or Why It Seems We Are Not Democrats

It might seem that the definition of a system of government as widespread, at least nominally, as democracy is already well known. Nevertheless, it is not superfluous to examine the basic features of this system in an attempt to improve or refine our understanding of the concept. In this regard, Robert Dahl wrote some interesting observations in one of his publications:

An important cause of the confusion over what democracy means in our present world is that it has developed over several thousand years and stems from a variety of sources. What we understand by democracy is not what an Athenian in the time of Pericles would have understood by it. Greek, Roman, medieval, and Renaissance notions intermingle with those of later centuries to produce a jumble of theory and practices that are often deeply inconsistent.

2 José Rubio Carracedo, *Paradigmas de la política: del estado justo al estado legítimo*: Platón, Marx, Rawls, Nozick, Anthropos, Barcelona, 1999, p. 22.

What is more, a close look at democratic ideas and practices is bound to reveal a considerable number of problems for which no definitive solution seems to exist. The very notion of democracy has always provided a field day for critics. Critics are roughly of three kinds: those fundamentally opposed to democracy because, like Plato, they believe that while it may be possible it is inherently undesirable; those fundamentally opposed to democracy because, like Robert Michels, they believe that, while it might be desirable if it were possible, in actuality it is inherently impossible; and those sympathetic to democracy and wishing to maintain it but nonetheless critical of it in some important regard. The first two might be called adversarial critics, the third sympathetic critics.³

A modern author reflects on the term and offers several interesting criteria worth considering for a detailed analysis. Lalander, R., notes that democracy at this point is not what was originally conceived in Athens, and that it must be viewed or understood in a manner specific to the education of those communities and to the various idiosyncrasies that are experienced or formed within them.⁴

Some authors define democracy as an attempt to establish aristocracy in all citizens —that is, to make them all excellent through virtue. Clearly, democracy vitally requires civic habits, as well as intellectual habits, that will prevent the system from

3 Robert A. Dahl, *La democracia y sus críticos*, Paidós, Barcelona, España, 2002, pp. 10-11.

4 “Modern democracies are not as simple as the political system of Aristototele’s Athens. Political institutions change and the studies of political have proven to be cumulative. Further, the behavior and development of one political system is affected by other political system is seldom isolated”. Richard Lalander, *Suicide of the Elephants? (Venezuelan Decentralization between partyarchy and chavismo)*, Institute of Latin American Studies, Monograph 42, Stockholm University, Finland, 2004. p. 17.

faltering. This is a frequent occurrence, as a contemporary author such as Aníbal Romero writes:

Societies, in other words, do not perish from 'natural causes'; only rarely do they disintegrate as the result of a 'murder' (external aggression). The most frequent cause of deterioration and failure is suicide: the consequence of deficiencies in the leadership's creative capacity. These failures can manifest themselves in two ways: through demagoguery or authoritarianism. Either because leaders, out of weariness and complacency, surrender themselves to the dangerous art of deceiving the majorities, or because, driven by excessive ambition and a lack of humility, they oppress the majority, thereby breaking the bond of loyalty and credibility that sustained the system.⁵

There are, in my view, several causes of this apparent failure of education. The most fundamental is that there is an attempt to teach cognitively something that is not merely theoretical, but rather a practice, a "way of life," as democracy is. Schools, however, have systems that are not precisely democratic and are often quite the opposite. Features of this kind of school range from requiring students to sit physically wherever the teacher "wants," under threat of sanctions, to oppressive schedules designed more for the teacher's convenience, and even to a form of "discipline" that seeks not to cultivate habits in students but simply to ensure peace and quiet for teachers. J. Dewey writes:

One of the most important instruments for producing democratic men is a school system structured for that purpose (...) Therefore, the task of schools is not only to unite the minds of generations, but to form personalities through the organi-

5 Aníbal Romero, *La Miseria del Populismo*, Prólogo, Ediciones Centauro, Caracas, 1994.

zation or method, as well as through the content of the institution.⁶

The various curricula and activity programs produced by the State reflect the thinking of the officials who drafted them at a given time. Notwithstanding whatever shortcomings they may have, a body responsible for oversight and planning is necessary. And this must always be understood in relation to a city that requires order, even though that order may sometimes degenerate into the temptation of command for command's sake —that is, into authoritarianism, potentially progressing as far as totalitarianism. We echo Naval's observation:

The man whose image is revealed in the works of the great Greeks is the political man. Education was not a sum of private arts and organizations aimed at forming a perfect and independent individual. A spirit detached from the State was as impossible as a State detached from the spirit.⁷

Going further into the subject, we realize that since justice is a necessary habit for democratic life, it is not transmitted through the communication of information or knowledge, but rather is the result of an "atmosphere" that one breathes within a community (in this case, the school community). By this same criterion, we perceive that another source of distortion lies in poorly established family customs concerning participation and constructive dialogue. These are cultivated through customs ranging from eating together and cultivating table manners and interpersonal civility to seeking better ways of living together, and these can only be cultivated within the family. It is a fact that

6 Cfr. John Dewey, *Democracia y educación: una introducción a la filosofía de la educación*, Ediciones Morata, 1996.

7 Cfr. Concepción Naval, *Educación Ciudadanos*, EUNSA, Pamplona, España, 1995.

our Venezuelan family reality is certainly a weak point when it comes to achieving democracy.

Other Definitions, the City and the Citizen

The classical concept of the polis is not merely the concept of a physical place —a space— for human coexistence and interaction. The characteristics of our present society, shaped by globalization and digital interconnection, have given human communities unexpected new dimensions. At present, a city is far more complex than anything it might have been in antiquity. Simply by observing the various forms of technology used in the home —information technology— which allows people to communicate across great distances instantaneously and without physically moving through space, conduct economic transactions, and access academic education with no greater inconvenience than having a PC at their disposal, we can conclude that the culture and civilization of our time are entirely different from those of earlier periods.

This necessarily determines the educational condition of individuals and the various plans and programs, as well as people's circumstances with regard to their work and access to the productive sphere, as a consequence of their academic training.

New legal provisions necessarily emerge governing interpersonal relationships that bear no resemblance to the social relations of earlier periods. The technological leap brought about a new conception of life: in the physical sphere, in the movement and transportation of people within cities, and in mass transit, affecting the circumstances of families, education, and modes of economic production. Naval continues by outlining the foundations of this line of thought:

Education and institutions are like the two columns that support the edifice of the city. They have the same end: the

happiness and prosperity of the social body (...) therefore, pedagogy and politics have the same end: the happiness of the city; and they have the same foundation: human psychology.⁸

These changes have been so far-reaching that the original concept of the citizen in past and classical periods is entirely different from what we might call the citizen of our own time. It is worth clarifying the various stages or dimensions that define this element. The inhabitant of the city must possess *certain habits* that constitute citizenship, *certain specific legal dimensions* that determine their identity, and both of these give rise to *political commitments*. Together with the *social requirements*, these would form the basis of what we might call citizenship.

The Structure of Our School and the Structure We Would Like for Democracy

An author wrote years ago that a school is a place where *memory and desires* converge. The idea of education taking place in a setting such as a school entails the community's commitment to achieving a series of elements that shape a citizen, and those elements are subordinated to desires linked to the common good of that community. Ensuring that this common good is truly what is desired, while also being what has been "filtered" through the memory established by past achievements and apparent achievements, is one of the characteristics that is particularly important to that community. For this reason, when the government of a community is constituted, its actions should be guided by the pursuit of virtue in the citizen through the system of laws and formal school education. Otherwise, a properly constituted civil society cannot emerge, and the process of solving and resolving problems becomes arduous, frequently leading to dead ends.

8 Idem.

Touraine observes: *"...what is valid for society is also valid for the individual. The education of the individual must be a discipline that frees him from the narrow, irrational vision imposed upon him by his own passions and his family, and opens him to rational knowledge and participation in a society that organizes reason."*⁹ Rethinking the school structure that has governed us for so many years is an interesting subject.

The search for reasons why a system of government fails to produce what is desired, in terms of the people who participate in it and the fruits yielded by that same system, is usually conducted within the educational system as a mental construct, but less frequently does one consider the structure of the school as a social institution. There is a difference between these two concepts: one is the idea, while the other is life itself in a classroom. This distinction is pertinent because the various levels that make up a school, and those that define an educational system or school project as such, are not always clearly understood.

In the first case, the structure of a school depends greatly on the culture of the community in which it is embedded, or on the motivations that gave rise to it —that is, the ideologies and the reasons that produced the institution. On the other hand, that school has or follows programmatic guidelines and employs means to achieve the objectives it seeks to accomplish through the activities, content, and actions characteristic of the educational environment.

An interesting proposal along these lines is a "school project" that was initiated in several places throughout the country. However, it failed to reflect all the effort of the institutions and individuals involved in the project and, like many things in the

9 Alain Touraine, *Crítica de la Modernidad*, Fondo de Cultura Económico. México, 1994, p. 20..

country, ultimately became identified with the environment of the school or community in which it was implemented. As a result, it lost its distinct identity as a project and became simply another part of the existing system.

Democracy requires a particular kind of teacher, both in terms of academic and cultural education. That is, a teacher who is open to dialogue, capable of listening, free from stereotyped prejudices about people or groups engaged in intellectual production, and who possesses the habit of deliberation and of correcting errors once they have been identified. Such teachers are not being trained by the various schools of education or teacher-training institutions in the country. An additional “plus” is needed in those who train them, one that lies in the realm of culture and the formation of personal character, rather than merely in academic specialization. Training is required in an environment of freedom and spiritual openness, one that develops people’s character more than their erudition, without, of course, neglecting the latter.

Some Means Appropriate to These Ends

We frequently ask ourselves where these undemocratic habits among the people with whom we live in this country come from. If we conceive of democracy as something that is learned, then there must be some problem in the educational processes. This brings us to the heart of the matter concerning the many problems involved in the transmission of knowledge, and there we find our first task: to achieve the agreement that will strengthen our ability to attain the goals we have set. The possibility of consensus within the educational process of a democratic system is central—indeed, vital—to the preservation of the system. We cannot conceive of a nondemocratic educational system for the purpose of educating people with a democratic mentality. It is, unfortunately,

a system that is frequently repressive, one that provides little opportunity for dialogue, does not cultivate deliberation or critical thinking through questioning. Briceño Iragorri writes:

In a democracy that does not respect the higher life of the spirit and does not allow itself to be guided by it, where demagoguery has free rein, national life is rapidly and easily lowered to the level of mediocrity, for demagoguery insists on bringing culture down to the level of the masses instead of raising the masses to a higher plane through education.¹⁰

The transfer of government is not, as we might suppose, simply an activity involving a change of leadership. It should be the consequence of an attitude toward life, toward natural and communal events, arising from a particular kind of education. So, what does a change of government really mean? In reality, it represents the genuine continuity of habits of civic action—diligence, for example—of habits of thought, and of ideals that transcend one's own actions, placing the "dignity of the other" as the guiding principle of civic life.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Since education is a necessary and important undertaking for the individual, and even more so for the person, it is something that belongs to the community before it belongs to any other institution. This activity is above all a process of optimizing the possibilities given to a person by nature, through which they establish a connection with the reality that surrounds them, particularly their social reality.

10 Mario Briceño Iragorri, *La Hora Undécima*. Ediciones de la Presidencia de la Republica, Caracas, 1956, p. 94.

This makes the State, as an entity arising from the social nature of the human person, responsible, first and foremost, for ensuring that education *functions*, and then, perhaps through a process of decentralizing responsibilities to the communities that govern educational institutions, for demanding that it *function well*. This is because, although the State is responsible for creating and maintaining schools, it cannot bear the entire burden —nor is it within its competence— of what constitutes the actual quality and relevance of education. Hannah Arendt expresses this clearly: “It is not the family but the State, that is, the public world, that requires school attendance, and consequently, in relation to the child, the school comes to represent the world, even though it is not, in fact, the world.”¹¹

One of the first recommendations we can make in this regard is to decentralize the educational process and grant the greatest possible decision-making power to the assemblies of parents and guardians at educational institutions throughout the country. This would initially lead to a series of mistakes in the management and administration of the school, but it is through this process that sound leadership can emerge, as we learn —through trial and error— the various procedures involved. In this way, each school can be given the vital impetus it needs, as José A. Marina confirms:

Vital needs impose an adaptation to reality, communication with other beings, and cooperation with them on a practical level. All these things require the configuration, within the subject’s consciousness, of an objective, common, interpersonal, stable space.¹²

11 Hannah Arendt, *Entre el pasado y el futuro, Ocho ejercicios sobre la reflexión política*, Ediciones Península, Barcelona, 1996, p. 200.

12 José Antonio Marina, *Ética para Náufragos*, Ediciones Anagrama, Barcelona, 1998, p. 132.

María José Duarte Bernal

El Bus TV: Face-to-face journalism as an act of resistance.

Living in a country in crisis means making an effort to recognize it in all its nuances and discomforts. When you practice journalism in a territory with more than seven million people who are disconnected, isolated, and focused on survival, the only apparent way to understand them, to leave a record of their pain and scarce joys, is to get closer.

You walk, and sit down in a plaza.

You go out, and get on a bus.

You arrive at a popular market, and stand on a street corner.

Because to pay attention, you have to stop and, in some cases, ask the bus to stop. The Bus TV has done it this way since 2017: young journalists take to the streets to share news that cannot be found through traditional information channels because they have been censored or have disappeared.

In Venezuela, getting informed *the way we used* to is a memory.

Of the printed newspapers that once existed, all that remain are advertising posters that lose their color each day in the newsstands. They are a kind of *souvenir* from a country that experienced freedom of the press and then gradually lost it, until arriving at what it has today: an ecosystem of independent media outlets trying to survive with scarce financial resources, website blockages, persecution, and the criminalization of journalists, as well as the distrust of a wounded society.

For more than 20 years, the habit of staying informed has been something associated with older generations. The practice of turning it into a participatory exercise, a collective discussion, was lost. Perhaps that is why intervening in the daily routine —reading the news on buses— was the only way to begin stimulating something very human and necessary for anyone who aspires to live in a democracy: understanding that they have the right to know what is happening around them.

Innovative. Creative. Necessary. Strategic. Part *guerrilla*, part resistance.

Those are some of the words a reporter from El Bus TV has heard after finishing a newscast or putting up a news poster in a remote town in Venezuela and asking, “What do you think of this initiative?”

It has happened in Apure, the Capital District, Táchira, Trujillo, Mérida, Zulia, Miranda, Bolívar, Amazonas, La Guaira, Lara, and Falcón. It is as if the frame they carry with them, or that sheet of paper covered with news, were reviving a forgotten tradition: keeping up with what is happening in the country.

May 27, 2017. That day marked 10 years since the closure of Radio Caracas Televisión (RCTV), and it was the date on which El Bus TV aired its first newscast on a bus along Avenida Francisco de Miranda in Caracas. While just a few blocks away, protesters were already marking more than three months of mass demonstrations demanding civil rights and a change of government, the newscast recalled an event that had become a landmark, paving the way for an information blackout.

What Laura Helena Castillo, Abril Mejías Romhany, and Claudia Lizardo, the project's co-founders, did not know was that they were also opening the door to a new journalistic experience for dozens of students and young journalists across the country.

The temporary effort to break the pattern of news consumption became a little school of journalism, reminding everyone, day after day, that someone still believes in this profession and can practice it despite the circumstances.

This can even be put to the test. If you ask any reporter what El Bus TV does, they will answer without hesitation: "Hyperlocal, offline, and service journalism."

It is not a magic formula, much less something easy to grasp at first. Even so, it sticks in their minds because it has become the way they connect with the country, even if that country is represented only by a small group of people.

Every week, they take to the streets to confront a country that has been suffocated, almost by necessity, by a cruel system, and in the process they have discovered that a news story can provoke all kinds of reactions. In their audience, they see kindness, honesty, humor, and something that is often lost behind a

computer screen but serves as a gauge of a country that moves every day: the possibility of documenting public opinion.

El Bus TV has been able to confirm that people are indeed willing to exercise a basic, constitutional, and inherently human right: freedom of expression.

There are many examples, both recent and from years past.

In late 2019, I took to the streets for the first time as a reporter for El Bus TV. Our news route was Avenida San Martín, in the west of the capital, known for its proximity to famous “Chavista territories” and to several major public hospitals: Maternidad Concepción Palacios, Hospital Pérez Carreño, and Hospital El Algodonal.

One of the stories we read that afternoon was a summary of a report by armando.info about properties in Caracas purchased by relatives of Cilia Flores, the wife of former president Nicolás Maduro. It generated the most comments. One came from an older woman, who said that in the future, if the government changed, those houses should be sold and the money invested in hospitals.

I remember how nervous I was when we recorded her testimony. The irony is that, at that point, the possibility of a pandemic had not yet crossed anyone’s mind, but Venezuelans were already aware of something: depending on the healthcare system was more of a sentence than an opportunity to heal or survive.

Years later, the number of testimonies of that kind —direct, critical, and destabilizing to some— declined amid growing

fears of persecution, repression, and being accused of treason, especially after July 28, 2024.

Persecution, arbitrary detentions, and charges of incitement to hatred brought against more than 20 journalists. *Operation Tun Tun*, which left more than 3,000 civilians, activists, and community leaders in the country's prisons. Constant surveillance of public spaces. An increase in censorship. The risk involved in showing one's face or sharing an opinion. All of this was enough to make us understand that the context was different from what we had experienced and that this meant finding a *camino verde*,¹ an alternate path, to continue reporting safely.

They began by pausing some forms of reporting: the newscasts on buses. Recorded testimonies were no longer published. Photos began to be edited to protect those who protested or gave statements to reporters. The content remained informational, but it was different.

The reporters began creating news posters to explain other topics: gender-based violence, sexual and reproductive rights, mental health. And more space was made for stories about identity.

There was a collective realization: to preserve more hyper-local memory and to make an effort to disseminate useful news to the communities El Bus TV passes through. That was a *camino verde* for listening to a country that had been forced into silence.

1 "Camino verde" ("green path") is a Venezuelan expression for an unofficial shortcut or alternative way of achieving something, outside the usual or formal route.

Reporting the basics, the things that may seem unimportant, does something essential to journalism: it connects with people.

Before the elections, El Bus TV did just that. It told the story of residents at a nursing home in Mérida who wanted to vote but needed help getting to the polls. It also interviewed a woman in Los Puertos de Altigracia, Zulia, who offered her motorcycle to take people to their polling places. It explained, using news posters, how to register to vote for the first time.

And after that date, forever etched in the mind of every Venezuelan, El Bus TV prioritized providing the basics through a hyperlocal lens: where to get medical tests at low cost; what activities a community cultural center is planning; the schedule for a tournament organized by a local sports group on the neighborhood court; when the gas truck will arrive and how much the gas cylinder will cost; the story of a sanitary pads bank that inspired the creation of the first sanitary pads bank in a community in El Vigía, Mérida.

What came before and after matters. The great task is to make it visible in the communities around us. To accompany the process, even without knowing what will happen, may be the formula.

Perhaps it is because, from the beginning, this model of journalism has been confrontational. It offers people news, and they decide what to do with it. What is never lost is rigor, mobilization through listening, answering questions, and making visible the fact that other possibilities exist for the country. Sometimes that new possibility is simply beginning to feel represented in a news story or discovering a new point of view.

But as with everything in journalism, there are circumstances you neither choose nor can predict. January 3, 2026, and what followed is an example of that.

After Nicolás Maduro and Cilia Flores were taken out of the country, a new reality emerged. The first few days were filled with uncertainty: What should we report? How should we do it? What do people want to know? Can we talk about *what everyone knows*? How do you name what happened?

To find those answers, the compass was always the people, the contact with the streets, because that is where we all began to experience the desire to express ourselves again.

The reporters watched that process escalate. Before opinions, came questions. Then came testimonies about everyday problems: inflation, wages, and basic services. And that was when the door began to open to what could not be named: the release of political prisoners, complaints about the price of gasoline, the opening to the United States, the courage to use certain words, such as freedom, democracy, and human rights.

As a journalist and a reader of El Bus TV's national reports, it was impossible not to say: *something different is happening here*.

No one can say for certain that this will be the bridge to a political transition. Nor can it be called the absolute return of freedom of expression and the end of persecution, since there is still a struggle to lift the blocking of more than 60 independent digital newspapers, the closure of more than 200 media outlets has not been forgotten, and more than one journalist has been detained since then. But it is clear that this is an opportunity to make adjustments and remember what we have lived through with precision, and that means working collectively.

This collaborative effort is traveling on buses and appearing on the walls of regions considered information deserts through El Bus TV, which, in this new phase, is sharing news from independent Venezuelan media outlets. In this process, audiences have gained access to information they cannot find on social media, that remains scarce on radio and television, and that they had assumed no longer existed. The surprise is mutual: those who posted it are surprised by the level of interest, while those who read them, consciously or not, are struck by what they learn and by the reawakening of their right to information. And within that capacity for wonder lies *resistance* as well.

Resistance in its different forms: expressing opinions, paying attention to the facts, expressing emotions, sharing information individually through a community WhatsApp group, mobilizing. In short, the changes that come from knowing about something.

There is a record of this.

In Trujillo, a state that experienced the terror of persecution and arbitrary detentions in the aftermath of the elections, Manuel Medina, a reader and guardian of news posters, finds the courage to share his opinion about the death of a political prisoner in state custody.

In Apure, the residents of Llano Alto, a neighborhood in Guasdalito, say they are dissatisfied with the minimum wage and that union members have the right to protest for their rights, which are also theirs.

In Zulia, a young political leader decides to share that he served as a poll watcher in the elections after reading a news poster about young people's political participation in Venezuela.

Every time a testimony like this emerges, the same question arises: would this have been possible before January 3, 2026?

Each person's answer depends on their circumstances, but for a large part of the population, the answer is obvious and monosyllabic: no.

Since its first broadcast on May 27, 2017, El Bus TV's reporters have repeated the same sign-off: "We'll keep reporting." It is non-negotiable, and it is delivered with the forcefulness and seriousness that face-to-face journalism demands. When you are the one saying it, after a news story that stirs things up, it can send chills down your spine.

Because if resistance is one thing, it is persistence; and resistance, for those who have ridden this news bus, means *continuing to report* despite the obstacles and potholes along the route. In this oil-rich country, there is no shortage of fuel: the people, their questions and curiosities, our own recent history, the profound need to explain ourselves and understand one another.

Juan Miguel Matheus

Educating for Democracy

We are approaching the inauguration of Venezuelan democracy. The possibility is no longer a remote conjecture, but a horizon that is beginning to take shape with greater definition. And that proximity compels us to think more deeply about what is at stake. Venezuela does not merely need a change of rulers, or even a more or less successful institutional readjustment. What is decisive is something else: whether the country is capable of sustaining freedom when it ceases to be a dream and becomes a social reality. Or, in other words, whether we can reverse the damage caused by injustice in the individual soul of each Venezuelan.¹

Democracy is not exhausted by elections or agreements, although both are indispensable. Above all, it is a form of public life sustained by habits, by boundaries of civic concord that citizens have internalized, and by a certain moral discipline that makes it possible to live together without resorting to imposition. Without this foundation, freedom becomes unstable, wears down,

1 Paola Bautista de Alemán, "Reflexiones sobre el daño antropológico en Venezuela," *Red Forma*, accessed May 4, 2026, <https://red-forma.com/articulo/reflexiones-sobre-el-dano-antropologico-en-venezuela-paola-bautista-de-aleman/>

loses its substance, and becomes an illusion that cannot endure over time.

For this reason, the problem before us is not merely political in the strict sense. To a large extent, it is an educational problem. It is a matter of educating citizens capable of living in a democracy, not merely of winning or receiving one; of educating the civic soul of the country in the habit of justice, so that freedom is not an isolated episode in our national history, but an experience that can be carried forward over time and endure. For freedom may arrive as a circumstantial and ephemeral event, but it can only be sustained structurally through civic virtue.

It is therefore worth structuring a broad-strokes reflection on what it means to educate for democracy: first, an examination of conscience as a people, to understand what happened and how it was possible; second, an education in memory, preserving the experience we have lived through as a lesson learned, as a republican cautionary tale; third, an education for the rule of law, as the foundation of life in common; and fourth, education for social justice in freedom, avoiding both domination by the state and indifference on the part of citizens.

Let us consider each of these aspects.

A People's Examination of Conscience

The starting point here is not comfortable, but it is necessary. The autocracy we have endured cannot be explained solely as the emergence of a group that seized power, but also as the result of a civic illness within the Venezuelan people as a

whole.² That undoubtedly happened, but it is not enough. This process encountered conditions that made it possible, and those conditions existed, to some extent, within Venezuelan society—in its understanding of politics, its relationship with power, and its everyday habits.

Over the years, what was essential was gradually eroded. Privilege ceased to be the exception and began to become the rule; abuse ceased to provoke social outrage, and lying became commonplace in public life. The will of autocrats grew accustomed to imposing itself without limits or checks and balances, and this habituation slowly undermined the very idea of legitimate authority.

At the same time, a disproportionate expectation of the state took hold. Everything had to come from there; everything had to be resolved from there. And, paradoxically, while everything was demanded of the state, people stopped demanding limits from it. The instinct for restraint that characterizes a society that knows itself to be free—and understands that power must be restrained in order not to overreach—was gradually lost.

In this context, democracy began to be seen as something given, rather than something that requires care, vigilance, and constant commitment. This was perhaps one of Venezuelans' most serious failings. For when Hugo Chávez came along, he opened the door to a form of power that encountered insufficient resistance in its earliest manifestations.³

2 Cfr. Julio Borges y Paola Bautista de Alemán, *La patria que viene*, Dahbar, Caracas, 2021.

3 Juan Miguel Matheus, "Configuración ideológica de la Revolución Bolivariana," *Red Forma*, accessed May 4, 2026, <https://red-forma.com/articulo/configuracion-ideologica-de-la-revolucion-bolivariana/>

It is true that there were different degrees of responsibility. Not everyone did the same thing, but perhaps all of us —or almost all of us— stopped doing what was required of us. Some promoted injustice. Others justified it. Others remained silent in the face of it. Others adapted to living with it. Others thought none of it would affect them. Others stopped cultivating sound judgment in the spheres for which they were responsible, thereby weakening the capacity of that collective we call the citizenry to respond —a status that entails an active role in the exercise of rights and duties.⁴

This is not, therefore, about indiscriminately assigning blame or subjecting ourselves to pointless self-flagellation. It is about understanding that a country that does not examine its civic conscience leaves itself exposed to repeating what it has already experienced. Degradation does not begin when the courts cease to serve justice or when dissent is persecuted. It begins earlier, at a more subtle point: when the sense of what is just is lost and those premises that should be firm foundations of life in common are treated as relative.

Educating for democracy means confronting this diagnosis without evasion, undertaking an examination of conscience in order to establish civic responsibilities, and building safeguards against the autocratic potential that may reemerge in the future.

Educating Memory

Without memory —an active memory— there can be no defense against renewed autocratic ambitions. A country that forgets leaves itself unprotected against any attempt to repeat the

4 Julio Borges, “Primero Justicia en la transición hacia la democracia,” lecture delivered at the Raíces Seminar organized by Primero Justicia,

past, because experience fades away, and with it disappear the moral criteria that enable us to distinguish right from wrong and resist evil in the civic life of a people.

Venezuela has too much to remember to allow itself the luxury of amnesia about the nearly three decades of Chavismo, Maduroism, and Rodrigato. Political persecution, imprisonment without due process, forced exile, the fragmentation of families, the transformation of institutions into instruments of control, the theft of elections, and the abduction of popular sovereignty—all of this forms part of an experience that cannot be erased without cost, without moral impoverishment, without political weakening, and without squandering the civic antibodies needed to resist injustice.

But memory does not serve a function of revenge. It serves a function of self-knowledge, of realism in confronting the justice and injustices of which we are capable as a people. It draws a boundary that must not be crossed again, and that boundary must be recognized as such by society as a whole, not only by those who suffered it directly.

Memory makes it possible, specifically, to distinguish between power and abuse, between authority and subjugation, between law and arbitrariness. Without these distinctions, politics loses its moral compass and becomes susceptible to repeating its worst forms, even when the names or circumstances change. For this reason, it is necessary to cultivate what the ancient republican tradition called *horror injustitiae*: not as a rhetorical Latinism, but as a genuine political disposition, as an effective rejection of injustice, arbitrariness, and the violation of rights, without

January 27, 2026, in *Cuadernos Roscio: Ideas de Primero Justicia para la transición. Hacia la Venezuela de la justicia*, vol. I, 2026.

self-serving qualifications or calculations of convenience that distort citizens' moral judgment: abuse must find no justification, arbitrariness must not be tolerated, and the violation of rights must not be normalized.

And at this point, it must be recognized that this kind of disposition does not arise spontaneously. It requires education, transmission, narrative, understanding; it even requires free literary expression.⁵ For memory is not merely the accumulation of facts. It is interpretation, continuity, a way of integrating the past into present consciousness in order to guide the future. But it must also include goodness, the good in history, and the experience of resistance, for not everything was submission: there were those who upheld principles, those who accepted the costs, those who did not yield. Without this dimension, memory would cease to be whole. Evil is not of the race, as Cecilio Acosta once said.⁶

Educating for the Law

Democracy presupposes the law. Without law, what exists is something else, something closer to domination than to order.

In this sense, the Venezuelan crisis has been, to a significant extent, a crisis of legality and of the rule of law.⁷ The law ceased to serve as a reference point for life in common and became an

5 Grisel Guerra, "Escribir y leer desde y sobre una dictadura," *Red Forma*, accessed May 4, 2026, <https://red-forma.com/articulo/escribir-y-leer-desde-y-sobre-una-dictadura-grisel-guerra/>

6 Juan Miguel Matheus, "El mal no es de la raza," *La Gran Aldea*, accessed May 11, 2023, <https://lagranaldea.com/2023/05/11/el-mal-no-es-de-la-raza/>

7 Rogelio Pérez Perdomo, "Anomia, Estado y Derecho en Venezuela," *Red Forma*, accessed May 4, 2026, <https://red-forma.com/articulo/anomia-estado-y-derecho-en-venezuela-rogelio-perez-perdomo/>

instrument of power. The Constitution was invoked while being stripped of its substance. Legal forms were used to conceal arbitrary decisions and give the appearance of legality to that which lacked it.⁸

This process, common among twenty-first-century autocracies, does not merely destroy institutions. It disrupts public life as a whole, weakens trust, erodes predictability, and leaves citizens exposed to the power of the powerful. It is man being wolf to man...

Restoring democracy therefore entails reestablishing the law as an effective framework for human relations. Not as an ethically neutral positivist formality, but as a limit on power and a guarantee of rights and freedoms. The law protects citizens from power, establishes procedures through which justice can be achieved, and makes it possible to anticipate conduct in civic life. Without it, public life is left at the mercy of decisions that do not respond to stable criteria, but to the shifting whims of arbitrary exercises of power.

But educating for the law does not mean transmitting rules in the abstract. It means cultivating a disposition: the disposition to recognize authority, to follow rules even when they are unfavorable, and to understand that power is not the property of those who exercise it.

8 Juan Miguel Matheus, "El carácter gradual del desmantelamiento del Estado de Derecho en Venezuela," *Red Forma*, accessed May 4, 2026, <https://red-forma.com/articulo/el-caracter-gradual-del-desmantelamiento-del-estado-de-derecho-en-venezuela-juan-miguel-matheus/>

In the Venezuelan case, there is a clear point of reference: the 1999 Constitution.⁹ It has been violated, but it has not lost its status as a normative framework. It contains the mechanisms for organizing power, guaranteeing rights, and channeling popular sovereignty.

The problem, then, has not been the absence of a constitutional text, but the absence of its practice —its banalization. For this reason, legal education must descend to the everyday level, to the way even the simplest rules are embraced with a deeper sense of purpose, to the willingness to fulfill obligations, and to the consistency between what one demands of others and what one does oneself. This is where a legal culture begins to be rebuilt.

Educating for Social Justice in Freedom

It is worth recalling that in *Caritas in veritate*,¹⁰ Benedict XVI makes clear that social justice cannot be sustained without freedom, but neither can freedom endure without truth and justice. Each without the other degenerates —either into oppression or into arbitrariness. One of the most delicate tensions in any democracy is at stake here. When concern for social issues is separated from freedom, it becomes a mechanism of control; and when freedom becomes detached from social realities, it loses its civic foundation and legitimacy.

9 Juan Miguel Matheus, “De la fuerza a la ley: la Constitución en la transición democrática,” lecture delivered at the Raíces Seminar organized by Primero Justicia, January 27, 2026, in *Cuadernos Roscio: Ideas de Primero Justicia para la transición. Hacia la Venezuela de la justicia*, vol. I (2026).

10 Benedicto XVI, *Caritas in veritate*. Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2009, sec. 6.

The Venezuelan experience has clearly demonstrated the first case: a social discourse used to justify the concentration of power, the creation of dependency, and the neutralization of the autonomy of individuals and families. But democracy requires integrating both dimensions: freedom and social justice.

Educating in this area means reexamining deeply rooted assumptions such as the false dichotomy between the state and capital.¹¹ It means moving beyond the idea that the solution to poverty depends exclusively on the state; recognizing equality before the law; recognizing the dignity of work, education, initiative, and investment, as well as the importance of creating genuine opportunities; and rejecting the use of need as an instrument of control. Assistance has a place as an expression of solidarity, but it cannot become subordination or a mechanism for compelled loyalty. Social justice in freedom requires a demanding balance: avoiding both domination by the state and individualistic indifference on the part of citizens. But that balance cannot be imposed; it must be built. It requires responsibility at different levels—among those who make decisions, those who produce, those who educate, and ordinary citizens. For prosperity —that point of intersection between freedom and social justice— does not arise spontaneously, nor can it be imposed. It is built through an intricate web of rules, efforts, and decisions that must be understood and embraced as such in an effort to shape a people's political culture.

11 Rafael Caldera, "¿Capitalismo de Estado o iniciativa privada?" *RafaelCaldera.com*, July 30, 1959. <https://rafaelcaldera.com/1959-julio-30-capitalismo-de-estado-o-iniciativa-privada/>

Conclusion

Democracy dies in slow motion. That is what happened in Venezuela. It did not begin with the annihilation of institutions, but with the abandonment of civic spaces, with antipolitics, with tolerance of abuse, and with the enthronement of the idea that power can expand without resistance.

That is why the question now is not merely how to restore democracy. That, relatively speaking, is easy. The challenge is not to empty it of its moral substance once we inaugurate it. And that does not depend on a constitutional provision or a more sophisticated institutional design. It depends on something simpler and more difficult: the integral development of the person and the relationship that citizens establish with power and with justice.¹² If that relationship does not change, everything will be temporary, and autocratic regressions and setbacks in matters of justice will be the order of the day, hanging over republican life like a sword of Damocles. If it does change, everything else can begin to endure over time, through civic effort and sacrifice. What comes next for Venezuela is at stake in this —nothing less, and nothing more.

12 Paola Bautista de Alemán, “Estabilización para la democracia: primera fase de la transición,” lecture delivered at the Raíces Seminar organized by Primero Justicia, January 20, 2026, in *Cuadernos Roscio: Ideas de Primero Justicia para la transición. Hacia la Venezuela de la justicia*, vol. I, 2026.

Ayrton Monsalve Barrios

From Regulation to Pluralism: Reflections on Democratic Reform of Venezuela's RESORTE Law

Introduction

The discussion surrounding the future of the Law on Social Responsibility in Radio, Television, and Electronic Media (RESORTE Law) extends far beyond the legal sphere. In the Venezuelan context, debating this legislation means discussing the model of public communication that will accompany a potential democratic reconstruction. After more than two decades marked by the closure of media outlets, the progressive concentration of communications capabilities in the hands of the state, the shrinking space for the independent practice of journalism, and the expansion of large areas of the country where citizens lack regular access to reliable local information, reforming the regulatory framework governing communications emerges as an essential task for any process of institutional transition.

The Venezuelan experience demonstrates that freedom of expression cannot be understood solely as the absence of prior censorship. Freedom of expression also depends on the existence of material, legal, and institutional conditions that enable citizens to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas of all kinds. This is precisely the conception reflected in Article 13 of the

American Convention on Human Rights, which recognizes the right of every person to seek, receive, and impart information without regard to frontiers and through any medium of their choice.¹

From this perspective, the central question should not be merely how to reform the RESORTE Law, but why it should be reformed. My thesis is that future democratic legislation must definitively abandon the logic of content control and replace it with a regulatory model aimed at guaranteeing rights, promoting pluralism, and strengthening access to public information.

From Communication Control to the Protection of Rights

When the RESORTE Law was introduced to the country, its proponents argued that it was intended as a tool to promote the social responsibility of the media and protect legitimate societal interests. However, the subsequent evolution of the legislation and of the institutions responsible for enforcing it revealed a different trajectory. The law gradually acquired characteristics of a system of permanent content oversight, in which the broad scope of certain legal categories created significant room for discretion in administrative action.

The fundamental problem lies not merely in the existence of sanctions or regulatory mechanisms. Every democracy has rules governing the use of the radio-frequency spectrum, ensuring competition, and protecting the rights of third parties. The problem arises when such powers are exercised through ambiguous concepts or political interpretations that make it

1 Organización de los Estados Americanos. *Convención Americana sobre Derechos Humanos, artículo 13*. Artículo 13 - Libertad de Pensamiento y Expresión (Organization of American States).

possible to punish forms of expression legitimately protected under international human rights law.

The Office of the Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights² has repeatedly held that any restriction on freedom of expression must meet strict standards of legality, necessity, and proportionality. Likewise, the Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression reminds us that freedom of expression is an indispensable prerequisite for the very existence of a democratic society.³

The Venezuelan experience forces us to recognize that, for years, many journalists, audiovisual producers, broadcasters, and digital media outlets stopped asking themselves what information was relevant to citizens and began asking what information could lead to administrative or political consequences. When legislation creates permanent incentives for self-censorship, it ceases to serve a democratic function and begins to erode the public debate it should protect.

Concessions as an Instrument of Political Control

There is also a personal dimension that inevitably informs this reflection. Like many Venezuelans of my generation, my interest in public affairs did not begin in a university classroom or in a political organization. It began with observing events

2 Comisión Interamericana de Derechos Humanos. *Relatoría Especial para la Libertad de Expresión*. Relatoría Especial para la Libertad de Expresión (Organization of American States).

3 Comisión Interamericana de Derechos Humanos. (2000). *Declaración de Principios sobre Libertad de Expresión*. OEA. CIDH - Declaración de Principios sobre Libertad de Expresión (Organization of American States).

that shaped the life of the nation when I was just beginning my secondary education. Among them, few had as profound an impact as the taking off the air of Radio Caracas Televisión on May 27, 2007.

Beyond the political positions that, over the years, have sought to reduce that episode to a simple narrative, the RCTV case left an institutional lesson that remains relevant to any debate about the future of communications in Venezuela. For the first time, an entire generation witnessed the state using a formally lawful power –the administration and renewal of radio-frequency spectrum concessions– to make a decision that broad sectors of society perceived as an attempt to punish a critical editorial line. That night, not only did the country’s oldest television channel disappear from free-to-air broadcasting; a question also became firmly established in the public debate, one that remains relevant nearly two decades later: how far should the power of the state extend in deciding who may or may not communicate?

The historical significance of this case lies not only in the fate of a particular media outlet. The Inter-American Court of Human Rights itself subsequently concluded that the non-renewal of the concession constituted an indirect restriction on freedom of expression and warned that frequency allocation and renewal processes must be conducted according to open, independent, and transparent criteria, precisely to prevent regulatory powers from being used as mechanisms of political pressure on the media.

This experience makes it necessary to address an issue that is often sidelined in debates over reforming the RESORTE Law. It is not enough to eliminate provisions that facilitate content censorship. It is also necessary to institutionally constrain

the ability of political authorities to use radio-frequency spectrum concessions as instruments of reward or punishment. A democracy cannot depend on the goodwill of those in power to guarantee pluralism. It must establish legal safeguards that prevent any future administration, regardless of its political orientation, from using the allocation, renewal, or revocation of frequencies to influence the editorial stance of media outlets.

For this reason, any future reform should establish public, competitive, and technically verifiable procedures for the granting and renewal of concessions; objective criteria defined in advance by law; independent appeal mechanisms; public access to all administrative records; and an explicit prohibition against considering factors related to a media outlet's editorial stance, political position, or informational content when deciding whether it may remain on the radio-frequency spectrum. The goal should not be to protect any particular media outlet. The goal should be to prevent the state's regulatory power from ever again being perceived as a tool for shaping the information ecosystem according to the political preferences of those in power.

Access to Public Information as a Guiding Principle

If new legislation genuinely aspires to rebuild Venezuela's communications ecosystem, its central focus should not be content regulation but the effective guarantee of the right to information.

For years, public debate in Venezuela focused on direct censorship, while another equally problematic dimension was often underestimated: state opacity. Citizens cannot engage in democratic deliberation when they lack access to official statistics, public budgets, economic indicators, or information related to government administration.

For this reason, any future reform should explicitly incorporate access to public information as a guiding principle of all communications policy. The state must not only refrain from censorship; it must also actively and transparently produce, preserve, and disclose public information.

From this perspective, future legislation should recognize that freedom of expression and access to information are inseparable rights. There can be no genuine freedom to inform when the state monopolizes the information necessary to understand reality.

Transforming CONATEL into an Independent Authority

Democratic reform of the RESORTE Law also requires a thorough institutional review of the National Telecommunications Commission (CONATEL).

The existence of telecommunications regulatory bodies is common practice in established democracies. What distinguishes democratic regulators from those associated with restrictive systems is their degree of independence from political power.

Accordingly, a democratic transformation of CONATEL should aim to create an independent technical authority, with transparent mechanisms for the appointment of its officials, terms of office protected from partisan interference, public accountability, and effective judicial review of its decisions.

Its mission should focus on the technical administration of the radio-frequency spectrum, the promotion of competition, the expansion of connectivity, and the reduction of gaps in access to telecommunications services. It should not be responsible for determining the political legitimacy of journalistic or editorial content.

Rebuilding Venezuela's Information Ecosystem

One of the least discussed aspects of reforming the RESORTE Law is that Venezuela faces not only a problem of freedoms, but also a problem of information infrastructure and capacity.

In many municipalities, radio stations, newspapers, news bureaus, and local news production outlets have disappeared. Where mechanisms for the circulation of community information once existed, there are now information gaps that are often filled by rumors, mass messaging chains, or unverified information.

Democratic reconstruction requires directly addressing this phenomenon. New legislation should include incentives for the return of regional media outlets, transparent mechanisms for the recovery of concessions, competitive grant programs for independent journalism projects, and programs aimed at strengthening the sustainability of local media.

Reducing information deserts should become a national public policy priority. Democracy cannot take root where sufficient information does not exist for citizens to understand and participate in public affairs.

Independent Producers and Community Media

Particular attention should be paid to the situation of independent national producers and community media outlets.

For years, both sectors were presented as tools for democratizing communication. However, on numerous occasions, they ultimately became subject to administrative or political dynamics that limited their autonomy.

Future legislation should expressly recognize that independent producers are key actors in ensuring informational and cultural diversity. Their relationship with the state should be built on guarantees of independence, not on mechanisms of surveillance.

Likewise, community radio stations should reclaim their original purpose: to serve as media outlets for their communities, rather than as instruments of government communication. A genuine community radio station should be accountable to its community, respond to its information needs, and reflect the diversity of voices present in its surrounding environment.

Reviewing the Law against Hate and the Rabat Plan of Action Standard

Finally, no comprehensive reform of Venezuela's communications system would be complete without a thorough review of the so-called Law against Hate.

From a democratic perspective, I believe the most consistent course would be to repeal it and replace it with legislation compatible with international human rights standards. However, even if the political debate were to lead to partial reform rather than repeal, such reform should expressly incorporate the criteria established by the United Nations Rabat Plan of Action.⁴

This instrument represents one of the most significant efforts to distinguish between forms of expression protected by freedom of expression and forms of incitement to hatred that

4 Naciones Unidas. *Plan de Acción de Rabat sobre la prohibición de la apología del odio nacional, racial o religioso*. ACNUDH - Libertad de expresión y Plan de Acción de Rabat (ohchr.org)

may justify legitimate restrictions.⁵ The so-called Rabat threshold examines six elements: context, the speaker's position, intent, content, reach, and likelihood of harm.

Adopting this standard would significantly reduce judicial and administrative discretion. More importantly, it would prevent ambiguous categories from being used to target critical or dissenting opinions under the pretext of combating hate.⁶

Conclusion

Reforming the RESORTE Law represents an opportunity to redefine the relationship among the state, the media, and citizens in a future democratic Venezuela. For years, a view prevailed according to which communication should be administered by those in political power. The transition requires replacing that logic with one based on rights, pluralism, and transparency.

The central question should no longer be how to better control the circulation of information, but how to ensure that everyone can access it under conditions of freedom and equality. Modern legislation must protect criticism, promote a diversity of voices, strengthen local journalism, guarantee the independence of regulators, and ensure that any restriction on expression complies with strict international standards.

Ultimately, the social responsibility of communications cannot consist in protecting those in power from the public. It must consist in protecting the people's right to be informed.

5 Naciones Unidas. *¿Qué es el discurso de odio?* ONU - Discurso de odio (United Nations).

6 Relatores Especiales de ONU, OEA, OSCE y CADHP. (2011). *Declaración Conjunta sobre Libertad de Expresión e Internet*. Declaración Conjunta sobre Libertad de Expresión e Internet (Organization of American States).

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