

Authoritarianism and poverty in Venezuela: Twenty years after Chavismo

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Abstract

Democracy and development are two objectives highly valued in society. The joint analysis of democracy and development allows a more reasoned and complete understanding of the living conditions of a population. Therefore, the aim of the present research is to analyze authoritarianism and poverty in Venezuela, during the presidential administrations of Chavismo. The article states that during the presidential administrations of Chavismo, authoritarianism, and poverty have increased. Authoritarianism has been the main cause of widespread poverty in Venezuela. And the state of poverty has left citizens more vulnerable to the authoritarian policies of the Chavista regime.

Keywords

Venezuela, authoritarianism, populism, poverty, Chavismo

Introduction

Democracy and development are two objectives highly valued in society. The joint analysis of democracy and development allows a more reasoned and complete understanding of the living conditions of a population. The performance of democracy and development is not necessarily linear; the empirical evidence warns us that a democratic and developed country may have setbacks in one or both spheres. For example, Venezuela went from being a model country, in terms of democracy and development, for Latin America from 1958 to 1978 to a country that is currently going through a humanitarian emergency and which is the protagonist of the largest population displacement in the recent history of the region.

The aim of the present research is to analyze authoritarianism and poverty in Venezuela during the presidential administrations of Chavismo. The hypothesis that guides the research is that during the presidential administrations of Chavismo, authoritarianism and poverty have increased, and have been mutually reinforcing one

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another. The methodology used is historical-analytical, since the inductive tracking of broad contexts and the sequential decomposition of the dense historical narrative allows us to infer the key events and their causal configurations, with a greater explanatory weight.

The research is presented in two parts. The section called *Authoritarianism* analyzes the main mechanisms that Chavismo has used to break democracy and stay in power, with an emphasis on the so-called “legalized authoritarianism”. In the second part, entitled *Poverty*, the decline in material conditions and basic capacities is characterized during the Chavismo administrations, with an emphasis on income poverty and malnutrition during the presidency of Nicolás Maduro.

Authoritarianism

The Venezuelan case shows that there is no suitable consolidation of democracy. A democracy, even of high quality, can slide towards an authoritarian government.

Venezuelan democracy was considered one of the best in Latin America during the period that goes from 1958 to 1978. It had one of the strongest political party systems in the world, highly institutionalized, nationalized, disciplined, and centralized. The political system maintained strong ties of identity with the population in general and with sectors of specific interests. During the first twenty years of democracy, all the presidents alternated in power respecting their constitutional terms. Popular support for the political system was massive and electoral participation remained around 90% of the voter registry (Miranda, 2020a; Miranda, 2017a; Caballero, 2000; Mainwaring and Scully, 1997; Coppedge, 2005).

However, since the beginning of the 1980s, the political management model has become exhausted. The economic elements that once maintained support for the political system, client networks, and public services guaranteed by the government have declined. In addition to these economic problems, political parties have been unable to renew their programmatic agendas and leadership, thus increasing personalism. This has led to a constant deterioration of their legitimacy, misalignment in the political system, increased abstention, and electoral volatility. All of this has occurred in the context of rising poverty, inequality, and unemployment, along with recurrent corruption scandals (Miranda, 2017a; 2019).

This moment can be called the pre-populist moment, and it is followed by the emergence of a populist leadership. Populism emerges when the inability of political parties to articulate demands coincides with public dissatisfaction. The public perception of this inability affects the public agenda of the civil society.

The convergence of all these elements led to the election of an outsider, with an anti-system discourse, whose main credential was being one of the leaders of a failed coup in 1992—Lieutenant Colonel Hugo Chávez. Chávez won the presidential elections on December 6, 1998, in a competitive race and assumed the presidency on February 2, 1999. However, with his administration, the decline of Venezuelan democracy deepened.

Immediately after being elected, the Chávez government convened a Constituent Assembly that extended the presidential term to six years and allowed for immediate reelection, guaranteeing the longest presidential term in Latin America in the event of reelection. The 1999 Constituent Assembly also declared a crisis in the judiciary, leading to the firing of over a hundred judges, dissolution of the Supreme Court, and its

replacement with a new body. When a dissident faction emerged within the now-called Supreme Court of Justice in 2004, the court's membership was expanded in such a way that guaranteed the president's dominance. Furthermore, in 2006, the appointment of the National Electoral Council and, in 2007, the appointment of the Prosecutor's Office were conditioned by political sympathies. The Comptroller's Office also lost its autonomy, favoring Chavismo with administrative disqualifications that excluded opposition candidates with high preferences from elections, without the final conviction of a court, as required by the Constitution. In 2009, indefinite reelection was introduced for the first time in Latin America (Miranda, 2020a; Ramos, 2011; Penfold, Corrales, and Hernández, 2014).

These institutional changes allow the Chávez administration to be analytically divided into two periods, one populist and the other authoritarian. Although the populist and authoritarian elements overlap throughout his administration, authoritarian characters began to prevail since 2009.

Populism is a specific way of competing and exercising political power, it is above all an act of political dominance where the populist leader seeks or exercises the power of the government based on the direct, non-mediated, and non-institutionalized support of a large number of followers, mostly unorganized, bypassing established intermediary organizations. They can even create their organizations but keep them under their tight control. It is also characteristic of populists to attack the political class and other established elites and to reinforce the majority elements of constitutional arrangements (Weyland, 2001; Weyland, 2003). Populism represents the regeneration of participatory ideals but denying the plurality of the social, thus degenerating into autocratic and plebiscitary forms of acclamation to a leader (De la Torre, 2009).

Populism can also be understood as an attempt to empower citizens to build popular and anti-vertical republicanism, seeking emancipation and autonomy for the people. Populism has been especially recurrent in the last couple of decades due to the horizontality of democracy at a global level. This form of populism understands the State as intrinsically anti-popular and therefore seeks a relationship not mediated by it and its institutions. However, not having control of these institutions can lead to a concentration of power that results in an authoritarian system. The democratizing or authoritarian capacity of populism will depend on the strength of counterweights of the previous structures of the State and civil society. Populists with strong controls on their grassroots social movements or prior autonomous state institutions cannot so effectively concentrate power or establish authoritarian regimes. In Latin America, for example, the populist regimes of Ecuador and Bolivia provided a certain political order and social equity, while in Venezuela and Nicaragua, they led to authoritarianism.

Chávez sought to legitimize himself through the elections, while he deteriorated the other democratic elements. The elections became the only legitimizing instrument, and these were not entirely democratic either. Chávez promoted a non-liberal and distorted conception of democracy, politicized inequalities, and mobilized citizens, but relationships were built in a clientelist way and damaged the rule of law, social plurality, and the demands were reduced to a vertical homogenizing discourse.

During Chávez's presidential term, his political party won 15 out of 16 elections, always with advantages of 10 to 20 percentage points. This includes all presidential elections, the vast majority of the country's governors and mayors, and all seats in the country's National Assembly (AN) in the legislative elections of 2005, with the absence

of opposition candidates. The only election he lost was the 2007 consultative referendum that included the possibility of indefinite reelection of the president. However, Chávez insisted until its approval the following year. These elections and referendum had a plebiscitary character, with electoral initiatives arising from the government rather than civil society. They were semi-competitive, with alternative legitimizing objectives to the rest of the democratic institutions (Ramos, 2006; Corrales and Penfold, 2011; Weyland, 2013; Penfold, 2010).

The mechanisms of direct and participatory democracy were also used to increase the power of the executive *vis-à-vis* civil society. The institutional reengineering carried out with the 1999 constitution, which declared a participatory and protagonist democracy, incorporated four types of referendums: approval, consultative, abrogative, and revocation, as well as legislative initiatives, open councils, the revocation of the mandate, and the obligation of deliberative bodies to consult with citizens and their organizations on the formulation of laws. It also allowed the president to propose constitutional reforms and call consultations. However, these reforms were proposed as alternatives rather than as a complement to the institutions of representative democracy, which resulted in the disempowerment of civil society due to the imbalance of power between it and the executive (López Maya, 2014; Lissidini, 2014; Ramos, 2011).

Another populist tool was the creation by law of Communal Councils in 2006. These councils sought citizen participation but were dependent on the decisions and resources of a re-centralized government. The representatives elected by suffrage were replaced by the figure of spokespersons. The bodies are not elected but constituted in popular assemblies, which create an environment of polarization and coercion that has served as a mechanism for the exclusion of minorities and even the political segregation of local majorities. Recurrent incidents include forceful eviction from meetings and impediment of access to designated meeting places. In addition, Communal Councils and other organs of popular power, such as Communes, must be recognized by the Executive to legitimize their actions, which limits the recognition of councils not sympathetic to the government. The Communal Councils have been characterized by their use directed from above and instrumentalized for the president's political project. This network of Community Councils has also functioned as a vast clientelist network, where the government grants resources through a direct relationship with the president, and in reciprocity, the latter demands political loyalty (López Maya, 2014; Álvarez, 2008).

Finally, the direct communication strategy with citizens was completed with the consolidation of the communication monopoly. The Chávez government created hundreds of new communication media, such as community radio stations, while it did not renew the concession of independent channels such as RCTV in 2007. It also maintained permanent harassment of the media, forcing them to self-censor.

Thus, Chávez consolidated a populist regime, damaging the fundamental elements of democracy such as political parties, the rule of law, autonomous civil society, and the independent media.

Populist elements continued during the Chavista administration, but since 2009, authoritarian elements have stood out. The legalization of indefinite reelection ended one of the few elements of accountability that the regime maintained: time. The time limit is a significant mechanism against omnipotence and the abuse of power (Miranda, 2017b).

Authoritarianism is a non-responsible political system with limited political pluralism, lacking intense or extensive mobility, where the leader or the board of leaders, exercise

power within ill-defined formal limits (Linz, 2009). Contemporaneously, the generality of political systems are hybrids, they combine democratic and non-democratic features in different degrees, for which a set of adjectives have emerged to define these phenomena. One of the most used categories, even for the Venezuelan case, is that of competitive authoritarianism.

Competitive authoritarianism is distinguished by being a type of hybrid, undemocratic, and civil regime where formal democratic institutions are the mechanisms to achieve government, but holders of state power abuse their position to gain significant competitive advantages. Although elections in these regimes do not present massive fraud, neither are they entirely free or fair, and main candidates are regularly formally prohibited or effectively excluded. Informal institutions are the most significant since they dictate the political dynamics, and fraud results in practically no correspondence between the preferences of the voters and the official electoral results (Levitsky and Way, 2005; Levitsky and Way, 2010).

However, in other cases, such as the Venezuelan one during the final years of Chávez's presidency and under Maduro's regime, the main effort of authoritarianism has been focused on weakening, and especially co-opting, the liberal dimension of democracy: the rule of law. For this reason, the concept of legalized authoritarianism is more pertinent.

Legalized authoritarianism is a non-democratic hybrid regime characterized by manipulating institutions and laws to maintain and concentrate power. It restricts the autonomy of electoral authorities, and the rule of law does not limit the power of the presidency but rather is its main articulator. Legalized authoritarianism is distinguished from authoritarianism because, in the former, maintaining democratic formality and legitimacy is essential, and democratic competitiveness and the rule of law are allowed, at least until they pose a threat to the power of the president. In legalized authoritarianism, laws are an instrument to transform abuses and excesses into legally justified forms and actions, and the State is the legal expression of authoritarian hegemony. Laws are generally unconsulted since the regime maintains control of the legislative power, and the judiciary, also dominated by the executive, guarantees their application and interpretation. The constitutional separation of powers is only a facade as they are articulated and subordinate to executive power (Miranda, 2020a).

Since 2013, with the presidency of Nicolás Maduro, authoritarianism has become more pronounced both within the framework of the laws and beyond. On April 14, 2017, presidential elections were held, resulting in a narrow victory for Nicolás Maduro, who had been chosen by Chávez as his successor shortly before his death. However, these elections were widely questioned by both national actors and the international community. Lacking the economic and political resources of his predecessor, Maduro has clung to power through increased manipulation of elections, authoritarian practices, and acts of violence.

The main conflict dates back to 2015 when the opposition won a majority in the parliamentary elections. This National Assembly found President Maduro responsible for breaking the constitutional and democratic order, for violating human rights, and provoking a humanitarian crisis. In response to this, Maduro pointed out that the National Assembly had been dissolved and in January 2016 the Supreme Court of Justice, dominated by Maduro, declared the National Assembly null and void. These conflicts of powers generated a significant number of protests, to which the government responded with lethal force, leaving more than twenty dead and numerous political prisoners.

On May 1, 2017, Maduro decreed the establishment of a National Constituent Assembly, a move that was promptly deemed unconstitutional by the National Assembly and was electorally boycotted by the opposition. Nevertheless, Maduro persisted with the call, resulting in a participation rate that remained unclear due to the lack of transparency in the vote count.

Additionally, when the opposition won elections for governors and mayors in 2017, they overlapped and displaced their powers with the Communal Councils. The Communal Councils were unelected bodies of Popular Power created to compete with the elected authorities and not to supplement them. They were not the expression of the autonomous civil society, but were created and financed by the presidency, instead. In addition to the weak federalism of the State, the presidency assumed greater administrative responsibilities in regional spaces where Chavismo lost elections (Brewer, 2011; Álvarez, 2008).

In this context, presidential elections were held in May 2018, where Maduro was reelected. However, these elections were widely regarded as blatantly unfair and illegitimate. The elections were called by the National Constituent Assembly, a body created by Maduro, which led to the imprisonment of several opposition leaders and the exclusion of opposition forces. As a result, the civil and political rights of the general population were systematically violated.

Based on these circumstances, Juan Guaidó, the president of the National Assembly, declared himself the interim president of the country. Throughout this presidential crisis, the interim president has faced significant challenges, rendering him almost completely unable to exercise any form of effective governance. Additionally, regional and international tensions have arisen regarding whether to support or repudiate the current government.

Venezuelan authoritarianism meant the end of democratic consensus in Latin America, not only because of the breakdown of one of the most resilient democratic systems in the region but also because of its impact at the Hemispheric level with its efforts to promote its political model diplomatically and financially. Its main instrument has been the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA), which supports non-democratic countries and maintains anti-democratic rhetoric and actions (Miranda, 2016). For example, in Nicaragua, a diffusion effect of authoritarianism is seen, where the presidencies of Chávez and Maduro granted economic and diplomatic support to Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega (Miranda, 2020a).

Globally, the Maduro regime has garnered support from undemocratic middle powers. For instance, under the presidency of Vladimir Putin, Russia has aimed to reclaim its world preponderance and respond to what it perceives as interference by the United States in its natural sphere of influence. Consequently, Russia's preferential support for Venezuela aligns with its geopolitical strategy.

Similarly, Turkey, led by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, is seeking greater global projection. Thus, its presence in the region serves as a crucial instrument in its pursuit of attaining the status of a global power.

Lastly, Iran, under the leadership of Hasan Rohani, aims to evade international sanctions and consolidate political allies. As a result, Iran has opted to support Maduro to further its objectives (Miranda, 2020b).

Thus, during the twenty years of *Chavismo* in office, the Venezuelan government has become more authoritarian. In recent years, the Maduro government has remained in

power due to the violence of the Armed Forces and security agencies, due to fraudulent elections, and due to the diplomatic and economic support of some non-democratic intermediate powers.

Poverty

The twenty years of Chavismo not only broke the democratic order in Venezuela but have also deteriorated the economic sphere of the country. Venezuela went from being one of the most economically successful countries in Latin America to one of the poorest.

Since the advent of democracy, during the presidential terms of Rómulo Betancourt (1959-64) and Raúl Leoni (1964-69), Venezuela witnessed the implementation of unprecedented educational policies, setting a remarkable precedent within a short period not only in the country but also across all of Latin America. Among these policies, University Autonomy emerged as a significant highlight, along with the promotion of Universities and Institutes. The government also exhibited an exponential increase in prioritizing investment in education and its infrastructure, leading to a surge in the number of primary, secondary, and university students. Additionally, a significant shift occurred in the tradition of allocating a larger budget to education than to the military. As a result of these transformative policies, both health and schooling levels reached the highest standards in the region (Salcedo-Bastardo, 2006; Caballero, 2000).

Venezuela was widely regarded as the most successful economy in Latin America during the period from 1920 to 1960, holding the distinction of having the highest economic growth until the 1980s (Bértola and Ocampo, 2014). Particularly noteworthy was the significant advancement in industrialization from 1950 to 1978, with the manufacturing sector experiencing an annual average growth rate of 7.9%. This growth propelled Venezuela from last place to the forefront concerning industrial production among medium-sized Latin American countries such as Colombia, Chile, and Peru (Bitar and Troncoso, 1982).

In the agricultural sector, Venezuela experienced remarkable progress as well. Between 1950 and 1970, the production of plant-based products doubled, while that of animal-based products more than tripled. Notably, the 1960s witnessed some of the world's highest agricultural growth, boasting an impressive rate of 5.8% per year. The 1970s saw further diversification and expansion in production items, territorial occupation, and production systems within the agricultural sector (Gutiérrez, 2010).

In the 1970s, Venezuela embarked on the Second Phase of Import Substitution Industrialization (ISI), a crucial economic strategy. Additionally, in 1975, the government established *Petróleos de Venezuela (PDVSA)* and took the significant step of nationalizing the oil industry. Remarkably, this nationalization respected the industry's administrative autonomy, enabling it to achieve levels of efficiency necessary to compete on the international stage successfully.

Furthermore, in 1974, the government also carried out the nationalization of iron, and the steel company experienced significant expansion through the incorporation of new production lines. Alongside these developments, several instrumental entities were created to further drive economic progress, including the Venezuelan Investment Fund, Agricultural Credit Fund, Industrial Credit Fund, Small and Medium Industry Development Corporation, and Urban Development Fund (Miranda, 2017c). These measures played crucial roles in shaping Venezuela's economic landscape during that period.

However, starting in the 1980s, this economic momentum came to a sudden halt, primarily due to the sharp decline in international oil prices and the low levels of productivity within the overall economy. In 1978, there was a significant drop in international oil prices, and although there was a slight increase in prices and demand in 1979, the market quickly stabilized. Concurrently, oil production continued to decline, and the non-oil GDP experienced an average annual decrease of 0.8% during the period from 1979 to 1983.

By 1980, the manufacturing export coefficient had reached its lowest point, and the import coefficient had risen to its highest level among all large and medium-sized countries in Latin America. These developments occurred in the context of regional changes in industrial policy and profound processes of trade and financial liberalization (Miranda, 2017c).

Nonetheless, the most significant downturn in the Venezuelan economy transpired during the Chavismo era.

The political process plays a crucial role in determining the nature of economic institutions, while the political institutions themselves influence the functioning of this process (Acemoglu and Robinson, 2012). Political institutions encompass various factors, such as the quality of democracy, written constitutions, the state's regulatory capacity, and the distribution of power. When power is concentrated and unchecked, leading to absolutist political institutions, those in authority can shape economic institutions to serve their self-interests, further enriching themselves at the expense of society.

In contrast, inclusive political institutions ensure a broader distribution of power throughout society, limiting its concentration in the hands of a select few. In such systems, political power is shared among a diverse coalition or plurality of groups. As a result, countries with inclusive political institutions tend to foster economic prosperity by providing incentives for people to save, invest, and innovate.

On the other hand, countries that fail to develop often possess extractive economic institutions, stemming from extractive political institutions. These extractive economic institutions do not create the necessary conditions for sustained economic growth, as they prioritize the interests of a privileged few who benefit from extraction.

In summary, the relationship between political institutions and economic institutions is vital in shaping the trajectory of a nation's development (Acemoglu and Robinson, 2012).

This analysis holds particular significance in the context of Venezuela, given its status as a rentier State and economy, which reinforces the incentives to establish rentier political and economic institutions. The abundance of oil not only impacts the economy but also shapes the institutional framework of the State itself. The substantial income derived from natural resources empowers the ruling elite *vis-à-vis* other state actors. Unlike in most countries where governments function as tax collectors and income redistributors, in Venezuela, the government acts as an allocator of economic benefits and favors. Consequently, the need for government legitimization is reduced since support can be secured through selective financial assistance (Gonzales and Miranda, 2019).

Populism and authoritarianism may achieve certain economic objectives such as economic growth or poverty reduction, but both approaches have inherent limitations. Populism is characterized by its short-term and deinstitutionalized policies, which often result in a clientelist approach to public policy and increased corruption. Consequently, even if populism initially aims to reduce poverty and succeeds to some extent, these policies lack the sustainability, continuity, and efficiency required to empower people with

essential skills to secure employment. Ultimately, sustained poverty and vulnerability reduction depend on fostering opportunities that enable individuals to find stable jobs, which populism often fails to achieve.

On the other hand, authoritarianism is primarily concerned with maintaining power, making social legitimacy less of a priority. Although authoritarian regimes may occasionally pursue objectives like poverty reduction, they face inherent challenges. One significant difficulty is their tendency to overlook or disregard social demands, which should serve as the foundation for planning effective social and economic policies.

In conclusion, while both populism and authoritarianism may achieve short-term economic goals, their respective weaknesses in terms of sustainability, responsiveness to social demands and long-term planning make them insufficient for achieving lasting social and economic progress.

Since the beginning of Chávez's presidency, short-term tax revenues were prioritized, resulting in a sacrifice of investment and, consequently, the present and future production capacity. This damaging approach significantly harmed the productive capacity of the entire economic system, ultimately leading to widespread poverty.

Official statistics on poverty in Venezuela are not available, as the government has refused to publish key indicators. As a result, the most credible source for poverty data is the National Survey on Living Conditions (ENCONVI), conducted by the Andrés Bello Catholic University (UCAB), the Central University of Venezuela (UCV), and the Simón Bolívar University (USB).

Regarding income poverty, it is important to note that in 1998, the year when Chávez's presidency commenced, 26.3% of the population lived in poverty, with 18.7% in extreme poverty. By 2014, after Chávez's administrations and a short period into Maduro's presidency, poverty had slightly decreased to 24.8% of the population, while extreme poverty increased to 23.6% (UCAB, UCV, and USB, 2015).

However, from the first year of Maduro's presidency, the economic deterioration escalated. For instance, from 2014 to 2015, structural poverty rose from 21.3% to 29.1%, Recent Poverty increased from 33.1% to 47.1%, and Chronic Poverty surged from 16.1% to 24.3% (UCAB, UCV, and USB, 2018).

By 2016, in the context of hyperinflation, poverty reached 30%, with extreme poverty hitting 51.51%. General poverty soared to 81.8%, including 31.9% experiencing chronic poverty (UCAB, UCV, and USB, 2016). Finally, by 2018, general poverty encompassed 91% of the population, and extreme poverty had tripled, accompanied by a deterioration in living conditions, access to drinking water, and electricity services (UCAB, UCV, and USB, 2018).

In 2016, amidst hyperinflation, poverty levels in Venezuela rose to 30%, with extreme poverty reaching a staggering 51.51%. Consequently, the overall poverty rate surged to 81.8%, including 31.9% facing chronic poverty (UCAB, UCV, and USB, 2016). By 2018, the situation worsened significantly, with general poverty impacting 91% of the population, and extreme poverty tripled, accompanied by a decline in living conditions, access to drinking water, and electricity (UCAB, UCV, and USB, 2018).

Poverty, however, extends beyond merely lacking financial resources; it fundamentally involves the deprivation of fundamental freedoms and capabilities. These basic capabilities are essential elements necessary for a person to lead a long, healthy, dignified, and creative life (Sen, 2003). The approach to capabilities is substantive, providing insight

into the lives that individuals truly lead. Health and education are vital aspects of these capabilities, essential for a truly human, biographical life (Nussbaum, 2006).

The Venezuelan health system is on the brink of collapse, evidenced by severe shortages of medicines, vaccines, and basic supplies for disease prevention and treatment. Nutrition, being a critical element for overall health and freedoms, is particularly concerning and deserves closer analysis.

In the years leading up to 2016, food insecurity became a significant issue in Venezuela. The inability to afford three meals a day affected 11.3% of households in 2014, while in 2015, 87% of households reported that their income was insufficient to buy enough food (UCAB, UCV, and USB, 2014; UCAB, UCV, and USB, 2015). By 2016, the situation worsened further, with high inflation rates, food and medicine shortages, and changes in eating patterns to adapt to limited resources. An alarming 93.3% of surveyed households reported inadequate income, and 48.7% stated their diet was monotonous and deficient. The impact was evident in body weight loss, with an average reduction of 9 kg for individuals in extreme poverty (UCAB, UCV, and USB, 2016).

In 2018, food prices continued to rise, leading to a further decrease in the quantity and quality of food consumed, and the food infrastructure collapsed. An alarming 70.1% of households reported that their diet was not healthy or balanced, 79.8% stated they had to reduce food servings, 78.6% mentioned eating less due to scarcity, and 61.2% experienced going to bed hungry. The severity of food insecurity was also evident, with 34% of households being slightly food insecure, 31% moderately food insecure, and 23% severely food insecure. The average weight loss for the population in extreme poverty reached 11.4 kg. Furthermore, deaths increased in the first year of life, and life expectancy decreased by 3.5 years (UCAB, UCV, and USB, 2018).

The cumulative impact of these economic challenges and deteriorating living conditions has had a devastating effect on the well-being and basic capabilities of the Venezuelan population, illustrating the profound crisis faced by the country.

Hence, it is evident that malnutrition has systematically increased during Maduro's presidential administration. When the nutritional component is compromised, it adversely affects other fundamental freedoms, particularly in terms of health and education.

In the field of education, alarming statistics were recorded in 2014, with only 63% of the population between 3 and 5 years of age attending school. Additionally, 21.4% of young people dropped out of school before the age of 15, while 56.2% of those between 15 and 19 years old were not attending school. This trend continued, with general school attendance declining from 78% in 2014 to 70% in 2017. The main reasons for school dropouts during this period included lack of access to water, electrical failures, teacher strikes, transportation problems, poor nutrition, and disease (UCAB, UCV, and USB, 2018; UCAB, UCV, and USB, 2017).

The cumulative impact of these challenges has led to a dire humanitarian crisis, with infants, women, and the elderly being particularly vulnerable. This crisis is the result of a combination of poor governance, encompassing both authoritarianism and the inefficiency and corruption within the bureaucracy. The government's authoritarian approach has made it insensitive to the demands of its citizens, while bureaucratic inefficiency and corruption have hindered and diverted the limited social and economic policies that have been implemented.

In summary, the situation in Venezuela is dire, with malnutrition, educational setbacks, and a humanitarian crisis further exacerbating the challenges faced by the population. It is

crucial to address these issues and work towards more inclusive, responsive, and effective governance to alleviate the suffering of the Venezuelan people.

Conclusions

During the presidential administrations of *Chavismo*, authoritarianism and poverty have increased. Authoritarianism has been the main cause of widespread poverty in Venezuela. And the poverty has left citizens more vulnerable to the authoritarian policies of the *Chavista* regime.

The analysis of the Venezuelan case shows that a stable and high-quality democracy can lead to an authoritarian regime. Authoritarian regimes can combine democratic elements with non-democratic ones, but when they lose democratic competitiveness, they become more authoritarian in their quest to maintain power. During the *Chavista* regime, the first years were characterized by populism, but towards the end of Chávez's presidency and up until now under Maduro, legalized authoritarianism has become the most distinctive feature.

Populism, due to its intrinsic non-institutionalized nature, tends to be unstable and move towards other forms of political system. It can move towards a democratic system or not, depending on factors such as the cohesion of the actors that support the government, and the strength and articulation of the opposition, among others. In the Venezuelan case, the economic decline that made it impossible to maintain populist economic policies, the internal cohesion of the actors attached to the government, and the dispersion and weakness of the opposition, helped making the transition towards an authoritarian regime.

Finally, in contemporary times the Venezuelan economic sphere is characterized by the generalized poverty of its citizens. The most significant variable to explain this poverty is political institutions, specifically, the legalized authoritarianism of the *Chavista* regime.

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Título

Autoritarismo y pobreza en Venezuela. Veinte años después del chavismo

Resumen

La democracia y el desarrollo son dos objetivos altamente valorados en la sociedad. El análisis conjunto de la democracia y el desarrollo permite una comprensión más razonada y completa de las condiciones de vida de una población. Por lo tanto, el objetivo de la presente investigación es analizar el autoritarismo y la pobreza en Venezuela durante las administraciones presidenciales del chavismo. En el artículo se afirma que, durante las administraciones presidenciales del chavismo, el autoritarismo y la pobreza han aumentado. El autoritarismo ha sido la principal causa de la pobreza generalizada en Venezuela. Y el estado de pobreza ha dejado a los ciudadanos más vulnerables a las políticas autoritarias del régimen chavista.

Palabras clave

Venezuela, autoritarismo, populismo, pobreza, chavismo

タイトル

ベネズエラにおける独裁主義と貧困。チャベス主義から20年後

要旨

民主主義と発展は、社会において高く評価される2つの目標である。民主主義と発展を共に分析することで、市民の生活状況に対するより信頼性の高い、総合的な理解が得られる。そのた

め、本研究の目的は、チャベス主義の大統領政権下におけるベネズエラの独裁主義と貧困を分析することである。本稿によると、チャベス主義の大統領政権下では、独裁主義と貧困が増加している。独裁主義は、ベネズエラにおける広範な貧困の主な原因とされている。貧困状態にある市民は、チャベス主義政権の独裁的な政策によってより脆弱な状態におかれた。

キーワード

ベネズエラ、独裁主義、ポピュリズム、貧困、チャベス主義

