

CUBA AND VENEZUELA: REVOLUTION AND REFORM

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Beginning in 1789, France produced the most significant of the social revolutions of the 18th century. Both the French and the American revolutions issued from the Enlightenment; swept away traditional systems; followed similar stages, moving from moderate to radical before a final conservative swing; and helped set in motion modern constitutional government, along with the very notions of liberty, democracy, social justice, and nationalism. By contrast, the Russian, Chinese, and Cuban revolutions issued later from a different ideological paradigm: Marxism-Leninism (Chaliand 2008).

In Latin America, there have been various revolutionary processes with different degrees of radicalization, such as the Mexican Revolution of 1911 and the Bolivian revolution of 1952; leftist governments also came to power through elections, as in Guatemala, Peru, Chile, Nicaragua, and Jamaica; and populist governments developed in Argentina, Bolivia, and Ecuador. Cuba was a unique case (Blasier 1976). All had in common the anti-Americanism of their foreign policies. Cuba went further than any, as the Castro regime sought to openly challenge the U.S. and established a close alliance with the Soviet Union during the Cold War.

The United States responded to Latin American nationalistic aspirations in various ways: with Castro's Cuba and Allende's Chile, through an existential confrontation; with Mexico, Bolivia and Peru, through reconciliation; with others (e.g., Guatemala in 1954 and Venezuela in 2002) by encouraging internal conspiracies against their radical regimes.

In this paper, we compare and contrast two Latin American revolutions—the Cuban Revolution un-

der Fidel and Raúl Castro and the Venezuelan Bolivarian Revolution under Hugo Chávez and now with Nicolás Maduro for what these will tell us about their particular experiences and about revolutions, in general.

THE STUDY OF REVOLUTIONS

In the analyses that follow we pay attention to the role of revolutionary leadership; ideology and culture; and identities in the origins, processes, and outcomes of both the Cuban and Bolivarian revolutions (e.g., Goldstone 2009; Foran 1997; Aminzade et al. 2001; Eisenstadt 1978, Skocpol 1979).

Both revolutions point us to some of the classic debates among scholars of revolution: the role of the middle classes; of the church; of international alliances; of leadership; of ideology and its reinterpretation. Both experiences had in common an “ideological package” establishing the foundation of the socialist state (Carrere D'Encausse 2005).

Nonetheless, the Cuban revolution has important characteristics distinguishing it from the Bolivarian revolution. Cuba's revolutionary takeover progressed with great speed due to the general social decomposition under Batista's dictatorship and through armed struggle and the fact that there were no elections, a weak party system, and no institutions able to check the power of the president (cf. Corrales 2001). Venezuela's revolution has progressed at a slower pace, within the framework of parliamentary methods and electoral politics (McCoy and Myers 2004).

Cuba's revolution, Fidel Castro's leadership, and the political and economic alliance between Caracas and Havana all played an important part in the genesis

and consolidation of Venezuela's revolution. Cuba became a model for Venezuela's projects and public policies.

Cuba also derived important benefits from its recent ties to Venezuela. Cuba's new partnership with Venezuela replaced the old Soviet Union partnership, mitigating the economic costs of preserving the revolutionary system after the fall of the Berlin Wall. It also reinvigorated the notion of socialism.

The two revolutions resemble each other in important ways: both underwent the displacement of the old elites and the emergence of new elites; engaged in a radical anti-U.S. foreign policy; and put in place a highly centralized economic program with a collective orientation.

Yet the contrasts are quite real. In Venezuela there is still some room for democracy; the government's monopoly of domestic policy is not total; the armed forces are not fully controlled by the state; elections are still proceeding (although the electoral process has many flaws); private enterprise is still operating (though the business sector is shrinking); and the exodus of the middle class has not been massive.

The historical conjuncture is radically different, too. The Cuban revolution took place in the context of the Cold War confrontation between Washington and Moscow, while the Bolivarian revolution did so in the context of a growing multi-polarity (Romero 2006). Moreover, the Cuban economy declined precipitously, while the Venezuelan economy continues to grow, relying on its great oil reserves.

McAdam et al. (2001) called for a study of "contentious politics"—revolutions, social movements, and civil wars—not only in terms of their causes and consequences but also as processes, seeking to identify not only the *why* and the *what*, but also the *how*. In this paper we address three main questions:

1. What was the origin of the revolution? How did the revolution achieve state power?
2. What were the processes through which the revolution unfolded?
3. What were the political, economic and social outcomes of the revolution?

In both cases we are in the presence of charismatic leaders who are able to attract the masses around their ideologies and policies. As Goldstone (2001:148) pointed out, the twin pillars of all states can be summed up in two words: effectiveness and justice.

THE CUBAN REVOLUTION: DEMOCRACY BETRAYED

Causes of the Cuban Revolution

The changes that took place in Cuba since 1959 were dramatic, entailing a complete break with the past. In less than four years the Cuban revolution progressed through distinct stages, while Fidel Castro repeatedly stated that it was not a communist revolution but an authentically Cuban one—not red, but "green as its palm trees."

The political causes of the revolution were Batista's dictatorship and Castro's charisma; its social and economic causes were extreme social inequality, in spite of the existence of a strong middle class. Cuba in the 1950s was among the top two or three countries in socio-economic development in Latin America—including Venezuela (Mesa-Lago 2000). An affluent middle class concealed real tensions and frustrations in society: Cuba's economic dependence on the U.S. and vast social inequality (Pérez 1995). Also, there was an unacknowledged problem of race, while women were subjected to a double standard.

Process of the Cuban Revolution

The revolutionary process was marked by five distinct stages, as Amaro (1977) identified them: democracy, humanism, nationalism, socialism, and Marxism-Leninism. During the democratic stage, Cubans who fought for the revolution wanted to restore the constitutional elections that Batista's 1952 coup had brought to a halt. Batista was president of Cuba twice: from 1940 to 1944, when he was democratically elected, and from 1952 to 1959, after his coup d'état. At that time, Cuba had a multiparty system, with the two largest being social democratic parties. In his first presidency, Batista had ruled fairly, built public works, supported organized labor, and promoted the island as a tourist haven. But a national survey conducted in early 1952 made clear he would not win office again. Thus, he seized power

via a coup, on March 10, 1952, putting an end to an era of democratic government and the aspirations expressed in the Constitution of 1940 (Mañach 1959).

This first stage of the revolutionary process began with the 26th of July Movement that Castro spearheaded. While the 26th of July Movement led the violent, armed struggle in Oriente, the *Directorio Revolucionario Estudiantil (DRE)*, the university student movement, did so in Havana. The *DRE* was responsible for two major revolutionary accomplishments: the attack on the Presidential Palace in March 1957; and the opening up of the second front in the Escambray mountains, which *Che* Guevara afterwards led. The Presidential Palace attack resulted in the death of José Antonio Echeverría, leader of the *DRE* and the Federation of University Students (*FEU*). The loss of Echeverría, a leader who was committed to democratic principles, and of Frank País, a 26th of July leader with similar democratic leanings (Morán-Arce 1980), pushed the movement totally into the hands of Castro and his conception of the 26th of July movement. It housed a number of different tendencies: a Marxist, pro-Soviet Union current; a nationalist revolutionary current; a liberal-reformist current; and a conservative current, but above all of them was Fidel Castro's *caudillismo* (Franqui 1983).

After the failed Moncada attack, Fidel Castro and others were imprisoned. A middle-class lawyer, Castro conducted his own defense pronouncing a lengthy argument which was published in the form of a pamphlet titled "History will Absolve Me" and became the 26th of July Movement's manifesto. Almost all the Catholic Church members supported the revolution, with the archbishop of Santiago de Cuba, Enrique Pérez-Serantes, interceding with Batista for Castro's life, saving him from execution.

As Domínguez (1978:133) summed it up, "Modernization without modernity, weak political institutions, and an economic depression in a context of political illegitimacy" are the basic ingredients for a classic revolution, as they were in Cuba. After seven years of tyranny, Batista's departure provoked enormous joy and hope for democracy.

Fidel Castro defined the second stage as humanism in his visit to the U.S. in April 1959: "Neither bread

without liberty, nor liberty without bread. ... Liberty with bread, without terror. That is humanism" (in Amaro 1977:237-38). He assured that elections would soon be held. In Cuba, a crisis unfolded as the *esbirros* who collaborated with Batista were executed, resulting in a sense of betrayal of the revolution, fear, and terror. At the same time, the government began a series of social reforms (rent control, agrarian reform, tax reform) that incorporated the socially marginal groups.

This second stage ended when *comandante* Huber Matos wrote a letter to Fidel in October 1959 denouncing the communist turn the revolution was taking and resigning from his post, which led to his removal and imprisonment for 20 years (Matos 2002). The First Provisional Cabinet resigned and the rule of the moderates came to an end (cf. Brinton 1965). In the midst of this crisis, José Ignacio Rasco founded the *Movimiento Demócrata Cristiano (MDC)* as a middle way between capitalism and communism.

The third stage was nationalism, which emphasized the problem of "Yankee" imperialism and lasted until the government nationalized all the big industries, both Cuban and American-owned. In 1960 the revolution took its definitive course: a diplomatic and economic war between the U.S. and Cuba ensued; and Cuba's economic and political dependence shifted from the U.S. to the Soviet Union. Nationalism, the fight against U.S. imperialism, and the nation under siege became major themes and a source of legitimacy. The independent voice of civil society collapsed. The government took over the newspapers and television; labor unions were controlled by communists; and the Catholic Church was silenced.

But for others the revolution was about justice. The race problem was "a boon to Castro" (Fagen et al. 1968:120), as the revolution opened the upper reaches of society closed to them. The revolution also challenged gender inequality by the participation of women in the revolution (Shayne 2004) and in the workplace (Casal 1987).

Increasingly, the revolution became anti-American and pro-Soviet, as a diplomatic war ensued between Cuba and the U.S. that led to the cessation of com-

mercial ties. “*Cuba Sí! Yanquis No!*” was the slogan. This led to further counterrevolution, civil war, and a massive exodus. In the first wave, those who left were Cuba’s elite, who were bound to a political and economic structure that, as Amaro and Portes (1972) underlined, was completely interpenetrated by American capital. They did not believe that the American government would permit the consolidation of socialism in the island. “Those who wait,” as they labeled these refugees, came to the U.S. imagining that exile would be temporary.

The fourth stage was socialism, which began with the large-scale nationalizations in 1960. Brigade 2506, consisting of Cuban exiles that invaded Cuba at the Bay of Pigs in April 1961, organized the opposition with the goal to restore democracy to Cuba. President John F. Kennedy was ambivalent regarding the invasion, whose plans he inherited from President Eisenhower. Wanting to hide the American hand (that could scarcely be hidden), Kennedy destroyed the operation when he withdrew the air cover as the young exiles landed (Wyden 1979). One hundred and fourteen exiles were killed in the invasion, a few were executed, and 1,189 were captured and imprisoned, then traded for food and medical supplies from the U.S. The failure of the Bay of Pigs invasion consolidated the revolution and sealed the identity between Fidel-*patria*-revolution (Pérez-Stable 1999). The international influence was decisive. With the opposition largely crushed, many took the road to exile. Franqui (1983) realized that the revolution such as it was then—communist, backed by the Soviets, immensely popular—would last a very long time.

The fifth and last period in the consolidation of the revolution was the Marxist-Leninist phase, after Fidel Castro publicly declared in December 1961 that he was a Marxist-Leninist and would remain so until the day he died. Only then did all ambiguity cease. “Those who escape,” wanted to leave an intolerable new order (Amaro and Portes 1972). Now the exodus was more a middle class than an upper class movement. It doubled in size. “What began as a trickle was, by the middle of 1962, a small flood” (Fagen et al. 1968:62).

While Cubans left for many lands, the U.S. welcomed the largest settlement. Data from the 1990 Census show that 677,512 Cubans immigrated to the U.S. from 1960 to 1990 (U.S. Census Bureau 1993). The Cuban Refugee Program assisted most in Miami (Pedraza-Bailey 1985). These highly educated Cuban refugees over-represented the professional, managerial, and middle classes, 31% of the total (Fagen et al. 1968).

The Cuban Missile Crisis in October 1962 ended the first wave. Nuclear missiles pointed at the U.S. were discovered in Cuba. An eye-to-eye confrontation developed between the U.S. and the Soviet Union in which, as U.S. Secretary of State Dean Rusk expressed it, “they blinked.” Nikita Khrushchev, then the First Secretary of the Communist Party, gave orders for the first Soviet vessels to reach the U.S. blockade to turn back. Khrushchev and Kennedy reached an agreement over Cuba, whereby Kennedy promised not to invade the island, accepting the Castro regime. For many Cubans in exile, the Missile Crisis was a second defeat (Ros 1995).

Outcomes of the Cuban Revolution

Conflicts within the government elite took several forms. Within the Party, a struggle developed between the old communists—Aníbal Escalante and others—and the new communists—led by Fidel Castro and Raúl Castro. The Soviet Union backed the old guard.

As Domínguez (1978) pointed out, the old communists were well-organized, thus they garnered most of the power of the Integrated Revolutionary Organizations (*ORI*)—the precursor of the official Cuban Communist Party (*PCC*) (Enzensberger 1974). The Communist Party was again shaken by internal division in 1968 when a “microfaction” highlighted the island’s serious political and economic problems. Their effort resulted in political imprisonments and forced resignations (“Microfaction Unmasked” 1968).

There were also conflicts within the government, between Fidel Castro and *Ché* Guevara. Initially, the *Instituto Nacional de Reforma Agraria (INRA)* led a land redistribution program that expropriated large land-owners and distributed small plots to thousands

of families. Together, Fidel and *Ché* nationalized American companies and large Cuban-owned enterprises, toppling down the industrial and landed underpinning of the economy. But Guevara wanted to go farther and also change the attitudes of the people, creating *un hombre nuevo*—a new man—whose work would fulfill a social duty through voluntary labor and sacrifice. Thus, material incentives (extra pay) were replaced by moral incentives (recognizing vanguard workers); rapid industrialization was emphasized; and cost accounting was eliminated. The economy plummeted.

Guevara was sent overseas as a roving ambassador, where he railed against Western colonialism and imperialism, and also against the socialist countries as accomplices of the West. Since the Soviet Union was keeping Cuba afloat through generous subsidies, Guevara's criticism was unwelcome. Politically marginalized in Cuba, *Ché* turned to starting armed revolutions first in Africa and then in Latin America. In the Bolivian *altiplano*, where the peasants failed to support him, wounded and ill, he met his death in October 1967.

The second major exodus from Cuba began in the fall of 1965, in the form of a chaotic flotilla exodus from the port of Camarioca. "Those who search" characterized this wave (Amaro and Portes 1972). In response to President Lyndon Johnson's "open door" policy that welcomed refugees from communism, for eight years the United States and Cuban governments administered an orderly air bridge, known as the *Vuelos de la Libertad* (Freedom Flights), that daily brought around 3,500 Cubans from Varadero to Miami; these new arrivals were resettled by the Cuban Refugee Program. The U.S. and Cuban governments have often "cooperated with the enemy," as Domínguez (1992) stressed: jointly, both governments decided who would emigrate and the migration proceeded through family networks.

Cuba failed in her attempts to cease being a sugar monoculture. Together with the economic mismanagement by the leadership, the impact of the hemispheric trade embargo imposed by the Organization of American States (OAS) in 1964 began to be felt, though it was counteracted by Soviet subsidies. The

impact of the U.S. trade embargo was twofold. On the one hand, it contributed to making Cuba a poor nation as the vast market nearby was lost and machinery and spare parts could not be replaced, affecting productivity. On the other hand, the embargo also served to justify the ineffective policies of the Cuban leadership. Cubans lived with extreme shortages of food, clothing, and transportation.

The Camarioca exodus was the first time Fidel Castro used massive emigration as a weapon, turning Cuba's internal problems into an American domestic crisis. By the time the refugee airlift closed in 1974, it had brought approximately 284,642 persons (U.S. Census Bureau 1993). With a total population of around 6.5 million at the time of the revolution, around 8% left the island during 1959–1974. This second wave of immigration was largely working class and *petite bourgeoisie*. Amaro and Portes judged (1972) that over time the political exile increasingly became an economic exile as "those who search" looked for greater economic opportunities. A new wave of nationalizations—the "revolutionary offensive" in the late 1960s—confiscated over 55,000 small businesses, "pushing" out the little entrepreneur and his employees (Mesa-Lago 1978). They represented Cuba's "middling service sectors" (Portes et al. 1977). The Cuban government labeled them *parásitos* (parasites).

The social transformations the Cuban revolution effected were so pervasive that they always "pushed" Cubans. The United States, in facilitating the migration, always "pulled" them (Pedraza 2007).

THE BOLIVARIAN REVOLUTION: A PERMANENT AMBIGUITY

Causes of the Bolivarian Revolution

Hugo Chávez's electoral victory in 1998 and his transformational presidency, as well as the very idea of a change in Venezuelan politics, captured the attention of many scholars and analysts (Ellner 1997; Corrales and Penfold 2011; Rey 1991; Kornblith 1997; Coppedge 2005).

During the 1960s and 1970s, Venezuela was seen as a case of successful political transition because it was able to overcome the military dictatorship led by Marcos Pérez Jiménez (1948 to 1958) and to enjoy

democratic and constitutional governments from 1959 to 1999, under the five-year presidencies of Rómulo Betancourt, Raúl Leoni, Rafael Caldera (served two terms), Carlos Andrés Pérez (served two terms), Luis Herrera Campins, and Jaime Lusinchi (Rey 1991; Kornblith 1997).

Given these 40 years of democracy, most scholars deemed the Venezuelan political system as remarkably stable, particularly given the elite political pact of 1958, known as the *Punto Fijo* Pact. This was a formal arrangement among representatives of the three main political parties whereby they agreed to accept the results of the 1958 presidential elections, so as to preserve the emerging democratic regime (Silva Michelena 1967; Levine 1973). Moreover, a rather powerful state ably distributed oil revenues among various social groups (entrepreneurs, labor, middle classes, rural peasants) through the national budget (Karl 1997). In addition, civilians exerted control over the armed forces and other pressure groups through the mayor Venezuelan political parties—the social-democratic party, *Acción Democrática* (AD) and the Christian-democratic party, known as COPEI (Levine 1973; Rey 1991).

Yet, by the end of the 1970s, the very stability of the political system began to show some cracks. The government had created a client relationship with various social sectors based on its oil revenues, which came to be known as *el rentismo*. This was coming to an end due to the growing income inequality among different social classes and groups; the emergence of high inflation; a soaring external debt; and an unfavorable exchange rate (Coppedge 2005; Rey 1991; Kornblith 1997).

At the same time, the prevailing idea that Venezuela's foreign policy reflected a real internal consensus also drew sharp criticism. In fact, important voices emerged warning about a hyper-active foreign policy and a lack of consensus on important issues, such as the bilateral relations with Colombia, Cuba, and the United States; boundary issues; and foreign trade.

Carlos Andres Pérez was re-elected President of the Republic for the period 1989–1994. Upon coming to power, he applied the model of the “Washington Consensus”—a neo-liberal economic program,

which involved “shock therapy” that resulted in a strong social reaction in February 1989; two attempted military coups in 1992; and Pérez's departure from office in May 1993, before the end of his term and in the midst of a crisis of political legitimacy. Pérez was replaced by two interim presidents: Octavio Lepage (from May 21 to June 5, 1993) and Ramón J. Velázquez (from June 5, 1993 to February 2, 1994), who in turn handed power over to Rafael Caldera (who had served as President from 1969 to 1974). Caldera emerged victorious in the presidential elections of December 1993 and he campaigned under the banner of recovering the *Punto Fijo* Pact.

Hugo Chávez, a Venezuelan Army officer who was involved in the 1992 coup attempts against Pérez, was released from jail and retired from the military in 1994. Although Chávez initially refused to participate in the electoral process, later on, in 1997, he recognized that the conditions existed to attain power through elections. Though a failed *golpista*, Chávez won the election in December 1998 by an ample margin, collecting 56.2% of the popular vote. With a populist platform and the backing of a rather heterogeneous alliance, he called for radical political reform in Venezuela's political life, a national Constitutional Assembly to write a new constitution to replace what was seen as the old constitution of the so-called Fourth Republic and the *Punto Fijo* Pact (Rey 2007).

Process of the Bolivarian Revolution

Since 1999 Hugo Chávez started a process of transforming the nation and establishing a new political model: displacing the old elites; establishing himself as a new player among equals; and promoting a new relation between the state and society.

In its first decade, the Bolivarian revolution went through three stages, which were quite different than the Cuban case. The first stage, from 1999 until 2000, was a period of transition to a new political and economic model of populist democracy under the stewardship of a constitutional process. This resulted in the adoption of the 1999 Constitution; the re-legitimization of the national authorities; the presidential elections of July 2000; and the beginning of a new presidential term (2000–2006) (Rey 2007).

The second stage, from 2000 to 2004, was a period when the foundation of the new model was laid. This process was fraught with instability and uncertainty due to the clash between the government and the ruling alliance vis-à-vis a growing political opposition. That period had three turning points: the failed coup against President Chávez in April 2002; the strike of the oil workers, that is, the employees at *Petróleos de Venezuela (PDVSA)*, from late 2002 to early 2003; and the call for a Presidential referendum in August 2004. The Presidential referendum intended to achieve a political, democratic, and constitutional solution to the crisis of those years. It was part of a negotiation process between the government and the opposition, which was supported from 2002 to 2004 by important intermediaries, such as the OAS, the Carter Center, and the United Nations (Martínez-Meucci 2012).

The third stage began in 2004 with the implementation of the new, radical political model—a centralized state model that broke sharply with the past. Parliamentary and presidential elections were held in 2005 and 2006 (the opposition declined to participate in the parliamentary elections of 2005). President Chávez won the presidential election of 2006 with 62% of the votes. In what some analysts called (in traditional Marxist thought) the transition from a liberal and reformist model to a fully socialist one, the new program was baptized as “socialism of the 21st century.”

Chávez initiated a constitutional reform that would have resulted in his holding presidential power indefinitely. This was subject to a referendum in December 2007 which was defeated by a narrow margin of 1%. In 2008 he tried it again, as part of the National Assembly reform of the 1999 Constitution, this time successfully. He thus opened the way to his reelection in 2006 and 2012 and to the idealistic political model of *las comunas*. Chávez established the communal councils with the idea that the community and workers could organize to take power into their own hands. This is now taking place alongside the process of the formation of the political party the *Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela (PSUV)*, building it up from the grassroots.

At the same time, revenues from the state oil company, *PDVSA*, enabled vast increases in social spending. Chávez initiated a targeted outreach to the poor in cities and rural areas via many government social “missions” (e.g., *Misión Barrio Adentro*, *Misión Milagro*, *Misión Robinson*). These *Misiones*, in which Cuban doctors and health workers have been centrally involved, largely bypassed the old government structures and achieved important results, as the poor in urban shanty towns and remote rural areas felt they were listened to and looked after (Coppedge 2005; Kornblith 2007; Rey 2007). As of 2011, by Cuba’s estimates, there were 51,000 *colaboradores* (technical helpers) working in Venezuela, including 31,315 in the health sector—11,054 doctors and 10,997 health technicians—as well as 5,000 doing political work training revolutionary cadres.

Venezuelan diplomacy developed an agenda that combined traditional concerns with new issues: using oil as the main instrument for participation on the world stage and hemispheric international activism; promoting a new political model based on participatory democracy; launching a new economic model called an “endogenous development model”; creating an ideologically partisan foreign service (career diplomats were sidelined while politically-connected newcomers were promoted over them); and actively supporting various political, social, and cultural anti-globalization groups (Naím 2005).

Outcomes of the Bolivarian Revolution

The Venezuelan economy revolves around the international energy market, namely the production and marketing of oil and its derivatives. Venezuela’s oil revenues constitute 28% of its GDP, 95% of its exports, 95% of its foreign currency assets, and more than 50% of public expenditures (Orro 2009; Ross 2011).

Despite Chávez’s popularity, large sectors of Venezuelans have refused to accept his hegemonic plans. They are committed to democratic resistance. On several occasions and by various means they have tried to check Chávez’s political control. At times they have been successful, while other times they have incurred severe losses, as was the case during the attempted coup against Chávez in April 2002

(Coppedge 2007; Kornblith 2007; Taguieff 2007; Weyland 2003).

Since 1999, the country's sustained economic surplus due to its oil revenues placed the Venezuelan case again on the agenda of comparative politics. In fact, Venezuela is no longer seen as a model where oil revenues played a key role in its stable, democratic past. Rather, the oil revenues now help to explain the emergence and development of the electoral oil authoritarianism which has shaped the nation in all these years (Corrales and Penfold 2011; Hachemaou 2012; Karl 1997; Romero and Curiel 2009; Dunning 2010). The Venezuelan economic model has some features in common with Arab oil-producing countries, such as Algeria and Libya (before 2011) and Syria and Iraq (before 2003): the capture of rent by a revolutionary party organization; a quasi-monopolistic, binary identification between the state and the revolution; the formation of an authoritarian coalition; some aspects of an economy of plunder; and the lack of democratic institutions capable of exercising control over public spending (Martínez 2010; Hachemaou 2012; Morse 2012; Levitsky and Way 2010; Lindberg 2009).

Moreover, with respect to foreign policy, a radical discourse aspired to develop a multipolar world. According to the Government, Venezuela was said to be under the constant threat of a U.S. military attack and other destabilizing politics; it promoted alternative social sectors around the world; and the traditional policy of alliances changed. Caracas reinterpreted the issue of international cooperation based on the role of a "global renter nation." In the long run, Venezuela's international policies seek to influence the whole world: as a form of resistance against globalization to undermine the hegemony of the U.S., Chávez's leadership has been tested and proven, although it derives from a world view that is stuck in a Cold War time warp (McCoy and Myers 2004).

TWO REVOLUTIONS COMPARED

Similarities

A revolution entails a fundamental break with the past. Both Cuba and Venezuela experienced revolutions, though the transformation went far deeper in Cuba. Both revolutions had a charismatic figure at

the center. Both featured the displacement of the old elites by new elites. Both entailed the state's control of society. Both were visionary and romantic. Both used the legal process to transform the constitutional power. Both reduced the power of private business (although Cuba did it more than Venezuela). Both enjoyed enormous popular support from those they sought to represent and benefit: the poor, the working class, peasants, women, and racial minorities. Both generated enormous opposition from the social sectors most affected and dispossessed as well as from those who did not believe in their promises. Both railed against the United States, establishing an anti-American foreign policy. Both sought new international partnerships.

Differences

In Cuba, the polarization of the society resulted from both internal and external factors; in Venezuela, it is the result of internal factors. Critics fault Chávez for persecuting his opponents; exerting pressure on the courts; and stifling the news media, but the Venezuelan opposition has largely remained in the country and continued to challenge the revolutionary leadership through organized party politics. Cuba's internal opposition soon lost its importance but this has not been the case in Venezuela. Cuban leaders achieved complete political control of the state, but they were and still are totally dependent on foreign aid (trade, subsidies, investments, and remittances). In Venezuela, this has not been the case, as its leaders have retained a large though not total control of the public sector, and they are not dependent on external aid.

Profound contrasts obtain in the international arena. The Cuban revolution took place within the context of the Cold War, while Venezuela's took place after the collapse of communism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. To consolidate its revolution, Cuba established a strong alliance with the Soviet Union. This alliance replaced the power vacuum left by the break between Havana and the U.S. and it became a cornerstone for the survival of the new regime. In the first decade of the Cuban revolution, the international influence was decisive in sustaining the regime due to the Soviet Union's support and also to the close

diplomatic ties established with European and Third World socialist experiences and revolutionary movements across the world (Blasier 1976; Blasier and Mesa-Lago 1971; Domínguez 1978).

In Venezuela, Chávez's Bolivarian revolution took place in the context of a new globalization with a far less rigid international scenario. Even when relations between Venezuela and the U.S. deteriorated, a new bilateral alliance with another power did not develop, nor was there a definitive break with the U.S. (Alzugaray-Treto 2009; Corrales and Romero 2013). In fact, there was no Soviet Union to intrude, support, assist, or from whom demand. Although Venezuela had the support of the international Left, this movement is more diverse and less controlled by Moscow than in previous years.

Regional relations also differed. When Cuba established its alliance with the USSR, it found great resistance in Latin America and the Caribbean, as expressed in the hemispheric trade embargo and Cuba's exclusion from regional associations. Cuba isolated itself from, and was isolated by, other countries in its hemisphere. With the exception of the failed civil-military coup against Chávez in 2002, the Venezuelan regime did not experience a serious threat, either from other governments, multilateral actors, or by civil society (the media and social networks). Venezuela operated with a great deal more flexibility and suffered far less antagonism than Cuba. Venezuela simply did not experience the real threats of the Cuban Missile Crisis; the expulsion from the OAS; the diplomatic and economic war with the U.S.; or a Bay of Pigs exile invasion. Last, but not least, Cuba was always under the pressure and siege of an economic embargo, which Venezuela did not suffer.

In politics, the differences loom large. The Cuban revolution issued from a dictatorship, involving the transition from one type of an authoritarian regime to another. Thus, in a very short time, Cuba was able to eliminate the institutions of the old regime and to consolidate a centralized state with a minimal private sector. In the first decade, the Cuban government engaged in two waves of nationalizations: first, of the large industries; the second, of the very small businesses. At the end of the first decade, Cuba had only

a few remnants of a capitalist economy and a larger proportion of state-owned enterprises than anywhere in the Eastern European communist world (Corrales 2001; Domínguez 1978; Mesa-Lago 1971). While Venezuela has a centralized state largely controlled the military, the capitalist economy is not eliminated and the private sector remained powerful (Corrales and Penfold 2011).

The Cuban government inherited a constitution that was applied until the promulgation of a new constitution in 1976, when the Cuban Communist Party held its First Congress—17 years after the revolution's triumph (Domínguez 1978). In Venezuela, the new revolutionary regime established its own constitution almost immediately: the 1961 Constitution was replaced by the 1999 Constitution, although the latter was practically replaced in 2006. Venezuela went through a cumulative process of legal transformation through this constitutional reform; the practical enactment of laws and regulations; and the decisions of the Supreme Court (Brewer-Carías 2012).

Party politics also reveal profound differences. In Cuba the democratic system of elections and parties collapsed almost immediately, under the weight of Fidel Castro's charisma and the weakness left behind by seven years of dictatorship. A single party system resulted: the merger between the Cuban Communist Party and the Cuban state itself expressed in a single figure (Corrales 2001; Perez-Stable 1999).

In Venezuela, though many people consider they are in the presence of an odd case of electoral authoritarianism, the opposition has not been outlawed. Rather, the opposition participates in elections; it is represented in the National Assembly; and it is legally organized in political parties, although freedom of expression is somewhat limited and the human rights record is in deficit (Corrales and Romero 2013). The new elites that have governed the nation since 1999 have developed some novel mechanisms of political control, such as the formation of the *comunas*, and the dominance of the Executive branch over the legislative branch, electoral power, and the judiciary. However, Venezuela has not been able to establish a one-party regime.

In the economic realm, differences abound. In Cuba, with the Soviet economic model as the blueprint, the state centralized all key economic activities—such as food distribution (via *la libreta*, the rationing book), housing, employment, wages and salaries, investment, exchange rate policy (Pérez-Villanueva 2008, 2009; Mesa-Lago 1978, 2009). In Venezuela, the government did not fully control the economy, though from 2006 on, it has made strides in developing a socialist economy through the nationalization of many big enterprises, such as *CANTV* (the telephone company), the *Banco de Venezuela*, *La Luz Eléctrica de Venezuela* and *SIDOR* (steel and iron producer); the creation of many enterprises for the provision of social services; the expropriation of private enterprises like *Agroisleña*; and the creation of the *comunas*.

Looking at indicators of economic growth—such as GDP, the availability of material resources, and currency reserves—we can see that in Cuba the economic cycles were very pronounced, with few years of economic expansion and a low and declining per capita income (Mesa-Lago 1978; Pérez-Villanueva 2008, 2009; Domínguez et al. 2004). In Venezuela, Chávez's regime registered significant economic growth between 2003 and 2012 as a result of the high revenue Venezuelan crude oil exports bring. Over 60% of Venezuela's imports are handled by private companies, though not exports, 95% of which are handled by the state oil company *PDVSA*. In its first decade, the Bolivarian revolution tried to control the economy and private enterprises but without complete success.

Socially, important differences obtain. Both social processes involved a sharp political polarization. In Cuba, that polarization entailed the exclusion of legitimate forms of opposition, with people no longer able to participate either politically or economically. As mentioned above, this resulted in a massive exodus over several waves. In the first dozen years of the revolution, the U.S. alone absorbed over 8% of the Cuban population. In Venezuela, a massive exodus did not take place. According to the Venezuelan Ministry of Foreign Affairs, at present around 600,000 Venezuelans (or about 2.4% of the popula-

tion) are living abroad, particularly in the U.S., the European Union, Canada, and Australia. Moreover, their transnational ties are strong, so they often travel to and fro. In contrast, for the first 20 years of the revolution the Cuban government refused to allow the return of anyone who had left.

Still, the Venezuelan population in the U.S. has grown recently. Census data show that the population born in Venezuela living in the U.S increased dramatically: from 48,513 in 1990, to 107,031 in 2000, to 192,291 in 2011 (U.S. Census Bureau 2000; American Community Survey 2011a and 2011b). As these figures show, to date most of the opposition has remained in the country, as both democratic politics and the capitalist economy have survived, resulting in rising personal incomes and living standards and with the possibility to return. Cuba was a society without oil or another coveted economic resource that could allow it to remain economically autonomous. Meanwhile Venezuela is a society well endowed with oil at a time when it is arguably the most prized resource. Chávez hoped this would result in "socialism without poverty."

REVOLUTION AND REFORM TODAY

The Cuban revolution is a very important event in Latin American history. Over half a century after its triumph, over the course of several economic and political cycles, with approximately 20% of its population living abroad, its final outcome is still uncertain. Fidel Castro ceded power to his brother Raúl, yet the direction Cuba will take is uncertain and the reforms announced in the recent VI Party Congress in 2011 are not substantial enough to change people's lives (Mesa-Lago 2011). Cubans in the island respond to the new reforms with excitement; black humor; and skepticism (Gorney 2012). Cubans living in the island note they know neither the direction Cuba will take nor what the new model will be called.

From the beginning of the Cuban revolution, Fidel Castro and his followers believed that only promoting revolution in others countries, particularly in Latin America, could ensure the survival and the consolidation of their regime. Exporting the revolution was a major foreign-policy goal and Venezuela was seen

as a critical place to receive such export (Blasier 1976; Chaliand 2008; Chilcote 1970).

During the 1980s, due to the failure of the socialist experiments in Chile and Grenada, the retreat of the Left in the continent, and the Soviet's policy of reducing their presence in the hemisphere, Cuba ceased to be a strategic concern. It remained isolated in the region, a situation that worsened during the 1990s due to the hardening of U.S. policy toward Cuba, with the Helms-Burton Act further tightening the existing economic embargo. Due to the severe economic crisis (the "special period") that resulted from the collapse of Soviet and Eastern European communism, many expected Cuba to follow suit. But Cuba was able to survive as it effectively replaced the Soviet Union, its economic lifeline, with Venezuela.

As we entered the 21st century, Cuba was also able to turn to the newly emerging Left in Latin America and the Caribbean: first in Venezuela and later in other places, such as Brazil, Bolivia, and Ecuador. The debate reemerged regarding whether Cuba was a security problem for the region or a model to be followed in the Americas, and the possibility that the Venezuelan political model was to follow in the footsteps of the Cuban revolution (Romero 2006).

Havana had supported the *lucha armada* (armed struggle) in Venezuela during the 1960s and helped Venezuelan revolutionaries in their struggle. After the failure of the guerrilla warfare, the Cuban leadership had to resort to other alternatives and helped the Venezuelan forces around Hugo Chávez to take the Venezuelan presidency through the electoral process in 1998, using the same institutions as in Cuba: lead-

ership (Hugo Chávez), ideology (socialism) and political party (first *MVR*, then *PSUV*) (McCoy and Myers 2004).

The economic dependence on oil, political vulnerability, and an inequitable distribution of wealth remain salient features of Venezuela today—as they were half a century ago. The Bolivarian revolution which was promised in 1999 has not been fully achieved. Those who voted for Chávez in October 2012 believed that he would achieve it in the next two terms the Constitution now granted him. But, he did not live long enough to fulfill those terms. Nicolás Maduro replaced him in the middle of a growing economic crisis.

Through cooperation, trade, and joint economic investments, bilateral relations between Cuba and Venezuela have strengthened to the point of creating complementarities between the two nations, which involve transfers of large sums of money and people. Venezuela provides significant economic support to Castro's Cuba, while Cuba provides significant political support to Chávez's Venezuela.

Last, but not least, our own comparative analysis of these two revolutions lead us to add that, particularly in developing countries of the Third World, for a revolution to become established as the new status quo, the international context is crucial, as is the departure of the opposition. Neither of the revolutions we compared has reached its end. We hope this analytical exercise will enable a better understanding of both social processes, as the Cuban and Bolivarian revolutions continue to unfold, and enhance the understanding of social revolutions more generally.

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