

## TWO REVOLUTIONS COMPARED: CUBA AND VENEZUELA

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While scholars who study revolutions have long called for cross-national comparisons (e.g., Skocpol 1979; Goldstone 1982), few comparative analyses have been carried out, and those that do exist have mostly focused on European cases, seldom centering on the developing world. Thus, our attempt to compare the Cuban and Venezuelan revolutions is novel (Pedraza and Romero 2017).

Yet it is not easy to compare the Cuban and the Bolivarian revolutions, as their origins, processes, and outcomes were rather different (cf. Tilly 1981). The political propaganda tries to render them equal: both from those who see them as the result of an inevitable world-wide revolutionary dynamic and from those who denounce them for their similarities. The effort to compare these two processes analytically—whether motivated by the wish to applaud or criticize the Venezuelan-Cuban connection—is often tainted by particular interests and political ideologies. Here we strive for a less ideologically-driven analysis, comparing them according to their similarities and differences.

### SIMILARITIES

Regarding their similarities, both were revolutions in that they entailed a fundamental break with the past, though the social transformations went far deeper in Cuba. Issuing from an armed struggle in the mid-1950s that sought to depose the unyielding dictator, Fulgencio Batista, the Cuban revolution initially garnered enormous support across all social classes and races. For over half a century, Cuba relied on the twin leadership of the two Castro brothers: the charismatic, paternalistic figure of Fidel Castro at the

helm of government, supported by Raúl Castro's control at the helm of the military.

A strong opposition began to develop after the massive nationalizations that took place in the early 1960s of all the large industries and institutions controlled by the U.S. and Cuba's elites. Particularly the failure of the exile-led invasion at Bay of Pigs in 1961 caused the massive exodus of Cubans leaving the island to begin to take place, an exodus that now consists of five distinct waves, and has never ceased (Pedraza 2007; Amaro 1977). When the failure at Bay of Pigs consolidated the revolution, Fidel Castro declared himself to have always been a Marxist-Leninist, contrary to his earlier assertions that the revolution was not red but "green as the palm trees of Cuba" (Castro 1959). Cuba then shifted its economic and political allegiance from the U.S. to the Soviet Union.

With the Soviet Union and Eastern European countries as its economic lifeline and benefactor for the next 30 years, the Cuban revolution modeled itself on the blueprint of their communist institutions. By contrast, Hugo Chávez was also a charismatic figure but he gained the presidency in Venezuela in 1998 through the electoral system, which has always remained standing, and the revolution he sparked was originally characterized, rather ambiguously, as "the Bolivarian revolution." Under the charismatic leadership of Hugo Chávez, Venezuela became a different political model, rooted in *caudillismo* and in the anti-elite thrust of populism. It was based on a redistribution-oriented oil policy, involving the synchronization of the civic and the military, and dependent on the exercise of the electoral majority. It gradually be-

came transformed into the deeper vision of “the socialism of the 21<sup>st</sup> century” after several electoral successes (Corrales and Penfold 2015).

Through a process of nationalizations and strong popular support, both revolutions also featured the displacement of the old elites by new elites willing to carry out its socialist vision for the future. Both entailed the state’s control of the society. Both revolutions were an expression of populism (cf. Müller 2015). They 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 those most affected and dispossessed, particularly the middle and upper classes, including those who did not believe in their promises. Both railed against the United States and established an anti-American foreign policy, while seeking new international partnerships. As Slater and Fenner (2011:1) pointed out, both regimes became stable and sustained their rule by similar means: coercing rivals; extracting revenues; turning citizens into Party militants; and cultivating dependence.

Both revolutions undermined dissent by persecuting their opponents, including jailing them as political prisoners; exerting pressure on the courts; and taking over the independent institutions of civil society, in Cuba, or stifling the news media, in Venezuela. The opposition to Fidel and Raúl Castro in the early 1960s took on the form of armed struggle; from the mid-1980s on, it became a non-violent dissident movement inspired by *glasnost* and *perestroika* in the Eastern European communist world. While it continues to exist today, expressed in groups such as the *Damas de Blanco* (the Ladies in White) as well as *UNPACU* (Patriotic Union of Cuba), they continue to lack strong popular support as they are the object of severe repression.

After the initial rule that consolidated the social and economic changes the revolutions effected, both revolutions have recently experienced a transition from a strong, charismatic leader at its forefront—the father of the nation (Fidel Castro in Cuba, Hugo Chávez in Venezuela)—to another far less charismatic leader that inherited their hold on power but who does not

equally speak to and for the hearts and minds of the people (Raúl Castro in Cuba, Nicolás Maduro in Venezuela). While the leadership transition from Fidel to Raúl and Chávez to Maduro was effected, in both cases the actual death of the leader was really mourned. Fidel Castro’s death, in particular, in 2016, captured the imagination of the world and marked the end of an era in Latin America. As Pedraza (2016) underscored, “He was the young, bearded revolutionary from a small island who took on the enormous Goliath of U.S. capitalism and American hegemony. That is the stuff of dreams.” But it was not a dream for everyone, and real disagreements remain as to whether he was David or Goliath.

Both revolutions relied on each other to deepen the social transformations effected. From Chávez’s victory in 1998 on, the historical link between Venezuela and the United States was gradually replaced by a strong link between Venezuela and Cuba. The strong friendship and alliance between Fidel Castro and Hugo Chávez served to buoy up the island. This not only entailed military collaboration and training, but also the exchange of services of Cuban doctors and other health personnel for Venezuelan oil. The enormous hardships created by “the special period,” as Castro characterized the deep economic and political crisis that took place in Cuba after the collapse of communism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe in 1989–1990, resulted in a contraction of GDP in Cuba of about 35% in the early 1990s. The result in the island was both an economic and a political crisis.

After a few years, Venezuela stepped in to replace the Soviet Union as the island’s benefactor. Cuba traded its doctors for oil. The oil—90,000 barrels a day—kept Cuba from the persistent losses of electric power it had been suffering, making the expansion of the tourist sector more viable. While Cuba’s historical mainstay as a nation had been sugar, faced with the lack of productivity of the sugar sector, Fidel Castro ordered closed nearly half of the sugar mills. Thus, among Raúl’s pragmatic reforms after the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Party Congresses, was turning to tourism as the mainstay of the economy and its only dynamic sector. Cuba’s social services, particularly education and public health, whose extension had proved para-

mount in the success of the revolution, continued to steadily deteriorate. Mesa-Lago and Pérez-López (2005) concluded that, although external factors contributed to an economic slowdown, its root cause was the “politically motivated paralysis of essential structural reforms” (2005:xiii). Cuba began exporting its medical doctors, nurses, and ophthalmologists to Venezuela, to work as part of the new program called *Barrio Adentro*, to serve the poor and also to garner their political support. The Cuban doctors also enabled Chávez to establish his program of “social missions” to benefit the poor in the inner cities and rural shanty towns (cf. Fernandes 2010). Their health and well-being were in the hands of the nearly 50,000 Cuban health personnel working in Venezuela. Both revolutions, then, were mutually dependent and kept each other afloat.

## DIFFERENCES

A revolution entails the rise of some and the downfall of others, as well as the exile of many. In short, it is a process with winners and losers. In Cuba, the society became polarized due to both internal (the opposition) and external (the U.S., the USSR) factors; in Venezuela, the polarization of the society is solely the result of internal factors. Nonetheless, most recently President Trump seems quite willing to play the role “*el imperio*” (the empire) that Nicolás Maduro constantly tries to attribute to him. The fact remains that nothing equivalent to the exile invasion of Cuba organized by the Americans has occurred in Venezuela.

Two consequences flow from these issues. First, Cuba’s internal opposition rapidly lost the importance it originally had. This was not the case in Venezuela. The Venezuelan opposition largely remained inside the country and continuously challenged the revolutionary leadership through organized party politics and its electoral base. Second, Cuban leaders achieved complete political control of the state but were and still remain totally dependent on foreign aid—originally from the Soviet Union and the Eastern European countries, most recently, from Venezuela (for cooperation, trade, subsidy, investment, remittances). This has not been the case in Venezuela, whose leaders have retained a large but not total political control of the public sector and who, due to

the oil revenues, do not depend mostly on external aid.

The military also had different origins and played different roles in both countries. Cuba’s armed forces—*Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias (FAR)*—were created after the demise of Batista’s armed forces; in effect, they set aside the traditional army and started from nothing; particularly from the 1970s on, they functioned rather autonomously. The military went on to play a major economic role, as they created a major logistical apparatus with respect to their military goods and services. As an economic enterprise, they were also very capable, more so than the rest of the Cuban bureaucracy. As a political enterprise, they earned enormous prestige not only for the role they played within Cuba but also for their efficacy in the international military campaigns they waged overseas (Domínguez 1978a, 1978b; Brenner et al. 2015). Today the Cuban military leadership may be living its best moment as Raúl Castro, for many years Minister of Defense, just recently ended his tenure as the President of Cuba and still retains a great deal of influence as Head of the Cuban Communist Party, while high ranking military leaders also occupy key positions with the Party (Veiga González 2013).

In Venezuela, the armed forces were gradually controlled by the new leadership that took power in 1999. The first step taken by Hugo Chávez, whose roots were in the Venezuelan army, in politics was to re-incorporate those officials and troops that had sided with him in the military insurrection of 1992 into the new government, as well as to invite some retired army officers to participate in Venezuelan politics as members of parliament, councilmen, ministers, directors, leaders of public institutions, and as members of his government, and to join the *Movimiento Quinta República* he founded, which afterwards was re-baptized as the *Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela (PSUV)* (Langue 2002).

Thus, from the moment of Chávez’s arrival to power, there was an avalanche of military personnel, active and retired, who joined the leadership of the Bolivarian revolution, although over 500 of over 3,000 officials refused to support the political and military ini-

tiatives of the new government: some remained neutral, others left, and still others joined a conspiracy against the government. Some of the latter officials took up arms in 2002 and lent their support to the military coup led by the businessman Pedro Carmona, while another group joined a public rebellion in the Plaza Altamira in Caracas, which went on for a few months in 2003. These forms of opposition came to an end with the persecution, detention, and expulsion of over 200 military officers. Thus, the government controls the military institutions, which benefitted from massive military expenditures and from higher benefits than the rest of the state bureaucracy. At the same time, a program of ideological training began, which departed from the neutral and apolitical nature that had characterized the military previously (Romero 2011).

In both countries the legal process was used to transform constitutional power. At the triumph of the revolution in 1959, the Cuban revolution inherited the 1940 Constitution; through interpretations and other schemes, the extant constitution was subverted until the passage of the 1976 Constitution, after the Cuban Communist Party had held its First Congress—fully 17 years after being in power (Domínguez 1978a). By contrast, in Venezuela, the new revolutionary regime *ipso facto* established its own constitution. Chávez inherited the 1961 Constitution, which gave way to the 1999 Constitution, though the latter hardly constituted a socialist constitution. This one was also reinterpreted and overtaken after 2006.

In the international arena, profound contrasts also obtain. The Cuban revolution developed within the context of the Cold War, while Venezuela's took place in a different theater—after the end of the Cold War, at the time of the collapse of communism in the Soviet Union and the Eastern European countries. To consolidate its revolution, Cuba established a strong alliance with the Soviet Union; its foreign policy goals were shaped by that alliance. This alliance replaced the power vacuum left by the break between Havana and Washington and it became a cornerstone for the survival of the new regime (Blasier 1976; Domínguez 1978b). In the first decade of the

Cuban revolution, the international scene played a critical role in sustaining the regime due both to the strong support of the Soviet Union and also to the close diplomatic ties established with other socialist experiences, in Europe and the Third World, and with several revolutionary movements across the world, as the citizen-soldier developed in the island (Mesa-Lago 1971; Domínguez 1978a).

By contrast, the first decade of Chávez's Bolivarian revolution took place in the context of changing world dynamics: globalization together with a far less rigid, post-Cold War international scenario. In particular, while relations between Venezuela and the United States deteriorated, this did not result in a new bilateral alliance with a different power, as was the case when Cuba shifted its traditional alliance with the U.S. for a new alliance with the USSR (Corrales and Romero 2012). In fact, there was no longer a Soviet Union that could intrude, support, assist, or demand, nor was there a U.S. effort to redirect or stop the revolutionary process, as had been the case with Cuba. Although Venezuela's revolution had the support of the international Left, they had also changed, becoming more diverse and less controlled by Moscow than in the past. Thus, there was not a definitive break between Venezuela and the United States.

Regionally, 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 the exclusion of Cuba from regional associations, such as the Organization of American States (OAS). Thus, Cuba isolated itself from and was isolated by other countries in its hemisphere. By contrast, Venezuela did not find the support for its revolutionary process limited in the region. Neither did it find strong opposition from Washington, despite the political conflicts between the two nations (Alzugaray Treto 2009; Domínguez 1978b). With the exception of the attempted civil-military coup against Chávez in April 2002, in its first 15 years, the Venezuelan regime did not experience a serious threat, either from other governments, multilateral actors, or from civil society, including the media and other social networks. That may well

have changed now that the Venezuelan opposition has grown large, both inside Parliament and on the streets, where violence is manifested daily and some international bodies and other governments have begun to openly criticize the political and economic behavior of Maduro's government, its growing tendency to violate human rights, and its intent to reduce the spaces for democracy.

Therefore, in the international arena, Venezuela operated with a great deal more flexibility and suffered far less antagonism than Cuba. Venezuela simply did not experience the political and economic war with the U.S. that resulted in broken diplomatic and commercial relations; the economic embargo; the threats of the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962; the expulsion from the OAS in 1964; or a Bay of Pigs invasion, an exile expeditionary force backed by the Americans. Venezuela simply did not experience a direct confrontation with the West.

Last, but not least, Cuba was *una nación asediada* (a nation besieged), as its strong supporters inside the island felt; always under the pressure of an economic embargo. In our view, the U.S. embargo served both to undermine and strengthen the Cuban revolution. It undermined the revolution because it cut commercial, trade, and diplomatic relations with the U.S. and the many other nations that followed suit, rendering Cuban industry unprofitable. It strengthened the revolution because its leaders were never accountable for the mistakes they made, for their failed policies, which could always be blamed on the embargo (Pedraza 2007). Venezuela, on the contrary, has not suffered an economic embargo like the one the U.S. imposed on Cuba (Corrales and Romero 2012).

Domestically, the contrasts in politics loom large. The Cuban revolution emerged from a dictatorship: Fulgencio Batista's. It involved the transition from an authoritarian regime to a totalitarian regime by the implementation of a communist regime whose characteristics were economic statism, one-Party rule, lack of an autonomous civil society, and lack of freedom. While Kirkpatrick (1979) made a valid distinction between authoritarian and totalitarian societies, in Cuba the one made the other more possible. Batista's dictatorship had rendered the institutions of civil

society weak. Thus, with enormous speed, in a very short time, Cuba was able to eliminate the institutions of the old regime and put in place a centralized state with a minimal private sector (Amaro 1977).

In the first decade, the Cuban government engaged in two waves of nationalizations. The first, in 1960–61, involved the big industries of the bourgeoisie and the *latifundios* (large landed estates), owned both by Americans and Cubans, as well as the medium-size businesses owned by the middle class and professionals. The second, in 1968, called the “revolutionary offensive,” involved state take-over of the small businesses, owned mostly by the self-employed petite bourgeoisie. Thus, at the end of the first decade of revolution 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 (Mesa-Lago 1971).

By contrast, the Bolivarian revolution emerged from a long democratic experience of 40 years, involving the transition from a democratic polity to an authoritarian regime. Moreover, capitalism survived to a very different extent than in Cuba. While Venezuela developed a centralized state and controlled the military, the capitalist economy was not eliminated and the private sector continued to play an important role (Corrales and Penfold 2011). As Wright et al. (2012:29) phrased it, “In fact, it may also be easier for autocratic regimes to use increasing levels of oil wealth, whether caused by price increases or new discoveries, to co-opt challengers in the officer corps by buying new weapons, raising military wages, and providing other benefits than to develop the kinds of institutions needed to reach masses of citizens with sufficient benefits to deter demands for democracy.”

Venezuela went through a process of legal transformation through constitutional reform; the practical enactment of laws and regulations; and Supreme Court decisions (Brewer-Carías 2012). The changes aimed at keeping Chávez in power without constitutional limitations and to control the rest of the State powers and the conduct of elections. In spite of that, the opposition, through its coalition of the *Mesa de la Unidad Democrática (MUD)*, won the legislative elections of December 2015 and took control of the

*Asamblea Nacional*, the legislative branch of the Venezuelan state. President Maduro and the *PSUV* refused to recognize the opposition's victory and began to manipulate the legislative body through the judiciary, the *Tribunal Supremo de Justicia*, eliminating some legislative functions of the *Asamblea Nacional*. In mid-2017, Maduro called for the establishment of an *Asamblea Nacional Constituyente* to write a new constitution that would express socialist programs and policies and keep him in power. As Flores and Nooruddin (2016:95) pointed out, when conditions make it hard or even impossible for those in power to govern, many governments resort to electoral malpractice to secure re-election—an electoral authoritarianism. Democracy thus stagnates or suffers.

Party politics also entailed profound differences in the two countries. In Cuba the democratic system of elections and parties collapsed almost immediately, under the weight of Fidel Castro's charisma and the weak civil society left behind by seven years of dictatorship. In a speech on May 1, 1960, at a massive May Day demonstration at the *Plaza de la Revolución*, Fidel underscored that elections were unnecessary because the people had already chosen: "This is democracy. The Cuban revolution is democracy... Our enemies, our detractors, ask us about elections. ... The presence of such a large crowd is the best proof that the revolution has fought for the people" (Castro 1960). To members of the opposition, for example those organized in the universities as the *Directorio Estudiantil*, the legal order—the notion of political rights as the normative underpinning of society—had collapsed (Pedraza 2007). Thus, an opposition that could continue to operate democratically—i.e., through the legal framework of elections based on universal and secret vote for plural political parties, recognizing the autonomy of the opposition and the government—ceased to exist, as did also the legal recognition of dissent. The result was a one-Party system. And the merger between the Cuban Communist Party (*Partido Comunista de Cuba*, *PCC*) and the Cuban state itself expressed in the single figure of Fidel (Pérez-Stable 1999). Thus the political system took on the features of Eastern European communism. With the Cuban government's military victories over the external exile invasion at

Bay of Pigs as well as over the internal counterrevolution in the central mountains of *El Escambray*, the political opposition was decimated very early on.

By contrast, in Venezuela today, even though many people consider that they are in the presence of an odd case of electoral authoritarianism turning into corporate authoritarianism, the opposition has not been outlawed. In fact, in recent years it has continued to grow in size and importance due to Nicolás Maduro's inept control of the political and economic system and the growing economic crisis. Rather, the opposition participates in elections; it is represented in the National Assembly; and it is legally organized in political parties. Nonetheless, freedom of expression is somewhat limited and there is a significant human rights deficit (Corrales and Romero 2012).

There are real obstacles to the exercise of democracy in Venezuela. The new elites that have governed the nation since 1998 have developed some novel mechanisms of political control, such as the formation of *Comunas*, ideologically-oriented social groups working in poor urban and rural areas allied with the *PSUV*, the partisan control of the government, and the strong influence of the Executive on the other branches of the State: the legislative branch (controlled by the opposition since 2015), the electoral council, and the judicial branch. However, Venezuela has not been able to establish a one-Party regime (Corrales and Romero 2012). As Ezrow and Frantz (2011:1) expressed it, the Venezuelan regime relied on democratic institutions such as political parties and legislatures and tried "to maintain control of the state. Parties and legislatures provide a means through which dictatorships co-opt potential opponents, distribute rents to supporters, and mitigate elite conflicts."

With respect to the economic arena, despite some similarities, differences abound. In Cuba, in just a few years, the government took control of the nation's economy. The nationalization of foreign and local companies rendered the role of private enterprise and free trade minimal. The highly centralized Soviet economic model provided the blueprint for Cuba. The economic system took on the features of Eastern European communism. Thus, the state cen-

tralized all the key economic activities—such as the budget, public spending, private consumption (via *la libreta*, the rationing book), the licit forms of employment, the wage structure, investment, the exchange rate policy, and the external debt (Pérez Villanueva 2009; Mesa-Lago 1978).

By contrast, in the first decade of the Bolivarian revolution, the Venezuelan government did not exert full control over the Venezuelan economy. From 2006 on the government did make strides in developing a socialist economy through the nationalization of many big enterprises, such as the telephone company *CANTV* (*Compañía Anónima Nacional de Teléfonos de Venezuela*), the central bank *Banco de Venezuela*, and the steel and iron company *SIDOR* (*Siderúrgica de Orinoco C.A.*), the creation of many social services enterprises, the expropriation of private enterprises like the agricultural supply company *Agroisleña*, and the creation of communal enterprises and other forms of a socialized economy. But it is also true that most of the private sector and the foreign private investment sector remain untouched (Corrales and Romero 2012).

The economic growth performance of the two nations contrasts sharply. When we look at macro-economic indicators—such as GDP, the availability of material resources, and currency reserves—we can see that in Cuba the various economic cycles were very pronounced, with relatively few years of economic expansion compared to many more of stagnation and very low growth and overall low and declining per capita income (Mesa-Lago 1978; Pérez Villanueva 2009; Domínguez 1978a). By contrast, with the exception of the first few years of his government and his last year (2013), Chávez's regime mostly showed positive economic indicators and significant economic growth, as a result of the high revenues generated by Venezuelan crude oil exports. But it is the case that after Chávez's death, from 2013 on, the Venezuelan economy began a steep economic decline.

Moreover, in Cuba the economy was mostly dependent on the generous Soviet subsidy that lasted for 30 years. Such dependence on another nation did not mark Venezuela's course, as its economic indepen-

dence was assured by its oil revenues. In Cuba, the Soviet economic bailout had both positive and negative consequences. On the positive side, it ensured the survival of the revolution; on the negative side, it shaped the formation of an economically weak state with a downward trend in both production and distribution (Blasier and Mesa-Lago 1979; Mesa-Lago 2009). Moreover, it also kept the Cuban government from facing up to its policy errors that resulted in the disaffection of large sectors of the population, whose “dream” became to leave the country.

Over the course of the Cuban revolution—now well over half a century old—few vestiges of capitalism remained. By contrast, in Venezuela, economic independence shaped an economically strong state with an upward trend in both production and distribution. Today, over 60% of Venezuela's imports are handled by private companies. This is not, however, the case for 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 success. Therefore, one must conclude that the Venezuelan economy still remains capitalist (Corrales and Penfold 2009).

The exodus of massive numbers of people is a critical difference. Both social processes involved the sharp political polarization of the population. In Cuba, that polarization entailed the exclusion of legitimate forms of opposition, of people who could no longer participate, neither politically nor economically. This resulted in a massive exodus of over five waves by now, particularly the emigration of the upper and middle classes between 1959 and 1965. In the first 10 years of the revolution, the United States alone received over 8% of the Cuban population, with other countries also receiving a large numbers of émigrés, particularly Spain, Venezuela, and Costa Rica. At present, Cuban statistics put the estimate of the exodus at 20% of the population (Pedraza 2007).

The impact of such a massive exodus was two-fold (Pedraza-Bailey 1985). On the one hand, it entailed the externalization of dissent, which enabled the revolutionary government to achieve greater legitimacy and grow politically stronger. Fidel Castro was well

aware of this function. As quoted in *Granma*, the official newspaper of the Cuban Communist Party, during the massive flotilla exodus from the harbor of Camarioca in 1965, he explained: “In this country, when we say to someone, ‘If you want to leave, we aren’t going to stop you; you are free to leave,’ this country doesn’t lose a citizen. Why? Because that citizen could never be considered—from our revolutionary point of view, from our Marxist point of view—a citizen of this country” (*Granma*, 8 November 1965). As on many other occasions, when faced with the exodus of 125,000 Cubans from the harbor of Mariel in 1980, Castro explained the benefit of externalizing dissent: “I think that those of them remaining here are people with whom we can work better, much better! ... So we need not worry if we lose some flab. We are left with the muscle and bone of the people. We are left with the strong parts” (*Granma*, 22 June 1980).

On the other hand, such a massive exodus also entailed serious losses. First, it meant the loss of the talent and skills that define middle class professionals who upon leaving would no longer contribute to the development of Cuba’s economy and society. Instead, they went on to make their contribution elsewhere, in the U.S. (particularly in greater Miami and the rest of Florida, and the state of New Jersey), the island of Puerto Rico, and other countries, particularly Venezuela, Costa Rica, and Spain. Cuba’s government often barred doctors—as well as other technical and professional people—from leaving the country. As Castro underscored: “We have only contempt—which they merit—for all those who desert the honorable ranks of our doctors” (*New York Times*, 24 December 1965). Similarly in 1980, when the “scum” of the Marielitos (as he called them) left Cuba, Castro assailed the Americans: “In the past, they used to take away our doctors, engineers, teachers, all highly qualified personnel. Now it was their turn to take away our lumpen” (*Granma*, 22 June 1980). Second, it meant the loss of the salutary challenge and prompting of a dynamic for change that a legitimate opposition can bring, even when they fail to win in electoral politics (Pedraza 2007). Such is the meaning of the concept of “loyal opposition” and

its importance in exercising a genuine democracy (Flores and Nooruddin 2016).

In Venezuela, such a massive exodus did not take place. According to Venezuelan analysts, around 4 million Venezuelans are now living abroad, about 5% of the total population (Dávila 2017). Approximately 360,000 are living in the U.S.; 500,000 in Latin America, 50,000 in Canada; 20,000 in Australia; and over 400,000 in the European Union. U.S. 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 (including Puerto Rico)—nearly doubling in that decade. Taken from 2000 to 2011, roughly Chávez’s years, it doubled. While those numbers are far below those for Cuba and constitute a much lower proportion of its population, the dramatic growth is impressive (U.S. Census Bureau 2000a and b; American Community Survey 2011a and b).

As the figures on the immigration of Venezuelans to the U.S. show, in the first dozen years of the Bolivarian revolution, most of the opposition remained in the country, as both democratic politics and the capitalist economy survived. These yielded both business opportunities and rising personal incomes and living standards: the economy was healthy at least until the year 2013. By contrast, Cuba was a society that lacked oil, or another coveted economic resource that could allow it to remain economically autonomous. Its dependence on the Soviet Union turned the Cuban revolution as a communist revolution and allowed Cuba to circumvent the United States’ economic embargo. However, coupled with the loss of the middle class, such survival came at the cost of its living standard, which declined to very low levels, making it a society whose socialism meant the spread of poverty. By contrast, Venezuela was a society with oil at a time in world history when it was arguably the most prized possession of any nation. Hugo Chávez hoped this would result in “a socialism without poverty.” Since 2013, that dream has not come true.

In this context, the future of the relationship between Venezuela and Cuba can develop along three scenarios:

In a first scenario, the relationship will continue to expand, based on the key elements of this alliance: economic complementarity, energy cooperation, and political agreements based on a combination of *hard power* (political and military assistance and economic cooperation), *soft power* (ideological promotion), and *social power* (social aid).

A second scenario would involve an eventual political and economic opening in Cuba, with both governments moving apart from each other. It could contribute to expand a debate in Cuba regarding the alliance with Venezuela and its relationship with some economic and social policies under criticism. Havana would then depend less on Caracas, curbing the worst consequences of the cooperation between the two countries. These consequences are the result of Venezuela's intention to influence Cuba's internal politics, the impact of Venezuela's revenue-dependency on the dislocations in Cuban society as inequality there continues to grow, the corruption generated in cooperation management, the accruing of Cuba's financial debt to Venezuela, and the creation of social inequalities within Cuban society due to Venezuela's aid. At the same time, Cuba could seek to strengthen energy, trade and financial relations with other countries, such as Algeria, Angola, Brazil, Equatorial Guinea, Iran, Mexico, and the United States. Venezuela could also reduce the subsidized oil sales to Cuba if the prices of oil or its production were to drop considerably.

A third scenario could arise from internal changes in the orientation of the Venezuelan or Cuban processes, which would lead to a reconsideration of the basis and the means for strategic cooperation that, to date, has been based on the common commitment to build socialism and to promote an anti-imperialist foreign policy.

### THE FUTURE OF BOTH REVOLUTIONS

Our comparison of the two revolutionary processes leads us to conclude that there are important similarities between the two: the sharp break with the past; the displacement of the old elites by the new; the growth of government centralization; a government in tune with the popular feeling of the masses; the anti-Americanism of its foreign policy; and the

search for new international alliances. Yet the differences between the two loom larger than the similarities. In the first dozen or so years of his Bolivarian revolution Chávez was able to leave a strong print on Venezuelan society. However, a vigorous opposition that expressed itself mainly through electoral politics was able to check some of his policies.

Some analysts believe that revolutions cannot be predicted. Goldstone (1993), analyzing the revolutions that took place in the USSR and the Eastern European countries between 1989 and 1993, underlined that we should have been able to predict them, if we had used "a conjunctural process-based theory of revolution" (1993:132). His theory of the origins of revolutions focused not so much on the causes of revolution but on the historical processes and events through which they cumulatively developed. In predicting the origin of these revolutions, he identified three basic conditions that converged:

1. the loss of effectiveness by the state, in its ability to command resources or obedience;
2. the alienation of the elites and intellectuals from the state; and
3. the mobilization of the population for protest actions.

We concur that all three of these conditions were present at the onset of the Cuban and Venezuelan revolutions. But our own comparative analysis of these two revolutions leads us to add that, particularly in Third World countries, for a revolution to become established as the new status quo and to continue surviving as revolutions, two other factors are also critical:

4. the role of the international context, that served as a foil against which the revolutions defined themselves, and
5. the exodus of the opposition, that served to externalize dissent.

### PRESENT TRAJECTORY

Among the many differences between the Cuban and Venezuelan revolutions is their present trajectory. Cuba has already begun the transition from a totalitarian society to an authoritarian society (Domínguez 2006), allowing the formation of a small civil society. Venezuela has left behind a democratic society and is

moving toward an authoritarian society, as the room for a strong civil society progressively narrows.

Since 2013, both revolutions have been changing in a very important way. Fidel Castro left power in 2006 for health reasons and died in November 2016. Since Raúl Castro became President of Cuba, some reforms have taken place in the Cuban economy that aim to create a modest capitalist market: an increased opening of small businesses, the semi-free circulation of the American dollar and the European euro, and substantially less control over the flows of labor and remittances. However, despite those new policies, the Cuban economy has continued to stagnate and deteriorate in the last few years. Some observers have stipulated that due to the decline in oil prices and the reduced payment to Cuba for its health personnel working in Venezuela, the Venezuelan economic crisis has hit the Cuban economy through its reduced economic assistance to the island. Other analysts point out that the Cuban economic situation is—in large part—the failure of Raúl Castro’s timid and incomplete economic policies, the lack of labor incentives, and the lack of investment (Mesa-Lago 2011, 2008).

It is very important to take into account the turning point in the history of the relations between Cuba and the United States, with the restoration of the diplomatic relations under President Obama, relations which were severed in 1961 during the Cold War—over half a century earlier. The re-establishment of diplomatic relations in July 2015 was greeted with much hope by Cubans in the island, and some on the U.S. mainland. U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry underscored that “U.S. policy is not the anvil on which Cuba’s future will be forged” since Cuba’s future is for Cubans to shape. But he stressed that “We remain convinced that the people of Cuba would be best served by genuine democracy, where people are free to choose their leaders, express their ideas, practice their faith; where the commitment to economic and social justice is realized more fully; where institutions are answerable to those they serve; and where civil society is independent and allowed to flourish” (U.S. Embassy in Uruguay 2015). As he has repeatedly done, Raúl Castro defended the primacy

of the one-Party system, which remained unchallengeable (Castro Ruz 2016). He was persuaded that “If they manage someday to fragment us,” in the name of bourgeois democracy, “it would be the beginning of the end” (in Pérez 2014:353).

However, since Donald Trump’s arrival to the U.S. presidency in 2017, he has sought to dismantle Obama’s legacy on all fronts: domestic and international both. On June 16, 2017 Trump announced that he was cancelling the Obama administration’s policies toward Cuba, expressing that a new and better deal could be negotiated. Yet his new policy initially did not dismantle much of Obama’s policies. Trump kept the re-established diplomatic relations achieved under Obama, as well as the newly re-opened embassies in Havana and in Washington D.C. He also continued to allow travel to Cuba, as well as the sending of family remittances. However, he did restrict travel, returning to the practice of limiting group travel, only for people who have serious reasons to travel there, such as students, professors, or religious personnel.

But despite all the aspects of Obama’s policy that he kept, his actions have constituted a political attack on Cuba. Trump’s has set out that he would not ask Congress to end the commercial sanctions on Cuba until the political prisoners were liberated and free elections held. As was to be expected, Cuba’s President Raúl Castro insisted that Cuba would not allow itself to be pressured and would not make political reforms to negotiate on economic issues with the U.S. Thus, both countries returned to the chess game that for many years was frozen in these two positions, with the chess pieces unable to move.

Another key difference between the two revolutionary processes lies in the size and role of the Cuban exile community in the U.S., its ability to lobby Congress and to influence life in the island. Over the course of the half century since the triumph of the Cuban revolution, over 20% of Cuba’s population left the island for other lands, most of it settling in the U.S. Given its large size, and particularly the large number of people that have left the island since the beginning of “the special period,” flows of remittances increasingly flowed back to the island as those

who left sought to help the family left behind. These remittances aggravated the division between the races in the island, since Black Cubans did not have as many family living abroad to help them. By contrast, since the Venezuelan revolution is far more recent and has entailed far less of an exodus, such a sizable Diaspora community has not yet emerged and the number of Venezuelans who have become U.S. citizens is low. Thus, the influence of this community on U.S. politics as well as on the homeland is far less, particularly at a time when President Trump has made visible his anti-Hispanic biases. Yet Trump has been quite able to court the Cuban-American vote. Although all Cuban-Americans want the return of democracy and elections to Cuba, in addition to the free expression of opinions and free association, this community has always been divided between “the intransigents” (those who do not believe that one should give an inch to Cuba’s communist government) and “the moderates” (those who think that through dialogue and negotiation one may attain more). The former identify with the Republican Party; the latter, with the Democratic Party. Without doubt Trump’s support within the Cuban-American community comes from “the intransigents” and the former political prisoners.

In our view, Cuba deserves to have a system of free elections, more than one political Party, and the expression of parliamentary conflicts and disagreements that we understand constitute democracy in practice. To many Cubans from a moderate persuasion, in the negotiations regarding the re-establishment of relations, Obama did not ask enough from Raúl, although he did open the door to a new relationship that means a great deal to the Cuban people in the island and that even Trump does not want to shut out. It is also possible that Trump is asking too much from Raúl. In the middle are the people of Cuba who continue to suffer from the system under which they live, despite the efforts and the courage of so many political prisoners.

Strangely, late in the summer of 2016, a sizable number of personnel in the American Embassy in Havana, as well as a few in the Canadian Embassy, reported that they were victims of “sonic attacks” that had

resulted in their becoming gravely ill. Insisting that Cuba was at least responsible for allowing this to happen, President Trump took a tough stance demanding that Cuba stop the practice and moreover inform the U.S. and the public about what had happened. Thus, the lively two-way flow of communication that had been established in recent years among relatives and friends on both sides of the Gulf has now been impeded.

Raúl Castro ceased to be Cuban president when he was replaced by Miguel Díaz-Canel Bermúdez in 2018. It was the first time since the triumph of the revolution in 1959 that the Cuban leadership did not derive its legitimacy from having fought in the mountains of the Sierra Maestra against Batista’s dictatorship (Rodríguez 2017).

In Venezuela, since Hugo Chávez passed away in 2013 and was replaced by Nicolás Maduro, the government has confronted at least four major problems: (1) the deterioration of the Venezuelan economy due to the declining prices of oil, together with hyperinflation and scarcity of goods and services; (2) strong criticisms by more than half the Venezuelan population regarding the *Chavista* regime and Maduro’s job in the presidency; (3) the increasingly negative opinion in which other governments, multilateral organizations, NGO’s, the mass media, and social media hold the Venezuelan regime and *Chavismo*; and (4) the significant growth of the Venezuelan opposition, through the leadership of the *MUD* and civil society organizations confronting *Chavismo* in many ways.

## POSSIBLE SCENARIOS FOR CUBA AND VENEZUELA

What are the possible scenarios for Cuba and Venezuela at this juncture? For Cuba, a first scenario rests on the idea of the continuation of the current situation in which the highly centralized state and the power of the Communist Party maintain the same format that was implanted in Cuba in the 1970s. The objective would remain to develop a socialist society, controlling domestic politics, and being supported by unconditional international allies, such as Venezuela, to maintain the status quo inherited from Fidel and Raúl Castro.

A second scenario projects structural changes in the Cuban economy but without regime change accompanying it. The Cuban government and the Communist Party would conclude that economic reforms must be deepened, allowing private foreign investment and self-employment, *cuentapropismo*, and a small amount of private property in home ownership, so as to diversify the market of goods and services on the island. However, a political reform would not be contemplated.

A third scenario projects the Cuban revolution as emerging from the current economic crisis with a leadership vacuum on the part of the Cuban government and the Communist Party (Pedraza 2018). This would be accompanied by strong social criticism, a social explosion in which the majority of Cuban citizens would join protests, asking for regime change and an open economy, with strong international backing from sectors that promote democracy worldwide. This would bring about the end of the Cuban revolution as such.

For Venezuela, a first scenario would foresee the possibility of less violence, but a deepening of the hegemonic project. The regime might reach greater stability and negotiate a call for elections with the opposition, albeit within a framework of increasing authoritarianism and declining international criticism of the Venezuelan government.

A second scenario rests on the possibility that the internal situation would continue to deteriorate, and the tension between the democratic capacities of the country and the growing democratic regression of the Venezuelan state will continue, as the law and coercive mechanisms are applied illegitimately, without the possibility of change in the short term. In other words, the government would become stable and would continue to manage the public agenda with strong military support, despite growing political, social, and international opposition, leading to a repressive reaction from the government or to its early implosion. This is the present trend.

A third scenario rests on the uncertainty of a present that has been characterized as *ni paz ni pan* (neither peace nor bread) (Romero 2017). Together with the rigid and strained international situation, as well as

the deepening of the internal crisis, the conditions would exist for a change of regime. The majority of citizens would call for Maduro's resignation as the government continues to lose its internal and external support. In this scenario Maduro's government would agree to negotiate, fully recognizing the opposition while stopping it from corroding the political life, with the support of the international community.

In a polarized society two different narratives exist regarding the current events in Venezuela. To the advocates of the Venezuelan revolution, the United States, the oligarchy and the Venezuelan Right, together with the Latin American and European Right, have not let up in their attempt to destroy the enormous achievements accomplished by the Bolivarian Revolution and Maduro's government. The enemies of the Bolivarian Revolution see it at one of its lowest points since Chávez's electoral victory in 1998. After the defeat in the December 2015 National Assembly elections, the worsening of the economic situation is having an impact on the working people, who are the revolution's base. At present the clash between the government and the opposition has become quite violent and has flowed into the streets.

Flores and Nooruddin (2016) stress the importance of a nation's "democratic stock": elections are more likely to succeed, to bring about future democracy, in countries with a longer past experience of democracy. Cuba's democratic stock is very shallow. Electoral democracy has not been practiced for over half a century under communism. Even more, historically, prior to the revolution, the periods of electoral democracy were few and brief. Cuba's lack of acquaintance with democratic electoral processes does not augur well for the future. It is, thus, entirely possible that if the present economic crisis were to continue and a new political crisis were to develop, a situation of conflict and violence might unfold that might call for the assistance of international actors, such as the United Nations. Of course, that remains to be seen. By contrast, Venezuela's democratic stock runs deeper: 40 years of parliamentary democracy prior to Chávez's arrival, and the continuation of elections under both Chávez and Maduro. Thus, we expect that in due

time Venezuela will find its way back to the electoral solution of its social problems, perhaps improving on its past performance, having developed a stronger “loyal opposition.” That remains to be seen.

We hope this analytical exercise comparing both revolutions will enable a better understanding of both social processes, as these continue to unfold in Latin

America, and of the success and failure of social revolutions, more generally. We stress that particularly when considering revolutions in the developing world, analysts need to seriously consider the key roles the international context and an exodus can play.

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