
REVIEW ESSAYS

LIBERAL DEMOCRACY, POPULISM, AND BEYOND Elite Circulation in Bolivarian Venezuela

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Populism in Venezuela. By Ryan Brading. New York: Routledge, 2013. Pp. xi + 208. \$130.00 cloth. ISBN: 9780415522977.

Dismantling Democracy in Venezuela: The Chávez Authoritarian Experiment. By Allan R. Brewer-Carías. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010. Pp. xiv + 418. \$39.99 paper. ISBN: 9780521145572.

Comandante: Hugo Chávez's Venezuela. By Rory Carroll. New York: Penguin, 2013. Pp. 320. \$27.95 cloth. ISBN: 9781594204579.

Who Can Stop the Drums? Urban Social Movements in Chávez's Venezuela. By Sujatha Fernandes. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010. Pp. xv + 319. \$23.95 paper. ISBN: 9780822346777.

Venezuela's Chavismo and Populism in Comparative Politics. By Kirk A. Hawkins. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010. Pp. xiii + 290. \$80.00 cloth. ISBN: 9780521765039.

The Revolution in Venezuela: Social and Political Change under Chávez. Edited by Thomas Ponniah and Jonathan Eastwood. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011. Pp. vi + 338. \$24.95 paper. ISBN: 9780674061385.

Hugo Chávez Frías ranks in the first order of transformative leaders to govern in Latin America since World War II. He attacked and dismantled one of the region's most established liberal democracies then presided over a slide into leftist

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“competitive authoritarianism” underpinned by the military. The six volumes reviewed here display some concern with the causes of Venezuelan liberal democracy’s unraveling. The central focus, however, is on two questions: how did Hugo Chávez and his supporters wrest power from the ruling class that governed Venezuela between 1958 and 1998, and how did Chávez make competitive authoritarian rules of the political game the new normal?

One useful theoretical lens to employ in answering those questions is the elite circulation paradigm pioneered by Gaetano Mosca and refined by sociologists Mattei Dogan and John Higley. The paradigm argues that when elites have relative autonomy, their decision making is of the highest importance and we should focus on elite activities when describing and explaining political change.¹ Over the fifteen years that he controlled Venezuela, Chávez acted as a charismatic leader. He dominated his inner circle, whose members were expected to support enthusiastically whatever policy he proposed and have remained unified and autonomous since Chávez’s passing on March 3, 2013. Thus, conditions in Venezuela between 1998 and early 2014 are precisely the ones that advocates of elite circulation view as favoring the use of their model. Nevertheless, paradigms such as rational choice, class conflict, institutionalism, and political culture also have demonstrated capabilities for explaining complex processes and also are brought to bear in exploring what the volumes under review have to offer. What follows is an examination of how the volumes under review portray both agency and structural conditions that contributed to displacing liberal democratic elites (1998 to 2006) and normalizing Bolivarian dominance in Venezuela (2006 to 2013).²

AGENCY IN THE DISPLACEMENT OF LIBERAL DEMOCRATIC ELITES

Support for Venezuelan liberal democrats was eroding when Hugo Chávez Frías burst on the political scene as architect of the unsuccessful 1992 military *golpe de estado* (coup d’état). In 1994, after President Rafael Caldera pardoned Chávez and released him from prison, the newly emancipated lieutenant colonel formed the MVR (Movimiento de la Quinta República, Fifth Republic Movement), an organization designed to compete in the electoral area. Chávez’s electioneering gave priority to severing the bonds that linked the urban poor, the impoverished middle class, and the established political parties Democratic Action (AD, Acción Democrática) and the Social Christians (COPEI, Comité de Organización Electoral Independiente). As has been recounted many times, Chávez won the 1998 presidential election and proceeded to eclipse AD and COPEI.

Liberal democrats resisted at every juncture. After the unsuccessful coup of April 2002 they staged mass demonstrations to force the president from office. They also compelled Chávez to stage a recall election that took place during

1. Alan Knight, “Historical and Theoretical Considerations,” in *Elites, Crises, and the Origins of Regimes*, ed. Mattei Dogan and John Higley (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1998). Gaetano Mosca, *The Ruling Class*, ed. Arthur Livingston, trans. Hannah D. Kahn (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1939).

2. Chávez portrayed his movement as an updated version of Simón Bolívar’s dream of creating a powerful state in northern South America. Members of his inner circle were thus known as Bolivarians.

August 2004. The failure of these efforts led liberal democrats to abandon the electoral arena and boycott the October 2005 elections for the National Assembly. This ill-conceived tactic eliminated much of their influence. When liberal democrats returned to the electoral arena in the 2006 presidential election, Chávez won decisively.

The body of work under review makes clear that agency was hugely important in Hugo Chávez's assault on Venezuela's long-standing liberal democracy, the so-called *Puntofijismo* that had been in place since 1958. Chávez's achievement is seen in large measure as deriving from the strategies and tactics he employed and from the inability of liberal democrats to adopt effective countermeasures. Political actors on both sides made many strategic choices, arranging populist mobilizations, institutional manipulations, and patronage allocations. Structural conditions influenced the outcomes of these choices.

Conscious choices made in struggles between competing elites permeate Rory Carroll's portrait of Hugo Chávez in *Comandante*. Carroll, a former chief of the Latin American Bureau of the *Guardian*, resided in Venezuela for six years (2006–2012). He interviewed Chávez and members of the president's team as early as 1999. Carroll opens his portrait with a quote from Gabriel García Márquez that "El Comandante" (understood here as an allusion to Chávez) could become either the savior of Venezuela or pass into history as just another despot (5). Carroll opines that Chávez took the presidential oath of office for the first time convinced that he alone embodied the will of the Venezuelan people. His plan to destroy *Puntofijismo* and replace it with a regime that increased popular participation and rescued Venezuela from international capitalism became known as the *Proceso Bolivariano*, and Carroll argues that the 2002 coup attempt against Chávez by supporters of liberal democracy led him to radicalize that change.

The volume edited by Thomas Ponniah and Jonathan Eastwood also examines intentionality in changes that occurred early in Chávez's government. Several of the contributors view these changes largely as the result of rational choices made by competing elites. For example, Javier Corrales presents polarization as a conscious political strategy. The president calculated that polarization would destroy linkages between the urban poor and the established political parties (AD and COPEI). In the following chapter Gregory Wilpert agrees that Chávez consciously polarized the political discourse early on, but he views it as a defensive reaction to protect the "Bolivarian Revolution" against liberal democratic efforts to derail it.

Intentionality also pervades the chapter by Margarita López Maya and Luis E. Lander that examines the December 2006 presidential election. They paint opposition candidate Manuel Rosales as strategizing to convince those who had attempted to unseat Chávez by force to change course. His success led to a meaningful electoral contest. For his part, Chávez appears as orchestrator of a duplicitous strategy in which he presented himself as the candidate of peace while labeling the opposition as the "squalid ones" (*los escualidos*). Such Manichaeian rhetoric is often employed in populist mobilizations to craft virtuous identities for potential supporters while demonizing opponents, and the volumes by Kirk Hawkins and Ryan Brading depict Chávez's assault on Venezuelan liberal democracy as a populist mobilization, drawing from theories postulated by the Argentine social-

ist Ernesto Laclau, who conceives of populism as a worldview rather than a set of policies.³

Both Hawkins and Brading depict Chávez as a charismatic transformer who peddled a worldview in which Venezuela's urban poor and impoverished middle classes were worthy but wronged. Using emotionally charged rhetoric he promised to restore these disinherited groups to their rightful place in the nation as the sovereign power (*el soberano*). Hawkins and Brading agree that as the contest between Chávez and the liberal democrats unfolded the president shifted to more overtly Marxist appeals. This confirms that populist mobilization in Venezuela was not driven by fascists: its impetus came from the left.

Even so, there are important differences in the authors' approaches. Hawkins's work weds narrow studies of *chavismo* with broader comparative data, and within each study he combines quantitative and qualitative methods. Hawkins deconstructs speeches by populist leaders and extracts data for measuring populism and political culture in ways that are valid, reliable, and efficient. Thus, he pursues a positivist understanding of populism that can hold up against testable, large-N methods. Hawkins also marshals data that suggest that *chavismo*'s populism gained traction only after the economic downturn in the 1990s made corruption a salient political issue. After unpacking empowering processes and features specific to *chavismo*, Hawkins again turns to comparisons. The goal is to demonstrate that populist discourse can be measured and the results can be replicated and varied by others. By contrast, Brading provides a qualitative case study of *chavismo* that probes for the explanatory power in Laclau's theories of populism. Two research questions orient Brading's work. First, he seeks to determine to what degree Venezuelan political development under Chávez constitutes an instance of Laclau's populist politics. Second, Brading inquires as to whether a more general account of populism can be applied to the Venezuelan case and used to evaluate existing theories of populism (5).

Despite their different research questions and methodologies, Brading and Hawkins come to similar conclusions about how Venezuelan populists were able to mobilize in order to dislodge *Puntofijismo*. Both describe Chávez as courting alienated masses after his release from prison in 1994. He reassembled the cadre that conspired with him in the unsuccessful 1992 coup and added leftist politicians. Chávez then organized the MVR as an electoral vehicle. In the 1998 presidential election campaign, he repeated that the Venezuelan people had been victimized by an immoral political system that he would destroy. Still, Chávez formed alliances with liberal democratic forces he labeled as "progressive." When the progressives broke with him in 2002 and 2003 they became enemies. In conformity with Manichaean prescriptions they received no quarter.

Anthropologist Sujatha Fernandes profiles the rise of social movements among the urban poor in Caracas. Her work is not tied to any specific paradigm. She employs an "alternative approach" that explores the alliances, conflicts, and mutual empowerment of state and society, which she views as reciprocal (5). This reci-

3. Ernesto Laclau, *On Populist Reason* (London: Verso, 2005).

procuity, much like the mobilization discussed by Hawkins and Brading, is seen as creating an identity for the urban poor. The mind-set of shantytown (*ranchos*) residents, according to Fernandes, turned hostile to liberal democracy in the late 1980s, when shrinking revenues from petroleum led AD and COPEI to all but abandon the urban poor. She explains how abandonment gave rise to gangs, many of whom responded favorably to populist appeals. Identification with Chávez led residents of the *ranchos* to pour into the streets and demand the president's reinstatement after liberal democrats briefly removed him from power in April 2002. In her account of this spontaneous uprising and other instances of demand making by the urban underclass, Fernandes provides a valuable perspective on the consequences of successful populist mobilization.

The work of lawyer Allan Brewer-Carías masterfully dissects how law was used between 1998 and 2009 to dismantle liberal democratic institutions. Brewer-Carías asserts that from the beginning Chávez plotted to transform the legal system into a mechanism that facilitated implementation of the Proceso. This was done by crafting procedures and institutions that would make government and the economy directly responsive to the will of the people as manifested in the person of the president. Brewer-Carías believes that Chávez employed Rousseau's democracy to trump the variant championed by John Locke with its emphasis on minority rights. He characterizes this strategy as legal subterfuge camouflaged by socialist rhetoric.

Brewer-Carías sees the opening act in this subterfuge as the arbitrary and illegal process orchestrated by the newly elected president that suspended the 1961 constitution, imposed a transitional government, and took control of new governmental institutions once the 1999 constitution entered into force. He also discusses and analyzes changes that crippled AD and COPEI, specifically the elimination of state funding for opposition political parties and distortion of the electoral system. Brewer-Carías recounts the political struggle that gave rise to the law that ended the autonomy of *Petróleos de Venezuela* (the state petroleum company). This and laws restricting property rights laid the groundwork for state control of the economy. The government-controlled Supreme Tribunal of Justice upheld the constitutionality of these laws.

The use of institutional changes to influence the struggle between liberal democrats and *chavistas* surfaces in three other studies. Ponniah and Eastwood's collection features work by López Maya and Lander that discusses efforts by the opposition to develop a coalition of interest groups to support the 2006 presidential election campaign of Governor Manuel Rosales. López Maya and Lander also look at the government's formation and use of neighborhood electoral battalions. They link these battalions to the *Maisanta Command*, which reported directly to the president.

Tension between patronage controlled by the government and autonomous demand making are described in all six volumes. Popular participation in resource allocation during the first seven years of the Proceso went far in convincing the urban underclass that their best interests lay with Hugo Chávez. The rise in petroleum revenue that began in 2003 allowed him to distribute merchandise and

services to targeted groups. This helped to propel Chávez to victory in the recall election of 2004 and the presidential election of 2006. It also contributed to Bolivarian success in the regional elections of 2004 and the local elections of 2005.

Carroll relates multiple instances when Chávez himself dispensed patronage. These ranged from donating tickets and transportation to attend baseball games to fulfilling requests received on the presidential Twitter account. Brading and Hawkins provide a more systematic analysis of the patronage system. However they each ignore the bureaucracy that traditionally played a central role in distributing patronage. The public sector that Chávez inherited in 1999 was starved for resources. In addition most public sector workers up until 2003 had been appointed by AD and COPEI governments. Few of them supported the president. Thus when the possibility to allocate resources increased, the president ignored the traditional bureaucracies and instead created new institutions staffed by individuals loyal to him. These were the Misiones Bolivarianas. When voters went to the polls in 2006 to select a president, sixteen *misiones* were functioning. They offered educational opportunities, delivered health care, subsidized food, constructed housing, redistributed land, and provided a long list of additional benefits. All accounts of the 2006 presidential election campaign reviewed here concur that the misiones were popular. Candidate Chávez boasted that unlike the oligarchic bureaucracy, his misiones encouraged participation and responded to citizen requests. The misiones thrived and traditional bureaucracy atrophied.

UNDERLYING CONDITIONS DURING THE DISPLACEMENT OF LIBERAL DEMOCRATIC ELITES

Contributors to the volume edited by Ponniah and Eastwood focus initially on how to determine if changes that occur during periods of upheaval are truly revolutionary. Following in the footsteps of Seymour Martin Lipset, Eastwood argues in the introduction for using separate stratification pyramids that configure class, status, and power (3–11).⁴ He calls for comparing each pyramid's internal structure at the onset of turmoil and after order has been restored. Eastwood also asserts that the contributions in the volume, when viewed through the prisms of class status and power, will suggest that revolutionary changes occurred on President Chávez's watch.

Fernando Coronil views the April 2002 coup as pivotal in speeding up the circulation of elites and rearrangement of relationships among other groups. He demonstrates that the balance of power and influence between the chavista and liberal democratic elites changed dramatically between the moments when Chávez was removed and his triumphant return two days later. After that the president held the upper hand. Interests that had supported the coup, especially organized labor, business, and the Catholic Church, became pariahs. In contrast, the urban poor who demanded Chávez's reinstatement were heroes. Coronil argues that as saviors of the Proceso and champions of basing identity on social

4. Reinhard Bendix and Seymour Martin Lipset, *Class, Status and Power: A Reader in Social Stratification* (Glenco, IL: Free Press, 1953).

justice norms rather than meritocracy, *el pueblo* (the people) gained dramatically in status after 2002. Carroll relates a poignant example that supports Coronil. In a session of the presidential television program *Aló Presidente* that Carroll attended, Chávez received an aged peasant woman, spending more than half an hour discussing her vegetable garden and how to increase its yield.

Sujatha Fernandes provides a fascinating account of changing political structuring inside of the Caracas ranchos. She discusses the roots of social movements during the Punto Fijo era, but she is most concerned with government behavior after Chávez came to power. In the late 1990s informal employment was common in the shantytowns. Militants of the established political parties were engaged in internecine competition to preserve their access to powerful politicians, and the middle classes were struggling to retain their status and income. This mixture contributed to the rise of gangs whose leaders controlled the shantytown landscape, much as feudal lords dominated medieval Europe.

At the beginning of his presidency Chávez signaled that he would dialogue with shantytown residents and gangs. Fernandes recounts that in many instances participatory democracy became a reality. The official sectors of chavismo helped neighborhood organizations in barrios like 23 de Enero and La Vega to take control of public spaces and stage festivals that reflected their cultural heritage. Organizers were encouraged to ignore the technocratic principles of event management copied from Western Europe and North America. This contrasted with earlier efforts by liberal democrats who attempted to structure shantytown civil society as if they were designing organizations and events for the middle classes. Fernandes found that barrio residents used religious festivals, iconography, and heroes from the past to reinvent and raise the status of marginality, blackness, and indigeneity. A bond developed between barrio organizations and the revolutionary government where none had existed with the liberal democrats.

Fernandes demonstrates that struggles to control shantytown-built environments changed relationships of class status and power in the shantytowns. Her study of the Alameda Theater occupation is instructive. The theater, located in San Agustín (a Caracas barrio), initially catered to the upper middle class. It sat abandoned for thirty-seven years. Invasion from the barrio occurred in April 2004. The occupiers explained their action by referring to Article 70 of the constitution, arguing that its discussion of participation and contestation provided the impetus for their occupation. The invaders also referred to the language of “cultural patrimony” mentioned in the Organic Law of Culture. Their self-appropriated status as interpreters of the constitution and the law was unprecedented. The occupiers considered it to be their right. They proclaimed that the Alameda Theater would become a cultural center from which barrio residents could participate on an ongoing basis in political decisions.

At first the refurbished Alameda Theater was a showplace for participatory democracy. During the campaign to recall President Chávez in 2004 the Alameda served as a headquarters for the previously mentioned Comando Maisanta. Soon after the referendum, tensions surfaced between those who had invaded the theater and wanted to retain their autonomy and the professional politicians who wanted control. Fernandes concludes that relations between the ascendant elite

and the residents of San Agustín ended up being not so different from the earlier configuration in which liberal democrats were in power.

AGENCY IN THE NORMALIZATION OF BOLIVARIAN DOMINANCE

After winning the December 2006 presidential election, Chávez took measures to extend his power indefinitely. Between March and November of the following year he merged supporters into a unified political party, the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela, PSUV). In a referendum in December 2007 he sought approval for reelection of the president, creation of a centralized communal state, strengthened ties between government and the armed forces, and the limiting of political participation to implementation of socialist projects. Following rejection of the referendum, Chávez began implementing its provisions piecemeal. In July 2008 a decree-law strengthened linkages between government and the military; and in February 2009 the president gained voter approval for removing all term limits. The National Assembly passed legislation in December 2010 that imposed most of the other reforms that voters rejected in 2007.

Over the following six years, Chávez and his inner circle consolidated their status as the new governing elite. In examining this development, as in investigating how populist mobilization displaced liberal democrats, the six volumes under discussion focus on interaction between agency and structural conditions. As before, choices, populist mobilization, institutional manipulation, and patronage contribute.

Accounts describing choices with consequences surface in all six volumes when they examine regime consolidation. Brewer-Carías's analysis of the 2007 referendum paints Chávez as a strategist plotting to build on his December 2006 election victory to lock in the new balance of power. That referendum allowed for the indefinite reelection of the president and increases in the scope of the office. Other proposed changes to the constitution retained the Bolivarian myth while identifying it with socialism. The new normal envisioned in the referendum retained no sphere of autonomy from which opponents of the Proceso could organize or act autonomously. When voters rejected this vision Chávez moved quickly against those who had orchestrated the referendum's defeat.

Carroll provides multiple examples of choices made by Chávez for the purpose of punishing interference with efforts to consolidate Bolivarian dominance. Perhaps the best-known example is the incarceration of General Raúl Baduel, the former minister of defense who broke with Chávez over changes proposed in the 2007 referendum and whose opposition the president blamed for its defeat. Carroll also describes widespread surveillance inside of Chávez's inner circle. Paranoia was widespread after defeat of the referendum, and perversely, "The principal source of paranoia was what you said yourself" (128). The National Intelligence Police (Servicio Bolivariano de Inteligencia) and the Cuban G-2 tapped into private communications and managed a corps of informants that included drivers, chauffeurs, and even janitors. Surveillance increased in 2011 and 2012 as the president's health deteriorated.

Mark Eric Williams provides valuable insights into President Chávez's strategic thinking and hands-on style of policy making in "The New Balancing Act: International Relations Theory and Venezuela's Foreign Policy" (Ponniah and Eastwood, chapter 8). Williams analyzes Chávez's frustration with what he saw as disproportionate United States power and global domination by multinational corporations. He demonstrates that Chávez consistently employed international strategies and initiatives that he believed would project Venezuelan influence and strengthen opponents of the United States. Carroll (219) opines that some of these initiatives—such as the proposal to build thermonuclear plants with Russian help—were fantasies; they are perhaps better understood as provocations intended to throw the United States off balance but not as serious projects.⁵

Populist mobilization to consolidate identification with Hugo Chávez, as discussed above, intensified after his reelection in 2006. The PSUV stepped up its efforts to mobilize on behalf of Chávez and won 77 percent of governorships and 80 percent of mayoralties in the regional elections of November 2008. Voting for the National Assembly in September 2010 gave the PSUV almost 60 percent of the seats even though the party received only 1 percent more of the popular vote than candidates of the unified opposition. These contests are noted briefly in Brading and not at all by Hawkins, whose work does not incorporate data from later than mid-2009. Only Carroll recounts events after 2010, when Presidents Chávez and Maduro made new choices intended to entrench the Bolivarian elite. Neither Brading nor Hawkins examines populist mobilization's potential to create a stable political regime. However, Hawkins does view populism as a paradigmatic form of government, like democracy or authoritarianism.

Accounts of *misiones* programs after 2007 reveal concern with locking in Bolivarian dominance. The *misiones*, as indicated earlier, were marketed as endeavors to create a more egalitarian society. In conformity with *chavismo's* worldview, *misiones* agendas targeted the poor and marginalized but ignored the middle sectors. The president never tired of reminding *el pueblo* that he was giving them benefits that they deserved but had been denied under *Puntofijismo*. Still, the *misiones* proved more effective in maintaining identification with Chávez as a leader than in firming up loyalty to his populist regime. The works reviewed here suggest that much of the problem lay in follow-through and the implementation of government programs. Between 2003 and 2009 Chávez established more than thirty-four *misiones*. Many were announced on the spur of the moment and managed out of the president's office. When he turned his attention elsewhere the *misiones* stagnated.

Chavistas held the established bureaucracies in contempt and excluded them from administering the *misiones*, but Chavista loyalists simply did not have the technical expertise to run them. There were no protocols for evaluating *misión*

5. During the 1998 and 2000 presidential election campaigns I had periodic conversations with Chávez that centered on the global balance of power and the alternatives available to Venezuela. In those exchanges I found him to be hard-headed, nationalistic, and possessing a good grasp of how Venezuela could use soft power to advance its international interests. Williams's work confirms those impressions.

performance. Problems remained undetected until they reached crisis stage. Even Misión Barrio Adentro, the linchpin of cooperation between Hugo Chávez and the Castro brothers, was not immune.⁶ As of 2010 more than one thousand Cuban doctors had defected. Many Barrio Adentro clinics in the shantytowns were shuttered. Two years later Chávez announced a new program of Grand Missions (Gran Misiones), initiatives that Brading (143–144) characterizes as retreads with an eye to influencing voters in the upcoming presidential election. Reports in the Caracas press during January 2014 suggested that the Gran Misiones were encountering many of the same problems that reduced the effectiveness of their predecessors.

Brewer-Carías also expresses concern over institutional and legal changes that cemented chavismo's hold on power. The National Assembly enacted most of the important ones in December 2010, after Brewer-Carías had completed his work. The one exception was voter approval for indefinite reelection of not only the president but all elected officials. Otherwise, the laws enacted in December 2010 were almost identical to the proposals rejected in the 2007 constitutional referendum; thus one can obtain an accurate view of the institutional modifications designed to consolidate Chávez's rule by referring to Brewer-Carías's discussion of what Chávez proposed in 2007.

The legal modifications that locked in chavista rule transformed Venezuela from a social democratic to a socialist state. One of the most significant changes eliminated decentralization as state policy. The traditional regions (states) were not abolished but they ceased to exist as policy-making entities. Brewer-Carías discusses how the municipalities were stripped of their traditional constitutional status as primary units of the republic (Article 168 allocates this status). In their place communes were designated as fundamental territorial units that constituted a new "vertical level of power" and the "basic nucleus of the Venezuelan socialist state" (209). Inside of the communes, communal cities could be established by popular referendum if authorized by the president. The transfer of powers to communes has moved slowly, delayed by elected governors and mayors from the PSUV who have vested interests in existing institutional arrangements.

Other institutional changes that entrenched chavismo granted autonomy to the misiones and strengthened their legal status. Modification to one Organic Law fragmented the treasury in ways that institutionalized its dependence on the national executive. There were also new constitutional provisions that spelled out procedures for undertaking the transfer of responsibilities from local governments to the communes and community councils. (The extent to which transfers are actually taking place is unknown.) Additional institutional changes narrowed citizen rights to participate by eliminating the participation of civil society in nominating state officials and restricting the right of political participation to matters of implementing socialist ideology. Public financing for political parties was forbidden. Financial support for electoral activities was limited to ones in-

6. Barrio Adentro is the medical program that allocated clinics staffed by Cuban doctors to the urban slums. It became a parallel medical system to the one that was part of the traditional bureaucracy in which care was given by Venezuelan medical personnel.

tended to strengthen socialism. Thus, the institutions of “twenty-first-century socialism” envisioned no role for autonomous interest articulation or participation by a loyal opposition.

Patronage allocation after the displacement of liberal democracy was largely top-down, with locking in Bolivarian dominance being the driving criterion. The shift away from favoring autonomous participation unfolds in Fernandes’s case study of barrio-based media communication and in Cathy A. Rakowski and Giacinda Espina’s account (Ponniah and Eastwood, chapter 5) of efforts to advance woman’s rights. These studies explain how innovative programs to implement participatory democracy evolved into tightly controlled systems of clientelism.

Community broadcasting had its roots in projects developed by shantytown residents during the 1990s. Early media outlets disseminated information of neighborhood interest and expressed popular culture. Fernandes discusses how in 1999, soon after Chávez took office, media activists raised issues related to the commercial interests’ domination of communications in the shantytowns. The government responded by refusing to renew the licenses of many private radio stations and opening up the newly available bandwidth to community radio. The number of community radio stations increased from 13 in 2002 to 193 in 2008, with the national executive allocating funds for technical equipment and training. Fernandes explains that while community media personnel took advantage of these resources they were most interested in transmitting the meaning of everyday life in the barrio. They focused on what was learned from being with “el pueblo” and rejected the label of professional journalists (169).

After voters rejected the constitutional referendum in 2007 the national government began to condition support for community radio stations on their willingness to follow guidance from the Ministry of Telecommunications. In turn, that ministry created a network of state-affiliated community media outlets that were subsidized with government advertising. Members of the president’s inner circle with commercial interests in the barrios received preference in the allocations of licenses to broadcast (203), and requests by community radio station pioneers were routinely denied. Thus, concern with adding to the ruling elite’s financial interests and propagandizing barrio residents shifted resources away from broadcast outlets committed to interpreting barrio life in accord with autonomous perceptions and values.

Rakowski and Espina describe how legislation passed in the first Chávez government advanced feminism. Among the institutions that chavismo created for this purpose were Instituto Nacional de la Mujer (InaMujer, the National Women’s Organization) and Banco de Desarrollo de la Mujer (BanMujer, the Women’s Development Bank). InaMujer had two mandates: to serve the revolution and promote women’s interests (183). The two mandates were often contradictory. Rakowski and Espina explain how during implementation of the legislation that established InaMujer the government attempted to place women who prioritized service to the revolution in leadership positions. Reliance on this policy increased after the government came to view feminist leaders with a commitment to participatory democracy as roadblocks. Rakowski and Espina conclude by voicing concern that the chavistas were using gender issues to expand their control.

UNDERLYING CONDITIONS IMPACTING THE CONSOLIDATION
OF BOLIVARIAN DOMINANCE

Significant changes occurred in the pyramids of class, power, and status after 2006. On balance, structural conditions favored the chavistas, but not entirely. High prices for petroleum kept the populist experiment afloat, but questionable economic policies consumed resources whose distribution internally would have increased the regime's appeal, especially with the middle sectors.⁷ Presidents Chávez and Maduro escalated imposition of the legal and institutional foundations for socialistic dominance. Still, a residual of liberal democratic elites and allied middle sectors retained some influence. Targeted violations of their political rights increased after the December 2013 local elections. Government media disseminated portraits of the chavista inner circle as a revolutionary vanguard and proclaimed their linkage with "el pueblo"; their opponents and skeptics were labeled *escuálidos*.

The volumes under review are less complete when assessing the impact of underlying conditions after 2006. Mark Weisbrot (Ponniah and Eastwood, chapter 6) examines the state of Venezuela's economy through 2009 from a leftist perspective and challenges critics who assert that efforts to build political support explain public spending on unsustainable and inefficient projects. He argues that Chávez's policies have always been more sustainable than mainstream economists assert. Weisbrot's position is borne out by the demonstrated ability of Venezuela's government to increase public expenditures in 2010 and 2011 and to fund the Gran Misiones during the 2012 presidential election campaign. Nevertheless, commitments to allies in ALBA (Bolivarian Alliance for the Americas) have reduced the government's ability to invest inside the country. The Chinese, Belarusians, and the Iranians funded many projects that were part of the Gran Misiones. In early 2014, as these projects were completed, President Maduro was forced to apply belt-tightening measures.

Carroll provides journalistic impressions of class structure and its impact on politics. Toward the end of his book he reveals his disillusionment with the Bolivarian Revolution, a turnabout from the hopes he held when Hugo Chávez came to power. Carroll portrays the new ruling class as corrupt, closed, and engaged in internecine struggles for enrichment. Visits to government-sponsored events in the barrios during 2011 convinced him that the government had come to view residents as supplicants. He also describes incompetence in managing certain heavy industries, dissects the electricity crisis, and decries the crumbling physical infrastructure. While these criticisms are devastating, Carroll's choice of subjects lacks balance. He fails to identify strengths in the economy and bonds in the class structure that permitted Maduro to win election in 2013 and stabilize the political situation.

Carroll is critical of Chávez's and Maduro's international strategy. He dis-

7. Jose Manuel Ponte, "Renta y revolución: La economía política de Venezuela durante el gobierno de Hugo Chávez" (paper prepared for the 30th Congress of the Latin American Studies Association, San Francisco, California, May 23–26, 2012).

cusses at length the influence over Venezuela gained by Fidel and Raúl Castro during Chávez's illness. He suspects that the Cubans are playing a large role in consolidating Bolivarian rule, and he believes the Castro brothers will go to great lengths to guarantee that Venezuelan subsidies continue to prop up Cuba's economy. Carroll views Venezuela's funding of Petro-Caribe, the purchase of Russian arms, and privileges given to Iranian banks as misguided efforts to build international support. Weisbrot does not disagree, but he is more sympathetic to these initiatives and more hostile to the presence of the United States and multinational corporations in the Caribbean and South America. He argues that Chávez's foreign policy provided support that proved critical to the survival of his revolution. Thus, Carroll and Weisbrot, despite their differing sympathies, portray the international arena as a source of influence that has impacted the ability of chavismo to consolidate its dominance.

Turning to the structure of status, Hugo Chávez promised that the increased prestige and gains in influence that "el pueblo" had secured during his ascent to power would never be surrendered. This promise was central to his continuing appeal. When regime consolidation got under way, previously ignored groups had grown accustomed to participating in public decisions and considered this a fundamental right. When government officials began to consolidate the new regime their actions revealed a different view. Brewer-Carías, as discussed earlier, recounts changes in the law that restricted the right to participate. In his analysis of Chávez's *misiones* Hawkins confirms the supremacy of government priorities in decisions to abandon or refurbish *Misión Barrio Adentro* clinics. Carroll recounts multiple instances when the president's inner circle made decisions unilaterally. When it came to locking in dominance, the iron law of oligarchy trumped commitment to community decision making.

FINAL OBSERVATIONS

The regime changes described here raise several points of general interest to social scientists. First, they support use of elite circulation as a paradigm to order data that describes revolutionary transformation that is minimally violent and leads to challenging elites becoming the new ruling class. These six volumes also validate the utility of other approaches—rational choice, institutionalism, political economy, and political culture. These approaches assist in identifying the strengths and weaknesses embedded in the different kinds of political regimes in which elite circulation may be taking place. In the volumes covered here, the relevant regime types are liberal democracy, leftist populism, and competitive socialist authoritarianism.

The second point of interest is liberal democracy's vulnerability to assault by left-wing populists, especially in countries with weak states, poor governance, and massive income inequality. Populism, as described by Hawkins, focuses on the normative dimension of politics. We know that populism's Manichaean dialogue shapes political norms and identities. It assigns a superior moral identity to the underclass and portrays entrenched elites as villainous. This dichotomy has striking parallels with Marxism's materialist-based separation between bour-

geoisie and proletariat. When frustration over the behavior of elites pervades liberal democracy and that frustration persists in the presence of an economic crisis, populist mobilizers have an opening. They proclaim that the separation of powers, procedural rights, and guarantees of private sector autonomy—all legitimizing tenets of liberal democracy—perpetuate injustice. They also dismiss party politics and cyclical elections. When populist critiques strike a responsive chord, the entrusting of almost unlimited power to the leader who incarnates the will of the people has great appeal.

Third, the ideology of socialism emerges as having significant potential to transform leftist populism. Indeed, the course of political change in Venezuela since 2010 supports the proposition that leftist populism is an unstable regime type. Venezuela's slide into socialism is well advanced. Enemies of the *Proceso* are now called oligarchs and tools of imperialism. Members of the *pueblo* have become socialist citizens portrayed strikingly like their peers in communist Cuba. Participatory forms of decision making have given way to democratic centralism in which the ruling elite sets policy autonomously and middle-level apparatchiks are expected to generate enthusiasm and oversee implementation. Thus, while leftist populism appears potent as an action-oriented belief system capable of setting in motion the circulation of elites, it is less convincing as a facilitator of regime consolidation. For this, the tried and true methods of socialism are without peer.

Fourth, when the subject of economics surfaces, it is impossible to explain the circulation of elites in Venezuela without taking into account the political effects of oil. The popularity of Venezuelan presidents since World War II has varied with the amount of revenue that flowed into the country during their tenure. In the 1970s booming oil prices guaranteed dominance by AD and COPEI. The collapse of oil prices in the 1990s then destroyed their hegemony. Low oil prices in the first three years of Chávez's presidency forced him to work with segments of the liberal democratic ruling class even though he demonized AD and COPEI in the 1998 and 2000 presidential election campaigns. Massive increases in petroleum revenue beginning in 2003 changed the equation. Chávez was able to deliver unprecedented amounts of patronage. This helped him to win elections, marginalize the political opposition, and dramatically increase state control over the economy. It also allowed Chávez to increase Venezuela's influence in the Caribbean and South America. Mismanagement of the revenue bonanza fueled inflation, created shortages, and reduced Venezuela's influence abroad. Nevertheless, petrostate status continues to provide a cushion that allows the chavistas a freedom of action not available to any other ruling elite in Latin America.

The final point of interest is the military's appearance as a major actor in leftist political regimes. Hugo Chávez distrusted political parties and bureaucrats. He allocated resources through regional military commanders until the abortive coup attempt of April 2002. After "cleansing" the armed forces, Chávez rebuilt them as the linchpin of the *Proceso*. Cooperation between the Cuban and Venezuelan militaries increased during Chávez's illness and remains tight under President Maduro. The armed forces are also enmeshed in the governing of leftist populist regimes in Nicaragua, Bolivia, and Ecuador. They manage state corporations, let lucrative contracts, and enjoy benefits superior to what they received in

liberal democracies. These opportunities for wealth, power, and status provided by competitive authoritarianism of the left surely will make an impression on militaries elsewhere.

The works in this review suggest that the replacement of liberal democracy with leftist populism is a continuing risk throughout Latin America. For the time being a wave of populist regimes is unlikely, largely because of reasonable rates of economic growth and the presence of strong political parties committed to liberal democracy. However, systematic corruption and the yawning gap in income distribution are widespread. These conditions opened the door to successful populist mobilization in Venezuela and could do so elsewhere.