



**Sirius International**  
The Age Of Omnipresence

## Essay Series

### Democracy in the Americas

#### Twenty-First Century Socialism

#### Author's Note

Turning a Nelsonic blind eye to the shifting templates in contemporary Inter-American relations was unthinkable. So the tumult surrounding the 2012 Summit of the Americas prompted me to take a closer look at signals that continue to cast their shadows on regional politics in order to gain a deeper grasp of the unfolding events and their political context. Evidently, there are competing alliances at work challenging the fundamental tenets of the Inter-American system, the viability of the Organization of American States (OAS) as the heart of the (political) decision-making process of that body and the practicalities of future hemispheric cooperation through multilateral diplomacy, democracy promotion and consensus-building.<sup>1</sup>

In his recent essay, “The New Crisis of Democracy,”<sup>2</sup> Fareed Zakaria, surmises that all advanced industrial economies have now reached a stage of development that requires the change or abandonment of outmoded policies, structures and practices. Citing the experience of the United States, he explains that policies that are currently in place benefit “interest groups that zealously protect the status quo,” and that instituting reform at this juncture would compel the government to assert the national interest over parochial investments. In his view such a policy within the framework of a democratic system would be a difficult call.

This enquiry argues that the “new crisis” to which Zakaria alludes is by no means a present phenomenon. It may be recalled that many decades ago a Report entitled

The Crisis of Democracy: Report on the Governability of Democracies to the Trilateral Commission (which was primarily intended to identify and analyze the challenges confronting democratic government in today's world, ascertain the basis for optimism or pessimism about the future of democracy, and suggest innovations that will render democracy more viable in the future) laid claim to the stance that democracies can work "provided their publics truly understand the nature of the democratic system, and particularly if they are sensitive to the subtle interrelationship between liberty and responsibility."<sup>3</sup> Several important observations emanated from the study, one of which was that in a democracy the authority of governmental leaders and institutions depends in large part on the extent to which the public has confidence and trust in either sphere. Another observation was that the loss of confidence in government and public institutions amidst the "democratic surge" (as for example what obtained in the U.S. during the 1960s) in combination with increased citizenry involvement had resulted in national issues becoming increasingly "politically polarized" and "ideologically structured."

This enquiry contends that ideology lies at the heart of the present challenge to democracy within the Americas, and furthermore that the conspicuous signs of polarization that we see day by day, are a product of the loss of citizen confidence in institutions and their leadership. Moreover, the extraordinary synthesis of leadership vis-à-vis ideology on a geopolitically competing landscape will continue to be an important determinant in resolving ongoing rifts that are restraining opportunities and chances for successful cooperation and consensus building. Given the politically consequential nature of the issues at stake I have resolved to throw my gauntlet into the ring against the setting of Venezuela's recent electoral transitioning.

**Serena Joseph-Harris ATA**

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## SECTION I

### The Bolivarian Ideal

*... for the first time in the tumultuous regional history of Latin America, the United States is no longer the source of conflict, as it was in the past. Instead, political provocation comes from a group of Latin American countries that is walking away from the summit commitments. These countries have a different view of democratic governance, according to which democracy is defined exclusively on the basis of conducting popular elections. In this authoritarian shift, individual rights are marginalized in favor of the abstract interests of the collective...<sup>4</sup>*

Jaime Aparicio-Otero

### Introduction

Hugo Chavez has been Venezuela's chief of state and head of government since February 02 1999 when he was elected by popular vote for a six-year term. Chavez was returned to office on October 07, 2012 with a decisive 55.3 % of the national vote; his closest rival Henrique Capriles copped 44.1 % of the ballots with the remaining 0.6 % assigned to a line-up of less significant contenders. Despite an 81% voter turn out, and gaining of traction by the official opposition, by all indications a social consensus among the Venezuelan people has been renewed<sup>5</sup> A constitutional mandate now requires that (the elected) president be sworn in on January 10, 2013. Venezuela's next election is constitutionally due in October 2018 pending official convocation by the country's electoral body.

The rippling effects of the election are being felt throughout the region. Following the announcement of election results, the Bolivar fell from 2.3 % to a record low of 12.58 % in the unregulated market; yields in Petroleo de Venezuela SA's dollar bonds due in 2017 rose 55 base points to 11.73 % (according to Stuttgart Stock Exchange prices); and the IBC Stock Index tumbled 13 % with almost \$130,000 in shares changing hands after rallying 31 % during the preceding week. Patrick Dudley, former U.S. Ambassador to Venezuela, surmised that, "...if Chavez is re-

elected in a process judged acceptably free and fair, the U.S should seek to re-set the bilateral relationship with an eye toward the eventual renewal of high-level communication in areas of mutual interest. Daniel Kerner and Risa Grais-Targow of the Eurasia Group prognosticated “further radicalization” as Chavez presses ahead with his twenty-first century socialist agenda.

Hugo Chavez’s fourteen-year tour as Venezuela’s president has been mired with controversy. In the course of his dauntless pursuit of populist policies, he has consistently challenged America’s interests within the hemisphere notwithstanding that she endures as the dominant player politically, economically and militarily speaking. However, in spite of the fact that Latin America is now more than ever less economically dependent upon the United States, Chavez’s posturing has contributed in no small measure to undermining the political leverage of the United States within the Inter-American system. This situation is now compounded by uncertainty over his state of health, the designation of Vice President Chavista Nicolas Maduro as Chavez’s candidate of choice as political heir, and the implications that lie ahead for the region, should history conspire to punctuate Chavez’s presidential tenure.

### Emergence of Multiple Political Blocs

Among the developments that spotlight Venezuela’s penetrating influence in intraregional affairs is the emergence of two multinational groupings of note. The first, the Bolivarian Alliance for the Americas (Allanza Boliviana Para Los Pueblos de Nuestra America), was the subject of Fifth Republic of Fourth Reich? - my prequel on the impact of new geopolitical groupings within the Caribbean Community (CARICOM). Launched in December 2004, the mushrooming ALBA membership is reflective of a prototype of emerging social democratic regimes wielded together by a shared vision of political integration, economic cooperation and common monetary arrangements. Antigua and Barbuda, Bolivia, Cuba, Dominica, Ecuador, Nicaragua, St Vincent and the Grenadines and Venezuela make up this cluster.

The second development was the materialization of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), which was established in July 2011 following the dissolution of the Group of Rio and the Latin American and Caribbean Summit - at the February 2010 convocation in Mexico. CELAC, which conspicuously debars membership of the United States and Canada, is committed to deeper regional integration, more so, reducing the overwhelming influence of the

U.S. in the future politics and economics of the Americas. The onset of this major intraregional coalition of interests is premised on ideological preferences, central to which is circumventing the political principles and commitments that go hand in hand with representative democracy.

The visualization of CELAC members was perhaps captured in the pronouncements of Venezuela's President Chavez, Ecuadorian President Rafael Correa, and President Morales of Bolivia. The ALBA inner circle views CELAC as the logical precursor towards having in place a countervailing authority to the Organization of American States (OAS) present configuration. Evo Morales' averment in Mexico in February 2010, when members of the Rio Group convoked for the dissolution of that body, is certainly suggestive of less than cordial undercurrents. On that occasion, he remarked:

*"A union of Latin American countries is the weapon against imperialism. It is necessary to create a regional body that excludes the United States and Canada... Where there are U.S. military bases that do not respect democracy, where there is a political empire with his blackmailers, with its constraints, there is no development for that country, and especially there is no social peace, and therefore it is the best time for prime ministers of Latin America and the Caribbean to gestate this new organization without the United States to free our peoples in Latin America and the Caribbean."*<sup>6</sup>

CELAC's inaugural summit was held on December 2-3, 2011 and hosted and chaired by President Chavez of Venezuela. On that occasion, ALBA members seized the moment of unison to echo spirited calls for the replacement of the Inter American Commission on Human Rights with an alternative human rights commission and for the installation of replacement systems to the OAS and its organs as a means of resolving certain fundamental disputations. These calls are decided attempts to reverse the mandates set in motion through traditional summitry shared by the OAS membership.<sup>7</sup>

### Democracy-Promotion Instruments - the IADC

Part III of this anthology is a disquisition on political thought and responses to the unfolding events in Venezuela and the ramifications of succession to Chavez's

leadership at this juncture. The Alpha Barrier of North South Dialogue<sup>8</sup> delivered a strategic analysis of many of the current contentions surrounding emerging intraregional, regional and sub-regional groupings amidst political and ideological divisions, whilst enunciating prescriptions for greater political coherence among the Latin American and Caribbean governments. Indeed, developments in Venezuela should be placed within the wider framework of the Inter American Democratic Charter (IADC), the principal multilateral diplomatic instrument for the collective promotion and defense of democracy in the Western Hemisphere, alongside the Inter American summitry process, as the ultimate forum of the region's political decision-making.

IADC incorporates several democracy-promotion instruments that were developed as part of an historic effort to return many Latin American countries to a state of democratic governance after sustained periods of military rule. There is amounting evidence that commitments made by the said and other governments under the Charter "are increasingly threatened by the steady erosion and even attack by several Latin American countries." Venezuela is one of those countries that is antithetical to Charter principles and this was openly demonstrated in the positions taken against the backdrop of: -

- The disruption of democratic governance in Honduras in 2009
- The unwillingness of the Secretary General and member states of the IADC to invoke Article 20 of the IADC to convene the Permanent Council to undertake a collective assessment of alterations in the democratic order of members when such instances present themselves
- The demand of OAS member states for Cuba's unconditional reinstatement to OAS membership, despite not meeting the prescribed democratic criteria of the OAS Charter and the IADC. At the 2001 and 2009 summits of the Americas, the General Assembly resolution on Cuba was to prevent the country from participating in OAS activities, including presidential summits, unless Cuba complied with the Charter provisions.
- The rejection of decisions of the Inter American Court by Venezuela along with other nations such as Brazil, Bolivia and Ecuador and further actions of these nations to restrict the autonomy and independence of the Court
- The threat of Venezuela along with Ecuador to withdraw from membership of the Inter American Commission on Human Rights
- The disinclination of Venezuela to having observers from the OAS and European Union present to observe presidential and legislative elections

A significant aspect of this disquisition is recognizing Venezuela's role as a catalyst on the regional map and reckoning on the sustainability of its influence. In this

connection a change on leadership in Venezuela at this juncture will impact on current efforts being made by certain states parties within emerging coalitions that are antipathetic to Inter-American ideals of democracy, human rights, the sovereignty of states, the principle of non-intervention, non-use of force, and peaceful settlement of disputes and committed to (a) sidelining the United States and undermining its primacy within the Americas (b) eroding the resilience of the Organization of American States as the political heart of the Inter-American system; and (c) promoting a form of economic and political unification among new clusters of sovereign nations that is tangential to the OAS charter.

Given the scope of the discourse, this Paper has been segmented into various themes. Section I consists of (a) an expository on the elements of the democratic tradition and some of the inherent challenges in its earlier history (b) a description of Venezuela's populist perspectives and how these compare against the liberal perspective as it relates to the voting process; and (c) a brief discussion of the effectiveness of voting in realizing popular will and social choices. President Chavez has bemoaned, *“representative democracy for Venezuela has been a trap, and our Constitution compels us to strive for participatory democracy.”*

This aspect of the discussion therefore examines the nature of the constitutional innovations that have been achieved by what is deemed to be participatory democracy and how they will impact on the achievement of popular will. By all indications, these overtures have laid the foundation for Chavez's indefinite tenure as president and earned the support of other nations on a step-by-step basis for what will eventually culminate in an alteration in the regional power balance through “Twenty First Century Socialism,” as conceived of by President Chavez.

Section II and subsequent sections will examine more thoroughly Venezuela's catalytic influence on neighboring societies, specifically in the spheres of foreign policy and the economy. Some of these distinctions were spilled out at the Sixth Summit of the Americas held in Cartagena in 2012.

### Ideological Framework

In laying the groundwork for this discourse it should be recalled that in 1998, amidst Chavez's campaign for presidency, his most consistently articulated plan was to write a constitution that would replace Venezuela's 1961 predecessor instrument, the latter having endured as the longest serving one in the country's history. To this end, Chavez tapped into the ideas of undaunted thinkers of the ilk of Antonio Negri,

prominent contemporary leftist, who promoted the notion of “constituent power” to be supported by an associated “constituent assembly.”<sup>9</sup> Chavez adopted these concepts as the archetype, so to speak, of a constitutional assembly that would place Venezuela on a revolutionary footing and verbalized some of these ideas in some of his early interviews and conclaves among proponents:

*“We discussed how to break with the past, how to overcome the type of democracy that only responds to the interests of the oligarchical sectors; how to get rid of the corruption. We had always rejected the idea of a traditional military coup, of a military dictatorship, or of a military governing junta. We were very aware of what happened in Colombia in the years 1990-1991, when there was a constitutional assembly - of course! - it was very limited because in the end it was subordinated to the existing powers. It was the existing powers that designed Colombia’s constitutional assembly and got it going, and therefore it could not transform the situation because it was a prisoner of the existing power.”<sup>10</sup>*

Article 2 of the new Constitution of Venezuela, which was promulgated in 1999, sets forth the political philosophy of the republic in these terms, “...Venezuela constitutes itself in a democratic and social state of law and justice,” and serves as a major plank in legitimizing and executing the populist ideals embraced by the Chavez regime.

### Overview of the Democratic Tradition

Democracies have existed in the ancient Mediterranean world, late-medieval central European cities, and in many nations of the modern world whose social, political and cultural circumstances are extremely diverse. The goals and methods of democracy have been defined in an array of constitutional types and have found their way into a huge trove of judicial, philosophical, and popular commentary. Literature celebrating democracy, even authoritatively explicating it, renders a definition that is beyond the full scope of this discourse. Notwithstanding this, I dare suggest a modest inventory of some of the more representative documents that have shaped liberal democracy as specifically propagated within the Americas to include Pericles’ Funeral Oration, the Agreement of the People, the Declaration of Independence and Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address. The democratic properties that can be gleaned from this list of notables are “participation,” “liberty,” and “equality”.

More importantly, and central to all of these, is the act of voting. Indeed, all elements of the democratic ideal are meant to be moral extensions and elaborations of the method of voting and its workability, since democratic liberty is ultimately meant to organize voting and popular participation in government.

H.G. Wells, an apologist for global unity who sought to influence many key world leaders in his time including two U.S. Presidents, Theodore Roosevelt and Franklin D. Roosevelt as well as Lenin and Josef Stalin of the Kremlin, described how “the old order” of the nineteenth century, as he called it (with specific reference to the capitalist system) came to disaster during the second and third decades of the twentieth century. Wells attributed these failures to an amalgam of issues not dissimilar to the type displayed today - the disproportionate development of industrial production, the unsoundness and vulnerability of the monetary nexus and its political inadaptability. More importantly, he remonstrated over the labeling of that era as “The Age of Democracy”<sup>11</sup> since it was obvious to him that the extension of the ideal was powerless at that time to arrest the impending social collapse of the greater part of the Western world. The question that now arises is - What does the violation of democratic principles represent in this new era of Inter-American relations? And furthermore, in acknowledging that democracy is essential for the social, political and economic advancement of the Americas, what processes can be put in place to enhance its effectiveness?

In his era, Wells habitually bemoaned how adherents of the democratic ideal conceived of it in a sense that appeared to be beyond immediate practicality. Their idealized interpretation was represented as “...some far-away simple little republic of stout upstanding men all similar, all probably equal in fortune and power, managing the affairs of the canton in a folk-meeting, by frank speech and acclamation.” In satirizing the relevance of the concept against the backdrop of eighteenth and nineteenth -century political realities, he noted that, “...democratic republics, that is to say republics in which every man was supposed to share equal in the government, in the rare instances when they occurred at all before the end of the eighteenth century were like Uri, Unterwalden or Andorra, small and poor and perched in inaccessible places. The world at large knew nothing of them.” Directing his gaze to the social movements at work in Europe that propelled the democratic crusade he offered a rationale for “the bankruptcy of Parliamentary democracies.” He saw the movement that propelled nineteenth-century democracy as a revolt against “birth” and “privilege,” against the monopolization of privilege by restricted and generally hereditary classes in accordance with definitively established dogmas. In his mind, “... this revolt was the revolt of a very miscellaneous number of energetic and resourceful individuals not definitively organized, mentally or socially, it came about that at a quite early stage of the new movement it took the form of an assertion of the

equal political rights of all men.” In cementing his own concerns, he bemoans, “...the experience of the futile Disarmament and Economic Conferences of 1932 and 1933, the massive resistance in every national legislature to any but the most narrow egotism in foreign policy, the inability of the world as a whole to establish any unanimity of action in the face of swift economic collapse, revealed the final bankruptcy of parliamentary democracy.”<sup>12</sup>

Admittedly, the introduction of democracy to communities of the new world as a prescription for supplanting the feudal order rampant in Europe presented manifest challenges. Notwithstanding this, so widespread was the dread among its protagonists of a possible reversion to “privilege,” “restriction” and “tyranny,” that the interpretation and adoption of the ideal was popularly and inexorably embraced among them.

Democracy is both an acknowledged ideal as well as a method of practice. The defining aspect of this political model is that self-respect and self-realization are made possible by self-control and the concomitant cooperative control of the government. The democratic method includes the process of participation, specifically through voting in the management of society, where voting is understood to include all the ancillary institutions (such as political parties, pressure groups and the media) and social principles (like freedom and equality) that are necessary to render it significant. Central to this schema, however, is the process of voting and its unique relationship with social choice.

### National Consensus and Social Choice

Placed in context, we see within Venezuela an electoral framework that permits the election of a head of state, in the office of president, and a unicameral federal legislature. The Supreme Electoral Council (CSE) that is chosen every two years by Congress administers the elections process. The CSE in effect heads the country’s electoral system which is composed of state, district and municipal electoral boards and is responsible for registering eligible voters, operating polling locations, counting votes, and settling any disputes between parties and any associated electoral issues. Venezuela’s system is a multiple-party one, whereby many political parties have the capacity to gain control of government offices either separately or as a coalition. With the exception of the president, all candidates for national and local offices run on lists as members of a party. Candidates are elected on a proportional basis

according to the number of colored ballots cast for their party and their position on the party list.

The themes of social choice and national consensus are intimately intertwined with and germane to the politics of Venezuela in a manner not necessarily behooved to Westerners enduringly hitched to the notion of democratic idealism in its classical sense. The theory of social choice is a theory about the way the tastes, preferences, or values of individual persons are amalgamated and summarized into the choice of a collective group or society. It is about how people in groups choose among alternatives. Because voting is among the more legitimized and recognized methods for amalgamating and aggregating values, and because voting is an indispensable feature of democracy, the method of participation in voting and whether the predetermined ideals of democracy guarantee that through voting these ideals would be realized, become germane to this discussion. In the case of Venezuela, the system of government enthusiastically championed by the Chavez regime is populism and the interpretation and the significance of social choice under this brand of political authority, is significantly distinct to that of neoliberal politics.

From the liberal standpoint, liberty is a product of voting because its effect is to restrict and place checks and balances on the actions of officials through the mechanisms of popular vote and limited tenure, and consequentially there is no need to treat the output of government as the embodiment of liberty itself. From a liberal perspective, law is no more than the decree of legislators or judges, accepted and occasionally ratified by citizens. Populists, in contrast, see voting as the means through which liberty is generated by participation, so that the output of a participatory type government, in that regard, is liberty itself.

William Riker unravels the inherent flaws of the voting methods under liberal and populist type regimes and argues that either way, the process of social choice through voting methods, falls short of inspiring confidence in “the quality of majorities” or similar amalgamations for democratic decision-making.<sup>13</sup> Riker discerns under either voting method, the politically devastating consequences of inherent juggling within the voting process through the natural selection of issues, manipulation of agendas, and the creation of “new issues” on a grand scale that virtually toss and hurl public sentiment in one way or another. Tracing the history of American presidential elections, he observes how “repeatedly endorsed clusters of ideas,” although ostensibly vague, nevertheless disclose popular will. He also picks up how great political events merely corroborate a certain pattern - the efforts of participants (either leaders or losers) to manipulate outcomes to their advantage and more so, to introduce “new issues” for the sole purpose of generating “cycles of disequilibrium,” so that they can, with luck, emerge as winners. Riker’s central argument is that

“popular will” is determined by restricting the “dimensions” of issues thrown out to the electorate and that any mutation of issues, however minimal, is capable of triggering disequilibrium that can alter the outcome of voting.<sup>14</sup>

### The Liberal-Populist Debate

Riker’s prognosis regarding the liberal - populist applications and interpretations of voting methods led to some rather interesting illations that are pertinent to the discourse at hand, namely:

- That liberal democracy promotes a kind of equality - equal chances to restrain, to reject, to veto, to inhere and that the very idea of using votes to restrain or control officials is the essence of the idea of juristic equality
- That although equality has many derived meanings (including such notions as sharing in the national wealth), these derived senses cannot occur in the absence of juristic equality
- That although the liberal interpretation of voting admits to unfair methods, as demonstrated in his study, through devices such as agenda manipulation, voting is still able to retain the essential elements of democracy and it is only by this means that true democracy is attainable
- That institutional weaknesses in populist systems diminish their capacity to fulfill declared promises, and furthermore the loss of confidence that ultimately ensues, constrains their survivability

Riker made a further point in explaining that under populism rulers are impelled to “move swiftly and surely” to embody in law popular decisions and claims made on an electoral platform. This modus operandi, which he identifies as commonplace among Latin American dictatorships, places obligations on the law-making machinery to realize legislative enactments with an expediency that defies the level of debate and consultative processes that are typical of the democratic tradition. It is primarily for these reasons, that legislatures of populist regimes are characteristically self-generating, permitting only minimal restraints, whilst severely constraining majority party members from challenging the leadership. Another dubious aspect of the populist legislative-styled model is the ability of political leaders to manipulate the timing and conditions of elections in a manner that effectively secures indefinite continuance in office - a chain of conduct that ultimately leads to the suppression of major institutions of power.

## Constitutional Maneuvering

Riker's observations are corroborated in a Paper produced by Ruben M. Perina Ph.D. of Georgetown University and George Washington University, who iterates:

*“It is true that much progress has been made toward free and fair elections in most of the region, thanks in part to OAS efforts to monitor elections and provide technical assistance to electoral authorities. However, some incumbents twist electoral processes in their favor through manipulation of electoral laws and the constitution, use and abuse of state resources, and patronage, intimidation, and media bias and interference in judicial processes. Although democratic consolidation continues in most countries in the region, some Latin American states are moving slowly away from bedrock principles of the IADC - such as the separation of powers, freedom of the press and respect for political pluralism.”<sup>5</sup>*

With this in view, the much-publicized and discussed innovations to Venezuela's constitution should best be appraised within the framework of the IADC Charter, the underpinning elements of which are “respect for the rule of law;” “human rights and fundamental freedoms;” “periodic free and fair elections;” “a pluralistic system of political parties;” “the separation and independence of powers;” “fundamental democratic core values and practices such as probity and transparency in government activities;” “respect for diversity;” and “citizen participation.” Articles 19 and 20 of the Charter facilitate adherence among Member States by permitting the intervention of the OAS in cases of “constitutional interruption” and “unconstitutional alterations” that fly in the face of democratic traditions. A “constitutional interruption” may take the form of military coups and auto coups; whilst unconstitutional alterations are typified in “rigged elections,” illegal challenges by the legislative or judicial arms of government, or challenges by the military against a sitting government. Interruptions to the democratic order can also occur where the executive branch of government increasingly asserts autocracy and monopoly of power, ostensibly through democratic means such as elections or referendum, thereby eroding essential democratic institutions, values and practices.

Citing Bolivia, Ecuador, Nicaragua, and Venezuela as cases in point, Dr. Perina identifies existing aberrations in many Latin American countries that mirror alterations of the “democratic order” as defined under the IADC. Such actions

include, “...removing judges who are not politically aligned with the government, disobeying courts rulings or legislation passed by a legislature controlled by the opposition, ignoring or manipulating the other branches of government, closing or attacking the independent media, or persecuting political opponents.”<sup>16</sup>

Placed in context, Venezuela’s revised constitution transformed its former bicameral National Assembly into a unicameral legislature, so that the bifurcation of legislative powers between a Chamber-of-Deputies and the Senate effectively ceased. The said powers are now reposed in the office of the presidency. Thus, the main threat to democracy emanating out of populism becomes less of the exceptional temptation that exists to subvert the electoral process and more in the exceptional ability to do so. Therein lies the inherent inclination of populist regimes to effectively scuttle constitutional restraints.

Venezuela’s revised constitution now caters for four specific categories of referendum under Articles 71-74 respectively. These are:-

- A *consultative* referendum, which seeks answers to non-binding questions of a national nature as for example whether the republic can or cannot join a free trade or monetary union
- A *recall* referendum, which may be applied to any elected office holder provided that the incumbent has already served in excess of half the duration of his/her tenure
- An *approving* referendum, which is invoked for the passage of important national laws or to ratify treaties that would infringe on national sovereignty as well as approve constitutional amendments
- A *rescinding* referendum which is employed to revoke existing law

Significant constitutional enactments were introduced in 2009. These included a national referendum (Amendment No. 1/ Enmienda No.1) providing for the abolition of term limits for the offices of President, state governors, mayors and National Assembly Deputies. Prior to the amendments, the constitution provided for a three-term limit for deputies and a two-term limit for other offices. The 1999 referendum, which effectuated alterations in Articles 160, 162, 174, 192 and 230 of the Constitution, was endorsed by 54 % of the electorate and attracted the participation of roughly 70.33 % of registered voters. Of an electorate of 16,652,179, a total of 11,504,321 valid votes were cast with 6,310,482 or 54.85 % favoring the referendum and 5,193,839 or the equivalent of 45.14 % against it.

At that time the operative question/issue expounded on and tabled by Venezuela’s National Electoral Council was:

- Do you approve the amendment articles of 160, 162, 174, 192 and 230 of the Constitution of the Republic, as processed by the National Assembly, which increases the political rights of the people, with the purpose of allowing any citizen incumbent in a elected office, to be nominated as candidate for the same office, for the period of time established constitutionally, his or her possible re-election depending exclusively on popular vote? -

### Post-Revolutionary “Concentration of Power”

Revolutions are a profoundly political phenomenon, and all revolutionary regimes commit themselves to putting the concentration of political power in the society in which they in part control and in part serve, to decisively better uses than their predecessors. Revolutions effectually represent “...political struggles of great intensity, initiated by political crises within particular historical societies and resolved, insofar as they resolved, by the creation of a political capacity to confront the historical problems of these societies in ways that their prerevolutionary regimes had proven wholly incapable of doing.”<sup>17</sup> Any understanding of the meaning of revolution as a phenomenon in the modern world must necessarily therefore attend to the question of how far different revolutionary regimes discharge this commitment with success, and to the even more intricate issue of what are the connections between the ways in which the revolutions came about, the levels of success they achieve, and the diversity of strategies that they adopt in discharging this commitment. One such strategy is the continuous intensification of power concentration.

Henry Dunn, author of *Modern Revolutions*, stated:

*“It is because the locus of revolution is a nation state in which the concentration of political power and will to put this to effective use have together proved inadequate to protect the national society from elaborate damage from the impact of the world economy, that the post revolutionary regime requires still greater concentration of power and substantially firmer will to restore the viability. In order for a revolutionary regime to prove effective in the excessively taxing conditions in which revolutionary regimes are all likely to arise today it is necessary for it, however populist its rhetoric or authentic its concern*

*for an egalitarian distribution of social welfare, to maintain a highly concentrated distribution of political power.”<sup>18</sup>*

## Conclusion

The Bolivarian ideal has filtered into neighbouring societies and President Chavez’s self-styled crusade is well on its way to disrupting the leverage and political capacity of many key players, primarily the United States. This development must be juxtaposed against the following - China’s strategic progression into the hemisphere along with its impressive inroads in the areas of trade, commerce, diplomacy, and military exchanges and the proliferation of intraregional, regional and sub-regional geopolitical clusters whose loyalty to OAS founding principles will continue to be staunchly tested.

In deference to the array of concerns at hand, this enquiry argues that Venezuela’s ideological posture is unlikely to ebb in the face of a change of leadership under the honorific “Twenty First Century Socialism.” Furthermore, there are undercurrents at play such as an invigorated opposition that is steadily gaining traction, as well as “exiled” corporate interests whose apparent inability to restrain the ongoing transformation may be all but exaggerated, and merely awaiting more dramatic vicissitudes.

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8. Joseph-Harris, Serena. *The Alpha Barrier of North South Dialogue*. Fortis Publishing U.S.A. 2010. Print.
9. Antonio Negri - a Marxist-inspired intellectual whose ideas commanded widespread influence in Italy, across Europe, Australia and North America and is best known for the socialist concepts propagated in the ground-breaking trilogy co-authored with Michael Hardt : *Empire* (2000); *Multitude*(2005) and *Commonwealth* (2009). Negri's analysis notes that the emerging new world order is fundamentally different from classical European domination and draws upon U.S. constitutionalism with its "hybrid identity" of "expanding frontiers."
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