

**From Partial to Full Conflict Theory:
a Neo-Weberian Perspective on Post-Neoliberal Venezuela**

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Abstract

Discussion of Venezuela during the fifteen years of Chavismo has been dominated pluralist and neo-Marxist perspectives. Each of these “partial conflict theories” provides incisive analytic tools but proves myopic in portraying the breadth and complexity of the conflict. This in turn circumscribes their critical edge. Pluralist perspectives incisively describe the way Chavismo has reduced civil and political liberties and concentrated power, but miss the issues that explain the rise and staying power of Latin America’s new left governments. Neo-Marxist perspectives incisively describe the way Chavismo has confronted national and international capital, and promoted a process of economic, social and cultural democratization. However, they pull their punches when it comes to Chavismo’s concentration of power. Here I propose a “full conflict theory” based on the Weberian ideas of *multiple, conjunctural* causation. Using the work of Michael Mann I analyze post-neoliberal Venezuela in terms of the power networks that support Chavismo versus those that support its opposition. These networks are based on multiple combinations of four sources of ideological power: ideological, economic, political and military. I look at the unincorporated voting population in terms of their grounds for security. This full conflict theory not only provides a more satisfying description of the conflict, it provides grounds for normative critique, keying in on the performance and inherent monopolistic tendencies of power networks. I end with suggestions that this framework could be useful for understanding the conflicts generated by post-liberal governing projects in the region.

Most political commentary on Venezuela comes from what might be called *partial* conflict theories that critically examine some areas of social life but systematically ignore others. Perhaps the leading perspective used to understand Venezuela is a contemporary descendant of classic liberalism.

Pluralist political theory serves not only as the paradigmatic perspective of Anglophone political science but as the tacit framework for most journalistic commentary. Indeed sociologist Michael Mann says “Pluralism is liberal democracy’s (especially American democracy’s) view of itself” (Mann 2012, p.46)

Pluralist political theory suggests that there are multiple sources of social power that compete for dominance—such as religious, legal, ethnic or labor groups—and looks at the way political systems can ensure a *polyarchy*, a relative balance of interest groups (Dahl 1971). At its core it is a normative theory that looks at political institutions and whether they ensure a democratic equilibrium between competing groups (good), or end up allowing one group to attain hegemony over others (bad). In this view the democratic institutions of the state are ultimately decisive.

In the case of Venezuela, scholars and commentators working from the pluralist perspective have been remarkably insightful in critiquing the progressive concentration of power occurring during the Chávez and now Maduro governments. Yet they also tend to be tone deaf to social, economic and cultural inequalities. They ignore them as causes for the rise of Chavismo and also ignore Chavismo’s achievements in reducing them. Instead they provide analyses that begin with

politics and end with politics. For example, a recent article by leading political scientist Kurt Weyland (2013) perspicaciously traces all of the ways in which liberal democratic institutions have declined in the governments led by Hugo Chávez, Evo Morales, and Rafael Correa. They have increased executive powers, allowed for presidential reelection, weakened checks and balances and engaged in “discriminatory legalism.” And these leaders are not alone, before he was ousted, Honduras’s Manuel Zelaya was “preparing his own perpetuation in power” (19). And Argentina’s Cristina Kirchner is “eyeing constitutional changes” in a “push for entrenchment” (19). But perhaps more interesting are the motives Weyland projects onto these leaders. The decline in liberal institutions is not portrayed as a lamentable means to noble ends, nor as the unintended or even secondary consequence of policies intending to address the inequalities of the globe’s most unequal region. Rather these leaders’ “progressive rhetoric” is simply used by them to justify a “quest for personal power” (Weyland 2013).

In action-theoretic terms, all of the motivations Weyland projected onto the actors are political. The story begins with a will to power and ends with the concentration of power. Actual achievements in addressing social, economic and cultural inequalities are not mentioned. This perspective makes it virtually impossible to understand why Chavismo has won so many elections and indeed obliges Weyland to suggest that Chávez’s 2012, eleven point electoral victory (accurately predicted by Venezuela’s most reliable pollsters) was unfair and only confirmed that Venezuela “had already fallen under non-democratic rule.”

Most sympathetic treatments of Chavismo come from descendants of classic Marxism. Contemporary neo-Marxists provide insightful critiques of the effects global capitalism and the way it creates or exacerbates economic, social and cultural inequalities. In the case of Venezuela they have provided perspicacious analyses of the rise of Chavismo, its achievements and the clear class nature of Venezuela’s conflict. Nevertheless neo-Marxists becomes Pollyannaish when it comes to

the concentration of power in a revolutionary state. In the Venezuelan case this is especially striking given that the original key metaphor of the Chavista project was participatory democracy. Yet almost every reform over the past fourteen years has served to centralize and concentrate power in the executive branch of the government. Even participatory instruments like communal councils are centralized and dependent upon the Executive branch instead of local governments. Neo-Marxists systematically ignore how similar the concentration of power and its effects are to the centripetal forces that plagued 20th Century socialist projects. For example, Juan Carlos Mondero (2013), one of the leading theorists of Twenty First Century socialism, clearly identifies problems such as “hyper-leadership,” centralism, clientalism, and corruption. However, he does not see these as ironic tendencies inherent to socialism—so aptly described a century ago by Roberto Michels, Gaetano Mosca and others. Nor are they the fault of a government has been in power for a decade and a half. Rather he portrays them as carryovers from the atomization of Venezuela’s neoliberal 1990s.

In the rest of this paper I will argue that a neo-Weberian perspective can provide us with a fuller version of conflict theory, that can conserve the insights of pluralist and neo-Marxist perspectives, yet set aside their myopia. I will use this perspective to describe the Venezuelan conflict precipitated by Chavismo, and show how it can be used as a normative base of critique.

Full Conflict Theory

The key to neo-Weberian conflict theory is the idea of *multiple, conjunctural causality*. Of course most social and political theories include the idea of multi-causality. John Locke spoke of the state, economy and public opinion. Karl Marx analyzed state, economy and culture. Max Weber’s classic, if brief formulation looked at party, class and status. Contemporary neo-Weberian, Michael Mann has modified Weber’s formulation to include four basic “sources of social power:” political, economic, ideological and military. Where these social theories actually differ is on the issue of *causal*

primacy. Marxism, of course, tends to see the mode of production as the most basic cause. While some variants of neo-Marxism give the state and culture relative autonomy, they still give production ultimate primacy “in the last instance” or through the notion of “totality.” Liberalism, especially in its contemporary pluralist variant, doesn’t really provide a clear theory of causal primacy. But in practice it clearly regards the state as having causal primacy, as being the most fundamental and important factor for understanding social and political life.

Indeed the blind spots of the two perspectives described above make sense from their particular notions of causal primacy. From a Neo-Marxian perspective that thinks justice and equality are going to come from egalitarian ownership of the means of production, concentration of power can look like a temporary necessity on the road to socialism. In this view, revolution always leads to bourgeois reaction and even if the eventual goal is to make the state unnecessary, in the transition period it needs to be strengthened and power concentrated to push forward radical change. From a pluralist perspective that firmly believes that justice and equality are going to come from political institutions that ensure a democratic equilibrium, it is okay to look past the fact that often grotesque levels of inequality can persist in liberal democracy. If citizens are truly enfranchised and politicians are truly accountable, the latter will eventually be obliged to make progress on social, economic and cultural inequalities. Furthermore, violent, authoritarian measures can often times be justified as a temporary price that needs to be paid to allow liberty to gain traction.

What is different about neo-Weberian conflict theory is that none of the sources of social power are ultimately decisive or somehow more fundamental. In this sense it is a truly multi-causal perspective. More on this below.

A second important aspect of neo-Weberian theory is the idea of *conjunctural causality*--the idea that the causal efficacy of a particular factor depends on particular historical conjunctures. Michael Mann (2013), for example, ended his four volume *Sources of Social Power* suggesting that while

in any given historical context research can show one of the sources of social power to be causally dominant, no one of these causes is ultimately determinative in human history. In one context or period economics can be decisive. In another, ideology (or military power, or political processes) can be more fundamental. It is important to realize that a multi-causal theory does not necessarily entail a concept of conjunctural causality. Talcott Parsons' structural functionalism worked with a notion of *constant association*, the idea that all of the basic sources of causal power are at every moment and in every context. Much social science still does work with the idea of constant association, indeed the very idea of linear regression is based on it (Ragin 1987)

Working on the basis of multiple, conjunctural causality can help us move past the *partial* conflict theories that are generally used, towards a *full* conflict theory more adequate for understanding the complexity and nuance of the Venezuela conflict. Eschewing causal primacy allows us to benefit from the critical edges of both the pluralist and neo-Marxist perspectives while avoiding their critical myopia. We can appreciate the way the dramatic inequalities of Venezuelan society that have led to a demand for change at the same time that we understand the ironies whereby robust efforts at using the state to address inequalities can lead to a concentration of power that can undermine these efforts. We can criticize the deterioration of civil and political rights at the same time that we praise improvement in social, cultural and economic inequalities. And we can point to the legitimacy of the opposition's complaints at the same time we criticize its consistent unwillingness to do the hard work required to expand their coalition beyond Venezuela's urban middle classes. An emphasis on multiple conjunctural causality also generates an open-ended research agenda. Since there is no preestablished causal primacy, nor timeless causal relationships, research inevitably becomes more inductive than deductive, prioritizing empirical engagement.

Mann puts forward four ideal-typical sources of social power. These are all emergent phenomena that address certain human needs. This is not action theory. It is no the needs that

explain, although they are motors of history. Rather it is the emergent social organizations that provide social power that give unique shape to history. *Ideological power* comes from the human need to impose concepts on perceptions and provide ultimate meaning to life (Mann 2012, p.22). *Economic power* refers to the satisfaction of subsistence needs through production, distribution and consumption of goods (p.24). *Military power* refers to the necessity of organized defense and aggression (p.25). *Political power* refers to “the usefulness of centralized, institutionalized, and territorialized regulation of many aspects of social relations” (26). In Table 1 I have laid out a portrait of the Venezuela conflict in terms of these ideal-typical sources of social power. However, I will not describe these in the body of the paper as that would lead to a lot of repetition. It would also be somewhat misleading since, as Mann suggests “real institutionalized networks of interaction do not have a simple one-to-one relationship to the ideal-typical sources of social power” (Mann 1986, p.17). Most actual concrete social networks (including institutions and organizations) appeal to multiple sources of social power. Table 2 looks at the concrete power networks involved in the polarization process that began with Hugo Chávez’s election in 1998. I have arranged them in approximate order of importance and will describe them in greater length in the next section.

Table 1: Ideal-typical Sources of Social Power in the Venezuela Conflict

	Chavismo	Opposition
Ideological	<p>*Thirdworldism: a loose appropriation of the ideas of Lenin in the 20th C which blamed underdevelopment on imperialism and saw the solution in struggles for national liberation that would eventually lead to socialism.</p> <p>*Post-liberalism (Arditi 2010): not a rejection of the liberal discourse of rights but an expansion to include economic, social and cultural rights. *Developmentalism: modernity can be pushed forward with large scale developmental projects.</p> <p>*These ideological configurations can be pushed forward through a massive state media complex and through control of educational curricula.</p>	<p>*Liberalism: a perspective that sees the distinction between tyranny and liberty as central to democracy and human dignity itself. Connects into a discourse of universal human rights.</p> <p>*Globalism: an emphasis not on nation but global economic, social, cultural and political networks as the path to modernity.</p> <p>*Catholic civilization: neo-scholastic portrayal of human development being based on cultivation of higher faculties which in turn ensure liberty. In practice works with distinction between civilization and barbarism.</p> <p>*Global networks of media, education, commerce, politics and travel carry liberalism.</p>
Economic	<p>*Venezuela has massive reserves of hydrocarbons which are exploited through state industry as well as other joint ventures in petroleum exploitation and commerce.</p> <p>*The Venezuelan government controls national tax collections.</p> <p>*Control of foreign exchange regime provides the government with discretionary control over economy.</p> <p>*The economic model of a state that can administer petroleum revenues on behalf of societal well-being and national development has high legitimacy among the population but low sustainability. "Axe-relax-collapse" cycle (Corrales 2010).</p>	<p>*Over half of the economy is still in private hands and most manufacturing, commerce and banking is separate from the government.</p> <p>*Capitalist consumption networks and practices are dominated by urban middle classes.</p>
Military	<p>*Venezuela's Armed Forces includes an Army, Air Force, Armada (navy), and National Guard.</p> <p>*The Armed Forces traditionally control arms manufacture and imports, as well as airspace and borders</p>	<p>*Over the second half of the 20th Century progressively professionalized and came to see itself as under civilian control and separate from politics (Trinkunas). The increasing incorporation of the Armed Forces into Chavismo's socialist project has led to discontent of active and retired military officers who see it as a regression.</p> <p>*A backdrop to everything that happens is US military dominance in the hemisphere.</p>
Political	<p>*Given weak institutions, Chavismo's control of the state, including judiciary and electoral branches provides them with extraordinary political power.</p> <p>*International network of left governments, social movements & solidarity groups.</p> <p>*Reputation</p>	<p>*The collapse of Venezuela's party system led to a proliferation of opposition parties led by some new faces as well as figures from the pre-Chavez era. They still exhibit a strong tendency to look inward and engage in behind-closed-doors deals rather than seeking to expand their base.</p> <p>*The opposition has controlled some of the most important state and municipal governments in the country and uses these as platforms to exercise national level power.</p> <p>*The opposition controls a little less than 40% of the National Assembly</p> <p>*Opposition has the support of international NGOs that support global governance.</p>

The Power Networks of Chavismo

Central Government. The central characteristic of Chavismo is that it has full control of a petro-state. It has held both the presidency and legislature since 2000. However, over time it has extended its control to all branches of the government and centralized that control in the executive branch of the government. In 2004 it pushed through a judicial reform that expanded the number of judges in the Supreme Justice Tribunal (Supreme Court). The judicial branch has also run seriously behind in naming judges. Roughly 80% of Venezuela's judges are provisional. As a result the courts are squarely in the government's corner and do not exercise any type of counter-weight or veto power on the government.

Table 2, Power Networks in Conflict Concrete Power Networks (arranged in approximate order of importance with sources of social power)

Chavismo	Opposition
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Central government: controls executive, legislative, judicial, electoral branches. (PE) • State oil company (EIP) • Armed forces (MEP) • Central Bank, monetary policy (EP) • State media outlets (IP) • Partido Socialista Unidad de Venezuela (P) • Multilateral bodies & international allies (PEI) • Local governments (P) • Boliburgueses (E) • Bolivarian Universities (IP) • Government sponsored participatory organizations • Missions (EIP) • Colectivos (MPI) • Progov religious groups (I) • International solidarity groups (P) • New unions (EP) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mesa de la Unidad Democrática (MUD) coalition of parties (P) • Local governments, with police forces (PM) • Student movements (IP) • Private sector (banks, commerce, agroindustry), chamber of commerce (EP) • Private media (I) • Private and autonomous universities (I) • NGOs (IE) • Church hierarchy (IP) • Traditional multi-lateral agencies (IPE) • Traditional union movement (EP) • Expat networks (IP) • Fringe radicals (IM)

After the opposition boycotted the 2005 legislative elections the government had 5 years of free reign during which time it installed pro-government rectors in the electoral authority as well as a new People's Ombudsman who is squarely pro-government. The opposition participated in the 2010 legislative elections and controls roughly 40% of the seats which is enough to block some government initiatives. The electoral authority still runs a clean election day but is incapable of exercising any control over campaign conditions, giving the government an unfair advantage in electoral competitions.

State Oil Company. What puts the Venezuelan government in a unique position is the fact that it controls a state oil company that brings in tens of billions of dollars of revenue every year allowing it to carry-out a form of "export-oriented populism" (Richardson 2009), a non-zero-sum form of spending benefitting urban as well as rural sectors. Indeed the Chavista government has held an extraordinary checkbook with which to pursue its goals, control its opposition, and garner the support of the population. The main reason for the conflict that led to a 48 hour coup in 2002 was the Chavez government's attempt to gain control over the state oil company, up to that point with far reaching institutional autonomy. Despite the resistance that attempt was ultimately successful and the government has been able to directly control PDVSA's operations and budget. Indeed during a good part of the Chavista era, the same person has been in charge of the Ministry of Energy and Mines and PDVSA. PDVSA as an organization and financial resources has been directly involved not only in the oil business but in food imports, building homes, and many other parts of the government's social programs. One result of this expanding vocation is that it has fallen seriously behind in investment. While projections were that it was supposed to be producing six million barrels of oil per day by 2014, it currently produces less than three million, and less than it did when Chavez took office.

Central Bank. Another formerly autonomous economic institution that has come under direct governmental control is the Banco Central de Venezuela. The government first instituted exchange controls to fend off speculative attacks and capital flight during the general strike of 2002-03. However, it has been maintained since then and has become the source of serious economic distortions. At this writing (November 2014) there are three official exchange rates—6.3 for food and medicine, 11 for most other goods and travel, and 50 in periodic auctions open to the public. However, the parallel rate has reached Bs. 120 per dollar, almost 20 times the lowest official rate. This creates an infinite demand for dollars and has seriously affected the government's reserves. An inadequate supply of dollars to import manufacturing equipment and inputs as well as finished goods, explains much of the scarcities in Venezuela. And of course it has created corruption networks that create fictitious businesses that apply for and obtain official rate dollars then turn around and sell them on the black market for windfall profits. Frequently those close to the government are in the best position to engage in foreign exchange scams. Some big players in the government have used this mechanism to generate parallel budgets with which they can carry out government projects and develop their own personal networks of patronage. This could explain the government's resistance to modifying a foreign exchange regime that is transparently destructive.

It is the windfall profits of Venezuela's oil bonanza and the government's control over the exchange rate that allowed the government to preside over a period of remarkable growth during the 5 years from 2004 through 2008. This economic growth was presented not just in material terms but ideological terms, as evidence for the validity of socialism, the poverty of neoliberalism, and the moral bond between Chavez and the people. He had "done right by" them. However, in the current context of +70% inflation, widespread scarcities and the specter of declining oil prices, the Chavista economic bonanza looks increasingly like just another iteration of the : "axe-relax-collapse" cycle whereby Venezuelan governments take over in times of crises and put forward budget cuts, then

relax these efforts when oil prices increase leading to a broad sense of well-being. When oil prices fall it leads to crisis of sustainability and an inevitable collapse (Corrales 2010). It is not clear that Maduro's support can survive this process.

Military. Of course his past as a soldier was Hugo Chavez's most important biographical characteristic. The attraction this held to Venezuelans is indicative of the high esteem in which they hold the armed forces. In the minds of average Venezuelans the military is characterized by discipline, authority, rectitude, order and power. While democracy is inevitably messy and exposes all sorts of conflicting interests and unintended consequences, the military appears to work through an understandable moral economy of authority, responsibility and execution of tasks. As commander-in-chief Chavez rolled back decades of professionalization and de-politicization of the military by increasing their role in the exercise of governance and in the government itself. This tendency has been dramatically expanded, however, by his civilian successor. Weakened by a squeaker of an electoral victory and an immediate protest movement, Nicolas Maduro seems to have identified the military as the security blanket for a weak government. He has increased the number of active and retired military officers in the government, turned over citizen security to them, given them a larger profile in importation, as well as a bank and even a television network. The military controls Venezuela's borders as well as its airspace. Some sectors appear to be involved in drug trafficking.

State Media. Since his public emergence onto the Venezuelan political scene as a result of his failed coup in 1992, Hugo Chavez has been a media phenomenon. When the coup failed he was allowed to speak on national television and told the other rebelling military officers to put down their arms because they had failed to take power "for now." As president Chavez faced a context in which he had did not have articulate social movements, unions or an established party system supporting him. Media was his way of overcoming the problem of coordination. His hallmark policy as president was a television call-in show that would last hours on end. His government transformed

Channel 8 from a marginal station few people watched to a state-of-the-art media facility getting the government's message out. This has been followed by radio networks, web pages, newspapers and more television networks. This is also complimented by many community radio, television and newspapers all of which are funded by the government and wholeheartedly support it.

International Solidarity Groups. Representation and messaging is also carried out by international solidarity groups. Of course Venezuela is a destination of "revolutionary tourism" for North Americans, Europeans and Latin Americans from other countries. There are also a number of blogs and publications, such as *Venezuelanalysis.com* and North American Congress on Latin America that provide consistent pro-government messages. Social media initiatives such as "Hands Off Venezuela" and "Real News Venezuela" that work to monitor the media for what they see as unfair representations.

United Socialist Party of Venezuela. After his landslide re-election in 2006 Chavez said he wanted to all of the parties supporting him to merge together into one united socialist party. Most quickly obliged and came together into the Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela. Long dominated by the figure of Chavez, it never developed into a solidly organized party. However, it did become an effective electoral mobilization machine and is by far the most important party in Venezuela.

New Multilateral Institutions. Another hallmark of the Chavez government has been the effort to develop alternative regional mult-lateral institutions to counteract the Organization of American States. Chavez first pushed for the creation of ALBA which brought together a handful of like-minded countries in the region, including Bolivia and Nicaragua. However, regional powers like Brazil and Argentina demurred. Nevertheless they collaborated with Venezuela to create the Union of Southern Nations (Unasur) and the Council of Heads of State of Latin America and the Caribbean (CELAC). Venezuela also sought and was invited to become a member of MERCOSUR.

All of these institutions have given the Venezuelan government a degree of regional backing it did not formerly have.

State and Local Governments. Chavismo controls the majority of state and local governments across the country. This spread originally built off of Chavez's coat tails but also benefitted from the government's policies and presence in the interior at a time during which the opposition was increasingly restricted to large urban centers. Local and state governments, of course, serve the function of facilitating emerging leaders. In Venezuela they are also very important for voter mobilization in national elections.

Boliburgueses. Increasing state control over the economy has not done away with the private sector as the government has needed the private sector for its projects. Private companies have carried out everything from construction projects to food distribution and private banks hold much of the government's cash. This has provided endless opportunities for insider contacts, kickbacks and other rackets, creating a class of wealthy entrepreneurs referred to in Venezuela as "boliburgueses." These people have a strong interest in the continuation of the government and frequently contribute to its causes.

Bolivarian Universities. The part of the public sector that Chavismo has not been able to gain control over is Venezuela's public autonomous universities (more on them below). In response to this, and in response to the every increasing demand for higher education, the government created the "Bolivarian Universities" as well as expanding the Armed Forces universities, opening them to the public. These universities have seen hypertrophic growth and do not come close to the academic standards of Venezuela's other universities. However, they have enrolled hundreds of thousands of students who otherwise would not have been able to study and are grateful for the opportunity. In key moments they mobilize in the streets to support the government, especially by way of response

ot the student movements from Venezuela's autonomous universities. The Bolivarian universities also serve as a space of employment for leftist intellectuals.

New Pro-government Unions. Another power network that the government has not been able to control is the pre-existing and still dominant union movement. However, through a number of changes in the laws governing union creation and elections, it has been able to diversify the field and now there are a number of pro-government unions that vie for power in labor relations.

Missions. One of the government's marquee programs are the "missions." These are really a social policy delivery mechanism whereby the government attends to urgent needs through newly created, flexible institutional arrangements. In many cases the beneficiaries are episodic. In others, such as the educational missions, they are longer term. In all of them, the employees that work with the missions have a serious interest in their continuance.

Collectives. Finally, there has been a good deal of attention in 2014 to the *colectivos*. These are community groups, many of which predate Chavez, that see themselves as defenders of the revolution and are armed. Chavez himself encouraged them in the early years of his presidency with the idea of "the people in arms." However, in the last couple of years of his presidency he created the militia, which is an actual citizen body of the armed forces, and pushed forward a plan for gun control that pointed toward the need for the *colectivos* to lay down their arms. Most of them refused and the government in recent years has lived in tense coexistence with them.

The Opposition's Power Networks

Opposition party coalition. The leading force in the opposition is the coalition of opposition parties called the Mesa de la Unidad Democrática. The MUD has brought together parties mainly for electoral purposes. One of the main explanations of the rise of chavismo was the implosion of Venezuela's party system in the 1990s. A lack of internal democracy and connection to the broader

public undermined the legitimacy of parties in the electorate and led them to a series of self-defeating decisions. Indeed some scholars have said that AD and COPEI weren't killed by Chavez, they committed suicide. The MUD brings together a diverse set of parties and many leaders with aspirations and has had a difficult time presenting a unified alternative to Chavismo.

State and local governments. With the central government dominated by Chavismo, the highest profile positions for opposition leaders are governorships and mayoralties. And indeed the opposition controls the better part of Venezuela's major cities and states. For example, Henrique Capriles is the governor of Miranda State, Henri Falcon is the governor of Lara, and Carlos Ocariz is the mayor of the Sucre municipality in Caracas. These governorships give space to opposition leaders to cultivate followers and policy profiles.

Private industry and commerce. While the size of the Venezuelan government has grown dramatically during the Chavez period, the private sector has as well, maintain accounting for about two thirds of the economy. For the past fifteen years, private agroindustry, commerce and finance have all vigorously opposed the Chavez government. In recent years through expropriations, exchange control, and business regulation the government has clearly gained the upper hand over the private sector and most entrepreneurs live uncertain lives. The Venezuelan Federation of Chambers of Commerce (FEDECAMARAS) was once a fierce and formidable opponent of the government—indeed its President Pedro Carmona was named interim president during the 2002 coup—but now is a less vocal critic and has, over the past year successfully held dialogues with the government over concrete impediments to production. Food giant Polar Industries controls a large percentage of food production and distribution in Venezuela but assiduously avoids confrontation with the government.

Labor movement. Another once formidable adversary, the labor movement, has been seriously weakened. The Confederación de Trabajadores de Venezuela (CTV) was, along with Fedecamaras,

one of the leaders of the 2002-04 opposition movement that had Chavez against the ropes. However, since then its own corruption and dysfunction combined with the government's assiduous efforts to weaken through electoral laws and by giving preference to pro-government unions has reduced its effectiveness. The labor unions in the heavy industry in Guayana are still strong and some of them are militantly anti-government.

Catholic church. The Catholic church in general and the Catholic hierarchy most particularly has been one of the most effective critics of the Chavez government. The Church has traditionally been weak in Venezuela and dependent on stipends from the state to support everything from its role in education to upkeep of its churches. The Chavez government has tried to reduce the strength of the Church by reducing its stipend, using it to support other religious groups, and allowing Evangelicals a bigger role in government. The Venezuelan Church has a long historical relationship with Venezuela's middle and upper classes. It has sparred with the government regarding democracy and human rights. Most recently it released a report stating XYZ. The hierarchy's stance has moderated somewhat over the years.

Student movement. One of the most important opposition actors in Venezuela is what is known as the "student movement." These are actually the student movements from Venezuela's public autonomous and private universities which now represent a minority of all higher education students.. University student movements have had a long-term role in Venezuela's democratic movements going back to the 19th Century. These universities have electoral processes for the student government and being student body president is a time honored stepping stone to a political career. These student leaders tend to emphasize local issues such as university budgets and conditions, as well as broader national issues. However these latter tend to reveal their origins in the urban middle classes, focusing on issues of civil, political and economic liberties.

Venezuela's public universities are funded by the government but have far-reaching autonomy from it. And during the fifteen years of chavismo these universities have been the most solid bastion of intellectual criticism of it. Chavismo has tried to gain control of university administration repeatedly but never succeeded. It is currently attempting to change the electoral rules so that university presidents are elected not just by students and university professors but by all personnel, including maintenance, in hopes that will tip the balance in the favor of progovernment candidates. In lieu of that the government has progressively suffocated the university sector by reducing the budget and changing the terms of funds for research and attending conferences.

Private media. Venezuela's private media was once the strongest bastion of opposition to the government, serving a more important aggregating and coordinating function than political parties in the first five years of Chavismo. However, here as well the government has increasingly gained an upper hand. In 2007 the refused to renew the airwave concession of fierce anti-Chavez network RCTV. This and other actions brought other private networks such as Venevision and Televen to seriously tone down their criticism. A long term battle with news network Globovision was finally won in 2013 when the Zuloaga family sold the channel from exile to a shadowy group. In the year afterwards Globovision shed most of its critical journalists and has become a neutral voice. The same process has happened with Venezuela's two most important newspapers *Ultimas Noticias* and *El Universal*. More broadly, newspapers like *El Nacional* and *Tal Cual* have suffered from a shortage of newsprint. *Tal Cual* is considering discontinuation of its print version. There is still a robust representation of anti-government opinion, but more and more it is confined to online publications, and is not present on the airwaves or newsstand. In this situation, social media services like Facebook, Twitter and Zello have become the most important means of staying informed and organizing political action.

Non-governmental Organizations. Much of the most credible and informed criticism of the Chavista governments comes from Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) focused on human rights monitoring. The NGOs making up Foro por la Vida monitor different aspects of human rights and emit reports criticizing the government. These organizations are often articulated into international networks such as Transparency International, and present their findings in international forums such as the Interamerican Human Rights Commission and the United Nations Human Rights Council. As human rights are “universal,” in other words not subject to national sovereignty, they present an attractive discourse for opposition groups to seek international intervention in Venezuela that could tip the balance in their favor. Thus these groups, their reports and their claims are frequently instrumentalized by opposition figures and parties who make political battles into human rights battles.

Expatriate Networks. Much of this task is taken on by networks of Venezuelan ex-patriots in the US and elsewhere. In South Florida, which has the single largest community of Venezuelan immigrants, they have pressured representatives and senators to push for sanctions. Some even organized a “Caravan for Freedom” to Washington in July to demand passage of a bill calling for targeted sanctions on Venezuelan leaders. Marco Rubio’s sanctions bill is called the “Venezuela Defense of Human Rights and Civil Society Act of 2014.” Ex-pat networks are facilitated by social media inside and outside of Venezuela. Caracas Chronicles is a widely-read English language blog which, along with other blogs and Twitter accounts, mobilizes international opinion through Ex-pat networks. During the crisis of spring 2014 one video made by a Venezuelan-American at the University of Florida portraying a violent government ruthlessly victimizing students went viral on Youtube. It should be mentioned that these networks can dip into radical fringe groups that seek to the overthrow of the Venezuelan government, including Lord Rebel, and Un Nuevo Orden. It is not

clear if these movements are simply the social media expressions of youth bravado, or actual organizational efforts.

Multilateral Institutions. The OAS has not been able to have an effective role in Venezuela. The government regards it as a tool of US hemispheric dominance and has done what it can to undermine its importance. The UN likewise, other than occasional criticism of specific issues has not intervened in Venezuela. Both bodies have asked to send human rights representatives to Venezuela but been rebuffed. The Interamerican Human Rights Commission and Court have repeatedly criticized Venezuela and Venezuela has responded in kind. In 2012 after The IACHR demanded the release of a prisoner convicted for placing a bomb in the Spanish Embassy in 2003 because of mistreatment, Hugo Chávez announced they would be denouncing the court, a process which takes a year. And indeed they finally withdrew from the Court in 2012.

But perhaps the most important multilateral agencies are those have to do with international commerce. The International Chamber of Commerce, the World Bank and other bodies are overseeing a number of arbitration cases between Venezuela and international oil and mining companies. Venezuela with assets in refineries in the US and ships that rove the world to deliver oil is highly vulnerable to having assets embargoed.

Unmobilized Citizens

Of course, as is true in most national contexts, the majority of Venezuelan citizens are not clearly articulated into any of the power networks just discussed. Rather they are articulated into networks of family, neighborhood, hobbies, work or profession. They may have tangential relationship to these power networks—for example working in a bank, attending a Catholic Church or benefitting occasionally from a government mission. But they do not clearly form part of the power network as such. This does not mean they do not have a political preferences regarding Venezuela's

government. Rather it means their causal influence is restricted to opinion formation with other private individuals and to the act of voting. In the case of Venezuela both Chavismo and the opposition have the bedrock support of approximately 30% of the electorate, meaning about 40% of the population is politically uncommitted and votes on who they think will perform best.

We can understand the political preferences of these people during the Chavez years using the following framework that I have adapted from Mabel Berezin's (2009) work on illiberal movements in Europe. If we think of "security" in the broadest sense of the term as a state of well-being and predictability, we can look at the means people have for establishing security. We can think of a basic distinction between those whose means of ensuring security are tied to local emplacement, and those whose means of ensuring security are not. For most of the people reading this article it will be easier to understand the latter, and that is why most of us have a better intuitive feel for those who support the opposition. Their bases of security do not much depend on locale or even nation. They depend on their financial capital, human capital such as credentials, degrees and curriculum vitae; social capital such as professional and business networks; and cultural capital, for example ability to speak other languages, and to talk about and to other places and people. In contrast, the security of average Chavez supporters is based on local sources. Their livelihoods depend on the national economy. They benefit from growth and liquidity; they suffer from unemployment and inflation. Their well-being and the predictability of their existence depends on social solidarity for example personal, family and community networks of mutual assistance. All of these are facilitated by common culture in the form of language, norms, and identity.

Now let's think about the relationship between the state and society, we can think about a basic distinction between liberal and illiberal governments. Liberal governments grant personal freedoms and individual autonomy, but demand accountability and provide few safety nets. Illiberal

governments pursue collective inclusion (although usually restricted to specific groups considered to be “the people”) while reducing individual freedom.

Table 3, Basis of Security and Political Preferences

State/Society Relations	<i>Neoliberal</i>	<i>Illiberal</i>
Basis of Security		
<i>Local</i>	Vulnerable	Secure
<i>Extra-local</i>	Secure	Restricted

If we look at Table 3 we can see a broad ideal-typical conceptualization of the way average citizens feel about the governing projects they are subjected to. Neoliberal projects are embraced by those classes of people whose security does not depend on national emplacement. They thrive in a context of civil, political, economic and cultural freedoms. However, those same conditions give a sense of vulnerability to those people whose security is dependent on the local context. The underside of liberty is always the lack of inclusion or collective commitment by those with the most resources. An illiberal context can revert this. It provides those whose security depends on local context with a greater sense of security, although it usually depends on less than universal definition of “the people.” On the other hand it impedes and restricts the freedom of those whose basis of security is not based on locale. It redistributes economic and political resources and restricts political, civil and cultural liberties.

While I think Chavismo is better thought of as a “postliberal” (Arditi 2010) than illiberal governing project, Berezin’s framework is useful for understanding its attraction among unincorporated individuals. At its core, Chavismo has worked to shore up the security of locally emplaced Venezuelans. Its economic policies have maintained an overvalued currency, ever increasing public spending, and robust economic growth fueled, of course facilitated by record oil prices. The missions have been framed in terms of social solidarity, providing free medical care,

educational opportunities and job training, and access to low priced food home appliances. As well, the Chavez government pays much attention to images of the nation, of Simon Bolivar, of Venezuela's heroic past and present itself as a leader among nations. All of these nationalist images render a sense of collectivity that has a sense of commitment to the individuals that are part of it. At the same time it has reduced some economic, political, social and cultural freedoms of its citizens. I think the "plebiscitary" character of the leader-masses relationship that Dunkerly (2007) describes in Bolivia fits Venezuela as well. "Plebiscitary democracy—the most important type of leadership-democracy—is in its genuine sense a kind of charismatic authority which conceals itself under the form of a legitimacy which is derived from the will of the ruled and only sustained by them" (Weber quoted in Dunkerly 2007).

Of course the success of the Chavista model is strongly dependent on populist spending. Across the region, polling has shown that the bulk of support for leftist governments comes not from radicals but moderates who have given them a "performance mandate" to run the economy better (Baker and Greene 2011). Incorrectly portrayed as instrumentalist, average Venezuelan's experience of government spending is better thought of in terms of Maussian "gift exchange." Venezuelans tend to assume they live in a rich country and when elected officials spend money on them they think these officials are "doing right by" them. When there are cutbacks and needs go unfulfilled they tend to assume it is because of corruption or mismanagement. This means that support for the government beyond its bedrock core of people that form part of the power networks described above, is highly contingent on the economy and government spending. Indeed the single variable most strongly correlated with Chavez's popularity over his fourteen years in office was monetary liquidity. During Maduro's government that dynamic has changed because the printing of inorganic money has caused inflation that itself presents people with a threat to well-being. Inflation combined with scarcities and declining government services explain the better part

of Maduro's decline in popularity as people doubt he and the PSUV can continue to "do right by" them.

Critical Engagement

One of the attractive elements of both pluralist and neomarxist perspectives is how readily they lend themselves to normative analysis. This characteristic effectively makes them useful in contemporary political debate and this explains the high profile they have had in analysis and discussion of Venezuela. Weberianism has been most influential in comparative historical sociology, which focuses on causal explanations mainly of early-modern Europe, without a whole lot of critical content. The same can be said of political sociology, although to a lesser extent. But a full conflict sociological perspective provides some clear directions for critique.

First, the sources of social power all address human goals and can be evaluated in terms of how well they perform. *Ideological* power networks seeks to make meaning of the world. While some meanings about the ultimate significance of life are probably beyond scholarly analysis, most meanings can indeed be engaged. Do they provide valid orientation to life-in-the-world? *Economic* power networks are oriented to providing subsistence through production, distribution and consumption. How well does a given economic articulation do this? *Military* power networks seek to organize violence to provide physical security. How well do they do this? *Political* power networks seek to institutionally regulate social relations in a given territory. The analyst can ask whether they achieve that task. This focus on the way power networks can actual provide for human needs and facilitate human goals means that full conflict theory engages in "criticism" in the literary sense, providing not just jeers but also applause where merited.

Second, the *conflict* in Weberian conflict sociology comes from Weber's portrayal of power networks as inherently oriented towards monopoly (Collins 1994). No sooner do *ideological* power

networks make meaning of the world, than members of the network seek to protect those meanings from competitors and develop for themselves special positions of authority. No sooner do *economic* power networks make profits than they seek to ensure stable and consistent profits into the future by restricting the competition and seeking to colonize other sources of social power, just as neomarxist theory would suggest. Any *military* power network that achieves predominance seeks to monopolize the means of violence by defeating “irregular” military forces. And of course, no sooner does a *political* power network get a grasp on power as it seeks to perpetuate itself in that power, just as liberal theory would predict. Monopolistic ambitions are part of the consolidation of any network and create social power. However, monopolies can stifle the creativity and interstitial emergence of new forms of social organization. Full conflict sociology can help detect and critique these monopolistic tendencies beyond the blindspots of neomarxist and pluralist perspectives, pointing out the injustices they cause and the atrophic deterioration they lead to.

Finally, the notion of conjunctural causality can help us move past any abstract obligation to “balance” in our critical analyses. While the goal of social science should always be to portray actors as fully human and give everyone the benefit of the doubt, this does not oblige us to strike diplomatic compromises between partisan political actors. It is entirely possible that in any given historical context, one articulation of overlapping power networks achieves overwhelming power. If so, it deserves more critical scrutiny.

This is precisely the case right now in Venezuela. Chavismo now controls every branch of the government, the majority of state and local governments as well as the armed forces and the goose that lays the golden eggs: the state oil company. It is in a commanding but not hegemonic position because it is experiencing serious social, economic and political problems from the inherent flaws of its model of governance. Despite enormous windfalls over the past decade the economy has one of the highest inflation rates in the world and serious shortages of basic consumer goods. The

government has not been able to keep up with the infrastructural needs of a growing society and electricity blackouts and water outages are common. Crime and violence are still at historic levels.

So far the Maduro government has confronted these problems less by improving its performance than by seeking to control dissent. Since his first month in office Maduro has progressively expanded the space of the armed forces in public administration. The citizen security apparatus is now controlled from top to bottom by the retired or active military officers. This includes the Minister of Interior as well as the head of the Bolivarian National Police—a force originally created as part of a push for civilian policing. The military has been given a television station, a bank and a large role in the importation of goods.

The militarization of citizen security was clearly a factor in the government's heavy-handed response to the opposition protest movement. While most attention has been focused on the number of deaths, just as important is the indiscriminate use of tear gas and rubber bullets, as well as mass detentions without proper judicial orders or procedure. This led to around 3000 arrests of protestors. Around 2500 of them were given conditional release which restricts their ability to continue participating in protests. At the same time, the Maduro government has counteracted the protest movement by jailing or stripping some key opposition leaders of elected office.

The past year has also seen the government turn the corner in its consolidation of control over Venezuelan media. During the course of 2013 once fervent opposition television news channel Globovisión was domesticated. While the change in ownership a year ago was obscure, the results since then have been clear. Globovisión has shown serious signs of self-censorship during the cycle of protests, providing no coverage of conflicts in the streets and softball coverage of the politics around the protests. A similar process is currently occurring in the largest newspaper conglomerate. Cadena Capriles was sold in 2013 and is also undergoing serious turmoil as opposition journalists

buck an effort to control their writing. Finally, on the most serious day of protests, February 12 the government removed Colombia-based NTN24 from the air arguing that it was fomenting chaos.

One final way the Maduro government is attempting to deflect dissent rather than address its causes is through an endless flow of domestic and international conspiracy theories. Of course, conspiracies happen. But the continual flow of accusations made on scarce evidence—frequently debunked by the government itself in the following days and weeks without any explanation—can only be seen as a government attempt to distract attention from its own shortcomings.

Criticism of the government in no way requires a laudatory view of Venezuela's opposition. The close electoral loss in April 2013 unfortunately returned Henrique Capriles and the opposition coalition to the messages that they had seemingly overcome between 2008 and 2012: that they are the majority and the government is illegitimate. Capriles represented the December 2013 municipal elections as a plebescite on Maduro's presidency and lost his gamble as pro-government forces increased their percentage from the presidential elections eight months earlier.

Perhaps most relevant was the fact that shortly before the elections, polls showed that two thirds of respondents did not know where the opposition stood on the most important issues affecting Venezuela: crime, inflation and scarcities. The electoral setback generated a process of debate and discussion within the opposition in December and January and the leading opinion was the idea that the opposition needed to work to broaden its appeal and expand its coalition by developing its message and bringing it to average Venezuelans. However, a minority position thought that the situation was too urgent and that they could not count on democratic elections in the future and needed to push for change with street mobilizations under the logo #lasalida.

Of course demanding Maduro's resignation two months after his government had received significant support at the polls was a proposal that could only sound logical to opposition radicals. But the strategy was aimed at international more than domestic audiences. The most widely used

hashtag #SOSVenezuela portrays Venezuelans as captives of a tyrannical regime and in need of rescue. The protest movement sought to create situations in which the government would show its increasingly authoritarian direction, and it largely worked. The government did answer with excessive force, it did clamp down on the media, it did jail opposition politicians, and this did hurt its national and international image. However, there is little chance that the protest movement can dislodge an elected government that has such far reach political and economic power and has considerable international legitimacy. And it does not seem that it has helped the opposition to significantly broaden their coalition. In fairness, the dominant sector of the MUD did not support the efforts of López and Machado and fully realize they need to do grassroots mobilizing and “win the battle of ideas” as Henrique Capriles put it.

This is the situation of Venezuela today. It has a government that has everything it needs to consolidate a hegemonic position except for a viable model of governance. It seems more interested in controlling dissent than changing its model so more conflict seems likely. Venezuela’s opposition is still beset by a long term inability to recognize the poverty and inequality that surround them. Significant sectors of the opposition prefer to cry foul and seek international intervention rather than develop a set of proposals that attract average Venezuelans. The common denominator of Venezuela’s political conflict is a persisting gap between average citizens and those who hold political, economic, military and ideological power. The job of full conflict theory is to analyze and critique these powers, help hold them accountable, and thereby force them to take into account the people they aspire to represent.

Thinking Regionally

The rise of elected leftist governments in Latin America over the past decade and a half has produced something of cottage industry of scholars analyzing its shape and significance (see

collections by (Weyland and Madrid 2010, Levitsky and Roberts 2011, Cameron and Hershberg 2010). This paper joins forces with those who have criticized simplistic “good left” / “bad left” dichotomies. These perceived differences belie the fact that the leaders of quite varying leftist projects seem to get along so well--radical Chavismo has been consistently supported by moderate leaders such as Lula da Silva and Felipe Mújica. I would agree with French (2010) that the common denominator of these leftist governments is opposition to neoliberalism. Their varying direction depend largely on the economic, political and social contexts in which they are elected and construct their governing projects. And I agree with many (for e.g. Luna and Filgueira 2009 and Silva 2009) that the regional left turn was precipitated by a crisis of incorporation in which market reforms were undertaken in a context of weak states and dramatic inequality.

I also agree with Luna and Filguera (2009) that the rise of the left has generated a paradigmatic crisis in “academic interpretations of the political economy of democracy and development for Latin America.” Attempts to understand the rise of new left governments in terms of bounded political actors vying for power in a formal political arena simply does not capture the breadth of the conflict. In most new left contexts the left has arisen as part of Polanyian social resistance to the comprehensive marketization of society in the 1980s and 90s (Silva 2009). Neoliberalism allowed the retrenchment of, and in some cases creation of extensive social, economic, cultural and political inequalities which populations and movements have resisted, preparing the way for left governing projects. Many of these projects have pushed forward far-reaching processes of change, precisely by strengthening the power of the executive branch, reducing checks and balances and restricting civil and political liberties. This has generated, to varying degrees, processes of class-based polarization and conflict over the very meaning of democracy. Supporters of these leftist governing projects suggest they are moving to a more comprehensive form of democracy that includes economic, social and cultural rights. Opponents

argue that fundamental civil and political liberties are being attacked and this is leading to a new form of authoritarianism. Unfortunately, both sides are right and we need to construct social scientific concepts that can more fully capture this conflict.

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