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Citizens' electoral behavior in autocratic regimes

– A comparative study between Venezuela, Turkey and Russia –

Marta Díaz Fernández-Lomana

Master's Thesis



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ABSTRACT

This study offers an explanation of why voters repeatedly choose leaders who came to power democratically at some point but will not abandon it when they ought to. Research shows leaders will employ any and every mechanism to remain in power, from restricting liberties to turning to violence as a method of repressing dissidence yet voters continue to vote them back into power. Why? Through an examination of the current situations in Venezuela, Turkey and Russia, the thesis reveals that economic performance provides the key explanation. If the country provides welfare to its citizens, they will be willing to overlook other “minor” factors.

INTRODUCTION

The last twenty-five years of the past century were unsettled in political terms. A significant number of countries in seven different regions in the world evolved towards more open, liberal or less repressive regimes, and by extension, changed the political landscape in general. Whereas the causes, pace and shape of these transitions varied considerably, at least several of those countries in each region shared a common shift from dictatorships towards liberalization, and in many cases, democratization. Such was the fluctuation that the process was embraced by Western countries as the inexorable route towards the implementation of democratic regimes. In other words, it was widely assumed that democratic systems would eventually materialize in those countries. However, reality has proved otherwise. Many of those states have settled somewhere in the middle, continuing to display characteristics of both authoritarian and democratic regimes. Because reality does not correspond to the employed democratic lens to study those regimes, the resulting understandings are, not only biased, but incorrect.¹

These countries share both democratic and authoritarian features. On the one hand, they celebrate competitive elections but on the other, these are held on an uneven playing field, which reduces the opposition's chances to win them. In fact, the opposition is sometimes too weak to present itself as a real alternative. Media plays a very important role and therefore, the administration's efforts to control and censor it are significant. In many cases, there is widespread corruption that enlarges the gap between the incumbents, and large parts of the population which live in poverty. This bleak overview gives reason

¹ Thomas Carothers, "The End of the Transition Paradigm" *Journal of Democracy* 13, no. 1 (January 2002)

for voters to share a sense of hopelessness regarding change and therefore, indirectly support the regime in power.

Following the last point, this thesis asks why voters continue to support leaders that were elected democratically at some point but who will not follow the rules and leave power when they ought to. At times, leaders employ virtually every available means to avoid leaving office. They will repress any form of dissidence and ban protests by employing violence if necessary. They will restrict liberties and enhance repression. Some leaders will even amend the Constitution in case the document establishes limits on the number of terms the president can run. These regimes, because they normally share a history of corruption, tend to have economic swings, which only contribute to general dissatisfaction among the population. However, even in cases where there have been significant episodes of dissidence, citizens in polls show the intention of reelecting those leaders or directly do so in the upcoming elections. Such a puzzle is what constitutes the research question of this study. Whereas there are several features that arguably help these autocratic leaders to keep in power such as the aforementioned, the key is long-term economic growth. As long as the economy runs well for a sustained amount of time, voters will disregard other significant factors such as the absence of certain liberties, corruption, and lack of free press and justice.

- **Literature review**

One of the most noteworthy aspects in the study of states which are neither dictatorships nor fully democratic, is how many names have been used to identify them. The nuances between such labels are far from clear and hence contribute to a sense of

overlap and accumulation of terms while trying to explain the same or very similar ideas. For example, Steven Levitsky and Lucan A. Way define competitive authoritarian regimes as those in which there is electoral manipulation, abuse of state resources, unfair media access and varying degrees of harassment and violence that skew the playing field in favor of incumbents.² The authors consider that those regimes fall under the categorization of hybrid regimes given that they share both democratic and authoritarian features. Larry Diamond agrees with them by using the same term for those systems that present the form of an electoral democracy “but fail to meet the substantive test, or do so only ambiguously.”³ Similarly, Matthijs Bogaards acknowledges the proliferation of adjectives and calls on the necessity of specifying certain terms.⁴ Among them, he refers to delegative democracy, a concept coined by Guillermo O’Donnell, which refers to a minimally democratic system which lacks from horizontal accountability.⁵ Bogaards also emphasizes Zakaria’s conceptualization of illiberal democracy, in which the electoral component is also present but where civil liberties are restricted.⁶ Other scholars have worked on these regimes, which they refer to as defective democracies. In them, there is an effective democratic electoral regime but the state is unable to provide the necessary freedom and equality, as well as horizontal control by civil society that ought to be present for the realization of fully free and fair elections.⁷

Finally, Andreas Schedler coins the term electoral authoritarianism to designate those regimes that have established a democratic image, including the celebration of

² Levitsky, Steven, and Lucan A. Way. *Competitive Authoritarianism. Hybrid Regimes After the Cold War*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010, 3.

³ Larry Jay Diamond, “Thinking About Hybrid Regimes” *Journal of Democracy* 13, no. 2 (April 2002): 22

⁴ Matthijs Bogaards, “How to classify hybrid regimes? Defective democracy and electoral authoritarianism,” *Democratization* 16, no. 2 (April 2009).

⁵ Guillermo O’Donnell, “Delegative Democracy,” *Journal of Democracy* 5 no. 1 (January 1994)

⁶ Fareed Zakaria, “The Rise of Illiberal Democracy,” *Foreign Affairs* 76 no. 6 (November/December 1997)

⁷ Wolfgang Merkel et al., *Defekte Demokratie: Band 1: Theorie* (Germany: Springer, 2003)

regular competitive elections, but at the same time exercise authoritarian practices.⁸ According to Schedler, the playing field is so uneven, due to systematic and profound violations of the principles of freedom and fairness that elections actually serve as an instrument for the incumbents rather than as a democratic tool.⁹ These systems allow a certain margin for an opposition to run in minimally competitive conditions – even if they will not win the elections they will get a certain amount of votes and have some seats.¹⁰ Importantly, however, definitional questions of regime type are not only academic but also practical in these countries: while the authorities will claim the system to be democratic or in the process to become so, the opposition denounces it as authoritarian.¹¹

Up until now, academics have approached these regimes mostly from the state or the electoral competitiveness perspective: what factors make these regimes unique and different from pure democracies and dictatorships, the dynamics of electoral authoritarianism, as well as how to define an uneven playing field in which the opposition agrees to elections to gain power.¹² Attention has also been paid to parties' and states' strength, to the impact of opposition on such party strength, and to the possible coercive capacity of the latter.¹³ Questions have been posed regarding how elections constitute an element through which to establish legitimacy at home and abroad by allowing citizens to vote even if the means are unfair.¹⁴ Focusing on leaders, scholars have looked into how rulers stay in power while still holding elections that may

⁸ Andreas Schedler, ed., *Electoral Authoritarianism. The Dynamics of Unfree Competition* (Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2006), 1.

⁹ Bingham G. Powell. *Elections as Instruments of Democracy: Majoritarian and Proportional Visions*. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000).

¹⁰ Schedler, 3.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹² Schedler.

¹³ Levitsky & Way, 62-64, 70-72.

¹⁴ Vladimir Gel'man, "The Rise and Decline of Electoral Authoritarianism in Russia," *Demokratizatsiya* 22, no. 4 (Fall 2014): 504-505.

overthrow them in favor of the opposition,¹⁵ and how incumbents act towards succession.¹⁶ Finally, academics have considered Western leverage and linkage in such regimes and their consequences.¹⁷

Other theories look upon economic factors to explain the particularities of these systems. Among them, economic modernization theories hypothesize that competitive authoritarian regimes are more likely to democratize in societies with higher levels of education, more developed civil societies and larger numbers of middle and/or working classes. In other words, the authors argue that wealthier societies under these hybrid regimes are more prone to democracy than those that are less so.¹⁸ A second economic theory looks upon income inequality to argue that in those societies where the gap between the rich and the poor is higher, the redistributive demands of the lower classes are assumed to be greater and consequently, the elite resistance to democracy bigger too.¹⁹ Hence, democratization might be more probable in competitive authoritarian regimes where the income inequalities are lower. Finally, there is a third theory which focuses on economic performance by affirming that the system's stability is highly related to economic growth. Whereas good accomplishments will expand resources available for patronage and public salaries, as well as to bolster public support, downturns and crises will have the opposite effects, thus undermining the regime. As a result, competitive authoritarian regimes where the economy works well should be more stable whereas those that do not perform well are subjected to a higher risk of collapse.

¹⁵ Bunce and Wolchik, 49-50.

¹⁶ Levitsky & Way, 28-29.

¹⁷ Ibid, 40-42.

¹⁸ Carles Boix and Susan C. Stokes, "Endogenous Democratization," *World Politics* 55, no. 4 (July 2003). Adam Przeworski and Fernando Limongi, "Modernization: Theories and Facts," *World Politics* 49, no. 2 (January, 1997).

¹⁹ Carles Boix, *Redistribution and Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

However, there seems to be a gap regarding the citizens' perspective and why they continue to vote for leaders that do not play by the democratic rules once they ought to leave power. Very briefly, Bunce and Wolchik touch on the question and argue that voters regard their preferences as useless. On the one hand, citizens consider that the incumbents will manipulate the results in their favor. On the other, not only is the opposition highly unlikely to win, but also, citizens perceive those parties as weak and divided, sometimes collaborators with the regime, and in favor of boycotting elections and therefore, not worth their vote.²⁰ Nevertheless, such a broad statement generalizes without further investigating the voters' preferences and choices. Moreover, because the opposition is characterized by not having equal access to state resources, boycotting elections may be a peaceful and quite effective means of showing disagreement with the states' practices and undermining its legitimacy.²¹

While there are numerous theories about how organizing power to their advantage enables autocrats to stay in office, there has been much less focus on why citizens might *want* an autocrat to stay in office. One important exception is Beatriz Magaloni's work on electoral authoritarianism in Mexico. Following what has been discussed above about a positive correlation between a well-functioning economy and a stable regime, Magaloni argues that the electorate in regimes where there has been a long-term and sustainable growth is quite likely to tolerate short-term economic crisis.²² Although Magaloni focuses primarily on Mexico, I will argue that her theory could apply to other regimes.

²⁰ Bunce & Wolchik, 62.

²¹ Staffan I. Lindberg, "Opposition parties and democratisation in sub-Saharan Africa," *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 24, no. 1 (2006).

²² Magaloni, 20.

When looking at the economic performance of Venezuela, Turkey and Russia, her argument offers a compelling explanation for the continued electoral dominance of the ruling parties in those countries. On the one hand, oil in Venezuela has been an incredibly successful source of revenues and welfare for many years.²³ Many lower-class people gained more with Chávez than they ever did in the previous decades. However, the current situation where oil prices seem to be in free fall are putting President Maduro in a dead end where drastic measures ought to be taken. And indeed, the situation has presumably crossed the limit of what Magaloni would call a short-term economic crisis given the dissident voices heard all over the country. In the case of Turkey where the AKP has been in power for more than twelve years, the rule is also applicable. The country's economy has grown steadily during the past decade except for a serious downturn in 2009 following the world economic and financial crisis, which it has already left behind.²⁴ Finally, Russia presents a very similar economic trend to the Turkish one.²⁵

Together with long-term economic growth, Magaloni mentions two other factors that need appear in these states for leaders to obtain mass support from the electorate. First, it is expected for the country to exercise vote buying and enforce “the punishment regime”: reward loyalties and simultaneously threaten to exclude the opposition voters and politicians from the clientelist regime. Secondly, Magaloni mentions electoral fraud and the use of force as a constituent element of these regimes.²⁶ Nevertheless, while both features appear to be true in Venezuela and Russia, they do not take place in Turkey and consequently, only the first component, sustained economic growth, appears to be the

²³ <http://data.worldbank.org>

²⁴ The World Bank. Turkey's GDP evolution. <http://data.worldbank.org>

²⁵ The World Bank. Russia's GDP evolution. <http://data.worldbank.org>

²⁶ Magaloni, 20.

answer to the question of why citizens continue electing political leaders who do not respect the democratic parameters through which they came to power.

As will be discovered in the following pages, the literature on the Venezuelan, Turkish and Russian regimes has predominantly focused on the different characteristics that constitute the political systems and make them what they are, in some cases indirectly touching on the questions posed above. Thus, there have been studies on the patronage and clientelist system in Russia, inherited from feudal times and widespread today.²⁷ The question on electoral fraud or at least on dubious fair elections was raised the last time Venezuelan voters went to the ballot box and in the case of Turkey, voters are very well aware that Erdogan is violating the rules by exercising power from the supposedly symbolic post of president. Hence, Magaloni's variable of the long-term economic growth seems to apply to the study cases presented here, and indeed, will constitute the hypothesis of this project: if the country performs well economically for a sustainable amount of time, citizens are willing to overlook the lack of certain democratic tenets.

Venezuela, Russia, and Turkey all have the figure of a strong man who appeals to the masses and, a priori, has widespread support. Whereas there are other factors that these countries have in common – examined here as potential explanatory variables – they are, in fact, very different regimes with quite diverse backgrounds and societies, but all sharing the competitive authoritarianism backbone. Such a mix places this study in the middle of what has been named Most Similar Systems Design (MSSD) and Most

²⁷ Geoffrey Hosking, "Patronage and the Russian State", *The Slavonic and East European Review* 78, no. 2 (Apr., 2000).

Stephen K. Wegren and Andrew Konitzer, "Prospects for Managed Democracy in Russia", *Europe-Asia Studies* 59, no. 6 (Sep., 2007).

Different Systems Design (MDS) approaches. In the former, the case studies are quite similar but differ in a crucial aspect whereas in the latter, the cases present very different factors but a striking similarity in one. And so, whereas patronage is common in Venezuela and Turkey, and Russia and Venezuela present large numbers of rural and poorer voters, respectively, there are other factors that make them quite different such as Islam, unique to Turkey. So far, a shared instability and a charismatic leader figure appear to be the most salient factors in common.

Other features that may shape the voters' preferences are the importance of patronage distribution and the control of resources.²⁸ There also seems to be a relationship between demography and voting standards. Data points at rural voters as being more pro-regime than those that live in urban areas.²⁹ The same pattern appears in the case of the poor population, more likely to turn out to vote, and more pro-incumbents. Whereas these aspects are present in the three case studies analyzed here, not all of them are in every country, or else, there are other elements present. As an example, a patronage-based system clearly exists in Russia³⁰ and Venezuela³¹ but not in Turkey. Similarly, Venezuela and Turkey share a largely polarized society and a military which is very present in the state's affairs,³² something that does not appear to be true in the case of Russia. Thus, whereas the aforementioned factors presented in the table below are not

²⁸ Lust-Okar

²⁹ Magaloni.

³⁰ Geoffrey Hosking, "Patronage and the Russian State," *The Slavonic and East European Review* 78, no. 2 (Apr. 2000), pp. 301-320.

³¹ Francisco Rodríguez and Adam J. Gomolin. "Anarchy, State, and Dystopia: Venezuelan Economic Institutions before the Advent of Oil." *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 28, no. 1 (2009), pp. 102-121

³² M. Hakan Yavuz, "The Politics of Fear: The Rise of the Nationalist Action Party (MHP) in Turkey." *Middle East Journal* 56, no. 2 (Spring 2002), pp. 200-221.

Julia Buxton, "Venezuela's Contemporary Political Crisis in Historical Context," *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 24, no. 3 (2005), pp. 328-347.

to be dismissed in a study of voters' behavior in these regimes, they are ultimately secondary to the question presented here: if sustained economic growth is provided, voters will be willing to elect their autocratic leaders and tolerate arguably non-democratic tenets.

	Venezuela	Turkey	Russia	Similar / Different
Polarized society	X	X		Different
Significant military		X		Different
Nationalistic parties. One identity		X	X	Different
Patronage	X		X	Different
Rural voters/parties. Poverty	X		X	Different
Charismatic leader	X			Different
Authoritarian style	X			Different
Weak opposition	X		X	Different
Pro-government party "everywhere"			X	Different
Corruption. High levels of bureaucracy.	X		X	Different
European Union		X		Different
Religion at state level		X		Different
Long-term economic growth	X	X	X	Similar
Dependency on natural resources	X		X	Different

In conclusion, there has not yet been a consistent study on the question of why voters continue to reelect leaders that do not follow the democratic parameters once in power. Questions have largely focused on the state and the incumbents' dynamics to keep ruling but there is little information on the electorate's behavior, except for Magaloni's account. The thesis presented here will attempt to fulfill this vacuum through its study on the countries of Venezuela, Turkey and Russia, where the leaders have and are clearly violating the democratic rules and are still in power.

- **Case studies**

The selection of the countries of Venezuela, Turkey and Russia as case studies is not a banal choice. The three present questionably compatible factors with a fully democratic system. Despite being very different in ideological and political terms, they share many of the features examined above as potential explanatory variables and by extension, a common sense of instability. Furthermore, despite being located in different parts of the world and holding very different backgrounds, they present quite similar elements that enable them to be the object of this research. In particular, they share the figure of a strong man,³³ a significant factor in understanding the elections' dynamics in these countries. Secondly, the good economic performance of the three countries during the past decade, except for a significant episodic crisis in 2009 in Russia and Turkey, and one in Venezuela in 2011, offers an interesting occasion to study them according to Magaloni's theory on the success of authoritarian electoral regimes if they perform well economically in the long-term.

³³ The figure of a strong man in the case of Venezuela refers to Chávez, given that Maduro clearly does not have his predecessor's charismatic appeal.

Other country features are unique to each of them, such as the effect of the EU rejection of Turkish membership, or one party almost equivalent to the state as it appears to be in Russia. However, the existing literature on these regimes and their leaders offers several pieces from the same puzzle that scholars have not attempted to put together trying to answer the question of why these political systems look the way they do. This gap is widened by the academics that have gone into the theory of authoritarian competitive regimes but have not really explored them case by case. Furthermore, as has been explained above, the perspective has always been that of the state and how it functions whereas not enough attention has been paid to citizens' behavior in these countries and what their perceptions are. This thesis will focus on them and try to fill in that gap taking the economy and its positive growth as the first factor for voters to support an autocratic regime over time.

As has been mentioned, the three countries to be analyzed here have been largely studied in their idiosyncrasy without a particular focus on voters' dynamics. First, during the 19th-20th centuries, the authorities in Venezuela did not even hold control of the whole territory. While the "caudillos" – a term used to define the political leaders – had a lot of power, the society had been historically decentralized. That may explain why a large percentage of the population felt such disaffection towards its politicians later on, not feeling identified with Chávez nor with the opposition.³⁴ For its part, this opposition was significantly weak, united only in its dislike for the President. Indeed, Venezuela

³⁴ Julia Buxton, "Venezuela's Contemporary Political Crisis in Historical Context," *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 24, no. 3 (2005): 342.

presented a polarized society at the time of the elections when Chávez came to power,³⁵ which has very much continued until today.

At the beginning of the last century, the system was largely patronage-based and it was considered normal that to hold a public office would ensure private gains.³⁶ And so, the line between public and private became blurred³⁷ in an equation where political institutions became equivalent to the state, also known as patronage. The immense state bureaucracy only enlarged the corruption figures.³⁸ Moreover, the country faced poverty in such large numbers that the administration ensured loyalty by giving out property.³⁹ Chávez became widely renowned for his charisma, his authoritarian style,⁴⁰ and his presidential decrees, an arguably common instrument during his rule. His military background – Chávez was an ex-colonel who participated in the 1992 coup – largely explains the support he had from the army,⁴¹ and presumably the aforementioned authoritarian ruling style.

In the case of Turkey, the military has traditionally played an exceptional role for a democracy – the army has overthrown administrations when it considered that they were not working on behalf of the nation⁴² – by intervening or interfering in civilian areas and, by extension, in politics.⁴³ Nationalistic parties have risen in approximately the last two decades, constituting themselves around the idea of one identity and consequently

³⁵ Buxton, 329-330.

³⁶ Francisco Rodríguez and Adam J. Gomolín, “Anarchy, State, and Dystopia: Venezuelan Economic Institutions before the Advent of Oil,” *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 28, no. 1 (2009): 110.

³⁷ Rodríguez y Gomolín, 117.

³⁸ Buxton, 336-337.

³⁹ Rodríguez y Gomolín, 112.

⁴⁰ Buxton, 330.

⁴¹ Ronald D. Sylvia and Constantine P. Danopoulos, “The Chávez Phenomenon: Political Change in Venezuela,” *Third World Quarterly* 24, no. 1 (Feb., 2003): 72.

⁴² Cengiz Çandar, “Atatürk’s Ambiguous Legacy,” *The Wilson Quarterly (1976-)* 24, no. 4 (Autumn, 2000): 90.

⁴³ M. Hakan Yavuz, “The Politics of Fear: The Rise of the Nationalist Action Party (MHP) in Turkey,” *Middle East Journal* 56, no. 2 (Spring, 2002): 201.

dismissing and excluding the rest, especially the Kurds.⁴⁴ As in Venezuela, society is largely oriented towards the ruling party – AKP, which stands for Justice and Development Party, its leaders and their policies.⁴⁵ Concerns are mounting over the increasing authoritarian style of Erdogan, today President of the country, his attempts to control the opposition press, and how the country is losing its secularist identity and moving towards a more Islamist position, even at the expense of its traditional alliance with the West.⁴⁶ The society's polarization, together with the volatility of the party system, only reinforces the vicious circle of deepening the large tensions between the state and the population.

Finally, Turkey presents a unique factor in comparison to Venezuela and Russia, which is membership of the European Union. Whereas large numbers of Turkish citizens positively considered the idea of joining the EU at the beginning of the process in the 2000s, the ceaseless reform demands by the EU, with no corresponding positive action, has led to disillusion among large numbers of the population who do not regard Europe as their future anymore.⁴⁷ Europe's impact on Turkey has largely strengthened the role of civil society, which today participates in Turkish's policies and politics towards reform and democratization.⁴⁸ However, precisely because Turkey has largely evolved and transformed its state structures' by looking to the European model in the twentieth

⁴⁴ Çandar., 89.

Yavuz, 202-205.

⁴⁵ Morton Abramovitz and Henri J. Barkey, "Turkey's Transformers: The AKP Sees Big," *Foreign Affairs* 88, no. 6 (November/December 2009): 118.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 119.

⁴⁷ Yavuz, 201.

⁴⁸ Kivanç Ulusoy, "The Changing Challenge of Europeanization to Politics and Governance in Turkey", *International Political Science Review* 30, no. 4 (Sept., 2009): 368.

century,⁴⁹ some scholars argue that the EU rejection of Turkey's membership may halt Turkish achievements in enhancing its democratic project.⁵⁰

Finally, Russia is commonly regarded among scholars as one of those countries that is neither a complete democracy nor a dictatorship, although there is no consensus on how to exactly designate it either. Some academics have referred to it as managed democracy, meaning a political system where there is "political stability, elections are held but results are more or less foreordained, and serious political challenges to executive power are either absent or muted. Upheavals, spontaneity, and unpredictability are precluded."⁵¹ Probably its most salient features are patronage and clientelism, which go back to the feudalist regime of the 15th century.⁵² Both systems evolved into the *nomenklatura* structure during the Soviet Union era, and the unofficial mutual exchange of goods and services practice that prevails in the country today.⁵³ Thus, the distinction between public and private interests and goods is virtually non-existent, as is the case in Venezuela, since both are present in the concept of public service.⁵⁴ An important factor in the Russian regime is rural voters. Because they comprise significant swing constituencies, and voter turnout there is larger than in urban areas, these groups have largely shaped the country's politics.⁵⁵

Hence, whereas Venezuela, Turkey and Russia are incomparable countries in many aspects, with very diverse backgrounds that have led them to what they are today, the three share some factors that make them an interesting comparative study on the

⁴⁹ Ibid, 363.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 379.

⁵¹ Wegren and Konitzer, 1025.

⁵² Hosking, 301-302.

⁵³ Ibid., 319.

⁵⁴ Hosking, 312.

⁵⁵ Wegren & Konitzer, 1026.

question of why voters continue electing their undemocratic leaders. All of them have gone through periods of long and sustained economic growth that have placed them at the core of the international community. Moreover, this advancement has arrived hand in hand with the presence of three strong men that have been in power for more than a decade and – except in the case of Venezuela because Chávez died – they clearly have no desire to abandon power.

The choice of three case studies will allow the essay to carry out an in-depth analysis of each of them and simultaneously provide a wider scope for contextualization. Because the question posed here has not been addressed before, the conclusions of this thesis will constitute new theory. However, it is acknowledged that the selection of just three countries shall not assume an automatic generalization of the outcomes with states whose regimes are similar but these could present other non-democratic features such as the potential explanatory variables presented here. The cases have been selected according to the commonality of an authoritarian charismatic leader and consistent economic growth, recognizing all the differences in the three countries which make the study all the more compelling. This thesis argues that sustained good economic performance over time enables political leaders to adopt an autocratic ruling and still enjoy voters' support.

- **Research design**

The three countries proposed here present several common elements, although not to all three cases, such as uneven playing field, patronage and clientelism, good economic performance, high power of the military as a state institution, high interference in politics,

weak opposition, high levels of state bureaucracy and widespread corruption, a polarized society, nationalistic parties, widespread poverty, a charismatic leader as the head of the state, authoritarian ruling style, and a strong state party. These potential explanatory variables are what at first have made possible the choice of Venezuela, Turkey and Russia for the purposes of this project. At the next level, the three countries are governed by politicians who were elected democratically but who subsequently have not followed the rules to leave power when they ought to and instead are employing all the necessary measures to stay in office. As has been explained above, until now focus has been placed on the leaders' instruments to stay in power but attention has not been put on citizens' behavior. This question will constitute the dependent variable of the project.

The three states have had episodes of dissidence at some point in the last months – the Pussy Riot group in Russia, mass protests in Istanbul following the government's intention to demolish Gezi park to construct a shopping mall in its place, and continuous demonstrations in Venezuela against the government, its policies and economic shortages – which have been strongly repressed by violent means: in the case of Russia by sending three of the group members to prison. And still, after the population showed its disagreement with the government in different ways, Putin and Erdogan have successfully played the game of switching from prime minister to president (and vice versa in the case of Putin), a theoretically symbolic position, while in practice keeping power and ruling the country. The apparent contradiction between dissident episodes and the leaders' perpetuation in power is to be analyzed through the economic argument presented here: if there is economic growth, the population will weigh in its favor despite the lack of other important factors such as impartial justice or free media.

VENEZUELA: A spiral of populism, violent rhetoric and patronage

“The Bolivarian Revolution is a non-democratic and hegemonic regime, with a totalitarian vocation, a Castro-Communist filiation and military profile, that seizes our liberties, pretends to control all the human life aspects, and forces us to subsist in social and economic conditions that denigrate the dignity of every Venezuelan.”⁵⁶

– Julio Borges, co-founder of *Primero de Justicia*, one of the main political parties in the opposition.

Although Chávez died on March 5, 2013, President Nicolás Maduro, appointed by Chávez himself as his heir, has ruled Venezuela continuing his predecessor’s style and policies. Thus, for the purpose of this project, even if Chávez is the only politician not in power anymore from the three case studies included here, both leaders and periods will be analysed together due to their many continuities, such as the government’s aggressive rhetoric, its populist policies and its anti-Imperialism, among other factors. However, given the current challenges Maduro is facing that Chávez never did, questions will also be raised about the transcendence of the crisis: is it product of the circumstances that the country is going through or does the leadership play a role too?

Hugo Chávez arrived in power in 1998 after winning the elections with 56.2% of the vote and a turnout slightly over 63% of the population. Despite his initial commitment to ensure a truly efficient democratic system in Venezuela – rampant corruption and patronage were the instruments which "managed" the country at the time – his presidency was characterized precisely by a return to those practices, a seizure of the

⁵⁶ In the original Spanish: “un régimen no democrático y hegemónico, de vocación totalitaria, filiación castro-comunista y perfil militarista, que secuestra nuestras libertades, pretende controlar todos los aspectos de la vida humana y nos hace subsistir en condiciones sociales y económicas que denigran la dignidad de todos los venezolanos.”

Manifiesto to Venezuela de *Primero de Justicia* in its third National Convention, Caracas, April 6, 2014. Julio Borges, “Dignidad de conciencia, totalitarismo y antipolítica. Notas sobre la crisis moral venezolana.” *Fundación FAES. Cuadernos de pensamiento político* no.44 (Octubre 2014): 86.

media and the justice system, undermining civil society and by all methods, preventing the formation of an effective, strong and real opposition to his government.

Such a dismal picture would presume a population disenchanted towards its government but after fourteen years of a more than contested democratic rule, the streets were full of people mourning the loss of their leader in March 2013. Why? Why would the people continue electing a leader that clearly undermined civil liberties by crushing independent media, reformed the judiciary in order to ensure its loyalty, jailed opponents, and adopted an adversarial approach towards the United States and by extension all their allies, almost becoming an outsider except for relations with Cuba, Russia and Iran and some neighbours in Latin America?

The answer is simple: the vast Venezuelan oil resources tied to the boom prices that lasted for decades enabled a patronage system where not only the elites became rich but millions of Venezuelans left poverty and became middle-class. As Magaloni accounts in her study of Mexico, if there is sustained long-term economic growth, the population will overlook other factors such as civil liberties or rights. After all, Chávez's voters never achieved so much before and who would ensure that the opposition would keep the same practices? Nevertheless, the current economic crisis seems to be challenging the system's pillars: if the structure is not sustainable anymore – as it seems to be by the mass protests and the long queues to buy basic goods – who ensures that the *chavistas* will continue voting for a regime that cannot provide them with what they are used to?

- **Venezuela: heir of the Punto Fijo Pact (1958)**

In order to understand the current political system in Venezuela, one ought to go back to the emergence of democracy in 1958. At this point the dictator Marcos Pérez Jiménez, in power since 1953, was overthrown and from it emerged what was called the Punto Fijo Pact. This agreement was devised as a governability tool which grouped the church, the military, the political parties – with the exception of the Communist Party – and civil society.⁵⁷ The project guaranteed a set of basic rules for the political order to work and to ensure that the elected governments would not be overthrown.⁵⁸ The President was the most important figure in the country with most powers concentrated in him. Private interests had a place at the state level: representatives were elected without being accountable to the electorate or even to the party, and the revenues' redistribution came from the oil industry, not from taxation.⁵⁹ Finally, it is important to note the high decentralization that characterized Venezuela until the 1920s by which the national authorities were little more than administrative structures which lacked control of the whole territory. The subdivision of the country into multiple regions allowed the emergence of the “caudillos” – regional and local leaders with a lot of power.

By 1978 the democratic system had achieved a certain degree of equilibrium with a stable two-party regime, a high degree of partisan identification, sustained economic growth, a huge trade surplus, and an efficient neo-corporatist arrangement of intra-elite bargaining.⁶⁰ Only two years later, the first cracks began to appear. The two party-system

⁵⁷ Mariana González, “Chavismo y oposición: categorías y significados.” *Fundación FAES. Cuadernos de pensamiento político* no. 44 (Octubre 2014): 90.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 91.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 91-92.

⁶⁰ Pedro Sanoja, “Ideology, Institutions and Ideas: Explaining Political Change in Venezuela.” *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 28, no. 3 (2009), 394.

became highly criticized due to its lack of internal democracy, the citizens' unrest appeared to be ubiquitous and businesses and labour unions were increasingly voicing their discontent against the government's rule. Together with a seemingly stagnant economy after a long period of prosperity, the perspectives did not appear stable.⁶¹

By 1989, the Punto Fijo system was losing authority following the drop of the oil prices and the absence of an alternative economic model that would have mitigated its effects. The populist conciliation system, based on the distribution of economic resources to the political elites and popular classes, was not sustainable anymore.⁶² In an attempt to keep order, the regime resorted to violence and electoral fraud which culminated in massively repressed anti-government riots in February of that year, known as the Caracazo. Estimates point at 400 hundred people killed and thousands injured.⁶³ Hugo Chávez Frías, at the time a military colonel, was among the outraged at the use of violence against civilians. In 1992 he led an unsuccessful coup against the government for which he assumed responsibility on TV and wished the best for the country. This first public appearance as a brave and humble soldier was the first step of what would become his political career.⁶⁴ For six years he honed his political figure until in 1998 he won the national elections with the support of civilian and left sectors. He initially began with the Movimiento Bolivariano Revolucionario (MBR), a military organization which would culminate in the political group Movimiento Quinta República (MVR), with Chávez as head.⁶⁵ His electoral success could be identified as the capture of the population's malaise

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² González, 93.

⁶³ Julia Buxton, "Venezuela's Contemporary Political Crisis in Historical Context." *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 24, no. 3 (2005), 334.

⁶⁴ González, 93.

⁶⁵ Ronald D. Sylvia and Constantine P. Danopoulos. "The Chávez Phenomenon: Political Change in Venezuela." *Third World Quarterly* 24, no. 1 (Feb., 2003), 66.

against the traditional elitist parties. In contrast, Chávez presented a new and inclusive political order that embraced the majority.⁶⁶ Tony Blair, former British Prime Minister, defined his model for the transformation of the country as “The Third Way” – neither socialism nor capitalism.⁶⁷ Nevertheless, due to Chávez’s involvement in the 1992 coup, many voices called on the illegitimacy of his participation in the 1998 elections, and hence, even when he won them, many of his opponents did not recognise the government as valid.⁶⁸ As a consequence, the new government took power in the context of a polarized society.

- **A former colonel as president of the country**

In comparison to other authoritarian electoral regimes, Venezuela has been depicted as presenting a very particular feature which is the promotion of disorder.⁶⁹ Whereas other countries such as Saudi Arabia or Russia intend to have political legitimacy enforcing order, Venezuelan leaders do not work to stop lawlessness. The population feels intimidated through third parties – cases of thugs attacking oppositionists or citizens living in fear of random crime have been reported – and are consequently discouraged to take collective action against the government. It also produces discontent although not among the *chavistas*’ protected class.

As soon as Chávez came to power in December 1998, he convened the National Assembly to draw up a new constitution which would be approved one year later by 71 per cent of the population. The preamble defines the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela as

⁶⁶ González, 93.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 95.

⁶⁸ Buxton, 329-330.

⁶⁹ Javier Corrales. “Venezuela: Petro-Politics and The Promotion of Disorder,” *Freedom House* (June 2009), 65.

a “democratic, participatory and protagonist society”, a model that sought a high participation of the population in public affairs.⁷⁰ The Constitution gives pre-eminence to international human rights treaties above domestic laws, a measure that brought about broad political support.⁷¹ The document establishes the possibility for the president to succeed himself although with a maximum of two terms in the presidency. It also says that the government may be abolished through a popular referendum in case it does not perform well.⁷² Nevertheless, Chávez’s critics considered the Constitution partisan and a “charter for dictatorship” – the document was drafted by an overwhelmingly pro-Chávez assembly.⁷³ On this point, it is worth noting that the current opposition approves the document and its political strategy is based on it.⁷⁴

Chávez’s project was defined as the Bolivarian Revolution, in a tribute to Simón Bolívar’s role in the independence of Venezuela from the Spanish empire. Together with Bolívar, Ezequiel Zamora and Simón Rodríguez constituted the three pillars upon which the program was founded. As a whole, the three constituted an “entity” which embodied the values of social justice, freedom, the fight against a class-based oppression, and education for the masses, although adapted to the 20th century population’s needs.⁷⁵ Venezuela sought a place of its own in the global order and not to be subservient to the American interests or those of international institutions such as the IMF or the World

⁷⁰ Damarys Canache, “The Meanings of Democracy in Venezuela: Citizen Perceptions and Structural Change.” *Latin American Politics and Society* 54, no. 3 (Fall 2012), 99.

⁷¹ “A Decade Under Chávez. Political Intolerance and Lost Opportunities for Advancing Human Rights in Venezuela,” *Human Rights Watch*. (September 2008), 42.

⁷² Sylvia, 68.

⁷³ Buxton, 331.

⁷⁴ Mesa de la Unidad Democrática. “Propuestas programáticas” (April 22, 2010).

⁷⁵ Sanoja, 401-406.

Bank. This has been one of the backbones of the new Venezuelan ideology, traditionally defined as anti-Imperialist.⁷⁶

It must also be pointed out how Chávez envisaged his democratic model to be more participatory than liberal.⁷⁷ He intended to make citizens more involved in the decision-making processes in non-political spheres of the social life, instead of only participating through the holding of elections – the dominant political model in the world. With this purpose he promoted the creation of Bolivarian circles,⁷⁸ cooperatives, social enterprises and communal circles during his first term (1999-2007).⁷⁹ Upon his reelection in 2007, his model, defined as “21st century socialism” became a radicalization and reformulation of the Revolution.

It is important to note that the reference to socialism only came with time. In fact, the Bolivarian Revolution rejected it since the movement’s maturation took place in the context of socialism’s collapse. Yet following the values of solidarity, justice, fraternity, liberty and equality, as they appeared in the electoral campaign of 2006, the new ideology became more specific in the attempted constitutional reform of 2007. The participatory democracy was now to be understood as based on “popular power”. In this second phase the government developed an immense network of community councils with spokespersons at the head of community-based organizations. However, this process of increasing the population’s participation in parallel led to a competition with and weakening of the local institutions and their representation.⁸⁰ And so, despite the 1999

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Canache, 98.

⁷⁸ The Bolivarian circles are political and social organizations of workers’ councils in Venezuela created under President Chávez for the promotion of the Revolution’s ideas.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 100.

⁸⁰ Canache, 100-101.

democratic Constitution, Chávez's presidency was marked by clearly unfair practices, a very antagonistic attitude towards the opposition and high peaks of instability. Nevertheless, the upgrade in the population's quality of living due to the immense capital from the oil industry made them disregard such negative factors and continue supporting Chávez and his patronage practices.

- **Huge cash flows without real growth**

To begin with, the creation of the mechanisms that empowered the population constituted a politicisation of social programs for electoral purposes. The spectacular oil boom prices and the fact that Venezuela was the fourth biggest exporter in the world⁸¹ led to a huge amount of revenues which the administration largely invested in what were called the missions. Barely any money was saved or reinvested in the oil sector or in a diversification of the economy and it was the presidency itself which supervised the programs, instead of the local governments or the bureaucracy. Estimates have pointed at an increase in the funding of the missions programs of a 314 per cent in per capita terms.⁸² Such initiatives in health, education, and citizen mobilization were aimed at key sectors of the population, in many cases following political purposes such as to secure the loyalty of the beneficiaries, to bolster the support of the regime's politicians, and the distribution of patronage and jobs to loyalists.⁸³ As a result of the missions Chávez earned support from four key groups: those who received the social benefits, low-income classes mainly; those formally associated with the state – the bureaucracy in Venezuela reached to one out of every six citizens between 1958-1998 when party affiliation or

⁸¹ Sylvia, 65.

⁸² Ibid., 69.

⁸³ Corrales, 67.

loyalty to AD and COPEI, the two ruling entities, meant a job at the state level,⁸⁴ (and the situation has not changed much) – the military, and the rent-seeking private sector.⁸⁵ The public sector employees have been especially valuable to the regime, above all in electoral periods when support for the party ensures promotions and job tenure. Other sectors like the military, businesses, agriculture and the public sector payroll received subsidies too. This fiscal stimulation led to an economic growth of 8 or 9 per cent between 2004-2007, which allowed a large increase in government contracts and nationalization of enterprises in 2007.⁸⁶

The anthropologist Pedro Sanoja points at an important sociological change in order to understand how the political spectrum has evolved in the country. According to the scholar, the poor, a formerly relatively passive population sector, became increasingly assertive in their demands in the 1990s as they progressed and climbed in the social strata.⁸⁷ Their political strategies were much more disruptive than those of the middle classes. However, the political rulers largely failed to address them in contrast with the Bolivarian project, which adopted that agenda. And so, Chávez's focus on the disadvantaged and rejection of the elites emerged as a direct reaction against the higher classes' pacts which constituted the core of the country's political stability.⁸⁸

In fact, this political division was a very clear line between the AD and COPEI parties which had alternated the power in Venezuela for decades and the new government. On the one hand, the former accused the Chavez administration of politicising and militarizing the state by placing supporters in key posts. On the other

⁸⁴ Buxton, 336.

⁸⁵ Corrales, 70-71.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 70.

⁸⁷ Sanoja, 403.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 404.

hand, militants of AD and COPEI dominated the institutions inherited by Chávez and held a rather obstructionist attitude towards the President's administration. As a result, Chávez increasingly resorted to the promotion of loyalists in line with the development of the missions programs. The outcome was a displacement of those who had held power since the Punto Fijo Pact in favour of those who had been marginalised at that time, an important factor in understanding the high levels of polarization during Chávez's mandate.⁸⁹ And still, a sizeable part of the electorate was neither pro-Chávez nor against him but identified as "Ni-Ni".⁹⁰

- **The wheels of a whole compliant system**

The media is one of the clearest cases of how the regime has used the mechanisms at its disposal to crush the opposition. A 2007 study which was conducted by four leading daily newspapers found out that those loyal to the regime received 12 times more official advertisement than its competitors.⁹¹ The "social responsibility law" bans media from publishing information that could be considered against national security or disrespectful of elected officials.⁹² Penalties include prison sentences for criminal defamation, and exorbitant fines for libel, which were reinforced with the adoption of the 2005 criminal code.⁹³ Along the same line, vaguely defined "incitement" penalties have been expanded and toughened, leading to arbitrary suspension of TV and radio channels, among other measures.⁹⁴ Similarly, the state has largely abused of its control of broadcasting

⁸⁹ Buxton, 337-338.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 342.

⁹¹ Corrales, 70.

⁹² Ibid., 72.

⁹³ Human Rights Watch, 65.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 66.

frequencies by threatening and punishing critical TV and radio channels and newspapers. The most blatant case was the non-renewal of the broadcasting license of RCTV (the oldest and one of the most popular of the TV channels in Venezuela) in December 2006 for its critical coverage,. Although Chávez had publicly threatened to do so before and the government was not obliged to renew the contract, the decision was still shocking, even more so given that it did extend Venevisión’s license. Unlike RCTV which had continued with its severe tone against the Chávez administration, Venevisión had drastically reduced its opposition news coverage and lowered its criticism in the aftermath of the 2004 recall referendum.⁹⁵

Chávez had his own TV and radio show on Venezolana de Televisión (VTV), “Aló Presidente” (Hello President), a program which had been aired 311 times as of mid-2008, equivalent to 4 hours and 21 minutes. The President used his show to communicate with his supporters, announce new policy initiatives, and of course challenge and insult his media critics and political enemies.⁹⁶ His aggressive rhetoric became one of its most distinctive features. After the 2002 coup which overthrew him from power for two days, he adopted an increasingly adversarial approach against the private media, to which he started referring to as “the media enemy” and demonized them as “enemies of the people”, “terrorists”, “laboratories of psychological warfare”, “trash”, “immoral”, “fascists”, “coup-mongers”, and “liars”, among other things.⁹⁷ They were accused of conspiring against the President and even of participating in the 2002 coup.⁹⁸ It should be

⁹⁵ Ibid., 110-117.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 70.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 72.

⁹⁸ Human Rights Watch., 64.

noted that these same private media were forced to broadcast 70 minutes of free government publicity per week.⁹⁹

The state's interference and undermining of the judicial system has been as systematic and flagrant as that of the media. Although Chávez devised an ambitious project to reform the judicial system as part of his electoral program when he first ran for the Presidency in 1998, things began to turn around only a couple of years later. As a start, the judicial regime was in very much need of an urgent and profound reform after decades of rampant corruption and political meddling that had made the system a deeply discredited and dysfunctional instrument. Figures speak for themselves: in 1998, only 0,8% of the population had confidence in the judiciary.¹⁰⁰

Once Chávez took power, one of the first measures the new National Constituent Assembly¹⁰¹ took was firing hundreds of judges following a declaration of a state of emergency in the country. As a matter of fact, the judicial power has been in permanent restructuration since then, which in practice has meant political meddling and losses of independence.¹⁰² As a result, almost no judge who had achieved his post prior to the creation of the so-called Emergency Judicial Commission, has kept his post following the restructuration.¹⁰³ The establishment of the Supreme Court, composed by 20 judges has been part of the reform process, initially perceived as an arguably fair and unbiased institution. Upon its creation, it was established that in order to protect the judges' independence, two thirds of a majority vote at the National Assembly should be reached

⁹⁹ Corrales, 73.

¹⁰⁰ Human Rights Watch., 38.

¹⁰¹ The National Constituent Assembly would be the same chamber that would draft the new constitution to be approved in December 1999.

¹⁰² "Informe sobre la independencia del Poder Judicial" *Aequitas*, (October 2011), 2.

¹⁰³ *Aequitas*., 2.

to impeach a sitting justice.¹⁰⁴ However, the Court became increasingly polarized during Chávez's first mandate. Only in 2002, 49 decree laws were passed, intensifying the tensions between the government and the opposition.¹⁰⁵ It was the first time that several sectors from the CD in opposition rejected the administration's ruling and asked for its resignation. The Judicial Commission together with the Supreme Court suspended the public competitive examinations and ruled that provisional designated judges, which have the same duties as the nominal judges, would be of free nomination and at discretionary removal from the Judicial Commission itself.¹⁰⁶ The same situation occurred with the public prosecutors, freely appointed by the Public Ministry in almost 100% of the cases in a provisional status and subject to the removal of the General Attorney.¹⁰⁷

In 2004, the government passed the Organic Law on the Supreme Court of Justice, one of the most serious blows against the judicial independence of the country. The new legislation stipulated an increase from 20 to 31 justices at the Supreme Court which from that moment on would be selected by a simple majority vote at the National Assembly (before the proportion at that election was of two thirds). Since the governing coalition had a slim majority at the chamber, the new nominations radically altered the balance of the Court and ultimately of the whole country, since the highest authority is entitled to appoint the members of the local courts.¹⁰⁸ The LOTSJ also eliminated the constitutional provision that established a single 12-year term for the judges and the impeachment process through a two thirds majority at the National Assembly. Under the new law, the members of the judiciary were subject to removal under "serious offence", a

¹⁰⁴ Human Rights Watch, 42.

¹⁰⁵ González, 96.

¹⁰⁶ Aequitas, 3.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ HRW., 45-46, 49, 53-54

provision that considered two mechanisms. The first one estimated that justices pending an impeachment could be suspended before the verdict arrived. The second one devised nullifying their appointments.¹⁰⁹ In other words, the guarantee of justices' independence was abolished. Indeed, since then the Supreme Court has become boldly compliant to the government's rule: it has failed to respond to the separation of powers' assaults, it avoided addressing the 2007 challenges that attempted to reform the Constitution and it has ruled in favour of the government in the TV licenses concessions of RCTV and Venevisión.¹¹⁰

The consequences of such governmental torpedoing and the ultimate lack of independence of the judicial system could not be more distressing. Impunity levels are above 90% in cases of common offenses and up to 98% in those that touch on human rights. In 2009, from the 9224 claims where these were presumably violated, only 315 (3.28%) proceeded as accusations.¹¹¹ These alarming figures are widely acknowledged within the justice system itself. In a survey conducted the same year, only 5.41% of the interviewed practitioners estimated that the judicial decisions in Venezuela were taken according to law parameters and 14,93% expressed that they enacted their decisions following commands that were against the law and their conscience.¹¹²

Corruption is so rampant that court cases against the leadership's interests are literally dismissed, meaning there's virtually no accountability for graft. Estimates suggest that less than 5% of government contracts go through any bidding process.¹¹³ As it has already been noted, patronage is used as a political tool to ensure supporters'

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 47-48, 52.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 54, 60.

¹¹¹ Aequitas, 4.

¹¹² Ibid., 4-5.

¹¹³ Corrales, 73.

loyalty and of course, to increase the politicians' private fortunes.¹¹⁴ The administration also resorted to a law provision which estimates that revenues which exceed the amount anticipated in the legislatively approved budget must be placed in a special "stabilization fund." Chávez deliberately underestimated the projected price of the oil, ignored the legal provision of the fund and consequently freely used vast sums of money without supervision. Figures rose to a 20 per cent revenue surplus every year from 2002 until 2009, the year when this data was published.¹¹⁵

Needless to point out that corruption has also reached the electoral mechanisms. The government has been under the microscope for allegedly engaging in massive voter-registration campaigns.¹¹⁶ It has also sought to discourage opposition voters by creating uncertainty about the possible victory of their leaders. Through various mechanisms such as employing clearly biased officials who undermined the National Electoral Council's objectivity or denying jobs and government contracts to those who had called for the holding of the 2004 recall referendum, Chávez intended to foster apathy, defeatism and abstentionism.

The government has also pursued a very harsh line against dissident voices in civil society. Criminal investigations have been opened on unsubstantiated and political motivated charges, organizations receiving foreign funding have been excluded from international forums, and rights groups have been discredited and undermined by unfounded accusations of complicity in subversion, among other measures.¹¹⁷ Rights' advocates have faced prosecutorial harassment under allegations of being engaged in

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 71.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 67.

¹¹⁷ Human Rights Watch, 198.

partisan activities or pursuing a biased political agenda, ultimately seeking to destabilize the country and oust Chávez from office.¹¹⁸ In fact, as happened with the antagonistic drive towards the opposition, the President also accused both institutions and individuals in society of backing the 2002 coup against him, or being paid by the “empire” (the United States).¹¹⁹ The President’s relations with human rights groups, which were fairly positive at the outset of his presidency, have worsened in parallel to the opposition’s successes and criticisms. This increasingly aggressive political tone is to be regarded in the context of a deteriorating public services’ system which has affected almost every branch from education and health facilities to urban services or public works.¹²⁰

The last important factor to be mentioned is the immense militaristic levels the country reached with Chávez as President. Despite no significant threat either foreign or domestic, Venezuela could be considered the most militarized state in Latin America while Chávez was in power. Not only have members from the army been present in key government programs and institutions, but military spending increased sevenfold during his mandates. Between 2005-2007 the regime spent \$4.4 billion on arms imports, an amount of money with which 300 new schools, 19 superhospitals, 34 medical schools, and two sports stadiums could have been built. Chávez viewed the military not as a neutral guarantor of the Constitution but as a “guardian of socialism against imperialists and oligarchs.”¹²¹ Notwithstanding the long list of anti-democratic practices that characterized Chávez’s administration, large numbers of the population were willing to disregard such factors as long as their economic welfare was secured. The current

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 203.

¹²⁰ Corrales, 69.

¹²¹ Ibid., 71.

situation where the economy is at its minimum levels will indeed prove how much are the citizens willing to support their government when, apart from restrictions in civil liberties and corruption, there is unprecedented violent repression and the economic well-being is only in free fall.

- **A government marked by instability**

Hugo Chávez was about to lose power three times only between 2001-2004 when he had been in the Presidency just since 1999: following the massive street protests that instigated the short-lived coup in 2002, the 2002-2003 general strike led by the oil sector, and the 2004 recall referendum.¹²² Along these years he adopted a more and more aggressive tone against his opponents and any sign of dissidence was persecuted, silenced and taken to the justice. Chavez made of the decree laws an increasingly common ruling tool, successfully co-opted and gradually coerced media, the justice system, and undermined civil society. The campaign against the opposition faction reached such levels that by 2005 it decided to take the most drastic measure until then: to boycott the National Assembly ballot hoping that the international community would back them and force the government to annul or postpone the elections.¹²³ In retrospect this was the costliest decision as the government proceeded to hold the elections anyway and as a result, formed a chamber without opposition forces, which in the previous legislature had held 45% of the seats.¹²⁴

Two years later, the Chavez administration pursued to adopt a contentious constitutional reform that would have given the executive much more power, including

¹²² Ibid., 67.

¹²³ Ibid., 69.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

supervising the military; and the economy would have been controlled by the central authority of the government, conducted following common interests.¹²⁵ The reform was rejected by a very small margin, whose result is partly explained because it was organized by a student movement, with a very specific purpose, and not by political parties.¹²⁶ The internal debate that emerged following the failed approval was quickly left aside with the emergence of the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV in the Spanish acronym), the government's organization. Its slogan was "homeland, socialism or death."¹²⁷ Such political volatility may also be found in the government's cabinet itself: between 1999-2008, Chavez had 6 vice presidents, 6 foreign ministers, 9 interior ministers, 12 secretaries of the presidency, 7 finance ministers, 9 ministers of industry and commerce, 6 ministers of health, and 7 ministers of infrastructure.¹²⁸

In 2009, the regime successfully held a referendum to end the term limits in the Constitution. Unfair practices were recorded at the next elections such as heavy use of public media in favour of his party or extravagant and illegal state spending. Some new tactics were introduced like aggressively calling to participate the *chavistas* who had abstained in the 2007 referendum, promising an indefinite mandate to all the elected posts and even arguing that the Venezuelan democratic system was strong enough without the terms' limits checks and balances, and that elections alone were sufficient to provide accountability.¹²⁹ In the 2012 electoral campaign Chavez defined himself as "the people": "whatever you do and whatever happens you won't be able to defeat Chavez because he's

¹²⁵ González, 96.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 97.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Corrales, 78.

the people.”¹³⁰ Previously he had identified the people’s voice as God¹³¹ and so he drew a trinity between himself, the people and God.

- **An opposition united only in its dislike for Chávez**

“Venezuela is a country where every day the opposition wakes up not thinking how to improve the situation but how to overthrow the government,”¹³² according to Ali Rodríguez, Chávez’s trusted lieutenant and head of the state oil company. This quotation is from 2002 and without denying its current value, the playing field has been so uneven in favour of the government that one ought to measure the opposition’s successes through that lens. As a start and as has already been explained with the pervading use of the media, the regime adopted a more antagonistic position towards the opposition after the attempted coup against Chávez in 2002, instead of aiming at reconciliation. The President pursued a radicalization strategy against his opponents by pushing them into extreme actions so that the public would be forced to take sides.¹³³ Since then, voters have been targeted and persecuted by the regime as happened following the 2004 recall vote. The ballot was full of administrative irregularities that sought to impede it and was postponed for months until it finally took place. Economic and social disorders have successfully been encouraged in the areas where the opposition ruled.¹³⁴ Because the Coordinadora Democrática (CD), the largest oppositional faction in Venezuela for many years, was composed by a significant business sector associated with the traditional parties, the

¹³⁰ In the original Spanish: “hagan lo que hagan y pase lo que pase no podrán con Chávez porque él es el pueblo.”

In “¡Chávez no soy yo, es un pueblo invicto!” J.M. Carrasquel, *El Correo del Orinoco*, in González, 98.

¹³¹ *Chávez: el pueblo es la voz de Dios en la tierra*, YouTube, accessed March 18, 2015.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fZqD_LoFHho

¹³² *The Economist*, October 12, 2002, in Sylvia, 74.

¹³³ Corrales, 67.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 73.

government has emphatically depicted it as “the right”. Chávez deliberately associated it with the Punto Fijo Pact forces, ultimately enhancing polarization.¹³⁵

Today, the Democratic Unity Roundtable (Mesa de Unidad Democrática in Spanish), a coalition of several liberal, social-democratic and progressive political parties, constitutes the biggest opposition force. The most charismatic and well-known figures like Henrique Capriles, Leopoldo López – incarcerated without charges for more than a year now – and María Corina Machado, who lost her certificate of election a couple of months ago, all belong to this bloc. In April 2010 the opposition issued a document in which they explained their principles and proposals.¹³⁶ In it, they defined Venezuela as a state that claims for unity and in which frustration and discouragement are seen in the streets. They condemned the almost unprecedented power concentration and centralization in the country’s history that the government enjoys today, while at the same time it has disposed vast financial resources. They denounced the authoritarian, populist, statist practices as well as the unsafe conditions in which the population live. They expressed their discomfort with the government’s confrontational attitude towards the opposition and its use of insults and damaging remarks, as well as the personality cult enforced by the regime that arguably aims to consolidate a statist society. The document also denounces the flagrant violations on human rights and how the last decades have only witnessed a worsening in the living conditions and in the institutional sphere. The opposition considers that there are fewer opportunities than ever to make progress in the country and points out that millions of people continue living in poverty conditions. Finally, they call for a very much-needed unity in their estimation that a country cannot

¹³⁵ González, 96.

¹³⁶ Mesa de la Unidad Democrática.

have a future without everybody's inclusion and Venezuela deserves to be acknowledged by its contributions.

The Democratic Unity Roundtable takes the 1999 Constitution as the starting point from where to begin a new model for the country. They call for dialogue, agreement, and understanding in order to achieve it. They embrace the values of democracy, community spirit, equality, solidarity, and cooperation and they emphasize national unity above all. According to them, wealth is to be accumulated through effort, work, and meritocracy. Prosperity and entrepreneurship should be boosted. The state should safeguard the values of pluralism, tolerance, respect for popular sovereignty, and the liberties of thought and expression.

- **Chavismo vs. opposition**

According to the Real Academia Española (which could be translated as Royal Spanish Academy), the suffix “-ismo” refers to doctrines, systems, schools or thoughts. Giving a person's name to it is to be analysed as a thinking doctrine with very high value significance and a remarkable degree of personal cult.¹³⁷ Both terms *chavismo* and “the right” are Chávez's creations since it was he who formulated them and gave them meaning through the presidential agenda.¹³⁸ The former refers to a complex mix of heterogeneous contents, which form a system of ideas that has been evolving since 2004. In contrast, the latter, being delegitimized as “the right” has not articulated a unique system of ideas in exchange for the so much needed unity, an important disadvantage in comparison to *chavismo*.

¹³⁷ González, 98.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 99.

However, without Chávez, both categories do not have the same meaning as when they were conceived. Instead, new identifications emerge: there are *chavistas* who do not identify themselves with the current presidency, as there are parts of the opposition whose corporatist element constitutes a civil and partisan bloc.¹³⁹ Moreover, it is incorrect to associate both factions with right and left when most of the political parties since 1983 have been placed in the centre in terms of ideology. It is interesting to note that the current government as well as the opposition in place today still keep both categories. On the one hand, “chavismo” is understood as Chávez’s legacy although because their heirs do not go in depth into it, they risk falling on deaf ears as has happened with the opposition. On the other hand, the opposition continues seeking unity and cohesion even in sacrifice of ideology. Just as they did to remove Chávez from power, today they are together against Maduro.

- **Do the Venezuelans have an option other than *chavismo*?**

The opposition front sees the current situation in Venezuela as their opportunity to introduce change. The fact that the oil prices have been in free fall for months now and that this constitutes the sole significant source of revenue for the country’s economy has put the regime in a dead end where discontent is only increasing among the population. In fact, the explosive economic growth that lasted for decades in the country in consonance with the oil boom corroborates Magaloni’s assumption of a compliant population with the loss of civil rights and liberties if wealth is secured. The current situation seemingly follows her account too on how a long-term economic crisis will make the population revolt against its government. As an ultimate consequence, and more and more plausible

¹³⁹ Ibid.

as the economic situation increasingly deteriorates, the Venezuelan government could collapse as a result of the people's hostility to it.

However, there are two important factors that play in favor of the government. In the first place, the regime has changed the lives of thousands of peoples through patronage, distribution of resources and access to power and thus, even if the conditions are not good today, people do not know what would the opposition bring either but surely they would lose part of those benefits. Secondly, the broadcasted information is so biased and the playing field in general is so uneven for the opposition, that their message does not reach everybody nor does it have the same force as the regime's one. Hence, the country lives in a spiral of distribution of patronage, a polarized society enhanced by the aggressive regime's discourse, and an economic crisis that instead of being addressed by the government, is being demonized as a product of the American imperialism, the fascists and the right.¹⁴⁰

Under such conditions, the possibilities of a regime change in Venezuela do not appear very optimistic. And still, things are only worsening and Maduro's administration is not precisely working to change them. Furthermore, the president does not have his predecessor's charisma and the aura under which he took power nominated by Chávez as his heir has clearly faded away under the current country's conditions. Similar to Erdogan in Turkey and Putin in Russia, Maduro has not hesitated in resorting to violence whenever necessary, as Chávez never did or faced the need to do, as happened with last year repressing students' protests. Only between February and March 2014 more than 28 people died, most of them as a result of bullet wounds in their heads, and more than 1,600

¹⁴⁰ Mario Vargas Llosa, "La libertad en las calles," *El País*, March 9, 2014.
http://elpais.com/elpais/2014/03/06/opinion/1394116119_987776.html

were detained.¹⁴¹ The National Guard and the bands commanded by the regime resorted to shooting, abuse in the use of tear gas, destroying and entering houses and public properties, vandalism, torture, and raids in several universities across the country, among other measures.

It is not to forget either that President Maduro won the elections by a very thin margin of a less than 2 per cent of the votes against Henrique Capriles.¹⁴² This means that half of the population in Venezuela was against Maduro's regime at the time of the elections, and presumably is today, if the numbers are not even bigger given the current situation. Thus, even if the conditions under which the opposition plays are blatantly unfair, the possibilities of change are far from impossible. After all, the rationing regime where people wait for hours in long queues to get a package of toilet paper or prepared milk for babies have never been seen before in the country.¹⁴³ Some even travel to other cities in search of products such as a bottle of oil, for which they pay a luxury price. Not only is this a dramatic situation but the regime persecutes those who dare attempt to buy more than what is allowed. More importantly, this situation does not distinguish between social classes and it has already reached unsustainable levels. Only time will give the answer to Venezuela's future but one thing is clear: the mechanisms that ran the country only some months ago do not do so anymore, a fate shared by Turkey and Russia too, as will be analysed in future chapters.

¹⁴¹ María Teresa Romero, "Venezuela: en escalada represiva," *Infolatam*, March 13, 2013.

<http://www.infolatam.com/2014/03/14/venezuela-en-escalada-represiva/>

¹⁴² "Maduro gana la elección en Venezuela, informó el Consejo Electoral," *CNN México*, March 14, 2013.

<http://mexico.cnn.com/mundo/2013/04/14/venezuela-elecciones-maduro-capriles>

¹⁴³ Leila Guerrero, "Venezuela," *El País*, November 12, 2014.

http://elpais.com/elpais/2014/11/10/opinion/1415638868_079946.html

TURKEY: A country still defining its identity

“We live in a country in which the prime minister was once imprisoned because he read a poem but has hauled hundreds of writers through the courts during his time in office. We live in a country in which the BDP enjoys the largest support of any party among the Kurdish voters but has to back independent candidates because the electoral threshold prevents it from entering parliament. We live in a country in which Kurdish politicians and mayors have been imprisoned on trumped-up charges and are not allowed to defend themselves in their mother-tongue. We live in a country in which Kurdish children are tried in court for shouting slogans and throwing stones. We live in a country in which journalists, writers and cartoonists face fines of astronomic proportions. We live in a country in which women are subjected to violence and are murdered in the name of “honour”. We live in a country in which environmentalists who oppose the building of dams that will submerge ancient heritage sites such as Hasankeyf and Zeugma are branded as “traitors”.”

- Osman Baydemir on the current situation in Turkey.¹⁴⁴

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has been in power since 2002 when, with an unexpected 34% of the votes, the party seized the majority of the seats at the National Assembly for the first time in 15 years. Years of rampant corruption from the previous government laid down the perfect scenario for the new party – whose AKP acronym stands for “cleanness” – to present itself as the needed alternative. Since then, good governance, sustained economic growth and political stability after three military coups in twenty decades have arguably provided Erdogan with the popular support to be in office uninterruptedly.

However, after years of unparalleled Turkish progress in so many areas and being depicted both by the West and its Muslim countries as the model to imitate in terms of approaching politics and religion, concerns have been raised recently over

¹⁴⁴ Osman Baydemir, in “The ‘we know best’ democracy.” In *What Does Turkey Think?* Dimitar Bechev (e.d). London: European Council on Foreign Relations, June 2011, p. 43.

the cutback on freedom of expression, the mounting persecution of human rights activists, the uneven electoral playing field, and the increasingly authoritarian style Erdogan has been adopting in the past months in general.

In the context of such a flawed performance one would wonder why citizens continue to vote for him, all the more so after significant waves of dissidence and disenchantment. Among these, the most clear episode were the 2013 street protests following the attempted dismantling of the emblematic Gezi park in the centre of Istanbul to build a shopping mall in its place. The answer to that question follows the Venezuelan case in terms of good economic performance which has raised living standards considerably and enlarged the middle class. In addition, Turkey presents a unique factor in comparison to Venezuela and Russia and that is the emergence of a remarkably important religious social group thanks to Erdogan's late ambiguous non-secularist policies. Although the AKP party is non-Islamist, it has Islamic roots, a component afresh and shrewdly managed by the current President. This has led to the empowerment of this part of the society that until then did not occupy a relevant place but that because now does, is likely to continue supporting the leader that has given them such status.

- **Historic and political context**

The foundations of modern Turkey go back to 1923 with the establishment of the republic under President Kemal Atatürk. In 1928 the country was declared secular, arguably its more distinctive feature, by removing from the Constitution the clause that defined Islam as the state religion. The political spectrum in Turkey has historically

cultivated parties from every ideology: from Kurdish identity, ultranationalists, pro-Islamists, centre-left, to centre-right.¹⁴⁵ Nevertheless, looking at the political life of the country over the years, it seems that the population is largely conservative - centre-right positioned.¹⁴⁶

Two features stand out in Turkish politics. In the first place, the military has traditionally perceived itself – and backed by the citizenship, which is important to note – as the guarantor of the state’s stability.¹⁴⁷ Considered the country’s most respected institution, the army has launched three coups d’état (1960, 1971 and 1980), and has consistently meddled in politics during this time. Its support mainly comes from the urban middle class and the state bureaucracy, two of the most important groups in Turkish society.¹⁴⁸ Secondly, the Constitutional Court has significantly interfered in politics too by banning several parties or attempting to do so. In 1998 the Welfare Party was barred upon allegations of going upon the principles of the secular republic.¹⁴⁹

From the ashes of Welfare emerged the Virtue Party, an organisation divided almost from the beginning between loyalists to the former Welfare leader, Necmettin Erbakan, and those more reformists. Upon 2001 when the Court decided on its dissolution, indicted of being the focus of Islamic militancy, two new parties were born following both groups. The Felicity Party, composed of the Virtue’s traditionalists, never gained much support, in contrast to the Justice and Development Party (AKP), today in

¹⁴⁵ Michele Penner Angrist, “Party Systems and Regime Formation in the Modern Middle East: Explaining Turkish Exceptionalism,” *Comparative Politics* 36, no. 2 (Jan., 2004): 237-242.

¹⁴⁶ “Turkey profile,” *BBC*, December 15, 2014. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-17994865>

¹⁴⁷ Çandar Cengiz, “Atatürk’s Ambiguous Legacy.” *The Wilson Quarterly* (1976-) 24, no. 1 (Autumn 2000): 90.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 91.

¹⁴⁹ R. Quinn Meham, “From the Ashes of Virtue, a Promise of Light: The Transformation of Political Islam in Turkey.” *Third World Quarterly* 25, no. 2 (2004): 345.

power.¹⁵⁰ Once again, in 2008, this organisation was about to be suspended under accusations of undermining the secular constitution. The last episode occurred in 2009 when the Constitutional Court considered forbidding the Democratic Society Party over alleged links to the Kurdistan's Workers Party (PKK), an organization largely opposed to the government.

As David Shankland, a social anthropologist specializing in Turkey argues, in this country “governments rise and fall, dozens of parties change their names or are closed down entirely, electoral regulations change, military interventions jostle with new constitutions.”¹⁵¹ Not everything is so unstable however. Elections have been held regularly since 1950 despite the army's interference in politics,¹⁵² and in contrast with the many prime ministers that have exercised power in Turkey, the country only has had nine presidents – counting the pre-democratic Atatürk and İnönü. And still, Shankland's synthesis embraces quite well Turkish turbulent politics.

- **Is Turkey a democracy?**

Osman Baydemir, a Kurdish politician, lawyer and human rights activist, poses a set of questions that ought to be considered when thinking about democracy in Turkey. Does the rule of law exist as well as an effective and impartial judiciary? Are the different identities, beliefs, cultures, and mother tongues recognised? Are the media free and unbiased? Are the people able to rule over themselves and participate in the running

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 349.

¹⁵¹ David Shankland, “Islam and Politics in Turkey: The 2007 Presidential Elections and Beyond.” *International Affairs* 83, no. 2 (Mar., 2007): 357.

¹⁵² Meham, 341.

of the Turkish public life?¹⁵³ Whereas the answer to these questions is not openly negative, nor is it clearly positive.

There are several factors that characterize Turkey as a very particular regime. To begin with, the military's functions, as has been examined above, have largely exceeded those of safeguarding the country's borders. Its interference in Turkish politics overthrowing up to three democratically governments elected in twenty years, under the excuse that the country was at risk, is a highly justifiable practice. Nevertheless, the population's support constitutes a crucial factor in this case, given the common tendency of associating the military rule with dictatorships. In this sense, one of Erdogan's most important achievements has been to place the army at its lowest political profile since the 1950s,¹⁵⁴ by setting it in a position that is subservient to the civilian authorities.¹⁵⁵

As a second factor, Turkey has largely been regarded as a model of state secularism, in the midst of a region that holds Islam inseparable from politics. Cengiz Çandar, a Turkish journalist and former war correspondent, offers a rather different and provocative approach. According to Çandar, secularism was born in Turkey following the French model, which highly influenced Atatürk and his contemporaries, especially its revolutionary Jacobinism trend.¹⁵⁶ And so, just as the Catholic Church was presented as a threat to the French Republic, so Islam was supposed to be for modern Turkey. Consequently, the religion was barred, not only at the state level but in public spaces too by forbidding the use of female headscarves, for example.

¹⁵³ Baydemir, 43.

¹⁵⁴ Juris Pupcenoks. "Democratic Islamization in Pakistan and Turkey: Lessons from the Post-Arab Spring Muslim World." *The Middle East Journal* 66, no. 2 (Spring 2012): 282.

¹⁵⁵ Arch Puddington and Zselyke Csaky, "Erdogan's Ambiguous Decade", November 2012, Freedom House.

<https://freedomhouse.org/blog/erdogan's-ambiguous-decade#.VOuamlrnm2w>

¹⁵⁶ Çandar, 95.

Apparently, the tendency is reversing today and Islam seems to be imposing itself against secularists who have accused Erdogan of discriminatory policies. For instance, in 2005, the secular President of the Yuzuncu Yil University in Van, Yucel Askin, was arrested and imprisoned for alleged procedural misconduct. This provoked the outcry of virtually all the university presidents across the country who claimed that the government was manipulating the judiciary.¹⁵⁷ Five years later, in September 2010 a referendum was passed amending the Constitution so that the Parliament would have more control, not only over the military but also over the judiciary.

Finally, the prospect of becoming part of the European Union has largely influenced and shaped the Turkish state. Kivanç Ulusoy argues that the process of reforming the governing structures in Turkey goes back to the 19th century, formally looking upon the EU in the 20th century.¹⁵⁸ The idea was to evolve from a multinational and multi-religious empire to a nation-state by acquiring a modern administrative structure and a coherent national identity. According to Ulusoy, Europe became increasingly involved in Turkish politics by the 1980s, in two ways. It exercised direct pressure for the country to adopt European governance structures and roles, and it strengthened civil society, providing it with mechanisms to influence state politics towards reform and democratization.¹⁵⁹

Despite the initial enthusiasm Turkey showed upon accession to the EU – it constituted a major card in the AKP’s electoral program back in 2002 – the process’s halt has largely disenchanted an important part of the population, which no longer sees the

¹⁵⁷ Pucenoks, 284.

¹⁵⁸ Kivanç Ulusoy, “The Changing Challenge of Europeanization to Politics and Governance in Turkey.” *International Political Science Review* 30, no. 4 (Sept. 2009): 363.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 368.

European Union as the (obvious) future they should seek. Opinion polls show that support for EU membership rose to 75 per cent in 2004 and sharply declined to 44 by 2013,¹⁶⁰ although that figure increased to a 53 per cent last year.¹⁶¹ In any case, the EU is losing leverage in Turkish politics. Only in December 2014, following EU criticisms of the deteriorating press freedom in the country President Erdogan replied with a “mind your own business” tone pointing at the last Islamophobic episodes in the continent, on which the EU should be focusing on instead.¹⁶² The divergence between both powers has been pointed as a direct hampering factor in the democratization process in Turkey.¹⁶³ The Western state model and the Turkish desire to imitate it, the place of religion in the country, and the exceptional importance the military has played in its history are the pieces of a complicated puzzle. Traditionally admired by neighbouring countries in the region and depicted as the ideal to follow by the United States and the European Union, today Turkey has important flaws that preclude it from being considered the democracy it sought to be.

- **The AKP: A 12 year rule**

Only by looking at the wide spectrum of political parties in Turkey, one would wonder why the Justice and Development Party (AKP) has been ruling the country since it first won the elections in 2002. Juris Pupcenoks, offers a good answer. In 2002, when the party ran for the ballots for the first time, the population felt a significant disaffection

¹⁶⁰ Barın Kayaoğlu, “Is Turkey giving up on EU membership?” *Al-Monitor*, September 23, 2013. <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2013/09/turkey-giving-up-eu-membership.html#>

¹⁶¹ Jacob Poushter, “The Turkish people don’t look favourably upon the U.S., or any other country, really” Pew Research Center, October 31, 2014. <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/10/31/the-turkish-people-dont-look-favorably-upon-the-u-s-or-any-other-country-really/>

¹⁶² “Erdogan tells Europe to stop criticizing Turkey,” *Reuters*, December 26, 2014. <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/12/26/us-turkey-erdogan-idUSKBN0K40U720141226>

¹⁶³ Ulusoy, 379.

for the secular parties in place, largely due to the rife corruption from the previous government. The context was the perfect breeding ground for a different option.¹⁶⁴ The elections resulted in the first time in 15 years that one political party won the majority of the seats at the national assembly with 34 per cent of the votes. At the opposition side only stood the Republican People's Party (CHP) and independent seats.¹⁶⁵ Since then, Erdogan's party has provided good governance, especially in the economic and foreign policy areas, possibly at the core for its constant re-election.

Turkey has achieved unprecedented economic growth levels; inflation and the budget deficit have been significantly reduced. Also, the country has become an important source for economic investment for other Muslim countries in the region, namely Saudi Arabia – the Saudi monarchy announced in 2011 an investment of \$600 million in Turkey's agricultural and manufacturing sectors during the next two decades.¹⁶⁶ In terms of social policies, Erdogan has advanced in women's rights considerably – the country has improved its gender equality levels and positive discrimination was approved in 2010 in their favour, among other social groups.¹⁶⁷ In 2008, constitutional amendments were introduced in order for women to be able to wear headscarves at universities. However, not all the decisions have gained the same support. In fact, some have been quite contentious such as the government attempt in 2004 to criminalize adultery, a proposal that raised such controversy that it was finally dropped. Furthermore, the consumption of alcohol has been restricted more and more. Taxes have been increased 450 per cent over this product in the first four years of the party's rule.

¹⁶⁴ Pupcenoks, 286.

¹⁶⁵ Mecham, 340.

¹⁶⁶ Dina Al-Shibeeb, "Saudi Arabia plans to invest \$600 billion in Turkey," *Al-Arabiya*, April 29, 2011. <http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2011/04/29/147216.html>

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 286.

The government has legislated for cities to pass ordinances that ban alcohol if they wish to, and its availability in public spaces has largely decreased. Despite what one would think, the AKP does not appeal to Islamic norms but to the health problems that derive from alcohol's consumption to justify this new rule.¹⁶⁸

The AK Party was founded following the *ak* word, which means “white” and “clean”, and which implied that the organization was untainted from the corruption of the past.¹⁶⁹ This pun achieved relevance in December 2013 when a major corruption scandal broke affecting Erdogan's government. In it, at least 34 people, including the sons of three ministers were arrested on charges of bribery, tender-rigging, and suspected corruption.¹⁷⁰ In a clear political intrusion into the judiciary, not only have all the accused been released, but the Parliament also voted in January 2015 not to investigate the four former ministers affected by the case. This suspiciously came after Erdogan had reassigned hundreds of judges and prosecutors as well as thousands of police, accused of being loyal to his former ally Fethullah Gülen, today accused of being the architect of a complot to overthrow the government.¹⁷¹ The continuation of the corruption soap opera arose in February last year with the revelation of tapped phone conversations made public through Youtube. According to the recordings, Erdogan and his son were supposedly planning to remove \$1billion from the family members' houses and conceal it.¹⁷² Even if the scandal achieved unimagined proportions – two million people had listened to the

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 285.

¹⁶⁹ Mecham, 349.

¹⁷⁰ Constanze Letsch, “Turkish ministers' sons arrested in corruption and bribery investigation,” *The Guardian*, December 17, 2013.

<http://www.theguardian.com>

¹⁷¹ Gulsen Solaker, “Turkish parliament votes against corruption trial for ex-ministers,” *Reuters*, January 21, 2015.

<http://uk.reuters.com/>

¹⁷² Cengiz Çandar, “The Erdogan tapes,” *Al-Monitor*, February 27, 2014.

<http://www.al-monitor.com>

conversation only in the first day – there were no political consequences. President Erdogan issued a statement affirming that the audio was false and that was the end of the story.

The scandals affecting the ruling party are nothing new. In October 2008 a trial started against the alleged ultranationalist Ergenekon group, blamed of being behind a series of attacks and of provoking a military coup against the government. The organization is said to be composed of terrorist paramilitary groups, the military and the police, NGOs, journalists, government officials, judges and politicians. Whereas there seems to be some truth in the case given the initial support for the trials, the worrisome increasing of suspects and accused – estimates of around 300 – has raised the alarm and criticisms both within and outside the country. The irregularities under which the trials have been conducted have only reinforced such concerns. Not only have secret evidence and anonymous witnesses been allowed, but episodes such as an Air Officer who declared that his phone was confiscated by the police and when he got it back 139 contacts had been loaded, later used as evidence, are far from reassuring. Along the same line, cases such as the arrest of Ahmet Sik, an investigative journalist, accused of collaborating for the propaganda wing of the organization, quite ironically given that he spent much of his professional work to uncover the organization, has led to analysts to point at the prosecution of innocent people using the case as an excuse.¹⁷³

Within such a context it should not be surprising that freedom of press has become more and more precious in the last years with Erdogan's tightening the grip. In 2012, the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), an independent non-profit organization,

¹⁷³ Justin Vela, "Analysis: Turkey's divisive Ergenekon trial," *Al-Jazeera*, August 12, 2013. <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2013/08/201381175743430360.html>

published a report in which Turkey appeared to be the top-world country in repression against journalists, followed by Iran, Eritrea, and China,¹⁷⁴ which became number one by the end of last year.¹⁷⁵ Even more worrisome is the fact that one third of all terrorism-related convictions in the world since the 11-S attacks have been Turkish, a number that amounts to 12,897, according to a 2011 study from Associated Press.¹⁷⁶ The tendency seems to be slightly decreasing – in August 2012 there were 76 journalists imprisoned, down to 49 at the end of the year and to 40 by December 2013 – but still, the documented abuses during the processes are extremely alarming.

As an example, Kurdish defendants may serve. They constitute a large 70 per cent of those in jail and are not allowed to speak their language at the court. The indicted are charged for covering the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) banned activities and the Union for Communities in Kurdistan (KCK). Almost all the rest of the imprisoned journalists have been accused of participating in plots against the government or of belonging to prohibited political parties.¹⁷⁷ According to the CPJ report, these people were routinely held in prison for long periods of time while waiting for their verdict. The possession of certain books, documents or newspapers, as well as the expression of some ideas has been criminalized.¹⁷⁸ Arguably unsurprisingly, President Erdogan has publicly menaced certain journalists¹⁷⁹ and he even shut down Youtube and Facebook temporarily

¹⁷⁴ "Turkey's Press Freedom Crisis," Committee to Protect Journalists, (October, 2012): 9.

¹⁷⁵ "China is world's worst jailer of the press; global tally second worst on record," Committee to Protect Journalists, December 17, 2014.

<https://cpj.org/reports/2014/12/journalists-in-prison-china-is-worlds-worst-jailer.php>

¹⁷⁶ "Turkey's Press Freedom Crisis", 22.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid, 9.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Fehim Taştekin, "How foreign journalists become 'spies' in Turkey," *Al-Monitor*, January 12, 2015.

<http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/01/turkey-press-freedom-foreign-journalists-spies.html#>

last year.¹⁸⁰ In other words, democracy exists for those in power but rights are not shared by everybody.¹⁸¹ Erdogan rules without room for dissidence: he is entitled to behave the way he wants given that he has the voters' support. The voices of protesters, judges, prosecutors, opponents or Europe are just dismissed.¹⁸²

- **On the path of becoming an autocracy**

The demonstrations at Taksim Square in Istanbul that began in May 2013 and lasted until mid-August, marked a turning point in Erdogan's administration. The President planned to replace the emblematic park in the centre of the city with a shopping mall. Except that, as Suzy Hansen from the *New York Times* argues, Erdogan was not the mayor of the city and did not consult the constituents for their opinion.¹⁸³ In fact, when a committee composed of municipal appointees, historians, and academics, unanimously voted against the project, he just dismissed them by creating a new one favourable to his plan. As a result, people from every social background took the streets to protest with numbers rising to millions. What began as a defence of a public space extended to demonstrations against the mounting government's authoritarianism and the use of violence in the protests – estimates count up to 8,000 people injured. Erdogan referred to the demonstrators "terrorists" and "looters" and as a result of their action,¹⁸⁴ today they are facing trials in comparison to the police's impunity.

¹⁸⁰ Alev Scott, "Turkey's YouTube and Twitter bans show a government in serious trouble," *The Guardian*, March 28, 2014.

<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/mar/28/turkey-youtube-twitter-ban-government-trouble>

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 43.

¹⁸² "The battle for Turkish politics," *The Economist*, March 29, 2014.

¹⁸³ Suzy Hansen, "Whose Turkey Is It?" *New York Times*, February 5, 2014. <http://www.nytimes.com/>

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

In her account of the Gezi protests and the current Turkish situation in general, The *New York Times*' journalist points at the concentration of power as the factor that forges the current regime:

Turkey's biggest problem, its authoritarian structure, has little to do with Islam. The state remains a tool for accumulating disproportionate power, and when threatened, it sacrifices its citizens to save itself. If a prime minister can co-opt the laws and the media, and if a self-interested group can prosecute trials of dubious legality, and if the citizens have nowhere to express themselves but in the streets, then the state institutions are broken.¹⁸⁵

The country seems to be governed by the axiom "the people do not know what is best for them, but we do."¹⁸⁶ In Baydemir's words, Erdogan rules according to the principle of subordination proven that he does not believe in real democracy nor in elections.¹⁸⁷ And still, with such a grim picture, Erdogan has been able to switch positions and become President of the Republic, and continue being the effective ruler of the country despite its supposed symbolic authority.¹⁸⁸ The Constitution devises five functions the President is supposed to fulfil.¹⁸⁹ The document establishes that the President is legitimized to supervise the legislation drawn up by the Grand National Assembly and confirm that it is compatible with the Constitution. Secondly, he is the person designated to appoint the most relevant posts in the ministry of internal affairs, several senior civil appointments, and to propose prime ministers when new governments are being formed. Similarly, it is the President the person in charge of deciding the timing

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ Baydemir., 44.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ In August 2014, Erdogan became President of Turkey after ruling for three terms as Prime Minister. Outgoing Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu became Prime Minister.

"Turkey's Erdogan is inaugurated as President," *BBC*, August 28, 2014.

<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-28961495>

¹⁸⁹ Shankland, 358.

of the elections. He may refer legislation to the constitutional court and, although he cannot propose new legislation, he has considerable power to intervene, to influence and to impede its elaboration. Furthermore, upon his election, the President ought to cut ties with any political party it would have previously belonged to, in this case the AKP.¹⁹⁰ Erdogan has publicly declared he has no intention to do any of these but rather to amend the Constitution – which dates from the 1980 military coup – in order to bestow upon himself more powers and effectively rule the country. It should be quite illustrative to remind the reader that to this day nobody really knows who Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu is, at least in the international arena, and it has been Erdogan who has continued governing Turkey since his appointment as President last August.

- **12 years later, why is still Erdogan in power?**

Given the persecution and prosecution of journalists, the attempts of closing several social media, the partial judiciary, the use of violence to repress protests and deaths of people in the streets, and the loss of civil liberties and rights in general, why is Erdogan still in power today? Why and how has he been able to switch posts from Prime Minister to President with a victory of a narrow 52% in the first round? Two tentative answers emerge at this point.

First, as has been seen throughout this thesis, Erdogan's economic performance has been more than satisfactory during this decade. Turkey is today the 17th largest economy with a gross domestic product that went from \$232 billion in 2002 to \$820 in 2013, according to the World Bank, and the GDP per head of population rose from

¹⁹⁰ “Turkey’s Erdogan is inaugurated as President,” *BBC*.

\$3,490 in 2002 to \$10,780 in 2013.¹⁹¹ In comparison to the inefficient and corrupt government in power prior to Erdogan's arrival, the Motherland Party, the AKP has lowered inflation – from 18,4 in 2003 to 9,1 in July 2014 – and unemployment figures, also to less than 10 per cent, among other achievements. Whereas prospects do not look so optimistic – last year Turkey had the biggest current-account deficit in the OECD countries' club and the lira has tumbled to around 24% of its value – citizens may regard this as a temporary crisis and await a better future. In this sense, it is not illogical to assume that if the living standards have largely improved, citizens will continue to vote for the party that provides for them even looking the other way when a major corruption scandal comes to light such as that of 2013, and important factors such as freedom of speech are curtailed. As it happened with Venezuela where economic welfare prevailed over other aspects, Magaloni's theory also seems applicable to Turkey. The limits of the citizens' tolerance are what remain to be seen.

Secondly, an important sociological transformation is taking place in the country. The AKP's Islamic roots have gradually led to an increasing presence of the religion in society. In Michael Thumann's words, "Islam is coming out of the closet."¹⁹² The reputed journalist and scholar argues that if headscarves are seen more frequently today in the streets it is not because the country is going through an Islamization process – in fact the proportion of women that wear them has declined from 73 to 60 per cent between 1999 and 2008 – but because those women that do so are becoming part of the public life.¹⁹³

¹⁹¹ "Turkish economy foundation of Erdogan's rule," *World Bulletin*, August 29, 2014.

<http://www.worldbulletin.net/news/143307/turkish-economy-foundation-of-erdogans-rule>

¹⁹² Thumann, 28.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

Decades ago these “uneducated” and “uncivilized” people started emigrating to the cities but it has been now when the government has empowered them by giving public space to religion.¹⁹⁴ Consequently, Turkey is currently facing a clash between the urban elite which has ruled the country for more than 80 years, and an increasingly influential Islamic class that demands its place at the central institutions. Needless to say that the old elite is very much aware of the arising changes and is not willing to accommodate to the new situation: “We feel that things are sliding from our hands, and we live in the fear that our children will see a darker future,”¹⁹⁵ according to a 60 year-old translator from an elite family. The buoyant religious class is gaining public space and it seems that, except for the consumption of alcohol, they seek the same pleasures as the secular population. Women have made of their headscarves a fashionable garment,¹⁹⁶ Islamic bathing suits have become more popular, and subscriptions to Islamic publications have tripled in the past years.¹⁹⁷ Logically, as it happens with those who support a political party that enhances economic welfare, in this case this new emergent class is likely to continue to vote for the AKP given that it is due to them that they have achieved rights and enabled them to actively participate in society.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 29.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 30.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 28.

¹⁹⁷ Pupcenoks, 285.

RUSSIA: Tsarist and Soviet legacy in the 21st century

“Everything was extraordinarily effective, but at the same time completely meaningless. And meaninglessness, having acquired gigantic proportions, became threatening.”

-Alexander Dugin on the end of “managed democracy” in Russia under Putin’s rule.¹⁹⁸

Vladimir Putin came to power in 1999 and promptly set about consolidating his control over opposition parties, clamped down on independent media, and arrested activists who contested his rule while sitting atop a kleptocratic political machine. The political Russian scenario could be synthesized by a state heavily invested in political monopoly. To achieve this, the regime’s apparatus and the dominant political party, United Russia, have been hierarchically subordinated to the central authority, and insulated from Western influence. With the purpose of ensuring this autocratic rule, the state has traditionally imposed high barriers to enter the political market, thus averting possible challenges. It has systematically coerced “non-systemic” actors following the divide-and-conquer tactics and it has co-opted loyalists.¹⁹⁹ The vast economic growth that Russia has enjoyed for years due to oil and gas prices has played an important part here. As a result, the population’s good living conditions seemingly explain the absence of popular demands until very recently, which, together with the government’s political monopoly have ensured what could be defined as an authoritarian regime behind a democratic façade.

¹⁹⁸ By “managed democracy” we understand a system in which the formal democratic requirements are fulfilled – celebration of elections, political parties and (theoretical) separation of powers – but the ideology, the political system, the media, and public discussions are under the government’s control.

¹⁹⁹ Vladimir Gel’man, “The Rise and Decline of Electoral Authoritarianism in Russia,” *Demokratizatsiya* 22, no. 4 (Fall 2014): 505-506.

Despite all of these blatant anti-democratic acts, Putin has remained surprisingly popular among ordinary Russians. Recent opinion polls, following his invasion of Eastern Ukraine and the Crimea, find that he has 80 per cent favourable ratings. Why? Why would an autocrat enjoy such widespread support?

The present chapter argues that Putin's ability to continually grow the economy has helped maintain his broad popularity and prevent the development of a unified opposition to his rule. Nevertheless, while the President's control over state apparatus, media, and patronage have helped to prevent the emergence of strong opponents, such factors cannot explain his broad based popularity. In fact, as a result of the on-going economic crisis in the country his approval ratings have waned for the first time. The best way to understand this surprising support is by looking at the ways in which economic growth impacts both ordinary Russians and other political elites.

- **How did we get here?**

Russia has been one of those countries included in what was called the transition paradigm. Because so many new political regimes emerged in different countries at the end of the 20th century, an approach emerged theorizing that following the collapse of a dictatorship a democratic regime was to be born.²⁰⁰ Reality has proved otherwise and today Russia is clearly not a democracy. Yet it is also not fully authoritarian either. Some scholars have defined it as a managed democracy, a regime in which citizens consent to the manipulation of the political scenery.²⁰¹ Such systems hold elections although the results are more or less foreordained, there is political order and by extension, serious

²⁰⁰ Carothers, 6.

²⁰¹ Liik, 1.

political challenges to the executive tend to be absent or silenced.²⁰² In the Russian case, after the 1990s' uncertainty following the fall of the Communist regime, the population accepted to play the game in exchange for stability.²⁰³

Hence, in order to understand the current political system in Russia one ought to look back at the demise of the Soviet Union and the transition to a new political order. According to Michael McFaul, a number of decisions taken in the context of the circumstances at the time and without a long-term perspective, have configured the current Russian regime. To begin with, political parties organized themselves only after two national elections to the Soviet Congress of People's Deputies in 1989 and the Russian Congress of People's Deputies in 1990. It is important not to forget that back in 1989 only the Communist Party was legal, and although an amendment was introduced in the Constitution in February 1990 to allow other parties to compete, its inclusion came too late for them to organize and participate in a substantial way in the elections in spring of that same year.²⁰⁴

In parallel, following the first session of the Russian Congress of People's Deputies in the spring of 1990, the idea of creating a presidential office had emerged among the democratic deputies.²⁰⁵ In the Congress session of May 1990, Yeltsin was elected as chairman but only with a minimum margin of four votes. With such precarious hold of power, Yeltsin and his team envisaged the establishment of a presidential bureau that would strengthen his government and his position towards the Congress opponents.

²⁰² Stephen K. Wegren and Andrew Konitzer. "Prospects for Managed Democracy in Russia," *Europe-Asia Studies* 59, no. 6 (Sep. 2007): 1025.

²⁰³ Liik, 1.

²⁰⁴ Michael McFaul, "Party Formation and Non-Formation in Russia." *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace* 12, (May 2000): 21.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 27.

It is important to note then, that the presidential system emerged in response to a concrete situation and not as a result of a well-devised strategy. In fact, the referendum, which was held in March 1991 and was approved by 69.9% of the population, took place before the powers of the president were spelled out and included in the Constitution.²⁰⁶

Secondly, the generation of new democratic leaders was primarily concerned with containing communism and excluding it from the emerging system. Proto-parties formed following the amendment to the Constitution although they didn't run in the elections.²⁰⁷ The idea was that the new system needed to ripen first before holding multiparty elections and despite the call of democratic leaders to convene them following the attempted coup in August 1991, Yeltsin waited until 1993. By then, almost all the widespread spectrum of political parties that existed two years earlier, from liberals to social democratic passing by Christian-democratic, had disappeared. Yeltsin also devised a different timing for presidential and parliamentary elections, which consequently, hampered party development.²⁰⁸

In March 1996, on the eve of the presidential elections, the possibility of Yeltsin winning again looked highly improbable. Because the probability of being defeated posed both political and physical threats to the leader, several options were considered from repressing the opposition and eliminating institutions to a coup d'état. However, they were all too risky. Therefore, the holding of elections, even if unfair, remained as the only possibility. Once the authoritarian electoral system emerged and continued over several electoral cycles, the price and consequences of changing the dynamics and rules

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 28.

²⁰⁷ Ibid. 21.

²⁰⁸ Ibid., 22.

of the game became more and more costly both for the elites and the public.²⁰⁹ And so, the regime was born not as a premeditated action but as a consequence of the events at that moment, to be developed and enforced with time. The new system devised so much power and benefits for those at the top that motivations to promote change towards a more democratic regime have never been advocated since that would bring about accountability and losses of privileges.

- **No checks and balances on the President**

In Russia, the President is the most powerful political position.²¹⁰ He is entitled to appoint the prime minister although the State Duma (lower house of the Parliament) needs to approve the nomination and if it rejects the candidate up to three times, new elections ought to be called. The President has veto power even though a majority of two thirds of the Duma and the Federation Council (upper house of the Parliament) can override it.²¹¹ He also controls the nomination of the judges from the Constitutional Court and the Supreme Court and has the right to issue decrees, although these have to be in accordance with the Constitution and the existing legislation.²¹² Such edicts have largely been employed to privatize oil companies, TV networks or nickel mines.²¹³

Such concentration of power makes the Parliament very weak in its functions. Indeed, political parties are highly irrelevant in Russian politics. They are only present in the State Duma with a 50 per cent of the seats. Furthermore, the government has never

²⁰⁹ Gel'man, 513.

²¹⁰ McFaul, 6.

²¹¹ Tanya Bagashka, "Presidentialism and the Development of Party System in Hybrid Regimes: Russia 2000-2003," *Europe-Asia Studies* 64, no. 1 (Jan. 2012): 98.

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ McFaul, 6.

reflected the political spectrum of the lower house Parliament.²¹⁴ However, the Duma has traditionally worked as a check on the President's mandate given that in order to pass relevant legislation he had to count on a parliamentary majority. Finally, the Federation Council is composed by chief executives of the regional government and chairs of regional legislatures. In this chamber, committees organize the internal work and consequently political parties are not present either.²¹⁵

The unimportance of political parties in Russia is quite significant and several explanations have been offered related to it. Michael McFaul points at two very interesting ones from different schools. The first approach argues that after seventy years of Communist rule where such a party was the only one allowed, the society was alienated against party politics. Moreover, because there was no previous party culture, there was nothing to resurrect.²¹⁶ More radical than this account, the second theory depicts Russian history and culture as inherently undemocratic, consequently impeding society from developing political parties.²¹⁷ And so, Russia is a combination of a presidential system with a very weak Parliament that gives almost all the power to the President in place.

At the fall of the Communist regime, Russia went through a transition “from the failing yet still functional bureaucratic authoritarianism of the late-Soviet period to a flashier, more footloose authoritarianism that rests on selectively capitalist kleptocracy, the dominance of informal influence groups, a decorative democracy... and officially encouraged attempts to create a new and profoundly illiberal ideology with mass

²¹⁴ Ibid., 9.

²¹⁵ Ibid., 8.

²¹⁶ Ibid., 18.

²¹⁷ Ibid.

appeal.”²¹⁸ This began with Yeltsin in the 1990s, it was consolidated with Putin in the following decade and reinforced with the oil boom prices in the 2000s.²¹⁹ In order to enforce this system, and to avoid potential challenges from the opposition as well as from part of the ruling group that may attempt an overthrow of the regime, the government resorts to a balanced system of sticks and carrots, repression and co-optation.²²⁰ It is not to be overlooked that an authoritarian regime needs to be enforced and sustained over the long run and for this purpose, a control of the bureaucracy, a coercive apparatus and a dominant party, in case there is one, are crucial. Finally, the regimes needs to face up to political changes if things go bad, or, at the other extreme, deal with political inclusion and rising expectations if there is economic progress.²²¹

What was born as a rigged and managed democracy to ensure Yeltsin’s stay in power was gradually enforced and perfected until it became the current regime in Russia today. Without any institution exercising relevant leverage on the President’s extensive ruling powers, his figure has been consolidated as the sole significant source of power in the state. This has allowed him to rely on a very small group of people that belong to the higher class to control the country’s assets, which produce benefits for the President and his allies. Once again, economic growth has ensured wealth for the ruling and upper class, and distribution of patronage among the lower groups.

²¹⁸ Daniel Kimmage, “Russia: Selective Capitalism and Kleptocracy,” *Freedom House* (June 2009): 49.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 50.

²²⁰ Gel’man, 506.

²²¹ *Ibid.*

- **Public resources for private gain**

Patronage and clientelism have been part of the Russian political system since medieval times and continue in modern forms today. The former refers to an exchange between a client that would offer goods, services or support to a patron in exchange for protection or other benefits such as the promotion of the clients' interests.²²² The latter was an important component in feudalism although unlike this system, clientelist relations were characterized by a much more informal liaison.²²³ In feudal times, the object of exchange used to be land that the landlord allowed vassals to cultivate, at least part of it, in return for the workers' military skills, money or a share of the production. Today, the working class receives access to local transport, favours in the capital city or jobs in their living area, in return for votes.²²⁴

This entrenched system endured in the Soviet Union where patronage continued to be omnipresent: the state was the main employer, it lacked the means to fulfil its promises to the whole population and it operated in an idiom incomprehensible to the great majority.²²⁵ This system was formally established through the *nomenklatura* structure, comprised by the Soviet elite – almost all were members of the Communist Party – which had the greatest responsibilities in the state bureaucracy in exchange for important privileges. In fact, if a person wanted to climb steps in society, he or she ought to belong to the *nomenklatura*.²²⁶ In contemporary Russia, politics continue to operate following an unofficial mutual exchange of goods and services, in hands of the former

²²² Geoffrey Hosking, "Patronage and the Russian State." *The Slavonic and East European Review* 78, no. 2 (Apr. 2000): 301.

²²³ *Ibid.*, 302.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, 314.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, 315.

nomenklatura members. During the privatization process following the demise of the Communist regime, personal connections became more important than ever since they provided access to resources, information, credits and licenses. Today, favours are paid in cash, a combination of corruption and violence, sometimes also defined as mafia.²²⁷

The machinery of the state, with its public goods serving for private gains and interests is indeed one of the most prominent characteristics in the contemporary Russian system, and the first one that enforces Russian authoritarianism today, according to Daniel Kimmage. The scholar defines it as “selective kleptocracy”, meaning a no distinction between high-level businessmen and senior officials: the latter occupy posts on the boards of large state-run companies.²²⁸ For their part, employers have to bribe officials in order to do business. As a famous Russian saying puts it, “the elites want socialism for themselves, and capitalism for the people.”²²⁹

Kimmage then expresses that given that there are no legal guarantees for private property, the real vehicles of power in the country come from informal influence groups, which seek to influence the state’s apparatus in order to ensure their wealth.²³⁰ These clans are based on mutual business interests, corporate solidarity, and experiential bonds. Such groups, which have been managed by Putin from the top without allowing any to become stronger than the other, have become prosperous through these unofficial means. And so, the least they want is a more democratic and transparent regime, which would only precipitate their loss of power. Shrewdly, Putin never repudiated the latter or its

²²⁷ Ibid, 319.

²²⁸ Kimmage, 51.

²²⁹ Ibid., 52.

²³⁰ Ibid., 53.

constitutional principles but he neither allowed them to form and consolidate.²³¹ So in order to be a legitimate system even if its practices are not democratic, the government needs to perform as if it was and the holding of elections is its foremost mechanism. They are only façade given that the result is carefully controlled from above but they serve to establish national and international legitimacy and at the same time, the elite is able to extract material benefits during their time in power.²³²

Additionally to the holding of elections, the regime has implemented several institutions that undermine the spirit of the constitution and benefit the ruling elite. For instance, in 2000 the territory was divided in seven federal districts, which were subordinated to the presidency and consequently, did not require constitutional approval. In the same year the State Council, a body composed of the heads of the different country's regions was established with very similar functions to those of the Federation Council. Similarly, the Presidential Council for the Implementation of the National Projects, in charge of housing, education, health and agricultural projects, was born in 2005. The institution clearly eroded the prime minister's authority given that its activities run in parallel to the government's. The Public Chamber was created as a body to supervise draft legislation and the parliament's work as well as that of the federal and regional administrations, investigate possible breaches of the law, and issue non-binding recommendations to the parliament and the government on internal issues. These are all functions that are theoretically the responsibility of the State Duma, whose authority was evidently undermined with this new-born Chamber.²³³ As becomes clear, "In Russia, the

²³¹ Richard Sakwa, "Putin's Leadership: Character and Consequences." *Europe – Asia Studies* 60, no. 6 (August 2008): 882.

²³² Kimmage., 54.

²³³ Sakwa, 889.

political order defends the privileges of the political regime, which in a patrimonial way itself became the organiser, if not the outright owner, of economic property.”²³⁴ In other words, “The Putin corporation does not exist to preserve, develop, and improve Russia, but instead, Russia exists to feed and humor the Putin corporation.”²³⁵ And still, the upper class is not cohesive anymore around Putin’s figure and the long-time taboo over the leader’s succession is now open.²³⁶ Ben Judah and Andrew Wilson, collaborators at the European Council on Foreign Relations, define the new era as “late Putinism”, expected to be characterized by “elite divisions, continuous protests, social pessimism and an increasingly unpopular regime.”²³⁷ The recent annexation of Crimea and the on-going war on Ukraine have insulated the Putin administration with fresh air by raising the President’s popularity to an unprecedented 80 per cent.²³⁸ Nevertheless, it is still too early to assess its steadiness and if Putin continues to be the glue that holds together the Russian operating system.²³⁹ After all, the population did not receive the announcement of his return in 2011 enthusiastically, regarded as the turning point of his mandate. And so, the assessment of Putin being the best-supported politician in the country has lately been explained as the absence of better alternatives rather than the first people’s choice or following the perception that no challenge is likely to succeed.²⁴⁰ In fact, sustained

²³⁴ Ibid., 890.

²³⁵ Dimitry Oreshkin, “Russian Riot: Senseless and Ruthless or Legal Protest?” *Russian Analytical Digest* 118, no. 2 (October 2012): 5.

²³⁶ Ben Judah and Andrew Wilson, “The End of the Putin Consensus,” *European Council on Foreign Relations* 50, (March 2012): 2.

²³⁷ Ibid.

²³⁸ Christopher Walker and Robert Orttung, “How Russia props Putin in the polls” *The Washington Post*, January 30, 2015.

http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/how-russia-props-up-putin-in-the-polls/2015/01/30/0302bea8-a59e-11e4-a7c2-03d37af98440_story.html

²³⁹ Liik, 2.

²⁴⁰ Graeme B. Robertson, “Managing Society: Protest, Civil Society, and Regime in Putin’s Russia,” *Slavic Review* 68, no. 3 (Fall, 2009): 530.

economic growth, one of the presidency's pillars, is no longer provided and without welfare, disarray and dissatisfaction are more likely to emerge.

- **Cracks within the system**

The long-supporting elite is increasingly divided among those that want to transform Putin, those who are primarily concerned with protecting their interests and therefore want to keep things the same as they are, and those who would sacrifice the President in order to save the system.²⁴¹ Some of the 1990s oligarchs²⁴² whose wealth was amassed without Putin's assistance are increasingly unhappy with Putin's new circle of friends. Others are approaching state officials who, as a result of their high-level positions, have access to important resources and are less likely to remain loyal to Putin in the long-term.²⁴³ Therefore, because its rule is less secure, the government has shifted from co-optation to coercion. One could even argue that despite the head of the state still being the same, the regime is changing.²⁴⁴

Part of the population today considers welfare insufficient as a means to remain loyal to Mr. Putin whereas for others corruption and the administration's failure to provide basic services have reached the tipping point where welfare gains are not enough anymore.²⁴⁵ Besides, not everyone is winning. The new middle class that emerged thanks to years of an economic boom in oil prices, users of the media and Internet, today feel

²⁴¹ Judah and Wilson, 4.

²⁴² State oligarchs are either heads of management boards of companies owned by the state and thus appointed by the Kremlin or executives at the head of state-owned businesses, which have control over financial flows.

Sakwa, 893.

²⁴³ Judah & Wilson, 4.

²⁴⁴ Liik, 1.

²⁴⁵ Ibid., 3.

like losers.²⁴⁶ Putin's presidency has been characterized by contradictory or incompatible policies such as the restoration of Soviet symbolism and liberal practices, which allowed him to reach very different social groups who felt that at least Putin accomplished some of his electoral promises.²⁴⁷ This has been possible because like his predecessor, Putin never joined a political party (although Unity Russia is considered the Kremlin's organization), since such a decision would have constrained his future alliances. The regime has also clearly lost the support from the urban intellectual intelligentsia and within this group, some are even willing to demonstrate. Putin is trying to fight back by mobilizing the provincial areas but even these groups are increasingly detached towards the regime due to the system's failings.²⁴⁸

Part of this disaffection and increasing demands come from the Medvédev era as President. Medvédev was President of Russia from 2008 to 2012 while Putin became Prime Minister. The Russian Constitution establishes a limit of two consecutive presidential mandates and as a result Putin could not run for a third term in 2008. However, Putin has been back in the Presidency since 2012. While Medvédev failed to accomplish reform and modernization in institutions, investment, infrastructure and innovation, he opened the door to new ideas precisely with his unfulfilled promises to renovate the system. Together with the announcement of Putin's return in September 2011, the population's animosity largely mounted towards the ruling class.²⁴⁹ Furthermore, the three pillars upon which an authoritarian regime sustains itself

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

²⁴⁷ Ibid, 2.

²⁴⁸ Ibid.

²⁴⁹ Judah and Wilson, 2.

according to Przeworski – economic growth, lies, and fear²⁵⁰ – came true in Russia for some time although over time have proved feeble.

In the first place, the boom in oil prices which led to impressive economic growth in the 2000s decade run parallel to widespread support from the citizenship towards the regime. However, this loyalty was tied to the procurement of material benefits and not a perception of legitimacy from the regime in itself.²⁵¹ The collapse in the oil prices, together with the EU and US sanctions following the Crimea and Ukrainian events in the past months have already had severe consequences for the Russian economy, although their political consequences remain to be seen. In fact, Putin’s geopolitical moves in the region have been largely interpreted as a distraction manoeuvre to conceal the population from economic difficulties the country is facing and boost his popularity, as indeed has happened.

Secondly, the government has built up an effective propaganda system through its media monopoly. The Russian media conglomerate RT, before called Russia Today, was born in 2005 with an assignation of 30 million dollars, a ten-fold figure today.²⁵² In November 2014, the government launched Sputnik, a worldwide agency whose contents will be broadcasted by radio and Internet in 30 different languages from offices in several countries. The Kremlin’s aim, shared by many other authoritarian governments such as China, Iran or Saudi Arabia who are also developing their own channels, is to counteract the Western’s predominance in the world’s media. These countries seek to give their own vision of democracy, undermine the international institutions that emerged at the end of the Cold War and that have served as a liberal backbone for the world since then, and

²⁵⁰ Gel’man 509.

²⁵¹ Ibid.

²⁵² Christopher Walker, “La guerra de las ondas,” *Domingo. El País*, January 25, 2015, national edition.

restrain the democratic reformists of the emerging democracies or undermine the integrity of the new ones.

Together with the low demand among many Russians for other informative sources, the big picture has been of wide support for the regime and unquestionable belief in their messages. Thus, a great majority of the respondents defined the 2007-2008 as fair despite the widespread manipulations and fraud.²⁵³ Finally, following the axiom ‘better the devil you know than the devil you don’t know’, “the fear of potentially losing existing benefits and the population’s inherent risk aversion”²⁵⁴ has contributed to a sense of continuity in the regime, even among those who did not like it. Rather than fear in the sense of repression, which was probably overestimated, it was more this kind of precaution that prevailed. After all, the economic growth of the 2000s had allowed the regime to loosen its grip, and at least on paper, to guarantee individual and even some civil freedoms.²⁵⁵ The problem now is that because the Russian economy has been funded in oil exports, and benefits have been partly achieved through protectionism, the current crisis is posing a serious problem to the non-diversified economy of the country. The “energy superpower”, as the Kremlin defines itself, has probably realized that the fact that oil and gas account for more than 63 per cent of the Russian exports and 49 per cent of the federal budget, is not a matter to joke about.²⁵⁶

So far the Russian picture consists of several elements. For years, there has been important economic growth from which a new middle urban class has emerged. Logically, their aspirations and ambitions have increased too, in parallel to a severe

²⁵³ Ibid., 510.

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

²⁵⁶ Lilia Shevtsova, “Vladimir Putin.” *Foreign Policy* no. 164 (Jan-Feb. 2008): 35.

economic crisis that is hampering their realization. Many of these educated people did not live through the Soviet era and thus are not motivated by Putin's appeals to it, one of the President's reference points.²⁵⁷ Within the oligarchy, many do not owe their wealth to Putin and have other contacts to which they are loyal. Even if the disaffection towards the President is not widespread yet, the regime has been clearly leaking in the last years. And so the next question ought to be: where is the opposition?

- **The opposition? Weak and uncoordinated**

The 2011-2012 protests called into question the status quo in Russia. The legislative elections in which United Russia won only a 49.3 per cent of the vote were largely documented as unfair and the results much lower than reported. The population said enough is enough and took to the streets. Sustained economic growth was not sufficient anymore, the regime's propaganda was less effective with mass access to Internet and other sources, and fear was partly overcome by a bandwagon effect of the mass demonstrations.²⁵⁸ In February 2013, only one month before the Russian annexation of Crimea, 28 per cent of the population expressed a negative answer when asked if they would vote for Putin again and more than 50 per cent would not want him to be re-elected in 2018 after three terms in office.²⁵⁹ Given the fertile ground for the opposition, one would wonder why it has so far been unable to capitalize on the growing discontent among the population.

In the first place, there is no coordination between the different anti-regime factions. As an example may serve the high profile of the 2011-2012 demonstrations in

²⁵⁷ Liik, 2.

²⁵⁸ Gel'man 516.

²⁵⁹ Liik, 2.

Moscow when thousands of people went out to protest, and yet, the high peak was in 2009 in the provinces, which passed largely unnoticed. Those concentrations were rooted in social and economic discontent and uncoordinated among them. Such lack of a common front becomes apparent when looking at the opposition leaders in the capital, more political and ideological, and those in the rural areas, more focused on practical and local issues.²⁶⁰ There is no unity either in ideological terms within those who are against the Kremlin's rule. Nationalists, socialists, simple opportunists, and a wide range of liberals only have in common a non-desire for more *Putinism*. In fact, the slogan in the 2011-2012 protests was "Vote for anyone but United Russia".²⁶¹ And so, despite substantial international coverage, broad support for the opposition comes only on a case-by-case basis.²⁶²

The fact that demonstrations have not coincided with the electoral cycles has also weakened their potential effect. Riots arose after the legislative elections in December 2011 and the presidential ballot was to take place in March 2012, a too-short time period for a candidate to emerge and to be able to deliver a strong and unifying message.²⁶³ The repressive tactics increasingly employed by the administration have not helped the emergence of a strong opposition either. Today, the government anticipates the activists' work and warns potential participants in mass protests of the negative consequences they may face, organizers are harassed or detained in advance, police informers infiltrate crowds, and potential gathering places are blocked beforehand.²⁶⁴ Arrests have been

²⁶⁰ Ibid., 3.

²⁶¹ Vladimir Gel'man, "The Regime, the Opposition, and Challenges to Electoral Authoritarianism in Russia." *Russian Analytical Digest* 118, no. 2 (October, 2012): 3.

²⁶² Robertson, 537.

²⁶³ Liik, 3.

²⁶⁴ Robertson, 537.

made under criminal charges for spontaneously organizing meetings, some even taking place tactically after the demonstrations had ended.²⁶⁵

Putin has also counterattacked by mobilizing pro-regime protests and creating organizational structures loyal to the Kremlin. This has been the case of Nashi (Ours), founded in March 2005, which grouped youths patriotically working for their country with a very clear message: “Putin’s opponents are fascists or traitors, Russia’s enemies are the United States and Russian liberals, Russia’s friend is Vladimir Putin.”²⁶⁶ After the 2007 elections, the Nashi members were rewarded with higher offices or posts at the Duma. Furthermore, because fighting against the enemies is supposed to be a common cause businesses were expected to collaborate economically or otherwise be exposed as unpatriotic.²⁶⁷ The Kremlin propaganda has also played an important role in shaping the global perception of the mass protests and opposition leaders. The regime has created an image and succeeded in making it resonate in the population’s consciousness which see them as agents working for the “Western foes” such as the US, NATO or the West in general, and consequently liable to be arrested.²⁶⁸ Furthermore, they are even associated with the 1990s crises.²⁶⁹

However, episodes such as the Pussy Riot female musical group performing at the Christ Savior Cathedral in February 2012 in Moscow,²⁷⁰ where they begged Mother Mary for her to save their country from President Putin, and which received international coverage, prove an increasing and alive dissidence. Three members of the group were

²⁶⁵ Ibid., 534.

²⁶⁶ Ibid., 544.

²⁶⁷ Ibid., 543-544.

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

²⁶⁹ Oreshkin, 6.

²⁷⁰ Laura Smith-Spark, “Russian court imprisons Pussy Riot band members on hooliganism charges,” *CNN*, August 18, 2012. <http://www.cnn.com/2012/08/17/world/europe/russia-pussy-riot-trial/>

condemned to two years in prison, charged on offending the people present in the church at that moment, insulting the Russian Orthodox Church, and undermining public order. The court dismissed the women's defence that argued that their motive was political.

All together, these factors inhibit the opposition from becoming a strong force against the regime although in contrast with the early years of Putin's rule when there were centres of opposition such as some oligarchs and the media they controlled, today the opposition is wider, deeper and more dispersed, which makes it more difficult to suppress it.²⁷¹ In fact, in the public opinion's eyes, Putin is quickly shifting from "the president of hope", as the provider of order, legality and justice, to the "despair president", for whom there is no enthusiasm but is still better than the rest.²⁷²

- **What does Putin's future look like?**

The current political system in Russia has its roots in the Soviet years, with some elements even inherited from the Tsarist era such as absolute decentralization and a void between the urban and the rural areas. After seven decades of Communist rule and following the chaotic demise of the regime in 1989-1991, the population mainly sought for stability and economic welfare. As long as individual freedoms were guaranteed, political rights were secondary. Such conditions were perfect for the emergence of a system under Yeltsin that favoured a few privileged and that would be consolidated over the years with Putin. The *nomenklatura* structure from the Soviet times is still in place and the benefits of economic oil boom have traditionally been shared out among the

²⁷¹ Liik, 4.

²⁷² Oreshkin, 6.

powerful and untouchable oligarchs. With such a scenario, the regime has long played the game of depicting Russia as not mature enough yet to be truly free.²⁷³

Nevertheless, Putin's prospects today are far from clear. The President has been in power for 16 years since he first arrived to the Presidency in 1999, in which he has even switched posts with Mr. Medvedev from President to Prime Minister and back to President. Despite a divided and weak opposition, dissident episodes have taken place such as the Pussy Riot eruption in 2012. The economy does not look good and its prospects are worse. As Magaloni proved in her work on Mexico, the population is willing to overlook economic downturns if they do not pose a challenge to the status quo but the current situation in Russia has been going on long enough for it to be considered not temporary but as a long-term crisis already. Within such a context, Putin's record popularity following Crimea's annexation and the conflict in Ukraine should be taken with a pinch of salt. In fact, in the months prior to these events, the population already showed increasing dislike for him and in the future that should come back as soon as the war fervour fades away and the living conditions have only worsened.

²⁷³ Shevtsova, 35.

CONCLUSION

The global political spectrum is far more nuanced than a division between democracies, dictatorships and possibly those shifting from one to the other. The study cases presented here are among those that are not clearly identified in any way. Although certainly different in many ways, the three share an aspect that is frequently cited as the basic tenet of democratic regimes and that is the holding of elections. However, as this study has proved, reality is far more complex. While Venezuela, Turkey and Russia hold regular elections, they are commonly regarded as hybrid regimes. As a common significant feature, their leaders have been in power for more than a decade now – for the purpose of this study, President Maduro in Venezuela has been considered as a continuation of Chávez as he actually presents himself. This raises a puzzle: why, if the country holds regular elections, do citizens continue voting for the same leaders? Why keep doing so when there have been widespread dissidence episodes that have been violently repressed in all cases?

A detailed examination of the countries' regimes has brought up too many features that do not coincide with what is commonly understood as a democracy such as governmental judicial interference, restriction of civil rights and liberties, attempts to amend the constitution to stay in power indefinitely or else switching posts from prime minister to president or vice versa, undermining freedom of press, electoral uneven playing field which has sometimes risen to persecution of opposition leaders, etc. Such panorama offers a bleak scenario for change but what appears interesting here is that Chávez, Erdogan and Putin have won elections over and over with large popular support, even when the regime presented all those negative factors. Why so? The answer,

although not obvious at first sight, is simple: if the population is economically wealthy, it will overlook “secondary factors” such as certain lack of civil rights and liberties.

Francis Fukuyama, in an article published in June 2014 in *The Washington Post* in which he reviewed his well-renowned theory of the triumph of democracy at the end of history, argued the following: “Democracies survive and succeed only because people are willing to fight for the rule of law, human rights and political accountability. Such societies depend on leadership, organizational ability and sheer good luck.”²⁷⁴ Remarkably, the last sentence seems more accurately applicable for the autocratic regimes object of this study. The three factors necessarily need to be present, intertwine and be skillfully managed by and for leaders to keep in power while still holding elections and thus exposing themselves to the possibility of an unexpected victory from the opposition. In other words, it would be nonsensical to assume that the regimes in place today in Venezuela, Turkey and Russia are inherently autocratic. Rather, they are a combination of their current leaders who are good managers, and the historical, political and economic circumstances in which they operate.

In any case, Fukuyama’s conviction on the eventual success of democracy could arguably be a reformulation of the transition paradigm which assumed that dictatorships would eventually open up and gradually democratize. Twenty-five years after this thesis was devised, many of the countries “in transition” have indeed never become the Western desired systems and others have gone backwards in its democratic consolidation such as Nicaragua, Sri Lanka or Turkey. Recent studies confirm the tendency: since 2000 there have been 25 breakdowns of democracy in the world, not only through military or

²⁷⁴ Francis Fukuyama, “At the ‘End of History’ Still Stands Democracy,” *The Washington Post*, June 6, 2014. <http://www.wsj.com/articles/at-the-end-of-history-still-stands-democracy-1402080661>

executive coups but also through an increasing and gradual degradation of the democratic systems in place.²⁷⁵ Along the same line, since approximately 2006, there has been a significant halt in the expansion of democracy and freedom globally, oscillating between 114 and 119 – around 60 per cent of the world's states.²⁷⁶

To sum things up, as long as a regime performs well economically, the country population will be (rather) complacent in tolerating other aspects such as the restriction of freedom of press, corrupted judiciary or repression of protests. However, the economy fluctuates and evidence has arguably proved that when the citizens do not have that incentive because things become worse, eventually those regimes face unrest and turmoil, as is happening today in Venezuela. Because the population has less or nothing to lose, insurrection episodes will be more dangerous and difficult to control and hence, put the regime at risk, with unforeseen consequences.

Whereas globalization and technology are favoring citizens' mobilization and awareness of the conditions under which they live and what the rest of the world looks like, by the same means autocratic leaders are learning how to improve their techniques and secure their power. Putin, Xi Jianping in China or the Ayatollahs in Iran are not only restricting freedom of press but they are also developing their own media to counteract the Western predominance, give their own view of world's affairs and hence, have their own people under control. Moreover, democratic recession is crossing borders and reaching even the first world-power as it is the US in terms of efficacy, self-confidence and energy. The American political class has become increasingly polarized, corrupt and dysfunctional over the years, facing government shutdowns and having trouble passing

²⁷⁵ Thomas L. Friedman, "Democracy Is in Recession," *The New York Times*, February 18, 2015. http://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/18/opinion/thomas-friedman-democracy-is-in-recession.html?_r=0

²⁷⁶ Ibid.

something as basic as a financial budget. Facing those issues, who are they to give lessons to the rest of the world? This is the argument posed by authoritarian regimes who take advantage of it in order to discredit the US regime and its authority. History has shown us that evolution does not equal progress but fluctuation, advancement and stagnation. It would thus be naïve to expect that the kind of systems studied here will one day disappear and the world would become inherently democratic.

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