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The Prevalence of Socialism in South America: Democracy and Inequality

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Introduction

South America has recently experienced a new pink tide, some countries are choosing socialism for the first time while others are politically realigning against the right-wing parties. Even with political instability most countries have experienced a left-wing aligned government in the past five years. The development of socialist governments that started in the 2000s is currently perplexing. Throughout the last 20 years, those socialist governments have not accomplished promises and goals and there is no steady development in the problems of high inequality or economic growth. Despite these failures, there are still many countries that are democratically choosing the left. In the history of South America, the spread of socialism has not been due to ideological agreements with the left, but rather it is a democratic response to other parties failing and getting voted out. This paper will study the connections between foreign interventions, high inequality, and socialism in South America's history. It will look at the consequences of foreign intervention and their effect on South American countries. The paper will also study correlations between voters and the political development of socialist parties between those open to liberal ideas and those more radical socialists since the 2000s. In addition, there is a case study on the development of socialism in Venezuela as one of the more radical socialist governments, and the reasons for the extreme radicalization, different from other countries in the continent.

Legacy of Marxism

In the 20th century, South America was finishing its transition out of its independence era into a new period focusing on the building of nations. The Russian Revolution influenced the South American left parties amid a changing international scenario. These emerging ideological changes were first seen in Brazil and Peru. Every country on the continent felt the impact of the great depression when it arose. This limited foreign investment and trade, forcing countries into manufacturing industries. Cities slowly began to grow during this period and the impact of governments was expanding. Authoritarian governments also experienced an increase which affected the political scenario that had been leaning towards democracy until then. South America started exchanging ideologies with the rest of the world while change was present. The main influence was from the United States with liberal policies and its opposite was Marxism. The role of the government and nationalism was starting to change, and with the Soviet Union joining WWII, many South American countries experienced a growth in left parties along with repression from Latin American elites[1]. Countries were facing the influence of the United States which held hegemony in the hemisphere, and to maintain good relationships growing fascist influences were ended. The first country in Latin America to fully engage with communism was Cuba. The political group in charge of the insurrection engaged in Guerrilla warfare to overtake the government of Fulgencio Batista. The Cuban society had experienced hardships since Batista first left in 1944, experiencing a breakdown of public services and a great increase in corruption.[2] The second return of Batista unfortunately looked different than his acclaimed past

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[1] Edward B. Richards, "Marxism and Marxist Movements in Latin America in Recent Soviet Historical Writing," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 1 November 1965; 45 (4): 577–590. doi: https://doi.org/10.1215/00182168-45.4.577

[2] Andres Suarez, "The Cuban Revolution: The Road to Power," *Latin American Research Review* 7, no. 3 (1972): 5–29. http://www.jstor.org/stable/2502783.

years, when he came back to power in 1952 through a coup. Batista had become a harsh leader

and a dictator, taking control of the media, health services, and education. He also manipulated

the elections to stay as the ruler shortly after. Fidel Castro finally overthrew the government

using Guerrilla warfare 1958[3]. The Cuban engagement with communism started the involvement

of Latin America in the Cold War. The victorious use of Guerrillas ignited many South

American countries such as Venezuela, Colombia, Peru, Uruguay, Argentina, Bolivia,

Guatemala, and Brazil[4]. Guerrillas in the 1960s arrived at a time when many countries in South

America were not satisfied with their governments, and the promises brought by nationalism did

not accomplish the expected. The guerrillas all through the continent followed Che Guevara's

foquismo theory and even started relationships directly with Cuba, and insurgent leaders from

Bolivia, Nicaragua Peru, and Venezuela, claiming the Cuban model was the main inspiration for

their revolutionary activism[5]. The Foco model claimed that the necessary conditions for

revolution can be created through the emergence in rural areas of highly trained guerrilla fighters

organized into cohesive groups[6]. In this model, armed groups were supposed to start in the rural

areas by winning the trust of the peasants, and using their knowledge to better understand the

area along with connections in the cities. The theory was not only shared by principals but also in

training, as around three thousand men were personally trained in Cuba, especially Peruvians,

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[3] Timothy Wickham-Crowley, "Two 'Waves' of Guerrilla-Movement Organizing in Latin America, 1956-1990." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 56, no. 1 (2014): 215-42, http://www.jstor.org/stable/43908288;

[4] Margaret Gonzalez-Perez, "Guerrilleras in Latin America: Domestic and International Roles." *Journal of Peace Research* 43, no. 3 (2006): 6, http://www.jstor.org/stable/27640319.

[5] Wickham-Crowley, "Two 'Waves' of Guerrilla-Movement Organizing in Latin America, 1956-1990," 8.

[6] Jose A, Moreno, "Che Guevara on Guerrilla Warfare: Doctrine, Practice and Evaluation." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 12, no. 2 (1970): 3, http://www.jstor.org/stable/177959.

Venezuelans, and Colombians in the 1960s[7]. The Cuban training helped guerrillas organize, as the left-wing parties and movements were only focused on protest, later on their journey. Cuba would also support guerrillas with new warfare tactics and weapons. The training and military aid provided by Cuba marked some of the most violent years Venezuela and Peru had experienced. In the case of Venezuela, guerrillas started when the country was unsatisfied with the policies of the new government. The presidency of Romulo Betancourt did not deliver the policies and changes it had promised. He reached power with the support of labor unions and the Left party and then renounced his socialist ties. The Movement of the Revolutionary Left (MIR) and the Communist Party of Venezuela (PCV) along with many members of the youth started protesting, rioting, and partaking in civil demonstrations. The goal was to gain the people's support in the cities. In 1961 Guerilla warfare started in Cuba, and upon the socialist return, the direction of the MIR and PCV drastically changed to follow rural guerrillas and urban terrorism. The terrorism that took place included robbing banks, burning warehouses, killing police, and kidnapping[8].   In Peru, the nation was not satisfied with the government and the great inequality the country was experiencing, presenting a good scenario for the Alianza Popular Revolucionaria Americana (APRA) and the Partido Comunista Peruana (PCP) to create a strong relationship with Cuba and acquire de foquismo theory[9]. The Peruvian version of MIR, which in 1964 declared its admiration for Cuba. The militias then started to be changed from militias into guerrillas, and although it does not follow a foco group like the Che Guevara, the guerrillas

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[7] Wickham-Crowley, "Two 'Waves' of Guerrilla-Movement Organizing in Latin America, 1956-1990," 9; H. Micheal Tarver. *History of Venezuela,* 2nd ed. (Greenwood: ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2018), 116.
[8] Tarver, "History of Venezuela," 117.
[9] Leon G, Campbell. "The Historiography of the Peruvian Guerrilla Movement, 1960-1965." *Latin American Research Review* 8, no. 1 (1973): 10, http://www.jstor.org/stable/2502695.

establish many front zones and immobile security zones[10]. One example of sparked guerrillas happened in Uruguay, a armed group known as the Tupamaros was formed in 1966 focusing on overthrowing the government to set a socialist society. A Lenist-communist approach was taken instead of the foco theory from Che Guevara, lasting around 10 years until political unification[11]. The Tupamaros are known for their within-the-cities approach, attacking with bombs, bank robberies, thefts four seasons, and kidnappings when the country was under difficult political circumstances[12]. The Tupamaros were also recognized for their affiliation with women, having 10% of their members being females in their first year, women would take all kinds of roles including guarding prisoners, distributing propaganda, and engaging in robberies, even affecting policy positions of the group into society-oriented policies.the development of foquismo and the Cuban Revolution in the different countries proved to work differently as it did in Cuba, in some cases the peasants did not join the cause. The peasants were heavily terrorized by the government in a fight to control the flow of information. Guerrilla zones executed in Venezuela were bombed regularly, peasants from certain regions were publicly tortured, and women were raped by the military[13]. the ending of the presidential period for Betancourt came along with this and the overwhelming participation in the choosing of a new president the Guerrillas in Venezuela died off[14].Peru's guerrillas ended mostly when the three of their main leaders were killed by the army after surrendering, this came after the most intense bombing of guerrillas in South America,

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[10] Campbell, "The Historiography of the Peruvian Guerrilla Movement," 11.

[11] Gonzalez-Perez, "Guerrilleras in Latin America: Domestic and International Roles."

[12] U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, C Suarez and R Sarmiento, "*Tupamaros,*" NCJRS (Virtual library, 1971), file:///C:/Users/13177/Zotero/storage/UFY39RD4/tupamaros.html.

[13] Timothy Wickham-Crowley, "Terror and Guerrilla Warfare in Latin America, 1956-1970." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 32, no. 2 (1990): 201–37, http://www.jstor.org/stable/178913.

[14] Tarver, "History of Venezuela," 122.

where mostly peasants were hurt or killed along with the guerrillas[15]. Similarly, Bolivian Guerrillas faced a different problem, most of the peasants never joined their cause, were rather apathetic and hostile, and eventually started working as informants for the government[16]. Likewise, most Guerrillas failed to outlive the 1970s because the focus groups were not as cohesive or could not retain men due to the harsh conditions they were forced to live in and emerging ideologies discrepancies. This was a main factor in the failure of the guerrillas in Bolivia, where the group had members from Cuba and Peru, which created internal problems in the armed group, had many men deserting[17]. Likewise, by the 1970s there was a rise in the Soviet line communists that countered in principle from Che's foquismo, claiming a withdrawal from the armed struggle, such ideology became more attractive for the remaining groups that then withdrew from the public[18].

The main opponent to Cuban influence was the hegemony of the United States, as part of their Cold War policies the country deeply opposed communism worldwide. The U.S. was focused on spreading a liberal, democratic, capitalistic agenda through Central America, the Caribbean, and South America, a work that started even before the Cuban revolution. Beginning with the Spanish-American war as early as 1898[19], then the Banana Wars, and the Panama Canal, the United States claimed hegemony in the region by the beginning of the Twentieth century. This legacy was then pursued with the Monroe Doctrine a couple of decades early, followed by the good neighbor policy. While the Monroe Doctrine was focused on maintaining control of the

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[15] Wickham-Crowley, "Terror and Guerrilla Warfare in Latin America," 13.
[16] Moreno, Che Guevara on Guerrilla Warfare, 12.
[17] Moreno, Che Guevara on Guerrilla Warfare, 11.
[18] Wickham-Crowley, Terror, and Guerrilla Warfare in Latin America.
[19] Kurt Weyland, "Limits of US Influence: The Promotion of Regime Change in Latin America," *Journal of Politics in Latin America*, (2018:)135-164, https://doi.org/10.1177/1866802X1801000305.

region[20] and being a policeman, the second policy offered a more open approach by also focusing on finances. Policies and actions by the U.S. were guided by the principles of self-defense by the threat socialism was posing[21]. Such was the reason for the many directly and indirectly related interventions in other countries. The U.S. had a serious impact on South America through diplomacy, economics, and the CIA. This power in the region left political, economic, and cultural ramifications, along with military measures and interventions, a very common strategy in the second half of the 1900s.

Along with governmental control, there was also a strong influence being pushed by multinationals from the U.S.A. Very early examples of their influence are first seen by the United Fruit Company and its effects in Guatemala, Colombia, and Nicaragua, a company that was always backed up by the government[22] (Ramirez Cabal). Later on, many MNCs seemed threatened when left-wing presidents would reach power, and along with requiring some kind of intervention by the government, they were used as tools to further the political agenda[23] (Steenland, 1974, p. 22). These interventions in many cases created destabilization in the countries that were targeted, some tactics included infiltration into governments and socialist groups(Steenland, 1974, p. 22 footnote), to military training through institutions such as the School of the Americas. This institution started its education in the Panama Canal zone in 1946, the SOA trained almost exclusively U.S. military officers. But a couple of years later, with the

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[20]Weyland, "Limits of US Influence," 7.

[21] Rabe et all, Review of *Historic Patterns of Intervention: U.S. Relations with Latin America*, by David G. Haglund, J. Michael Hogan, Mark T. Gilderhus, John F. Bratzel, Karl Bermann, and Harold Molineu. *Latin American Research Review* 23, no. 2 (1988): 8. http://www.jstor.org/stable/2503246.

[22] Mariana Ramirez, "The Dark Side of Bananas: Imperialism, Non-State Actors, and Power," *Harvard International Review,* (2023).

[23] Kyle Steenland, "The Coup in Chile," *Latin American Perspectives* 1, no. 2 (1974): 15. http://www.jstor.org/stable/2633976.

success of the Cuban revolution and with the fear of the spread of communism through Latin

America the institution started military training for enlisted men of Latin America. Their offered

courses also changed, there was then a focus on military intelligence, "techniques intended to

eradicate enemies", terrorism counterintelligence, use of drugs for the extracting of information,

extortion, and spying[24]. This education did not stay in Panama, it rather expanded through the

regions and its people, men from many different countries assisted the school, and in some cases,

there were programs established for specific countries. Many of the men trained in this academy

have appeared in the destabilization movements of many countries in the region, along with the

concern of the human rights violation taught, posing a threat to democracy in the past and

present. The U.S.A. interventions along with the military training are better understood as a

process rather than many events [25], along with the SOA there is also U.S. involvement in

Operation Condor. McSherry explains Operation Condor as a secret intelligence and operation

system through which South American military regimes coordinated intelligence information and

seized, tortured, and executed political opponents in combined cross-border operations[26]. The

Condor operations had their roots in the counterinsurgency doctrines and counterterror

operations promoted by the United States, its key members were Argentina, Chile, Uruguay,

Paraguay, Bolivia, Brazil, and later on Ecuador and Peru[27]. There has also been more direct

influence by the U.S. in South American governments, supporting coups in Brazil in 1964

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[24] Gregory Weeks, "Fighting the enemy within: Terrorism, the school of the Americas, and the military in Latin America," *Hum Rights Rev* 5 (2003): 12-27, https://doi.org/10.1007/s12142-003-1001-1.

[25] Rabe et all, Review of Historic Patterns of Intervention, 9.

[26] Patrice McSherry, "Tracking the Origins of a State Terror Network: Operation Condo," *Latin American Perspectives* 29, no. 1 (2002): 38–60. http://www.jstor.org/stable/3185071.

[27] Keith Slack, "Operation Condor and Human Rights: A Report from Paraguay's Archive of Terror," *Human Rights Quarterly* 18, no. 2 (1996): 492–506. http://www.jstor.org/stable/762513.

overthrowing Joao Goulart, Argentina in 1966 overthrowing Arturo Illia, and in Chile in 1973 overthrowing Salvador Allende[28].

The many interventions and coups put the South American continent in a position of political and military distrust, along with nations that started suffering the consequences of failing to meet economic goals for the region. After a decade of dealing with outside interventions, 1970 was a decade of political and economic change, most countries in South America had become more politically stable and had left behind the days of violence. Nevertheless, it was never completely peaceful in the southern continent, as in this decade Uruguay and Chile started a military dictatorship, and Colombia would still have a long fight against the guerrillas. During this decade there was great economic expansion throughout the continent, and poverty went down in most countries while also facing issues of economic stability. When facing inflation there was a major confiscation of assets, and some countries also experienced financial crises[29]. The next decade of 1980 experienced financial recession and later stagnation, and during this time it was clear that the growth of the economy and markets did not reach everybody in the different nations, especially after poverty rose while the income share of the poorest 90% decreased considerably and the income share of the richest 10% expanded; Nonetheless the rise in poverty is not attributed only to the economic stagnation but rather to the

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[28] Mario Rapoport and Ruben Laufer, "Estados Unidos y Los Golpes Militares En Brasil y Argentina En Los Años '60." Programa Universitario de Historia Politica. https://historiapolitica.com/datos/biblioteca/RRIIsesentas_lauferyrapoport.pdf; Steenland, "The Coup in Chile".

[29]Timothy P.Wickham-Crowley, and Susan Eckstein, "The persisting relevance of political economy and political sociology in latin american social movement studies." *Latin American Research Review* 50, no. 4 (2015): 8, http://www.jstor.org/stable/44000317.

changes in inequality[30]. This is not a result from the past two decades but rather a system that

had been in place since the 1950s due to industrialization and urbanization improving mobility

for some, this inequality appears in many aspects of life throughout the continent: rural and

urban, in genders, race, class; having heavy implication for health and welfare[31]. The unequal

distribution of wealth and the low social mobility point to some of the main reasons why the

continent was not performing well overall, it was not a lack of resources but rather decades of

policies that were not addressing the real problem of inequality.

Inequality in South America was intersectional between class, region, and gender, and

due to its long-lasting effects, it became normalized [32]. Inequality disproportionately affected

those in rural areas, women, and indigenous people and all of these were communities that were

dealing with issues of injustices and representation. Inequality affects many different aspects of

life, it appears in access to education, and access to health care. This happened due to the

government's failure to place policies directed to social spending in public investment and

education that could have efficiently helped reduce half of the income inequality in the

continent[33]. In the 1980s there was a significant education gap and a decline in work

opportunities and wages. The policies put in place helped to make the population less poor than

they had been decades before, but it was not addressing poverty, rather it might have embedded

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[30] Juan Luis Londoño & Miguel Székely, "Persistent Poverty and Excess Inequality: Latin America, 1970–1995." *Journal of Applied Economics* 3:1, (2000): 93-134, DOI: 10.1080/15140326.2000.12040547

[31] Kelly Hoffman and Miguel Angel Centeno, "The Lopsided Continent: Inequality in Latin America." *Annual Review of Sociology* 29 (2003): 363–90, http://www.jstor.org/stable/30036972.

[32] Hoffman and Centeno, The Lopsided Continent, 22.

[33] Judith Lifton, Daniel Díaz-Fuentes and Julio Revuelta, "Fiscal Policy and Inequality in Latin America, 1960–2012." In *Has Latin American Inequality Changed Direction?*, ed. Luis Bértola, Jeffrey Williamson (Springer Open, 2017), 219-241.

it. When looking into the countries the gaps become clearer, average income fell for the working class by 40% in Venezuela, in Brazil, most of the population only had up to 4 years of schooling, and less than 30% of rural men and women were literate [34]. Opportunities and political representation for women in the 1980s were an ongoing issue after legally getting civil rights. Many women who decades before had joined guerrillas trying to change the status quo of corrupt, unpopular, and elite base states[35] had not seen significant progress. The fighting was focused on representation in the labor force, as the opportunity to obtain jobs was not creating a change, it put single mothers in a more delicate situation. As well there was more discrimination for mothers and pregnant women, as companies were mostly choosing younger single women to work for them. This created a social pushback for older mothers who were being stigmatized once again, being able to only obtain low-paying jobs with poor working conditions[36]. Along with the older generation, girls were getting a different education and were being underrepresented in higher education, and the inequality gap became bigger when considering illiterate girls and women in rural areas who were being affected by the lack of opportunities. Along with their political representation, women were gaining more space in the political arena. However, they were not gaining higher leadership roles within the political parties, most of the time focusing on social issues. It similarly happened to the guerrillas. Many women joined armed groups that had a domestic agenda on change, and although the participation was not equal, the presence of women affected the way guerrillas would behave around civilians, having a much lower rate of raping as a tool of war compared to the government's military[37]. Another part of the

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[34] Hoffman and Centeno, The Lopsided Continent, 9.

[35] Norma Stoltz Chinchilla, "Marxism, Feminism, and the Struggle for Democracy in Latin America," *Gender and Society* 5, no. 3 (1991): 16, http://www.jstor.org/stable/189842.

[36] Hoffman and Centeno, The Lopsided Continent.

[37] Wickham-Crowley, Terror and Guerrilla Warfare in Latin America.

population that received a lot of pushback and suffered from inequality were the indigenous

communities all around the continent, as there were matters of racism and classism, the social

systems put in place were intended to exclude them from broad participation (Rice). The

countries with the most prominent indigenous communities were Ecuador and Bolivia, both

places had communities engaged beyond regional and mobilized in the whole country. Some of

their main requirements were demanding policies in bicultural education, agrarian reform, and

territorial autonomy, all done under the regional federation of ECUARUNARI in the Andes

mountains and CONFENAIE in the Amazon[38]. These reforms were demanded due to the poor

treatment they had received for decades, as the prejudice from colonial times had only been

transformed for the new society. Indigenous who would also be producers which made them

more vulnerable to the inequality gap, had to face governments that would not recognize them,

therefore public education provided by the state was strictly in Spanish and would negate the

indigenous culture. Their second and third demand would go together, as indigenous

communities would unionize as big companies or high-class members would steal their land, and

to keep working they were forced to still harvest these lands, while not getting the correct

remuneration from the new land owners nor the government for their produce work. Native

communities claimed that democratic governments did not uphold promises of liberal

conceptions about the individual and respect for their identities, along with the state's obligation

to uphold the jurisdiction of indigenous authorities and customary laws. Indigenous also felt a

damaging impact by neoliberal state reforms, especially when discussing the distribution of

lands, enabling communities to demand retribution, justice, and guarantees from the state[39].

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[38] Deborah J. Yashar, "Contesting Citizenship: Indigenous Movements and Democracy in Latin America." *Comparative Politics* 31, no. 1 (1998): 25, https://doi.org/10.2307/422104.

[39]Yashar, Contesting Citizenship.

Through an extensive history of socialism in South America, the many different international interventions by force and ideology shaped the relationship of the continent with the Marxist ideology. The Cuban influence supporting socialism impulse countries into political and social destabilization through guerrilla warfare while also providing support to left-wing political parties. On the other side, the anti-socialist influence of the United States had a stronger impact, influencing the changes of socialist governments in government, while also supporting right-wing parties, which in some cases placed hurtful governments in power. The material and ideological influences of these two different countries destabilize most countries in South America. Along with the failing of neoliberal economic goals, countries experienced financial hardships by the last decades of the 20th century, leaving the continent in the biggest state of inequality worldwide. Unstable political, economic, and social situations left a precedent of dissatisfaction with both political ideologies, creating an opportunity for socialism to come back, as the liberal measures were failing the majority of countries.

The New Left

Neoliberal economic policies helped countries improve economically in the 1980s but after reaching a peak, these policies could not prevent inflation and growth slowdown by the end of the 90s. The 2000s started with most countries in South America experiencing important political changes after trying to recover from economic downfalls and with a new political left that expanded through the continent. Yet, countries in South America did not have a significant change in ideology supporting socialist values, rather they were democratically reacting to social and economic conditions happening under right-wing or center-left governments. People were

politically realigning because governments were not performing as promised, therefore they were punished by getting voted out of the government.

The election of socialist governments in South America started in the 1990s and it influenced most countries by the 2000s. This was the first pink tide, the first time there were so many left-wing parties in power at the same time in the southern continent[40]. The increase of socialist parties throughout the continent was due to political realignment and the change in the left-wing political parties. Socialist parties evolved as the left had abandoned its radicalism of the 1960s which led voters to consider left-wing parties as valid options for a change in government[41]. Socialist parties were no longer aligned with guerrillas or had violent values, they were becoming more organized which made them more acceptable for conservative elites and therefore to democratic politics[42]. After the fall of the Soviet Union and the deradicalization of the left, many felt they could democratically vote from the left without fearing a military coup[43]. The preference for democracy in the continent had become institutionalized after all the international interventions many countries faced. In the normalized democratic process, the left was reintegrated into political society[44] after being excluded from the political process under the more extreme right-wing government of the past. The change to socialism was not an ideology change but a democratic response from voters. Most voters in Latin America preferred

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[40] Raul L, Madrid, "The Origins of the Two Lefts in Latin America," *Political Science Quarterly* 125, no. 4 (2010): 587–609, http://www.jstor.org/stable/25767091.

[41] María Victoria Murillo, Virginia Oliveros, and Milan Vaishnav, "Electoral revolution or democratic alternation?" *Latin American Research Review* 45, no. 3 (2010): 10, http://www.jstor.org/stable/40926271.

[42] Murillo et all, "Electoral revolution or democratic alternation?" 9.

[43] Luisa Blanco and Robin Grier, "Explaining the rise of the left in latin america," *Latin American Research Review* 48, no. 1 (2013): 5, http://www.jstor.org/stable/41811588.

[44]Murillo et all, "Electoral revolution or democratic alternation?" 9.

democracy[45], especially when the political competition allowed them to exert political control

over the parties they were unsatisfied with[46]. After the poor economic development of the past

decades, and high rates of social inequality voters punished conservative right-wing governments

by voting them out of office and placing different parties in power. Latin Americans do not

ideologically support the left more than they do the right, from 1996 to 2005 ideological self-

identification in Latin America kept moving towards the right[47]. Therefore the winning of offices

by socialist parties in the 2000s was not led by a change in ideology but was reactionary to the

political, social, and economic scenario. Conservative governments faced economic problems

that forced them to take more conservative economic policies with no increase in social

spending[48]. In contrast, the left-wing parties promoted different economic policies, focusing on

supporting the marginalized and increasing state regulations. By relocating resources more

efficiently these policies were focused on: "giving individuals - particularly the poor- freedom

within a socialist system to assert themselves politically and economically"[49]. This new and

developing left in South America was addressing social issues such as inequality not only in

economic matters but also in politics, reaching the lower classes and those who had felt excluded

from politics. Socialist parties were addressing the issue of inequality by responding to the

demand for redistribution[50] while arguing for state control which was appealing to the most

unequal countries. It is not that people were opposed to conservative policies, but they were

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[45]Jose Del Tronco "Desconfianza y 'Accountability' ¿las causas del populismo en américa latina?" *Latin American Research Review* 48, no. 2 (2013): 5, http://www.jstor.org/stable/43670076.

[46] Murillo et all, "Electoral revolution or democratic alternation?" 9.

[47] Murillo et all, "Electoral revolution or democratic alternation?" 4.

[48] Blanco and Grier, Explaining the rise of the left in Latin America, 3.

[49] Amy Kennemore and Gregory Weeks, "Twenty-First Century Socialism? The Elusive Search for a Post-Neoliberal Development Model in Bolivia and Ecuador," *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 30, no. 3 (2011): 3, http://www.jstor.org/stable/41238219.

[50] Murillo et all, "Electoral revolution or democratic alternation?" 10.

looking for policies that would support them out of poverty. Socialist governments also were

focused on creating relationships with the indigenous groups that had been historically excluded

from politics and were the most discriminated group in the 1990s[51]. Socialist parties focused on

creating strong relations, and a sense of national belonging and promised to constitutionally raise

the standard of indigenous rights[52] These changes in socialist parties turned them into reliable

options for government. These further developments of socialist parties occurred simultaneously

when the people were trying to find solutions for the failing economies and social problems of

the time. Therefore they were a solution to get old parties out of power while also trying new

economic and social policies.

      The 2000s started with many left-wing governments in the South American continent,

characterized by new policies but especially new popular politicians. Many charismatic leaders

rose to power along the South American continent: Fujimori in Peru, Correa in Ecuador, Evo

Morales in Bolivia, Daniel Ortega in Nicaragua, Chavez in Venezuela[53], Kirchner in Argentina,

and Silva in Brazil[54]. This new group of socialist presidents was defined as populist due to their

speech and charisma, their ability to unify a highly fragmented bloc of the nonelite[55], and their

new appeal in political representation[56]. Although populism itself was not new in South America

as it was part of the politics in past decades along authoritarian presidents, Neopopulism

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[51] Blanco and Grier, Explaining the rise of the left in Latin America, 6.

[52] Kennemore and Weeks, Twenty-First Century Socialism? 6.

[53] Del Tronco, Desconfianza y 'Accountability, 12.

[54] Juan Grigera, "Populism in Latin America: Old and New Populisms in Argentina and Brazil," *International Political Science Review / Revue Internationale de Science Politique* 38, no. 4 (2017): 3, https://www.jstor.org/stable/26940303.

[55] Steve Ellner "Latin America'S Radical Left in Power." *Latin American Perspectives* 40, no. 3 (2013):13, https://doi.org/10.1177/0094582X13478398.

[56] Del Tronco, Desconfianza y accountability.

responded in opposition to liberalism[57]. These new leaders of political parties represented new

choices in a political system that had not been satisfactory for the voters in the past decades.

Given the characteristics beginning of the 2000s of political, economic, ethical, or other kinds of

distress it presented the rights characteristics for the rise of populist party leaders[58].

Once reaching power the socialist governments throughout the continent followed

different strategies and approaches to the increasing problems of the time. Some countries

manage to follow liberal economic and social policies through a socialist lens while others

approach more left-isolationist policies. The discrepancy between those political parties created

two different groups of socialist governments in the continent, one being a socialist with a liberal

approach and the other being a more radical socialist. The liberal approach was taken by

countries like Brazil under Lula da Silva, Vazquez in Uruguay, Lagos en Chile, and Kirchner in

Argentina. Socialism in these countries was characterized by their openness on foreign trade and

investment along with negotiations of free trade[59]. Although these governments were open to

having relations with the United States and other Western countries they were still claiming

sovereignty over Western control in South America. Likewise, these governments followed more

conservative monetary and fiscal policies while still trying to implement social policies, and

except for Chile and Argentina socialist governments were not nationalizing private firms or

privatizing state-owned assets[60]. These groups of socialist governments were able to take a

liberal approach for different reasons. First, they came from older left parties that were pressured

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[57] Juan Grigera, "Populism in Latin America: Old and New Populisms in Argentina and Brazil," *International Political Science Review / Revue Internationale de Science Politique* 38, no. 4 (2017): 9, https://www.jstor.org/stable/26940303.

[58] Burkhard Schnepel, "Max Weber's Theory of Charisma and Its Applicability to Anthropological Research," *Journal of the Anthropological Society of Oxford 18*, no. 1 (1987): 9, https://doaj.org/article/5d4d209f372f412690035e56d1e92c3e.

[59] Madrid, The Origins of the Two Lefts in Latin America, 4.

[60] Madrid, The Origins of the Two Lefts in Latin America, 5.

to follow the use of liberal policies as although they were not addressing inequality and poverty they were solving problems like hyperinflation, creating pressure to follow market-oriented policies in countries where liberalism was the most successful[61]. Countries, where liberal policies worked to stop financial crises, are more likely to have the next office being conservative and to doubt the performance of left-wing parties[62]. Therefore the older left-wing parties were forced to address these policies to stay as relevant options, addressing inequality and poverty. Secondly, these groups of countries did not have key natural resources that would have allowed them to become independent from the market, as they did not have rentier economies[63]. The more liberal socialist countries embrace values of equality and representation while following liberal more conservative financial policies. Lastly, these socialist parties got control only of the executive branch while the legislative and judicial branches counted with members of other parties. Despite the weakness that usually characterizes the institutions in South America, the distribution of other political parties in important positions maintained a balance of power.

The second group of socialist governments that tend to be more radical includes Ecuador under Correa, Bolivia under Morales, and Venezuela under Chavez. The radical left was characterized by winning elections in their early years with more than 60% of votes and taking control over other government branches, their own parties, and dismissing negotiations with opposite parties,[64] Internationally these governments started as critical to capitalism and the West, and although they did not break relations with the United States nor stop free trade they started trading relations with Iran, Russia, and the People's Republic of China[65]. These populist

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[61] Madrid, The Origins of the Two Lefts in Latin America, 9.
[62] Blanco and Grier, Explaining the rise of the left in Latin America, 13.
[63] Kurt Weyland, "The Rise of Latin America's Two Lefts: Insights from Rentier State Theory," *Comparative Politics* 41, no. 2 (2009): 8, http://www.jstor.org/stable/40599207.
[64] Ellner, Latin America's Radical Left in Power, 2.
[65] Madrid, The Origins of the Two Lefts in Latin America, 5.

governments developed into radicalization and state control adversely to those who became more liberal. First, many countries in South America that experienced economic sharp downturns under liberal financial policies and market-oriented economies during the late 1990s had central or left-wing parties in the government [66]. These older center-left parties started losing support and created the space for more traditional socialist left parties that would later emerge after 1997. Once democratically arrived to power the governments of Bolivia, Ecuador, and Venezuela started reforms focused on the redistribution of wealth, public spending, and political representation[67]. Second, these more populist countries possess important reserves of raw materials allowing them to undermine market-oriented policies creating the illusion of richness and a strong economy[68]. The possession of important natural resources weakens liberal policies of competition and builds on the socialist narrative of sovereignty and nationalism. Lastly, populist governments that became radical reached power by winning with the majority of votes for the presidency and congressional majorities. This contributed to an unbalance of power that along with democratic constitutional changes in the long run allowed the government to maintain absolute control of their political parties along with legislative, and judiciary branches, and armed forces[69]. This eliminated any power balancing from other parties stopping the bureaucratic order[70] and further weakening those institutions. These governments also created further polarization, as charismatic authority is personal and emotional, those who were moderates and

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[66] Madrid, The Origins of the Two Lefts in Latin America, 9.
[67] Kennemore and Weeks, Twenty-First Century Socialism? 3.
[68] Weyland, The Rise of Latin America's Two Lefts, 8.
[69] Steve Ellner, "The Distinguishing Features of Latin America's New Left in Power: The Chávez, Morales, and Correa Governments," *Latin American Perspectives* 39, no. 1 (2012): 96–114, http://www.jstor.org/stable/23238970.
[70] Schnepel, Max Weber's Theory of Charisma, 5.

in the opposition became political, social, and economic groups characterized as disloyal to the country[71] and were either penalized or persecuted.

The disappointment with liberal policies, unstable market-oriented policies, and increasing inequality created a political space where a new reformed left was accepted into the democratic system. This preference for the socialist government was a democratic response to the dissatisfaction with the governments of the past decades. The new socialism brought populist leaders along with two main financial and political approaches creating liberal socialist and populist governments that became radical. Both types of governments were approaching the same problems of inequality and wealth distribution, lack of representation, and financial problems through different strategies. Liberal socialist states were open to liberal financial policies and broad foreign relations, while more radical governments focused on wealth distribution and foreign relations with socialist states.

Case Study: Populism in Venezuela

Despite being one of the reaches countries in oil, Venezuela is experiencing one of the worst social, financial, and political crises in its history. For a long time, there has been inconsistency in democracy and a lack of stable institutions causing long-lasting effects on the government and in the engagement of voters. Socialism started in Venezuela as a populist government under Chaves, it slowly became more radical until the present point of authoritarianism and a fragmented society. Nonetheless, this was an unfortunate but not surprising development, Before Chavez there wasn't high trust in the political parties in government due to arrangements that undermined democracy for decades, weakened the

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[71] Ellner, The Distinguishing Features of Latin America's New Left in Power, 6.

government institutions, and kept experiencing economic ups and downs following the performance of the oil prices. Then Chaves reached power democratically due to his populist speech that included all who felt ignored or wronged by the politics of the past along with promises of reforms and national well-being. His government was a symptom of a bigger problem within Venezuelan politics, as in the last two decades his government has replicated the same problem decades ago, just directed to a different group and directly taking control over all government branches.

Historically democracy has been undermined creating a precedent and an untrusting relationship between politicians and voters. After many before, there was a military overthrow in 1948 by General Officer Perez Jimenes who became president directly overlooking the Constitution which led to ten years of dictatorship[72]. His time in the presidency has been one of the most ruthless, and while making use of the military to reduce civic rights, he was also receiving support from Western countries due to his anticommunist stance during the Cold War. While maintaining the precedent of persecuting and shooting down left-wing political parties and worker/student unions his focus was also on strengthening the relationship with the US and foreign oil companies[73]. Later on, from 1958-1961, there was a transition back to democracy accomplished by a political agreement known as the Pact of Punto Fijo, which was in place until 1998. The political pact was agreed upon by the three main political parties Democratic Action (AD), Social Christian Party (COPEI), and the Democratic-Republican Union (URD), who had arranged for power sharing between the political parties regardless of electoral results[74]. The new

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[72]Francisco Monaldi et all, "Political Institutions, Policymaking Processes, and Policy Outcomes in Venezuela," IDB Working Paper No. 202 (2006):102, http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.1814756
[73] Tarver, "History of Venezuela," 105.
[74] Julia Buxton, "Venezuela's Contemporary Political Crisis in Historical Context." *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 24, no. 3 (2005): 328–47. http://www.jstor.org/stable/27733773.

pact's focus on democracy and cooperation created more power for the recurrent political parties rather than for the government, using oil income distribution to obtain support for the democratic system while also ostracizing the left-wing parties. This system's focus on the party's control had a damaging effect on the governmental institutions because political affiliation started affecting job opportunities in the public sector. It started a constant creation of similar positions and ministries to ensure a balance between parties expanding bureaucratization and greatly increasing corruption in the institutions[75]. Likewise, The agreement divided the control of the executive and legislative branches and provided minority parties with some seats in Congress[76] to maintain cooperation between the political parties, even if it implied going against political elections. These political arrangements constitutionally weakened the executive branch while empowering legislators and party leaders, and along with the falls in oil revenue, this caused a decay in the cooperative incentive structure[77]. The slow decay of institutions continued along with the growing corruption, and although some policies were focused on social welfare by the end of 1990 two-thirds of the population lived below the poverty line[78]. Likewise, there is a high rate of inequality seen in the landownership concentration, and almost half of the population working in the informal sector. (Buxton 12).

Before Chavez reached power, Venezuelans were greatly discontent with the political system. In the beginning, he was perceived as a solution to these problems and the two-party system. His career in politics started in 1992 when he was part of an armed rebellion led by a

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[75] Buxton, Venezuela's Contemporary Political Crisis in Historical Context.

[76] Monaldi et all, Political Institutions, Policymaking Processes, and Policy Outcomes in Venezuela.

[77] Monaldi et all, Political Institutions, Policymaking Processes, and Policy Outcomes in Venezuela, 5.

[78]. Buxton, Venezuela's Contemporary Political Crisis in Historical Context, 12.

civil-military organization known as Movimiento Bolivariano 200[79]. Despite being in jail for two

years, his participation in protest and the rebellion gave him a platform that he would later turn

into a political organization when he was released from jail in 1994. He became well known in

the country and on the political stage, he was able to get the support from followers of the old

left who were looking for new representation, militias, and ex-militaries, while also creating a

career in politics. During his political campaign, he advocated for political and economic reforms

through democratic channels, he wanted to demonstrate commitment to social change and

democracy. He became very influential and while using the influence and followers received

years before through his military actions, he was able to convince voters he was no longer a

threat to democracy[80]. Chavez's speeches were directed against the Punto Fijo Pact and its

effects, addressing groups that had been overlooked or excluded, he talked about representation

for everyone in the nation in a "participatory and protagonistic democracy"[81]. After officially

winning the presidential elections of 1998 he started proposing and implementing constitutional

reforms and implemented grassroots social programs throughout the country. These grassroots

organizations were focused on political representation and social welfare, especially in

universities, neighborhoods, and slums reaching many Venezuelans who allied themselves to his

government, creating alliances and having a more personal appeal to citizens[82]. No longer after

his election, due to deep changes to the constitution ratified by democratic elections, his

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[79] Damarys Canache, "From Bullets to Ballots: The Emergence of Popular Support for Hugo
Chávez," *Latin American Politics and Society* 44, no. 1 (2002): 69–90,
https://doi.org/10.2307/3177111.
[80] Canache, From Bullets to Ballots, 7.
[81] Yannis Stavrakakis et al, "Contemporary Left-Wing Populism in Latin America: Leadership,
Horizontalism, and Postdemocracy in Chávez's Venezuela," *Latin American Politics and Society*
58, no. 3 (2016): 51–76, http://www.jstor.org/stable/24766056.

[82] Stavrakakis et al, Contemporary Left-Wing Populism in Latin America, 17.

government took power over the judicial and legislative branches along with other governmental institutions and the military. Then, after Chavez passed away, the left party in control of the state was not able to maintain the power obtained by Chavez or an economy based on the oil prices, creating deeper issues for Venezuelan society. Making Venezuela a country rich in resources, but extremely poor, violent, and unequal, which has the driver for the biggest exodus of immigrants in the continent. The case of Venezuela, although one of the extreme examples of populist radical governments, shows the South American citation before the 2000s and why socialism along with a charismatic leader was preferred.

Conclusion

The political system in South America has been democratically inconsistent, due to internal factors of weak institutions, corruption, and distrust in political parties. There have also been external factors such as repetitive international influence and interventions. These factors caused political, social, and financial problems that although have evolved, they are still present in the continent. However, voters were supporters of democracy as a form of government all through the decades, and eventually, countries were able to institutionalize democracy around the 1990s. During this time many countries were also dissatisfied with the political parties due to the lack of social improvement through economic and political policies. Voters consider democratically choosing the left as a way to punish other parties in power that were not meeting expectations and were not fulfilling their promises. The new left changed by leaving the radicalism of guerrillas in the past and became more organized and open to participate in the political party system if given the chance. Therefore with a more reliable left many countries chose them over old parties with the hope of addressing the high levels of inequality and lack of representation. Once in office, the left developed in two different groups, some more open to

liberal ideas and policies while the others declared socialism as a goal and became more radical with time. This division within socialism was also influenced by voters, as the left had to adapt to more conservative policies to stay in office. The example of Venezuela portrays the effect populism had in countries that were dealing with distrust in political parties along with problems of inequality and representation. It also presents the problems of weakening the institutionalization of democracy. Although socialism is not the preferred ideology it is still present in South America and will probably keep appearing in different states. Countries in South America are showing dissatisfaction with both left and right-wing political parties, realigning after elections as they are looking for a party that solves the problems of the country regardless of their ideology.

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