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The Lithuanian Community of Venezuela

Between Two Worlds: Politics, Imagery, and Identity Between Lithuania and Venezuela*

Summary. This article presents the author's observations from 1991 to 2020 on the divergent social and political trajectories of Lithuania and Venezuela, exploring the relevance of these contrasts within the contemporary European socio-political context. Lithuania's path after the Soviet rule embraced democracy and economic reform, supported by a historical foundation of innovation and adaptability. Venezuela, despite its wealth in natural resources, fell into economic and social decline under prolonged socialist regimes led by Hugo Chávez and Nicolás Maduro. The article examines the influence of international actors, including Cuba, Russia, Iran, and China, within Venezuela's territory and considers the potential implications of these relationships for the European Union. Finally, it underscores the importance of monitoring developments in Venezuela to assess the risks of its evolving role as a consolidated platform for Western adversaries.

Keywords: Venezuela, Hugo Chávez, Simón Bolívar, global south, modern socialism, Soviet Union, Lithuanian-Venezuelan community, Iran, Russia, Democracy, dual identity, welfare state, ALBA, teleSUR, innovation, paternalism.

Introduction: Reflections from Two Homelands

I consider myself fortunate to have two families and two nations that I can call home. I am Venezuelan, and I am Lithuanian. In Venezuela, I am considered Lithuanian; in Lithuania, I am viewed as Venezuelan. This duality has given me a rare sense of belonging and detachment, a perspective that has come full circle over the years.

In the 21st century, many people share this multifaceted sense of identity. It is not solely defined by nationality, religion, or ethnicity, but rather by an intricate blend of

* The article is based on the lecture given by Gabriel Orent on 2 October, 2024, at the Valdas Adamkus Presidential Library-Museum.

experiences and influences, as unique as every person. Growing up between cultures offers an unusual vantage point—a chance to observe them from within and without. It is a sentiment shared by fellow immigrants I have met, from Honduras to Brazil, who have found themselves in Lithuania. A “fly-on-the-wall” standpoint that fosters an understanding of how intertwined, yet distinct, cultural perceptions can be.

Im/migration is not just a concept to me; it is a legacy. You see, I am a child of the diaspora. My father fled Lithuania after WWII, finding refuge in Venezuela, where he met my mother, herself an immigrant from Colombia. Now, I am an immigrant in reverse, returning to Lithuania, albeit for entirely different reasons.

Between 1992 and 2003, I shuttled frequently between Venezuela and Lithuania, witnessing Lithuania’s metamorphosis first-hand. My father’s move to Vilnius in 1994 gave me an excuse to visit and observe the unfolding changes. Every year seemed a step forward, but toward what, was the question in everybody’s mind. Nowadays, with the power of hindsight, it is not difficult to look back to that “Laukinė Lietuva” of the 1990s and realise: pessimism at the time was overrated.

Yet, despite Lithuania’s substantial progress, I still hear the echoes of pessimism today. This is understandable given the generational divide, where many economically active Lithuanians have never known the Soviet rule. Efforts in political and academic circles to erase physical memories of that era risk lulling us into complacency. It is easy to lose one’s perspective on the fragility of democracy.

If the war in Ukraine has taught us anything, it is that everything we take for granted can be stripped away, faster and more easily than it was earned. The same holds true for Venezuela, where 40 years of democracy collapsed in a single day of election in 1998. That election paved the way for 26 years (and counting) of socialist autocracy. Lithuania’s first period of independence lasted just 22 years before the 1940 occupation. Today, at 33 years, its current democracy has outlasted that record. Whether it endures for another 33 depends on our vigilance and cognisance of potential threats. We want to be sober about the risks and aware of the weaknesses.

Living on the other side of the ocean teaches many lessons, often the hard way. One can only attempt to pass on some of these experiences in the hope that they may be useful (or at the very least) thought-provoking. The art of recognizing friend from foe is a subtle discipline, but one that every citizen and voter should be well-versed in. A skill essential for safeguarding what we hold dear.

In writing this article, I aim to achieve three key objectives. First, to highlight the striking contrasts between Venezuela and Lithuania, framed within the broader context of “Tercermundismo” (or third-world ideology). Second, to illustrate how Venezuela’s political and economic developments have already impacted the European Union and intersect with the ongoing war in Ukraine. Finally, to issue a warning against the complacency that allows regimes like Venezuela’s to serve as platforms for Western adversaries, including Cuba, China, Iran, and Russia. By exploring these themes, I hope to provide readers with a more in-depth understanding of how these interconnected narratives shape our contemporary community despite Lithuania’s substantial progress.

A Tale of Two Countries

Let us run an imaginary experiment between two countries with vastly different resources and circumstances, each aiming to provide prosperity for its citizens over a 30-year period.

Country A is endowed with an abundance of natural and human resources: about one million square kilometres of land, 4,000 kilometres of coastline (1,700 of which are suitable for recreation), and a tropical climate with temperatures ranging from 20°C to 35°C all the year-round. Agriculture and fishing are as well feasible year-round, thanks to this favourable weather. The country's mineral wealth includes vast reserves of iron, bauxite, precious stones, and, most notably, the world's largest crude oil reserves, bringing its GDP to an impressive \$500 billion. Its population of around 30 million continues to grow, supplying a strong potential workforce. Additionally, this democratic nation's geographical position offers accessible trade routes to multiple continents, further enhancing its potential for economic success.

Country B, by contrast, is a small, resource-limited country with only 65,000 square kilometres of territory. Located in a cold Northern Hemisphere climate, it endures long, harsh winters with temperatures reaching -20°C, which restricts agricultural and fishing activities for much of the year. Mineral resources are scarce, with only minimal oil reserves that barely impact the national GDP. The population, once around 4 million, now sits at 2.5 million and is steadily declining, projected to decrease further by the end of the century to a mere 1.5 million. With a GDP at just 10% of that of Country A, the prospects for Country B appear quite limited.

Based on these descriptions, one would assume that Country A, with its immense resources, would outshine Country B in terms of prosperity. However, reality tells a different story: Country B has outperformed Country A by a wide margin in terms of growth and prosperity.

You already know that this scenario mirrors the real-world examples of Venezuela (Country A) and Lithuania (Country B). Over the last 30 years, Lithuania transitioned away from socialism toward a free-market democracy, earning all the necessary requisites to join NATO and the European Union. It has shown steady economic growth and cultural development, advancing in various social and intellectual fields.

Meanwhile, Venezuela moved in the opposite direction, adopting a socialist economic model and eventually becoming a dictatorship under Nicolás Maduro, echoing influences from the Soviet Union and, more distinctly, Cuba. Despite its wealth of natural resources, Venezuela's economy has been in continuous decline since the 1990s, with conditions worsening after Hugo Chávez's Bolivarian Revolution. Today, Venezuela's oil production has dropped to a point in which it can no longer supply local demand. The country is currently importing fuel from Iran.¹ Extreme poverty and political repression have led to a

¹ Rendon, Moises, "The Fabulous Five: How Foreign Actors Prop up the Maduro Regime", CSIS, October 19, 2020, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/fabulous-five-how-foreign-actors-prop-maduro-regime-venezuela> [accessed October 20, 2024].

mass exodus, with 7.7 million Venezuelans fleeing the country, a number that is expected to grow further in the coming years.²

This dramatic divergence highlights critical questions about governance, economic policy, and the true drivers of national prosperity. What went wrong with Venezuela's trajectory, and what lessons can we glean from Lithuania's progress? While these questions require deeper exploration, we can begin to uncover some answers.

Venezuela from the 1950s to the 1980s

When my father arrived in Venezuela in 1950, the country was predominantly rural, cloaked in dense vegetation, and marked by a few areas that could truly be called cities. At the time, Venezuela was governed by a Military Junta, followed by the dictatorship of Marcos Pérez Jiménez, whose immigration policy actively welcomed Europeans. Pérez Jiménez's ambition was to infuse Venezuelan society with the values and work ethic of the Old World, which he saw as vital to his vision of national development. His plan sought to merge Western ideals with the wealth from oil to create the strongest economy in Latin America.³

Within his first year in Venezuela, my father (a photographer from Kaunas who spoke fluent German, but no Spanish) was already producing documentary work for the Ministry of Development. He collaborated with Shell and Creole oil companies, as well as various public and private institutions. He became a part of an exclusive circle of immigrant contributors to *Revista Shell* (Shell Magazine), a publication funded by the Royal Dutch Shell Company. *Revista Shell* was a high-quality magazine, produced with premium materials and cutting-edge printing technology, rivalling *National Geographic* in quality whilst considerably exceeding its size at 23×31 cm.

Interestingly, *Revista Shell* featured no advertisements or direct promotions for Shell. Instead, it showcased an impressive array of content, spanning archaeology, agriculture, art, philosophy, science, literature, geography, and economics, encapsulating Venezuela's rich cultural heritage. Even today, its scope remains unparalleled. The magazine's photo archive, containing over 16,000 images, has only recently begun to be recognised for its historical significance, with scholarly interest emerging as late as 2023.

Revista Shell emerged during what is now considered Venezuela's "golden age"—a period when the country began to realize its economic, cultural, and social potential. This was the era of grand infrastructure projects, including the bridge over Lake Maracaibo, the Caracas-La Guaira highway, the Ávila cable car system that connected both cities, the towers of the Simón Bolívar Center, the residential area of "El Silencio", the magnificent Hotel Humboldt, University City in Caracas (now a UNESCO World Heritage Site), and many

² "Emergency Appeal: Venezuela Situation", *UNHCR*, 2024, <https://www.unhcr.org/emergencies/venezuela-situation> [accessed October 30, 2024].

³ One should not forget that, along with his development plan, Pérez Jiménez incarcerated and tortured numerous political opponents, especially people on the left. This is one of the reasons why his regime has often been interpreted as right-wing.

others. All of which were captured through the lens of a humble Lithuanian photographer.

However, this rapid development brought its challenges. As oil wealth created new opportunities in urban areas, many Venezuelans left agriculture, hoping to prosper in the cities, which marked the beginning of Caracas' shanty towns. From my father's photographs, one can see the beginnings of a problem that has plagued Venezuela for decades. Today, tens of thousands of square kilometres of mountainsides are covered in precarious informal settlements, homes to the country's poorest residents. During the 50s, Pérez Jiménez attempted to address this issue with social housing projects, but urban infrastructure development struggled to keep pace with population growth.

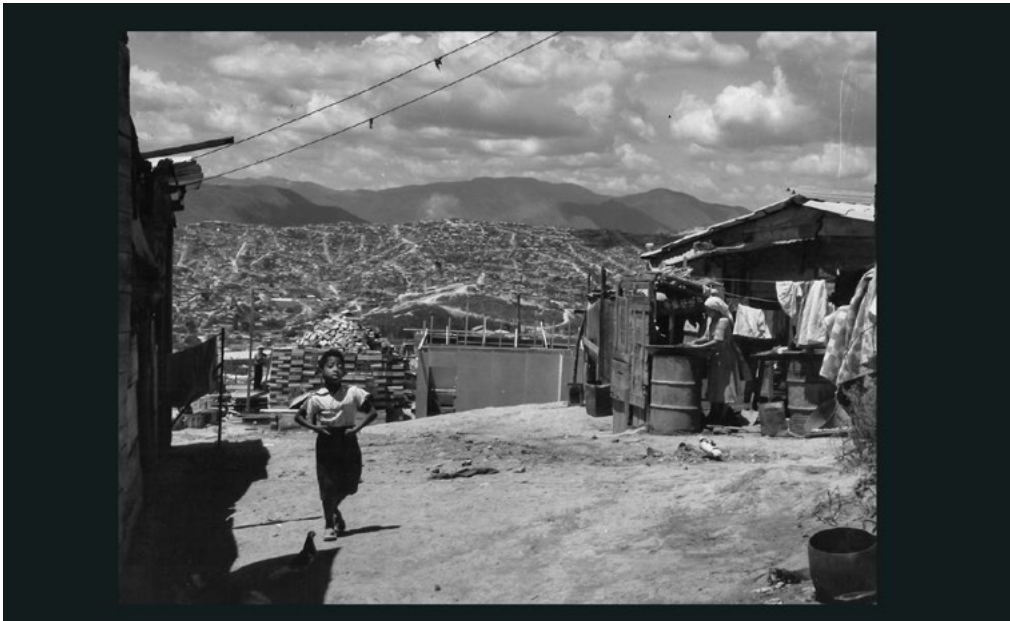


Figure 1. *Caracas shanty towns, already forming on the hills of Caracas between 1950 and 1960. Photo by Gediminas Orentas*

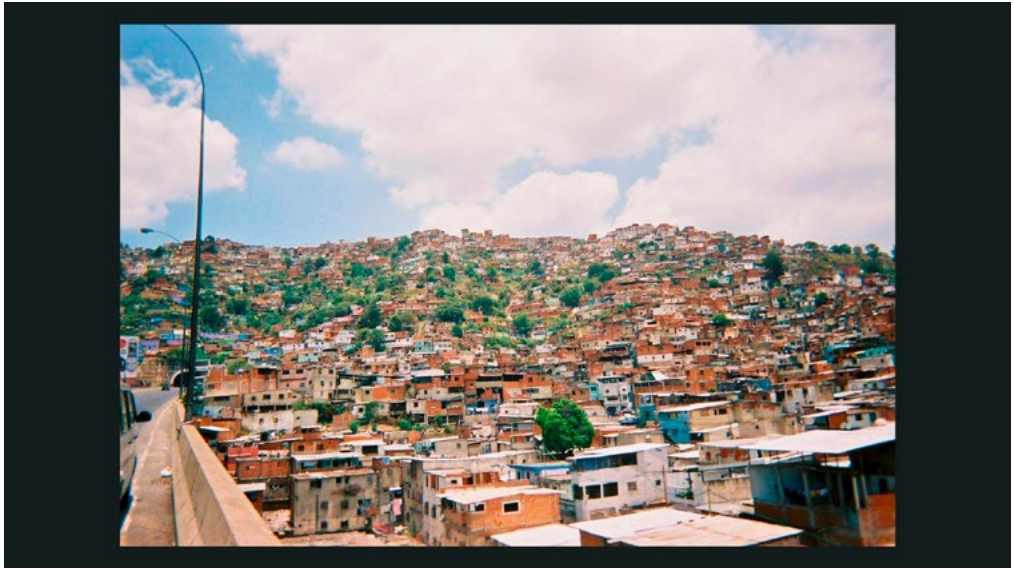


Figure 2. *Current grow of shanty towns in Caracas. Photo: Wikipedia Commons*

The spread of shanty towns around Caracas and other urban areas has become overwhelming. For each social housing unit constructed, ten more dwellings seemed to appear in informal settlements. Following the fall of Pérez Jiménez in 1958, subsequent democratic governments, despite substantial oil revenues, struggled to resolve this issue effectively. Even Hugo Chávez's lauded housing programmes made only marginal inroads into the issue.

During the 1960s and 1970s, Venezuela cemented its position as a leading oil supplier and co-founded the OPEC cartel alongside Middle Eastern nations to advocate for higher oil prices. Until then, revenue had been divided roughly equally between the state and private companies through taxes and fees. The 1973 oil embargo sent oil prices soaring, leading to a financial windfall for Venezuela. In 1976, social-democrat President Carlos Andrés Pérez nationalised the oil industry, securing 100% of oil revenues for the state. Yet, despite these vast sums, the growth of shanty towns and poverty continued unabated.

For those interested in a deeper approach to the economy of Venezuela during this period, I would recommend having a look at the book: *Cuando Venezuela Perdió el Rumbo (When Venezuela Lost Its Way)*. The book was published in 1992 by one of the most important financial institutions of the time, and it contains an in-depth economic analysis of Venezuela between 1945 and 1991.⁴ This kind of introspective analysis is very rare in Venezuelan literature these days, especially when considering that the government ceased to publish macroeconomic figures since approximately 2016.

⁴ Funes, Julio César, *Cuando Venezuela perdió el rumbo: un análisis de la economía venezolana entre 1945 y 1991*. Venezuela: Ediciones Cavendes, 1992.

Brink of Freedom, Brink of Collapse

By 1983, the Venezuelan government could no longer deny that something was gravely wrong. Despite the nation's wealth, Venezuela was at the gates of a severe economic crisis. On February 18th, the president appeared on the national television to announce the devaluation of the currency, marking an end to the country's Western aspirations and the start of a decline that snowballed to this day.⁵

Within the Lithuanian community in Venezuela, there was an air of disbelief. At home, we noticed that things were becoming more strained, but there was still hope that the crisis would not be permanent. After all, three decades of prosperity could not simply vanish overnight, could they? Such conversations were common, especially during poker nights. Every other Saturday, my father or one of his Lithuanian friends would host a game. Although community gatherings were infrequent, these evenings kept a certain spirit alive. Conversations, held mostly in Lithuanian, often turned to Venezuelan politics. One frequent participant was Vytautas Dambrava, who, unbeknownst to us at the time, would one day become the ambassador of independent Lithuania.

Approaching the 1990s, Venezuela underwent radical shifts. Inflation and corruption filled the headlines, accompanied by the usual finger-pointing among politicians. For both Venezuela and Lithuania, 1989 was a pivotal year. For many of us in the diaspora, Lithuania was an idea more than a reality. To the younger generation, the notion of an independent Lithuania was more conceptual than tangible. At least it was, until the fall of the Berlin Wall. With history unfolding in front of our eyes and serendipity knocking at the door, we heard the echoes of a distant history: the empire that fell in 1918 gave way to Lithuanian independence. Now the empire falls again.

However, while Lithuania stood on the brink of freedom, 1989 spelled trouble for Venezuela. On February 27th and 28th, years of economic strife culminated in widespread unrest. President Carlos Andrés Pérez (the same one who nationalised the oil industry in 1976) announced a set of economic measures, including an increase in petrol prices. Leftist activists seized the public discontent, turning it into a full-scale riot that consumed the nation. The violence left thousands dead, although the true number of casualties remains unknown.⁶

By 1991, Lithuania's newfound independence invigorated the local Lithuanian community, which quickly rallied to support the fledgling republic. Vytautas Dambrava recruited some of us to start gathering signatures. The idea was to introduce a petition urging the Venezuelan Congress to recognise the Republic of Lithuania. I recall gathering signatures at the music conservatory where I studied, a task that sparked a heated argument with one of my professors. His refusal to sign was rooted in his unrestricted loyalty to the Soviet Union. Needless to say, my musical career ended up with a colourful patriotic note—an expletive unsuitable to repeat here.

⁵ Alonso, Juan Francisco, "Qué fue el Viernes Negro y por qué marcó el fin de la Venezuela saudita", *BBC Mundo*, Febrero 17, 2023, <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-64428203> [accessed October 25, 2024].

⁶ Morgade, Alba, "Qué fue 'la masacre del Caracazo' hace 30 años y qué nos dice de la situación actual en Venezuela", *BBC Mundo*, Febrero 27, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-47379668> [accessed October 25, 2024].

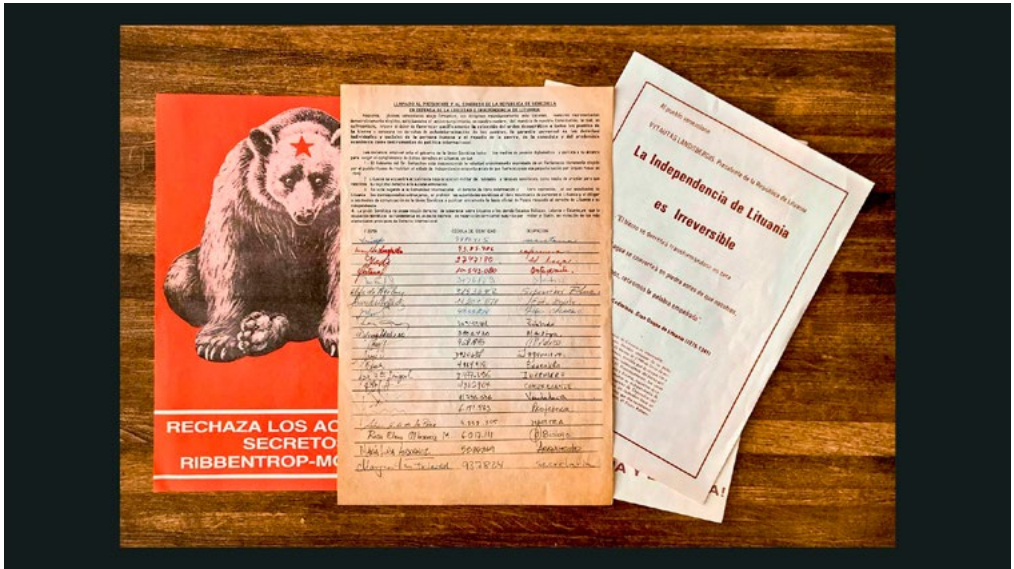


Figure 3. A leftover sheet with signatures gathered in Venezuela for the recognition of Lithuania’s independence in 1990–1991. On the right: a copy of a pamphlet with excerpts of a speech by president Vytautas Landsbergis in Spanish. Photo by Gabriel Orentas

As Lithuania began its path to reconstruction, Venezuela continued to unravel. Two coup attempts shook the nation in 1992. The first, on February 4th, was led by Hugo Chávez, who failed to assassinate President Pérez and was subsequently arrested. Chávez’s brief surrender speech on the national television catapulted him to celebrity status. The second coup attempt, in November of the same year, was spearheaded by the members of the air force. Though it too failed, both coups left a trail of civilian casualties, reminiscent of the 1989 riots.

Diverging Paths: Lithuania’s Ingenuity vs. Venezuela’s State Dependence

Following 1993, Lithuania and Venezuela embarked on starkly divergent trajectories. Lithuania transitioned from communist rule toward democracy and market-oriented reforms. In contrast, Venezuela shifted from a democratic system toward socialist governance, carrying with it predictable economic and social challenges.

While Venezuela experienced its “golden age” from relatively 1950 to 1983, Lithuania lived the same historical period under the boot of Soviet control. Yet even then, Lithuania was a hub of engineering and manufacturing within the USSR. For example, Soviet aircraft maintenance took place in Lithuania, and Lithuanian engineers designed avionics for the

Soviet space program (although they did not know this themselves because everything was kept secret).

Lithuanian factories manufactured industrial items like electricity metres for the entire Soviet Union. I know this because I was given a tour of the factory in Vilnius' Paupys in 1994. Furthermore, Lithuania has been credited with a significant portion of global laser-related patents. How do I know that? I met a physics professor in 1996, who kindly explained that Lithuania did not develop its own products given that there is a line of foreign companies waiting to buy Lithuanian patents, cash in hand, as soon as they are registered. This is also why a Lithuanian “James Dyson” is still an elusive dream.

On another occasion, this time in 1993, I met a group of scientists who attempted to commercialise a spectrophotometer they developed. The machine, appropriately named “Vaiva”, was designed to analyse the chemical composition of distant stars based on the spectrum of the light they emitted. Was that invention a success or a failure? I cannot say. The important thing here is to illustrate the deep-rooted ingenuity and entrepreneurship that existed within Lithuania. When the Soviet Union’s influence finally lifted, the groundwork was already in place for Lithuania’s economic and technological development. It is this existing foundation that helped lift Lithuania’s eventual growth, contrasting with Venezuela’s struggles despite its abundant natural resources.

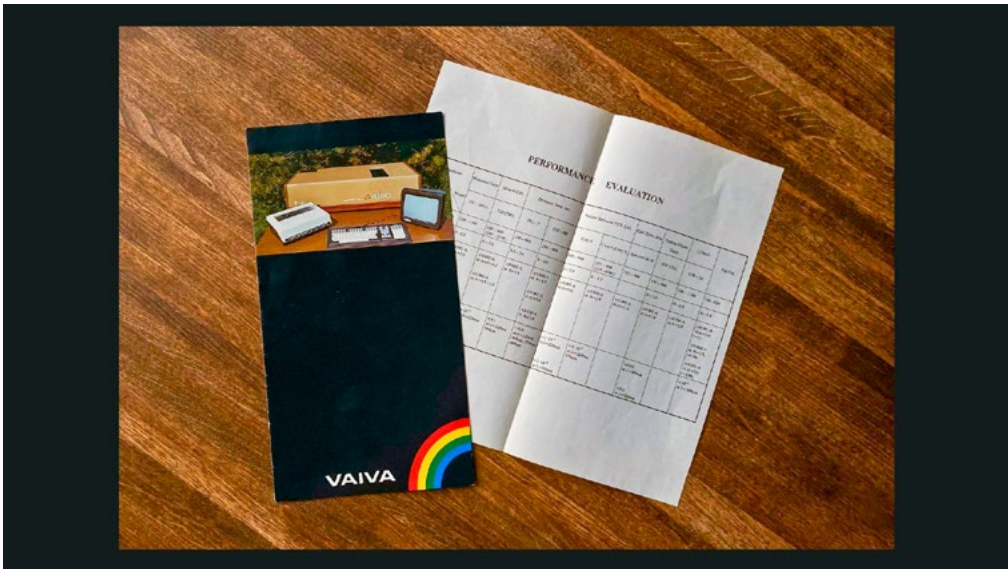


Figure 4. The “Vaiva” spectrophotometer’s brochure and performance evaluation sheet from 1993. At the time, the brochure text was offered in Russian, English and German languages. Excerpt from the brochure: “VAIVA is the automatic two beam spectrophotometer including photon counting detectors. Designer: Vilnius P. Kapsukas State University. Manufacturer: Institute of Physics of the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences.” Photo by Gabriel Orentas

In other words, due to Lithuania's lack of natural resources, Lithuanians had to make do with their ingenuity to compensate, not necessarily by inventing new things, but perhaps by inventing new business or new ways to do business. From the outset, because of Lithuania's experience with the Soviet rule, people felt more inclined to favour a legal framework rooted on property rights. An essential basis if you are keen to do business with the rest of the world.

In contrast, Venezuela has always been, and continues to be, a paternalistic state, where citizens expect everything would be handed by the state. A system the government fosters and manipulates.

An example of this is the CLAP bag. The acronym stands for Local Committees for Supply and Production (Comités Locales de Abastecimiento y Producción, in Spanish). A CLAP is basically a plastic bag filled with some food products. My sister is a member of one of those committees. She receives the products at home, then prepares the contents of each bag according to a list of instructions given by yet another committee. Then the bags are taken to the entrance of a residential building and people come in, one by one, to pick up theirs. Receiving or not a CLAP bag depends on either your political affiliation (whether you voted for Maduro) or, how well you know someone from the committee.



Figure 5. Residents collecting their CLAP bags in a former middle-class neighbourhood in central Caracas. Photo by Gabriel Orentas

This system of fostered dependency (exemplified in CLAP) generated a culture of attachment that hindered broader economic participation and innovation. A report by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights found that CLAP did not meet food standards and, furthermore, was used as a tool for political propaganda and social

control.⁷ Many people, on the other hand, truly believe CLAP is a force for good that it is helping thousands of other people without access to food. Some admit, however, that the quality and provenance of the foods are rather questionable at times.

Lithuania's resilience and reliance on human capital laid the foundation for its development post-1993. In stark contrast, Venezuela's dependence on state control and abundant resources led to economic stagnation and social fragmentation. This divergence illustrates that prosperity often hinges not just on resources, but on governance, innovation, and the culture that shapes a nation's path.

The Myth of Venezuelan Capitalism

Ever since the arrival of Columbus in America, the Spanish crown was the sole proprietor of the land and all its resources. A concept such as private property did not really exist. *Encomiendas* (licences to exploit portions of the land) were the legal instruments provided by the crown for the exploitation of those resources. One example of this was the encomienda given to the Welser, a merchant family of Augsburg, which, by the way, baptised the new land as *Klein-Venedig*, *Little Venice*, or in its Spanish translation: *Venezuela*. This name was inspired by the custom of constructing houses on stilts by the indigenous inhabitants of Lake Maracaibo, reminiscent of the iconic waterways of Venice.

The Welser did little to develop the cities of Coro, Puerto de Altagracia, or Maracaibo, all of which they populated, all of which still exist today. However, rather than develop mining or agriculture, the Welser abandoned those communities and adventured to try fortune in search for El Dorado, an enterprise bound to be doomed from the beginning.

Myths and legends like El Dorado have created considerable damage to Venezuela. Spanish America was imagined around the fantasies and biases of the European colonisers. It was thought to be the lost paradise as described in the Bible before "the fall". Therefore, the natives of these lands ought to be undoubtably innocent, noble, rid of greed or violence.⁸ As the Welser eventually discovered, the real natives were none of those things. Defeated by the heat, the curare, and the mosquitos, the Welser enterprise ended in less than 20 years.

Centuries later, Venezuela's identity would merge this kind of historical myths with the narrative promoted by socialist ideologies, bolstered by Soviet influence in the mid-20th century. Moscow's propaganda efforts, disseminated through universities, unions, and military circles, promoted anti-capitalist sentiments and fostered distrust toward the United States.⁹ These ideas have remained influential, complicating efforts to address the nation's issues through diversified economic and political solutions.

⁷ Informe de la Oficina del Alto Comisionado de las Naciones Unidas para los Derechos Humanos, "Violaciones de los Derechos Humanos en la República Bolivariana de Venezuela", ACNUDH, Junio, 2018, https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Countries/VE/VenezuelaReport2018_SP.pdf [accessed October 25, 2024].

⁸ Rangel, Carlos, *Del Buen Salvaje al Buen Revolucionario*. Spain: Editorial Fundación FAES S.L.U, 2013, 44.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 198.

The socialist government of Venezuela has taken these attitudes to new highs by directly altering the face of Simon Bolivar and remoulding his physiognomy to suit the preferences of the regime.¹⁰ Neither the astronomical cost of the enterprise, nor the desecration of the tomb of the national hero, served as deterrent for their actions.

Mythology, compounded by the lack of property rights and the invariant allure of socialism, created a country with no real political spectrum. In Venezuela, there is no ‘right’ as we understand it in Europe. Successive governments in Venezuela have been either a sort of paternalist welfare system or a social-democratic system. Even the dictatorships like those ran by the Military Junta and Marcos Pérez Jiménez, which are often presented as examples of right-wing regimes, both indeed provided ample social warranties. Everything, from highways to shopping malls to hospitals and universities, were all built and often ran by the central government.

After 1958, every government in Venezuela has been a Social-Democrat government, with overtones akin to the so-called “Scandinavian model”. Education and health, have been constitutionally free of charge since 1961.¹¹ The Venezuelan constitution had provisions for the protection and integration of indigenous communities as well.¹² When Hugo Chávez took charge in 1998, he ignited a process to abolish the constitution of 1961, then took credit for the incorporation of those same social warranties into his new constitution. Yet, the advocates of Chávez’s Bolivarian revolution, keep peddling the argument that before Chávez, Capitalism ran wild and that he brought finally free education and free health to the poor.¹³

Furthermore, since the nationalization of 1976, near 90% of Venezuela’s GDP belongs to the state, either from exports of crude oil, chemicals, or natural resources like iron and bauxite.¹⁴ The other approximate 10% comes from the result of some private activities. Thus, the argument that Venezuela’s crisis has been the result of neoliberal policies, or (as Chávez often put it) “wild capitalism”, is bogus at best, given the fact that the vast majority of capital resources have been possessed by the state for over 70 years. They are not (and by past and current law they cannot be) in private hands.

Carlos Rangel, a Venezuelan writer and well-respected journalist, described in 1983, the consequences the allure of socialism had in Venezuela with a simple metaphor: “Socialism works like this: first, socialists convince you that you can spread your wings and fly. Then, you climb to a second floor and jump out from the window. And what happens? You fall and break both your legs. But now, the same socialists tell you: ‘you’ve got it all wrong, you needed to jump from the tenth floor!’...”¹⁵

¹⁰ Voz de América, “Chávez presenta el rostro de Simón Bolívar en 3D”, *Voz de América*, Julio 24, 2012, <https://www.vozdeamerica.com/a/venezuela-hugo-chavez-simon-bolivar-3d-rostro-libertador-caracas-oea/1444582.html> [accessed October 30, 2024].

¹¹ Centro para la Integración y el Derecho Público CIDEP, *Constitución de la República de Venezuela*, 1961, Art. 76, 78, <https://cidep.online/files/constituciones/1961.pdf> [accessed October 26, 2024].

¹² CIDEP, *Constitución de la República de Venezuela*, Art. 77.

¹³ Maher, Bill, “Sean Penn | Club Random with Bill Maher”, *YouTube*, 2023, https://youtu.be/c_Nxp9PZmqk?si=Pxy0OvYgSbH4bUbT&t=3180 [accessed November 01, 2024].

¹⁴ Workman, Daniel, “Venezuela’s Top 10 Exports”, *World’s Top Exports*, <https://www.worldstopexports.com/venezuelas-top-10-exports/> [accessed October 20, 2024].

¹⁵ Granier, Marcel, “Primer Plano: Entrevista con Carlos Rangel”, *YouTube*, Mayo 30, 1983. <https://youtu.be/NO2fAWpi3Lo?si=fWFGhxS-aBjjVKrM&t=400> [accessed August 16, 2024].

This sharp critique did not go unchallenged. At Venezuela's Central University, a known hotbed of socialist thought, students publicly burned Rangel's books. His exposés on Soviet influence, particularly in academia and unions, provoked significant backlash. Moscow's directives filtered through Cuban intermediaries to Venezuelan communists, who embedded these ideas in various social and political institutions, including the armed forces.¹⁶ Hugo Chávez was one of the adherents shaped by this ideological tide.¹⁷

In her book, *Fascism* (2018), former U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright dedicated chapters to Mussolini, Hitler, Stalin, and Hugo Chávez. She wrote:

No one can deny that Chávez brought far-reaching change to Venezuela, but neither can one conclude he did all he had pledged. By the time of his premature death, many of the country's wealthy professionals had taken their talents elsewhere, the seats they once occupied in fancy restaurants filled instead by currency manipulators, smugglers, narcotics peddlers, and officially empowered thieves.¹⁸

This observation brings home the far-reaching impact of Chávez's rule: a country where institutional decay and the erosion of trust have led to a new existing state of affairs, built not on promised social equality but on a cycle of corruption and lost potential.

The Dual Identity of Venezuela

The persistent struggles of Venezuelan society cannot be attributed solely to political ideology, such as socialism; they are also deeply embedded in the actions and attitudes of its citizens. This observation echoes the cautionary words of Simón Bolívar, the nation's revered liberator, who in 1830, after years of leadership, delivered a poignant assessment:

I have ruled for twenty years, and from those, I can only extract just but a few true conclusions:

1. For us, [Latin] America is ungovernable.
2. Those who serve a revolution plough in the sea.
3. The only thing one can do in [Latin] America is to emigrate.
4. This country, [the Gran Colombia] will fall infallibly into the hands of the unbridled mob, just to be handed over to insignificant chieftains of every colour and breed.
5. Devoured by all the crimes and extinguished by barbarity, the Europeans won't bother to re-colonise us.
6. If it could be possible for a part of the world to return to its state of primitive chaos, that would be that last age of [Latin] America.¹⁹

¹⁶ Rangel, *Del Buen Salvaje al Buen Revolucionario*, 417.

¹⁷ "Chavez y Fidel, absueltos por la historia", *CubaDebate*, Julio 28, 2024, <http://www.cubadebate.cu/especiales/2024/07/28/chavez-y-fidel-absueltos-por-la-historia-fotos-y-video/> [accessed October 26, 2024].

¹⁸ Albright, Madeleine, *Fascism. A Warning*. London: William Collins, 2018, 141.

¹⁹ Rangel, *Del Buen Salvaje al Buen Revolucionario*, 40–41.

Bolívar's statement is seldom highlighted in Venezuelan education, yet it offers a significant reflection on the present state of the nation. Each point he raised appears to have materialized: political fragmentation, mob rule, leadership by populist figures, mass emigration, unchecked crime, and the relative indifference of global powers.

In the mid-20th century, Venezuela was often regarded as aligned with Western ideals and values. Today, however, it is identified as part of the "Global South," a term that subtly categorizes nations in opposition to the United States and its allies. This shift is evident in the rhetoric of leaders such as Xi Jinping, Ali Khamenei, and Vladimir Putin, who frequently invoke the term as part of their political narratives. In the end, "Global South" is just a new way of saying "Third-World."

Simón Bolívar's foresight included a recognition that within Venezuelan society lay the seeds of both progress and disorder. His understanding that revolution alone could not guarantee sustained development reveals a tension that persists to this day.

We can remember Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886). In the novel, Dr. Jekyll embodies rationality and societal order, while Mr. Hyde represents impulsivity and moral decay. Such a dual nature appears in the reality of Venezuela: industrious and innovative, on the one hand, and plagued by lawlessness and corruption on the other.

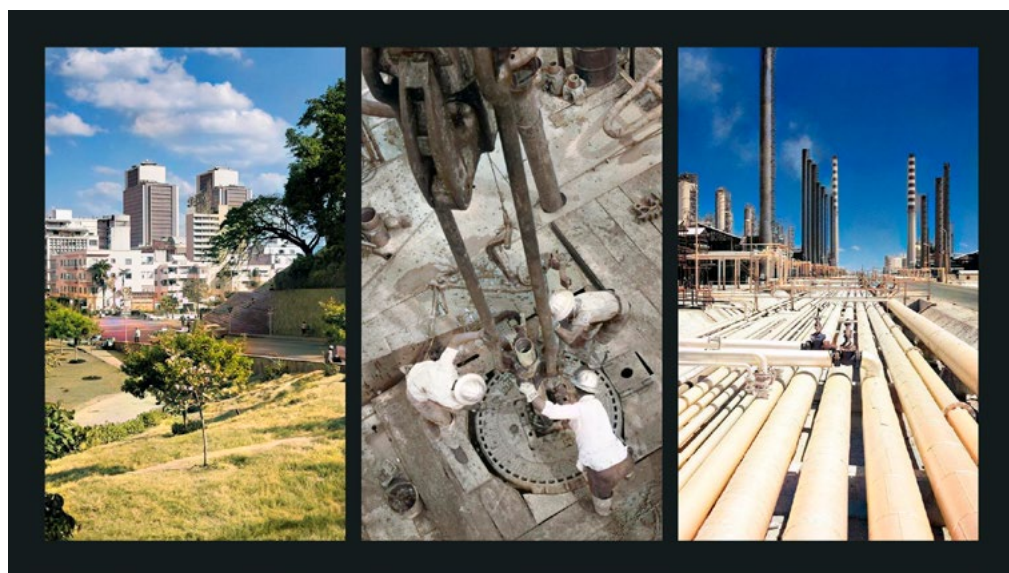


Figure 6. *Three views of the industrious side of Venezuela. Photos by Gediminas Orentas*

This dichotomy manifests in everyday life. The same citizens who contributed to the development of the country's oil industry, making Venezuela a founding member of OPEC and elevating PDVSA to the world's seventh-largest oil company, also exhibit behaviour that undermines societal order. Traffic infractions, bribery, and public disregard for laws are widespread, particularly in urban centres like Caracas. Such behaviour, while viewed as

normal by many, has serious consequences, including (unsurprisingly) pedestrian injuries and fatalities.

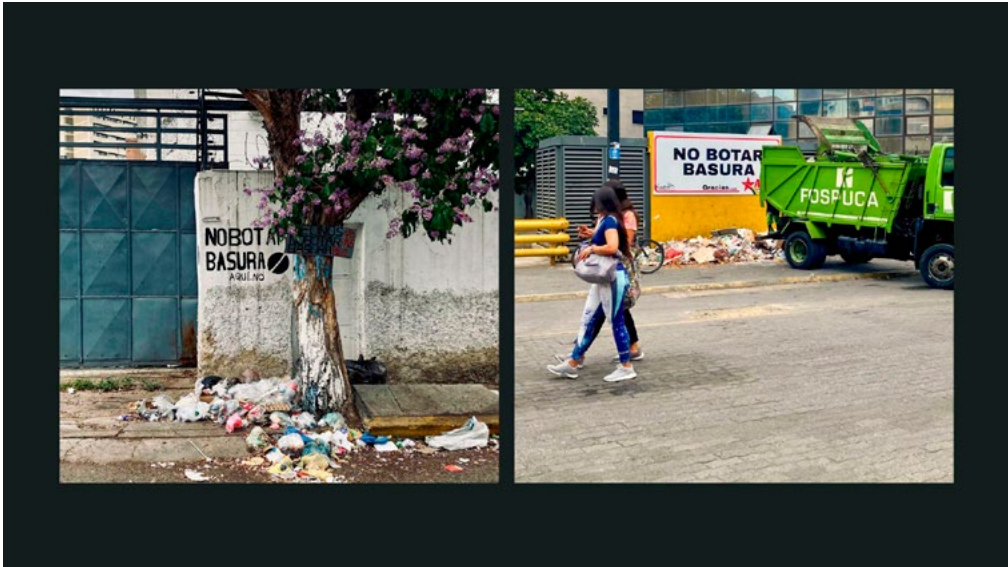


Figure 7. *The other side of Venezuela as expressed in everyday life. On the left, there is a beautiful blossoming tree with a sign that reads: “Neighbours, love your country, do not litter the streets”. On the right: a garbage truck picking up rubbish from under a massive sign that says: “Do not litter” located in one of the most popular areas of Caracas. Photo by Gabriel Orentas*

Winston Churchill once described that the civil society rests on the upholding of laws. He observed, Civilization “means a society based upon the opinion of civilians. It means that violence, the rule of warriors and despotic chiefs, the conditions of camps and warfare, of riot and tyranny, give place to parliaments where laws are made, and independent courts of justice in which over long periods of time those laws are maintained. That is Civilization — and in its soil grows continually freedom, comfort and culture.”²⁰ The incompatibility between civilization and anarchy, noted by both Bolívar and Churchill, points us to an urgent question: which aspect of Venezuela’s identity will prevail?

In Stevenson’s novel, it becomes evident that Jekyll and Hyde can no longer exist in the same body. Dr. Jekyll eventually succumbs, leaving Mr. Hyde to take over. If Venezuela’s internal duality continues unchecked, one might wonder if the nation’s future will echo a similar outcome. The answer lies in whether collective and individual behaviours can align to nurture the stability and rule of law that are essential for a sustainable society.

²⁰ Ferguson, Niall, *Civilization*. London: Penguin Books, 2012, 98.

North vs. South

Niall Ferguson once described the colonization of the Americas as “one of history’s biggest natural experiments,” where Western cultures (British in the North and Spanish/Portuguese in the South) were imposed on different regions and peoples. As history shows, the results diverged sharply.²¹ Carlos Rangel, a Venezuelan intellectual, drew similar conclusions, emphasizing that poverty in Latin America cannot simply be attributed to exploitation by wealthier nations. This perspective is useful when examining the contrasts between countries like Lithuania and Venezuela.

Long before Ferguson, Rangel explored these disparities in his book *Tercermundismo* (1982) (Third world-ism). He argued that the underdevelopment of Latin America (the so-called “third world”) is not the result of exploitation by wealthy nations like the United States. Instead, he pointed to internal failures. While North and South America began their journeys almost simultaneously, their trajectories were notably different. After the American Revolution in 1776, the United States established a system rooted in democracy, property rights, and the rule of law. In contrast, when Simón Bolívar led the creation of Gran Colombia (a union of Venezuela, Colombia, Panama, Guyana, and Ecuador) its government centralized power and struggled against competing visions of political rule. After Bolívar’s death in 1830, the Gran Colombia fell apart into conflict and division, further confirming his predictions.

By this time, the United States was expanding rapidly, uniting its territories from the Atlantic to the Pacific. By the time of the dissolution of Gran Colombia, the U.S. controlled most of the East Coast (except for Florida) and had already extended to the Pacific Northwest. The North grew stronger and more unified, while the South fractured and stagnated.

By the late 19th century, as industrialization transformed the United States into an economic powerhouse, intellectuals and political leaders in Latin America sought to explain the growing disparity. When the proletarian revolution predicted by Marx and Engels failed to materialize by the time of their deaths, a new narrative emerged. Thinkers like Hobson, Hilferding, and Lenin reframed Marx’s ideas, shifting the struggle from “poor vs. rich people” to “poor vs. rich nations.” This perspective resonated deeply in Latin America, where the narrative of exploitation by the “imperialist” United States gained traction. After World War II, this ideology expanded into the concept of the “third world,” casting Latin America as a victim of Western oppression and prescribing socialist revolution as the solution.²²

The Cuban Revolution solidified this narrative. It was the first real challenge to U.S. influence in the region, inspiring similar revolutionary movements across Latin America: guerrilla warfare in Colombia and Peru, coups and assassination attempts in Venezuela, all supported by Havana.

Whilst Ferguson emphasizes institutional differences between North and South America, Rangel highlights how cultural attitudes and collective behaviours differ in both. Yet,

²¹ Ferguson, *Civilization*, 97.

²² Rangel, *Del Buen Salvaje al Buen Revolucionario*, 190–192.

their conclusions align: the South's persistent struggles are rooted more in internal dynamics than external exploitation. Lithuania's story adds further weight to this thesis. Since 1991, Lithuania has dismantled socialist systems, embraced democracy, and integrated into Western institutions. Despite lacking natural resources and enduring a history of imperial domination, Lithuania today offers a much higher quality of life than Venezuela, a nation with a vast oil wealth.

These facts are well illustrated by official data from the World Bank:

- 1. GDP Per Capita:** Overall, Venezuela's GDP is ten times larger than Lithuania's, but Lithuania's GDP per capita is 50% higher.
- 2. Life Expectancy:** In the 1990s, Venezuelans had a higher life expectancy than Lithuanians (73 vs. 69 years). Today, those numbers have reversed, with Lithuania at 76 years and trending upward, while Venezuela has fallen to 71 years and declining.
- 3. Inflation:** Lithuania reduced its inflation from 1,000% in 1992 to under 1% by 1998. Venezuela, on the other hand, has experienced hyperinflation since 2013. Its currency has been altered three times since 1998, eliminating a total of 14 zeroes.²³ A single bolívar in 1997 is equivalent to 100 trillion bolívares today.²⁴

(Links to more detailed World Bank's data have been provided in the Appendix at the end of this article).

The metaphor Carlos Rangel once used ("jumping off the tenth floor in pursuit of socialism") aptly captures Venezuela's trajectory. Despite historical lessons and repeated warnings, the nation has consistently amplified state control and restricted economic freedom, perpetuating a cycle of decline.

Lithuania's progress, by reason of contrast, is not the result of extraordinary circumstances, but of deliberate choices: embracing Western institutions, fostering transparent governance, and integrating into structures like NATO and the EU. These decisions have provided stability, direction, and a commitment to democratic principles.

If Venezuela continues to brand itself as the "Bolivarian Republic," it would do well to heed Bolívar's own warnings about the dangers of unchecked state power and the consequences of mismanagement. His foresight remains as relevant today as ever, a missed opportunity for a nation that continues to prioritize ideology over pragmatic reform.

The Company You Keep

The voices we hear today have done little to reflect the plight of Venezuela. Ever since Hugo Chávez came to power, many international public figures have raised their voices

²³ Urrego, Anderson, "Venezuela le ha quitado 14 ceros al bolívar...", *La República*, Agosto 6, 2021, <https://www.la-republica.co/globoeconomia/venezuela-le-ha-quitado-14-ceros-al-bolivar-en-13-anos-por-medio-de-tres-reconversiones-3212621> [accessed October 30, 2024].

²⁴ "Venezuela Inflation Rate", *Trading Economics*, <https://tradingeconomics.com/venezuela/inflation-cpi> [accessed October 30, 2024].

supporting his agenda. The credit crisis of 2008, the subsequent Occupy movement, those have influenced our current cultural climate in favour of socialism. For many people, to be “on the left”, to be anti-imperialist, it is considered “cool”—as long as the anti-imperialist focus is the United States, but not Russia or China.

Jeremy Corbin, Kevin Spacey, Sean Penn, Noam Chomsky, Danny Glover, Michael Moore, are just a few of the names that throughout the years have lent their voices to the cause of Venezuelan socialism. However, no other has been more vocal about the gospel of Hugo Chávez than Oliver Stone.

How one of the most privileged film directors in Hollywood becomes the tannoy of Chávez’s political propaganda is definitely a topic for a separate study. For now, all we need to know is that Stone produced and directed two documentary films about Chávez: “South of the Border” and “My Friend Chávez”. Stone invited Chávez for the premiere of the first one in Cannes. They both attended dressed in matching suits and ties.

Stone transformed Chávez into a pop icon easy to consume for the masses. In the 20th century, we had t-shirts with the mug of Che Guevara printed on them, now in the 21st, we have Hugo Chávez on a bicycle. The new icon, envisioned by Stone, transubstantiates the violent demagogue into an innocent child.²⁵



Figure 8. It is common to find a “Banksy-styled” graffiti of Hugo Chávez on a bicycle in the streets of Caracas, an iconography derived from Oliver Stone’s film *South of the Border*.

Photo: Flickr

Stone’s film, which counted with the participation of another close friend of Chávez, Sean Penn, has been of greatest importance to stirring anti-US sentiments around the

²⁵ “Hugo Chávez Bike Fall”, *YouTube*, November 15, 2010, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1m9guj5ayiI> [accessed October 25, 2024].

world. It is true that the US can be criticised for its many flaws, but to present Venezuela as an example of “success” is profoundly flawed; especially when a key part of that success is supposedly based on the charisma of a man who subverted the constitutional order of Venezuela twice and had the blood of many Venezuelans in his hands.

After the death of Chávez in 2013, Nicolás Maduro inherited not only the government, but also the Chávez fan club, which notably includes Vladimir Putin among its members. Since the beginning of the Bolivarian revolution in Venezuela, Russia has been a close ally. Chávez, Maduro and Putin are often featured in murals painted all over Caracas and other major cities, and the current Venezuelan regime supports Russia’s incursion in Ukraine in substantial ways, as we will see later.

According to the Center for Strategic International Studies:

Russia and Venezuela have a longstanding financial, political, and diplomatic partnership. With little regard for commercial risk, Russia continues to act as a lender of last resort, help Venezuela circumvent oil sanctions, fuel disinformation campaigns, and provide military supplies to the Maduro regime.²⁶

50 Mig-29s constitute one part of those military supplies, training and operations sponsored by the Wagner Group constitute the other. Russia’s military deal included as well a USD 450 million package of MI-17, MI-35 and MI-26 helicopters.²⁷ The Venezuelan pilots of these helicopters were presumably trained in Lithuania.



VENCEREMOS = WE SHALL PREVAIL

²⁶ Rendon, “The Fabulous Five”.

²⁷ “Venezuela Air Force - Modernization”, *Global Security*, <https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/venezuela/airforce-modernization.htm> [accessed October 30, 2024].



Figures 9 and 10. 2 street murals with the images of Hugo Chávez with Vladimir Putin and with Iran's Qasem Soleimani. Photo: Flickr

Along with Russia, there are other countries, such as Iran, which provide Venezuela with the necessary fuel to supply local demand while circumventing international sanctions. There is China, which supplies infrastructure (radars) as well as money, and buys ultra-heavy crude oil from Venezuela. Cuba has played a pivotal role in the establishment of the socialist regime, providing intelligence services and developing a network of internal espionage, extra-judicial arrests and systematic torture that guarantees any attempts to topple Maduro's government are kept at bay. 40,000 Cuban personnel have been deployed in Venezuela since Hugo Chávez became president in 1998.²⁸

However, why any of these concerns should matter to Lithuania? For a country that understands the weight of external influence and has navigated its post-Soviet path toward democracy, Venezuela's experience could serve, in part, as a cautionary tale. Fundamentally, the strategic alliance with Russia shows that the endurance of certain obscure tactics, used in the past to maintain power and suppress dissent, are still much alive in the present.

ALBA and teleSUR

The Bolivarian Alternative for Latin America and the Caribbean (in Spanish: Alianza Bolivariana para los Pueblos de Nuestra América) is one of the organizations created by Hugo Chávez with the proceeds of Venezuela's oil exports. On paper, ALBA's mission is

²⁸ Rendon, "The Fabulous Five".

the economic development of Latin and Caribbean countries. In reality, however, this organization has been used as a tool for diplomatic manoeuvring. For instance, during Russia's annexation of Crimea, ALBA's countries supported the results of the referendum and later recognised Crimea as a legitimate part of the Russian territory.

The war in Ukraine has been Putin's tool for political destabilization of the West. It draws resources from his geopolitical adversaries in Europe and America, and generates divisions and polarizations that can (and will be) exploited. A Europe in permanent fear of war cannot concentrate on more significant matters, such as detachment of its reliance on the United States for defence.²⁹ In addition to that, Europe's conflicted views on im/migration are now compounded by the mass exodus of Ukrainians fleeing the conflict. Putin's offensive is not just powered by bullets, social pressures play a part as well.

In Latin America, the mass exodus of Venezuelans has disrupted most countries in the continent, and not even the United States has managed to scape the crisis.³⁰ Moreover, who is to say a somewhat similar scenario to the one in Ukraine could not be played in South America as well, performed, this time, by a close ally of Russia? The exploitation of a 100-year-old territorial dispute with Guyana may not be too far from that scenario.³¹

Of course, we should not forget another of Chávez's organizations financed with oil money: teleSUR. An international TV channel specially created to broadcast the gospel of the Bolivarian revolution around the world. It is not unusual to watch the leaders of Cuba, China, Iran, or Russia featured there.³² Thus, Russia's narratives can still reach Latin America and other parts of the world with no restraint. teleSUR broadcasts in both Spanish and English.

The European Parliament and the "Venezuela Majority"

After Nicolás Maduro allegedly stole the election in Venezuela in July 2024, there have been numerous calls in Europe to support the Venezuelan opposition leaders and demand a safe change of government. The opposition in Venezuela, in fact, managed to gather copies of the official tallies at the majority of the polling stations in Venezuela. These documents are now publicly available.³³ On the other hand, the government's official website of

²⁹ Vinocur, Nicholas, "It Doesn't Matter if Trump or Harris Win. Europe Has Already Lost", *Politico*, October 31, 2024, <https://www.politico.eu/article/donald-trump-kamala-harris-jd-vance-tim-waltz-eu-nato-us-elections-weapons/> [accessed October 31, 2024].

³⁰ Goodman, Joshua, "Tren de Aragua Gang Started in Venezuela's Prisons and Now Spreads Fear in the US", *Associated Press*, September 25, 2024, <https://apnews.com/article/tren-de-aragua-gang-venezuela-us-a12c8fee9dc4a-0ca73769ea893e09e53> [accessed October 30, 2024].

³¹ Regina, García and Coto, Dánica, "Tensions Are Soaring Between Guyana and Venezuela Over a Territorial Dispute", *Associated Press*, December 10, 2023, <https://apnews.com/article/venezuela-guyana-essequibo-territory-dispute-maduro-referendum-d956cc4d5d2a70e3a1e762b744e397de> [accessed October 19, 2024].

³² "Iran's President Gave an Assessment of His Visit to Venezuela in an Exclusive Interview with teleSUR", *You Tube*, June 15, 2023, <https://youtu.be/A0UjWcMvCHg?si=cgJD2Ld4Oom153bg> [accessed November 1, 2024].

³³ For the results and related documents, see: <https://resultadosconvzla.com/>.

the *Consejo Nacional Electoral* (the National Electoral Council) was shut down on the day of the election, and it has not been accessible ever since.³⁴

Edmundo Gonzalez, the opposition candidate, who allegedly won the election, is now living in Spain in exile. His colleague, Maria Corina Machado, is now in hiding. Given the strong presence of both Cuban intelligence and the Wagner Group in Venezuela, the prospects of political assassination are very real.

The EU's first attempt to issue a joined declaration regarding the fraudulent election in Venezuela was vetoed by Hungary³⁵, a well-known ally of Russia within Europe. Just after the election result was disputed, EU officials were only able to issue personal declarations.

By September 19, 2024, the European Parliament finally managed to recognise Edmundo González as the legitimate president of Venezuela. The Parliament's press release reads: "The EU should do its utmost to ensure that Edmundo González Urrutia, the legitimate and democratically elected President of Venezuela, can take office on 10 January 2025."³⁶

This vote, however, has not passed without controversy. From all the votes counted, 309 were in favour, 12 were abstentions and 201 were against. The issue is not about the vote itself, but about the political affiliation of the coalitions voting. While the right voted almost unanimously in favour (309), the left voted almost unanimously against (201). This vote has set a strong precedent for how votes would come to the European Parliament. This line-up of MEPs on the right has been called "The Venezuela Majority."³⁷

Lithuanian MEPs, including Vilija Blinkevičiūtė, Virginijus Sinkevičius and Vytenis Andriukaitis, are counted in the fraction that voted against.³⁸ Why a Lithuanian democratic politician would vote in favour of an ally of Vladimir Putin can only be understood as the result of political blindness due to the difficulties in navigating the complexities of European bureaucracy.

This split in the European Parliament is more than a procedural anomaly; it is a stark reminder of how deeply entrenched ideological divides can undermine Europe's ability to act with coherence on global democratic issues. The near-automatic support for the Maduro regime by left-leaning MEPs, highlights how political ideology can blur the moral clarity required to defend democracy.

For Lithuania, a country that has fought hard for its democratic identity and knows the weight of foreign oppression, such mixed messages are troubling. The votes cast by Lithuanian MEPs against recognizing a democratically elected leader in Venezuela reflect a

³⁴ <https://www.cne.gov.ve/>.

³⁵ von der Burchard, Hans, "Hungary Blocks EU Bid for Unified Statement on Venezuela Election", *Politico*, July 31, 2024, <https://www.politico.eu/article/hungary-block-eu-statement-venezuela-election-results-foreign-policy-josep-borrell/> [accessed July 31, 2024].

³⁶ "Venezuela: MEPs Recognise Edmundo González as President", *News European Parliament*, September 19, 2024, <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20240913IPR23907/venezuela-meps-recognise-edmundo-gonzalez-as-president> [accessed September 20, 2024].

³⁷ Wax, Eddy, Griera, Max and Barigazzi, Jacopo, "Far-Right 'Venezuela Majority' Signals New Power Balance in European Parliament", *Politico*, October 28, 2024, <https://www.politico.eu/article/far-right-venezuela-european-parliament-power-imbalance-epp-legislature/> [accessed October 29, 2024].

³⁸ "Situation in Venezuela", *European Parliament*, September 19, 2024, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/PV-10-2024-09-19-VOT_EN.html [accessed September 20, 2024].

disconnect that cannot be attributed merely to bureaucratic missteps. It is a sign of deeper political blindness and polarising ideologies.

These fractures play into the hands of Russia and its allies, eroding unity and making it easier to sow division. For Lithuania and the rest of Europe, allowing democratic principles to be overshadowed by ideological skirmishes is a risk which echoes of Venezuela's path to downfall.

As a result of Venezuela's demise, around 150 Venezuelans of Lithuanian heritage have looked for refuge in Lithuania. As a community, we look at these political developments with serious concern.

What Goes Around: Gratitude and Reflection

Over thirty years ago, we dreamed of coming from “the West” as saviours of Lithuania, envisioning ourselves as guardians of a culture that had endured so much under the Soviet rule. However, little did we know, Lithuania needed no help from us. It was Lithuania, with its resilience, democratic principles, and commitment to progress, that ultimately saved us. Here, we discovered a sanctuary that rekindled the spirit of our community, offering hope and stability amidst the turmoil in Venezuela.

Lithuania's journey from Soviet repression to an example of European democracy stands as a powerful counterpoint to Venezuela's descent into authoritarianism. We need to remember the value of steadfast commitment to democratic ideals, even when faced with political and economic pressures. As the world grapples with new challenges from geopolitical adversaries like Russia and the complexities of internal European politics, the lessons learned from Lithuania's perseverance resonate more than ever.

For our modest community, Lithuania has been more than a safe harbour, it has been a testament to the importance of unity, vigilance, and the defence of liberty. In an era where ideological divides and global alliances test Europe's cohesion, the shared experiences of our communities should help to stand firm against those who seek to exploit division. In the end, Lithuania's story reminds us that the true strength of a nation lies in its people and their unwavering dedication to achieving liberty. For that, and for the second life it has given us, we are eternally thankful.

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Appendix

World Bank Group Venezuela and Lithuania indicators

- Venezuela: <https://data.worldbank.org/country/venezuela-rb?view=chart>
- Lithuania: <https://data.worldbank.org/country/lithuania?view=chart>

Gabriel ORENTAS

Venesuelos lietuvių bendruomenė

TARP DVIEJŲ PASAULIŲ: POLITIKA, VAIZDINIAI IR TAPATYBĖ LIETUVOJE IR VENESUELOJE

Santrauka. Šiame straipsnyje pateikiamos autoriaus pastabos apie skirtingas Lietuvos ir Venesuelos socialines ir politines trajektorijas nuo 1991 iki 2020 m., nagrinėjant šių kontrastų aktualumą šiuolaikiniame Europos sociopolitiniame kontekste. Išsivadavusi iš sovietų valdžios, Lietuva orientavosi į demokratiją ir ekonominę reformą, remdamasi istoriniais inovacijų ir prisitaikymo pagrindais. Venesuela, nepaisant gausių gamtos išteklių, patyrė ekonominį ir socialinį nuosmukį dėl užsitęsusių socialistinių režimų, vadovaujant Hugo Chávezui ir Nicolásui Maduro. Straipsnyje nagrinėjama ir tarptautinė įtaka (Kubos, Rusijos, Irano ir Kinijos) Venesueloje bei svarstomos galimos tokių santykių pasekmės Europos Sąjungai. Galiausiai pabrėžiama, kaip svarbu stebėti įvykius Venesueloje, kad būtų galima įvertinti kylančius pavojus dėl jos, kaip konsoliduotos Vakarų priešų platformos, vaidmens.

Raktažodžiai: Venesuela, Hugo Chávezas, Simónas Bolívaras, globalieji Pietūs, modernus socializmas, Sovietų Sąjunga, Venesuelos lietuvių bendruomenė, Iranas, Rusija, demokratija, dviguba tapatybė, gerovės valstybė, ALBA, „teleSUR“, inovacijos, paternalizmas.