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RESEARCH ARTICLE

# The Devil and Democracy in the Global South: Hugo Chávez's Transnational Populism

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**Abstract**

In this article, we argue that the speeches and policy documents from the later period of Hugo Chávez's presidency exemplify 'transnational populism', a form of populist discourse that defies the close association between populism and nationalism that frames the scholarly literatures on both populism and Chávez. We explain why Chávez's populism took this distinctive form by reference to the history of international political thought in Latin America and the political context surrounding the creation of the Alianza Bolivariana para los Pueblos de Nuestra América (Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America, ALBA). We suggest that while transnational populism may actually amplify the threat that other scholars have argued populist leaders pose to democratic institutions, it also offers an important corrective to how scholars think about the relationship between populism, democracy and international politics, suggesting that international institutions capable of restraining powerful states are essential to stabilising democracies in the Global South.

**Keywords:** Venezuela; Chavismo; populism; nationalism; regional integration

On 20 September 2006, the president of Venezuela, Hugo Chávez Frías, rose before the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) to deliver what was to become an infamous speech. He began by declaring that the podium still 'smelled of sulphur' a day after his US counterpart, George W. Bush, had given his own address. 'The Devil was here yesterday', Chávez explained, 'talking as if he owned the world'.[1] The day before, Bush had greeted delegates from the 'freely elected government of Afghanistan' and the 'democratic government of Iraq', calling the latter 'a beacon of hope for millions in the Muslim world'.[2] Chávez noted pointedly that both countries were beset by brutal warfare and rampant corruption, even as they remained under occupation by US and allied armed forces. If this is what Bush meant by

[1]United Nations General Assembly Official Records (hereafter UNGAOR), 61st session, 12th plenary meeting, 20 Sept. 2006, UN Doc. A/61/PV.12, p. 11.

[2]UNGAOR, 61st session, 10th plenary meeting, 19 Sept. 2006, UN Doc. A/61/PV.10, pp. 8–11.

'democracy', he quipped, the US president needed to re-read Aristotle. Far from beacons of hope, Iraq and Afghanistan offered only bitter reminders of the destruction that US interventions had unleashed across Asia, Africa and Latin America. 'One has to wonder', Chávez mused, 'when listening to the US President speak to those people':

> If those people could talk to him, what would they say? I am going to answer on behalf of the peoples because I know their soul well, the soul of the peoples of the South. The downtrodden peoples would say: 'Yankee imperialist, go home!' That would be the shout springing up everywhere, if the peoples of the world could speak in unison to the United States Empire.[3]

Chávez's UNGA speech nicely illustrates why he is widely considered an exemplary *populist* leader. Literally demonising his political opponent, he placed Bush at the head of a violent conspiracy to subvert democracy. He aligned himself against this conspiracy and with 'the people', taking it upon himself to articulate what he characterised as their uniform and admirable desire to be left in peace. In these respects, Chávez fitted neatly in the populist mould.

But other aspects of Chávez's speech are more difficult to square with existing accounts of populism. The conception of the 'people' that Chávez invoked at the UNGA was unusually capacious, taking in not only the people of Venezuela, but also the peoples of Cuba, Bolivia, Iraq, Afghanistan, Palestine, Russia and China. Chávez even impersonated 'the people of the United States', insisting that 'if you walk the streets of the Bronx, or through the streets of New York, Washington, San Diego, California, San Antonio, San Francisco, any city, and you ask people, … all of them want peace'.[4] Despite their wide geographic dispersal and presumably diverse perspectives on international affairs, Chávez merged these populations, conjuring for his audience a globe-spanning people unified by their shared experience of oppression.

The term Chávez chose to describe that oppression also stands out. The 'empire' he condemned at the UNGA was guilty not only of repeated, forcible violations of the norm of popular sovereignty in a series of nations across the 'Global South', but also of co-opting the UN, whose legitimacy, he implied, rested on the same norm of popular sovereignty. Countering the threat of empire required a concerted strategy, Chávez argued, organised through alternative, regional organisations and aiming, ultimately, to 'build a new and better world' by wresting control of international institutions away from 'the empire' and putting 'the people' in charge.[5]

While emphatically populist, then, Chávez's populism was distinctively *transnational*, defying the close association between populism and nationalism that frames the scholarly literatures on both Chávez and populism, and forms an important, if often implicit, assumption in critical accounts of the relationship between populism and democracy. In this article, we challenge this association, developing a concept of 'transnational populism' that captures essential features

[3]UNGAOR, 61st session, 12th plenary meeting, 20 Sept. 2006, UN Doc. A/61/PV.12, p. 12.
[4]*Ibid.*, p. 11.
[5]*Ibid.*, p. 13.

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of Chávez's discourse and allows a more nuanced assessment of both the causes and the effects of populism in the democracies of the Global South.[6] We build on the influential 'ideational' approach,[7] defining transnational populism as a form of populist discourse distinguished from nationalist populism by three features: a conception of the 'people' that extends across national borders; a commitment to global popular sovereignty as the standard for legitimate international governance; and a call to build alternative regional political institutions to address needs and pursue interests marginalised within the present international order and existing international institutions.[8]

Scholars employing the ideational approach have argued that because populism itself is a 'thin-centred' ideology, populist discourses vary because they incorporate different 'host ideologies'. But few works try to explain why populist leaders adopt the particular host ideologies that give their populist discourses their distinctive forms.[9] We address this puzzle, identifying the intellectual and institutional contexts that shaped Chávez's transnational populism.[10] We describe the historical antecedents of Chávez's outlook by reference to prominent, but non-populist, Latin American theorists of international politics, especially Simón Bolívar, José Martí and Ernesto 'Che' Guevara. We then describe the strategic concerns that motivated Chávez's transnational turn, focusing on the period following the failed coup against his government in 2002 and the rollout of his signature foreign-policy initiative, a regional political institution called the Alianza Bolivariana para los Pueblos de Nuestra América (Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America, ALBA). Generalising from the contexts that shaped Chávez's transnational populism, we consider where the necessary conditions exist to produce transnational populist discourses in other parts of the world.

Finally, we consider the implications of the specifically transnational elements of Chávez's populism for democracy. While, broadly, the scholarship inspired by the ideational approach has argued that populism can be both a 'corrective and a threat to democracy',[11] a prominent strand of the literature suggests that populist leaders,

[6]Benjamin Moffitt, 'Transnational Populism?: Representative Claims, Media and the Difficulty of Constructing a Transnational "People"', *Javnost – The Public*, 24: 4 (2017), p. 410; See also Benjamin De Cleen *et al.*, 'The Potentials and Difficulties of Transnational Populism: The Case of the Democracy in Europe Movement 2025 (DiEM25)', *Political Studies*, 68: 1 (2019), pp. 146–66.

[7]Cas Mudde, 'The Populist Zeitgeist', *Government & Opposition*, 39: 4 (2004), pp. 541–63; Kirk A. Hawkins and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, 'The Ideational Approach to Populism', *Latin American Research Review*, 52: 4 (2017), pp. 513–28.

[8]Here we employ 'transnational' in the sense that Inés Valdez has recently given the term. Transnational populism aims to confront imperialism by 'inaugurat[ing] counter-publics that mark themselves off from the dominant public and belong neither to the domestic nor the international realm, but straddle them'. See Inés Valdez, *Transnational Cosmopolitanism: Kant, Du Bois, and Justice as a Political Craft* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), p. 1.

[9]Cas Mudde and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, 'Exclusionary vs. Inclusionary Populism: Comparing Contemporary Europe and Latin America', *Government & Opposition*, 48: 2 (2013), pp. 147–74.

[10]For the use of intellectual and institutional contexts in the explanation of political ideas, see Joshua Simon, 'Institutions, Ideologies, and Comparative Political Theory', *Perspectives on Politics*, 18: 2 (2020), pp. 423–38.

[11]Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, 'The Ambivalence of Populism: Threat and Corrective for Democracy', *Democratization*, 19: 2 (2012), pp. 184–208.

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including Chávez, have transformed several Latin American democracies into 'competitive authoritarian' regimes.[12] Our analysis partially supports this assessment, but we argue that transnational populism also forces us to reconsider how we think about, and *measure*, democracy in the Global South. The constraints that the prevailing international order imposes on policy-making autonomy in the Global South and the counter-democratic effects of foreign interventions should be considered when assessing the quality of democratic institutions in countries subjected to them. Although transnational populism has proven a flawed vehicle for reforming the international order, it conveys from the international political theories that inspired it an insight relevant to both empirical and normative research agendas concerning populism and its effects: the quality of democratic institutions and the stability of the rule of law *within* states depends critically on the existence of institutions that ensure the observance of these same ideals in relations *between* states. To strengthen democracy in the Global South, the world needs institutions that can restrain the devils of the Global North.

## Chávez, Populism and Nationalism

From the moment he took office in 1999, Chávez captivated global observers, drawing paeans and lamentations from commentators on every continent. He also attracted attention from social scientists, prompting debates that remained vital even after Chávez himself succumbed to cancer in 2013. Chávez's ascent outside the traditional corridors of power in Venezuela forced scholars to account for the collapse of Latin America's longest-standing party system,[13] and stimulated interest in the long-neglected political activities of poor urban communities, whose support helped raise Chávez to the presidency.[14] Another large literature considers the unusual and, at times, extra-legal procedures that Chávez employed to enact policy over the resistance of entrenched opponents.[15] Though some scholars argue that Chávez oversaw a deepening of Venezuela's democracy, improving

[12]Steven Levitsky and James Loxton, 'Populism and Competitive Authoritarianism in the Andes', *Democratization*, 20: 1 (2013), pp. 107–36.

[13]Kenneth M. Roberts, 'Social Correlates of Party System Demise and Populist Resurgence in Venezuela', *Latin American Politics and Society*, 45: 3 (2003), pp. 5–57; Jana Morgan, *Bankrupt Representation and Party System Collapse* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2011); Jason Seawright, *Party System Collapse: The Roots of Crisis in Peru and Venezuela* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012); Steve Ellner, *Rethinking Venezuelan Politics: Class, Conflict, and the Chávez Phenomenon* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2008).

[14]George Ciccariello-Maher, *We Created Chávez: A People's History of the Venezuelan Revolution* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013); Alejandro Velasco, *Barrio Rising: Urban Popular Politics and the Making of Modern Venezuela* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2015).

[15]Mario J. Garcia-Serra, 'The "Enabling Law": The Demise of the Separation of Powers in Hugo Chávez's Venezuela', *Inter-American Law Review*, 32: 2 (2001), pp. 265–93; Kent Eaton, 'The Centralism of "Twenty-First-Century Socialism": Recentralizing Politics in Venezuela, Ecuador and Bolivia', *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 45: 3 (2013), pp. 421–50; Matthew M. Taylor, 'The Limits of Judicial Independence: A Model with Illustration from Venezuela under Chávez', *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 46: 2 (2014), pp. 229–59; Joshua Braver, 'Hannah Arendt in Venezuela: The Supreme Court Battles Hugo Chávez over the Creation of the 1999 Constitution', *International Journal of Constitutional Law*, 14: 3 (2016), pp. 555–83; Allan R. Brewer-Carías, *La demolición de la autonomía e independencia del poder judicial en Venezuela (1999–2021)* (Caracas: Editorial Jurídica Venezolana, 2021).

the representation of marginalised constituencies,[16] others claim his administration created a 'hybrid regime' with both democratic and authoritarian characteristics.[17] Others still suggest that these assessments are not mutually exclusive, arguing that Chávez was innovative in both his efforts to foster participatory democracy and to defy institutional constraints on his authority.[18]

Despite their disagreements, however, scholars have generally concurred in describing Chávez as a populist leader. Indeed, Chávez's rise significantly influenced how scholars think about populism itself, inaugurating what some described as a new era of Latin American populism.[19] Because Chávez's time in office coincided with a wave of plain-spoken racist and nativist politicians across Europe and the United States,[20] scholars struggled to find a definition of populism that would fit these distinctive cases. Chávez is a central reference for scholars who define populism, variously, as a political 'strategy', a 'style' of political action, or a 'thin-centred ideology', as we do here.[21] Chávez's rhetoric and policies also inform the distinctions scholars have drawn between 'inclusionary' and 'exclusionary' varieties of populism, and efforts to explain why these varieties appear in different regions, a question that we pursue in this article.[22]

There is much to be learned from these literatures, but they are framed by a problematic assumption that has, thus far, resisted scholars' efforts to add nuance

[16]Gregory Wilpert, 'Venezuela's Experiment in Participatory Democracy', in Jonathan Eastwood and Thomas Ponniah (eds.), *The Revolution in Venezuela: Social and Political Change under Chávez* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), pp. 99–130; George Ciccariello-Maher, 'Venezuela between Two States', in Tulia G. Falleti and Emilio A. Parrado (eds.), *Latin America since the Left Turn* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018), pp. 113–37.

[17]Javier Corrales and Michael Penfold, *Dragon in the Tropics: Hugo Chávez and the Political Economy of Revolution in Venezuela* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2011); Scott Mainwaring, 'From Representative Democracy to Participatory Competitive Authoritarianism: Hugo Chávez and Venezuelan Politics', *Perspectives on Politics*, 10: 4 (2012), pp. 955–67; Levitsky and Loxton, 'Populism and Competitive Authoritarianism'.

[18]David Smilde and Daniel Hellinger (eds.), *Venezuela's Bolivarian Democracy: Participation, Politics, and Culture under Chávez* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011); Margarita López Maya, *Democracia para Venezuela: ¿Representiva, Participativa o Populista?* (Caracas: Editorial Alfa, 2021).

[19]Steve Ellner, 'The Contrasting Variants of the Populism of Hugo Chávez and Alberto Fujimori', *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 35: 1 (2003), pp. 139–62; Felipe Burbano de Lara, 'Populist Waves in Latin America: Continuities, Twists, and Ruptures', in Carlos de la Torre (ed.), *The Routledge Handbook of Global Populism* (London: Routledge, 2019), pp. 435–50.

[20]See Cas Mudde, *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Theda Skocpol and Vanessa Williamson, *The Tea Party and the Remaking of Republican Conservatism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

[21]Mudde, 'The Populist Zeitgeist'; Carlos de la Torre, *Populist Seduction in Latin America* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2010); Kirk A. Hawkins, *Venezuela's Chavismo and Populism in Comparative Perspective* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Benjamin Moffitt, *The Global Rise of Populism: Performance, Political Style, and Representation* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2016); Kurt Weyland, 'Populism: A Political-Strategic Approach', in Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser *et al.* (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Populism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 48–71; Diego von Vacano, 'American *Caudillo*: Princely Performative Populism and Democracy in the Americas', *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, 45: 4 (2019), pp. 413–28.

[22]Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 'Exclusionary vs. Inclusionary Populism'; Dani Filc, 'Latin American Inclusive and European Exclusionary Populism: Colonialism as an Explanation', *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 20: 3 (2015), pp. 263–83.

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to their treatments of populism and its instances: the close association of populism, generally, and of Chavismo, specifically, with *nationalism*.[23] As Bertjan Verbeek and Andrej Zaslove point out, the literature on populism fails to distinguish clearly between the idea of the 'nation' that defines nationalism and the idea of the 'people' that defines populism, suggesting without showing that populism's call for the empowerment of the people must refer to a nation.[24] In recent work, Benjamin De Cleen and Yannis Stavrakakis develop a compelling theoretical framework that distinguishes populism from nationalism and opens the way for empirical work on forms of populism that are not nationalist.[25] But both scholarly and popular commentators still frequently assume that opposition to international laws, international agreements and international institutions is an integral aspect of populist ideologies. And this assumption colours critical evaluations of populism's effects on democracy.[26]

The underlying conceptual problem is that in these literatures, 'internationalism' means support for a particular set of regional and international institutions, which were created in the mid-twentieth century in order to insulate free markets and property rights against interference from state-led development programmes and redistribution.[27] Populist opposition to these particular institutions becomes 'nationalist' by implication, even when the populists in question do not aim to reclaim sovereignty for their nation-states. Here, as elsewhere, Chávez is an exemplary case. Scholars describe Chávez's foreign policy as 'nationalist' even when they are referring to his efforts to construct and empower alternative regional political institutions or to reform and fortify existing international institutions.[28] Our point is not that none of Chávez's rhetoric or policies were nationalist. On the contrary, we will show below that nationalist themes were predominant in Chávez's early speeches and writings, and present throughout his career. Rather, we argue that identifying populism with nationalism has prevented scholars from adequately describing, explaining and assessing the transnational elements that distinguished Chávez's later discourse and foreign policy.[29]

[23]Fernando López-Alves and Diane E. Johnson (eds.), *Populist Nationalism in Europe and the Americas* (New York: Routledge, 2019); Rogers Brubaker, 'Populism and Nationalism', *Nations and Nationalism*, 26: 1 (2020), pp. 44–66.

[24]Bertjan Verbeek and Andrej Zaslove, 'Populism and Foreign Policy', in Rovira Kaltwasser *et al.* (eds.), *Handbook of Populism*, pp. 384–405.

[25]Benjamin De Cleen and Yannis Stavrakakis, 'Distinctions and Articulations: A Discourse-Theoretical Framework for the Study of Populism and Nationalism', *Javnost – The Public*, 24: 4 (2017), pp. 301–19; Benjamin De Cleen, 'Populism and Nationalism', in Rovira Kaltwasser *et al.* (eds.), *Handbook of Populism*, pp. 342–62.

[26]Eric Posner, 'Liberal Internationalism and the Populist Backlash', *University of Chicago Public Law and Legal Theory Paper Series*, No. 606 (2017); Rogers Brubaker, 'Why Populism?', *Theory and Society*, 46: 5 (2017), pp. 357–85; Dani Rodrik, 'Populism and the Economics of Globalization', *Journal of International Business Policy*, 1: 1 (2018), pp. 12–33.

[27]Quinn Slobodian, *Globalists: The End of Empire and the Birth of Neoliberalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018).

[28]See, for example, Corrales and Penfold, *Dragon in the Tropics*, p. 102; Kenneth M. Roberts, 'Populism and Democracy in Venezuela under Hugo Chávez', in Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (eds.), *Populism in Europe and the Americas*, p. 140.

[29]Even Steven Levitsky and Kenneth M. Roberts' otherwise nuanced discussion of 'left-wing populism', which usefully distinguishes Chávez from other populist and other left-wing leaders, makes no reference at

By contrast, the literature on contemporary Latin American regionalism shows that, while Chávez frequently criticised the regional and international institutions, from the proposed Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA, or ALCA in Spanish) to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, that pressed Latin American states to deregulate trade and foreign investment, diminish government spending, and dismantle state-run development initiatives, he did not reject regionalism or internationalism. Rather, Chávez led a turn to 'post-neoliberal' or 'post-hegemonic' regionalism, forging new trade agreements and constructing alternative regional institutions designed to mitigate the United States' political and economic influence in Latin America, while at the same time implementing '*gran-nacional*' or 'supra-national' programmes related to economic development, the environment, public health, social welfare, education, and scientific research.[30]

Most of the scholars contributing to this literature acknowledge that post-hegemonic regionalism has, to date, largely failed to improve Latin American governments' autonomy in setting economic-policy priorities, and many concede that the main effect of some specific initiatives championed by the Chávez administration was to expand Chávez's personal influence across the region.[31] Nonetheless, the literature on post-hegemonic regionalism clearly illustrates the error involved in describing Chávez's foreign policy as invariably 'nationalist'. In this sense, Chávez exemplified what we shall call *transnational populism*.

## Transnational Populism

The influential 'ideational' approach to populism defines populism as a 'thin-centred' ideology that characterises politics as a Manichean struggle between a virtuous 'people' and a vicious elite and insists that only those policies and institutions that embody or reflect the will of the people are legitimate.[32] The proponents of this approach argue that its primary advantage is its 'minimalism'. Because the ideational approach reduces populism to just two definitive features, it can capture and assess the effects of the wide variety of populist discourses without negating their internal differences. However, as we have seen, the scholarly literature has

all to his international politics. See 'Latin America's "Left Turn": A Framework for Analysis', in Steven Levitsky and Kenneth M. Roberts (eds.), *The Resurgence of the Latin American Left* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011), pp. 6–7, 14–15.

[30]Diana Tussie, 'Latin America: Contrasting Motivations for Regional Projects', *Review of International Studies*, 35: 1 (2009), pp. 169–88; Thomas Muhr, 'Counter-Hegemonic Regionalism and Higher Education for All: Venezuela and the ALBA', *Globalisation, Societies, and Education*, 8: 1 (2010), pp. 39–57; José Antonio Sanahuja, 'La construcción de una región: Sudamérica y el regionalismo postliberal', in Manuel Cienfuegos and José Antonio Sanahuja (eds.), *Una región en construcción: UNASUR y la integración en América del Sur* (Barcelona: Fundación CIDOB, 2010), pp. 87–134; Pía Riggirozzi and Diana Tussie (eds.), *The Rise of Post-Hegemonic Regionalism: The Case of Latin America* (New York: Springer, 2012); Mark Petersen and Carsten-Andreas Schulz, 'Setting the Regional Agenda: A Critique of Posthegemonic Regionalism', *Latin American Politics and Society*, 60: 1 (2018), pp. 102–27; Asa K. Cusack, *Venezuela, ALBA, and the Limits of Postneoliberal Regionalism in Latin America and the Caribbean* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).

[31]Cusack, *Venezuela, ALBA, and the Limits of Postneoliberal Regionalism*.

[32]Mudde, 'The Populist Zeitgeist'; Hawkins and Rovira Kaltwasser, 'The Ideational Approach to Populism'.

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often identified populism with nationalism and, as a result, mischaracterised both the nature and the effects of some discourses that meet the criteria for populism but that are not nationalist. Chávez's *transnational* populist discourse differed in three important respects from the implicitly nationalist conception of populism that dominates the scholarly literature.

First, like all populisms, transnational populism depicts politics as an eternal struggle between a virtuous 'people' and a vicious 'elite', but the people invoked by transnational populism merges populations spread around the world, rather than the inhabitants of a single nation-state. As noted above, at the UNGA in 2006, Chávez not only claimed to speak on behalf of the populations of multiple nation-states, but actually invoked several aggregates that these populations comprised, including '*nuestra América*', the 'Third World' and the 'Global South'.[33]

Second, like all populisms, transnational populism denounces the oppression visited upon the people by the elite. However, while it is typical for populist leaders to denounce cabals of foreign and domestic actors bent upon abusing their constituents, the vice they characteristically allege and propose to eradicate is *corruption*: the use of public resources and public authority for private profit and private interests. By contrast, the specific charge levelled by transnational populism is *imperialism*: the exploitation of military superiority, economic dependence or institutional advantages by some countries to constrain or direct policy-making in other countries. Thus, while nationalist populism condemns departures from popular sovereignty in domestic affairs, transnational populism demands that global popular sovereignty be recognised as the standard for legitimate international governance.

At the UNGA, Chávez used the term 'imperialism' to describe the military occupations that the United States undertook in Iraq and Afghanistan, the economic sanctions that the United States imposed upon Cuba and Iran, and the support that the United States provided to opposition parties in Chávez's own Venezuela, amongst other countries. All of these policies allowed a wealthy and powerful country of the Global North to interfere in the domestic policy-making of the poorer and less powerful countries of the Global South. So long, Chávez argued, as the United States held its economic and military might, 'like the sword of Damocles', over the heads of peoples whose aspirations to rule themselves did not advance the interests of the empire, democracy amongst the world's 'downtrodden' would remain a 'false democracy of elites'. To achieve 'true' democracy in the Global South, 'imperialism' must be abolished.[34]

Thus, third, like all populisms, transnational populism denies legitimacy to political institutions that actively frustrate or simply fail to pursue the unified and shared interests of 'the people'. But transnational populism seeks to enact popular sovereignty on a global scale by constructing, reforming and empowering alternative regional and international institutions rather than demanding the reversion of sovereignty to nation-states. At the UNGA, Chávez asserted that 'the United Nations system that emerged after the Second World War has collapsed, shattered, it does not work anymore'. But he made it clear that, in his view, the problem was that international institutions like the UN had too little, not too much, authority.

[33]UNGAOR, 61st session, 12th plenary meeting, 20 Sept. 2006, UN Doc. A/61/PV.12, p. 12.
[34]*Ibid.*, p. 11.

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The UNGA, he argued, had 'been turned into a deliberative body, with no power to exert the slightest impact on the terrible reality the world is experiencing'. Implementation of UNGA resolutions was precluded, specifically, by the 'anti-democratic veto mechanism, the veto power on decisions of the Security Council', which permitted the world's 'imperialist' governments to refuse to recognise resolutions condemning their impositions on the democracies of the Global South. Chávez demanded the abolition of the veto power and called for an expansion of the Security Council's permanent membership to give greater representation to 'the Third World'. He also called for strengthening the 'role and functions' of the UN Secretary General, an executive office appointed by the UNGA.[35]

Recognising that powerful states would not voluntarily accede to demands for reforms that diminished their influence, transnational populism aims to change international politics by constructing and empowering alternative regional institutions. At the UNGA, Chávez praised the Mercado Común del Sur (Southern Common Market, MERCOSUR) and the Caribbean Community and Common Market (CARICOM) – trade organisations in South America and the Caribbean, respectively – as well as the Unión de Naciones Suramericanas (Union of South American Nations, UNASUR), the League of Arab States, and the African Union – supra-national political organisations whose member states were once ruled by European empires. He suggested that these regional organisations had a critical, intermediary role to play in international politics, organising resistance to 'imperialist' incursions that the UN, as configured, could not effectively curtail. He promised the leaders of these organisations that if Venezuela were elevated to Security Council membership, its delegates would speak there 'not only with the voice of Venezuela, but also the voice of the Third World, the voice of the peoples of the Planet'.[36]

As this last quote illustrates, while transnational populism and nationalist populism can be usefully distinguished as ideal types of populist discourse, Chávez employed and blended both forms. Transnational populism does not demand that sovereign authority be returned to the nation-state from regional or international institutions, as nationalist populism does, nor does it seek the abolition of the nation-state in favour of regional and international institutions. Rather, transnational populism proposes to create and reform regional and international institutions in order to secure the nation-states of the Global South against the asymmetric vulnerability to external intervention they face within an 'imperial' international order.[37]

When we recognise that populism *can* vary from more nationalist to more transnational forms, the question that arises is why some populist discourses are more transnational than others. The ideational approach that we have built on here suggests a partial answer: populism is a 'thin-centred' ideology that never appears in

[35] *Ibid.*, p. 12.

[36] *Ibid.*, pp. 12–14.

[37] In this sense, and for historical reasons that we elaborate below, transnational populism incorporates elements of what Adom Getachew has described as anti-colonial 'worldmaking'. Like theorists of African unity earlier in the century, Chávez sought to 'institutionalize the international conditions of [national] self-government'. See Adom Getachew, *Worldmaking after Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self-Determination* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019), quotation p. 28.

pure form. Real-world instances of populism are always 'thickened' by their attachment to a 'host ideology', like socialism or white supremacism.[38] Different host ideologies give populisms their different forms. Scholars have suggested that different host ideologies might account for the relatively 'exclusionary' or 'inclusionary' forms of populist discourses that prevail in Europe and Latin America, respectively, which differ according to whether they demand the exclusion of particular groups from material, political and symbolic advantages that they presently enjoy or the extension of those advantages to groups who are presently excluded.[39] But these explanations only prompt a further question: why are the populist discourses that arise in these regions attached to different host ideologies?

We can gain some traction on this question by returning to a theory of populism that influenced the ideational approach.[40] Ernesto Laclau argued that to understand populism, one must not approach it as the 'ideology or type of mobilization of an already constituted group'. This was the stumbling block that caught many Marxists and modernisation theorists when they sought to explain the populist wave that swept Latin America in the mid-twentieth century. Populism cannot be dismissed as a deviant alliance between classes destined to struggle against one another, or as the spasmodic recoil of traditional social sectors from dislocations occasioned by industrialisation. Rather, populism represents 'one way of constituting the very unity' of a group that has no existence prior to or outside the populist movement. Forging 'chains of equivalence' between the unsatisfied 'demands' of differently situated individuals, populist ideologies convert a 'feeling of vague solidarity' into 'a stable system of signification' that separates allies from opponents and maps a line of march. Populism, when it is effective, transforms a disaffected but atomised population into a 'people', united in pursuit of its collective interests.[41]

In his early work, Laclau emphasised the important role that 'popular traditions' played in this alchemical process. The Marxist theories that Laclau revised described societies riven by a series of distinct class conflicts, each particular to the historical mode of production in which it appears. By contrast, Laclau argued, popular traditions describe politics as a *continuous* struggle between *eternal* enemies: the people and their oppressors. These popular traditions are the ready-made discursive 'elements' out of which populist discourses are constructed. Though fungible, he insisted, popular traditions are 'far from being arbitrary' and 'cannot be modified at will. They are the residue of a unique and irreducible historical experience and, as such, constitute a more solid and durable structure of meanings than the social structure itself.'[42]

Laclau's account suggests a hypothesis concerning the causes of variation amongst populist discourses. To be effective, populist discourses cannot be constructed *ex nihilo*, but rather must be assembled from existing popular traditions – ready-made discursive resources that make populist discourses intelligible and

[38]Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 'Populism and (Liberal) Democracy', p. 9.

[39]Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 'Exclusionary vs. Inclusionary Populism'.

[40]For Laclau's influence on the ideational approach, see Hawkins and Rovira Kaltwasser, 'The Ideational Approach', p. 516.

[41]Ernesto Laclau, *On Populist Reason* (London: Verso, 2005), pp. 72–4.

[42]Ernesto Laclau, *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory: Capitalism, Fascism, Populism* (London: Verso, 1977), pp. 166–8.

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compelling to their intended audiences. Thus, the popular traditions present within different settings limit the forms of populist discourses that can emerge and mobilise constituencies in those settings. The variation of popular traditions across regions and periods of time may account for why some populisms are 'inclusionary' while others are 'exclusionary', or, more pertinently for the present study, why some populisms are 'nationalist' while others are 'transnational'.

Here, we argue that the existence of popular traditions susceptible to incorporation within a transnational populist discourse is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for the emergence of that form of populist discourse. Even where such popular traditions are available, populist leaders will only avail themselves of them when they believe that transnational populism will help them achieve their policy goals, prolong their time in office, or fulfil some other aspiration. Thus, we should only expect to observe transnational populism in settings where adequate discursive resources are present *and* the political context makes transnational populism strategically attractive. Below, in order to explain the emergence and mobilisational efficacy of Chávez's transnational populism, we will first reconstruct the popular traditions present in the region that furnished the distinctive elements of transnational populism, and then describe the political circumstances that led Chávez to assemble those traditions into a transnational populist discourse.[43]

## Historical Antecedents

In his speeches, writings and interviews, Chávez regularly invoked a series of towering figures from Latin American history. The most prominent by far was Simón Bolívar, a leader of Venezuela's independence movement, for whom Chávez named his political movement (the 'Bolivarian Revolution'), his signature foreign-policy initiative (the 'Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America'), and even the state over which he presided (the 'Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela'). Chávez also praised Bolívar's tutor Simón Rodríguez, Bolívar's collaborator José Antonio de Sucre, and Ezequiel Zamora, a hero of Venezuela's later nineteenth-century Federal War. But even more frequently than these local heroes, Chávez invoked José Martí, a leader of Cuba's independence movement and an innovative writer of poetry and prose, and Fidel Castro and Che Guevara, icons of the Cuban Revolution.

Scholars who study these figures and their ideas have sometimes dismissed Chávez's references to them as historically illiterate,[44] and it is true that Chávez took significant licence in recounting their deeds and commitments. Most objectionable, from a historical standpoint, is the way that Chávez forced figures from very distinctive periods and places into a Procrustean narrative tailored to his own political purposes. In Chávez's speeches, Bolívar, Martí and Guevara are made to fight side-by-side against the forces that threatened Chávez's own regime.

[43]In describing the discursive resources that Chávez utilised in his transnational populism as 'popular' traditions, we do not mean to deny that 'elite' intellectuals shaped Chávez's thinking and strategic decision-making. See Maristella Svampa, *Debates Latinoamericanos: Indianismo, desarrollo, dependencia y populismo* (Buenos Aires: Edhasa, 2016), pp. 463–6.

[44]See, for example, John Lynch, *Simón Bolívar: A Life* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006), p. 304.

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In the Chavista graffiti that covers Caracas' walls, the three men's portraits often appear literally side-by-side, or in odd amalgamations where, for example, Bolívar dons Guevara's signature silver-starred beret. Here, the particularities of each figure fade away as they unite to recommend adherence to the people's – and Chávez's – cause.

The continuity of this struggle is, of course, only apparent, but it is not an illusion created by Chávez out of whole cloth. Rather, Bolívar, Martí and Guevara were already, prior to Chávez's rise, lead actors in a regional popular tradition that connected their distinct projects. As Laclau suggested, it is precisely the apparent continuity of the struggle that makes this popular tradition such an effective element of Chávez's transnational populism. To explain the transnational form of Chávez's populism, we return to the historical periods in which Bolívar, Martí and Guevara lived and worked, finding the antecedents of transnational populism's distinctive features: the border-transcending conception of 'the people'; the description of departures from international popular sovereignty as 'imperialism'; and the emphasis on regional integration as a means of constraining imperialism and achieving global popular sovereignty.

As soon as Spanish Americans began making plans to free their colonies from Spanish imperial rule, they began making plans to unite their region under a common government.[45] In this period, regional unity served two distinct purposes. First, by organising a shared diplomatic and military struggle against Spain, proponents of regional unity believed they would hasten the end of the war and international recognition of the new Spanish American republics' independence. After independence had been won, a united continent would more effectively fend off foreign incursions and achieve greater commercial autonomy.[46] Second, regional unity would help preserve peace amongst the former colonies, allowing them to avoid a pattern well-illustrated in European history, where the pressures of continuous inter-state conflict doomed experiments in self-rule. Supra-national political institutions capable of mediating disputes amongst member states would give the New World's republics the stability that their Old-World predecessors sought in vain.[47] This distinction between the Americas and Europe, the New and the Old World, prefigures the distinction between 'the people' and 'the empire' that characterises transnational populism. However, in place of the latter's moralised categories, independence-era theorists emphasised the geo-strategic and institutional differences that set Spanish Americans and Europeans at odds.

[45]See, for example, Juan Pablo Viscardo's 1792 'carta dirigida a los españoles americanos', which ends, 'In this way the inhabitants of America will draw the ends of the continent together and, united by a common interest, form a single, GREAT FAMILY OF BROTHERS.' Antonio Gutiérrez Escudero, 'Juan Pablo Viscardo y su "carta dirigida a los españoles americanos"', *Revista Iberoamericana de Filosofía, Política y Humanidades*, 9: 17 (2007), pp. 323–44, quotation p. 343 (emphasis in the original).

[46]Joshua Simon, 'The Americas' More Perfect Unions: New Institutional Insights from Comparative Political Theory', *Perspectives on Politics*, 12: 4 (2014), pp. 808–28.

[47]Arthur P. Whitaker, *The Western Hemisphere Idea: Its Rise and Decline* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1954); Germán A. de la Reza, *La invención de la paz: De la República Cristiana del Duque de Sully a la Sociedad de Naciones de Simón Bolívar* (Mexico City: Siglo XXI, 2009); Tom Long and Carsten-Andreas Schulz, 'Republican Internationalism: The Nineteenth-Century Roots of Latin American Contributions to International Order', *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 35: 5 (2022), pp. 639–61.

Bolívar was the most prominent expositor of this theory of international politics in Spanish America. From his position at the head of the continent's most effective armed force, he pursued a series of successively larger projects of political integration.[48] Between 1816 and 1822, Bolívar liberated and unified the former Spanish Viceroyalty of New Granada (comprising present-day Venezuela, Colombia, Panama and Ecuador), creating a federal union known to historians as 'Gran' or 'Greater' Colombia.[49] Then, between 1822 and 1826, Bolívar liberated the territories of present-day Peru and Bolivia, writing a constitution for the latter which he hoped to apply to an even greater entity referred to by historians as the 'Federation of the Andes'.[50] But Bolívar's grandest project was to invite all of the Spanish American republics to send delegates to an 'Amphictyonic' congress convened in Panama in 1826.[51] In the short term, Bolívar hoped to coordinate military action against Spain's last American redoubts, but his invitation also offered a longer-term vision of the Panama Congress as a permanent diplomatic forum where member states would draft a common 'public law' to regulate their interactions, peacefully settle differences and organise collective responses to both external threats and internal rebellions. He drew a close connection between the peaceful international politics that the Panama Congress would structure and the stability of democratic government in Spanish America. Institutionalised relations between the new republics would serve as a 'foundation', as he put it, 'upon which these governments can endure into eternity, if such a thing is possible'.[52]

The delegates at the Panama Congress drafted a 'Treaty of Perpetual Union, League and Confederation', but only Colombia's legislature ratified the document. Critics elsewhere depicted Bolívar's integrationist efforts as dangerous and self-aggrandising,[53] and Gran Colombia fell to separatist forces shortly afterward, joining failed unionist projects in the Río de la Plata and Central America.[54] Bolívar died disillusioned but won a permanent place at the head of a pantheon of Latin American leaders who viewed regional integration as the key to maintaining independence and stabilising democratic institutions. Like a tragic hero from the ancient world, Bolívar anchors the popular tradition Chávez drew upon in constructing his own transnational populism.

[48]Joshua Simon, *The Ideology of Creole Revolution: Imperialism and Independence in American and Latin American Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp. 89–127.

[49]Germán Carrera Damas, *Colombia, 1821–1827: Aprender a edificar una república moderna liberal* (Caracas: Universidad Central de Venezuela, 2010); Daniel Gutiérrez Ardila, *El reconocimiento de Colombia: Diplomacia y propaganda en la coyuntura de las restauraciones, 1819–1831* (Bogotá: Universidad Externado de Colombia, 2012).

[50]Simon Collier, 'Nationality, Nationalism, and Supranationalism in the Writings of Simón Bolívar', *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 63: 1 (1983), pp. 55–7.

[51]Germán A. de la Reza, *El Congreso de Panamá de 1826 y otros ensayos de integración latinoamericana en el siglo XIX: Estudio y fuentes documentales anotadas* (Mexico City: Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, 2006).

[52]Simón Bolívar, 'Invitación del Libertador […] al Congreso de Panamá', in Germán A. de la Reza (ed.), *Documentos sobre el Congreso anfictiónico de Panamá* (Caracas: Biblioteca Ayacucho, 2010), p. 40.

[53]Daniel Gutiérrez Ardila, 'The Chilean Republic in the Face of Bolívar's Expansionism (1823–1828)', *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, 36: 3 (2016), pp. 313–25.

[54]Germán A. de la Reza, 'De las autonomías a la pluralidad de las repúblicas: ¿Destino ineluctable?, *Política y Cultura*, 33 (Jan. 2010), pp. 9–34.

In Bolívar's time, the primary threats to Latin American independence were European, but this changed as industrialisation increased the United States' military capacities and interest in overseas markets. The contemporaneous rise of the racial 'sciences' introduced new divisions into the hemisphere, leading many US Americans to identify more closely with the 'Anglo-Saxon' nations of northern Europe than with the 'Latin' inhabitants of Spanish America.[55] Both factors contributed to a shift in inter-American relations, as the United States adopted a more aggressively interventionist foreign policy and theorists of international politics in Latin America grew wary of their neighbour's intentions. When, in the last decade of the nineteenth century, US politicians and business leaders sought to increase their influence in, and exports to, Latin America by creating a 'Pan-American' diplomatic and commercial organisation, the Cuban intellectual and political leader Martí warned readers in what he called '*nuestra América*', or 'our America', meaning Latin America, not to fall into the trap being laid by 'the other America', meaning the United States. He argued, in particular, that closer relations with the United States would not support Latin America's independence or increase its prosperity, but exacerbate the region's exposure to foreign intervention and deepen its economic woes.[56]

Martí's distinction between 'our America' and 'the other America' modified the Old World / New World distinction that characterised independence-era international political thought, introducing a characterisation of global politics closer to the one we find in Chávez's transnational populism. But Martí's framing was not the populist's eternal, moralised struggle. Rather, he located the origins of the Americas' divisions in their different experiences under British and Spanish imperial rule and the distinct trajectories they had traced after independence. While many of his contemporaries despaired of their region's prospects and denounced what they perceived to be its cultural and racial deficiencies, Martí argued that the problem lay not in Latin America's diversity but in its political disunity. 'The pressing need of our America', he wrote, 'is to show itself as it is, one in spirit and intent'. Latin American unity would not only force the United States to 'remove its hands out of respect', but also provide a framework within which Latin Americans could stabilise their democratic political systems and achieve consistent economic development, making more equal relations with the United States possible in the future.[57]

[55]Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981); Joshua Simon, 'From the American System to the Anglo-Saxon Union: Scientific Racism and Supra-Nationalism in Nineteenth-Century North America', in Andrew J. Arato, Jean L. Cohen and Astrid von Busekist (eds.), *Forms of Pluralism and Democratic Constitutionalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), pp. 72–94.

[56]José Martí, 'Conferencia Internacional Americana', in José Martí, *Obras Completas*, vol. 6 (Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1991), pp. 54–70. For Martí's evolving views of the United States and of the advantages of trade with the United States for Latin America, see also Isabel Monal, 'José Martí: Del liberalismo al democratismo antiimperialista', *Casa de las Américas*, 13: 76 (1973), pp. 24–41. For the motivations behind the Pan-American Congress, see David Healy, *James G. Blaine and Latin America* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2001), pp. 138–59.

[57]José Martí, 'Nuestra América', in Martí, *Obras Completas*, vol. 6, pp. 21–2. See also Joshua Simon, 'Overcoming the Other America: José Martí's Immanent Critique of the Unionist Paradigm', *Review of Politics*, 84: 1 (2022), pp. 55–79.

Martí's bid for Latin American unity was no more successful than Bolívar's, but his writings shaped a popular tradition in which Latin Americans share a unified identity, grounded in their common exposure to the threat of US imperialism. As Martí put it, in a phrase that would become a favourite reference of his admirers: 'our enemy is following his plan: to inflame us, disperse us, divide us, drown us. Thus, we follow another plan: rising to our full height, tightening our bonds, overcoming, creating at last our free homeland. A plan against their plan.'[58] In this way, Martí reinforced Bolívar's conviction that regional integration was essential to resisting the empires – now not only European, but also US – that threatened Latin America's independence, peace and prosperity, and he added a novel element, rejecting an integrationist project that, in his analysis, would only facilitate the advance of US imperialism and proposing an alternative and exclusively 'our American' project of regional unification as a strategy of resistance.

This project underwent further modification in the context of the Cold War, as Latin American theorists responded to two developments outside the Americas. The first was the Russian Revolution, and particularly Vladimir Lenin's influential account of the connection between advanced capitalism and imperialism. At the Second Congress of the Communist International, in 1920, Lenin described a 'whole world divided into a large number of oppressed nations and a very small number of oppressor nations', and called for closer collaboration between proletarian revolutionaries struggling against capitalism and the nationalist liberation struggles unfolding in 'colonial and dependent countries', envisioning the eventual construction of a global federation of communist states, for which the USSR was to serve as a model.[59] Initially enthusiastic about this prospect, over time the leaders of movements against European imperial rule in Asia and Africa became disillusioned with Soviet leadership. When delegates from both regions convened in Bandung, Indonesia in 1955 to consider 'problems of common interest and concern to countries of Asia and Africa' and to discuss 'means by which their people could achieve fuller economic, cultural, and political co-operation', their unanimous 'Final Communiqué' condemned 'colonialism in all its manifestations', capitalist and socialist, Soviet and Western.[60] The Bandung Conference set the stage for meetings of the 'Non-Aligned Movement', beginning in 1961, and the 'Group of 77' developing nations, beginning in 1964, both of which drew significant delegations from Latin America.[61] The contours of what became known as the 'Third World' were further defined at the 'Solidarity Conference of the Peoples of Africa, Asia and Latin America', also known as the 'Tricontinental Congress', which met in Havana in 1966. At the conference's closing session, Fidel Castro took note of the great diversity of 'philosophical ideas', represented there, but he insisted that the participants 'have something in common. What the peoples have most in common; what unites the people of three continents and of all the world today is the struggle against imperialism.'[62]

[58]José Martí 'Adelante, juntos', in Martí, *Obras Completas*, vol. 2, p. 15.

[59]Vladimir I. Lenin, 'Draft Theses on National and Colonial Questions', in Vladimir I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, vol. 31 (Moscow: Progress, 1965), pp. 144–51.

[60]Final Communiqué of the Asian-African Conference of Bandung (24 April 1955).

[61]Vijay Prashad, *The Darker Nations: A People's History of the Third World* (New York: New Press, 2007).

[62]Fidel Castro, 'Speech at the Tricontinental Congress', 1966.

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Here Castro echoed the analysis of his collaborator, Guevara, who delivered a lengthy discourse against imperialism in all its many forms in 1964, from the same podium at the UNGA that Chávez used to deliver the speech described at the outset of this article. Guevara ridiculed the United States' attempts to clothe its global interventions in the language of 'free institutions' and 'peaceful coexistence'. Throughout the world, he said, 'imperialism attempts to impose its version of what coexistence should be', undertaking unilateral actions that undermined the possibility of 'true coexistence' – a world order in which the sovereign rights of nations were limited only by multilateral agreements that bound 'all states, regardless of size', and 'regardless of the previous historical relations that linked them'.[63] Grounded in Marxism–Leninism and preserving that tradition's characteristic account of class-conflict shaped by historically specific modes of production, the transnational opposition between imperial and tricontinental states that Guevara described is not the moralised and eternal opposition between the people and their oppressors that distinguishes populist discourses. However, Guevara's tricontinentalism defined the essential geographic contours of the 'Global South' that Chávez's transnational populism invoked.

By the turn of the twenty-first century, Latin Americans familiar with Bolívar's 'New World', Martí's '*nuestra América*', and Guevara's 'tricontinentalism' were well prepared to understand the transnational people that Chávez imagined when he promised to speak on behalf of the 'Global South'. Within the region's popular tradition, the three very distinct empires that Bolívar, Martí and Guevara struggled against merged into a single, eternal menace, whose global hegemony violated the norm of popular sovereignty at both the domestic and international levels. And, despite the dismal record of Bolívar, Martí and Guevara's integrationist efforts, the notion that regional unity was the key to Latin America's freedom and prosperity enjoyed widespread legitimacy.[64] The region's popular tradition depicted a continuous struggle despite serial failures, condensing the varied eras of international political thought in Latin America into a single, unfinished project whose time had finally come.

## The Transnational Turn

Chávez did not begin his career as a firebrand critic of US imperialism and promoter of Latin American unity. Interviewed in prison after his unsuccessful 1992 coup attempt, Chávez insisted that 'our fight is not against the United States. Our fight is against corruption and against this government.'[65] A few years later, Chávez opened his platform for Venezuela's 1998 presidential elections by describing a 'historical crisis'. The 'profoundly anti-popular and oligarchic' regime established 'when the project of Gran Colombia went to the grave with Simón Bolívar' was finally collapsing under the weight of its own inefficacy. Chávez offered an

[63]Ernesto Guevara, 'Speech at the 19th General Assembly of the United Nations', 11 Dec. 1964.

[64]Daniel F. Wajner and Luis Roniger, 'Transnational Identity Politics in the Americas: Reshaping "Nuestramérica" as Chavismo's Regional Legitimation Strategy', *Latin American Research Review*, 54: 2 (2019), p. 462.

[65]Cristina Marcano and Alberto Barrera Tyszka, *Hugo Chávez sin uniforme: Una historia personal* (Caracas: Debate, 2005), p. 283.

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*Agenda Alternativa* that, he emphasised, was 'Bolivarian because it attends not only to the national future to be built, but also to international currents, and forms part of the new continental awakening that is raising hopes for justice, equality, and freedom from Mexico to Argentina'. Apart from this introduction, though, Chávez's *Agenda* lacked the features that distinguish transnational populism. Rather, it denounced the corrupt bargain that had kept the country's two dominant political parties in power for almost half a century, and visited a 'moral, economic and social catastrophe' upon 'poor Venezuelans'. Chávez did demand the 'reaffirmation of our national sovereignty' and referred to the dominance of the oil industry by foreign firms as 'colonialism', but he assigned blame to domestic profiteers and the politicians that abetted them, not an empire.[66]

This more nationalist populist discourse persisted through Chávez's first year in office, as he convened a constituent assembly to draft a new constitution. The resulting document, ratified in 1999, changed the name of the country to incorporate a reference to Bolívar (Art. 1), and included a provision enjoining the Republic to 'promote Latin American and Caribbean integration', specifically granting the government the right to 'confer upon supra-national organisations […] the powers necessary to carry out the process of integration' (Art. 153). But more notable were the amplified powers and extended term-limit it granted the executive (Arts. 230, 236), and the detailed and ambitious programme of socio-economic reform (Arts. 299–310). The clearest evidence of Bolívar's influence in the document is not its promotion of regional integration but rather the independent 'Citizen Power', a fourth branch of the federal government charged with preventing public corruption (Art. 274), which was modelled on a proposal Bolívar made in a famous 1819 address.[67]

In 2000, however, Venezuela assumed the secretary generalship of the Organisation of the Petroleum-Exporting Countries (OPEC), and Chávez embarked on a diplomatic tour of OPEC member states that included visits with Saddam Hussein of Iraq and Muammar Gaddafi of Libya, attracting criticism from the US State Department. A year later, Chávez was among the first world leaders to openly criticise the US invasion of Afghanistan, appearing on television with photographs of Afghan children that he said were killed by a US missile strike, and describing the war as an effort to 'fight terrorism with terrorism'.[68] In response, the United States recalled its ambassador to Venezuela and multiplied at least fourfold the funding provided to opposition parties in Venezuela through the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) and the Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI).[69] Distributing these funds put US agents in close contact with the opposition leaders who, in April 2002, removed Chávez from office and formed an interim government.[70] During the coup, the US State Department issued statements criticising

[66]Hugo Chávez Frías, *Agenda Alternativa Bolivariana* (Caracas: Ediciones Correo del Orinoco, 1996).

[67]For Bolívar's 'Moral Power', see Simon, *Ideology of Creole Revolution,* pp. 99–104.

[68]Larry Rohter, 'U.S., Irritated by Criticism, Calls Envoy Home from Venezuela', *New York Times*, 3 Nov. 2001.

[69]Eva Golinger, *The Chávez Code: Cracking US Intervention in Venezuela* (Northampton, MA: Olive Branch Press, 2006); William M. Leogrande, 'A Poverty of Imagination: George W. Bush's Policy in Latin America', *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 39: 2 (2007), pp. 370–6.

[70]Office of the Inspector General, US Department of State, 'A Review of U.S. Policy toward Venezuela, November 2001–April 2002', Report Number 02-OIG-003.

Chávez's economic policies and encouraging Latin American governments to recognise the interim government. However, in the face of immense popular demonstrations, the coup collapsed and Chávez returned to office.

An official history published later by regime-sympathetic academics describes the brief period Chávez spent in detention as 'three days that would change the world'. The coup brought into view the global conspiracy operating underneath Venezuela's domestic instability, and the global import of Venezuela's heroic resistance. 'Had the imperial alliance managed to destroy Venezuela, a new world order would have finally been consolidated […] But the Venezuelan people overthrew this first phase of the fascist conspiracy, opening the way to a new future, to a new historical contingency.'[71] In this changed political context, transnational populism went from discursively possible to strategically compelling. By associating domestic opposition to his policy agenda with a US-led effort to impose neoliberal orthodoxy on the developing world, Chávez undercut his critics' legitimacy. By framing the coup as a global empire's nefarious interference in a poor democracy, he made his own administration's survival emblematic of the entire Global South's struggle for recognition in international politics.

After the coup, Chávez redoubled his criticisms of the War on Terror, making himself a spokesman for regimes around the world threatened by US intervention. At the 2002 plenary session of the UNGA, he insisted that the 'condemnation of terrorism must necessarily be accompanied […] by an equally forceful condemnation of the causes and processes that have transformed the world into an infinite sum of marginalised individuals and a reign of injustice, inequality and poverty'. Here, we see the border-crossing conception of the people that distinguishes transnational populism from its nationalist counterpart. While relating the economic difficulties that servicing external debt had generated for Venezuela, Chávez gave Guevara's tricontinentalism a populist spin, emphasising that 'the countries of Africa and Asia can tell the same story as we do in Latin America'.[72] His transnational populism transformed a strategic alignment forged to navigate the geopolitics of the Cold War into a moral struggle between an impoverished, but virtuous, global people and a vicious empire intent on wringing blood from a stone.

As the people Chávez claimed to represent shifted, so too did his account of the people's enemy.[73] In a 2002 interview with the Chilean academic and journalist Marta Harnecker, Chávez noted that his Venezuelan opponents had visited Washington DC prior to the coup, arguing that 'they did what they did because they felt supported' by the US government officials that received them.[74] He claimed, with some exaggeration, that Bolívar, too, had 'clashed often with the United States', describing a few textual fragments in which Bolívar had 'foreseen what would come' in US–Latin American relations and suggesting that Bolívar's lost works likely contained 'more writings on this theme'. In this way, Chávez retrospectively placed the United States amongst the empires that had inspired Bolívar's

[71]Mario Sanoja Obediente and Iriada Vargas-Arenas, *La revolución bolivariana: Historia, cultura, y socialismo* (Caracas: Monte Ávila Editores, 2008), pp. 273–5.

[72]UNGAOR, 57th session, 5th plenary meeting, 13 Sept. 2002, UN Doc. A/57/PV.5, p. 2.

[73]Hawkins, *Venezuela's Chavismo*, p. 62.

[74]Marta Harnecker, *Hugo Chávez Frías: Un hombre, un pueblo* (San Sebastián: Tercera Prensa, 2002), pp. 167–8.

efforts to forge 'a common front against external threats' at the Panama Congress, using the popular tradition traced above to frame his own contretemps with the US State Department as the current phase of an eternal struggle.[75]

As time went on, Chávez became less circumspect in both his historical and contemporary analyses. In a 2004 interview with the German sociologist Heinz Dieterich, he frankly alleged that the 'North American elite […] infiltrated and sabotaged' the Panama Congress, 'bought' the compliance of the separatist leaders who dismembered Gran Colombia, and even attempted, in collaboration with the vice-president of Colombia, to assassinate Bolívar himself. 'From then until now', he continued, 'the great power established by Washington has obstructed – and not just obstructed, but demolished, with lead, blood and fire – any integrationist current' that threatened the influence of the United States in the hemisphere. 'The recent aggression against Venezuela, the coup d'état in April 2002', he argued, was initiated 'because we were promoting the humane integration of our peoples'.[76] Though condemnations of the Venezuelan oligarchy did not disappear from his speeches, after his transnational turn Chávez increasingly indicted outside critics, like Mexico's former President Vicente Fox, or Spain's José María Aznar, describing both, as well as his domestic opponents as 'puppies' or 'lackeys of the empire', and thus suggesting that foreign co-optation rather than mundane corruption led them to betray the people.[77]

At the same time, Chávez took a strong stand against the FTAA, a trade agreement being negotiated among 34 nations in North America, South America and the Caribbean. In November 2005, as the hemisphere's presidents gathered in Argentina to sign a final FTAA agreement, Chávez convened an alternative, open-air 'Summit of the Peoples'. There, he led a large crowd in a chant: '*¡ALCA, ALCA, al carajo!*' ('To hell with the FTAA!'). Chávez's denunciation of the FTAA was not, however, based on nationalist opposition to regional integration. Rather, like his icon Martí, Chávez called for an alternative, 'our American' project of integration: 'Only together can we overthrow imperialism and lift up our peoples. Only together can we win a better life, a better world.'[78]

The Summit of the Peoples served as a belated launch party for Chávez's signature foreign-policy initiative, a regional organisation originally called the Alternativa Bolivariana para los Pueblos de Nuestra América (ALBA). The name declares its oppositional relationship to the FTAA, while also making explicit reference to both Bolívar and Martí. As Chávez put it, in an interview, the ALBA was an effort to 'relaunch Bolívar's original idea […] put forward at the Congress of Panama, the idea of forming a League of Nations: a union of republics'.[79] This dream first took form in 2004 as a bi-lateral agreement between Venezuela and Cuba, already envisioned as the nucleus of a broader organisation:

[75]*Ibid.*, p. 151.

[76]Hugo Chávez, *El destino superior de los pueblos latinoamericanos y el gran salto adelante: Conversaciones con Heinz Dieterich* (Jaén: Alcalá Grupo Editorial, 2007), pp. 123–4.

[77]Adriana Bolívar, '"Cachorro del imperio" vs. "cachorro de Fidel": Los insultos en la política latinoamericana', *Discurso & Sociedad*, 2: 1 (2008), pp. 1–38.

[78]Hugo Chávez, 'Speech in Mar del Plata', 4 Nov. 2005, available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=iUZ39bz47bc, last access 10 July 2023.

[79]Harnecker, *Hugo Chávez Frías*, p. 71.

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'The cardinal principle that should guide the ALBA is the widest possible solidarity amongst the peoples of Latin America and the Caribbean […] without egoistic nationalisms or restrictive national policies that obstruct the aim of creating a *Patria Grande* in Latin America.'[80] The organisation's early statements were packed with abstract declarations of principle like this one, but the ALBA also served as a forum for organising more concrete projects, including the well-known Misión Barrio Adentro, which brought thousands of Cuban doctors to under-served parts of Venezuela and subsidised Venezuelan oil exports to Cuba. As more member states joined, the ALBA launched *misiones* targeting illiteracy, higher education, and food prices, and sponsored a regional-development bank (Banco del ALBA), a virtual currency (Sistema Unitario de Compensación Regional (Unified System for Regional Compensation, SUCRE)), and a loan programme based on subsidised oil sales (PetroCaribe).[81]

While meeting the immediate needs of impoverished communities, these programmes were also meant to fortify democracy in ALBA member states by loosening their dependence on international commodity markets, the US dollar, the World Bank and the IMF. The official statement released to announce the ALBA bank described how the World Bank and the IMF compromised policy autonomy in developing nations by making their loans conditional on austerity, privatisation and free trade. To escape these impositions, the ALBA bank would facilitate trade within an integrated 'economic zone', while also reducing 'asymmetry, poverty, and social exclusion'.[82] Once again by contrast with nationalist populism, then, transnational populism demands more egalitarian and prosperous economic interdependence, not national autarky.

In 2009, at the eighth ALBA Summit in Havana, the presidents of nine member states signed an agreement that gave the ALBA a formal institutional structure. One innovation introduced at this stage nicely illustrates its transnational populist character. Alongside political, social and economic councils, the ALBA was to feature a Consejo de Movimientos Sociales (Social Movements Council, CMS). The CMS was described as a 'mechanism for facilitating the direct integration and participation' of social movements in ALBA policy-making. Cast as 'anti-imperialist and anti-neoliberal', the CMS was empowered to present 'proposals, projects, declarations and other initiatives' directly to the organisation's Presidential Council.[83] Including the CMS within ALBA's administrative structure responded to one of the primary issues that has animated nationalist populism, particularly in the European Union. There, it has been frequently alleged that that regional and international institutions foster 'depoliticised' and 'technocratic' decision-making procedures, permitting elites to circumvent member states' democratic institutions and determine policies without popular consultation or accountability.[84] Transnational populism differs from nationalist populism in insisting that depoliticisation is not a necessary attribute of regional

[80]ALBA, 'Declaración Conjunta Venezuela–Cuba', 1st ALBA Summit, Havana, Cuba, 2004.

[81]Josette Altmann, 'El ALBA: Entre propuestas de integración y mecanismo de cooperación', *Pensamiento Propio*, 33 (Jan.–June 2011), pp. 185–216; Cusack, *Venezuela, ALBA, and the Limits of Postneoliberal Regionalism*.

[82]ALBA, 'Acta fundacional del Banco del ALBA', 6th ALBA Summit, Caracas, Venezuela, 2008.

[83]ALBA, 'Estructura y funcionamiento del ALBA-TCP', 8th ALBA Summit, Havana, Cuba, 2009.

[84]Chantal Mouffe, *For a Left Populism* (London: Verso, 2018).

integration. The ALBA's CMS was meant to demonstrate that a well-designed regional institution could actually encourage popular participation in policy-making and programme implementation, even at supra-national levels of aggregation.

For Chávez, the ALBA was not an end in itself, but a proof of concept and a means of organising a movement to effect change on a global scale. In 2011, already fighting the cancer that would end his life, Chávez delivered his last speech at the UNGA. There, he described the ALBA as 'an avant-garde experiment in progressive and anti-imperialist government, seeking to break the prevailing international order and improve the capacity of the people to face, together, the prevailing powers'. He also praised regional organisations in Africa and Asia for creating 'regional democratic spaces that are respectful of differences and that foster solidarity and complementarity'. He expressed hopes that a 'broad alliance among the regional organisations of the South' could 'organize the majority of the people on earth to defend ourselves against the new colonialism' embodied in the then decade-long War on Terror. Decrying the UN's inaction in the face of 'perpetual imperialist war', Chávez asked his fellow delegates to reflect on the aim for which the UN had been founded: 'peace – and not the peace of the cemetery, as Kant said ironically, but a peace based on the most zealous respect for international law'. Such a peace would be impossible, he argued, so long as the UN forced the 'weak to follow the law while [permitting] the strong to commit abuses'. Thus, Chávez demanded an 'immediate, in-depth revision of the UN Charter', that eliminated the category of permanent membership and the veto power of the Security Council and 'maximized the democratic decision-making power of the General Assembly'.[85] Here, we find all the distinctive features of transnational populism exhibited clearly and emphatically. Chávez depicts politics as an eternal conflict between a global 'people' and a rapacious 'empire' and criticises existing international institutions for serving imperial rather than popular aims, but he also insists upon the necessity of international institutions as a check upon empire and outlines a programme of institutional reform to be pursued through regional integration across the Global South.

A decade later, though, it is hard to find evidence that the ALBA, specifically, or transnational populism more generally have significantly influenced international politics. The ALBA's cooperative *misiones* provided much-needed medical care, education and food to impoverished populations across Latin America, but PetroCaribe, the ALBA bank and the SUCRE virtual currency, despite some initial promise, were managed inconsistently, allowing fraud and opportunistic arbitrage to fatally undermine their functions. The ALBA's CMS never even materialised, making it a poor demonstration of the feasibility of participatory supra-national governance. After oil prices fell in 2008 and Chávez died in 2013, the extent to which the ALBA depended upon Venezuela's wealth and Chávez's charisma became painfully apparent. Membership plateaued and declined as former allies rushed to distance themselves from the inept authoritarianism of Chávez's handpicked successor, Nicolás Maduro.[86]

[85]Hugo Chávez, 'Speech to the UN', *Law and Business Review of the Americas*, 17: 4 (2011), pp. 627–33.
[86]Cusack, *Venezuela, ALBA, and the Limits of Postneoliberal Regionalism*, p. 12.

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The genesis and trajectory of the ALBA do, however, suggest some generalisable factors that influence the orientation of populist discourses to international politics. The centrality of historical references to Bolívar, Martí and Guevara illustrates the important role this regional popular tradition played in shaping Chávez's transnational populism. Analogous popular traditions, linking anti-imperial struggle to regional integration, exist in parts of Africa and Asia as well,[87] fulfilling what we have argued forms a necessary condition for the emergence of transnational populism. Leaders in those regions also face a strategic problem similar to the one that drove Chávez's transnational turn, where interference by foreign governments constitutes a significant threat to both their tenure in office and their ability to enact their policy priorities. The asymmetric exposure of states in the Global South to external interventions of this kind could explain regional variation in the form that populist discourses take. Populist leaders in wealthy and powerful countries, like France's Marine Le Pen, Britain's Boris Johnson or the United States' Donald Trump, fear that stronger international institutions might constrain their nation's ability to unilaterally pursue their interests through foreign interventions, and consequently articulate strongly nationalist populist discourses, calling for the retrenchment of international accords and commitments in the name of their nationally bounded 'peoples'. By contrast, populists from poorer regions, like Chávez, may see an opportunity to constrain interventionist outsiders by making those same institutions more responsive and more powerful. Of course, former Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro demonstrates that not all Latin American populisms are transnational,[88] and Greece's former finance minister Yanis Varoufakis demonstrates that not all European populisms are nationalist.[89] Further theoretical refinement will be necessary to explain these intra-regional variations.

## Transnational Populism and Democracy

In this article, we have described an important dimension of variation amongst populist ideologies, distinguishing the *transnational populism* exemplified in Chávez's late discourse from the implicitly *nationalist* conception of populism that both popular and scholarly commentators have heretofore employed. Refining the categories that scholars use to describe and explain variations in populist ideologies is an important task, but improving our understanding of transnational populism is of more than classificatory interest. Some of the most important contemporary debates on populism concern the relationship between populism and democracy. Scholars of comparative politics have argued that the election of populist leaders 'hollows out' democratic institutions, creating 'uneven playing fields' that disadvantage opposition parties and, in this way, transforming

[87]Cemil Aydin, *The Politics of Anti-Westernism in Asia: Visions of World Order in Pan-Islamic and Pan-Asian Thought* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007); Gary Wilder, *Freedom Time: Negritude, Decolonization, and the Future of the World* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015); Getachew, *Worldmaking after Empire*.

[88]Matias Spektor, *Democracia em risco? 22 ensaios sobre o Brasil hoje* (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2019), pp. 324–38.

[89]De Cleen *et al.*, 'The Potentials and Difficulties of Transnational Populism'.

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democracies into 'competitive authoritarian' regimes.[90] Drawing on these findings, political theorists consider the conceptual connections between democracy and populism, asking whether critics of the enormous inequalities of wealth and power that characterise many contemporary democracies should embrace populism's egalitarian rhetoric, or, contrarily, reject populism as antithetical to and corrosive of democratic self-government.[91] The association between populism and nationalism that we have aimed to sever here informs both empirical and normative discussions of populism's effects on democracy, so the present study should prompt us to ask whether the nature of that relationship varies according to the nationalist or transnational character of the populist discourse in question.

Chávez used the discursive framework of transnational populism to justify not only the interventions in international politics we have described above, but also the domestic policies and institutional reforms that many scholars argue have diminished the quality of Venezuela's democracy.[92] What is more, Chávez's well-publicised denunciations of US imperialism and savage neoliberalism, along with the resources provided to allied governments through the ALBA's *misiones*, and particularly through the PetroCaribe oil-export and regional-development scheme, may have helped insulate incumbents in those governments from both domestic and foreign criticism as they undertook reforms that diminished the quality of their own countries' democratic institutions.[93] Generalising from the case we have considered here suggests, then, that transnational populism may have even more detrimental, because more geographically extended, implications for democracy than nationalist populism.

However, our analysis of transnational populism also raises some conceptual questions relevant to ongoing debates in both comparative politics and political theory. Through all its varied eras, the history of international political thought in Latin America that furnished the discursive elements of Chávez's transnational populism draws close connections between the quality and stability of democratic institutions and the nature of the international order that surrounds them. The comparative politics literature on populism and democracy has not neglected the important effects of international politics on the propensity of states to democratise or to transition from democratic to hybrid regimes. On the contrary, in their influential work, Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way argue that the 'leverage' exerted by powerful democratic states, and especially the United States, upon less powerful ones, including in Latin America, fortifies democracy by constraining incumbents

[90]Enrique Peruzzotti, 'Populism as Democratization's Nemesis: The Politics of Regime Hybridization', *Chinese Political Science Review*, 2: 3 (2017), pp. 314–27; Kurt Weyland, 'Populism and Authoritarianism', in Carlos de la Torre (ed.), *The Routledge Handbook of Global Populism* (London: Routledge, 2018), pp. 319–33.

[91]Margaret Canovan, 'Trust the People!: Populism and the Two Faces of Democracy', *Political Studies*, 47: 1 (1999), pp. 2–16; Maria Paula Saffon and Juan F. González-Bertomeu, 'Latin American Populism: An Admissible Trade-Off between Procedural Democracy and Equality?', *Constellations*, 24: 3 (2017), pp. 416–31; Paulina Ochoa Espejo, 'Populism and the People', *Theory & Event*, 20: 1 (2017), pp. 92–9; Nadia Urbinati, *Me the People: How Populism Transforms Democracy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2019).

[92]Levitsky and Loxton, 'Populism and Competitive Authoritarianism', pp. 124–5.

[93]Javier Corrales, 'Using Social Power to Balance Soft Power: Venezuela's Foreign Policy', *Washington Quarterly*, 32: 4 (2009), pp. 97–114.

who seek institutional reforms or take other actions that would disadvantage opposition parties. They show that states that are more susceptible to 'leverage' because their economies are highly dependent on commerce with the United States are more likely to democratise, if they are not democracies, and less likely to devolve into authoritarianism, if they are democracies.[94]

By contrast, transnational populism insists that the quality and stability of democratic institutions within states can be compromised as readily by foreign interference as by corrupt incumbents. That is to say, states that are exposed to external interference in their democratic procedures, or that are constrained in their policy-making autonomy by relations of economic dependency are, *in that sense*, already less democratic than they would be if they were not so exposed or constrained. The implication for the literature is that 'leverage' should not only be treated as an independent variable that explains variation in rates of democratisation or democratic deconsolidation across states. A state's exposure to external intervention or degree of economic dependency should also be considered when measuring the quality of that state's democracy, and treated as part of the baseline against which the effects of populist leadership are gauged.

As we have seen, Chávez's transnational populism did not successfully diminish Venezuela's exposure to external intervention or its economic dependence, let alone that of the rest of the Global South. However, through the ALBA and other initiatives, Chávez did raise the profile of an approach to addressing these problems with a long history in Latin America and the rest of the Global South. Regional integration and the enforcement of international law by international institutions offer weaker states more effective defence against the impositions of their powerful neighbours than the 'parchment barrier' of state sovereignty that nationalist populism seeks. The contemporary political-theory literature on populism is full of well-argued calls to protect fragile democracies from the threat of populism, but these calls are rarely accompanied by acknowledgement that elections and policy-making in the same fragile democracies are systematically distorted by actual and threatened foreign interventions. Both the long tradition of international political thought in Latin America and contemporary transnational populism suggest, then, that democracy and the rule of law will be tenuous ideals in the Global South until democracy and the rule of law become definitive, enforceable norms of international politics.

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[94]Steven Levitsky and Lucan A. Way, *Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes after the Cold War* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 50–4.

**El diablo y la democracia en el Sur Global: El populismo transnacional de Hugo Chávez**

En este artículo, argumentamos que los discursos y documentos políticos del último período de la presidencia de Hugo Chávez ejemplifican el 'populismo transnacional', una forma de discurso populista que desafía la estrecha asociación entre populismo y nacionalismo que enmarca la literatura académica tanto sobre el populismo como sobre Chávez. Explicamos por qué el populismo de Chávez tomó esta forma diferente en relación a la historia del pensamiento político internacional en América Latina y el contexto político que rodeó la creación de la Alianza Bolivariana para los Pueblos de Nuestra América (ALBA). Sugerimos que, si bien el populismo transnacional puede amplificar la amenaza que otros estudiosos sostienen que los líderes populistas suponen para las instituciones democráticas, también ofrece un importante correctivo a la forma en que los estudiosos piensan sobre la relación entre el populismo, la democracia y la política internacional, señalando que las instituciones internacionales capaces de restringir a los Estados poderosos son esenciales para estabilizar las democracias en el Sur Global.

**Palabras clave:** Venezuela; chavismo; populismo; nacionalismo; integración regional

**O diabo e a democracia no Sul Global: O populismo transnacional de Hugo Chávez**

Neste artigo, argumentamos que os discursos e documentos políticos do período final da presidência de Hugo Chávez exemplificam o 'populismo transnacional', uma forma de discurso populista que desafia a estreita associação entre populismo e nacionalismo que enquadra as literaturas acadêmicas tanto sobre populismo quanto sobre Chávez. Explicamos por que o populismo de Chávez assumiu essa forma distinta por referência à história do pensamento político internacional na América Latina e ao contexto político em torno da criação da Alianza Bolivariana para los Pueblos de Nuestra América (ALBA). Sugerimos que, embora o populismo transnacional possa realmente ampliar a ameaça que outros estudiosos argumentam que os líderes populistas representam para as instituições democráticas, ele também oferece um importante corretivo de como os estudiosos pensam sobre a relação entre populismo, democracia e política internacional, apontando que as instituições internacionais capazes de restringir estados poderosos são essenciais para estabilizar as democracias no Sul Global.

**Palavras-chave:** Venezuela; chavismo; populismo; nacionalismo; integração regional

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