



Venezuela: The Multidimensionality of a Hemispheric Crisis

More than five years ago, we published a special issue under this title in our magazine under the editorship of Thomas Legler, Andrei Serbin Pont, and Ornela Carelli-Ríos, in which the editors noted “the complex and multidimensional nature of the Venezuelan crisis” in the introduction. At that time, the Venezuelan crisis, with its regional and international repercussions, reached such a dramatic point that we preferred to replace this director’s message with two blank pages “in homage to the Venezuelan people and in solidarity with the suffering they are going through.”

Over these years, this suffering has deepened to unpredictable levels, and this complexity and multidimensionality have significantly intensified. Therefore, in publishing a number dedicated to Venezuela again, this time edited by María Isabel Puerta-Riera and Andrés Cañizales, and predominantly focused on some political and international aspects, we cannot fail to mention, even briefly at this juncture, the other dimensions of the crisis the country is going through. This time, the issue dedicated to Venezuela is published predominantly in English to facilitate the reading of articles and comments for an English-speaking audience.

The political crisis - in all its aspects and seriousness - is not disconnected from a profound economic crisis. The Venezuelan economy and the oil industry, which have been its economic backbone, have undergone a process of accelerated deterioration, only momentarily halted by stagnation and subsequent slight recovery since 2022, driven in the last year and earlier this year by the effect of the suspension of economic sanctions imposed by the United States as a pressure factor to promote a clean and transparent electoral process with opposition participation. The Maduro government’s failure to comply with the conditions agreed upon in October of the previous year in Barbados

for this purpose has led to an increase in the illegal persecution of opposition members and repression of the media, alongside the use of various mechanisms to halt the progress of the opposition around the candidacy of María Corina Machado.

This process needs to be broken down into different aspects. On the one hand, the concern and interest of the United States in maintaining a flow of oil resources in the context of increasing international oil prices and, on the other hand, the need to stop Venezuelan migration to that country. This has led to a series of back-and-forths by Washington in the application of sanctions, also linked to a web of negotiations - some open, others covert - with Maduro, and limited authorization for Chevron to continue crude oil extraction in Venezuela - a key factor in the partial recovery of the industry and Venezuelan oil production in the last year but also for the United States' demand for oil - with an impact on the growth of the Venezuelan economy that has only begun to show in recent months, but where economic collapse persists with high inflation, high levels of debt, and marked income inequalities.

Moreover, Venezuela's humanitarian crisis - where 60% of the population lives in poverty according to data from a research institute (ENCOVI) at the Andrés Bello Catholic University (as there have been no official data on this matter for years) - has led to the emigration of more than 7 million Venezuelans in a country of 28 million, many of whom have attempted to reach mainly US territory, leading, in the context of ongoing negotiations, to an agreement for their repatriation by the United States. The humanitarian crisis, however, implies multidimensional poverty that includes marked income inequalities - according to some data, the inequality between the richest 10% and the poorest 10% is 35 times - but also access to services such as education and health, which, particularly in the latter case, has led to the collapse of the public health system, lacking supplies, doctors, and adequate infrastructure.

These data do not fully reflect the depth of the humanitarian crisis in which Venezuela is immersed, but they do reflect its articulation with the economic dimension and a political dimension that, in turn, are linked to high levels of corruption (as recently revealed in the case of PDVSA and the detention of its general manager closely linked to the government), misgovernment, and penetration by organized crime,

guerrillas operating in some areas, and drug trafficking, to the point that some analysts do not hesitate to describe it as a “mafia state,” while citizens and civil society organizations suffer the “brutal and massive” onslaught of the regime with the approval of a Law of Supervision, Regularization, Action, and Financing of Non-Governmental Organizations and Related Entities that “would have devastating consequences for vulnerable populations affected by the humanitarian crisis, migration expulsion factors, and daily abuses of power,” according to Amnesty International’s director for the Americas. A law that would also reinforce the repression and persecution of political opponents and human rights activists.

Finally, as mentioned in the aforementioned previous special issue of *Pensamiento Propio*, the fading of the Chavista project at the continental level does not mean that the Venezuelan crisis does not have regional and hemispheric repercussions. Beyond the United States, some countries in the region have been affected by the migration crisis, and many governments - in a broad political spectrum ranging from Argentina to Brazil and Colombia - have demanded elections that do not involve the marginalization and persecution of the opposition and the violation of elementary citizen rights. In fact, the International Criminal Court is processing a complaint against the Maduro government for acts of crimes against humanity. On the other hand, a geopolitical dimension to consider is the alignment of the current Venezuelan government with Russia and its connection with China, to which is added the crisis in the Essequibo as the government seeks to turn it into a call for national unity within an evident maneuver aimed at diverting the country’s attention from the elections, after a long period of mishandling of the claim.

In this context is the turbulent electoral process that should culminate on July 28 of this year but is unlikely to displace the Maduro regime, even if the opposition achieves a decisive victory and it is recognized. The dismantling of the criminal network that supports it will, in any case, pose a significant challenge for any government that takes office and does not identify with Chavismo.

Against this background, the articles included in this edition of the magazine, both in the **Analysis and Research** section and in the **Comments** section, analyze and highlight various aspects of the political and international dimension of the Venezuelan crisis and serve as an important reference for a comprehensive understanding of it. Both sections have been organized and evaluated by the editors, with the exception of the commentary on the Essequibo written especially for the magazine by the former Venezuelan ambassador to Guyana, Sadio Garavini. We therefore appreciate both the meticulous work of the editors, the contribution of Ambassador Garavini and the authors who have collaborated with research and analysis articles, and comments, as well as the reviewers who have contributed to this issue.

Until the next issue.

Andrés Serbin