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An Analysis of U.S. President Donald Trump's Administration Compared to Previous Autocratic Regimes

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Author

Tapia, Karina

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APPROVED

Dr.
Department of

Dr. Richard Cardullo, Howard H Hays Chair and Faculty Director, University Honors
Interim Vice Provost, Undergraduate Education

Abstract

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Introduction

Many Americans feel dread, as we try to assure ourselves that things cannot possibly be that bad. The Constitution, our national doctrine of freedom and equality, our high levels of education and wealth, our historically tough middle class and our large, diverse private sector should protect us from a democratic breakdown that has occurred elsewhere. American politicians treat their rivals as enemies; they intimidate our free press, and even threaten to reject election results. They try to weaken the institutional safeguards of our democracy, which includes the courts, ethics offices, and intelligence agencies. The ones in power rewrite electoral rules and redraw electorates to guarantee a win. What does it all mean? Are we experiencing the fall of one the world's oldest and most effective democracies?

Blatant dictatorship (in the form of communism, fascism, and/or military rule) is not very common across the world. Democratic regression begins today at the ballot box. Constitutions and other technically democratic institutions remain in place and people can still vote while elected autocrats maintain an appearance of democracy while also gutting its substance. Government efforts to topple democracy can be "legal", in the sense that they are approved by the legislature and/or accepted by the courts. They can be portrayed as efforts to improve democracy by making the judiciary more efficient, cleaning up the electoral process, and fighting corruption. Newspapers may still publish but can be bought off or intimidated to use self-censorship. Citizens will continue to criticize the government but can often find themselves facing a tax or other forms of legal troubles. This spreads public confusion since people do not immediately realize the change. The United States' citizens could learn from the mistakes that past democratic leaders have made in allowing would-be authoritarians and, equally, from the ways that other democracies have kept radicalists out of power. Elected autocrats from different

parts of the world use strangely similar strategies to challenge democratic institutions. This is how elected autocrats destabilize democracy—packing and weaponize the courts and other neutral institutions, pay off the media and the private sector (or bully them to remain silent), and rewrite the rules of politics to tilt the playing field against opponents (Gruber, 2000).

In any democracy, politicians will eventually face harsh challenges such as an economic crisis, the rise of public dissatisfaction and an electoral drop of mainstream political parties that test the judgment of even the most experienced. If citizens become open to authoritarian appeals, then in time, democracy will fail. The public assumes too much of democracy, the idea that “the people” can shape at will what kind of government they have is too naive. The first misguided belief is that democratic institutions can control an authoritarian. The second is called an “ideological collusion” which is when the authoritarian’s agenda overlaps suitably with that of mainstream politicians that resignation is desirable, or at least preferable to the alternatives (Levitsky and Ziblatt, 2018, p. 67). It is irrefutable that electoral majorities had opposed Hitler and Mussolini until both of these men achieved power with support of political insiders that were blind to the danger of their own determination. Potential demagogues (a political leader that gains popularity by manipulating people’s emotions and prejudices) can and do exist in all democracies, and sometimes, one or more of them will strike a chord with the public. Juan Linz was born in Weimar Germany and raised during Spain’s civil war, and as a professor at Yale dedicated most of his career trying to comprehend how and why democracies die. He believed that there were four main behavioral warning signs that could help us identify an authoritarian,

“We should worry when a politician 1) rejects, in words or action, the democratic rules of the game, 2) denies the legitimacy of opponents, 3) tolerates or encourages violence, or 4) indicates a willingness to curtail the civil liberties of opponents, including the media.

A politician who meets even one of these criteria is cause for concern. Very often, populist outsiders do” (Levitsky and Ziblatt, 2018, p.21).

Populists are often antiestablishment politicians, figures who claim to represent the voice of “the people” and wage war on what they describe as the corrupt and conspiratorial elite (Levitsky and Ziblatt, 2018, p. 22).

Populists also tend to deny the legitimacy of established parties by attacking them as unpatriotic and undemocratic. They will tell voters that the current system of government is not really a democracy but instead has been stolen, corrupted, or arranged by the elite and they swear to detain said elite and return power to said people. The book *How Democracy Dies*, by Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt, offers ways that politicians could fend off any threats to democracy. Firstly, they could keep would-be authoritarians off party ballots during election time. This would require them to resist temptation to nominate extremists for higher office even if they can potentially provide votes. Second, parties can eradicate extremists within their own ranks. Third, pro-democracy parties should try to avoid all alliances with antidemocratic candidates and parties. Linz said the demise of many democracies could be traced back to a party’s attraction to extremists on their side of the political spectrum. Fourth, pro-democratic parties can also act to systematically isolate instead of legitimize extremists. Lastly, whenever extremists appear as serious electoral candidates, mainstream parties should establish a united front to defeat them by joining with opponents that are ideologically different but are committed to the protection and survival of democratic political order (Levitsky and Ziblatt, 2018, p. 24-25).

A political outsider with uncertain democratic credentials can come to power with the aid of a foreign nation regardless of the protections in a constitution. Constitutions are the products

of the people, making the people the first source of power, and capable of abolishing the Constitution if they wanted. Demagogues will attack their critics with harsh and confrontational terms as enemies, as traitors, and even as terrorists. In the cases of Turkey and Venezuela, we can see how their populist leaders have led to the fall of their democracies and in turn, pin point the warning signs that are present in Trump's administration. Autocratic regimes, as opposed to leaders, are characterized by an absence of democratic safeguards such as checks and balances, no preservation of separate branches of government, strong limits on individual rights and freedoms, absence of truly competitive, free elections, limits on media and an ample use of repression to silence opposition. They begin by weakening the democracies in various ways. In authoritarian regimes, the most important actors always include the president and often include a hegemonic party (if there is one and if it is reasonably independent with respect to the president), the main opposition party (under authoritarian regimes, with competitive elections), and the military. Public opinion is also being one of the most valuable resources that actors can employ (Gruber, 2000).

Turkey

Turkey is a predominantly Muslim country that is pursuing membership into the European Union by taking steps toward democratic consolidation, and integrating with global capitalism. The country, however, was facing serious democratic deficits, such as prosecution of activists and journalists, and criminalization of opposition. The courts were busy prosecuting dozens of individuals on charges of insulting state figures and offending the sensibilities of Muslims, “Tons of thousands of websites were blocked for content that allegedly violated the principle of national unity and threatened family values- journalists fired or resigned” (Yesil & Project Music, 2017, Introduction). April 2015, CNN’s foreign affairs showed a segment on the increasing authoritarianism of Turkey’s ruling Adalet ve Kalkinma Partisi (Justice and Development Party) AKP. The AKP had demonized their opponents, expanded police powers, and emplaced censorship on the internet, which was described as a “sad metamorphosis from a promising role model for the Middle East to a textbook example of illiberal democracy” (Öktem & Akkoyunlu, 2016, p. 470). In the summer 2013, AKP publicized intolerance of political dissent, free expression and public protest as it tried to violently repress the antigovernment Gezi Park Protests. A massive corruption scandal erupted in December 2013, and AKP responded by tightening its grip over the judiciary and banning Twitter and YouTube, an effort to slow-down circulation of damaging reports and evidence (Yesil & Project Music, 2017, Introduction).

Turkish democracy arose as a system based not on the prioritization of respect for the rule of law, civil society, and individual rights, but on the advertising of national unity and state interests. To Turkey, the “State” refers to rooted bureaucratic, military and judicial structures and institutions. It is seen as a “Contradictory entity that is in itself subject to competing interests and struggles” (Mango, 2003, p. 206). Turkey’s economy is strong despite the global recession and is

growing impressively. Its foreign policy is increasingly assertive, by taking advantage of being a member of NATO and an ambitious member of the European Union, while, at the same time, wielding considerable influence in the larger Middle East (Cagaptay, 2017, Introduction).

The AKP came into power in 2002 based on the promise of economic prosperity, and democratization. They would work closely with the IMF to undertake programs for cutting off “public spending, controlling wages, limiting agricultural support, and privatizing state-owned enterprises” (Musil, 2016, Introduction). AKPs authoritarian tendencies had been in the making for some time in other areas besides the media such as in their “much-acclaimed democratic achievements (e.g., limiting the role of the military in politics, undertaking EJ reforms, initiating the Kurdish peace process)” (Cagaptay, 2017, Introduction). AKP was characterized with a mix of the party’s particular brand of Islamism, neoliberalism and nationalism (Musil, 2016, Introduction).

Television is the dominant source of entertainment and information in Turkey. Global media corporations such as Turner Broadcasting, News Corp, and Bloomberg are present in the television market via joint ventures (CNN Turk, Fox, and TNT). The public broadcaster TRT works as a global actor with service in several languages reaching millions of audiences in Central Asia, North Africa, the Middle East, and Europe. Close to half of the population (the youth mainly) are online sharing information and opinions on social media platforms (Yesil & Project Music, 2017, Introduction). Although this online public sphere is subject to ever-increasing restrictions, “This vibrant and growing media landscape, however, operates under the conditions of a polarized and politicized structure, which is marked by patron-client relationships, high levels of cross-media ownership, and horizontal and vertical integration” (Yesil & Project Music, 2017, Introduction). Media outlets owned by Albayrak, Hedef, and

Kaylon groups are closely tied with the AKP, so much that they serve as propaganda mouthpieces. Turkey's media system also bears similarities to that of after authoritarian regimes in regards to the delivery of state power with neoliberal elements. It can be described as a hybrid system that blends commercial and statist imperatives that exist in an interdependent relationship. There are characteristics of centralized authority and its democratization demands, "the interpretation of state and capital, and the overlapping of patronage structures with market imperatives" acting as a push-pull force (Yesil & Project Music, 2017, Introduction). Aside from the issues of concentration and gathering, Turkey's media system is highly clientelistic and politicized (Yesil & Project Music, 2017, Introduction).

The corporations grew a dependence on government licenses to conduct business in certain sectors which made them extremely vulnerable to financial pressures from the government and worsened the problem of instrumentalism. Turkey is a parliamentary democracy and remains under the weight of a strong state tradition that prioritizes the protection of the state over individual rights and freedoms (Kandil, 2012). After Turkey's Recep Tayyip Erdogan's ascension to the presidency in August 2014, AKP officials, pro-governmental media, and Erdogan himself would stress the idea of a "New Turkey" (Cagaptay, 2017, Introduction.).

Turkey's Recep Tayyip Erdogan accused journalists of spreading terrorism. These attacks can be dangerous for if the public comes to share the same view that political opponents are linked to terrorism and that the media only spread lies, it then becomes easier for the authoritarian to justify taking actions against them. Important television networks and newspapers endorsed extra constitutional efforts to overthrow Erdogan and had to face the consequences. Of course, future authoritarians construe these attacks as a serious threat and then become even more hostile. Democracies to be successful require negotiations, concessions, and

compromises. Setbacks can be unavoidable and almost all victories are partial. Presidential initiatives can be stopped by congress or blocked by the courts. For outsiders, particularly those who have demagogue nature, democratic politics are often unbearably frustrating. More often than not, the attack on democracy arises slowly. For many citizens at first it may be unnoticeable since elections can continue to be held, opposing politicians can still sit in congress and independent newspapers would still be circulating. Erdogan believed in a new political order where the elected government, not the military or judiciary, holds power. He strived for a new sociocultural order in which the remaining vestiges of top-down Westernization will be replaced by Muslim nationalism and neo-Ottoman revivalism (Yesil & Project Music, 2017, Introduction.). He sought an “Empowered executive branch...a super-presidency...unprecedented concentration of power in the hands of one man... [not a] cause for alarm regarding the separation powers” (Cagaptay, 2017, Introduction).Erdogan grew increasingly distrustful of the other branches, and tried to limit or control them, or ignore them. This led to him limiting the press and polarizing the military increasing the power of the executive branch at the expense of congress and the courts (Kandil, 2012).

The destruction of democracy takes place spasmodically and requires taking baby steps. These steps could be approved by parliament or even ruled constitutional by the court systems. Many of the changes are adopted under the pretext to pursue some legitimate or admirable public objective, such as fighting corruption, improving the quality of democracy, cleaning up the electoral system, or increasing national security. The result could be allowing the government to enforce the law selectively and punish opponents while also protecting allies. Tax authorities could be used to target rival politicians, media outlets, and businesses. The police can crack down on protests hosted by the opposition while allowing or even promoting acts of violence by

pro-government thugs (Levitsky and Ziblatt, 2018, p. 78). Intelligence agencies can also be used to spy on critics and find material to use as blackmail while the president is quietly firing civil servants and other neutral officials to replace them with their loyalists. The democratic façade and authoritarian institutions of the Turkish political system serve to neutralize and bounce off challenges to the status quo by sheltering those truly wielding power and demilitarizing politics. This state of affairs is reflected in the irrational pattern in which opposition groups have been included and excluded in politics resulting from two factors, “First, the military elite and its civilian allies derive significant benefit from Islamist participation” (Lenze, 2011, p. 204). This leads to the great enhancement of both the legitimacy of the regime and the ability of authoritarian leaders to neutralize opposition. Second, the officers, like all individuals, do not have a perfect theory of politics and often believe that they can manage the risks associated with Islamist political participation. Within the last decade, Turkey has taken over major steps in political, economic, and international arenas (Cagaptay, 2017, Introduction).

Many supporters of the authoritative president would make an effort to make sure that key players (anyone actually able of hurting the government) are hobbled, sidelined, or bribed into losing the game. Key players might include opposing politicians, business leaders who invest in the opposition, major media outlets involved in broadcasting about politics, and some religious or other cultural figures who have a positive public moral standing. Scott Mainwaring discussed how different actors join the pro- or anti-democracy coalitions, “political actors, not structures or cultures, determine outcomes even though structures and cultures affect the formation of preferences of actors” (Mainwaring & Perez-Linan, 2014, Introduction). A president’s administration can be identified by the moderation or radicalization in policy preferences and international political influences exercised through external actors. The point of

worry is when liberal democracy is seen as an inefficient, corruption-plagued obstacle to rapid economic growth and when it is seen as a façade for bourgeois domination, most likely to mobilize for workers' gains (Cagaptay, 2017, Introduction).

Most elected autocrats begin by offering favors to leading politicians, businesspeople, or media figures in public position such as benefits, or outright bribing them in exchange for their support or at least for their quiet neutrality. Cooperative media outlets gain special access to the president and friendly business executives receive profitable reductions and government contracts. Modern autocrats have a habit of hiding their repression behind a veil of legality while governments also use their control of 'referees' to legally marginalize the opposition media with defamation or libel suits (Gruber, 2000). The referees refer to law enforcement, the courts and ethics and intelligence agencies. In Turkey, a key victim of such action was the powerful Dogan Yayin media corporation that controlled about 50% of the Turkish media market that includes the country's most read newspaper, *Hurriyat*, and numerous television stations. Many of the Dogan group media outlets were irreligious and liberal, which made them a target for the AKP government. In 2009, the government fought back by fining Dogan approximately \$2.5 billion, an amount that almost surpassed the company's total net worth, for tax evasion. Dogan was left crippled and forced to sell off much of the conglomerate, including a TV station and two large newspapers leading to pro-government executives buying them (Yesil & Project Music, 2017, Introduction).

The Erdogan government also politically marginalized businessmen. The wealthy tycoon Cem Uzan created and funded the Young Party (GP), it emerged as a serious rival in 2004; financial authorities arrived to seize Uzan's business empire and charged him with racketeering. Uzan would flee to France and the GP quickly collapsed (Levitsky and Ziblatt, 2018, p. 85). A

few years later, Turkey's largest industrial conglomerate, the Koc group, was accused of assisting the large 2013 Gezi Park protests (a Koc-owned hotel near the park was used as a makeshift hospital and shelter amongst police repression). That year, tax officials had audited several Koc companies and canceled a massive defense ministry contract with a subsidiary, thus the Koc family learned the lesson and kept its distance from the opposition after 2013.

Lastly, elected autocrats often try to silence cultural figures such as intellectuals, artists, pop stars, athletes and anyone whose moral standing and popularity could make them potential threats. Outlets owned by Ciner, Dimeroren, Dogan and Dogus employ columnists and invite talk show guests from opposing political groups in order to imply national pluralism and objective reporting, and they would hire editors and managers "recommended" to them by government officials. These media companies are part of huge nonmedia enterprises and are operated as "bargaining tools" with the government for contracts, subsidies, and privatization deals. Television channels and newspapers owned by these conglomerates are primarily used as political tools, and it has become common for their editorial lines to shift with changing political economic circumstances. The highly politicized judiciary would, "through broad interpretations of the Press Law, the Internet Law, and the Broadcasting Law, as well as application of the Penal and Anti-Terror Law Provisions, [criminalize] media practitioners, [ban] and [confiscate] publications [shut] down websites, and [prosecute] writers, publishers, and artists"(Yesil & Project Music, 2017, Introduction) . The charges included spreading Kurdish propaganda, "harming Turkey's national security and territorial integrity, inciting hatred and enmity among the Turkish public, insulting State institutions, undermining the moral values of Turkish society and insulting Islam and the Prophet Muhammad"(Yesil & Project Music, 2017, Introduction).

Once key opposition, business players, and the media are bought off or put aside, the opposition will shrink and the government wins without essentially breaking the rules. Authoritarians seek to consolidate their power by reforming the constitution, the electoral system, and other democratic institutions to weaken or disadvantage the opposition. The effect would be to tilt the playing field against their enemies. These reforms are carried out under the facade of public good, while in reality; they are stacking the deck in favor of appointees and because they involve legal constitutional changes, they allow autocrats to maintain these benefits for years, even decades. The would-be autocrats often use natural disasters, economic crisis, and particularly security threats such as wars, armed insurgencies, or terrorist attacks to justify all antidemocratic measures (Gruber, 2000). Meanwhile, citizens become more likely to tolerate and support authoritarian measures during security crises. Elected autocrats often need such crises like external threats to offer a chance to break free, both swiftly and legally. The combination of a major crisis and a potential authoritarian can therefore, be lethal for democracy (Levitsky and Ziblatt, 2018, p. 94).

It can be said that prospective authoritarians are primed to exploit crises to justify any power grabs. Recently, the Erdogan government in Turkey used the threat of security crises to justify the tightening grip on power. After the AKP lost its parliamentary majority in June 2015, there were a series of ISIS terrorist attacks that enabled Erdogan to call for snap elections and regain control of parliament only five months later. The July 2016 coup attempt was even more consequential by providing justification for a countrywide crackdown. Erdogan responded to the coup by declaring a state of emergency and launched a huge wave of repression that by purging 100,000 public officials, shutting down several newspapers, and arresting more than 50,000 including 144 journalists, hundreds of judges and prosecutors, and two members of the

Constitutional Court. Erdogan used the coup attempt as a window of opportunity to make the case for new extensive executive powers. The power grab climaxed in the April 2017 passage of a constitutional amendment that removed checks on presidential authority (Levitsky and Ziblatt, 2018, p. 96).

A crisis represents an opening to start dismantling the checks and balances systems that are present with democratic politics. Turkey is also battling with two major domestic threats. First, is the Ergenekon criminal network that had been operational perhaps for decades but unearthed in 2007 following a series of investigation, “the Turkish government began arresting and prosecuting Ergenekon members in 2008, among which there were retired military generals, military officers, academics, businessmen, and journalists, who were allegedly conspiring to overthrow the elected government and install a military rule” (Kandil, 2012). The second is the PKK, a “pan-Kurdish separatist movement that has been actively terrorizing the country since mid-1980s, which, in the last six years had started to install the structures of a parallel Kurdish state in southeast Turkey known as the KCK”(Bilgin, 2012, Introduction). In 2009, the government began to target this parallel state structure, arresting those affiliated with it including, journalists, press workers and others. The arrests would be frequently used to portray the AKP administration as being increasingly inclined towards authoritarian policies. Turkey then adopted a military constitution in 1982. Ethnic identity was denied and sectarianism was suppressed while the CHP ruled with an iron fist (Cagaptay, 2017, Introduction).

Turkey tried to deny the existence of Kurds, which comprise about 20 percent of the total population. Kurdish villages were given Turkish names and Kurdish babies were forced to accept Turkish names, “Laws were adopted allowing land seizure and the deportation of Kurds on security grounds” (Phillips, 2017, Introduction). Erdogan had appealed to the pride of Turks,

asserting Turkish nationalism; he presented himself as a man of the people and a pro-western modern Muslim and tapped into feelings of inadequacy, alienation, and frustration (Cagaptay, 2017, Introduction).

All successful democracies rely on other informal rules that, although they are not defended in the constitution or by any laws, are widely known and respected. These norms are more than just personal dispositions and they do not just rely on a political leaders' good character, but rather are shared codes of conduct that have become common knowledge within a community or accepted, respected, and enforced by society. A mutual toleration within politics can be considered one of these norms such as when long rivals play by constitutional rules and accept that they have an equal right to operate, compete for power, and win office. It is acceptable to disagree with and even strongly dislike the opposition but they still have to accept them as legitimate. Where norms of forbearance are strong, politicians do not use their institutional privileges to the limit, even if it is technically legal to just that, such action could endanger the existing system (Levitsky and Ziblatt, 2018, p. 106). The judiciary may also be positioned for a constitutional hardball. Politicians are more likely to be forbearing when they accept each other as legitimate rivals and politicians who do not view their rivals as insurrectionary will be less tempted to resort to norm violation to keep them out of power.

Polarization can also destroy democratic norms for when socioeconomic, racial, or religious differences give rise to extreme prejudice, societies will sort themselves into political camps whose worldviews are not just different but also mutually exclusive and toleration becomes that much harder to sustain. Under a unified government where judicial and legislative institutions are in the hands of the president's party, the threat is no longer confrontation but resignation. If partisan hostility triumphs over mutual toleration, those in control of congress

may prioritize the protection of the president over the performance of their constitutional responsibilities. Erdogan most recently justified his consolidation by power labeling his opponents as existential threats. Institutional forbearance can be thought of as avoiding actions that, while respect the law, obviously violate it in spirit (Levitsky and Ziblatt, 2018, p. 106). Erdogan began to suppress democratic checks and balances, including the media and courts. He would crack down on his opponents, locked up dissidents, and provide freedoms only for his conservative and Islamist base (Cagaptay, 2017, Introduction). Eventually it led to the political playing field being uneven in order to prevent power from escaping his hands. To describe his administration, there are four possible types of intraparty authoritarianism; benign, clandestine, challenged and coercive:

“Benign authoritarianism, both the local party actors and national party leaders have mutual material gains from the authoritarian party structure...Clandestine authoritarianism, the local party actors are not aware of or are indifferent to the domination of the national party leaders...Challenged authoritarianism, the local party actors object to the authoritarian party structures...[and] Coercive authoritarianism, the party leaders exert explicit coercion or threat over the local party actors who challenge their authority in the party” (Musil, 2016, Introduction).

In the sense of his conservative and Islamist base, Erdogan is benign but to those that challenge his power, he is coercive. As opposed to internally democratic parties, the assignment of authoritarianism is transferred from national party leaders (principals) to local party actors (agents) in authoritarian party organizations, not the other way around. These configurations are based on material and ideational interests. Material interests being those associated with power-seeking aims such as a desire for a position in public office and ideational interests (shared ideas

and values) referring to the interests shaped in ideational contexts such as ideological attachment, loyalty to the leader, or policy interests (Gruber, 2000). Corruption was suddenly rampant in Turkey. A corruption scandal came out in 2013 that affected Erdogan, his son Bilal, and members of the inner circle. Wiretaps would disclose disreputable self-enrichment scandals, forcing four cabinet members to resign (Cagaptay, 2017, Introduction).

US-Turkish relations also reached a low in 2016. Erdogan criticized the Obama administration for supporting the People's Protection Units (YPG), Syrian Kurds allied with the United States. Under the pretext of fighting Isis, "Turkey invaded and occupied Syria in a bid to keep the YPG east of the Euphrates River and prevent the establishment of a contiguous Kurdish territory in Syria along the Turkish-Syrian border"(Phillips, 2017, Introduction). Erdogan had insisted that the YPG was an extension of the PKK; he skeptically re-started Turkey's civil war with the PKK to rally a nationalist base, by creating a crisis and then presenting himself to voters as the only one with a solution. Erdogan wanted to change Turkey's constitution and establish an executive presidency with himself at the wheel. He used the failed coup in July 15, 2016 as an opportunity to strengthen his dictatorship, using early-prepared lists to eliminate his opponents. Erdogan's hubris had led to the polarization of Turkish society, the alienation of the military and secularists, rousing them to try to remove him from power (Cagaptay, 2017, Introduction).

Venezuela

Venezuela's regime for over a decade had been affected by deep-rooted political polarization that at times would make the opposition to become nondemocratic themselves to try and remove the *Chavistas* from power (the coup attempt in 2002) and also gave Chavez the reason to justify the use of constitutional rules for his own political gains "such as banning opponents, allowing the ruling party to spend state money unaccountably, eliminating term limits for the presidency in 2009, or creating electoral laws that are biased in favor of incumbents" (Corrales & Penfold, 2015, p.451). Chavez's first power grab after becoming the president was rewriting the Venezuelan constitution. Puntofijista derives from the Punto Fijo Pact of 1958 that were a set of agreements following years of dictatorship that set the terms for democratic political competition (Corrales & Penfold, 2015, p.456). However, the system was corrupt and unstable, thus Chavez promised to dismantle the system by first attacking Accion Democratica and COPEI, and the system's founding parties (Corrales & Penfold, 2015, p.460). In 1998 (before Chavez) Venezuela's GDP per capita had regressed to the level from the 1950s, "moderate and extreme poverty spread from 44.4 percent of households in 1989 to 57.6 percent in 1998, and extreme poverty grew from 20.1 to 28.8 percent" (Corrales & Penfold, 2015, p.468). This explains why voters supported Chavez because he promised to repair the political system. As president, Chavez first focused on increasing presidential power by changing the relationship between the branches of government (Corrales & Penfold, 2015, p.476). Chavez justified the weakening of the branches in 1999 as to end the dilapidated parties.

Hugo Chavez died in office in March of 2013, resulting in a succession crisis as politicians feared of what is next to come. It can be said that Venezuela has now become the country with the worst economy, "by mid-2014 Venezuela featured a nasty combination of

recession, inflation, deficits, debt, and shortages” (Corrales & Penfold, 2015, p. 89). Under Maduro, there appears to be a turn toward less competitiveness however; this implies that the regime has become even *more* authoritarian. Maduro’s “response to declining electoral competitiveness” was the result of inherited institutions left over by Chavez when he “transformed Venezuela’s political institutions in the direction of virtually eliminating checks and balances on the presidency and increasing restrictions on veto players” (Corrales & Penfold, 2015, p.116). Maduro had inherited the repression of impunity;

“a ruling party in disarray that could only be united by launching a frontal attack on the opposition; a series of armed forces (military and paramilitary groups) that had been purged of disloyal elements and indoctrinated to serve the revolution; and an array of diplomatic ties that reduced the degree to which Venezuela could be held accountable internationally” (Corrales & Penfold, 2015, p.120).

President Hugo Chavez Frias was in office from 1999 through 2013 when he passed away, established the United Socialist Party (*Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela*, the PSUV) and was reelected in 2000, 2006, and 2012 (Corrales & Penfold, 2015, p. 103). As discussed previously with the case in Turkey, there can be an illusion of freedoms still existing and the opposition being allowed to compete in elections, however, the system of checks and balances are not enforced. Hugo Chavez had “die-hard loyalists...placed at top-level positions in state offices, such as the courts, thereby undermining the system of checks and balances” while the state was actively seeking ways to undermine civic institutions (Corrales & Penfold, 2015, p. 153). In Venezuela the electoral field was unfair by systematically denying the opposition and supporting the major party through the amount of electoral support. Chavez participated in many elections over his time in office and because of his unlimited term limits he participated in

seventeen elections with “the *chavista* forces [prevailing] in all but one” (Corrales & Penfold, 2015, p.161). He resulted in the expansion of the executive powers, the limitation of alternating in office and the reduction in accountability.

Venezuela’s inflation at one point was above 700 percent because of the extremist government that resulted from Hugo Chavez and his successor Nicholas Maduro (Chaplin, 2015, Introduction). Both leaders in their administrations have been gradually killing business with a “multitude of regulations, price controls, and government take-overs which has eliminated the private production of many goods and services” (Corrales & Penfold, 2015, p.210). Venezuelans had to put up with a lot of disorder and grew dissatisfied with their government after many years of violent struggles over power. Hugo Chavez earned his start through the military when he led two failed coup attempts before becoming president. He would portray himself as a socialist opponent to President Bush’s imperialism. Chavez as president took advantage of the “record high oil prices during the 2000’s to spend on his people while running irresponsibly high budget deficits year after year” (Corrales & Penfold, 2015, p.210). Nicholas Maduro became his successor in a “fraudulent” election and continued Chavez’s policies after his death (Chaplin, 2015, Introduction). Maduro’s party would then lose control of the legislature by a landslide; however he packed the courts with loyalists who have so far defeated the opposition’s efforts to remove him. He then placed blame on the country’s problems on outsiders by believing the conspiracy that the American CIA is causing an economic warfare (Chaplin, 2015, Introduction).

In Venezuela, Hugo Chavez was a political outsider who protested against what he saw as corrupt governing elite, and swore to build a more genuine democracy that would take advantage of the country’s vast oil wealth to benefit the lives of the poor. He tapped into the resentment of regular Venezuelan citizens; many felt mistreated and ignored by the recognized

political parties, thus Chavez won the presidency in 1999(Corrales & Penfold, 2015, p.42). He held free elections for a new constituent assembly in 1999; in it his allies won the overwhelming majority (Corrales & Penfold, 2015, p.149). This allowed the *chavistas* (those who supported Hugo Chavez) to rewrite the constitution. It was not until 2003, that Chavez took his first clear steps toward authoritarianism. Public support was fading and Chavez was stalling an opposition-led referendum “that would have recalled him for office- until a year later, when soaring oil prices had boosted his standing enough for him to win” (Levitsky and Ziblatt, 2018, p.4). After 2006 the regime grew evermore repressive by “closing a major television station, arresting or exiling opposition politicians, judges, and media figures on dubious charges, and eliminating presidential term limits” resulting in Chavez being able to remain in power indefinitely (Levitsky and Ziblatt, 2018, p.4). A year after Chavez’s death, his successor, Nicholas Maduro, would follow his example by also winning a questionable reelection and his administration would imprison a major opposition leader in 2014 (Levitsky and Ziblatt, 2018, p.4).

Venezuela once considered itself a democracy starting from 1958, one of the oldest in Latin America. Chavez, prior to the presidency, was a junior military officer and later a failed coup leader who had never held public office (Sylvia & Danopoulos, 2003, Introduction).One of the founders of Venezuelan democracy, Rafael Caldera, would give Chavez his opportunity to rise in power (Levitsky and Ziblatt, 2018, p.16-19). Venezuelan politics consisted of two major parties, “the center-left Democratic Action and Caldera’s center-right Social Christian Party (known as COPEI)” and was once viewed as an example of democracy in a region filled with coups and dictatorships (Levitsky and Ziblatt, 2018, p.16).The 1980s for Venezuela however, saw the oil-dependent economy sink “ into a prolonged slump, a crisis that persisted for more than a decade, nearly doubling the poverty rate” leading to the Venezuelans becoming

dissatisfied (Levitsky and Ziblatt, 2018, p.18). Hugo Chavez would lead mass riots in February of 1989 and “the rebels called themselves ‘Bolivarians’, after revered independence hero Simon Bolivar” but the coup failed (Levitsky and Ziblatt, 2018, p.16). Chavez was detained and forced to appear on live television to tell his supporters to surrender, the promise of a future change made him a hero in the eyes of many Venezuelans, mainly the poorer ones. The former president gave them an opening to mainstream when instead of “denouncing the coup leaders as an extremist threat, [he] offered them public sympathy” (Levitsky and Ziblatt, 2018, p.16-18). In 1993, Caldera’s party system collapsed however Chavez was still in jail waiting for trial. Then, in 1994, President Caldera dropped all charges against him, Caldera believed that Chavez was just a momentary fad “- someone who would likely fall out of public favor by the time of the next election” he believed that nobody would vote for him (Levitsky and Ziblatt, 2018, p.19). Caldera couldn’t have been more wrong for on December 6, 1998, Chavez won the presidency.

Hugo Chavez was elected by a majority of voters and shared the trait of the many autocratic leaders before him, by attacking his critics. He would use “harsh and provocative terms- as enemies, as subversives, and even as terrorists... described his opponents as ‘rancid pigs’ and ‘squalid oligarchs’” and as president he called them enemies and traitors (Levitsky and Ziblatt, 2018, p.75). The Venezuelan opposition would try their best by even requesting to the Supreme Court to appoint “a team of psychiatrists to determine whether Chavez could be removed from office on the grounds of ‘mental incapacity’” (Levitsky and Ziblatt, 2018, p.76). An example of Chavez’s questionable sanity would be the instance when opposition leader Leopoldo Lopez, was “arrested and charged with ‘inciting violence’ during a wave of antigovernment protests in 2014”, and when asked to provide evidence, government officials said that it allegedly at one point had been “subliminal” (Levitsky and Ziblatt, 2018, p.83).

Another example was when the Chavez government investigated Globovision television owner Guillermo Zuloaga, leading him to escape arrest by fleeing the country and under strong financial pressure, Zuloaga would eventually sell Globovision to a businessman that was considered government-friendly (Levitsky and Ziblatt, 2018, p.83). Many media outlets would begin practicing self-censorship when key media outlets began to be threatened. The Chavez administration increased their attacks in the mid-2000s leading to one of Venezuela's largest television networks, Venevision, to decide to stop covering politics. Prior to this, Venevision was considered a pro-opposition network; however it barely covered the opposition during the 2006 election, "giving President Chavez more than five times as much coverage as it did his rivals" (Levitsky and Ziblatt, 2018, p.84).

Chavez (and Erdogan most recently) has justified their merging of power by labeling their opponents as existential threats. In December 2015, Venezuelan opposition parties won control of congress and had hoped to use their legislative power to check President Nicolas Maduro. The new congress passed an amnesty law "that would free 120 political prisoners, and it voted to block Maduro's declaration of a state of economic emergency (which granted him vast power to govern by decree)" (Levitsky and Ziblatt, 2018, p.109). Maduro would then turn to the Supreme Court, which he had packed with loyalists, effectively incapacitating the legislature by ruling the majority of their bills, including the amnesty law, unconstitutional (Levitsky and Ziblatt, 2018, p.109). A similar course of events had occurred earlier in Venezuela under Hugo Chavez. Chavez's opponents found his populist discourse terrifying even during his earlier years in office when he still feigned a democracy. They would try to remove Chavez by any means necessary in hopes of avoiding Venezuela transforming into Cuban-style socialism (Levitsky and Ziblatt, 2018, p.216).

In April 2002, opposition leaders would result in destroying their democratic image when they attempted and failed a military coup. Then in December 2002, “the opposition launched an indefinite general strike... seeking to shut the country down until Chavez resigned” however the strike only lasted for two months and it cost Venezuela approximately \$4.5 billion and it too ultimately failed (Levitsky and Ziblatt, 2018, p.216). A third strategy involved the boycotting of the 2005 legislative elections, “but this did little more than allow the *chavistas* to gain total control over Congress” thus, all three had backfired (Levitsky and Ziblatt, 2018, p.216). The strategies resulted in the erosion of the opposition’s public support, allowed Chavez to label his rivals as antidemocratic, and handing “the government an excuse to purge the military, the police, and the courts, arrest or exile dissidents, and close independent media outlets” (Levitsky and Ziblatt, 2018, p.216).

The Chavez administration did have aspects that made it different to other authoritarian regimes in Latin America such as the presence of the military and the increase of state-owned enterprises. The Venezuelan government would not promote privatization and enforced the most severe regulatory restrictions. But it was their distinct foreign policy that was odd for they had actively tried to counteract the United States’ influence and promoted radical nationalism across the region (Chaplin, 2015, Introduction). Chavez was hostile toward any world leaders he disliked which included the United States president however he made Iran a close ally when it was a leading buyer of Russian weapons (Corrales & Penfold, 2015, p.184). Chavez’s administration mainly focused on three aspects of society, “the role of (decaying) liberal democracy since the 1970s, (failed) economic reforms in the 1990s, and (overpriced) oil in the 2000s” (Corrales & Penfold, 2015, p.200). There were demands for political institutions to become more participatory when the fiscal resources from oil declined. The early 2000s saw a

rise in oil prices which gave Chavez the opportunity to deliver on the changes demanded of his regime. Venezuela's dependence on oil eventually would cause "macroeconomic [instability]; political party fragmentation, which triggered ...infighting; government mismanagement of the economy...and the Asian crisis of the 1997, which devastated Venezuela's economy" around the same time Chavez was running for president (Corrales & Penfold, 2015, p.233).

Chavez saw the instability of the oil industry and the failing of checks and balances when his administration became in charge of their own private oil company. *Chavismo* could be deemed as a "political project" meant to challenge traditional checks and balances "by building an electoral majority based on radical social discourse of inclusion" due to property redistribution and social handouts from the oil industry while also weakening horizontal and vertical accountability (Corrales & Penfold, 2015, p.281). *Chavismo* mobilized nontraditional actors strengthening democracy but also excluded large segments of society by labeling them as enemies to the people (Ellner & Hellinger, 2004, Introduction). In the period from 1999-2004, Chavez's renovation of institutions within politics and the oil sector "led to the erosion of checks and balances and the restructuring of PDVSA, [allowing] Chavez to convert the oil sector into, in essence, the regime's checking account" (Corrales & Penfold, 2015, p.325). Chavez's successor, Nicolas Maduro, had selectively accommodated the ruling party when he organized a network between Chavez's international and institutional allies. The regime had become even more repressive and less competitive as overtime the country faced rising opposition and internal disputes, the rising disdain for the opposition, the implementation of autocratic laws and the sense of urgency from the unified opposition (Corrales & Penfold, 2015, p.325).

Some researchers theorize that the Chavez regime can predict the downfall of other countries that are also suffering with party decay, weak state powers, and economic instability.

Venezuela's transformation from a democracy to an authoritarian regime could have also resulted from the rising dissatisfaction with the government which resulted in politicians seizing centralized power to manage these issues. Between 1999 and 2001, Hugo Chavez was enjoying the highest approval rates and electoral results in the region allowing him to have institutional changes that allowed him to increase presidential powers before the 2003-2008 oil boom (Corrales & Penfold, 2015, p.420). Venezuela had become extremely polarized in 2001 between the *chavistas* and the opposition and still continues to today (Corrales & Penfold, 2015, p.422). In 2004, Chavez survived a recall referendum and no longer felt any political threat for his "approval ratings, electoral fortunes, and command of institutions recovered spectacularly, and street protests against the government never again matched the levels of 2002 to 2004" (Corrales & Penfold, 2015, p.425). Chavez responded to this by again increasing power concentration and the restrictions on the opposition, "none of this [having] occurred in the context of any genuine political emergency" (Corrales & Penfold, 2015, p.428).

Maduro's current regime has resulted from deploying strategies that included the use of the intense polarization in the country, political clientelism, job discrimination and his immunity of punishment for corruption (Corrales & Penfold, 2015, p.631). Chavez has exemplified how "a democratically elected leader can manipulate domestic institutions to crowd out social and political groups and, by extension, to crowd out democracy" (Corrales & Penfold, 2015, p.439).

In the 2000s, Chavez called for a National Constituent Assembly to put an end of the hold traditional parties had in Venezuela, taking advantage of the anti-party sentiment that had become wide-spread. To elect delegates of the National Assembly, Chavez used one of his first administrative acts for a presidential decree for a consultative referendum. Chavez's political party had lacked the votes "little more than 20 percent seats in the Chamber of Deputies and 22

percent in the Senate” for at the time Congress needed two-thirds vote to call a Constituent Assembly (Corrales & Penfold, 2015, p.484). Thus, Chavez needed the consultative referendum to bypass Congress, resulting in sparking a conflict between the different branches of government. In March 1999 the Supreme Court approved the consultative referendum and in “April 25, 1999, about 87 percent of the voters approved the idea of holding a Constituent Assembly and the electoral rules set up by the presidency to elect delegates to the assembly” (Corrales & Penfold, 2015, p.492). The Supreme Court feared denying Chavez for his popularity thus months after the ruling, Congress was suspended. Chavez had earned the “highest approval ratings of any Venezuelan president since the 1960s” and would use his power over the majority to intimidate the other branches (Corrales & Penfold, 2015, p.495).

Chavez had gained control over the Constituent Assembly after his difficult political accomplishments in 1999. The presidential commission designed a plurality system for selecting the delegates, a “nomination strategy that ensured that no more candidates from [Chavez’s] coalition would be nominated per district than there were seats under competition, which was a way to avoid wasted votes” (Corrales & Penfold, 2015, p.498). However the opposition made their candidates compete individually instead of on a single banner. But since there were too many candidates dispersed, the government with only 53 percent of the votes to earn 93 percent of the seats, resulting in the opposition having little to no say in the draft of the new constitution (Corrales & Penfold, 2015, p.503).It resulted in greater expansion of power for the executive than the other branches of government, but the president won the most expansion of power overall (Corrales & Penfold, 2015, p.506).Chavez extended the presidential term from five to six years and allowed for the immediate reelection to a second term. He eradicated the system of checks and balances between the branches, eliminated the Senate and “obtained complete

discretion over promotions within the armed forces without legislative approval” (Corrales & Penfold, 2015, p.507). Chavez also prohibited the public financing of political parties, possibly a way to eliminate any opposition from entering office. By weakening the legislative branch, Chavez was now more able to pack the courts and control the attorney general (Corrales & Penfold, 2015, p.520). Chavez gained control of the CNE “by creating a transition council”, made up of members of the Constituent Assembly and loyalists to create a smaller congress, “that governed legislative affairs in the period between the approval of the new constitution in December 1999 and the election of the new Congress in August 2000” (Corrales & Penfold, 2015, p.522-525). He had now increased his hold on power and his threat to the opposition and now he wanted to adjust relations between the state and society.

In 2001, Chavez had gained the Legislature’s power to rule by decree in a series of policy areas such as in property rights (Corrales & Penfold, 2015, p.420). He threatened to reform the education law “to give the central government greater lee-way over the hiring and firing of teachers and the curriculum in both the private and public systems” (Corrales & Penfold, 2015, p.538). The new power from the Legislature, the eradication of checks and balances for the institutions and the proposal to reform education resulted in a rise of discontent from society. Chavez responded to this by becoming more defiant and unwilling to change his administration, thus from 2001-2003 it seemed that the opposition had the upper-hand in this conflict (Corrales & Penfold, 2015, p.546). On November 13, 2001, without discussing prior to the cabinet meeting, Chavez approved 49 laws, “civic organizations, political parties, business groups, and the media reacted by stirring up discontent against the president” resulting in marches and protests (Corrales & Penfold, 2015, p.554). Some of the opposition that were linked to the business community and traditional parties began to openly plot against the government and tried to get

upper rank officers to join in a potential coup (Corrales & Penfold, 2015, p.556). There was a large campaign that questioned the democratic legitimacy of Chavez's administration and on April 11, 2002, approximately 1 million people marched to the presidential palace. Chavez ordered the military to suppress the protestors but the leading military officers refused and Chavez reportedly resigned (Corrales & Penfold, 2015, p.564).

The new transitional president announced the removal of the 1999 constitution but it resulted in the military pulling back their support and labor groups distancing themselves from him. Because of the "undemocratic nature of the first set of laws" the *chavista* supporters were able to restore Chavez back into power in under three days (Corrales & Penfold, 2015, p.567). This crisis in Venezuela strengthened the military and the presidency, mainly because the nation was still very polarized "Chavez still enjoyed substantial support, and the military, to avoid escalating societal tensions, opted for formal restoration of the status quo ante rather than for a call for new elections" (Corrales & Penfold, 2015, p.575). Polarization was heightened as *Chavistas* became more resentful of the opposition and because the status quo had remained the same instead of reforming (Corrales & Penfold, 2015, p.575). The 2002 crisis resulted in intervention by the international community, "Cesar Gaviria, secretary general of the Organization of American States (OAS)", moved to Venezuela to try promoting talks between *chavistas* and the opposition, and they eventually reached a deadlock (Corrales & Penfold, 2015, p.583).

As Chavez continued his autocratic policies; Venezuela continued to be intensely polarized. It was clear that Chavez wanted to maintain political and operational control over the oil industry, the opposition took advantage of this by supporting a 3 month long strike by the workers and managers of the state-owned oil company, Petroleos de Venezuela, S.A. (PDVSA),

by closing operations along with other companies and the majority of the oil industry (Corrales & Penfold, 2015, p.590). Public services such as the media, banks, leading food producers and supermarkets continued operating but Venezuela's oil production came to a standstill, resulting in an economic depression in a matter of weeks (Corrales & Penfold, 2015, p.600). Chavez's response was to punish the protestors by firing "nearly 60 percent of the PDVSA personnel, including most managers, and assigned control of the oil industry to the military" (Corrales & Penfold, 2015, p.603). As the distribution of gasoline collapsed, certain foods and convenience goods became unavailable in large cities. Chavez had persuaded the international community and the military that PDVSA had been used for treason "and that the national interest required direct state control of the industry" (Corrales & Penfold, 2015, p.603). Oil production was slowly restored when the military accepted its new responsibilities with the support of chavista activists and PDVSA managers (Corrales & Penfold, 2015, p.603).

For the third attack at Chavez after the oil strike, the opposition chose to call for a referendum, but the constitution was set with high thresholds. In 2003, Chavez's approval ratings were at their lowest, however, the opposition required the signatures of 20 percent of registered voters to even initiate the referendum. Then to actually remove Chavez, the referendum required more votes than the amount Chavez earned in the previous presidential election (August 2000) where he won by a landslide (Corrales & Penfold, 2015, p.614). Chavez's administration countered by coming up with several legal barriers to discourage the collection of signatures, another example of how he manipulated institutionally to challenge electoral pressures (Corrales & Penfold, 2015, p.618). However this ended to no avail for in March 2004, the CNE finally agreed that the opposition had actually "collected more than enough valid signatures to hold a

referendum and preparations began to schedule it for August 2004” (Corrales & Penfold, 2015, p.614).

Chavez’s administration had their weakest point in early 2004 when the opposition was leading in the polls. In response to the threat, the state used vintage clientelism; after Chavez’s victory in the referendum, he maintained high levels of public spending “to support the candidacies of chavista gubernatorial and mayoral candidates” (Corrales & Penfold, 2015, p.657). The extreme level of resources made Chavez grow favorably for the majority of the population. Meanwhile, the government continued to pack the courts and struck back on those who signed the petition “by publishing on the Internet a list of voters’ electoral preferences that had been compiled through sophisticated technology” known as Tascon’s list (Corrales & Penfold, 2015, p.665). Luis Tascon was a chavista assembly member that generated the document from the database of signatures from the CNE (Corrales & Penfold, 2015, p.665). This list was meant to threaten citizens, saying that if they didn’t withdraw their signatures they could lose their jobs and social benefits (Corrales & Penfold, 2015, p.665).

Possibly the most blatant show of authoritarian tendencies from Hugo Chavez were his outright punishments of the opposition but more specifically, “the right to a secret ballot and the right to vote one’s conscience without fear of reprisals” (Corrales & Penfold, 2015, p.670). It was no surprise that by 2006 the opposition was almost nonexistent for every effort to remove Chavez and his loyalists from office had failed. The opposition over the years had tried everything “from mobilizing vast public demonstrations, to plotting with military factions, to shutting down the oil industry by means of a national strike, to holding a recall referendum, to boycotting one election, to denouncing corruption and power grabs” (Corrales & Penfold, 2015, p.682). All these strategies while the opposition received little to no support from the

international community. In Venezuela, much like any oil-producing country where the state owns all or the majority of the industry, the government controlled the money flow from the oil and most of it went to Chavez's supporters (Corrales & Penfold, 2015, p.686).

In 2006 it seemed that the conditions for a fair and just election remained in doubt. Members of the remaining opposition pointed out the following problems: “-CNE was not independent of the regime. The electronic voting system was susceptible to manipulation... Access to the media was uneven and overwhelmingly favored the incumbent. The state was greatly exceeding spending limits on political campaigning” and lastly the voting machines allowed for the government to see who someone voted for (Corrales & Penfold, 2015, p.706). The OAS gave the CNE technical assistance for the 2006 presidential election to reduce the tracing of voting records. The CNE also addressed one of the concerns the opposition mentioned previously but failed to enforce it. The CNE was to prohibit public officials “from using official acts and events for electoral purposes and to limit each candidate's daily television advertising time- but it failed to follow through” (Corrales & Penfold, 2015, p.731). The opposition had a disadvantage even when trying to gain access of the media for “the regime invested more than \$40 million in up-grading the state-owned TV channel and the state news agency; established three other TV stations... 145 local radio stations...75 community newspapers; and launched up to 66 pro-government websites” (Corrales & Penfold, 2015, p.740-743). The opposition had no access to any of these media outlets; thus, President Chavez won the election with 62.9 percent of the vote, the widest margin and the greatest voter turnout in Venezuelan history (Corrales & Penfold, 2015, p.756). Chavez won the presidency, his political party, Movement of the Fifth Republic (Movimiento Quinta Republica, or MVR), took a majority of the votes (Corrales & Penfold, 2015, p.767).

Following the 2006 election, Chavez's administration became more radicalized while the opposition became more moderate. Post-election, Chavez announced plans to hold a constitutional referendum to advance a new socialist agenda. The constitutional reform was part of phases to radicalize that involved

“using a new enabling law to change more than sixty pieces of legislation...changing the constitution by means of a presidential committee... including no term limits for the president and more stringent conditions for recall referenda... redrawing the administrative political map at the regional and local levels to curtail the influence of governors and mayors...expanding ideological guidelines for hiring and training public school teachers. ... [and] the creation by Chavez of still-unspecified centers of power at the sub municipal level, the so-called communal assemblies, to challenge the authority of mayors and other local officials” (Corrales & Penfold, 2015, p.789-792).

Furthermore, Chavez announced his intent to nationalize telecommunications and the electricity sectors and the increase of state involvement in other areas of the economy (Corrales & Penfold, 2015, p.805). Public and private university students protested the closing of the RCTV (the oldest and most popular channel in Venezuela that he claimed to be anti-government) and Chavez's plans for a constitutional reform. But he dismissed their movement and encouraged chavista loyalists to counter-protest leading to violence. Even with the protest of international NGOs like the OAS and the Human Rights Watch, the government revoked RCTV's license (Corrales & Penfold, 2015, p.810).

Chavez's administration came up with a new way to degrade and undermine the opposition's leadership, by producing a list of citizens that are banned from running for the

presidency due to being under suspicion of corruption (Corrales & Penfold, 2015, p.829). After some reduction, over 250 candidates were banned and over 200 of them were from the opposition (Corrales & Penfold, 2015, p.829). In 2009 the government began to target elected officials. Manuel Rosales was the elected mayor of Maracaibo and a former presidential candidate was accused of corruption and had to seek refuge in Peru (Corrales & Penfold, 2015, p.844). Chavez would threaten other governors in the same fashion. In the same year the government passed a new electoral law that manipulated districts without any input from the opposition. The ending of term limits also meant that Chavez did away with any challenge of the few potential checks on presidential power that were left (Corrales & Penfold, 2015, p.162). Chavez now had a new fear, since 2003, there was talk about having *chavismo* without him, and Venezuela was filled with discussion of a potential successor.

However, the end of term limits for the president should have ended any dispute of having a successor. To encourage party leaders to permit this constitutional change, Chavez proposed the indefinite reelection for all elected officials (Corrales & Penfold, 2015, p.873). If other institutional aspects of government such as judicial, party, economic and educational were weakened, terms limits serve as the only check against clientelism. The system of checks and balance and the electoral system in Venezuela were under direct control of Chavez's administration; however, Chavez argued that they were all the state needed to contain the expansion of executive powers (Corrales & Penfold, 2015, p.887). Now that Chavez was able to run for as long as he wanted, few party leaders dared to engage in succession battles and instead spent their time promoting their loyalty to Chavez (Corrales & Penfold, 2015, p.893). The massive funding of social programs, though a democratic practice originally, passed a certain limit causes irregularity and resulting in the undermining of "democratic practices by creating an

uneven playing field between the incumbent and opponents” (Corrales & Penfold, 2015, p.964). The chavista aid programs used special software that was similar to the “Big Brother” concept and gave the government a way to discriminate jobs in the public sector and buy votes (Corrales & Penfold, 2015, p.997). Chavez died in 2013 but Venezuela and the international arena is still feeling his impact live on through his successor Maduro.

Trump

If someone were to describe to you a crumbling democracy where political opponents accused each other of corruption, the government of interfering with election results and the use of political power to impeach and secure seats in the Supreme Court with loyalists, you would have thought of the two previous examples discussed in this report. But the radicalization of the Republican Party has made the United States just as much of a political warzone as Turkey and Venezuela. However this is not strange when considering the history of the American government that is filled with “government shutdowns, legislative hostage-taking, mid-decade redistricting, and the refusal to even consider Supreme Court nominations” (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018, p.167). Donald Trump has been in office for only a year and yet he has already followed the steps of Hugo Chavez, and Recep Tayyip Erdogan. America’s new president began his term by instigating attacks on his opponents and calling the media an “enemy of the American people” (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018, p.176). He questioned the legitimacy of judges and has threatened to cut the federal funding to major cities (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018, p.176). Not only did Trump claim to be plagued by powerful forces in the establishment but even went as far to say that “no politician in history, and I say this with great surety, has been treated worse or more unfairly” (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018, p.176). Prior to his first year in office, Donald Trump had shown all four warning signs. To review for this final section; Levitsky and Ziblatt said,

“We should worry when a politician 1) rejects, in words or action, the democratic rules of the game, 2) denies the legitimacy of opponents, 3) tolerates or encourages violence, or 4) indicates a willingness to curtail the civil liberties of opponents, including the media. A politician who meets even one of these criteria is cause for concern. Very often, populist outsiders do” (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018, p.21).

Trump's candidacy was just a precursor for what was to come and what possibly will transpire in the following years. America's checks and balances have been preserved by the "mutual toleration...the understanding that competing parties accept one another as legitimate rivals... that politicians should exercise restraint in deploying their institutional prerogatives" (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018, p.28). These standards of toleration and restraint have served as guardrails for American democracy by helping it avoid the types of political battles that have destroyed democracies before. But it seems that the guardrails in the present have been weakening and now American democracy is threatened. The deterioration of our democratic norms began in the 1980s but has accelerated in the 2000s with Donald Trump. Trump's appeal of "mixed racism with populist appeals to working-class whites' sense of victimhood and economic anger, helped him" gain popularity with a traditional blue-collar base (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018, p.36).

On June 15, 2015, real estate developer and reality-TV star Donald Trump made the announcement that he was going to run for president. Trump was known for his extremist views and his most recent experience with politics at the time had been as a "birther" when he questioned President Barack Obama's origin of birth (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018, p.53). He denied Obama's legitimacy as president when he didn't believe that he was born in the United States, one of the main requirements for the presidency is to be a born citizen (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018, p.62). Trump did so to an extent that leading media and political figures began to take him seriously. Celebrities being able to run for presidency could be traced back to the post-1972 primary system "[which] was especially vulnerable to a particular kind of outside: individuals with enough fame or money to skip the 'invisible primary'" (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018, p.54). To win the nomination, Trump had to compete against sixteen other candidates in a complicated network of caucuses and primaries. He could not have hoped to win the support of the

establishment because Trump lacked any political experience and he hadn't been a Republican for long. Trump actually switched his party registration multiple times and at one point contributed to Hillary Clinton's campaign for U.S. Senator (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018, p.55). Trump began to gain support in the polls but few people actually took his candidacy seriously.

In August 2015, two months into Trump's candidacy, many still believed his chances of winning to be highly unlikely and Las Vegas bookmakers even gave him one-hundred-to-one odds of winning (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018, p.56). Possibly another major factor that weakened the power of traditional gatekeepers was the extreme use of alternative media, mainly cable news and social media (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018, p.56). Fox News and influential radio talk-show personalities over the years had radicalized conservative voters that eventually benefited extreme candidates like Trump however, he was still shunned by the Republican party establishment (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018, p.56). Trump initially had a tough relationship with Fox News, his candidacy however reaped the benefits of its highly polarized media landscape. As a "candidate with qualities uniquely tailored to the digital age", Trump also found ways to use old media to substitute for traditional campaign spending and endorsements (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018, p.58). Trump attracted free mainstream coverage by creating controversy. By one estimate, the Twitter accounts of MSNBC, CNN, CBS, and NBC (not seemingly Pro-Trump) mentioned Trump twice as much as his rival Hillary Clinton. It is estimated that Trump received approximately \$2 billion in free media coverage just during the primary season (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018, p.58).

The South Carolina primary for Trump seemed bleak since he did not have a "single endorsement from a sitting Republican governor, senator, or congressperson" (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018, p.57). Republican leaders were powerless to stop Trump's rise and the barrage of

attacks had little impact and possibly even helped Trump in the voting. He was so uniquely inexperienced compared to other U.S. Presidents but what caused the level of unease by the media, politicians and civilians was his “extremist views on immigrants and Muslims, willingness to violate basic norms of civility, and praise for Vladimir Putin and other dictators” (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018, p.60). The United States faced a dilemma as Trump’s critics took him literally but not seriously and his supporters took him seriously but not literally, defending his campaign as nothing but “mere words” (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018, p.60).

The first sign that President-elect Donald Trump was a potential autocratic threat is the weak commitment to the democratic rules of the game. Trump questioned the legitimacy of the electoral process and made the outlandish suggestion that he would not accept the rules of the 2016 election if he did not win (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018, p.61). Trump insisted that millions of illegal immigrants and dead people were being mobilized to vote for Clinton during the 2016 campaign and yet it is nearly impossible to actually coordinate a national-level voting fraud (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018, p.61). The second warning sign was “the denial of the legitimacy of one’s opponents” (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018, p.62). To preface, authoritarian politicians frame their rivals as criminals, subversives, unpatriotic, or even a threat to the national security. As mentioned earlier, Trump had been a “birther”, he challenged the legitimacy of Barack Obama’s presidency and went as far as suggesting that he was born in Kenya and Muslim (Frum, 2018, p. 238). Then many of his supporters associated and even equated Muslims as being “un-American”. Trump during the 2016 campaign also attacked Hillary Clinton’s legitimacy as a rival when he branded her as a “criminal” and repeatedly stated that Clinton “has to go to jail” (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018, p.62). The third category was “the toleration or encouragement of violence” and Trump not only tolerated but actually supported violence among his supporters.

Trump would embrace and encourage supporters who physically assaulted protestors and would offer to pay for their legal fees as was the case for a supporter who attacked and threatened to kill a protestor at a rally in Fayetteville, North Carolina (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018, p.62). He would also respond to protesters at his rallies by provoking violence with his supporters.

The final warning sign was Trump's "readiness to curtail the civil liberties of rivals and critics" (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018, p.64). One thing that differentiates autocrats from democratic leaders is their readiness to use their power to punish the opposition such as politicians, media and even civilians. Trump during his campaign said he planned to hire someone to investigate Hillary Clinton after the election and declared that Clinton should be imprisoned while also threatening to punish unfriendly media (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018, p.64). Trump is quoted saying "I'm going to open up our libel laws so when they write purposely negative and horrible and false articles, we can sue them and win lots of money..." (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018, p.64). The primary process that prohibits radicalists from entering had failed and allowed a man so unfit for office to run as a mainstream party candidate.

The system of checks and balances was designed to protect our institution and the people of the state from leaders who wished to abuse and concentrate their power, and for the majority of American history it has. However, even the best constitutions can fail, and no perfect democracy exists. This constitution can be interpreted in ways that benefit the leaders while undermining the law. The American constitution says little to nothing about the president's individual authority via decrees or executive orders, and fails to define the limits of executive power during a crisis (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018, p.100). What has preserved the American democracy for so long consists of "many factors mattered, including our nation's immense wealth, a large middle class, and a vibrant civil society" and also the development of democratic

norms (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018, p.100). In order for our system to function properly, the executive branch, judiciary branch and Congress need a balance of power. However, Congress and the courts need to oversee and check the power of the president when necessary (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018, p.125). These institutions that have enough power to check the president also need to give the president enough freedom to run successfully. While the president holds the power of “executive orders, the presidential pardon, and court packing...another three lie with the Congress: the filibuster, the Senate’s power of advice and consent, and impeachment” (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018, p.177). The use of these powers could definitely result in a deadlock (or worst case scenario) a democratic breakdown.

Without the prevention of the constitution and approval of Congress, Presidents can push their agenda, bypassing the legislature when they issue executive orders, proclamations, vetoes, and executive agreements (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018, p.128). The act of court packing consists of either “impeaching unfriendly Supreme Court justices and replacing them with partisan allies, or altering the size of the Court and filling the new seats with loyalists” and both of these strategies are legal (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018, p.130). The Constitution allows the impeachment of judges and does not have a required size for the Supreme Court thus the president could remove seats and pack the Court with loyalists without violating the law. The third notable test of America’s democratic institutions was the authoritarian behavior of the Nixon administration. The American democracy was threatened before during Nixon’s administration because he also didn’t follow the norms nor tolerated mutual toleration (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018, p.141). Nixon viewed public opponents and the media as enemies, often depicting them as communists and threats to the nation (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018, p.205).

The presidency before Trump experienced the rise of extremism. President Obama was challenged over his legitimacy by “fringe conservative authors, talk-radio personalities, TV talking heads, and bloggers”, which eventually led to the political movement known as the Tea Party (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018, p.158). President Obama was constantly questioned as being a “real American”. The 2008 presidential candidate Sarah Palin would call her majority white Christian supporters “real Americans” and during Obama’s terms in office the Tea Party would stress that he did not love America nor share its values (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018, p.158). The biggest questioner of Obama’s legitimacy was Donald Trump. Prior to running for president, in an interview on the *Today* show Trump discussed his doubts. Trump would claim “I have people who actually have been studying it... and they cannot believe what they are finding” (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018, p.160). Trump would continue to appear on television news programs to demand the president to publicize his birth certificate. When Obama finally released his birth certificate in 2011, Trump proposed that it was a fake. He had refused to run against Obama in 2012 but his constant berate on Obama’s nationality had given him media attention and favor of the Republican Tea Party (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018, p.160).

Trump has attempted similar strategies that authoritarian leaders use to consolidate power. If politics were to be compared to a sport, Trump has attempted to “[capture] the referees, [sideline] the key players, and [rewrite] the rules to tilt the playing field against opponents” (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018, p.177). Right after winning office, Trump wanted that the to ensure “that the heads of U.S. intelligence agencies, including the FBI, the CIA, and the National Security Agency, would be personally loyal to him”, in hopes of protecting him from any investigations into his Russian ties during his campaign (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018, p.177). President Trump’s efforts to stop independent investigations were similar to the case in

Venezuela when “Prosecutor General Luisa Ortega, a *chavista* appointee who asserted her independence and began to investigate corruption and abuse in the Maduro government” (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018, p.178). Her investigations would lead to her dismissal in 2017.

President Trump pardoned former Arizona sheriff Joe Arpaio in August 2017 which was seen as a controversial jab at the judiciary. Arpaio was convicted on racial profiling and was now a political hero to Trump’s anti-immigrant supporters (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018, p.179). His action would spark fear of him eventually pardoning all in his inner circle including himself. Not only did Trump put judicial independence in question but also “openly spoke of using the Justice Department and the FBI to go after Democrats, including Hillary Clinton” (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018, p.180). Mounted efforts to sideline key players in the political system. President Trump showed efforts of sidelining key players when he verbally attacks critics in the media (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018, p.177). He repeatedly accused outlets such as the *New York Times* and CNN as providing “fake news” and conspiring against him and has considered enforcing government regulations on unfriendly media companies. In Trump’s first week in office, he signed an executive order “authorizing federal agencies to withhold funding from ‘sanctuary cities’ that refused to cooperate with the administration’s crackdown on undocumented immigrants” (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018, p.182). The plan was similar to the repeated attempts of Chavez government’s to remove opposition-run city governments control over organizations such as local hospitals, and police forces but luckily this time, the courts blocked Trump (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018, p.182).

As of yet there are no journalists arrested, and no media outlets having to adjust their coverage under pressure from the government. But so far Trump has made efforts to tilt the playing field to his advantage for in May of 2017, “he called for changes in what he called

‘archaic’ Senate rule, including the elimination of the filibuster, which would have strengthened the Republican majority at the expense of Democratic minority” (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018, p.182).The Democratic Party has become the primary representative of minority voters such as first-and second-generation immigrants while the Republican Party has remained a majority of white voters (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018, p.183).

The Republican Party has a history of marginalizing minority votes that stems from the days of Jim Crow and have continued into 2008 when they enforced stricter voter identification laws that were directed at the Hispanic population (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018, p.183).The Commission’s actions suggest potential voter suppression. They are collecting stories of voter fraud nation-wide to provide evidence for state-level voter-restrictions and voter roll purges that would remove many legitimate voters (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018, p.185).The Republicans control both houses of Congress under Trump but that does not mean they will support and defend all of his controversial actions. Any loyalists that are passive will distance themselves when there is a scandal but will still vote for their president (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018, p.189). Some loyalists will try to distance themselves but will also not take any actions against Trump. If they were to support an abuse of power however, that would enable authoritarian tendencies. Republicans would have to practice restraint, by backing the president on many issues, “from judicial appointments to tax and health care reform, but draw a line at behavior they consider dangerous” (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018, p.189). When authoritarians can’t win over the military or have allies swear their loyalty and have their critics leave them alone, they turn to public opinion. Chavez and Erdogan would attack democratic institutions and not fear backlash because of how popular they were.

The final factor that could allow President Trump an opportunity to breakdown our democracy is a potential crisis. During major crises like war or terrorists attacks, citizens are more tolerant and even support authoritarian policies if it means to defend national security (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018, p.191). Some instances in American history where such crises led to executive power grabs were “Lincoln’s suspension of habeas corpus [,] Roosevelt’s internment of Japanese Americans [and] Bush’s USA PATRIOT Act” (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018, p.193). So far Donald Trump has not shown any self-control with his presidential power and his promotion of violence and constant scandals and controversies, it is highly likely that conflict will occur. Due to Trump’s continued violation of democratic norms he has expanded what has been considered “acceptable” presidential behavior. The characteristics now include “lying, cheating, and bullying” (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018, p.193). Because of his unwillingness to follow the unwritten rules Trump stands out from previous presidents and these same rules are what maintain our democracy healthy. Among these norms is the separation of private and public affairs. To avoid nepotism, the legislation has prohibited “presidents from appointing family members to the cabinet or agency positions, [but] does not include White House staff positions” (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018, p.195). So when Trump appointed his son-in-law Jared Kushner as a high-level advisor, it was technically legal but still undermined this unspoken rule (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018, p.195).

President Trump has a conflict of interests when he was inaugurated. He still wanted to maintain his business assets while in office so he gave his sons control over his holdings (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018, p.197). He also disregarded political civility when postelection instead of reconciling with Clinton; he continued to attack her and also kept his onslaught on Obama (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018, p.197). The *New York Times* had kept track of all the lies Trump has

said while in office and they discovered that “he made at least one false or misleading public statement” every single day in his first forty days as president (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018, p.198). The media are a constant target of Trump’s remarks, repeatedly stating they were “among the most dishonest human beings on Earth” (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018, p.199). His administration has gone as far as prohibiting certain reporters from his press conferences (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018, p.200). In his first year as president, Trump has made lying, bullying and cheating a normalcy and has established political deviancy into daily routine.

Our constitution and culture can’t protect us from a democratic breakdown. As a country we have faced such extreme polarization before but that resulted in our nation collapsing and breaking into a civil war. In the cases of other countries like the Middle East and Latin America, “U.S. governments used diplomatic pressure, economic assistance, and other foreign policy tools to oppose authoritarianism and press for democratization” such as the post-Cold War period (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018, p.205). However, Donald Trump in his first months showed no sign to continue the U.S.’s role as a democracy promoter. After his many attacks of the press, threats to imprison his rival and blatant denial of election results if he didn’t win, Trump’s possibly the least democratic president in American history. The most optimistic view of our future is the recovery of our democracy. Trump could lose his support, not be reelected or impeached and forced to resign. Another scenario is the continued support of Trump and the Republicans “a pro-Trump GOP would retain the presidency, both houses of Congress, and the vast majority of statehouses, and it would eventually gain a solid majority in the Supreme Court” (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018, p.207). Trump’s administration would eliminate rules that would protect minorities. They would maintain a white majority through large-scale deportations, “immigration

restrictions, the purging of voter rolls, and the adoption of strict voter ID laws” (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018, p.207).

The methods discussed above seem extreme but each one has been discussed by Trump’s administration. If any of these measures were to be enacted, there would be great resistance from minority groups and the private sector. This would then lead to violence and in turn increase police repression on minorities. An example of this conflict is the political movement called Black Lives Matter (Frum, 2018, p. 343). The worst case scenario is the extreme polarization of the United States leading to increased institutional warfare under an authoritarian regime. If our democratic institutions could control or defeat Trump it will also strengthen them. Those who consider themselves as Anti-Trump should form a pro-democratic coalition similar to “Progressive synagogues, mosques, Catholic parishes, and Presbyterian churches may form an interfaith coalition to combat poverty or racial intolerance, or Latino, faith-based, and civil liberties groups might form a coalition to defend immigrant rights” (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018, p.218). While Trump increased the tension, the extreme polarization in America stems from deep-rooted resentment from racial and religious differences (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018, p.115). This polarization existed before Trump’s birther antics and will continue even after his term in office. In his first year, President Trump has boldly disregarded the constitution and institutional norms. He has used his power to intimidate his opponents and critics and has incited violence. Trump has used America’s weakness with polarization to favor him and now our democracy faces a downfall.

America can protect itself from others like Trump, Chavez and Erdogan with their political parties. Political parties need to screen out those individuals who would be unfit for office and serve as a prodemocrat while also represent the party’s voters. Not all political

outsiders had huge public support in the beginning, but were allowed their opportunity by other politicians when they disregarded the warning signs. A great misconception is the idea of authoritarians being controlled by democratic institutions but what the cases in Turkey and Venezuela have shown is that if Trump wanted to follow his own agenda, with enough public, political and militaristic support he could accomplish his goals for America.

Conclusion

In both cases of the fall of democracy into an authoritarian regime, I got to study the following years after their political peak. I was able to find warning signs shared in Chavez's and Erdogan's administrations that have become prominent since the earliest days of Trump's political journey. However, while Trump's term has been scandalous since his campaign and has continued to be as each day goes by, I cannot predict what will happen in the near or far future. As I am writing this conclusion, it has been over one year and politicians still cannot say if he will continue his presidency even a month from now. The same uncertainty that gives some people fear and anxiety is a sign of hope for others.

Turkey's government focused on the destabilization while maintaining an appearance of democracy. Erdogan would reject the system of checks and balances to increase his executive power while he bullied his opponents and criminalized the media. Meanwhile his political party the AKP would repress other politicians, protestors and citizens not associated with civil society. The research from this section showed me how an authoritarian will use his power to quiet his rivals and remain in office.

Venezuela faced multiple crises from high stagflation to multiple coups that lead the people to support a populist leader like Hugo Chavez. He used his opportunity to win office and then for over a decade continued to increase his presidential power, end term limits and weaken the other branches of government. He grew evermore repressive in the 2000s but when he died he left his position to Nicolas Maduro who continued his tradition of oppression and disregard for Congress and the media. The case of Venezuela showed how a president could use crises to rise in public support and manipulate the constitution to benefit their authoritarian agenda.

While the section on Trump was shorter when discussing his campaign and time in office, it did show how much he has expressed authoritarian tendencies thus far. He curved his negative media coverage in a way that made him the victim in the eyes of his white-middle class supporters and made him win the election. In his campaign alone he disregarded democratic norms, denied legitimate opponents, encouraged violence and repeatedly threatened his critics and rivals. It seems that the future of American democracy is in peril but democratic institutions and political parties in all of these scenarios could prevent this type of political leader from gaining a position of power.

Political parties are the gate-keepers that can decide whether extremists like Trump will be allowed to run in the invisible primaries. While I speak for myself when I say that Trump's reign of terror will be short lived, I cannot speak for those who voted and continue to support his administration. Chavez, Erdogan and Trump all share massive popularity, people who were dissatisfied with their current form of government. President Donald Trump shares all the warning signs of an authoritarian leader like in Venezuela and Turkey, but there are those in the United States who will ignore these signs no matter how blatant they are. While my research ends before Trump's end of term, future political researchers could continue where this stops and discover what happens when a populist wins the election and holds the American democracy in the palm of their hands and what they do with it.

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