

**The Relationship Between Immigration Policies in  
Venezuelan History, the Development of Racism, and the  
Election of President Hugo Chávez Frías in 1998-2012**

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## **Statement of Originality**

I hereby declare that this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree or diploma to any other university or institution. In addition, I certify that to the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously written or published by another author except where due reference is made in the thesis itself.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: 06/02/2020

## Abstract

Venezuela is one of the most racially mixed countries in Latin America and has been described for more than a century as a place where all races are welcome. However, this mentality was tested on December 06, 1998, when Hugo Chávez Frías became “the first non-white president in the majority non-white country’s history” (MacLeod 2018, p.9). It follows that from the perspective of this study, Chávez’s election, as well as social conflicts post-election, exposed doubts about this presumably racially egalitarian democracy.

Scholars like Corrales (2005) have accused Chávez of polarizing the country with his radical political changes. Likewise, studies such as MacLeod’s (2018) have blamed the Western media for manipulating Chávez’s image and presenting him as a divisive figure. However, polarization and racism in Venezuela before Chávez have not been studied in sufficient detail.

This thesis argues that racism and polarization were pre-existing conditions generated by the country’s colonial past as well as immigration policies put in place long before Chávez’s election, that were then exposed clearly during his government.

The aims of this study are to investigate:

1. How did the immigration policies historically implemented by the Venezuelan government play an important role in the development of class and racial division?
2. Had these policies already divided Venezuela into two groups before the election of Chávez, and did this impact the support for Chávez in the 1998 election, as well as in consecutive elections in 2000, 2006, and 2012?

The first part of this research will analyse discourses put forth by historians and experts in the field of race and migration history, as well as including an auto-ethnographic approach. The second part will compare data related to ethnic identities through their own identification with certain ethnic categories from the most recent Venezuelan census (2011) to voting trends obtained from the *Consejo Nacional Electoral* (CNE) (National Electoral Council). This research attempts to add to additional evidence to claims for the history of racism in Venezuela as a significant possible cause of polarization after Chávez's election.



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## Acronyms

AD	Acción Democrática (Democratic Action)
CNE	Consejo Nacional Electoral (National Electoral Council)
COPEI	Comité de Organización Política Electoral Independiente (Independent Political Electoral Organization Committee)
CTV	Confederación de Trabajadores de Venezuela (Venezuelan Workers Confederation)
DISIP	Dirección Sectorial de los Servicios de Inteligencia y Prevención (Sectorial Directorate of Intelligence and Prevention Services)
FEDECAMARAS	Federación Venezolana de Cámaras y Asociaciones de Comercio y producción (Venezuelan Federation of Chambers and Associations of Commerce and Production)
FONDUR	Fondo Nacional de Desarrollo Urbano (National Urban Development Fund)
MAS	Movimiento al Socialismo (Movement Toward Socialism)
MEP	El Movimiento Electoral del Pueblo (People's Electoral Movement)

MVR,	Movimiento Quinta República (Fifth Republic Movement)
OPEC	Organización de Países Exportadores de Petróleo (Organization of Petroleum-Exporting Countries)
PCV	Partido Comunista de Venezuela (Communist Party of Venezuela)
PDVSA	Petróleos de Venezuela Sociedad Anónima (Petroleum of Venezuela, Joint Stock Company)
PP	Polo Patriótico (Patriotic Front)
PPT	Patria para Todos (Homeland for All)
PSUV	Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela (United Socialist Party of Venezuela)
ROA	Red de Organizaciones Afrovenezolanas (Network of Afro-Venezuelan Organizations).
URD	Unión Republicana Democrática (Republican Democratic Union)

# Introduction

For more than a century, Venezuela has described itself as a country *café con leche*; comparing their multicultural society to coffee with milk. The expression refers to the variety of skin tones that are found in the nation, and is a fond way of reiterating that Venezuela is one of the most racially mixed Latin American countries, and that indigenous people, Europeans, Africans and everyone else residing in Venezuela lives free from racial discrimination (Wright 1990). However, this mentality was tested on December 06, 1998, when Hugo Chávez Frías, became the first non-white President in Venezuelan history – despite most of the population itself being non-white (MacLeod 2018, p.9).

Since Chávez won the election, Venezuela has been extremely polarized. Wilpert (2005) claims that the left-wing portrayed the conflict as “black versus white” – one in which race and class are highly correlated. Wilpert (2005) pointed out that if anyone paid attention to the pro-government demonstrations in comparison to those from the opposition, there is a clear link between social class and skin colour. The people in favour of Chávez (largely associated with the lower class) are dark skinned, whereas the pro-opposition groups (who are associated with the middle and upper classes) are white or light skinned.

Racial, social, and political polarization in Venezuela has been the topic of several investigations, books, articles and more. It has generated many debates among academics, with some scholars claiming that Chávez polarized the country. For Corrales (2005, p. 105), “The Hugo Chávez Frías administration (1999-present) is the most polarizing government in Venezuela since the late 1940s.” In a more recent study, MacLeod (2018), argues that the Western media is responsible for accusing Chávez of creating polarization, presenting him as a divisive character, and ignoring other possible causes for division. Roberts (2003) claims

that Chávez's election is the result of twenty years of social inequalities, political crisis, and economic deterioration in Venezuela.

I agree with Roberts in saying that, twenty years before Chávez, Venezuelans lived through their worst economic and political crisis and this economic deterioration gave Chávez, a non-traditional candidate, the opportunity to be considered a president. However, social inequalities have been present in Venezuela since the time of colonization. I would like to establish through this study that the immigration policies implemented by the government throughout Venezuela's history significantly built towards the country's polarization. In addition to the economic crisis, Venezuelan immigration policies contributed to the election of Chávez and the loyalty of his supporters. These policies generated racism, class division, and discrimination.

Venezuelan elites, throughout history, have promoted European immigration and discriminated against the black population. Some examples of these policies are:

- 1830: President José Antonio Páez promoted European immigration (Tinker Salas 2015, p. 37). Additionally, in the constitution of 1830, Venezuelans of African descent and the indigenous people were not considered to be Venezuelan citizens (Garcia cited in Wilpert 2005).
- 1918: The Venezuelan government introduced a policy that banned non-white immigrants (Tinker Salas 2015, p. 70).
- 1940s: According to Wright (1990, p. 98), the government (AD party) passed a legislation in 1940 aimed to prohibiting racist attitudes against black people, but evidence suggests that discrimination remained. Wright (1988, p. 458) states that in 1947: "Immigration remained an important issue with *adeco* leaders. Therefore, they pressed for changes in the immigration laws that had restricted non-whites from entering Venezuela".

- 1950: President Pérez Jiménez gave preference to the Spanish, Italian and Portuguese in his immigration policies. He believed that a racial makeover was necessary for the country (Tinker Salas 2015, p. 88).

This study claims that the country's racial and social polarization was a pre-existing condition in Venezuela, and not generated by Chávez's election. My research intends to answer the question:

*What is the Relationship between Immigration Policies in Venezuelan History, the Development of Racism and the Election of President Chávez in 1998-2012?*

This study aims to investigate:

1. How did the immigration policies historically implemented by the Venezuelan government play an important role in the development of class and racial division?
2. Had these policies already divided Venezuela into two groups before the election of Chávez, and did this impact Chávez's support in the 1998 election, as well as in consecutive elections in 2000, 2006, and 2012?

# Literature Review

I have referred to President Hugo Chávez throughout this study as a former coup leader. However, since as a Venezuelan I was present during his campaign and political career I had no other perception of him other than as a socialist leader. Some of the reasons are the following:

According to Azicri (2009, p. 103):

To meet Castro after leaving prison was Chávez's wish. He received an invitation to visit Havana after his release in March 1994. Upon his arrival, he was surprised to find Castro waiting for him at the airport.

Chávez's visit to Cuba was important news in Venezuela, quickly disseminated by the press (Elizalde and Báez 2005, p.72). His speech in Cuba was used against his political campaign by the opposition because it contained communist terminology and ideology. For example: his recognition of the Cuban Revolution, and the comparison of Mao Tse Tung with General Ezequiel Zamora (a leader of the Venezuelan Federal Revolution). Chávez also revealed in his speech his anti-imperialist position and his intention to unify Latin America. Demiryi (2013) states that Chávez, during this speech identifies himself with the Cuban Revolution on the one hand, and with Fidel on the other.

Although Chávez had a moderate period after winning the elections, during his campaign in 1997, his party, the MVR, *Movimiento Quinta República* (Fifth Republic Movement—MVR) projected socialist ideologies that were captured by some academics and citizens. For example, according to Ellner (2001, p. 11):



At various times throughout its short existence, the Quinta República has moderated its positions and toned down its rhetoric. Its initial program in 1997 embraced the traditional leftist model of state interventionism in the economy, including ownership of strategic sectors and partial control of financial operations and of the production of basic commodities.

Straka (2017, p. 78- my translation) states:

Much has been debated if from the beginning Chávez's project was socialist, or if the construction of "Bolivarian socialism", as he ended up calling his ideology, was the result of a gradual radicalization

Lander and López-Maya (1999) point out that during the 1998 elections, Chávez becomes the candidate of a collision called *Polo Patriótico* (Patriotic Front - PP). The collision was composed of his left-wing party MVR, and a group of left-wing parties among which are the MAS (Movement Toward Socialism), PPT (Homeland for All), PCV (Communist Party of Venezuela) and MEP (The People's Election Movement).

Méndez, Cortés & Materán (2008) states that in 2007 Chávez unified all the small leftist parties and created the PSUV (United Socialist Party of Venezuela). However, many of these parties had been supporting Chávez since his first election. Although not all parties joined the PSUV, they continued to provide the same support to Chávez, except for the MAS, which according to Ellner (2008), abandoned Chávez in 2001.

To conclude this point, in 1999 Cuba became Venezuela's main trading partner in Latin America (Blanco, 2002). In 2000, the two countries signed the agreement: Cuba-Venezuela Cooperation Agreement on Health, in which Venezuela provides 90,000 barrels of oil per day to Cuba, in exchange for 30,000 doctors and specialized assistance in sports and education (Azicri, 2009). From my personal perspective, there were sufficient evidence before Chávez's election to visualize the direction of his government and perceive him as a socialist leader.

Apart from racism and the immigration policies in the history of Venezuela, there are three other aspects that had considerable influence on Chávez's election, and whose impact on polarization has been extensively studied by scholars.

1. The economic crisis between 1980s and 1990s that preceded Chávez's election with the following milestones identified by Tinker Salas (2015).

- ☐ 1979 President Carlos Andrés Pérez ending his term involved in a corruption case.
- ☐ 1982: Price of oil decreased, and foreign debt increased from 11 billion USD in 1978 to 34 billion USD in 1984.
- ☐ 18th February 1983 - Black Friday (end of the fiesta). The devaluation of the *bolívar* (Venezuelan currency). After 20 stable years, the dollar increased from 4.30 to 13 *bolívars*. Poverty increased.
- ☐ 27th February 1989. *El Caracazo* was a massive popular rebellion against economic policies.

2. The 1990s saw the collapse of the political democratic system (Pact of *Punto Fijo*) that ruled Venezuela from 1958-1998.

- ☐ 1992. Two military coups called for government resignation. The first was led by Hugo Chávez Frías (a soldier in the army), who was sent to prison (Tinker Salas 2015).
- ☐ 1993. The attorney general reopened a corruption case against President Carlos Andrés Pérez and soon after Pérez was impeached. (Tinker Salas 2015).

3. The influence of the media on the country's polarization and Chávez's image (MacLeod 2018).

The reason scholars have assessed the situation in Venezuela from a primarily political perspective is because, before the election of Chávez, Venezuela was an ally of the US. Its political system was considered to be a “model of democracy” for the rest of Latin America since the 1960s (Ellner 2008, p. 51). One of the political reasons behind Venezuela being referred to thus was because, unlike the rest of Latin America, the country was free of acute conflicts that could threaten the political system, compared to the rest of Latin America (Ellner and Tinker Salas 2007, p. 5).

Chávez, on the other hand, was a former coup leader who was not part of the two traditional parties that controlled Venezuela for 40 years. However, whilst the economic and political aspects are relevant to understand Chávez's election, many academics discovered during their investigations that there were also racial issues at play. Macleod's (2018) research, while discussing some aspects of racism, stays primarily focused on how the Western media has covered the image and election of Chávez after 1998. MacLeod (2019, p. 12) points out that the studies that claim that polarization existed before Chávez are few.

I aim to contribute to the debate on the role of pre-existing racism at the time of the Chávez government with my investigation. As mentioned, there are many theories concerning polarization. I support the idea that Venezuela was polarized in various ways before Chávez's election, but I focus on the role that pre-existing racial divisions played in the leader's election. Apart from the media, economic issues and personal political interests, there are other aspects such as the immigration policies that can influence social class and race and therefore the

preferences of voters. According to Cannon (2008, p. 731) “there is indeed a correlation between class and race within the Venezuelan context”. Cannon (2008, p. 734) states that:

The rejection of Chávez by parts of the middle and most of the upper classes in Venezuela is precisely a rejection of these very qualities: being poor and dark-skinned. This rejection is furthermore based on a deeply rooted historical rejection of the Black as being culturally and socially inferior to the White.

These aspects have not been explored enough in the Venezuelan case. A study like this raises awareness about social and historical issues that contribute to the rise and fall of political movements.

There is varied research that has identified certain groups as Chávez supporters in 1998, but none have been linked to their position in relation to Venezuelan immigration policies. The need to answer my research question has been expressed by many scholars. Garcia (cited in Wilpert 2005, p. 109) states that:

The need to research and find hard data on racism in Venezuela is, however, precisely one of the demands of Venezuela’s Afro-Venezuelan network. As long as there is no hard data and as long as there is a popular belief among the vast majority of Venezuelans, regardless of skin color, that there is no racism in Venezuela, nothing will be done to correct the clear racial/class discrimination that does exist.

According to (Tinker Salas, 2015, p. 163): “It is not a simple task to characterize people who supported the Chávez government. Adherents include those drawn from diverse social backgrounds, historical experiences, and political orientations”. The idea that Chávez polarized Venezuela continues to be explored by many scholars, but as MacLeod (2019, p. 12)

expressed: “There were some references to society being already polarised before Chávez’s election, but they were not common.” Ishibashi (2007, p. 33-my translation), points out that:

Despite the tendency of polarisation in the political discourse at the time of the government of President Hugo Chávez, the debate on the racist undercurrent throughout history in Venezuelan society has not been substantially studied.

There is now more data available through the 2011 Venezuelan census, because it includes five ethnic self-identification categories: black, afro-descendant, *moreno* (brown), white, and other. According to Wright (1990), ethnic categories were not available in the Venezuelan census since 1854. Wright (1990, p. 4) states that: “No census taken since the abolition of slavery in 1854 mentioned people by race”. For Fortoul (1896, p. 24) the lack of inclusion of the races in Venezuela began in the census of 1891. Fortoul believes that it was due to the fear of the government of hurting susceptibilities of blacks and slaves' descendants, since by then the races were already mixed in the country and it was common to see people of color occupying public positions. In fact, Fortoul (1896) pointed out that according to the census of 1839, of the total population of 945,344 inhabitants, about 44% (414.151 inhabitants) were composed of mixed race. However, Wright (1990) and Fortoul (1896) totally ignored that since 1873 indigenous were included in the census. According to Angosto-Ferrández (2014, p. 373) “since 1873, censuses represented the country’s population through a dichotomous distinction between general (undifferentiated) and indigenous”.

# Methodology

My research disciplines are Political Science and Latin American Studies as interdisciplinary fields. This project argues that the racism that has existed in Venezuela since the colonization period intensified with governmental immigration policies throughout the country's history, and that this, in turn, had an effect in the election of past President Hugo Chávez. I will use a mixture of quantitative and qualitative methods to engage with these statements.

The goal of combining methods is to, on the one hand, investigate the historical context that generated the intensification of racism and, on the other, to evaluate, supported by data, how this intensification impacted on the election of President Hugo Chávez Frías. The qualitative analysis focuses mainly on the immigration policies implemented by various Venezuelan governments throughout the 20th century fostering racism. The data used in the quantitative method includes voting practices by neighbourhood, during the entire *Chavista* period (1998-2013), since Chávez's first election in 1998, until his last in 2012, three months before his death, together with data on the racial constitution of the various regions of the country.

Chávez was the first non-white president in the history of Venezuela, a mainly non-white country (MacLeod 2018, p. 9), but he was also elected in a different context than usual. He won the elections after Pact of *Punto Fijo* collapsed, a political agreement which had controlled the governmental system for four decades and only allowed two parties to participate in the Venezuelan elections. Disappointed by the economic crisis generated in the 1980s and 1990s, it can be said that, for the first time in 40 years, Venezuelans were presented with a different option for which to vote in 1998, a president who was not part of the traditional parties. For some analysts, this political context raises doubts about Chávez's triumph's relationship to his racial background. For example, Corrales (2005) argues that the election of Chávez is the consequence of the economic crisis that took place in Venezuela in the decades prior to his

election. He also alleges that Chávez polarized the country in racial and class terms. However, for MacLeod (2018, p. 9) Venezuelans identified with a president who looked and spoke like them, in a country where the majority is not white, and this influenced their vote. This study intends to investigate the relationship between the immigration policies in Venezuela, the effects of race on the country's electoral system, and the multiple elections of President Chávez during the period 1998-2012.

The first part of this study includes three chapters:

- Chapter 1. Immigration Policies in Venezuela: History and Racism and Class Division (1830- to Modern Venezuela).
- Chapter 2. Economic Changes during the Democratic era (1958-1998): From Pérez in 1974 to Pérez in 1988.
- Chapter 3. Social and Political Polarization: Racism and Class Conflict in the Chávez Era (1998-2013).

The first chapter will analyse the different immigration policies implemented in Venezuela during the 20th century by different governments, and their impact on the evolution of racism and the development of class division. The second chapter will focus on analysing the period that preceded the Chávez government known as the Pact of *Punto Fijo* (1958-1998), the economic changes during President Carlos Andrés Pérez's two terms (1974 and 1988) and the transition from a prosperous Venezuela in 1974 to a bankrupt Venezuela in 1988. Knowledge of this period is essential to understanding the economic, social and political context in which Chávez won the election for the first time. According to Roberts (2003, p. 71) Chávez's victory was the result of the deterioration of Venezuela, which took place throughout the two decades prior to his election. Chapter three argues that the country's racism and polarization, attributed by many to Chávez, were a pre-existing condition present long before the *Chavista* period.

The following concepts will be key to the first part of my research:

Endogamy: “Cultures which practise endogamy require marriage between specific social groups, classes or ethnicities” (Dzimiri 2014, p.114). “Endogamy is from a Greek word ‘endon’ which means within. It specifies the groups within which a spouse must be found and prohibits marriage with other groups” Schaefer and Lamm (cited in Dzimiri 2014).

Eurocentrism: “The conscious or unconscious process by which Europe and European cultural assumptions are constructed as, or assumed to be, the normal, the natural or the universal” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin 1998, p.86).

Hegemony: “Fundamentally, hegemony is the power of the ruling class to convince other classes that their interests are the interests of all” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin 1998, p. 113).

In addition:

The term is useful for describing the success of imperial power over a colonized people who may far outnumber any occupying military force, but whose desire for self-determination has been suppressed by a hegemonic option of the greater good, often couched in terms of social order, stability and advancement, all of which are defined by the colonizing power (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin 1998, p. 113).

Miscegenation “The sexual union of different races” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin 1998, p.138).

Similarly important are the words used as racial categorisations in Venezuela, such as:

*Criollos*: traditionally, Spanish descendants born in the Americas<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Tinker Salas (2015, p. 16)



*Mestizos*: descendants of mixed race: European and indigenous, and/or indigenous and *pardos*<sup>2</sup>.

According to Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin (1998, p. 133), the term *mestizo*:

Semantically register the idea of a mixing of races and/or cultures. Initially, they emerged from a colonial discourse that privileged the idea of racial purity and justified racial discrimination.

*Pardos*: people with African and European heritage<sup>3</sup>.

*Zambos*: descendants of mixed race: indigenous and African heritage<sup>4</sup>.

It is also relevant to understand the meaning of discrimination:

Discrimination relates to behaviour, or the way in which groups or individuals act out their social relationship with other groups or individuals. Usually discrimination takes an overt form and works against the interests of a specific social or racial group (Wright 1990, p. 3)

For the purposes of this study, it is essential to explain the definition of class. According to Chandra (1980, p. 281), as part of the economic control and domination “the colonial state tries to break up the merging national unity in the colony, promotes segmentation in the colonial society into any of all kinds of social groups, including social classes”. For Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin (1998, p.37) economic control played a significant role in colonial societies. They state that:

Economic control involved a reconstruction of the economic and social resources of colonized societies. Consequently, class was an important factor in colonialism, firstly in constructing the attitudes of the colonizers towards different groups and categories of the colonized (‘natives’), and increasingly amongst the colonized peoples themselves as they began to employ colonial cultural discourse to describe the changing nature of their own societies.

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<sup>2</sup> Tinker Salas (2015, p. 22)

<sup>3</sup> *ibid*

<sup>4</sup> Wright (1990, p. 47)

According to Morón (1964) in Venezuela this social classes implies a hierarchical social order established by the conquerors, the European Spaniards. Morón (1964, p. 58) states that: “Some authors have described the groups in colonial society as castes, because the inequalities established between them by practice as well by law”. For Morón (1964) the term democracy did not exist in Venezuelan colonial society, which was composed of castes and based on inequalities. Morón (1964) pointed out that the white conquerors (Spanish Europeans) were considered by the Spanish Crown as the ruling class, the founders and rulers of the people, who dominated the natives and black slaves. There were also the descendants of Spaniards born in Venezuela called *Criollos* (Creoles) and the descendants of mixed races. Morón states that during the colonial era three large groups were predominant in Venezuela: the Creole oligarchy and the rich and dominant class; the large class of mixed races and free men and lastly the slaves and the Indian and mixed races who were born as slaves.

It is also important to understand the difference between race and ethnicity. Two concepts extensively used in this study. According to Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin (1998) ethnicity is a term that has been used to refer to the nature of a group in terms of their identity that includes culture, languages, values, belief, traditions, social patterns and ancestry. Whereas race is as term who classified human beings into distinct groups according to their physical, biological and genetic characteristics. Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin (1998, p. 193) states that:

The notion of race assumes, firstly, that humanity is divided into unchanging natural types, recognizable by physical features that are transmitted ‘through the blood’ and permit distinctions to be made between ‘pure’ and ‘mixed’ races

Firstly, the intention in this first part of the project is to identify immigration policies implemented throughout Venezuelan history in order to ‘whiten’ the country, such as encouraging European immigration, and secondly, to identify their impact on racial discrimination and political dissatisfaction. Finally, I aim to evaluate whether the resulting

demographic and attitudinal shifts had an effect in the perception of Chávez and his multiple elections as president of Venezuela. In other words, if Chávez's appearance or ethnic background influenced voting trends and if so, how (negatively or positively).

For the purposes of these three chapters, qualitative methods will be used, which will involve a historical analysis of policy and existing findings by experts on the field of immigration and race in Venezuela. Chapter two of the study will also include an auto-ethnographic approach to some of the events that took place during President Carlos Andrés Pérez's two terms (1974 and 1988). I grew up in Venezuela in the 1970s, a time when neoliberal policies of the traditional parties (AD and COPEI) were in place. This means that I experienced the transition from the democratic regime to the Chávez government. The goal of incorporating my own testimony as a Venezuelan is to provide a non-Venezuelan audience with a greater understanding of the economic crisis that took place in Venezuela before the election of Chávez. Additionally, the first part of the study will converse with essays and articles by prominent experts in politics and history in the Venezuelan context, such as Steve Ellner, Miguel Tinker Salas, and Winthrop R. Wright.

The second part of this study will analyse the voting outcomes of the four elections won by Chávez (1998, 2000, 2006 and 2012). The objective is to evaluate Venezuelan voting trends, correlation with demographics, and suggest as a result whether Chávez's racial background influenced the preferences of the population. This part will be informed by a quantitative approach, which will involve the statistical analysis of data, records and demographic information on selected precincts where the majority of voters supported Chávez, as well as data on some of the precincts that opposed his election. The two official Venezuelan government resources that will be used with this purpose are:

1. Documents from the *Consejo Nacional Electoral* (CNE) (National Electoral Council), the institution responsible for ensuring the transparency of governmental and regional elections, as well as referendum results, in Venezuela. The documents selected from this source are the electoral results from the following elections:

- ☐ 1998 presidential election results by state
- ☐ 2000 presidential election by state
- ☐ 2006 presidential election by state
- ☐ 2012 presidential election by state
- ☐ 2012 regional election by state

2. *XIV Censo Nacional de Población y Vivienda 2011*. (*National Census of Population and Housing*), which included the ethnic self-identification of the population by state for the first time in Venezuelan history. To substantiate if there were racial influences at play in the election of Chávez, the primary data used in this study is the *XIV Censo Nacional de Población y Vivienda 2011*, which includes, in percentage terms, five categories of ethnic self-identification in Venezuela: black, *moreno* (brown), afro-descendant, white, indigenous and other. According to the last census in Venezuela (2011), 51.9% of the total population identified themselves as *moreno* (brown), 43.6% as white, 2.9% as black and 1.2% as other.

I intend to evaluate the voting tendencies in the aforementioned elections in relation to the ethnic make-up of various Venezuelan states. The indicators that will be used are the total population by state and their ethnic percentage distribution, the total valid votes by state, the percentage of votes received by Chávez by state or the winner by state (in case Chávez lost) and the percentage of abstention. Then the states with the largest black population, largest brown population, and the largest white population will be selected to evaluate their tendencies.

These states will be evaluated in the following four elections won by Chávez: 1998, 2000, 2006 and 2012.

In order to make a more accurate evaluation of the voters' trends, the data from the regional election in 2012, held the same year as the presidential one, will be incorporated into the study.

## Limitations:

### Census:

Wilpert (2005), points out that the pro-*Chavista* support group is apparently integrated by the darker skinned Venezuelans and the opposition group is apparently only integrated by the whites. As a Venezuelan, I believe that the description of Chávez supporters presented by Cannon (2008, p. 734) is more accurate:

The poor's support for Chávez is based on the fact that he is like them: from a poor background and pardo (of mixed Indigenous, African and European descent).

As a Venezuelan who grew up there, and lived there until 2001, I know the inequalities and discrimination present in the country. I can say with confidence that blacks and Afro-descendants are included in the poor background group in the Cannon description. Cannon (2008, p. 734) also clarifies this point:

Dark skin, as we shall see, is still associated with poverty and, the darker the skin, the more likely that that person will belong to the poorer sections of society.

Unfortunately, the 2011 Census does not include a category for mixed races as the ones expressed by Cannon (2008). Angosto-Ferrández (2014) argues that the 2011 Census

eliminated Venezuela's social diversity because it substituted the national identity: *mestizaje* into five racial purity categories: black, Afro-descendants, *moreno* (brunette), white and other. "None of these categories can be straightforwardly associated with *mestizaje*" (Angosto-Ferrández 2014, p. 373). I strongly agree with Angosto-Ferrández. I am a Venezuelan. My father was white, and my mother is very dark. Both are Venezuelans. There are no descendants of this union that have the same skin tone, or the same type of hair and the variations between all of us are significant. I do not know how I can identify myself in the 2011 Census. When I was living in Venezuela, I was considered white because my father was white, but I always described myself as a 'mestiza'. I also note that the descriptions of these ethnic categories provided by the 2011 Census glossary are based purely in physical appearance and do not take into account if somebody is a descendent of black or white people, their culture, language, ancestors, etc. The only exception are the Afro-descendants that can be associate with their culture, language, traditions and root. Therefore, they should be considered pure racial categories not ethnic categories. As was pointed out by Angosto-Ferrández 2014, these pure racial categories do not represent the Venezuelan population.

These are the descriptions of the five ethnic categories includes according to the 2011 Census glossary (p. 65-my translation):

- Black: Any person with strongly pigmented skin, very curly hair, nose flattened and thick lips.
- Afro-descendant: Africans brought to the country through the slave trade as well as their descendants.
- *Moreno* (Brunette): Any person whose phenotypic characteristics are less marked or pronounced than those of people defined as black.
- Indigenous: The original inhabitants of the country.

- White: People whose skin tone is fair and usually associated with populations of European origin.

Another limitation for this study, is that the percentage sum provided by the Census 2011 of these five categories: *moreno*, white, black, afro-descendant and other represent 100% of the total of the Venezuelan population. Unfortunately, the indigenous population was not included in the total national ethnic distribution percentage provided by the 2011 Census. As was expressed before, in the 2011 Census, 51.9% of the total population identified themselves as *moreno* (brown), 43.6% as white, 2.9% as black and 1.2% as other. The percentage of indigenous people is provided in an independent table as if they are not part of the total population. According to the Census (2011, p. 24-31) the total national indigenous population in 2011 was 724,592 and the total national population was 27,024,931. I can assume that the indigenous can be incorporated in the *moreno* population, but that would mean including indigenous people in a category that does not belong to them and a restructuring by region of the official information provided by the 2011 Census. For this limitation the indigenous percentage will not have a significant consideration in this study.

There is also a gap between the year of the Census data and Chávez elections data. The Census was done in 2011 and Chávez elections dates are 1998, 2000, 2006 and 2012. However, the idea of using the Census data is to identify the states with the largest black population, the largest white population and largest brown population and this is the closest data set available to Chávez's election.

## Other Limitations:

Even though there are other aspects that may influence voter preferences apart from race, this dissertation aims to contribute to the role of race as an influencing factor at the time of Chávez's election and subsequent re-elections. However, some of these aspects should be brought to our attention. For example:

1. In Venezuela, to vote is not compulsory and the percentages of abstention during the *Chavista* period are significant. While 18.08% was the highest abstention percentage between 1958 and 1988, it is important to mention also that after the economic crisis between 1980 and 1990, abstention increased considerably to 39.84% in 1993 and continued to be over 20% during the whole *Chavista* period.
2. The *Chavista* period has been characterized by numerous controversial political events that may also have influenced voters' trends. These will not be considered here due to space and time limitations. This study will be limited to evaluating voting outcomes in racial terms. However, if important differences are found in the tendencies of the voters, in addition to the existing literature and the objectives of this study, the reader will be provided with brief information on possible influences other than race for their own evaluation. Some of this information may include: the creation of new political parties during the period studied, the merging of political parties, and the deterioration of the traditional parties, Democratic Action (AD), and the Independent Political Electoral Organization Committee (COPEI), as well as the influence of the opposition and other important political events that probably had an impact on the tendencies of the votes during the *Chavista* era, such as the 2002 oil strike and the coup attempt against Chávez in April 2000.



# Chapter 1

## Immigration Policies in Venezuela: History, Racism and Class Division (1830 to Modern Venezuela)

Every colonized people -in other words, every people in whose soul an inferiority complex has been created by the death and burial of its local cultural originality- finds itself face to face with the language of the civilizing nation; that is, with the culture of the mother country. The colonized is elevated above his jungle status in proportion to his adoption of the mother country's cultural standards. He becomes whiter as he renounces his blackness, his jungle.

(Frantz Fanon 1986, p.18)

This chapter will analyse the different immigration policies implemented by different Venezuelan governments during the 20th century and their impact on the development of racism and class division.

### 1.1 European Racist Influence: Endogamy, Miscegenation and Discrimination against African Descendants and Non-white Groups (1830-1870).

According to Tinker Salas (2015), in order to ensure the preservation of social hierarchy, their position in higher ranks, and to protect their properties, the white elites of the Americas practiced endogamy since the colonial period despite the limited number of Europeans in Venezuela. He pointed out that African descendants were discriminated against, and that this

miscegenation produced a varied number of mixed races including *mestizos*<sup>5</sup>, *pardos*<sup>6</sup>, and *criollos*<sup>7</sup>. Wright (1990, p. 46) points out:

In general, a socioracial division of society lingered on in practice, as it had during the colonial era. This followed very closely the class distinctions between the white elite and colored popular masses.

For Wright, apart from the descendants of Africans, the *zambos*<sup>8</sup> were also the most discriminated against, not only by Venezuelans but also by foreigners. According to Wright (1990, p. 47) “they saw none of the ‘civilizing’ characteristics in the *zambo* that they assigned solely to European influences”.

Tinker Salas (2015) points out that racism has always been present in Venezuelan history. He claims that in 1830, the Venezuelan congress reinstalled privileges that favoured *criollos* and the commercial (white) elites, even though the country had gained independence from Spain. In addition to that, he states that “those in power throughout the nineteenth century also sought to alter social and racial conditions by promoting European immigration to Venezuela” (Tinker Salas 2015, p. 37). Tinker Salas also claims that, at the time, racial tensions arose, and that many sectors protested the circumstances, including Afro-Venezuelans – whose conditions remained akin to slavery despite their newfound independence. Additionally, indigenous people and Afro-descendants were not considered Venezuelan citizens under the 1830 constitution of Venezuela. According to Brito Figueroa (1967) Indigenous people and Afro-descendants were not considered freemen in 1830. Brito Figueroa (1967) points out that indigenous people were considered independent and savages, and Afro-descendants considered

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<sup>5</sup> People of European and Indigenous heritage (Tinker Salas 2015, p. 22)

<sup>6</sup> People of European and African heritage (Tinker Salas 2015, p. 22-23)

<sup>7</sup> People of European heritage (Tinker Salas, 2015, p. 22-23)

<sup>8</sup> People of Indigenous and African heritage (Wright, 1990, p. 47)

slaves. In 1825 the Venezuelan population was officially counted at 685,212 inhabitants, of which only 616,545 people were considered free, the rest were categorized as slaves, a total of 50,000 and independent and savage Indians, a total of 26,578 (Brito Figueroa 1967, p.347). "The situation of the indigenous, in fact, in the social reality, was not very different from the condition of the slaves" (Brito Figueroa 1967, p. 357-my translation). During the 1830s to 1840, the indigenous people were reduced and isolated to remote villages, becoming a fleeting population. Although they were considered free, they were not integrated into the society. They were subjected and forced to work for free, being exploited, which is why many preferred to live in the jungle instead (Brito Figueroa 1967, p. 358).

The Venezuelan government and elites implemented immigration laws during 1831-1837 and in 1840 with the intention to attract agricultural workers from Europe in order to populate the country with white European immigrants (Wright 1990, p. 59). However, according to Wright (1990) they failed to appeal to many white immigrants – instead, there was an increase of black immigrants in the Guayana district of eastern Venezuela. Wright points out that “Ironically, if European whites did not come to Venezuela in significant numbers, Antillian and Guyanese<sup>9</sup> blacks did” (1990, p. 60). In 1850, the governor of Guayana, José Tomás Machado, described the black immigrants as “unstable men without morality.” He suggested that the Venezuelan government prevent further black immigration (Wright 1990, p. 60-61).

According to Wright, in 1866 the Minister of Development Jacinto Reyeno Pachano declared the Europeans as the most suitable immigrants, and the same attitude continued until the end of the nineteenth century from Venezuelan leaders (1990, p. 62).

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<sup>9</sup> Afro- descendants from British Guyana

## 1.2 European Racist Theories of Spencerian and Darwinian Positivism: Whitening the Venezuelan Population (1870-1900)

In 1870, Antonio Guzmán Blanco became the Venezuelan president after leading a revolt, thus becoming the leader of the Liberal Party (Tinker Salas 2015). Guzmán Blanco ruled the country for three terms between 1870 and 1887 and would refuse to be referred to as “president,” instead preferring the title “Illustrious American” (Tinker Salas 2015, p.47). President Guzmán Blanco promoted white immigration, especially that of Canary Islanders, and provided them with important roles in commerce and agriculture (Tinker Salas 2015, p.47). Guzmán Blanco preferred European immigrants, particularly Canary Islanders but he accepted Lebanese immigration (Troconis 1986).

Wright states that, “After 1870, the elites moved increasingly toward adopting European intellectual solutions to Venezuela’s endlessly nagging problems of development” (1990, p.43). Wright also asserts that the elites and politicians adopted positivism as their leading philosophy. He claims that the Venezuelan elites, intellectuals, and politicians were influenced by racist European theories such as Spencerian and Darwinian positivism.<sup>10</sup>

Evolutionists and social Darwinists generally believed that Black people from Africa were the lowest form of human being and consequently aimed demeaning racist insults against those of African American ancestry. (Jeynes 2011, p. 542)

Wright points out that influenced by these theories, in 1890, Venezuelan elites became concerned about Venezuela’s national image (1990, p.10). According to Wright (1990) from their perspective, it was the era of positivism; a future that was aspired to for Venezuela. Since 1890s the Venezuelan’s elites established the whitening of the population through two forms: first, they openly restricted the access of non-white immigrants to the country (Wright 1990, p. 2). Secondly, they called for miscegenation in order to gradually phase out the black race by

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<sup>10</sup> “Herbert Spencer (1851) actually coined the term “the survival of the fittest” and was a major proponent of social Darwinism. Social Darwinism is the belief that evolution can and should be applied to improve society at large” (Jeynes 2011, p. 538).

promoting the mixing of Europeans with black and reduce the “pure” black minority groups.

Wright states that:

These individuals most of whom resided in Caracas, composed an integral part of the elites who associate themselves with the liberal factions that sought to create an increasingly powerful centralized government. Clearly influenced by Spencerian positivism and related European racist theories, these individuals worried publicly about Venezuelan national image (1990, p. 10).

This ended with the enactment of a new law in July 1891 that prohibited entry to black and Asian immigrants. The law was promulgated on August 1891 (Wright 1990, p. 62). According to Troconis (1986, p. 216) this law issued in 1891 by President Andueza prohibited only the entry of Asian immigrants, a restriction that was eliminated by the later government. However, in 1894 an immigration law is enacted that prohibits the entry of black Antilles. (Troconis 1986, p. 211). Regarding miscegenation Wright wrote: “At their urging subsequent governments began a campaign to whiten Venezuelan’s population” (1990, p. 10).

During the last quarter of the nineteenth century, Venezuelan elites focused on Europeanising the country (Wright 1990, p. 62). According to him, they wanted white immigrants, ranging from productive workers to entrepreneurs, in order to boost the economy – similar to what had been achieved in Brazil and Argentina. The white elites believed that *pardos* and blacks were incapable of ruling the country by themselves because of their respective races (Wright 1990, p. 10). This attitude is promoted by Darwinism: for Jeynes “Darwin (1859, 1871) avers that there are certain races that are superior to others and therefore favored in the natural selection process” (2011, p. 536). Jeynes states that:

To Darwinists, “savages” of Africa and South America represented the “missing link” between lower animals and human beings. Darwin and his followers instigated this brand of racism by

propounding an evolutionary rubric of a chain of being that portrayed some of the features of non-White races as being animal-like (2011, p. 537).

According to Tinker Salas (2015), in Venezuela, there was discrimination between other racial groups as well. For example, Tinker Salas points out that the *criollos* were concerned about the educated *pardos*:

Compounding *criollo* fears were concerns that educated *pardos* would make use of legal and social channels to subvert the racial policies that excluded them from seizing the reins of power within colonial society (2015, p. 23).

During the early nineteenth century in Venezuela the white elites refused to accept the *pardos* and free blacks as their equals, increasing social cleavages (Tinker Salas, 2015). This attitude generated during the last decade of the nineteenth century a competition for status and equality from multiple racial groups, and in this, some *pardos* won a good reputation.<sup>11</sup>

### 1.3. The United States' Influence (1899-1935). The Roosevelt Corollary (1904)

Some historical events make it clear that the United States intended to become a hegemony in the Americas. For example, in the early twentieth century, the growth of U.S. power in the Caribbean scared the Venezuelan population because most Venezuelans were aware of the segregation laws in the United States and did not want to create a similarly segregated society in their country (Wright 1990, p. 73). By that time, the United States had gained

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<sup>11</sup> For example, Juan German Roscio was a pardo attorney who used his position to defend the social equality of mixed-race people in colonial tribunals (Tinker Salas 2015, p. 23).

Venezuela's respect as a modern developed industrial nation, but was still feared for its racial attitudes, as Venezuela was multiracial (Wright, 1990). The Venezuelan media strongly rejected and criticised United States policies (Wright 1990, p. 73).

The United States had had a strong interest in Venezuela and Latin America for a long time. According to Højen, in 1823 "Washington was concerned that imperial European powers such as the United Kingdom would interfere in the development of the newly independent Latin American region" (2015, p. 50). Because of this, the President of the United States, James Monroe (1817-1825) issued a foreign policy regarding Latin America in 1823, named the Monroe Doctrine. It established that European countries would not interfere or increase influence in Latin American countries. According to Hendrickson, during the Roosevelt government "the preservation of peace and stability and the protection of the Panama Canal approaches were the principal goals of the United States diplomacy in the Caribbean" (1970, p. 482). However, his relationship with Cipriano Castro, the Venezuelan president, was difficult, and Roosevelt considered this situation as an impediment for his goals (Hendrickson 1970). Tinker Salas states that "Depictions of Castro in United States' diplomatic cables and in the foreign press accentuated his dark skin and describe him as an impertinent child" (2015, p. 52). During 1902-1903, Castro could not successfully manage the country's external debts and received an ultimatum from Germany, Italy and Great Britain, all of whom demanded repayment of loans (Hendrickson 1970). According to Tinker Salas, the intervention was in addition to a separate humiliation:

In October 1899, an international tribunal in Paris granted London control over disputed territory in the neighboring British colony of Guyana, angering Venezuelans and increasing tensions with European powers (2015, p. 51).

Despite facing several economic problems, Castro criticized foreigners, declared the need to uphold "National Unity" and constantly cited his goal to restore the Gran Colombia (Tinker

Salas 2015). The United States intervened and took the role of mediator, guaranteeing a financial agreement between Venezuela and Great Britain (Tinker Salas, 2015). Because of the British claims, Venezuela was given control of the Orinoco river, and Britain was given ninety percent of the Guyanese territory (Tinker Salas 2015). Tinker Salas believes that the US did this because they wanted to prevent the British government from accessing the most important waterway in South America. According to Tinker Salas (2015) despite his national rhetoric, Castro ended up accepting future mediations and proposals from the United States. In 1904, the Monroe Doctrine was extended by President Roosevelt to increase US rights over the Latin American territories, giving them the freedom to control Venezuela, manage its finances, and avoid European influence over the region (Tinker Salas 2015). This doctrine justified future US intervention in Latin America (Højen 2015). Originally, the Monroe Doctrine was a passive policy created with the intention of stopping Europeans from recolonising any Latin American country, but by the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it provided the United States with a greater role: the ability to control the Western Hemisphere (Laderman 2016). However, diplomatic relations between Venezuela and the United States only improved with the arrival of a new president in Venezuela, Juan Vicente Gómez (Hendrickson 1970). From that moment on, the United States intervened in several other foreign claims regarding Venezuela, and later, with the incorporation of petroleum resources, solid diplomatic relations were established between the two countries (Hendrickson 1970).

## 1.4 The Ban on Non-whites, Black Discrimination, European Immigration, and US Support (1900 to 1940)

This section has been divided into three important periods in Venezuelan history, that presented different racist attitudes: the regime of Juan Vicente Gómez, the oil era and the post-Gomez



era. By the 1900s Venezuela had a population of approximately 2,500,000 people. According to Tinker Salas (2015), over eighty percent of the population resided in rural areas, with about 100,000 people living in the capital, Caracas. Racial categories were difficult to discern in the country, as there was no clear division between them (Tinker Salas 2015). They had no segregation laws like those in the United States, and some *pardos* had reached high cultural levels and important public positions, and openly discriminated against blacks, natives and other people of colour. However, they did not undermine the dominant whites. Although slavery had been abolished almost 60 years earlier, the conditions of previous slaves and their descendants was still precarious (Tinker Salas 2015).

### **The Regime of Juan Vicente Gómez**

In this period the government of Juan Vicente Gómez (1908-1935) was dominated by the alliance between Venezuela and the US imperialism, racist attitudes against Afro-descendants, and the rejection of non-white immigrants by the Gómez government and US officials.

In 1908, Venezuelan President Cipriano Castro was sick and travelled to Europe for medical treatment, leaving his military commander, Juan Vicente Gómez, in charge (Tinker Salas 2015). Gómez consulted the United States, his military leaders, political allies and economic interests, and got the necessary support needed to prevent President Castro from returning to Venezuela (Tinker Salas 2015). Castro was overthrown by a coup d'etat, which received support from the United States (Ellner, 2008). President Roosevelt “sent warships to the coastal area off of *La Guaira*<sup>12</sup> in support of Juan Vicente Gómez’s takeover” (Polanco Alcántara 1990, Ewell 1996, cited in Ellner 2008, p. 35).

Castro could not return to Venezuela for the rest of his life and became “a man without country” (Polanco Alcántara 1991 cited in Ellner 2008, p. 35). Additionally, he was tracked by the US

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<sup>12</sup> Venezuela’s main port.

Navy, as a request of Gómez's government and was denied access to some Caribbean countries by French and English authorities. (Caballero 1993, cited in Ellner 2008).

Despite the confrontations between the United States and Venezuela during Castro's time, Chávez celebrated the legacy of Castro. According to Ellner (2008) Chávez ordered the transfer of Castro's remains to the National Pantheon in February 2003.

Gómez and Castro both came from the state of Táchira:

According to their own accounts, Táchira had few blacks, boasted a large proportion of mestizos, and had a white aristocracy. Táchirans considered themselves serious, industrious, hardworking people of European origin (Wright 1990, p. 70).

However, Wright (1990) claims that despite coming from the state of Táchira, as a leader, Castro did not favour white people over black. Castro received advice from two black military generals during his political campaign, Benjamín Ruiz and Antonio Fernández, and rewarded them after he became President, providing them with a high rank in the army (Wright 1990). Castro continued giving black people important visible positions, generating resentment from Caracas elites. An example was Manuel Corao, a black man who occupied several important roles during the Castro administration despite the elites rejected him. Castro was severely criticized by diplomatic visitors from Washington for employing black people and people of colour (Wright 1990).

According to Harlan and Smock, James Weldon Johnson, a consul at Puerto Cabello who arrived from the USA, described the presence of blacks and people of colour in a letter to Booker T Washington:

When I saw the President's suite, and mingling among the crowd, colored colonels and generals, and major generals, clad in crimson and gold with gold handled swords clinking at their sides, I felt like exclaiming with the prophet, 'Lord mine eyes have seen thy salvation, let now thy servant depart in peace' (cited in Wright 1990, p. 70-71).

It came as no surprise that during Castro's administration, Ruiz, Corao and even Castro himself were victims of strong racial attacks from the white elites, ranging from verbal attacks, newspaper articles, caricatures and pamphlets. In 1907, Corao was called a variety of names by his attackers, such as "opulent orangutan," "heartless black," "the monkey Corao," and "the leading orangutan of the American jungle" (Pardo and Vargas Vila, 1907 cited in Wright 1990, p.71).

During the Gómez government (1908–1935) racial debates continued to be relevant in Venezuelan society (Tinker Salas 2015). Much like the other governments in Latin America at this time, Gómez supported the policy of bringing in European immigrants, and referred to Afro-Cubans as barbarians (Tinker Salas 2015). In 1930, an intellectual suggested that people from Mérida be relocated to Caracas, simply because they were whiter and had the potential to improve the race in the capital (Tinker Salas 2015, p. 70).

According to Duffy (1969, p.41), in 1913, an expedition organised by Castro on the Venezuelan coast forced President Gómez to leave his position and meet with Castro, who, as mentioned earlier was exiled from Venezuela by Gómez. Duffy (1969) pointed out that Gómez left vice-president Victorino Márquez Bustillos in charge. Gómez won the elections again, but was not in office, and thus let his friend Bustillos rule again (Moron 1964). In 1918, Bustillos introduced a policy that banned non-white immigrants from entering Venezuela (Tinker Salas 2015, p. 70). Berglund (cited in Troconis 1986, p. 218), pointed out that oil companies imported thousands of black workers from the West Indies to carry out forced labor. According to Berglund the relationship between these workers and Venezuelans was very conflicted (cited in Troconis 1986, p. 218). On June 21, 1918 the government generated an immigrant law that prohibited entry to people of color. At the same time the law requested every foreigner of color to present his legal documents. Berglund (cited in Troconis 1986, p. 218). Racist cartoons are found during this Gómez period in Venezuela. In the 1920s. According to Wright (1990), some

Venezuelans turned to humour and satire to express their racism at this time. Some of the many examples provided by Wright (1990, p. 86-89) are cartoons drawn by Leo Martinez (Leo), a Venezuelan humourist and founder of the Magazine *Fantoches*. The first image below, one of Leo's drawings, appeared in his magazine in 1927. Named "Paternal Sacrifices," it portrays a rich black man with his two sons and an older woman. The black man mentions to the woman that he has been bathing his two black sons with oxygenated water since their birth.



*Top. Paternal Sacrifices*

"Oh, my friend, you don't know what these sons cost me." "Ah, but are these your little boys? So blond?" "Yes, Señora, but washed in oxygenated water since infants."

*Fantoches* (Caracas), September 21, 1927, p. 8.

*Right. "I have everything but the hair and the color."*

*Fantoches* (Caracas), April 25, 1925, p. 7.

*Figure 1: Paternal Sacrifices*

The second cartoon is from 1925. According to (Wright 1990, p. 86):

Leo showed a coal black dandy dressed in a double-breasted suit, standing in front of a mirror with his hand on his hair. Looking at his image, he said: “I have everything but the hair and the color”



*Figure 2: Hair and the Color*

Tinker Salas (2015) points out that after the 1930s, several debates about race continued to be present in Venezuela, and people would either describe the race of immigrants as “acceptable”

or “unacceptable” depending on the skin colour and racial differences. He states that according to immigrants these racial differences continue to determine people’s status.

Tinker Salas states that Gómez played an important role in these debates, affecting the perception of race and amplifying racial fears (2015, p. 70). For example, Gómez established a campaign to promote Venezuelan traditional music and rejecting Afro-Cuban music, describing it as “barbaric.” Gómez preferred European immigrants, especially from the Canary Islands and Spain (Troconis, 1986). According to Tinker Salas (2015, p. 70), Gómez justified his racial discrimination and argued that he defended the country from foreign influences. In the end, he ruled the country with his racist views until his death on December 17<sup>th</sup>, 1935.

### **The Oil Industry in the Venezuelan Economy**

This period was dominated by racism and foreign white male skilled migration. The incorporation of oil into the economy of Venezuela began on a smaller scale in 1878, arousing investor interest from 1880. During the beginning of this period, in the last decade of the nineteenth century, European immigrants dominated many sectors of the economy, for example, Italians directed most of construction and manufacturing, while the Portuguese managed trade, Canary Islanders, agriculture, and in much smaller numbers, Middle Easterners in retail (Tinker Salas 2015, p. 69). The presence of European immigrants did not impact Venezuelan nationalists. However, the arrival of Afro-descendants from Guyana, Trinidad and Tobago to work in mines and agriculture generated strong rejection from intellectuals and political figures with European ancestors. They considered the Afro-descendants a negative influence for the Venezuelan population. (Tinker Salas 2015, p. 69-70).

Similar racial tensions were present in the oil industry between Venezuelans from different regions, and US workers. Tinker Salas (2015, p 59-62) states that in 1926, oil replaced coffee

production, and in 1928, Venezuela became the second largest exporter worldwide. But it was during the Gómez era in 1935 that Venezuela became one of the world's leading producers. In 1935 Venezuela rose to first place as an oil exporter. According to Tinker Salas (2015) although the interaction of Venezuelans from different states of the country generated a new kind of *mestizaje*, new communities near oil production and more racial sensibilities between foreigners and locals.

Eventually the companies moved to create self-sustaining residential enclaves known as *campos petroleros* (oil camps), with facilities segregated between their foreign and Venezuelan work forces. The contrast between a multiracial Venezuelan work force and a foreign white male skilled supervisory staff accentuated prevailing US views on race, serving to confirm Venezuelan elites' views on these matters (Tinker Salas 2015, p. 64).

Additionally, the benefits received by Venezuelan employees from the oil companies were lower than those received by foreign American employees, creating resentment (Tinker Salas 2015).

### **The Post - Gómez Era:**

After the death of Gómez, the white elite and intellectuals used the media to discriminate against blacks and to promote European immigration. Wright (1990) points out that past the Gómez era, elites focused on white immigration as a solution to the social and economic problems of Venezuela. They continued to intend to improve agricultural production, despite oil revenues giving Venezuela enough to support its national economy and budget. This racist view was portrayed in the media. According to Wright (1990), headlines in different newspapers throughout the country blamed the black population for these problems. For example, in 1936, the director of *La Esfera*, a Caracas newspaper, Vicente Dávila claimed that: "most Venezuelan lacked the spiritual, ethnic, and racial strength required to resolve the most urgent problems" (cited in Wright 1990, p. 101)

According to Wright, Dávila states that:

In order to help our national evolution, we need the introduction of other races, the joining of other ideas, the transfusion of blood, the example of creative activity, and the fertile stimulation of the spirit of sacrifice (cited in Wright 1990, p. 101).

Other media figures were less assertive, such as Alfredo Pardo, a journalist of *The Luchador* newspaper (Ciudad Bolívar state). During the same year, 1936, he stated that the government should stop the entry of “undesirable or harmful elements, in that these would only contribute to the degeneration of our race” (Wright 1990, p.101). Tensions were also redirected to the oil sector. According to Wright (1990), on 27 August 1936, *The Daily Panorama* wrote an article warning Venezuelans of the presence of black immigrants: “That newspaper hoped to weaken a strike at the western oil fields by turning Venezuelan workers against West Indians who worked there” (Wright 1990, p. 101). The title of this editorial was “The Negro Danger,” and suggested that law in Venezuela force companies to enact a policy in which 75% of workers had to be Venezuelan, since the black Antilles were taking Venezuelans’ jobs (Wright 1990, p. 101). The newspaper also accused the black Antilles of threatening the wellbeing of the entire country (Wright 1990, p. 101). According to (Wright 1990) Venezuelan white elites such as Arturo Uslar Pietri, believed that European immigration represented progress due to their aggressive economic mentality while the immigration of the black workers represented low standard of living and would delay Venezuelan progress. On August 26, 1936, the Eleazar López Contreras government decreed a new law called: *La Ley de Inmigración y Colonización* The Immigration and Colonization Law, which among the main rules for accepting immigrants, included that the race must be white, excluding Semites (Troconis 1986, p. 239). According to Torrealba (1983), this law, in addition to accepting only the white race, prohibited the entry of elderly, sick and people with ideas contrary to the government.



## 1.5 The Venezuelan National Image: The Adoption of the Term *Café con Leche* to Project a Racial Democracy

In 1944, Andrés Eloy Blanco, a well-known Venezuelan political advocate and poet, coined the term *café con leche* (coffee with milk) to describe Venezuela as one of the most racially mixed countries in Latin America, and a place where all races are welcome (Tinker Salas 2015, p.79). Eloy Blanco was born in the western State of Sucre, where there was a significant Afro-Venezuelan population (Tinker Salas 2015). He actively promoted the inclusion of black people into the national discourse and subsequently wrote a classic poem, “*Píntame Angelitos Negros*” (Paint Me Little Black Angels). The poem calls upon artists to incorporate black angels in church paintings, in which traditionally, the Virgin Mary is surrounded by white, blonde ones. The poem was popularised by singers throughout Latin America, who turned it into a song (Tinker Salas, 2015).

Even though the term “*café con leche*” was adopted among intellectual circles on every level of Venezuelan society, Eloy Blanco did not believe that he had an impact on the decline of racial discrimination in the country (Tinker Salas, 2015). Much like in many other Latin American countries, Venezuelan immigration policies continued to restrict the entrance of black people and people of colour, despite there being no formal or official law put in place that denied their access to the country (Tinker Salas, 2015, p. 80).

## 1.6 Jim Crow Laws: American Racist Legislation's Influences on Venezuela Racist Attitudes

Despite becoming allies, strengthening their important ties since the beginning of the 20th century, and the United States' overall influence on Venezuela, the perception of race differs completely in both countries. In Venezuela, appearance defines race more than origin, while in the United States, the origin of a person defines their race. Venezuela considers a black person to be an individual with dark skin. In the case of the United States, a descendant of a black person is considered black to the white ruling class, regardless of skin colour. According to Wright:

The Venezuelan's visual perception of race differs from that of white North Americans. The latter have argued that origin determines race and that, by definition, any negroid features automatically make an individual black. Thus, a drop of black blood makes an individual black in the eyes of the dominant white group in the United States. But Venezuelans consider only those individuals with black skin as blacks. Color rather than race – appearance rather than origin – play far more important roles in influencing the Venezuelans' perceptions of individuals" (1990, p. 3)<sup>13</sup>

The abolition of slavery occurred in Venezuela in 1854, a decade before the United States. However, Tinker Salas (2015) points out that the racial practices of the USA continued to influence Venezuela throughout the 1940s. American businessmen brought some of the country's practices to Venezuela through their ventures. Tinker Salas explains that:

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<sup>13</sup> A recent example of this is Meghan Markle, a former American actress, whose popularity considerably increased after becoming Prince Harry's wife and a member of the British Royal family. Meghan Markle identifies as biracial. On 20th May 2018, the day after the Royal Wedding, Elaine Welteroth, an American journalist and former editor-in-chief of Teen Vogue, commented on Meghan Markle's statement on her Instagram account, stating that:

Think about it: in the case of virtually every other "biracial" celebrity we know—many of whom marked historic "firsts," from President Obama to Halle Berry—the media has used the term "black" to describe them.

In 1945, several hotels, including the recently inaugurated Avila (built with funds provided by Nelson Rockefeller) on Jorge (George) Washington Avenue, initially constructed to house visiting foreign oil officials, refused service to several US African American performers visiting Caracas. Jim Crow had gone further south (2015, p. 80).

For Tinker Salas (2015), this was an indication that Jim Crow laws (American segregation laws) were unofficially functioning in South America. The Jim Crow laws were a number of laws implemented by the USA after the country's civil war. "Jim Crow laws, passed primarily in cities and states in the South from the mid-1860s to 1965, mandating racial segregation in nearly every social circumstance" (Riggs 2015, p. 667). However, the Jim Crow laws were adopted in nearly every state of America. Apart from segregation, the legislation banned interracial marriage. This is another difference between the United States and Venezuela. As was mentioned before, in 1890 Venezuela promoted interracial marriage, they called for miscegenation between European and blacks in order to whiten the population. (Wright 1990, p.10).

This racist attitude was not exclusive to the Hotel Avila in Caracas. Denying hotel accommodation purely based on race continued to be an issue in Venezuela in the 1940s, despite Jim Crow laws not being part of Venezuelan legislation, providing thus another opportunity for Venezuelan elites to impose white racial superiority freely, something that had not ceased since colonisation, with the indirect support of the USA. This is just another example of how Venezuelan elites would enact policies that were never officialised. They adopted the motto "*café con leche*" in order to disguise racism and discrimination in Venezuela as racial harmony. Wright (1990 p. 2) states that:

In theory, then Venezuelan had achieved a society free of racial tensions. At least they thought they had and claimed as much. But, in fact they accomplished this at the expense of blacks, whom they overlooked as a major class

According to Tinker Salas (2015, p. 80):

The concept of *café con leche* acquired widespread acceptance among intellectual circles, particularly in light-skinned middle-and upper-class sectors eager to dispel the notion that racial prejudice still existed.

For Quintero (2003) Venezuela presents itself as a non-racist society, however, in a study carried out of the school texts of Venezuela's primary and secondary education, philosophies were found that discriminate and disqualify non-European culture. Quintero (2003) pointed out that for the realization of this study the content of school texts of four periods of Venezuelan history was reviewed: 1944-1968; 1969-1980; 1980-1985 and 1985-1997. For Quintero, the ideas transmitted in school texts, due to racist content, prevent the population from perceiving itself as it really is: a society of multicultural heritage: Amerindian, African American and Latin American (2003, p. 9). According to Quintero (2003) this racist ideology is developed in cultural elites, which comprises mostly of Eurocentrists.

More evidence is available for those who still deny the existence of racism in Venezuela. In June 1945, three hotels in Caracas refused accommodation to North American singer, Robert Todd Duncan (Wright, 1988). The incident was reported by *Time Magazine*, which emphasised that the reason behind the rejections was the race of Robert Todd's family (Wright, 1988). Many Venezuelans were in shock, since few were aware of the racism occurring in their own country: "This news, came as a shock to many Venezuelans who had considered their nation a racial democracy in which discrimination and prejudice did not exist" (Wright 1988, p. 441). Venezuelan elites were also surprised, because the news came from the American press, one of the most racist societies on Earth at the time according to Wright (1988, p. 441). *The National* newspaper blamed the powerful influence of America for the hotel incident, warning Venezuelans of the racist influence America had had in the southern hemisphere, specifically in Cuba (Wright 1988, p. 450). They pointed out that "some Venezuelans now chewed *Wrigley*

gum, read *Readers' Digest* selections, smoked mild cigarettes, and held racial prejudices” (Wright 1988, p. 450). A Venezuelan, Dr. Jorge Stronach, condemned the hotel’s behaviour, saying that foreigners had brought Aryanism of the Hitlerian type to Venezuela. Despite these conversations about racial democracy, the Venezuelan elites did not accept racial equality, and most blacks continued to have less opportunities than whites, as well as a lower socio-economic status.

According to Wright (1990, p. 458) “Immigration remained an important issue with *adeco* leaders. Therefore, they pressed for changes in the immigration laws that had restricted non-whites from entering Venezuela”. President Medina Angarita did not speak publicly about the incident but passed a legislation a week after the Duncan rejection to prohibit any kind of racial discrimination within public services. However, a military coup took place, and AD became the ruling provisional party (Wright, 1988). Soon after, AD won the election, its candidate being Rómulo Gallegos, a writer (Wright, 1988). Gallegos changed the immigration policies in 1947, eliminating the restriction for non-white immigrants to enter the country (Wright, 1988, p. 457-458).

Previous administrations had systematically denied education to the masses and had barred their entry into the private and public business sectors. At best, a poor black could aspire to become a shopkeeper or grocer. But under Acción Democrática things changed for the better, for blacks at least (Wright 1988, p. 458).

In 1948, an opening policy was created in which the government emphasized receiving immigrants to solve national needs such as production problems, further clarifying that the white and the European would not be considered superior to the national mestizo (Torrealba 1983). Gallegos also incorporated black people into government, gave them access to business and education but was severely attacked by white elites, especially after stating that “now the blacks are ruling” in September 1948 (Wright 1988, p. 458).

One of his opponents was the influential liberal oligarch Arturo Uslar Pietri, someone who had very clear racist views. According to Wright (1988), Uslar Pietri accused Gallegos of using race to divide the country (Wright 1988). Uslar Pietri had written a racist article in the newspaper *El Universal* (Caracas) in 1937, where “he did not think that Venezuelans had the capacity to realize the economic potential of their country because of the indolent nature of their mixed race” (Wright 1990, p. 101). Pietri blamed the blacks for the country’s problems and referred to them as a “negative element” of the country (Wright 1990, p. 101). In 1948, a military coup took place with the support of the white elites, ending Rómulo Gallegos’ government. The government of Marcos Pérez Jiménez took place and proceeded to rule the country for 10 years (1948-1958). In 1950, President Pérez Jiménez promoted Spanish, Italian and Portuguese immigration in his government policies, according to his belief that the country needed to improve its race (Tinker Salas 2015, p. 88). The Duncan Todd incident was forgotten, and Pérez Jiménez re-established white minority rules and racial views. No lesson was learned (Wright 1988, p. 459).

## 1.7 Venezuelan Racist Attitudes during the Pact of *Punto Fijo*: Discrimination, Ethnic Shame and Devaluation of Nationalism (1958-1998)

As already noted, this period was characterized by the Pact of *Punto Fijo*, a political agreement which had controlled the Venezuelan political system for 40 years (1958-1998) and only allowed two parties, AD and COPEI to participate in the Venezuelan elections. According to Romero (2004), the solid relationship between the US and Venezuela during the *Punto Fijo*

period was based on the economic and strategic interests of Washington. These interests consisted in ensuring the supply of oil to the US by Venezuela at an acceptable price.

This period preceded the Chávez government and had a significant impact in Chávez's election due to economic reforms and political issues, relevant background for main argument of this study. Therefore, the next chapter is dedicated to explaining this period, providing the reader with a better understanding of the social, political and economic context in which Chávez won the election. In relation to the issue of Venezuelan ethnicity during these 40 years, In 1966 a new immigration and colonization law was enacted that retained the restrictions of 1936 but eliminated the restrictions of race. (Torrealba 1983, p. 381).

However, according to Montero (cited in Vargas Arenas 2005), this period was characterized by the projection of a Europeanized culture and United States influence. In other words, the Pact of *Punto Fijo* was characterized by foreign domination. For Vargas Arenas (2005) the national culture was considered as moving backwards, while the Europeans and the United States were considered positive and progressive. Therefore, the national culture was devalued. The indigenous were considered primitive and the blacks were associated with indiscipline, generating negative stereotypes and ethnic shame (Vargas Arenas 2005).

## 1.8 Racist Attitudes in Modern Venezuela

For Vargas Arenas (2005), nowadays most Venezuelans consider it a privilege to be a descendant of Europeans. As for the indigenous and Afro-descendants, although they do not reject the ancestral inheritance, they consider that the characteristics of these cultures have been erased with miscegenation, while the European characteristics prevail.

According to Ishibashi, in present-day Venezuela, racism is maintained through exclusion regardless of the lack of institutionalized racism found in the Southern United States before the

American civil right movements (2007, p. 27). Ishibashi (2007) argues that the fact that this racism is non-institutionalised means that Venezuelan people refuse to acknowledge it, but it exists – there is an obvious discrimination against minority groups and those who are less privileged. Ishibashi (2007) points out that this exclusivist and racist practice extends to all sectors and levels of the population. People of colour are discriminated against and excluded from the university population, the labor market and important professions such as managers, doctors, public relations, diplomats and also secretaries and receptionists from multinational companies, because of their appearance and physical features (Ishibashi 2007, p. 27). Therefore, seeing African descendants or those with black origin sustaining professional positions is uncommon. This also applies in the world of television, where the majority of actors or actresses in Venezuelan *telenovelas* are white with physiognomies of European origin. If there are people of colour, their roles are never relevant or associated with progress (Ishibashi 2003). This exclusion has remained prevalent since colonial times, during which, according to Ishibashi, “the white man is associated with progress, the civilized and financially stable, while the black man is synonymous with the primitive, poverty and ugliness” (2007, p. 27-my translation). However, Venezuelans usually denied the existence of racism because politicians never implemented an exclusionist policy inside the country purely based on race (Wright, 1990). The Venezuelan elites considered themselves not racist. They argued that they had never used violence or force to intimidate the black minority groups. They considered their negative racial ideas were based on cultural and economic factors (Wright 1990, p. 127). They believed the poverty of black people did not come from policies established by the government but was rather the result of their ancestral experience of slavery (Wright 1990, p. 127).

Historically speaking, the living conditions of Afro-Venezuelans had improved little since colonization. Most of them live in poor and rural areas, because Venezuelan politicians and elites continue to discriminate against them through racist attitudes.



In a study recently of poverty in Venezuela by Colmenares (2017), the following was determined:

The situation of poverty in the municipalities studied is strongly associated with the ethnic component, since the proportion of households in extreme poverty in the six municipalities studied is higher in those areas with high proportions of black or Afro-descendant population. This phenomenon could correspond with the historical origin of this population, which placed it for many years under very disadvantageous and unequal conditions to the rest of the ethnic groups studied. According to these results, these groups still feel the consequences of more than 300 years of slavery. (p. 59- my translation.)

Additionally, Colmenares (2017, p. 58-59) expressed that extreme poverty and school absences were also identified in high numbers in rural locations, with high percentages of black or Afro-descendant population. Also situated in this category of extreme poverty, in more moderate proportions, was the brunette population.

In 1974, a Venezuelan anthropologist and proponent of racial democracy theory, Miguel Acosta Saignes, accused the whites of discrimination against blacks not only for economic reasons but also for racial reasons (Wright 1990, p. 128). Acosta exemplified his claims in a newspaper article, with the attitudes of white elites against one of his black friends, who was a surgeon but was never welcome to join the social world of the whites (Wright, 1990). For Acosta, “Money had not whitened his friend” (Wright, 1990, p. 129). Other historical events continually support the discrimination and racism against Afro-descendants in Venezuelan society. For example:

1. In 1975, a group of black residents were removed from their land close to the beach at Cata Beach near Ocumare de la Costa. They were relocated to a marginal mountain – a place where there was a lack of job opportunities, water and roads. They were fishermen, rural workers and farmers in their original residences. The reason behind their relocation was the construction of a luxury condominium. The local and national government refused to protect the black

residents, and nobody protested or protected them. They suffered, just like their ancestors did during the era of slavery, continuing to live with limitations and discrimination. This case was recorded in a daily national newspaper by Kalinina Ortega (Wright 1990).

2. In 1979 a Catholic newspaper ran an editorial questioning the validity of racial democracy in Venezuela, accusing their own country of racism (Wright 1990). According to Wright, they wrote: “We do not believe that this racial prejudice might have been brought here by foreigners. It is very old. Older than immigration. It is the product of the badly understood creole “*mantuanismo*” [snobbery] (1990, p. 130).

3. In 1982, a liberal Catholic journal dedicated a similar issue related to racism in modern Venezuela. The article pointed out that Venezuela had a racial problem and the black population faced real forms of discrimination, despite the existence of a non-discrimination policy (Wright 1990, p. 130). As was mentioned before, according to Wright, the Venezuelan government passed a legislation in 1945 to eradicate racist attitudes. However, evidence suggests that discrimination remained (Wright 1990, p. 98).

Ishibashi claims that, during the 20th century, in their effort to pretend to be a European nation, cultural elites totally ignored the historical contributions of Afro-Venezuelans (2007, p. 26). The result of the invisibility of Afro-descendants, according to Ishibashi (2007) can be seen today in school texts regarding national history. According to Wright (1990) the government has totally ignored the contributions of blacks in history, this includes government documents, court records, national history. Basically, the blacks do not exist. Wright states that:

These elitist attitudes show that since the late nineteenth century, Venezuela’s dominant classes held antiblack prejudices similar to those of the colonial ancestors, who believe that the African’s presence in the New World owed to their enslavement. In their eyes, slaves worked. In a slave economy, blacks did the work that the white refused to do (1990, p. 5).

In 1999, a new constitution was approved in Venezuela that prohibits discrimination of any kind as political, social, sexual and racial (Fernández Matos & Gutiérrez 2017). Additionally, the new constitution included the protection of indigenous peoples, their cultures and customs, guaranteeing them the protection of the State, at the same time prohibiting discrimination against indigenous people (Fernández Matos & Gutiérrez 2017). This meant a historical advance for indigenous peoples, which had been excluded in the 1961 constitution (Fernández Matos & Gutiérrez 2017). However, Afro-descendants were not included or recognized in the 1999 Constitution (Pineda 2015). According to Ishibashi (2007, p. 26), Afro-descendants were excluded despite proposals made by civil associations that are currently part of the *Red de Organizaciones Afrovenezolanas* (ROA) (Network of Afro-Venezuelan Organizations).

Despite these inequities, historically, Venezuela has continued to describe itself as *café con leche* (coffee with milk) since the time of Andrés Bello, feeling proud in expressing its multiculturalism and racial freedom. For Tinker Salas (2015, p. 22), the Venezuelan hierarchical colonial society was based on racial supremacy. Whitening, according to Wright, became a prerequisite for social mobility and blacks had to bury the cultural aspects relevant to their identities (1990, p. 6). Wright points out that:

Only blacks realize the full implications of the lingering prejudice that operates below the surface. They, probably more than any other racial group in Venezuela, realize that Venezuelans want only a little *café* with their *leche* (1990, p. 131).

## Chapter 2

### Economic Changes during the Democratic Era (1958-1998): From Pérez in 1974 to Pérez in 1988

Despite this study's focus on racism, I consider it necessary to explain how the economic crisis that occurred during the 1980s and 1990s impacted Chávez's election, since the social impact of economic downturn cannot be separate from racial discrimination. The aim of this chapter is to provide the reader with some historical facts about the political context in which Chávez became the Venezuelan President. I have selected the two terms of Carlos Andrés Pérez presidency, 1974-1979 and 1988-1993, in order to explain the economic crisis in Venezuela prior to Chávez's election. There are three reasons for the selection of these two periods. Firstly, they represent the transition from a prosperous Venezuela in 1974 to a bankrupt Venezuela in 1988. Secondly, Chávez emerged as a political leader during Pérez's second term. Finally, I am a native Venezuelan who was living in the country during the two Pérez Presidential terms, and who left the country three years after Chávez began ruling. Therefore, I am able to provide a thoughtful and vivid perspective on the economic crisis that took place before the *Chavista* period for a non-Venezuelan audience, using my own personal experience of the interconnection between economic, political change and social attitudes around race. Knowledge of this period is vital in understanding the political, economic and social context in which Chávez won the first presidential election in 1998.

## 2.1 The Economic Crisis. The 1974-1988 Transition from Prosperity to Bankruptcy: Auto-Ethnographic Approach.

“South America’s Most Stable Democracy Explodes” *Newsweek* 1989 (cited in Ellner and Tinker Salas 2007, p. 8)

In 1976, two years after Carlos Andrés Pérez, the candidate of the Democratic Action (AD) party won his first term election (1974-1979), my family and I moved to a small suburb named Menca de Leoni located in the city of Guarenas. This is one of the cities in the state of Miranda, close to Caracas, and is the place where the *Caracazo* began.

The *Caracazo* was a massive protest that took place on February 27<sup>th</sup>, 1989 in Venezuela. This protest emerged as a result of the economic measures imposed by President Pérez during his second term starting in 1988 (Tinker Salas 2015, p. 117). These economic austerity measures that included the increase in gasoline prices, the price of food and services were baptized as *El Gran Viraje* (The Great Turn), since according to the Pérez government they were destined to enable economic freedom (Salamanca 1994). Although popularly they were known as *el paquete* (the package) and included an immediate inflation increase of 40%.

Though I'm not aware of many studies that have recognised Menca de Leoni, Guarenas as the place where the *Caracazo* begun, and this information is not widely disseminated, it is still cited in a few sources. According to Romero, Caro and Vidal, the *Caracazo*, the protest that shook Venezuela to its core, begun in Guarenas and extended quickly to other cities (2014, p. 17-18). Romero, Caro and Vidal Ortega (2014) point out that the *Caracazo* was the result of a population tired of the country’s terrible situation, a crisis that was moral and ethical on top of being economic because most Venezuelans did not trust the political system and government institutions. According to Roberts (2007) by the 1990s, one survey indicated that 70 percent of

the poor and 84 percent of the wealthy believed the political parties to create more problems than solutions, and most Venezuelans were abandoning parties. Tinker Salas (2015) suggests this loss of faith in the traditional parties was a consequence of recurring cases of corruption, unpopular austerity measures, and lack of ability for the government to solve problems. Adrián (2016, p. 147) mentions that the suburb, Menca de Leoni, received its name in order to honour the wife of former Venezuelan President Raúl Leoni. However, according to Adrián (2016), the name was changed to *27 de Febrero* (27<sup>th</sup> of February) in reference to the protests against the increase of the public transport from Guarenas to Caracas that took place on the same day. Chávez had considered this protest to be the seed of his political process (Adrián 2016). The current Venezuelan president, Nicolás Maduro, has also acknowledged that the *Caracazo* specifically began in Menca de Leoni, Guarenas. On 27<sup>th</sup> of February 2015, on the official website of the Venezuelan government *Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela* (PSUV) (United Socialist Party of Venezuela) an article was published expressing that:

This Friday, in commemoration of the 26 years of the awakening of the Venezuelan people against the economic policies that suffocated the population, inhabitants and neighbours of the suburb *27 de Febrero*, in Guarenas, carry out a mass act to commemorate those events that marked a milestone in the history of democracy in the country (PSUV 2015-my translation).

For Tinker Salas (2015), the *Caracazo* revealed the loss of credibility in the traditional parties and political institutions for most Venezuelans. Pérez's second term was completely different from his first term, supporting this interpretation. The first term represented the best economic era in Venezuelan history, and the second one was during the worst economic era in Venezuelan history and represented the end of the Pact of *Punto Fijo*.

Many scholars agree that the 1970s was the best period for Venezuela in terms of political and economic stability.

There was a radical improvement in Venezuela's fortunes after 1973 as the Organization of Petroleum-Exporting Countries (OPEC) and turmoil in the Middle East combined to increase the oil price tenfold (Buxton 2003, p.115).

According to Tinker Salas (2015), the Yom Kippur War (Arab-Israeli war) that took place in 1973 generated an Arab oil embargo which dramatically increased oil prices across the globe. The boycott was directed to the countries that supported Israel (Kubarych, 2005). In less than two years, the price of oil increased from \$2 per barrel in 1973, to \$13 per barrel. As a part of the OPEC group, this represented a financial bonanza for Pérez's new government (Tinker Salas 2015, p. 102).

In addition to this, in 1976, President Pérez nationalized oil, which generated government revenues estimated at 170%, and an increase in public spending of 96.9% (Buxton 2003, p. 115). This financial bonanza generated employment opportunities as well as excellent public services (Buxton 2003, p. 115). According to Márquez (2003) the benefit of this economic bonanza extended to the *adecos* (members of the AD Party). Márquez (2003, p. 198) states:

In the Venezuela of the 1970s a new social class of wealthy *adecos* emerged. Even in small towns in the interior, local politicians and entrepreneurs were benefiting from politics and oil wealth. This was the time of the global oil price increase (1973-1974).

Márquez (2003) points out that 1973-1974 was the time in which oil prices increased on a global scale, and a significant percentage of Venezuelans from different socio-economic statuses obtained a share of the oil wealth. My father was one of the Venezuelans mentioned by Márquez (2003) who benefited from the oil bonanza. He had left his hometown of Barquisimeto and moved to Caracas as a teenager in the 1950s. It was in 1976, at the age of 42, when he had the first opportunity to become the owner of a new apartment. The country had provided him with this opportunity, and he did not dare to miss it. According to Jaramillo, during 1974-1975 the government implemented several policies to facilitate the acquisition of housing (2001). Some of them are: the creation of a national housing subsidy program; the

creation of a secondary market stabilization fund for mortgages or securities; the integration of the mortgage systems through the creation of the National Bank of housing and Urban Services, and the creation of the Fondo Nacional de Desarrollo Urbano (Fondur) National Urban Development Fund as a land bank (1975). I still remember one of my sisters exclaiming “We are rich!” on the night that we moved. The building was surrounded by parks. A Catholic church was soon built in front of our apartment, and from our balcony, you could see the children playing around the church. It was a wonderful time with a lot of financial freedom. I had begun my primary studies, and the school was five minutes walking-distance from our house. We were a large family, yet our public primary school provided me and my siblings with a quart of milk and a cake for breakfast as well as a full lunch. Policies about nutrition were a priority for the government. There were friendly policemen on front of our school helping us cross the street. Additionally, we had two shopping centres in the area, and a transport terminal that included a private bus service. My father ran a petrol station, and my mother did not have to work to support us. Despite these racist inequalities whilst white elites continued in control of the country, during the 1970s the government improved the socio-economic status for many Venezuelans. According to Márquez:

Unlike the 1990s, when the middle and lower classes got poorer, in the 1970s there was a trickle-down process in which the poor sectors of the population benefited (2003, p. 199).

The name of the suburb, which as has already mentioned was for the wife of President Leoni, was a constant reminder of how the party had improved our life and the lives of many other Venezuelans. My family was always grateful to the AD party. My father used to say, “With the *adecos*, you live better.” This was a popular slogan used by the AD party during their re-election campaign and adopted by many Venezuelans whose lives benefitted from AD policies during its first term. Scocozza (2001) claims that the slogan was used solely to win the election.



He argues that, soon after, Pérez implemented neoliberal economic policies, a kind of economic Darwinism. This forced the population to make unsustainable sacrifices, increasing hunger and misery for many Venezuelans. Nevertheless, Pérez alone was popularly credited for the financial freedom in the 1970s and gained the loyalty of many Venezuelans. My whole family voted for Pérez again in 1988, and so did I. We were not aware of the economic crisis in Venezuela until a few weeks before the *Caracazo*. Unfortunately, and like many others, we associated Pérez with his first government.

In 1988, a year before the *Caracazo*, I had received a scholarship from an American company to study business at a private college in La Castellana - Chacao, Eastern Caracas. During this time, my economics lecturer warned our class about the critical economic situation Venezuela was in. He worked for the Venezuelan Central Bank and mentioned several times that Venezuela was in bankruptcy. He pointed out that national accounts were red, and that Venezuela could not afford to pay its debts. We did not take him seriously because corruption cases were always common in Venezuela. However, it was not until the 16<sup>th</sup> of February that my university classmates and I realized just how difficult the Venezuelan situation was. On that day, the government announced its austerity measures, which he called the *paquetazo*, which included an increase in oil prices by 100%, an increase in food prices, and an increase in other services such as electricity. Venezuelans did not expect such austerity measures. It was a radical economic change that suddenly affected the standard of living for all sectors of society.

The government anticipated that the *paquetazo* (the package), as the measures became known, would increase inflation by forty percent, but had not foreseen that it would generate significant public outcry (Tinker Salas 2015, p. 119).

The response to this economic package was almost immediate. Eleven days later, on the 27<sup>th</sup> of February, the *Caracazo* hit the streets of Venezuela. Fuchs and Brown write that:

By the time of the Caracazo, prices of oil, electricity, telecommunications and water had risen by 100%. The decree that sparked the Caracazo raised public transport prices by 30% overnight (2016, p.18).

On that day, I was at work in Caracas. I worked full-time during the day and studied at night. I had left the company that gave me the scholarship at the end of 1988 but had still decided to pursue my studies. I enrolled again at the beginning of 1989. The college was located in La Castellana–Chacao, one of the most expensive places in Venezuela. In order to pay for my studies, I had to work full-time. However, I knew that after the government's new measures, I would not be able to pay for my studies any longer, and I was right.

According to MacLeod:

Much of the elite live inside private gated communities in Eastern Caracas protected by armed guards. Chacao, on the east side, is home to the headquarters of international businesses, Ferrari dealerships, and some of the most expensive private schools in Latin America (2018, p. 9).

At 12:00pm, the company that I used to work for, located in Caracas, advised their personnel to go home. They had listened to the news and decided to close their operations early. They were in shock and warned me that the protests had begun in Guarenas, the place where I lived. They recommended that I not go home. I instead opted to go to the office and called a university classmate, staying away from home until it was all over. I spent two days in Caracas at her home with her. We bought some food as soon as we could, and spent the whole day watching the news. A couple of hours later, the protests reached Caracas as well, but did not reach my friend's suburb. However, I was in a state of shock as I watched this all unfold. I called my

mother, and she asked me not to go home, and to stay where I was and stay safe. The disruptive actions in this protest had never been seen before in Venezuela. According to López Maya:

The *Caracazo* spread within hours from the capital to all the main and secondary cities of the country, which suffered barricades, road closures, burning of vehicles, stoning of shops, shooting and widespread looting. The cost in material and human losses was very high, and the deaths, which totalled almost four hundred, were largely of poor people resident in the capital (2002, p. 202).

Ellner describes the *Caracazo* as “two days of mass looting followed by several days of repression by military troops sent to slum areas, resulting in hundreds, perhaps thousands, of deaths” (2008, p. 91). Some sources estimate those killed by firearms during this protest numbered above 2000, despite official counts revealing only 277 killed and 1009 wounded (Ellner 2008, p.95). For Dominguez, with the aim to stop the riots during the *Caracazo*, the Pérez government took brutal military actions against civilians (2011, p. 117). He argues that the rebellion left between 600 and 3000 civilians dead.

Two days later, when I went back to my home, the whole area was surrounded by the army. Even the entrance to the building that I lived in was surrounded by about 5 soldiers. Nobody else could be seen outside of their home. One of the soldiers smiled at me, and I looked back at him with a deadpan expression, mainly because of the fear that I felt in that moment not knowing how my family really was. There was broken glass everywhere, rubbish, and even blood in some places. My father told me of a friend that lost his 14-year-old son, whom I knew, since we were neighbours. The teenager had a mental disability and had gone out during the protests. He, unaware of the gravity of the situation, copied what everyone else was doing, thinking that that was the normal thing to do. This led to him being killed by the police.

The events of *the Caracazo* left me, my family and the whole country in shock. After the protests, the economic situation in Venezuela became harder. I could not afford to pay for my

studies. I left the College almost immediately and started to look for a better job. I had to save money for several months to be able to return the second semester in September 1989. These austerity measures meant inflation was around 50%, consequently wages were dramatically reduced. I have to say that I was very fortunate at that time to find a better job, which on top of my salary paid 90% of my business studies for the following 5 years (1990-1995). I had applied for a job at a Venezuelan laboratory of German origin, located in Caracas. After the selection process, the company decided to offer me a better position as a financial analyst and, they decided to pay 90% of my business degree. This job allowed me to move to Chacao, relatively close to my college and where many white elites lived. I usually finished my university day sometime between 11:00pm and 11:30pm, and would arrive home after 12:30am, which, considering the crime rate in Menca de Leoni, was extremely dangerous. I was the witness of many small crimes before I moved. A couple of years later, my family moved to a town in the countryside. According to Herrera Nuñez (2015, p. 6-my translation):

The increase in the homicide rate in Caracas has had a very crucial growth. The rest of the country has had increases in a much greater proportion. The homicide rate for Caracas doubled, from 44 to 90 per 100,000 inhabitants, while in the entire country it increased from 13 to 58 per 100,000 inhabitants, representing a 361% boom in the last 25 years.

The following statistics provided by Herrera Nuñez (2015, p. 6)<sup>14</sup> illustrates the evolution of the homicide rate in Caracas and Venezuela expressed per 100,000 inhabitants from 1990 to 2015:

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<sup>14</sup> See: Herrera Nuñez, E. 2015. *Evolución de la criminalidad en Venezuela* (Evolution of the Homicide) (1990–2015): <http://pazactiva.org.ve/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Informe-Asamblea-Nacional-FINAL-Criminalidad-Ernesto-Herrera.pdf?platform=hootsuite>



Fuente: CICPC, Centro para la Paz UCV, Ministerio Público.

Ellner points out that “The *Caracazo* was followed by a one-day general strike on May 18 that was called to pressure the government into reconsidering its neoliberal policies” (2008, p. 91). Crime rates increased considerably in Menca de Leoni, now called *27 de Febrero* (27<sup>th</sup> of February) but that did not happen in Chacao. The socio-economic imbalance between Eastern Caracas and Menca de Leoni was obvious. While crime and inflation increased and services deteriorated in the poorest parts and neighbourhoods, the opposite happened in Chacao. Security and public services, as well as investments, increased in Chacao. Modern shopping centres and international restaurants opened and, companies continued to invest. Not many black people were living in Chacao. The Portuguese predominated in Chacao, whilst in another area of Caracas such as La California Norte, a significant percentage of the population was Italian. At the University where I studied, there were few black students. According to García-Guadilla, Roa & Rodríguez (2009), Chacao is one of the richest municipalities in Venezuela, relatively small and better equipped in terms of infrastructure of services. The rate of poverty is also one of the lowest in Venezuela.

There were also many overcrowded slums on the outskirts of Caracas. These people did not have access to education, health care or public services. They were very poor, and many could

not even read. MacLeod (2018, p. 9) pointed out that those who live in Eastern Caracas, “rarely come into contact with the poor majority of Caracas residents who live in precarious existences in the shantytowns on the hills surrounding the city”.

Many young children from these poor areas, were working in the streets of some cities near Chacao in Caracas. They were selling cigarettes, snacks or cleaning shoes. I usually finished University at 11:00pm and many of these children as young as 8 years old were still working. All children were very dark skinned. I spoke to some of them and they told me their parents left them in the street and never went back because they could not afford to keep them. Some of them were exploited by other people, others were sent by their own parents to work. During a conference, I was able to meet the Minister of Intelligence at the time. I made a comment to him regarding how the government should make improvements for the lives of these poor children, to which he ignored completely. In Venezuela poverty, discrimination and inequality were evident.

The events of February 27, 1989 that characterized the *Caracazo* had different and interesting immediate interpretations. For Viso (1989), social inequality and poverty generated by the government and financial institutions in Venezuela were the roots of *the Caracazo*. According to Mendible (1989) for Arturo Uslar Pietri, an influential liberal elite, the protest was simply carried out through unjustified criminal acts. For Luis Beltrán Prieto Figueroa, the founder of the AD Party, the protests implied a social explosion that was a sign for the need to reflect (Mendible 1989). For Mendible (1989), the events represented the evolution of Venezuela derived from ignoring the country’s past. As mentioned before, Chávez did not participate in the *Caracazo* and did not exist as a political figure during that period. However, the possibility of a coup d'etat as a solution was considered by some academics. Duno (1989, p. 16) expressed that the situation in Venezuela after February 27, 1989, created the conditions for a coup d'etat and raised doubts about the survival of the inefficient existing political system.

This last prediction came true. Chávez (1998) said in a television interview that the decision to carry out the coup on February 4, 1992 with the intention of overthrowing the government of President Pérez was taken by him after the *Caracazo*. This will be elaborated in more detail in the next section. Trinkunas (2002, p. 71) pointed out that:

Venezuela's political and economic crisis in the 1980s provided an opening for military intervention, which led to the 1992 coup attempts

## 2.2 Venezuelan Exceptional Democracy during Pérez's Presidential Terms: (1974-1979) and (1988-1993). The Pact of *Punto Fijo*

In order to understand the economic changes that took place from Pérez's first period to Pérez's second period, it is necessary to analyze the role of the Pact of *Punto Fijo*, an important political alliance between the traditional parties that ruled Venezuela for 40 years (1958-1998).

According to Tinker Salas the Pact of *Punto Fijo* was an agreement signed by the three main non-communist political parties: Democratic Action (AD), the Republican Democratic Union (URD), and the Independent Political Electoral Organization Committee (COPEI) (2015, p.92).

The pact adopted the name 'Puntofijo' from Caldera's residence in Caracas. The place where the agreement was signed. Caldera was the candidate of COPEI (Tinker Salas, 2015)

Corrales claims that the objective of the agreement was to replace the competition between the three leading parties with cooperation to consolidate democracy, avoid a dictatorship, and protect their mutual interests (2001, p. 90). Tinker Salas (2015) similarly alleges that this was done to guarantee democracy in the country and eliminate the division between political parties. However, Hellinger argues that the pact was inclusionary but also exclusionary, since

it eliminated the participation of the Communist Party from the political process (2003, p. 29). The pact itself was signed in Venezuela, but the original outline of the agreement was established in an early meeting in New York by Venezuelan (AD party) exiled leaders, such as Rómulo Betancourt, together with members of the US Congress (Tinker Salas 2015). These AD leaders had been exiled as a consequence of a coup that took place in 1948 (Moron, 1964)<sup>15</sup>. Tinker Salas (2015) states that in the same year the Pact was formed, the Democratic Action party the (AD) candidate, Rómulo Betancourt won the presidential election. According to Tinker Salas (2015):

Venezuela acquired heightened status in US policy toward Latin America. At his inauguration Betancourt (1959-1964) proclaimed that the “philosophy of Communism is not compatible with the development of Venezuela”

For Acosta (1987), the Betancourt government faced economic problems and needed to cooperate with the United States, and for that reason he played the anti-communist game. United States was the number one customer for Venezuela’s oil and their economic support was vital for Betancourt. Tinker Salas (2015, p. 94) states that “Venezuela increasingly became a showcase for a mildly reformist, yet stridently anti-communist government that served as a trusted US ally during the Cold War”

Not long after this, the Democratic Republican Union party (URD) was noted to be endorsing the PCV (Venezuelan Communist Party) and was promptly removed from the pact by the newly elected government (Ellner 2008, p. 62). The two remaining parties, AD and COPEI, were now the two major parties. They proceeded to control the country for 40 years, from 1958 to 1998, until Chávez won the election. During the first term of AD representative Carlos

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<sup>15</sup> “On November 24, 1948 a Military Junta of Government seized power, without the slightest struggle. The governing party, Accion Democratica, was dissolved and its leader went into exile” (Morón 1964, p. 2)



Andrés Pérez as president, many scholars considered Venezuela a country with a so-called exceptional democracy. Hellinger (2003) states that Venezuela's democracy was established by the Pact of *Punto Fijo* in 1958. Ellner and Tinker Salas argue that the "notion of Venezuela as a privileged Third World nation is rooted in concrete historical, economic, political, and geographical circumstances" (2007, p. 3). Factors that made some defend this exceptionalism are that, unlike elsewhere in Latin America, Venezuela was free of social conflicts that threatened the government's stability, and that its political democratic system was solid and stable (Ellner and Salas 2007, p. 5). Some attribute the success of democracy in Venezuela to the establishment of the Pact of *Punto Fijo* to guarantee democratic stability. Hellinger (2003, p.29) points out that the pact was selected by the United States elites and used to serve US interests as an ideal model of transition to democracy that avoids dictatorships. According to Hellinger (2003), one objective of the Pact of *Punto Fijo* was to prevent a repetition of the coup of 1948. However, some academics do not consider the period of the Pact of *Punto Fijo* to be a democratic period. Ciccariello-Maher (2013) describes the *Punto Fijo* period as a conspiracy and attack against the Venezuelan people, because the decision making and the demands of the population were centralized solely in the two predominant political parties AD and COPEI.

Others attribute Venezuelan exceptionalism to a centralized democracy based on the revenue from oil production (Ellner and Salas 2007, p. 6). Venezuela presented characteristics that allowed it to distinguish itself from the rest of Latin America. According to Levine, some of these characteristics involved solid economic growth, a centralized oil state that allowed it to finance political and social activities, and the absolute control of the military (Levine 2002, p. 250).

During Pérez's second term, the perception of Venezuela as a Latin American democratic model declined. The following view was expressed by Ellner and Salas (2007, p.8):

Events during the 1990s, including two military coup attempts in 1992 and a wave of street protests, obliterated Venezuela's image as a model democracy, while they confirmed its status as a Third-World nation.

Many scholars agree that Chávez was elected as a result of the economic crisis in Venezuela that took place in the 1990s. Ellner & Tinker Salas claim that the middle and lower classes deteriorated economically in the 1980s and 1990s (2007, p. 1). Corrales (2005) suggests that the majority of Venezuelans hoped that Chávez would function as the turning point from the previous regime (1958-1998). Roberts states that by the 1990s, all Venezuelans had abandoned the two traditional political parties (2003, p. 65). For Corrales (2005), a political replacement was necessary in the country. However, even in studies with different focus, dedicating some chapters to the existence of strong racism and race-class entanglement in Venezuela linked to Chávez's election is unavoidable, as it is always encountered during investigations. For example, MacLeod's (2018) study focuses on how Western media portrayed the image of Chávez since 1998, after Chávez became the Venezuelan president. However, through his study, he identifies Venezuela as a highly unequal and racially divided country. According to Cannon (cited in MacLeod 2018, p. 9):

Darker skinned Venezuelans were functionally barred from well-paid jobs in the oil industry, adding to the race/class dimension. The poor are mostly black and the black are mostly poor. There is a strong correlation between race, class and voting tendencies inside Venezuela

I argue that racism as an underlying driver of social inequalities in Venezuela was a contributing factor to Chávez's election, as well as the exacerbation of the nation's racial and class divide. Racism was a pre-existing condition long before the election of Chávez, as described in Chapter 1. From the perspective of this study, without the strong economic crisis, political and social discontent that took place in Venezuela during the 1980s and 1990s, a non-white Venezuelan like Chávez and his successor, President Nicolás Maduro, would have never

had the slightest chance of being elected Venezuela's president. I argue that Chávez and Maduro would have never passed the Pact of *Punto Fijo* standards firstly because of their socialist background and secondly because of elite filters around race and class. Herrera Salas described the context of Venezuela in which Chávez won the election as:

Economic and political power remains predominantly in the hands of the "white" sector, while the indigenous and Afro-Venezuelan population, as well as the majority of their descendants for the most part still find themselves in the lowest socioeconomic strata (2007, p.114).

Chávez was non-white, a mix of Amerindian and African heritages (MacLeod, 2018). Additionally, he was a coup leader. Therefore, I agree that it was originally the collapse of the political system, the economic crisis and the need for change that opened the door for candidates of non-traditional parties, thus providing Chávez with an opportunity to run for elections.

Ellner (2008) claims that Chávez's election called for a revision and re-examination of the written political literature in favour of the *Punto Fijo* democratic period. As we exposed before, the majority of the scholars described Venezuela during the *Punto Fijo* era free of social conflicts that threatened the government's stability. However, during the late 1980s and 1990s, Venezuela experienced a high level of turbulence, a massive protest in 1989 and two military coups during 1992. According to Ellner, Chávez's election also put into question the perception that Venezuela had solid political institutions, enjoyed a stable government, and was a country free of conflicts (2008, p. 13). For the first time after 40 years that the Pact of *Punto Fijo* was implemented, presumably a model of democracy, their member parties lost the election and instead Chávez, a former coup leader won the election.

## 2.3 The Transition: The End of Pérez and the Beginning of Chávez

The deterioration of political conditions and growing social inequality in the 1980s and 1990s debunked the myth of Venezuela's "exceptional" democracy and set the stage for Chávez's rise to power (Ellner and Tinker Salas 2007, p. 1).

For Tinker Salas, (2015) the *Caracazo* reflected the evident discontent that Venezuelans had against the political system that had governed them since 1958 when the Pact of *Punto Fijo* started. He points out that crime rates had continued to increase since the 1960s, and that the situation did not improve in the 1970s. In 1974, even though there were considerable improvements in many sectors of the country, poverty levels continued to rise, and the existence of massive shanty towns became more and more widespread. The poor people from these shanty towns would travel to the cities, increasing the level of crime in the area, including murder (Tinker Salas, 2015). The authorities associated crime with the young people of colour who lived in the poorest areas of Venezuela. Government policies meant that teenagers aged from 14-18 were considered adults in court (Tinker Salas, 2015). On top of the economic crisis, racial discrimination and inequalities continued to intensify in modern Venezuela. Tinker Salas mentions that in the 1990s, the number of murders committed involving gunshots swelled: according to newspapers, the rate ascended to over 200 per month (2015, p. 121). However, he argues that the economic crisis in Venezuela began in the 1980s. Tinker Salas points out that in 1980 employees in the oil industry accounted for less than 1 percent of Venezuela's population, and the social inequalities generated by the distribution of wages were the most unjust in the continent despite the nationalization of oil in 1976 (2015 p. 106). President Pérez, who ended his term in office in 1979, was involved in a case of corruption. Later, in 1982, the price of oil decreased, and foreign debt increased from eleven billion dollars in 1978 to twenty-seven billion in 1983 and reached thirty-four billion in 1984 (Tinker Salas 2015, p. 111-112).

For Mommer, “As a result of the nation’s growing crisis after 1983, the state lost control over the petroleum sector” (cited in Lander 2007, p. 24). Additionally, on 18 February 1983, known as *viernes negro* (Black Friday) president Luis Herrera announced the devaluation of the *bolívars* (Venezuelan currency), which had remained stable for twenty years. The bolivar devaluated from 4.30 *bolívars* to 1 USD to 13 *bolívars* to 1 USD (Tinker Salas 2015, p. 112). Under the next elected government, an AD Party candidate Jaime Lusinchi (1985-1989), the economy continued to deteriorate. The bolivar decreased from 15 bolivares to 1 USD in 1985 to 25 *bolívars* to 1 USD dollar in 1986 (Tinker Salas 2015). President Lusinchi was also involved in several scandals, such as: corruption charges; extramarital affairs; the purchase of sixty-five Jeeps for AD officials; and the shooting of fourteen fishermen (Tinker Salas, 2015). The Venezuelan Supreme Court tried to start a trial against Lusinchi for the purchase of the Jeeps, to no avail. He finished his term in government, formally married his lover and secretary, Blanca Ibáñez, and moved to Miami (Tinker Salas, 2015). Similarly, Blanca Ibáñez was also accused of corruption, but a Venezuelan court acquitted her of all charges, despite the evidence showing her possession of six million dollars in a Florida bank account (Tinker Salas 2015).

Despite these corruption cases in 1988, as mentioned above, Carlos Andrés Pérez, the candidate of the same political party AD as Jaime Lusinchi, won the elections. Most Venezuelans associated Pérez with the economic freedom which Venezuela enjoyed during his first term. However according to Tinker Salas, though Pérez’s campaign promised a return to the good times of the seventies, instead Pérez’s second term started with the announcement of austerity measures (*paquetazo*) and generated the *Caracazo*.

According to Dominguez (2011), the aggressive reaction from the government to control the citizens during the *Caracazo* caused two military rebellions with the objective to take down the government, the first one of these led by Chávez.

Chávez's coup attempt failed, he surrendered and assumed his full participation in the rebellion and all his symbolic acts were televised. For Tinker Salas:

In a society in which people had endured repeated corruption, scandals and in which politicians seldom assumed responsibility for their actions, the statement captivated people and trust Chávez onto the national stage (2015, p. 123).

For Roberts (2003), events such as *the Caracazo*, two coup d'états, and corruption charges against president Carlos Andrés Pérez, intensified the economic crisis in the 1980s and 1990s, a period in which corruption reached its highest levels, generating a political crisis (p. 64-65).

For Tinker Salas, additionally, Chávez mobilized groups that had been marginalized:

The appearance of Chávez on the national stage during the 1990s served to consolidate diverse left-wing trends that had been active in community-based movements and among workers, women's organizations, and groups of intellectuals. It also gave voice to the struggles of people of color, the indigenous, and those of African heritage long marginalized by a discourse on [sic] a supposedly thorough miscegenation (*café con leche*) and the existence of a purported racial democracy (2015, p. 164).

I agree with Tinker Salas (2015) in saying that Chávez established himself as a political figure that sided with the working classes and gave a voice to the minorities and forgotten groups. As Tinker Salas (2015) points out, people of African heritage had clearly long been marginalized. The *café con leche* expression to describe a multicultural Venezuelan was an identity narrative rather than a reality.

Pérez was accused of corruption by the new attorney general Ramón Escobar Salom in 1993, the Supreme Court recommended bringing him to trial (Ellner 2008, p. 97). soon after Pérez was impeached (Tinker Salas (2015). Chávez gained popularity, as Tinker Salas (2015)

mentions. The suburb in which the *Caracazo* begun never went back to being the place it was before the protest. Today, it is solely remembered for the protest, and honours the *Caracazo* with its name. Regarding to the *Caracazo*, Tinker Salas states that: “some observers recognized that Venezuela would never be the same” (2015, p. 120-121). Iturrieta (1989) commented that as an historian and university professor, he had thought he understood Venezuela, but his perception changed during the three days the *Caracazo* took place.

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## Chapter 3

# Social and Political Polarization: Racism and Class Conflict in the Chávez Era (1998-2013)

Beyond the political sphere, a great deal of the debate that Hugo Chávez has created since he began to rise in 1998 electoral opinion polls centered on his social status, his color and personal style...The president, a native of Barinas, lower-middle class, dark in color...is the epitome of the Venezuelan from the masses that rose to the height of power (Márquez 2004, cited in Herrera Salas 2007, p. 112).

This chapter claims that this racial and class separation facilitated the rise of Chávez, his successful subsequent elections and the loyalty of his supporters, who identified themselves with his race and his rhetoric.

Chávez had a significant impact on the history of Venezuela since he won the election, well beyond his death in 2013. His radical political transformation of Venezuela has been the subject of debate among scholars and continues to be contested. Smilde and Hellinger claim that “Hugo Chávez’s rise to and consolidation of power in Venezuela over the last decade has set into motion perhaps the most controversial political process in contemporary Latin America” (2011, p. 1). Due to the radical reforms he made to the entire political structure of Venezuela after taking power, Chávez is also accused of having divided the country. Corrales, for example, links Chávez to the polarization in Venezuela: “The Hugo Chávez Frías administration (1999-present) is the most polarizing government in Venezuela since the late 1940s” (2005, p. 105). However, other studies that have discussed the topic of polarization disagree with Corrales’ argument. An example of this is MacLeod who points out that “it is



more accurate to see Chávez as the *consequence* of intense polarization, rather than its cause” (2019, p.1).

As discussed in Chapter 1, the country’s racism and polarization, attributed by many scholars to Chávez, were in fact a pre-existing condition present long before the *Chavista* period, with roots in the colonial era. The origin story of the Chávez political movement in current literature contains a number of contradictions which will be discussed in the next section. These contradictions indicate the strong possibility that a component of the ideological foundation of Chávez was driven by experiences of racial discrimination and inequalities.

There is no doubt that the economic crisis generated in the 1980s-1990s had a significant impact on the election of Chávez, as explained in Chapter 2. However, there were racial issues also at play. The existing literature on the Chávez era has still not explored the links between polarization and racism in sufficient depth, and this thesis contributes towards addressing that gap.

### 3.1 Chávez’s Motivation to Create a Revolutionary Group

According to Dominguez, Chávez’ rebellious attitude towards the government was inspired by the government’s aggressive behaviour to control the citizens during the *Caracazo*, resulting in several civilian deaths (2011, p. 117). Chávez supported this statement. However, I disagree that Chávez’s rise is directly attributable to the *Caracazo*. I believe that the rise of Chávez and the *Caracazo* were two independent events, a point on which I will further elaborate in this chapter.

I had the opportunity to interview an Inspector of the DISIP, *Dirección Sectorial de los Servicios de Inteligencia y Prevención* (Sectorial Directorate of Intelligence and Prevention Services) immediately after the *Caracazo*. At the time of the *Caracazo*, we both lived in Menca

de Leoni. The DISIP were the investigative police with a specialization in public safety that reported directly to the Ministry of Interior and Justice (Ungar, 2003). The DISIP were more commonly known as “the political police.” According to (Ungar, 2003), they were completely dependent on the government and were loyal to them. The DISIP Inspector informed me after his investigation that the *Caracazo* was an unexpected and spontaneous protest by the lower class (personal communication). According to him, the protest initially arose when a woman was not allowed to enter a public bus for not having the correct amount for the trip. She was unaware that the price for public transport had increased by 30% overnight. Apparently, after the driver denied her access to the bus, the passengers agreed to all get off the vehicle and start the protest, which spread rapidly throughout the rest of the city and the country. According to my friend, the *Caracazo* was not a planned or organized protest against neoliberalism, and participants did not expect to die. It was a protest against the austerity measures of the then government of Carlos Andrés Pérez. This alternative narrative complicates the direct ideological causality of Chávez’s claim.

Chávez expressed his position regarding the *Caracazo* and other events that occurred in the late 1980s, on 10 October 1998, two months before his election, in a live interview on television with Marcel Granier (*Primer Plano with Marcel Granier 1998*), the president of *Radio Caracas Televisión* (RCTV), a Venezuelan network. Chávez (1998) stated that he did not participate in the incident of October 1988, despite having been arrested as a suspect, and that he was released that same day.<sup>16</sup> He also assured his interviewer that he was not involved in the *Caracazo*. However, Chávez pointed out that the decision to carry out the coup on February 4<sup>th</sup>, 1992 with the intention of overthrowing the government of President Carlos Andrés Pérez was taken by

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<sup>16</sup> Castillo (2012, p. 1) states that on October 26, 1988, two rows of armoured vehicles left *Fuerte Tiuna* (one of the military installations of the Armed Forces located in the city of Caracas, Venezuela) and they reached two government departments without authorization. The incident was reported. However, the results of the investigation were not publicly clarified by the government.

him and his collaborators after the *Caracazo*. According to Chávez, his clandestine group felt indignant that the government had sent soldiers to kill protesters, including children. Chávez's motives for carrying out the coup on February 4<sup>th</sup>, 1992 are credible. According to Trinkunas (2002, p. 51):

The deployment of the armed forces to repress the February 1989 uprising had disgusted many junior officers, especially on contrasting the poverty of the rioters with the alleged corruption of politicians and the military high command.

However, his original motivation to create a revolutionary group is questionable. In his interview with Granier, Chávez also stated that he had created the Bolivarian Revolutionary Army 200 in 1982 as a clandestine group inside the army. He pointed out that by the time the government received information about his group in 1985, it had already gained quite a bit of power. According to Chávez, all the members of the group had been instructors at the Military Academy for several years, making it easier for them to transmit “Bolivarian” ideologies to their subordinates. Although Chávez did not explain his views on the ideology of Simón Bolívar, the historical figure has been the most relevant person in the history of Venezuela. Bolívar is considered a hero - one who freed Venezuela and four other Latin American nations (Bolivia, Peru, Colombia and Ecuador) from the Spanish government in the 1800s.<sup>17</sup> He is also described as someone with high moral standards and ethical values.<sup>18</sup>

Chávez assured during the interview that the foundation of the group was made in honour of the bicentenary of Simón Bolívar (1783-1830). Similarly, according to Chávez (1998), they did not have any sort of conspiracy plan. The group was formed for ideological purposes only,

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<sup>17</sup> “The most radical attitude took flesh in Simón Bolívar, converted by the wars into the supreme hero. But not only did he direct the wars, he also stimulated the creation of the State. A real Venezuelan State hardly existed before 1830, but the idea of statehood certainly did exist, Great Colombia-a purely historical name-is precisely Bolívar’s most happy conception in the field of law. Perhaps this conception was not based on what was practical, on the necessary conditions for building a State” (Morón 1964, p. 92).

<sup>18</sup> Simón Bolívar believed that all men should be equal and free. Worrell, M. ed., 1991. *Oxford Children's Encyclopedia: Abraham to Zhou Enlai: [biography]*. Oxford University Press p. 30.

to implement “true Bolivarian” ideologies in the military ranks. However, Tinker Salas states that Chávez had founded the initial insurgent group, named the Venezuelan People's Liberation Army (ELPV) in 1977, not in 1982 (2015, p. 25). According to Gott, Chávez founded the ELPV in 1977, after two years of joining the army, at the age of 23 (2005, p. 37). Gott points out that Chávez invited Jesús Urdaneta, another young soldier with similar radical views, to join his revolutionary group (2004, p. 37). Chávez mentioned to Urdaneta that he had formed the group because he was disappointed by his experience in the army (Gott 2005, p. 37).

Gott's claim, and the suggested original name of the clandestine group, generate contradictions in Chávez's statements. Firstly, the group was created in 1977, not in 1982 as Chávez claimed. Secondly, the implication of the name: ‘Venezuelan People's Liberation Army.’ Liberation from what? There was no ‘*Caracazo*’ or economic crisis in the 1970s, a strong economic period. Therefore, it is likely that if Chávez's group was born in the 1970s, it was mainly motivated by the inequalities, racism and discrimination historically characterizing Venezuela. According to Tinker Salas (2015), in the early 1970s the Venezuelan Army Forces underwent an important transformation. Additional to the military training, they were receiving university equivalent education in different disciplines such as political economy, philosophy and history. This education initiative known as Plan Andrés Bello “reinforced nationalist patriotic sentiments among officer cadets after 1974” (Trinkunas, 2002, p.45). For Tinker Salas (2015, p. 194) “Chávez drew inspiration from Venezuelan history and began to see the army as a potential agent of social change”.

### 3.2 Political and Racial Division: Racist Attitudes during the Chávez Era (1998-2013).

The manifestation of pre-existing racism in Venezuela was evident from the moment Chávez won the Venezuelan election in 1998. At the time that Chávez won the election and was addressing his followers from the presidential palace, Humberto Celli, a prominent leader of the democratic AD party expressed the following:

When I saw Chávez triumphant on the “People’s Balcony, ‘greeting the multitude and the TV cameras focused on those delirious faces” said Celli. “I said to myself, ‘My God, those are the *negritos of Acción Democrática* (Colomina 2001, cited in Hellinger 2003, p. 42).

For Hellinger, Celli clearly expressed the meaning of race in Venezuela through his perception of the Chávez scene addressing his followers:

“*Horror a la oligarquía*” was a popular Federalist cry to rally the underclass of peons and former slaves, most of African ancestry. Chávez resurrected the slogan to appeal to the poorest Venezuelans, who despite relatively relaxed social barriers are disproportionately blacks and pardos (2003, p. 41)

Ishibashi states that polarization and racism before the Chávez era has not been substantially explored:

Despite the racialized tendency of polarized political discourse at the time of the government of President Hugo Chávez, the debate on the racist undercurrent throughout history in Venezuelan society has not been substantially studied (2007, p. 33, my translation).

I agree with Ishibashi in saying that racism has not been explored enough. As a Venezuelan, I believe that one of the reasons racism is ignored, is because the most discriminated are the indigenous and afro-descendants who represented the minority groups. While the rest of

Venezuelans denied racism because many believe they had not been affected. However, as MacLeod notes, there is evidence and indication that racism in Venezuela has excluded the participation of the poorest sectors from many areas of society, such as political life and the oil sector:

Chávez was the first non-white President in the majority non-white country's history. Since the time of slavery, where whites were land-owners and blacks and Amerindians were slaves, Venezuela has been a highly racially and socially unequal country (2018, p. 9).

Similar statements have been made by Herrera Salas:

The figure of President Chávez represents an important obstacle to the classism and racism of the opposition. The fact that he expressly identifies himself as "Indian," "black," or "mixed breed" transforms these supposed insults into positive qualities of which one may feel proud (2007, p. 112).

Márquez states also that:

Skin color is a mark which, depending on the shade of café con leche, (coffee with milk) hinders or facilitates social mobility, just as it opens or closes windows of opportunity (cited in Herrera Salas 2007, p. 112)

According to Tinker Salas, (2015) Chávez suffered discrimination. Tinker Salas pointed out that Chávez's family was quite poor. He states that originally Chávez's application to enter the army was rejected but later he was accepted because of his baseball skills. Tinker Salas (2015) believes that the socio-economic background of Chávez made him rejectable by the army.

Chávez states that:

We are not preparing to attack. No one...We are not the aggressors; we are the attacked. Historically. For five hundred years the powers of the world have been attacking us! (2009, p. 2, my translation).

These statements confirm that the election of Chávez exposed again the continuity of the racist attitudes that have been present and denied throughout history. For Herrera Salas (2007), racism in Venezuela has been a cause of division since the time of colonization. Herrera Salas (2007) states that, economic and political power has historically remained in the hands of whites, while indigenous peoples, and Africans and their descendants continue to be marginalized to this day. As a result, the inclusivist racial and social policies of the Chávez government generated support from poor and racially marginalized groups, as well as racist reactions from the upper class.

Ishibashi identifies a new trend after Chávez election— one in which racism and class division drives political conflict (2007, p. 28). The Chávez government and opposition mutually assault each other with racist terms, such as “whites,” “blacks”, “Indians” and “zambos”. I agree that the extensive levels of such aggressions are a novelty or a new trend. However, throughout this investigation (See Chapter 1), we have found that, historically Venezuela has been a country dominated by white elites, which had excluded and discriminated against minority groups, especially blacks and descendants of Africans. These racist positions would never have allowed Venezuela to be ruled by a black president at any time in the history of Venezuela. In fact, Chávez 's situation can also be compared to the time of Rómulo Gallegos (See Chapter 1), whose inclusion of black personnel was rejected by white elites and, ultimately, cost him his position (Wright 1988, p. 458). Ishibashi mentions that racism before Chávez was an individual behavior but has become collective between *Chavistas* and anti-*Chavistas* since Chávez's election (2007, p. 32). Ishibashi claims that this categorization of associating Chávez with blacks and Indians and anti-*Chavistas* with whites, is the product of a premeditated political strategy with the objective of overthrowing the Chávez government (2007, p. 32). Similarly, Chávez also used the problem of pre-existing racism in his favor without giving it the importance it deserves (Ishibashi, 2007).

An example provided by Ishibashi (2007) is Chávez introducing a new executive of PDVSA during the television program *Alo President* in 2002. Chávez describes his academic background and also makes comment on his black race. Chávez commented that some people dislike him because he is black and Indian.

According to Ishibashi (2007), Chávez's intention for describing Rodríguez's academic background, his black race and his executive position at PDVSA was to highlight the racism in Venezuela. PDVSA being the most important oil corporation in the country and, before Chávez, employed exclusive white elites for executive positions. Ishibashi (2007) criticized the attitude of Chávez and especially Rodríguez because despite also being an afro-descendant, both him and Chávez, actively participated in bringing the racism in Venezuela to the political sphere.

During this study, it has been noted that due to Chávez's background in power representing the Afro-descendants, minorities now have a voice that had been silenced since colonisation. Unfortunately, as Ishibashi (2007) pointed out, both Chávez and the opposition have incorporated in their political discourses the racial differences that obviously exist in Venezuela. These political attitudes have generated greater open aggression between both groups instead of minimizing or eradicating the historical racism in Venezuela. In other words, the opposition and Chávez have used racism as a political strategy to discredit each other. However, these strategies are based on real racist feelings. There is enough evidence to confirm that racism has always been and continues to be part of Venezuelan history since the time of colonization but has been exposed openly during the Chávez period.

Racial differences have been officially established by immigration policies and elites. No single investigation can hope to address all historical facts, cases and victims of it. There are still too many areas to explore. However, this study aims to contribute to the debate on the role of pre-existing racism at the time of the Chávez government.



Ishibashi (2007, p. 29) claims that in Venezuela, there is a division not only between the poor and the rich, but also between those who have different skin tones. He claims that those who supported Chávez have been associated with the darker skinned population, representing the indigenous, and the descendants of slaves, while the opposition was portrayed as light skinned. Ishibashi also argues that one of the more significant Afro-Venezuelan communities situated in marginal areas of the country are considered one of the most solid foundations in support of Chávez (2007, p. 29). In contrast, MacLeod (2018) claims that most of the Venezuelan elites live in Chacao, Eastern Caracas.

In the following Chapter, this study will analyse the Venezuelan voting trend data during the four elections won by Chávez (1998, 2000, 2006 and 2012) and the regional election of 2012. The objective is to identify correlations between racial identification (according to census data) and voting behaviour, from which we may be able to infer a race-based influence on Venezuelan elections.

## Chapter 4

### Voting outcomes of the 1998, 2000, 2006 and 2012 elections

While the census design and the data collection may be problematic, the ethnic multiculturalism of Venezuela is nevertheless suggested in the results of the *XIV Censo Nacional de Población y Vivienda 2011* (The XIV National Population and Housing Census 2011) prepared by *Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas* (The National Statistics Institute [INE] 2011, p. 30). The census includes, in percentage terms, five categories of ethnic self-identification in Venezuela: black, afro-descendant, *moreno* (brown), white, and other. The ethnic percentage distribution indicates that 2.9% of the population identified themselves as black; 0.7% as an Afro-descendant; 51.6% as dark, 43.6% as white and 1.2% as other (See Table 1). These categories and the identification process can be contested, but the geographic distribution remains suggestive.

Tinker Salas (2015) claims that the election of President Chávez in Venezuela in 1998 not only unified leftist groups, but also gave participation to marginalized and minority groups such as Afro-descendants, indigenous people and people of colour. According to Gruson (cited in Canache 2004), in 1990, more than 50% of residents in Caracas were considered poor, with 7% classified in extreme poverty. In similar situations were other urban areas with 70% of the population being poor and 12% in extreme poverty. After the crisis of the 1980s and 1990s, the urban poor began to express their frustration through protests (Canache 2004). When Chávez was released from prison he united the urban poor and after his election he consolidated the status of the poor, making them a political force (Canache 2004).

MacLeod claims that there is a strong relationship between social class and race in Venezuela that prevails till today (2018, p. 9). Those with darker skin are discriminated against in the country, and their benefit from the oil industry has been historically more limited. Cannon claimed that there is a relationship between race, social class, and voting preferences in Venezuela's political context (2008, p. 731). Wright (1990, p. 3) states that:

In the words of Juan Pablo Sojo, one of a handful of Venezuelans who have studied the culture of blacks Venezuelans, "Here we only have prejudice against the color of the skin". By that he meant that white Venezuelans looked down on black skinned people.

This is part of the context around the Chávez era which merits more investigation in order to better understand the role of race as a fundamental factor, as is being explored throughout this thesis. Chávez is a descendant of Amerindians and Africans, which, according to MacLeod, is a reason why he obtained support from the lower classes in Venezuela, who, for the first time, identified with a president who resembled them (2018, p. 9).

This chapter aims to analyse whether there is a relationship between systemic racism, which as was previously argued was actively entrenched by historical immigration policies, and the voting trends during the elections of President Chávez. In other words, it presents one data set showing a potentially significant but under-researched factor influencing the success of Chávez in 1998 and his re-election (2000, 2006 and 2012).

To achieve this purpose, the five ethnic categories provided by the *XIV Censo Nacional de Población y Vivienda 2011* (*The XIV National Population and Housing Census 2011*) have been regrouped into three main categories:

Group 1: Black and Afro-descendant population. This group represents the darkest population that has been most impacted by racism (See Chapter 1).

Group 2: White population: This group represent the lightest population and is the group that aligns with social and, historically, political elites; those who have most reinforced and benefited from racism in society throughout history (See Chapter 1).

Group 3: This group represent the rest of the population. It is composed by the remaining two categories included in the census, the *moreno* (brown population) and others. Two groups whose stake in the maintenance of transformation of race-class relations in Venezuela is more ambivalent.

As mentioned earlier, the XIV *Censo Nacional de Población y Vivienda 2011* (*National Census of Population and Housing*), included the ethnic self-identification for the first time since the abolition of slavery in 1854<sup>19</sup>, except for indigenous population that have been including since 1873<sup>20</sup>. This information is provided by state. Similarly, the documents from the *Consejo Nacional Electoral* (CNE) (National Electoral Council), the institution responsible for ensuring the transparency of governmental, regional elections and referendum provides the election results by state. This allows the evaluation of voting tendencies during the four elections won by Chávez: 1998, 2000, 2006 and 2012 in relation to the ethnic self-identification by Venezuelan states.

The indicators that will be used in this study are the total population by state and their ethnic percentage distribution, the total valid votes by state, the percentage of votes received by Chávez by state or the winner by state (in case Chávez lost) and the percentage of abstention. Then, the states with the largest Group 1, Group 2 and Group 3 ethnic categories will be selected as indicative populations to analyse voting tendencies. Three states will be selected by category. For example, the three states with the major black and afro-descendant population

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<sup>19</sup> Wright (1990, p. 4) and Fortoul (1896, p. 24)

<sup>20</sup> Angosto-Ferrández (2014, p. 373)

will be selected (Group 1). The documents selected from this source are the electoral results from the following elections:

- ☐ 1998 presidential election results by state
- ☐ 2000 presidential election by state
- ☐ 2006 presidential election by state
- ☐ 2012 presidential election by state
- ☐ 2012 regional election by state

As was mentioned in the Methodology, the data from the 2012 regional elections, held the same year as the presidential one, will be incorporated into the study, in order to make a more accurate evaluation of the voters' trends. The idea is to evaluate if the voters had the same preferences at both levels: regional and national. This will allow a more accurate evaluation of the voters' trends, since the regional elections are limited to its inhabitants, and the government elections included the entire national territory. For example, if in the mostly white states the opposition won and, in the states with the largest black population, they supported Chávez's party.

## 4.1 Data analysis: Limitations and Problems

The main problem of the data of the Census 2011 is that there is not an adequate option for mixed races. As was described in Chapter 1, miscegenation produced a varied number of mixed races in Venezuela since colonization until today, including *mestizos*, *pardos* and *zambos*. The options in the census according to the description are: indigenous, white, black, afro-descendant, *moreno* (brown) and other. The category *moreno* (brown) can be probably the

only option for mixed races but is described in the census as “Any person whose phenotypic characteristics are less marked than those of people defined as black” (2011 Census, p. 65-my translation) (see introduction for a description of all categories). There is also an option titled “other” described as “any person that does not identify with the previous ethnic categories options” (2011 Census, p. 65-my translation), Only 1.2% of the population identified themselves as “other”.

Angosto-Ferrández (2014) has pointed out that the Census of 2011 does not represent objectively the Venezuelan racial categories and presents a lack of cultural diversity.

Angosto-Ferrández pointed out that:

Racial categories were introduced to discreetly identify all the non-indigenous population: black, Afro-descendent, moreno/a (brown/black), white or other. None of these categories can be straightforwardly associated with *mestizaje*, neither in terms of cultural admixture and lived experience nor in terms of miscegenation (2014, p. 373).

Angosto-Ferrández (2014) exemplified his claims with Chávez who had both Indian and black heritage. For Angosto-Ferrández (2014) Chávez himself had to choose between indigenous or afro-descendant in the 2011 Census self-identification.

In the past, Herrera Salas (2007) accused the Venezuelan miscegenation ideology and the racial democracy for discriminating against afro-descendants and indigenous people. He argues that miscegenation justifies policies of whitening in order to reduce and displace the indigenous and afro-descendants. However, the new census does not represent the diversity of the population because it included the afro- descendants but eliminated the mixed races.

This lack of self-identification choices can definitely affect the results of this study. For example, according to Cannon (2008, p. 737), in the 2007 World Values Survey in Venezuela (4 years before the Census of 2011): the respondents identified themselves as: 4.2% Black and

Other Black; 35.8% as White, 16.6% as 'Coloured Dark'; 42.7% as 'Coloured-Light' and indigenous groups represented only 0.5%. Obviously, the self-identification options provided by the 2007 World Values Survey were different than the ones in the Census of 2011. In June 2019, I attended a Venezuelan party at the Uruguayan Club of Sydney. Approximately 100 Venezuelans living in Sydney attended and asked several how they identified according to the categories contained in the 2011 Census. Most of them who had mixed races identified themselves as Light Brown or Dark Brown, hence dividing the brown category in two. This closely resembles the categories mentioned by the 2007 World Values Survey. It is important to note that not everyone associated the brown category as being black or Afro-descendant, but also with having white, Indian and Afro-descendant ancestors. In other words, being descendants of mixed race.

Another problem I found is that the indigenous were not included in the ethnic section. They were presented in an independent section of the 2011 Census, as was explained in the limitations of the studies. Therefore, the percentages of distribution of the other five ethnic categories that compose the total Venezuelan population (100%) in the ethnic section must be incorrect because they do not include the indigenous percentages. According to the 2011 Census, indigenous people represented 2.8% of the total population. However, there are states where they have a significant impact due to their distribution. For example, the total population of Delta Amacuro is 163,452 and the total indigenous population stands at 41,543, which represents 25.4% of this state's total population. I have selected this state for having the largest black population, but its indigenous population exceeds the black population and is not included in the ethnic distribution offered by the 2011 Census. According to the 2011 Census, the ethnic distribution of Delta Amacuro is distributed as follows: 6.2% Black population, 0.8% Afro-descendant, 54.8% *Moreno*, 36.5% White, and 1.7% as Other. The indigenous population definitely had an impact in the election of Chávez and will affect the result of my study.

Likewise, another state I selected was Amazonas. According to the 2011 Indigenous Census, the total population of Amazonas was 142.143 and the total indigenous 76.314, which represents 53.7% of the population in this state. I have selected this state for having the second largest *Moreno* (brown) population, at 60.6%. But the fact is that the indigenous population represents 88.61% of the brown population and is not included in the ethnic distribution offered by the 2011 Census. According to the census, the ethnic population of Amazonas is distributed as follows: 3.3% Black population, 0.8% Afro-descendant, 60.6% *Moreno*, 34.4% White and 0.9 % as Other.

All these incongruencies in the 2011 Census discredit the veracity of the statistics offered by it. For example: According to Pineda (2015, p.5), indigenous people represent 2.7% of the national population and Afro-descendants 55.2%. Pineda (2015, p. 6- my translation) pointed out that:

In Venezuela according to census data carried out in 2011 (INE- Venezuela): Black are 2.9%, Afro-descendants 0.7, *Moreno* (Brown) 51.6%, that means, more than 55.2% are recognized as Afro-Venezuelan.

If we make an analysis by state similar to that made by Pineda (2015) using the same sources of information, the ethnic information of the Census 2011 and the indigenous Census 2011, we could conclude that 64.7% of the Amazonas State population are Afro-descendants, 53.7% indigenous, 34.4% white and 0.9% others, which exceeds 100%. I can therefore assume that the indigenous must be included in the *Moreno* (Brown) category.

For all these reasons, I strongly agree with Angosto-Ferrández (2014) in saying that the Census of 2011 does not represent objectively the Venezuelan racial and cultural admixture. However, I have decided to go ahead with my selection criteria including the Amazonas and Delta



Amacuro states in my studies. As for the indigenous people, I will assess whether an impact on voting preferences can be observed in the Delta Amacuro and Amazonas States, since they have a significant presence.

As I explained earlier, several academics have pointed out that in Venezuela there is a relationship between skin color, support for Chávez and economic status. According to Cannon (2008) in Venezuela, the darker the skin color, the greater the poverty and the greater the tendency to vote for Chávez. Unfortunately, as a Venezuelan, I admit that Cannon is right in saying there is a relationship between skin color and poverty in Venezuela, the product of the historical discrimination set forth in Chapter 1. In regards to voting trends, it is an integral part of my research. For this reason and the inconsistencies noted in the 2011 Census regarding the statistics of ethnic categories, I have grouped the ethnic categories into the three groups mentioned above according to the skin tones, to try to approach the results more accurately regarding the support for Chávez. Hence, through my intimate knowledge of these ethnic categories as a Venezuelan, I have tried to mitigate the biases that are inherent in the statistical data.

Group 1 included the darkest population, Group 2 the lightest population and Group 3 was composed of the remaining population. One of the reasons I identified that the indigenous people were not included is that I know Venezuela quite intimately. For eleven years I served as Credit and Collections Manager in different corporations and one of my main duties was to evaluate the financial situation of clients. Due to the devaluation of the dollar since 1983 known as Black Friday, (see Chapter 2) many merchants preferred to invest in assets than to have their money in banks. As part of my evaluation I needed to visit them and evaluate their inventories. This allowed me to appreciate very closely the magnitude of ethnic diversity in Venezuela. Cultural differences are significant between one state and another. This ethnic distribution in

Venezuela was very stable. The percentages of the categories of Afro-descendants, blacks and whites in the selected states closely resemble what I perceived during my travels (1990-2001).

As for Group 2, (as I mentioned in chapter 1) according to Wright (1990) in modern Venezuela, appearance defines race more than origin. Venezuela considers a black person to be an individual with dark skin and a white person, an individual with white skin, whereas their origin does not matter. I am in total agreement with Wright (1990). Ishibashi (2007, p. 27) who lived in Venezuela and with whom I had the opportunity to work for two years in Caracas, expressed that racial discrimination in Venezuela is practiced through the exclusion of the discriminated groups, which is based on their physical appearance. Additionally, Ishibashi (2007, p. 27) expressed that since colonial times in Venezuela, the white color is associated with progress, aesthetics, sophistication, and civilization. While black is synonymous with ugliness, backwardness and poverty, which limits opportunities at all economic and social levels of blacks and people of African descent. For this reason, I have selected the three states in which the most physically white population predominates, especially Miranda, in which MacLeod (2018) pointed out that most of the Venezuelan rulers and elites live.

However, I have the intuition that the percentages of the brown category include apart from brown, indigenous and mixed races. In addition to the skin tone, this is another reason why I have decided to consider the Brown and Other categories in Group 3.

## 4.2. Ethnic Self-Identification according to Census 2011

According to the XIV National Population and Housing Census 2011, the total of the black population and those with African descent combined represent 3.6% of the total national

population. The white population represents 43.6%, and the brown population combined with the “other” category are represented by the remaining 52.8%. (See table 1):

VENEZUELA									
TABLE 1. PERCENTUAL DISTRIBUTION OF THE POPULATION, BY ETHNIC SELF-IDENTIFICATION, ACCORDING TO CENSO 2011 BY STATE									
REGION	ETHNIC SELF-IDENTIFICATION					TOTAL	MAJOR GROUPS SELECTED		
	BLACK	AFRO-DESCENDANT	BROWN	WHITE	OTHER		BLACK + AFRO-DESCENDANT	WHITE	BROWN + OTHER
TOTAL	2.9%	0.7%	51.6%	43.6%	1.2%	100%	3.6%	43.6%	52.8%
DISTRITO CAPITAL	2.3%	1.0%	44.3%	51.2%	1.2%	100%	3.3%	51.2%	45.5%
STATE:									
AMAZONAS	3.3%	0.8%	60.6%	34.4%	0.9%	100%	4.1%	34.4%	61.5%
ANZOÁTEGUI	3.5%	0.4%	54.9%	40.0%	1.2%	100%	3.9%	40.0%	56.1%
APURE	5.3%	0.2%	63.5%	30.2%	0.8%	100%	5.5%	30.2%	64.3%
ARAGUA	2.4%	1.2%	51.9%	43.4%	1.1%	100%	3.6%	43.4%	53.0%
BARINAS	2.4%	0.2%	54.1%	41.9%	1.4%	100%	2.6%	41.9%	55.5%
BOLÍVAR	3.7%	0.4%	55.1%	39.2%	1.6%	100%	4.1%	39.2%	56.7%
CARABOBO	2.5%	1.0%	53.0%	42.7%	0.8%	100%	3.5%	42.7%	53.8%
COJEDES	3.8%	0.4%	59.2%	35.6%	1.0%	100%	4.2%	35.6%	60.2%
DELTA AMACURO	6.2%	0.8%	54.8%	36.5%	1.7%	100%	7.0%	36.5%	56.5%
FALCÓN	4.1%	0.7%	55.7%	38.9%	0.6%	100%	4.8%	38.9%	56.3%
GUÁRICO	5.5%	0.3%	60.4%	32.8%	1.0%	100%	5.8%	32.8%	61.4%
LARA	2.0%	0.3%	54.8%	41.9%	1.0%	100%	2.3%	41.9%	55.8%
MÉRIDA	0.8%	0.3%	42.5%	53.7%	2.7%	100%	1.1%	53.7%	45.2%
MIRANDA	3.6%	1.6%	48.0%	45.8%	1.0%	100%	5.2%	45.8%	49.0%
MONAGAS	3.8%	0.8%	54.8%	38.8%	1.8%	100%	4.6%	38.8%	56.6%
NUEVA ESPARTA	2.0%	0.5%	49.1%	47.1%	1.3%	100%	2.5%	47.1%	50.4%
PORTUGUESA	3.3%	0.2%	58.4%	37.0%	1.1%	100%	3.5%	37.0%	59.5%
SUCRE	4.4%	0.5%	54.7%	38.5%	1.9%	100%	4.9%	38.5%	56.6%
TÁCHIRA	0.6%	0.2%	38.6%	58.8%	1.8%	100%	0.8%	58.8%	40.4%
TRUJILLO	1.1%	0.2%	49.6%	48.3%	0.8%	100%	1.3%	48.3%	50.4%
YARACUY	4.0%	0.9%	58.4%	35.5%	1.2%	100%	4.9%	35.5%	59.6%
ZULIA	2.3%	0.5%	50.3%	46.3%	0.6%	100%	2.8%	46.3%	50.9%
VARGAS	3.8%	1.8%	48.1%	44.7%	1.6%	100%	5.6%	44.7%	49.7%
DEPENDENCIAS FEDERALES	3.6%	0.8%	51.7%	42.9%	1.0%	100%	4.4%	42.9%	52.7%

*Table 1: Percentual Distribution of the Population (Ethnic Self-Identification :2011)*

As mentioned earlier, the percentage of the indigenous population was excluded from the distribution of ethnic self-identification provided by the Census of 2011. Therefore, it is important to consider that this may affect the outcome of this study, particularly in the states of Amazonas and Delta Amacuro in which they have a significant representation. (See Table 1.1.).

VENEZUELA						
TABLE 1.1. Percentual Distribution of the Population (Ethnic Self-Identification Vs. Percentual Indigenous Population)						
Percentual Distribution of the Population (Ethnic Self-Identification : Census 2011)					Percentual Indigenous Population not included in Ethnic Self Identification) (Indigenous Census 2011)	
STATE	TOTAL POPULATION	BLACK + AFRO-DESCENDANT	WHITE	BROWN + OTHERS	TOTAL INDIGENOUS POPULATION	INDIGENOUS %
Group 1						
DELTA AMACURO	163,452.00	7.0%	36.5%	56.5%	41,543.00	25.4%
GUÁRICO	736,760.00	5.8%	32.8%	61.4%	948.00	0.1%
VARGAS	339,452.00	5.6%	44.7%	49.7%	336.00	0.1%
Group 2						
TÁCHIRA	1,021,689.00	0.8%	58.8%	40.4%	589.00	0.1%
MÉRIDA	786,919.00	1.1%	53.7%	45.2%	2,103.00	0.3%
MIRANDA	2,486,761.00	5.2%	45.8%	49.0%	3,348.00	0.1%
Group 3						
APURE	441,795.00	5.5%	30.2%	64.3%	11,559.00	2.6%
AMAZONAS	142,143.00	4.1%	34.4%	61.5%	76,314.00	53.7%
COJEDES	316,458.00	4.2%	35.6%	60.2%	289.00	0.1%

To assess voter trends, I have selected the three states that represent the largest population of each of the three groups. The selected states with the largest black and Afro-descendant population are: Delta Amacuro with 7%; Guárico with 5.8% and Vargas with 5.6%. The states selected with the largest white population are the Táchira state with 58.8%, the Mérida state with 53.7% as well as the Miranda state with 45.8%. It is important to note that while it is true that the Capital District would be the state with the third-largest white population at 51.2%, it has been replaced by the Miranda state. This replacement is based on the information provided by MacLeod, in which he reports that most of the elites in the country live in Chacao, Eastern Caracas (2018, p. 9). Chacao is one of the 21 municipalities that make up the Miranda state. Five of these 21 municipalities are political and administrative subdivisions of Caracas: Chacao Baruta, El Hatillo. Sucre and Libertador.

According to Cazal (2017) Chacao, Baruta, El Hatillo and Sucre often referred to as Eastern Caracas and in the first three mentioned the wealthiest sectors are concentrated not only in the state but also in the country. For (García-Guadilla, Roa & Rodríguez (2009) Chacao is one of the municipalities with the lowest poverty rates and highest income in Venezuela.

### 4.3 Results of the elections in the year 1998

TABLE 2. YEAR 1998. RESULTS OF THE VENEZUELAN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION. VOTING OUTCOMES OF GROUP SELECTED								
STATE	TOTAL	BLACK + AFRO-DESCENDANT	WHITE	BROWN + OTHERS	TOTAL VALID VOTES	WINNER	WINNER %	ABSTENTION %
Group 1								
DELTA AMACURO	100.0%	7.0%	36.5%	56.5%	34,736.00	Henrique Salas Römer	52.21%	40.38%
GUÁRICO	100.0%	5.8%	32.8%	61.4%	179,306.00	Hugo Chávez Frías	56.51%	36.85%
VARGAS	100.0%	5.6%	44.7%	49.7%	108,044.00	Hugo Chávez Frías	62.70%	36.78%
Group 2								
TÁCHIRA	100.0%	0.8%	58.8%	40.4%	292,418.00	Henrique Salas Römer	48.95%	34.87%
MÉRIDA	100.0%	1.1%	53.7%	45.2%	217,865.00	Hugo Chávez Frías	51.48%	34.63%
MIRANDA	100.0%	5.2%	45.8%	49.0%	728,970.00	Hugo Chávez Frías	51.45%	35.02%
Group 3								
APURE	100.0%	5.5%	30.2%	64.3%	96,840.00	Henrique Salas Römer	58.87%	38.43%
AMAZONAS	100.0%	4.1%	34.4%	61.5%	22,729.00	Henrique Salas Römer	54.26%	39.71%
COJEDES	100.0%	4.2%	35.6%	60.2%	79,375.00	Hugo Chávez Frías	54.80%	35.56%

*Table 2: Results of the Presidential Election (1998)*

In the results of the elections in the year 1998 provided by the official page of the National Electoral Council (CNE), Table 2, it can be seen that voter trends in both states with the largest black population and states with the largest white population presented similar preferences that favoured Chávez as the winner. Of the three states with the largest black population (Delta Amacuro, Guárico and Vargas), two preferred Chávez as president, whereas the other states favoured the opposition. Similarly, out of the three states with the largest white population (Táchira, Mérida and Miranda), two preferred Chávez as president. However, in the third group (brown + others), the votes favoured the opposition, with there only being one state in which Chávez was preferred – Cojedes State.

It can be concluded that racism did not have an obvious statistically significant role in the 1998 elections won by Chávez with 56.6% of the national votes. However, the state that had the largest percentage of Chávez voters is Vargas (Group 1 - Black people and Afro-descendants) with 62% of the total votes. It is important to note in Table 2 that, according to the information

provided by the National Electoral Council CNE, a significant abstention of 35% to 40% of voters can be observed in all states. This undermines the completeness and reliability of the results of this investigation, since we do not know with certainty the ethnic distribution of the group that abstained.

It could be assumed that the reason why Chávez originally won the election in 1998 is the economic crisis that was explained in Chapter 2, in which many scholars say that Venezuelans were disappointed in the traditional political parties. However, in the States Amazonas and Apure (Brown population + Others) the preferential candidate Henrique Salas Römer represented AD Party, one of the two main traditional parties in the history of Venezuela as outlined in Chapter 1 and Chapter 2.<sup>21</sup> The party's percentage of votes were 29% and 35% respectively.<sup>22</sup> They were heavily assisted by minor opposition parties such as *Proyecto Venezuela* in order to win the election in these states. In Táchira (white state) the same candidate, Henrique Salas Römer was preferred as President representing the non-traditional party Proyecto Venezuela, with a percentage of votes of 38.61% plus AD and COPEI together adding only a 10.31% of the total votes.<sup>23</sup> Even though AD and COPEI survived in some states during the 1998 election, in total national percentage, the two parties garnered the lowest number of votes in their whole history, AD only swaying 9.05% of voters, and COPEI 2.15%. From 1958-1989, the average percentage for the presidential election was between 35% and 55%.<sup>24</sup> This disillusionment with traditional parties suggests that the economic crisis in the 1980s and 1990s, had a huge impact in the 1998 elections.

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<sup>21</sup> Consejo Nacional Electoral (National Electoral Council), *Elecciones realizadas el 06 de diciembre de 1998. Presidente de la Republica. Total Votos a Nivel Nacional y por Entidad Federal*. CNE, Caracas, viewed 20 August 2019, [http://www4.cne.gob.ve/web/documentos/estadisticas/e98\\_01.pdf](http://www4.cne.gob.ve/web/documentos/estadisticas/e98_01.pdf)

<sup>22</sup> *ibid*

<sup>23</sup> *ibid*.

<sup>24</sup> Consejo Nacional Electoral (National Electoral Council), *Elecciones Presidenciales. Cuadro Comparativo 1958-2000*. CNE, Caracas, viewed 20 August 2019, <http://www4.cne.gob.ve/web/documentos/estadisticas/e006.pdf>

It is also important to point out that there are other relevant factors that can affect the voter trends. For example, for some voters, race was arguably less relevant – they based their vote on whichever party represented their socialist ideology. According to the figures granted by the CNE, in the states where Chávez won representing the MVR (Movement Fifth Republic) party, an increase of approximately 7%-10% of the votes came from the MAS (Movement Toward Socialism) party, the main and oldest socialist party in Venezuela.<sup>25</sup> As was pointed out in Chapter 1, the 40 year period that preceded the Chávez era was defined by the Pact of *Punto Fijo*, which limited the participation of communist parties. With Chávez representing a socialist party in 1998, the participation of leftist groups in the political aspect of Venezuela was opened. These groups' support for Chávez had also an impact on the voter trends.

## 4.4 Results of the Elections in the Year 2000

TABLE 3. YEAR 2000. RESULTS OF THE VENEZUELAN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION. VOTING OUTCOMES OF GROUP SELECTED								
STATE	TOTAL	BLACK + AFRO-DESCENDANT	WHITE	BROWN + OTHERS	TOTAL VALID VOTES	WINNER	WINNER %	ABSTENTION %
Group 1								
DELTA AMACURO	100.0%	7.0%	36.5%	56.5%	38,349.00	Hugo Chávez Frías	65.60%	40.39%
GUÁRICO	100.0%	5.8%	32.8%	61.4%	165,011.00	Hugo Chávez Frías	59.68%	45.22%
VARGAS	100.0%	5.6%	44.7%	49.7%	84,250.00	Hugo Chávez Frías	69.98%	52.27%
Group 2								
TÁCHIRA	100.0%	0.8%	58.8%	40.4%	292,094.00	Hugo Chávez Frías	54.84%	39.65%
MÉRIDA	100.0%	1.1%	53.7%	45.2%	221,668.00	Hugo Chávez Frías	57.46%	39.02%
MIRANDA	100.0%	5.2%	45.8%	49.0%	666,351.00	Hugo Chávez Frías	51.93%	44.13%
Group 3								
APURE	100.0%	5.5%	30.2%	64.3%	98,488.00	Hugo Chávez Frías	54.35%	41.73%
AMAZONAS	100.0%	4.1%	34.4%	61.5%	23,171.00	Hugo Chávez Frías	62.36%	44.32%
COJEDES	100.0%	4.2%	35.6%	60.2%	80,795.00	Hugo Chávez Frías	58.68%	36.70%

*Table 3: Results of the Presidential Election (2000)*

<sup>25</sup> Consejo Nacional Electoral (National Electoral Council), *Elecciones Presidenciales. Cuadro Comparativo 1958-2000*. CNE, Caracas, viewed 20 August 2019, <http://www4.cne.gob.ve/web/documentos/estadisticas/e006.pdf>

In 2000, Chávez was elected president, receiving 59.76% of national votes. Group 1, composed by the three states with the largest black and Afro-descendant population – Delta Amacuro, Guárico and Cojedes – have an increase in their votes for Chávez in comparison to the 1998 election. The percentage of votes for Chávez in this group range between 65.60% to 69.98%, the most notable increase being by the Delta Amacuro state. In 1998, Delta Amacuro was dominated by votes for the opposition, however, in the 2000 elections, 65.60% of their total population voted for Chávez. The case of Amazonas is similar, the opposition won in 1998 and Chávez won obtained in 2000 the 62.36% of votes. This represented a radical political change in Amazonas and Delta Amacuro.

Likewise, the Vargas state, which presented the highest total percentage of votes for Chávez out of the three groups in 1998 with 62.70%, increased their level of votes to 69.98% in 2000. In second place for the most votes for Chávez is Group 3, the three states with the largest *moreno* (brown) population. These states provided Chávez with 54.35% to 58.69% of their votes. According to Pineda (2015) Chávez recognized indigenous peoples in the 1999 Constitution. According to Pineda (2015) Chávez recognized indigenous people in the 1999 Constitution. Although we do not have indigenous people incorporated into the ethnic distribution, which remains problematic, we know from the indigenous Census 2011 (See Table 1.1.) that the indigenous people represent 25.4% of the total population in Delta Amacuro and they represent 53.7% of the total population in Amazonas, which is likely the main cause of the preferential changes of votes for Chávez.

As for the states with the greatest white population – Táchira, Mérida, and Miranda – the percentage of votes for Chávez is the lowest out of the three groups, even though he was the candidate selected to be president. The voter trends range between 51% to 57%, the lowest being Miranda with 51%. This makes sense, as it is the state in which most of the white elites lived. During this election, the parties AD and COPEI had so few votes that they were no longer



relevant to the results. The significant increase in the votes for Chávez in the year 2000 compared to 1998 by Afro-descendants and *moreno* (brown), suggests an existence of racial polarization accentuated in the support of Chávez.

## 4.5 Results of the Elections in the Year 2006

TABLE 4. YEAR 2006. RESULTS OF THE VENEZUELAN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION. VOTING OUTCOMES OF GROUP SELECTED								
STATE	TOTAL	BLACK + AFRO-DESCENDANT	WHITE	BROWN + OTHERS	TOTAL VALID VOTES	WINNER	WINNER %	ABSTENTION %
Group 1								
DELTA AMACURO	100.0%	7.0%	36.5%	56.5%	67,790.00	Hugo Chávez Frías	78.02%	26.33%
GUÁRICO	100.0%	5.8%	32.8%	61.4%	301,114.00	Hugo Chávez Frías	71.95%	25.50%
VARGAS	100.0%	5.6%	44.7%	49.7%	162,842.00	Hugo Chávez Frías	69.35%	26.30%
Group 2								
TÁCHIRA	100.0%	0.8%	58.8%	40.4%	504,180.00	Hugo Chávez Frías	51.13%	23.34%
MÉRIDA	100.0%	1.1%	53.7%	45.2%	376,168.00	Hugo Chávez Frías	53.78%	23.04%
MIRANDA	100.0%	5.2%	45.8%	49.0%	1,220,798.00	Hugo Chávez Frías	56.74%	25.65%
Group 3								
APURE	100.0%	5.5%	30.2%	64.3%	181,291.00	Hugo Chávez Frías	69.76%	26.92%
AMAZONAS	100.0%	4.1%	34.4%	61.5%	51,301.00	Hugo Chávez Frías	77.81%	27.58%
COJEDES	100.0%	4.2%	35.6%	60.2%	136,627.00	Hugo Chávez Frías	73.36%	22.69%

*Table 4: Results of the Presidential Election (2006)*

The results of the 2006 presidential elections reflect a substantial increase in favour of Chávez in comparison to the year 2000. Chávez gained 62.84% of votes on a national level. Of the three groups selected in the study group, Group 1 (Black and Afro-descendants) continues to show the most support for Chávez, with vote percentages between 69.35% and 78.02% (See Table 4). The Delta Amacuro state, which is the state with the largest black and Afro-descendant population, had the highest number of votes at 78.02%. Guárico followed in second place with 71.95%.

Group 3 (Brown + others) comes in at second place, with the percentage of votes in favour of Chávez varying between 69.76% and 73.36%. Group 2 (white) continued to maintain the lowest percentage of votes in favour of Chávez. Therefore, it can be assumed that the black and Afro-descendant population in Venezuela had a greater proportional impact on the election of Chávez, as well as the brown population, whereas the white population had less.

It is important to note that in the 2006 elections, there was a significant decrease in abstention in all selected states. This means that a greater number of voters participated in the election of Chávez (Table 4) in comparison to the 2000 election. Percentages of votes in favour of Chávez are therefore based on a much larger population. This can be easily confirmed by comparing the figures of the valid votes of each state in 2006, with respect to 2002. In the state of Miranda, for example, the total number of valid votes in 2002 came to 666,351, while the valid votes in the same state in 2006 come to a total of 1,220,798 voters – an increase of 83.21%. This increase in political participation may be the result of a series of significant events that occurred during the period from 2001 to 2004. Due to the limitations of this investigation, we will only give a brief overview of these events.

According to Ellner (2008), in 2001, the MAS party abandoned Chávez. The opposition and powerful economic groups allied in order to generate confrontations, which led to two dozen people dying in a coup on April 11<sup>th</sup>, 2002 that aimed to overthrow the government (Ellner, 2008). “Following the coup, Chávez attempted to reduce tensions by moderating his rhetoric and offering the opposition concessions” (Ellner 2008, p.118). At the end of the year, during December, 2002, CTV (Venezuelan Workers Confederation), FEDECAMARAS (Venezuelan Federation of Chambers and Associations of Commerce and Production) and PDVSA, (Petroleum of Venezuela, Joint Stock Company) declared an indefinite general strike with the objective of forcing Chávez to resign (Ellner, 2008). The general strike ended after eight weeks, and despite the opposition attempting new strategies in order to force the government to leave

power, Chávez implemented social programs and continued to rule the country (Ellner, 2008). These events had an impact on the rest of this particular election. Ellner (2008) pointed out that a large number of previously neutral voters ended up swinging over to the side of the *Chavistas*.

## 4.6 Results of the Elections in the Year 2012

TABLE 5. YEAR 2012. RESULTS OF THE VENEZUELAN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION. VOTING OUTCOMES OF GROUP SELECTED								
STATE	TOTAL	BLACK + AFRO-DESCENDANT	WHITE	BROWN + OTHERS	TOTAL VALID VOTES	WINNER	WINNER %	ABSTENTION %
Group 1								
DELTA AMACURO	100.0%	7.0%	36.5%	56.5%	82,227.00	Hugo Chávez Frías	66.84%	27.39%
GUÁRICO	100.0%	5.8%	32.8%	61.4%	387,229.00	Hugo Chávez Frías	64.31%	22.65%
VARGAS	100.0%	5.6%	44.7%	49.7%	207,002.00	Hugo Chávez Frías	61.47%	22.15%
Group 2								
TÁCHIRA	100.0%	0.8%	58.8%	40.4%	634,243.00	Henrique Capriles	56.24%	20.63%
MÉRIDA	100.0%	1.1%	53.7%	45.2%	469,055.00	Henrique Capriles	51.09%	18.69%
MIRANDA	100.0%	5.2%	45.8%	49.0%	1,543,145.00	Hugo Chávez Frías	49.96%	20.89%
Group 3								
APURE	100.0%	5.5%	30.2%	64.3%	235,998.00	Hugo Chávez Frías	66.09%	23.88%
AMAZONAS	100.0%	4.1%	34.4%	61.5%	72,840.00	Hugo Chávez Frías	53.61%	24.35%
COJEDES	100.0%	4.2%	35.6%	60.2%	178,485.00	Hugo Chávez Frías	65.31%	19.97%

*Table 5: Results of the Presidential Election (2012)*

According to the figures provided by the CNE, in the 2012 elections, there are considerable changes in the votes that show a decrease in Chávez supporters. Chávez won the election with 55.07% of votes – this means a national decrease of 7.77% in the votes in comparison to the year 2006.

Group 1 (Black + Afro-descendants) continues to be the group with the most support for Chávez, with the percentages of votes ranging from 61.47% to 66.84%. However, the percentages have decreased in comparison to 2006, with variations ranging from a loss of 7.88% to 11.88% votes.

In Group 2 (White), a radical change is observed. The opposition's candidate, Henrique Capriles, won in Mérida and Táchira – replacing Chávez, who had been the winner in 2006. In Miranda, despite Chávez winning the election, there is a significant decrease in voters by 6.78% in comparison to 2006. Miranda, the state where, presumably, most white elites reside in, continues to be the state that has the lowest percentage of Chávez's votes. As for Group 3 (Brown + Others), Chávez is preferred as president and won in all three states. However, there is still a decrease in the percentage of votes ranging from a 3.2% drop to one of 24.2%. Evidently, the most significant difference is that of 24.2%, which is that of the Amazonas state. In 2006, Chávez had 77.81% of the votes in Amazonas, but in 2012, he only received the 53.61% of the votes.

#### 4.7 Chávez's Vote during his Four Presidential Elections

<p><b>TABLE 6</b> <b>Chávez's vote during his four presidential elections</b></p>				
State:	1998 Presidential Election	2000 Presidential Election	2006 Presidential Election	2012 Presidential Election
<b>Group 1: (Black + Afrodescendent)</b>				
Delta Amacuro	43.99%	65.60%	78.02%	66.84%
Guárico	56.51%	59.68%	71.95%	64.31%
Vargas	62.70%	69.98%	69.35%	61.47%
<b>Group 2: (White + Elites)</b>				
Táchira	47.90%	54.84%	51.13%	43.29%
Mérida	51.48%	57.46%	53.78%	48.45%
Miranda	51.45%	51.93%	56.74%	49.96%
<b>Group 3: (Brown + Other)</b>				
Apure	38.56%	54.35%	69.76%	66.09%
Amazonas	43.99%	62.36%	77.81%	53.61%
Cojedes	54.80%	58.68%	73.36%	65.31%

*Table 6: Chávez's Vote (Four Elections)*

Table 6 is a comparative chart that groups Chávez votes trends by the states selected in this study during Chávez's four presidential elections. It is comparative data collected from all the

previous tables. This table includes all the percentages of votes for Chávez both in the states he lost and the states that he won. For example, in 1998, Chávez lost in Delta Amacuro, Táchira, Apure and Amazonas. In this table, we have replaced the percentages of votes for the winning opposition party with the percentages of the votes for Chávez. The objective of this study is to assess whether there were racial influences in the behaviour of votes in favour of Chávez, who, despite losing in several states, won all four elections on a national level. However, in 1998, it is noted that there is no significant difference between the three groups. In both Delta Amacuro, the city with the largest black population, and Táchira, the city with the largest white population, Chávez loses the elections. There were no demonstrable differences in percentage of votes in different regions.

In the 2000 elections there is a significant increase in Chávez voters among all three groups. However, it is observed that although Chávez wins in all states that make up the three groups, the percentages of Group 2, representing the white population, are the lowest. Unlike groups 1 and 3, the percentages of the white population remain below 58%.

According to the figures, the highest vote percentages were obtained by Chávez in the 2006 elections, however, the votes of Group 1 (Black + Afro-descendants) and Group 3 (Brown + others) considerably increased their votes in favour of Chávez, while the white population had the lowest increase with their percentage continuing to remain below 58%.

As for in 2012, there is a decrease in votes in favour of Chávez by Group 1 (Black + Afro-descendants) and Group 3 (Brown + others). However, Chávez continued to maintain a percentage greater than 60% in both groups, except for in the Amazonas state from Group 3, which instead presented a considerable decrease (For more details see explanation in Table 5).

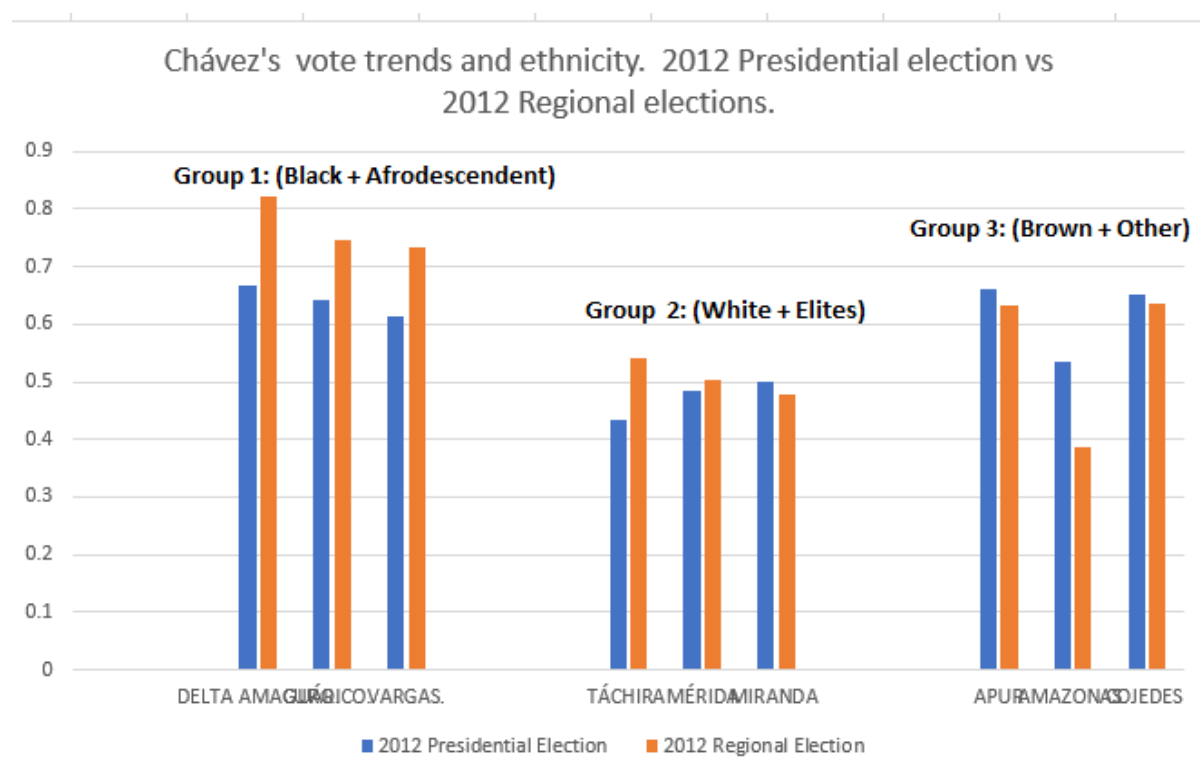
## 4.8 2012 Venezuelan Presidential Election vs 2012 Venezuelan Regional Election

<b>Table 7</b> <b>Chávez's vote trends and ethnicity</b> <b>2012 Presidential election vs 2012 Regional elections</b>		
State	2012 Presidential Election	2012 Regional Election
DELTA AMACURO.	66.84%	82.08%
GUÁRICO.	64.31%	74.70%
VARGAS.	61.47%	73.44%
TÁCHIRA	43.29%	54.00%
MÉRIDA	48.45%	50.23%
MIRANDA	49.96%	47.82%
APUR	66.09%	63.30%
AMAZONAS	53.61%	38.74%
COJEDES	65.31%	63.43%

*Table 7: Chávez's vote trends and ethnicity (2012 Presidential vs 2012 Regional)*

In order to offer a more accurate evaluation of the voter's trends, the results of the 2012 regional elections, which occurred in the same year as the presidential election, have been incorporated into the study. It is important to mention that there will only be a focus on the votes for Chávez during the regional elections, regardless of whether he won in that state or not. The idea is to exclusively compare the support received by Chávez's party from state to state. The percentages indicate that the ethnic behaviours of voters are similar in both elections. It is evident that candidates representing the *Chavista* party received similar support in regional elections when compared to the presidential ones.

As seen in Table 7, the percentages of the highest voters for Chávez are located in Group 1 (Black + Afro-descendants) states in both the regional and presidential elections. In second place is Group 3 (Brown + others). However, the group with the lowest percentage of votes for Chávez continues to be that with the largest white and elite population. Chávez also lost the presidential election in Táchira and Merida, and in Miranda, the opposition was very close to winning. Chávez won the presidential election in Miranda with 49.96%, and Henrique Capriles, the candidate for the opposition ended up with 49.52%<sup>26</sup> of votes. Similarly, in the regional election, Chávez had 47.82% of votes in Miranda, but the opposition won with 51.83%<sup>27</sup> of votes. Despite Chávez's party winning in Táchira and Merida, the opposition party was extremely close to success. This comparison can be better visualised in the following graph:



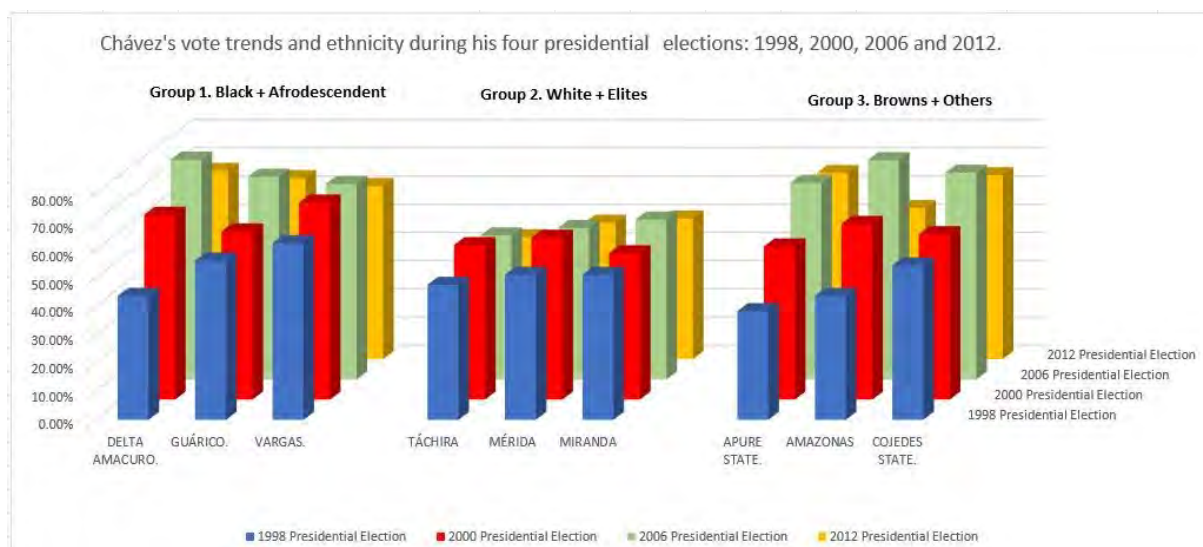
*Graph 1: Chávez's vote trends and ethnicity (2012 Presidential vs 2012 Regional)*

<sup>26</sup> Consejo Nacional Electoral (National Electoral Council), *Elecciones realizadas el 06 de diciembre de 1998. Presidente de la Republica. Total Votos a Nivel Nacional y por Entidad Federal*. CNE, Caracas, viewed 20 August 2019. [http://www4.cne.gob.ve/web/documentos/estadisticas/e98\\_01.pdf](http://www4.cne.gob.ve/web/documentos/estadisticas/e98_01.pdf)

<sup>27</sup> *ibid*

## Conclusion

In order to illustrate the findings in chapter 4, a graph has been incorporated that clearly shows the trends of the voters in the three groups in relation to the four elections of Chávez. The blue bars represent the 1998 election, the red bars represent the 1999 election, the green bars represent the 2006 elections, and finally, the orange bars represent the 2012 election.



*Graph 2: Chávez's vote trends and ethnicity during four presidential elections*

This clearly shows that the support for Chávez has considerably increased from election to election since 1998 in regard to Group 1 (Black + Afro-descendants) and Group 3 (Brown + others). It can also be clearly seen that the behaviour of the three states with the largest white population is quite stable (middle group). There is no significant variation during the four Chávez elections, and they are the states with the lowest percentage of support for Chávez.

The data suggests there was a significant difference in voter behaviour along racial lines that may have been influenced by active campaigns among certain groups. For example, according



to Ellner (2008), in 1998, Chávez included social programs in his campaign, as well as the concept of a participatory democracy that promoted the inclusion of popular sectors in government decisions. Ellner (2008) pointed out that Chávez's social and economic programs were put into action in 2003, aiming to help the lower classes of neighbourhoods (*barrios*). This could be one of the reasons why Chávez's vote percentage increased considerably in 2006 for Group 1 (Black + Afro-descendants) and Group 3 (Brown + others).

MacLeod (2018) describes the people who live in the *barrios* as black, poor and Chávez supporters. MacLeod claims that:

Half of those voting for him in 1998 had never voted before. They lived in adobe huts in the countryside like the one Chávez had grown up in or in the *barrios*, the overcrowded slums of the major cities, synonymous with poverty and crime (2018, p. 9).

For MacLeod (2018), the support for Chávez was clear throughout the 2002 coup, when a huge demonstration of dark-skinned Venezuelans surrounded the Miraflores presidential palace, removing the temporary government who deposed Chávez.

For Herrera Salas, Chávez represented the possibility of changes for Afro-descendants and other minority groups:

The names that the president's followers have given to the Bolivarian Circles include those of indigenous leaders that resisted the Spanish Conquest and Afro-Venezuelan rebels such as José Leonardo Chirino and el "Negro" Felipe. It is evident, therefore, that his political discourse and the symbolic and cultural practices of the Bolivarian Revolution have emphasized so-called national values, significantly reducing the occurrence of ethnic shame and end racism in the popular sectors (2007, p. 113)

It is important to highlight that the results found in the states Amazon and Delta Amacuro, which represent 25% and 53.7% of its population respectively, clearly show that the 2011 Census did not reflect the reality of Venezuela, not in terms of diversity as expressed by

Angosto-Ferrández (2014), nor in terms of ethnic percentage distribution. In the data provided by the 2011 Census of ethnic percentage distribution, the percentage of indigenous people has been replaced by other categories. The 2000 elections showed a radical change that was favorable to Chávez. In both states, more than 60% of the population voted for Chávez and both had voted for the opposition in 1998. As we stated earlier, it is likely that the cause has been the inclusion of indigenous people in the 1999 constitution. Wright (1990, p. 4) pointed out that Hoetink found that “demographic factors within individual countries brought about diverse situations between localities”. According to Wright, this means that in one location the blacks can comprise the majority and hold the leadership, even though they might not have presence in a national level

On the other hand, the opposition worked hard in order to win the election. This is reflected in the significant percentages that Chávez obtained in the three white states despite losing the elections. For example, he lost the election in Táchira in 1998 with 47.90% and the opposition won with 48.95%. Likewise, he closely won the election in Miranda in 2012 with only 49.96% and the opposition obtained 49.52%. Racist attitudes continued to come to light in the country. For example, in 2004, six African countries accused *Globovision*, a Venezuelan television chain of racism. The chain made a racist parody of Robert Mugabe, the president of Zimbabwe (Herrera Salas, 2007). Cardenal commented after visiting Venezuela that:

Chávez is always being caricatured by the media, emphasising a new racism that has emerged in Venezuela. They make fun of him because of his features and skin colour. His supporters call him *Mi comandante* (My commander); the right have nicknamed him *Mico Mandante* (Monkey-in charge) because he is mestizo, mulatto, or maybe both, and because of his somewhat coppery skin. The campaign on the right is openly anti-people. I’ve even heard about a television host who openly calls the poor ugly and toothless and refers to them as “violent blacks.” (2004, p.1-my translation).

The quantitative analysis of correlation between vote data and census data provides an additional insight into the manifestation of racially inflicted polarization in Venezuela. According to the data obtained and analysed in this study, in the 1998 presidential election, race did not play a significant role in the success of Chávez. However, from 2000 to 2012, the states with the largest black population and Afro-descendants gave Chávez a greater support of votes. The second-place supporting was occupied by the states with brown and other people. The positions of the states with greater white population and elites with the least votes for Chávez, have maintained a stable behaviour, without significant variations during the Chávez period, which indicates that they did not significantly change their position with respect to Chávez.

The results in the quantitative analysis agree with the chronological historical qualitative study that was carried out in the first part of this investigation. The racism established by Venezuelan elites since the time of colonization is unquestionable, the historical evidence showed that racism always existed, it is supported by the elites and it continues to operate in modern Venezuela through exclusion and discrimination.

The idea to present auto-ethnographic reflection on the transformative experience of the late 1980s and early 1990s was to provide the non-Venezuelan audience with the social and political and economic context in which Chávez won the election. Additionally, to the problem of racism, Venezuela has experienced cases of excessive corruption, especially during the forty years that preceded the Chávez era. These acts of corruption overshadowed the wealthy Venezuela of the 70s and generated the economic crisis of the 80s and 90s, favouring the election of Chávez in 1998. However, according to the data results, since 2000 there is a significant increase in the votes towards Chávez by the states evaluated. The greater number of people of African descent and *morenos* (browns), supporting Chávez

indicate a continuity of racial polarization that has characterized Venezuela since the colonisation.

The quantitative analysis allowed to see other political aspects such as the deterioration of the traditional AD and COPEI parties that ruled Venezuela for 40 years and, how this disillusionment impacted the election of Chávez in 1998. Other political aspects such as the alliances between parties MAS and the PSUV in 1998 and their separation in 2001. Additionally, the increase in the percentage of vote abstention in 1998 and 2000, with its subsequent significant decrease in 2006 and 2012 which suggests the need for future investigation. However, there are also other aspects that could influence voter trends such as those mentioned in the analysis of the 1998 election, and the 2006 election. Likewise, there are other factors that were not considered in this research due to the limitations of the study, which should be investigated in subsequent studies, such as the ethnicity of the figures that abstained from voting and a deeper analysis of the ethnic categories included in the 2011 Census.

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