

Information for Participants in Mock Trial of Hugo Chávez

There will be two teams, one for the defence and one for the prosecution. The entire trial will take place on Tuesday 31 March. Aside from a few minutes at the beginning (which I will use to explain the activity), you have the entire lecture/tutorial period for the trial. Make sure you know who your teammates are!

The charges to be debated are:

1. Hugo Chávez was a dictator
2. Hugo Chávez led an authoritarian regime
3. The Chavista regime moved in a non-democratic direction over the last decade.

In order to prepare for the trial, every member of the group (regardless of whether you are in the defence or the prosecution team) should read the following articles on Venezuela before looking up information about Chávez on the internet:

- Mainwaring, Scott. 2012. “From Representative Democracy to Participatory Competitive Authoritarianism: Hugo Chávez and Venezuelan Politics.” *Perspectives on Politics* no. 10:955-967. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/s1537592712002629> . The Chavez regime in Venezuela has been the object of much controversy. Was it/is it/did it become authoritarian at some point since the moment Chavez came to power in 1997? Why might some people think the Chavez regime became “competitive authoritarian” at some point in the recent past? This article reviews various works on Venezuelan politics that address these questions.
- Ellner, Steve. 2010. Hugo Chavez’s First Decade in Office. *Latin American Perspectives* 37 (1): 77-96. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0094582X09355429> . This piece is a defence of the democratic character of the Chavez regime. What do people who defended the Chavez regime’s “democratic credentials” focused on? Note that the piece was published in 2010; things have continued to evolve since then.
- Corrales, Javier. 2011. A Setback for Chávez. *Journal of Democracy* 22 (1): 122-136. http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/journal_of_democracy/v022/22.1.corrales.html A much less sympathetic take on Chavez from 2011. Again, note that things continued to evolve since the piece was published. Corrales also wrote a good book on Chavez with Michael Penfold, “[Dragon in the Tropics](#)” that may be worth checking out if you have time.
- Smilde, David. 2015. The End of Chavismo? *Current History* 114 (769): 49-55. <http://www.wola.org/sites/default/files/Venezuela/Smilde%20Current%20History\T1\textendashfinal.pdf> A short account of very recent developments in the Chavista regime. (Recall Chavez died at the end of 2013; this looks at the last year of developments).
- Some of the articles [here](#) may also be worth checking out. Many are quite sympathetic to the Chavista project.

This is the minimum you should do. DO NOT MERELY RELY ON RANDOM INTERNET SOURCES WHEN PREPARING FOR THE TRIAL. There is a LOT of propaganda out there about Chavez (both pro and con); you cannot understand where people are coming from, and read critically the sort of information you find on the internet, without having a fuller picture first.

Once you have read these pieces, you may wish to divide any further research among members of the group and organize the actual trial (see some of the additional resources listed below).

The actual trial works like this. Each team will get a maximum of 40 minutes to make their case, including making an opening statement, examining witnesses, and making a closing statement. You can bring in data

to display (via, e.g., PowerPoint), and role-play particular witnesses (in previous years, groups have “brought in” Luis Miquilena, a former Chávez minister; members of Freedom House or Amnesty international, and many other people). You can also interview me as an expert witness. Groups have also invited outsiders once or twice (Prof. Nigel Roberts was once brought in as a witness), but you should check with me before doing this. After an opening statement, each team gets to examine its witnesses, which can then be crossexamined by the other team. Both teams can make a closing statement at the end of the trial. The entire class will then deliberate and we will vote either the next class or over the internet.

It is expected that each team will exchange their witness list with the other before the trial; I can serve to mediate this exchange if you don’t have contact info for the other team.

You need to decide who you want to have as witnesses, who will deliver an opening or closing statement, and who will conduct the cross examination. Not every member of the group needs to speak, but every member of the group needs to participate in the preparations. You can decide how you will communicate and meet (groups in previous years have done things like setting up a facebook group or using the course blog or the wiki), but you are responsible for getting in touch.

Here are some additional resources you might consult when preparing for the trial:

1. Additional scholarly sources about Venezuelan politics in the Chávez era are listed in our course bibliography under the tag “Venezuela” (<http://www.citeulike.org/group/13886/tag/venezuela>).
2. Look at what relatively respected international organizations say about Venezuela. There are a number of reports worth looking at:
 - [Report of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights on Democracy and Human Rights in Venezuela](#) (30 December 2009).
 - [Human Rights Watch reports on Venezuela](#).
 - [The various Freedom House reports on Venezuela](#).
3. You also need to think about how we should classify political regimes. For this purpose, some of the [additional readings from the first week of the term](#) may be useful.
4. Relatedly, you may want to consider how standard regime classifications rank Venezuela since the 1990s (e.g., [Polity IV](#), [Freedom House](#), the DD data by Cheibub, Gandhi and Vreeland, the unified democracy scores, the Economist’s democracy index, etc.).
5. There are many blogs and websites dedicated to covering Venezuelan politics, from the extremely anti-Chávez to the extremely pro-Chávez.
 - [VenezuelAnalysis.com](#) is probably the major pro-Chávez website in English.
 - [Caracas Chronicles](#) is a good starting point for looking at opposition blogs in English.
 - [Venezuelan Politics and Human Rights](#) is a neutral blog that provides some excellent analysis of Venezuela’s politics. It is run by David Smilde, who wrote one of the pieces you need to read listed above.
- You can always look at my [pinboard feed on Venezuela news and commentary](#) (a collection of web clippings) for recent news and commentary.
- There are also a number of movies on Chavez, from the relatively anti-Chavez ([this PBS documentary on Chavez](#)) to the relatively pro-Chavez ([The Revolution Will Not Be Televised](#)). All of them are partial pictures – handle with care!

If you have any problems, please do not hesitate to [contact me](#).

Have fun, and learn heaps!