Policy Transfer Through Time for Regime Legitimisation: The Case of Hugo Chavez and Venezuela

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Abstract
The burgeoning literature on policy transfer has focused almost exclusively on the transfer of ideas, institutions and policies from one place to another. Little or no attention has been paid to policy transfer through time. This paper examines policy transfer over a significant period of time - more than 150 years - and how the items transferred have been used as the foundation of regime legitimization. The case in focus is Venezuela under President Hugo Chavez. He resurrected and reinterpreted the ideas contained in the writings of Simon Bolivar, a hero of the 19th century independence struggles in Latin America. The paper examines the ways in which Chavez appropriated and used Bolivar's ideas in a contemporary context to provide legitimacy for his 'revolutionary' regime. Using the data from this Venezuelan case, the paper also builds a model of stages of policy transfer that might be applied to other cases.
**Introduction**

Making radical changes to the political institutions of the state invariably raises major legitimisation challenges for the reformers. How can they justify the new order? Why should citizens obey the new rules and accept the reformulated institutions? If the architects of change ignore such questions, they risk a backlash from citizens and interest groups that can derail their reform plans. There will always be opponents to change especially of the radical type. Some opponents strive to defend their privileges under the old order while others are wary of what the brave new world has in store for them. People generally feel threatened by transformational change because of the uncertainty it engenders. Those who are powerful and stand to lose most are likely to exploit such feelings and make considerable efforts to mobilise citizens against the reforms. The reformers thus face the problem of how to persuade sufficient numbers of citizens and interest groups that their visions, proposals and actions for political change are 'the most appropriate ones for the society' (Lipset 1960: 77) and that they represent a political order that is valued for itself and is 'considered right and proper' (Bierstedt 1964: 386). They can use coercion but that is a dangerous path. They could claim that as the incumbents of state office they hold the monopoly over the legitimate use of force. But when state force is exerted against numerous protesters, the claims to legitimate coercion start to ring hollow. This is why authoritarian rulers often invest substantial resources in devices other than coercion to legitimate their rule. They manipulate symbols, rewrite history, emphasize external threats, seek international acceptance, stress improved socioeconomic conditions and point to the lack of viable alternatives (Turner 1990). The route to political legitimacy, whatever the regime type, cannot rely on coercion alone. This can be a big problem for those who wish to introduce radical change and acquire popular support for the appropriateness of the new institutions.

Hugo Chavez faced such a situation in Venezuela when he was elected president in 1998. He had visions for Venezuela that involved major changes to the country's political institutions, overthrowing the comfortable elite accommodation of 40 years of democracy. But he was faced with the challenge of how to legitimate his new order, how to secure popular acceptance of the obedience-worthiness of the institutional changes he wished to make. Chavez adopted a novel
mode of legitimation. He reached back into Venezuela's history to recruit the assistance of a hero of the Latin American independence movement, Simón Bolívar, and utilise his famous and influential writings as the basis of a legitimation strategy. Chavez engaged in the unusual legitimation practice of policy transfer through time, a phenomenon listed in standard models of policy transfer but remaining largely unexplored in academic writing.

In this paper, we seek to delineate the motivations for and ways in which Chavez engaged in policy transfer in time to legitimate the considerable regime changes he introduced as President of Venezuela. From this Venezuelan experience we set up a general model of policy transfer through time that may be applicable to a wider range of situations. We also identify the point at which legitimation through policy transfer in time expires and when other modes of legitimation take over: In our Venezuelan case, this is when Bolivarianism was superseded by Chavismo.

Policy transfer in time is not just desirable but necessary for some political groups and/or leaders. This is due to the individual or group’s deficiency in areas of legitimacy in a polity. The individual or group’s ultimate goal will always be to achieve a transfer in space. However, without prior or established legitimacy with the policy, something more is required. In this situation, the individual/group will search for rapid ways in which to obtain this legitimacy. Transfer though time provides a rapid and clear avenue in which to obtain this legitimacy. It also becomes the necessary ingredient if the eventual transfer through space is to be achieved. The necessity to transfer policy over a significant period of time becomes even more apparent when it relates to a leader in his/her political infancy and/or to a leader lacking an established political brand (legitimacy). This was the exact problem confronting Hugo Chávez when he was elected president of Venezuela in 1998. In the following sections, we present the case of Venezuela under the leadership of Hugo Chávez to demonstrate how and why policy transfer over time can be used as a form of legitimation. The concluding sections will establish a four-step process for legitimation through policy transfer in time based on the Venezuela experience.
Bolívar’s Influence on Chávez’s Early Life

Following the independence wars against the Spanish during the early part of the nineteenth century, the ideas and legacy of Simón Bolívar became the inspiration for a variety of groups and individuals ranging from small clandestine organisations to presidents of Latin American nations. Bolívar has become synonymous with the concepts of Latin American independence (*independencia*), unity (*unidad*), the fatherland (*patria*), and liberty (*libertad*); these concepts have retained a specific relevance to Latin American politics, and are just as important today as they were two hundred years ago. The importance of Bolívar for Hugo Chávez can be traced back to his early experiences as a junior military officer in the Venezuelan Armed Forces.

In the 1970s, Venezuela’s armed forces implemented reforms its officer training known as Plan Andres Bello (Trinkunas 2004). The aim was to ‘inculcate a mystique of honour, discipline and self-sacrifice in a new generation of officers’ (Trinkunas 2004, 54). These reforms worked to instil a populist, egalitarian and utilitarian vision of democracy which had previously been absent in the formal education of the armed forces. Hugo Chávez was a member of the first graduating class at the military academy under Plan Andres Bello and this experience formulated his specific understanding of the legacy of Simón Bolívar and consequently, the important role of the armed forces in Venezuela as the defenders and ultimate bastion of democracy.

Hugo Chávez was among a new generation of frustrated officers that rejected the entrenched system of patronage and corruption exhibited by the senior command of the Venezuelan armed forces. In response to this growing frustration with the entrenched system, on 17 December 1982 Chávez and several other officers formed a small clandestine organisation called the *Movimiento Bolivariano Revolucionario 200* (MBR-200). This small group of officers took a personal oath and swore to change the way in which the Venezuelan government was organised and to devise an alternative that was free of what they considered to be a corrupt and exclusionary process. Drawing on inspiration from the ‘liberator’ they recited Simón Bolívar’s historic oath, in the same place that he had done 200 years earlier: ‘I swear before you, and I swear before the God of my fathers, that I will not allow my arms to relax, nor my soul to rest, until I have broken the chains that oppress us’ (Lynch 2006, 41). This symbolic gesture foreshadowed future events which would spur Chávez and members of the MBR-200 into action in an attempt to challenge
the legitimacy of the Venezuelan government and political system. Conway (2003,152) argued that:

Captain Hugo Chávez Frías had decided to fashion himself after Bolívar and his spectacular journey. He was self-consciously surrendering himself to History by beginning with a thinly veiled reenactment of Bolívar’s oath. It was a gamble, but if his plans were to come to fruition, Chávez knew that his oath would recreate the iconic image of Bolívar and secure his place in Venezuelan mythology as a true heir to the hero of independence. And as extraordinary as it might seem in retrospect, Chávez’s self-important bid to ‘be like’ Bolívar did produce results, and shook Venezuela to its foundations. Eighteen years after his oath, and after a failed coup and two years in prison, Hugo Chávez ascended to the Venezuelan presidency and embarked on an ambitious plan to radically transform Venezuela.

During the 1980s, Venezuela not unlike other Latin American countries at the time experienced a series of economic crisis that in turn led to a series of political crisis that challenged the legitimacy of incumbent government at the time. In 1992, Chávez and members of the MBR-200 attempted a coup d’état against the Perez government. The coup d’état ultimately failed, however Chávez proved to be ingeniously resourceful when he offered to concede defeat on national television. He said:

Lamentably, for now, our objectives were not achieved in the capital. But it now is time to reflect that new situations will arise for the country to take the road toward a better destiny.... I assume responsibility for this Bolivarian military movement. (Chávez, 1992)

In the improvised speech, Chávez addressed three issues that would prove crucial to his future trajectory to power. Firstly, he revealed to the Venezuela public the existence of his Bolivarian Movement and its military origins while simultaneously linking himself to the historical legitimacy and symbolism of Simón Bolívar’s legacy. Secondly, his use of por ahora (‘for now’) clearly articulated to the Venezuelan public that the failed coup was not an isolated event and the Bolivarian Movement would continue to challenge the legitimacy of the government. Finally, the decision to allow Chávez to deliver his concession speech in a live televised format gave the Venezuelan population a face and an unorthodox national figure to attach to this new movement that promised change.
The chaotic events of 1992 signalled a changing political tide in Venezuelan politics. For example, prior to winning the 1993 election, former President Caldera addressed the Senate, condemning the coup while simultaneously justifying it as an understandable response to the failings of the Pérez Administration. Molina and Pérez (2004, 164) described the new political arrangement as ‘one of deinstitutionalised and polarized pluralism.’ The two main political parties that had electorally dominated the political sphere since democratisation, COPEI and AD, suffered drastic losses in support during this period as the Venezuelan populace searched for any alternative from the traditional Punto Fijo model of governance. Corrales (2001, 102) asserted that, ‘once considered a paradigmatic case of party fortitude, Venezuela in the 1990s developed one of the most unstable and fragmented party systems in Latin America.’ During the mid-1990s the Venezuelan population registered their disillusionment with politicians and party politics through record-level abstention rates in most elections. The decay of the traditional party system and the emergence of personalistic political parties provided an atmosphere in which Chávez could establish himself in the political arena and present as a viable candidate for the 1998 presidential elections.

Upon his release from prison in 1994, Chávez began to implement changes to the MBR-200 with the aim of developing the mission of the organisation to encompass a greater political focus on obtaining power through legitimate processes. From 1994 through to the presidential elections in 1998, Chávez and his supporters waged a long campaign to increase the MBR-200 support base, strengthen Chávez’s public image and establish a political platform that would appeal to the general public. Thus, in 1997, Chávez and his supporters established the Movimiento de la Quinta República (MVR) political party as the banner under which Chávez would make his bid for power in the 1998 elections.

In the last few months of the campaign, Chávez and the MVR managed to make considerable gains in the opinion polls and retained a lead until the end. On 6 December 1998, Hugo Chávez won the presidential elections with 56 per cent of the vote (Carter Center 2007). COPEI and AD, the traditional bastions of Venezuelan politics, only managed to win two and nine per cent of the vote respectively. Trinkunas (2003, 66) observed that ‘this rapid shift in voter preferences and party loyalty is highly unusual and signals the depth of the crisis experienced by Venezuela.'
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during the 1990s.’ While there were other variables that ultimately influenced the electoral result, it is clear that Chávez’s platform based on a complete abandonment of the old party system resonated with a considerable section of Venezuela’s poor and working-class populations.

The economic and political crises that engulfed Venezuela during the early 1990s produced a series of outcomes that ultimately led to a total transformation of the Venezuelan political system. First, the inability of the government to manage the economic affairs of the nation led to a loss of legitimacy in large sections of the Venezuelan population. Second, this loss of legitimacy was not just felt at a civil level but extended to members of the armed forces. The government’s failure to adequately continue a policy of appeasement towards the armed forces resulted in military challenges to the regime and further highlighted the failings of the administration to even greater sections of the public. The traditional system of elite accommodation provided by the Punto Fijo model of democracy no longer engendered legitimate support from the majority of the Venezuelan population. The systemic loss of legitimacy produced a power vacuum in which a seemingly unlikely candidate for the presidency was found in Hugo Chávez. However, as Molina and Perez (2004, 169) stated, ‘Chávez is [was] a consequence, not the cause, of the party system’s unravelling.’ So while Chávez was able to successfully leverage an electoral advantage due to the complete collapse of the traditional mode of politics, the fact remained that Chávez and his followers still lacked a credible and distinguishable political brand of their own. They needed to search further, perhaps into the past, to identify something on which to base their new political project upon. Chavez rectified this problem during 1998 presidential campaign when he clarified his position. He stated that ‘I am not a socialist. Latin America requires someone to leap forward. My ideological view is Bolivarianism’ (Chávez 1998). This was the first time that Chavez had moved beyond personally identifying with Bolívar to formally appropriating the man and the myth into his political platform for the presidency.
Hugo Chávez and the Transformation of Venezuela

When Hugo Chávez assumed the presidency of Venezuela on 2 February 1999, his government immediately moved to implement policies to transform the political system in Venezuela. In his inaugural speech Chávez (1999, 1) articulated his vision of the need for radical change in the Venezuelan political system when he stated: ‘We are being called to save Venezuela from this immense and putrid swamp in which we have been sunk during 40 years of demagoguery and corruption’. He introduced what he termed to be a ‘Bolivarian revolution’ which aimed to reorientate the political and social fabric of Venezuela. Ellner (2008, 110) argues that initially ‘Venezuelan politics in 1999 centred on the elections for the Constituent Assembly, the drafting of the Constitution, and its approval in the national referendum held in December of that year.’ The results of the referendum overwhelmingly supported the new Constitution. The new constitution introduced a model of participatory democracy that aimed to directly involve sections of Venezuelan society that had previously been excluded from the government’s decision-making process during the Punto Fijo era. Chávez often emphasised the importance of citizen participation in community councils and promoted the idea that the will of the citizens should influence the new policy processes in Venezuela. For example, to further validate this new approach, Chávez once again turned to Bolivar for legitimation when he said ‘I cling to what said Bolivar. I think more on the advice of the people that on the advice of the intellectual elite. The only wisdom to be found here is the wisdom people’ (Chávez in Chaparro, 2007, 111).

In 1999, the price of crude oil per barrel had dropped below US$10. Initially, this impeded the government’s ability to engage in broad reaching social policy reform, however, during the latter part of the year and into 2000, prices began to rise significantly, thus providing greater funds to the government to pay for its promised program of social reform. The centrepiece of President Chávez’s campaign against poverty had been Venezuela’s social missions. These missions are ‘state-sponsored, grassroots-oriented development programs, addressing pressing needs in various fields of human development such as education, health, culture, food security, job training and housing’ (BGV 2008, 1). For example, when President Chávez took office in early 1999, he inherited a nation facing similar crises to that of the late 1980s and early 1990s. In 1999, 42.8 per cent of Venezuela’s population was classed as living in poverty and 16.6 per cent
in extreme poverty (UNDP 2009). In order to address the chronic problems of poverty and inequality, the government implemented a range of targeted programs in the areas of literacy (Misión Robinson), completion of high school education (Misión Ribas), universal access to tertiary education (Misión Sucre), public housing, employment (Misión Vuelvan Caras), food security (Misión Mercal), access to general healthcare (Barrio Adentro), specialised healthcare services such as free eye surgery (Misión Milagro) for low-income families, and land rights (Misión Zamora). These programs have been met with mixed results, however representatives from organisations such as the UNDP have acknowledged the crucial role of the missions in Venezuela meeting its Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) targets (RBV 2012). The social missions were and continue today to be an enduring legacy of the Bolivarian revolution in Venezuela.

Aside from the initial success of the social missions in Venezuela, the first five years of Chavez’s presidency were beset with direct challenges to the legitimacy and tenure of his Bolivarian revolution in Venezuela. The approval of enabling laws (leyes habilitantes) that greatly enhanced the authority of President Hugo Chávez and his ability to govern without interference from traditional parliamentary checks and balances became the catalyst for a protracted battle over domestic political legitimacy between the Venezuela opposition comprised of the traditional elite and the proponents of the Bolivarian revolution.

When Chávez proposed the possibility of seeking control over public education, large sectors of society including the middle class and business elites began to express concerns about the objectives of the Chávez government. As Corrales and Penfold-Becerra (2007, 102) argued, that many sectors of Venezuelan society:

responded with what amounted to a kind of allergic reaction in the body politic: business and labour groups, civil society organizations, and political parties both old and new began to promote national pro-tests, including a two-day civil stoppage in December 2001.

When MVR came to power in 1999, the opposition had been initially wary of the new government’s plans for reform in Venezuela. However, wariness on the part of the opposition rapidly turned to mistrust when Chávez rushed through 49 laws in the final days of his rule by
decree in 2001. The effects of the legislation pushed through during the period of rule by decree set in motion a chain of events that would ultimately lead to a coup d’état that was primarily orchestrated by the military, various labour and business federations and the opposition media outlets in Venezuela.

In February 2002, President Chávez had announced his plans to reform the way in which the state-owned oil company PDVSA conducted its business dealings and the general operation of the company. For Chávez, PDVSA represented one of the last remnants of the Punto Fijo era and symbolised the power and control enjoyed by Venezuelan oligarchs during the period of Punto Fijo democracy (1958 – 1998). When Chávez announced his intentions to overhaul PDVSA and its senior management, various groups within Venezuela began to campaign against the reforms and the government. Following the announcements, the private media in Venezuela embarked on a vicious and unapologetic campaign against the government’s plans for PDVSA and against the government in general.

At the time that President Chávez came to power, all commercial media outlets in Venezuela were controlled by three companies, which held large investments in the United States (US) and other countries. The government’s access to media outlets was limited to one television station (Channel 8), one news radio station and the government press agency. This proved to be one of the major factors that prevented the government from communicating with the broader population during the initial stages of the coup d’état. On 10 April, the day before the coup d’état, Pedro Carmona the head of FEDECAMARAS appeared on all private media channels to call for an opposition march through Caracas to the headquarters of PDVSA the following day. In the evening of 10 April, a military general also appeared across all private media channels demanding the resignation of Hugo Chávez and his administration. Dissent had now spread to some sections of the armed forces, which were one of the original bases of power for Chávez’s government.

On the morning of 11 April 2002, opposition protestors gathered together to begin their march through Caracas to the headquarters of PDVSA. The central offices of PDVSA were chosen as the key location of the opposition demonstration as a sign of support for the company’s former
executives who had recently been dismissed by Hugo Chávez. At the same time and in response to media coverage of the opposition march, a pro-Chávez rally was being held near the presidential palace, (Palacio de Miraflores), in downtown Caracas. The combination of both demonstrations meant that an unusually large portion of the population of Caracas was present on the streets that morning. An unexpected turn of events occurred when organisers of the opposition group decided to reroute the march’s final destination from the headquarters of PDVSA to the presidential palace.

For several hours violent clashes occurred between pro-Chávez supporters, anti-Chávez supporters, the police, members of the National Guard and some military soldiers. Much of the violence was filmed and broadcast across the private television channels in Venezuela and around the world. Inside the presidential palace, President Chávez and his Cabinet were in closed meetings, trying to assess the situation and devise a strategy to resolve the crisis. On the evening of 11 April, several officers from the military high command entered the presidential palace in order begin discussions with Chávez to negotiate his resignation (Bartley and O’Briain 2003). A dawn deadline had been given for Chávez and his government to peacefully and unequivocally resign or an aerial bombardment of the presidential palace would commence. Just before dawn, President Chávez was escorted out of Miraflores and at the time flown to an unknown location by the Venezuelan armed forces.

The following morning, Pedro Carmona appeared on Venezuelan media channels, announcing that Chávez had resigned and was in the custody of the military. He further stated that an interim government would be immediately established. On 12 April, Pedro Carmona again appeared on television to be formally sworn in as president of the interim government (Bartley and Briain 2003). Following this announcement, the newly appointed Attorney General proceeded to dissolve the political, judicial, legislative and administrative institutions established by the Chávez government. On the morning of 13 April, a large portion of Caracas’s population took to the streets to protest the actions of the armed forces and the interim government. Many protestors headed directly to Miraflores and surrounded the presidential palace in order to apply further pressure on the newly installed administration. This public display of support was relayed to many of the deposed Cabinet ministers who had gone into hiding after the forced
removal of Chávez. Events then took an extraordinary turn: ‘By the next morning, both pro- and anti-Chávez military leaders were working together to remove Carmona and replace him with Chávez’s vice president, Diosdado Cabello, who had come out of hiding’ (Nelson 2006, 9).

Furthermore, members of the palace guards began positively responding to the protestors outside the palace gates and decided to devise a plan to retake Miraflores. At the same time, Pedro Carmona and his followers had sensed the changing tide in public support and began a rapid evacuation of the presidential palace. By the time the palace guard launched their counter-coup, the majority of the interim government and coup plotters had fled.¹ From here, ministers in Chávez’s government soon began to descend upon Miraflores to commence an emergency meeting that concentrated on plans to locate Chávez and return him to Caracas. Later that evening, Chávez arrived at Miraflores by a military helicopter and was greeted by thousands of Venezuelan citizens who had continued to protest outside the palace for his return.

The events of 11–13 April 2002 presented both great challenges and opportunities for Chávez and his government. The initial success of the coup revealed Chávez’s reduced capacity to influence and control sections of the Venezuelan armed forces as well as the might and determination of many opposition groups to conspire against the government in order to bring about its demise by any means. However, the events of the short-lived coup also demonstrated the commitment of numerous Venezuelans across a variety of sectors to support and demand the continued tenure of President Chávez, his government, their policies and their vision of a Bolivarian Venezuela. As Nelson (2006, 9) noted

For Hugo Chávez, the coup was a boon. It reinvigorated his presidency and helped him further consolidate power. During the crisis, all the masks came off. When he returned to office, he knew exactly who was with him and who was against him.

In the weeks following Chávez’s return to power, a range of small opposition groups formed a loose coalition under the banner of Coordinadora Democrática (CD) (Democratic Coordinator) (Mainwaring and Scully 2009, 152). While the political and social groups that made up the

¹ Footage of the counter-coup can be view in the documentary The Revolution Will Not Be Televised. 2003. Available from URL: http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=5832390545689805144#
coalition were not necessarily aligned in their ideologies, they were united in a mutual desire to remove President Chávez from office.

The CD organised a general strike which began in early December 2002 and continued until early February 2003. The general strike drastically reduced Venezuela’s oil exports over the two-month period and consequently disrupted the economy. In retaliation against the strike and in a bid to gain control of the renegade oil company, the Chávez government sacked approximately 18,000 PDVSA employees, specifically targeting upper and middle management as well as highly skilled technicians (Kelly and Palma 2004, 227). The government then set about replacing the sacked PDVSA workers with new employees who were sympathetic and loyal to the management model that was being implemented. While Chávez and his government had survived the effects of the oil lockout and achieved a rapid and fundamental cultural change within the state-run oil company, they were still unable to completely dismantle the opposition’s influence on large sections of the population and to avoid a presidential recall referendum in 2004. However, his successful defeat of the recall referendum signalled that after almost five years of struggles and direct challenges to the legitimacy of his government, President Chávez had finally achieved a clear and convincing consolidation of power.

In the months following the August 2004 recall referendum the Chávez government began a review of the Bolivarian Revolution and the direction that it would take in the future:

Venezuela has changed forever, there’s no going back to the past. The Fourth Republic has died! My respectful salute to those Venezuelans who do not agree with us 100 per cent to… We respect them and I invite them all, the opposition, and the independents to come with us and begin this new chapter, I invite those that call themselves our adversaries to see the positive accomplishments of the Bolivarian Revolution, like the Misión Robinson [literacy program] and like Barrio Adentro [community health care clinics], and call for them to respect the wishes of the majority of Venezuelans. Today’s victory is not just for the people of Venezuela, but also for the people of Latin America and the Caribbean who are struggling for their freedom (Chávez 2004).

Chávez emerged from the tumultuous first five years with greater power and legitimacy, ready to build on the policies already in place at home and to venture into new initiatives abroad. It is during this period that ‘Chavistas’ and the concept of ‘Chavismo’ begin to rival the importance and emphasis that had previously been placed on Bolivar and ‘Bolivarianism’ in the domestic
political arena. As Chávez’s time in office progressed, he employed an increasing degree of ‘poetic licence’ in relation to his use of Bolívar. For example, he claimed that towards the end of Bolívar’s life he was becoming ‘more revolutionary and more socialist’ (Aló Presidente, Program 279, 2007). It is claims such as this that appear to be at odd with the historical accuracy of Bolívar found in his writings. For example, shortly before his death Bolívar wrote of his disappointment and complete disillusionment with Latin American liberation in his letter to General Flores. He wrote:

‘Use the past to predict the future. You know that I have ruled for twenty years, and I have derived from these only a few sure conclusions: (1) America is ungovernable, for us; (2) Those who serve the revolution plough the sea; (3) The only thing one can do in America is emigrate; (4) This country will fall inevitable into the hands of the unrestrained multitudes and then into the hands of tyrants so insignificant they will almost be imperceptible, of all colours and races; (5) Once we’ve been eaten alive by every crime and extinguished by ferocity, the Europeans won’t even both to conquer us; (6) If it were possible for any part of the world to revert to primitive chaos, it would be America in her last hour’ (Bolívar, 9 November 1830, p149)

It would appear that during this period, the necessity of attaching Bolívar to key statements on political issues in an attempt to garner domestic support was no longer required. Instead, Chávez increasingly blurred the historical accuracy of his references to Bolívar in an attempt to now fit Bolívar to his own political project of 21st century socialism. In 2007, this became even clearer when he disbanded the Fifth Republic Movement (Movimiento de la Quinta República [MVR]) and established his United Socialist Party of Venezuela (Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela [PSUV]). The move to formalise socialist institutions in Venezuela was a clear departure from any ideas or policies of Simón Bolívar. For example, writers such as Wilson (2008, 531) have argued that Chávez is delusional in claiming that ‘Bolívar is at the heart of the socialist revolution underway in Venezuela’ and she concluded that ‘[g]iven a closer look…no such “Bolivarian socialist revolution” exists, only Chávez’s own socialist revolution draped in Bolivarian clothing’

However, Chávez did continue to transfer some of the ideas and symbolism of Bolivar from a domestic to an international stage. In many policy announcements and public speeches, President Chávez referred to the writings of Simón Bolívar as providing the ideological
framework and inspiration for contemporary Venezuelan foreign policy. For Bolívar, the future success of Latin American solidarity would germinate in the soil of hybridity: ‘All the sons of Spanish America, whatever their colour or condition, are joined in fraternal and inalterable affection’ (Bolívar 1822, 44). Bolívar frequently referred to this shared condition and experience of ‘Americans’ as the inextricable link that would bind the continent’s identity and safeguard independence from colonising European powers (McCarthy-Jones and Greig, 2011). This Bolivarian approach to foreign policy has demonstrated Venezuela’s ambition of reviving Bolívar’s focus on Latin American unity and solidarity within a 21st century framework. The historical legacy of Bolívar and its influence on Chávez’s vision of Venezuela’s role in Latin America could explain elements of recent Venezuelan foreign policy initiatives that focus on increasing Venezuelan assistance to various nations in the region. For example, the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (Alternativa Bolivariana para las Américas [ALBA]) was an economic trade and development bloc that formed the first key piece of foreign policy implemented by Chávez following his domestic consolidation of power. In its infancy, ALBA began as a simple bilateral exchange of resources between Cuba and Venezuela. In late 2004, Cuba and Venezuela formally signed the first agreement under ALBA’s new framework, which saw approximately 20,000 Cuban doctors sent to work in Venezuela in exchange for the importation of heavily subsidised Venezuelan petroleum. Since then ALBA’s mission has expanded, as Harris and Azzi (2006, 6) explained:

The Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas includes promotion of trade between countries, and even the elimination of tariff barriers on certain products, but its core purpose goes far beyond this. The explicit aim of ALBA is to promote the ‘social’ side of development, eliminating poverty and combating social exclusion in a cooperative effort by Latin American nations.

This Bolivarian focus on social development from an endogenous Latin American base has manifested into a system that incorporates exchanges between member states in a non-traditional way, at times similar to a bartering system. This approach is designed to foster regional development and to involve countries that ordinarily would not be able to participate in trade based on a traditional monetary exchange for goods. Projects such as ALBA are the tangible manifestations of traditional Bolivarian ideas of Latin American solidarity and independence.
From the beginning, Chávez played a leading role in championing the importance of regional integration and solidarity. As early as 1999 Chávez identified the importance of developing the political component of regional integration when he stated:

> It is appropriate that we move boldly towards the political. I believe that the shaping of a solid block, solid political space is much more important, far greater priority, and much more urgent than the setting up of this necessary economic space.\(^2\)

Since then Venezuela has played a lead role in regional developments including the establishment of ALBA, Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) and The Community of Caribbean and Latin American States (CELAC). Chodor and McCarthy-Jones (2014) argue that ‘Chávez has been the driving force of this process, putting forward proposals that became the key building blocks of the post-liberal regional order. Even when his proposals were not adopted, they nevertheless played an important role in setting the regional agenda to which the other countries had to respond and accommodate, thus pushing the boundaries of the whole process beyond where they would have extended to in normal circumstances.’

On 1\(^{st}\) July 2012, Chávez launched his campaign for the presidential elections to be held in October of that year. During his speech, which lasted several hours and although visibly ill from the cancer that had afflicted him, Chávez entertained the sprawling crowds with a mixture of amusing anecdotes, songs and political statements about the future of a socialist Venezuela. Importantly, his narrative focussed on the importance of Venezuela’s model of 21\(^{st}\) century socialism, the concept of Chavismo and the Chavista movement. During these hours, Chávez’s sporadic references to Simón Bolívar appeared to be lip service at best. Towards the end of his speech, Chávez proclaimed to the crowd ‘I am Chávez, you are Chávez, we are all Chávez’ (Chavez on teleSUR, 2012). When Chávez died on 5 March 2013, his supporters took to the streets and social media proclaiming ‘Todos somos Chávez’ (‘we are all Chávez’). It is clear that by the end of his life Chávez had moved well beyond his initial functional goal of gaining political legitimacy to now having an almost mythological place in Venezuelan history similar to, if not more potent than Bolívar himself.

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Four-step process for policy transfer in time

From the case of Venezuela during the Chávez era, we can establish a four-step process of policy transfer over a significant period of time for the purpose of regime legitimisation. The four steps are: identification, appropriation, interpretation and consolidation.

Identification

The first step of the transfer process is the identification by the individual or group of what is to be transferred. This involves the individual or group embarking on an exploratory expedition to seek out and find the most appropriate policy or idea to be transferred, and to a certain degree, an assessment on the seeker’s part as to what will hold most traction in the polity through the transfer process. This is a voluntary and proactive choice to begin searching for what is to be transferred. As the Venezuelan example has shown through the selection of Simón Bolívar, there is an assumed familiarity when choosing to search one’s own past. This process also eventually allows for a subjective evaluation of what is being transferred. The individual or group (policy elite) wishing to engage in policy transfer look for relevant examples from the past that may contribute to achieving their aims in the present and future. For Chávez, Bolívar provided the most obvious and effective choice for transfer as they were familiar and appealed to both the military and civilian sections of the Venezuelan population. Chávez’s evaluation of the ‘past experiences’, in this case the historic battles for liberation and independence waged by Bolívar during the early 19th century, his visions of a unified continent and his supreme legitimacy as the ‘great liberator’, fulfilled the contemporary requirements of Chávez. Finally, it is the symbolic importance of what is under consideration for transfer that guides the identification process. If what is being transferred does not possess symbolism that is able to transcend social cleavages and appeal to the broader population, then the attempt to transfer over time for legitimization purposes will more likely fail.
**Appropriation**

The second step in the transfer process is appropriation. The appropriation step demonstrates how the individual or group begin the process of formally selecting the policy lessons from the past and linking them to current policy directions. During appropriation these historical lessons or concepts begin to be embedded in contemporary public policy discourse. Prior to assuming power, Chávez used Bolívar as the key historical reference that highlighted the themes of patriotism, liberation and independence. For example, during his presidential campaign in 1998, Chávez remarked that ‘I am not a socialist. Latin America requires someone to leap forward. My ideological view is Bolivariansim’ (Chávez speech 1998). In this phase of the process, policy elites are driving the embedding process with an aim to imbue the transferred ideas in the polity. The ideas become accepted especially as they are seen to have historical authenticity. Ideas which are transferred through time but derive from another geographical location may find much greater difficulty in becoming accepted if they are unfamiliar. In the appropriation phase in Venezuela there was a rapid move to transform the Venezuelan political system by re-writing the constitution, re-naming the country and its institutions to include reference to Bolívar as well as the relentless government discourse that aimed to link current political and social issues to the historical experiences of Venezuela during the time of Simón Bolivar. What Chávez was doing was to legitimate his political changes through Bolívar.

**Interpretation**

The third step in the process focusses on the ‘interpretation’, or perhaps ‘reinterpretation’, of past lessons or policies for the contemporary situation. This involves attention to the details of policy and its justification in terms of past lessons. Historical accuracy begins to become less important to the newly emerging narrative in public discourse. Some of the ideas of Simón Bolívar have undoubtedly been revived and incorporated into the rhetoric of Venezuela’s modern day Bolivarian Revolution. Elements of Bolívar’s legacy and myth have been used as the inspiration, and to some extent, the legitimisation of the Chávez government’s radical and unique approach to policy-making. But, President Chávez has sought to choose and interpret the parts of Bolívar’s story he wants to support his own agenda and vision for Venezuela. His time in power has seen a transformation and subsequent dissonance between his delineation of the main pillars
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of Simón Bolívar’s legacy and his own political brand which had increasingly focussed on Chavismo rather than the historical relevance and accuracy of Bolivarianism. The interpretive element of transferring policy over time provides the opportunity to update and modify ideas, themes and symbolism for a modern audience. This is evident in the way in which Chávez departed from referencing Bolívar’s ideas with historical accuracy. Increasingly Chávez attempted to mould the image and significance of Bolívar to his own unique project of establishing Venezuela as a socialist state. This is best demonstrated when Chávez declared that ‘the Bolivarian project is perfectly applicable to the socialist project’ (Chávez in Chaparro, 2007, 110).

Consolidation

The final step in the process of policy transfer in time is the stage of consolidation. In this stage, the incorporation of past lessons has been clearly defined and articulated. In Venezuela, this was achieved due to the decline in Bolívar’s importance and the meteoric rise in popularity of Chavismo which promoted the cult of Chávez as the new great leader and liberator of the Venezuelan people. This decline in importance of the original object that has been transferred is indicative of the dilution of the original policy ideas transferred over time. This is true in the case of Venezuela whereby Chávez had successfully consolidated his legitimacy and the legitimacy of the political changes he introduced through the previous stages of identification, appropriation and interpretation. With consolidation, more change is likely because of the difficulty of continuing to fit an old policy to current circumstances becomes more apparent. If the importance of transfer over time is for symbolic and legitimacy reasons, as was then the case with Chávez in Venezuela, once the initial legitimization has been accomplished then the leading policy actors can move on to new pursuits in the ever-changing environment.

Conclusion

When Hugo Chávez came to power in Venezuela he faced the self-imposed problem of how to engineer radical policy change to the country’s political institutions and legitimise those changes. To accomplish this task he reached back into Venezuelan history to recruit the assistance of one of the country’s and continent’s revolutionary heroes, Simón Bolívar. It was important to
demonstrate that the changes could be justified as legitimate and viewed by a majority of the population as acceptable and appropriate. Their direct association with Simón Bolívar, a potent symbol of legitimacy, was vital to Chávez’s project. Thus, he engaged in a process of policy transfer in time. This can be viewed as a staged process of four parts. The four parts emerged from the analysis of the empirical data as a mode of grounded theorising.

There is an initial stage of ‘identification’ in which the person of group interested in policy change look to the past for the ideas that may be valuable for the present or future. The further back one looks in time the less the likelihood of finding a precise fit of past experience with present environments, as the latter will have undergone major transformation from when the policy, institution or ideas were first introduced. Thus, policy transfer from the distant past is more appropriate for providing inspiration as distinct from copying. As such, it may be of great symbolic value as in the case of Hugo Chávez and Venezuela.

The second stage of policy transfer in time is ‘appropriation’ when the transfer becomes more formalised, the transferrers embed it in policy discourse and clearly link it to current actions. For example, political institutions will be formally linked to and justified by a well-respected historical figure like Simón Bolívar. The lessons or ideas from the past are likely to be used at this stage as justification and legitimation of contemporary practice. The past may well be utilised as ideological support for the present. The second stage often merges seamlessly into the third stage of ‘interpretation’ as it involves the use of the past to legitimate the details of current policies. It is potentially a time when the transferrers more carefully pick the specified items they want from the past to support their current policy directions and ambitions. For example, at this stage Chávez focussed on only those aspects of Bolívar’s legacy that suited his particular policy needs. It is also the time when modifications may be made to the old ideas so that they better fit current conditions and ambitions. In Venezuela, this stage of policy transfer was also when Chávez’s personal standing became more firmly established and Chavismo began to eclipse Bolivarianism in its importance.
The final stage, ‘consolidation’, is when the transferred items have been incorporated into current policies. The transfer process has been completed and the legitimating functions of the past ideas and policies have largely taken place. The transferred items are fully embedded in current policies and institutions but policy-making is moving on to other matters. Time has changed the policy environment and raised new challenges and priorities. In Venezuela’s case, the stage of consolidation was disrupted by the death of Chávez and the need to choose and legitimise a successor. This has led to a legitimation crisis characterised by widespread opposition to the present government. Policy transfer from the distant past has run out of stream and utility while raising the ghost of the recently deceased Chávez to legitimate the current has proved difficult if not impossible to achieve. This gives emphasis to the importance of context in policy transfer through time. Chávez identified the opportunity and desire for radical political change at a critical juncture in Venezuelan history. He also realised that for legitimating his new order he could utilise the powerful symbolic support of a national hero. Chávez’s successors face different conditions and therefore different options. Although it is still early days, it appears that the success of Hugo Chávez’s experiment with ‘policy transfer through time’ has not translated into an effective tool for regime legitimation for the current government under the leadership Nicolas Maduro.
Reference List

Aló Presidente. 2007. ‘Program No. 279, September 2007.’ Transcript from the Venezuelan Ministry for Communication and Education.


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