

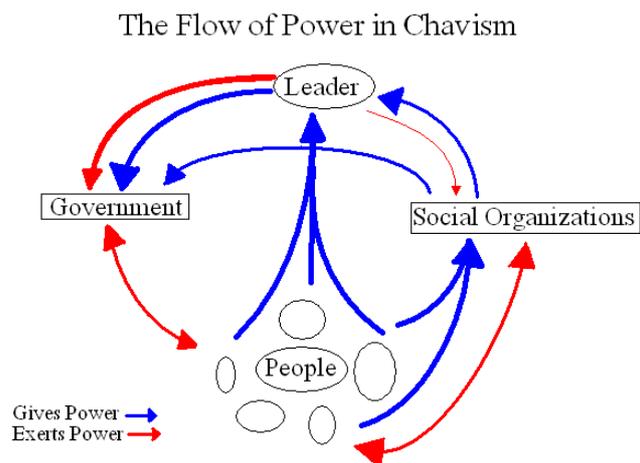
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### The Flow of Power Under Chávez

The diagram of “neo-populism” used in class on November 6 did not represent the flow of power in Venezuela under Hugo Chávez well, a system I will call chavism. Under populism, there seems to be a broken circuit of power. Power comes from the middle sectors, who give it to the leader who then asserts his or her power on both the middle sectors and lower classes. Thus, the lower classes do not get to assert any power but are affected by it. Though the lower classes have power and think they exert it through the electoral process, the middle sectors and the leader in collusion actually manipulated and thereby control them. Accordingly, they do not realize their power in society. The pyramid diagram represented this well, but simply removing the middle sectors from it still seems to indicate a broken circuit to me. Accordingly I developed this diagram.

With this diagram, I have tried to represent the flow of power under Chávez. Basically, there are only two groups: the leader and the people (Roberts 2003). The government and social organizations are institutions made up of the people that are methods of manifesting their power. These two institutions can be parallel and overlapping. The system begins with the people of Venezuela as a disparate entity



giving their consent to be ruled by a leader. In Venezuela they have done this by electing Chávez several times and by demanding the return of Chávez to power when a coup removed him. People also have some ability to assert power on the government through things like participatory budgeting and elections. Chávez uses the power people give him to assert it very directly on the government to make it do what he wants. He has done this by decreeing government policy and controlling the state oil company (Hellinger 2009). Chávez also empowers the government who then assert power on people, and people experience power come back down creating a complete circuit. The government does this through police, taxes, education, healthcare, and every other way the government affects people's lives. Chávez has also asserted power on the social organizations through such means as appointing leaders in the Electoral Battle Unit hierarchy (Gindin 2005). People also empower and to a large extent control the social organizations, things like neighborhood assemblies, peasant associations, and electoral (now social) battle units. Some of these institutions directly assert their power back on people and affect their lives in many of the same ways as the government. Social organizations can also assert power on the government by deciding how to allocate resources among neighborhood assemblies. Social organizations, specifically the UBEs, have also focused people's power to empower Chávez by doing electoral work for him (Gindin 2005).

The two significant and defining elements of this structure of power are the two loops of power that feed back to people. The first gives power to the leader who then mainly asserts it back on people through the government. In the other, people empower social organizations which then assert this power back on people. The common critique of chavism as authoritarianism targets the first loop. This loop is a structure that can be exploited, but only if the people let it. This direct feedback allows for people to hold their leader accountable, to a

greater extent than under populism. The second feedback loop is more democratic. It is also newer and still increasing and may become the dominate relation of power under chavism (Gindin 2005). Chávez supports this structure and in doing so shows that he does not wish to abuse the power the people have given him, though there are few checks on it now. The increase of social organizations is also helping to make the people less atomized, and if they become well organized outside of the state, they should be better able to resist oppression by it.

#### References

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