

SHIFTING OPPORTUNITIES: COMPARING THE DYNAMICS OF  
2014 AND 2017 VENEZUELAN PROTESTS

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SHIFTING OPPORTUNITIES: COMPARING THE DYNAMICS OF  
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## DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

I, Beyza Kurtuluş, certify that

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## ABSTRACT

### Shifting Opportunities:

#### Comparing the Dynamics of 2014 and 2017 Venezuelan Protests

This thesis explores the 2014 and 2017 street protests in Venezuela in accordance with the opposition elites and the Maduro government's approach to the street protests. For this review, answers were sought to the following questions: How can the repertoires and strategies of opposition and repression of the government actors to the 2014 and 2017 protests be explained? Which changes and continuities were observed in the approaches of these actors? What could be the motive behind the actor's approaches to the protest cycle? In response to these questions, the hypothesis argues that the motive behind the change and continuity in the approaches of the opposition and government to protests is political opportunity. The variability in political opportunities, the emergence of new opportunities, the end of some determines the approach of each party to the protest cycle. At the same time, the actors were more mechanically treated in the social science literature, but according to the framework of the paper, these political opportunities were also added to the actors' learning practice, and these changes were explained by agency approach. Accordingly, the thesis presents a comparison both in terms of continuity and the change in the behavior of the contention parties from 2014 to 2017 and offers the opportunity to compare how these actors adapted and responded to the changes in each other's behaviors.

## ÖZET

### Değişen Fırsatlar:

#### 2014 ve 2017 Venezuela Protesto Dinamikleri Karşılaştırması

Bu tez Venezuela’da gerçekleşen 2014 ve 2017 sokak protestolarına yakından bakmaktadır. Buna göre tez kapsamında 2014 ve 2017 sokak protestolarında muhalefet elitleri ile Maduro hükümetinin protestoya yaklaşımı incelenmiştir. Bu inceleme ile şu sorularına yanıt aranmıştır: 2014 ve 2017 protestolarında muhalefet elitlerinin protesto repertuar ve stratejileri nasıl şekillenmiştir? Buna karşılık Maduro hükümetinin protestoya yaklaşımı ve baskı pratikleri nasıl dönüşmüştür? Protestoların iki kanadının protestoya yaklaşımlarının devamlılık ve değişimlerinde ana etmen nedir? Bu soruya cevap olarak tez savunmaktadır ki, protesto aktörleri var olan, gelişen ve yok olan politik fırsatlara göre yaklaşımlarını oluşturmuşlardır. Politik fırsatlar dinamik ve değişken olduğu için aktörlerin yaklaşımları da birbirlerinin değerlendirdiği ve değerlendiremediği politik fırsatlara göre şekillenmiştir. Aynı zamanda bugüne kadar sosyal bilimler literatüründe aktörler daha mekanik şekilde ele alınırken, tez çerçevesinde bu politik fırsatlara ayrıca aktörlerin öğrenme pratiklerini de katarak onların yaşayan yapılarına uygun olarak daha realist bir yaklaşım ile bu dönüşümleri açıklamıştır. Buna göre tez, hem 2014 yılından 2017 yılına protesto taraflarının davranışlarındaki devamlılık ve değişim açısından bir karşılaştırma sunarken, hem de bu aktörlerin birbirlerinin davranışlarındaki değişime karşı nasıl adapte olduğunu ve yanıt verdiğini kıyaslama imkânı da sunmaktadır.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

ABP	Alianza Bravo Pueblo
AD	Acción Democrática
AN	National Assembly
AP	Avanzada Progresista
COPEI	Political Electoral Independent Organization Committee
CTV	Confederación de Trabajadores Venezuela
FANB	The Bolivarian National Armed Forces
FEDECAMARAS	Union of Chambers of Commerce
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GNB	Bolivarian National Guard of Venezuela
MUD	Democratic Unity Coalition
OAS	Organization of American States
OPEC	Petroleum Exporting Countries
PCV	Communist Party
PJ	Primero Justicia
PNB	Bolivarian National Police
PP	Political Process
PPF	The Pact of Punto Fijo
PSUV	Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela
RM	Resource Mobilization
SM	Social Movement
TSJ	Supreme Court of Justice
UNT	Un Nuevo Tiempo

URD Democratic Republican Union

VP Popular Will

VV Vente Venezuela

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

Civil resistance movements, across the globe, have been an escape for the average man to use against the asymmetrical power of the state. Although protests are a constitutional right and part of civil liberties, they have now become ad nauseam especially in the context of Latin America. However, these routine practices still do not mean that we know everything about them. While Latin America is a haven for protests, much more research is needed to deeply make sense of these mobilizations. Since the origin of Latin America's rich protest repertoire is the subject of different studies, this diversity offers researchers many opportunities to make observations.

Although street protests occupy a rich place in the European and American contexts, especially in the literature of democratic countries, street protests in authoritarian regimes have yet to be examined in depth. For this reason, Venezuela and street protests were chosen as the main subject of this thesis. Apart from the Chavismo movement, what makes Venezuela special is that it shows tendencies that shift from a competitive authoritarian regime to hegemonic electoral authoritarianism, especially in recent years. (Corrales & Penfold, 2011) In the context of this shifting regime, protests against such regimes are only recently being studied. Also, unlike the others, Venezuela is one of the regimes where the opposition took the streets the most under such regime's pressure. All these features make Venezuela unique in this regard. The progressing turmoil in Venezuela has been depicted overseas as struggle between Venezuelan citizens and a progressively frantic government.

Venezuela has hosted many protest cycles. Among them, the protests in 2014 and 2017 were chosen as the subject of this thesis. The main reason for this choice; included my interest understanding challenges to authoritarian rule, the ease of finding data due to their proximity to current history, the fact that the protest cycles are still a fresh topic that has not been written about very much, and that they took place just at the beginning of the Maduro era, after the death of Venezuela's legendary leader, Chávez.

This framework examines the 2014 and 2017 Venezuelan street protests from the perspective of the protesting dissidents who are considered regime challengers and governmental actors who want to preserve the status quo. For this reason, the readers of this thesis will be able to observe both the government and opposition approaches in 2014 and the transformation of these approaches in 2017 and will have the opportunity to observe the changes and continuities in the approaches of the government and opposition to the protests in an ordered timeline.

While doing this, the thesis explains the change and continuity in the approaches of the opposition and government to protests through the theory of political opportunity. Some behaviors were continued while others were abandoned and replaced by new ones. The reason for this is that this thesis examines the concept of political opportunity closely and emphasizes how opportunities in political contexts facilitate protest behavior-with the approaches of the two actors of the protest cycle.

Emphasizing the dynamism and volatility of the political opportunities within the framework of the thesis, I will deal with how the two opposing sides evaluated it. While doing this, this thesis will emphasize that the behaviors of the actors are not static, and that they can learn from the previous experience and can turn toward new

and different ones while they will not be static in their reactions. According to this thesis, the opposition and government actors are dynamic organizations.

Accordingly, a lesson or learning practice from 2014 could have changed the approach to the protest in 2017. This learning practice does not reject the concept of political opportunity, but rather supports it. Although the main reason for change and continuity is the approach of evaluating the political opportunity, the sole evaluation of this concept has distanced the Social Movement (SM) literature from political actors from the actor centered approach. That is to say that structures do not entirely determine outcomes. Actors have strategic agency shaped by their learning experiences. Therefore, while explaining the observed changes and continuities with political opportunity, this thesis aims to present an inclusive and realistic perspective by including the relations of the actors with each other and learning practices, as a whole.

This research tries to provide an answer to the question of “How can the strategies of opposition and repression of the government actors to the 2014 and 2017 protests be explained? Which changes and continuities were observed in the approaches of these actors? At the same time, with the completion of this study for 2014 and 2017 together, the evolution of the protest cycle from 2014 to 2017, with the development and transformation of the protester strategies and government repression methods, will be revealed. While the government's movements are analyzed in terms of repression practices within the framework of this thesis, the movements of the opposition party and its approach to protest are examined in terms of protest strategies. The main literature around protests and mobilization center upon the protest policing and repression framework generally concerning European societies and North America. This thesis seeks to contribute to recent efforts to

explore protest dynamics outside western democratic contexts. Studies comparing multiple protests cycles under Venezuelan autocratization remains insufficiently examined. Therefore, this research aims to fill this gap in the literature.

While explaining the concept of political opportunity, the change of hands of the concept of a political opportunity between the opposition and ruling parties will be observed. This thesis examines the assessment of the political opportunities from the government and opposition sides of the protest cycles both in 2014 and 2017 under the Venezuelan experience. Therefore, these two factors will provide an important inside look to understand the changing environment in Venezuela.

While the secondary sources in this thesis consisted of the research of the relevant scholars in the SM literature, the primary sources were obtained through the archive scanning compiled from the news in the newspaper El Pais. It would be appropriate to explain why El Pais newspaper was chosen for the thesis. The online archives of local newspapers are not open to participants from outside Venezuela, and most of the current news comes from biased newspapers known for their government affiliation. For this reason, El Pais newspaper offers the most reliable archive that can be reached and has a high probability of being out of polarization. Although El Pais is a Spanish-based broadcasting company, it also covers news from all Latin American countries. It is also the only newspaper that offers newspaper publications from 2014 and 2017, online. For this reason, although the newspaper's amount of news about Venezuela is not as high as a Venezuelan local newspaper, the scope and purpose of this thesis is not to reach all news about Venezuela completely, but to see the general trajectory in the protest trends. Considering all these factors, El Pais was chosen because it covers both waves of protest with sufficient news content,

is accessible from outside researchers, and is as far away as possible from of local press freedom violations.

For this thesis, 81 news articles between February 13th and April 16th in 2014 and 39 news articles between March 30th and May 30th in 2017 were scanned. In other words, a period of 4 months in Venezuela was scanned with 120 news articles. Editorials and videos were not taken into account in this archive scan, and only the protest cycles in the relevant periods were examined in light of data collected from the news articles. At the point of explaining the arguments in the secondary sources and drawing a framework, events in Venezuela will be mentioned based on the data collected from the news articles in El Pais newspaper and the processing of these data. The thesis method is based on archive scanning and the data were collected, classified, and coded with the translation of Spanish news into English, which I did myself. All of the two code books consists same title columns as the following: Date (event date), link (link to news report), any dead (number of deaths), by (reason of death), injuries (number of injuries), detainees (number of detainees), how it started (which side started the event), where it started, who leads (name of the event starters), how they protested (actions, i.e. looting etc.), what is the demand of protestors / what opposition claimed (opposition repertoire), how police reacted (government physical reaction) How media reacted (media coverage or any reports about censorship), how government reacted (governmental speeches/claims). Rows descend from old to new with the protest dates of each day. The colors in the codebook are separated according to the days and show how many newspapers there are for that day. Fields left blank in the codebook mean that there is no news about the column in that day's newspaper. For an average of two months for each protest

cycle, every news article about Venezuela in the newspaper was scanned and coded manually.

There were two street protest cycles in Venezuela in 2014 and 2017. Although these two protests are recent, they marked many important milestones in Venezuela's development and transformation. Although the ruling and opposition parties remained the same in both protests, both actors maintained some of their stances and gave up on others. Thesis tries to understand how repression and protest strategies interacted and shaped each other and why the government and opposition changed their repertoires of repression and protesting over time. As a result of this thesis, these continuity and changes are explained with the dynamism of the concept of political opportunity and found a place in the literature.

While the specific opportunities propelled the opposition actor to be bold in their demands, they turned into threats for the Venezuelan government. While increasing the opportunities created a triggering infrastructure for the opposition to realize the reformist aims, they also pushed the government to be more repressive at the same time. Within the framework of this thesis, as the sub-title of political opportunity, the opposition's catching the opportunity and the government's drifting away from political opportunities and moving closer to the concept of threat are discussed. This thesis evaluates the concept of threat as the complementary part of the concept of political opportunity. Under these circumstances, failing to seize political opportunities is characterized as facing a threat.

Here, some conceptual definitions could be useful to better capture the framework of the thesis. Thesis investigates protest cycle and government repression concepts to better explain the actor's behaviors. In the end change in the behaviors of the actors explained by political opportunity concept. Therefore, protest cycle,

repression and concept of opportunity first needed to be clarified. Protest cycles, according to Tarrow, can be defined as an “increasing and then decreasing wave of interrelated collective actions and reactions to them whose aggregate frequency, intensity, and forms increase and then decline in rough chronological proximity” (Tarrow, 1993, p.287). For this reason, the protest cycle is considered as the mobilization, protest or SM that has spread to many parts of the society in a fast and planned way. Concept of repression could be perceived as “actual or threatened use of physical sanctions against an individual or organization, within the territorial jurisdiction of the state, for the purpose of imposing a cost on the target as well as deterring specific activities and or beliefs perceived to be challenging to government personnel, practices or institutions” (Davenport, 2007, p.2). Finally, according to Tilly (1977), the concept of political opportunity can be described as “the extent to which other groups, including governments, are either a) vulnerable to new claims which would, if successful, enhance the contender's realization of its interests or b) threatening to make claims which would, if successful, reduce the contender's realization of its interests.”(p.35) On the other hand, the concept of threat can be summarized as the loss of current conditions and damage to the protested group. For this reason, the concept of political opportunity is generally incorporated with the possibility of seizing the interests and the concept of threat with failure to seize the interests.

While doing this, this thesis will primarily cover the literature review chapter and the concept of repression and strategies will be examined in the current literature. Underneath these, the concept of political opportunity will be examined and explained comprehensively through different scholars within the framework of its wide space in the literature.

Afterwards, the historical development of Venezuela will be presented. In this context, the formation of Chavismo and the conditions in which it had a chance to rise and the authoritarian tendencies in Venezuela under the shadow of Chavismo will be mentioned. The historical development part was completed with the arrival of Chávez's heir Maduro, who took over the seat with the death of Chávez. This section will help to better explain the theoretical and empirical integration that will be discussed in the following chapters and the maturation of the conditions that provide the infrastructure for this development for readers who have limited knowledge about the historical development of Venezuela.

This chapter will be followed by the 2014 wave of protests. In this chapter, first, this wave will be analyzed with its historical dimension as a summary. Subsequently, the government and opposition fronts will be examined in terms of suppression practices and protest strategies, respectively. In the next chapter, the evaluation made for 2014 will this time be made for 2017. That is to say that, first a historical summary of the events in the 2017 protest cycles and then theorization of the events will be evaluated. The combination of empirical and theory will finally conclude with a comparison chapter for 2014 and 2017. In this section, the protests of 2014 and 2017 will be examined as continuities and changes under separate subtitles on behalf of the government and the opposition, as in the previous sections. With this chapter, it will be possible to observe which approaches seen in 2014 were abandoned in 2017 and which were continued in terms of both the opposition and the government.

Finally, the thesis will end with the conclusion chapter. This chapter will go over these continuity and changes and summarize how they are explained with political opportunity and will note the concluding arguments.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Scholars have long been curious construing the effect of state repression and mobilization strategies. Recent processions of study on state repression and protest repertoires accented explanatory outcomes, yet the main discussion is still pondered: how can the government repression and protest strategies affect and evolve around each other? The thesis presents that, to make sense of government repression as a response to mobilization and protest strategies of the mobility needs to be elaborated together. The thesis, thus, tries to set the basis for this theorization by visiting political opportunity literature with the connection between repression and protest repertoire and strategies over the eyes of the critical selections opposing parties can make. Seeing protester and the protested as having a dynamic focus to their responses submits a broader representation for mobilization studies and provides a comprehensive portrayal of the contentious politics. Why or under what circumstances protest strategies have been shaped and accordingly how governmental repression evolved around the mobilization, is problematized. In doing so, the thesis recapitulates ways for empirical research on the connection between government repression and mobilization strategies.

The purpose of this chapter is to draw a theoretical framework for the concepts of repression and cycles and strategies, which are the main topics of the thesis. In the first part, in order to explain the concept of "repression", the façade of the concept will be drawn. Later, this concept will be evaluated to be able to explain the government's suppression techniques in the 2014 and 2017 protest cycle in Venezuela. In this protest cycle, the repression technique applied by the Venezuelan

government against the protests and the transformations in these techniques, if any, will be placed within the relevant theoretical framework, and the continuity and changes in the concept of state repression in the country that is the subject of the thesis will be tried to be explained through this literature.

In the second part of this chapter, especially concerning the concept of repression mentioned in the first part, the strategy of the opposition within this protest cycle will be problematized. In this section, starting from Tarrow, the SM literature will be scanned and the possible effects of the changes in the strategy of the opposition in this cycle in Venezuela will be evaluated. In this second part, in addition to the classical theorem with Tilly and Tarrow, McCarthy and resource mobilization, McAdam and Political Process theories will deepen the view on strategy and cycles. In this part of the thesis, since the theoretical background of the arguments in the literature and the explanation of the events in Venezuela will be tried to be established, the relevant events will be mentioned when needed, in this chapter. Of course, the historical narrative part of the events will be discussed in more detail in the following chapters.

This thesis examines the government's repression techniques and the changes in the opposition's strategy in the protest cycles of 2014 and 2017. By doing so, the thesis tries to explain the changes and continuities with the political opportunity literature. Here, the changes and continuities within this cycle will be examined through two basic concepts. While the government's suppression techniques will be examined with the repression literature; the opposition's strategies will be problematized with the literature on SMs cycles and strategy.

## 2.1 Concept of repression

The concept of repression is one of the main topics of this thesis. The main reason for this, is that this thesis examines the state's suppression techniques and the interactive changes and continuities in the opposition's strategy within the cycles of protest in Venezuela.

The concept of repression constitutes one of the basic concepts in protest studies. In this respect, it can be said that there are many studies focused on the concept of repression in the literature. In order to understand the changes of state repression over time and to make sense of the changes that can be seen in this concept in Venezuela, it is inevitable to mention the important arguments explaining this concept at this stage of my thesis.

In the first part of this heading, I will look at how repression as a concept has been handled and categorized by different authors. Davenport and Inman (2012) argue that while there is a huge concentration on how and why state repression takes place, yet there is less about its impact on dissent behaviors. They classified repression under three forms as: restrictions on personal speech and privacy rights, illegal detention, torture as an extreme one.

In addition to them, Earl (2011) also has her own definition. Earl in her article summarizes current trends on repression studies and highlights the way through the future research on this area of study. While underlining the importance of distinguishing between political repression from other forms of it, the article emphasizes that if it is accepted that in democracies there are civil liberties then the number of protests should be higher than in the authoritarian regimes whereas there is still a tremendous number of protests that took place in autocracies. Earl categorizes repression based on three criteria: first one is who is the repressive: state,

private actor or hybrid actor. The second is whether the repression is coercive or channeled (whether it is directly transmitted to the protestors or it is directed through indirect limitations) and the third is that whether the repressive action is covert or overt. Also, threat is a significant component of the study of repression because threat can be perceived higher than its potential by the state, when it arises from the locations that state is demographically or geographically less powerful. While studying repression in authoritarian states Earl emphasizes that it is hard to distinguish between political and social control. Therefore, each domain should be considered as they reinforce each other. (Soule and Davenport, 2009) Parallely, newer research also confirms that in case of overt repression, masses tend to radicalize more and can capture a more violent repertoire. When rule of law is exercised then extreme positions are abandoned (Morselli, Passini & McGarty, 2020).

In the second part of this heading, I will address the reasons for repression and how it will affect a possible protest, with explanations given by different authors. Davenport and Inman (2012) about the literature of repression, suggest that there is a mainstream rationalist and structuralist framework in which authorities make pros and cons analysis before making any decision about repress or not to repress. Based on that literature, they identified four mainstream conclusions. First is that there seems to be a heavy concentration for state on the domestic factors rather than internationals. Second, economic wellbeing of the states can have a diminishing factor for the probability of state repression. So that, during economic welfare, states might be reluctant to take a repressive behavior against any occurrence of a protest in the country. Although the reason behind this is not fully explained, the state may not want to spoil the current situation by putting on an oppressive appearance, as the

current economic good situation will likely trigger welfare and satisfaction among the people. This is also, thirdly, valid for the political institutions. As every government agency, including the police force, will opt for repression when there are good economic indicators. Finally, when faced with conflict, states tend to take coercive action too. By telling these, authors fundamentally summarize what we do know about dissent and state repression literature as a whole. Yet, they underline that public opinion and behavioral challenges are yet to be known. Still, while the rationales behind state repression vary across the globe, it is underlined that coercive behavior by state is not effective to repress toward a challenging dissent. (Davenport & Inman, 2012) Therefore repression can be explained by worsening of the economy which probably creates an insecurity for the repressive because of the probability of increasing tension among the base and therefore risk of loss of existing reins. In this case, Davenport and Inman's arguments create the expectation that state violence in Venezuela should increase with the worsening of the economy and those foreign actors should be ignored according to domestic factors. In this case, as the economy deteriorates, the state will increase the tendency to suppress, and internal dynamics will be more important than pressures from the international arena. This argument might make us think that an oppressive state against international actors and international organizations would care less and instead would be more inclined to direct the process, perhaps based on the practices of the opposition, institutions, and protesters in its own country.

Parallel to this, Soule and Davenport (2009) try to provide a light to the issue of protest policing in the US after 1969. To do so, they scan 15.000 protests news on NY Times between 1960-90. While they defined de-escalated protest policing as the velvet glove times, they also called the escalated model as the iron fist which meant

to be more aggressive. Differently, they put a third alternative which is even hand that can be used for the proportional police force against the dissents. After a whole data observation, they found that especially after 1969 in the US, the de-escalation model seems to be more proper to address. It is added that police force heavily correlated as a response to the magnitude and behavioral challenges they met. That is to say that protestors' tactics and events' magnitudes trigger police brutality. While the dissents with radical aims do not trigger more arrest but more violence, bigger event size and protestors being more tactical, and rioting do trigger more police violence. Davenport and Soule here, the fact that the protesters are in a tactic creates a danger or a situation of pressure on the police and state institutions, and urgent brutal suppression practices are applied to prevent this situation from progressing. Of course, which demand of the protesters is radical in the eyes of the state or which protest repertoire is more tactical is open to debate. Also, context matters. Considering that Davenport said this for a more USA-focused context, it might seem natural that it works differently in Latin America. In this, it can be observed that the regime types of the two continents are not parallel to each other. While the USA may be considered a democratic country, authoritarian tendencies in Venezuela may have reversed this situation. This argument leads us to question whether there is a connection between the regime type and the concept of repression.

Davenport (1999) tries to find a clue about whether regime type affects the repression and if yes how, to which direction. To do so, he observed 137 countries between the years 1950-82 and captured their degree of democracy, level of repression and regime change if any. Empirical findings suggest that while democracy decreases likelihood of a state repression authoritarian trends increase repression. While regime duration is insignificant, regime changes are problematic

and tend to end up with repression, regardless of how smooth or harsh the transition is. As autocracies provide bad conditions for civil liberties, after 10 years, maybe because the regime feels consolidated, the level of repressiveness and sanctions regress. Whereas democracies lower the amount of repression. After one to five years of the transition from an authoritarian state to a democracy, censorship and sanctions are released. Study confirms that authoritarian states are inclined to be more repressive but at the same time it reveals that once autocracies are consolidated sanctions are also likely to be relaxed. Author concludes that the relation between regime type and movement cycles and patterns are yet to be discovered. The high state repression in Venezuela, which is generally accepted to be an authoritarian country, can also be explained by this argument.

He also tries to gauge most and least repressive types of autocratic regimes and differentiate them from each other. To do so the author uses Geddes' differentiation between autocratic regime types as; single-party, personalist, military. As coercion is accepted to be one and only way to control the society for the autocrat, it is expected to be widely used in non-democracies. Autocratic leaders may be expected to make a cost and benefit analysis before using coercive force. Repression is measured by civil liberty restrictions and political terror measures by Poe and Tate. First area includes banning, detention, curfews and restrictions by government intervention. Terror measures are the practices in which the state is against the integrity of the individual. For example, such as interference with the right to life or torture. Results validate those democracies have lower levels of civil liberty violations compared to autocracies. In addition, rightist governments are as likely as the leftist governments when it comes to restricting their citizens' liberties. Also, study affirms that there is a Cold War effect which means after 1989 single-party

authoritarian regimes lowered their degree of restrictions on violations over rights of assembly speech. Also, military authoritarian regimes are more inclined to reduce coercive actions, yet there is more violence in terms of torture and mass killing. In terms of civil liberties personalist regimes are not very likely to restrict them but this is only the case after the Cold War. Also, single-party authoritarian regimes are the least coercive form. In this article Davenport argues that single-party governments are especially accepted to have a form in which there are less human right violations, because more people and organizations are involved in management. This fact, accordingly, has a diminishing effect on the possibility of a violation. Davenport (2007) concludes his article about whether maybe until transition to democracy this type of autocracy can be a remedy to reduce human rights violations among other forms of autocratic regimes. The extensive use of the coercion factor in Venezuela is not surprising for an authoritarian regime.

Earl et al. (2003) explained the characteristics of SMs and the issue of repression in different sources too. Article investigates the relationship between police repression and SM characteristics. Overt protest policing method tested based on the three hypotheses that explain the variety of police response, they are: threat, weakness and interactive approach. While the threat approach argues that if there is a greater confrontation to the interests of elites then police would be more brutal, weakness approach suggests that police will be repressive when they believe that movement tends to fall under pressure. Interactive approach indicates a correlation between the first two approaches and advocates that repression is likely when movement is threatening and formed by radical groups. To test the hypotheses, authors gather protest news reports in the US from the NY Times chronicles between 1968-73. Study envisages two staged processes in which firstly police show

up to the SMs and then secondly decide what to do with the movement. As reported, police did not show up in 69% of the cases, when a mostly preclusive approach was taken. When testing the hypotheses, authors find that threat approach seems to be very applicable in their case, which means when protest in terms of size is bigger, when protesters tend to use tactics and have marginalized goals police tend to be more aggressive and repressive. In terms of weakness approach, subordinate and SMO group existence raises the likelihood of police occurrence. Even though there is no support for the interaction between the approaches, authors find that bigger police capacity triggers bigger possibility for police occurrence. Although there are many different and disparate thought systems in the movement repression literature, it is possible to gather them under a single roof and present them in a more compact way. One of the people who has done this best is Earl. Earl et al. (2003) in the article tries to cover up and bridge the current repression literature under a roof. To do so she first covers the existing repression literature under 6 categories as: threat, weakness, threat, and weakness together, political opportunity, timing, and law enforcement. According to the Threat approach, the more intimidating the protesters, the more violently they are suppressed. Some studies defending this argument are as follows: Bromley and Shupe (1983), Davenport (2000), McAdam (1982), Wisler and Guigni (1999). The second main argument is the weakness approach. According to this, more severe repression is applied when it is anticipated that the protesting group will retreat in the face of repression. Some thinkers such Stockdill (1996), Wisler and Grungi (1999) supported this system of thought. Piven and Cloward (1977) and Stockdill (1996) put forward the third argument by combining these first two ideas. For them, the more frightening a protest is, the more it tends to fall apart in the face of repression, the more it is suppressed. Reason behind this could be

explained by the fact that the protesters are particularly marginal group – for example ethnic or religious minority groups, lower class, gay people in certain countries – can make them targets of police violence. To the police force, marginalized groups can be perceived as therefore frightening. For this reason, the police may tend to show more violence against marginalized groups.

According to the fourth school, there is a formation around the concept of opportunity. Della Porta (1995), McAdam, McCarthy and Zald (1988), Tarrow (1989, 1994), Wisler and Kriesi (1998), political opportunities are volatile and dynamic. When these opportunities are open, the pressure is less, but when they are closed, the pressure is increased. This argument defines a repression as follows: the state of repression varies according to the resources available to the group. While it is less likely for the police to put pressure on a group that is financially advantageous and has big supporters, police will be less afraid of inflicting violence on a more disadvantaged group.

According to the fifth and last group Karstedt-Henke (1980), Koopmans (1993), White (1999), the fact that what stage the protest is at, is important. Because the initial reaction is high in the form of over-reaction. In this case, with the participation of moderate actors in the protest and the elimination of marginal groups, the severity of suppression also decreases over time. McPhail, Schweingrubber, and According to McCarthy (1998), Stockdill (1996), Waddington (1998) the last group formed by the school, the personal characteristics of the police are determinative. For example, agents from a high culture of police violence in the past can be much more suppressive. (Earl, 2003)

All of these elements try to explain the amount of repression to SMs by different agents. After covering up the current academia, Earl introduces hers.

Accordingly, she proposes a three-dimensional approach. First is the identity of repression; whether it is a state agent tightly connected to the political elite or loosely connected or repressive agent can also be a private force. Second is the character of repression whether it is coercion or channeling. She outlines that even though coercion found a huge place among academic literature, channeling, on the other hand, did not take enough attention. This neglected term covers for example selective tax enforcements to control some social groups and movements. Final element is the fact that whether repression is observable or not. In her final step, the author merges her suggested theoretical framework with the existing literature. This scheme enables students of repression to study the correlational relations between the threat, weakness, or desired literature with the proposed type of repressive behavior.

Existing literature has focused on repressive responses to protests and motivations behind them. However, the remarkable point here is that each protest is perceived independent from one another, and the learning skills of the actors are ignored. What is meant by this is that; a repressive actor may act differently at one protest and differently at the next. Existing literature does not take this dynamic factor into account sufficiently. In contexts where the actors are not machines but dynamic organizations, these actors may learn from their previous experiences and act differently in the next. This situation has also been observed in Venezuela. Existing literature expects the repression practices of authorities to always be the same.

Admittedly, the available literature has indicated that there may be changes in the behavior of the suppressing group depending on the reason for the protest and the demand of the group. Yet, in this research, it has also been observed that practices learned from previous experiences and not working mechanisms are abandoned and

replaced by new ones. This situation makes us think that apart from the identity of the protest, we should also consider the development process within the actors. As will be observed in this research, the reasons for the protests, the identities of the protesters and their methods are changing. All these have shaped the techniques of the suppressing party accordingly. So far, the existing literature has already been used. But on top of that, a learning practice has also been observed in this protest cycle, especially in Maduro and the authorities in Venezuela. This practice is an area that has been extinguished until now.

## 2.2 Cycles and opposition strategy

In this part of the chapter, I will take a closer look at the protester group. SM literature will be used to understand the dynamics within the group, the embodiment of the repertoires used, and their change over time. Repertoire can be perceived as the mobilization and its coaction with the antagonist. Strategy of contention could be perceived as the whole set of self-expression patterns of the individuals within a SM including the repertoire. Protest strategy will try to be understood in order to get a little closer to seeing the protest through the eyes of the opposition and the protesters.

At the point of the research, one of the most important points to be considered is that the entire group of protesters cannot be put into a uniform group and the same behavior standards. Trying to fit a group of thousands of unique people into a single frame is an endless effort. However, the generalizations that will be tried to be made here cannot be attributed to the whole group but can be thought of as sharing the ways of thinking and behavior of more than one person in this group. In these movements, the ways in which people express their demands, the repertoire

they use and their relations with each other will be examined under this title and the arguments in the SM literature and the events in Venezuela will be tried to be explained and associated.

It would be appropriate to approach the SM literature primarily through Tilly. Tilly (Tilly & Wood, 2015), unlike other scholars, distinguishes between protests and SMs. To him, SMs are more than people coming together to protest, they are actually a sum of social interaction of the people to challenge an authority and to whom in power. While SMs historically started in the 1800s, they still penetrate daily life differently than any protests or electoral process. Accordingly, SMs need three main mechanisms to operate. First is what he calls a campaign. This is basically the expressions and the unity of the whole claims that people demanded. Second can be summarized as the performances of repertoires that protesting groups acting in a way to tire attention. Final element is WUNC which is a summation of worthiness, unity, numbers, commitment. All of these four are meant to gather people to have a required minimum to be the center of attention. (Tilly, 2019) At this point, the gathering of people who rebelled against orthodoxy becomes a SM rather than a protest when their interaction and relations with each other are included. The concept of protest remains a concept that underestimates this dynamic process in which people shape politics and which has sometimes managed to be as effective as elections. SM, on the other hand, is a much more dynamic and holistic concept that includes this group's influence, interactions with each other and learning practices and behavioral changes. Therefore, it would be more appropriate to refer to the concept of SM, as a sharing environment where so many people come together for a purpose. Tilly explains the historical background of the concept of SM and says that it first dates back to the 1800s. He accepts SM as the modern form of

contentious politics. It is underlined that the difference of the SM from contentious politics is this solidarity, which he refers to as WUNC, campaign and repertoire. Based on this idea, since there is social interaction and it is acted with a strategic plan, individual protests and the concept of social mobility are not the same thing.

Still, the clear and structuralist boundaries that Tilly draws do not exist in the literature. Tarrow (2011) compares the old and new repertoires of SMs.

Accordingly, the old traditional repertoire has close minded, sectioned, and adjunctive characteristics in which focus is mostly on a sole coterie, demands of everyman conveyed to local power holders through a mediator spokesperson and routines are not definite and can change depending on the emplacement. Author provides examples from food rebellions, religious and land disputes and uprisings around a severe disease. Whereas the new one had multinational, transferable and autarchical characteristics in which focus is mostly suitable for many different segments of society, settings are prone to adapt, and demands are conveyed to power holders directly. Boycotts, petitions, public marches, are examples of it. Means of repertoire depends on the nature of the group performing the action, the radicality of its aims, etc. Studies on this subject, for example, focus on the differentiation of the repertoires of student actions and workers' or peasants' actions. In addition, there are studies showing that the changes in the social and economic structure in the historical process are also effective in determining the action repertoire. (Tilly, 1986) As a SM actor, it emerges as one of the elements that identify the repertoire. Tilly states that the repertoire is defined or changed by three main motives. The primary of these variables is the political regime in the country where the repertoire started. Since the state suppresses some SMs and empowers others, diverse repertoire forms emerge according to the attitude of the regime. Secondly, it

provides the formation of the historical repertoire of the traditional conflict and struggle in the country. For example, since building barricades is perceived as a tradition in France, students will adopt barricades in the future, and this will become a classic repertoire. Finally, the structure of political opportunities and the changes that occur in this structure directly affect the formation of the repertoire. (Tilly, 2005)

Tarrow (2011, p.71) covers societal disjunctions as the seeds of contention based on 19th century framework. Yet, with the post-industrial period this idea left its place to the idea in which the state has been seen as a mediator between the social disputes and its societal exigencies. With the emergence of the latter idea, governmental authority is no longer seen as an autonomous factor but as a mediator role through the process. From the reference of Przeworski and Sprague, the author underlines that claimant of the SMs were not homogenous or class based as Marx predicted, instead they came around an ideology through the spread of newspapers. Unlike Marx, Polanyi claims a cyclical SM framework. The economy that capitalism has liberalized further while holding power will strive to overcome the wounds arising from capitalism as conservatives and reformists reach power. Therefore, SMs present a cycle. Tocqueville, finally, argues that state formation creates an avenue for political participation so that claimants have an opportunity to flourish their idea without any need of contention. As local authorities are autonomous, they are able to provide more space for the ordinary. While the press shows that a voice can be made by spreading ideas and coming together, associations; showed that by establishing a network under solidarity and unity, the power holder can be challenged. (Tarrow, 2011)

Tarrow (2011) states that SMs occur in cycles and form a repertoire. In a certain phase of the SM, which can be called the 'moments of madness', everything seems possible to the actors. The actions performed in this phase later take on a ceremonial nature and are added to the repertoire of resistance and struggle. Confrontational repertoires such as strikes, violent attacks, mass looting and conventional methods like petitions, legal actions could be observed together during those moments. While talking about the features of old and new repertoires, Tarrow (2011) also states that the new ones are more cosmopolitan, transferable, and autonomous, whereas the old ones are more parochial, sectioned and adjunctive. What is meant by these terms is that it is not just those who suffer from it who protest it in a cosmopolitan act. For example, slavery protesters are not just slaves. On the other hand, the owners of parochial and grievances are the same person as those who act. Finally, with the adjunctive presented as autonomous and its opposite, it is meant whether the protests should be in a complex and more systematic form. In this sense, it can be said that they are autonomous since there is systematic progress. According to Tilly, there are more politicians in the SM transition period than in the past. Politicians can therefore be considered as movement entrepreneurs and politicians can be considered together with the SM. In this case, in order to be able to define SM, a unity of mobilization is required, which is more expected from the state. This definition is in line with and explains the Venezuelan protest cycle, in which the opposition elites are involved as a mediator.

Although Tilly and Tarrow were pioneers of the SM literature, this literature was expanded upon with many different views on them. Especially on the concepts of resource and opportunity, McCarthy, Zald, Gurr and McAdam contributed to the expansion of this field. McAdam (1983) first refers to the American experience of

political power as a pluralistic force which has been distributed evenly among the different interest groups. Consequently, the system becomes more responsive, and power becomes hard to be captured by a single group and coercion becomes harder to use. Then the author illustrates examples from the classical perspective for the SM studies. Mass social theory is an example of this classical view and accordingly, the more individuals feel isolated from society and feel excluded, the more open they are to act and protest. Another explanation is made by dissonance theory. Accordingly, as people's differences with each other such as social status, education and profession deepen, protests become inevitable. The last classic explanation is collective behavior. Accordingly, the rise of social tension prepares the basis for the formation of social mobility. However, the author criticizes these classical perspectives by expressing them as very mechanical and superficial, planar explanations. According to the author, SMs are too collective events that cannot be reduced to this much personal. Finally, the author claims that isolated, socially differentiated, or strained individuals do not magically create protests at once, but that these individuals come together to form a SM with a systematic effort. At this very point, the subject takes on a political and social identity by differing from psychological or individualistic manner.

A third alternative to the classical model and resource mobilization literature is political process theory. Especially the mainstream paradigm in the 80s was shaped around this thought system. Reference can be made to Doug McAdam under this heading. (McAdam, 1983) In his article on political process theory, McAdam mentions that social mobilities are politically based rather than psychologically based and develop in a process rather than an instantaneous one. In explaining this argument, the concepts of opportunity, threat and alliances are placed in a political

context. There is also a difference in the organization itself. Whereas the Resource Mobilization (RM) literature is about having the resources of the elite, in Political Process (PP) theory the resource comes from within the base and organization. The source of power is not the elite, but the mass itself. The most important detail here is that for the first time in the SMs literature, society is defined as a collective identity rather than a group of people with grievance. While this model is similar to the RM theorem in terms of handling excluded groups, they differ due to their point of view towards the elite class. In resource mobilization theory, the elite is considered in a situation that is more willing to change and mobilize their resources accordingly, whereas in this theory the elites are considered in a status quo-oriented manner.

For mobilization, organizational capacity, collective trust in a successful uprising and close cooperation with a higher political group are important factors. The strong political position of the insurgent group and the costs of suppressing them are important criteria that affect the success of mobilization. In parallel with the resource mobilization theory, in this PP model too; Participants in the protest, reasons for participation, network of connections and those leading the protest are holistic approaches that affect success. Accordingly, mobilization is primarily occurring after the formation of necessary opportunities and existence of a strong organizational structure, with a change of perception in people's minds. McAdam calls this change as cognitive liberation. (Mitchell, McAdam, & Williams, 1983) Accordingly, first of all, the system begins to lose its legality in the eyes of the public, upon which the public demands a change, and finally they realize that they have the capacity to make this change. The mass, which reaches a certain awareness, realizes the mobilization here. Almeida (2003) also mentions the opportunity from the institutional access perspective. Accordingly, this term provides a venue for

challenging the authority when present. Especially in authoritarian environments, this institutional access stands for political parties, unions or new legislations that can create a legitimate base for mobilization. As this is an important note for Venezuela and will be examined in further chapters, the author underlines that protest strategies tend to get intense and find a venue to rise when this kind of institutional access is provided.

In parallel with this, Tarrow is also included in the concept of opportunity; adds actor participation, political realignment, potential alliances, and elite division. According to these factors, the presence or absence of the opportunity can be decided. Tarrow (2011) explains how and why social mobility occurred in many powerful and centralized regimes through opportunities. Accordingly, the likelihood of revolt increases when the masses gain access to resources that will give them a chance to dismantle existing disturbances. Tarrow calls them as opportunities. Besides that, there are also threats. These are the costs to the group of an attempt to revolt or a state of unresponsiveness. Examining the concept of strike, Tarrow says that workers tend to strike more, especially in times of prosperity when unemployment is low and competition for jobs decreases. The underlying reason is the opportunities workers find. The concept of opportunities is not one-dimensional. It includes the assessment of opportunities and threats, the presence of potential supporters, coalition possibilities, and perspective toward the contention regime. These opportunities and threats are not the same for everyone, and they can occur and disappear instantly. Evaluating them is directly proportional to the skills of the groups and their resources. Especially the instability of the regime, the existence of disagreement among the elites, and the presence of important allies can help the success of the protest.

Jasper and Goodwin (2011) also reflect on this opportunity concept and argue that it is very dynamic. However, the concept of structure is very static. It can be criticized that this situation is an oxymoron. They provide critiques to political opportunity literature. Accordingly, the authors evaluate social mobility as a set of opportunities. The mistake of one group may be the victory of the other. Accordingly, social mobility is shaped between the intentions of the groups and the results of their actions. Some SMs succeed, while others do not. The underlying reason is how these dynamic opportunities are evaluated by groups. This approach does not challenge the view of resource mobilization. According to the authors, the resources, and skills available can provide an advantage or disadvantage to a particular group. The threats and opportunities that cause the actors in the mobility to respond are created by governments or large-scale institutions. (Goodwin & Jasper, 2011) As Tilly points out, the aforementioned opportunities arise not from independent variables, but from conflicts that occur through social relationships and interactions. While the opportunities are more dynamic, the structure is more static. At the point of protests, these opportunities constitute both their causes and their consequences. One outcome may set the stage for another protest, so a more circular rather than linear view should be developed. When it comes to the actors of the protest, one can think of not only individuals but also companies and even some states. In this arena, protesters use their resources and skills to seize opportunities that arise. In order to become the winner of this arena, a player may attempt to gather information about other groups in advance, to place spies, or to turn the other party's error in their favor. While the movements of the players can be easily observed at this point, the structure itself cannot. For this reason, it is argued that

there is an oxymoron here, and the concept of opportunity varies from context to context.

The point where these arguments bring us is that there is more than one theory in the SM literature to explain protester characteristics and behavior patterns. While many of these theories are valid for Venezuela, some of them are too democratic countries focused, so that they were insufficient to explain the country of the thesis. On the other hand, it has been seen that the protest repertoire literature deals with the protesters with their much more agencies driven features by trying to explain them more dynamically and through interpretation and culture cleavages, while it is seen that the repression literature deals with its subject group with more statically and mechanically and perceived them as more predictable.

This research helps us to understand how these repertoires and strategies can label the identity of the protester and the mobilization of the SM itself. At the same time, the suppression techniques reveal the attitude towards this mobilization. This analysis leaves us with the following questions: How 2014 and 2017 protest cycles developed in Venezuela? What continuities or changes have been observed? How are political opportunities evaluated by the government and opposition elites? A possible answer to all these questions will be tried to be given in the following sections. While these two factions in conflict with each other coexist in diverse ways and in the same mobilization, how they do this and how they adapt and transform themselves to each other would find an answer in this study.

## CHAPTER 3

### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

In this chapter, before moving on to the main research topic of the thesis, especially before, during and after the Chávez period, authoritarian tendencies during this period and the development process of the country will be looked at from a historical perspective. With this chapter, the development and transformation of Venezuela in the historical process will be examined and the infrastructure for better understanding the arguments in the following chapters will be prepared. This chapter consists of three parts: the pre-Chávez period, Chávez era, and post-Chávez period. In particular, the pre-Chávez subhead will cover the infrastructure created for the arrival of Chávez and namely, a closer look into the *Puntofijismo* and the rise of Acción Democrática (AD) will be taken. This subhead will be followed by the Chávez era subhead. The long and main part of this chapter will be this one. In this section, the policies implemented by Chávez when he came into power and the oil and economy-oriented nationalization policies during his rule, which tended to become authoritarian with the Bolivarian revolution, will be discussed. Finally, in the post-Chávez section, Maduro's coming into power and the conditions under which he took over the country will be mentioned. As the 2014 protests started shortly after Maduro came into power, this subhead will be followed by a new chapter namely, 2014.

#### 3.1 Pre-Chávez-period

By 1958, Marcos Peres Jiménez's dictatorship had come to an end. From 1958 until 1999 when Chávez came into power, Venezuelan politics was dominated by AD and the conservative Political Electoral Independent Organization Committee (Comité de

Organización Política Electoral Independiente, COPEI). The Pact of Punto Fijo (PPF) in Venezuela had a great impact on the end of Perez's dictatorship. According to this pact, three opposition party leaders came together and signed a treaty. By an alliance of the Democratic Republican Union (Union Republicana Democratica, URD), COPEI, AD, and the Communist Party (PCV), the pact was prepared to ensure that the signing parts would reverse forthcoming election outcomes, impede single-party autocracy, ally to combat the dicta, split oil abundance between themselves to prevent possible conflict around the oil revenue distribution and share their political influence. (Wilpert & Azzellini, 2009) In January 1959, the first democratic election in the country was held. The AD party won this election. The country's president has been elected as Romulo Betancourt from the AD party. (Tarver, Denova, & Frederick, 2005)

Puntofijismo brings many challenges to democracy together with many developments. Accordingly, elections are free and fair in which parties are elected but seats and deputies are decided by the party leadership. Therefore, a deduction here can be made that while prohibiting the success of small parties and independent candidates, it encourages a strong party system. In addition, it was not possible to oppose the decisions of the leaders because the internal discipline was remarkably high. The Punto Fijo pact is known to be a written obstacle for the creation of any coup d'états in the future. Pact is also known to be exclusionary because it excludes the Communist party from joining. (Hellinger, 2001) Thus, the pact incorporated the system with the transnational oil companies, the bourgeoisie and, of course, the United States. Venezuela, as a result, began to experience a golden age, especially due to high oil prices in the 70s. This period of Venezuela was called the "Venezuela Saudita" years, that is, Saudi Venezuela. (Gott, 2011)

The democracy of this pact is in the form of a two-party system, elections were held at regular intervals and the administration changed hands between the AD and COPEI. (Dincer, 2017). In the fourth governmental election, Carlos Andres Perez from the AD party, became president in 1973. Due to the oil boom in 1973, Venezuela's economy experienced rapid growth and the country's only national oil company, PDVSA has established in 1976. (Parker, 2005) Puntofijismo has succeeded in bringing the liberal AD, conservative COPEI, social democrat PODEMOS, radical left UNT, Union of Chambers of Commerce (FEDECAMARAS), and labor union CTV together. (Alarcon, Alvarez and Hidalgo, 2016). During the pact democracy, many job opportunities were created in the public sector, and through these opportunities the middle class was created in the country and oil revenues were shared by the middle and upper class in the country. The fact that the country's oil revenues are shared between the country's elite and private oil companies, prevented the emergence of political crises and the pact democracy was therefore also supported by the middle class (Forelle & Howard, 2015).

For the army, the pact ensured the organization of the overcoming of nearly supreme independence within the treatment of the military, particularly within the purchase of weapons, that the command of the Service of Defense would continuously be worked out by the military. The incorporation of the army forces within the agreement, in addition to recognizing the relative weight of this on-screen character, had an apparent preventive impact, which was to avoid the political framework against a conceivable backslide of the overthrow and to subordinate the army to the respectful control of the pact (Villa, 2000). The 1961 constitution set up the requirement for congressional and presidential endorsement for any advancement at the rank of generals or colonel. This prerequisite created openings for political

control, especially by the president. While only a small number of advancements were influenced, numerous senior officers felt that they had to adjust themselves casually with one of the two fundamental political parties, AD and COPEI, to ensure their careers (Trinkunas, 2002).

There are distinctive logical arguments for the arrangement of the 1958 Punto Fijo settlement, which laid the foundation for Venezuelan democracy. For a few political researchers, Punto Fijo may be a victory for mindful lawmakers who do not see his political interface over the country's democracy. It is the victory of the pioneers and is made with the understanding of majority rule pluralism (Levine, 1978). Other political researchers who oppose this view say that this agreement may be a political agreement that chooses how oil incomes are shared among Venezuelan elites. In other words, this settlement belongs to the Venezuelan bourgeoisie's interests and thus it was sustained that long (Karl, 1987).

Since maintaining the democratic stability of the state is based on the distribution of this oil income, the regime faced a serious threat in the 1980s due to falling oil prices. To ease the burden of diminishing oil prices, austerity measures were introduced. As a result of the austerity policies implemented by Perez in order to postpone the bankruptcy of the regime, with the directive of the IMF, as a result of the austerity policies, transportation prices doubled, the prices of basic goods increased, and millions of people took to the streets (Hellinger, 2001). The country's currency was devalued by the Venezuelan government in 1983 and caused a high amount of money loss within the country. These economic problems caused the formation of Black Friday (Salas, 2005).

By the end of the 1980s, the amount of foreign debt of the country increased and the people were on the way to impoverishment. In 1988, Perez became the

president of the country again. The most important effect of Perez being the president is the belief of the people in Perez and their belief that he would return to his old days (Villa, 2005). However, the ongoing unsatisfactory situation got worse in a year and the president was unable to prevent the Caracazo that began on February 27th, 1989 (Hellinger, 2001).

On February 27th, 1989, the demonstration of a group protesting the price hikes reflected in public transportation vehicles in Caracas turned into an uprising. Beyond the matter of this increase, this popular uprising was of course very much a revolt toward the political consensus of COPEI and AD, which had ruled the country since 1958, and it was aimed at the Punto Fijo system itself (Ellner & Salas, 2007). With the Caracazo revolt in 1989, it was realized that there was a serious dissatisfaction among the public with the current administration and Movimiento Bolivariano Revolucionario (MBR) accelerated its work. The MBR, which organized a coup against President Carlos Andres Perez in 1992, was unsuccessful, but received great support from the public. Chávez, who was imprisoned for two years, increased his charisma in the eyes of the public and he was released with amnesty in 1994. Chávez then founded the Fifth Republic Movement (MVR) in 1997 (Hawkins, 2003).

### 3.2 Chávez era and the Bolivarian revolution

First of all, it would be useful to analyze the period prior to 1998, when Chávez came into power as the head of state. Looking at the history of Chavismo, its roots were established in 1983 under the leadership of Chávez; based on the organization in armed forces of MBR. (Hawkins, 2003) Especially with the 1989 great Caracazo uprising, populism in the country started to increase rapidly. According to this, with the Caracazo uprising in 1989, the public emphasized loudly that they were tired of

neoliberal policies deepening the inequalities in the country. To the mass that Chávez appealed to, neoliberal policies were an effort by political elites and western powers to control their country. By contrast, Chávez offered the people a third way in between western liberalism and Russian communism, which was 21st century socialism. According to the doctrine that Chávez called 21st century socialism, the goals of the Bolivarian Revolution were economic and political independence, grassroots political participation, referendum, participatory democracy, economic self-sufficiency, creating patriotic national consciousness, fair distribution of the country's resources, and the prevention of corruption (Yildirim, 2010).

On the basis of his foreign policy after he became President, Chávez was influenced by Simon Bolivar's idea of a united Latin America. He had the idea of bringing the continental countries together by breaking the US influence in Latin America (Gott, 2011). After Chávez came into power, Chávez stressed the necessity of a new constitution. An election was held for the establishment of the Constituent Assembly in April 1999. A new constitution was prepared and adopted in 1999 with 71% of the votes (Van Cott, 2003). In the new constitution Bolivarian ideology was declared as the basic philosophy of the state, the country was named as Venezuela Bolivar Republic, state intervention in the economy was included in the constitution, free health care was envisaged, and indigenous people languages and cultures were accepted (Maduro & Rodriguez, 1999).

The party, which won the 1998 election, changed the constitution in 1999 with the majority of the people's vote. Chávez urged Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) to raise oil prices. A policy of complying with OPEC decisions was followed by cooperating with other countries. The difference that Chávez made was that the previous governments did not comply with the oil

production quota determined by the OPEC. Chávez, on the other hand, decided to abide by the quota set by the OPEC. Therefore, he carried out oil diplomacy with OPEC member countries. (Corrales & Penfold, 2011) The second policy pursued by Chávez was the oil company PDVSA and the prevention of the privatization of the industry. In this way, Chávez aimed to strengthen his hand against the US in terms of oil revenues. (Ellner, 2008) Chávez launched ALBA (La Alianza Bolivariana para los Pueblos de la Latin America) to consolidate cooperation with Latin American countries. (Karluk, 2014) Therefore, it could be inferred that Chávez tried to move his country away from neoliberal politics toward a socialist structure. In this process, oil was an important economic resource. He found the opportunity to realize the desired reforms in the country with the rising oil prices and found a significant income in foreign oil trade.

In February 1999, Chávez announced Plan Bolívar 2000. Within this plan the framework of public projects, such as construction of hospitals, houses and schools, education, strengthening of activities, and solving nutritional problems were planned to be carried out by soldiers. Thus, the army capacity would be mobilized, and, on this occasion, it was planned to establish a dialogue between the army and local regions (Jorquera, 2003). Parallely, Barrio Adentro was released in mid-2003. The term barrios is widely used for neighborhoods where the poor live. In these regions the state provided free health care by doctors from Cuba with subsidy, and many clinics were also built at the local level (Fernandes, 2008). With these strategies, Chávez appealed to the masses. In doing so, Chávez presented himself as the voice of the people to fight against the opposition and foreign forces in the name of people and their interests. While doing this, Chávez used political activism very carefully and effectively. While aiming to end inequalities, he first brought the constitutional

amendment with a referendum. He then mobilized the poor and non-white people in their rhetoric to offer equal rights (De La Torre, 2016).

In the late 90s and early 2000s, Chavismo was on the rise. Chavismo, as well as being an anti-capitalist thought that avoids market-oriented reforms, draws its strength from the broad middle class and informal sector. Here, populism can be classified under two basic elements. The first is the existence of a charismatic connection between the voter and the leader, and the other is the presentation of the elite as an enemy against the will of the people. At this point, populism creates a dilemma: while the leader fights for their rights alongside the oppressed people, he begins to usurp the rights of those who are seen as enemies and discredit institutions (Hawkins, 2003).

In April 2002, the leader of Confederacion de Trabajadores Venezuela (CTV), Carlos Ortega and Fedecámaras declared a two-day strike. After the strike on April 11th-12th, the National Guard carried out a coup with the support of his military officers and Chávez was dismissed, and it was announced that Chávez resigned even though he did not. Hearing of the coup, the people took to the streets, shouting pro-Chávez slogans. With the support of both the people and a wing of the army, Chávez returned to his post on February 14th (Gott, 2008).

Here, it could be helpful to open a paragraph for the establishment of *circulos bolivarianos* as their effects would be important for both the 2014 and 2017 protests. In 2001, Chávez started to spread the Bolivarian understanding of revolution and the idea of Chavismo among the people with his institutions called *Circulos Bolivarianos*. Chávez, in 2001 founded the *Círculos bolivarianos*. With this institution, Bolivarian and revolutionary thought became widespread among the people of Venezuela. With the establishment of the Venezuelan communal councils

(Consejo communal) in 2005, Chávez gained great appreciation by his people with the commencement of widespread infrastructural renewal projects. Like every populist leader who presented his leadership as the integration of the people and himself as their messenger, Chávez could not hesitate to become authoritarian in doing so. It is known that while he monopolized more than half of the media, he used state resources for himself in the pre-election campaigns. With the Ley Orgánica De Telecomunicaciones, Chávez also grasped the power of the media by regulating the right to suspend publications when he found them against the interests of the country. The most striking point of leftist populism in Latin America is that it transformed state institutions with the use of ballots and in the name of the people. (De La Torre, 2016) This institution was frequently criticized by the Venezuela opposition in the 2000s on the grounds that it was created specifically to strengthen Chavismo.

Hawkins and Hansen consider civil society as an important step in democracy building and examined how the democracy-strengthening elements of *circulos bolivarianos*, which gradually lost its importance in 2004. The authors interviewed about 110 members to examine this institution. The main objectives of each *circulos* around 11 members were social affairs and politics. According to the reports of the members, while the institutions offered local assistance for social literacy, education, and health needs, they also took part in the dissemination of the Chavismo view and pre-election propaganda. The criticism of the opposition that members of these institutions received support from the state, on the other hand, was not quite correct, according to the members' reports. Small budgets were allocated for financing institutions and activist work voluntarily. It is known that each member participating in these institutions chose the directors of the institutions themselves or determined them with a common consensus method. Moreover, the civillness of these

institutions was highly questioned in Venezuela. It is known that the program generally comprised Chavismo supporters. In these institutions, there was a commitment to Chávez and his charismatic leadership rather than a unique corporate affiliation. This was especially true in the context of an expectation of reform from him with an exchange of voting and support. Activists were in a supportive position in other mobilities, but these places were also in a pro-Chavismo line, just like *circulos bolivarianos*. Their low institutionalism, personal races for management, and new formations of Chávez that replaced them, were shown to be weakening motives behind these civil society formations, which especially lost their effect after 2004. It is an undeniable fact that this structure in Venezuela played an important role in the development of civil society and its spread at the grassroots level. However, its contribution to democracy due to its level of dependency on the leader is open to further discussion (Hawkins & Hansen, 2006). This, in a nutshell, is how Chávez rose and consolidated his power.

When the AD, URD, COPEI, and the PCV coalition came into power by overthrowing the Perez dictatorship in 1958 and the Punto Fijo pact they established, the opposition took over the administration (Wilpert & Azzellini, 2009). Opposition to the pact always existed; however, more open opposition to the Pact emerged in the late 1980s. One of the first indications of deep public discontent with the political system was the 1989 Caracazo, the deadly riots that took place in the capital Caracas due to increases in the state's public transport and gas prices (Ellner, 2000). Forty years after its creation, the PPF ultimately became obsolete, with Hugo Chávez assuming the presidency. The pact was already irreversibly damaged by the previous 1993 election of a third party under Rafael Caldera, but the 1998 Venezuelan presidential election effectively ended. Chávez guaranteed that he would cancel the

ancient political framework and open up political control to independents and third parties (Ellner, 2004). Considering the pact to be synonymous with "elitist rule", Chávez condemned the actions of AD and COPEI and the ruling duo on a platform known as patriarchy (Ellner, 2000). For this reason, the Venezuelan opposition was not far from being a profitable alliance to coalitions and union governments, to the Bolivarian revolution. In 2008, the opponents of Chávez established a bloc called Democratic Unity Coalition (Mesa de la Unidad Democrática -MUD). The bloc took its final form in 2009 (Agdemir, 2012). After Maduro's success in the December 2013 local election, opposition elites, which were united under the roof of MUD, had some divergences. On the one hand, there were the Capriles and his supporters, who believed that Maduro should go by the election and continued their struggle in this direction, and the other side, López and his dissidents, led by Machado, who lost hope that the Bolivarian government would be ousted with the election, and therefore developed a mobilization-based strategy that would force Maduro to resign (Akgemci, 2014). These disagreements within the opposition will be discussed in the next section, which will examine the street protests of 2014 in more detail.

Finally, it would be useful to examine the authoritarian tendencies in Venezuela in a separate paragraph. The Chavista coalition, which came into power in 1999, developed a populist discourse under the leadership of Chávez. Although there are many definitions of populism, it is a direct relationship in which society is polarized against a selected enemy group and no parliamentary/legal intermediary between the leader and the people is accepted. Chávez himself did not like the use of this concept for himself, as he found it to be negative. His charismatic leadership was an undeniable truth. The quasi-divine perspective on his personal character, rather than a promised service to the elector or the idea of a Bolivarian revolution, was one

of the major factors behind his success. His party intended to take a stand close to the people by aiming for a revolution from the bottom up. However, the party did not quite achieve this since intra-party democracy was not very strong. In particular, the rules could be bent when they fell apart with Chávez. Looking at the discourse, however, it is seen that it was again extremely powerful and populist. In his discourse, Chávez chose the concept of revolution for his failed coup attempt, while many times he called those who opposed him rebellious or traitors. Especially when putting pressure on media companies, Chávez called the four opposing channels the four horsemen of the apocalypse (Hawkins 2003, p.18).

Chávez set in motion four basic mechanisms to establish this direct relationship with his people. The first was that each election was held in a local or national referendum atmosphere, in favor of or against Chávez, with heavy usage of governmental resources for Chávez's campaigns. Accordingly, Chávez's legitimacy increased with each victory. Second, with oil revenues rising, the government used it for media infrastructure and monopolization. Chávez actively and uninterruptedly made his propaganda with programs called Hello President, which lasted about six hours. Third, with the establishment of communal councils, an organizational network started to be formed around Chávez, resources for local projects were transferred to supporters who offered commitment to the leader. Finally, with operations called social missions, paternalistic ties were strengthened, while dependence on the leader was increased. It was observed that these discourses increased even more between Chávez's second presidential term in 2007–2013 and exacerbated the authoritarian tendency (Maya, 2014).

In 2007, Chávez proposed a constitutional reform to establish what he called the socialist state of the 21st century. With this, he would gather power on one hand,

paralyzing the horizontal control mechanisms and empowering him to duty until he died. However, the public rejected this proposal. However, following the incident, Chávez succeeded in subordinating the Supreme Court of Justice (TSJ) to make them make decisions for his own benefit by reinterpreting the rejected several decisions. This ideal form of communal state is governed by a collective popular power rather than individual and liberal rights and freedoms. After the rejection of the first referendum motion, Chávez, who criticized the result and argued that the country had not reached sufficient political maturity, obtained the right to amend the constitution with a new referendum in 2009. Accordingly, there were no obstacles against his re-election as long as he won the election (Maya, 2014).

When the economic fluctuation in the period was examined, it was seen that the rentier and foreign-dependent state phenomenon in many oil exporting countries is also valid for Venezuela. While most companies were nationalized by the state and state control in production increased, there was an inevitable stagflation. Fiscal spending increased, especially in 2011, and created a serious debt hump. The death of Hugo Chávez put Venezuela, which had to elect a new president, into a period of uncertainty. His absence marked the end of an era, not only for his country, but also for Latin America. Although his illness did not give Chávez the opportunity to make his final speech, he took a precautionary measure for political stability by handing over his office to his deputy, Nicolas Maduro.

### 3.3 Post-Chávez period

Upon the death of Chávez on March 5th, 2013, Maduro began working to replace him as his heir and maintain public support. In the election a month later, Socialist candidate Maduro received 50.7% of the vote, while opposition candidate Henrique

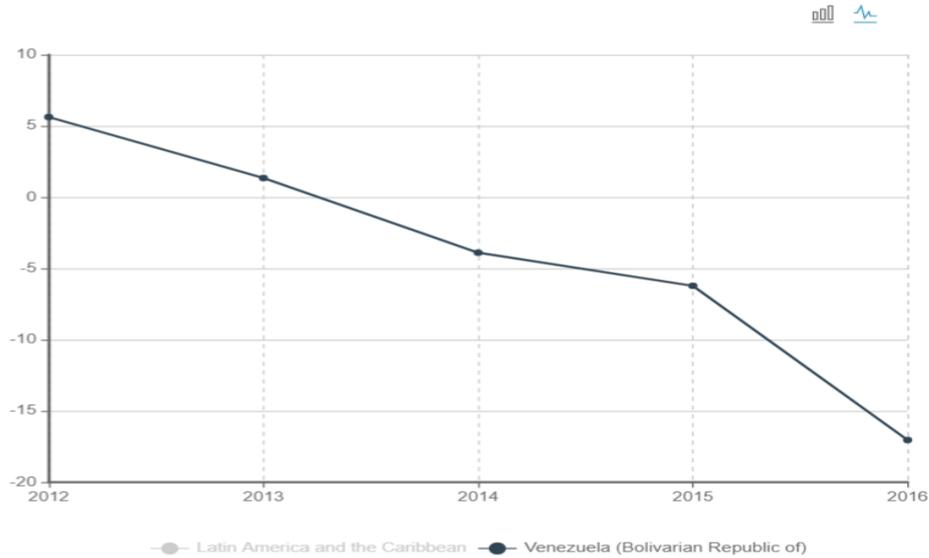
Capriles received 49.1%. However, due to the proximity of the seats in the assembly, many opposition party politicians have been subjected to investigations and attempts to reduce their numbers. Maduro sued many journalists during this period, as he was often criticized for his tendencies towards nepotism and militarization. Accordingly, liberal democratic elements are diminishing, and authoritarian tendencies are increasing day by day in Venezuela due to this socialist communal state idea and populist rhetoric (Maya, 2014). For this reason, Chávez's death actually left his country with great uncertainty and a growing economic depression. Maduro, who took office, faced both a great economic depression and the shortcomings of trying to fill Chávez's undeniable charisma.

After Hugo Chávez passed away on March 5th, 2013, Venezuela held an election on April 14th, 2013. In the election, the Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela (PSUV) nominated Nicolas Maduro, who had strong support. Maduro had a fierce battle with his opponent Henrique Capriles in the presidential election. Maduro was elected president with a very close vote difference of 50.6% of the votes. Under Nicholas Maduro, Venezuela faced an economic crisis and a serious increase in crime rates, accusations of loss of trust, and allegations of corruption. Inflation is up to 56% and Maduro, who took over the seat with the protests, was immediately accused of the current economic instability (Cin, 2019).

When Nicolas Maduro took over from Chávez, an international drop in oil prices worsened Venezuela's economic situation. Under Maduro, negative ratios of economic growth occurred (Baran, 2019). As shown in the figure 1, The Cepal data also justified Baran's argument. In 2012, the GDP growth rate was 5.6%, while it was 1.3% in 2013, -3.9% in 2014, -6.2% in 2015, and finally, -17% in 2016.

Annual National Account in dollars

**Rate of growth of Total Annual Gross Domestic Product (GDP) at constant prices**  
(Percentage)



Source: CEPALSTAT - ECLAC - UNITED NATIONS

Figure 1. Rate of growth of total annual gross domestic product (GDP) at constant prices in Venezuela (Cepal.org. 2021)

The data in figure 2 show that the export-dependent structure of Venezuela continues. While oil still ranks first in the exports of Venezuela, it seems that Maduro's efforts to break the dependency on oil prices unfortunately did not yield any results. As the graph indicates in 2013, petroleum still composed 85.1% of the export of Venezuela. Therefore, there is still an increasing dependency on the global oil prices. This dependency, therefore, created a fragile economy for Venezuela and was the basis of a serious upcoming debt crisis. The fact that the tension in Venezuela was more visible during the Maduro period or a number of reasons contributed to the increase in its severity are debt crisis, inflation and economic factors, such as the drop in oil prices and the fact that Maduro was not a charismatic leader like Chávez, caused the tension and violence in the country to increase. In Venezuela, the paramilitary polity known as guarimba, which dates back to 2003 also caused increased social violence during the Maduro period (Ellner, 2017).

Exports of leading products as percentage of Total			
Crude petroleum	85.1	%	2013
Methyl alcohol /methanol/	0.6	%	2013
Iron ore and concentrates (excluding roasted iron pyrites)	0.3	%	2013
Sponge iron or steel	0.2	%	2013
Nitrogenous fertilizers and materials nes	0.2	%	2013
Other hydrocarbons	0.1	%	2013
Other acyclic alcohols and derivatives	0.1	%	2013
Other ferro alloys	0.1	%	2013
Ships and boats, other than warships	0.1	%	2013
Ammonia, anhydrous or in aqueous solution	0.1	%	2013

Figure 2. Exports of leading products as percentage of total (Cepal.org. 2013)

Although Maduro won the election, it is clear that he would follow a policy that remained in the shadow of Chávez for a long time. The votes for Maduro's victory should not only be evaluated in relation to the defeat of the opposition party, but also the defeat of a US-backed opposition (Kilincarslan, 2016). Against the dependence on oil revenue and rising inflation, Maduro also tried to give new names to protect the value of the currency in the country. Although the bolivar began to be called the new bolivar, the currency continued its sharp depreciation (Aydogan, 2019).

When Venezuela's foreign policy was evaluated in general during the Maduro era, Venezuela underwent a change from proactively seeking influence in the international arena to react according to international conditions (Mijares, 2015). Since there are various reasons such as socio-economic problems, the decrease in the number of allied countries, this fact prevents the country from being an effective

actor in politics. The important point for Venezuela during the Maduro period was, it was trying to resist the interventions of the USA and solve its socio-economic problems at the same time. For this reason, it was very difficult to maintain an effective line in foreign policy (Demirel, 2020).

Considering all of this, the country Maduro took over was already in a crisis with rising inflation and negative growth figures. In addition, after Chávez's charismatic leadership, a gap that was difficult to fill also made Maduro's job difficult. Under Chavismo, different groups aggregated around personalities, rather than ideas. This does not mean that with the departure of Chávez in the country, Chavismo entered a weakening process. However, it is undeniable that Chávez's charismatic leadership was an important factor in persuading the masses in the rise of Chavismo and Bolivarian thought. Maduro, in a country full of crises that he took over after Chávez, faced a great challenge from his first year in 2014 by encountering massive street protests.

## CHAPTER 4

### 2014 PROTEST ANALYSIS

This chapter presents an analysis and findings of the 2014 protests and aims to answer the following questions: How did the Venezuelan government's repression practices and opposition elites' protest strategies develop in the 2014 protests? How did they influence each other? How did each party evaluate the opportunities they had; how did they react to the occurring threats? The aim of this chapter is to present an empirical analysis by making sense of the protest strategy that took place in Venezuela in 2014 and the repression practices developed by the Venezuelan state in response to that. As in the Political Opportunity Structures approach, the political focus is on context and changes. Consequently, the issues that make up a SM and the actors are taken as given, and the actors use their strategies to pursue their own interests. Emphasis is placed on how they develop and how they interact with the environment (Tarrow, 2011). At this point, the continuity and changes observed in the attitudes of the government and the opposition supporting the protesters will be examined. It should be underlined here that this research is specific to Venezuela and the arguments determined in this geography may not be valid for the rest of the world or for democratic regime types.

#### 4.1 Historical background

Figure 3 indicates the “we want peace without robberies and kidnappings, we want peace without poverty” (Rawlins, 2014, own translation) banners of the protestors, which was used on the second day of the protests, is a summary of the general demand of the civilian protesters and the purpose of the protest. In order to analyze

the protest, first, it is necessary to look at how and why the 2014 protests broke out. The 2014 protests in Venezuela resulted primarily as the result of university students who were against the growing violence and inflation. In a very short time, with the participation of the opposition, it turned into a protest cycle that spread all over the country. The protested front included the Maduro government, the PSUV and the paramilitary group called the *colectivos*, which met under the umbrella of supporting the Bolivarian regime. The protesters, on the other hand, usually consisted of two different groups: the opposition elites and civic groups. In addition to a protest mass from students, opposition elites were already aware of it under the leadership gathered in the MUD.



Figure 3. Anti-Maduro front gather where a protester victim died (Rawlins, 2014)

During the Youth Day celebrations in Caracas on February 12th, 2014, a group of anti-government students were detained. The Venezuelan government, exactly 200 years ago on the Youth Day celebrations, on February 12th, 1814, organized students at the University of Santa Rosa de Lima against the army of the

king. Thus, the capital Caracas was chosen for simultaneous protest demonstrations in 38 cities on the same day. Opposition leaders Leopoldo López and María Corina Machado called mostly university students on February 1st. When a group attacked the prosecutor's office with Molotov cocktails, among the march of the mass of middle-class students, the celebrations turned into conflict (Akgemci, 2014). On February 13th, when the protest first began, university students gathered in front of the general prosecutor's office in Caracas to demand the release of five university undergraduates who were arrested. The students were accompanied by the opposition party María Corina Machado, Leopoldo López, and the metropolitan mayor of Caracas, Antonio Ledezma (Meza, 2014, February 13th). López and Machado asked Venezuelans to take to the streets to demand a new election, as they called this Exit (La Salida). However, with this development and involvement of the opposition elites in the protests, the facade of the mobilization started to change. First the demands were mainly for freedom for already detained students, then slowly, the direction of the protestors discourse started to turn toward the resignation of Maduro. As it is understood, while the demands of the university students were mostly about the release of their friends, the issue took on the character of an uprising against Maduro with the participation of the opposition elites and it grew significantly.

On February 14th, the second day of the protests, the Venezuelan government declared that opposition leader López was responsible for the protests and issued an arrest warrant for him. López was charged with crimes of association to commit a crime, instigation to commit a crime, public intimidation, setting fire to a public building, damage to public property, serious injuries, homicide, and terrorism (Meza, 2014, February 14th). López surrendered two days after the call, yet he summoned thousands with a video he posted on his twitter account as he invited them to the

streets. Students occupied the streets, this time for López's release. With the arrest, the opposition leader became the figurehead of the protests, while the protesters occupied the streets with much higher participation and determination than before, showing that the existing unrest in Venezuela would not settle any time soon.

During the week that the protests began, a disagreement arose between Capriles, Machado, and López. Capriles clearly separated himself and made calls for a call down in the streets. Crack in the opposition supported by the expression of the opposition deputies through their calls and social media accounts (Scharfenberg, 2014, February 14th). It seemed like the protesters may not have followed Capriles' calls on February 22nd, so Caracas became the scene of the largest opposition protest since the election. In addition to the massive attendance of tens of thousands in Caracas, the Venezuelan exile called for protests in 70 cities around the world (Scharfenberg, 2014, February 22nd). The protesters, who attacked the government buildings with stones and sticks, were responded to by the police with pepper spray and batons. The protests escalated further with López's imprisonment.

While the protests were heating up in the streets, by the third week, Maduro blamed the MUD, which he accused of unrightfully trying to overthrow the government.

Although the police tried to suppress the protests in a bloody and violent way, they were unsuccessful, and the process took longer than expected. While this was all happening, anti-Maduro rhetoric began to increase, especially from foreign powers such as the EU, UNASUR, and the USA, which showed its concern about the arrest warrant of the opposition Leopoldo López (Fariza, 2014, March 28th). Maduro called this proof that the protesters were serving the imperialist powers. Moreover, Latin America was divided as a result of the events in Venezuela. The Colombian leading block together with the USA, Peru, and Brazil led the way against Maduro in

the international arena. While the bloc led by Santos, the Colombian president, expressed concerns over the regime, the Havana bloc, including Argentina and Bolivia, took sides with Maduro. This situation brought about a great difference of opinion on the continent (Ballesteros, 2014, February 27th). Responding to international concerns with the aforementioned statements by Maduro, triggered participation in the protests. While polarizing rhetoric fueled the chaos in the country, the number of dead and injured protesters and police continued to rise. However, the president did not hesitate to propose a peace conference to calm the streets (Scharfenberg, 2014, February 24th). Although the opposition elites did not like this proposal at first, they probably saw this as a way of negotiating for the release of López, and as they could not get results from their bloody actions, after a while they sat at the table with the government. After a month passed since the protests started, and although not all protesters approved of the opposition's meeting with the government, there was a serious decrease in the course of the protest and participation. In this way, the streets began to calm down and the protests began to come to an end, nearly in the middle of March.

#### 4.2 Approach of opposition elites to the protest

Political elites shaped the trajectory of the cycle in Venezuela, first, by determining the protest strategy. As stated, the initial reason for the protest was that university students demanded the release of their friends. The first change in the protester's demand began with the opposition's involvement and taking ownership of the 2014 protests. In the news on the first day of the protest, dated February 13th, it was stated that the students marched to the office of the prosecutor to ask for the release of their friends who had been detained in the former protests, while the demands for the

release of the students and the protest style consisted of marching and shouting slogans. (Meza, 2014, February 13th) Accordingly, it can be said that the 2014 protests were initiated by students and in a way that could be described as peaceful. First, the transformation of the protesters' demands should be looked at. Although the students gathered due to security problems, poverty, and friends in custody, the process turned into La Salida protests with the inclusion of the opposition in almost one day, which meant the exit as a symbol of Maduro's resignation and a solution to the existing problems in the country. A dynamic change was observed in the development of the repertoire and strategy in 2014 in Venezuela. Tarrow considers the protest repertoire as the whole set of self-expressions and argues that protest repertoires are dynamic and develop and grow over time and become the most acceptable form of itself. Accordingly, it is built on old repertoires by adding new ones and becomes widespread (Tarrow, 1993). This construction process also explains the framing development of the 2014 protests. It was observed that there were fluctuations in the demands of the protesters within the two-month period examined. It would be correct to divide these fluctuations into civilian protesters who were mostly university students and the opposition elites. Demands within both the civic and elite groups and, accordingly, the framing was transformed.

Let us first consider the transformation of the civic group. In the news dated February 13th, the first day of the protest, it was stated that students were marching, and demanding the release of five university undergraduates who were arrested in the Andean states of Mérida and Táchira (Meza, 2014, February 13th). In the news on the second day, this time, the students took to the streets to protest the death of young protestor Basil Da Costa, by a gunshot to the head. While the students were making a request for their friends on the first day, towards the end of the second day, they

started walking with the intention of protesting against the police on behalf of the young protester who was shot (Meza, 2014, February 14th). Although the methods of chanting and marching did not change, the protesters began to target and challenge governmental institutions. In this way, they found themselves in the lane opposite Maduro. On the third day of the protest, of course, with the influence of the opposition elites, this student group merged with the opposition party, MUD, which is a larger and more effective protest group, and almost dissolved among them. What is meant by this dissolution is actually to lose one's own essence by being influenced by a larger and more powerful group and adopting its arguments and behaviors. Although the effects of this dissolution were felt in the first days, they were first experienced on the third day of the protest when the opposition increased its impact significantly. This situation can also be explained by the concept of political opportunity. The opposition party interpreted the current dissatisfaction of university students who took to the streets in the face of their current economic situation and price hikes as an opportunity. And in this case, the opposition elites joined the protest and enlarged it, turning it into a demand for Maduro's resignation. In this case, the opposition saw the current dissatisfaction as a cleavage and used this political opportunity for its own agenda.

At this point, it would be useful to examine the opposition's participation in the protest and how it changed its course. In the early days of the protest, there was a crack in the opposition, and this included some disagreements about how to take a stand toward the existing protest. So much so that the first day's newspaper noted the cracks in the opposition leadership. Machado and López harangued the crowd to maintain the resistance in the streets, while the governor of the State of Miranda and former Presidential candidate, Henrique Capriles Radonski, were listening. Capriles

stated, "Things are not good, let's help this country come out of chaos. Let's not let extremes damage this vision" (Scharfenberg, 2014, February 14<sup>th</sup>, own translation). It is possible to see this divergence as a clash of radicals and moderates within the opposition. Just one day after the protests started, a disagreement arose between Capriles, Machado, and López. Capriles clearly separated himself from Machada and López. However, López and Machado, who had a more hard-liner approach, aimed to attract more people to the streets and increase the volume of the protest. So much so that when López surrendered on February 18th, he called on everyone to take to the streets. He claimed, "The exit has to be peaceful; the exit has to be within the Constitution, but it also has to be on the street" (Scharfenberg, 2014, February 18th, own translation). This speech exemplifies how he wanted to keep the tension in the streets and indicated that the protest was the way toward solution, in contrast to what Capriles claimed. Here, the calculations of the political elites, who perhaps wanted to turn the current dissatisfaction in their favor, were also seen. It seems that while the López and Machado line believed that change would be achieved through the protests and overthrowing the government, perhaps they also wanted to become popular leaders in the eyes of many who wanted to take to the streets. In this way, while increasing their popularity, perhaps they took into account their election concerns. On the other hand, it should not be thought that Capriles reached this decision without a calculation. At this point, Capriles, following a more moderate line, may have believed that change would come through the ballot box. At the same time, maybe he was afraid of a regime with authoritarian tendencies, perhaps fearing possible detention or loss of existing privileges. Both sides on the opposition line tried to seize the opportunities available in this dispute in a way that was best for them.

In this divergence, the protesters can be seen mostly supporting López in his hard-liner approach. After his call, while participation in the protests increased significantly in Venezuela, many Americans gathered in front of the Organization of American States (OAS) in Washington to support López (Saiz, 2014, February 19th). On February 22nd, Caracas became the scene of the largest opposition protest since the election. In addition to the massive attendance of tens of thousands in Caracas, the Venezuelan exile called for protests in 70 cities around the world. A student leader, Juan Requesens, the wife of Leopoldo López, Lilian Tintori, the leaders of the MUD, María Corina Machado and Antonio Ledezma, and Henrique Capriles Radonski all participated. In fact, Capriles, who participated in this peaceful march, acknowledged the cracks in the opposition and stated that "We may have differences, but there is something that unites us that is bigger, and it is called Venezuela" (Scharfenberg, 2014, February 22nd, own translation). Whether it was a self-contradictory act for Capriles to attend the largest protest ever in Caracas, after calling for an end to the chaos, is up for debate. On the other hand, since the march was peaceful and there was no serious police violence that day, Capriles' participation may suggest that he did not give up his soft-line approach. Particularly, discord in the opposition was experienced at the very beginning of the protest. Following this, Capriles appealed for calm, while López was keenly aiming to escalate the protest. With López's imprisonment, his role as a leading figure and his increasing popularity may have triggered the protesters to turn toward a more López-supportive approach by showing obedience to his call to gather in the streets. The opposition's dilemma began to unravel in López's favor with his growing popularity. As proof of this, the prisoner López managed to keep the people on the streets with his calls. However, Capriles could not be in a position to direct the streets despite the

fact that he is being free. According to the news dated February 22nd, the imprisoned Leopoldo López managed to impose his strategy of street pressure. López's call to take to the streets from prison did not go unanswered, and millions of people continued to march for his release and Maduro's resignation with increased tension (Meza, 2014, February 22nd).

The breaking point in the conflict within the opposition elite was also experienced at this stage. Capriles' participation in the February 22nd protest was the first, but it would not be the last. With the crack and flow direction, the protest continued to escalate. Unable to find the support Capriles had hoped for from the protester base, he began to slide into a line of support by joining the protest after López was jailed. Capriles' shift in this radical direction can be explained by the loss of faith in democratic values with López's imprisonment, and that the Maduro government could be overthrown by an election. While Capriles hoped for change with the election, López's imprisonment may have made him believe the impossibility of achieving his aspirations in a country with these democratic values. With this learning experience, Capriles joined the line of support for the street protests and the disagreement within the opposition was resolved. After this breaking point, the opposition managed to maintain unity within itself, although they could not achieve their purpose of Maduro's resignation. At this point, when this cracked voice was silenced, the disagreement within the opposition came to an end. So, repression led to opposition unity on the streets, together with the students.

According to McCarthy and Zald (1977), a successful protest requires time, money, mass participation, and elite support. As the economic situation improves, so does the amount of money people can put into the organization, so the probability of protest success increases. It can be seen as effort by those who are dissatisfied with

power, and organizations offer suggestions to change this and find the necessary support from beneficiaries. So here, not very organization-oriented but more of an idea-centered definition was chosen for SM itself. For this reason, since the opposition had economic resources and the existing elite support, it managed to lead the social mobilization. With these resources, provided to the extent that the opposition elites were able to provide, social mobilization started to gain momentum. With the silencing of the moderates in the opposition, the opposition shifted to a more radical line and thus the 2014 protests began to drift away from their original demands.

The second important finding was that the size and participant profile mattered for the fate of mobilization. As Tarrow (2011) underlines, mobilizations cannot be reduced to the social classes but instead a much wider and populated base needed so that demands of the protest participants to be heard. López, as the symbolic leader of the anti-government protest group, tried many times to appeal to a much wider base. Before he surrendered, López summoned thousands with a video he posted on his twitter account and invited them to the streets. Tens of thousands of people responded to the call. However, according to the news reports, those who came to the call were mostly young people who scribbled slogans on cardboard. Moreover, their opposition figures were present at the event. The staff of the MUD) represented by its former coordinator, Ramón Guillermo Avelo, and former presidential candidate, Henrique Capriles Radonski, also joined (Scharfenberg, 2014, February 18th). As was seen from this news report, although López tried to mobilize a wider base, his calls were often answered by the youth and an audience that would not be representative of all of society. Young people or deputies from opposition

parties cannot be a reflection of all of society but a limited group of elites and students.

In addition, after López surrendered, his wife posted another video previously shot by him. While López called for the protesters to not leave the streets in the video, thousands of young university students, some peaceful and others who were reported as more violent, responded to the call and continued to take to the streets, in the newspaper article of that day (Meza, 2014, February 13th). Once again, the calls of the opposition leader resonated within the young protesters. To give a definitive answer to the question what the underlying reason is why Maduro's resignation could not be achieved, which was the expected final goal of the 2014 protests, is a tough task. Whether it was because this mobilization appealed to a more limited base and included a population consisting only of young people and could not symbolise all of society, compared to 2017, could have been a motive behind this conclusion. Nevertheless, the profile of the protest base seems to be of great importance in reaching this conclusion in conjunction with the existing literature. The 2014 protests did not include participation from different classes and different segments of society, as was expected by the opposing group.

The third point that draws attention is the reference to the concept of legitimacy through the claims about peace in the protests. Taylor and Van Dyke argue that “Frequently activists adopt strategies and tactics not simply because they have been shown to be effective, but because they resonate with the beliefs, ideas, and cultural frames of meaning people use to make sense of their situation and to legitimate collective action” (Taylor & Van Dyke, 2004, p.276). The issue of the legitimacy of political mobilization has also been widely discussed in the Venezuelan context. In particular, the opposition elites, by condemning the violent protest

actions, aimed to put the movement on a legitimate basis from the very beginning. The protesting mass started to emphasize in the first days that they wanted peace and this emphasis started to increase as the days passed. The opposition, Mesa de la Unidad, and the coalition of political parties of which they were part of, condemned the violence without reservation. "We are people of peace," said its executive secretary, Ramón Guillermo Avelo (Meza, 2014, February 13th, own translation). With this rhetoric, the opposition may have wanted to get the support of the international community. The opposition's position in the protest here, as Almeida claimed (2003) was a kind of institutional access that provided a legitimate base for the protests and gave momentum to the masses' way of expressing themselves. As the imprisonment of López found reflections on the international arena, the legitimacy of the government's act started to be questioned. Masses started to participate in the call of the opposition, and not very reluctantly. This move from the protester side could be perceived as a "cognitive liberation" as McAdam mentions (McAdam, 1982). When the masses socially realized that by coming together, they could actually create the changes that they wanted to see, it made them way more radicalized and eager to reach their goals. This does not imply that the mass was inactive before and yet it means that after the imprisonment of López and with the forceful support of the international arena, they reached a stage of realization that they had much more leverage in their hands than they thought. As the masses were not very satisfied with the status quo and rebelled against it, at a point, they realized that they actually had the power to overthrow the government. As this pattern saw the masses as a collective power to unite and rebel against authority as a way to

overthrow and change the status quo, it suggests that the system started to lose its legitimacy even more in the eyes of the public.

The opposition elites also shaped the trajectory of the cycle by taking the support of international actors. At the end of the very first week of the protest, the White House called for an investigation into the violence in Venezuela. White House spokesman Jay Carney asked Maduro to "promote the necessary political space" so that all citizens could raise their voices (Saiz, 2014, February 18th, own translation). The USA also showed its concern about the arrest warrant of opposition leader Leopoldo López. The USA denied any type of involvement in the demonstration and Obama called on Maduro to release those detained in the demonstrations (Saiz, 2014, February 14th). This concept of legitimacy became the leading force that increased participation in the protest. The opposition's effort to become this legitimate was actually an effort to gain the support of international actors. For this reason, accusations such as treason against the homeland began to be made against the protest participants, which aimed to destroy the legitimacy provided by that institutional access. Against these accusations, the protesters fell under the obligation to prove that they wanted peace and loved their country.

When Maduro called for a democratic negotiation to discuss his demands with the opposition, there was a gradual decline in the opposition's supporters on the street. Table 1 indicates the data gathered. According to the news reports, within the first week, there were six deaths, 236 injuries, and 539 detentions. In the second week, news of 13 deaths, 137 injuries, and 18 stories of torture and ill-treatment under custody were reported. This meant that the highest weekly death toll ever had been reached. That week, Maduro took a step toward peace with his call for a peace conference. In the week following this event, the number of deaths decreased to two

and the number of detentions dropped to 41. In the following weeks, the death toll never exceeded the peak of the second week. According to this, 40 deaths, more than 500 injuries, and over 2000 detention cases were reported in the seven weeks that the newspaper data were compiled. In light of these data, Maduro went to negotiate in the second week when the news of death and torture was at its peak, and although the protests continued in the following weeks, the numbers of deaths, injuries, and detentions all decreased.

Table 1. Reported Number of Deaths, Injuries and Detainees in 2014 Protest Cycle from Code Book (Appendix)

Week	Deaths	Injuries	Detainees
Week 1 13-20 February	6	236	539
Week 2 21-28 February	13	137	18 stories of torture under detention
Week 3 1-7 March	2	No data	41
Week 4 8-15 March	10	16	Total 1529
Week 5 16-23 March	3	No data	Total 2000
Week 6 26 March-1 April	5	Total 611	Total 2000
Week 7 2-9 April	1	Total 611	Total 2000
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>40 deaths</b>	<b>611 injuries</b>	<b>2000 detainees</b>

It is understood from this that the motivation that pushed the protesters to the streets was the belief that they would not find a democratic interlocutor. Although it took more than a month for the two groups to come together, the first dialogue between the government and the opposition left more doubts than hopes. The meeting did not respond to the expectations that had been generated to solve the

country's political conflicts. One of the opposition leaders, former presidential candidate Henrique Capriles, described this conference as "a comparsa", which in the local language is equivalent to an act without transcendence, in an interview with a local radio station, and announced that he, as well as the Mesa de la Unidad, the coalition of parties that supported him, would not attend. (Scharfenberg, 2014, February 26th, own translation). The long-awaited first meeting between representatives of the Venezuelan government and the opposition MUD was held in Caracas and lasted for six hours and was broadcast in full by the national radio and television network. The MUD suggested continuing to meet every Tuesday, generating visible results in a short time, and consigned a proposal for an Amnesty Law for political prisoners that it believed President Maduro could enact using his empowering powers. Capriles also accused Maduro of being in the presidency as a result of the control he exercised over the institutions. Since it was broadcast on the radio and television on the national network, most of the speakers seemed to speak to the public rather than to their companions. It was the price to pay for the transparency necessary, as Ramón Guillermo Avelledo, the executive secretary of the MUD, stated in his initial presentation, "to overcome mistrust". All of these achievements, however, were not enough for the actors of the Unit Table that called the protest, led by the ousted deputy, María Corina Machado, and the leader of the Popular Will party, Leopoldo López. They demand the beginning of a transition that

culminates with the replacement of the current government, a proposal that did not seem viable to even appear on the table (Scharfenberg, 2014, April 12th).

#### 4.3 Venezuelan government reaction and discourse

The Venezuelan government's accusations to the protesting group that they were trying to stir the country into confusion and the accusations of treason against the protesters started to be made immediately after the protests started. Venezuelan Foreign Minister, Elías Jaua, claimed that Venezuela faced an attempt to overthrow its government led by an opposition actor that did not accept its electoral defeat. Moreover, transnational interests were hidden to make Venezuela put an end to the opposition groups that joined the demonstration, who were initially students who "had received money from US institutions" (Saiz 2014, February 14th, own translation). With such accusations, the main institutions of the state accused the protesters of betraying their state and collaborating with outside powers, which mostly meant the USA. It seemed that with such statements at the beginning of the protest, Maduro and his government took a very harsh stance against the protesters and the opposition. They thought that their stance would perhaps help to quickly suppress the protest. These aforementioned accusations of treason were made not only to the protesters on the street, but also to opposition party leader López, who was arrested. Such accusations by Maduro increased the violence and participation of the protest, especially with the imprisonment of López, he turned into a folk hero, causing him to become the symbolic name of the movement. López was quickly declared a traitor and an arrest warrant was issued. This meant that from the government's point of view, the cracks in the protesting group suggested that they would collapse in the face of pressure and for this reason, it was aimed to quickly

disperse the mobilization by increasing the pressure by Maduro. The blaming attitude of the government here is actually open to interpretation as an effort to turn the current situation in its favor. Maduro's government wanted to question their legitimacy and benefit from their current situation with statements that the opposition betrayed the country by being supported by many places with support from the USA and many foreign affiliates. When the opposition was accused of treason, the Bolivarian regime and Maduro government, which opposed them, were thus positioned as legitimate and at the same time, aggrieved as the protector of the country automatically. In this way, the Maduro government wanted to seize political opportunities.

However, Maduro's legitimacy began to be questioned severely after López was imprisoned and under severe pressure from the police. First, Leopoldo Lope's mother declared that "if the laws were respected, Leopoldo would have to be released today because it is an unfair process and an unfair accusation" (Saiz, 2014, February 20th). Then, Pope Francis called for dialogue in Venezuela and the Copei Social Christian Party, another of the two hegemonic parties in Venezuela, requested that Tuesday, through its president, Roberto Henríquez, that the good offices of the Vatican and the United Nations address the Venezuelan crisis and verify "if there was compliance with respect to human, political, social, and economic rights (Scharfenberg, 2014, February 26th, own translation). Additionally, the media was under serious censorship. Twitter was not working. Users of the social network noted that from Venezuela, it was impossible to upload photo and video attachments or view them. On that Wednesday, there were practically no television channels broadcast images of the opposition mobilization, and some did not even name it. Channel NTN24, an international signal that originated in Colombia, disappeared.

Later, President Maduro acknowledged that this was due to a decision of the state (Scharfenberg, 2014, February 14th).

These interrogations about the regime's legitimacy triggered an important change in the government's attitude. At this point, Maduro broke this continuity and made a remarkable move. When the government realized that they could not find legitimate support by accusing the opposition elites, they developed a different approach to the current opportunities. By mobilizing his own base, the president took the citizens who were next to him to the streets. The pro-government protesters, who started to take to the streets against the anti-government protesters, called themselves that is, the people of peace (*pueblo de paz*). Thus, the will of these people would end the debate about Maduro's legitimacy. The people of peace, as a pro-Maduro supporter group, marched against the group that took to the streets for their dissatisfaction with Maduro and the current government. The people of peace took to the streets in red, basically symbolizing the Bolivarian regime with pictures of Chávez and Maduro in their hands (Rawlins, 2014). With this tactic, Maduro, instead of giving the appearance of conflict with the people by taking his supporters to the streets, wanted to show that not all of the people were against him. In fact, there were too many of his own supporters in the country. Pro-government mobilization rallies act as a deterrent against anti-government protesters. Pro-regime protests can be perceived as a tool to defend autocracies against internal challenges. While pro-government mobilization does not generally remain peaceful, it is more rarely suppressed by police forces than anti-government mobilization. Studies have shown that pro-regime allies are more common, in parallel to the increasing size of the wave of anti-government protests (Hellmeier & Weidmann, 2019). Pro-Bolivarian regime allies with posters of Maduro and Chávez in their hands, emphasized that the

government is legitimate and governing in the name of people in Venezuela, perhaps, and underlined that the people-state conflict should in fact be perceived as an opposition and state conflict instead. Although the protests of this group did not last very long, they held an important place with their support of this legitimacy.

There are basic conclusions that can be drawn from the Davenport, Earl, and Soule arguments. Many different theories have been put forward for protest policing and repression conceptualization. The arguments under these themes are too complicated to be grouped together. However, as Earl did, it was possible to categorize the concept of repression according to the way it was applied. From the repression concepts provided by the literature, there are many arguments that overlap with Venezuela. Chief among these is that the concept of opportunity may have been influential in some political decisions. This can be explained by the fact that Maduro, who suffered a loss of legitimacy, especially in the international press, gained self-justification and legitimacy by mobilizing his own base. Mobilizing its own base, rather than overt repression, was a method of regaining legitimacy for the protested government. When people revolt against the government, as people are equal to democracy and the will of the people, the government sits in a position that opposes this democracy and the demands of the people. For this reason, when the Bolivarian regime mobilizes people who support the government, there will be a comparison of people vs. people and the government frees itself from its position that goes against the demands of the people. Underlying reason was that as people acknowledged as the collective will and people will mean democracy, people being against the government has power to put the governmental actors under the pressure of being illegitimate whereas a comparison of people for and against for Bolivarian regime

indicates a legitimacy for the government because it shows that there are also people supporting the regime which bring legitimacy.

Neither side of the protest was able to share the peace. But then neither side actually acted very peacefully. In the first weeks of the protest, dozens of police vehicles were set on fire. The protesters, some armed with fireworks and slingshots, covered their faces with vinegar-soaked shirts to avoid breathing in the fumes. The second week continued with violent protests due to López's detention and some protesters blocked a road with chairs, while others threw stones. Likewise, the Palace of Justice in Caracas has been taken by López's followers to support him, and also in Valencia, Carabobo state, in the center of the country, the alleged action of one of these anarchic groups resulted in gunshots in eight people. Even though the suppression techniques of the police against these protests will be explained in detail in the following pages, it should be underlined that the police continued to respond to these protests very strongly. During the first two months of the 2014 protests, 40 deaths, 608 injuries, 2285 detainees, 904 of whom were students, and 18 torture under custody cases were reported.

When López was not released in the third week of the protests and his family could not reach him, this time, the protesters made a tactical change, demanding the release of the opposition leader with a peaceful march. On top of that, the remarkable point was that the police did not try to use any suppression strategies. So, the police did not violently suppress the mobilization and let them protest and the protesters also stopped destroying and damaging the streets and surrounding stores. However, how valid is the argument to attribute the decrease in police violence only to the fact that the protesters downshifted and took more peaceful actions? The voices rising up against Maduro, especially from America, OAS, and Latin America, may have

realized that the repression tactics he used perhaps undermined his image in the international arena and caused a loss of legitimacy of the Venezuelan government against people who exercised their democratic rights, and may have caused the change in the police tactics. In other words, while making violent protests did not bring the aspirations of the protester group to the release of López and the resignation of Maduro, trying to repress harshly also became an action that did not benefit the protested government, because it also created a loss of legitimacy for them. Perhaps this form of action was abandoned because it was not in the interests of either group. For this reason, both the government and the opposition learned that such dynamics in Venezuela would not be as beneficial as they expected. The conclusion that can be drawn from this is that the opposition in Venezuela learned that it could not achieve its goals through violent protests, and therefore decided to choose a more conciliatory and calm way by trying a new peaceful framing. Likewise, when the government failed to end the protests with repression, it abandoned overt repression and instead opted for the negotiation method discussed in the next paragraphs. In other words, both actors changed their strategy and repression techniques in the protest cycle. The underlying reason for this is, of course, the abandonment of existing methods with the realization that they were insufficient to achieve the desired results.

There were fluctuations in the protest repression and response tactics of the governmental actors, perhaps influenced by the opposition's discourse. Most importantly, as the harsh statements from Maduro and the government were made, and especially the detentions of the opposition, radicalization of the protester group and increased violence were observed. In this case, the government, which applied the pressure, increased it, and when they could not succeed in dissolving the protests,

they chose the negotiation card instead. The last and one of the most important findings in this chapter, and perhaps in this thesis specific to Venezuela, is that, in the face of overt repression and the government's unwillingness to negotiate, the protesters tended to radicalize by developing a more violent and destructive protest strategy. This fact was also stated in recent studies published about Venezuela (Morselli, Passini & McGarty, 2020).

As stated before, while the protests started as marches and slogans by students, Maduro made harsh statements. He started to explain from the first day that the perpetrators of the protests would receive the punishment they deserved. President Nicolás Maduro made assurances that “a plan similar to that of April 11th, 2002, had been activated”, referring to the date on which an immense popular demonstration, also reduced to gunfire, culminated in the fall of then-President Hugo Chávez (Meza, 2014, April 11th, own translation). With the participation of the opposition in the students and the transformation of the protest into "La Salida", the government also stepped up and began to make harsher statements and sanctions. Therefore, it is understood that for the government, the threat of the spread of mobility was greater than the threat of suppressing it. Therefore, the government made an effort to suppress the street protests as violently as possible.

Parallely, the Foreign Minister, Elías Jaua, accused Leopoldo López of being the "intellectual responsible for the death and the wounded in Caracas", adding that "The State has no more excuses to punish this murderer". Additionally, the president of the National Assembly (AN), Diosdado Cabello, declared for the opposition that “the people are too big for them, they will never rule this country” (Meza, 2014, February 13th, own translation). Such statements from the government reinforced the unrest among the protesters. The statement that the opposition would never be able to

rule the country may have created the perception that the government would prevent this at all costs and may have been perceived as a threat that even if they came with a democratic election, the opposition would never be given a chance. The claims that the opposition in the country could never rule the country as democratic elections were held, changed the preferences of waiting for change in the elections by relying on these democratic institutions and elections. Since the opposition would not be allowed to come by election, then the only way for change was seen as overthrowing the current government through protests. Events started to get out of control when López, who was not allowed to meet with his family even though his trial was not over, was imprisoned. Also, as Almeida (2003, p.353) noted, when competitive elections are cancelled or become meaningless, then masses are more likely to use their revolutionary power to influence the authority. With this democratic erosion, trust in institutions was further shaken, and the protesters began to ravage, perhaps, as the protest was seen as the only way to change the current regime and the elections began to cease to be an exit. All of these developments shook the trust of the protesters, not only in the Maduro government, but also in the institutions and the judiciary, because there was a serious public perception that there would be no fair trial.

Statements from the government side caused the protesters to begin to radicalize even more. In fact, as can be seen, the protester and the protested front can never be considered separately from each other, and the behavior patterns of both groups are shaped and changed according to each other. The question is, what would the protests have looked like if Maduro's government had called on the opposition leader to negotiate instead of jailing him as responsible for the protests? However, this is a subject of different research, a possible scenario could be seen when the end

of the 2014 protests were coming up. The argument that can be made here, especially with the alienation from democracy and the decrease of trust in institutions with authoritarian tendencies, SM started to be considered as an alternative to overthrowing the president through protests rather than elections, which was a possible democratic exit. At this point, the protesters began to take to the streets with more and more violent demonstrations.

If SM is defined as the name given to the instrumental and rational actions carried out by a collective actor outside of the political system in order to be included in that system and maintain its place (Lelandais, 2009), then a government's approach to taking the risk of violently suppressing the mobilization could be perceived as an effort to maintain their place and existing status quo in within the system. On top of the statements, Maduro applied a tactic called overt repression. Overt repression of protest by police has the virtues of being systematically observable and well-studied, as well as serving as a useful indicator of the authorities' general program of social control toward particular dissident groups (Della Porta, 1995). Observable/overt repression committed by governments includes military-based repression, national guard deployments, and public protest policing (Earl, 2003). The National Guard threw tear gas canisters and jets of water at the crowd (Meza, 2014, February 15th). The Bolivarian National Police (PNB) confronted protesters in the Plaza Altamira, in Caracas with water tanks, tear gas, and rubber bullets, and tried to disperse groups of anti-government protesters (Gutierrez, 2014, February 16th). The improvised obstacles to closing streets, called *guarimbas* in the Creole Spanish of Venezuela, were used (Scharfenberg, 2014, February 24th). Moreover, when the police wanted to disperse a rally in support of María Corina Machado, they used hundreds of agents as part of a security operation

deployed by the National Guard and the Bolivarian Police in consecutive cordons. In the area, 30 anti-riot tanks were gathered. At least two fronts of riot police ended up throwing tear gas canisters in bulk (Scharfenberg, 2014, April 2nd).

On the very first day, the president took the head of the opposition into custody, perhaps quickly making López a victim, and made a tactical mistake. Thereupon, more people who had not been out before, went out more violently to support López. Another tactical mistake was the use of overt policing methods and serious police violence in the suppression practices instead of covert methods. As these exemplifying implications showed, the protest policing methods can be described as harsh and violent. Therefore, the Venezuelan government suffered a loss of legitimacy. This loss of legitimacy can be understood from the news of clear and unequivocal support for the students and citizens who were being attacked by the government from neighboring countries. Two days later, at a press conference after the Toluca summit, Obama called on Maduro to release those detained in the demonstrations (Saiz, 2014, February 20th). Latin America, on the other hand, seemed divided over Maduro. Bolivia, Cuba, and Argentina, allies of Caracas, took sides with the conspiracy theory of coup d'état against the regime, rejected by Washington and in which, in addition to the USA and Colombia, would be Spain, while Brazil and Mexico opted for the lukewarm condemnation.

In addition to international actors, many international organizations have also brought serious human rights abuse accusations against the Maduro government which can be acknowledged as proof of legitimacy loss. The Venezuelan Penal Forum made assurances that the opponents were savagely beaten and abused by the civil and military police (Meza, 2014, February 24th). Amnesty International denounced cases of torture during the protests in Venezuela. The NGO launched a

documented report with testimonies of victims in the anti-government protests. "So far, three countries have been presented as an option by UNASUR to mediate in the dialogue between the government and the opposition," said Nuria García, a researcher in South America and the author of the report. The demonstrations left a balance, until March 27th, of at least 39 deaths, more than 550 people injured by fire and rubber bullets, and 2157 detainees, of which only 66 were released unconditionally, as highlighted by Esteban Beltrán, the Director of AI for Spain. Although the NGO had the opportunity to speak and interview "dozens" of victims, the report only contains 10 stories of human rights abuses and violations. "The biggest difficulty is that people did not want to speak out for fear of reprisals", Nuria García told El País minutes after the report was released (Cebrian, 2014, April 1st, own translation). All of this caused Maduro's blatant and obscene pressures to return to him as a loss of legitimacy.

With these developments, maybe that was why the president made a tactical change by doing a cost benefit analysis. Realizing that he could not reduce the group's radicalization through pressure, Maduro stepped back at the end of the second week of the protests and called for a National Peace Conference to be held with the participation of the opposition. After Maduro's democratic call, although it took a long time for the opposition to agree to sit at the table, there were no violent clashes or street protests during this process. Although the protests continued, with this step, the mass of protesters on the street decreased and there were no violent actions like before. Maybe it was related to the prolongation of the process and the loss of momentum of the protest, but with Maduro's step, the streets softened and the opposition's decision to agree to negotiate, even though the whole protester group

did not approve the opposition's decision, the protests in 2014 entered a phase of dissolution.

Changes in the tactics and vibration of the protest is a valid argument that could be explained within Jasper and Goodwin's (2011) concept of opportunity as the opportunities are dynamic and mistakes of a group could create a mobility capacity for the other group. As mentioned, these opportunities are not independent from each other but are created and realized based on the interactions of the opposing groups. Therefore, as it is the viewpoint of this research, protests are not a linear process of reaching success or failure, yet they should be perceived as a circular set of ups and downs to which both groups play their cards accordingly. That is why concluding a protest as a failure, or a success based on reaching the first proposed target would be a barren approach to SM studies. As this will be more visible with the examination of the 2017 protests, even though a protest cannot reach a desired outcome, it creates a learning process for both actors of the mobilization. As this learning is a cumulative process, each mobilization changes and develops the forthcoming mobility by transforming the social memory. For this reason, the protests should not be handled separately and independently, instead they should be taken into account as a cumulative learning process with their previous experiences and memories.

## CHAPTER 5

### 2017 PROTEST ANALYSIS

This chapter aims to present an analysis of the street protests that took place in Venezuela in 2017. In this chapter, the concept of political opportunity is essentially perceived as the position of political actors within the system. In doing so, this chapter problematizes how the opposition elites developed the protest discourse and, accordingly, the response of the Venezuelan government to the protest. What kind of protest strategy did the opposition elites promote in the protests in 2017? What repression practices did the government develop in response to this, and which inference and takeaways can be made? While trying to provide an answer to these questions, the continuity and changes in the protest repertoire and strategy of the political elites and the repression practices of the Venezuelan government will be examined in this context.

#### 5.1 Historical background

From 2014 to 2017, the tension on the streets almost never calmed down. The very first months of 2017 started with protests in Venezuela. Opposition leaders put forward their current economic problems as the reason for the mobilization.

However, the tension rose in late March with what the opposition framed as a "coup". The TSJ, controlled by Chavismo, decided to strip the powers of the AN (AN), with the majority of the opposition, for being in "contempt", as determined by the highest court the last year after non-compliance with several sentences.

Moreover, the TSJ snatched parliamentary immunity from opposition deputies and granted special powers to President Nicolás Maduro in criminal, military, economic,

social, political, and civil matters (Castro, 2017, March 30th). The opposition leader, governor of the State of Miranda and former presidential candidate, Henrique Capriles, described the action of the TSJ as a "coup" against the legislature. The opposition leader called on the international community to "save democracy" in his country (Palomino, 2017, March 31st, own translation).

A group of opposition deputies was the first to carry out a protest. They demonstrated before the headquarters of the TSJ, in the center of Caracas, against ruling 156 of the Constitutional Chamber of the TSJ. In several districts in the east of the city, tiny and spontaneous demonstrations took place to reject the breakdown of the constitutional order, while Maduro accused them of an international plot against him, saying "The US State Department has assembled a coalition of right-wing governments to overthrow Venezuela" (Castro, 2017, March 31st, own translation). On March 1st, as the opposition prepared to return to the streets, the Supreme Court of Venezuela backtracked and returned its powers to Parliament. The decision came after the request of the military as a National Defense Council, which urged the TSJ to review the sentences that stripped Parliament of its functions (Meza, 2017, April 1st).

However, this step back was not enough to ease the tension in the streets and Venezuela was at the beginning of a full year of street protests. At this point the demands of the opposition were clear: the holding of elections; the release of political prisoners, such as the former mayor of the Caracas municipality of Chacao Leopoldo López, imprisoned since 2014; the establishment of a "humanitarian channel" to mitigate the shortage of food and medicine; and, finally, the full recognition of the AN, which had the opposition majority (Manetto, 2017, April 20th). To decrease the tension, Nicolás Maduro made assurances that he wanted to

hold an election "soon" and he also asked his supporters to go to streets. However, he was unable to find a solid base to diminish the unrest as police and protesters threw tear gas and Molotov cocktails into the streets of Caracas and the Bolivarian National Police used tear gas and rubber pellets (El País, 2017, April 21st).

The national army force accompanied the police forces and with a much more comprehensive and holistic approach, the Venezuelan government wanted to suppress the protests. Although his rhetoric seemed to be softer and close to fulfilling the demands of the opposition, Maduro followed an extremely violent stance on the repression in the streets. A total of 55 deaths, 134 injuries, and 481 detentions were reported. With the voices rising from the international arena, including the OAS and USA against Maduro, Venezuela withdrew from the OAS as a learning practice from the previous cycle. (Alonso, 2017, April 27th). As the government learnt from 2014, now decided to eliminate any risk of sanctions from the organization and therefore immediately prevent themselves from any threat of sanctions by announcing their withdrawal from OAS. Although the government tried to suppress the protests with a much more militaristic approach this time, the protests did not cease in the two months during which this thesis research was conducted, and they lasted even until the last month of 2017. The two months that are the subject of this chapter consist of the two months when the street protests started and were the most intense. After these months, although the protests continued, their effects diminished.

## 5.2 Approach of opposition elites to the protest

First, and one of the most important findings, is that 2017 street protests had been on the stage since the beginning of 2017. The street protests in Venezuela first broke out in reaction to the high inflation and shortage of basic goods (Robins-Early, 2017).

Following the suspension of the referendum for election to supplant Maduro, the scope of the mobilization expanded with over a million members in each of September and October 2016 (Morselli, Passini and McGarty, 2020). “People from all socio-economic strata and different age groups participated in massive demonstrations throughout most of the national territory, which began in early April 2017. There is no evidence of the existence of a mobilization coordination centre, although during the first month, the protest repertoire was homogeneous and conventional (marches, gatherings, and vigils) and predominantly peaceful” (Puyosa, 2019). However, the protest gained significant momentum with the attempted coup by the TSJ. The TSJ's move provided a good opportunity for the opposition elites to inflame and create a legitimate base for the protests. With their decision, the opposition elites gained a good base to justify the mobilization and lead the way. This decision, which caused democratic erosion, received high reactions from the international community. With this, the opposition got all of the support it ever wanted. Therefore, it is fair to state that, through international lobbying, the opposition managed to gain international backing for their contestation.

The UN asked the Venezuelan government and the opposition to reactivate the political dialogue. The president of Argentina, Mauricio Macri, lamented the two deaths in the march. He also asked that an election be called for in Venezuela. Panama asked the government and the opposition of Venezuela to avoid confrontations and settle their differences peacefully (País, 2017, April 21st). The Pope called for negotiated solutions to the crisis in Venezuela. The governments of eight Latin American countries, comprising Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Peru, Paraguay, and Uruguay, endorsed the Pope's position. "It is essential to have very clear conditions for a negotiated solution" (Meza, 2017, May

1<sup>st</sup>, own translation). The president of the USA, Donald Trump, affirmed that "Venezuela is a disaster, it is a very sad situation. I am very sorry for what is happening in Venezuela", Trump stated this along with Argentinian President Mauricio Macri, whom he received at the White House (Meza, 2017, April 27<sup>th</sup>, own translation). All of these statements strengthened the hands of the opposition elites and created a political opportunity for them to continue protesting toward getting the promise of an election coming from Maduro's side. Therefore, the opposition group did not withdraw from the streets after getting the election promise. This international support could be perceived as a reason for the opposition MUD to continue to increase the tension on the streets, because they know that this time, they were protesting for a tangible and solid reason, which was the Assembly's deprivation of power. The opposition found the opportunity to raise their voice and get a valid argument to go out to the streets. With the international recognition and support from the neighboring states, the opposition elites insisted on the mobilization. Since the TSJ's decision could not be legitimized by any arguments, especially in the international arena, this created a more energetic and eager opposition to protest and raise the tension in the streets to get what they demand.

The second important finding regarding the opposition is that even though the opposition group MUD was a fragmented organization that consisted of the Primero Justicia (PJ), AD, Avanzada Progresista (AP) and Un Nuevo Tiempo (UNT), López's Popular Will (VP), Maria Corina Machado's Vente Venezuela (VV), and Antonio Ledezma's Alianza Bravo Pueblo (ABP) (Velasco, 2018), in the 2017 protests, it managed to unite around a single leader: Capriles. The fact that Capriles gave the first and strongest reaction after the TSJ's attempt and the fact that López was still imprisoned, can also be perceived as the reasons for this. Henrique Capriles,

in his first press conference with the Colombian media, called on the whole world and invited everyone to take action for democracy in Venezuela, thanks to the legitimate infrastructure created. The opposition leader compared the situation his country was going through with that of Peru in 1992, when President Alberto Fujimori announced the autogolpe. "The deputies have to mobilize, they have to lead," he said (Palomino, 2017, March 31<sup>st</sup>, own translation). Capriles was seriously intimidating the government by showing clear leadership and opposing this decision under all circumstances. It was clear from his speeches that this issue would not be closed easily and that the tension in the streets would not decrease soon.

Capriles's increasing popularity gained speed with the Comptroller General of the Republic's decision to disqualify him from holding positions of popular representation for the next 15 years. The AN incorporated into the parliamentary plenary session the three deputies, two of them from the opposition, from the state of Amazonas (south of the country) who had not been able to assume their positions in January due to a challenge to the electoral result presented before the TSJ by the officialdom. The government representatives who appealed to the Court alleged that acts of coercion and vote-buying were committed in that jurisdiction by the regional leader, Liborio Guarulla, from the opposition. The Electoral Chamber of the TSJ determined that "the act of swearing in and incorporating Julio Ygarza, Nirma Guarulla and Romel Guzamana as deputies lacked validity, existence, and legal effectiveness", and announced that it could take legal actions and legal proceedings against deputies and the board of directors of parliament for their contempt (Scharfenberg, 2016, August 2<sup>nd</sup>, own translation). Capriles delivered a fiery speech. The measure reconfigured the panorama of the opposition and the selection of the candidate that would face Chavismo in the 2018 presidential election. For Capriles, it

was noticeably clear that a candidate would be chosen between himself and Leopoldo López, but the ruling of the Comptroller's Office and the López's situation, imprisoned for more than three years and with no real possibility of leaving prison in the short term, forced him to reinvent himself (Meza, 2017, April 8th). Former presidential candidate Henrique Capriles indicated that he would not accept the offer of an election in exchange for quelling the protests because the government was designing an opposition to suit him (Meza, 2017, April 25th). However, this fact did not stop Capriles from leading the protest. After his call, thousands of people took Caracas against Chavismo while he was in charge of directing the protesters to the headquarters of the Ombudsman's Office, in the center of Caracas. The opposition underlined that with Capriles under threat of being disqualified and with Leopoldo López imprisoned, the remaining options with possibilities to lead the opposition were weak and disputed figures, who insisted on reconciliation and national agreement as the core points of their offer. And that would be the most favorable scenario for the Government in an election (Meza, 2017, April 9th). After the government disqualified him, Capriles continued to lead the protests and made statements to justify and legitimise the protests in the eyes of the international arena.

Capriles backed himself with legal articles, to further intensify and legalise his call for protests. He assured that; the daily protests showed that article 350 was already in force. That article granted citizens the right to rebellion when the constitutional thread was interrupted. "Venezuelans have the right to disobey any fraudulent call made by the government" (Scharfenberg, 2016, May 23rd, own translation). When the mother of all Marches took place on April 19th, he publicly stated "that all Venezuelans can be absent from their work or academic activity because they will defend the Constitution of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela",

which managed to gather more than 100,000 citizens in Caracas on Wednesday to march against the Government of Nicolás Maduro (Manetto, 2017, April 20<sup>th</sup>, own translation). To keep the legitimacy of the movement, he often made calls for peaceful demonstrations. Capriles called on Venezuelans to "ignore such madness" and continue in the streets as they had done since the beginning of April. But the leadership stressed that the demonstration must be peaceful. During the night, the MUD offered a press conference with Borges as a spokesperson to expand Capriles' message. "What Maduro ended up presenting is much worse than the complaint we made. The president has dissolved democracy and the Republic" (Meza, 2017, May 2<sup>nd</sup>, own translation).

Although the TSJ withdrew its decision three days later, the ban on Capriles further intensified and radicalized the protest. The result from that, which is the third finding so far, was that especially the democratic erosion and the restriction of political freedoms created greater discomfort in the public and became a trigger for the protests. Therefore, after that, the protests started to get radicalized. A protester, Alexa Gutiérrez took off her bra and waved it around in the air. She said she was fed up with Venezuelan public hospitals being out of supply and costing the lives of women suffering from breast cancer. She justified her reason to participate in the protests as "We want elections now, to get out of this dictatorship. Maduro is scared because he knows that the town has been lost for a long time" (Scharfenberg, 2016, April 20<sup>th</sup>, own translation). Another protester who undressed and walked amid a rain of tear gas, ended up climbing into a military tank, shouting "Don't drop more bombs". Singer Jesus Alberto Miranda, "Chino", of the duo Chino y Nacho, sang the national anthem during the anti-government protest in Caracas, along with the mayor of Chacao, Ramón Muchacho (País, 2017, April 21<sup>st</sup>, own translation).

Tarrow claims that SMs have to be addressed to not just one segment but to the many, to be successfully heard. In other words, according to Tarrow, the participation of a single class is not sufficient for the success of mobilization. Therefore, mobilization should try to appeal to all of society rather than a single class (Tarrow, 2011). The protest population is therefore an important characteristic. The last finding is that the anger and the situation created by the TSJ's decision to dissolve the assembly also caused the situation to gain a different characteristic than other protests so far. Participation in the protest was much more diverse and from broad masses. Especially from the lower-class barrios, the opposition elites started to find participants for the protests. The former Minister of the Interior and Justice, Miguel Rodríguez Torres, admitted that unlike in 2014, when an opposition headed by the leader Leopoldo López, then imprisoned, called for the anticipated end of the Maduro government, the escalation of the conflict included popular sectors that did not participate in the demonstrations three years before (Meza, 2017, May 18th). This development can be interpreted as very unusual, as the popular sectors were generally known to support the Chavista movement. "Venezuela's social-based democracy has promoted ongoing political mobilization of popular sectors on a massive scale and for a duration unmatched in twentieth century ... involvement of large numbers of low-income Venezuelans over an extended period of time is without precedent in modern Venezuelan history and stands out as a major feat of the nation's social-based democracy" (Ellner, 2011). Workers with no social security, poor working conditions, and low wages in the informal sector constituted the most important mass base of Chávez (Ellner, 2004). Studies were also carried out in neighborhoods for the public to adopt and engage with Chavismo. For example, in the neighborhoods where the working class lived, the constitution committees were

set up for them to learn and own and internalize, and people were requested to stand up for their constitutions (Harris, 2007). Also, in addition to the lower-class barrios, the protests were attended by the upper classes and especially the health sector. Although the opposition alliance MUD, had only called for a march, it brought together medical and nursing professionals in Caracas and other cities in protest against the health crisis that plagued the country (Scharfenberg, 2017, May 23rd).

### 5.3 Venezuelan government reaction and discourse

After the assembly was dissolved by the TSJ, support for the TSJ came from the Maduro Family. Cilia Flores, the first lady of Venezuela and the official deputy claimed "The assembly, being in contempt, annulled itself and the vices, defeats and erratic behavior of the Venezuelan Parliament led it to that session of the OAS to end it, and finish destroying it. That is what this right is doing. The grass does not grow anymore on the ground where they stepped" (Castro, 2017, March 31<sup>st</sup>, own translation). The first change experienced by the Venezuelan government was the step back in their support for the decision of the TSJ, three days after supporting this decision with the first lady's statement and Maduro's statements in the first place. Maduro first supported the TSJ's decision with the aforementioned statements. Then, three days after that, he decided to step back and exhibited a much more moderate and softened stance.

Just in the day of TSJ's backtrack the return of the powers of assembly, Maduro, after three days of silence, has wanted to show himself as the mediator between the powers. Also, at the same time he tried to remove the stigma of the dictator that the tacit compliance with the sentences conferred on him (Meza, 2017, April 1st). Moreover, as a softening and maybe an attempt to calm the streets,

Maduro acknowledged that in 2018 there would be an election in Venezuela. Maybe due to the international condemnation of the self-coup promoted by the TSJ through two controversial sentences and the dire state of the economy, the regime was forced to not continue postponing the date of the governor's election and not delay the presidential election for December 2018 (Meza, 2017, April 8th). "I want elections now," President Maduro said on that Sunday on his television program. "I say it as president and as head of government," he added (Meza, 2017, April 25<sup>th</sup>, own translation). With this statement, Maduro met one of the opposition's basic demands, yet mobilization still did not calm down. The government wanted to portray the regime as pro-democracy by publicly accepting the holding of the elections in the eyes of the international media and neighboring countries, yet the pressure of the Maduro regime on the street was the exact opposite of this rhetoric. The police showed serious pressure to make the situation much more costly for anyone taking to the streets to protest. In addition, Maduro tried to deter the potential and moderate protesters with his speeches. Maduro consolidated his stance with the announcement on May 1st that he was convening a National Constituent Assembly that would serve as a forum for dialogue "to achieve the peace that the Republic needs." Although the current Constitution was dated 1999 and was drawn up under the watchful eye of Commander Hugo Chávez, already in power by then, it was understood that the call for a Constituent Assembly was intended, in the best case for Chavismo, to reconfigure the rules of the institutional game in his favor. Maduro told his followers on that Tuesday, "either Constituent or violence; or bullets or votes" (Scharfenberg, 2017, May 24<sup>th</sup>, own translation). In other words, Maduro supported the TSJ's decision in the first week that this decision was announced. When the TSJ reinstated the assembly's powers in the same week, he softly assumed the role of mediator of

international forces and protesters and said that a presidential election would be held in a year. All of these were too many and drastic changes for a week. This change of attitude by Maduro came about due to the possibility of a new protest wave coming and the situation being described as a coup in the international arena, and he started to receive criticism from many countries, especially from Latin America.

The first inference that can be made regarding the government's attitude is that Maduro, in particular, had different approaches toward the street and politics. Although he showed attention to the voice in the street by declaring that an election would be held, which was one of the most basic demands of the protest mass, he also suppressed the voice in the street harshly. Especially while Maduro heralded that there would be an election and perhaps wanted to soften the streets, the police forces also exerted serious pressure on the streets at the same time. With the announcement of elections, Maduro met one of the opposition's basic demands, yet mobilization still did not calm down. The government wanted to portray the regime as pro-democracy by publicly accepting the holding of the elections in the eyes of the international media and neighboring countries, yet the pressure of the Maduro regime on the street was the exact opposite of this rhetoric. The police showed serious pressure to make the situation much more costly for anyone taking to the streets to protest. In addition, Maduro tried to deter the potential and moderate protesters with his speech. This could be interpreted as different targets. While moderate rhetoric tried to deter the potential participants and moderate ones, the police, on the other hand, tried to make it more costly for those on the street. Therefore, the Venezuelan government was not far from hearing the demands of those on the street. At this point, this indicates that mobilization was an accepted way of conveying a demand for Maduro then. But on the other hand, while he was trying to fulfil the demands of the protestors, the police

violence on the street was at the highest level. Maduro used extensive police and military forces to suppress the protest. In other words, although the government seemed to lower the tension with its statements and deter potential protest participants, there was serious police violence on the street and the tension was increasing. Is this a contradiction? Perhaps not, because both of these seemingly contradictory stances have one common goal: to end the protest. Maduro always took a moderate stance in his speeches, perhaps in order to undertake a more moderate vision to gather support in both the domestic and international arenas. On the other hand, on the street, the police tried everything to never allow the protest to grow. The Bolivarian National Guard of Venezuela (GNB, military police) repressed hundreds of opposition protesters with tear gas, anti-riot tanks that blocked the road, and were dispersed with gasses (País, 2017, April 3rd). The Police fired tear gas to prevent the protesters from reaching the Ombudsman's Office. Heavy repression with tear gas and rubber bullets deterred some protesters, but others insisted on continuing to their destination. The National Guard threw many tear gas canisters. One of them set fire to the warehouse of a parcel company neighboring Capriles' office. The building had to be vacated. Capriles was in his office but was out of danger, like the rest of the team that accompanied him (Meza, 2017, April 9th).

The Venezuelan government's practices of violent suppression of the streets and its soft statements that seemed doomed to mediation can also be manifested by the intense censorship in the media. Especially since it is known that many media organizations are monopolized by the government, the Venezuelan government may have hoped that reports of police violence would not be heard much abroad. Despite this, Maduro's statements were displayed in a much more visible and accessible way, and it can be thought that they were trying to get support from many international

actors through those messages. The rain of eggs against Maduro took place in a public act at the first speech open to the public that he offered after the wave of protests. The act was being broadcast on the national radio and television network. The transmission was interrupted abruptly when, in an open plane, several bodyguards were seen climbing into the discovered vehicle that was transporting the president to try to stop or deflect the projectiles (Scharfenberg, 2017, April 12th). Moreover, during a march held by the opposition, various attacks against the media were reported. Bolivarian Police officials tried to strip photographer Rodolfo Churión, who was covering the riots in Las Mercedes, Caracas, of his equipment. In the La Candelaria parish, alleged members of collectives threatened and robbed workers of the Venezuelan websites Caraota Digital and Efecto Cocuyo (Scharfenberg, 2017, May 11th).

One of the most important responses by the Venezuelan government in the 2017 wave of protests was to have a holistic approach to suppress the protests. What is meant by this concept is that, unlike previous cycles, the government used the police and army forces together and systematically on the streets, which is called the “Zamero” plan. The president ordered the military to take to the streets on the eve of the opposition march: This was “a day, in defense of morality, honor, commitment, civic-military union, commitment to the homeland, in repudiation of treason against the homeland and traitors to the homeland.” Defense Minister, Vladimir Padrino López claimed “The Bolivarian National Armed Forces (FANB) preserves its monolithic, granite unity, and ratifies its unconditional loyalty to the president.” (Manetto, 2017, April 18th, own translation). Maduro appeared that Sunday night surrounded by his ministers at the Miraflores Palace, headquarters of the Presidency of the Republic. He did so to announce that two days before Wednesday's protest, to

which Chavismo would respond with a parallel mobilization, the Army was going to take to the streets. The same day, Maduro announced that he wanted to arm one million civilians as members of the Bolivarian National Militia, a support body for the armed forces that already had hundreds of thousands of troops to defend the peace, sovereignty, and independence of the homeland. He also assured that there would be "a rifle for each militiaman". The president also ordered FANB to march as a sign of rejection of those he described as "traitors to the homeland" (Manetto, 2017, April 18th, own translation).

The Zamero plan was announced on April 19th during Mother of all Marches, just 20 days after the TSJ's announcement about taking the powers of the AN, which caused a massive wave of protests. The president announced the activation of an operation called the Zamora plan, which consisted of mobilizing the military, police, and civilian structures "to guarantee the operation" of the country. Maduro affirmed that the president of the Venezuelan Assembly, the opposition Julio Borges, had to be prosecuted. "What Borges has done today constitutes a crime against the Constitution and must be prosecuted that way. He openly called for a coup d'état to the officials of the Armed Forces". Borges, earlier that day, had asked the military to act conscientiously during the mobilizations, stating that the chain of command did not relieve these officials of their responsibility (Manetto & Scharfenberg, 2017, April 19th, own translation). Defense Minister Vladimir Padrino López announced that 2000 guards and 600 soldiers from special operations would be transferred to San Cristóbal, where since that Monday, three people had died in riots, and he would implement the second phase of the Zamora Plan, a collaboration between civilians and the military, which involved the participation of the Army and the Militia Bolivarian National (composed of civilians) in the maintenance of public order. The

Government declared that 20 businesses were looted, two police facilities and a military detachment attacked with firebombs just after Nicolás Maduro ordered the militarization of the State of Táchira. A lieutenant colonel in the National Guard was wounded in the face after that attack (Meza, 2017, May 18th).

The result of the militaristic tendencies increasing by the Maduro government in 2017 can also be explained by Davenport's arguments on this issue. Accordingly, military authoritarian regimes are more inclined to release coercive actions, yet there is more violence in terms of torture and mass killing (Davenport, 2007). Regimes which are supported by the existence of the armed forces are prone to exercise repressive methods that are mainly directly within their area of specialization which is physical violence. Shared economic and political interests between Maduro and the military bolster the regime. FANB is an essential party for the Bolivarian regime to survive. There is a symbiotic relationship between the regime and military. Under President Chávez, active-duty and retired military officers assumed political and bureaucratic positions, occupying up to a third of cabinet portfolios, with the FANB becoming one of the principal facilitators of government programs and policy, clearly moving from a restricted domestic role to an active one. By 2016, it was known that at least 200 military officers were in very high positions and that special promotions were provided for these soldiers. Established especially in the footsteps of Simon Bolivar, FANB has always maintained warm relations with the Bolivarian regime afterwards (Fonseca et al. 2016). As Stronen argues (2016, p.7) “Concurrently, the Armed Forces were also attributed a more politicized role as the custodians of national sovereignty vis-à-vis foreign meddling in the country. Chávez died in April 2013, but the doctrine of a civil-military alliance has been kept alive.”

This holistic approach taken by the Venezuelan government this time was supported by the police and army, as well as the anti-riot group *collectivos*. The Church and the opposition attributed four deaths to the protests. According to witnesses, in both cases, there was the presence of armed base groups of the ruling party, commonly called *collectivos*, who acted in collusion with members of the National Guard (GNB, militarized police) to reduce the protesters. The governor of the state of Lara, Henri Falcón, of the opposition, denounced during a press conference that Wednesday the presence of 80 motorized vehicles by firing indiscriminately at people. Cardinal Jorge Urosa Savino, the Archbishop of Caracas, lashed out at the presence of "armed groups that acted with alleged impunity (...). These gangs are illegal and commit crimes and the Government cannot continue to protect them". Hours later, after the homily he gave in the Church of Santa Teresa, in the heart of Caracas, he was the victim of an attempted attack by alleged members of the groups (Scharfenberg, 2017, April 13<sup>th</sup>, own translation).

The so-called collectives or armed base groups of Chavismo actively participated in the efforts to control the disturbances. Members of those groups were the ones who allegedly tried to attack the Archbishop of Caracas, Jorge Urosa Savino, on that Wednesday and painted graffiti against the Church (Scharfenberg, 2017, April 14<sup>th</sup>). A new attempt by the opposition protesters to march to a state institution, in this case, the headquarters of the TSJ, resulted in serious disturbances in several areas of Caracas on that Wednesday afternoon and at least one death. Anti-riot squads repressed the march and later dissolved it with tear gas and projectiles. In the La Candelaria parish in Caracas, the protesters denounced the reports that Chavismo shock groups, known as *collectivos*, came forward and intimidated those protesting by firing firearms (Scharfenberg, 2017, May 11<sup>th</sup>). All of these examples

show that the Venezuelan government used its base, i.e., the *collectivos*, police forces, and military force, at the same time to suppress the protesters. All of this was a very comprehensive and holistic approach. It is possible to interpret this as a lesson that Maduro learned from the 2014 protest cycle. Maduro, who was not remarkably successful in suppressing that protest wave immediately, may have tried such a new way by building on his previous experiences with a more holistic approach this time. During the two months that this thesis examined, 55 deaths, 134 injuries, and 481 detentions were reported. Table 2 indicates that, the number of mortal cases reached its peak in the week of April 24th–31st. The number of deaths peaked that week, with 17 deaths recorded in one week.

Table 2. Reported Number of Deaths, Injuries and Detainees in 2017 Protest Cycle Code Book (Appendix)

Week	Deaths	Injuries	Detainees
Week 1 30 March-7 April	1	1	No data
Week 2 8-15 April	5	18	169
Week 3 16-23 April	3	62	312
Week 4 24-31 April	17	7	No data
Week 5 1-7 May	8	45	No data
Week 6 8-15 May	5	1	No data
Week 7 16-23 May	5	No data	No data
Week 8 24-30 May	11	No data	No data
TOTAL	55 deaths	134 injuries	481 detainees

The most important reason for this was the government's announcement of Venezuela's withdrawal from the OAS that week on April 27th. The Foreign Minister of Venezuela, Delcy Rodríguez, announced that Wednesday that the

country would withdraw from the organization, the most important in the region. The decision was made minutes after the member countries approved the convening of a meeting of foreign ministers to address the crisis that the country is going through. Venezuela invoked the catchphrase of meddling in its internal affairs to justify its decision and singled out Mexico as the battering ram in a process that sought to "protect" its country. The Venezuelan Foreign Minister said that "fortunately, that will never happen, because that is how it is marked in our history, our present and future". Rodríguez appeared in Caracas a few minutes after 19 member countries of the 34 of the OAS approved by vote the convocation of the meeting to address the Venezuelan crisis. Samuel Moncada, the representative of Venezuela to the OAS, affirmed in the session prior to the vote that the OAS was the cause of the disturbances in the country (Meza, 2017, April 27th, own translation). Aware that the OAS was going to make a decision against the Venezuelan government, Maduro announced this decision in order to prevent this, at least to be exempt from any decision made by the OAS.

Here, the Maduro government saw a clear opportunity on the part of the OAS, which was at risk of making a decision against the Venezuelan government. Perhaps Maduro saw this more easily this time, as he clashed with the OAS in the 2014 protests as well. Here, the government played its cards faster and withdrew from the institution without allowing the OAS to impose any sanctions and did not allow the opposition to use this opportunity that was open to them to act. The threats and opportunities that caused the actors in the mobility to respond were created by governments or large-scale institutions. At the point of the protests, these opportunities constituted both their causes and their consequences. One outcome may

have set the stage for another protest, so a more circular rather than linear view should be developed.

When it comes to the actors of the protest, one can think of not only individuals but also companies and even some states. In this arena, protesters use their resources and skills to seize opportunities that arise. In order to become the winner of this arena, a player may attempt to gather information about other groups in advance, to place spies, or to turn the other party's error in their favor (Jasper & Goodwin, 2001). At this point, the Maduro government acted primarily in order to not strengthen the hand of the opposition elites, who at least had the support of international actors, and played a strategic card with the decision to leave the OAS. Whether this would be to the benefit or to the detriment of the country requires long-term observation. With this decision, the Venezuelan government tried to reduce the tension against them to a certain extent.

Although Maduro took a holistic approach to suppress the protests, he failed to do so, as it is known that the protests lasted until the end of 2017. Despite Maduro's oppressive and strong approach, there may have been many reasons why he could not achieve his goal. The most plausible of these can be seen as the language of polarization he used and his alienation from democratic approaches. As it was determined before, the democratic erosion had an increasing effect on the mobilization for Venezuela. Although Maduro promised an election in this protest cycle, some of his rhetoric, and especially his movements, did not support them, and in this case, it was not enough to get the already strong-handed protesters off the streets. The Interior Minister, Néstor Reverol, held the opposition responsible for the damage and has said that those responsible had already been identified (Meza, 2017, April 9th). With that attitude, the Venezuelan government immediately declared that

the opposition and the people supporting them were responsible for what was happening in the country. More than 30 alleged "violent terrorists" were arrested, said Maduro. Maduro blamed the USA and the OAS for the violence on the streets of Venezuela. (País, 2017, April 21st, own translation). With this statement, the government gave mixed signals, as there was no definitive explanation as to whether the opposition parties, the USA, or the OAS were responsible for the incidents. Maduro insisted that he would take "firm steps" to "regain peace" and threatened the opposition deputies by taking them to jail, and that Sunday, the president once again invited the opposition to resume a dialogue process that had been frozen since the previous year (Agencias, 2017, April 25th, own translation). Explanations like these were extremely confusing. The possibility of a dialogue meeting was almost gone, as Maduro both invited the opposition elites to the interrupted dialogue and threatened to imprison them in the same speech. Protest was seen as the only way out for the opposition and many people who made the decision to take to the streets, as Maduro threatened opposition leaders with imprisonment, and there were examples of him making this threat a reality with López. The thought that it was not possible to achieve anything by democratic means caused the tension in the streets to continue for months.

## CHAPTER 6

### 2014 vs. 2017

In this chapter, the changes and continuities between the Venezuelan government's stance of repression and opposition elites' approach to the protest will be compared regarding the 2014 and 2017 protest cycles in Venezuela. The changing and continuing patterns will be identified to better understand the learning process of both sides of the protest cycle. From 2014 to 2017, although the protester identities, personalities, and actors changed, some patterns persisted. Against this, although the leaders of the opposition and government remained stable, it was seen that they preferred to abandon some approaches and replace them with new ones. These changes and continuities also allowed the opportunity to monitor the Venezuelan government and opposition elites' evolution of the approach to the protests over time.

#### 6.1 Approach of opposition elites to the protest

The significant difference between 2014 and 2017 protests was that in 2017, for the first time in years, the opposition seemed to have managed to unite around a single leader. In 2014, there were cracks due to the fragmented structure within the opposition. López and Capriles differed many times over the course and management of the protests (Scharfenberg, 2014, February 13th). However, when it came to 2017, the opposition was a more united structure due to both López's imprisonment and Capriles' attitude to support more active mobilization by moving a little further from the moderate line. In 2017, Capriles managed to take responsibility for the leadership of the protest. He led the way throughout the cycle and continuously maintained the

mobilization up in the streets (Palomino, 2017, March 31st). Therefore, compared to 2014, the 2017 protest cycle had a single leader to gather around. No leadership crisis or divergence happened, which triggered an easier mobilization for a wider base.

Here, it would be useful to devote a separate paragraph to Capriles' development and approach to the protests from 2014 to 2017. In 2014, it was known that the MUD was more fragmented and in conflict. During this period, while López more actively increased the violence of protest and calls to take to the streets, Capriles made calls for calm and dialogue by separating himself from the more conservative line (Scharfenberg, 2014, February 13th). However, when it came to 2017, Capriles, who took the lead of the opposition this time, took a line close to the approach taken by López before, and encouraged active mobilization and called the people to the streets (Meza, 2017, April 9th). The same person and the same country, but what could be the reason for this different approach? Was it a contradiction in itself?

As a result of the framework of this thesis and the observed data, this was not perceived as a contradiction. When we look at 2014, Capriles, who had a more abstaining attitude, may have had a more active and protest attitude in 2017. Here again, we come to the conclusion that the actors and institutions should be treated from an agency perspective that go through their learning and observation practises rather than being a static line. In 2014, Capriles chose to remain calm at a more abstaining point. In 2014, perhaps, he believed that the opposition could achieve its goals through dialogue. But after his colleague, López, was taken into custody, Capriles may have come to believe he would not get to the targeted point, with dialogue. At the same time, as the authoritarianism in the government increased,

consequent increase in the radicalization on the street, could be also a valid argument for Capriles as well. López's incarceration may have triggered Capriles, and he may have thought that he could find a way out with louder and more active mobilization against the authoritarian stance rather than dialog. Even though the positive correlation between the increase in governmental authoritarianism and the tendency of the people to take to the streets will be discussed in detail in the following paragraphs, it could be also valid for Capriles' learning process, which brought him from a moderate to a more radical line. Here, in addition to the lesson Capriles learned, it is impossible not to mention the political calculations he probably made. He might have realized that he would be irrelevant if he did not take an active position, and López's incarceration gave him the opportunity to do so. With this decision, it was only natural that Capriles took on the responsibility of the leadership of the opposition group, while calculating his chances of political re-election and raising his popularity.

One of the other significant changes was the protesting group profile. The group protesting at the 2014 protests was mostly university students. They demanded the release of their detained friends. In the following days, with the participation of the opposition, the protests turned into dissatisfaction with the government and demanding Maduro's resignation. Although the opposition tried to involve every segment of society in the protest, it could not be said to have been very successful. The protesters remained as opposition elites and civilians, and mostly students. However, in 2017, it can be stated that there was a variety of classes, including the poor barrios and health sector workers. The participation of people from different groups and economic income groups in the 2017 protests resulted in the protests having wider participation in 2017 when compared to 2014 in terms of volume.

At the same time, the protest repertoire may have been effective in the participation. In Venezuela, the opposition was actually on the streets with marches for a long time and regularly organised protests. The protesters' demand and framing evolved from the release of the detained youth to Maduro's resignation in 2014. While these demonstrations were initially protesting against the detentions and economic problems, after a while, they started to gain an anti-government and anti-Maduro character. However, the opposition's street demonstrations had so far failed, and the government suppressed them. An argument to support this comes from Gurr (2015). According to him, people's economic worries trigger grievances and create a serious deprivation. This causes people to tend to conflict and protest, especially in countries more prone to poverty. Also, as already mentioned, the economic wellbeing of the states can have a diminishing factor on the probability of state repression because "governments with more developed economies might diminish the likelihood of political challenges from below, thus reducing the need to use reactive repressive action. On the other hand, governments with more developed economies might have greater resources for co-opting and accommodating challengers or making sure that they have the most developed mechanisms for surveillance as well as counteractivity. This reduces the need for coercion as well" (Davenport & Inman, 2012, p.621). Considering that the economic situation deteriorated gradually from 2014 to 2017 as a result of the rising inflation, this can be expected to increase the probability of mobilization occurring. The causal connection behind the argument is that there is an expectation that the dissatisfaction will grow due to the economic deterioration and therefore this would trigger unrest and mobilization as a consequence. Therefore, considering the diminishing economic performance of Venezuela from 2014 to 2017, it should be expected that the

grievances, and therefore the protesting mass volume, would increase. However, in 2017, protests were held in the slums in the western part of the capital Caracas, where the government received the highest votes, in recent days. In the 2015 Venezuelan Parliamentary election, the MUD won 56% of the votes, while the PSUV won 37%. The PSUV won districts Apure, Cojedes, Yaracuy, and Portuguesa, which were located in the western side of the country (Consejo Nacional Electoral, 2016). In 2017, the people took to the streets for more political reasons, such as the dissolution of the assembly and the constitutional amendment. In particular, not only a certain group but also many different groups from the public opposed the change that limited the rights of the legislature. Aside from political reasons, of course, the masses participated in the protest, especially from the nursing and health sectors, due to socio-economic problems, such as increasing inflation, and food and medicine shortages, in the country (Scharfenberg, 2017, May 23rd). In other words, although there were reasons, such as economic instability, and food and medicine shortages, in the protests in both 2014 and 2017, the protest in 2014 started around the student movement and grew with the support of the opposition elites, while the 2017 protests were started by the opposition elites and developed for political reasons, in addition to economic problems and managed to reach a wider segment of the population.

When compared in terms of popular participation, it can be stated that in 2017, there was a wider profile of participants in the protest cycle when compared to 2014. In the 2014 protest, the participant profiles mostly consisted of students and opposition elites. However, in 2017, in addition to students and opposition elites, a wider base of population was activated, including health sector workers. Reaching a wider base could be perceived as an important characteristic for mobilizations.

Tarrow (2011) believes that since the leaders realized the working class would never

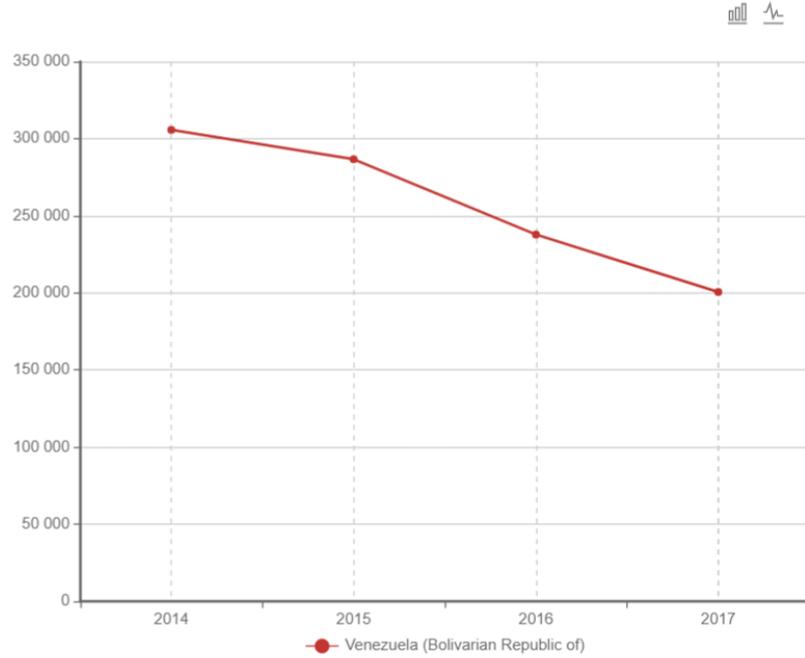
be large enough to seize power, they had to appeal to the masses. The SMs also had to be directed to not just one sector, but to the many in order to be heard. This argument is also valid for Venezuela. Although López made great efforts to reach people from all segments in the 2014 protests, unfortunately, he was not very successful at this. On the other hand, during the 2017 protests, where he was in prison, Capriles was able to reach a much wider base of protesters, including nurses and doctors. In this, it can be seen that the protests of 2017 resonated in many segments of the public, with more people joining every day and for broader reasons, such as constitutional change, inflation, and drug shortages.

Here, it is also important to discuss the opportunities offered by the economic crisis in framing the protest in a way that appealed to a larger segment of the society. From 2014 to 2017, according to figure 4, total annual gross domestic product (GDP) diminished from 305,698 to 200,557 million dollars (Cepal.org, 2021). Moreover, according to figure 5, the annual growth rate of the consumer prices index core inflation from December to December increased from 51.8% to 792% (Cepal.org, 2022). The data clearly shows that the economic situation in Venezuela deteriorated significantly from 2014 to 2017.

Economic / Real sector / National accounts / Annual / In dollars

**Total Annual Gross Domestic Product (GDP) at constant prices in dollars**

(Millions of dollars)



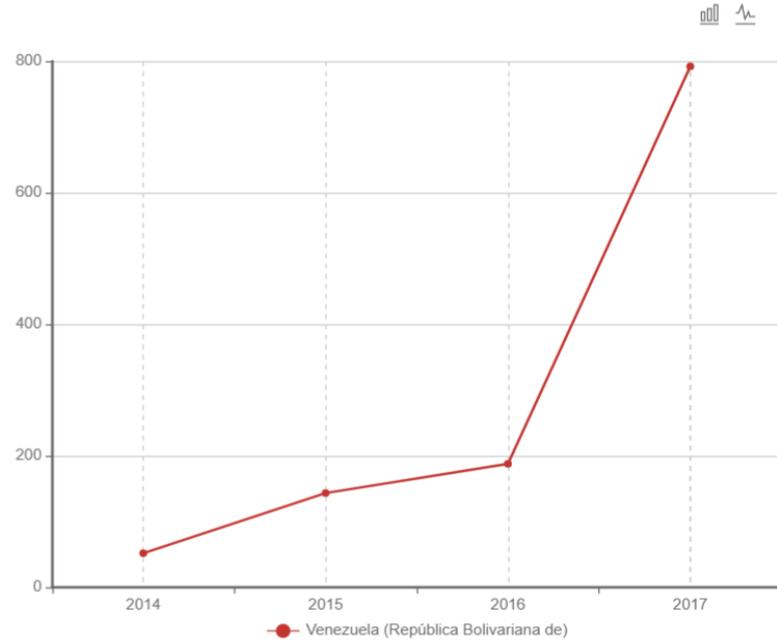
Source: CEPALSTAT - ECLAC - UNITED NATIONS

Figure 4. Total annual gross domestic product (GDP) at constant prices in dollars (cepal.org. 2021)

Economic / Real sector / Domestic prices / Price indices / Consumer / Annual

**Annual growth rate of the consumer prices index core inflation: december to december**

(Percent)



Source: CEPALSTAT - ECLAC - UNITED NATIONS

Figure 5. Annual growth rate of the consumer prices index core inflation: december to december (cepal.org. 2022)

Economic deterioration triggered Capriles' hand to be stronger in 2017 than in 2014 to hold the government accountable for the current situation. Perhaps this deteriorating economic situation created an opportunity for the opposition to voice their rhetoric more loudly. This diminishing economic performance created an opportunity for the opposition elites to proactively lead and gather support for the mobilization from a wider base. While getting support from a wider base due to the economic unrest created an opportunity for the opposition elites to act accordingly, also it created an avenue for Capriles to lead the mobilization and gain significant popularity in the eyes of the public. Therefore from 2014 to 2017, generated opportunities including economic indicators, strengthen the hands of opposition to be bold and raise their voice loudly. Therefore, it can be argued that economic deterioration created leverage for the opposition elites to put pressure on the Maduro government.

The direct proportional relationship between the increase in democratic erosion and the increase in the radicalization of the protester base, which is one of the most powerful and valid arguments used to make sense of the movements of the protester mass, continued in both the 2014 and 2017 cycles. The increase in democratic erosion should be perceived as the explanation of increase in protest radicalization. That is to say that the protesting front indicated signals of radicalization in their protesting practices whenever democratic institutions and values were undermined. This does not mean that there was no permanent damage to the institutions and democracy in Venezuela. This is true in the long run. However, the tension increased in the streets at the points where President Maduro corroded the democratic institutions even more with some of his speeches, rhetoric, and

suppression practices. After the speeches and actions in which he called for conciliation and peace, there was calmness in the streets.

That argument helps us to understand the motive behind the reasons for protester behaviors. This argument helps to explain why in some periods, participation in the protest cycle and the radicalization of protester behavior increase. In both 2014 and 2017, statements were made that would push the protesters toward radicalism. As a result, the tension in the streets increased even more. When the government switched to discourses and concrete steps that were prioritising the dialogue, then the mobilization lost its power.

In the protests in 2014, statements that raised the pulse on the streets were made. Foreign Minister Elías Jaua accused Leopoldo López of being the intellectual responsible for the deaths (Meza, 2014, February 13th). Along with these, protest participation and radicalization increased. Until the second week, when the protests reached their peak, there were many statements that could be interpreted as a departure from democratic values. Minister of the Interior and Justice, Torres, stated on Wednesday that due to the protests, the citizens would be subjected to a virtual curfew. In response, the Government decided to suspend the carrying of weapons, station the Army at all access routes to that population and send reinforcements from the Bolivarian National Guard. Moreover, Maduro threatened to impose a special state of exception in the city if they did not regain control as a result of these decisions (Meza, 2014, February 20th). Statements that the establishment of a state of exception in this way would be determined by whether the people gave control back to the Venezuelan government and diverted the base of protesters from giving up on the streets. President Maduro also ordered the Minister of Communication and Information, Delcy Rodríguez, to initiate the administrative process to remove the

signal of CNN from the air (Scharfenberg, 2014, February 21st). This decision by the President can also be interpreted as an attempt to control the freedom of the press, which is one of the most important aspects of democracy. Decisions on censorship in the media also mean the erosion of democratic institutions. Additionally, on the first day of the protests, the president of the AN (AN), Diosdado Cabello, for the MUD, claimed that "The people are too big for them, they will never govern this country. What do they think?" (Meza, 2014, February 13th, own translation). Following these statements, the streets got even more heated, and the Palace of Justice in Caracas was attacked and overrun by protesters (Meza, 2014, February 19th). According to the data collected, 19 deaths, 373 injuries, more than 539 detentions, and torture in 18 detentions were recorded in the two weeks before Maduro made his call for the peace conference (Meza, 2014, February 24).

Parallel to this, in 2017, moving away from democratic values and every statement and action in this direction angered the protest front in Venezuela and encouraged more people to take to the streets. Especially during the weeks, when Maduro threatened to take the MUD deputies to jail (Agencias, 2017, April 25th), the protests became radicalized as the result of naked demonstrations and protesters climbing onto tanks (Scharfenberg, 2016, April 20th; País, 2017, April 21st). Moreover, during these weeks, as in 2014, the highest number of deaths and detentions were recorded in parallel with the stronger reaction of the police to radicalization. A total of 26 deaths, 88 injuries, and 481 detentions reported. So, while the undemocratic rhetoric and threats created radicalization among the protesters, radical protesters also created a more repressive police force, which was manifested in the numbers of deaths and detentions. Accordingly, it is understood for the Venezuelan context that the triggering factor for the people to take to the streets

here was the anti-democratic discourse and behaviors shaped by the attitudes of the government officials. Every move away from democracy and every approach toward authoritarianism had an increasing effect on the street mobilization in Venezuela. Finally, that meant that state repression does not cause the protest to demobilize, contrary, it triggered the street mobilization in 2014 and 2017 protest cycles.

## 6.2 Venezuelan government reaction and discourse

One of the most important continuing features of the 2014 and 2017 protests is that the Venezuelan government chose to suppress the protests. The first characteristic to note is that the government did not hesitate to use the police force in the face of the protests. Whatever the reasons for the mobilization and whoever the lead ones were, the Maduro government did not leave the protests alone and preferred to suppress them violently. During the two-month observed protest period in 2014, the most applied protest policing methods were tear gas, armored vehicles, human obstacles, tanks, property breaking down, beatings with helmets, sexual abuse and threats under detention, and consecutive cordons, forcing to flee naked. In 2017, however, these suppression practices continued unabated. According to the data reported that year, methods including tear gas, anti-riot tanks, rubber bullets, pellet rounds, firearms to disperse the protests, Molotov cocktails, projectiles, snipers, beating with helmets, and rifle butt were used. It can be understood that while the news about torture and abuse allegations in custody decreased in 2017, the methods of violence applied on the streets, increased. In 2014, unlike in 2017, human barriers and cords were used. For this reason, it can be seen that in 2014, physical human power was more prominent. However, in 2017, methods that required more military equipment, such

as rubber bullets, pellet rounds, firearms, Molotov cocktails, projectiles, snipers, and rifle butts were used, which were not reported in 2014.

There was also continuity in terms of Maduro's decision to mobilize his own base. Against these groups and demands, the government did not choose less police violence while shaping its repression practices but developed an additional tactic toward the existing violence. The government mobilized the pro-Maduro base and called them out to the streets to march against the opposition group. These tactics not only gave Maduro legitimacy, but also helped him solidify his image in the eyes of the public and the international arena. In 2014, the *colectivos* were on the scene to support the regime (Scharfenberg, 2014, March 13th). However, in 2017, they also actively participated in the protest as an anti-riot group together with the police force, and they tried to suppress the protesting opposition front (Scharfenberg, 2017, April 14th). The position of the *colectivos* should not be underestimated. Whenever Maduro and the Bolivarian regime faced a wave of protesters, these groups staunchly sought to protect it and maintain the current status quo. Regardless of the subject and the reason for the protest, these groups took to the streets and expressed their views as an alternative grassroots base against the rioting people. This also contributed to the legitimate image of the Venezuelan government because they showed the international press and many curious eyes from outside that the rioters should not be interpreted as the entire population of Venezuelan people. It is indicated that there were also supporters of the Bolivarian regime which are still too large to be underestimated.

One of the most important changes that took place in the repression practices of the Venezuelan government was that there was an enlarged and diversified suppression group in 2017. In 2017, Maduro resisted mobilization with a more

complex and holistic approach than in 2014. Maduro received support from the army forces in addition to the police in order to suppress the protests in 2014 (Meza, 2014, February 20th). Even still, this approach was shallower than in 2017. However, when 2017 came, Maduro used his police, military, and *colectivos* forces in a collective and more holistic way. He brought them all together under the name of the Zamora plan (Manetto & Scharfenberg, 2017, April 19th). Accordingly, police, military, and civilian supporters came together to implement the future of the country. What is meant by this is the total suppression of any mobilization that threatened the Maduro government. According to this, it meant the re-implementation of public order against looting, attacks, and all kinds of dangers during the protests by coming together with the civilian population, the military, and the police force. Violence also increased with this holistic approach and yielded some consequences. According to data scanned from newspaper reports in 2014, there were around 2000 detentions. In 2017, this number was 481. Unfortunately, this dramatic decline was not seen in the number of deaths. While 40 deaths were reported in the newspaper in 2014, this number was recorded as 55 in 2017. While the Maduro government applied a suppression method focused on police violence in the 2014 protests, in 2017, Maduro generated a more holistic approach toward protest policing. Fewer detentions in 2017 than in 2014 protests, however, did not necessarily mean that the repression had decreased. The increasing number of deaths was an indication that the state did not hesitate to use police violence.

For this reason, the fact that the number of police brutality incidents and detentions was higher in 2014 than in 2017 coincided with this argument. For the relevant period in 2014, international organizations also prepared reports regarding the abuse and torture of the Venezuelan police in their custody (Meza, 2014,

February 24th). It is clear from this that Maduro took a much more complicated approach to the police force, which was incapable of suppressing the 2014 protests. So, it was thought that a more holistic approach, using the police force, military, and pro regime civilians together, building on its experience in 2014, would bring success in the suppression practices. This argument shows that governments and institutions, which are not mechanical but dynamic and evolving structures, can also behave differently, drawing on lessons from each of their experiences. In other words, it is necessary to approach politics and institutions from an actor centered approach that will not give the same results and reactions under all circumstances, and it should not be ignored that they also have learning practices. However, the learning practices cannot be the sole element to explain this change. The change in the attitude of Maduro was the result of seizing the opportunities. Opportunity structures are also dynamic and when compared to 2014, in 2017, Maduro was more prepared for the upcoming protest cycle. Therefore, he was able to repress it with more police, armament, and soldier capacity. In doing so, he had the opportunity to use all of these resources together. Unlike before, Maduro learned that street protests cannot be suppressed with the police force alone. Combining this with the opportunities he had, he decided to activate his military power as well. In this way, he succeeded in putting serious pressure on the mobilization in a more comprehensive way.

One of the continuities around the cycle is the fact that international institutions, and especially Latin American neighbors, held the Maduro government responsible for those killed and injured by police violence and called for negotiations with the opposition both in 2014 and 2017. Many international actors, pioneers of the USA, did not hesitate to show their clear support for the opposition group. Caracas in

both cycles had Bolivia and Cuba by its side while the USA, Colombia, Spain, and Brazil condemned the violence and sided with opposition elites (Ballesteros, 2015, February 27th). Along with the protest cycle from 2014 to 2017, the OAS had a strategic position to determine the fate of Venezuela. In 2014, OAS members wanted to openly discuss the situation in Venezuela, which was not a very favorable attempt for the Venezuelan government (Saiz, 2014, March 1st). When it came to 2017, the OAS decision to address the crisis in Venezuela was the end for the Maduro government's connection with the entire organization (Meza, 2017, April 27th). Throughout this thesis, the tension of the Venezuelan government's relations with the OAS over the years was also observed. Therefore, relations were severed in the eyes of the government as the OAS openly supported the anti-government protests. However, knowing the attitude of the OAS in 2014 and learning from the past, the Maduro government did not let the OAS act against the Venezuelan government in 2017 and announced Venezuela's withdrawal from the organization. This attitude could be explained with both actors learning practices and also evaluating the open opportunities. Maduro acted fast to announce the withdrawal so as to hinder the OAS from acting against the Venezuelan government. He saw open opportunities against him and therefore stopped any possibility of the OAS acting immediately, so as to not put his government in a disadvantageous position in the international arena. Regarding Venezuela, especially during the 2014 protests, external actors Pope Francis, Colombia, and the USA made statements against Maduro. On the other hand, the UNASUR sided with Maduro (Primera, 2014, February 14th). Parallely, in 2017, the Pope again made a call for negotiations between Maduro and the protestors, which was a continuity (Meza, 2017, May 1st). That is, international actors, the position of the Pope, the OAS, UNASUR, and most Latin American

countries maintained their attitude in 2017, with whichever side they sided with in 2014. Therefore, it is possible to conclude that the existing close relations and mutual interests determined the side to be supported. Changes in conditions or time, cannot easily change ideas. International actors do not hesitate to show support in order to maintain their own interests and the side with which they have close relations.

Last but not least, the Venezuelan government throughout the protest cycles kept using the concept of peace. During the 2014 protest cycle, Maduro claimed "Venezuela needs peace and dialogue to move forward. We welcome anyone who sincerely wants to help us achieve that goal" (Saiz, 2014, April 2nd). The president also acted and called for a National Peace Conference (Scharfenberg, 2014, February 24th). This pattern continued in 2017 as well. However, the calls for peace here contradicted the extreme militarist tendencies, especially provided by the Zamora plan. Maduro reiterated this call for peace in his speech, in which he declared that he wanted to arm a million civilians during a military event organized on the occasion of the seventh anniversary of the national militia day (Manetto, 2017, April 18th). Maduro demanded that he take firm strides to recapture peace and intimidated the opposition appointees by threatening to put them in prison in the speech where the president also asked the MUD to reconcile the communication. In this cycle, whenever the president called for peace, he at the same time, also intimidated the protesting front (Agencias, 2017, April 25th).

## CHAPTER 7

### CONCLUSION

In this thesis, it was aimed to examine the role of political opportunities in SMs through the example of the 2014 and 2017 Venezuelan protests. In the examinations and evaluations, how the 2014 and 2017 protest cycles emerged, and how the government repression and opposition elites' discourse and repertoire of the movement aligned with each other were examined. In this process, the government's response to the protests and the strategy of the opposition elites were discussed comparatively, and the situation was examined through an analysis of the protest cycle development from 2014 to 2017. The changes and continuities observed were explained through the concept of political opportunity. While explaining the changes and continuity, the thesis treated the actors as dynamic organizations. For this reason, throughout the thesis, in addition to the theory of political opportunity, these changes and continuities were also explained with the concept of learning practices, considering that the actors have a tendency to learn from the past in accordance with their agency driven identity. Therefore, not only political opportunities but also learning practices were integrated into this concept and a more realistic conceptual framework was drawn.

The thesis tried to answer the following questions: What approach did the opposition elites and government representatives pursue during the 2014 and 2017 Venezuelan protests? How did the opposition's protest strategy develop and how did the government's repression practices take shape accordingly? What continuity and changes were observed in the approaches of the two sides between 2014 and 2017? By using systematic newspaper scanning, it was attempted to determine the

government opposition reactions, discourse to the protest, and how each party evaluated the changing structures.

The main argument reached as a result of the research was as follows: The approaches of the actors in the protest were also shaped according to the changing political opportunities. Each actor wanted to make the best use of the opportunities they caught in line with their own purpose, for their own benefit. Some behavior patterns were maintained, while others were abandoned. Here, while making the continuation and abandonment decisions, the actors looked at the results they got from the opportunities they evaluated. If the result was successful in reaching the goal and served the interest of the actor, continuity was observed, if it did not help in reaching the expected goal, abandonment was observed. Since the opportunities were dynamic, the behaviors of the actors also changed according to the decisions and positions taken by each other. Since the approach of one actor changed and took shape according to the approach of the other actor, this thesis examined both sides of the protests together. While doing this, the dynamism of the political opportunities as well as the dynamic structures of the actors were taken into consideration. Until now, approaches to political opportunity have always treated actors more mechanically. However, this approach pushes students of contention studies into a vulgar understanding that expects actors to behave the same under all circumstances. On the other hand, within the framework of this thesis, while the behavior of the actors was explained within the framework of political opportunity theory, the mechanistic approach that expects them to behave the same in all conditions was derived. Instead, the theory of political opportunity and the reality of learning lessons in accordance with the dynamic agency structures of the actors were added. With this approach, it was aimed to develop a more realistic approach while explaining the behaviors of the

protest actors. In addition to this main argument, many important sub-arguments were obtained in terms of political science and protest literature in line with the empirical material obtained throughout the thesis. These arguments will be summarized in the following paragraphs and important milestones will be formed regarding Venezuela's protest approach.

When we first looked at the analysis of the empirical material for 2014, it was seen that this street protest cycle was shaped by the protest strategy of the opposition. This cycle, which started especially with university students, grew with the participation of the opposition and the demands were shaped accordingly. At this point, the existence of a group that already took to the streets due to the current dissatisfaction was an opportunity for them, and the opposition took advantage of the political opportunity by transforming this demand according to their own agenda.

The second important argument is that there was a difference of opinion on the opposition front until the later unification of this fragmented structure. Here, it was seen that the actors with two different perspectives tended to make the best use of the opportunities available to them. López and Machado may have been concerned about re-election by increasing their popularity by playing the leadership of the current mobilization. On the other hand, Capriles may have acted in favour of solving the problem with democracy, perhaps both by creating an antithesis to the authoritarian regime, and by being afraid of what the current regime might do to him and acted with an instinct of self-preservation. Although both sides positioned themselves within the framework of the concept of political opportunity, with the imprisonment of López, Capriles also shifted from the moderate line to the radical line. With this shift, the opposition united in a radical line and coalesced in the street protests.

The profile of the protesters that the opposition elite could mobilise takes its place as the third argument. There are arguments in the literature that for protests to be successful, participation must come from a wide variety of segments of society (Tarrow, 2011). In light of these, the participant protests for the 2014 protests did not reach a very broad segment. Most of the participants for this cycle were the aforementioned university students and opposition elites who wanted to change the current mobilization for their own benefit. At this point, why the protest did not find a response from a wider popular base is the subject of a different study, but the possible explanations could be: fact that the deteriorating economic conditions had not reached their peak yet, the shock caused by the death of Chávez on the Bolivarian regime, and the fact that hopes could be foreseen that the current situation would improve and a better course would be achieved.

The opposition elites, who could not reach a wide base of society, on the other hand, were successful in finding international support. This can be examined as the fourth argument. Accordingly, by emphasising their own behavior and their rightness in mobilising, the opposition elites wanted to put their strategy on a legitimate basis. While doing this, the opposition also emphasised peace many times. In fact, this emphasis developed as a result of their desire to put their strategy on more legitimate ground. In this case, the expectation is that there was an obligation to be legitimate in order to be supported. It can be argued whether this was right or wrong, but of course, international support of the opposition showed that the opposition elites successfully used this opportunity by adding the support of international actors to the current mobilization by strengthening its hand.

One of the most important and last arguments reached from the opposition side of the 2014 protests is that the participation and support of the protests

increased, especially with the estrangement from democratic values. Evidence of this argument was observed after Maduro called on the opposition for peace talks. When Maduro took a mediator stance and wanted to sit at the table with the opposition, the number of cases in the protests also decreased. Therefore, authoritarian tendencies trigger and increase mobilization. The most logical explanation for this is that, as the current government moved away from democracy, the belief in elections and democratic values decreased and the street was seen as the only way out. When the detente period started, mobilization started to resolve and reached its end.

The first main argument on the government front of the 2014 protests is that Maduro accused the protesters and wanted to question their legitimacy. Here, the Maduro government tried to seize an opportunity and find support by showing themselves as the victims of these protests. Maduro's protest framing was to present the opposition as the American supporters, while he was the patriotic figure who was protecting the homeland.

However, this effort by the Maduro government was not highly successful, especially after López was imprisoned, whom Venezuelan government described as responsible for all of these protests, and the mobilization flared up even more. López's imprisonment called into question the legitimacy of the Venezuelan government due to Maduro's autocratic attitudes, which is the second argument for the government approach to the 2014 protest cycle. Here, again, as an effort to gain legitimacy, Maduro made a strategy change and mobilised his own base. Calling the Bolivarian regime supporters to the streets, Maduro actually wanted to show here that there was a real mass in the popular base that had elected him democratically, and they were supporting Maduro as the party of these protests. In this way, with his own base taking to the streets, Maduro removed this cycle from being a people

against government conflict and framed it as a conflict between one group of people against another group of people which had chosen him through democratic means.

Finally, there was a linear relationship between overt repression, which was one of the most important pressure techniques followed by the government, and the increase in mobilization. Maduro wanted to severely suppress the protest with the police force, but he did not succeed. In the face of overt repression, the protesters acted more aggressively, and the protest did not end either. In other words, it can be said that in Venezuela, in the face of overt repression, mobilization increased. In this situation, Maduro again made a change of tactics and called on the opposition for a peace conference. Although the opposition did not immediately respond to Maduro's call, the streets calmed down after that. Therefore, the motivation that drove the protesters to the streets was that they think they could not change the government through democratic means. Protesters who receive moderate signals from the government, do not prefer street protests as an alternative in environments where dialogue is chosen.

The first approach of the opposition elites in terms of the 2017 protest strategy and framing was that the TSJ decision was framed as a "coup". This strong statement was an important step in drawing attention to the seriousness of the issue. At the same time, the opposition elites against this so-called coup attempt wanted to protest this situation by taking to the streets, and while doing this, they represented themselves as an anti-coup and pro-democracy wing. The biggest contribution of this framing to the opposition elite was that they became legitimate as the pro-democracy wing combatting the coup and therefore, they received support from international actors. Here, it is seen that the opposition quickly and successfully seized the available political opportunities. Since there were not many actors that could publicly

support the coup or frame this situation in a different way, the opposition had much more solid arguments for their reasons for going out in this protest wave.

In addition, there was no disagreement within the opposition from the 2017 wave of protests. Capriles led the protest from the very first day and by supporting the protest with many legal articles, he supported the repertory effort that was again based on this legitimate ground. The belief that the protests were legitimate was, in the context of Venezuela, an important factor in supporting the protests, as the opposition wanted to shape a strategy in this direction in every protest wave.

Although the TSJ backtracked from its decision, the protest did not cease because it had a legitimate strategy and was organised around a single strong leadership. Since the main aim of the opposition elites was to bring about a change of government in line with the political opportunity they got, the TSJ's step back was not enough for them to achieve their ultimate goal. Therefore, the protest was only at the beginning of a long process.

The linear relationship between the democratic erosion and the increase in mobilization, which was examined throughout the thesis, was also observed in the 2017 protest cycle. Accordingly, the street protests intensified after the Venezuelan government's decision to disqualify Capriles. The deprivation of Capriles' popular representation for the next 15 years can itself be regarded as a testament to the erosion of democracy and the autocratic tendencies of the government. After the announcement of this decision, the situation in the streets became far more distant from the desired outcome that the Venezuelan government wanted to see. So, his disqualification intensified the protest, and it was reaffirmed that the autocratic tendency was a factor that triggered protest participation and radicalization for the Venezuelan context.

In addition, the final implication for the opposition front is to diversify the protester profile. The protest participation in 2017 was formed by many different segments of the society. Particularly, the protest cycle found participants from the barrios regions, where the Bolivarian regime supporters were concentrated. In addition, the worsening economic situation from 2014 to 2017 created drug shortages and difficulty with access to basic foodstuffs in the country. This situation triggered participation in the protests by many nurses and doctors working in the health sector. In this regard, in line with the studies on the effect of the increase in the participant profile of the protests and the effect of reaching a wider circle on the protest (Tarrow 2011), it can be commented that the existing diversified participant profile was perhaps the reason why the protest wave continued until the end of the year without any detente.

In the 2017 protest cycle, the Venezuelan government first responded with support to the TSJ decision. Especially Cilia Flores's supporting statements for the TSJ, who was a deputy in Venezuelan assembly and also first lady of Venezuela, drew a reaction very quickly. Within a short time, Maduro backtracked and softened his approach. While Maduro adopted a mediator and calm tone with his speeches and public discourses, he preferred a much more oppressive and harsher attitude with the police force and state institutions against those who took to the streets. This ambivalent attitude actually served the ultimate purpose of quelling the protests. An example of this was Maduro's announcement that he wanted an election and that an election would be held, and that he wanted to destroy the most basic of the opposition's reasons for protesting. The conclusion to be drawn from this should be that while the showcase and the visible face in the Venezuelan protests were quite mild to minimize the reaction of international actors, in fact, it had a much more

serious practice of suppression on the street. It is understood from this that Maduro's attitude and approach was actually to make the situation as costly as possible for those on the street by getting as little reaction as possible.

This approach of not attracting the reaction of international actors was also reflected in the censorship in the media. It was said that many media outlets in Venezuela had serious censorship imposed on them by the government. Accordingly, instead of street protests and police repression, the newspaper reports mostly featured Maduro's speeches. The softness of the rhetoric was mentioned before, but the harshness of the street also had an effect here. Especially with these moderate speeches, Maduro was seen as a mediator. From this point of view, it was getting harder to justify the protesters on the street. In fact, with this tactic, Maduro made a wise move to turn many political opportunities against him to his advantage.

One of the most important moves by the Maduro government in terms of the repression practices and discourses in the 2017 protests was the implementation of the plan, which was called as the Zamero plan. With this plan, the government responded in a more complex and holistic way to the protests. The police forces, which were insufficient to suppress the 2014 protests on their own, were supported in 2017 by adding military forces, regime shock groups, called *circulos bolivarianos*, and every civilian who voted for them. In this way, the government, which learned lessons from the cycle in 2014, developed a much more planned and holistic approach. The army, police and *circulos* forces together could be interpreted as the resources available to the Bolivarian regime, yet the regime itself managed to use these resources as a political opportunity. They created cleavage and huge pressure on the protesters using this opportunity.

Another reaction by the government to the protests was more strategic. Accordingly, the regime, which announced its decision to withdraw from the OAS, which was close to taking sanctions against the Venezuelan government in 2014, also reduced the pressure of the international public opinion that was being formed against itself. In this move, both the evaluation and change of political opportunities and the learning practices of the leaders were observed from an agency driven approach together. Maduro, who was targeted by the sanctions of the OAS in 2014, learned that this time, he had to act faster without allowing it, and wanted to minimise the pressure on his regime strategically.

Although Maduro initially made a mediator position for himself with his rhetoric, he gave more mixed and non-holistic signals as the protests dragged on and did not come to an end. The autocratic tendencies, which became more evident with disqualification of Capriles, resulted in the intensification of the protests, as seen in the previous protest wave. In other words, in both protest experiences observed, every move of the government away from democratic values triggered tensions to rise in the streets. Institutional mistrust and democratic erosion caused the protest cycle to last until the end of year without any clear conclusion.

Due to its scope, this thesis accepts the political opportunities as variable and dynamic. Accordingly, it examined the changes in the approaches of protest actors. As a result, this thesis argues that the main reason for the continuity and variability in these approaches was the changing and transforming political opportunities. Accordingly, the variability in political opportunities, the emergence of new opportunities, the end of some, and the approach of the protest actors to protest according to the moves of the opposite party determined the approach of each party to the protest cycle. As the existing political opportunities changed and transformed,

the attitudes of the actors also changed accordingly. In this context, this thesis explains these transformations not only with the theory of political opportunity, but also with the learning practices of the actors. Explaining actor behavior only in terms of political opportunities, as has been done so far, attributes them to more mechanical characteristics. In contrast, this thesis deals with actors with dynamic characteristics. Actors who move away from these mechanical features are handled in a more profound way in terms of social sciences framework. According to this, in addition to changing opportunities, actor behavior and approach to protest are also shaped by the lessons that actors have learned from their previous experiences. That is to say that, in the scope of this thesis, the government and opposition elites' approach to the existing protest cycles are determined by the political opportunities and actors' learning experiences together. In doing so, the approaches of the two actors are considered together, as the behavior of one actor of the protest may differ according to the political opportunities that the other party can or cannot seize. At the same time, examining the cycles in both 2014 and 2017 together was useful to show that the actors may have determined their behavior in 2017 as the result of a lesson learned from 2014. This thesis argues that the government and opposition elites' approach to the existing protest cycles are determined by the political opportunities and actors' learning experiences together.

## APPENDIX

### CODE BOOK FOR 2014 AND 2017

All of the two code books consists same title columns as the following: Date (event date) Link (link to news report), any dead (number of deaths), by (reason of death), injuries (number of injuries), detainees (number of detainees), how it started (which side started the event), where it started, who leads (name of the event starters), how they protested (actions, i.e. looting etc.), what is the demand of protestors / what opposition claimed (opposition repertoire/strategy), how police reacted (government physical reaction) How media reacted (media coverage or any reports about censorship), how gov. Reacted (governmental speeches/claims). Rows descend from old to new with the protest dates of each day. The colours in the codebook are separated according to the days and show how many newspapers there are for that day. Fields left blank in the codebook mean that there is no news about the column in that day's newspaper.





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