



DISINFORMATION AND PROPAGANDA IN VENEZUELA REPORT

GLOBAL AMERICANS - MEDIANÁLISIS

This joint report is part of the Global Americans' comparative research project on Measuring the Impact of Misinformation, Disinformation, and Propaganda in Latin America. To read the executive summary or full report in English, Spanish, or Portuguese, [click here](#).

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report examines disinformation across public and private media channels in Venezuela through the analysis of news related to Russia and China, as well as content published by the Venezuelan government on its Twitter and Facebook accounts. Content from the Twitter accounts of Russia Today (RT), Telesur, and Sputnik Mundo was also reviewed to showcase what was qualitatively described as the core of the disinformation ecosystem in Venezuela coming from foreign authoritarian powers. The study found that Russia and China are overtly promoting disinformation in Venezuela, bolstering the Maduro government, and eroding the country's democratic institutions with the help of Venezuela's own military and high-level government officials. This report also demonstrates, through careful monitoring of traditional and non-traditional media sources, the concerted efforts from Russia and China, with Venezuela as their regional pivot, to sway neighboring countries to adopt their geopolitical agenda and to disrupt the institutions of those whose current leaders have partnered with the United States.

Context

For more than twenty years, Venezuela has been immersed in a political crisis—in which an authoritarian regime that initially rode to power by way of an electoral crisis in 1998 has increasingly consolidated its hold on Venezuelan society, especially through the dismantling and takeover of democratic institutions.

The crisis has resulted in serious consequences for Venezuela. The economy has been in recession for seven years, with three years of hyperinflation (Econalítica, 2021) causing a widespread increase in poverty reaching 96 percent of households, according to the Survey on Life Conditions conducted by the Institute of Economic and Social Research at the Andrés Bello Catholic University in 2020. According to the same study, at least one in four Venezuelan households is food insecure. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO, 2021), Venezuela is among the 25 countries around the world at heightened risk of food insecurity.

The economic and political situation has triggered an unprecedented exodus in the region. According to the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR, 2021) the greatest migration crisis in the world is no longer in the Middle East or Africa; it is in Latin America, due to the 5.6 million Venezuelans who have fled their country in search of better living conditions.

Acuña-Alfaro and Khoudour (2020) have documented that Venezuelan migrants and refugees are especially concentrated in Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru, countries that saw their Venezuelan migrant populations increase 66 percent between 2010 and 2019.

Naturally, the slide towards autocracy led to the restriction of the system of civil liberties established in the Constitution of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, especially the freedoms of expression and information. Hundreds of traditional private media companies were forced to shut down, change their editorial line, or be sold to pro-government interests. Medianálisis (2020) has estimated that between 2013 and 2018, 71 print publications in Venezuela have changed their distribution, migrated to an online-only format, or have closed, while 144 radio stations have been shut down by the National Telecommunications Commission (CONATEL) regulatory agency.

Additionally, dozens of independent journalism portals and international television channels have been sanctioned or blocked by CONATEL under restrictive journalism legislation.

Social media networks now represent an important outlet for interaction and information among Venezuelans. According to the report “We are social” (2020), there are 12 million social media users in Venezuela, with Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter being the most popular platforms. In addition, the report indicates that 81 percent of Venezuelans regularly connect to interactive media platforms through their mobile devices.

It is important to add that the deterioration of public services, such as electricity and the internet, contribute decisively to government control over the public sphere. In March 2019, all of Venezuela was without electricity for five days, due to a failure in the country’s main hydroelectric plant. Since then, daily power outages, especially in the interior, have only intensified.

According to the Committee for People Affected by Blackouts (Depablos, 2021) at least 38,004 power failures were registered in the first quarter of 2021.

According to CONATEL, the main internet provider in Venezuela is the public access service CANTV-ABA, which accounts for 66.4 percent of internet subscribers (Arvelais, 2021). CANTV-ABA, however, works only intermittently and blocks numerous independent informational portals, limiting citizens’ access to information.

Satellite internet and fiber optic services are now offered but remain unaffordable for the vast majority of Venezuelans, whose salaries are well below average for the region (and continue to depreciate amid the country’s ongoing economic and financial crisis).

Consequently, the government’s hegemony over communications outlets has solidified over the past five years. Bisbal (2011) has identified this as the state’s main strategy for ensuring the

primacy of its ideology. The ideological hegemony of “Bolivarian socialism” was spearheaded by the late President Hugo Chávez, who ordered the creation of a multitude of state-run media outlets, which have come to dominate the airwaves.

In this context, it is easier for the Venezuelan state to produce disinformation that generates repercussions at home and abroad. According to Trepiccione (Cañizález, 2020), Venezuela “has become a great laboratory for the manufacturing of fake news for some years now, insofar as the Venezuelan problem ceased to be a local political conflict and gave way to a global geopolitical and geostrategic dispute.”

The study was conducted based on the following two assumptions:

- The governments of Russia and China are coordinating and conducting disinformation activities in Venezuela.
- The Venezuelan state, through its state-run media outlets, is actively participating in disinformation activities.

The topics addressed by this study are detailed below. The results stem from an analysis of Russian and Chinese media outlets, followed by a geopolitical analysis.

RUSSIA

Sputnik and EpiVacCorona Vaccines

This study looks at the Twitter accounts of RT, Telesur, and Sputnik. Social media accounts of Venezuelan government actors that follow these outlets were also identified, including Venezolana de Televisión (VTV), vice president Delcy Rodríguez, and Nicolás Maduro, as disclosed in the following table:

Table 1: Venezuelan government accounts that follow Russian media

| from_user_bot | from_user_scri | id | original_query |
|---------------|-----------------|-------|--------------------|
| 0.7 | VTVcanal8 | GobVe | SputnikV |
| 0.36 | AquiConErnesto | GobVe | SputnikV |
| 0.75 | ViceVenezuela | GobVe | SputnikV |
| 520.294 | CarnetDLaPatria | GobVe | SputnikV |
| 0.45 | drodriven2 | GobVe | SputnikV |
| 708.113 | DianaIndustrias | Gobve | SputnikV |
| 0.26 | Mippcivzla | GobVe | SputnikV |
| 323.988 | LaHojillaenTV | GobVe | SputnikV |
| 0.59 | bloque_patria | GobVe | SputnikVLlegaAVene |
| 0.31 | NicolasMaduro | GobVe | SputnikVLlegaAVene |
| 900.614 | MisionRSOficial | GobVe | SputnikVLlegaAVene |
| 0.67 | CancilleriaVE | GobVe | SputnikVLlegaAVene |
| 379.801 | ErikaPSUV | GobVe | SputnikVLlegaAVene |
| 515.643 | ZE_Aragua | GobVe | SputnikVLlegaAVene |
| 207.906 | MarcoTorresPSUV | GobVe | SputnikVLlegaAVene |
| 0.37 | MercalOficial | GobVe | SputnikVLlegaAVene |
| 596.776 | ZEPortuguesa | GobVe | SputnikVLlegaAVene |
| | FundambienteOfc | GobVe | SputnikVLlegaAVene |
| 495.058 | somos_ejercito | GobVe | SputnikVLlegaAVene |
| 959.028 | GNB_Amazonas | GobVe | SputnikVLlegaAVene |
| 0.88 | Lechuginos_com | GobVe | SputnikV |
| 0.39 | ConasGNBCmdte | GobVe | SputnikVLlegaAVene |
| 0.45 | GDP_Cabimas | GobVe | SputnikVLlegaAVene |
| 835.829 | hogardepatria | GobVe | SputnikV |
| 0.54 | GNBDesur32 | GobVe | SputnikVLlegaAVene |
| 0.71 | CMDTEDESUR32 | GobVe | SputnikV |
| 0.33 | CaracasUnefa | GobVe | SputnikVLlegaAVene |
| 0.47 | ConasGNB | GobVe | SputnikVLlegaAVene |

The Hoaxy tool extracted #SputnikV hashtag data that reveals the hashtag was powered by Actualidad RT with the support of at least 54 bots and 152 additional accounts, which share many characteristics of *cyborgs*. Thus, state media outlets seek to praise Russian support via distribution of the Sputnik vaccine, as opposed to vaccines developed in the United States. According to this narrative, these outlets uphold that the U.S. maintains a “block” against Venezuela, when there is really no such sanction. In fact, the U.S. Department of State has loosened sanctions to facilitate the acquisition of supplies to combat COVID-19.

When analyzing pro-government (PROGOB) and private media outlets indicated in the table below, results show that outlets neither elaborated on the subject matter, nor verified this information regarding vaccine distribution.

Table 2: News by media outlet and trend

| Outlet | Tendency | Units |
|-------------------------|----------|-------|
| CDCCS | PROGOB | 8 |
| EFFECTO COCUYO | PRIVATE | 11 |
| EL PITAZO | PRIVATE | 17 |
| CARAOTA DIGITAL | PRIVATE | 16 |
| TELESUR | PROGOB | 3 |
| LA IGUANA TV | PROGOB | 3 |
| TAL CUAL | PRIVATE | 6 |
| LA PATILLA | PRIVATE | 25 |
| EL NACIONAL | PRIVATE | 17 |
| EL UNIVERSAL | PRIVATE | 3 |
| ÚLTIMAS NOTICIAS | PROGOB | 9 |
| CORREO ORINOCO | PROGOB | 4 |
| APORREA | PROGOB | 4 |
| BANCA Y NEGOCIOS | PRIVATE | 2 |
| 2001 | PRIVATE | 3 |
| TOTAL OUTLETS REVIEWED: | 15 | |
| PROGOVT TENDENCY: | 6 | |
| PRIVATE TENDENCY: | 8 | 131 |

The analysis looks at three different moments: the announcement of vaccine registration on August 11, 2020; Maduro's statement saying he would be the first to be vaccinated; and finally, the alleged participation of Venezuela in the third phase of the vaccine trial. The vaccine rollout was regularly monitored during the investigation, including the contract signed between Venezuela and Russia and the arrival of the Sputnik vaccine; however, so far there is no official information on the arrival of the second doses of the vaccine.

As the last component of the investigation, 11 sources were selected, including official Venezuelan and Russian websites and public media outlets. This period of the study ran from June 1 to July 12, 2021. Data shared by the Minister of Education regarding the time extension between the delivery of the first and second doses of the Sputnik vaccine was verified and compared with other sources, including the Ministry of Education website and two Russian media outlets.

The sources analyzed are detailed below:

Table 3: Media outlets

| MEDIA OUTLET | WEBSITE |
|--------------------|-------------------------|
| VTV | vtv.gob.ve |
| TELESUR | telesur.net |
| CORREO DEL ORINOCO | correodelorinoco.gob.ve |
| SPUTNIK MUNDO | mun.do.sputniknews.com |
| RT | actualidad.rt.com |

Table 4: Government sources

| SOURCE | WEBSITE |
|---|------------------------|
| MINISTRY OF HEALTH | mpps.gob.ve |
| SISTEMA PATRIA (NATIONAL ID SYSTEM) | covid19.patria.org.ve |
| MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS | mppre.gob.ve |
| VICE PRESIDENCY | Vicepresidencia.gob.ve |
| MINISTRY OF ECONOMICS AND FINANCE | mppef.gob.ve |
| MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION | minci.gob.ve |

Subsequently, the state television network VTV published a single informative piece on June 27, 2021 titled "Study in Argentina reveals that one dose of Sputnik V reduces mortality by up to 80 percent in those over 60 years of age." However, the article did not address the implications for Venezuela, nor did it mention the new norm of receiving a single dose in Venezuela. There was also no mention of this in the *Correo de Orinoco* state-run newspaper. The multistate TV network Telesur published an informative piece on its website on June 20 with the headline, "[Vice President] Delcy Rodríguez follows up on supply of vaccines in Russia." It used a tweet published on June 18 by the Vice President as reference. Telesur copied the story from the Vice President's website on the same date that the tweet was posted. The article details her meeting with the Russian Fund for Direct Investment "to follow up on the Delivery Plan for Sputnik V and Sputnik Light vaccines in Venezuela." The media spread misinformation by stating that "...in the midst of the economic sanction imposed by the U.S. government, the government continues to guarantee the protection and life of the Venezuelan people."

An analysis of the media outlets indicated above was conducted specifically with regard to the EpiVacCorona vaccine developed by the State Research Center for Virology and Biotechnology (VECTOR).

Discourse condemning North American imperialism, which the governments of Russia and Venezuela are united against, is prevalent in vaccine related news. The website of the Russian

news agency Sputnik provides information explaining the delay in production and delivery of the second doses. RT also published four articles related to the delay. The headlines read: i) on June 23, "Moscow comments on reports about a shortage of the Sputnik V vaccine in Argentina"; ii) on June 26, "A study in Argentina reveals that a dose of Sputnik V reduces mortality by up to 80 percent in those over 60 years of age; iii) on June 29, "The Argentine laboratory Richmond announces that production of the second dose of Sputnik V will begin next Monday"; and iv) on July 12, "Sputnik V produces a high level of COVID-19 antibodies and neutralizers [sic] after a single dose, concludes an Argentine study published in the journal *Cell*." While they all refer to Argentina, nothing is said about Venezuela.

In addition, the articles published between May 4 and June 4, 2021 clearly note the presence of propaganda bias in public information, which have been used to divert attention away from the failure to deliver the second doses of the Sputnik vaccine as the government remains silent on the issue.

The investigation found that the regime's propaganda is even more noticeable around issues pertaining to Russia than to aid from China. On March 29, 2021, an announcement stated that the second dose of the Russian vaccine would be arriving in the country and that the Venezuelan volunteers would participate in the Phase III clinical trial of the vaccine. On March 30, the first doses arrived, and both events were celebrated simultaneously. Government spokespersons praised Vladimir Putin and took the opportunity to issue statements against the common enemy: the U.S.. These announcements were opportunistic in the wake of the Russian Deputy Prime Minister Yuri Borisov's visit to Caracas. After these events, there was no further discussion about the matter or the second dose. Furthermore, the document from the Ministry of Health authorizing its emergency use is unavailable. It is unknown how many doses arrived, what the protocol is for selecting trial candidates, the age range of volunteers, how much it costs, or how much each volunteer will be paid.

Vice President Rodríguez clearly expressed on behalf of the Maduro government that "[t]here is a contrast between Russia and China and the role played by some countries who are accumulating and hoarding vaccines with the aim of creating imbalance and asymmetry worldwide."

The RT Spanish portal echoed the tweets that the Minister of Science and Technology wrote about the vaccine on March 30 in an article titled: "Venezuela begins studies with the Russian vaccine EpiVacCorona." Oddly enough, it published an article with a similar headline on May 5, stating: "Venezuela starts Russian EpiVacCorona anti-covid vaccine clinical trials." In this piece, they reference Delcy Rodríguez's statement and a tweet from the Russian ambassador to Venezuela.

Additional information from three government websites was reviewed:

Table 5: Government websites

| SOURCE | WEBSITE |
|---|---------------|
| MINISTRY OF HEALTH | mpps.gob.ve |
| SISTEMA PATRIA | patria.org.ve |
| MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION | minci.gob.ve |

On June 4, 2021, a month after the Russian ambassador to Venezuela was vaccinated, an agreement to export the second dose of the vaccine to Venezuela was announced during the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum. It was signed by Carlos Alvarado, the Minister of Health, and in the presence of Gabriela Giménez, the Minister of Science and Technology, and the Russian Minister of Industry and Commerce, Denis Manturov.

In the midst of disinformation circulating about the vaccines, the only government response was to impose lockdown. In comparison, most countries in the region had relaxed lockdown measures by this time, in order to mitigate the devastating effects of the pandemic on the economy and begin vaccination campaigns.

While reviewing media response, the usual live coverage by the state TV network VTV of the Maiquetia airport and tweets by Nicolas Maduro or Delcy Rodriguez were not complemented by further information on the VTV website. In the newspaper *Correo del Orinoco*, the topic of vaccines was not highlighted until the export agreement was signed. One brief article merely cited VTV as reference.

When reviewing the two Russian international media outlets, Sputnik agency and RT, no in-depth coverage was found regarding this topic.

The Sputnik agency only reported relevant information around the aforementioned dates. When the export agreement was signed, Carlos Faría, the Venezuelan ambassador in Moscow, was interviewed about the number of vaccines to be provided. The diplomat's response was: “the numbers are details that are being defined at this time.” In other words, the agreement was signed; but the conditions are unknown.

In this review, information from 13 official sources were examined, starting with Venezuelan media outlets and comparatively including media in Argentina, Mexico and Bolivia. They all reproduced the misinformative nature of the information. The following table lists the outlets included in this analysis:

Table 6: Media outlets reviewed

| OUTLET | WEBSITE |
|------------------|------------------------|
| VTV | vtv.gob.ve |
| TELESUR | telesur.net |
| ÚLTIMAS NOTICIAS | ultimasnoticias.com.ve |
| EL ESTÍMULO | elestimulo.com |
| TAL CUAL | talcualdigital.com |
| EFFECTO COCUYO | efectococuyo.com |
| EL ECONOMISTA | economista.com.mx |
| EL FINANCIERO | elfinanciero.com.mx |
| EL MUNDO | elmundo.com.bo |
| PAGINA SIETE | paginasiete.bo |
| LA NACIÓN | lanacion.com.ar |
| INFOBAE | infobae.com |

The natural source of public information in this case are the media outlet websites. Local media coverage was reviewed and triangulated by media response in Argentina, Bolivia, and Mexico. This translates into the reproduction of information by 15 primary news sources spread over 12 media websites and three official government websites. The content that was reviewed covers August 12, 2020, to February 13, 2021, spanning the period from the official announcements about vaccine delivery to the final publication date of this report.

Key dates include August 11, 2020, when Russia announced the Sputnik vaccine and Maduro almost immediately expressed his willingness to obtain it. In October, the signing of the agreement to send 10 million doses to Venezuela was announced. In February 2021, the first 100,000 doses arrived, but it remains unknown if the agreement will be honored and when the rest of the vaccine doses will arrive.

CHINA

The trace of disinformation is also reflected in the media coverage of news related to China. The supposed Chinese humanitarian aid that has been provided to numerous countries in the region has been praised by the Venezuelan government as an act of altruism.

Maggioreli (2019) notes that while the U.S. diminished humanitarian, military, and police aid in its backyard, China became a main source of support in the region and increased its aid and loans to Latin American governments. Throughout the research process, data suggests special treatment given to information about Chinese humanitarian aid and the Sinopharm vaccine. Information from 14 government media outlets was reviewed, dating from March 16, 2020, when the national

quarantine strategy began, until September 2020. The official websites of the Ministries of Health, Economy, and Foreign Affairs were examined to try and identify specific information about humanitarian aid. The table below lists the private and public media outlets examined:

Table 7: Media outlets that publish news about China's aid to Latin America

| Outlet | Website | Tendency |
|------------------------------|--|----------|
| Últimas Noticias | www.ultimasnoticias.com.ve | Progob |
| Efecto Cocuyo | www.efectococuyo.com | Private |
| El Universal | www.eluniversal.com | Private |
| El Nacional | www.elnacional.com | Private |
| Telesur | www.telesurtv.net | Progob |
| Alba Ciudad | www.albaciudad.org | Progob |
| La Iguana TV | www.laiguana.tv | Progob |
| Correo del Orinoco | www.correodelorinoco.gob.ve | Progob |
| VTV | www.vtv.gob.ve | Progob |
| Runrun.es | www.runrun.es | Private |
| La Patilla | www.lapatilla.com | Private |
| El Estímulo | www.elestimulo.com | Private |
| El Pitazo | www.elpitazo.net | Private |
| Venezuelan News Agency (AVN) | www.avn.info.ve | Progob |

The analysis demonstrates that state media outlets echo official government propaganda. Private media outlets possess a similarly uncritical perspective toward information provided by the government, paving the way for the promulgation of disinformation in a society already ravaged by complex social, political, and economic crises.

Furthermore, the lack of transparency regarding the Sinopharm vaccine is one of the most obvious examples of disinformation that persists over time. It is worth noting that on March 1, 2021, 500,000 doses of the Chinese vaccine arrived in Venezuela, but neither government websites nor public or private media related to Chavez governance provide consolidated information regarding vaccine delivery. These websites also did not specify if these vaccines were a donation, even though Venezuela's participation in Phase 3 clinical trials was announced. Tables 8 and 9 below outline the media outlets and government sources that were examined.

Table 8: Media outlets analyzed in relation to Sinopharm in Venezuela

| OUTLET | WEBSITE |
|--------------------|-------------------------|
| VTV | vtv.gob.ve |
| TELESUR | telesur.net |
| CORREO DEL ORINOCO | correodelorinoco.gob.ve |
| ÚLTIMAS NOTICIAS | ultimasnoticias.com.ve |
| AGENCIA XINHUA | spanish.xinhuanet.com |

Table 9: Government sources consulted

| SOURCE | WEBSITE |
|--|------------------------|
| MINISTERIO DE SALUD | mpps.gob.ve |
| SISTEMA PATRIA | covid19.patria.org.ve |
| MINISTERIO DE RELACIONES EXTERIORES | mppre.gob.ve |
| VICEPRESIDENCIA | Vicepresidencia.gob.ve |
| MINISTERIO DE ECONOMÍA Y FINANZAS | mppef.gob.ve |
| MINISTERIO DE COMUNICACIÓN E INFORMACIÓN | minci.gob.ve |

In addition, a director at VTV announced a week later that “teachers from 250 schools in Caracas received the first dose of the Chinese vaccine.

The truth is that the Venezuelan government gave special priority to the Sputnik vaccine, despite the fact that the 10 million vaccines promised to have not been delivered and the second doses are pending for hundreds of thousands of citizens. There was not the same precedence with the Sinopharm vaccine, and as previously stated, it was unknown whether it was a donation. This was verified by reviewing content from 10 sources between March 1 and May 3, including official government and media outlet websites, as well as the *Xinhua* agency website.

An anti-imperialist U.S. stance was found to be prominent in communications regarding Venezuela’s relations with Russia, especially in the context of any event involving Nicolas Maduro. Information about the Chinese vaccine is scarce, aside from the announcement of the arrival of vaccines and their application in 250 schools in Caracas, without further detail on the number of teachers receiving the vaccine. Neither on the *Xinhua* news agency website nor on Telesur subdomain websites is there any information available about the Chinese vaccine.

Similarly, the narrative favoring Russia and China is also reflected in the criticisms and allegations in relation to the COVAX Global Vaccine program and the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO). According to these institutions, the exclusion of Venezuela from the program is justified

and the AstraZeneca vaccine, the first vaccine set to arrive in Venezuela through this program, is discredited.

The reaction of Nicolas Maduro's government to the possibility of providing 1.4 to 2.4 million doses of British vaccine AstraZeneca (AZ) through the COVAX program is not convincing to many. The discreditation of this vaccine promoted by the government has no scientific basis because according to the World Health Organization, (WHO, 2021) the risk of developing thrombosis with thrombocytopenia is very low. In the United Kingdom, only four cases per one million vaccinated adults developed these adverse effects. It was therefore recommended that authorities be alert and perform risk and benefits analysis based on the specific characteristics of each country.

Six government websites and six media outlets were reviewed from March 19-31, 2021. The analysis reveals the complexity of political interests around the vaccine issue and how it could reflect on Nicolas Maduro's government. It appears that Venezuela's entry into the COVAX program could be considered as a victory for *chavismo*, since it was handled as a proposal in conjunction with the "interim government" led by the former president of the National Assembly (Legislative power and opposition) Juan Guaidó. However, in parallel to the ban of the AstraZeneca vaccine, Maduro's government announced that it would import the Russian EpiVacCorona vaccine.

This is an important finding that represents the extensive disinformation activities carried out by the Venezuelan government. Even the National Armed Forces, through the Bolivarian National Guard, was involved in this ploy by intentionally promoting articles from VTV, the state television network, on Facebook and Twitter.

The eleventh flight from China to Venezuela arrived on March 1 at 11:00 p.m., carrying 500,000 doses of the Vero Cell vaccine produced by Sinopharm. The plane was also carrying an additional 17 tons of supplies to combat the COVID-19 pandemic.

The event was covered by the main news agencies, in particular by EFE and Europa Press - both among the first results on Google search from Venezuela. It was also covered by CNN en Español and RT Actualidad television channels, as well as the *Sputnik Mundo* website. However, it was not covered by the *Xinhua* Chinese news agency website. The latest article published about Chinese flights to Venezuela was on February 24, when the 10th flight landed. Instead, what was found is an article on how China is supporting Latin America in its fight against COVID-19, reinforcing the narrative that China is a global leader in international aid. The newspaper *Últimas Noticias* did not spare praise with the headline "Chinese vaccines take over much of the world." The following media outlets covering the delivery of Sinopharm vaccines were reviewed:

Table 10: Media outlets that cover the delivery of Sinopharm vaccines Venezuela

| Outlet | Headline |
|------------------|--|
| VTV | Supplies and first shipment of 500 thousand vaccines against COVID-19 developed by China arrives |
| Telesur | Venezuela receives 500,000 doses of Chinese anti covid vaccine |
| CNN | Venezuela receives 500,000 doses of Chinese Sinopharm vaccine |
| EFE | Venezuela receives half a million doses of vaccines against COVID-19 from China |
| Europa Press | Venezuela receives half a million doses of Chinese vaccine against COVID-19 |
| Finanzas Digital | Venezuela begins vaccination of teachers with Chinese Sinopharm vaccines |
| Últimas Noticias | Chinese vaccines take over much of the world |
| Actualidad RT | Venezuela receives the first 500,000 doses of the Sinopharm vaccine against COVID-19 [sic] |
| Sputnik | First shipment of Chinese vaccine Vero Cell arrives to Venezuela |

The data was sourced by using the Crowdtangle extension (plugin) for Chrome on two different days: March 3 and 15. Shared data from all of the accounts on Facebook was downloaded, as well as the data from the Telesur and VTV accounts on Twitter.

The most interesting finding is in the data downloaded from the VTV article shared via Twitter. It shows that the article was shared by 59 Venezuelan military accounts linked to the Bolivarian National Guard (GNB). Many of the accounts also used face mask face (😷) and thumbs up (👍) emojis, suggesting that they were created according to instructions of some kind. Most of these accounts appear to be institutional, and there are also various accounts of commanders and lieutenants.

Table 11: Examples of military accounts

| User | Followers | Interactions |
|---------------------------------|-----------|--------------|
| Antidrogas GNB | 3.090 | 22 |
| GNB Sucre 🇻🇪👍 | 10.641 | 21 |
| GNB D- 811 Faja Petrolífera 🇻🇪👍 | 1.600 | 20 |
| 👍🇻🇪DESUR-VIGIA👍🇻🇪 | 114 | 20 |
| @1RACIA-DESUR👍🇻🇪 | 581 | 19 |
| GNB _ANZOALAB52 | 3.044 | 18 |
| Gnb2daciaDesurLara | 229 | 16 |
| D.V.C N° 41 GNB 🇻🇪👍 | 1.885 | 15 |
| @1RACIA-DESUR👍🇻🇪 | 581 | 15 |

| | | |
|----------------------|-------|----|
| 👍🤔 DESUR-VIGIA 👍🤔 | 114 | 15 |
| GNB PUEBLO FALCON 🤔👍 | 5.793 | 15 |

The VTV article was also the most shared on Facebook. Two military accounts also stand out: Milicia Bolivariana and FuerzasMilitares.org, although the latter is an independent Colombian magazine that covers security and defense issues.

Table 12: Facebook sites that shared the VTV article

| Facebook sites (page or group) | Followers | Interactions |
|--|-----------|--------------|
| VTVCanal8 | 601.687 | 1490 |
| Followers of Ernesto Che Guevara | 19.101 | 19 |
| fuerzasmilitares.org | 164.609 | 8 |
| Chavez y Bolívar revolutionaries | 636 | 6 |
| BOLIVIAN MILITIA | 6.414 | 6 |
| RT (International news in Spanish) [unofficial group] | 12.675 | 0 |
| Trujillo Socialist Municipality | 1.186 | 0 |
| RETIRED AND PENSIONED OF VENEZUELA | 106.994 | 0 |
| Maracaibo Raya Maicao Travel | 105.493 | 0 |

This analysis exposes the diversity of actors participating in disinformation campaigns and demonstrates commitment to the government, the government media and even the national Armed Forces. It is evident that because of hegemonic communication, these campaigns have an important effect on the population. Display of government power on social media is evident, as it was from 2015-2017 when the government managed to dominate discussion on Twitter.

The GNB is the largest arm of the National Armed Forces after the Bolivarian Militia and the Army. This military body, with all its ubiquity, has Twitter accounts which are used to promote not only its activities but also those of the government: not only institutional accounts but also those of active military personnel. These activities are outside the country's regulatory framework. For example, Article 330 of the 1999 Constitution of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela prohibits the National Armed Forces from participating in propaganda, militancy, or political proselytizing.

In contrast to the first research findings regarding the GNB's promotion of the Chinese vaccine on interactive media, data from 40 accounts identified at the beginning was downloaded. The GNB accounts identified were:

Table 13: Bolivarian National Guard accounts that promote the Chinese vaccine

| Twitter Account | Followers | Following |
|------------------------|-----------|-----------|
| GNB Guardia del Pueblo | 97.507 | 1.012 |
| GNB Capital | 37.469 | 1.203 |
| GNB Anzoátegui | 29.743 | 1.137 |
| GNB Bolívar | 25.776 | 894 |
| Mayor GNB Rivero | 16.948 | 18.562 |

When the following accounts were filtered in relation to the followers of the 40 accounts selected, it turns out that there does not seem to be a follow-for-follow strategy, since not all accounts follow each other. However, the number of accounts that are followed is certainly remarkable. The total number of unique follower accounts is 692 (out of a total of 3,482 followers downloaded from all accounts), which is a particularity that began when Hugo Chavez created his account @chaveucedanga in 2010.

WHAT DOES THE VACCINE SENTIMENT ANALYSIS SAY?

The purpose of this section is to detect if there is a bias in sentiment analysis using a tool developed for this project by the Tecnológico de Monterrey. This tool allows you to analyze and visualize the emotion behind a text (positive, negative, or neutral) and determine the possible underlying intention.

3,200 tweets from the Telesur International account and 3,200 tweets from the Telesur Venezuela account were downloaded. Although the two accounts belong to the same medium, the tweets are not all identical. For the purpose of this research, we selected tweets specifically discussing the vaccines, of which only 254 resulted in triunes, 131 from Telesur Venezuela and 123 from Telesur International. Repeated tweets were included in the sentiment analysis as they are considered part of a strategy to understand the general perception of sentiment based on identical messages.

The following questions were considered in the sentiment analysis of Telesur's Twitter account: Is it possible to identify a bias of emotion in tweets of a channel considered to be informative? Additionally, does an existing bias make it possible to identify fake news? It is generally understood that fake or falsified news uses the media's informational structure or sensationalist clickbait content. Journalism can be sensational, even if it is not false.

VADER and the NRC Emolex lexicon tools were applied, in addition to the TextBlob application programming interface (API).

When the analysis was conducted with the VADER lexicon, which produces results labeled as positive, negative and neutral, it is evident that the messages are mainly neutral. The neutral column gave a 1 rating to 87 out of 254 values, which means that on a scale of 0 to 1, they are

completely neutral. However, the median total value is 0.924. The tools did not identify evidence of language that might reflect a positive or negative trend in the group of tweets about the vaccine.

The NRC Emolex lexicon analysis was conducted with a scale of +1 to -1; the results table displays only polarity. Consistent with the results of the analysis described above, most values average at 0 and therefore point to the tweets being neutral.

What happens when the evaluation is not based on positive, negative and neutral, but rather on words linked to groups of emotions? The sentiment analysis tool identifies that the value that dominates that emotion is equal to zero. For example: there are 195 tweets that represent anger, and their value is zero; but the maximum value of this set of tweets is one of 0.153. When it comes to happiness, there is a similar trend. 182 tweets have a value of zero, and the maximum value of one tweet is 0.25. Nonetheless, trust is the emotion with the highest value, specifically a tweet from the Russian ambassador to Venezuela who trusts the EpiVacCorona vaccine and was the first to be vaccinated.

The following image is a word cloud that visualizes ideological trends among the tweets. The most important words include: vaccines, Sputnik, Soberana, Abdala and Cuba (Soberana and Abdala being the Cuban vaccine candidates that the Venezuelan government has been promoting over the last few months).

A review of publications between November 30 and December 6, 2020, was conducted. These publications pertain to eight media outlets, including the *Xinhua* news agency. It is noticeable that China's aid is not mentioned in the government media, which shows that the promotion of this support is not part of the alliance's propaganda technique. The media outlets examined are outlined in the table below.

Table 14: Media outlets examined for coverage of oil shipments from Venezuela with Chinese mediation

| MEDIA OUTLET | WEBSITE |
|------------------|------------------------|
| AGENCIA XINHUA | spanish.xinhuanet.com |
| TELESUR | telesur.net |
| VTV | vtv.gob.ve |
| ÚLTIMAS NOTICIAS | ultimasnoticias.com.ve |
| EL ESTÍMULO | elestimulo.com |
| EL UNIVERSAL | eluniversal.com |
| EL NACIONAL | elnacional.com |
| EFACTO COCUYO | efectococuyo.com.ve |

This reinforces the official narrative, which explains that the collapse of *Petroleos de Venezuela* (PDVSA) is a result of sanctions from the U.S. government. From that single statement, we can already corroborate elements of disinformation spread by the Venezuelan government in the form of propaganda. From this same perspective, they claim to be living and waging an asymmetric war to which the government of Xi Jinping joins Venezuela as an ally.

Another issue is the group called *Los Republicanos*—a term that means "outstanding citizens well versed in State affairs and political issues"—who define themselves as a political movement and not as a party. They believe that the solution for Venezuela is a U.S. military intervention and consider a large part of the Venezuelan opposition to be a sham. They were among the last to acknowledge that Trump had lost an election, or rather that Biden would come to power. They see intervention by philanthropist George Soros in everything and are influential on social media.

Alberto Franceschi, a representative of the *Venezuela Project Party* (center-right) in the defunct Venezuelan congress (as the legislative branch was previously called), is one of the most prominent members of the alternative right movement. Franceschi drives content both on the movement's website and YouTube channel. On his personal video channel, he has 32,000 followers.

Humberto González is another visible leader of the *Republicos*, with 565,000 followers on Twitter. At the end of 2020, before the U.S. presidential elections, he had estimated 615,000 followers. He was considered to be a member of a network of Venezuelans who supported Donald Trump as president and candidate, and even joined Trump's communications campaign contesting the

electoral fraud accusations against him. He is also a columnist for the weekly publication *La Razón*.

Franceschi and González are not the only ones; however, they are the most well-known Republicos. On the Republicos website there is a group of people who are constantly posting and commenting, including activists from other Latin American countries.

The Republicos have both personal and institutional accounts on WhatsApp, Telegram, YouTube, Twitter, Parler, and Gab (these latter two networks being infamous in the U.S. for embracing far-right figures and groups banned by other platforms). They have connections with news channels such as *Parte de Guerra* that have more than 36,000 subscribers and more than six million views since 2014.

In comparison, *Efecto Cocuyo*, an independent Venezuelan media outlet that has also been on YouTube since 2014, barely exceeds 5,000 subscribers and 900,000 video views. *The Freedom Post*, a related outlet that emerged this year, started with 100,000 visits according to the Similarweb internet analysis conducted in January of this year. Now visitor numbers are less than 50,000, which possibly may have been influenced by Google's algorithm change that occurred this year.

The last case studied was that of CDI, which is part of the parallel health system created by *chavismo*, despite the formal and functional existence of a public health system since the first third of the 20th century.

It is important to clarify that the so-called “missions” are social welfare programs created by the government of Hugo Chávez as of 2003 to address social exclusion, but also as a form of social control of the population in poverty. The Barrio Adentro mission is a strategy to bring health professionals to poor neighborhoods in cities to provide health care with the help of Cuban healthcare workers. This program was created even though there was already an extensive network of outpatient clinics and primary health care centers, as well as qualified local healthcare personnel.

Venezuela not only bought Cuba's services to build up the Barrio Adentro mission, but also began to control interactive media associated with this social welfare program. Venezuela bought services from Cuba that it did not even produce in order to create and operate the Barrio Adentro network. In addition, the government runs a propaganda network to convince Venezuelans of its solidarity.

The investigation set out to identify the true scope of the Twitter accounts linked to the CDI and the Cuban Medical Mission. User statistics of 14 CDI accounts throughout Venezuela were downloaded. They are accounts that promote the hashtag #BarrioAdentro18Aniversario and range from having dozens to a few hundred followers. These accounts are listed below.

Table 15: Users, their number of followers, accounts following and CDI followers

| Users | Followers | Following | CDI Followers |
|-------------------|-----------|-----------|---------------|
| @cdipuertadelli1_ | 121 | 25 | 46 |
| @CDI_arenas | 364 | 262 | 46 |
| @CdiMichelena | 22 | 79 | 16 |
| @CdiLibertador | 531 | 387 | 21 |
| @cdihiguerote3 | n.a. | n.a. | 58 |
| @CdiGilberto | 271 | 156 | 19 |
| @CDIelRosario | 67 | 77 | 16 |
| @cdicorpo11 | 232 | 181 | 50 |
| @cdicarvajal | 73 | 27 | 3 |
| @CdiBocono | 10 | 4 | 8 |
| @CDI_Tariba | 32 | 2 | 2 |
| @cdi_suiza_ | 99 | 99 | 42 |
| @CDI_feyalegria | 914 | 1.751 | 53 |
| @CdiLagunas | 189 | 201 | 47 |
| @cdi_sucre | 53 | 226 | 9 |

Among all these accounts there are 1,431 unique accounts that include individuals, public health centers and Cuba Coopera accounts, which is what users of Cuba's international medical cooperation program—or the Cuban Medical Mission—are called. Cuba Coopera has Twitter accounts by state and mission.

After examining the 14 aforementioned accounts, we found that there are up to 114 unique CDI accounts within the Barrio Adentro mission. In 2009, there were 499 CDIs in Venezuela, according to sources from Barrio Adentro.

Undoubtedly, the number of accounts that indicate Cuba as their location is also curious, because on Twitter the location may mean that the user is originally from or currently located in the country mentioned in the post timestamp. Keeping this in mind, more than 370 of the 956 accounts affirm that they are located in Cuba. This means a third of the total followers are not Venezuelans.

In general, Barrio Adentro accounts are full of socialist slogans, Fidel Castro, white coats (alluding to the Barrio Adentro doctors), and insistence of Cuba's supposed solidarity with Venezuela. In addition, the Cuban flag appears in the profile photos of these accounts, so it is evident that they carry out propaganda in favor of Barrio Adentro.

Special Case Study: Protests in Colombia

In 2019, Colombia was shaken by violent protests that resurfaced in 2021 as a result of an extemporaneous proposal for tax reform proposed by the government of President Duque, which was immediately withdrawn. However, the fuse was already lit and soon it spread into social protests that condemned the deep inequalities that persist.

In the context of this unrest, numerous accounts of police abuses and excessive use of force were reported, as was disinformation. For this case study, hashtags related to the protests in Colombia were examined. Key hashtags dated between May 29 and June 7 were identified based on the Trendinalia index. Hoaxy was also used to download data to identify hashtag connections. The Vicintas app was used to download tweets from a specific hashtag. Hoaxy generally identifies just over 1,000 relationships to hashtags per search, and about 2,000 tweets were downloaded through Vicintas. All Hoaxy downloads are from the search #ParoNacional + date (day + initial letter of the month), therefore hashtags ranged from #ParoNacional29M to #ParoNacional7J.

For this case, it was decided that no official government accounts would be used in this analysis. A cross data analysis was conducted using tweets with a specific hashtag and filter by Venezuela (on Twitter the location is defined, not geolocated, unless the account user activates this function).

176 accounts were linked to the following four hashtag trends: #ColombiaResiste, #CaliResiste, #DuqueAssino and #SOSColombiaNosEstanMatando.

While the focus of the analysis was on accounts that identified their location as Venezuela, a specific account stood out. This account had 69 tweets, retweets or cited tweets and belongs to a Venezuelan that was tweeting from New York and interacts with *chavismo* intellectuals such as Roberto Hernández Montoya. This user known as Prometeo @AntonioM646, publishes many photos and sarcastic comments and is one of the accounts identified as most influential in the context of this case study.

We define cyborg accounts as those that share similar traits to bots but are managed by humans acting in an orchestrated way to fuel messaging campaigns. They can also be automated to some extent, for example, when retweeting posts from certain accounts. Most of the accounts found appear to be cyborg accounts, with people running them behind the scenes.

In summary, whether expressly organized or not, it is evident that there are *chavismo* attempts to influence politics of other countries; in this case, that of Colombia. It is important to note that Colombia and Venezuela are sister countries with strong cultural, historical, and economic ties. Colombia has always been an important player in Venezuelan domestic and foreign policy.

For the U.S., Colombia is the most important and reliable ally in the region. In the context of the Venezuelan crisis, Colombia has received the largest number of Venezuelans migrants and has

deployed a broad diplomatic strategy aiming to find opportunities for negotiation to end the crisis. A period of political instability or an eventual replacement of the Duque government before the end of term would weaken Colombia's firm stance against the Maduro government and its international leadership. Furthermore, if greater powers in the region such as Mexico and Argentina, which are currently ruled by the left, continue to avoid questioning the Venezuelan regime, regional pressure for political change in Venezuela will decrease notably.

Social networks are playing a greater role in the expression of social unrest, as seen during the Arab Spring more than ten years ago. In Latin America, social movements are organized through social networks, which is why they become fertile ground for disinformation and the promotion of anti-systemic movements.

Until a few years ago, Russia had no major relevance in the region beyond the sale of weapons to various countries. However, it has recently expanded its influence through deploying disinformation campaigns without investing much human, financial, or technological resources, and is having an important impact in public opinion and consequently outlooks on the political future of the region.

GEOPOLITICAL ANALYSIS

President Maduro's government began in 2013 after a controversial victory by a 1.49 percent margin over opposition candidate Henrique Capriles. During this time, the government's authoritarian tendency grew stronger. Maduro, unlike Chavez, has never had overwhelming popular support, so his administration compensated for its lack of democratic legitimacy with the use of force.

For Jacome (2016), the government's turning point towards a more open authoritarianism was the triumph of the Democratic Unity Roundtable (MUD) party's pro-democratic campaign in the 2015 legislative elections. This resulted in greater deterioration of institutions as well as greater control of the Executive branch in order to limit the functions and capacity of the new legislative power of the opposition party. Jacome argues that this control was strengthened with increased militarization and the postponement of national elections.

This authoritarianism made the Venezuelan crisis more visible to the world and shined a spotlight on the potential consequences of a mass exodus of Venezuelans in the region.

Intervention by the international community began in 2002-2003 when the opposition began an insurrection to displace former President Chavez. The Organization of American States (OAS) participated in a Forum for Negotiation and Agreement. Unfortunately, the international community did not monitor the country's compliance with the agreements and all efforts were in vain. The 2004 referendum recall was too late, and the country became even more polarized.

Today, the geopolitical environment is much more complex. The change in Venezuelan foreign policy towards a multipolar landscape allowed for it to strengthen relations with Russia and China

to the detriment of its previous relationship with the U.S. that existed during the democratic period in Venezuela (1958-1998).

Bravo (2011) explains that the country's foreign policy has evolved since 2002 to challenge the U.S. through its oil diplomacy, projecting international influence in support of a multipolar international system. At the same time, and practically from the beginning of his government, President Chavez sought rapprochement with Putin's Russia under this rhetoric of multipolarity. As a result, Russia has become one of Venezuela's closest allies in military, economic, commercial, and even scientific domains. This broad cooperation has allowed Russia to consolidate its presence in the region beyond the sale of arms to various countries.

Likewise, oil diplomacy allowed the then nascent *chavismo* to weave a support network with the leftist governments of the region—starting with Cuba, but also with Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Ecuador, and Nicaragua. *Chavismo* aimed to create the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA) as an alternative to what Chavez called neoliberal integration in the region.

This and all the multilateral initiatives led by *chavismo*, such as the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) and the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) broke down as soon as the price of oil, its main resource that sustained political allegiances, fell. Similarly, various leftist governments entering the second decade of the century gave way to liberal governments that detached from these organizations created by Chavez because they lacked institutionalization and purpose beyond promoting Chavez's discourse and the oil industry.

In this context, the anti-U.S. narrative of the Venezuelan government has been incessant over the last 22 years: accusations of assassinations, coup plots, attacks, and military invasions of all kinds, all without evidence. Most recently, the Venezuelan government has blamed the U.S. for its difficulties in dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic.

The four years of the Trump administration and his rhetorical threats of military invasion reinforced the narrative of the Venezuelan government and contributed to the polarization of the international community, thus hindering consensus among the various Latin American and European governments interested in finding a peaceful path to conflict resolution.

Currently, President Biden has emphasized that the greatest challenges for U.S. foreign policy are related to Russia and China, stating clearly that the U.S. will engage in the defense of democratic values and human rights across the world. After four years of the U.S. closing itself off to foreign policy and abandoning important spaces in global politics, dealing with Russia and China will not be easy. In his first speeches as president, Biden made it known that the good feelings with Russia are over and that China represents a threat to the U.S., thus taking a more confrontational stance towards both powers.

Putin's Russia is a declining power that lacks the stature of the former USSR and cannot compete with the U.S. China is something else. Its economic growth has been exponential in the last two decades, developing an almost perfect authoritarian system that leaves no room for dissent, and that seems to have been strengthened by the COVID-19 pandemic. On the other hand, its discreet

diplomacy, respectful of principles of non-intervention, promotes its political model under the conviction of its superiority over the West. This is the preferred narrative of the highest spokespersons of the Venezuelan government: Nicolas Maduro, Vice President Delcy Rodriguez, and Foreign Minister Jorge Arreaza.

The Sinopharm and Sputnik vaccines have been decisive in the disinformation strategy aimed at portraying the U.S. government as the main adversary of the Venezuelan people, and Russia and China as great benefactors. The truth is that if a negotiation process fails again, authoritarianism in Venezuela will advance even further and will have consequences not only for the country, but for the democratic governance of other countries in the region.

CONCLUSIONS

- The research reflects that government websites and the public media system in Venezuela do not have consolidated and reliable information on any of the topics covered, even in regard to COVID-19, the acquisition of vaccines, or vaccination plans.
- The destruction of the traditional media fabric in Venezuela puts the population in a vulnerable situation when it comes to access to information. As authoritarianism deepens, Venezuelans have serious barriers to accessing and comparing information, thus allowing government disinformation campaigns to have a greater impact on the population.
- In Venezuela the deterioration of public services, particularly electricity and internet, prevents in-country citizens' access to information.
- The results of this investigation show that the Venezuelan government is carrying out disinformation activities aimed at misleading, confusing, and promoting social polarization in the country around key issues such as COVID-19.
- These activities are linked to disinformation agendas of other authoritarian governments such as Russia and China, which highlight concern about poor countries' access to COVID-19 vaccines and are spreading disinformation in Venezuela to promote their political model as favorable, in opposition to that of the West (specifically the U.S.).
- As Milosevich-Juaristi (2017) points out, disinformation is a strategy constantly used by Russia, both domestically and abroad. In this case, it has sought out to discredit Western vaccines and cast doubt on their effectiveness in order to promote Sputnik. However, it has not been able to comply with the delivery of vaccines; Venezuela still has not received the shipment of the second doses of the vaccine.
- China has used Russia's relationship mechanisms with Venezuela to penetrate the region and carry out its own disinformation activities. In the specific case of the Sinopharm vaccine, it uses the same strategy as Russia to spread inaccurate information about all Western vaccines and influence public opinion in favor of its vaccine.

- The narrative of the Russian and Chinese media pictures both countries as allies and unconditional friends of Venezuela in the face of the “blockade,” sanctions and alleged acts of aggression imposed by the United States. In addition, Venezuelan authorities have adopted the narrative that China has efficiently managed the pandemic.
- Also, as part of this narrative, there is evident bias and favoritism towards Russia and its vaccine assistance to Venezuela in the wake of COVID-19.
- The disinformation generated by the government of Venezuela and its allies Russia and China has contributed to the dismantling of democracy in the country.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The advancement of authoritarianism requires the strengthening of civil society through the creation of networks that include various social actors in order to generate collaborative strategies. In addition, international donors play a role in drawing attention to the issue and supporting the strengthening of civil society.
- Capacity building is not a competence exclusive to communicators and academics. It is essential that citizens understand the subject matter. One aspect to consider would be the creation of disinformation chairs at educational institutions, with the support of NGOs and in an international cooperation framework. In the context of Venezuela, NGOs would have more prominence, since higher education institutions are on the verge of closing down due to decrease in faculty and students, budget cuts and lack of professors’ autonomy.
- The prominence of Russian and Chinese information must be faced by promoting more independent digital media outlets committed to freedom of expression and information.
- Breaking the information bubble is a must. A negotiation process on the mere holding of free elections is not enough to promote democracy in Venezuela. It also requires the reconstruction of the social fabric, in which NGOs play a central role in boosting government transparency, depolarizing society, and promoting values such as tolerance.
- Latin America is currently facing a difficult moment. Democracy is at stake. Countries such as Mexico, Argentina, Peru, and Brazil are experiencing the debilitation of institutions that were challenging to build. On the other hand, Venezuela, Nicaragua, and Cuba are increasingly authoritarian. In this complex context and with the aim of promoting multilateralism and the democratic agenda of President Biden, the U.S. must work not only with governments, but also with civil society to combat disinformation and strengthen the private media ecosystem.