

## *Introduction*

# THE VENEZUELAN GOVERNMENT AND US EMPIRE IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

At the turn of the twenty-first century, the US government possesses and maintains a global empire. This might sound nefarious or hyperbolic. It might even sound conspiratorial. The existence of the US Empire, however, is widely accepted among many contemporary scholars, journalists, and politicians (Go 2011; Immerwahr 2019; Kaplan 2020; McCoy 2017). When we speak of the US Empire, what is meant, quite simply, is that the US government and its functionaries wield disproportionate influence over global affairs through the exercise of a number of modalities, such as, for example, economic coercion and military intervention. While it remains true that some regional powers exist, such as China and Russia, and while it remains true that these countries possess some influence over some of their neighbors, the US Empire remains hegemonic in the sense that US government decisions remain far more consequential and wide-ranging than the decisions of any other global actor. The US government, for example, wields far more leverage than any other country over a far wider array of government leaders and international organizations, such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank (Babb 2009; Mann 2013; McCoy 2017; Nye 2015).

Despite US preponderance of global power, though, challengers have continued to confront the US government well into the twenty-first century. US government leaders, for instance, charged the Russian government with interfering in its 2016 presidential elections by infiltrating Democratic and Republican Party electronic messages and databases, promoting the Trump candidacy, and transmitting partisan material over social media in order to sow discord during the electoral season. The Chinese government, for another, continues to court allies throughout many parts of the world with its One Belt, One Road initiative, and the US government has recurrently accused the Chinese government of intellectual property theft in order to unfairly bolster their domestic economy and outcompete US-based corporations. Over the

course of the last decade, too, several Latin American countries have openly defied the US government by asserting their claims to national sovereignty, removing US government agencies from their territory (e.g., the Drug Enforcement Agency, and the US Agency for International Development), and calling for the creation of a multipolar world system free from US global domination, including countries such as Bolivia, Cuba, Nicaragua, and Venezuela.

No government has been more vociferous in this endeavor than the Venezuelan government, formerly under socialist President Hugo Chávez, and now led by Chávez's successor, President Nicolás Maduro.<sup>1</sup> Under the socialists, the Venezuelan government has condemned the global war on terror, established intensive relations with US government foes (e.g., Belarus, China, Iran, Russia), and expropriated US businesses. All the while, Venezuelan leaders have sought to cultivate a new socialist model to combat free-market economic policies championed by US government leaders.

Throughout recent history, the US government has forcefully, and often successfully, targeted and deposed Latin American leaders who have challenged its dominance. In the 1950s, President Dwight D. Eisenhower permitted the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to assist dissident and exiled military forces in Guatemala in overthrowing the democratically elected government of Jacobo Arbenz. In the 1960s, President Lyndon B. Johnson ordered a US military invasion in the Dominican Republic to ensure that leftist forces would not achieve presidential power, and President John F. Kennedy ordered an invasion of Cuba led by exiles living in Florida to defeat the Castro government. In the 1970s, President Richard Nixon failed to prevent socialist President Salvador Allende from attaining presidential power in Chile, but, thereafter, succeeded in deposing, and, ultimately, killing him by permitting the CIA to work with dissident military forces led by General Augusto Pinochet. Although Congress reined in on CIA activity following hearings led by Senator Frank Church in the 1970s, CIA and US government leaders under the Reagan administration still found ways to work with counterrevolutionary forces in Nicaragua to violently destabilize the leftist Sandinista government in the 1980s, even after Congress prohibited these efforts.

Two dynamics, however, distinguish the arrival of the Venezuelan socialist government from earlier instantiations of leftist governance in Latin America during the twentieth century. First, the Soviet Union no longer exists, and, as a result, no other superpower seriously threatens to replace the US Empire as the world's most powerful entity. Regional powers surely exist, but their capacity for global influence is limited. Russia might maintain some degree of influence over Belarus and parts of Ukraine, and China might wield some degree of influence over North Korea, for instance, but they do not command the extensive sort of influence that the US Empire now commands across the globe. What is more, though, given the absence of the Soviet Union, the

threat of socialism and/or communism as a justification for aggressive US foreign policy seems hardly defensible. US government leaders might denounce Venezuelan socialism, but the country hardly appears to pose the same existential threat that the Soviet model formerly posed to the US government.

Second, Venezuela has, until very recently, remained an upper-middle-income society that possesses more oil reserves than any other country in the world.<sup>2</sup> As a result, the Venezuelan government has not been as vulnerable as other Latin American countries that had previously experimented with socialist and leftist policies at earlier points in time. While the US government easily overthrew the Guatemalan and Grenadian governments, for instance, the United States would conceivably face more formidable obstacles in an attempt to forcefully depose the Venezuelan government. Indeed, if the US government could not, and has not been able to, depose the Cuban government—a country that has faced much international isolation and suffered much misery across the last few decades—there is only more doubt that it could easily overthrow the Venezuelan government and dismantle its accompanying Bolivarian Revolution.

Despite these impediments, US government leaders have in no way abandoned imperial efforts to control political-economic dynamics inside Venezuela. US government agencies have continually sought to steer the country in a direction that US government leaders would prefer. This book, in part, examines how the US government has sought to undermine socialist governance in Venezuela, promote liberal democracy, and bring the Venezuelan opposition to power. In doing so, I show how the US government has primarily used democracy assistance to pursue these objectives. Through agencies like the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) and the US Agency for International Development (USAID), the US government has, for example, provided funding and training for opposition political parties and opposition-oriented nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). Although the US government and its democracy-promoting agencies have claimed that such funding remains neutral and nonpartisan, this is anything but the case. In Venezuela, these agencies have continually sought to bolster the opposition. In response, the Venezuelan government has pushed back against these initiatives with several legal maneuvers. Yet, despite this, US government intervention has continued. I briefly turn to the origins of US imperialism, before outlining the path ahead for this text, and the arguments that I will put forth in ensuing chapters.

### **The Origins of US Imperialism**

Until the turn of the twentieth century, US government efforts toward territorial expansion had focused on the elimination of Indigenous populations

across “the American Frontier.” The US government continued to push its boundaries further west under a settler-colonial model until they reached the Pacific Ocean. Settlers pushed Native American tribes off their land, murdered many of those Native Americans who resisted their displacement, continually broke formerly existing treaties, and thereafter circumscribed the land upon which Native Americans could reside (Bulmer-Thomas 2018; hooks 1982; Horne 2020; Horsman 1981; Jung 2011). In addition, American revolutionaries pushed for emancipation from England, in part, so that they might continue to enslave Africans and African Americans, a practice that persisted until the mid-nineteenth century (Horne 2016). Thereafter, white US leaders developed a racial, patriarchal dictatorship wherein only white propertied men could vote, govern, and maintain political office (hooks 1982; Horne 2014, 2020; Horsman 1981; Jung 2011).

As White Anglo-Saxon Protestant (WASP) men cultivated what bell hooks (1982, 27) terms a “white imperialistic order,” US government leaders such as Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson thoroughly believed that they were a chosen people destined to manage the entirety of the Americas (Horsman 1981; Immerman 2010; Fitz 2017; Krenn 2006). They supported some nineteenth-century Latin American revolutionaries, such as Simón Bolívar, in their efforts to overthrow Spanish rule, but US government leaders believed that the Americas remained a US government sphere of influence, and they eventually codified this belief in 1823 under the Monroe Doctrine (Fitz 2017; Krenn 2006; Schoultz 2018). To the south and to the west, US government forces annexed large portions of Mexico and warred with the country from 1846 to 1848. Much like their depiction of Native Americans, US government leaders depicted Mexicans as culturally backward, possessing impure blood, and thus unworthy of managing such vast territory (Fitz 2017; Horsman 1981). To these leaders, it was only natural that US Americans should remove it from them.

In 1898, though, US imperial efforts moved beyond the continental mainland. With the support of much of the US populace, President William McKinley deployed the US military to assist in the removal of Spanish forces from Cuba, Guam, the Philippines, and Puerto Rico. Following the Spanish defeat, President McKinley and other US politicians had much difficulty in deciding upon an exit plan. This would become a turning point in US history. US government leaders underwent little existential anguish extending their boundaries across the continental mainland, but what about an overseas empire?

This situation indeed provoked much soul-searching among US political elites. But, following lengthy congressional debates concerning US values and the future of the US role throughout the world, President McKinley decided that the United States would temporarily remain in the formerly Spanish-

controlled colonies (Bulmer-Thomas 2018; Go 2011; McCoy 2017). These temporary dealings have long since spiraled into indefinite stays in some places (Guam, Puerto Rico) in comparison with others (Cuba, the Philippines). McKinley, more than anyone else, consecrated the contemporary origins of US global empire. With his initiation of overseas military engagement, the door opened for a global US government presence. At the turn of the twentieth century, the British government continued to operate as the world's hegemonic superpower, and other European powers, such as the French and Portuguese, continued to retain colonial possessions throughout the world. But, while the US government did not claim many additional lands beyond those garnered from Spain and did not pursue the acquisition of formal colonies, US government leaders commenced a pattern of gunboat diplomacy and military invasion, particularly throughout Central America and the Caribbean (Grandin 2006; McPherson 2016; Schoultz 2018). In fact, these areas would serve as the training grounds for future US imperial efforts—that is, in the years before the US government would eventually reach hegemonic maturity after World War II (Go 2011; Grandin 2006).

Indeed, it was not until the conclusion of World War II that the US Empire reached maturity as a hegemonic force and ushered in an era of widespread US global empire-building. Following the war, the US portion of global GDP reached roughly 35 percent, former European colonial powers turned many of their military bases over to the United States, and the US government began a cold war with the Soviet Union, continuing to engage in invasions and battles in places such as the Dominican Republic, the Korean Peninsula, and Vietnam (Mann 2013). On the cultural front, too, Hollywood films and US corporately produced music came to dominate much of the airwaves across the world, and US cultural products, from sports jerseys to toys and gadgets, found their way into global markets, solidifying US cultural imperialism.

Interestingly, though, as the United States became a globally hegemonic power, it did not pursue colonial arrangements, as previous European empires had. Some have interpreted this in a benign light, claiming that the US Empire has ruled over the world system in a benevolent manner, commanding a new form of empire built upon freedom, liberty, and democracy (see, e.g., Kaplan 2020). Many more social scientists, however, argue that little evidence exists to support these claims (Bulmer-Thomas 2017; Go 2011; Immerwahr 2019; Mann 2013; McCoy 2017). Instead, they view the US Empire as continuing to engage imperial strategies in a similar effort to control and dictate both the domestic affairs of foreign countries and global affairs writ large, albeit in a more indirect and informal, rather than formal and colonial, manner.

Firstly, many scholars reject the idea that the US Empire is historically unique in comparison with previous empires. Historian Victor Bulmer-Thomas (2018) and sociologist Julian Go (2011), for instance, point out that

the US government indeed engaged in colonial arrangements even during the first few decades of its existence, long before the Spanish-American War and the pursuit of overseas aggression. As the US government expanded its boundaries beyond the initial thirteen colonies, the federal government ruled over newly acquired territories, such as Louisiana, for substantial periods of time without territorial citizens possessing the same rights as citizens in official states (Bulmer-Thomas 2018; Go 2011). Some politicians even challenged the presidential candidacy of Republican senator Barry Goldwater, for example, given that he was born in Arizona before it achieved official statehood in 1912 (Bulmer-Thomas 2018).

In the wake of World War II, it remains true, though, that the US Empire has not pursued formal colonial efforts in the same manner as European colonial powers throughout earlier centuries. Go (2011) dispels the notion that this is due to American exceptionalism and a unique form of benevolence—that is, in contradistinction to former European colonial powers. Like Bulmer-Thomas (2018), Go (2011) points out that the US government pursued colonial efforts both on the US American mainland and beyond. More importantly, though, he points out that global dynamics prevented the US government from pursuing colonies. In the wake of World War II, the US Empire contended with the Soviet Union, and, while the United States could have pressured European powers to turn their colonies over to the United States, Soviet support for decolonization in many parts of the world precluded such efforts. Given that some revolutionary movements received support from the Soviets, US government leaders feared that should they succeed, and should the US Empire pursue colonies or support continued European colonialism, successful revolutionary movements might align with the Soviets and turn against the United States. As a result, these structural conditions stifled any consideration of such pursuits.

In addition, Go (2011) points out that US government leaders could not simply claim territories as European colonial powers had done so during, for example, the scramble for Africa. Rather, in the post-World War II period, territories were defined, nation-state lines were drawn, nationalist movements developed, and at least some local governance was established within many formerly colonized territories, even if that local governance could easily and formally be undercut by governors and other colonial rulers. The global terrain had changed since Europeans colonized the world, and US government leaders had to adjust to these new circumstances.

Second, and more importantly, social scientists have documented how under these new arrangements, the US government deployed other sorts of imperial methods—beyond colonization efforts—in order to maintain a global empire. Michael Mann (2013) has identified four informal methods of imperial control that the US Empire has deployed in lieu of formal colonializa-

tion efforts, but no less intended to ensure global domination. These efforts include military force, support for proxy governments, economic coercion, and hegemony. While the US government has persistently been at war since World War II in places such as Iraq and Vietnam, it has also relied upon authoritarian rulers in many parts of the world, who have embraced US foreign policy interests. During the Cold War, the US government supplied not a few dictators with economic and military support, such as General Augusto Pinochet in Chile. Even in the present, the US government continues to intensively work and maintain friendly relations with authoritarian governments in places such as Azerbaijan, Honduras, and Saudi Arabia. In addition, the US government has exerted control over the policies of foreign governments through the threat of removing bilateral aid or vetoing multilateral aid. Finally, many world leaders have simply accepted the global leadership position of the United States and have fallen in line behind US global policies, such as when British and Australian leaders quickly supported US counterterrorism policies, including the invasion of Iraq.

Mann (2013), among other social scientists, remains much justified in spotlighting these particular imperial modalities. However, these methods include only the most visible strategies undertaken by the US Empire. Many of these methods are not frequently deployed in most areas of the world. More importantly, these methods are often not deployed against some of the US Empire's most formidable opponents, including those middle-income countries that pose a serious challenge to the future of US global power, such as China, Iran, Russia, and Venezuela. In such middle-income countries, the US government often relies upon far more subtle methods in its attempts to steer political-economic dynamics in a direction consonant with US imperial visions of how foreign governments should operate.

Given that the US government cannot invade all countries, and given that the United States often cannot economically coerce middle-income countries due in part to their independence from international financial institutions, how have US government leaders responded to such challenges?

### **US Empire Building in the Twenty-First Century**

In some instances, the US Empire continues to use the aforementioned sorts of informal tools to exert control over global affairs. There is no question about that. Many social scientists focused on US imperialism, however, often entirely miss an understudied, yet consequential US foreign policy initiative that has become widely used at the turn of the twenty-first century: democracy assistance. In the 1980s, US foreign policymakers began to establish programs and agencies specifically charged with providing governments, newly developing political parties, and NGOs in Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe,



Latin America, and the Middle East with financial and technical support, or democracy assistance, for transitioning to and constructing democratic political systems (Carothers 1999; Geogehan 2018; Robinson 1996). While the US government has distributed this aid within many low-income countries, it has also provided such assistance within several middle-income countries, such as Belarus, Colombia, Russia, and Venezuela.

By the 1980s, it had become clear that communism had begun to lose its international vitality, as communist governments faced recurrent domestic protest and began to formally transition away from authoritarian modes of political-economic governance. Mikhail Gorbachev, for instance, initiated policies of *glasnost* and *perestroika*, or a loosening of restrictions on civil liberties and private enterprise, alongside freedom for nearly all imprisoned critics. The Reagan administration, for its part, recognized that the days of communism were limited and wanted to shape what political-economic system replaced the Soviet model in many locations across the world. Administration members also believed that the inspiration that the Soviet Union formerly offered, had now dissipated. Some disagreement remains, though, as to the ultimate basis for the beginnings of democracy assistance. Thomas Carothers (1999), for one, argues that the global shift away from communism allowed the US government to adamantly, and, finally, pursue democracy promotion without the suspicion that foreign citizens might elect socialist or communist-inspired leaders who might align with the Soviet Union and threaten US national security interests. In contrast, William Robinson (1996, 2006) has argued that as popular social movements were beginning to unseat authoritarian dictators in places such as Iran and Nicaragua, US government leaders searched for a new policy that would prevent these developments and allow the United States to more carefully manage global affairs. What is more, Robinson has argued that dictators had become anachronistic vestiges who prevented the full spread of neoliberal economic policies, as these leaders often engaged in crony capitalist policies such as awarding domestic businesses to friends, family members, and political supporters. In his view, moderate and right-leaning governments that were democratically elected could thus provide the best stability for global capitalism and the spread of transnational corporations. Taken together, Robinson (1996, 2006) argues that these two dilemmas—increasing social unrest and crony capitalist policies within dictatorial countries—pushed the US government to advance a new form of imperialism that would allow for long-term control over other countries.

Since this time, the US government has developed several agencies that provide governments, political parties, and NGOs with democracy assistance. Specifically, this has included offices within the US Agency for International Development (USAID) and the Department of State. In addition, US policy-makers created the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) and its four



associated groups—the International Republican Institute (IRI), the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI), the Solidarity Center (SC), and the Center for International Private Enterprise (CIPE)—to provide political parties and NGOs with complementary assistance. The NED and its associated groups receive nearly all of their funding from Congress, but they possess independent boards of directors and must only provide Congress with annual reports on their programs and policies throughout the world. They exist as a sort of semi-government institution in contrast with US offices within USAID and the Department of State. All together, these groups encompass the heart of what Thomas Melia (2006) has termed “the democracy bureaucracy,” which also includes a smattering of additional private organizations, foundations, and other groups that contract with these state organizations, all of which I discuss in later chapters.

Similar to mid-twentieth-century US foreign policy endeavors, contemporary US democracy assistance practices remain controversial. Neo-Marxist scholars, for instance, have argued that the US government only provides democracy assistance to a select array of political actors (Burron 2013; Petras 1999; Robinson 1996, 2006). These include political parties and NGOs that champion neoliberal economic policies, including trade liberalization, privatization of formerly nationalized industry, and economic deregulation. In a word, neo-Marxists claim that the US government supports actors that pave way for the spread of transnational capitalism and transnational corporations, many of which are headquartered in the United States. Although elections might appear free and fair, they argue that the US government seeks to cultivate political leaders that only it deems worthy of leading countries abroad. To do so, they argue that the US government lavishes such leaders and organizations with funding and assistance.

Government leaders throughout the world have also criticized democracy assistance and, in some places, they have curtailed and criminalized the practice (Carothers 2006; Christensen and Weinstein 2013; Gill 2016). For one, the Egyptian government has prohibited some NGOs from receiving US government assistance, and, in February 2012, Egyptian law enforcement arrested forty-three civil society workers, including several US citizens working in the country. In the same year, the Russian Duma under President Vladimir Putin passed legislation that labels NGOs that receive foreign aid as “foreign agents” and subjects them to financial regulations. Putin has also shut down USAID offices and expelled its workers from the country. Similar episodes have occurred in places such as Belarus, Bolivia, Nicaragua, and Hungary.

Government leaders throughout Latin America, including President Hugo Chávez in Venezuela, President Daniel Ortega in Nicaragua, President Evo Morales in Bolivia, and President Rafael Correa in Ecuador, also criticized, circumscribed, and, in the instance of Venezuela, entirely prohibited

political parties and politically-oriented NGOs from receiving US democracy assistance and other forms of foreign aid. In 2010, after years of condemning USAID and other US government funding practices in the country, the Venezuelan legislature successfully passed the Law for the Defense of Political Sovereignty and National Self-Determination, which prohibits political parties and political NGOs from receiving foreign funding. While it does not apply to all NGOs, the language of the law remains ambiguous as it extends its jurisdiction to include any organization that has as its purpose “to promote, divulge, inform, and/or defend the full exercise of citizens’ political rights.” Since many NGOs support the expression and defense of what could be understood as political rights, such as electoral rights and freedom of the press issues, it is conceivable that the Venezuelan government could subject a range of NGOs and their leaders to fines and prosecution based on this new legislation. These measures, however, have not deterred US government agencies, as they have continued to openly fund civil society groups in the country.

### **US Democracy Assistance and the Venezuelan Government**

In chapter 1, I provide a short history of Venezuelan politics, and US-Venezuelan relations. I show how political-economic discontent throughout Venezuela during the 1980s paved way for the success of outsider presidential candidate Hugo Chávez, who critiqued socioeconomic inequalities in the country and offered an opportunity to break with the Venezuelan two-party system. In addition, I lay out how under Chávez, US-Venezuelan relations increasingly deteriorated to the point where the two countries expelled their respective ambassadors. What is more, I detail some of the basic claims laid out by scholars concerning US intervention into Venezuela during these years, including how the United States used democracy-promotion efforts to undermine the Chávez government.

In chapter 2, I discuss the various US government agencies that carry out foreign policy abroad, including their origins, official mandate, and how they have used funding. I also lay out the two major perspectives that exist concerning the provision of democracy assistance, including a neo-Marxist perspective and a neo-Tocquevillian perspective. Although many scholars have neglected to examine this form of intervention, these two perspectives comprise what scholarly work exists on these practices. Throughout this book, I build upon the neo-Marxist perspective and provide a comprehensive understanding of US democracy assistance efforts abroad. As a result, I complement this analysis by drawing upon postcolonial work from scholars such as W. E. B. Du Bois, as well as the work of critical historians examining US foreign policy in Latin America.

What is more, I show that the neo-Tocquevillian perspective does not offer an accurate view of US democracy assistance efforts abroad. Taking influence from the work of Alexis de Tocqueville and his belief in the inherent beneficence of civil society groups, neo-Tocquevillian scholars have argued that governments such as the United States should furnish political parties and NGOs with financial and technical support in order to cultivate a healthy civil society and a pluralist political model (Carothers 1999; Diamond 2009; McFaul 2004 Wiarda 2003). Such scholars, many of whom have worked within the US democracy assistance community, believe that civil society and democracy are mutually reinforcing, and each would not properly function without the other. In addition, such scholars portray democracy assistance as unbiased, nonpartisan, and flowing to a diverse array of political actors, including a multiplicity of NGOs and political parties. They claim that these political actors strengthen the societies they inhabit, and, where democratic consolidations have not transpired, they believe that NGOs and political parties can play an essential role in solidifying democratic change.

My analysis shows that a liberal democratic framework has undergirded US democracy assistance efforts. In addition to private property rights, liberal democratic politics involve policies that promote individual rights, including voting rights, limited government, decentralization of services, law enforcement, and, indeed, private property rights. The US government has embraced the centrality of the individual citizen in contrast to a strong centralized state. What is more, my analysis links democracy assistance with a history of US foreign policymaking that has involved racism, neocolonialism, and paternalism within the region. US policymakers believe it is their duty to show Venezuelans their true interests and to turn them away from Chávez and his allies. They envision Chávez and his allies as uncivilized and undemocratic, and as manipulating Venezuelan citizens, who remain rather irrational and cannot understand their true interests. Indeed, this serves as the justification for US intervention and for the use of democracy assistance in the first place.

In chapter 3, I specifically examine the racist and neocolonial underpinnings involving US foreign policymaking toward contemporary Venezuela. One of the primary assertions that I render in this book is that US global empire persists into the present, and, what is more, it persists with much ideological continuity since the days of the Monroe Doctrine, the Mexican-American War, and President McKinley's decision to initiate an overseas empire. In particular, I argue that visions of US exceptionalism, US political-economic supremacy, and US racism, neocolonialism, and paternalism guide and justify US foreign policy efforts in Venezuela. US government elites believe it is their duty to promote their vision of democracy—that is, a liberal democratic vision—within Venezuela and to convince Venezuelan citizens what politicians they should support, which excluded Chávez, the

politician that Venezuelan citizens, of course, did continually evidence support for. I show that US government actors have viewed Chávez's supporters as emotionally beholden to him and as a frenzied mass that cannot think for themselves. However, with US guidance, government functionaries believed they could enlighten Chávez supporters (Chavistas), teach them to reject him, and cultivate an allegiance for the Venezuelan opposition. In rendering this argument, I centralize the work of W. E. B. Du Bois, but also Edward Said and Aníbal Quijano, and their emphases on the global color line, Orientalist thought, and coloniality. While Du Bois's ideas help us to make sense of how the US government continues to exert control over countries abroad in a neocolonialist manner, Said's work on Orientalism and Quijano's work on coloniality assists us in making sense of the cultural dichotomies that US government functionaries draw upon to justify intervention into Venezuela. Together, such thinkers help us to make sense of the superiority evidenced by US government actors and their sense of paternalism over countries in Latin America and the choices their citizens make.

In chapters 4–8, I carefully detail the array of US democracy assistance efforts in Venezuela, including the work of the NED and its associated groups (chapters 4–7), and USAID (chapter 8). Throughout these chapters, I show that US government functionaries promote US global supremacy in the realm of political-economic life, and they understand their vision of democratic politics as superior to all other manifestations and understandings of democratic politics. This particular US understanding of democratic politics is closely aligned with the liberal democratic tradition of politics that champions civil liberties, individual rights, and limited government—or, in other words, civil and political rights. This deeply contrasts with the Venezuelan government's vision of democratic socialist politics that prioritizes social and economic rights and, at times, involved the transgression of individual rights, such as private property rights for corporations and landholders.

Chapters 4–7, respectively, lay out the funding efforts of the NED, the IRI, the NDI, and, finally, CIPE and the SC. Although the NED provides funding for its associated groups, it also directly funds NGOs. In Venezuela, such funding has prioritized liberal democratic features of governance, such as, for example, civil liberties, decentralization of government, power, and human rights training for law enforcement officers. For its part, the IRI has run training seminars for political parties that include suggestions on how, for example, the opposition might recruit youth supporters, reach out to voters, hold press conferences, and construct a political platform. Within interviews, former IRI representatives quite plainly state that these efforts were designed to help the opposition defeat Chávez. The NDI, on the other hand, has maintained more of a mixed record in terms of its support for projects in Venezuela. On the ground, it largely worked with opposition mayors on

infrastructural issues. However, it also engaged in electoral observation projects, including the creation of an electoral watchdog group composed of both opposition and government members that would eventually verify Chávez's electoral victories.

In chapter 6, I show how CIPE exclusively worked with members of the opposition and sought to promote neoliberal economic policies throughout the country, particularly through funding for a libertarian-oriented think tank, as well as through training programs for poor Venezuelans to learn about the alleged advances of free-market capitalism. Finally, I discuss how the SC primarily worked with labor groups opposed to the Chávez government and its labor policies. The group initially worked with one of the country's largest organized labor groups, the Confederación de Trabajadores de Venezuela (CTV), whose leaders had participated in a 2002 coup d'état and a subsequent lockout strike designed to unseat Chávez. In later years, the SC helped to establish a new labor organization designed to push back against Chávez's socialist policies, including his emphasis on cooperatives and worker councils.

In chapter 8, I detail the efforts of USAID and its Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI). While the NED and its associated groups worked with political parties, business groups, labor groups, and NGOs, USAID and OTI primarily worked within civil society to pull supporters away from Chávez and to assist the burgeoning, opposition student movement, all in the wake of the 2002 coup d'état that temporarily removed Chávez from power. In this chapter, I show that USAID and OTI unsuccessfully attempted to pull Chávez's supporters away from him by establishing seemingly neutral community groups in working-class neighborhoods of Caracas that incrementally criticized government practices and promoted a liberal democratic vision of politics. When these efforts failed, USAID and OTI shifted their focus primarily from poor barrios to student groups within the country. This chapter draws on interviews with former USAID and OTI workers, and their contractors, who operated programs in Venezuela, as well as unredacted US diplomatic cables describing these efforts in the country.

The final substantive issue that this text addresses involves the Venezuelan government's response to US government intervention. In chapter 9, I discuss how and why the Venezuelan government eventually prohibited foreign funding for political parties and NGOs at the time that it decided to do so, in December 2010. Much classical political sociological theory has centered on the domestic sphere and the composition of the domestic electorate to explain the passage of legislation. In Venezuela, though, Chávez and his supporters dominated all branches of government since 2000. Instead of directing attention toward the concerns of classical political sociology, which fail to help us understand these dynamics, I show how the shifting nature of Venezuelan international relations helps us to make sense of the timing of such legislation.

I show that when the Venezuelan government sought to pass anti-NGO legislation at earlier points in time, it still remained keyed into a nexus of relations with the United States, Western European countries, and several multilateral institutions. These embassies, institutions, and their representatives successfully persuaded the Venezuelan government to stall anti-NGO legislation, particularly in 2006, as the government remained highly concerned with its reputation throughout the world and did not wish to further damage relations with the these groups.

Following a presidential election in 2006, however, Chávez consolidated relations with an anti-US network of allies, including Belarus, China, Iran, and Russia—who were also pursuing and passing similar pieces of legislation, in addition to a regional, anti-imperial network of allies, including Bolivia, Ecuador, and Nicaragua, that recently came to power, establishing what has become known as the Latin American Pink Tide. Likewise, Venezuela diminished relations with the United States, Western Europe, and several multilateral institutions. When anti-NGO legislation came onto the agenda in 2010, the Venezuelan government did not consult with these latter countries and institutions or even seem concerned with their perspective on the legislation, as they had several years earlier. Rather, Venezuela had consolidated a new-found set of international relations, and, within this new nexus of relations, anti-NGO legislation was not transgressive, but, in fact, normative, as these same countries were also pursuing similar pieces of legislation and a process of diffusion had emerged among them.

### **Moving Forward**

Over the past two decades, US foreign policy has been extraordinarily controversial in Venezuela—first under Chávez and now under Maduro. Venezuela is hardly the only location, though, where the US government has designed and operated interventionist programs carried out under the auspices of democracy assistance. The Venezuelan government is also hardly the only country that has pushed back against US government intervention and taken aim at foreign funding for NGOs and political parties—a new pattern that is developing among many countries throughout the world (Carothers 2006; Christensen and Weinstein 2013; Gill 2016). Other governments such as China and Russia are allegedly developing their own interventionist plans to target the United States, and we know that Russia, for one, has been involved in attempts to manage affairs in Eastern Europe, such as in Georgia, Serbia, and Ukraine. Given these global dynamics, a case study involving Venezuela provides an excellent opportunity to examine these newfound trends and, subsequently, to build upon and extend existing theory with regards to the US government and its contemporary imperial modalities.