



May 6<sup>th</sup>, 2022

**Panel Summary: The Road to Democracy in Venezuela**

**Purpose:**

Analyze the realistic “roads to democracy” in Venezuela by examining the political, security, and socioeconomic consideration impacting the move towards democracy.

**Executive Summary:**

On May 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2022, Florida International University (FIU) hosted a virtual panel on the path to democracy in Venezuela. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0Rrdh3murHA> The panel was facilitated by JGI’s Latino Public Opinion Forum and featured speakers from Foro Civico, Amherst College, and Datanalisis. The panel took place over a 90-minute period and discussed the various aspects hindering Venezuela’s democracy and the best avenues that the people of Venezuela can take in order to establish a functioning democracy.

**Background:**

Since 1999, Venezuela’s democratic institutions have steadily deteriorated as authoritarian rule became more entrenched. The Nicolás Maduro regime created an even sharper decline as opposition groups have consistently been met with increasing crackdowns. Elections are widely condemned as being deeply flawed while the ruling party relies on them to control all levels of government. There are essentially zero channels for political dissent that do not result in incarceration or some other form of punishment. Civil liberties are restricted and due process for those perceived to be enemies of the government is nonexistent. One of the results of these developments are simultaneous humanitarian and migration crises as millions struggle to live their daily lives while others make the difficult choice to leave their homes. Once considered a potential model for democracy in the region, Venezuela is now largely viewed as one of the most brutal. The problems facing the country are multifaceted—quarreling domestic actors, economic collapse, intense polarization, and repression.

**Summary**

**Panel Participants:** Dr. Eduardo Gamarra (JGI, Latino Public Opinion Forum), Mariela Ramirez (Foro Civico), Javier Corrales (Amherst College), Luis Vicente Leon (Datanalisis)

**Key Points**

- **Elections:** Path to democracy in Venezuela is difficult as the economic crisis it has faced in recent years has consolidated the Maduro regime’s power. Despite authoritarian tactics, there are still elections that could function as an avenue for democracy.
- **Dialogue:** Dialogue with the Maduro regime is uncertain. In a situation where they walk away from negotiations, elections are the best way to remove legitimacy.



- Dictatorships in the Region: Cuba, Venezuela, and Nicaragua need each other, but can survive without each other. Venezuela becoming more democratic might inspire other nations to do the same.
- Internal Division: Most people within Venezuela want Maduro removed from power, up to 75%. The issue of actually removing him from power is the internal division of Venezuela's politicians and what comes after.
- Obstacles for Negotiations: Major obstacles for negotiations are that the Venezuelan government does not provide its people with enough freedom to negotiate. The election authority does not provide secure elections. The Maduro regime does not want to negotiate. The opposition needs to take a unified approach and they have not done that. The U.S. is also not in a position to remove any type of sanctions as the Maduro regime will do nothing in exchange.
- Strengths of the Opposition: Appealing to the humanitarian situation in Venezuela could help the opposition develop a grass roots movement. Waiting for things to get worse will not help them. Appealing for oil sanctions could also force the removal of Maduro, since that is where most of his funding comes from.
- Sanctions: Sanctions have very little impact on how the regime functions. Venezuela is a corrupt nation where sanctions are offset onto the people. Targeted sanctions against certain sectors in Venezuela would benefit the Venezuelan people overall. Humanitarian changes and oil sanctions might go hand in hand when negotiating with the Maduro regime.