

Supervisor's report on bachelor thesis

Name: The flaws of the political opposition in Venezuela in changing the regime of Nicolás Maduro (2014-2020)

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The thesis in hand is exceptional for several reasons. Firstly, the chosen topic focused on the role of the opposition in non-democratic contexts and its possibilities to change the regime is highly relevant and still insufficiently elaborated by existing literature. The author's focus on explaining the failure of Venezuelan opposition to change the regime of Nicolás Maduro in favourable conditions for regime change from the existing democratization studies' point of view, has the great potential of theoretical and empirical contribution to actual state of knowledge about conditions for regime change in authoritarian contexts. This can be seen in the author's sophisticated justification of the topic based on the existing works in which the reader finds out that despite the fact that the Venezuelan authoritarian regime has fulfilled main conditions for regime change stressed by the leading authors in this thematic field (such as economic crisis, loss of government legitimacy, strong international involvement, parliamentary victory of the opposition), the government of Nicolás Maduro is still in power while opposition seems to be in retreat. In this respect the author provides us with really exhausting summary of existing theoretical and empirical works dealing with the topic of regime change in general and Venezuelan case specifically. The deviant character of Venezuelan case thus makes the theses even more urgent, calling for different explanations. For that purpose the author has directed her analysis to the strategies and structure of Venezuelan opposition.

Methodologically the theses is also outstanding regarding the bachelor's grade criteria. With respect to the method of analysis the author has adequately chosen the combination of two types of process tracing method – theory testing and explaining outcomes. In this respect she initially deduced from the already existing works possible causal mechanisms and then showed their insufficient explanatory power by confronting them with the Venezuelan reality. Then she proceeded to inductive approach to explain contradictory findings and discover missing parts of the story. Novelty of her research is that she explores opposition performance in interaction with government reactions taking into consideration also important contextual factors such as economic situation of the country, public opinion and international involvement. The analysis is then based on the great amount of diverse data that the author managed to gather by different methods including interviews with active members of Venezuelan opposition, thus increasing validity of author's findings. This has to be appreciated especially regarding the difficult setting for gathering the data in non-democratic contexts.

In an analytical part the author provide us not only with detailed description but also demonstrates her analytical skills when she skilfully interprets her deep knowledge of local political processes with regard to theoretical concepts introduced earlier taking into account also sequence of events as a basic evidence of connection between opposition and government strategies with the failure of the opposition to change the regime. Moreover, she did not forget to consider also the role of other contextual factors in the causal chain bringing about very interesting and sometimes surprising findings based on rich empirical evidence in form of public opinion data, interviews, reports of multilateral institutions and depicted in clearly arranged diagrams. One interesting conclusion is that opposition debilitation and failure does not always stem from the regime repression and military power but rather from mistakes and misconduct of opposition itself despite favourable context such as towards opposition inclined public opinion, deep economic crisis or strong international support. Other surprising conclusion concerns democratic linkage-leverage perspective when author

convincingly shows how democratic leverage can in specific circumstances reduce rather than increase the chances for regime change by pushing the respective regime closer to non-democratic forces and thus isolating it from democratic pressure.

To conclude, the presented thesis is well elaborated, theoretically grounded and methodologically transparent. The author proved the capability of argumentation and analytical skills.

I recommend the theses for the defense.

Barbora Vališková

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