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Venezuela: 2014 is not 2002

Rafael Uzcategui

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At the bottom of all the recent events, President Nicolás Maduro assures us, is a “golpe de estado” [a coup] in process, one that is repeating the “script of April 2002.” If it’s true that in a magical realist country like Venezuela nothing is impossible, we still believe that the conditions of 2014 are so different that it would seem impossible that there could be a breaking of the constitutional fabric, at least in the terms that we witnessed 12 years ago.

In the first place, the fragile leadership of Maduro contrasts greatly with the ascendancy that Hugo Chavez and his followers enjoyed. In the absence of a figure around which the events of 2002 developed, today the government, as well as the opposition, and each side is undergoing a crisis of representation and internal disputes between tendencies for political dominance.

Secondly, if the government has been effective in anything, it has been in the purging of the middle and upper ranks of the Armed Forces, unifying and strengthening the military support for the Bolivarian project. By comparison, the opposition has an overwhelmingly minor influence over those in uniform.

Thirdly, the comparison between the media with a pro-government line with the dissident media was relatively equal

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in 2002, with a slight edge in favor of the opposition. That's very different today. The State has efficiently reached its project of communicational hegemony, and now controls television; it has neutralized sectors of the radio and it is boxing in the print media, the only space where it isn't preponderant, by means of controlling access to foreign exchange for the import of supplies.

Fourthly, in 2002 there were guns used by both sides, now this is the sole option of the State, which is also incorporating repressive forces, as well as parapolice groups for the dispersal and control of demonstrators. If such forces were present in the "Camonazo,"¹ Their activity today is much more structured and evident with different levels of participation and much less control on the part of the central authority of the Executive.

The government's portrayal of itself as a victim after the April 2002 has been an effective communication strategy both inside and outside of the country to criminalize dissent. Will it continue to be effective?