

THE EFFECTS OF VICTIMIZATION AND FEAR OF CRIME ON DEMOCRATIC
POLITICAL CULTURE IN CHÁVEZ'S VENEZUELA

By

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To my mom

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AD	Democratic Action
COPEI	Political Electoral Independent Organization Committee
CTV	Confederation of Workers of Venezuela
FEDECAMARAS	Venezuelan Federation of Chambers of Commerce
IMF	International Monetary Fund
LAPOP	Latin American Public Opinion Project
MBR-200	Revolutionary Bolivarian Movement-200
OAS	Organization of American States
OVV	Venezuelan Violence Observatory
PDVSA	Petroleum of Venezuela
PSUV	United Socialist Party of Venezuela
URD	Democratic Republican Union
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
WHO	World Health Organization

Abstract of Thesis Presented to the Graduate School
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Over the past two decades, rates of crime and violence in Venezuela have reached epidemic proportions. The country's murder rate of 67 per 100,000 is among the highest in the world. Venezuelans consistently rank 'crime' and 'insecurity' as their top concerns. Previous research suggests that crime can erode values, attitudes, and preferences considered essential to democracy. Although Venezuela's dramatic rise in criminality has been one of the most significant developments during the Chávez era, the political consequences of criminal victimization and personal insecurity are largely unknown. This thesis begins to address this deficit by using data from the AmericasBarometer public opinion survey in 2010 to analyze the impact of victimization and fear of crime on three areas of political culture: support for democracy, trust, and commitment to the rule of law. Additionally, the analysis goes beyond the hypotheses traditionally found in the existing literature by specifying and empirically testing the prediction that the political environment (partisanship, in particular) is important in the relationship between crime and democratic political culture. The results of the primary regression analyses show that exposure to crime, whether directly through victimization or indirectly through fear of becoming victimized, has a negative effect on most of the

political culture variables tested, although some findings were mixed. The secondary analyses considering the impact of support for Chávez on the relationships of interest show that partisanship can play a mediating role in the effects of victimization and fear of crime on democratic political culture in Venezuela.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Over the past twenty years, Latin America has witnessed a dramatic upsurge in crime and violence (Bergman 2006). The severity of this recent crime wave is reflected in the number of homicides recorded per 100,000 persons, which reached 16 in 2010—more than double the world average of 6.9 and nearly on par with Africa’s average of 17 (UNODC 2011). Although every country in Latin America has been afflicted by increased levels of violence, this regional statistic masks large between-country differences. While Chile and Argentina’s homicide rates were below or comparable to the United State’s 5.0 average in 2010 (3.7 and 5.5, respectively), several countries in Central America are nearing ‘crisis point’, with murder rates reaching as high as 82 in Honduras and 66 in El Salvador. Furthermore, Mexico’s homicide rate rose 65% from 2005 to 2010 and Venezuela experienced a 30% increase in the last year alone (OVV 2011; UNODC 2011). It is inarguable that the intentional killing of another human being is the most heinous of crimes, yet, compared to other crimes it is also less prevalent.

More ordinary types of crimes, such as robbery, assault, and burglary, have become increasingly ubiquitous and often threaten citizens in the course of their daily lives (Moser and McIlwaine 2005). Accurate data on crime victimization are difficult to come by in Latin America, particularly given that over half of all crimes in the region go unreported and official records are often manipulated (Prillaman 2003). However, the AmericasBarometer Latin American Public Opinion Project’s (LAPOP) annual survey provides an estimate of the proportion of people who have fallen victim to crime. In 2010, an average of nearly one out of every five citizens across the region reported being criminally victimized during the previous year—a significantly higher level than

any other year since data collection began in 2004 (Seligson and Smith 2010). As startling as this statistic may seem, it is likely that the percentage of people living in fear of becoming a potential victim is even greater. Scholars have recently given increased attention to the myriad ways in which criminal victimization and citizen insecurity undermine Latin American development. Unfortunately, given that the region's prospects for declining crime rates look bleak (Crespo 2006; Prillaman 2003), it is probable that these issues will remain pertinent for years to come.

The social and economic costs of Latin America's crime crisis cannot be overstated. There are the straightforward consequences, such as physical harm suffered by victims and the loss of human life. Additionally, feelings of insecurity stemming from frequent exposure to crime can have deleterious effects on one's quality of life by threatening psychological wellbeing, decreasing interpersonal trust, and causing citizens to withdraw from society (Garofalo 1979; Pain 2000; Walkate 2001). A large body of literature has also established that crime and violence severely drain economic activity in numerous ways. Victims may experience material losses, the destruction of property, medical expenses, and lost earnings (WHO 2004). Crime also hampers Latin America's economic development through the increased costs of goods and services used to prevent violence or deal with its effects. Such costs include increased government spending in areas such as health, policing, and prisons (Moser and McIlwaine 2006). Businesses and citizens alike are increasingly turning to private security to shield themselves from crime and violence with hired guards, bullet-proof cars, surveillance systems, and electronic alarms (Caldeira 2000; Howard, Hume, and Oslender 2007). Other negative consequences include foregone foreign investment,

higher insurance premiums for businesses, and reduced tourism, to name a few (Maingot 2003; Prillaman 2003). In fact, the economic impact of crime and violence in Latin America is so severe that the World Bank estimates the region's average per capita income would be 25% higher if it had a crime rate that was comparable to the global average (Prillaman 2003).

In addition to the social and economic consequences, Latin America's crime epidemic also poses a serious threat to the maintenance and deepening of democracy through mechanisms that are varied and complex (Ceobanu, Wood, and Ribeiro 2011). Countries where the processes of institutional consolidation and democratization are still evolving are particularly vulnerable to the pernicious effects of crime (Cruz 2008). As Prillaman argues, citizens of Latin America typically hold a more statist view of democracy than do their counterparts in consolidated democracies. The author points out that Latin Americans tend to define a government as "democratic" primarily according to its ability to deliver substantive benefits, rather than its protection of due process, human rights, and civil liberties. Thus, a state that fails to deliver basic services, such as public security, is likely to be considered inefficient, or even illegitimate, by its citizens (2003). Recent research suggests that high levels of violent crime can erode values, attitudes, and preferences considered essential to democracy. In particular, scholars have demonstrated that criminal victimization and citizen insecurity can have corrosive effects on various elements of political culture, such as support for democracy, interpersonal trust, and commitment to the rule of law, to name a few (Ceobanu, Wood, and Ribeiro 2011; Cruz 2008; Pérez 2004; Prillaman 2003).

This thesis considers the case of Venezuela, where crime and violence have reached historical highs and the political consequences of this trend are currently the topic of much speculation. The Venezuelan Violence Observatory reported that at least 19,336 people were murdered in 2011, an average of 53 per day. The country's murder rate of 67 per 100,000 is among the highest in the world. For perspective, this figure is more than four times that of drug war-embattled Mexico and closely trails gang-ridden El Salvador and Honduras (UNODC 2011). Venezuela is also plagued by pervasive petty crimes, gang violence, armed robberies, assaults, and kidnappings. In fact, estimates have shown that Venezuelans are criminally victimized an average of 17 times during the course of their lives—four of which are violent (Rotker and Goldman 2003). Not surprisingly, crime has emerged as the top concern among citizens in Venezuela (Rebotier 2011). Nearly half of Venezuelans reported that 'crime' or 'insecurity' were the most serious problems facing their country in the 2010 AmericasBarometer public opinion survey. Although the nation's dramatic rise in criminality has been one of the most significant developments during the Chávez era, the consequences of this trend for democratic political culture remain largely unknown.

This thesis begins to address this deficit by using data from AmericasBarometer public opinion survey in 2010 to analyze the effects criminal victimization and fear of crime have on various dimensions of political culture considered essential to democracy. Specific attention will be given to three themes commonly found in the literature: support for democracy, interpersonal trust, and commitment to the rule of law. Contemporary Venezuela constitutes a crucial case for empirically testing the political consequences of victimization and fear. As outlined above, crime and insecurity in

Venezuela have reached alarming levels in recent years. Additionally, the country's rampant criminality is particularly worrisome given the increasingly precarious nature of democracy under the Chávez administration. Recent research by Wood and Ribeiro (2011) suggests that criminal victimization has a more pronounced effect on anti-democratic attitudes in more fragile democracies than in their consolidated counterparts. According to Freedom House's seven indicators of democratic performance—the electoral process, political pluralism and participation, functioning of government, freedom of expression and belief, associational and organizational rights, rule of law, and personal autonomy and individual rights—Venezuela is the least consolidated democracy in Latin America. This combination of one of the region's highest crime rates and lowest level of democratic consolidation seems to indicate that political culture in Venezuela may be considerably vulnerable. Furthermore, as the politically polarized nation prepares for a presidential election, which could put Chávez in power for another 6 years, these issues will likely become increasingly salient.

Hypotheses

This thesis uses the AmericasBarometer Latin American Public Opinion Project's (LAPOP) 2010 public opinion survey to test the hypothesis that, controlling for people's socio-demographic characteristics, criminal victimization and fear of crime affect three dimensions of democratic political culture in Venezuela: support for democracy (two measures: satisfaction with democracy and preference for democracy), interpersonal trust, and commitment to the rule of law (three measures: support for authorities occasionally 'crossing the line' to catch criminals, approval of people taking the law into their own hands when the government does not punish criminals, and belief that a military coup would be justified when there is a lot crime). The expected relationships

between these variables – the rationales for which are explained in Chapter 3 – are summarized in Table 1-1, below.

Table 1-1. Hypothesized relationships: victimization/FOC on political culture

Measures of Political Culture	Independent Variables	
	Victimization	Fear of Crime
Support for Democracy		
Satisfaction with democracy	-	-
Preference for democracy	ns	ns
Trust		
Trust in community	-	-
Rule of Law		
Support for police ‘crossing the line’	+	+
Approval of vigilante justice	+	+
Military coup justified	+	+

The hypothesized relationships depicted in Table 1-1 have been derived from the general literature on the political consequences of crime. However, the effects of victimization and fear of crime on democratic political culture have only rarely been subjected to empirical test, and have never been tested in the context of Venezuela—a country which presents its own particularities. A defining characteristic of contemporary Venezuela that most stands out is the extraordinary degree of political polarization that divides supporters and opponents of the Chávez regime. This political division has, as I will argue, the potential to influence the relationship between crime and political culture. Accordingly, the analyses in Chapter 4 will perform the same tests noted in Table 1-1, but will also include separate regressions for those who support Chávez and those who do not. These separate regressions test the additional hypothesis that citizens’ support of the current regime will influence the degree to which criminal victimization and fear of crime affects their support for democracy, trust, and commitment to the rule of law. More specifically, it is expected that the negative effects of victimization and fear on

democratic political culture will be stronger among Chávez's critics than his supporters. This expectation is formulated according to the assumption that fear of crime is a social construction and is therefore affected by the social and political context in which it is embedded. Thus, the analysis goes beyond the hypotheses traditionally found in the existing literature by specifying and empirically testing the prediction that the political environment is important in the relationship between crime and democratic attitudes, beliefs, and preferences.

Organization of the Thesis

This thesis is divided into five parts, including this introductory chapter. The body is organized as follows. The second chapter presents a chronological political history of modern Venezuela, which includes the period from the overthrow of military dictator Pérez Jiménez in 1958 to the present. Chapter 2 is not intended to be comprehensive but rather aims to present key events and highlight pertinent historical linkages. Additionally, it provides background on the rise of criminality during the Chávez era and also includes a discussion of the various explanations and theories that have been offered to account for this trend. Chapter 3, the literature review, focuses on the recent body of research that explores the political consequences of crime in Latin America. More specifically, Chapter 3 reviews prior studies that examine the effects of criminal victimization and/or fear of crime on various dimensions of democratic political culture. Chapter 4 describes the research design and methodology and presents the findings. Regression models are used as the method of analysis, while means tables and frequency tables are also used to present some preliminary data. The final chapter concludes with a summary of the results and their implications for the future of democracy in Venezuela.

CHAPTER 2
PUNTOFIJISMO, CHÁVISMO, AND THE RISE OF CRIMINALITY

The Punto Fijo Era

During the latter half of the twentieth century, as several Latin American countries were held under the coercive force of military rule, violent dictatorships, or authoritarian regimes, Venezuela stood as a noteworthy exception. In 1958, after the overthrow of the nine-year military dictatorship of General Marcos Pérez Jiménez, Venezuela's two dominant parties representing the moderate left (*Acción Democrática*—AD) and the moderate right (*Comité de Organización Política Electoral Independiente* —COPEI) alternated power through stable, democratic elections for nearly four decades (Sylvia and Danopoulos 2003). Scholars lauded the nation for its political accomplishments and privileged position in the region. This modern democratic period was touted by political scientists as the 'Venezuelan Exception.' The notion of 'exceptionalism' was not only in reference to the stability of the system, but also two other presumed features: that it remained largely free of class cleavages and that its political culture was stable and healthy (Ellner and Tinker-Salas 2005). The former belief centered on the country's transition to an oil-based economy which was argued to have weakened the oligarchy, created a large middle class, and left only a small working class, therefore containing class tensions and resulting in the multiclass bases of both parties (Karl 1987). During this era, scholars also praised the nation for its level of political participation and its "mobile, active, participatory, and optimistic" population, which were thought to be unparalleled in Latin America (Martz 1980: 1-2). To the shock of many, a profound transformation of Venezuelan politics occurred during the 1998 presidential election when the country's traditional party systems dramatically collapsed and an

overwhelming percentage of the population cast their ballots for a political outsider – military officer and former coup-leader Hugo Chávez Frías.

Chávez’s stunning victory was not the result of ephemeral conditions or a sudden shift in the behavior of the electorate. Although, during the post-1958 period, elections were rarely questioned for their integrity and most observers considered Venezuela a consolidated democracy, the system was greatly flawed (Coppedge 2005). After a general uprising forced Pérez Jiménez into exile in 1958, the inauguration of democracy was arranged through a power-sharing agreement between AD, COPEI, and the less influential *Unión Republicana Democrática* (URD) (Myers 2006). Formalized in the 1958 Pact of *Punto Fijo*, this alliance of the main political parties made certain that power would remain in the hands of a few (DiJohn 2009). A small inner circle of leaders at the head of each party tightly guarded the interests of the elite and ensured that the most polarizing issues would be kept off of the political agenda (Levine 1973; Myers 2006). As such, Venezuelan critics began referring to their political system not as a *democracia* (democracy), but a *partidocracia* (partyarchy) (Coppedge 2005).

Furthermore, as opposed to the overly optimistic perceptions of ‘Venezuelan Exceptionalism,’ not all sectors of society benefited from the nation’s oil riches. The wealth pouring into the country from its primary export from the mid 1950s to the late 1970s predominately fell into the hands of the wealthy, while a considerable portion of the population remained desperately poor (Sylvia and Danopoulos 2003). During these ‘golden years’, Venezuelans’ opulent standards of consumption were famous from Miami to Paris and the phrase “*tá barato, dame dos*” (‘it’s cheap, give me two’) became an identifying expression (Márquez 2003; Rebotier 2011). In large part, Venezuelan

democracy during the *Punto Fijo* era rested upon AD and COPEI's ability to fund a vast system of clientelism using the country's ample oil revenue (Levine 2002). As Giacalone and Hanes argued, "the political system developed since 1958 has been based on the economic capacity of the state to subsidize democracy, providing the prebends necessary to maintain a certain consensus around the democratic system" (1992: 138).

Meanwhile, large sectors of Venezuelan society hoping to escape rural poverty began migrating to Caracas, where they would be forced to settle in crowded shantytowns at the margins of the city. Living conditions in these squatter slums drastically contrasted with the urbanized zones and exclusive residential sectors of East Caracas (Rebotier 2011). Life in these *barrios de ranchos* was marred by electrical shortages, inadequate waste disposal, limited potable water, and growing crime rates (Sylvia and Danopoulos 2003). In 1950, 17% of Caracas' population lived in *ranchos*; at the end of the 1970s, when the country was experiencing the highest oil revenues in its history, the proportion increased to more than 50% (Rebotier 2011).

The presidency of AD's Carlos Andrés Pérez began just as the price of oil was soaring during the 1973 oil crisis (Tarver 2005). During this period of rapidly expanding petroleum rent, standard of living and social mobility improved in Venezuela (Briceño-León 2005). Given that historical patterns of growth and increasing oil prices were projected far into the future, members of the upper and middle classes did not see their increasing wealth and lavish lifestyles as threatened by popular demands (Lander 2005). Venezuelan society as a whole, and the new urban majority in particular, expected to continue moving up the social ladder. As Edgardo Lander argues, "a 'modern' integrated society appeared possible in the not too distant future" (2005: 26).

In the halcyon days of the 1970s oil boom, the belief of Venezuelan 'exceptionalism' and its corresponding political culture of 'national harmony' reigned (Ellner and Hellinger 2004; Lander 2005).

The popular sector's expectations of continued growth and improved standards of living would not survive into the next decade, however. The global debt crisis and plunging oil prices in the 1980s created severe economic chaos in Venezuela, which further exacerbated social inequalities and disproportionately affected the country's urban poor (Ellner and Salas 2007). Amid factions within AD and corruption scandals surrounding the preceding presidency of Carlos Andrés Pérez, COPEI's Luis Herrera Campíns was elected to office by a narrow margin in 1979 (DiJohn 2009). Herrera's presidency failed to bring economic progress: unemployment rose above 15%, the country experienced almost no growth in real GDP, and real wages dropped more than 22% (Enright, Francés, and Scott 1996; Looney 1986). Left discredited, COPEI would not win another presidential election. AD's Jaime Lusinchi's subsequent presidency from 1984 to 1989 brought nothing more than stagnant growth, increased inflation, and continued corruption (DiJohn 2009). The political elite seemed unwilling or unable to handle the mounting crisis (Sylvia and Danopoulos 2003). The masses began to feel alienated by the bipartite system and electoral participation, although mandatory, declined by 6%—resulting in an unprecedented 18% abstention rate in the subsequent election (Dietz and Myers 2007; Levine and Crisp 1999).

Venezuelans reelected former AD President Carlos Andrés Pérez in 1989 in hopes that he would bring back the prosperity that characterized his prior period in office from 1974 to 1979 (Sylvia and Danopoulos 2003). During his electoral campaign,

Pérez stressed that profound changes were needed to modernize the Venezuelan economy and promised a return to the interventionist policies he claimed had been responsible for the so-called “*La Gran Venezuela*” of his previous administration (Davila 2000). However, only days after assuming office, Pérez took the country by surprise when he implemented a series of austerity measures at the urging of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) (Neuhouser 1992). The Adjustment Plan lacked political consensus and completely ignored popular expectations—Pérez’s agreement with the IMF had not been submitted to parliamentary consultation and it was not made public until after it had been signed (Lander 2005). The President attempted to justify the new policies and the hardships that would be endured by the people in the short term by arguing that the resulting economic growth would benefit the lives of all Venezuelans after a few years time. However, the administration failed to implement adequate policies that would soften the burden of the neoliberal reforms on the popular sector or ensure that the economic impact would be distributed fairly (Davila 2000). Frustration quickly mounted as the transition of Pérez’s so-called ‘Great Turnaround’ led to painful effects for the majority of the population—subsidies and price controls for a variety of public services were withdrawn, real income decreased, unemployment rose, and the cost of basic consumer goods spiked (Ellner and Hellinger 2004).

A few weeks later, the urban poor turned on Pérez with a vengeance. On February 27, 1989, unprecedented riots erupted in the hillside slums bordering the capital (Sylvia and Danopoulos 2003). Known as the “*Caracazo*,” the outburst was provoked by a doubling of gasoline prices, which were passed on by private bus companies (DiJohn 2005). Rioting quickly spread from the *barrios de ranchos* down to the formal areas of

the city center. Pérez responded by sending in the armed forces, whose brutal repression left hundreds dead, if not more (Lander 2005). The popular uprising left an indelible mark on Venezuela's social and political landscape. Until then, the country's deep-seated class cleavages had been masked by the myth of democratic tranquility and social cohesion (Ellner and Hellinger 2004). After the *Caracazo*, an increasingly divided society began to emerge in Venezuela, as the 'excluded' classes that had been forgotten in the dominant political discourse and political culture were no longer possible to ignore (Lander 2005).

Following the tragic event, Pérez announced immediate concessions and sought to reshape political identities around a neo-populist strategy. His attempt, however, was short lived (Davila 2000). Conditions continued to worsen for the great majority of the population. Total poverty in Venezuela nearly doubled – from 36% of the population to 68% – between 1984 and 1991 (Martel 1993). By 1990, the level of informal employment neared 40%. This increasing fragmentation and informalization of the country's labor force helped to destroy the social bases of support for the traditional political parties (DiJohn 2005). Very little attention had been given to people outside of the established functional groups that had formal connections to AD or COPEI. As acknowledged by a former AD leader, "there was never any discussion about the informal sector; the party was completely unprepared and did not try to include new people or new groups" (Morgan 2007: 85). The country's profound degree of social and political polarization was made obvious once again on February 4, 1992, when a military coup led by then-lieutenant colonel Hugo Chávez nearly overthrew the government (Ellner and Hellinger 2004).

Chávez and a group of likeminded leftist military officers had covertly formed the subversive Revolutionary Bolivarian Movement-200 (MBR-200) years earlier to prepare a coup against Pérez and the *Punto Fijo* regime. However, Chávez and his men quickly accelerated their plans as other members of the armed forces joined their ranks following the government's brutal response during the *Caracazo* (Sylvia and Danopoulos 2003). Although the attempt failed, a critical victory was won when Chávez negotiated his own surrender for the opportunity to address the country on national television. Pérez obliged the officer, on the condition that he would urge his followers to put down their arms. Although brief, Chávez's appearance put a face on the opposition to the *puntofijista* party system (Dietz and Myers 2007). Furthermore, as he spoke of the defeat he emphasized that the struggle against the government had failed "*por ahora*" ('for now').

Chávez' s prescient phrase was interpreted by most of his supporters optimistically, as an indication of his intention to return (Gott 2011). The political establishment was stunned by the amount of support expressed for Chávez among Venezuela's popular sector (Ellner and Hellinger 2004). The people's attraction to the anti-corruption and anti-neoliberal elements of the rebellion made it evident that Venezuela's popular-democratic rules had to be redefined (Ellner and Hellinger 2004; Philip 1992). The following year, Pérez was suspended from office for misuse of public funds and embezzlement. The two-time president was harshly criticized by his own party for his anti-popular policies and exclusionary governing style. Ultimately, Pérez was impeached by the Supreme Court. As voiced by one of judges during the trial, the

impeachment “goes beyond the issue of corruption; it is a repudiation of Pérez the politician” (Davila 2000: 33; Ellner 1993: 16).

Pérez’s presidency made it clear to the majority that the traditional party system had become incapable of representing distinct social groups and political alternatives (Morgan 2007). In the 1988 presidential election AD and COPEI had received 94% of the vote; but by the 1993 election partisanship had drastically declined. Abstention reached a record high: 45% of the electorate did not vote. Furthermore, the combined AD-COPEI vote fell under 50% for the first time since the *Punto Fijo* system was established (Davila 2000). Disillusioned with the traditional system, the electorate opted for former president and COPEI founder Rafael Caldera, after he broke with his party and ran as an independent. Caldera had experienced a surge in political popularity following Chávez’s failed coup when he publicly chastised *puntofijismo* for the people’s dissatisfaction that, in his opinion, was both the explanation and justification for the military rebellion (Briceño-León 2005). To gain electoral support, the former president distanced himself from the neoliberal agenda and campaigned almost entirely on an anti-political-party platform (Ellner and Hellinger 2004). Another factor that contributed to Caldera’s electoral success was that he avoided criticizing the increasingly popular, although currently imprisoned, Chávez during the election (Davila 2000). Although Caldera’s *Convergencia* alliance received only 30% of the vote, he was able to narrowly outpace the other candidates in the tight four-way race.

Once in office, however, Caldera was no more politically consistent than his predecessor. Although he began his term with anti-neoliberalism as the centerpiece of his program, a series of ill-conceived stabilization plans and deepening economic crisis

forced his administration to give in to pressures for market reform (Ellner and Hellinger 2004; Weyland 2003). Popular discontent toward Caldera's political leadership and worsening economic conditions resulted in continued social upheaval. Frustrations were expressed by bouts of anarchy, urban violence, theft, strikes, and political terrorism (Davila 2000: 35), and the president responded by suspending six articles of the Constitution concerning freedoms, including the freedom of movement and freedom from arbitrary arrest (Lea, Milward, and Rowe 2001). In the end, not only did Caldera fail to confront the problems caused by over a decade of economic decay, but his inability to articulate a new political agenda left little doubt that the desire for change was completely incompatible with the country's traditional parties (Davila 2000).

In addition to the political turmoil, the years leading up to Chávez's rise to power were marked by rapidly increasing social polarization across class lines. The year before the 1998 election, a severe economic recession led to further impoverishment of Venezuelan society (Ellner and Hellinger 2004). However, the transformation of class relations had dramatically emerged nearly a decade prior. In the minds of many upper- and middle-class Venezuelans, the *Caracazo* represented the 'loss of the city' to the marginalized members of society. This sentiment is reflected in a well-known Venezuelan phrase concerning the historical event, which is described in detail by Julien Rebotier (2011: 6) and is worth quoting at length:

When covered by popular quarters, hills are called *ceros*. When wealthier sectors are concerned, the hills are called *colinas* or *lomas*. This socially-oriented difference in the naming of similar topographic forms is referred to in a common expression about the *Caracazo*: 'the day when the *cerros* ran down' (*el día que bajaron los cerros*). The expression describing the invasion of the formal city by social margins has turned into a symbol of transgression of an idealized order.

No longer hidden behind the façade of ‘exceptionalism’ and its accompanying social harmony, the threat of the ‘dangerous class’ took center stage in the media and became a source of fear among the upper echelons of society. The wealthier Venezuelans responded to the perceived risks posed by the urban poor through actions that increased exclusion and segregation (Lander 2005). Into the 1990s, outbreaks of popular protests and increased criminality served to further fragment Venezuelan society (San Juan 2002). As Rebotier argues, fear among the upper classes gave way to a host of responses that further separated the elite from the masses. Barricading homes and businesses, prohibiting public access to residential areas, and privatizing previous shared spaces all became measures used to maintain socio-spatial order (2011).

Chávez’s Venezuela

Venezuelans across the social strata were in search of an alternative to the traditional party system by the end of Caldera’s widely unpopular second administration. However, in the process of identifying the desired opposition to the old regime, the rich and poor went in separate directions (Roberts 2004). The 1998 presidential was dominated by two antiparty candidates, Hugo Chávez and Henrique Salas Römer (Ellner 2008). After decades of being ignored by a corrupt and self-serving political elite, the lower-class Venezuelan majority demanded a change in leadership. Hugo Chávez – with his role as former coup leader and a campaign platform centered on electing a constituent assembly to redraw the country’s constitution – represented the radical change the people were longing for (Roberts 2004). In the December election, Chávez won in a landslide victory with more than 56% of the vote (Sylvia and Danopoulos 2003).

Since Chávez first came to power in 1999, Venezuela has undergone a profound transformation—not only in regard to the country’s political system, but in society as a whole. Upon taking office, Chávez followed through on his campaign promise to convene a constituent assembly to overhaul the nation’s political system and draw a new constitution (Ellner 2001). Supporters of the president were elected to 91% of the 131 constitutional convention seats (Gott 2005). On December 15, 1999, the Venezuelan public approved the constitution through a national referendum with 71% of the vote (Gott 2000). Among other things, the nation’s redrafted constitution mandated for a new presidential election to be held the following year, extended the presidential term from five to six years, allowed for a president to succeed his first term, provided the option of impeachment through popular referendum, and abolished the Senate in favor of a unicameral National Assembly (Tarver and Frederick 2006). Additionally in the 1999 constitution of the rebranded ‘Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela’, participatory ‘protagonist’ democracy is posed as an alternative to the representative democracy affiliated with the past and *puntofijismo* (Ellner and Tinker-Salas 2007). Chávez again stood for election under the new constitution on July, 31, 2000 and won with more than 59% of the vote (Sylvia and Danopoulos 2003). In the so-called ‘mega-election’ Chávez supporters also gained control of the National Assembly. With AD and COPEI declining to contest, Venezuela’s traditional party system finally reached the point of complete collapse (Dietz and Myers 2007).

Following the ‘moderate stage’ of Chávez’s presidency, the radicalization of the *chavista* movement began in November 2001 when the government enacted a package of forty-nine enabling laws designed to reverse the neoliberalism of the 1990s. This

controversial move had a profound effect on political polarization by both driving moderates away from the current administration and uniting the opposition around the common cause of forcing Chávez out of office (Ellner 2008). Additionally, deepening economic decline, coupled with the president's "personalistic rule and incendiary rhetoric," led many Venezuelans to lose faith in Chávez's political movement (Hawkins et al. 2008: 2). In an increasingly divisive context, several general strikes were initiated by the president's opponents—political parties, the country's leading trade union federation (Confederación de Trabajadores de Venezuela, CTV), business group FEDECAMARAS, employees of the state-owned oil company (PDVSA), and various leaders of the Armed Force (Sylvia and Danopoulos 2003).

On April 11, 2002, a still-disputed violent confrontation broke out between the members of an opposition march who were demanding the president step down and Chávez supporters. Hours later, after several dozen deaths, the conflict gave way to a military coup (Ellner 2008). FEDECAMARAS president Pedro Carmona headed the interim government, which immediately dissolved democratic institutions and nullified the forty-nine laws of 2001 and the 1999 Constitution. Although elections were promised to take place within one year, a "civilian-military" alliance resulted in Chávez being restored to power within 48 hours (Ellner 2008: 115). The opposition had not only failed to anticipate the coup's widespread rejection among the military, but also the tens of thousands of *chavistas* that would riot in demand of their president's return (Sylvia and Danopoulos 2003).

In 2003, the government was faced with another opposition-led attempt to remove Chávez from office. This time, however, the *antichavistas* opted for a constitutional

route through a recall referendum (Ellner 2010). In December of that year, the opposition successfully submitted a petition containing signatures from more than three million Venezuelans demanding referendum on Chávez's presidency. In August 2004, a deeply divided society rallied around the 'yes' or 'no' vote in a closely-fought election to determine whether the president would continue his term until 2007, or would be forced out of office immediately (McCoy 2006). Voter turnout was exceptionally high—more than 70% of registered voters turned out to cast their ballots, which was a 10% increase over the last three presidential elections. As Jennifer McCoy explains, both sides of the polarized populace “believed themselves to be in a struggle for the soul of their country” (2006: 65). In the end, Chávez supporters defeated the recall with 59% of the vote (Legler 2007). Although the opposition claimed fraud, international observers, including OAS and the Carter Center, verified the outcome reflected the intent of the electorate (McCoy 2006).

Following the defeat of the recall referendum, Venezuela entered into a period of greater political stability (Ellner 2008). After a weakened opposition organized a boycott of the 2005 national legislative elections, parties loyal to the president secured every seat of parliament (Hawkins et al. 2008). A dramatic rise in oil prices allowed Chávez to institute a series of new social programs, called *Misiones Bolivarianas* ('Bolivarian Missions'), which are centered on poverty alleviation and development-promoting initiatives. The programs include the provision of health services, education (ranging from literacy classes to university education), basic foodstuffs, cash transfers, and occupational training, to name a few (Penfold-Becerra 2008). Amid extraordinary popular support, Chávez ushered in a third, increasingly radical, stage of his

presidency: “Socialism for the Twenty-First Century.” Key reforms included maintenance of the *Misiones*, nationalization of key industries, expansion of worker cooperatives, land reform, development of new communally based urban communities, and the creation of a new political party, the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV) (Ellner 2008; Hawkins et al. 2008). In the 2006 presidential election, Chávez secured six more years in office with 63% of the vote, the highest in any election since the inauguration of democracy in 1958 (Ellner 2008).

More than five million of Chávez’s supporters enrolled in the newly created PSUV party during the first half of 2007. In December, the members participated in massive numbers by canvassing in favor of a constitutional reform proposed by Chávez (Ellner 2010). The president suffered his first defeat at the ballot box when the referendum was ultimately rejected by a mere 2% of the vote (Ellner 2008). The proposed package of constitutional reforms sought to expand social security benefits to workers in the informal sector, reduce the maximum work week from 44 to 36 hours, end the autonomy of the central bank, and strengthen state control of strategic industries, among other amendments. A more profound proposition within the 69 reforms, however, was the elimination of presidential term limits, which would allow Chávez to run for reelection indefinitely (BBC News 2007). Upon his defeat, the president immediately announced his intention to seek approval for these reforms in the near future (Ellner 2008).

Chávez’s proposal for indefinite reelection finally triumphed in a similar constitutional amendment referendum in 2009, with 54% of the vote. Unlike the 2007 referendum which stipulated that only the president could seek reelection, the 2009 ballot sought to abolish term limits for state governors, mayors, and National Assembly

deputies, as well (Alvarez 2011). After more than a decade in power, Chávez remains determined to continue his 'Bolivarian Revolution.' Following his electoral victory, the president proudly proclaimed to his supporters, "Those who voted 'yes' today voted for socialism, for revolution. Today we opened wide the gates of the future. In 2012 there will be presidential elections, and unless God decides otherwise, unless the people decide otherwise, this soldier is already a candidate" (Price 2009).

Despite Venezuela's faltering economy, high inflation, currency controls, falling oil production, and devastating rates of crime and violence, the president's approval rating has remained relatively stable over the years (Alvarez 2011). After more than 13 years as President of Venezuela, Chávez will stand for reelection in October 2012. Even in the current context of a united opposition and uncertainty surrounding Chávez's health, the president's approval ratings have topped 50% in the polls (Sequera, James, and Rodriguez 2012).

Whether Chávez secures another six years in power or the opposition obtains the presidency, a sizeable proportion of the population will have to face an extremely unfavorable result. Regardless of the electoral outcome, the 2012 presidential election in Venezuela seems unlikely to unfold peacefully, given the deep-seated social polarization that divides the nation across class lines. Additionally, scholars, politicians, and citizens alike are concerned with what six more years of *Chavismo* will mean for the already precarious nature of democracy in Venezuela.

Of course, it must be pointed out that the standards by which the country's current form of democracy is judged yields conflicting conclusions. As Ellner (2010) offers, there are two distinct criteria used to evaluate the political system under Chávez's rule.

According to liberal standards, the current political climate in Venezuela does not fare well. The model of liberal democracy stresses the importance of checks and balances and the rights of minorities, while disapproving of excessive executive power and centralism. Radical or 'participatory' democracy, on the other hand, emphasizes majority rule and the direct participation of the population in decision making, criteria by which Venezuela fares far better (Ellner 2010: 79). However, regardless of the standards used to endorse or critique the current state of affairs, it is plausible to consider that intense political polarization, the extreme division of society, and weak rule of law could pose a serious threat to the stability of Venezuelan democracy. Furthermore, in a climate of increasing insecurity these conditions are particularly worrisome. Various dimensions of political culture deemed essential to democratic governance, such as support for democracy, interpersonal trust, and commitment to the rule of law are vulnerable to erosion in the face of citizen insecurity (Ceobanu, Wood, and Ribeiro 2011; Cruz 2008; Pérez 2004; Prillaman 2003). Not only are current levels of crime and violence in Venezuela extremely alarming, but the problem is likely to persist, or even intensify, with the upcoming election and the unpredictable years ahead of it.

The Rise of Criminality in Venezuela

Venezuela has become one of the most violent countries in the world. In Caracas – often cited as the murder capital of the world – the figure is even more alarming, with estimates ranging anywhere from 127 to 233 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants (International Crisis Group 2011; OVV 2011). The murder rate in Caracas has even outpaced that of Mexico's Ciudad Juárez—Ground Zero of the 'War on Drugs' (Casas-Zamora 2012). Yet, Venezuela is not in the middle of a civil war, an armed insurgency,

or a foreign military attack. Even in such a politically polarized society, killings are rarely an expression of political violence (International Crisis Group 2011). What then, can explain the country's rising crime crisis? Unfortunately, there is no easy answer to the question. The alleged causes of Venezuela's security fiasco are complex and varied. What is certain, however, is that rising criminality did not begin with Chávez. Even so, analysts widely agree that the situation has gotten considerably worse during his lengthy tenure.

In the decades leading up to the 21st century, several developing countries experienced rapid increases in criminality. Most notable among these nations were those in Latin America, which during the 1990s weathered some of the most substantial increases (Crespo 2006). Venezuela is no exception to this trend. Throughout much of the 1980s, the murder rate stayed relatively stable at an average of eight per 100,000 inhabitants (International Crisis Group 2011). Between 1987 and 1998, however, this figure increased substantially from eight to 22 per 100,000 (Briceño-León 2009: 31). Most scholars agree that Venezuela's rising crime rate during this period can largely be explained by the general "social, political, and institutional crisis" that was concomitantly affecting the country (Crespo 2006: 348). During this time, the excluded class did not simply represent a marginalized minority, but in fact constituted the great majority of the population. Widespread poverty, inequality, segregation, and political isolation all contributed to the crisis-like living conditions for most of Venezuelan society (Rebotier 2011). Edgardo Lander draws on the work of Ivez Pedrazzini and Magaly Sánchez (1994) to explain what became a "culture of urgency" in Venezuela, characterized by "a practical culture of action in which the informal economy, illegality, illegitimacy, violence,

and mistrust of official society are common” (2005: 26). Furthermore, following the events of the *Caracazo*, Venezuela no longer operated under the guise of social and political cohesion that had been provided by the myth of ‘exceptionalism’ (Ellner and Hellinger 2004). In this context, an increasingly fragmented society and frequent popular protests contributed to an already “emerging culture of violence” (Lander 2005: 26).

The trend of rising crime and violence did not cease with the election of Chávez. In fact, criminality has increased at an alarming pace during his time in office. The 4,550 homicides recorded in 1998 skyrocketed to 19,336 by 2011. During this period, Venezuela has also experienced an upsurge in petty theft, armed robberies, assaults, gang violence, and kidnappings (International Crisis Group 2011). Attempting to explain the rampant insecurity in present-day Venezuela, however, is particularly difficult. As Kevin Casas-Zamora argues, the country’s current security crisis “is as tragic as it is enlightening. Above all, it offers a cautionary tale about the limits of easy explanations, prescriptions, and predictions when it comes to crime” (2012). Casas-Zamora’s argument centers on the fact that while standard narratives about crime in Latin America tend to focus on income inequality as the cause and growth in human development levels as the solution, the situation in Venezuela is incompatible with this idea. The nation’s Gini Coefficient – a commonly used measure of inequality ranging from 0 (perfect equality) to 1 (perfect inequality) – has experienced a decline from 0.498 in 1999 to 0.412 in 2008, more than any other country in the region. Additionally, human development levels, as measured by the UNDP’s Human Development Index, have also increased markedly from 2000 to 2011 (Casas-Zamora 2012).

Venezuela's situation is undoubtedly unique. Although there is no sole cause behind the country's current crime levels, several explanations have been offered to help account for this worrisome trend. To begin, there is broad consensus that impunity is the primary factor behind the problem. The vast majority of crimes, including homicides, go unsolved in Venezuela. In 2009, the OVV reported that 91% of murder investigations did not result in arrest (International Crisis Group 2011). Additionally, not only are the police inefficient in Venezuela, but they are also infamous for abuse, extortion, and criminal activities such as kidnapping and the trafficking of arms and drugs (Ungar 2003). In 2009, the Minister of Interior and Justice Tarek El Assaumi admitted that nearly 20% of crimes in Venezuela were committed by the police (International Crisis Group 2011). In the 2008 AmericasBarometer public opinion survey, more than 80% of Venezuelans reported being dissatisfied with the country's police—believing that they fail to protect citizens, are involved in criminal activity themselves, or both—a percentage which was higher than any other country in Latin America. Bravo Davila also points to the country's weak rule of law to help explain rising crime levels: "Authority has been relaxed in the extreme and social order and discipline have been disappearing" (2004: 10).

Additionally, some scholars point to the polarization of Venezuelan society as part of the problem (Briceño-León 2009). Chávez often engages in aggressive rhetoric directed at the country's middle and upper classes (Ellner 2010). According to a survey conducted by the Venezuelan Violence Observatory, 53% of respondents reported that they believed Chávez's language encouraged violence and insecurity (Briceño-León 2009). Other explanations that have been offered to account for Venezuela's crime

crisis include the governments arming of citizens in the form of a Bolivarian Militia and urban *colectivos*, the widespread circulation of arms, unemployment, gang violence, government corruption, organized crime, and the country's increasing role in international drug trafficking (Alvarez 2011; Briceño-León 2009; Hawkins et al. 2008; International Crisis Group 2011; Rebotier 2011).

Unfortunately, the government's response to Venezuela's rising criminality has not reversed the trend. In a 2009 poll, more than 70% of Venezuelans reported that they disapproved of how the administration is confronting crime and violence, and more than 50% said they have little or no confidence in Chávez's ability to resolve the problem (Briceño-León, Ávila, and Camardiel 2009). However, one recent measure taken by the Chávez administration that seems promising is a reorganization and reform of the country's police.

Following a National Commission for Police Reform, the Organic Law of the Police Service and National Police was passed by presidential decree on April 9, 2008 (Sugget 2008). The Organic Law of the Police Service and National Police outlined new arrangements for the recruitment, training, coordination, and operations of most of the country's public order police forces. Presumably, the decree aims to transfer administrative control of the police from governors and mayors to the national government which would ultimately result in unified standards of conduct for all law enforcement in Venezuela. The decree also called for the creation of a national force, the Bolivarian National Police (PNB), which would be responsible for maintaining public order at a national level and would also give particular emphasis to community policing services (Birkbeck 2009). The creation of a national training institute for police was also

mandated by the decree in order to train the new force and other public security bodies according to the new policing model proposed by the National Commission for Police Reform. The National Experimental University of Security (*UNES*) aims to train police according to a model that adheres to the criteria, principles, and guidelines of human rights, and also emphasizes preventative policing as opposed to the traditional punitive approach. The first unit of the National Police was launched on December 20, 2009 (Janicke 2009). Authorities claim that the PNB has contributed to a more than 60% decline in murder and robbery rates in the areas it patrols, although, the reliability of this information is uncertain (Alvarez 2011). In the months leading up to the 2012 presidential election, Venezuela's rampant crime problem is likely to receive a great deal of attention by Chávez's political opponents. Whether this has the potential to improve the country's crime crisis, however, is yet to be seen.

CHAPTER 3 CRIME VICTIMIZATION, CITIZEN INSECURITY, & POPULAR POLITICAL CULTURE

Prior to the 1990s, little attention was given to the impact of crime on democratic stability in Latin America. Instead, scholars focused almost entirely on the threats posed by poor economic performance and the unequal distribution of income (Malone 2010). However, Larry Diamond cautioned against evaluating the efficacy of democratic regimes strictly in economic and material terms. The author warned that citizens are “no less concerned with their physical safety and security, which require protection from arbitrary harm by the state or criminal elements” (1999: 88-89). In addition to threatening the perceived legitimacy of democratic governance, Diamond stressed that crime could be “socially destabilizing” and could “undermine respect for law” (1999: 90-91). Recently, scholars have been giving increased attention to the myriad ways crime can undermine democracy in Latin America. A growing body of recent research uses public opinion survey data to empirically test the corrosive effects of criminal victimization and citizen insecurity on the values, attitudes, and preferences considered essential to democracy. For our purposes, the focus of this review will be limited to three themes commonly found in the literature: support for democracy, interpersonal trust, and commitment to the rule of law. These various dimensions of political culture – in the context of Venezuela – are also the focus of the subsequent data analysis which constitutes the core of this thesis.

Public Support for Democracy

Perhaps one of the more intuitive political consequences of crime in Latin America is its impact on citizens’ expressed support for democracy. As Diamond argues, “order and personal safety constitute one of the most basic expectations people have of

government” (1999:94). Thus, if a state fails to provide its citizens with such a fundamental principle of democracy as security, it risks being perceived as illegitimate (Prillaman 2003). Popular support for democracy is crucial to the maintenance and stability of political systems, particularly as it allows democratic regimes to endure and overcome times of crisis (Schedler 2001). Although many scholars simply assume that support for democracy in Latin America declines in the presence of increased criminality, this relationship has been subjected to empirical test only on a few occasions (Bailey and Flores-Macías 2007; Cruz 2003; 2008; Seligson and Azpuru 2001).

Within the general literature on the political consequences of crime, the concept of support for democracy is typically measured by responses to two survey items. One asks respondents to rate, on an ordinal scale, how satisfied they are with “the way democracy works” in their country. The other asks respondents whether they think democracy is “preferable to any other form of government.” In contrast to previous research that treats support for democracy as an undifferentiated concept, Ceobanu, Wood, and Ribeiro (2011) contend that ‘satisfaction with democracy’ (SWD) and ‘preference for democracy’ (PFD) should be affected by crime in diverse ways due to the conceptual differences between them. Accordingly, the authors predict that SWD, as largely contingent on evaluation of regime performance, will be vulnerable to the negative effect of crime. PFD, on the other hand, should be less susceptible, as it’s presumed to be a more stable component of political culture. Results supported the hypotheses that previous victims are less likely to express satisfaction with “the way democracy works,” but are no less likely to prefer democracy as a political system.

Additionally, fear of crime, included as a control variable, followed the same pattern in regard to SWD. However, fear did exert a statistically significant negative effect on PFD, but its magnitude was rather negligible. In conclusion, these findings by Ceobano, Wood, and Ribeiro (2011) suggest that citizens who experience crime directly or feel vulnerable to victimization may hold the current regime accountable, yet their endorsement of democracy as a preferred form of government should not be shaken.

Public Support for Democracy in Venezuela

Following the collapse of the *Punto Fijo* regime and Chávez's landslide victory, the former coup leader began his term in 1999 with widespread popularity among the population. According to the World Values Survey, satisfaction with the government went from 13.7% during Caldera's term in 1996 to 61.1% in 2000. Additionally in 2000, the level of satisfaction with "the way democracy is developing in our country" was higher in Venezuela than any other country in Latin America (Hawkins et al. 2008). However, during Chávez's more than 13 years in office – a tenure which awards him with the distinction of being the longest-serving head of state now in power in the Western Hemisphere – the president's popularity has undoubtedly waned from the honeymoon highs of the earlier years. As outlined in the previous chapter, Chávez's presidency has coexisted with rapidly increasing levels of crime and violence. Less than 30% of Venezuelans approve of how the government is confronting the country's crime crisis, and more than half hold little or no confidence in the president's ability to resolve the problem (Briceño-León, Ávila, and Camardiel 2009). Between 2008 and 2010, Venezuela suffered the sharpest decline in satisfaction with democracy in all of Latin America, dropping from 58.8 to 46.3 on a scale from 0 to 100 (Seligson and Smith 2010). In such a climate of consistent insecurity and inefficient government action,

citizens' satisfaction with democracy seems likely to deteriorate. Furthermore, considering the intense political polarization of Venezuelan society, it appears plausible that satisfaction among the proportion of the population already opposed the current regime may be particularly susceptible to the effects of criminality.

Preference for democracy, on the other hand, should not be sensitive to crime. As Wood and Ribeiro (2011) demonstrate, preference for democracy as a political system is more stable and enduring than satisfaction with 'the way democracy works.' Even in weak and unconsolidated democracies, such as Venezuela, victims have been shown to be no less likely to prefer democracy than non-victims (Wood and Ribeiro 2011). Furthermore, in the 2010 AmericasBarometer survey, the percentage of the population that agreed democracy was preferable to any other form of government was higher in Venezuela (88.04) than in any other country in Latin America, and considerably exceeded the national average (78). It is undeniable that democracy in Venezuela has undergone a profound transformation during the era of Hugo Chávez and his political project, the *Bolivarian Revolution*. However, regardless of whether they believe the democratic system has improved or deteriorated, it is clear that the majority of Venezuelans are uninterested in a political alternative. Therefore, with this particularity in mind, along with the findings of prior research, neither victimization nor fear of crime is expected to have a significant effect on citizens' preference for democracy in Venezuela.

Crime and Social Capital

Crime also has corrosive effects on social capital, which is thought to be a crucial component of social, political, and economic development. Social capital is broadly defined as the "accumulated result of social networks, norms, contacts, associations,

and memberships in private organizations” (Prillaman 2003: 11). In climates of pervasive crime and violence, people become far less trusting of their fellow citizens. In turn, they tend to withdraw from their communities and society as a whole, which hinders the development of a robust civil society (Miethe 1995). Trust also helps foster civic engagement through networks of voluntary associations and citizen organizations, which lead to increased political awareness and democratic stability (Newton 2001; Seligson 1999). Recent research in Latin America has shown that victims of crime and those who are fearful of being victimized register significantly lower levels of interpersonal trust (Cruz 2008; Seligson and Azpuru 2001). Controlling for demographic characteristics and socioeconomic status, Wood and Ribeiro (2011) demonstrate that victims of crime in Latin America are significantly less likely than non-victims to say they trust the members of their community. Additionally, Pérez (2010) found that feelings of insecurity had a strong effect on interpersonal trust. Among Latin Americans who felt insecure in their neighborhood, the average value of the indicator of interpersonal trust (measured on scale that varied from 0 to 100) declined from 70 to less than 50. Therefore, whether one experiences crime directly through victimization or indirectly via fear of the possibility of becoming a victim, crime undermines people’s trust in the members of their community.

Crime and Social Capital in Venezuela

High crime rates, economic insecurity, and democratic fragility have contributed to a decline in interpersonal trust across Latin America (Hawkins et al. 2008). In politically polarized Venezuela, society is marked by an intense division that fosters suspicion and mutual distrust. As trust between citizens has already worn thin during Chávez’s tenure, insecurity may have an even more pronounced effect on the way people view the

members of their community. Between 2008 and 2010, the percentage of Venezuelans that considered their neighbors to be either trustworthy or somewhat trustworthy declined from 67% to 59% (LAPOP 2010). In line with previous research, it is expected that Venezuelans who have fallen victim to crime or are fearful of being victimized will have less trust in the members of their community.

Crime and the Rule of Law

Finally, crime and violence is thought to threaten democracy in Latin America by eroding commitment to the rule of law. In countries where the state is weak and police are inefficient and undisciplined, crime can arouse extreme, illegal, and undemocratic responses in attempt to control it (Diamond 1999). Often, these repressive measures attempt to control violence with violence. In a context of widespread insecurity, citizens are more likely to support *mano dura* ('strong-handed') policies, extralegal actions, and vigilante justice (Wood and Ribeiro 2011). *Mano dura* policies generally involve "curtailing individual rights and re-empowering the military and police" (Pérez 2010: 4). As criminality rapidly increased throughout Latin America, some "opportunistic leaders" assured citizens that they could successfully confront criminals if only they were able to circumvent the law—promises which greatly appealed to those living in fear (Malone 2010: 2). Furthermore, Latin Americans who become convinced the institutions designed to protect them are useless are increasingly taking law into their own hands, particularly through vigilante justice and mob lynching (Prillaman 2003).

The relationship between crime and commitment to the rule of law has only recently been subjected to empirical test in the context of Latin America. In Central America, Malone (2010) demonstrated that criminal victimization and fear of crime can increase support for authorities' circumvention of the law. Additionally, Cruz (2008)

relies on recent survey data to reveal that crime can prompt citizens to support political breakdown through a military coup. In fact, the author finds that “no other national problem raises more support for military coups than criminal violence” (2008: 2; see also, Malone 2010: 3). In a recent study, Wood and Ribeiro (2011) found that respondents who had been the victim of a crime were more likely to endorse the idea that police should be permitted to ignore the laws in pursuit of criminals and were more likely to think that a military coup was justified when crime is high. Although this effect was strongest in weak and intermediate democracies, respectively, commitment to the rule of law was also found to be sensitive to victimization in consolidated democracies. Compared to non-victims, citizens in ‘strong democracies’ who have fallen victim to crime in the previous year are 26% more likely to approve of an authoritarian political alternative, and are 15% more likely to support authorities circumventing the law to catch criminals.

Prior studies thus suggest that the already fragile commitment to rule of law in Latin America may be further jeopardized in the face of rising criminality, as victims and those living in fear of becoming a victim are more likely to endorse undemocratic measures to control crime. Additionally, the fact that even consolidated democracies are vulnerable to this authoritarian reflex is particularly worrisome. Whereas democracy requires law and order, it is weakened when stability is achieved at the expense of constitutional guarantees of due process and human rights (Diamond 1999).

Crime and the Rule of Law in Venezuela

Venezuela is no exception to what one witnesses in other Latin American countries where a weak commitment to the rule of law – both by the state and its citizens – has continually threatened democratic consolidation (Hawkins et al. 2008: 83).

Rampant crime and citizen concerns of insecurity are palpable indicators that the institutions designed to insulate the public from potential offenders, such as the criminal justice system, are strikingly inefficient. Furthermore, in Venezuela, impunity reigns (International Crisis Group 2011). In an attempt to quell the rising crisis, Venezuelans may be more inclined to support police circumventing the law in order to catch criminals, particularly if they have themselves been victimized or are living in fear of the possibility. However, because the nation's police forces are notorious for corruption and human rights violations, the percentage of the population that approves of authorities 'crossing the line' is considerably low. In fact, Venezuela is among the countries in Latin America with the highest percentages of respondents supporting the idea that authorities should always abide by the law, even in the pursuit of criminals (LAPOP 2010). Therefore, if previous victims and those fearful of crime are more likely to support this undemocratic measure in such a context, as expected, considerable support will be given to the reliability of this relationship.

The second dimension of interest regarding the rule of law in Venezuela is approval of vigilante justice. Given that the majority of Venezuelans distrust the efficacy of the justice system to punish criminals, high levels of crime and insecurity may influence citizens to take the law into their own hands. In a 2007 survey, 62.4% of victims in Venezuela claimed that they did not report their crime to the proper authorities because "it [did] not serve any purpose" – one of the highest percentages in Latin America (Hawkins et al. 2008: 86). Although vigilantism has been most notable in Central America (Malone 2010), Venezuela has not escaped this worrisome 'privatization of justice,' which has taken such diverse forms as mobs, lynching, and

death squads (Prillaman 2003). To my knowledge, the relationship between victimization or fear of crime and approval of citizens taking law into their own hands has not been subjected to empirical test in Latin America. However, I predict that the effects of crime on this dimension of rule of law will follow the same pattern as the other measures, namely that victims and those living in fear of becoming victimized will be more likely to approve of vigilante justice.

Finally, there is currently much speculation about the possibility of a military takeover following the upcoming 2012 presidential election in politically-charged Venezuela. Unfortunately, regardless of the electoral result, the risk of an outbreak of political violence seems high. Recently-named Defense Minister General Henry Rangel Silva told a Venezuelan newspaper in 2010, “A hypothetical opposition government starting in 2012 would be selling out the country; the Armed Force is not going to accept that” (Sanchez 2012). On the other hand, in the case of a Chávez victory, “the perspective of six additional years of *chavismo* could well cause opposition’s unity and discipline to disintegrate and radical elements to resort to violence” (International Crisis Group 2011: 29). Furthermore, given the degree of polarization and militarization of Venezuelan society, the possibility of a calm post-election scenario seems bleak. Therefore, the effect of victimization and fear of crime on support for a military coup in the face of high crime is a particularly salient issue during this time in Venezuelan history. The percentage of the population that reports a willingness to endorse a military takeover is somewhat low in Venezuela, at 34.8% (LAPOP 2010). However, the results of Wood and Ribeiro (2011) suggest that the effect of criminality can significantly

increase support for this undemocratic circumstance even in cases where they are far more unlikely.

Victimization and Fear

To test the effects of criminality on the various dimensions of political culture discussed in this chapter, the analysis will consider both previous victimization and fear of crime. Although scholarly studies and media accounts highlighting the increase of criminality in Latin America often refer to victimization and fear of crime interchangeably, these are two distinct concepts, and there are several reasons to consider the variables separately.

To begin, fear of crime is not merely a function of the statistical probability of being victimized (Duce and Pérez-Perdomo 2003). Prior research has demonstrated that perceptions of insecurity do not always coincide with actual rates of crime and violence. The criminology literature labels this phenomenon the “paradox of fear” (Covington and Taylor 1991). Feelings of insecurity are also influenced by socioeconomic status, trust in law enforcement, media exposure, political insecurities, and ‘crime talk’ among acquaintances, to name a few (Dammert and Malone 2006; Pain 2000; Walkate 2001). Additionally, scholars have demonstrated that fear of crime is a more widespread problem than crime itself (Hale 1996). As such, people may feel insecure without ever actually falling victim to crime. Logically, the opposite is also true, as previous victims may not necessarily live in fear. Finally, it is also unclear whether victimization itself or the fear of becoming a victim is more important in the relationship between crime and political values, attitudes, and behaviors in Latin America (Seligson and Smith 2010).

In summary, this thesis builds upon the prior studies of Wood and Ribeiro (2011), Ceobanu, Wood, and Ribeiro (2011), Malone (2010), Pérez (2010), and Cruz (2003,

2008) to test the hypotheses that criminal victimization and fear of crime erode democratic political culture in Venezuela. As outlined in the previous chapter, levels of crime and insecurity in Venezuela have increased at alarming rates during recent years and now rank among the highest in all of Latin America. Additionally, the threat posed by this trend is particularly worrisome given the increasingly precarious nature of democracy under Hugo Chávez. Recent research by Wood and Ribeiro (2011) suggests that the pernicious effects of crime have a more pronounced impact on anti-democratic attitudes in weak democracies than in their consolidated counterparts. Freedom House's seven indicators of democratic performance—the electoral process, political pluralism and participation, functioning of government, freedom of expression and belief, associational and organizational rights, rule of law, and personal autonomy and individual rights—rank Venezuela as the least consolidated democracy in Latin America. Thus, this combination of one of the region's highest crime rates and lowest level of democratic consolidation seems to indicate that political culture in Venezuela may be at considerable risk. Furthermore, as the politically polarized nation prepares for a presidential election, which could put Chávez in power for another 6 years, these issues will likely become increasingly salient.

As previously mentioned in this chapter, there have been some significant changes between 2008 and 2010 in the dimensions of political culture that are of interest in the subsequent analysis. Table 3-1 shows the mean values of the indicators of support for democracy, trust, and rule of law. Additionally, average levels of victimization and fear of crime are included.

Table 3-1. Means for variables of interest: 2008 and 2010

Measures of Political Culture	Year	
	2008	2010
Support for Democracy		
Satisfaction with democracy	2.78	2.40
Preference for democracy	0.97	0.88
Trust		
Trust in community	2.83	2.71
Rule of Law		
Support for police 'crossing the line'	0.32	0.27
Approval of vigilante justice	2.86	3.25
Military coup justified	0.38	0.35
Crime		
Victimization	0.21	0.26
Fear of Crime	2.59	2.51

CHAPTER 4 DATA ANALYSIS

The AmericasBarometer round of public opinion surveys are administered biennially throughout the Americas (North, Central, South, and the Caribbean) by researchers from the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) hosted at Vanderbilt University under the direction of political scientist Mitchell Seligson. In 2010, 26 countries were surveyed, involving around 43,000 interviews. The survey asks respondents a variety of questions regarding values, preferences, and behaviors using national probability samples of voting-age adults, with quota sampling at the household level. The questionnaire includes response items that serve as operational definitions of three dimensions of political culture, which will be used as dependent variables in this analysis: support for democracy (satisfaction with democracy and preference for democracy), interpersonal trust (trust in the members of one's community), and commitment to the rule of law (support for police 'crossing the line,' approval of vigilante justice, and endorsement of a military coup when crime is high).

In addition to measuring a variety of socio-demographic variables, the questionnaire also asks whether respondents were the victim of a crime during the previous year, and how safe they feel in their neighborhood when they think of the possibility of being criminally victimized. Many of the responses are recorded in the form of an ordinal scale where the degree of the person's opinion varies along a four-, seven-, or ten-point continuum. Other questions prompt answers that are nominal in scale, often a simple "yes" or "no" response. The Venezuelan survey in 2010 includes 1,500 randomly selected respondents aged 18 or older, which allows the results of the survey to be generalized to the country's entire population.

Table 4-1. What is the most serious problem facing Venezuela

Insecurity	24.85%
Delinquency, crime	17.06%
Electricity (lack of)	12.63%
Economy (problems with, crisis of)	12.16%
Unemployment	6.11%
Politics	5.78%
Inflation	4.30%
Bad government	3.16%
Water (lack of)	3.09%
Corruption	1.54%
Environment	1.48%
Poverty	0.54%
All Others	7.30%
Total	100.00%

Source: LAPOP Venezuela, 2010

In 2009, the homicide rate in Venezuela was 49 per 100,000 persons (UNODC 2011). In Caracas – considered one of the most dangerous cities in the world – murders reached an astounding 233 per 100,000 inhabitants (INE 2009). Nearly every week, the country’s media echoes public opinion surveys which rank insecurity as the foremost concern of the Venezuelan people (Rebotier 2011). The AmericasBarometer survey directly asks respondents “*En su opinión, ¿cuál es el problema más grave que está enfrentando el país?*” (‘In your opinion, what is the most serious problem facing the country?’). The respondent is free to mention any problem that comes to mind. Table 4-1 shows that insecurity ranks as the top concern among Venezuelans, at nearly one quarter of the population. This is followed closely by delinquency or crime, which is cited by a little over 17% of respondents. Taken together, these closely related responses account for the primary concern of nearly half of the entire sample. It is worth noting that worries about insecurity and crime are far greater than people’s concern for the economy and unemployment.

As outlined in the previous chapter, recent research suggests that crime erodes the values, attitudes, and preferences considered essential to democracy. In particular, criminal victimization and the fear associated with vulnerability to crime are believed to have detrimental effects on democratic political culture. The objective of this chapter is to use the AmericasBarometer 2010 survey to test the hypotheses that criminal victimization and fear of crime reduce citizens' satisfaction with democracy, trust, and commitment to the rule of law. Additionally, a second hypothesis takes account of the influence of citizens' support for the Chávez regime. Specifically, I anticipate that the degree to which victimization and fear affect the various measures of political culture will be stronger among non-*chavistas* than *chavistas*¹.

Description of Variables

Independent Variables

The primary independent variables are criminal victimization and fear of crime. Previous victimization is a dichotomous variable derived from answers to the following question: "*Have you been a victim of any type of crime in the past 12 months? That is, have you been a victim of robbery, burglary, assault, fraud, blackmail, extortion, violent threats or any other type of crime in the past 12 months?*" Positive responses were coded 1 and negative responses were coded 0. The phrasing of the question is worth noting. In contrast to widely used public opinion surveys, such as Latinobarometro, which only present the respondent with the first sentence, the follow-up statement in the AmericasBarometer survey is explicit with respect to the definition of crime. The validity

¹ "Chavistas" are those individuals who answer the question "If the next presidential elections were next week, who would you vote for?" with "the candidate or party of the current president," while "non-chavistas" are those who say they would answer otherwise.

of the questionnaire item in the survey used here is not without its limitations, yet the AmericasBarometer is an improvement over other operational definitions of the concept.

The second main independent variable is the level of individual's fear of crime, operationalized by responses to a question that asks how safe respondents feel in their neighborhood: *"Speaking of the neighborhood where you live and thinking of the possibility of being assaulted or robbed, do you feel very safe, somewhat safe, somewhat unsafe or very unsafe?"* Response categories are on a 4-point scale ranging from "very safe" (1) to "very unsafe" (4). Responses were recoded in order to create four dummy variables. As with all operational definitions, the wording of questions designed to measure fear of crime has been the subject of debate (Lane and Meeker 2003). Many studies have relied on questions that are general in form, such as "How safe do you feel being out alone in your neighborhood at night?" Questions of this sort have been criticized because they do not include reference to specific types of crime and, as a consequence, people's responses could be in reference to other sources insecurity. The question included in the AmericasBarometer surveys avoids this common criticism by explicitly limiting the response to fear of being assaulted or robbed.

Control Variables

The analyses also control for the following key indicators of demographic and socio-economic status: place of residence, gender, age, education, and income. Place of residence is a dichotomous variable coded 0 for "rural" and 1 for "urban." The gender variable was coded 0 for females and 1 for males. Age is measured on a continuous scale, ranging from 18 to 89 years. The education variable is an ordinal-level measure of the respondent's level of formal education using 19 categories. Income is an interval-level measure of household income classified in 11 categories.

Dependent Variables

The following table displays the dependent variables used in this study in greater detail. Table 4-2 includes the specific measures of political culture concerning support for democracy, trust, and commitment to the rule of law, as well as the questions the items have been operationalized from and their individual ranges.

Table 4-2. Dependent variables

Variable	Survey item	Range
Satisfaction w/ democracy (SWD)	“In general, would you say that you are very dissatisfied, dissatisfied, satisfied, or very satisfied with the way democracy works in Venezuela?”	1 - 4
Preference for democracy (PFD)	“Democracy is preferable to any other form of government.”	0=no 1=yes
Trust in community	“Now, speaking of the people around here, would you say that the people in this community are untrustworthy, not very trustworthy, somewhat trustworthy, or very trustworthy?”	1 - 4
Police can ‘cross the line’	“In order to catch criminals, do you believe that the authorities should always abide by the law or that occasionally they can cross the line?”	0=no 1=yes
Approval of vigilante justice	“Of people taking the law into their own hands when the government does not punish criminals. How much do you disapprove or approve?”(None – A lot)	1 - 10
Military coup justified	“Would a military coup be justified when there is a lot of crime?”	0=no 1=yes

Hypotheses

The literatures reviewed earlier in this thesis suggest the following testable hypotheses: It is expected that previous victimization and fear of crime will have a statistically significant negative effect on satisfaction with democracy (SWD) and interpersonal trust. Preference for democracy (PFD) is not expected to be sensitive to victimization nor fear. Previous victims and those who are fearful are expected to express less commitment to the rule of law. Thus, victimization and fear are expected to

have a statistically significant positive effect on support for police ‘crossing the line’, approval vigilante justice, and justification of a military coup when there is a lot of crime. Additionally, these relationships are expected to be stronger among those who do not support Chávez compared to those who do.

Descriptive Analysis of Variables

Independent Variables

Responses in Table 4-3 show the averages for the two primary independent variables, victimization and fear of crime. The mean for victimization shows that 26.2% of respondents reported falling victim to crime during the previous year. This percentage is slightly lower for *chavistas* at 25.2%. Among *non-chavistas*, 28.1% reported being victimized. The mean for fear of crime falls between ‘somewhat safe’ and ‘somewhat unsafe,’ at 2.515 (SD=0.943). *Chavistas* report slightly more fear than *non-chavistas*, on average. Among Chávez supporters, the majority (36.5%) reports feeling ‘somewhat unsafe’ in their neighborhood, while the majority of non-supporters (34.4%) fall in the ‘somewhat safe’ category (not shown).

Table 4-3. Means: Victimization and fear of crime

	Mean	SD
Victim	0.262	0.440
Chavista	0.252	0.435
Non-Chavista	0.281	0.451
Fear of Crime	2.515	0.943
Chavista	2.709	0.946
Non-Chavista	2.419	0.966

Source: LAPOP Venezuela, 2010

Dependent Variables

Table 4-4 presents the mean values for the two measures of support for democracy: satisfaction with democracy (SWD) and preference for democracy (PFD). The country average for SWD is 2.398 on the 1-4 scale (SD=0.823). The majority of

citizens (46.1%) report feeling 'somewhat unsatisfied' with "the way democracy works" in their country, followed by 28.7% that feel 'somewhat satisfied.' The two extreme responses each contain roughly 10% (not shown). On average, Chávez supporters report more satisfaction than non-supporters, $M=3.065$ and $M=2.039$, respectively. Preference for democracy is very high, with 88% reporting that democracy is preferable to any other form of government ($SD=0.325$). Chávez supporters have a slightly lower average for PFD than non-supporters, 81.6% and 89.1%, respectively.

Table 4-4. Means: Support for democracy

	Mean	SD
Satisfaction with Democracy	2.398	0.823
Chavista	3.065	0.741
Non-Chavista	2.039	0.697
Preference for Democracy	0.880	0.325
Chavista	0.816	0.388
Non-Chavista	0.891	0.312

Source: LAPOP Venezuela, 2010

The average responses for the next dimension of political culture, interpersonal trust, are displayed in Table 4-5. The mean for this variable, at 2.711, shows that respondents feel their neighbors are closest to being 'somewhat trustworthy.' Chávez supporters report slightly more trust in the members of their community than non-supporters, $M=2.757$ and $M=2.668$, respectively.

Table 4-5. Means: Interpersonal trust

	Mean	SD
Trust in Neighbors	2.711	0.928
Chavista	2.757	0.925
Non-Chavista	2.668	0.944

Source: LAPOP Venezuela, 2010

Finally, the average responses for the three measures of rule of law are displayed in Table 4-6: support for police 'crossing the line,' approval of vigilante justice, and willingness to endorse a military coup. Slightly more than a quarter of respondents

(M=0.271) agreed that police could occasionally ‘cross the line’ in order to catch criminals (SD=0.445). This percentage is lower among *chavistas* (M=0.226). Among non-supporters, 31.4% support police circumventing the law (SD=0.465). Next, the average response for approval of vigilante justice is 3.305 on a scale from 1 to 6 (SD=3.644). Chávez supporters are slightly less likely to approve of people taking the law into their own hands than *non-chavistas*, M=3.048 and M=3.646, respectively. Finally, 34.8% of respondents agree that a military coup would be justified when crime is high (SD=0.476). Chávez supporters are considerably less likely to agree to this undemocratic measure than non-supporters. While only 26.9% of *chavistas* are willing to endorse a military coup in times of high crime, 41.9% of those who do not support the current president report willingness to do so.

Table 4-6. Means: Rule of law

	Mean	SD
Support for Police ‘Crossing Line’	0.271	0.445
Chavista	0.226	0.419
Non-Chavista	0.314	0.465
Approval of Vigilante Justice	3.305	3.644
Chavista	3.048	2.861
Non-Chavista	3.646	4.304
Endorse Military Coup	0.348	0.476
Chavista	0.269	0.444
Non-Chavista	0.419	0.494

Source: LAPOP Venezuela, 2010

Regression Analyses

Two multivariate statistical methods, ordinary least squares (OLS) regression and logistic regression, are used to test the various research hypotheses. OLS regression is used for the various ordinal level dependent variables: SWD, trust, and approval of vigilante justice. Logistic regression is used for the various binary level dependent variables: PFD, support for police circumventing the law, and willingness to endorse a

military coup when crime is high. The advantage of OLS and logistic regression is that they enable me to test for the effects of the primary independent variables (victimization and fear of crime) while controlling for other factors that may also influence the various dimensions of political cultures. Table 4-7 through Table 4-12 contain the results for the primary hypotheses. The results of the secondary analysis, which test for the effect of political polarization in Venezuela, are presented in Table 4-13 through Table 4-18.

Attitudinal Consequences of Victimization and Fear

Satisfaction with democracy

The results with respect to satisfaction with democracy support the hypotheses that criminal victimization and fear of crime reduce citizens' satisfaction with the way democracy works in Venezuela, as shown in Table 4-7. On a scale that ranges from 1 to 4, satisfaction with democracy is .22 lower among those who have been victimized during the previous year compared to non-victims ($p < 0.01$). Fear of crime also significantly reduces citizens' satisfaction with the way democracy works in Venezuela. Compared to those who feel very safe in their neighborhood, satisfaction for those who feel somewhat safe, somewhat unsafe, and very unsafe is reduced by .159 ($p < 0.05$), .282 ($p < 0.01$), and .426 ($p < 0.01$), on the 1-4 scale, respectively. Males report more satisfaction with the way democracy works in their country than females (coefficient = 0.167; $p < 0.01$) and satisfaction also increases with age, although only slightly (coefficient = 0.001; $p < 0.05$). Together, previous victimization, fear of crime, and the control variables explain 6% of the variance in citizens' satisfaction with the way democracy works in Venezuela.

Table 4-7. Satisfaction with democracy

	Coefficient
(Constant)	2.625
Urban	-.112
Male	.167***
Age	.001**
Education	.002
Income	.000
Victim	-.224***
Fear of Crime	
Somewhat Safe	-.159**
Somewhat Unsafe	-.282***
Very Unsafe	-.426***
R ²	.06

Source: LAPOP Venezuela 2010

***Significant at .01 or less.

**Significant at .05 or less.

Preference for democracy

Table 4-8 reports the results of the logistic regression that tests for the effect of victimization and fear of crime on preference for democracy. As expected, and consistent with previous research, PFD is not sensitive to crime victimization. Previous victims are no less likely to prefer democracy as a form of government than non-victims. However, contrary to expectation, fear of crime does have a statistically significant effect among those who feel 'very unsafe' in their neighborhood. The odds of preferring democracy for those who feel 'very unsafe' in their neighborhood are 50% lower than the odds for those who feel 'very safe.' This finding is inconsistent with expectation and particularly noteworthy given that preference for democracy is thought to be a more stable component of political culture and presumed to be less susceptible to the pernicious effects of criminality. However, the R² value indicates that we are only able to explain 1% of the variance.

Table 4-8. Preference for democracy

	B	Odds Ratio
(Constant)	1.835	6.265
Urban	.157	1.170
Male	.068	1.070
Age	.005	1.005
Education	-.007	.993
Income	.007	1.007
Victim	.097	1.101
Fear of Crime		
Somewhat Safe	-.026	.974
Somewhat Unsafe	-.255	.775
Very Unsafe	-.693**	.500**
R ²		.01

Source: LAPOP Venezuela 2010

***Significant at .001 or less.

**Significant at .05 or less.

Interpersonal trust

The results concerning trust in one's community are displayed in Table 4-9. Contrary to expectation, victimization does not have a significant effect on reported trust for one's neighbors. Previous victims are no less trustful of the members of their community than non-victims. Fear of crime, however, follows the hypothesized relationship. As fear of crime increases, interpersonal trust decreases. Compared to those who feel very safe in their neighborhood, interpersonal trust for those who feel somewhat safe ($p < 0.10$), somewhat unsafe ($p < 0.01$), and very unsafe ($p < 0.01$) is reduced by .134, .496, and .785 on the 1-4 scale, respectively. Males also report more trust in the members of their community than females (coefficient = 0.09; $p < 0.10$). Additionally, interpersonal trust increases as income increases, although only slightly (coefficient = 0.003; $p < 0.01$). Together, these variables explain 9.2% of the variance in trust in neighbors.

Table 4-9. Interpersonal trust

	Coefficient
(Constant)	3.101
Urban	-.109
Male	.090*
Age	.000
Education	-.003
Income	.003***
Victim	-.018
Fear of Crime	
Somewhat Safe	-.134*
Somewhat Unsafe	-.496***
Very Unsafe	-.785***
R ²	.092

Source: LAPOP Venezuela 2010

***Significant at .01 or less.

**Significant at .05 or less.

*Significant at .10 or less.

Police circumventing the law

Table 4-10 reports the results of the logistic regression that tests for the effect of victimization and fear of crime on support for police ‘crossing the line.’ The findings generally support the predicted relationships, although some findings are mixed. As predicted, victimization has a significant positive effect on support for police circumventing the law in the pursuit of criminals. The probability of supporting police ‘crossing the line’ is 1.88 times greater for victims than non-victims ($p < 0.01$). Fear of crime also has a significant positive effect on support for police circumventing the law. However, the effect is strongest for those who feel somewhat safe, somewhat unsafe, and very unsafe in their neighborhoods, respectively. This outcome is unexpected and puzzling. Together, victimization and fear of crime account for only 2.5% of the variance in endorsement of the police circumventing the law in the pursuit of criminals.

Table 4-10. Support police 'crossing the line'

	B	Odds Ratio
(Constant)	-1.576	.207
Urban	.204	1.227
Male	.122	1.139
Age	-.001	.999
Education	-.014	.986
Income	-.003	.997
Victim	.631***	1.879***
Fear of Crime		
Somewhat Safe	.494*	1.639*
Somewhat Unsafe	.400**	1.492**
Very Unsafe	.380*	1.462*
R ²		.025

Source: LAPOP Venezuela 2010

***Significant at .01 or less.

**Significant at .05 or less.

*Significant at .10 or less.

Vigilante justice

Table 4-11 reports the results of the OLS regression that tests for the effect of victimization and fear of crime on approval of vigilante justice. Contrary to expectation, victims are no more likely than non-victims to support people taking law into their own hands. Fear of crime shows a significant *negative* among those who feel only 'somewhat safe' in their neighborhoods, compared to those who feel 'very safe.' Additionally, although not reaching statistical significance, the relationship is also negative for those who feel 'somewhat unsafe' and 'very unsafe.' The direction of this relationship is particularly surprising, as is the fact that only the 'somewhat safe' category is significant. In an attempt to get a clearer picture between the relationship of fear and approval for vigilante justice, an additional approach (not shown) executes the same regression but collapses those who report feeling 'safe' or 'unsafe' into two categories. This dichotomous interpretation shows that fear is not a significant predictor of support for people taking the law into their own hands. Venezuelans who feel 'unsafe'

are no more likely to approve of vigilante justice than their 'safe' counterparts. These results suggest that this dimension of the 'rule of law' may not follow the same patterns as the other two measures traditionally found in the literature.

Table 4-11. Approval of vigilante justice

	Coefficient
(Constant)	3.776
Urban	.215
Male	-.060
Age	-.004
Education	-.014
Income	-.002
Victim	.262
Fear of Crime	
Somewhat Safe	-.594**
Somewhat Unsafe	-.313
Very Unsafe	-.358
R ²	.007

Source: LAPOP Venezuela 2010

***Significant at .01 or less.

**Significant at .05 or less.

*Significant at .10 or less.

Military coup

Finally, the regression analysis in Table 4-12 displays the results of the effect of victimization and fear of crime on justification for a military coup when there is a lot of crime. As expected, Venezuelans who have been victimized by crime in the previous year are more likely to believe a military coup would be justified in the face of high crime. Victims are 1.71 times more likely to justify such a scenario than non-victims. Fear of crime, however, does not statistically increase the likelihood of approving a military coup, contrary to the hypothesized relationship. Thus, the hypothesized effect of crime is only partially supported regarding this measure of rule of law.

Table 4-12. Endorsement of a military coup when crime is high

	B	Odds Ratio
(Constant)	-.376	.686
Urban	.186	1.204
Male	.033	1.034
Age	-.010**	.990**
Education	-.016	.984
Income	.003	1.003
Victim	.535***	1.708***
Fear of Crime		
Somewhat Safe	-.205	.814
Somewhat Unsafe	-.050	.951
Very Unsafe	.077	1.080
R ²		.024

Source: LAPOP Venezuela 2010

***Significant at .01 or less.

**Significant at .05 or less.

*Significant at .10 or less.

The Effect of Political Polarization

Satisfaction with democracy

Table 4-13 reports the results of the separate OLS regressions that test for the effect of victimization and fear of crime on satisfaction with democracy among *chavistas* and *non-chavistas*. The effect of victimization remains consistent in the separate regression models for both Chávez supporters and non-supporters. However, contrary to expectation, the effect is slightly stronger for *chavistas*, with a .253 decline in the 1-4 satisfaction scale among supporters and a .228 decline for non-supporters. The effect of fear is also stronger among *chavistas*. Compared to those who report feeling ‘very safe’, Chávez supporters who feel ‘very unsafe’ are .295 less satisfied with democracy ($R^2=0.062$). Among Venezuelans who do not support Chávez, those who feel ‘very unsafe’ are .230 less satisfied than their ‘very safe’ counterparts ($R^2=0.054$).

Table 4-13. Satisfaction with democracy by support for Chávez

	Coefficient	
	Chavista	Non-Chavista
(Constant)	3.156	2.565
Urban	-.128*	-.214*
Male	.101	.087*
Age	.001	-.002
Education	.008*	-.006
Income	.001*	-.002
Victim	-.253***	-.228***
Fear of Crime		
Somewhat Safe	-.101	-.113
Somewhat Unsafe	-.087	-.124
Very Unsafe	-.295**	-.230*
R ²	.062	.054

Source: LAPOP Venezuela 2010

***Significant at .01 or less.

**Significant at .05 or less.

*Significant at .10 or less.

Preference for democracy

The results concerning preference for democracy are displayed in Table 4-14. Once again, victims are no less likely report PFD than non-victims, regardless of partisanship. The results of the separate regressions for *chavistas* and *non-chavistas* indicate that the effect of fear is specific to those who are not Chávez supporters. Compared to those who feel ‘very safe’, *non-chavistas* who report feeling ‘somewhat unsafe’ and ‘very unsafe’ are about 67% and 72%, respectively, less likely to indicate preference for democracy. Although the relationship between fear and PFD was not expected to be significant, the finding that personal insecurity has a stronger effect on those who do not support Chávez is consistent with prediction. Among the control variables, the results indicate that Chávez supporters who live in urban areas are 4.55 times more likely to report that democracy is preferable to any other form of government than their rural counterparts. Additionally, the effect of education on PFD acts in an

opposite direction depending on partisanship. For *chavistas*, education has a negative, albeit small, effect on PFD. Among those who do not support the government, PFD increases as education increases.

Table 4-14. Preference for democracy by support for Chávez

	Chavista		Non-Chavista	
	B	Odds Ratio	B	Odds Ratio
(Constant)	.062	1.064	1.866	6.463
Urban	1.515***	4.550***	-.704	.494
Male	.338	1.402	-.161	.851
Age	.006	1.006	.005	1.005
Education	-.046**	.955**	.157***	1.170***
Income	-.004	.996	.019	1.019*
Victim	-.242	.785	.279	1.322
Fear of Crime				
Somewhat Safe	.363	1.437	-.807	.446
Somewhat Unsafe	.321	1.378	-1.108	.330**
Very Unsafe	-.294	.745	-1.244	.288**
R ²		.058		.055

Source: LAPOP Venezuela 2010

***Significant at .01 or less.

**Significant at .05 or less.

Interpersonal trust

Table 4-15 reports the results of the OLS regressions that test for the effect of victimization and fear of crime on interpersonal trust according to partisanship. Victimization remains insignificant for both Chávez supporters and non-supporters. Although the primary hypothesis regarding the effect of fear on trust in one's community is supported, the separate regressions for *chavistas* and *non-chavistas* indicate that the impact is actually stronger among Chávez supporters, rather than their *non-chavista* counterparts. Trust for the members of one's community among *chavistas* who report feeling somewhat safe, somewhat unsafe, and very unsafe declines by .234, .532, and 1.037, respectively, compared to their 'very safe' counterparts. Among *non-chavistas*, those who feel 'somewhat safe' are no less trusting of their neighbors than those who

feel 'very safe.' For those who feel 'somewhat unsafe' and 'very unsafe,' interpersonal trust is reduced by .463 and .653, respectively, which is a smaller decline in trust than was found for Chávez supporters.

Table 4-15. Interpersonal trust by support for Chávez

	Coefficient	
	Chavista	Non-Chavista
(Constant)	3.166	2.713
Urban	-.105	-.038
Male	.098	.085
Age	.000	.006**
Education	-.001	-.004
Income	.003	.003*
Victim	-.060	.046
Fear of Crime		
Somewhat Safe	-.234*	.066
Somewhat Unsafe	-.532***	-.463***
Very Unsafe	-1.037***	-.653***
R ²	.133	.103

Source: LAPOP Venezuela 2010

***Significant at .01 or less.

**Significant at .05 or less.

*Significant at .10 or less.

Police circumventing the law

Table 4-16 reports the results of the separate logistic regressions that test for the effect of victimization and fear of crime on support for police circumventing the law. These findings seem to suggest that the significant positive effect of victimization is specific to *non-chavistas*. Among those who do not support Chávez, the odds of endorsing police 'crossing the line' are 85% higher than the odds for non-victims. This effect of victimization is not statistically significant for *chavistas*, contrary to expectation. However, this difference between *non-chavistas* and *chavistas* does lend support to the hypothesis that the impact should be stronger among those who do not support the current president. The effect of fear is clearer when the analysis is divided by

partisanship. For non-supporters of Chávez, fear is no longer significant. For *chavistas*, fear of crime is only significant among those who report feeling ‘somewhat unsafe’ (odds ratio, 2.150) in their neighborhood, compared to those who feel ‘very safe.’ The observation that the coefficient for fear does not show a monotonic increase (from ‘somewhat safe,’ to ‘somewhat unsafe,’ to ‘very unsafe’) is inconsistent with the expected pattern. An alternative approach (not shown) executes the same regression but collapses those who report feeling ‘safe’ or ‘unsafe’ into two categories. This dichotomous interpretation of fear shows the predicted pattern of fear on support for police circumventing the law. In conclusion, the divergent effects of victimization and fear according to partisanship underscore the idea that victimization and fear are two distinct concepts. Also, these findings lend support to the idea that the effect of crime on political culture is affected by the social and political context in which it is embedded.

Table 4-16. Support police ‘crossing the line’ by support for Chávez

	Chavista		Non-Chavista	
	B	Odds Ratio	B	Odds Ratio
(Constant)	-21.589	.000	-.373	.689
Urban	20.243	6.189	-.247	.781
Male	.260	1.297	.134	1.143
Age	.001	1.001	-.016***	.984***
Education	-.047	.955	-.011	.989
Income	-.007	.993	-.001	.999
Victim	.404	1.498	.616***	1.851***
Fear of Crime				
Somewhat Safe	.316	1.371	.402	1.495
Somewhat Unsafe	.766**	2.150**	.363	1.437
Very Unsafe	.429	1.536	.285	1.330
R ²		.058		.033

Source: LAPOP Venezuela 2010

***Significant at .01 or less.

**Significant at .05 or less.

*Significant at .10 or less.

Vigilante justice

Table 4-17 reports the results of the OLS regressions that test for the effect of victimization and fear of crime on approval of vigilante justice according to partisanship. Unlike the primary analysis, victimization is shown to have a significant effect on support for people taking the law into their own hands. However, this relationship is specific to *chavista* victims. Chávez supporters who have fallen victim to crime in the previous year approve of citizens taking the law into their own hands by an increase of .678 over non-victims. Contrary to expectation, this relationship is not significant among those who do not support Chávez. Victimization does not have a significant effect on approval of vigilante justice among those who do not support the current president. Thus, the secondary hypothesis that predicts the effect of victimization will be stronger among *non-chavistas* is not supported. Once again, fear of crime shows a significant negative effect among those who feel 'somewhat safe,' compared to those who feel 'very safe.' Like the victimization, this effect is specific to Chávez supporters. Together with the control variables, victimization and fear of crime explain only slightly more than 4% of the variance ($R^2=0.042$). As before, another approach using a dichotomous measure of fear was attempted to provide more clarity to this relationship (not shown). This dichotomous interpretation among *chavistas* also shows that fear is not a significant predictor of support for people taking the law into their own hands. Therefore, the effect of victimization does lend some support to the general hypothesis, but the difference between *chavistas* and *non-chavistas* does not behave as predicted. Additionally, fear of crime does not appear to have an effect on approval of vigilante justice, at least not in the context of Venezuela.

Table 4-17. Approval of vigilante justice by support for Chávez

	Coefficient	
	Chavista	Non-Chavista
(Constant)	2.626	4.472
Urban	1.336*	.034
Male	.107	-.147
Age	-.002	-.013
Education	-.026	-.008
Income	-.001	-.001
Victim	.678*	.038
Fear of Crime		
Somewhat Safe	-1.057***	-.424
Somewhat Unsafe	-.655	.073
Very Unsafe	-.896	-.497
R ²	.042	.005

Source: LAPOP Venezuela 2010

***Significant at .01 or less.

**Significant at .05 or less.

*Significant at .10 or less.

Military coup

The results concerning support for a military coup are displayed in Table 4-18. The separate regressions for *chavistas* and *non-chavistas* suggest that the positive significant relationship between victimization and willingness to endorse a military coup is specific to those who do not support the current administration (odds ratio, 1.739). This finding lends support to the hypothesis that the effect of crime will be stronger among *non-chavistas* than *chavistas*. As before, fear does not statistically increase the likelihood of endorsing a military coup when there is a lot of crime, regardless of partisanship. Among those who do not support Chávez, the control variables and victimization explain only 2.5% of the variance, however. Therefore, both the primary and secondary hypotheses are only partially supported for this measure of commitment to the rule of law.

Table 4-18. Endorsement of a military coup when crime is high by support for Chávez

	Chavista		Non-Chavista	
	B	Odds Ratio	B	Odds Ratio
(Constant)	-1.903	.149	.352	1.422
Urban	1.710	5.531	-.169	.845
Male	.093	1.098	.167	1.182
Age	-.022**	.978**	-.008	.992
Education	-.020	.980	-.026	.975
Income	.002	1.002	.004	1.004
Victim	.280	1.323	.553***	1.739***
Fear of Crime				
Somewhat Safe	-.222	.801	-.299	.742
Somewhat Unsafe	.435	1.545	-.263	.769
Very Unsafe	.654	1.924	-.208	.813
R ²		.058		.025

Source: LAPOP Venezuela 2010

***Significant at .01 or less.

**Significant at .05 or less.

*Significant at .10 or less.

CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSION

The shift away from outright authoritarian regimes in Latin America which began in one country after another in the 1980s marked what is surely one of the most significant events in the region's political history. It is hardly surprising that the "Third Wave" attracted the attention of social scientists intent on understanding, in the first instance, the factors and processes that led to the transition to democracy, and in the second, understanding the character and sustainability of the democracies that came about. Analysts of the post-transition period who were concerned with the prospects of democratic "consolidation" pointed to evidence that the newly-established electoral democracies were incomplete, fragile, and subject to reversal, as regimes contended with longstanding challenges, such as political exclusion and socioeconomic inequality, as well as with new problems, such as the increase in corruption, crime, and violence. For many researchers, criminality and democracy were thus joined in an approach that focused on the various ways in which crime victimization and citizen insecurity threatened to modify, perhaps undo, the progress toward democracy that had been achieved. One strand of that research proposed a number of hypotheses – which were rarely subjected to empirical test – regarding the effects of victimization and fear of crime on the attitudes, values, and behaviors that are, presumably, required of the process of democratic governance and the prospects of democratic consolidation.

This research builds upon prior studies by Wood and Ribeiro (2011), Ceobanu, Wood, and Ribeiro (2011), Malone (2010), Pérez (2010), and Cruz (2008) by testing the hypotheses that, net of socio-demographic control variables, criminal victimization and fear of crime erode democratic political culture in Venezuela. Additionally, the analysis

went beyond the hypotheses traditionally found in the existing literature by specifying and empirically testing the prediction that the political environment (partisanship, in particular) is important in the relationship between crime and popular political culture. The primary analysis confirms the idea that an individual's personal experience with crime – whether directly through victimization or indirectly via fear of becoming a potential victim – promotes attitudes, beliefs, and preferences deemed detrimental to democratic consolidation. The empirical results lend support the widely accepted assertion that rising criminality poses a threat to democratic political culture. Apart from this general conclusion, however, the findings underscore the notion that victimization and fear of crime are two distinct concepts which can influence people's democratic dispositions in unique ways. Furthermore, these findings challenge the often-cited generalization that political culture, as a unitary phenomenon, is vulnerable to crime by demonstrating that not all components of this concept are affected equally. Finally, the findings associated with the effect of partisanship lend support to the idea that the effect of crime on democratic attitudes, beliefs, and preferences can be mediated by the by the social and political context in which it is embedded.

Empirical tests of the primary hypotheses used six attitudinal measures representing three dimensions of political culture: support for democracy, interpersonal trust, and commitment to the rule of law. The results generally support the hypothesized relationships, although some findings were mixed. In regard to the two measures of support for democracy – Venezuelans' satisfaction with "the way democracy works" in their country and their preference for democracy as a political system – the findings were partially consistent with expectation. Satisfaction with democracy was sensitive to

both criminal victimization and fear of crime, as predicted. Preference for democracy, on the other hand, behaved in an unexpected yet revealing way. In line with previous research, victims in Venezuela were no less likely to prefer democracy as a political system than non-victims. However, fear of crime did have a significant effect on people's preference for democracy—although the variance explained by this relationship was very low. In any event, this significant finding is noteworthy for two reasons. Not only is PFD considered to be less vulnerable to disturbance than SWD, but reported preference for democracy is higher in Venezuela than in any other country in Latin America and is considerably higher than the regional average.

The results with respect to interpersonal trust were also only partially consistent with prediction. Contrary to expectation, victimization did not have a significant effect on reported trust for one's neighbors. This finding is surprising and inconsistent with prior research. One potential explanation of this anomalous finding considers the location of where the victimization occurred. Unfortunately, the 2010 AmericasBarometer in Venezuela does not contain a follow-up question regarding where the respondent fell victim to crime. However, given the ubiquity of crime in Venezuela, it is not unlikely that a considerable portion of victimizations occur outside of one's own neighborhood. If this is so, it would be plausible to that victimization would have no effect on trust in the members of one's community, if the crime occurred elsewhere. Consistent with prediction, as fear of crime increased, Venezuelans were significantly less likely to report trust in their neighbors. Therefore, the relationship between crime and interpersonal trust only receives partial support in this analysis.

Finally, the results with respect to three indicators of people's commitment to the rule of law – support for police circumventing the law, approval of vigilante justice, and willingness to endorse a military coup when crime is high – largely suggest that the effect of crime on this dimension of political culture may be specific to direct experience with crime. Previous victims were significantly more likely than non-victims to support police 'crossing the line' and endorse a military coup. Fear of crime, on the other hand, did not behave as expected for either measure. In regard to supporting police circumventing the law, fear of crime did have a significant effect but the coefficients declined somewhat as insecurity increased. This finding is perplexing but does lend some support to the idea that fear can erode this particular commitment to the rule of law. Willingness to endorse a military coup, however, was not sensitive to fear of crime. The results for approval of vigilante justice indicated that neither victimization nor fear is significant for this relationship. Although this dimension of the rule of law did not behave as anticipated in the context of Venezuela, this is not to suggest that the relationship would not be significant elsewhere, such as Central America where approval of people taking the law into their own hands is much higher.

The results of the subsequent analysis, which took into consideration the effect of partisanship in Venezuela, support the general hypothesis that the relationship between crime and democratic attitudes, beliefs, and preferences should be affected by the political context in which it is embedded. However, the effect of victimization and fear was not always stronger among those who do not support the current president, as expected. Satisfaction with democracy was sensitive to both victimization and fear of crime among Chávez supporters and non-supporters alike. Contrary to prediction, this

effect was actually slightly stronger among *chavistas*. These findings suggest that even supporters of Chávez may become less satisfied with the way democracy works under his leadership if they fall victim to crime or feel unsafe in their neighborhoods.

Preference for democracy's sensitivity to fear was shown to be specific to *non-chavistas*. Although the relationship between fear and PFD was not expected to be significant, the fact that it is confined to those who do not support the president makes it a bit less surprising. This finding is slightly worrisome given that political violence may surround the upcoming post-election scenario and a fearful opposition could become increasing more likely to endorse an alternative to democratic governance.

Interpersonal trust reacted in a similar manner to satisfaction with democracy. Although fear of crime significantly reduced trust in neighbors for *chavistas* and *non-chavistas* alike, this effect was slightly stronger among the former. Finally, the three measures of commitment to the rule of law behaved in inconsistent ways depending on partisanship. Previous victims that do not support the president were more likely to support police 'crossing the line' and back a military coup than their non-victim counterparts, while neither of these relationships were significant among *chavistas*. These findings suggest that, at least nominally, Chávez supporters remain committed to these two forms of the rule of law even if they are personally affected by crime. *Non-chavistas*, however, may be more likely to endorse authoritarian alternatives if they themselves directly suffer the consequences of criminality. The results with respect to vigilante justice suggest that Chávez supporters are more likely to forgo the rule of law by taking law into their own hands, or at least approving of those who do so. Although the primary analysis failed to reveal a significant relationship between the variables of

interest, the separate partisanship regressions show that *chavistas* who have fallen victim to crime are significantly more likely to approve of vigilante justice than non-victims. Fear of crime was also significant, but only among the 'somewhat safe' group and the direction of the relationship was the opposite of expectation. A dichotomous interpretation of fear suggests that there is no relationship between personal insecurity and approval of people taking the law into their own hands. In conclusion, although *chavistas* are no more likely to support police 'crossing the line' or endorse a military takeover if they are victimized, a reduced commitment to the rule of law may manifest itself by other means.

As a whole, the results suggest that crime and violence may pose a threat to the already precarious nature of democracy in Venezuela. However, the low percent of variance explained by victimization and fear, along with the control variables, causes some hesitation in accepting this conclusion. The low explanatory power could indicate that the emphasis, in the literature, on the presumably dramatic effects of crime on political culture might be overstated. In the face of increasing criminality, particularly over an extended period of time, people may simply adapt and become accustomed to their deteriorating security (Casas-Zamora 2012). In this view, declining levels of public safety may be detrimental to democratic political culture, but its impact should be rather negligible. On the other hand, the ubiquity of crime and insecurity in Venezuela may contribute to the low explanatory power of victimization and fear in a very different way. In such a particular socio-political environment where crime and insecurity are so pervasive, variables that may have greater explanatory power in other contexts – such as, whether the respondent was criminally victimized during the previous year – lose

their discrete meaning. This line of reasoning would suggest that exposure to crime and concerns of public safety are so common among the Venezuelan population that variation in other variables simply does not make much difference. Finally, another potential explanation of the low percent of variance explained could be related to the specific survey questions used to measure victimization and fear. Although respondents were asked whether they had fallen victim to crime in the previous year, it does not seem unlikely that those who had been victimized in years prior to this particular time period could still be suffering the negative effects of their experience. In regard to fear of crime, respondents were asked to rate how vulnerable they felt in their own neighborhood. While how secure one feels in their community is undoubtedly important, people may be even more fearful of being victimized in areas outside their place of residence that they frequent on a daily bases. Therefore, these specific measures may fail to fully capture the detrimental effects of victimization and fear due to such limitations. Unfortunately, an analysis of these explanations is outside the scope of this thesis. However, future research focusing on the effects of crime on political culture in Latin America should attempt to address these possibilities.

Although the variance explained by the independent and control variables was lower than expected, victimization and fear were shown to have significant negative effects on several of the dimensions of democratic political culture considered. The implications of this trend are somewhat worrisome given that prospects for declining crime rates look bleak and political polarization may intensify with the impending presidential election. However, as one of the most serious problems currently facing the country, this subject is likely to receive a great deal of attention in the campaigning

months ahead—attention it undeniably deserves. Following recent criticism from the opposition candidates regarding Chávez’s insufficient response to the nation’s growing crime problem, the administration announced the creation of a new armed force – the People’s Guard – to improve public security through disarmament, control of alcohol, stopping small-scale drug trafficking, and reducing violent crime (Mundial 2011).

Whether these and other recent security-enhancing measures are ephemeral tactics motivated by a desire to improve Chávez’s standing in the upcoming election, or a true commitment toward reducing crime levels is yet to be seen. Regardless of the electoral outcome, the president starting his term in 2013 would be well served to give increased attention to citizen insecurity which may have important implications for democratic governance.

The findings contained in this thesis underscore the important position of public attitudes for the stability of democracy in Venezuela, and in general. Although, the political elite undoubtedly plays a substantial role in the establishment, maintenance, and consolidation of democracy, as Larry Diamond (1999) has demonstrated throughout his work, this one-sided focus overlooks the significance of public values, attitudes, and preferences. Once it is clear that the cognitive orientations of the public are relevant, it becomes important to understand the factors that influence them. In this case, the focus has been on the rise in criminal behavior and the associated citizen insecurity, which, as the findings show, have consequences for the subjective orientations that many analysts consider fundamental to democratic governance.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Angela Allyson (Revers) O'Malley was born in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. She was raised by her mother in Sioux City, Iowa. After graduating from East High School, she moved to Tampa, Florida where she attended Hillsborough Community College. Upon completion of her Associate of Arts degree, she transferred to the University of Florida, where she graduated cum laude with a Bachelor of Science in psychology and a minor in Latin American studies. In 2010, Angela enrolled in the Master of Arts in Latin American Studies (MALAS) program at the University of Florida, where she specialized in sociology. In the summer of 2011, she was awarded a research grant to complete her master's thesis field research in Caracas, Venezuela. Angela graduated with her master's degree in May 2012.