

**OP-ED**    APRIL 21, 2016 9:21 PM

# How the left blew it in Latin America

## HIGHLIGHTS

Massive corruption, megalomania contributed to failure

Some saw their personal wealth increase immensely while in power

Functioning democracies of the region must help new and better leadership emerge



BY DOUGLAS FARAH

*dfarah@ibiconsultants.net*

---

In the end, the populist revolutionaries who swept to power in Latin America a decade ago proved to be worse than the corrupt oligarchs they replaced. Instead of ushering in a new day of good governance and transparency, the Bolivarian revolution is fizzling out under the weight of its own massive corruption, ties to organized crime, intolerance and megalomania.

The promises of the rule of law, democratic openings, and authentic “people’s power” were mirages that have vanished. It will take years for the continent to recover from the wreckage of authoritarian populism that many initially thought held so much promise.

What is most disillusioning is that this discredited generation of revolutionary leaders had a real chance to substantially remake Latin America by offering a more inclusive, fair and less corrupt model of government.

Many of the leaders (Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, his successor Dilma Rousseff in Brazil; Daniel Ortega in Nicaragua; Salvador Sánchez Cerén in El Salvador) had actually put their lives on the line to defeat the old authoritarian and exclusionary order. Others like Rafael Correa in Ecuador; Hugo Chávez in Venezuela; Evo Morales in Bolivia were genuine political outsiders with a real opportunity to create new governance models unmoored from the chokehold of traditional elites. Some, like Argentina’s Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, were simply megalomaniacal. All failed abysmally.

Hugo Chávez, who used his oil wealth and personal popularity to help elect his regional Bolivarian allies eventually presided over narco-state that made the massive corruption of his predecessors seem like child’s play. His successor Nicolás Maduro, is president of a country with the largest oil reserves in the world yet unable to provide food, toilet paper, medicine or employment for an increasingly restive population.

Lula and Dilma, a labor leader and former guerrilla, are now enmeshed in a sprawling corruption scandal far larger than the webs of thievery spun by their predecessors. Their attempts to secure immunity have further tarnished their legacies.

Ortega has become so blatant at fixing elections and having his family vacuum up all public contracts and oil revenues that his wealth far surpasses that of Anastasio Somoza, whom he overthrew. Sánchez Cerén’s government and party control hundreds of millions of dollars

that do not pass through the national budget or oversight, and whose origin is entirely opaque.

The financial volumes flowing through the parallel structures for personal and party benefit are orders of magnitude greater than the right-wing oligarchs that once paid for death squads to kill communists. Fernández de Kirchner's personal wealth — just that declared publicly — rose by more than 1,300 percent during her time in government. Law enforcement investigations have documented the movement of millions of dollars by her closest associates to offshore havens and front companies.

Many in Latin America, given the failure of past models, held out hope for the revolution, often in the face of overwhelming evidence of its failure. The chickens are finally coming home to roost for the leaders of the Pink Revolution promising a new Socialist utopia.

Fernández de Kirchner's handpicked successor lost despite the widespread illegal use of government assets deployed to save him. Maduro presided over electoral system rigged to ensure his victory yet saw the opposition gain a two-thirds majority in the Congress.

The same record of failure distinguishes the other self-proclaimed revolutionary leaders.

Morales, the one-time peasant leader now fond of \$200 haircuts and questionable multi-million dollar contracts for his mistresses, lost many of the most important cities in the last year's congressional elections then lost his bid to authorize his own reelection earlier this year. Correa, facing an impending economic calamity, has announced he will not seek reelection. Sánchez Cerén is presiding over an unprecedented rise in violence that has seen El Salvador rocket to the least coveted title of most violent nation in the world.

The looming question is what comes next. At a time of massive global changes, simply returning to the past will only insure continued instability and violence. The populist revolution's political repression effectively decapitated an entire generation of young leaders who could have brought true democratic change.

What remains is an inchoate movement striving to sweep out the venal and incompetent leadership, caught between the failure of the cronyism of the neo-liberal reformers and the rank incompetence, hypocrisy, intolerance and kleptomania of revolutionaries proclaiming Socialism for the 21st Century.

It is incumbent on the functioning democracies of the region such as Chile, Uruguay and Colombia, along with the United States, the Organization of American States and European allies to lend political and economic support to whatever new models and leaders emerge, as long as they are genuinely democratic and transparent.

Argentina’s Macri and the OAS’s Luis Almagro have begun a healthy trend of publicly confronting the anti-democratic forces in the region and demanding accountability. Others should follow suit to help the region find a viable democratic way forward.

*Douglas Farah is the senior non-resident fellow at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, D.C.*



### MORE OP-ED

### COMMENTS

15 Comments

Sort by **Oldest**



Add a comment...



**Mario Chino Viejitos Navarro** · Mr. Chino/Cruiser at Viejitos CC SGV Chapter

How did Fidel Castro survived for so long?...Cubas time lock stopped in the 5's...WOW...Socialism is difficult to imittate from a dream to real quality?CHIT!

Like · Reply · 3 · Apr 22, 2016 2:39pm



**John Kastelic** · None

they are all a bunch of losers.!!!!!!!.

Like · Reply · 2 · Apr 22, 2016 2:46pm



**Gloria Sanchez**

Farah you are iust a clueless writer. Latin America has never stoned beignon a colony of an

Plan Ahead  
Take 15% Off

Plus earn 200 Wyndham Rewards Bonus Points

GO HAPPY. GO HOJO.  
Howard Johnson

BOOK NOW

cheap labor and to sell their products. British did to us and now we are doing to Latin American and many other countries.

Like · Reply · 3 · Apr 22, 2016 3:27pm · Edited



**Panagiotis Nikas**

Even do you are, or could be, right up to an extend in what you say, we can not blame the next guy for our own mistakes; it seems it is in the DNA of some to blame the US for whatever is wrong with South and central america. We, the poeple of these countries, elected the presidents that broke countries.

With all the pressure placed by the US could not accomplished what the dias Chavez /Maduro accomplished in Venezuela. I do not have updated figures but should be in the lines of previous events. When Bush invaded Iraq, Venezuela made so much money, because of the oil prices, that could have wip... See More

Like · Reply · 3 · Apr 22, 2016 4:40pm



**Alvaro Buendia**

No offense Gloria but you don't even know what you are saying. You are just using the same rhetoric from leftist revolutionaries to blame USA for their own problems. Chavez was in power for more than a decade and what type of econocmic warfare did the US employed to overthrow this government?. Venezuela is still ruled by the same corrupt government .

Like · Reply · 8 · Apr 22, 2016 4:46pm



**Gloria Sanchez**

Alvaro Buendia: Read basic high school world history and you will know Latin American history and what the empires usually do. This has nothing to do with left or right. In addition, Latin American govrnment have been corrupt since the beggining of the centurey, it did not start with Chavez..

Like · Reply · Apr 22, 2016 5:16pm · Edited

Show 4 more replies in this thread



**Emilio Zucco** · Santiago, Dominican Republic

The only one of the bunch that I see actually left his country in a better shape was Mujica

Like · Reply · Apr 22, 2016 3:50pm



**Nicholas Johan Westmaas** · Chaguanas, Trinidad and Tobago

Note that Correa did his very best and smells like roses compared to the rest!

Like · Reply ·  1 · Apr 22, 2016 4:23pm



**Jose P. Barrera** · West Chester, Pennsylvania

If his best is to corral the press, suppress human rights and stash money aside for his eventual move to Belgium, then he did his best. Out of all these morons, he survived two attempts to depose him! The others have gotten a free pass. But you are governed by what you vote in. You deserve what you get!

Like · Reply · Apr 22, 2016 9:31pm



**Julio Cameron**

Miami Herald ALEWAYS attacking the left, supporting economic blockades, economic blockade

But what about capitalisms in Puerto Rico, oops the US colony in bankruptcy.

What about Honduras? Guatemala? and so on

Like · Reply ·  2 · Apr 22, 2016 4:24pm



**Jose P. Barrera** · West Chester, Pennsylvania

It's a newspaper from the right, moron. How many papers would they sell should they embrace Noriega?

Like · Reply · Apr 22, 2016 9:32pm



**Alan Bradley**

This is hilarious. Yet again, socialism has left entire nations in economic ruin and poverty, without even the most basic staples of life like food, water, and energy, not to mention medicine. But, once again, the leftists like this writer rise up in unison and proclaim it wasn't socialism's fault, it was corruption! Socialism has failed in every country, on every continent, in every decade it's been tried, throughout our entire history, and the results have always been the same- absolute failure, without exception. Declining standards of living. Economic devastation. Shortages and rationing. E... See More

Like · Reply ·  5 · Apr 22, 2016 5:53pm



**Jose P. Barrera** · West Chester, Pennsylvania

Just until they pack their pockets with the nation's resources. Then they run to an eastern block country to enjoy what they stole from the country.

Like · Reply · Apr 22, 2016 9:34pm



**Juan Jose Gonzalez** · Owner at Green Mountain Landscaping

You are telling the truth, there are so many rich people in the shopping malls of El Salvador and so many poor on the outside. You wonder where do they get their income. Corruption is Abyss

Like · Reply · Apr 22, 2016 6:31pm · Edited



**Martin Downey** · Manhattan College

No government will work as long as people in these countries keep stealing from each other. Meet the new boss, same as the old boss. I am reminded of the saying, "what starts as a movement, turns into a business and ends up as a racket." From the movie "Under Fire"- "You fall

in love with the poets; the poets fall in love with the Marxists; the Marxists fall in love with themselves. The country falls in love with the rhetoric, and in the end we are stuck with tyrants."

Like · Reply · Apr 22, 2016 7:30pm



**Edgardo Alfonzo** · University of Puerto Rico at Mayagüez

These people continue to equate democracy with capitalism and corruption with socialism. Far from the truth. It's the other way around. It's the guys that come to power. They either abuse it and had no ideology to start with (only pretense), or otherwise cannot control the remnants of what they are trying to replace. It is the failure to eradicate the corruption of true humanitarian values and not necessarily leftist politics. The only thing that will do away with these evils is to educate the masses about the dehumanization of capitalism which leaves the great majority behind and struggling, while its social darwinism is glorified and tried to be rammed into the consciences of those most affected by it.

Like · Reply · Apr 22, 2016 8:04pm



**Jose P. Barrera** · West Chester, Pennsylvania

So socialism is the panacea we should strive to achieve even when it has been proven over and over again that it doesn't work? Oh... It's not socialism.. Is the 'guys that come to power'... Interesting, but wrong thesis...

Like · Reply · 1 · Apr 22, 2016 9:38pm

Load 5 more comments



**Obama arrives in UK for talks on Brexit, lunch with queen**

**SPONSORED CONTENT**

**BRITAIN-US-DIPLOMACY**

US President Barack Obama (R) is greeted by US ambassador to Britain Matthew Barzun (2L) and his wife Brooke Brown (L) on the tarmac after...





SPONSORED CONTENT

## South Korean researchers develop a smart patch for diabetes

Most diabetics need a finger prick test several times a day to determine whether their blood sugar level is under control

By vroll.tv



