

The Media and Media Agenda-Setting: A Case Study of Venezuela

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Abstract

Venezuela's government and the media have an intertwined relationship; the government controls the media and the media influences the government. Utilizing data collected from the International Social Survey Programmer (ISSP), this study focused on Venezuelan's history with the media and its citizens perception about which group influences the governments' actions. The data indicated that the military and the media are the two most influential entities. A discussion and implications of these findings is included.

Keywords: Media agenda setting • Venezuela • International social survey programmer • Media

Description

Venezuela is struggling with a humanitarian crisis. The prices for basic goods are rising and the supplies are falling short [1,2]. In the midst of this crisis, there is also a war on the media causing the dissemination of misinformation and outright government propaganda. The government has taken control of the press, taken over television stations, curtailed news articles, and closed media outlets [3-6]. Although the press informational output is limited, Venezuelans still desire to know the current events and rely upon the news. So citizens are trapped in a paradox: They turn to the news to discover what is happening with their government, but the news has become entrenched with pro-government propaganda. The original article is a case study that reviews the history of Venezuela, through the times of Chavez and into Maduro, and the relationship with the media and media agenda setting theory. To review Venezuelan's belief about the media's influence on government actions, this study used data from the International Social Survey Programmer (ISSP) to build the case study. Further discussion reviewed how Venezuelans are coping in an environment of a limited free press and the interconnection between the media and the government's influence upon each other.

Survey

The ISSP, originally started in 1985, collects data from over 57 countries in 11 different survey areas [7]. For this study, the "Role of Government" survey's question; "Please read the list and write in the boxes below the letter corresponding to the ones you think have the most and second most influence on the actions of the (COUNTRY)

government?" The 11 choices included: The media; Trade unions; Business, banks and industry; Religious organizations/authorities; The military/army; Organized crime; People who vote for the party/the parties in the government; Citizens in general; Civic and voluntary organizations; International organizations; or Can't choose [8]. The results, as indicated in Figure 1, indicated that the top four most influential on Venezuela's government (N=1045, n=955) are the military, media, political party and citizens in general. When asked for responses on the second most influential (n=941), the top four responses are the military, media, political party, and citizens once again, as indicated in Figure 2.

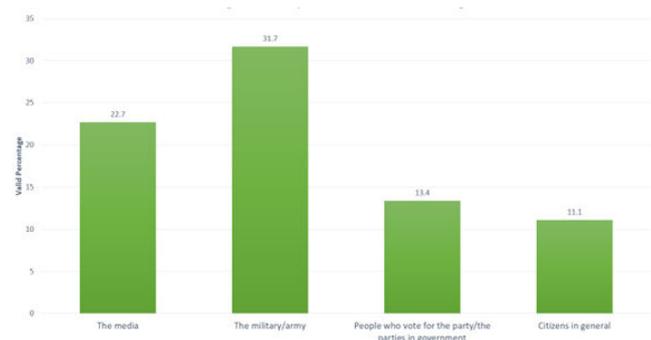


Figure 1. valid percentage of the four most influential on government actions.

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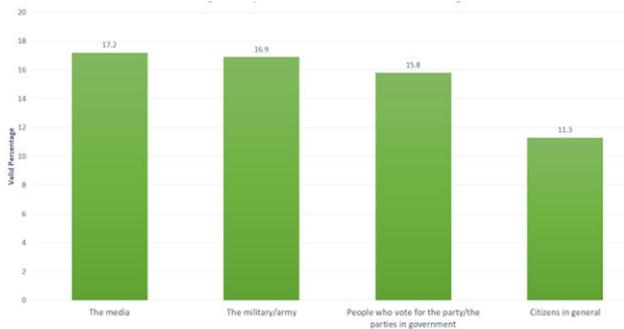


Figure 2. Valid percentage of the four second most media influential on government actions.

Additional age demographic information provided further information about the considered influences and provided significant differences [9-13].

Discussion and Conclusion

The implications of this study reinforce the influence of the military and the media on the government, but that the government controls the media. Under the reign of Hugo Chavez and Nicolas Maduro, Venezuela has undergone a massive shift from a "free press" to a government-controlled press. In order to hold government accountable, people rely on the media to investigate corruption and expose government shortcomings. However, the censorious actions of the Chavez and Maduro have made it impossible for the media report to accurately on government behavior. By controlling the media, the Venezuelan government is allowed to control the narrative that will always put them in a favorable light. Democracies flourish through robust debate and diligent fact-finding, and the Venezuelan people are being deprived of these basic democratic tenants. Consequently, the country is collapsing. A small glimmer of hope exists in the reach and influence of brought on by social media. Future research should continue to look at how Venezuelan citizens are circumventing traditional, government-controlled news media and using social media in order to combat the prevailing government narratives.

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