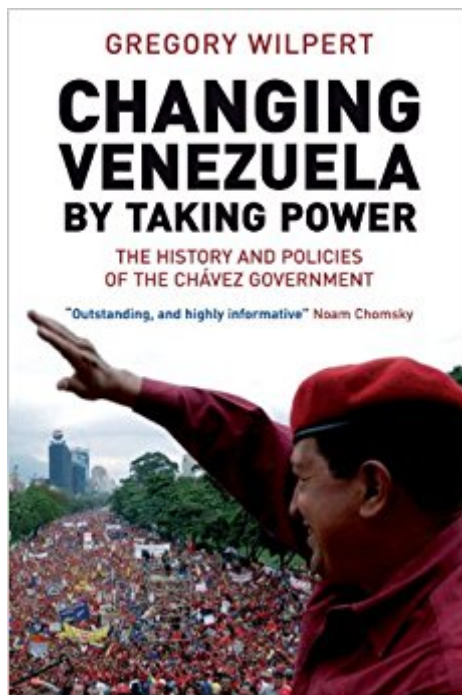




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Changing Venezuela By Taking Power: The History And Policies Of The Chavez Government



Synopsis

Since coming to power in 1998, the Chavez government has inspired both fierce internal debate and horror amongst Western governments accustomed to counting on an obeisant regime in the oil-rich state. In this rich and resourceful study, Greg Wilpert exposes the self-serving logic behind much middle-class opposition to Venezuela's elected leader, and explains the real reason for their alarm. He argues that the Chavez government has instituted one of the world's most progressive constitutions, but warns that they have yet to overcome the dangerous specters of the country's past.

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Customer Reviews

"This fascinating study is deeply informed, penetrating in its analysis, comprehensive in scope and explores the historical and socioeconomic roots of the Venezuelan initiatives of recent years, the conflicts they have engendered, the achievements and pitfalls, the animating ideals of a genuinely participatory society, and the prospects for realizing them in ways that, if successful, might have significant impact not only for Latin America but well beyond." • Noam Chomsky "Gregory Wilpert's book combines academic insight with perspectives gained from living in Venezuela through the tumultuous years of the Chavez administration. His book offers the best general introduction to the complex politics of a country and a leader making a profound impact on global politics at the dawn of this new century." • Daniel Hellinger "Greg Wilpert knows Venezuela intimately and

gives us the most thorough and objective analysis of the Chavez government's policies we are likely to find. A thoughtful and useful book for the 21st century and, let us hope, beyond. • Susan George • "Wilpert presents a detailed, comprehensive and balanced account of the Bolivarian revolution. • Science & Society

Gregory Wilpert is a sociologist, freelance journalist, and a former US Fulbright Scholar in Venezuela.

Gregory Wilpert has written an interesting book about the "Bolivarian Revolution" in Venezuela. Unlike most of the recent books about Venezuela, this book deals very little with Hugo Chavez and more with statistics and legal issues. The problem is however, that despite what is written in the constitution, Chavez does what he likes. The entire federal government is under his control and never does anything to reprimand him or limit his power. As Wilpert wrote in the beginning of the book, the "Bolivarian" Constitution is the same as that of the Soviet Union. It looks great on paper, yet in reality little of the constitutional guarantees have been delivered to the masses. Wilpert indicates that creation of public housing has been so inept, that the slums of Venezuela have been accepted rather condemned. He illustrates time and time again that the Chavez government has failed to accomplish much at all in improving the lives of the Venezuelan people. When he discusses Venezuela's horrible GINI coefficient, he does not say what it was in 2007, when the book was written, as Even after 8 years of the "revolution", Venezuela is still as unequal as it was in 1999, when Chavez assumed office. While far more critical of the government than other books on the "revolution", Wilpert left out one critical piece of information. He fails to mention anything about the deterioration of security in Venezuela. He discusses troops on the border, but fails to mention the marked increase in murders and kidnappings throughout the country. This would indicate that police corruption has gotten worse since 1999 and that the rule of law has also been severely weakened. Judging by Chavez's speeches and his sponsor of two violent coup attempts in 1992, it is no wonder that outlaws have looked to him as a hero and thus have increased their activities without fear of punishment, much less arrest. He mentions that clientalism may continue to be a problem in Venezuelan society, when it most certainly has increased since 1999. Chavez demands a sycophantic media and requires all federal employees (3 million people) to vote for him if they desire to continue in their present positions. By taking full control of the military, PDVSA, the media (almost) and various companies, Chavez has been buying votes. He hands out cheap populist perks to the peasants in order to garner their support, which in combination of forcing federal

employees to vote for him, guarantees that he will never lose an election. His final section is a theory of how a utopian society could be achieved. This section is quite strange and seems to have little basis in reality. Venezuela is very far from these theoretical examples, because it has a very strong central government that controls oil revenues and distributes them how they see fit. In conclusion, Wilpert has written a scholarly work. He desperately wants the "revolution" to succeed, yet at the same time he essentially concludes that after eight years, Venezuelan society has hardly changed at all.

This book unlike any other book written on the Hugo Chavez government's policies went into a great detail on how well the Chavez government has been performing in its attempts to rid the country of judicial corruption, reform land distribution, building cooperatives, spending of social security for Venezuela's poor. It is not only a book filled with rhetoric for left wing writers but had concrete facts and figures about the Chavez revolution. I would thoroughly recommend this book, if you were trying to research the effects of the Chavez government's economic and social policies.

President Hugo Chavez is creating a true gov't for all of Venezuela not a gov't only for the rich. President Hugo Chavez and the ordinary people of Venezuela are creating a gov't for everyone, not a gov't for the rich as we have in America.

Gregory Wilpert, a freelance writer based in Venezuela's capital Caracas, has written a very useful study of the history and policies of the Chavez government in Venezuela. He examines its governance policy, economic policy, social policy and foreign policy. He looks at the opportunities, obstacles and prospects facing the Venezuelan people, and explores Chavez's ideas of 21st-century socialism. In 1998, the people elected Hugo Chavez President, with 56.2 per cent of the votes. In the 2004 recall referendum, he won 58 per cent of the votes and in the 2006 election, 62.9 per cent. Wilpert notes that the previous ruling class's counter-revolutionary acts against the Chavez government have each radicalised the government. He also notes that between 2001 and 2005, the US state sent \$27 million to opposition groups. The government is promoting micro-credits, cooperatives, worker co-management, efforts to achieve self-sufficiency in food production, and skills training and logistical support to help people to start coops and social enterprises. Its social programmes have cut poverty from 44 per cent to 38 per cent. Wilpert shows how the Chavez government is trying to move from representative democracy to a more participatory democracy. This is an excellent introduction to the history and policies of the Chavez government,

joining Eva Golinger's *The Chavez code*, and Bart Jones' *Hugo! The Hugo Chavez story: from mud hut to perpetual revolution*.

If you want to read one book on Venezuela read this one. Greg Wilpert gives the reader an in-depth view of the economic, social and political changes occurring in Venezuela. As indicated by his very informative title, *Changing Venezuela by Taking Power*, Wilpert shows how Chavez's election in 1998 has led to 1: the growth of social programs that benefit the popular classes, and 2: the growth of popular power, e.g. communal councils. Through the growth of communal councils, participatory budgeting, etc., Venezuelans at the grass roots and community level are increasing determining how their communities are run, where government money goes, and what kind of society the majority want. Wilpert shows that although there are some real problems in Venezuela, , Venezuela is today more democratic than it was when Chavez was elected and most people are better off economically. I recommend this book very highly. I just returned from 10 weeks in Venezuela and had read many books about Venezuela before visiting This book by Greg Wilpert helped me more than any other one in understanding the current politics and economics of Venezuela. It is an important counter to what much of our mass media is telling us.

This book was well researched and it's a fair portrait of Chavez and the 'Bolivarian Revolution'... I highly recommend it!

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