

# Venezuelan students protest shutdown of Radio Caracas Television, 2007

- [\(mainly or initiated by\) people of color](#) [1]
- [\(mainly or initiated by\) student participants](#) [2]
- [included participation by more than one social class](#) [3]

## Timing

April 21,  
2007

to:

July  
2007

## Location and Goals

Country:

Venezuela

Location City/State/Province:

Mostly concentrated in Caracas, but some smaller protests also occurred throughout the country

[View Location on Map](#)

Goals:

To pressure the government to renew the broadcasting license for Radio Caracas Televisión

## Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 002. Letters of opposition or support
- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 018. Displays of flags and symbolic colors
- 037. Singing
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support

Methods in 2nd segment:

- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 011. Records, radio, and television
- 018. Displays of flags and symbolic colors
- 037. Singing
- 038. Marches
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support

Methods in 3rd segment:

- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 011. Records, radio, and television
- 018. Displays of flags and symbolic colors
- 036. Performances of plays and music
- 037. Singing
- 038. Marches
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support

Methods in 4th segment:

- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 018. Displays of flags and symbolic colors
- 037. Singing
- 038. Marches
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support

Methods in 5th segment:

- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 011. Records, radio, and television
- 018. Displays of flags and symbolic colors
- 037. Singing
- 038. Marches
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 180. Alternative communication system

Methods in 6th segment:

- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 011. Records, radio, and television
- 018. Displays of flags and symbolic colors
- 037. Singing
- 038. Marches
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 180. Alternative communication system

Segment Length:

Approximately 15 days

## **Classifications**

Classification:

Defense

Cluster:

Democracy

Human Rights

Group characterization:

- Mostly anti-Chávez university students and journalists from Venezuela

## **Leaders, partners, allies, elites**

Leaders:

Student leaders Oscar Perez and Jon Gicochea

Partners:

Radio Caracas Televisión journalists and staff

External allies:

Organization of American States' (OAS) Secretary General José Miguel Insulza, OAS's Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression, the Inter American Press Association, Human Rights Watch, Reporters Without Borders, Freedom House, the Committee to Protect Journalists, U.S. State Department, the European Union, and the legislators of a number of Latin American countries.

Involvement of social elites:

Legislators from the United States and a number of Latin American countries.

## **Joining/exiting order of social groups**

Groups in 1st Segment:

- RCTV employees
- University Students

Groups in 2nd Segment:

- NGOs

Groups in 3rd Segment:

- International Government leaders

Groups in 4th Segment:

Groups in 5th Segment:

Groups in 6th Segment:

Segment Length:

Approximately 15 days

## **Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence**

Opponents:

President Hugo Chávez and the National Telecommunications Commission

Nonviolent responses of opponent:

Venezuelans that supported Chávez's decision held several counter-protests.

Campaigner violence:

Throwing of rocks and bottles during one day of protest.

Repressive Violence:

Arrests, use of tear gas and rubber bullets on the protesters

## Success Outcome

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

1 point out of 6 points

Survival:

1 point out of 1 points

Growth:

3 points out of 3 points

Total points:

5 out of 10 points

Notes on outcomes:

The National Telecommunications Commission refused to renew the broadcasting license of RCTV despite the protests and the station was only able to survive by using alternative and underground methods of broadcasting.

The students who organized the protests in favor of RCTV were many of the same students who organized the later protests against Chávez's constitutional amendments. Additionally, RCTV survived through alternative means of broadcasting.

The protests drew international attention to the controversy in Venezuela, and the protesters were able to grow not only in numbers of demonstrators but also in international support.

Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez has often played a controversial role in Latin American politics, sometimes by testing the limits of freedom of expression. He has criticized the country's private media companies, accusing them of supporting the opposition, and regularly refers to the leading private media owners as "coup plotters," "fascists," and "the four horsemen of the apocalypse." On December 8, 2006, Chávez announced that the government would not renew the broadcasting license of Radio Caracas Televisión, the country's oldest private television network with Venezuela's largest viewing audience (10 million of the country's 26 million people watched its shows and soap operas). The government announced that it would replace RCTV with a government-sponsored channel called TVes, set to begin operations on May 28, the same day that RCTV's license expired.

The government stated that the non-renewal was caused by RCTV's alleged support for the 2002 coup attempt. Bernardo Álvarez, the country's ambassador to the United States, described the licensing decision as a simply regulatory matter and explained that Venezuela wished to adopt a more European model of public broadcasting. When RCTV filed a formal complaint in April, the Supreme Court of Justice ruled that it was within the National Telecommunications Commission's power to decide on the issuing, renewal, and revocation of broadcast licenses. On April 21 thousands of Venezuelan supporters of RCTV held a mass rally against the radio closure. The participants held national flags and banners, while red-clad counter-protesters also gathered to support Chávez's decision.

Throughout the month of May, RCTV's CEO Marcel Granier toured Latin America and Europe in an attempt to gather international support for his company. He prepared a binder with copies of international expressions of solidarity, which he presented to numerous NGO's and the Venezuelan government itself. On May 17, the government rejected another plea made by RCTV to stop the TV station's forced shutdown. Two days later, on May 19, nearly thirty thousand protesters gathered in Caracas to protest the government's decision. Other

marches took place in Maracaibo and Valencia. Throughout the next week, hundreds of journalists and students marched in Caracas, holding banners, singing, and chanting.

Tens of thousands of people marched in two rival rallies in Caracas on May 27, one mourning the decision, the other celebrating it. The police attempted to keep the two groups separate so as to avoid any violent clashes. At one point police turned water cannons against the protestors. That evening, pro-RCTV demonstrations in front of the National Telecommunications Commission became violent when protesters threw rocks and bottles at police, who responded by firing tear gas and rubber bullets into the crowd.

RCTV ended its final day of broadcasting on May 28, 2007 with a rendition of the national anthem performed by the network employees, followed by video of a pro-RCTV protest. Many of the network's employees then left the building and joined the demonstrators protesting for RCTV. Talk show host Miguel Angel Rodriguez led the crowd in chants and songs.

Later that week, a group of pro-Chávez demonstrators spray-painted the headquarters of news channel Globovisión, the country's last openly anti-government station, which Chávez has also threatened to take off the air for its critical coverage. Globovisión was the only TV station to air footage of pro-RCTV demonstrations and to interview demonstrators from both sides of the debate.

Many individuals, international organizations, and non-governmental organizations – including the OAS's Secretary General José Miguel Insulza and its Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression, the Inter American Press Association, Human Rights Watch, Reporters Without Borders, Freedom House, and the Committee to Protect Journalists – expressed concerns about freedom of the press in Venezuela. The Senate of the United States approved a motion condemning the closure, and the U.S. State Department, the European Union, and the legislators of a number of Latin American countries also expressed concern over the incident.

On June 1, various government web sites were discovered to have been “hacked” in protest over the closing of RCTV. Some of the websites showed images of people protesting against the closing of RCTV while others simply said “Hacked by [name], Chávez Escoñetará Todas Tus Web's”, loosely translated to “Chávez, I will destroy your websites.”

Later that month, RCTV found a way to continue its daily broadcasts. Although officially off the air, the news department continued to operate on reduced staffing, and the three daily hour-long installments of the newscast “El Observador” were uploaded onto YouTube by RCTV's Web department. On July 16, RCTV started broadcasting through cable and satellite service providers as RCTV International. About a third of Venezuela's citizens had access to cable and could thus continue watching RCTV. In addition, RCTV's Colombia-based affiliate, Caracol, agreed to transmit the evening installment of “El Observador” over its international signal.

By July, it appeared as if the nationwide protests were quieting down. The government refused to reconsider its decision or even acknowledge the continuing protests. Students instead turned their frustration with Chávez towards a new cause: opposing his proposed constitutional referendum. Claiming that the 69 amendments on the ballot would give too much power to Chávez, the students staged nationwide marches urging voters to reject the referendum. In the December elections, the referendum was rejected.

RCTV's alternative broadcasting continued without any major interruptions for the next two and a half years. However, on January 23, 2010 RCTV-I failed to air a speech made by President Chávez, breaking a law passed a year before requiring cable companies to conform to the same rules as broadcast channels, including requirements that Chávez speeches be shown. That same day the government publicly called on the cable and satellite operating companies to take RCTV-I off the air. The order was enforced that Saturday at midnight. This

began another round of protests, again led by students and journalists in Venezuela. This time, however, the protests were more violent and the government's responses more harsh, and at least two students were killed on the first day of demonstrations. This new round of protests is ongoing as of April 2010 and RCTV remains off the air.

## Research Notes

Influences:

The 2007 protests laid the foundation for the later 2010 protests (2). Many of the same groups were involved and the same tactics used to protest the second closing of RCTV.

Sources:

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"Venezuela TV makes comeback." BBC News. 17 Jul 2007. Web 9 Jun 2011.  
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Possibly other BBC News articles were used (the original researcher did not cite specific articles, but just cited BBC online in general. The articles here were the only ones possible to track down from BBC News)- Editor's note.

Additional Notes:

Blog of an American Journalist: <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,275912,00.html>

Pictures of the Protests: <http://toastedbread.wordpress.com/2007/05/29/venezuela-students-protest-because-of-rctv-closing/>

Edited by Max Rennebohm (09/06/2011)

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Meghan Auker Becker, 25/4/2010

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