

# Suicide of the Elephants?

Venezuelan Decentralization Governance  
Bureaucracy and Clientelism



Richard O. Lalander

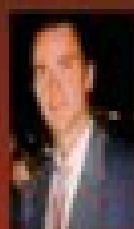
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SUICIDE OF THE ELEPHANTS?

Richard O. Lalander

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On the 1<sup>st</sup> of December 1999, Venezuelans went to the polls for the first time to directly elect their local and regional political leaders. A process of government decentralization was initiated with direct elections of municipal mayors and regional state governors. Since 1958, the political system had been dominated by two political parties, the social democratic AD (Acción Democrática) and Christian democrats COPEI, both strongly centralized parties. The system of strongly dominant political parties is often referred to as *patronato*, with penetration of organized social and political activities. Notwithstanding, the AD-COPEI partyarchy represented a relatively rapid process of undermining from 1999, losing control over important mayordoms, governorships and municipal councils. The municipal, regional and national elections of 1998 and 2000 changed the political panorama even more. Several entirely new political parties have emerged. The MVR (Movimiento V República) party of current President Hugo Chávez presents the most dramatic and rapid rise in this context. But similarly, other parties associated with decentralization have achieved increased political influence. Theoretically, a combination of actors' rational choice, and more process-structural approaches, helps to theoretically understand the political transformations related to decentralization and its implications for the party system. The study demonstrates that the party system and political decentralization are intimately connected and dependent of each other. This study describes and analyzes the "encounter" between the Venezuelan party system and the decentralization reform.



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# Suicide Of The Elephants Venezuelan Decentralization Between Partyarchy And

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