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Dependent-mode development and post-earthquake social development in Venezuela from Touraine

Desarrollo de modo dependiente y desarrollo social posterremoto en Venezuela desde Touraine

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ABSTRACT

The June 2026 earthquakes struck a society whose development depends on oil rent, since reconstruction may either reproduce or break that dependency. The study therefore aimed to analyze Venezuelan social development from Alain Touraine's work Latin America: Politics and Society, in post-earthquake political-natural contexts. A systematic literature review with a hermeneutic-analytical method was applied to 20 sources (1985-2026). The results showed that Venezuela has a dual economy, a central State within a limited and dependent capitalism, and weak social actors, while disasters may act as critical junctures or reinforce the status quo. It was concluded that post-earthquake social development requires strengthening autonomous actors and reducing the external vulnerability of the economic model.

Descriptors: social development; economic dependence; social movements; natural disasters; earthquakes. (Source: UNESCO Thesaurus).

RESUMEN

Los terremotos de junio de 2026 golpearon a una sociedad cuyo desarrollo depende de la renta petrolera, por cuanto la reconstrucción puede reproducir o romper esa dependencia. Es así que el estudio se planteó como objetivo analizar el desarrollo social venezolano desde la obra de Alain Touraine América Latina: Política y sociedad, en contextos político-naturales posterremoto. En este sentido se empleó una revisión sistemática de literatura con método hermenéutico-analítico sobre 20 fuentes (1985-2026). Entre los resultados se obtuvo que Venezuela presenta una economía dual, un Estado central en un capitalismo limitado y dependiente, y actores sociales débiles, mientras los desastres pueden operar como coyunturas críticas o reforzar el statu quo. Entre las conclusiones se estableció que el desarrollo social posterremoto exige fortalecer actores autónomos y reducir la vulnerabilidad externa del modelo económico.

Descriptores: desarrollo social; dependencia económica; movimiento social; desastre natural; terremoto. (Fuente: Tesauro UNESCO).

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Research Articles Section

INTRODUCTION

When, on June 24, 2026, two earthquakes of magnitude 7.2 and 7.5 shook northern Venezuela, west of Caracas, they triggered landslides in Catia La Mar, Playa Grande and the coastal mountains stretching from La Guaira to Naiguatá, according to the report of the U.S. Geological Survey [USGS] (2026), which also warned of the risk of debris flows affecting coastal communities. In line with the literature on disasters, Oliver-Smith (1996) argued that a disaster is not merely a physical phenomenon but an event that reveals the social structure, since vulnerability is historically constructed in the economic and political relations of each society.

For his part, Alain Touraine published *La parole et le sang* in 1988 and its Spanish version, *Latin America: Politics and Society* (Touraine, 1989), in 1989, a work in which he argued that economic dependence produces a dual society in the region, where modern and archaic sectors coexist, and that the State plays a central role in development models marked by a limited and dependent capitalism (Sanahuja, 1990). This indicates that the question of Venezuelan social development cannot be separated from the way the country is inserted into the world economy through oil, nor from the weakness of its social actors vis-à-vis the State.

Likewise, Kvangraven (2021) has shown that the dependency research programme is not a closed chapter of Latin American sociology, since it remains useful for explaining how global structures condition the development of the periphery, while Pelling & Dill (2010) argue that disasters can act as tipping points that accelerate political change or, on the contrary, reinforce the existing order. This invites reflection on a coincidence that is far from minor, since in the same year that Touraine's Spanish edition appeared, the Caracazo broke out in Venezuela, a revolt that López-Maya (2003) explained by the weakness of social and political institutions.

But which of Touraine's categories make it possible to understand Venezuelan social development, and how can a natural shock of the magnitude of 2026 reproduce dependency or open an opportunity to overcome it? Based on the above, the research aims to analyze Venezuelan social development from the perspective of Alain Touraine in *Latin America: Politics and Society*, examining how the dependent development model conditions the country's social dynamics in post-earthquake political-natural contexts.

METHOD

The methodology used is qualitative, with a systematic literature review design and the hermeneutic-analytical method, which made it possible to extract analytical categories from Touraine's work and contrast them with studies on the Venezuelan rentier economy, social movements and the political consequences of disasters. Accordingly, the phases of identification, screening, eligibility and inclusion were followed, and their criteria are summarized in Table 1, so that each selection decision was documented; documentary analysis was used as the technique and a recording matrix per source (author, year, type of document, finding and axis) as the instrument, and its data were subjected to content analysis by axis.

Table 1. *Systematic review protocol*.

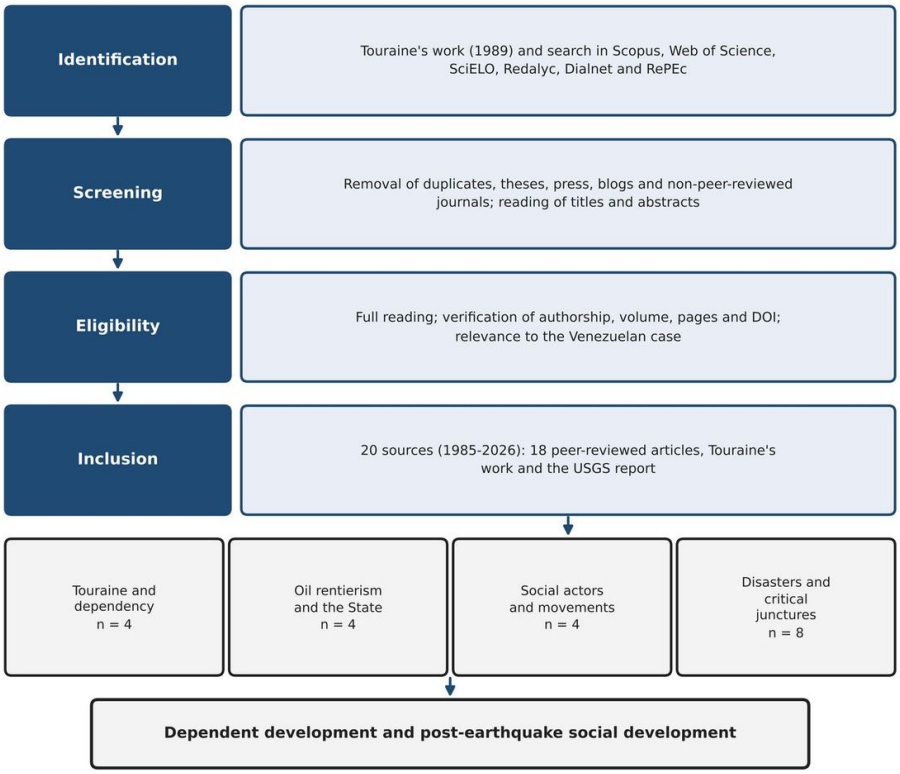
Element	Description
Design	Systematic literature review with a hermeneutic-analytical method
Primary source	Touraine, A. (1989). Latin America: Politics and society
Databases and repositories	Scopus, Web of Science, SciELO, Redalyc, Dialnet and RePEc
Search terms	("Touraine" OR "dependencia" OR "dependency") AND ("Venezuela" OR "renta petrolera" OR "oil rent"); ("desastre" OR "earthquake") AND ("critical juncture" OR "coyuntura crítica" OR "desarrollo")
Period	1985-2026
Inclusion criteria	Peer-reviewed articles with a verifiable record on dependency, rentierism, social movements and the political or economic consequences of disasters
Exclusion criteria	Theses, press, blogs, non-peer-reviewed journals, duplicate records and unconsolidated casualty figures
Axes of analysis	Touraine and dependency (n = 4); oil rentierism and the State (n = 4); social actors and movements (n = 4); disasters and critical junctures (n = 8)

Note: developed in-house.

As for its composition, the corpus comprised 20 sources, of which 18 are articles in peer-reviewed journals, to which are added Touraine's work (1989), as the primary source of the analysis, and

the USGS (2026) report, used as official contextual data on the seismic sequence. Subsequently, the sources were organized into four axes, namely Touraine and dependency theory, oil rentierism and the State, social actors and movements, and disasters as critical junctures, as represented in Figure 1.

Figure 1. *Phases of the systematic review and axes of analysis*.



Note: developed in-house.

Finally, since this is a documentary study, no work was carried out with people or personal data, and the use of casualty figures for the 2026 earthquakes, still disputed among sources, was avoided, so as to distinguish what the sources state from what is proposed as the authors' inference.

RESULTS

The results of the research are described below, organized according to the four axes of the corpus:

Touraine and the dependent society

First, Touraine's sociology starts from action rather than structure, since it understands the social movement as the conflictual action through which actors struggle for control of the cultural orientations with which a society produces itself, what the author called historicity (Touraine, 1985). From this premise, the reading of Latin America he proposed in 1989 emphasizes that the region's social movements show a real capacity for action but maintain weak ties with political forces and remain subordinated to the State, especially under populist regimes, so that democratic consolidation would require new actors organized around social and economic interests (Sanahuja, 1990).

Similarly, Kvangraven (2021) recalls that what unites dependency approaches is their historical and holistic character, their attention to the polarization between center and periphery and their interest in the structural constraints faced by peripheral countries, features that coincide with Touraine's idea of a limited capitalism. Table 2 thus summarizes the categories extracted and their expression in the Venezuelan case.

Table 2. *Touraine's categories and their expression in the Venezuelan case*.

Category	Formulation in Touraine	Venezuelan expression
Economic dependence	Limited and dependent capitalism	Oil rent as the basis of the 1958 transition and the exchange-rate channel of transfer (Karl, 1987; Kornblihtt & Dachevsky, 2017)
Social duality	Coexistence of modern and archaic sectors	Life expectancy from 31-34 years (1920) to 68-73 years (1980); industry from 17.5% (1997) to 13% of GDP (2015) (Arenas, 2012; Kornblihtt & Dachevsky, 2017)
Central State	State as the main agent of development	Distributive State and the imaginary of sowing the oil (Arenas, 2012; Purcell, 2017)
Social movements	Capacity for action, weak ties with political forces and subordination to the State	The 1989 Caracazo as collective action without institutional mediation (López-Maya, 2003)
Historicity	Struggle over the cultural orientations of society	Post-earthquake reconstruction as a field of dispute between centralization and participation

Note: developed in-house from Touraine (1985, 1989), Sanahuja (1990) and the sources cited.

Oil rentierism and the central State

Second, the Venezuelan case offers an extreme version of the dependent society described by Touraine, as shown by Karl (1987), who analyzed how oil revenues made possible the pacted democratic transition of 1958 and warned that Venezuela should not be taken as a textbook model for other democratizations.

Along the same lines, Arenas (2012) argues that the expectation that the State would distribute oil rent became a collective imaginary that made the relationship between State and society populist, and recalls that Uslar Pietri's call to sow the oil, formulated in 1936, became a demand that was never fulfilled, although the modernization financed by the rent raised life expectancy from about 31 to 34 years in the 1920s to 73 years for women and 68 for men in 1980. For their part, Kornblihtt & Dachevsky (2017) identify the overvaluation of the bolívar as the main channel for transferring the rent and record that industry fell from 17.5% of gross domestic product in 1997 to 13% in 2015, while Purcell (2017) concludes that the rentier macroeconomic framework limited the expansion of agricultural production.

Weak social actors and the precedent of the Caracazo

Third, López-Maya (2003) describes the revolt that began on February 27, 1989, which spread to Caracas and most of the country's cities with barricades, road blockades, looting and gunfire, and attributes the violent form of that collective action to the weakness of social and political institutions.

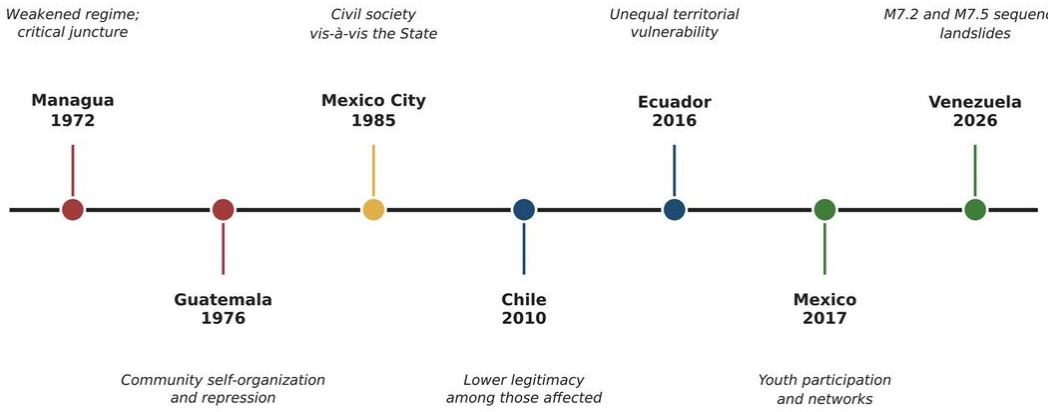
Another aspect that should be examined is the role of social capital in post-disaster recovery, since Aldrich & Meyer (2015) show that bonds among neighbors, bridges between groups and links with institutions explain a community's resilience better than material aid alone. In the Mexican experience of 2017, Loeza-Reyes & Campos-Gómez (2022) documented the participation of young people in humanitarian aid.

The earthquake as a critical juncture or as a reinforcement of the status quo

Fourth, the economic literature shows that the impact of a disaster depends on prior development, since Kahn (2005) found that richer countries do not experience fewer disasters but do suffer fewer deaths, and that democracy and institutional quality reduce mortality, while Noy (2009) found that the negative macroeconomic effects are greater in developing countries and smaller where there is more literacy, better institutions and higher per capita income.

At the political level, Olson & Gawronski (2003) analyzed the 1972 Managua and 1985 Mexico City earthquakes as possible critical junctures, and Gawronski & Olson (2013) showed that in Guatemala, in 1976, community self-organization was perceived by the national security State as a crisis to which it responded with repression, while Carlin, et al., (2014) found that in Chile, after the 2010 earthquake and tsunami, the most affected citizens rated democratic institutions less favorably. Figure 2 thus arranges these Latin American experiences.

Figure 2. *Seismic disasters in Latin America and their sociopolitical effects*.



Note: developed in-house from Olson & Gawronski (2003), Gawronski & Olson (2013), Carlin, et al., (2014), Bravo (2017), Loeza-Reyes & Campos-Gómez (2022) and USGS (2026).

In light of the above, Ecuadorian studies provide a close warning, since Bravo (2017) read the 2016 Manabí earthquake from the perspective of the political ecology of disaster and showed that the damage was distributed according to prior territorial inequalities.

DISCUSSION

The findings are discussed below and contrasted with what was set out in the introduction:

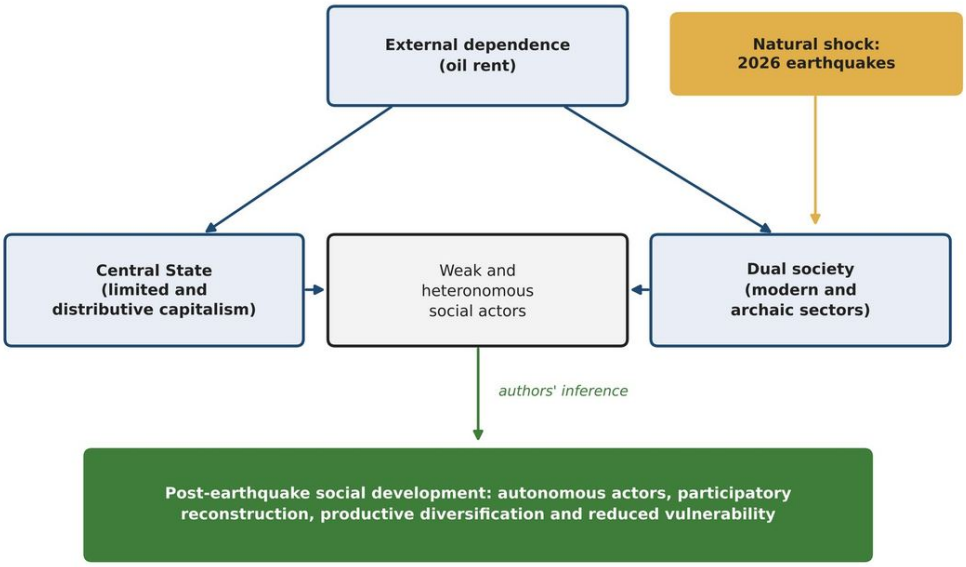
The results confirm the validity of Touraine's reading anticipated in the introduction, since dependency is not reduced to a macroeconomic fact but shapes the type of actors a society is capable of producing, so that a dependent economy tends to generate heteronomous actors who expect from the State what they cannot achieve on their own. Accordingly, the 1989 Caracazo offered a dramatic confirmation of the thesis on the subordination of social movements to the State, because when the rent was no longer enough, protest found no organized channels and erupted without mediation.

This invites reflection on the duality described by Touraine, since the same resources that modernized health and urbanization weakened the productive base, so that modern sectors dependent on the rent coexist with informal economies and peripheral territories that the rent does not reach. Hence an intrinsic challenge for the post-earthquake context, since the coastal areas of La Guaira affected in 2026 concentrate precisely the population living on that periphery of modernization.

Another aspect that should be examined is the meaning of the comparative experience, since the youth participation documented in Mexico suggests that a disaster can become an occasion to form the autonomous actors that Touraine found lacking, in line with Pelling & Dill's (2010) argument about disasters as tipping points. This indicates that, for Venezuela, reconstruction after 2026 may reproduce the dependent model, if it is financed with rent and decided centrally, or may open space for autonomous actors, if it is organized from the affected communities.

On this basis, the authors propose, as an inference, a model in which external dependence simultaneously feeds a central distributive State and a dual society, both of which produce weak social actors, while the natural shock of 2026 aggravates territorial duality, as represented in Figure 3. Consequently, the way forward does not consist in replacing one central actor with another, but in turning reconstruction into a process of actor formation, with community participation in decisions, productive diversification in the affected territories and a reduction of the vulnerability of the coastline, dimensions detailed in Table 3.

Figure 3. *Dependent development model and the way toward post-earthquake social development*.



Note: developed in-house from Touraine (1989) and the corpus reviewed.

Table 3. *Implications of post-earthquake reconstruction for social development*.

Dimension	Risk of reproducing dependency	Alternative oriented toward social development
Financing	Reconstruction financed only with rent and external borrowing	Territorial funds with community control and income diversification
Decision-making	Centralized planning without consultation	Reconstruction round tables with residents, trade associations and universities
Actors	Passive and heteronomous population	Community and youth organizations as autonomous actors
Territory	Relocation that ignores the duality of the coastline	Management of landslide and debris-flow risk with public information
Local economy	Dependence on imports for reconstruction	Local production of materials and employment in the affected areas

Note: developed in-house; authors' inference from Aldrich & Meyer (2015), Pelling & Dill (2010), Bravo (2017) and USGS (2026).

CONCLUSIONS

In sum, the analysis makes it possible to state that Touraine's categories retain explanatory power for the Venezuelan case, since the country has a dual economy, a central State within a capitalism that is limited and dependent on oil rent, and weak social actors, whose subordination to the State became visible in the 1989 Caracazo. Likewise, the literature on disasters shows that earthquakes can operate as critical junctures, as in Managua and Mexico City, or reinforce the existing order, so that the outcome depends on the organization of actors and on the quality of institutions before and after the shock. Similarly, social development in Venezuela after the 2026 earthquakes faces structural obstacles that perpetuate inequality, so that, based on the data reviewed, overcoming them requires strengthening autonomous social actors and reducing the external vulnerability of the economic model.

FINANCING

Non-monetary.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

There is no conflict of interest with any individuals or institutions related to this research.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Maritza Herreta-Sirgo: conception of the study, analysis of Touraine's work and writing of the introduction and the results.

Noemí del Carmen Navarro-Villarroel: search, screening and verification of sources, and preparation of tables and figures.

Carlos Manuel Carreño-Vélez: analysis of disasters as critical junctures and writing of the discussion and the conclusion. The authors participated in the critical revision of the manuscript and approved the final version.

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