

As a senior Political Science major, I decided to pursue departmental honors and write a senior thesis as a culmination of all my coursework, research, and experiences here at Notre Dame. The last four years, I have focused my coursework on the Comparative Politics sub-field while integrating courses related to Latin America for a minor in Latin American Studies. Beginning my sophomore year, I began to consider writing a senior thesis and took a research methodology course with Professor Susan Rosato, who introduced me to Doug Archer, the subject librarian for Political Science. Doug came to my class and helped me familiarize myself with the Political Science LibGuide, which was an essential resource when I first began conducting research for my thesis this year. My junior year, I took “Quantitative Political Analysis” with Professor Michael Coppedge, where I began to acquire the skills necessary to employ statistical techniques in my research and began performing original analyses on public opinion in Venezuela. At the end of my junior year, I asked Professor Coppedge to be my advisor and worked on narrowing my topic for my senior thesis. My interest in the topic I chose, “Political Polarization in Venezuela under Hugo Chávez,” stems from my personal background, having moved to the United States 17 years ago during the early years of Chávez’s administration. I chose to examine political polarization in Venezuela because of the popular discussion surrounding not only the election of Donald Trump, but also a series surprising turning points that took place around the world in 2016: Brexit, Colombia’s rejection of peace, and the emergence of right-wing, nationalist populism in Europe. In many ways, the rise of Chávez in Venezuela eighteen years earlier presaged the polarization sweeping electorates across the world. In addition, examining political polarization would allow me to integrate both the quantitative and qualitative research skills that I had developed.

At the beginning of the year, I turned to the Political Science LibGuide in search of datasets that I could use for my analysis. I was familiar with the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) from my previous coursework, but encountered a roadblock when I could not find enough data to cover the timespan of my analysis. I reached out to Doug and met with him at the library where we discussed the nature of my project, and Doug introduced me to the CurateND tool to search for LAPOP datasets the library had purchased. Doug also recommended that I meet with David Dressing, the Head of the Area Studies and Global Affairs Unit, who proposed that I use the Latinobarómetro for my analysis after also discussing my plans for my thesis with him. The Latinobarómetro turned out to be the perfect fit for my project, offering data from public opinion surveys conducted in Venezuela and other Latin American countries from 1995 to 2015. This allowed me to examine polarization even before Chávez took office in 1999 and after his death in 2013 and to compare levels of polarization in the country to the rest of Latin America. Doug and David were essential in helping me to locate and evaluate data to use for my thesis. Once I had identified the appropriate data, the library also provided me with the physical space and technology to work on my analysis. The library’s Center for Digital Scholarship (CDS) equipped

me with the tools to apply the statistical techniques I had learned from my course with Professor Coppedge, specifically SPSS statistical software to create my Index of Polarization (IP) and generate cross-tabulations from the Latinobarómetro survey data.

I turned to the library's OneSearch as my primary tool to find sources for my thesis. So far, I have referenced fifty-eight sources, all of which I found using the library's OneSearch engine; seven of these are print sources I checked out from the library and nine of these I was able to obtain through the Interlibrary Loan (ILL) system. I was impressed not only by the library's extensive electronic sources, but also by its vast collection, which even included books from Venezuela's top universities and research institutions. For example, *Polarización social y política en Venezuela y otros países* published by Centro Gumilla and Universidad Católica Andrés Bello was an indispensable source I found in the library's collection because it is one of the few sources that specifically discusses polarization in Venezuela. During my research process, I was most surprised to learn about the ILL, a service provided to me free of charge. All of my requests were submitted online and I received all items in each instance in less than week. Not having access to the ILL would have prevented me from discussing sources in my thesis that were vital to my analysis. OneSearch was an essential tool not only to locate my sources, but also to evaluate, manage, and organize them. When using OneSearch I could refine my results to peer-reviewed journals, and once I had found a useful source, I could save and organize sources in my e-Shelf into different folders. Providing appropriate and accurate citations was also simplified by OneSearch. I was able to export my sources from my e-Shelf folder to RefWorks, which allowed me to create a web-based bibliography in the style or format of my choice.

Through my experience writing my senior thesis, I have grown as an independent researcher and my understanding of library research has entirely changed. Hesburgh Libraries has provided me with more than just books for my research, it has molded my entire research process from planning to writing and everything in between. The library's subject librarians and specialists, electronic resources, collections, online tools, physical spaces, and technology were all invaluable and indispensable resources in the creation of my senior thesis. Motivated by the absence of research on the ideological basis of political polarization in Venezuela during the Chávez administration, my thesis offers a new perspective on the emergence and nature of ideological polarization in Venezuela.