

Bio

David Smilde

I am the Charles A and Leo M Favrot Professor of Human Relations at Tulane University, Senior Fellow at the Washington Office on Latin America, and member of the Woodrow Wilson Center's Venezuela Working Group. I served as editor-in-chief of the journal *Qualitative Sociology* from 2011-2018 and was a member of the International Panel on Social Progress from 2015-2018. I also have worked with the Open Society, Ford, and Luminate Foundations.

I received my Ph.D in sociology from the University of Chicago in 2000. Before coming to Tulane, I was assistant and associate professor of sociology at the University of Georgia. I also have been a visiting professor at the University of Notre Dame, the Universidad Católica Andrés Bello, and the Universidad Central de Venezuela.

My original line of research is on religion and I am the author of *Reason to Believe: Cultural Agency in Latin American Evangelicalism* (California 2007). This project was based on three years of ethnographic fieldwork in the popular barrios of Caracas. However, the main interest of all of my research has been participation. In 1999 I carried-out a research project and wrote a book with Margarita López Maya and Keta Stephany called *Protesta y Cultura en Venezuela: Los Marcos de Acción Colectiva*. (FACES-UCV 2002) in which we sought to understand the protests of the first year of the government of Hugo Chávez. These same interests led me to work on a second book on participation. In 2006 I organized a panel on Venezuela at the Latin American Studies Association congress in San Juan, Puerto Rico, that sought to broaden concepts of participation and civil society to include not just social movements and non-governmental organizations, but religion, media and poetry. That panel led to an edited volume that was published as *Venezuela's Bolivarian Revolution: Participation, Politics and Culture under Chávez* (Duke 2011).

From 2006 to 2016 I lived most of the calendar year in Caracas. Being so close to the ground in a time of conflict I became interested in doing more publicly engaged work. In 2008 I explained the appeal of Chavismo in "The Social Structure of Hugo Chávez." In 2011 I became a senior fellow at the Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA) and founded the blog *Venezuelan Politics and Human Rights*. With Chávez's death in 2013, Venezuela's crisis grew deeper every year and this blog became central to my professional activity. In its first seven years we averaged over one hundred posts per year, two thirds of which I authored or co-authored, all of which I curated. In the past ten years, I have published op eds in the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, and *El Pais*. I have also written policy pieces for *World Politics Review* and *Current History* and *Foreign Policy*. In all of my public advocacy I have worked for a negotiated solution to the Venezuelan crisis. My methodology has been to use social science to undermine the broad brushstroke portraits that Venezuelan and international political actors use to mis portray each other and the crisis. Undermining false and stereotypical information helps oblige these actors to actually engage in politics.

During this focus on advocacy, I have never set aside my disciplinary scholarship. In 2013 I published with three colleagues an edited volume called *Religion on the Edge: Decentering and Re-centering the Sociology of Religion* which sought to expand the empirical domain of the sociology of religion beyond its traditional focus on Christianity, and the U.S. and Europe. In

2014 I published a special issue of *Latin American Research Review* on “Religion and Citizenship” with two colleagues. And in 2021 I published a co-edited volume in Venezuela called *Postsecularismo y la religion vivida: aportes desde la sociología cualitativa norteamericana* (UCAB 2021).

In 2015 I started a collaboration with Verónica Zubillaga and Rebecca Hanson which led to a co-edited volume *The Paradox of Violence in Venezuela*, which will be published in spring 2023 by the University of Pittsburgh Press. It uses recent understandings of violence to breakthrough what has been a politicized debate. We worked hard for this to not simply be a book *about* Venezuela but also *from* Venezuela. Of the fourteen contributors of chapters to this book, nine are Venezuelan.

I am currently working on three projects. I am finishing a co-authored paper comparing the Venezuelan and Colombian Catholic Church’s engagement in peacemaking. I am working on another co-authored paper reviewing and contributing to the various debates regarding transitional justice in Venezuela. And with a Venezuelan colleague, I am writing a book on students and socialism in Venezuela.