

Trajectories of the Political Ringtone: Hugo Chávez and the Referendum of 2007

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The political ringtone, which in the form of national anthems and ethno-religious songs dates back to the earliest days of customizable ringtones, was profoundly transformed by the ringtone's mutation into a sound file. Recasting the cellular telephone as a portable music/sound playback and even recording device, the newest incarnation of the political ringtone has given rise to what might be understood as a *global form*: the political voice-remix ringtone. Originating in the Philippines in the summer of 2005 with the election scandal involving President Gloria Arroyo, in which the president's voice was wiretapped while in conversation with an election official, successive attempts to utilize ringtones in this fashion began to appear in various parts of the world.

One particularly important example was that of the "¿Por qué no te callas?" phenomenon, whose source was the previous mentioned phrase (English: "Why don't you shut up?") uttered by King Juan Carlos I of Spain to Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez at the Ibero-American Summit in November 2007. The incident immediately attracted widespread attention, both in the Spanish-language press and as a mass-cultural new-media phenomenon—via YouTube and through ringtone remixes. Generating significant profits and amplifying fantasies of imperial nostalgia within Spain itself, the phrase and ringtone were quickly adopted by the white creole elite youth in Venezuela, who constitute a core component of the Chávez administration's opposition and played a significant role in the defeat of the proposed reforms in the December 2007 referendum.