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<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/5mj6j3t8>

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Publication Date

2020-04-01

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The Fall of Democracy and the Rise of Authoritarianism in Venezuela

By: Samuel Roberts

Abstract

Latin America has been characterized as a region where democracies struggle and countries are rife with internal power struggles. The 20th century has seen a decrease in dictatorships and brutal regimes in a majority of Latin American countries, with most shifting towards democracies. Venezuela, on the other hand, has done the opposite, now having one of the most brutal regimes in the region. Once thought of as a model democratic country with adequate civilian control and a strong economy, Venezuela now has one of the worst economies and military dictatorships in the world today. While the history of Venezuela's democratic government has been anything but stable, late 20th century Venezuela showed promise for a newly reformed democratic government. It is impossible to pinpoint a single moment which caused the Venezuelan democracy to shift towards a dictatorship, but the leadership under Hugo Chávez is a good starting point. Venezuela's stance (or lack thereof) towards the military, its economic reliance on oil, rampant political corruption, and its foreign relations have all contributed heavily to the creation and resilience of the Maduro regime. This paper will seek to analyze the role past Venezuelan presidents and Chávez played in creating a repressive regime through the control of Venezuela's military, reliance on profits from oil, and international relations. With this information, the paper will help one to understand how Nicolás Maduro's dictatorship has been able to continue even with catastrophic inflation levels, a withering civilian population, and international threats. Additionally, this

paper will identify the different aspects of the government, economy, and political systems that must change in order for Venezuela to start the transition back to a democratic government. Through the analysis of these different factors, this paper will provide a better understanding for readers as to how Maduro has been able to retain power and what must change in order for the current Venezuelan dictatorship to shift to a democratic government.

HISTORY

In order to understand how Maduro has been able to maintain control of Venezuela while facing a volatile civilian population, threats from the United States, and an extremely weak economy, we must look to the past. Providing a complete history of Venezuela would prove to be lengthy and would ultimately detract from understanding Venezuela's current leadership. While the majority of this paper focuses on the span of time from 1999-2013 to study the massive effect Hugo Chávez had on Venezuela, it also covers Venezuela post-1958 in order to understand the impact of the Punto Fijo pact and how it essentially transformed Venezuelan politics. In providing an understanding of Venezuela's economy, military, foreign relations, and leadership under Hugo Chávez from 1999-2013, we will begin to see how a dictatorship has been all but inevitable for Venezuela.

Venezuela's Democracy

Venezuela's first democracy emerged in 1945, but was only able to sustain its hold briefly, with a military dictatorship swiftly taking over for nearly a decade in 1948. In 1958, another democracy emerged, this time strengthened by the Punto Fijo Pact, in which the three main political parties of Venezuela (COPEI, AD, and URD) agreed upon maintaining democracy.

This essentially created a strong, two party system with COPEI and Acción Democrática being the dominant parties. Specifically, the Pact of Punto Fijo declared that the three parties would respect election results and work together to prevent unconstitutional interference in the elections. In order to respect democracy, the Pact declared that the parties would alternate in power. This included forbidding the military from intervening in elections. Additionally, it stated that all parties needed to defend the constitutional authorities if a coup were to occur. Through the pact, both parties were able to consolidate power and gain support through their economic gains from oil. While the Pact did help to better establish democracy within Venezuela, there were problematic inclusions which proved to be exclusionary to the many poor citizens within Venezuela. Specifically, the allowance of the parties to use patronage as a means of rewarding party loyalty introduced a way in which parties could influence citizens through the provision of economic benefits.

While the Pact remained strong for decades, it was eventually weakened by an economic downturn in the 1980's, wherein oil prices fell tremendously. With a two-party system heavily reliant on oil profits to maintain power, this economic downturn resulted in confusion and turmoil for both parties. Soon enough, both parties were reliant on corrupt practices to control their rivals.

With corruption now frequently used to remain in power, public trust in the two-party democratic system fell tremendously. In 1989, President Pérez

was re-elected as President of Venezuela. His second presidency, however, was defined by corruption. Due to economic mismanagement by his predecessors, upon taking office President Pérez faced an immediate economic downturn, subsequently forcing his hand in implementing neoliberal policies recommended by the IMF, which Pérez had previously attacked during his campaign for president. These policies sought to end price controls, devalue the currency, reduce tariffs on imports, and increase the prices of public goods, among other things. However, the rising price of oil and transportation fueled frustration and anger amongst the citizens of Venezuela, resulting in mass protests dubbed the "Carazaco" which included mass looting and destruction of government property. After more than 24 hours, Pérez stepped in and ordered the military to act, leaving over 400 citizens dead and thousands injured. The Carazaco marked an important turning point in Venezuelan history, as it showed the public's extreme disapproval of the Venezuelan democracy in place with the Puntofijismo Pact.

The Carazaco represented a tipping point in Venezuela's democracy and encouraged then-army officer Hugo Chávez to help form MBR-200, which consisted of a small group within Venezuela's military with the plan to overthrow Pérez. In February of 1992, Lieutenant Colonel Hugo Chávez led a failed coup attempt with the help of MBR-200 against President Pérez and was immediately jailed, where he took responsibility for the failed coup. Jail did not change Chávez's strong anti-Pérez alignment, however. Upon

imprisonment, Chávez continued to stand by his actions, saying he had only failed “for now”. During this time in jail, Chávez’s popularity within Venezuela rose, helping to transform Chávez from a coup leader to a political leader.

One year later in 1993, President Pérez was impeached on corruption charges, allowing the newly formed National Convergence party to beat both COPEI and AD in the presidential elections. Founded by former president and COPEI party member Rafael Caldera, the National Convergence was assembled with a focus on reducing corruption in Venezuela. Caldera subsequently freed all military officers engaged in the two coups against Pérez, including Hugo Chávez, after getting elected. As soon as Hugo Chávez was freed, he immediately began a 100-day tour of Venezuela, helping to cultivate an even stronger support from Venezuela’s working-class citizens. During this time, Chávez founded the Fifth Party Movement, which was formed from MBR-200 and sought to further Socialist values.

During elections in 1998, Chávez won the majority vote and became president in 1999. Chávez, running on a prominent Socialist platform signified the further deviation from the two-party system which had ruled Venezuelan politics for over 30 years. Ultimately, Chávez’s election marked the further degradation of Venezuela’s democracy and greatly diminished the power of both COPEI and AD.

Hugo Chávez’s Regime

On February 2, 1999, Hugo Chávez was officially sworn into office as the 45th president of Venezuela. Before his election, Chávez was already a notable figure in Venezuelan politics due to a past 1992 coup attempt, which was supported by many Venezuelan citizens at the time. This added visibility allowed Chávez to gain a majority vote in 1999 and become president, the title of which he was able to keep until his death in 2013. In order to maintain and consolidate power, Chávez effectively ran on a Populist-turned-Socialist platform, appealing to the large population of lower-class citizens. However, Chávez's Socialist regime faced pressures from both internal and external sources due to a volatile economy, leading Chávez to consolidate his power through the installation of loyalists across a number of sectors, including the oil industry, government, and military.

Chávez's New Constitution

Chávez's new constitution was perhaps the first major blow to the greatly weakened Venezuelan democracy. During 1999, a new constitution was drafted under Chávez which aimed to replace the Venezuelan constitution that had been in place since 1961. While in office, Chávez based many of his policies on Bolivarianism, even going so far as to change the name of Venezuela to the "Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela". Bolivarianism was named after Venezuela's liberator, Simón Bolívar. Chávez sought to create equitable resource distribution, eliminate corruption, and fight against imperialism through Bolivarianism. Driven by Bolivarianism, Chávez wrote a new constitution that aimed to validate his Plan Bolivarian, which would

provide more aid to lower-class and poverty-stricken communities. However, the new constitution also allowed Chávez to consolidate his power through the subtle removal of power from the National Assembly, allowing Chávez to maintain control over legislative aspects of government. A common theme which Chávez utilized in order to get this policy passed with broad public support was that the bicameral National Assembly had become unrepresentative of Venezuela's working class. In converting the National Assembly into a unicameral chamber, Chávez was able to get party loyalists elected into the positions, allowing him to consolidate his power further through the passage of policies that benefited his presidency. The conversion of the National Assembly into a unicameral chamber and the disintegration of the Senate allowed Chávez to take away power from the Assembly to approve military promotions. With little-to-no oversight over military promotions, Chávez subsequently had complete control over military them.

With the formerly bicameral National Assembly shifting to a unicameral system, their overall powers were greatly weakened, allowing the executive branch to retain many of the legislative branch's former powers. This change, coupled with the executive branch's new ability to dissolve the National Assembly under certain conditions, further emboldened Chávez and helped to greatly reduce any internal threats within the government against Chávez's rule. Essentially, one of the biggest changes that came with the introduction of the new constitution was the fact that institutional oversight

was severely crippled, which allowed Chávez to instate his political cronies and loyalists into positions of power throughout the government and military. Through amendments within the new constitution, Chávez was able to severely limit the opposing parties' legislative and military oversight powers, thus further expanding his powers and insulating him against political adversaries or threats to his regime.

Additionally, Chávez passed policies that increased the presidential term limits to six years and allowance of reelection, giving him the ability to maintain control of the presidency for a maximum of twelve years. Chavez's new constitution also gave him sole power to pass referendums at will, without the input of the National Assembly. Because Chavez had vast support from Venezuela's lower-class citizens, he was easily able to pass many of his referendums. Chavez would later utilize corrupt, repressive techniques in order to ensure that his referendums were passed by the public, allowing him to remain in power up until his death.

Overall, it can be concluded that Chávez's reforms to Venezuela's constitution in 1999 did nothing to help strengthen democracy. Instead, the reforms had the opposite effect, allowing Chávez to further consolidate his power while still maintaining support from the public. As such, it can be understood that the 1999 constitutional reforms further shifted the democracy of Venezuela closer towards a dictatorship.

Anti-Imperialist Rhetoric and the Inability for Foreign Intervention

As previously noted, Chávez relied on anti-imperialist rhetoric to rise to power which did not stop upon him gaining the presidency. Chávez blamed the two-party system of Venezuelan government as the reason for the proliferation of corruption, as well as the United States, which he claimed sought to implement international policy to further their imperialist powers and promote policies that benefited them at the risk of Venezuela.

Anti-imperialist rhetoric was extremely effective in motivating support for Chávez, as the previous few decades in Latin America had seen plenty of foreign intervention by the United States, many of which failed. For too long, the United States had imposed heavy-handed approaches which were seen to be only beneficial to the United States, not any of the Latin American countries. Such prominent examples could be seen with the U.S. orchestrated coup against Guatemalan President Jacobo Arbenz (1954), its invasion of the Dominican Republic to overturn elected President Juan Bosch (1965), its support for the Chilean coup of 1973 and the Pinochet dictatorship that followed, and its invasion of Panama to oust President Manuel Noriega. With a population already fearful of United States intervention, Chávez was easily able to gain the trust of the Venezuelan citizens by perpetuating the belief that the United States was interested only in Venezuela to further its own policies. Additionally, Chávez's reliance on trade with Fidel Castro directly opposed U.S. foreign policy towards Cuba. Such policies irked the United States, which could not outright respond to Chávez, for if the U.S. were to engage in retaliatory, imperialist actions towards Chávez based on

his relationship with Castro, it would only cause Chávez to gain more support across Venezuela.

Chávez was successful in organizing a heavy resistance to U.S. intervention, making it nearly impossible for the U.S. to intervene. If the U.S. were to do anything to depose Chávez, their plans would almost certainly backfire and the nation of Venezuela would be further incensed, allowing Chávez to gain more support by the entire population. As such, the U.S. saw its hands tied in any efforts against Venezuela's regime. Even aid provided by the United States was turned away, seen after the Vargas tragedy (in which flash floods killed tens of thousands of people) when Chávez turned away military members and provisions sent from the United States to help those affected by natural disaster. In effect, the United States was essentially hamstrung with what foreign policy they could implement towards Venezuela.

Another important factor in the United States' inability to affect change in Venezuela was the fact that they had a strong financial interest in Venezuela's oil reserves. Until very recently, Venezuela was able to maintain dominance in oil production. With many major U.S. corporations reliant on oil from Venezuela, strong foreign intervention in Venezuela was impossible, as doing so would ultimately damage their economic interests. Overall, a strong dependency on Venezuela's oil, a history of failed Latin American interventions, and the strong internal resistance to the United States ensured that the U.S. would be unable to intervene in Venezuela's affairs.

Not only was the United States unable to affect change in Venezuela, neighboring South American countries also found themselves in a similar position. These countries had an economic interest in Venezuela and prescribed to the treaty of nonintervention within Article 15 of the Organization of American States Charter.¹ As such, surrounding countries were (and still are) reluctant to intervene in Venezuela's domestic affairs. Without having to face repercussions from the United States and Venezuela's neighbors, Chávez was able to maintain control over his regime without fear of displacement from external forces.

Venezuela's Economy

Venezuela is home to some of the largest oil reserves in the world, a resource which has historically sustained Venezuela's economy. Since the early 1900's, Venezuela has relied almost exclusively on oil production as a means of revenue. As such, Venezuela has faced the phenomenon known as Dutch Disease, wherein oil production has become the only means for profitability within Venezuela, thus reducing exports from other sectors. With a lack of focus and investment on the development of other sectors, Venezuela has effectively ensured that their economy is completely dependent on oil. Oil's influence within Venezuela has continued to grow, with it dominating the country's exports and contributing to most of the country's GDP. Helping to contribute to a stronger Bolivarian currency, oil production was pushed even further, resulting in the nationalization of the oil industry (PDVSA). The profitability of oil and its increasing exportation led to

a stronger currency for Venezuela, one that the past leaders took advantage of. With oil being Venezuela's most profitable good, it disincentivized the production of other goods and made it easier for Venezuela to import basic goods rather than produce them within the country itself. The effects of these poor economic decisions were not seen immediately, contributing to Venezuela's rising dependency on an economy stilted on oil.

By the time Chávez was elected in 1998, the profitability of oil production had already caused Venezuela to cut its industrial production tremendously.^{ii iii} 1999 marked a huge recession in which oil prices hit a record low not seen since the 1970's. This recession, however, did not immediately impact the oil industry. While it would later prove to be severely damaging to Venezuela's economy, Chávez continued to use these profits as a means of reducing poverty. Chávez utilized the military through a bevy of social programs called "Bolivarian Missions", the first of which being Plan Bolívar 2000, to provide social services to the lower-class in Venezuela. While these policies were received with international praise and a marked decline in poverty, there was a growing concern over the dependency Chávez placed upon oil. Chávez utilized the large oil capital that Venezuela had on providing the necessary funding for such programs, which received widespread acclaim by the lower-class Venezuelan citizens. With the ensured support of Venezuela's immense lower-class, Chávez was able to ensure that he would not face a recall by referendum. Instead of saving money to insulate Venezuela against the volatile price of oil, Chávez continued to

devote tremendous amounts of Venezuela's capital to these missions. Government expenditures soon exceeded government revenue in 2007,^{iv} leading to the start of an economic crisis within Venezuela. While implementing large-scale social programs meant to curb poverty rates seemed like a good idea at first, it soon became apparent that Chávez was only thinking of the benefits in the short-term, not the long-term. A lack of future planning and the mistaken belief that oil prices would continue to rise exponentially blinded Chávez and the Venezuelan people to the actual reality they faced. Thus, when government expenditures started to rise above revenue, the economy of Venezuela was in disarray. This increase in government expenditures led to inflation, as the government attempted to print more money in order to pay for their extensive expenditures. As such, the more money being printed meant that it started to lose its value. From 2007 to 2013 alone, the IMF estimated a rise in inflation from 19-39%.^v

Perhaps the most noticeable effect of high inflation, low buying power, and Chávez's disinterest in maintaining Venezuela's infrastructure were the rolling blackouts that plagued Venezuela. Starting in 2010, rolling blackouts occurred frequently throughout Venezuela, leading Chávez to proclaim an "electricity emergency". Chávez's intense focus on maintaining his costly social programs meant that there was a lack of focus on Venezuela's infrastructure, which became even more apparent once oil prices started to drop and inflation started to rise.

High inflation meant that everyday goods were harder to purchase for the average citizen. This was the same for the government as well: since Venezuela relied almost exclusively on the production of oil to sustain itself, the country had a harder time purchasing outside resources from other countries. The appointment of military officers and policy loyalists to banks and other government-run facilities meant that they had a means to influence policy that benefitted them. As such, the military and government were able to reap rewards while civilians suffered from a lack of material goods and money. Corruption proliferated, resulting in an ever-growing wealth disparity between Chávez's appointed officials and the general public.

Chávez and PDVSA

In order to gain a better understanding of the crippling economic crisis that Chávez helped to cause, it is important to analyze Chávez's policies concerning PDVSA, the state-owned oil refinery that controls all oil production within Venezuela. Formally nationalized in 1976, PDVSA provided the Venezuelan government with oil revenues and became one of the largest and most profitable companies around the world during Chávez's regime. Chávez started enforcing more regulations upon the nationalized oil company, eventually restricting its autonomy and reshaping it into a government tool. In order to create a company which bent to the demands of the president, Chávez replaced those holding major positions of power within PDVSA with party loyalists, ensuring his political dominance. In doing so, Chávez appointed military members to internal positions of power within

PDVSA. However, most military leaders assigned to these positions lacked the experience to effectively run them. Because of this, Venezuela lost enormous profits due to a diminished productivity, especially with maintaining and producing oil.

These moves, however, were met with widespread criticism, eventually leading to a coup attempt and major strike which briefly destabilized Venezuela's economy. After the two month-long strike, Chávez retaliated by firing 18,000 workers for PDVSA, resulting in a damaged corporation struggling with effectiveness after the purge caused a loss of many technologically competent workers.^{vi} These workers were replaced by military officers, many of whom started to engage in corrupt actions within the oil industry. Additionally, these military officers were unskilled in the oil refinery process, helping to further the inefficiency of PDVSA. To compare numerically, an estimated 3 million barrels were being produced per day before the coup, which fell to just around 200,000 barrels in December 2002, close to the end of the coup against Chávez.^{vii} While oil production started to fall,^{viii} the price of oil was rising,^{ix} allowing Chávez to continue promoting his false narrative that PDVSA was thriving. The rising prices of oil did help to sustain Chávez's regime for some time. However, oil production then began to gradually fall. While Chávez was able to keep inflation relatively low for the majority of his leadership, the state's overreliance on a volatile product like oil for the funding of social programs caused many issues. If oil were to fall by just a few dollars a barrel, Venezuela's population could face disaster.

Inflation has, for the most part, continued to rise since 2006.^x As such, poverty levels have increased and the country has had to rely on trading oil at below-market prices to allies in order to receive aid.

With such rampant inflation, Venezuela has faced intense shortages of both food and goods. To control inflation and manage production, the government under Chávez seized control of and nationalized many industries, such as coffee and rice. The result of a massive increase of nationalized industries has led to a large decrease of privatized companies within Venezuela. Additionally, it has effectively lowered production of goods to, in some cases, nonexistent levels. With inflation levels climbing and Venezuela facing an increasing shortage of goods, black markets became a means for obtaining goods, outrage grew, and many were left to wonder if Chávez's promises of a bright future for Venezuela were to be believed.

The 2002 Coup Against Chávez

On April 9, 2002, a strike led by the National Federation of Trade Unions began in response to Chávez appointing political loyalists to major positions within PDVSA. With roughly one million Venezuelans closing in on Chávez's presidential palace, guards immediately opened fire upon the protestors, resulting in 19 deaths of both protestors and supporters of Chávez. In response to the multiple civilian casualties, Venezuela's military high command arrested Chávez on April 11, 2002. While Chávez was imprisoned for two days, pro-Chávez supporters and military officers were able to retake the Presidential Palace and reinstate Chávez as president.

Following the coup, Chávez became increasingly focused upon maintaining and consolidating his power, establishing multiple coup-proofing techniques including increasing surveillance over the armed forces, thus maintaining control over the military. While one may assume the failed coup would leave Chávez in a weakened position, Chávez was able to regain his power immediately. Upon reinstatement, Chávez was able to determine who his internal enemies were inside the military. Through participation in the failed coup attempt, Chávez's opponents had all but revealed their identities to the public. As such, Chávez purged the military's ranks, removing both the officers and soldiers who had participated in the coup attempt against him. From this point forward, Chávez's regime became more and more like a dictatorship, as Chávez ensured that the positions of power both within Venezuela's government and the military were filled with party loyalists.

While U.S.-Venezuelan relations were already poor before the coup, they became even worse afterwards, with Chávez publicly stating that the United States was attempting to assassinate him. This claim allowed Chávez to gain more support among his supporters fearful of any form of U.S. intervention. Additionally, it ensured that the U.S. could not do anything to intervene, as any action taken against Chávez would help to increase support amongst Venezuelans. Even though tensions between the two countries had risen, petroleum trade still surged, allowing Chávez to maintain his exorbitant social programs.

Cuba

The support of Cuba and Fidel Castro helped to further the spread of Socialism and strengthen Chávez's rule over Venezuela. Prior to Chávez gaining power, relations between the two countries were weak, but a shared admiration held by both Chávez and Castro helped to strengthen them. It was after the 2002 coup in which Chávez started to engage in more trade with Cuba, wherein Venezuela provided economic assistance through the provision of oil offered at non-market rates to receive political assistance in the form of Cuban personnel. By entering into this exclusive deal with Cuba, Chávez was able to ensure that Cuba had a vested interest in the survival of his regime. Not only did Cuban aid allow for the dispersion of Castro's ideals to Venezuelan citizens and soldiers, Chávez was able to utilize the Cuban intelligence agents to discover dissenters within his armed forces and the government. With Chávez's help, Castro was able to place Cubans into several positions of power within Venezuela, helping to maintain and contribute to the extensive Bolivarian missions. Cuba's aid proved to be essential for the longevity of Chávez's regime. Through the provision of internal surveillance and military training, Cuba was able to help ensure that the Chávez regime was nearly impenetrable by both opposing internal and external threats. The impact of coup-proofing his regime through the instatement of Cuban intelligence operatives within Venezuela's military allowed Chávez to keep close tabs on potential subversives, many of whom faced severe punishment if found to be unsupportive of the Chávez regime. Not only did this surveillance reduce the likelihood of a coup attempt, it

ensured that Chávez's military was filled only with party loyalists, creating a more unified military under Chávez himself.

The Military Under Chávez

With foreign intervention not being a suitable option for removing Chávez from power, essentially the only body left capable of doing so was the Venezuelan military. However, the military has been loyal to both Chávez and Maduro, even though many of the lower-level soldiers come from Venezuela's lower and middle class. In order to understand how these leaders have been able to reign in the military and make them loyal to the Venezuelan regime, it is important to look at the composition of the military, the ways in which the military's missions have been defined by the government, and how the military became indoctrinated with Chávez's ideals. By instilling a doctrine of loyalty to the Venezuelan government and installing extensive coup-proofing methods within the military, Chávez was able to utilize the military to follow their orders of repression, thus ensuring that they do not face internal or external threats to their leadership.

Previously serving as a Lieutenant Colonel in the Venezuelan military meant that Chávez held different views than his predecessors when it came to civilian-military relations. As such, Chávez was less apprehensive about using the military for internal missions, seen with his usage of the armed forces during his Bolivarian Revolution. The unionization of the civilian-military relationship created a politically charged military that slowly became integrated throughout all sectors of Venezuela. Through the utilization of the

military for the distribution of social programs, Chávez was able to create an atmosphere of confusion, in which the military was unsure about their role in Venezuelan politics. Chávez ensured that the military remained politically charged by making them swear loyalty to him, a stance which troubled many and ensured a blurring of roles between the civilian and military relationship. Additionally, Hugo Chávez put military members into positions of power with an active role in the public sector, giving the military an active say in the development of public policies that influenced Venezuelan society. Chávez's command of the military went even further after the April 2002 coup, with him going so far as to indoctrinate soldiers with Socialist beliefs through the changing of military teachings at academies around Venezuela.

While Venezuela's military was not keen on maintaining internal order within Venezuela, there was a constant lack of external threats (with the exception of the perceived threat from the United States). With the treaty of nonintervention helping to maintain a calm across Latin America, Venezuela's military did not fear attack from a bordering country. As such, the military's focus was more internally centered, allowing Chávez to integrate his Bolivarian Revolution almost effortlessly, without too much opposition from the military. Since Venezuela became a democracy, civilian inattention to the military had become the norm. Essentially, institutions lacked oversight over the military. They did not attempt to exercise more power and control over the military, as those in control of said oversight were party loyalists and friends of Chávez. Profits aside, Chávez ruled with

an iron fist, seeking to consolidate and maintain power. As such, he exercised strong control over the military, ensuring that those in charge followed his orders through intimidation and internal surveillance. Institutions such as the Ministry of Defense lacked the authority and will to perform checks on the military's power, thus allowing the military to hold immense control of such things as their organizational structures and education. With the military gaining popular civilian support from their aid with the Bolivarian Revolution, even less attention was paid to the internal schemes of the military. Consistent inattention allowed the military and Chávez to indulge in corruption and thrive under a lack of transparency, with the military engaging in drug trafficking and illegal actions within PDVSA, the privatized statewide oil industry.

With Chávez denouncing the United States as an enemy after the 2002 coup, a majority of the Venezuelan population was united against a common external enemy. This brought together a large population of Venezuela's citizens, helping Chávez to further advance his policies and leadership. Being backed by a majority of Venezuela and the military meant Chávez was free to continue advancing his regime. Even more dangerous was the fact that civilians had frequently called for military intervention. Chávez had successfully won over the hearts and minds of a majority of Venezuela's civilian population, and a blending of the civilian-military relationship after Plan Bolívar 2000 further encouraged civilian support for military involvement with internal politics. While many within the military did not

agree with the shift of focus from external to internal missions, there was not much to be done due to extensive divisions and the rewritten 1999 Venezuelan constitution.

As Chávez was integrating the military into more of an internal policing unit than ever before, the changing mission structure created an environment defined by political repression. Already fearful of another coup, Chávez ensured that he would remain in power by silencing the opposition with the help of internal policing from both the military and police forces. This, coupled with rampant corruption and the involvement of the military in government matters, helped Chávez to transition from a democratically elected president to a pseudo-dictator. While Chávez was still backed by a popular majority well into the late 2000's, political repression had silenced his loudest critics, creating an environment in which those who disagreed with him feared being silenced.

The more pressure and surveillance Chávez directed towards the armed forces led to a less professional armed forces. Also contributing to this was the integration of the military into the private and public sectors. By placing loyal military officers into government positions of power, Chávez essentially blurred the lines separating the military and the government, leading to a confusion of roles. Through the integration of Socialist ideals into military academy trainings, Chávez further reduced professionalism in the military.

Historically, Venezuela's military branches have been internally divided, with competition preventing the different branches from cooperating. There has been extremely strong competition between groups, with each branch fighting to gain more resources. That, paired with strong internal policing, has helped to create an environment in which the likelihood of another coup attempt is small, if not completely nonexistent. With strong competition comes the inability for these branches to work together effectively, a well-known form of coup-proofing. Because the FANB (Bolivarian Armed Forces) is territorially dispersed, it limits the ability of a coordinated coup. A lack of clear and constant communication results in confusion, significantly hindering the success of any attempted coup led by the FANB. Strong internal policing has been in place within the military since Chávez was deposed from the 2002 coup. This ensured that only loyalists served in positions of power, leaving two options for military officers: face severe punishment and leave the armed forces or follow Chávez's orders. With a military full of party loyalists, Chávez now had the ability to use the military to achieve his political goals and to remain in power.

The creation of a civilian militia (currently estimated at nearly 3.7 million members) allowed Chávez to indoctrinate civilians with his ideals. Since these civilians receive payment directly from the government, they are unlikely to rebel against his leadership, as doing so would result in a likely disbandment of their group by another, more democratic leader or military dictatorship. The inclusion of such a large number of civilians within this

militia has created an army of loyalists, further increasing public surveillance and policing within Venezuela. By utilizing civilian forces to help maintain control, Chávez was able to ensure he had support from a large population of civilians. Civilians within the militia are unlikely to betray Venezuela's leaders, as many rely extensively on the benefits of being within the civilian militia. With Chávez's fear of U.S. intervention, putting arms in the hands of civilians helped to further protect him against any potential invasions. Additionally, the creation of this militia helped to protect Chávez in case another military coup occurred. This form of coup-proofing ultimately gave Chávez access to an extremely loyal pseudo-military division that he could utilize to fight against the military if it were to ever challenge him in the future.

Additionally, the military has been linked to extensive corruption with both drug trafficking and the Venezuelan oil industry. With the military seeing high autonomy in their internal actions and organization, they were able to engage in corrupt actions easily, something which has only been emboldened by the Maduro regime. Since Chávez utilized the military heavily for internal actions (including the Bolivarian Revolution and appointment to many private positions of power, including leadership within PDVSA and national banks throughout Venezuela), the military has found it easy to engage in corruption. The military relied on the longevity of Chávez's dictatorship because if their leader were to be deposed, they would be implicated and punished for engaging in corrupt actions. As such, the lives

and professions of many officers and soldiers relied on the Chávez regime's ability to remain in power.

With an already divided military facing the implementation of extensive coup-proofing techniques under Chávez, the chances of the military unifying to successfully depose their leader became extremely slim. Take into account that the military was already involved in interstate corruption via the drug trade and had been purged to create a loyal group, and one is able to see why the military has been unable to overthrow Chávez. If the military were to be under the control of another regime, then they would surely face investigations into their illegal activities, resulting in the diminished power and increased oversight from the government over the military, leading them with no other option than to embrace Chávez's regime. Outside Cuban personnel integration into the military provided Chávez with another means of surveillance. Additionally, the creation of a Socialist agenda taught at military academies provided Chávez with a means of distributing his ideologies to the individual soldiers and officers. Even if the military were to overcome the internal divisions and unify to overthrow Chávez, they would still face various paramilitary organizations, such as the civilian militia. It is more than likely that there were military soldiers that sided with Chávez's opposition during his rule. With Chávez already having a history of punishing dissenters and their relatives however, it made soldiers wary of attempting to overthrow Chávez. The risk of coupling clearly

outweighed the potential benefits, highlighting the collective action problem that these soldiers faced.

The military is perhaps the most important aspect of Venezuela that prevents change. With the protection of the entire armed forces, both Chávez and Maduro have been able to successfully maintain control over the collapsing Venezuelan government. Even when facing an extensive backlash and coup attempts, both leaders have been able to avoid a loss of power through the utilization of the military's coercive power. Essentially, the military was the last defense Chávez had to maintain control over Venezuela. With their backing, he was able to ensure that any threats to his power were minimized. By completely changing the civilian-military alliance seen before 1999 and shifting the military's doctrine to the inclusion of more internal control missions, Chávez was able to reign in the military and effectively control them, thus allowing his dictatorship to thrive and flourish while the rest of Venezuela suffered and sank deeper into despair and internal ruin.

Chávez Conclusion

While Chávez was able to raise a large population of Venezuela's lower-class out of poverty, it came at a steep cost. With a vested interest in maintaining and consolidating power, Chávez effectively transitioned the entire Venezuelan government into a dictatorship, with internal government organizations and the military helping him to maintain his power. Through the utilization of extensive coup-proofing techniques, a reliance on Cuban aid, and the privatization of PDVSA placed under the control of the military,

Chávez managed to create a lasting dictatorship at the risk of his country's economic stability. While it allowed Chávez to consolidate control over the population, an overreliance on a viable good combined with a lack of long-term economic foresight led to the complete economic downfall of Venezuela. With the inexperienced military controlling the most important good in Venezuela, efficiency and production started to drop, resulting in a large loss of profit for Venezuela. An inefficient system of refining oil coupled with a fall in the price of oil's profitability led to the start of a severe humanitarian crisis. As Chávez continued to bend the law in order to satisfy his cronies and remain in power, violence, corruption, and repression increased, with some estimates showing a rise in crime within Venezuela by 500% from 1986-2012.^{xi} When diagnosed with cancer, Chávez named Maduro his successor, leaving him with the insurmountable task of fixing Venezuela. Inexperienced and unable to control the looming economic meltdown, Maduro furthered the dictatorship of Venezuela, only helping to ensure the survival of his regime.

It is impossible to say which defining moment under Chávez's rule shifted the path of Venezuela's government from a democracy to a dictatorship. It would also be incorrect to say that without Chávez, Venezuela would still be a democracy: Hugo Chávez acted as a catalyst for what was inevitable. With Venezuela's extreme reliance on the volatile price of oil and an internally focused military, all that was left for the country to shift to a

dictatorship was a leader who could reign control over both of these aspects of Venezuelan society.

Maduro's Regime (2013-Present)

With Hugo Chávez's death in March 2013, it was shortly announced that Nicolás Maduro would be his successor. Maduro, a former bus driver and union leader, won a special presidential election, running under the United Socialist Party of Venezuela. Since his election in 2013, Maduro has not only sunk Venezuela into a much deeper depression, but also used harsh repression techniques to keep his opposition at bay and his followers loyal. In doing so, Maduro has created a landscape characterized by depravity and maltreatment. As of 2020, Venezuela has the highest inflation rate out of any country in the world. Not only has Maduro led Venezuela to certain economic downfall, he has continued to abuse his power. Maduro's corruption has been witnessed around the world, with many countries around the world supporting opposition leader Juan Guaidó as the rightful president in Venezuela. This conflict has created a massive humanitarian crisis that outside countries have been unable to contain. With millions of citizens

fleeing Venezuela and a growing mortality and inflation rate, among other things, it is clear that Venezuelan society is crumbling apart. Most recently, Maduro and multiple prominent members of his staff were charged by the United States government with drug trafficking. Facing an opposition leader unwilling to back down, a price on his head by the U.S., and one of the deadliest epidemics in recent history, it is important to analyze how Maduro has been able to maintain power for so long.

Maduro's Regime

Soon after taking office, citizens within the country of Venezuela faced a climbing inflation rate, one that as of today, has not stopped growing. Continuing Chávez's method of imposing government mandated price cuts for private goods, many companies throughout Venezuela saw little, if any, profits. With inflation growing, Venezuela's buying power was greatly diminished. Maduro continued to seize control of once-privatized industries, resulting in government-run facilities with greatly reduced production power. Under Maduro, corruption proliferated to levels even beyond that of Chávez, creating a dystopian and authoritarian regime that has managed to violate a multitude of human rights, all while sinking Venezuela into economic disarray.

History

Maduro has proven to be one of the most ruthless dictators in recent Latin American history, causing extreme economic destruction for Venezuela and allowing mass human rights violations to continue under his rule. Like

Chávez, Maduro has followed Socialist ideals. His Socialist roots can be traced back to the early 1980's, to which Maduro traveled to Cuba to train at one of their Communist schools. Upon leaving Cuba, Maduro was instantly drawn to Chávez, both campaigning for his release after the failed 1992 coup attempt and helping to found the Fifth Party Movement supporting Chávez after he was released. Maduro continued to work his way through the Venezuelan government, eventually becoming a member of the National Assembly in 2000. It was 2006, however, when Maduro became closest to Chávez through his services directly under him as the Minister of Foreign Affairs. On October 13, 2012, Maduro was officially chosen to be Chávez's Vice President and was granted authority to become the next President of Venezuela if Chávez were to die of cancer. When Chávez died on March 5, 2013, Maduro immediately took over as Venezuela's interim president. A special election was held less than a month later, to which Maduro won by only 1.5%,^{xii} cementing both his role as President of Venezuela and the further degradation of Venezuela's democracy. Maduro has faced constant opposition since being elected president, but with the increasing levels of inflation, the opposition became larger and protests became even greater. In order to maintain control over the ever-crumbling Venezuelan society, Maduro adopted stricter measures, ignored human rights, and sought to consolidate power even while facing a deteriorating economy and infrastructure.

The Government Under Maduro

Venezuela has seen a dissolution of its so-called democracy ever since Maduro was instated as president. Since he was elected to lead Venezuela, Maduro has been granted tremendous power by the National Assembly. Formerly composed of opposition members that had allowed some limits to Maduro's presidency, over time the National Assembly was tremendously affected by Maduro, so much so that today it is virtually unrecognizable from when Maduro entered office. Upon winning the election in 2013 by a mere 1.5%, Maduro was met with disdain and criticism from many who claimed he had unfairly become president. Perhaps the most significant action Maduro took upon entering office was to ask the National Assembly to let him rule by decree. While passed in October of 2013, Maduro has retained these dictatorial powers to this day. While later parts of this paper will analyze key details in various aspects of Venezuelan society and government that have allowed Maduro to remain in power, this section seeks to describe both the opposition's movement against Maduro, as well as the major turning points which have led to Maduro's regime to transition into a dictatorship with unchecked powers.

In 2015, the public's dissatisfaction with Maduro's regime was clear, as many opposition members were elected to the National Assembly, giving them a clear majority over the United Socialist Party of Venezuela. With the opposition gaining a clear majority over Maduro's Socialist Party, it signified the public's aspirations for a change in leadership. This was immediately noticed by Maduro, who started accelerating the rate in which he was

dismantling Venezuela's government by refusing to accept the election results and seeking to invalidate all legislation coming from the opposition-controlled National Assembly. Threatened by the thought of the opposition gaining legislative power in the National Assembly, the outgoing head soon claimed that he would start creating the National Communal Assembly, a second assembly that would work alongside the original National Assembly. This, ultimately, did not get created. Dissatisfaction with the Maduro regime rose alongside Venezuela's inflation, leading to a recall referendum being created by Maduro's opposition in 2016. While this proposition had gained plenty of support, it was ultimately cancelled by the National Electoral Council, citing voter fraud. Soon enough, Venezuela's judicial branch (the Supreme Tribunal of Justice) relinquished power from the National Assembly, passing laws that allowed the Supreme Tribunal to gain Venezuela's legislative powers previously held by the National Assembly. Met with swift backlash from protestors, the Supreme Tribunal of Justice alongside Maduro reversed the order.

With mounting protests led by opposition members, Maduro sought to draft a new constitution, replacing the one established in 1999 by Chávez. Maduro, citing violent opposition from protestors, claimed that a new constitution was needed to counter the opposition. As such, elections were held in 2017 to form the newly founded Constituent National Assembly. This temporary legislative branch was originally formed to help reform Venezuela's constitution, but has still remained a key part of Venezuelan

government to this day. While Maduro claimed that these elections had massive turnouts, many believed the numbers cited to be false and the elections were subsequently condemned by a multitude of outside countries. Essentially, the Constituent National Assembly took over the legislative powers originally held by the National Assembly and acted as a body of loyalists that Maduro could utilize to push through his favored policies.

Immediately after its creation, the Constituent National Assembly removed the nation's Chief Prosecutor and effectively removed all power from the National Assembly. Perhaps the most egregious act by the Constituent National Assembly, though, occurred during the 2018 presidential elections. In 2018, Maduro was up for re-election. Set for May of 2018, these elections were immediately discounted by many, as the Constituent National Assembly prohibited many of Venezuela's major parties from running against Maduro on account of their protests against the 2017 special elections. Maduro, of course, was able to rig these elections in his favor, resulting in his re-election for another six year term. Many accounts from civilians across Venezuela claimed that Maduro had leveraged provisions of both food and medical aid to win votes. Many outside countries (including OAS) criticized these results, maintaining that these elections were unfair. Civilian responses to this election were volatile, with multiple violent protests occurring soon after. Additionally, a drone attack against Maduro occurred as well, which ultimately did not result in Maduro's death, but signified a potential coup attempt by unidentified parties in Venezuela.

In response to the 2018 elections, the National Assembly fought back against these results by declaring them invalid and promoting National Assembly Speaker Juan Guaidó to acting president. Soon enough, Guaidó was recognized as acting president by many outside countries. However, Maduro has continued to remain in power. Since 2018, tensions have continued to rise. While a majority of international countries proclaim Guaidó to be the rightful leader of Venezuela, there are still a few that recognize Maduro as acting president. On occasion, Maduro has insisted in promoting a dialogue between the two, but Maduro has still refused to cede power. Since Guaidó became acting president, he has warned the Maduro regime on multiple occasions of mass uprisings that would remove Maduro from power. However, these have yet to materialize. While Guaidó has continued to be recognized by many to be the rightful acting president of Venezuela, he has not been able to express such power, facing constant denunciations from Maduro and his loyalists. In 2019, the Maduro-loyal Supreme Court placed a travel ban and asset freeze on Guaidó, preventing him from leaving the country. Additionally, Guaidó has claimed to have faced many threats against both him and his family as he has continued to maintain his presidency in Venezuela. Maduro and his loyalists have also prevented Guaidó from acting as the leader of Venezuela in many ways, most notably in early 2020 when the military blocked Guaidó from entering parliament. This action, almost undoubtedly called upon by Maduro, sought to block Guaidó from getting reelected in Venezuela's Congress. Upon successfully

blocking Guaidó from entering the building, Maduro was quick to announce the election results to which a Maduro-backed candidate had won. These election results, however, were condemned by many across the international community. The recent failed coup attempt taking place to which Guaidó was linked to has shown a desperate opposition leader having to resort to violence to gain power, showing that Maduro's techniques in blocking Guaidó from gaining power have worked. Maduro has yet to give up power and will not do so, leaving Venezuela's government in an extremely unique situation in which there are two recognized acting presidents. As long as Maduro maintains control over the military, it is unlikely that Guaidó will be able to obtain power.

With Maduro's continuous molding of the Venezuelan government to his will, it can be expected that Maduro will never give up power willingly. Maduro's actions upon taking office in 2013 reflect that of a dictator unwilling to relinquish his power. Maduro's attempts to exert dictatorial powers can be seen through his ruling by decree, special 2017 election of the Constituent National Assembly, and rigged 2018 elections, among other things. These three events marked a significant change in Maduro's regime, with the government of Venezuela becoming more and more similar to that of a dictatorship.

Maduro and the Economy

While inflation had risen considerably under Chávez's presidency, Maduro started his presidency with a relatively stable economy. Oil prices

remained high, allowing for Maduro to continue the funding of social programs implemented under Chávez and to appease the military. However, reports showed that in 2013, Venezuela had the highest misery index in the world out of any country,^{xiii} clearly showing a wide disparity between what was being promulgated by Maduro and reality. While Maduro followed Chávez's social programs and idealisms very closely, he lacked the charisma and leadership capabilities that Chávez exhibited. As such, Maduro sought to emulate Chávez and boost his appeal to the Venezuelan citizens. With inflation growing about 50% in June of 2013, food and utility prices sharply increased, causing great frustration among the citizens of Venezuela. Maduro blamed this inflation on rampant corruption throughout Venezuela and in early October of 2013, sought to rule Venezuela by decree to solve this "problem", to which he was granted the ability to by the National Assembly a month later. Previously used on multiple occasions by Chávez, this allowed Maduro to rule virtually unopposed. While originally supposed to last for only one year, Maduro took advantage of this unchallenged power. As of today, Maduro has successfully continued to rule by decree, with the Constituent National Assembly granting such power on an almost yearly basis.

Oil and Inflation

In 2014, oil prices plummeted as OPEC refused to cut oil production, leading to an oil glut that lessened the international prices of oil. Prices dropped significantly, thrusting the already inflated Venezuelan economy into uncharted territory. Maduro, insistent on the continued funding for

Venezuela's robust social programs while oil prices plummeted, led to Venezuela's recession becoming even greater. With less purchasing power and Venezuela's longstanding reliance on the importation of basic necessities, many citizens were starting to feel the effects. As of 2014, inflation had already grown by approximately 20%, leading Venezuela's economy to shrink by nearly 3% and reach inflation levels of over 60%. Subsequently, it was declared by the Central Bank that Venezuela had entered a recession, one that still has not dissipated to this day.^{xiv} Maduro, following the same tactics of Chávez, purported that the imperialist United States were the ones to blame and claimed that Barack Obama sought to destroy OPEC and Venezuela. Facing rising inflation, Maduro has relied heavily on foreign investment by China, Cuba, and Russia. As such, Maduro has exported oil at below-market prices. Even so, the debt Maduro has racked up through these investments over the years is large, with economists estimating that Venezuela's external debt (as of 2020) is over \$110 billion USD.^{xv}

Austerity measures recommended by the international community stated that, in addition to Venezuela fixing its current controls, they should raise its gasoline prices. Continuing Chávez's tradition of keeping gasoline prices extremely low for citizens, Venezuelans under Maduro were able to refill their gas tanks for mere cents of a dollar, costing Venezuela an estimated \$12 billion per year.^{xvi} Maduro, however, refused to follow such recommendations, maintaining that oil prices were to remain low for

Venezuela. As of 2019, oil prices have continued to remain extraordinarily cheap for Venezuelan citizens, with Maduro refusing to stop subsidizing it for Venezuelan citizens.

Maduro's insistence on continuing Chávez's costly social programs, cheap gasoline prices, and the extremely complicated currency controls led to further chaos for Venezuela's economy. In addition to this, Maduro (like Chávez), also ignored Venezuela's infrastructure, which lacked ample investment and faced further degradation. While Venezuela is home to large oil reserves, its power system relies mainly on hydropower. Facing droughts and poor infrastructure, rolling blackouts affecting a majority of Venezuela's population increased under Maduro and the amount of oil produced by Venezuela started to drop. Additionally, the number of oil rigs in operation started to drop drastically; approximately 80 rigs were in operation in 2012 before Chávez's death, with only 53 in operation in 2016. Luckily for Maduro, the closing of the oil rigs did not immediately equate to a loss of produced oil, with oil production falling from 2.37 million bpd in 2012 to 2.18 million bpd in 2016.^{xvii} As of 2020, oil production in Venezuela has slipped to below 1 million bpd, to around 890,000 bpd.^{xviii}

The jump in inflation from 2014 to 2015 was stunning: over the course of one year, inflation rose from approximately 60% to around 270%. Oil prices continued to fall to \$33 a barrel, with Venezuelan economists claiming that they would need to see barrel prices of \$111 to just break even.^{xix} Goods became even more scarce, with a shortage rate of over 70%.^{xx} Hyperinflation

occurred shortly thereafter, with inflation levels rising to over 4,000% in 2017.^{xxi} As of 2019, inflation had reached levels of over 10 million percent,^{xxii} with an estimated 90% of Venezuela's residents living in poverty.^{xxiii}

Numerous reports showed basic food and necessities costing millions of Bolívares, with one month's salary not being enough to buy enough groceries for a whole family, let alone one person. As such, many citizens in Venezuela have resorted to crime in order to fulfil their hunger and needs for basic goods. Those who do not engage in crime have faced the alternative option of fleeing to another country. As of 2019, estimates show approximately 5 million Venezuelans have fled the country.^{xxiv} As a result, Venezuela's economy has only gotten worse.

Currency Controls

In 2014, oil prices fell once again, with the average cost being a measly \$38 per barrel (compared to \$99 per barrel the previous year)^{xxv}. With Venezuela's economy sinking fast, Maduro pledged to rethink currency controls, which had given preferential exchange rates to favored officials and industries while exchange rates soared for regular citizens. Set in place by Chávez, these three exchange rate controls were originally created in order to solve the country's decline in currency reserves. Corruption in Venezuela has been rampant for decades, but these three price controls allowed individuals in the government to profit immensely. Those with access to the lowest currency exchange tier were able to import goods at lower prices, then sell those items for a much higher price on the black market, allowing

them to gain more Bolívares while still being able to exchange them at a lower rate. In 2014, the official exchange rate for government officials was approximately \$6 Bolívares to \$1 U.S. dollar, compared to the average black market rate of around \$88 Bolívares to \$1 U.S. dollar. Businesses, previously able to utilize the official exchange rate, found that they were now unable to access the premium rate (due to official exchange rate markets collapsing), had to rely on the higher black market exchange rates. This resulted in import costs rising, meaning that goods were even scarcer than before. The disparity in exchange rates rose exponentially as inflation grew, leading to Maduro implementing Sicad II, another currency exchange control. This, however, did nothing to stop the rising exchange rates. With the introduction of Sicaid II, many businesses saw vast declines in profits, leading many airlines and auto manufacturers to slow and stop operation within Venezuela. Making matters even worse, Venezuela's debts were increasing at a fast pace and international reserves were falling.

In 2018, Venezuela got rid of its currency controls for banks and companies, allowing them to exchange currency at a unified rate and permitting USD transactions, which subsequently went against Maduro's denouncements of the United States. While this did provide Venezuelans with the ability to exchange U.S. dollars instead of the essentially worthless Bolívares, about half of the Venezuelan population was still unable to access these dollars.^{xxvi} The scarcity of U.S. currency ultimately resulted in the dissolution of the currency controls not having much of an effect. With

groceries now costing millions of Bolívares, Venezuela also devalued its currency greatly, taking three zeros off of its currency. Many economists argued that this was merely a cosmetic change, as it had been implemented without any new or meaningful economic policies alongside it. As such, a new currency was introduced: the Bolívar Soberano (the exchange rate between the Bolívar Soberano and the Bolívar is 100,000:1).

Under Maduro, the mismanagement and corruption seen during the Chávez era only proliferated. Inflation soon became hyperinflation, oil production continued to fall, poverty swallowed almost all of Venezuela, and some failed economic policies became retooled, only to continue failing. By refusing to take drastic austerity measures, crackdown on corruption, or invest in Venezuela's infrastructure to make it more efficient, Maduro has created a nation with one of the worst humanitarian crises ever seen.

Maduro and the Military

As soon as Maduro took office, violence mounted due to the higher levels of inflation and economic disarray that Venezuela was facing. Kidnappings skyrocketed, in part due to corrupt police throughout Venezuela allowing such acts to occur. In 2013 alone, it was reported that there was one firearm in circulation throughout Venezuela for every two citizens.^{xxvii} In May of 2013, Maduro created the Secure Homeland Plan, which led to the deployment of approximately 3,000 military officials to work with Venezuela's police force to lower Venezuela's crime rate. This, however, resulted in gross violations of human rights and was unable to significantly

reduce crime. This integration of the military into the civilian police force was similar to what Chávez had done during his reign, leading to confusion with the military over its role. In his role as leader of Venezuela, Maduro has relied heavily upon military force, even more so than Chávez. Many believe this to be due to Maduro's lacking popularity amongst the citizens of Venezuela. While Chávez was admired and supported by many, Maduro had faced constant opposition since his election. Without his charisma to keep the citizens content, Maduro has relied on the military to continue holding authority over Venezuela. With statements from opposition leader Juan Guaidó though, many remained skeptical as to whether or not the military would turn against Maduro and coup against his leadership. As of 2020, that has yet to be seen, specifically due to three coup-proofing techniques employed by Maduro. First, Maduro has managed to appease the military financially, granting them extraordinary access to Venezuelan society and the ability to engage in illicit activities. Second, Maduro has followed in Chávez's footsteps by purging the military on various occasions, ensuring that only loyalists compose Venezuelan's armed forces. Lastly, Maduro has managed to promote loyalists to positions of power and has set up surveillance systems within the armed forces to find potential defectors. In doing so, Maduro has created a loyal force that has not and most likely will not revolt against their leader.

Maduro has been keen on continuing the military's entry into the civilian level and during his time in office, has allowed the armed forces to

breach the civilian sphere of Venezuela. This could be seen in 2016, wherein Maduro granted Defense Minister Vladimir Padrino López direct authority over many aspects of Venezuelan society, including the continued Bolivarian missions, the control of price controls, transportation, and some of Venezuela's ports. Of course, this granted the military extreme power, with many soon claiming that the military had now gained powers unseen since the early Venezuelan military dictatorships. This extraordinary endowment of power was likely done by Maduro in a strategic attempt to appease the powerful military and later promotions of military officials into Maduro's cabinet has occurred on multiple occasions throughout Maduro's reign over Venezuela. While Chávez was able to provide oil and its profits to keep the military sustained, Maduro was unable to, facing both increasing debts and declining oil production. Granting the military this much power over Venezuela ensured their help in the continuance of Maduro's regime by keeping them satisfied, but by also allowing them to profit from illicit activities, such as drug trafficking and control over food on the black market. Primarily, the military and other drug traffickers throughout Venezuela have relied upon air routes and sea travel to pass cocaine to the Caribbean and Columbia, as well as to other parts of the world like the United States. With Maduro granting the military complete control over food, it allowed the military to sell such goods on the black market for exorbitant prices, resulting in food scarcity and less food getting to stores across Venezuela. Not only did the engagement of the military in illicit activities give them

other ways to make a profit in the economically devastated Venezuela, it also ensured the military's support for Maduro in a few ways. With access to special exchange rates, military officials have managed to make a fortune through black market trading. Under a different leader, the armed forces would likely see a reduction in the range and scope of their power.

Additionally, their involvement in Venezuela's drug trade makes them likely targets of investigation if a new leader were to ever take Maduro's place.

Maduro has also sought to promote those most deeply ingrained within Venezuelan drug trafficking to ensure their loyalty to the Maduro regime. Fearing for their continued protection and valuable profits, the military's ability to enter the civilian sector has been beneficial for Maduro to stay in power.

Additionally, Maduro has continued to purge the military of anyone who could defect or start a coup against him. Maduro has faced multiple failed coup attempts, including some by military personnel within his armed forces. While all have failed, this has led Maduro to purge and detain members deemed disloyal. Those removed from the armed forces face detainment and torture, which for many is more than enough to prevent them from attempting to coup Maduro. In order to find possible defectors, Maduro has set up intricate surveillance systems throughout the armed forces with the help of Cuba military intelligence officers. These outside forces, loyal to the Venezuelan regime, provide necessary information and security for Maduro, allowing him to sniff out any possible dissenters. On the

other hand, those who remain loyal to Maduro are often granted promotions, giving them access to luxuries inaccessible to the everyday Venezuelan citizen. Additionally, Maduro's control over military trainings has allowed him to exert continued power over those entering the military, as well as providing a means for the continued indoctrination of Socialist beliefs into the military. Combining these multiple techniques, Maduro has managed to consolidate and maintain power. While Maduro has faced potential coup attempts on multiple occasions, these methods have been successful so far in stopping any from succeeding.

This paper would be remiss to not note the support for Maduro through the civilian armed forces. As of 2020, the civilian armed forces (consisting of over 150,000 members)^{xxviii} formally joined the Venezuelan armed forces. While these civilians lack proper training, they have been key in helping Maduro maintain power. The civilian militia serves as a way for Maduro to continue indoctrinating civilians with his beliefs. Under Maduro, these civilians have been called upon to quash protests alongside the military, oftentimes resulting in bloody violence. The admittance of civilians into Venezuela's armed forces has essentially allowed Maduro to have additional control over the volatile civilian population of Venezuela.

On multiple occasions, opposition leader Juan Guaidó has called upon the military to overthrow the president. This was perhaps the most noticeable in 2019, wherein Guaidó called upon a military uprising to no avail. Promising a mass exodus of soldiers from the armed forces' ranks, the

opposition was ultimately met with a number of dissenters far less than expected. Instead of an uprising, the Defense Minister reaffirmed his support for Maduro, stating that Guaidó declaring himself as president was akin to a coup. So far, the opposition has been unable to persuade the military to act against Maduro. While there is no telling what the future holds for Venezuela and whether its military will continue to support Maduro as Venezuela falls deeper and deeper into economic instability, it is most likely that an internal coup will not take place. While lower-ranked officers may feel more animosity towards the way in which Maduro has treated the Venezuelan population, internal surveillance and the special procurement of loyalists into Maduro's cabinet and top levels of the armed forces have allowed Maduro the continued control over Venezuela's military.

Crime in Venezuela

Almost immediately after Maduro took office, he further eroded human rights protections for the citizens of Venezuela. Following the elections of 2013, protests erupted, leading Maduro to disperse security forces to disperse protestors. Protestors faced severe violence and death, marking the start of what would soon become the norm for Venezuela.

Venezuela's rampant corruption not only helped to increase the number of human rights violations, but also the number of kidnappings and overall violence. Crime had increased greatly under Chávez and that trend continued after Maduro was elected. By 2017, Venezuela was one of most violent countries in the world (the crime rate reportedly decreased the

following year, attributed to mass emigrations from Venezuela). Statistics regarding violence, kidnappings, and corruption are hard to find, as Maduro's government has either hidden data or acts of violence have gone unreported. It can be concluded, though, that Venezuela suffers from an intense amount of violence, almost unparalleled by any other country around the world today. Facing mass poverty, many have had to resort to crime to just eat. Massive gangs thrive in Venezuela, with children reportedly joining gangs as a means of getting food. The proliferation of corruption under Maduro has led to many of Venezuela's own security forces and higher-up government officials engaging in illicit drug trafficking and crime against civilians. Most recently, the United States has declared Maduro a drug trafficker. Any action taken against Maduro on the basis of these charges has yet to be seen (ignoring the attempted plot against Maduro led by U.S. civilians). With such rampant corruption and a disregard for the wellbeing of Venezuelan citizens, it is clear that under current leadership, human rights abuses and crime will not go away.

In September of 2013, Venezuela formally announced their withdrawal from the American Convention on Human Rights, ensuring Venezuelan citizens had no access to the international tribunal. In February of 2014, students protested the lack of basic products in Venezuela, the poor economy, and the lack of security around their universities. These protests were met with violence from Venezuelan security forces, resulting in 37 deaths (almost all of which were civilians) in approximately one month.

Almost immediately condemned by the United States and the International Community for alleged human rights abuses, Maduro denied taking blame for his security forces' actions, stating that the opposition were the ones acting violently to begin with. To say Maduro reacted poorly to these protests would almost undoubtedly be an understatement; besides ordering the nation's security forces to use lethal force against the protestors, Maduro also punished opposition supporters who held positions in government. Maduro arrested two mayors of the opposition, charging them with inciting violence. Additionally, Maduro stripped opposition-backer María Corina Machado from her post in the National Assembly, further helping to ensure Maduro's Socialist party faced limited resistance in the legislative branch of Venezuela.

While protests have occurred frequently throughout Venezuela, it was perhaps 2017 in which these protests reached a head, wherein over 120 citizens of Venezuela (both protestors and security officials) were killed.^{xxix} Tired of the economic disarray and misleadership by Maduro, citizens gathered in massive crowds starting in January of 2017. It was not until early April (when Maduro's loyal Supreme Tribunal of Justice effectively dissolved the National Assembly, leaving them with both judicial and legislative powers) that protests occurred en masse. Hundreds of protestors were detained and many more were left injured. The protests, covered by the international community, led to more international sanctions imposed by the United States on Venezuela.

As of 2019, protests have continued to be seen all throughout Venezuela. In 2018 alone, there were over 12,700 protests.^{xxx} With these protests come violence, leading to shocking amounts of death and detentions. Under Maduro's Venezuela, armed protestors are tried in military courts, children are detained, journalists are silenced, and over 3 million Venezuelans have fled in search of a better life. Prisons are decrepit, overflowing with inmates and constantly besieged by violence. In order to gain "support" from Venezuelans, Maduro has essentially bought votes through the provision of food and medical goods for supporters (reports of doctors denying care to those in need who refuse to support Maduro is common).^{xxxii} Once again, the military's unprecedented control over Venezuela's food supply has resulted in a lack of food in Venezuela, while those in the military are able to either take food for their families or sell it on the black market for high prices, allowing them to reap the massive profits. It has been increasingly hard for journalists and citizens to express free speech, with laws being passed in 2017 (Law Against Hatred) that prevented individuals from publishing messages of hatred with the threat of a 20 year jail sentence.^{xxxii} With the United States imposing sanctions on Venezuela, the wellbeing of Venezuelan citizens is only likely to decrease as Maduro's regime falls further into economic distress. Now, as coronavirus grips the international community, reports show impoverished citizens who once fled their country in search of a better life, returning to Venezuela amidst an uncertain future.

United States and Venezuelan Relations Under Maduro

An important turning point in U.S.-Venezuelan relations occurred, as previously mentioned, in 2002 when Chávez faced an almost successful coup attempt and alleged that the United States was responsible. While not completely true, later reports showed to varying degrees that the Bush administration did have advanced knowledge of the coup. Relations after this event soured, leading to Chávez's continued insistence that the United States sought to overthrow him and ruin Venezuela with their imperialist actions. Relations only got worse once Maduro became president, leading to further denunciations and claims that the United States sought to depose Maduro and control Venezuela. In late Fall of 2013, Maduro expelled three U.S. officials from Venezuela, claiming that they sought to sabotage Venezuela's economy and power grid alongside Venezuela's opposition groups. This led the United States to order three Venezuelan diplomats to leave the country, with Maduro responding by stating that the U.S. and Venezuela would no longer have cordial relations.

In response to the gross violations of human rights, the United States imposed the Venezuela Defense of Human Rights and Civil Society Act of 2014, which sanctioned individuals known to have violated the human rights of Venezuelan citizens. The passage of this act led to the United States restricting the visas of multiple high-level officials within Venezuela's government. At this point, the year-long "rule by decree" order the National Assembly had previously granted Maduro in 2014 was coming to an end. As

such, Maduro requested a renewal of those powers, in order “...to confront the aggression of the most powerful country in the world, the United States, against this beautiful nation” (Maduro, 2015)^{xxxiii}. This, of course, was granted by the National Assembly Maduro had helped to stack in his favor, further allowing Maduro to exert dictatorial powers over Venezuela. Since then, Maduro has continued to reign by decree, maintaining a dictatorial presence over Venezuela.

Tensions continued to gradually increase in 2015, with then-President Obama declaring Venezuela a threat to national security and ordered sanctions against multiple top-level officials who had allegedly violated the human rights of citizens within Venezuela, mandating that these individuals could not continue doing business with or visiting the United States. Of course, tensions between Maduro and the United States worsened. However, business relations remained relatively stable, with the United States remaining as Venezuela’s top trading partner for oil. Following these sanctions in 2015, relations remained more or less the same until 2016, wherein Donald Trump was elected president.

The presidency of Donald Trump marked a change of the relationship between Venezuela and the United States. Following the 2017 Constitutional Crisis in Venezuela (wherein Maduro essentially rendered the National Assembly obsolete), Trump proclaimed a military intervention in Venezuela was possible, further ratcheting up tensions between the two countries. While Trump has not been known to engage in interventionist techniques

during his four years as president, the threat was all too real for Maduro. Additionally, Trump added to previous sanctions, now targeting 44 Venezuelans and Maduro himself. Additionally, Trump's administration imposed sanctions on PDVSA, limiting the state-run company's access to the U.S.'s financial sector. While Obama's administration had attempted to negotiate international relations with Venezuela on a more subtle level through the use of minimal sanctions and multilateral diplomatic talks, Trump's approach was much more heavy-handed. To many, it seemed almost careless in its imposition of sanctions and gave more weight to Maduro's cries of imperialism. This was noticed by the international community, which excluded the United States from the Lima Group, an international body formed of 12 countries that seeks to resolve the Venezuelan economic crisis peacefully. With the imposition of harsh sanctions aimed at further ruining Venezuela's economy and forcing Maduro from his leadership position, Trump's administration most likely did more harm than good. By further aggravating Maduro's unstable economy, reports showed that Trump's sanctions had cost an estimated 40,000 Venezuelans their lives from 2017-2018 alone.^{xxxiv}

With the hawkish John Bolton replacing H. R. McMaster as National Security Advisor to Donald Trump in 2018, many expected to see a more adversarial approach to Venezuela. As such, it was not much of a surprise to hear Bolton argue for both a military and economic intervention into Venezuela. While Bolton remained National Security Advisor, the harshest

sanctions against Venezuela were imposed, with Trump freezing all Venezuelan assets within the United States and announcing the punishment of American firms that would continue to do business with the country. As such, U.S. imports of Venezuela (once their biggest trading partner) dropped immediately to zero.^{xxxv} These sanctions effectively crippled PDVSA and severely limited the country's oil production. The international community saw Venezuela's oil production drop drastically, which was soon reflected in Venezuela's economy and greater inability to pay back its massive international debts. With Venezuela's economy in even worse shape, there is no doubt that these cost the lives of more citizens. Ultimately, Bolton did not last long in the Trump White House, with reports stating that he was ousted due to his overtly militaristic view of intervention in Venezuela. While military intervention was avoided, Trump continued to threaten it, claiming that Bolton was holding him back on enacting stricter Venezuelan policies.

The United States' later announcement in 2019 that they supported Juan Guadió as rightful president of Venezuela further irritated Maduro, who responded by closing the U.S. embassy in Venezuela. Trump, as usual, continued to threaten military intervention in Venezuela, which never occurred. The most recent development between Trump and Maduro occurred in 2020, in which Trump placed a \$15 million bounty on Maduro's head, claiming he was involved in narco-terrorism, corruption and drug-trafficking. When rogue U.S. compatriots attempted a failed coup against

Maduro in March of 2020, it was believed that these charges had inspired their action against Maduro.

The differences in handling relations between the United States and Venezuela greatly differ between Trump and Obama. Obama sought to come to terms with Venezuela on a more peaceful level, refusing to fall into the trap of Maduro labeling his actions as imperialist. Trump, on the other hand, paid no attention to the subtleties of international relations, oftentimes threatening to take down Maduro through the use of America's military forces. With the multiple impositions of heavy-handed and ruinous sanctions, Venezuela saw its economy reach even greater levels of ruin and tensions ratcheted up greatly between the two countries. Ultimately though, these sanctions and threats did not result in Maduro stepping down from power, showing that change would need to come from inside Venezuela, not from outside countries.

Maduro's International Allies

In order to remain in power, Maduro has utilized his key international allies as a means of sustaining Venezuela's massive economic downfall, but also to ensure protection against the United States from intervention. Since Maduro took office in 2013, he has been supported by three allies: Cuba, Turkey, Russia, and China. These three countries have all helped Maduro in various ways. As noted earlier, Chávez had extremely close relations with Fidel Castro, with Castro sending military and medical aid to Venezuela in exchange for oil at below-market prices. Maduro has continued to utilize

these forces from Castro. In fact, Cuban intelligence agents have essentially been granted complete access inside Venezuela's government and military, with many Cuban officials taking leadership positions within the regime. These Cuban officials have utilized both to train and modernize Venezuela's military, while also to find potential coup plotters or soldiers who do not support Maduro. Additionally, the provision of Cuban doctors to provide aid to those within Venezuela has been all but necessary for Venezuela's failing healthcare system and lack of basic medicinal goods. Even so, Maduro has managed to leverage this aid to gain political support, with reports showing that Cuban doctors were forced to forgo aiding supporters of the opposition.^{xxxvi} Overall, Cuba has proved to be extremely useful by providing surveillance of Venezuela's military and aid for sick civilians.

While Cuba has helped Venezuela immensely, perhaps the two most important allies of Venezuela are Russia and China, which have both provided enormous economic support to prop up Maduro's regime. Above all though, China and Russia backed Maduro in 2013 when few countries would, providing some sort of legitimacy to Maduro's regime. Of course, having China and Russia as allies was extremely beneficial to Maduro, as it effectively prevented the United States from attempting any sort of intervention. While it is hard to say how much exactly China and Russia have loaned to Venezuela, reports show that Venezuela is thought to owe more than \$100 billion to its outside creditors.^{xxxvii} As a means of repayment, Venezuela has provided its allies with below-market oil prices. However, a

severe decline in oil production has left Venezuela with much less to offer. While it may seem counterintuitive for Russia and China to remain partners with Venezuela while facing pressure from other international parties, having a foothold in Latin America is indeed powerful for the two Communist nations.

In addition to providing much-needed economic aid to Venezuela, China and Russia have provided military assistance to help further strengthen Maduro's regime. While China and Russia have had strong ties with Venezuela, it seems as if the upwards trajectory of their relationship is slowing, as recent reports state that China has stopped providing loans for Venezuela, perhaps in the realization that Venezuela will not be able to pay them off.^{xxxviii} In today's COVID-19 reality, it is almost impossible to predict what will happen with Venezuela's future allies. Will economic disarray and a global recession prevent Russia and China from further investing in Venezuela? Will Venezuela have anything left to offer these countries? As of now, Maduro's regime is currently in the midst of what may be his greatest challenge yet.

Conclusion

Venezuela's unique reliance on oil has been both a blessing and a curse. While extremely profitable at times, the tendency for leaders to focus on oil as Venezuela's main export has led to an ignorance of the production of other goods. This has greatly hindered Venezuela's economy, as prominently seen upon Maduro taking office. From Chávez to Maduro, Venezuela's democracy has crumbled under these two leaders. Chávez's reliance on oil to fund Socialist programs in order to gain popular support ultimately led Venezuela down a (literal) dark path. With help from a loyal military and changes to Venezuela's constitution, Chávez was able to contort the Venezuelan government into one extremely loyal to himself. This trend only continued as Maduro took office shortly thereafter Chávez's death. Maduro proved to be extremely similar to Chávez, likening himself to that of Chávez's son. Chávez was able to retain power and fund his Bolivarian Missions through the vast gains gotten from Venezuela's oil reserves, something that Maduro faced trouble doing as oil prices started to fall internationally. This did not stop Maduro from continuing to fund the exorbitant Socialist programs implemented by Chávez, though. A focus on retaining these programs ultimately led Venezuela to an economic crisis almost unheard of. With Maduro's reliance on corruption to retain power and his unwillingness to relinquish said presidency, Maduro essentially transitioned into a dictator. While Chávez came close to earning the title of dictator, his actions and handling of the Venezuelan economy were nowhere near that of Maduro's.

Additionally, it is necessary to understand that as long as Venezuela's military supports Maduro, there will most likely never be dramatic change to Venezuela's political landscape. Chávez was responsible for the slow degradation of Venezuelan society, but perhaps the most important changes to analyze occurred within the military. By shaping the military into a loyal force, Chávez all but ensured that his presidency could weather any coup attempts. Maduro has continued this, allowing the military to retain massive amounts of power within Venezuela's government. The strength of the military ensures that the opposition faces no chance in overthrowing Maduro. With Venezuela's strong international allies and military presence, there is next to no hope that a military intervention will ever materialize. Both Chávez and Maduro have crafted a government that bends to their will and allows them to maintain vast amounts of unchecked power, all while millions of Venezuelans suffer.

It is clear that Maduro will not step down from his position of power without action from an outside force. This outside force, however, has yet to be seen. Promises from Venezuela's opposition of uprisings have yet to be seen, while international countries are essentially at a standstill on acting against Maduro. Maduro's key allies and strong internal protection essentially protect the regime from any change. With COVID-19 now gripping the international community, we can only guess what position Venezuela may be in years from now. A feeble healthcare system and ruined economy provide little hope for those in need.

In order for Venezuela to reduce its enormous inflation and gain some semblance of a democracy, Maduro must either be removed or relinquish his power. It is clear that the Socialist policies pushed by both Chávez and Maduro have been greatly flawed, resulting in a terribly weakened economy and a country at the brink of destruction. While the opposition-backed Guaidó may be the best choice to act as president of Venezuela, it is unclear how he will be able to do so. Ultimately, change is required on an internal level. While international countries can urge Venezuela to change its leadership through sanctions and acts against Venezuela, it is clear that Venezuela is helpless until Maduro is removed from power.

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