Political Corruption in Venezuela

An Honors Thesis (Honr 499)

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Abstract

Venezuela is a country that is currently in political disarray. Following the 2018 election, which was rigged by the current president, Nicolás Maduro, there has been a power struggle between Maduro and the leader of the National Assembly of Venezuela, Juan Guiadó. This power struggle has led to humanitarian issues such as food and medicine shortages, along with a struggling economy and a lack of employment opportunities, that has caused more than four million Venezuelan citizens to flee their country. While the volume of Venezuelan citizens fleeing their country is unprecedented, the corruption that is currently plaguing the Venezuelan government has been prevalent long before Maduro came to power. I analyze the actions of Marcos Pérez Jiménez, Rafael Caldera, Hugo Chávez, Nicolás Maduro, and Juan Guiadó, in order to establish a historical basis for the humanitarian crisis that is currently happening in Venezuela.

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Process Analysis

I got the idea for this project in my Honors 189 class during the Fall 2019 semester, when I was tasked with writing a paper on a current event that was happening somewhere in the world. I completed my minor in Spanish in the Spring of 2018, and I loved every bit of learning about the language and the culture of different Spanish-speaking countries, so I decided to look for current events in South America. The first one that really caught my eye was about more than four million Venezuelan citizens fleeing their country due to a struggle for political power that was (and is still) taking place in Venezuela (Jepson 121). I found it fascinating to learn about a country that was having a potentially militant political struggle in their country, yet I never would have heard anything about it if I was not researching for an assignment. After I wrote about everything that was currently happening in the country, I was still left with a variety of questions, the main one being: What happened in Venezuela in the past that influenced what is happening now? I realized that an attempted *coup d’etat* does not just happen out of the blue; there has to be some kind of precedent for such drastic action.

This question piqued my interest, so I decided to do more research on the history of the country. I started by doing some general research on the political and economic history of Venezuela. The main question that I had was very general, so in researching the more general aspects of the country and its history, I was able to narrow my focus to what seemed most important to the situation now. I found in the paper I wrote in the fall of 2019 that the driving force behind the current political strain in the country is presidential corruption. There is a long history of corrupt presidents in Venezuela, and even though the people in Venezuela have received more legal rights in recent history (like the right to vote in democratic elections in
1949), that has not stopped the presidents in recent history from infringing upon these rights (Christy 3). As I was doing research on the country as a whole, I found that the current situation was something that Venezuela had been through many times before. The history of Venezuela has been riddled with dictators, coups, and abuses of power.

To do more specific research, I utilized some of the databases available on Ball State University’s Library website. The two databases that were the most beneficial for me were JSTOR and Historical Abstracts. At this point I had decided that I was going to research the history of corruption in the presidents of Venezuela, and initially I wanted to start with Venezuela gaining its independence. As I started to do my research, I realized that my time-frame was way too broad to be done in a single semester. I decided to start around 1950, as there was a new constitution that was adopted around that time. Because my project was based on the current political situation in the country, I thought the more recent history of Venezuela would have a greater impact on what is happening now than older history, which is why I decided to research 1950 to the present as opposed to an earlier time period.

While I realize that I may be more interested than the average American when first looking at the topic based on my love for Spanish-speaking cultures, this is actually something that is impacting our lives as Americans. As more than four million Venezuelan citizens have left their country from 2013-present, they obviously need somewhere to go. Many of them have fled to neighboring countries, like Colombia or Perú, but many of them have also come further North, all the way to the United States. There are people currently living in our country that fled Venezuela in fear of their lives. The majority of the people in our country are not even aware that there are problems in Venezuela. While this situation remains unresolved, it is likely that
more and more Venezuelan citizens will choose to leave their country, which means more and more Venezuelan citizens will be coming to our country. Of the four and a half million refugees that have left Venezuela, about twelve percent of them have come to the United States, meaning there are over half a million Venezuelan refugees currently living in the United States (Eoyang 65).

On top of this aspect of my project, I believe that South America as a whole is underrepresented in our educational system. The only reason that I have any knowledge of any Spanish-speaking cultures is based on my choice to take Spanish classes during my education, as our education system focuses on North American and Europe. It is important to realize that there is a lot more going on in the world outside of just the United States and Europe, so in doing this project, I hoped to help the people in the United States come to this realization.
Introduction

Today, Venezuela is in disarray. More than four million Venezuelan citizens have fled their country since 2014. With their total population of just under 32 million citizens, that means that almost 13 percent of their population has fled the country during the past six years (Oppenheimer). There is a power struggle currently going on in Venezuela for the presidency, which is the main reason behind all of these civilians leaving their country. The man who is President of Venezuela right now, Nicolás Maduro, has been in power since 2013. The problem is when it came time for his re-election in 2018, Maduro rigged the election to make sure he remained in power. He started to incarcerate his political opponents, causing some of them to flee the country. Many popular candidates were not on the ballot, so many citizens boycotted the election. Maduro ended up winning the election, but because of what he did in order to ensure that he won, many people saw it as illegitimate, including Juan Guaidó. He is the current leader of the National Assembly in Venezuela, and it is stated in their constitution that he is next in the line of succession for president if there is any kind of issue with their current president. Since Guaidó views the election as illegitimate, he views Maduro’s current presidency as illegitimate, and feels he is the rightful president of Venezuela. The majority of the citizens of Venezuela agree with this sentiment, which is the reason that Maduro felt the need to rig the election (Christy 3). Many Venezuelan citizens are fleeing the country, as they do not want to live in a country that is supposed to be democratic but is currently ruled by a dictator.

Venezuela has been an independent country for almost 200 years. Its citizens first declared independence from Spanish colonial rule in 1811, then went on to declare their
independence from Gran Colombia in 1830. Since 1830, when they became a truly independent country, Venezuela’s constitution has changed four times. Initially, they were named the States of Venezuela by their first constitution. In 1864, Juan Crisóstomo Falcón adopted their second constitution, which changed the name of the State of Venezuela to the United States of Venezuela. This constitution lasted about 90 years, until Marcos Pérez Jiménez adopted a new constitution, which renamed the United States of Venezuela to the Republic of Venezuela. In 1999, Hugo Chávez adopted the constitution that renamed the Republic of Venezuela to the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, which is the constitution that has survived until present day.

One of the key factors to the prosperity of Venezuela as a country has been its oil production. In 1973, Venezuelan oil production quadrupled to $9 billion per year (Guy 508). Before 1973, Venezuela’s economy had been doing well, but not well enough for Venezuela’s government to do anything in the way of foreign investment. After the large increase in oil production, Venezuela had capital, but they feared spending it all domestically due to the possibility of inflation. This prompted President Carlos Andrés Pérez to create the Venezuelan Investment Fund (Fondo de Inversiones de Venezuela in Spanish, or FIV) in June of 1974, which started Venezuela’s transition from “a chronic debtor nation to a solvent middle power with a respected currency in international markets” (Guy 508). Even though Venezuela’s economy began to boom, the nation did not reap the benefits of these advances. The money that Venezuela was collecting was going anywhere but into the pockets of the people in Venezuela, apart from lining the pockets of government officials.

The primary goal of this paper is to establish a connection between the history of corruption by the presidents of Venezuela and the political tension that is currently plaguing
the country. For that to be done effectively, we need to establish a working definition of corruption that will be utilized throughout the rest of this paper. Professor Robert Hughes, in his chapter on “Corruption” in the book Passage of Change, states, “This term has no precise meaning, but is popularly associated with the abuse of power for personal gain” (Hughes 35). This will be a very useful definition, as it has two specific criteria for identifying what is or is not corruption. For an action to be labelled as corruption, there will need to be both a clear abuse of power and the motivation of personal gain. I will be looking at various presidents in Venezuela in the past 70 years, both at what they were doing domestically and internationally. These presidents were chosen based on the impact they had on Venezuela as a whole, meaning the presidents who had significant accomplishments during their terms such as adopting a new constitution rather than presidents who did not accomplish anything noteworthy. While there is evidence of corruption with Venezuelan presidents who were in power before 1950, there is more likely to be a link between more recent presidents and Maduro. In order to label their actions as corruption, I will be looking for both an abuse of power, and that abuse of power leading to some kind of personal gain for that president.
The Republic of Venezuela

Throughout the recent history of Venezuela, there has been a constant struggle between the people in power in Venezuela wanting to stay in power, and the people of Venezuela wanting a democratic system. The first democratic election in the history of Venezuela took place in 1947, just six years before Venezuela adopted a new constitution that renamed the country as the Republic of Venezuela. While this election happened before the constitution was actually adopted in 1953, the idea of a formal democratic election process being added into the constitution was the main reason for the change. The language that was added into the new constitution in 1953 made it so an election would not be legitimate without the citizens being able to vote by secret ballot, and the president would be elected through the direct popular vote. Before this change, the only real gauge as to who was acting president of Venezuela was whoever had the strongest military force backing them up. Changes in power in Venezuela prior to 1947 had been done based on military victories and various coups, which is why the past presidents of Venezuela had largely been dictators. They won power for themselves in a military fashion, and since they were all afraid of the next military leader coming and taking power away from them, they all felt they had to rule with an iron fist.

Marcos Pérez Jiménez was the president elected in 1952 who eventually adopted the constitution that renamed the country to the Republic of Venezuela, and the biggest irony with this is that Marcos Pérez Jiménez was regarded as a dictator. The language that was added in the constitution was supposed to end the cycle of dictators. The presidency of Marcos Pérez Jiménez ended with a coup d’etat in 1958. While there was some unrest in the country throughout his presidency, the thing that pushed the people of Venezuela over the edge was a
The referendum that Jiménez proposed. The referendum was about extending the terms of both the presidency and all of the national and regional governors without holding new elections, however this referendum was held under non-democratic conditions (Yarrington 112). While another coup d’etat seems like it would have led to another dictator, and continued down the same path that Venezuela had been going on until 1947, most of the organization of this military action had been by the people. This allowed the people of Venezuela to have a clear say in who their next president was going to be, which was unprecedented in Venezuela. Edgar Sanabria took an acting role as president for about a year until the next presidential election was organized and in 1959 Rómulo Betancourt was elected as president of Venezuela, in an election that had almost 95 percent voter turnout. Even though Marcos Pérez Jiménez turned out to be a dictator, his change to the constitution allowed the democratic process that the people of Venezuela wanted to finally take place.

The referendum that ended up being the genesis of the coup d’etat in 1958 was a very clear example of corruption by Marcos Pérez Jiménez. The first part of the metric that we are using to identify corruption is an abuse of power. This criterion was met when Jiménez held the voting for the referendum under non-democratic conditions, which in this case meant that he changed the outcome of the votes. It was reported that almost 87 percent of the votes on the referendum were for, and about 13 percent were against, however exit polls were done that show only about 21 percent were for the referendum (Yarrington 114). Jiménez changing the results of the referendum is clearly an abuse of power, which leads to the second criterion for corruption: personal gain. In changing the results of the referendum, Jiménez tried to allow
himself to serve another term without another election, an election he would have lost based on the results of the exit poll of the referendum.

Another noteworthy president who served under this constitution was Rafael Caldera (1969-1974 and 1994-1999). One of the things that made him noteworthy in this administration was the fact that he served two non-consecutive terms as president, and he served those terms with two different party affiliations. One of the consequences that came out of the change in the Venezuelan Constitution in 1953 was the transitioning of Venezuela into a bipartisan political system. The voting has been done with the majority of the votes split between two parties, although it has not always been the same two parties receiving the votes. The party that Caldera belonged to in his first election was named the COPEI party, more commonly known as the Christian Democrats. During most of the years this constitution was in effect, the two parties that were vying for power were the Democratic Action party and the Christian Democrats. When Caldera was elected to the presidency at the end of 1968, it was the first time that the Christian Democrats won an election over the Democratic Action party. This election also marked the first time in the history of Venezuela that power was exchanged between two political parties peacefully (Herman 50). While a peaceful change of power seems like it should have been happening for a long time prior to 1968, it was a big step for Venezuela, as Venezuela was finally becoming the country its citizens had been dreaming about.

The second time, Caldera was elected in 1993 as part of the National Convergence Party. When it was time for the campaigns to start prior to the election in 1993, Caldera was passed up by his former Christian Democrats party as their candidate, so he formed a new party named the National Convergence party. While his party had a new name, he still held the same
ideals that he did back when he was president and a part of the Christian Democrats party, so he essentially ran as a second candidate under the Christian Democrats party. This term was especially interesting, because one of the first things he did as president was free Hugo Chávez from his imprisonment. In February 1922, Chávez was imprisoned after his first coup attempt failed, but a group of his followers attempted a second coup d’etat in November of the same year.

The interesting parts of these coup d’etat attempts lie with both Rafael Caldera and Fidel Castro, the president of Cuba at the time. While there are no officially confirmed reports of Chávez and Castro working together to incite this coup d’etat, there are many reports of Chávez being funded by Castro in order to create instability in the Venezuelan government, so Cuba could have control over their vast oil reserves. On top of this, Caldera has been reported as being a pawn to Chávez, as he was meant to take power after Carlos Andrés Pérez, the president of Venezuela at the time, was deposed. This allegation is backed up by the swift release of Chávez from prison after Caldera was elected to the presidency (Herman 64). The relationship between Chávez and Caldera was one of the main reasons the Christian Democrats did not want Caldera as their candidate in the 1993 election, due to the military power that Chávez attempted to use to depose Pérez. The Christian Democrats viewed this as a bad thing, even though the majority of the public approved of the coup d’etat attempts made by Chávez. This relationship, along with his former service as president of Venezuela, were both key factors in Caldera winning the election in 1992.
The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela

Even though the big change that Jiménez added into the constitution gave more power to the people, it was less than fifty years before Chávez came in and once again shifted the balance of power. Chávez took office in 1999, and that same year called a constitutional assembly, which drafted changes into the constitution that were adopted by popular referendum in December of that same year. The changes that Chávez made to the constitution aimed to give more power to the people of Venezuela, while simultaneously shifting power from the rest of the government to the president. This was accomplished through different amendments to the constitution that included the abolition of presidential term limits, the expansion of the presidential term from six years to seven years, and allowing the president to declare an unlimited state emergency (Gonzalez 136). The people of Venezuela were wary of dictators, as democracy was still fairly new in Venezuela at this point, so it is counterintuitive that they would adopt a new constitution that put more power into the hands of the president.

The way that Chávez was able to accomplish this was by convincing the people of Venezuela that putting more power into his hands was actually giving them more power. He preached that he was “committed to a constitutional democracy,” and it became a key talking point in all of the speeches that he gave (Gonzalez 91). He told his constituents over and over again that they deserved the chance to involve themselves in the political process, and if they gave him more power he would be able to better facilitate this involvement. He proved this to some degree in one of the changes he made to the constitution, where he “removed a clause criminalizing any propaganda which encourages people to disobey the law” and “replaced it with a call to repudiate bad laws” (Gonzalez 93). In making this change, Chávez gained the trust
of the people of Venezuela, as it seemed like a significant step towards giving the people of Venezuela more free speech in their political system. Along with the call to repudiate bad laws, some of the other noteworthy changes that Chávez added in his constitutional amendments were reducing the maximum work week from forty-four hours to thirty-six hours and lowering the voting age from eighteen to sixteen (Gonzalez 136).

Chávez was a very polarizing president in Venezuela, and this change that he made in the constitution gave his right-wing opposition an avenue to protest the laws that he was enacting. Their main method of doing so was through calling on their workers to strike, most notably workers in the oil industry, and they even went as far as intimidating workers that were loyal to the government and refusing to strike by telling their picketers to be aggressive towards citizens trying to go into work (Gonzalez 95). The point of this was to try and keep the oil industry in Venezuela from functioning, so the right-wing opposition to Chávez would be able to garner enough support from the masses to pass a referendum that would remove Chávez from office. While the opposition was very successful in uprooting the economy of Venezuela (the boss’ strike began in the beginning of December 2003, and by mid-December oil production had decreased from almost three million barrels per day to 150,000 barrels per day) it was not successful in shifting the support of the masses away from Chávez (Gonzalez 97).

The success of the right-wing opposition to Chávez in disrupting the economy only hurt Venezuela in the long run. At the end of December 2003 Venezuela had partially recovered its oil industry, producing around one million barrels per day (Gonzalez 99). The bosses’ strike ended in March of 2004, and the people of Venezuela remained on the side of Hugo Chávez. To understand why the people of Venezuela had remained so loyal to Chávez throughout this time,
there has to be consideration of what the right-wing opposition actually did. They disrupted Venezuela’s most profitable industry, and the people left dealing with the food shortages that resulted were the poor. Even though Chávez “had very few communications media at his disposal, in contrast to his opposition” he was still able to maintain the support of the masses in Venezuela (Gonzalez 99). While the right-wing had control of the media, the people of Venezuela still understood that the fault was with the right-wing.

The people of Venezuela were not blindly supporting Chávez either, as Chávez was closely tied to the Bolivarian Revolution in Venezuela through the changes he made in the constitution. The Bolivarian Revolution was a political movement in Venezuela that occurred through the end of the twentieth century and into the beginning of the twenty-first century. It was based on the political ideologies of Simón Bolívar, who is known affectionately in South America as the Liberator. He led a number of countries in present-day South America to their freedom from the Spanish Empire in the early nineteenth century, and one of his more famous quotes is “If you want to end poverty, give power to the poor” (Gonzalez 99). Bolívar is a hero in South American history, and Chávez became the face of the movement in Venezuela as he was the political leader trying to bring Bolivarian politics back to Venezuela, hence the name change of the Republic of Venezuela to the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela in the 1999 constitution. Many people in Venezuela believed that in staying loyal to Chávez they were staying loyal to the Bolivarian republic that they desired.

Chávez remained in power until 2013, when he died after a two-year fight with cancer. Before his death, he nominated his vice-president, Nicolás Maduro, to be his successor, which is extremely uncommon in a democracy. The reason that this was accepted was because the
majority of the people in Venezuela were still quite fond of Chávez, and “in the emotional
turmoil that followed Chávez’s death, that issue was forgotten” (Gonzalez 135). While Maduro
was much more formal and less charismatic than Chávez, he was able to win the election of
2013 due to the nomination from Hugo Chávez, as well as a detailed plan that Chávez had left
for him to follow, called the Socialist Plan of the Nation 2013-2019 (Gonzalez 136). People still
believed in Chávez, and following his death, they chose to believe in Maduro as well. While
Maduro was able to win the election in 2013, he only won by a 1.8 percent margin (Gonzalez
139). His victory in this election can likely be attributed to Chávez, and even the nomination
from Chávez and the support of the PSUV (the United Socialist Party of Venezuela, to which
Chávez belonged), he was barely able to beat his opponent. It was clear from the beginning of
Maduro’s presidency, he was not well-liked by the people of Venezuela, so he had less support
than Chávez had.

Maduro did not gain any popularity once his presidency began either, as less than six
months passed before he was trying to expand presidential power. One way Maduro attempted
to do this was to silence the right-wing opposition that had fought so hard against Chávez. On
top of trying to shift blame for anything going wrong in Venezuela to the opposition (some of
which is obviously justified based on what they did to the Venezuelan economy), he went so far
as ordering the arrest of a close advisor to the candidate he beat in the election, Henrique
Capriles, as well as stripping an opposition lawmaker of the legal immunity that he is entitled to
while serving as a government official (Christy 1). Maduro also pushed the National Assembly in
November of 2013 to pass the “Enabling Act,” which would have allowed him to implement
policies by decree for a year (Christy 1). Right from the start, it was clear to the people of
Venezuela that while Chávez had chosen Maduro to be his successor, he was not the Bolivarian leader they wanted.

Not only was Maduro’s decision making poor in the beginning of his presidency, the country was not given to him in great condition. Venezuela suffered greatly in 2014 when the global price of oil dropped, due to the fact that their economy is so heavily based on oil (Eoyang 65). Venezuela is also a country that relies heavily on imports of items such as food and medicine, which they were unable to purchase after the price drop. In order to combat this, Maduro “began to print more money in 2014…leading to inflation” (Eoyang 65). This measure only succeeded in further lowering the amount of purchasing power that the people in Venezuela had, making it so they did not have reliable access to even the food and medicine that Venezuela was importing. This is the driving force behind Venezuelan citizens fleeing their country, as the lack of food and medicine is also coupled with increased violence and decreased employment prospects (Eoyang 65). Between these problems and the fact that they were deprived of their constitutional right to choose their president, many Venezuelan citizens have seen no choice other than to leave.

While Maduro was a largely ineffective president, he was also a very power hungry president. He made that clear from the beginning of his presidency with his attempted passage of the Enabling Act, so it is not a surprise that he was not ready to give up his seat when it came time for the next election in 2018. What is surprising about that election is that Maduro ended up winning with 68 percent of the vote. This massive margin of victory in Maduro’s favor seems counterintuitive, as he was nearing the end of a term in which he was not popular and did not
fix any of the problems in Venezuela, and that is because the election was not held under the fair, democratic conditions that the citizens of Venezuela were promised in their constitution.

Maduro effectively rigged the election in a few different ways. The first way that he tried to rig the election was to get rid of all of his competition. The man who almost beat him in the 2013 election, Henrique Capriles, was not allowed to run for office, and the opposition leader, Leopoldo Lopez, was arrested and placed under house arrest (Eoyang 67). In doing this, Maduro made sure that the candidates who could potentially beat him in the election would not be on the ballot, making him the only choice. This led to an extremely low voter turnout, as they only had “46 percent in contrast to the 80 percent turnout in 2013” (Eoyang 67). This meant that people chose not to vote when they were unable to vote for their candidate of choice, leaving the portion of the population that supported Maduro and the small portion of the population that supported other candidates still allowed to run as the only voters.

Voter turnout was a concern of Maduro’s administration prior to the election, as the people who supported Maduro’s opposition would obviously not want to vote for Maduro. In order to ensure that a percentage of the population would still vote, Maduro “preyed on a starving population by placing food distribution centers next to polling locations” (Eoyang 67). If it was not bad enough that Maduro was rigging the election in the first place, he was attempting to use the poor economy that he was failing to fix to his advantage. People in Venezuela were unsure if they would receive food if they did not vote in support of the government, meaning that part of the reason for the huge gap in favor of Maduro was his intimidation of his starving constituents.
This election served as the genesis for the power struggle that is still happening today in Venezuela. Maduro was inaugurated on January 10, 2019, for his second term, however his second term is illegitimate based on the current constitution of Venezuela. This constitutional basis for Maduro’s current presidency being illegitimate has two different parts. The first part of it revolves around the two aforementioned factors that allowed Maduro to rig the election, as they influenced the National Assembly of Venezuela to label the election as “non-existent” (Hernández 1). This decision was supported by more than 50 other countries (including the United States), who are not recognizing the outcome of the election (Hernández 1). As the election did not happen in the eyes of the government of Venezuela, Maduro is not a legitimate president.

The second part of this comes in Article 233 of the Venezuelan Constitution. This article essentially deals with the line of succession for the president, and it says that “if the elected president cannot assume the presidency on inauguration day, the president of the National Assembly must assume the presidency as interim president until a new election is called” (Hernández 2). Because the election was deemed non-existent, Maduro was unable to assume the presidency on January 10, 2019, and therefore the leader of the National Assembly is the rightful interim president of Venezuela.

The current leader of the National Assembly of Venezuela is Juan Guiadó. There is a bit of irony in the fact that Juan Guiadó is the rightful president of Venezuela, as a big part of the reason that he is the leader of the National Assembly is due to Maduro rigging the 2018 election. Maduro placed the opposition leader, Loepoldo Lopez, under house arrest so he could not run against Maduro, and while under house arrest Lopez “helped Guiadó ascend to the top
of the opposition party” (Eoyang 67). Guiadó has tried a few different times to take power away from Maduro, some more diplomatic and some more militant. Even though Maduro’s presidency is regarded as illegitimate by the government of Venezuela and the governments of various other countries, he still has some support in Venezuela, namely military leadership (Eoyang 67). With the backing of the military, Maduro has been able to hold off Guiadó and maintain his seat in power.
Comparing the Presidents

*Marcos Pérez Jiménez and Nicolás Maduro*

These two presidents are probably the most similar of the two presidents analyzed. The legacy of Nicolás Maduro will probably end up being very similar to the legacy of Marcos Pérez Jiménez once Maduro loses power in Venezuela. The reason for this is that they had similar attempted power grabs in Venezuela that in Jiménez’s case ended in him losing the seat of the presidency to a *coup d’etat*, and in Maduro’s case is likely to end in him losing the presidency to Guaidó.

While the actions of Jiménez are more closely related to those of Maduro, there is a comparison that can be made between Jiménez and Chávez due to the changes they both made to the Venezuelan constitution that benefitted the people of Venezuela. Jiménez was the president that gave voting rights to the people of Venezuela, and Chávez gave them more freedom of speech, as well as giving them shorter work days. Jiménez and Maduro are more alike than Jiménez and Chávez in that they were more focused on their own power than giving any power to the people. Even though Jiménez was the president when the change was made to the constitution, the first democratic election happened in 1947, which was the election prior to the one that Jiménez won. In this way, his addition to the constitution was more of a formality, as democratic elections took place twice before Jiménez came to power. The attempted power grab at the end of the presidency of Jiménez was similar to the successful power grab of Maduro in 2018, so Jiménez’s presidency was more closely related to Maduro’s presidency as opposed to Chávez’s presidency.
Hugo Chávez and Nicolás Maduro

The comparison between Hugo Chávez and Nicolás Maduro is perhaps the most interesting out of all of the presidents analyzed, and this is mainly due to how different their presidencies were. Maduro not only served in the Chávez administration for years, eventually serving as his vice-president, but he was also named by Chávez as his successor. They belonged to the same political party, and on the surface they had similar political ideologies. With all of these factors in mind, it is surprising that Maduro has been unable to garner the same popular support that Chávez did throughout his time as president. One of the key differences between the two was the way they went about trying to enact legislation and push their respective political agendas forward. The goal of anything Chávez was doing was to gain more political power for himself, but he did it through the guise of giving more power to the people, and at times he managed to get both himself and the people of Venezuela more power. While Maduro had similar goals in his politics, attempting to garner more power through legislation like the Enabling Act, however he did not attempt to shift the focus from himself to the people in the same way that Chávez did. Chávez operated through what he would probably say is mutualism between himself as president and the people of Venezuela, while Maduro was solely focused on himself, and thus lost the support of the people of Venezuela.

Another key difference between Chávez and Maduro was the way they related to the people of Venezuela. Maduro was a more eloquent speaker than Chávez, which to the largely uneducated population of Venezuela separated him, and allowed them to classify Maduro as one of the wealthy elites who had been working to oppress them for years. In this way, the
masses in Venezuela saw Maduro as an enemy as opposed to a friend. While Chávez was not an eloquent speaker, his more rudimentary diction allowed the people in Venezuela to more easily identify with what he was saying, as the way he spoke was much more relatable to the average Venezuelan citizen. Maduro was also much more soft-spoken and reserved than Chávez, who was well known as an extremely charismatic leader. This reserved nature, along with his attempts to gain power for himself and nobody else, led to the souring of the public towards Maduro.

While the perceptions of Maduro and Chávez were much different, their political ideologies were very similar. The main focus for both of them was gaining more power for the seat of the presidency, and to stay in that seat as long as possible. This was clear in the 2018 election, as Maduro did everything in his power (both legal and illegal) in order to ensure his victory in that election. Even though Chávez was beloved by the majority of the people in Venezuela, he was seen by his opposition as a tyrant. This was because of the actions that he took while he was president, doing things like adding twelve judges to the twenty in the Supreme Court of Venezuela in order to ensure decisions would be on his side, and he ensured that “virtually all key decisions are in the hands of the president” (Shifter 48). Chávez was just as power hungry as Maduro, he was simply better at convincing the people of Venezuela that his power grabs were in their best interest.
Juan Guiadó and Nicolás Maduro

The contention between Juan Guiadó and Nicolás Maduro seems on the outside like a problem that should have been resolved very quickly. There is a mountain of evidence that shows how Maduro effectively rigged the 2018 election, and based on the current constitution of Venezuela it is clear that Juan Guiadó is the rightful president in Venezuela. The question then becomes: Why hasn’t this situation been resolved?

The first part of the answer to the question relies on the aforementioned military support that Maduro still has. Even though the majority of the people of Venezuela do not want Maduro in power, the leadership in the military remains on his side, and this means that any attempted militant action from Guiadó would have to face the full force of the Venezuelan military. This would likely turn into a war on Venezuelan soil, and since Guiadó has the best interests of the Venezuelan people in mind, this is not the kind of action that he is willing to take. He also has the support of the majority of Venezuelans at this point in time, which he would likely lose if he chose to wage a war on Venezuelan soil.

The second part of the question has to do more with international politics. Latin America in general has been a contentious region during the second half of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first century, as many of the countries are divided between wanting democratic rule and communistic rule. In the case of Maduro and Guiadó, Maduro is representative of communistic rule, while Guiadó is representative of democratic rule. This is based on their political ideologies, as Maduro is a member of the most prominent socialist party in Venezuela (PSUV), while Guiadó is a member of the Popular Will party, which identifies
as a social democratic party (Eoyang 72). This has led to many countries, such as Russia and China to support Maduro, while countries such as the United States and many members of the European Union support Guiadó (Eoyang 67). This means that the situation in Venezuela has gone beyond being a point of Venezuelan contention, and has evolved into a point of international contention.

With this in mind, the answer to the question of Maduro still being in power is simple: war. Guiadó does not feel comfortable starting a war on Venezuelan soil against the Venezuelan military in order to take power from the usurper Maduro. The other countries that are involved do not want to start a war either, as both sides of the struggle are backed by large militaries. The prospect of war in Venezuela based on the current situation would likely end in a high number of Venezuelan casualties, which is not the desire of either side involved.

Currently, Maduro is doing everything in his power to take power away from Guiadó. Maduro’s main goal in this is to have Guiadó arrested, as he would be unable to effectively oppose Maduro from the inside of a Venezuelan prison cell. There is currently a court order that prohibits Guiadó from leaving Venezuela, however he has done so twice since the court order was enacted, and has been able to get back into the country and remain a free man on both occasions (Smith 1). The point of this order is to try and keep Guiadó from strategizing with his international allies, as these trips have taken him to different countries and Europe as well as the United States.
Conclusion

The corruption that has plagued Venezuela in the past, and continues to plague Venezuela to this day, is centered on political power. This is evident in the referendum that Marcos Pérez Jiménez tried to pass at the end of his presidency, as well as the changes that Hugo Chávez made to the Venezuelan constitution and the 2018 election that Nicolás Maduro rigged. The common theme in all of these actions is the desire to stay in power. These actions all seem to coincide with the impending end of a presidential term, with the exception of the constitutional changes that Hugo Chávez made at the beginning of his first term.

It is clear that the people of Venezuela need help. They are in the middle of a power struggle for the presidency, a power struggle that has prompted millions of Venezuelan citizens to flee to neighboring countries. While it is easy for the average American to dismiss this as a problem in a foreign nation that has no direct effect on his/her livelihood, this problem actually has an impact on the life of the average American in a variety of different ways. The first way the problems in Venezuela affect the lives of the average American is because the people that are fleeing Venezuela need somewhere to go. While a significant number of these immigrants choose to go to neighboring countries like Colombia or Peru, there is also a significant number of immigrants who come as far north as the United States, and in 2016 the United States had the third highest population of Venezuelan migrants and refugees in the world at almost 300,000 people (Eoyang 66). The overall number of Venezuelan migrants at that time was fewer than two million, and that number has more than doubled in the last four years, for a total of over four million Venezuelan citizens leaving their country by the end of 2019 (Eoyang
This problem has a direct impact on the life of the average American, as that number has only risen since 2016 based on the overall number of people leaving Venezuela, so it is not unlikely that most Americans have come into contact with some of these migrants without even realizing it.

If the humanitarian aspect of this crisis were not enough, the average American can look to their own selfish interests in relation to this problem in Venezuela. The United States is a country that relies on imports of raw materials, such as oil, in order to function. Venezuela is essentially the opposite of the United States in this way, as they have “the world’s second largest proven oil reserves,” so they rely on exporting oil in order to keep their economy running (Christy 2). The United States relies heavily on oil and petroleum product imports from Venezuela, as in 2013 the United States was importing 805,000 barrels of oil per day from Venezuela, which accounted for more than eight percent of total U.S. imports (Christy 2). Since the United States has to rely on large amounts of oil from Venezuela, it is in our best interest to make sure they have political stability, so they can reliably give us the oil that we need.

Regardless of both of these factors, the United States actually has an obligation to Venezuela to help maintain democratic rule, through the Inter-American Democratic Charter. This was a charter that was adopted in late 2001 by a council of countries that included not only the United States but other countries such as Venezuela, Colombia, and Peru, for a total of 34 countries involved. One of the provisions of the charter is that the members of the council must “[ensure] a representative government that is elected through free and fair elections” (Christy 2). It is obvious that the 2018 election in Venezuela was neither free nor fair, meaning that all of
the countries that signed the charter have an obligation to intervene in Venezuela, in order to
remedy the current results of the rigged election.

It is undeniable at this point that the United States should be taking an active role in
Venezuelan politics. As it currently stands, Maduro is still holding the presidency in Venezuela.
Guiadó has been unsuccessful in taking the power that is rightfully his under the Venezuelan
constitution, as his various attempts at taking power have been stopped by Maduro, and the
military leaders who are still loyal to Maduro. This is clearly a situation that is not going to be
resolved without receiving help from other countries, and not only do we have an obligation to
do so based on the Inter-American Democratic Charter, we have an obligation to our economy
and the refugees who are currently living in our country to make the political situation in
Venezuela right, so they can return to the country that they call home.
Works Cited


Jepson, Nicholas. “Extractivist-Redistributive Type: Ecuador, Bolivia, and Venezuela.”

Appendix


This source is an article written by a senior policy analyst for the Foreign Policy Initiative in 2013. It outlines the beginning of Maduro’s presidency, specifically the changes he was trying to make and the difficulties of the transition between Chávez and Maduro. This source will be very beneficial when talking about the transition between Chávez and Maduro, as well as the looking at the differences between the two presidents.


This source is a journal article that was written in 2019, and it details the current problems in Venezuela. The main focus of the article is on Maduro, and it talks about international relations between the United States and Venezuela since Maduro was elected in 2013. This will be a very useful source in analyzing what has happened in Venezuela from 2013-2019, and it also provides insight into how the situation in Venezuela is affecting people in the United States.


This source is a book that was written in 2014, and the source material comes from two different chapters in the book, “The Legacy of Hugo Chávez” and “The Bolivarian Revolution Advances”. This source gives a lot of information about the actions of Chávez throughout his presidency, and it touches on the transition between Chávez and Maduro. This source will be
very important when discussing the Chávez administration, and it could be potentially useful in comparing Chávez and Maduro.


This source is from 1979, and it discusses the Venezuelan economy, specifically in terms of oil. This will be important for me when looking at the Christian Democrats administration, because it gives insight into how the economy was doing in the 1970s. It also gives statistics and actual numbers, which will be important when looking into money. Knowing how much Venezuela was making and how much money their industry was worth will be an important comparison to the amount of money that the Presidents of this administration are giving away illegally.


This source is a journal article done on the time when the Christian Democrats came to power in Venezuela and Chile in the 1960s. At the time this was written, the Christian Democrats would still be in power for about 20 more years. Most of the sources I’ve found are written closer to the end of their regime, so it will be good to use as a metric for how the Christian Democrats functioned at the beginning of their time in power, as well as how the public felt about their rise to power.

Hernández, José Ignacio. “Venezuela’s Presidential Crisis and the Transition to Democracy.” *Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS)*, 2019,
This source is a journal article that was written in 2019. It talks about the current situation in Venezuela that began in 2019, and it outlines the different aspects of the power struggle between Guiadó and Maduro. This source will be integral in comparing Maduro and Guiadó. It will also be a very helpful source in looking at the 2018 election, and everything that transpired immediately before and after the election.


This source is one chapter from a book that gives a thorough definition of corruption. It goes through specifics on the topic, and justifies what is and is not corruption. This will be useful towards the beginning of the thesis, as it will be necessary to craft a definition of what is meant by corruption. That definition will be the basis of the rest of the thesis, as that will help identify corruption throughout the rest of the analysis.


This source is a chapter out of a book written in 2020 that talks about socialism on an international scale, and the different effects that socialist governments have had on countries. This chapter in particular looks at three of the socialist governments in South America, one of which is Venezuela. It contains information that is focused mainly on the general population of Venezuela, so it talks more about the reaction of the people to policies rather than a specific
president. This will be very useful in giving background on the current situation in Venezuela, as well as talking about the reaction of the people of Venezuela to various policies that were implemented.


This source is a journal article published in 2006 that talks about the different aspects of Chávez’s presidency. It talks about the different policies that he proposed throughout his presidency, and it details the response of the people of Venezuela to the policies of Hugo Chávez. This source will be important in looking at the presidency of Hugo Chávez, as well as the comparison between Chávez and Maduro.


This source is a study that was done to analyze the history of corruption and anti-corruption in 20th century Venezuela. It has a lot of information on the presidential slush fund that started in 1919. It also focuses on the Acción Democrática party in Venezuela, and presidential payments to allies using public funds. This source will be helpful with some of the presidents in the 20th century, as well as a general overview of Venezuela in the 20th century.