

The Gradual Collapse of the Venezuelan Petrostate and Its Regional Consequences

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***Abstract:** State collapse weakens its overall geographic region by creating an enhanced risk of instability, social unrest, and potential conflict. This paper details the complete history of the Venezuelan petrostate and its gradual but undeniable decline that resulted in the economic, political, and humanitarian crisis that occurred between 2014 to 2019. In wake of its collapse, Latin America was affected greatly by the Venezuelan refugee crisis generated as a result, and Venezuelan citizens' humanitarian need. As a result of Venezuela's collapsed healthcare infrastructure, the regional weakness of preventative care against infectious diseases was exacerbated and created a profound health epidemic. This revealed state weaknesses on a regional scale. This paper will prove the profound regional consequences that state collapse imposes through the story of the Venezuelan state, its collapse, and the crisis generated as a result.*

INTRODUCTION

The story of Venezuela is a narrative that demonstrates the shortcomings and failures of the petrostate. Some experts claim that Venezuela is an example of “one of the worst cases of Dutch Disease in the world” (Venezuelan and Ausman 2019). To explain how Venezuela arrived at its multifaceted economic, political, and humanitarian crisis that resulted in over 4.5 million Venezuelans leaving the country by the end of 2019, Venezuela's history as a petrostate will be examined as well as its weaknesses (“Venezuelan Displacement” 2). The severe conditions of the crisis have created one of the largest mass migrations globally and economic collapses outside of war in the last fifty years which impose a

justified reason of concern for international relations (Labrador and Merrow 2019; Third Way 2019, 2). Venezuelan refugees have migrated to neighboring countries in need of humanitarian and medical assistance, which has increased perceptions of socioeconomic strain on state governments as well as fueled anti-Venezuelan xenophobia, enhancing the risk of instability and conflict throughout the region. As will be discussed later in this essay, the regional consequences of infectious disease as a result of the Venezuelan petrostate's collapse through the 2018 measles epidemic proves the theory that state failure has profound, and often harmful, regional consequences.

THE DEFINITIONS OF STATEHOOD, STATE FAILURE, REFUGEES, AND THE PETROSTATE

To understand the concepts of state fragility and failure, I will discuss the existing definitions for statehood and state failure in this section, in relation to Venezuela. These definitions will allow readers to better understand the conditions in which states collapse, and ultimately, the weaknesses behind the Venezuelan petrostate that led to its economic crisis of 2014 to 2019. Following this, definitions of “refugee” will be discussed, as well as the theoretical reasonings for the regional consequences of state collapse. The final definition will then regard the petrostate and how this term relates to Venezuela.

DEFINITIONS OF STATEHOOD

There are a variety of definitions for what constitutes a healthy and stable state. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development defines statehood in terms of “security, representation, and welfare” (Gentili 2009, 10). The International Rescue Committee defines statehood in terms of how well domestic systems take care of their citizens’ well-being and how effective they are in times of conflict (IRC 2021). Gravingholt labels functional statehood as “authority, capacity, and legitimacy” (Gravingholt 2012). A state in these terms will be able to exhibit effective authority over its citizens, have the capacity to maintain peace and order, as well as have legitimate rule. We will explore later how Venezuela does not fit these requirements. Other countries considered to have gaps in these areas are Yemen, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Afghanistan (Carment and Samy 2012, 107). Stein Eriksen defines statehood as such:

The state's primary purpose is to provide public goods like security, the protection of property rights, justice, or public health. Depending on the exact definition, welfare issues like access to education, basic social services, opportunities for participation and the rule of law can also be considered part of the state's core functions (Eriksen 2011).

This definition is similar to that of Richard Blanton et al., who believe that the heart of good governance is its ability to keep society balanced and provided for. “Good government, past or present, is premised on checks on power, a distribution of voice, ways to police corruption, equitable fiscal financing of the state, limits on greed...” (Blanton et al. 2020). Blanton et al., Eriksen, and Gravingholt all share similar beliefs that states should do the following: maintain legitimacy and justice, effectively take care of and represent their citizens, and provide some form of welfare and law to the nation. In summary, an effective state should have the capability to successfully govern itself and its people. Through these definitions of statehood, one can begin to understand the elements that constitute a failing or collapsed state.

DEFINITIONS OF STATE FAILURE

A failed state is a political institution that demonstrates ineffective governance, some form of corruption on the social, political, or economic level, and unjustly uses its power in a way that harms its citizens. Gentili argues that at the core of a failed state lies its inability to solve the socio-economic issues that its people face. She believes that the failed state consists of “...the deregulation of the labor market, unemployment, low wages, worsening conditions of housing and work” (Gentili 2009, 11). These states demonstrate severe or detrimental poverty, vulnerability, and

destitution for populations across the country, both in rural and urban environments. Failing states exhibit a growing inequality of access to basic resources for the majority of the population. Simultaneously in these conditions, governments often demonstrate extreme polarization or fragmentation, an overt disregard for human rights, and exert severe political repression upon the people and anyone who “opposes” their rule (Gentili 2009, 11). To simplify the definition of state failure, it is the consequence of corruption, abuse of power, and poor governance, resulting in a collapsed state.

To further elaborate on varying definitions of state fragility, failings, or collapse, this paragraph will demonstrate an array of arguments on state failure that relate to our contemporary and historical understanding of Venezuela. The work of Blanton et al. details “moral lapses” in government leadership as leading to a decline in citizen faith, engagement, and taxation, as well as state legitimacy and their ability to effectively govern and control crime and political opposition (Blanton et al. 2020). What can be described as “moral lapses” connects to themes of political repression, human rights violations, undemocratic means of governance, corruption, and general violence. The perceived abandonment of the peoples’ values by the government harms the institution’s sovereignty and authority within its borders as the people grow to distrust and resent the state. This internal political instability grows to create a fragile state. Carment and Samy mark state fragility similarly, through weak governance, lack of economic sustainability, and internal social or political conflict. “Fragility is generally a result of the interrelated aspects of poverty, conflict, and stability” (Carment and Samy,

2012). These elements of economic weakness and political inadequacy as well as internal sociopolitical conflict are all incredibly relevant to understanding the contemporary crisis in Venezuela.

Overall, the similarities that one can see in state failure across each of these definitions is a state that is not fulfilling its responsibilities of social welfare, public service, and security to the people. Other elements of state fragility that are relevant to the situations in Venezuela are high emigration rates, state delegitimization, and the creation of refugees (Iqbal and Starr 2008, 317). The concept of state failure demonstrates detrimental inadequacies of economic and political governance, weakness in legitimacy and sovereignty, and a disregard for citizens on a political or humanitarian level. As states fail systematically, large amounts of their population begin to leave the country to meet the needs that their governments failed to provide for. Many of these migrants are considered refugees, and their migration crisis has profound impacts on the surrounding region.

DEFINITIONS OF REFUGEES

According to Salehyan and Gleditsch, a refugee is:

Anyone who flees a country of origin or residence for fear of politically motivated harm...Thus people who flee conditions of general violence, such as civil or international wars and the breakdown of political regimes, in addition to those escaping direct government persecution are considered to be refugees (2006, 341).

Most refugees are fleeing countries where internal conflicts become incredibly violent and the state’s attempts to subdue them are ineffective. Salehyan and Gleditsch also mention the “government

purges of political opposition groups” that refugees attempt to escape from, which is applicable to the political repression and mass detainment that occurred in Venezuela (2006, 341). For Astri Suhrke, what differentiates refugees from migrants is their demand and need for asylum and relief from crises. Many statistical analyses confirm that political repression, change in political structure, civil wars, famine, and economic deterioration are all important predictors of flight (Salehyan and Gleditsch 2006, 338). Yet above all other reasons for migration, Suhrke stresses violence as the most pivotal “precipitating factor” to refugee crises.

Suhrke defines two categories of conflict that create environments that refugees leave: conflicts of state formation and conflicts of state order (1993, 220). Conflicts of state formation include the expulsion of “undesirables” from society through ethnic cleansing or genocide, and violence based on religious or racial differences. Conflicts regarding state order include social issues based on class inequality, questions of state legitimacy and revolts for a new political order. This type of conflict involves authoritarian rulers, repressed populations, the mass killings and jailings of political opponents, and the widespread exodus of citizens (1993, 220). This description is quite similar to the conditions of the Venezuelan crisis of 2014 to 2019. Yet, to understand the multifaceted hardships occurring during the gradual decline of the Venezuelan petrostate, we must first define what a petrostate is, its shortcomings, and how this suits Venezuela’s contemporary framework.

DEFINITION OF A PETROSTATE AND ITS SHORTCOMINGS

A petrostate is a government with the following characteristics: state income is highly reliant on the export of fossil fuels, an elite minority shares the majority of economic and political power within the country, institutions are weak and unaccountable, and corruption is far-reaching (Cheatham et al. 2023). Petrostates are vulnerable to a concept labeled “Dutch Disease”, which is when a government develops an “unhealthy dependence on natural resource exports to the detriment of other sectors” (Nelson 2018). The following information in this section relating to the petrostate draws on the arguments of Cheatham et al (2023).

A resource boom, in Venezuela’s case, oil, draws in significant amounts of foreign capital and investment in that country’s economy. This appreciates the local currency (increasing the international buying power of the bolivar), and the state is now able to afford more imports with ease. Due to the oil industry’s high profitability, this gives an incentive for the state to draw investment and attention away from other domestic economic sectors, leaving the state’s export industry unbalanced. In these environments, agriculture and manufacturing industries receive less government attention, despite being the two most important industries for domestic growth and international trade. As other economic sectors such as these begin to fade or weaken, unemployment rises, creating a greater need for social services.

The government then invests more in subsidies and social welfare programs, which require government spending money generated from oil revenues, enhancing the country’s dependence on oil income. As the domestic economy grows increasingly

reliant on oil exports, that state becomes highly vulnerable to the unpredictable and fluctuating swings of global oil prices and “capital flight”. Capital flight refers to when investors rescind their foreign capital from an industry when that commodity is at risk of depreciating. In addition to the threat of economic instability and collapse should oil prices sink, the “resource curse” of the petrostate severely impacts governance.

As a petrostate grows its ability to rely on export income for its main source of revenue, the importance of local taxes and relationships with citizens declines. As a result of this, petrostates create weak ties between its citizens and government, which can create further detachment, distance, and misrepresentation in government as citizens grow to become more disengaged with politics. In combination with political and economic factors, experts say that Venezuela fits the archetype of the “failed petrostate” with the following conditions: a history of oil dependence, falling economic production and revenue when oil prices decline, tremendous debt and hyperinflation, and a growing autocracy as the general population becomes less engaged with politics. We will see in later chapters of this essay how this is confirmed, but first, we must discuss Venezuela’s 20th-century history of economics and politics to see how the Venezuelan petrostate was formed to understand how that has contributed to the 21st-century crisis.

THE HISTORY OF THE VENEZUELAN PETROSTATE 1922-2014

The history of the Venezuelan Petrostate began when geologists first discovered oil in Venezuela in 1922. When

oil was first “struck”, it was reported to have generated more than “100 thousand barrels per day” (Cheatham et al. 2023). “Annual production exploded during the 1920s, from just over a million barrels to 137 million, making Venezuela second only to the United States in total output by 1929” (Cheatham et al. 2023). Oil in Venezuela was discovered under the dictatorship of General Juan Vicente Gomez, who ruled between 1908 to 1935, and welcomed foreign investors and companies into the country to aid in oil production (Cheatham et al. 2023). According to Robert Rapier (2019), most of Venezuela’s oil reserves come from the Orinoco Belt, which contains extra-heavy crude oil that is immensely difficult and expensive to produce, hence the importance of international investment. The Orinoco Belt holds about 1.2 trillion barrels of oil resources. This is not to be confused with oil reserves, as oil resources include both discovered, undiscovered, recoverable and unrecoverable oil deposits (Rapier 2019; Baranski 2022)¹. Yet even if an oil deposit is deemed feasible for oil production, the process is costly.

Therefore, throughout the 1920s, General Gomez invited international oil companies like Exxon, Mobil, BP, and Chevron to invest in the development of these reserves through infrastructure and technology to create fossil fuel exports (Rapier 2019). Yet, as the country grew to become more reliant on oil exports, it fell ill to “Dutch Disease”, as defined earlier in this essay. By 1935, the Venezuelan economy was booming; the Venezuelan bolivar had greatly appreciated yet all other domestic sectors of production were diminished as oil grew to account for over 90% of total

¹ Reserves refers explicitly to deposits of fossil fuels deemed “technically and economically feasible” to extract (Baranski 2022).

exports (Cheatham et al. 2023). As long as oil prices were high, the Venezuelan economy was thriving, and Venezuelan oil was in high demand internationally. “In the 1950s and 1960s, Venezuela was one of the 20 wealthiest countries in the world in per capita income” (Venezuelan and Ausman 2019). Oil rents in the 1940s helped to enforce Venezuela’s oil wealth as foreign oil companies were required to concede at least half of their profits to the Venezuelan state. Within five years of this law, Venezuela’s GDP had increased sixfold (Cheatham et al. 2023). However, as this boom continued, the country’s dependence on oil deepened.

Oil played an instrumental role in restructuring the Venezuelan economy, and continued to play a pivotal role in politics for the rest of the century. When Venezuela elected its first democratic government through the Punto Fijo Pact of 1958 after a series of military dictatorships, a representative of almost every major political player in Venezuelan society agreed that oil profits were one of the most political factors to consider and that oil revenue was to be controlled by the state (Cheatham et al. 2023). In 1960, Venezuela became one of the founding members of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), and their status and wealth continued to rise (Cheatham et al. 2023). Meanwhile, oil rents had increased to 65% revenue and by the 1970s, the world had entered another oil boom. Oil production reached an all-time high in 1970 as Venezuela produced 3.8 million barrels per day (Rapier 2019). In 1976, President Carlos Andrés Pérez created the first state-owned oil company in Venezuela, *Petróleos de Venezuela S.A. (PDVSA)* “...to oversee all exploring, producing, refining, and exporting of oil” (Cheatham et al. 2023). PDVSA agreed to partner with foreign oil

companies as long as the state held 60% equity in joint ventures, and these partnerships allowed oil businesses to run with minimal government regulations (Cheatham et al. 2023). For about fifty years, the Venezuelan state experienced a state of economic success and prosperity.

Between the years 1970 to 1985, Venezuela experienced a decline of over 50% in oil production when global oil prices plummeted in the 1980s (Rapier 2019). The Venezuelan petrostate, reliant on oil to keep its government afloat, suffered greatly and was not able to pay back its debts nor keep up with soaring inflation rates. This was due to the massive overspending carried out by the Venezuelan state during the 1970s oil boom. Its citizens had grown accustomed to foreign goods and luxuries during the height of Venezuela’s economy, and to keep up with high demand, the state undertook massive debt to fulfill this, expecting to be able to pay it back with projected oil revenue that did not arrive (Rapier 2019). In 1989, President Peréz launched a economic package of severe neoliberal policies prescribed by the International Monetary Fund in exchange for a financial bailout of international debt (Cheatham et al. 2023).

These severe neoliberal policies removed government subsidies of basic goods, cut back on many state-funded social services and prompted deadly riots across the nation. Amidst this political turmoil, a military officer named Hugo Chavez gained public popularity after an attempted military coup in 1992. He would go on to later win the 1998 presidential elections due to his popularity and his promises to reduce national inequality and poverty (Cheatham et al. 2023). By the time Hugo Chavez was elected president, the Venezuelan petrostate had recovered economically. In 1997, Venezuela sought to

deepen foreign investment and international influence and by 1998, Venezuela's oil industry recovered to nearly its former peak, with 3.5 million barrels per day (BPD) (Rapier 2019). With the turn of the century, arrived Hugo Chavez's plans for political and economic reformation, which he named *Chavismo*.

When analyzing Venezuela's economic crisis between 2014 to 2019, one can look to Hugo Chavez. His policies in the late 1990s to early 2000s had long standing consequences which directly contributed to the gradual collapse of the Venezuelan petrostate. His nationalization of private industry as well as the socialization of an economy highly dependent on a fluctuating commodity with few alternative economic sectors to fall back on would leave the country in a hyperinflated, impoverished state with a collapsed oil industry by the end of his extended term in 2013 (Third Way 2019, 2)².

Between 1999 to 2014, Chavez spent \$716 billion in oil revenues from PDVSA to fund his *Chavismo* agenda in social programming (Third Way 2019, 2). Despite generating over \$300 billion in oil revenue in from 2004 to 2008, the state still accrued large amounts of debt under Chavez to fund social programs in addition to imports and subsidies (Venezuelan and Ausman 2019). Nelson (2018) states: "Chavez borrowed against future oil exports, running budget deficits in nine of the years he was in office (1999-2013). Venezuela's public debt more than doubled between 2000 and 2012, from 28% of GDP to 58% of GDP." Massive debt, petroleum dependence, as well as an inefficient nationalization of private

industry would all have negative consequences for Venezuela's future.

Chavez won the 1998 election on the promise to share the country's oil wealth with the people, guarantee food security, deliver state-funded social services, and more (Benzaquen 2017). "The state provided cheap loans, subsidies, numerous jobs, and free public services, and made sure that an overvalued currency made imported goods accessible" (Venezuelan and Ausman 2019). During the oil boom of the 2000s, the Venezuelan petrostate drew in considerable amounts of profit. "Between 1999 and 2015, the Venezuelan government earned nearly \$900 billion from petroleum exports, with about half (\$450 billion) earned between 2007 and 2012 (Chavez's second term)" (Nelson 2018). The petroleum revenue allowed the nation to afford imported luxuries, as well as necessities like food, medicine, (which gave reason to not produce these products domestically) and subsidize the prices of basic goods. As most basic consumer goods that citizens relied on were imported and funded by oil revenues, they also became dependent on oil. In 2008, 93% of Venezuelan exports were oil, meaning that the majority of the country's GDP was being maintained by petroleum (Benzaquen 2017). Meanwhile, non-oil domestic industry under Chavez grew to be heavily restricted, underfunded, and noncompetitive compared to imports in terms of quality and pricing. When the country eventually cut imports when oil prices declined again, Venezuela's domestic industry was not strong enough to provide

² Cheatham et al. (2023) sums up Chavez's presidency concisely: "While his costly "Bolivarian missions" expanded social services and cut poverty by 20 percent, he also took

several steps that precipitated a long and steady decline in the country's oil production, which peaked in the late 1990s and early 2000s."

for the entire state (Venezuelan and Ausman 2019).

How did Chavez's presidency impact private industry negatively and eventually the oil industry as well? Increased state regulations for domestic production under Chavez's administration stifled local industry. Many private industries were seized by the government for state control yet were poorly managed. Under Chavez, the number of private companies dropped from 14,000 in 1998 to 9,000 in 2011 (Nelson 2018). Lack of effective management, as well as sufficient expertise, would later weaken other economic sectors that were not oil in Venezuela. Private industries that remained faced additional issues as the government enacted currency exchange controls in 2003 with the state being the sole administrator of U.S. dollars in the country (Benzaquen 2017). Companies struggled to obtain the U.S. dollars needed to import raw materials and machinery as government administrations operated at inefficient speeds. This dampened domestic industries' ability to produce goods locally at sufficient rates and incentivized many to close down or turn to the black market to obtain USD at quicker speeds, even if sold at inflated prices (Benzaquen 2017). In addition to this, the country's oil industry would also lose massive amounts of technical expertise under Chavez's reign.

Between 2002 to 2003, 19,000 experienced PDVSA workers were fired as a result of the oil industry strike and replaced by government loyalists (Rapier 2019). Not long after this, Chavez began subsidizing oil in 2005 to political allies until 2013. This dwindled oil reserves and more than doubled government debt (Cheatham et al. 2023). With the lack of experience being highly present in Venezuela's petroleum industry, oil production began to decline by

the end of 2007 (Rapier 2019). Experts say that Chavez failed to adequately invest the funds needed to continue developing the country's oil as well as support other factors of industry as alternative sources of domestic income. Instead, Chavez risked investing in increasingly expensive and unsustainable social programs that were highly dependent on oil revenue, leading to damaging consequences in the present (Rapier 2019). The story of Chavez's economic and political legacy brings us to the current crisis in Venezuela that arrived shortly after Chavez died in 2013. The crisis involves economic mismanagement, humanitarian neglect, political repression, and an extreme exodus of Venezuelans from the country in the years 2014 to 2019.

THE CURRENT CRISIS IN VENEZUELA 2014-2019

THE ECONOMIC CRISIS

During the middle of 2014, global oil prices plummeted, and with it, Venezuela's economy deteriorated (Cheatham et al. 2023). Yet what makes this crisis different from previous oil lulls, is the impact of Chavez's policies, political corruption, humanitarian abuses under both Chavez and Nicolás Maduro, and a systemic failure of the Venezuelan state. Oil output in Venezuela declined drastically across the 2010s having detrimental consequences for Venezuela's economy and people. The first portion of this section will describe the current economic crisis through charts exhibiting data from the International Monetary Fund. The consecutive portions will then discuss the political and humanitarian aspects of the crisis. A disclaimer is necessary to state that official data on the socioeconomic and

humanitarian status of the Venezuelan population has been largely unavailable or sparse from 2014 onwards due to possible government repression or lack of collection of national statistics that has made data on the situation limited, missing, or possibly much smaller than the actual numbers at hand (Page and Broner 2020).

The following chart expresses the 8 key indicators of Venezuela’s economic crisis.

Table 1: “Venezuela’s Economic Crisis: Key Indicators” (Nelson 2018).

Table 1. Venezuela’s Economic Crisis: Key Indicators

Indicator	Pre-Economic Crisis (2013)	Latest Data (**2016 or **2017 Forecasted)	% Change
Exports of goods	\$82.7 billion	\$27.0 billion ^a	-67%
Imports of goods	\$62.9 billion	\$21.4 billion ^a	-66%
GDP, constant prices, Venezuela’s national currency, the bolivar	62.2 billion bolivares	41.2 billion bolivares ^a	-34%
GDP per capita ^a	\$17,980	\$11,290 ^a	-37%
Inflation, % change in prices ^b	57%	1,133% ^a	1,888%
Unemployment, % of population	7.5%	26.4% ^a	252%
Government deficit, % of GDP	14.1%	18.5% ^a	31%
Government reserves	\$21.5 billion	\$10.0 billion ^c	-53%

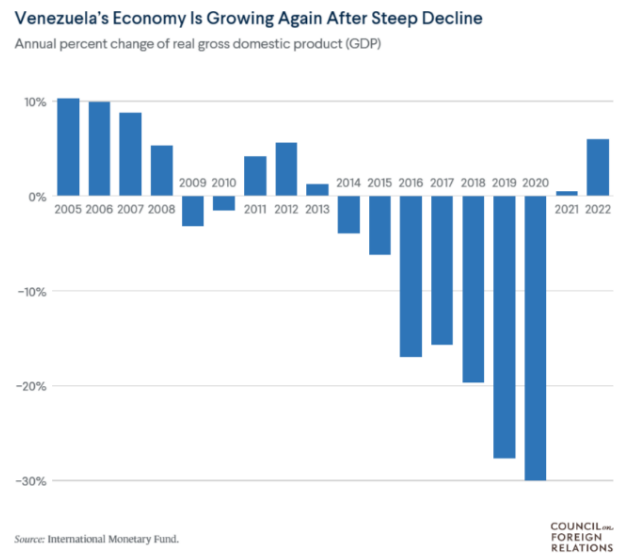
Source: IMF World Economic Outlook, International Financial Statistics, and Direction of Trade Statistics Databases, accessed December 18, 2017.

Notes:

- a. International dollars (adjusted for purchasing power parity); see Notes in Figure 1.
- b. End of period consumer prices.
- c. Data is for the fourth quarter of 2013 and the third quarter of 2017.

This table gives us an overview of how different key factors in Venezuela’s economy changed as a result of its crisis. The following figures will depict a closer look at each of these factors. Figure 1 depicts the annual change in Venezuela’s GDP from 2005 to 2022. What is particularly notable is the decline of GDP that occurs in the years 2014 to 2019 during the economic crisis. The negative percentage change peaks in 2020, most likely due to the financial impact the COVID-19 pandemic had on international economies, however for this research, we will be focusing explicitly on the years 2014 to 2019 for the Venezuelan crisis.

Figure 1: “Annual Percent Change of Venezuela’s GDP” (Cheatham et al. 2023).



In 2019, Venezuelan and Ausman stated that GDP loss is reportedly higher than what is reported outside of the country and claimed GDP loss to be 50%. In Figure 2, one can see that GDP per capita fell from 7,110 USD in 2014 to 2,620 USD in 2019, a nearly 40% decline (IMF 2023).

Figure 2: “GDP per capita of Venezuela” (International Monetary Fund 2023).

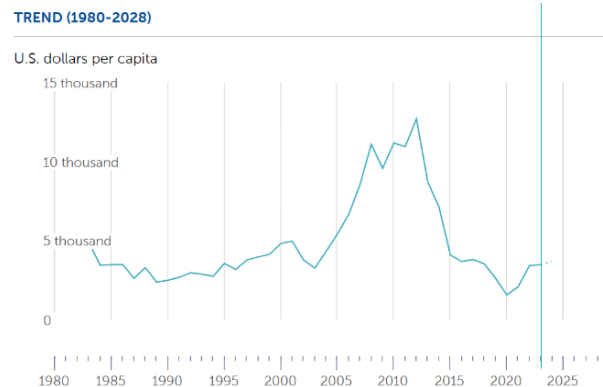
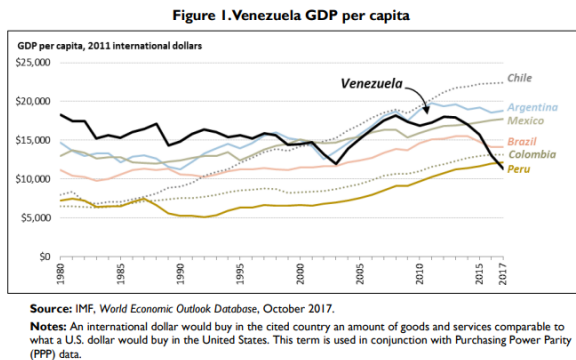


Figure 3: “How Venezuela’s GDP per Capita compares to the Latin American Region” (Nelson 2018).



Regarding the absolute purchasing power of Venezuelan currency in Figure 4, it was reported by the IMF to be 18.21 thousand in 2014 and to 8.17 thousand by 2019, an approximately 45% decline.

Figure 4: “Purchasing Power Parity of Venezuela” (International Monetary Fund 2023).

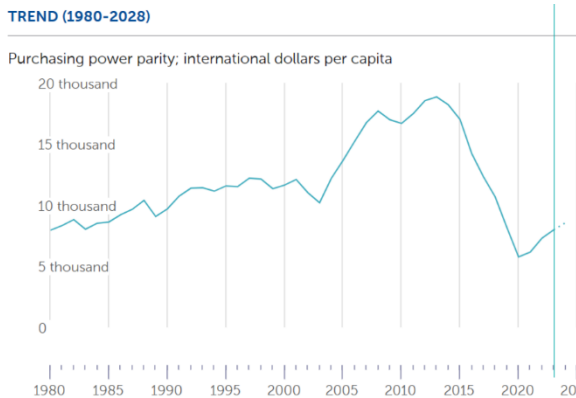


Figure 5: “Venezuela’s Declining Oil Output” (Cheatham et al. 2023).

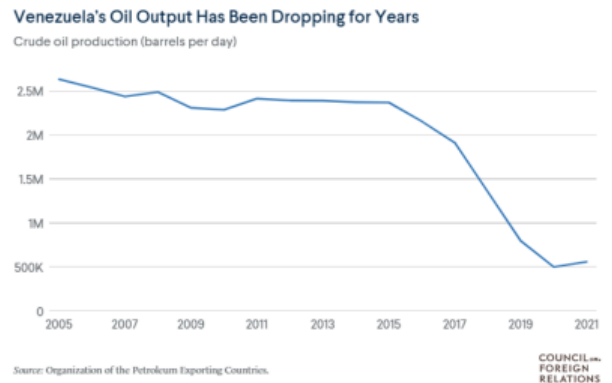


Table 2: “Venezuela’s inflation rates” (International Monetary Fund 2023).

Years	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Inflation %	62.2	121.7	254.9	438.2	65.37	19.91
					thousand	thousand

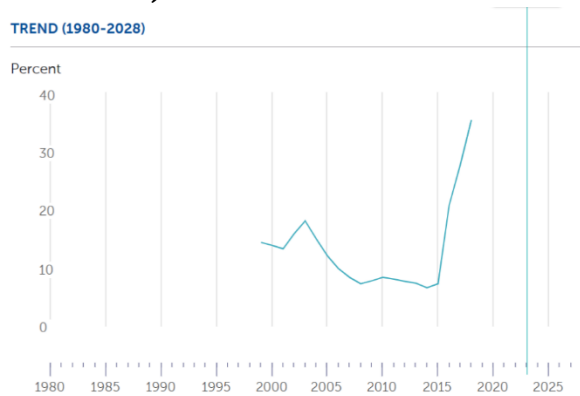
Despite the already immense rates of inflation reported by the IMF, there are some discrepancies as to the exact quantity of inflation in Venezuela. Cheatham et al. state that: “annual inflation skyrocketed to just over 130,000 percent in 2018” (2023). Venezuelan and Ausman claim that the inflation rate was approaching 500,000% in 2019 (2019). Whether this is a sign of the severity of the economic crisis in Venezuela or a lack of consensus on numbers reporting the situation, the fact of the matter is that inflation rates in Venezuela have become incredibly high between the years 2014 to 2019.

In conjunction with hyperinflation, unemployment had dramatically increased. Table 3 and Figure 6 describe the percentage of those unemployed in the existing Venezuelan labor force between the years 2014 to 2018. After 2018, the Venezuelan government was no longer reporting data on the national unemployment rate (International Monetary Fund 2023).

Table 3: “Venezuela’s Unemployment Rate” (International Monetary Fund 2023).

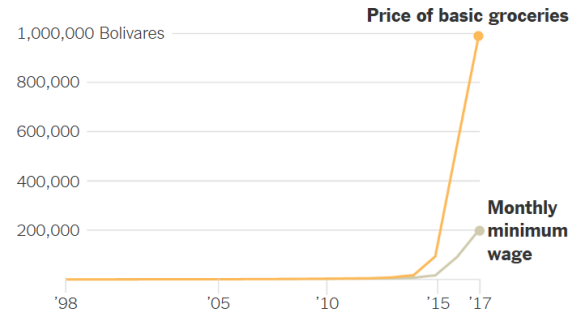
Year:	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Unemployment Rate:	6.7	7.4	20.9	27.9	35.6

Figure 6: “Unemployment Rate of Venezuela” (International Monetary Fund 2023).



The mismanagement of the country’s oil wealth under Chavez created an economic system that was no longer able to support itself when oil prices dropped after his administration. The history of Venezuelan economics depended solely on a fluctuating and unreliable commodity, resting the fate of its citizens well-being upon petroleum revenue. When left with no alternative source of income, when the petrostate inevitably failed, public healthcare, employment, and access to food and medicine all dramatically declined (Puglie 2019). As Maduro was left with an immense budget deficit in the wake of Chavez’s economic legacies, Maduro cut the social services, subsidies, and imports necessary to keep its citizens cared for (Benzaquen 2017). When the scarcity of food, employment, and medicine, was paired with the hyperinflation created by Maduro’s regime, the country entered freefall.

Figure 7: “The Disparity between Grocery Prices and the Monthly Minimum Wage in Venezuela” (Benzaquen 2017).



By The New York Times | Sources: CENDAS-FVM, Sary Levy, professor at the Central University of Venezuela | Minimum wage includes monthly food ticket | Measure for basic groceries based on the National Institute of Statistics’ monthly nutritional requirement for a family of five | As of May 2017

In 2017, the cost of groceries was reported to be five times the minimum wage (Benzaquen 2017). “In mid-2018, a dozen eggs cost the equivalent of two weeks’ pay in a minimum wage job” (Faiola et al. 2018). While Johns Hopkins University admits that official data is largely unavailable, they suggest that “nearly the entire population is food insecure and that acute malnutrition among children is reaching crisis levels in vulnerable populations” (2019).

Meanwhile, hospitals across the country are facing widespread closure due to the declining quality of facilities and mass shortages of medicine, clean water, sanitation tools, and electricity (“What is Happening?” 2022). Shortages of food, water, fuel, medicine, and jobs because of economic turmoil have caused social unrest. Protestors in 2017 demanded international food aid and early presidential elections; yet, this resulted in 3,600 arrests and more than 90 deaths (Benzaquen 2017). Unfortunately, protests against the state and demand for change have only been met by the state with repression and violence.

THE POLITICAL CRISIS

Under Chavez's regime, the following was common: infrequent negotiations with opposition parties, loyalists given access to top-level positions across government and industry, an uneven electoral system, and laws being invoked to penalize the opposition but rarely to sanction the government (Gonzalez 2019, 42). Chavez's "Bolivarian Revolution" sought to restructure the very foundation of Venezuelan politics, yet instead, it reestablished the foundations of authoritarianism (Venezuelan and Ausman 2019). With the growth of authoritarian rule came the "corruption of law, education, human rights, economics, health, housing, transportation, and systematic infrastructure" (Venezuelan and Ausman 2019). Under the Chavez administration, the lines between the state, the political party, and the government were intentionally blurred, creating more space for the president to expand his political power (Gonzalez 2019, 42).

Presidential powers were extended, the National Assembly weakened, term limits were abolished, independent press outlets were eliminated, and Chavez used intimidation tactics and price controls to nationalize the private sector completely, granting him almost complete economic control over the country (Cheatham et al. 2023; Gonzalez 2019, 42). Chavez prosecuted journalists, shut down television stations at will, aggravated media deemed "unloyal", and controlled many facets of media throughout his presidency (Gonzalez 2019, 42). According to Cheatham et al., Maduro would later on eliminate the freedom of the press and assembly in Venezuela, following in Chavez's footsteps (2023). In 2007, Chavez nationalized the telecom and electricity industries as well as replaced most of his

cabinet, 1/3 of it being former military officers (CFR 2023; Gonzalez 2019, 42). Political favors were common during Chavez's reign as he continued to enhance autocracy within the government by placing loyal supporters in government positions around the capital and in opposition territories across the country, even if these individuals did not have much prior political experience (Gonzalez 2019, 43).

In addition to having broad military support, being a former officer himself, Chavez instituted a civilian militia named the "Operations for the Liberation of the People" in Venezuela in 2005, which included 2 million individuals ready to fight "against foreign invasion" and to "safeguard" the Bolivarian Revolution (the term Chavez used to describe his political regime) (Gonzalez 2019, 43; CFR 2023). These became known as *colectivos* and were pro-government vigilante groups that participated in local government and received state support. However, criminal groups often took advantage of this system in order to gain local control and in exchange acted as the government's intelligence and security services as well as the distributors of the state's social programs (Gonzalez 2019, 43). This form of local espionage, surveillance, and corruption continued under Maduro's rule.

Certain experts believe that Maduro "consolidated power through political repression, censorship, and electoral manipulation" (Cheatham et al. 2023). This claim is not unfounded as in the face of severe economic crisis and social unrest in 2014 to 2019, Maduro has escalated repression and used military forces against protestors with deadly force (Gonzalez 2019, 44). This includes the presence of police brutality and the beatings of civilians, citizen disappearances, the arbitrary detainment and prosecution of

those deemed political opponents and critics, as well as acts labeled as crimes against humanity carried out by the state (Cheatham et al. 2023). At the “minor level”, those who publicly speak negatively about the government are liable to face death threats, forced resignation of employment, physical assault, and the destruction of personal records like birth certificates or other national records (Sarta 2019). Meanwhile, under Maduro, the *colectivos* have been acting as local armed groups that carry out the bidding of the state, including executing extrajudicial killings.

Colectivos have been granted “full reign” over their local territories by the government to fully police and control (Gonzalez 2019). The *colectivos* are responsible for the extrajudicial killings of 5,287 individuals in 2018 and almost 2,000 in just the first four months of 2019 (Cumming-Bruce 2019). Non-government-affiliated Venezuelan groups claimed that the “death squads” were responsible for more than 9,000 murders in 2018 and 2019 (Cumming-Bruce 2019). Often these victims are labeled as “possible threats” to the government, and on the state’s behalf, the *colectivos* carry out orders to execute citizens (Cumming-Bruce 2019). They are known for manipulating crime scenes to look as if victims were “resisting arrest” and as if “force was required”. In addition to the commonality of extrajudicial killings under the Maduro regime, arbitrary arrests and full-scale systems of torture have been discovered as well.

Through interviews with 250 people, the United Nations has “...identified a chain of command that works to silence, discourage, and squash opposition to the government” (Paúl 2022). According to Enderson Sequera, the Maduro administration has proven to be “an authoritarian regime that

is capable of murder, torture, and persecution to stay in power” (Paúl 2022). High-profile political opponents like opposition leader Leopoldo López have been arrested on the vague grounds of “inciting violence through subliminal messages” and sentenced to prison for 14 years (Gonzalez 2019, 43). Lesser-known opponents or critics, like smaller government officials, journalists, or activists, have been found subject to routine physical and sexual assault, mutilation, electric shock, asphyxiation and other cruel and unusual forms of torture while being held in government detainment centers (Paúl 2022). Before an individual’s arrest or assassination, the United Nations investigative team discovered that their name would be found on a list of targets created by the government, with most of them being civilians. The government would then surveil these targets, occasionally “bug” their phones, then plant “evidence” on them and arrest these individuals without a warrant, essentially kidnapping them (Paúl 2022).

In addition to the severe atmosphere of political repression, economic corruption has been exemplified by Maduro’s administration by embezzling over \$300 billion between 2013 to 2019 (Third Way 2019, 2). Furthermore, Maduro has taken advantage of the current food crisis to use as political leverage. To get a starving population to vote for him again in 2018, Maduro placed food distribution centers right next to polling stations; citizens were concerned that if they did not vote for him, they would not have access, so Maduro won the 2018 election with 68% of the vote (Third Way 2019, 4). However, 54% of the total population abstained because they did not see the election as free and fair, and the United States as well as 53 other countries refused to recognize Maduro’s government

as democratic and legitimate; meanwhile, mass protests across the nation were met with military repression (Third Way 2019, 4). Juan Guáido declared himself the legitimate leader and president of Venezuela in 2018, yet until 2019, Maduro continued to hold office (Third Way 2019, 4). The political crisis in Venezuela has continued to exacerbate humanitarian conditions.

THE HUMANITARIAN CRISIS

We have mentioned within the economic and political crisis of Venezuela the nationwide shortage and inaccessibility of medicine and food. This section will dive deeper into the implications for citizens' health and mortality. The healthcare system gradually collapsed from 2014 to 2019. This had been due to the shortage of medicine, potable water, regular access to electricity, basic sanitation products, and the significant emigration of healthcare personnel as a result of deteriorating working conditions (Johns Hopkins 2019). The same has occurred to the nation's food system. Venezuela relied on imports for most of the country's sustenance, yet by the beginning of 2016, food imports decreased by 67% in favor of federal debt payments (Aponte and Martínez 2018). In addition, domestic food production had been falling since 2008 under Chavez. By the time the country came to rely on domestic food production, this industry was already severely weakened (Doocy et al. 2019).

In addition, preventative health measures like mosquito control and vaccinations have nearly buckled, bringing about the rapid growth of infectious diseases in the country (Johns Hopkins 2019). The conditions facing a vulnerable, impoverished, and unvaccinated population led to Venezuelan citizens being highly susceptible to infection. "Infectious

diseases thrive under the conditions of poverty, crowded living arrangements, and malnutrition that many Venezuelans face" (Page and Broner 2020). More than one million malaria cases were reported in 2018 and according to Venezuelan and Ausman, and the shortage of medicine paired with government corruption has allowed the inflow of poor-quality medicines to enter the country, inadequately addressing cases of disease (2019). This swell in infectious diseases in Venezuela had detrimental consequences for the region which will be discussed later in this essay.

For now, to further investigate the domestic situation of Venezuela's health care and humanitarian needs, we will look at the following information provided by Johns Hopkins University (2019):

Infant mortality rose by 63 percent and maternal mortality more than doubled from 2012 to 2016. Since 2016, outbreaks of measles and diphtheria have spread throughout the country and into neighboring countries. From 2016 to 2017, the country had the largest rate of increase of malaria in the world, with the number of cases growing to 414,527. Tuberculosis cases increased by 68 percent between 2014 and 2017. Only about 10 percent of HIV patients are receiving their prescribed antiretroviral treatment. There are widespread outages of birth control. Shortages have led to a black market where birth control pills cost 14 times the minimum monthly income. Ninety-eight percent of physicians in Venezuela believe the health-care crisis was the worst in 30 years and nearly three quarters believe that working conditions in public hospitals violate physician ethics and human rights.

In addition, over 30,000 doctors have left the country in the past decade, and a third of hospitals have entirely no access to potable water (“What is Happening?” 2022). 85% of medicines are unavailable or scarce and the vulnerable population continues to rise (Venezuelan and Ausman 2019). “The vulnerable population includes over 140,000 cancer patients, 300,000 with cardiological diseases, 300,000 chronic patients (i.e., Parkinson’s and hemophilia), and 79,000 people with HIV, who stopped receiving treatment since 2016 or receive it intermittently” (Venezuelan and Ausman 2019). The electricity crisis that hospitals face is another example of the state’s failure and inability to sufficiently provide for their domestic institutions:

The national electricity system collapsed on March 7, 2019, after 15 years of mismanagement, underinvestment, and corruption.

Successive blackouts began on March 7 and left the country without electricity, water, functioning hospitals, public transportation, and communications critical for payment system operations (Venezuelan and Ausman 2019).

As power outages continue frequently and unpredictably, some Venezuelans say that this is an example of a state unable to meet even its country’s basic needs. The electricity crisis is closely tied to the state’s growing health crisis.

The nongovernmental organization, Doctors for Health, states that in only four months in 2019, more than 1,500 patients died due to a lack of supplies (Puglie 2019). As a result of these precarious and depleted conditions, many hospitals across the country have closed or are operating at very limited capacity (Page & Broner 2020). Doctors report that water shortages can last from “weeks to months” and that most hospitals do not have the capacity for “x-

rays, laboratory tests, intensive care beds or units, and respirators” (Page and Broner 2020). In addition to a declining healthcare system, the Venezuelan people are facing severe poverty and acute malnutrition, with children and pregnant women being most vulnerable to the latter (Johns Hopkins 2019).

According to Doocy et al. (2017), 87% of households lived in poverty (a nearly 40% increase from 2014), 80% were food insecure, nearly 90% reported that they did not have sufficient income to purchase food, and about 64.3% of the population claimed to lose weight, the average weight loss being 11.4 kilograms among adults (2019) (UNICEF 2016). Attested by Benzaquen: “9.6 million people eat two or fewer meals a day and 93% of people cannot afford food” (2017). The IRC reported that 14% of all children under the age of 5 were suffering from acute malnutrition and 57% of pregnant women were in states of being malnourished (“What is Happening?” 2022). According to the Venezuelan Society of Childcare and Pediatrics, 72% of children arriving for emergency care did not come to address illness, but instead “dietary deficiencies” (Doocy et al. 2019). Between 2011 to 2013, pediatric hospital admissions for acute malnutrition ranged from 180 to 220. After the crisis in 2014, annual admissions surpassed 300 per year, peaking in 2017 with over 600 cases (Schuyler 2002).

Before the economic crisis in Venezuela, child malnutrition rates were not nearly as severe, and according to Sistema de Monitoreo, cases have tripled since 2014 (Doocy et al. 2019). According to the Venezuelan Health Ministry, child mortality has dramatically increased (Sarta 2017). Table 4 demonstrates the United Nations’ varying projections for the number

of children impacted by acute malnutrition as a result of the crisis.

Table 4: “United Nations’ Projections for Venezuelan Children with S.A.M for 2017 and 2018” (Doocy et al. 2019).

Table 2. Caseload projections of Venezuelan children with acute malnutrition (United Nations (UN); UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), 2018b; US Census Bureau).

Population Estimates	Acute Malnutrition Prevalence Rate	Projected Acute Malnutrition Caseload, Children 6–59 mos.
2017 Population Estimate	31,977,000 Pre-crisis	4.1% ¹¹ 109,380
Crisis Emigration (since 2015)	2,300,000 Moderate	5–9.9% 133,390–264,110
2018 Projected Population ^a	30,877,000 Serious	10–14.9% 266,780–384,163
2018 Children 6–59 months ^b	2,667,800 Critical	>15% >400,170

Children are massively impacted by this health and food crisis, and these two elements are the driving factors for emigration, particularly for families, as later discussed in this essay. As for pregnant women, a 2018 survey found that 38% of this group had acute malnutrition and 29.1% were anemic (Landaeta-Jimenez 2018). In numerous ways, the future generations of Venezuela are being severely impacted by this modern crisis.

The food crisis correlates with Venezuela’s political misadministration through the government’s program of CLAP (Comite Local de Abastecimiento y Producción) boxes, which is the distribution of food supplies throughout the country as relief. State insufficiency is demonstrated through the irregular disbursement of these necessary food distribution boxes, with boxes not being delivered for months at a time to 54% of families (Doocy et al. 2019). State corruption is exemplified through the conditional and political access of CLAP boxes, as “identity cards”, which exhibit an individual’s voting history, are required to be shown and “approved” in order to be

eligible to receive these (Doocy et al. 2019).

The systematic economic failure of the Venezuelan petrostate, the severely violent and undemocratic political repression present, and the growing humanitarian crisis have all contributed to a collapsed state. The largest consequence of this is a population unable to have their most basic socioeconomic and humanitarian needs met nor their voices heard in government. Due to the drastic and desperate situations in which many Venezuelan citizens live, millions of people have left the country, resulting in the Venezuelan exodus. This refugee crisis is immense in scale and the main driving factors for migration have been the lack of food and medical care as well as the extremity of violence, poverty, and political repression (Labrador and Merrow 2019). The majority of Venezuelan migrants have moved to neighboring Latin American and Caribbean countries. With their displacement has come the transmission of the regional effects of state failure, particularly elements of instability and increased risks of conflict.

THE VENEZUELAN EXODUS

“As of October 2019, 4.5 million Venezuelans have fled the country. This population is estimated to grow to 5.4 million by the end of 2019 and 7.5 million by the end of 2020” (“Venezuelan Displacement” 2019, 2). At the beginning of 2019, it was estimated by the United Nations that one in every ten Venezuelans have left the country (Third Way 2019, 2). Within the population of those displaced includes vulnerable demographic groups such as the elderly, children, disabled individuals, and pregnant women, and a large portion of those emigrating are families with small children (“Venezuelan Displacement” 2019, 2). A disclaimer is

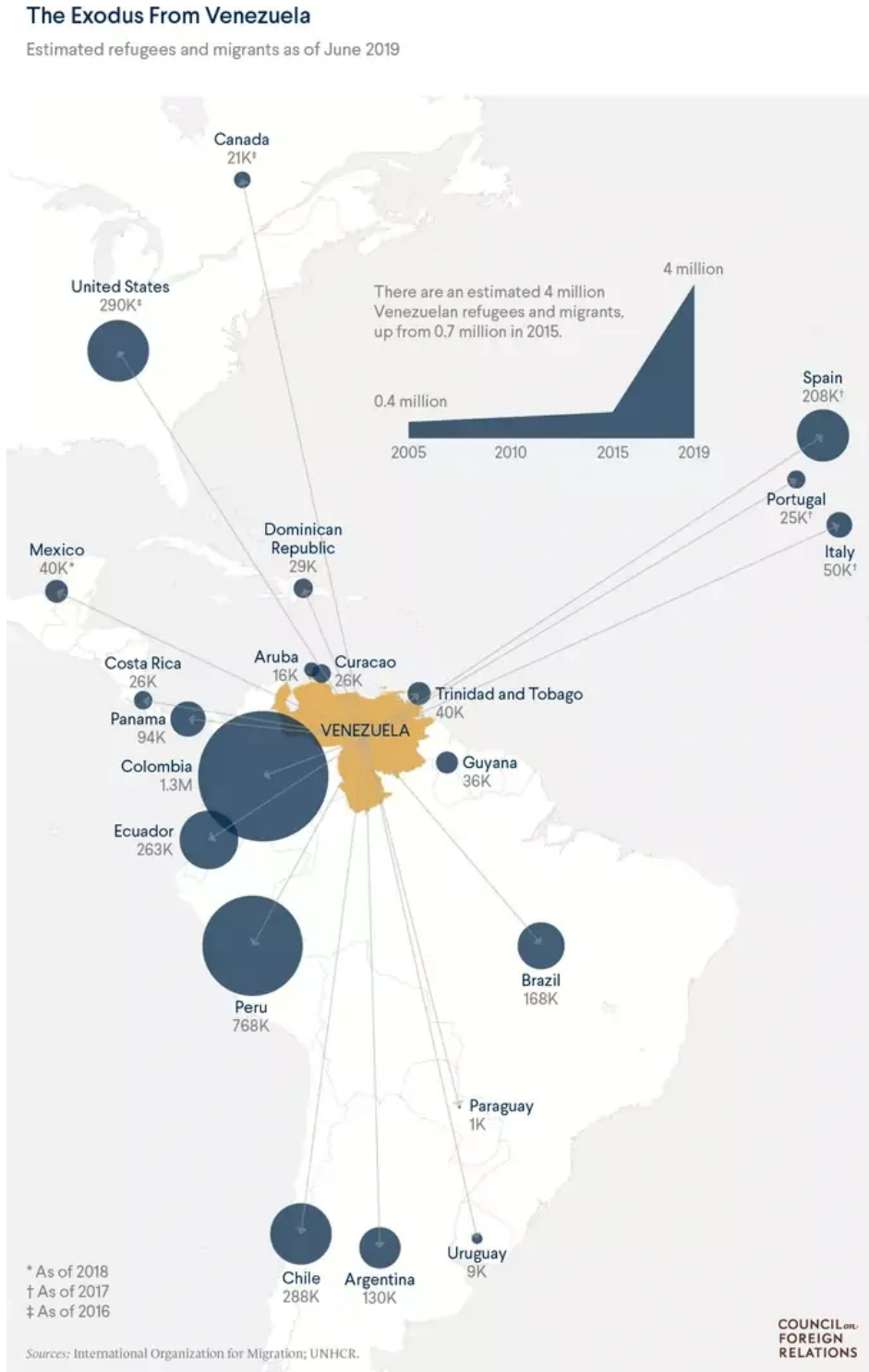
necessary to state that many of the international organizations referenced in this section do not clearly distinguish between refugees and migrants when referring to displaced Venezuelans, but consider their experiences to be shared and similar.

Where are the displaced going? What are their conditions like during travel and once they finally arrive at their destinations? Do their situations improve once they leave the country? According to Labrador and Merrow, “Approximately eight out of every ten Venezuelan migrants stay in Latin America and the Caribbean, while most of the remainder settle in North America and Southern Europe” (2019). As of 2019, Colombia hosts 1.4 million Venezuelan refugees (a 3,490% increase from 39,000 in 2015), Peru holds 860,900, Chile has 371,200, Ecuador 330,400 and Brazil hosts 212,400 Venezuelan refugees (“Venezuelan Displacement” 2019, 2). Yet, the majority of Venezuelans lack the documentation necessary to enter legally or stay for a prolonged period for most of these states. Due to this, they “are not guaranteed access to basic rights” (“Venezuela Crisis” 2023). Figures 8 and 9 show the amount of Venezuelan refugees in various Latin American countries between 2017 to 2018, and June 2019.

Figure 8: “Top Destinations for Venezuelan Migrants and Refugees between 2016 to 2018” (Third Way 2019, 3).



Figure 9: “The Exodus from Venezuela”
(Labrador & Merrow 2019).



Some changes to note between these two charts is the increase in Venezuelan refugees and migrants from 2018 to 2019 in Colombia, Peru, Chile, Panama, and Brazil. Colombia experienced a nearly 450,000 increase. Peru's was over 400,000. Chile's was over 180,000. Panama's was over 18,000 and Brazil's was over 118,000. These numbers show the immense scale of the Venezuelan refugee crisis and how the Venezuelan population is being dispersed across the entirety of Latin America.

During their intercontinental transit, the conditions that traveling Venezuelans face are adverse; over 50% reported risks while traveling ("Venezuelan Displacement" 2019, 2). "They travel hundreds of kilometers over days and weeks...Many suffer from exhaustion and illness" ("Venezuela Situation" 2023). Individuals experience injuries or severe blisters due to travel and face severe exposure to the elements, with many dying due to cold exposure ("Venezuela Situation" 2023). In addition, they experience a shortage of necessities like food, shelter, sufficient medical care and emotional support, as many citizens report experiencing severe trauma as a result of the current state of affairs in Venezuela (Page and Broner 2020). Even upon reaching their destinations, refugees may find cities or countries not accepting migrants, which means they then have to continue traveling by foot to the next location. Those who choose to enter illegally may find themselves at risk of being subjected to human trafficking to being recruited into a local armed group ("Venezuelan Displacement" 2019, 2).

All of the following information references the UNHCR ("Venezuela Crisis: Aid, Statistics, and News" 2023). As for those who are able to settle in neighboring states, they are still exposed to "heightened

risks of exploitation, trafficking, violence, discrimination and xenophobia" ("Venezuela Crisis: Aid, Statistics, and News" 2023). Many continue to live in severe conditions of poverty, overcrowded and unsanitary housing conditions, homelessness, and in states of moderate hunger.

Half of all refugees and migrants [from Venezuela] in Latin America and the Caribbean cannot afford three meals a day and lack access to safe and dignified housing. To access food or avoid homelessness, many Venezuelans resort to survival sex, begging or indebtedness (2023).

Many families take on debts to afford housing or sufficient access to food and remain at risk of exploitation and eviction. Political instability and economic hardship remain omnipresent throughout the region and the perceived increased competition for employment and social welfare that Venezuelans may impose to locals of neighboring states fuels sentiments of xenophobia and anti-Venezuelan discrimination. This has led to limited access to social services, jobs, schools, and other public spheres. Lack of sufficient legal documentation leads individuals to be more vulnerable to less-protected forms of income as well and leads to an increase of Venezuelan presence in the informal job sector. "Currently, the Venezuelan population is twice as likely to be unemployed as the local population and 93 percent with jobs work in the informal sector. Among Venezuelans, 78 percent identified a job as their greatest need." ("Colombia" 2022). This growing sentiment of social unrest and the perception of growing instability in the country as a result of Venezuelan refugees by locals, has led to different states in the region reversing their once-welcoming refugee and

migration policies (“Venezuelan Displacement” 2019, 2). In addition to enhanced feelings of social unrest and threat of internal conflict between locals and Venezuelan migrants, the collapse of Venezuela’s state as well as its healthcare infrastructure has had profound socioeconomic and medical consequences on the region.

THE REGIONAL CONSEQUENCES OF VENEZUELA’S STATE FAILURE

The two principal consequences for the region by the collapse of the Venezuelan petrostate and its humanitarian and migratory crisis has been the perceived socioeconomic strain this has imposed upon neighboring countries as well as a widespread medical crisis. The following section will detail the effects of the Venezuelan refugee crisis upon neighboring states, specifically Colombia as it has received the largest influx of Venezuelan migrants, and how their economy has been affected. The subsequent section will analyze the regional outbreak of infectious diseases stemming from Venezuela’s collapsed healthcare infrastructure and migratory dilemma.

THE REGIONAL SOCIOECONOMIC CONSEQUENCES OF VENEZUELA’S COLLAPSE

According to the International Rescue Committee (IRC), many Latin American countries receiving Venezuelan migrants, have already been experiencing their own economic hardships, armed conflicts, and stretched state capacities (2022). Prior to Venezuela’s collapse, neighboring states were already meeting complications regarding the provision of socioeconomic welfare to their local populations (Third Way 2019, 2). When large influxes of populations are combined with finite

resources, stagnant GDP growth, and underfunded public education and healthcare systems, this increases the region’s likelihood for instability and conflict (“Venezuelan Displacement” 2019, 1). Colombia alone holds “over 2.5 times as many Venezuelans as Germany does Syrians, with only eight percent of Germany’s GDP” (“Colombia” 2022). To summarize, regionally, Latin America was already struggling in multiple capacities, and did not have the secure socioeconomic or political foundation to effectively provide for Venezuelan migrants, which in turn, created heightened sentiments of xenophobia and competition by citizens of neighboring states.

Within Colombia, some citizens have perceived Venezuelans as competitors for job markets, social welfare, and medical attention, in addition to critiquing Venezuelans as the culprit for declining economic conditions in their state (IRC 2019). During the peak of the Venezuelan migration crisis, the following occurred in Colombia: “Real wages dropped 3-6 percent due to an increase in migration. National poverty rates did not decrease from 2017 to 2018 (for the first time since 2002)”, in addition to population adjustments costing Colombia approximately \$1.5 billion in public services (“Colombia” 2022, 2). Colombia has not been the only neighboring state where socioeconomic conditions were exacerbated as a result of the disaster in Venezuela.

Declining economic conditions and social support for migrants has occurred in both Ecuador and Peru, and as a result, they have introduced enhanced restrictions for migration, such as passport requirements, criminal record certificates or simply discontinuing short-term stays within their borders (IRC 2019). The requirement of a legal document like passports or criminal

record certificates more than halved official entries into Ecuador in just three months in 2019 (IRC 2019). What makes this requirement difficult is that it is hard to obtain a passport or legal document in Venezuela, as the state is unreliable and slow in its administration and that it is too expensive for most Venezuelans to afford (IRC 2019). Due to these requirements, illegal entries have increased by almost 30%, intensifying the risks of sexual and gang violence or exploitation that Venezuelans may face during and after their migratory journeys (IRC 2019). The Venezuelan state collapse and refugee crisis has had a significant impact on the region economically as well as socially, and as social unrest begins to grow in the face of xenophobia, regional crisis factors like instability and conflict become more likely in the near future.

DISEASE AS A REGIONAL CONSEQUENCE OF STATE FAILURE

With the collapse of the Venezuelan petrostate came the downfall of its healthcare system. Contractions of highly infectious diseases, like malaria, measles, and diphtheria spiked considerably following Venezuela's state failure (Venezuelan & Ausman 2019; Faiola et al. 2018). The mass movement of hundreds of thousands of potentially infected Venezuelans seeking medical and humanitarian aid exacerbated the spread of disease throughout the region and magnified Latin America's preexisting weakness of vaccination programs (Faiola et al. 2018). Outbreaks of infectious diseases overtook not only Venezuela, but Brazil, Argentina, Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru; with elements of economic, social, and medical crisis dispersed throughout the region (Faiola et al. 2018). According to the Pan American Health Organization, the

Americas was the first region in the world to eliminate measles, yet vaccine shortages and the breakdown of Venezuela's healthcare both contributed to the surge of the Latin American measles epidemic in 2018 that spread to over 14 countries (Page and Broner 2020).

While already under capacity to address the healthcare needs of a healthy domestic population, Latin American healthcare systems were unable to contain the measles epidemic before it spread to hundreds of thousands of individuals. In February 2018, one Venezuelan child contracted measles while crossing the Brazilian border; by October, more than ten thousand individuals were infected in the Amazonas state alone and evolving at a rate of 170 patients a week (Faiola et al. 2018). The immensity of the outbreak left thousands hospitalized and strained an underprepared and overwhelmed regional healthcare system. Meanwhile, between 2014 to 2017, malaria cases in the Latin American region more than tripled, with 406,289 cases existing in Brazil in 2017 alone (Faiola et al. 2018). Authorities from both Brazil and Peru have claimed the increase in migrant flows to have greatly contributed to these growing outbreaks of measles and malaria. Diphtheria ravaged the region as well with over 1,000 cases reported between 2016 to 2018, particularly affecting border regions in Colombia with a fatality rate of 14.7 % (Jamaica Observer 2018).

Due to the medical crisis, regional sentiments of anger and social instability grew in response to Venezuela's state failure and incapacity to care for its own citizens. This mindset led to the widespread discrimination and maltreatment of Venezuelans across Latin America and more closed border policies. Despite migration restrictions, regional vulnerability was exposed through porous

borders, the widespread transmission of disease, the weakened capacity of hospitals, and sparse preventative healthcare programs.

CONCLUSION

The weakness of a petrostate lies in its extreme reliance on oil revenues for the socioeconomic fate of the country. The policies of Hugo Chavez at the turn of the 21st century had long standing consequences that weakened Venezuela's ability to veer away from oil, ultimately leading to the state's collapse when global oil prices plummeted in 2014. Maduro's poor political and economic choices exacerbated a nation in an already precarious state and worsened the political and humanitarian crisis in Venezuela. In terms of humanity, economics, and politics, the Venezuelan people were neglected, impoverished, repressed, and suffering. As a tenth of the Venezuelan population fled their home country to neighboring states in search of relief and aid, the region as a whole felt the consequences of state failure through increased risks of social unrest, economic instability, and the widespread health epidemic. The spread of disease fully bared the region's weakness in vaccination programs and states' capacities to contain disease. This builds upon the theoretical framework that state failure often occurs in regions that are already exhibiting weakness and instability, and the limited state capacities of Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru demonstrated this argument, as well as the extensive susceptibility of Latin American citizens to preventable contagious diseases. As demonstrated by this paper, through the story of the Venezuelan petrostate, its shortcomings and its eventual failure, state collapse imposes profound and often detrimental

consequences for the region, as seen by the events discussed in Latin America.

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