

The University of Akron

IdeaExchange@UAkron

Williams Honors College, Honors Research
Projects

The Dr. Gary B. and Pamela S. Williams Honors
College

Summer 2021

The Impact of Human Rights Abuses and Emigration in Venezuela

Caroline Hanna
cgh24@zips.uakron.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://ideaexchange.uakron.edu/honors_research_projects



Part of the [International Relations Commons](#)

Please take a moment to share how this work helps you [through this survey](#). Your feedback will be important as we plan further development of our repository.

Recommended Citation

Hanna, Caroline, "The Impact of Human Rights Abuses and Emigration in Venezuela" (2021).
Williams Honors College, Honors Research Projects. 1439.

https://ideaexchange.uakron.edu/honors_research_projects/1439

This Dissertation/Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by The Dr. Gary B. and Pamela S. Williams Honors College at IdeaExchange@UAkron, the institutional repository of The University of Akron in Akron, Ohio, USA. It has been accepted for inclusion in Williams Honors College, Honors Research Projects by an authorized administrator of IdeaExchange@UAkron. For more information, please contact mjon@uakron.edu, uapress@uakron.edu.

The Impact of Human Rights Abuses and
Emigration in Venezuela
Caroline Hanna
Honors Research Project – Political Science

Introduction

This research paper analyzes the connection between human rights abuses committed by the Nicolas Maduro regime and the high levels of emigration. These human rights issues are addressed by the research question: Have the existing human rights abuses that are committed by the Maduro government led to the high levels of emigration that has greatly impacted many countries? Human rights abuses are a significant issue within the Venezuelan state, and it is important to address other variables some of which include the economic situation, a decaying public health care system, fraudulent elections, COVID-19, and external state actors that have led many people to lose faith in their political institutions and forced them to look for new opportunities in other countries. A majority of these human rights abuses occurred during the Hugo Chavez regime in the 1990s to 2010s and the situation has worsened since Nicolas Maduro took control of the country. Research in this area has been growing as many countries, including the United States, struggle to create a coherent strategy to the Venezuelan crisis. As the international system continues to grapple with the issue of Venezuela in light of new political situations, this research question will have continuing importance for foreign policy makers both in United States and abroad.

Literature Review

Emigration from Venezuela and human rights abuses are pressing issues for the Western Hemisphere and will continue to be as long as the Maduro regime maintains power. The independent variables I will focus on include: freedom of the press, political repression, repression of the opposition party, COVID-19 and a decaying healthcare system, arbitrary violence sponsored by the government, arbitrary detentions, the economic sanctions placed by

external actors, the amount of foreign aid being received by Venezuela, and immigration policies of receiving countries. These independent variables all play a role in explaining the dependent variable of emigration from Venezuela. There is a broad consensus regarding the importance of these variables and how they affect migration flows and the frequency human rights abuses perpetrated by the Maduro regime.

The Maduro regime has continuously denied freedom of the press and access to information by the general population. There are multiple laws prohibiting criticism of the regime or the President and have been used to detain reporters and people from the general population (State Department). Both journalists and private citizens have been targets of these laws as 24 people were arrested for criticizing the government over the internet and 39 journalists were detained in three months in 2018 (State Department). A majority of the news that is easily accessible, is promoted by state run entities or are former state entities that are still easily pressured by the Venezuelan government. The Venezuelan government has made it evident that freedom of speech, freedom of press, and the free exchange of ideas will not be tolerated. These are direct violations of human rights that are standard within the international community.

The human rights conditions in Venezuela have deteriorated since Nicolás Maduro came into power in 2013. Many of the examples given throughout this paper are human rights violations, such as the lack of free and fair elections or the inability to access adequate medical care. But there are also a variety of other human rights abuses that occur in Venezuela that are also perpetrated by the Maduro government. Arbitrary arrests of political figures and average citizens that oppose the government are normal occurrences under the Maduro regime and since 2014 over 15,000 people have been arrested through connections to different protests (Human

Rights Watch). Some of these arrests include warrantless arrests at people's homes and being charged under military courts which is standard under dictatorships and is not a new practice in Latin America. It is also reported that torture once people are arrested has occurred, but there is no way to verify the number of deaths that have occurred due to this or the number of people that have suffered as there is no transparency (Human Rights Watch). The use of the military to prop up the Maduro regime is to be expected as the authoritarian government under Maduro provides a breeding environment that allows for military to repress the population without oversight (Davenport, 1995).

Connected to arbitrary arrests is the violence perpetrated by the government that occurs daily in the country. Venezuela is one of the countries with the highest numbers of violent homicide and in 2017 the *Observatorio de Venezuela* found that 26,616 violent deaths were reported and that 15 people were killed per day by the police or the military (Buxton, 2018). It is important to note that these numbers are likely owing to the corrupt criminal justice system and the lack of accurate reporting in the nation. While the country had a ban on private gun ownership, this law did not make a dent in the number of violent deaths in the country (Buxton, 2018). These numbers have increased owing to the high numbers of *colectivos* (armed groups propped up by the Venezuelan government) and the presence of *Las Fuerzas de Acciones Especiales* (FAES) in the country.

When there are high numbers of arbitrary detentions, and the high levels of government sponsored violence, it is likely that the international community will see high levels of irregular migration from the afflicted country. Many arbitrary detentions are related to opposition politics and protests in Venezuela. This mirrors what has happened in many autocratic regimes throughout the world. In order to maintain power, countries such as Cambodia, Zimbabwe, and

Iran have unlawfully detained political dissidents and potential political candidates in order to maintain power (Hafner-Burton, Hyde, and Jablonski, 2014). These arbitrary detentions limit the power of the opposition party and create democratic backsliding. These detentions of protestors and political candidates have been used in South America under many dictators including in Chile and Argentina in the 1970s and 80s. State sponsored violence has also been a tool for governments to control dissidents. The Fujimori government in Peru during the 1990s used paramilitary groups such as the one named *rondas campesinas* (peasant defense groups) in order to attack dissidents that followed the ideas of *Sendero Luminoso* (Burt, 2006). In all of these situations there were migration flows that stemmed from the fear of retribution and the inability to express political thoughts freely, therefore I theorize that the arbitrary detentions and government backed violence in Venezuela is one of the causes of emigration.

When freedom of the press is threatened or restricted, more people will begin to emigrate from their country and Venezuela is no exception. The media has always played a watchdog role in society, and it is expected that the media reports on human rights abuses perpetrated by the government. In authoritarian regimes the media is often restricted, and journalists are often the target of attacks. With a lack of free reporting, the population is unable to trust its government as the government is able to repress its citizens with no independent watchdog to notify the public of its actions. In this paper, media refers to both newsprint and digital independent businesses. Demonstrated in the articles by Whitten-Woodring and Kim et. al. (2014), a cyclical relationship exists between the media, the general population, and the authoritarian government that is displayed in Venezuela. While traditional media has been restricted, there is still some media reporting regarding human rights abuses by the government. When these abuses occur, the population has protested and their demands have been met with force and repression instead of

government reform. This force includes the use of police and military force against civilians, forced disappearances, and arbitrary detentions. This cycle has continued, but I take the cyclical theory a step further as the opposition now fears the power of the government less people are willing to risk the consequences of protesting. This additional step is where the connection between emigration and restricted media is highlighted. In connection with the cyclical theory, I theorize that as media becomes more restricted and the general population protests less, migration becomes the only option to obtain the freedoms that the population does not have in its own country.

Political repression also plays a role in the human rights abuses and migration that occurs in Venezuela. Since 2013, Nicolas Maduro has consistently manipulated the government system to aid him, his supporters, and the military. Political repression in this context is defined by manipulating elections and limiting the power of the opposition forces within Venezuela. Mostly recently in 2020, Venezuela held parliamentary elections in order to elect new representatives to the National People's Assembly. The election was widely regarded by the international community as a power play by the Maduro government in order to consolidate power in the last branch of government that the opposition controlled (Sequera, Buitrago, 2020). The opposition party refused to participate, demonstrating that regardless of their influence the election would be rigged (Reuters). Maduro has also limited the effectiveness of the opposition party in general. Maduro has removed members of the opposition party from elections at all levels of government through a variety of tactics, but the most well-known case was the house arrest of Leopoldo Lopez in 2017 (Third Way). The arrest of Leopoldo Lopez came after he spent three years in a military prison for inciting violence against the Maduro regime (LA Times). Leopoldo Lopez was a well-known opposition leader that has supported Juan Guaidó as the rightful president of

Venezuela and the opposition movement even as he escaped in 2020 to Spain to be with his family and continues to support the opposition movement (Maria Delgado, 2020).

Elections are one of the key elements to free society and democracy, but the Maduro regime has almost eliminated its opposition party while it holds fraudulent elections in order to maintain power. While an opposition party and movement does exist in Venezuela, it is severely restricted which allows the status quo to be maintained. Venezuela is what Donno (2019) would refer to as a Competitive Authoritarian Regime (CAR) as the opposition party has candidates in elections and there are members that hold political office although not enough to create a majority. CAR governments are not likely to transition to democracies due to the control that the state maintains over elections and Venezuela will mostly likely maintain its current status as there is not enough international pressure to hold credible elections. The repression of the opposition party in Venezuela becomes worse during and after elections as Nicolás Maduro attempts to debilitate the opposition party and movement even more. This repression is standard practice in a regime that is attempting to maintain power as they are under a certain level of pressure domestically and abroad (Pop Eleches and Robertson, 2015). Without the opportunity to vote freely and express differing opinions than those of the government without fear of retaliation, I theorize that people will be forced to migrate elsewhere. This situation is not uncommon in South America and can be seen currently in other countries like Nicaragua as the Ortega regime detains members of the opposition party in order to eliminate competitors in elections.

Owing to the human rights abuses and poor conditions that Venezuelans live in under the Maduro government, many democracies, particularly Western democracies, have placed economic sanctions on Venezuela. While there has been a variety of sanctions placed on

individuals within the Venezuelan government, there have also been broader sanctions placed by the United States that have impacted the country's population negatively. One of the biggest financial sanctions placed by the Trump Administration was prohibiting access to American markets by any entity of the Venezuelan government (FAS, 2021). This included the state-owned oil company *Petróleos de Venezuela S.A.* This adversely affected the economy, leading to less jobs than there were already. This action in addition to Executive Order 13835, which prohibited the purchasing of Venezuelan debt, left the country unable to renegotiate their debt leading to extreme belt tightening (FAS, 2021). Owing to the belt tightening, the few social programs that still existed under Maduro lost significant funding. These sanctions are typical of a U.S. response to far-left regimes and have been utilized in South America for decades.

The European Union and the United States have both taken significant action against individuals that have propped up the Maduro regime and benefited from their corruption. Under the Trump Administration, the Treasury Department implemented a variety of individual sanctions that included Nicolas Maduro, his wife and son, along with multiple members of the Supreme Court, and leaders of the army and police (FAS, 2021). These sanctions helped target those individuals benefiting from the suppression of the Venezuelan people while creating the least amount of damage to the economy overall.

While economic sanctions may not be intended to affect the general population, most of the time economic sanctions imposed by external actors have devastating effects on the economy which forces people to look elsewhere for economic opportunities. Economic sanctions against authoritarian regimes, particularly personalist dictators like Nicolás Maduro, strengthen the resolve of a government and move the country further away from liberal tendencies (Walldorf Jr., 2014). By strengthening the resolve of the government but hurting its overall economy

personalist dictators are forced to reallocate money (Escribà-Folch and Wright, 2010). These actions typically result in more money being placed in the military or other areas that will help the regime maintain power and less money being allocated for social services (Escribà-Folch and Wright, 2010). Without acceptable levels of social services, especially in a country such as Venezuela where these services were promised *chavismo* (the leftist political ideology that adheres to Hugo Chávez's political ideals), people must live with less than normal. Without proper social services many people begin to look for other options including migration. Economic sanctions do not harm personalist dictators but places the burden on the general population which forces them to immigrate.

Even though multiple countries have sanctioned Venezuela, there are a variety of countries that have supported both Hugo Chávez and Nicolas Maduro which has helped keep the government afloat despite its challenges and setbacks. Some of these countries include China, Russia, and Cuba. Cuba has supported Venezuela since the beginning of the Chávez regime and while their impact may not be as strong now, their actions helped create some of the issues seen today. Both China and Russia pose as threats to regional stability due to their involvement with both the Chávez and the Maduro regimes. Both countries have provided economic aid, resources, and political cover to Nicolas Maduro when needed.

While economic sanctions have the ability to cripple an economy, foreign aid, such as the one given by China, Cuba, and Russia to Venezuela's dictators can help mitigate the effects of sanctions. Supporting actions by external actors can help prop up a regime that disregards human rights, therefore when this occurs more people will migrate in order to escape the conditions in their home country. When malign external actors provide foreign aid to autocratic regimes it stabilizes the regime and reinforces the actions of those in power (Bader and Faust, 2014). In

addition to this, foreign aid is also sent to countries where the leader is in danger of losing power (Licht, 2010). Therefore, it is understandable that leaders of autocratic regimes in need of foreign aid are supported by malign actors. With this support, leaders are able to funnel money into holding on to power instead of allocating the money towards public services. Since the Chavez regime, foreign actors have supported Venezuela which has impacted its citizens. Owing to the previous research in this area and Venezuela's history, it can be assumed that the foreign aid provided to Venezuela by external actors has led to influxes in irregular migration.

Adding to an unstable economy that has worsened under the Maduro regime, the COVID-19 pandemic has created new issues. A growing concern in South America and globally is the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic will have on migrants. This impact has already played a large role in Venezuela as many countries around the world hit the one-year anniversary of coronavirus shutting down their nations and economy. According to Castilla and Sørensen (2019), many migrants that had crossed the border prior to coronavirus displayed malnourishment and due to the lack of access to medicine in the country. COVID-19 has exacerbated these issues as many hospitals lack running water and soap in addition to the necessary medical supplies like ventilators that help fight the virus (Reeves, 2020). In 2017, labs were only able to process at 20% capacity and 85% of medicines were unavailable (Buxton, 2018). Owing to these issues, many Venezuelans have looked to other countries to live in but many receiving countries have shut down their borders. Those that are able to leave move towards Colombia, as the border between the two countries is largely unguarded and there are ways around the shutdown entry ports (Palau, Rueda, 2020). There is a growing consensus that COVID-19 has impacted more than just the number of migrants leaving Venezuela. Many

countries are turning away migrants or placing them into quarantine or isolation centers that will actually increase the spread of the disease (Ellis, 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted and exacerbated the shortcomings of healthcare systems worldwide, but natural disasters have been leading causes of emigration throughout history. An example of this is in 2010 when Haiti was rocked by a 7.0 earthquake which led to an immediate influx of migrants (Diaz, 2020). While COVID-19 is a natural disaster like the earthquake in Haiti, it differs in many ways. The migration flow that stems from COVID-19 will be vastly different than the migration flow seen by the international community in 2010. People were unable to travel for over a year and while irregular migration still occurred the rates significantly slowed. Prior to the pandemic, it was expected that the Venezuelan migration crisis would surpass the Syrian refugee crisis in 2020 which did not occur due to the pandemic. Therefore I theorize that COVID-19 limited opportunities for migration but exacerbated the conditions that cause migration therefore, as restrictions ease on travel and more countries begin to take in migrants again there will be a surge of Venezuelans leaving.

During the pandemic it was expected that the Venezuelan economy would shrink by 25 percent which would increase the lack of economic opportunities in the country (Santarelli, 2020). In the article by Nel and Righarts (2008), motive is a concept used as a reason for civil unrest, but in this situation it can be applied to migration as well. Venezuela's lack of economic opportunities, deteriorating healthcare system, lack of funding for public services, high levels of poverty, and high levels of food insecurity are motives for people to leave. COVID-19 has exacerbated all of these factors which will lead to sharp increase in migrants in the near future. Natural disasters have always been a main cause of migration and Venezuela and COVID-19 will be no exception.

The final important factor is the policies that receiving countries have towards migrants in general but more particularly towards migrants from Venezuela. South American countries such as Colombia, Ecuador, Chile, and Peru, but other countries have also been impacted such as the United States and Spain (Cheatham, Cara Labrador, 2021). Many countries have taken in hundreds of thousands of migrants and are now facing an unprecedented situation with COVID-19. In the article by Castilla and Sørensen (2019), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the International Organization for migration estimated over 5,380,000 migrants would have left Venezuela by 2019, therefore it is possible that this migration flow could top the Syrian Refugee crisis. This means that as migrants start to travel again it is obvious that the international community is not prepared to handle the influx of migrants that many countries will see in the coming months and years.

As countries begin to open their doors and change their immigration policies, more migrants are willing to leave their homes in search of refuge. The history of migration in South America is complicated as many countries have experienced both immigration and migration depending on different factors such as economic opportunity and regime change (Durand and Massey, 2010). Emigration that is caused by autocratic regimes has been documented in South America since the mid-1900s (Cerrutti and Parrado, 2015). Some of these countries include in the Stroessner dictatorship in Paraguay, the Pinochet regime in Chile, and many other military coups throughout the Southern Cone (Cerrutti and Parrado, 2015). During these migration flows open door policies helped migrants find work and assimilate until they were able to return to their home country, if they choose to do so. Therefore it is not surprising that many South American countries have taken in Venezuelan migrants, but what is different with this migration is the increasing number of migrants that are leaving. I theorize that the open-door policies that

have been used by many South American countries have put into place again will lead to more Venezuelans emigrating.

Hypotheses

Human rights abuses span a variety of different areas in daily life from a lack of free and fair elections to arbitrary detentions. There are a variety of variables that fall under human rights abuses that may have a connection to the influx of migrants leaving Venezuela. While there is debate about how much these abuses impact the average citizen, an example being the detention of opposition leader Leopoldo Lopez, it is clear that many Venezuelans have felt the effects of the Maduro regime and have been forced to leave. For some migrants it is a variety of these human rights abuses that have forced them to flee their homes. The Maduro regime has held power in Venezuela since 2013 and the lives of Venezuelans has progressively gotten worse.

It is important to note that migration within South America owing to autocratic regimes and human rights violations (Cerrutti and Parrado, 2015). What separates the Venezuelan migration crisis from past migration history is the historic number of people that have left Venezuela which currently is estimated to over 5 million. While there are many other factors that lead to migration, it is important to recognize that human rights abuses perpetrated by the government. have been a leading problem in South America since the mid-1900s. For these reasons, I argue that the various human rights abuses perpetrated by the Chavez and Maduro regime have caused emigration from Venezuela. The hypotheses I propose are:

H1: As the Maduro government limits freedom of the press, more people will flee Venezuela.

H2: As the Maduro regimes represses the political system, more people will immigrate to other countries.

H3: As the Maduro regimes represses the opposition party, more people will immigrate to other countries.

H4: As arbitrary detentions continue; more people will emigrate from Venezuela.

H5: As state sponsored violence continues to be a problem in Venezuela, more people will immigrate to other countries.

H6: As external actors place economic sanctions, there will be more Venezuelans leaving their home country.

H7: Foreign aid has supported the Maduro regime, which has increased the number of migrants leaving Venezuela.

H8: As COVID-19 pandemic continues worsen, there will be increased levels of emigration from Venezuela to other nations.

H9: As receiving countries open their borders, more Venezuelan migrants will leave their country.

Analysis

Freedom of the Press

Since the Chavez regime, freedom of the press has been limited and Nicolás Maduro has furthered the actions of his predecessor. Media and the press have been the target of the state since Maduro came to power in 2013. Some of the actions used to target the press include controlling news outlets/broadcasts that are critical of the regime through censorship, detentions of journalists, deporting journalists, and the spread of false information that is broadcasted by state media. These actions have left many Venezuelans without the basic information that is used in daily life such as information regarding elections, politics, and violence. Without this information, the Maduro regime has been able to continue its oppression of the Venezuelan

population without independent reporting to address the issue. While general oppression increases in Venezuela, so does the number of migrants looking to leave. This repression of free media and increase in propaganda from the government has impacted many Venezuelans decision to immigrate.

State run media outlets have become more common under the Maduro regime which has led to less independent reporting. Since 2013, 115 media outlets have closed under the Maduro regime which has left the population with few options to choose from (Share America). By eliminating potential media outlets, the Venezuelan government can control the storyline. Many times, this storyline includes false information or censorship that is intended to prop up the Maduro regime. An example of false information is when there was a historic blackout that lasted longer than five days that impacted almost the entire country (The Borgen Project). While the cause of the blackout was a technical issue at the Guri Dam that supplies 80% percent of the country with power it was originally reported by Nicolás Maduro that the cause was an cyberattack perpetrated by the United States (The Borgen Project). When false information is spread by government entities and there is no independent watchdog to contradict or investigate those statements, the general population is left in the dark wondering whether they can trust their government which attributes to the democratic backsliding that has plagued Venezuela since the early 2000s. When democratic backsliding occurs, it common to see waves of out migration from the affected country.

While false information is a threat to Venezuela, so is censorship. Under the Maduro government censorship has become more common and occurs in a variety of ways. One way that the government censors independent media is through legal investigations (Human Rights Watch). A newspaper business, *Panorama*, was forced to shut down when the business came

under investigation by the Administration of Customs, Duties, and Taxes for alleged improper actions regarding the business's taxes (Human Rights Watch). A second example of legal action is when *La Patilla*, a news website, had multiple members of its staff, including founder Alberto Ravell, faced a criminal defamation lawsuit after republishing information from a foreign news source that stated Diosdado Cabello, a pro Maduro politician, was involved in drug trafficking (Human Rights Watch). During this lawsuit a court order attempted to force Ravell and the staff to stay in Venezuela which led to Ravell and other staff members fleeing the country. Another tool for censorship that the government utilizes is blocking access to a variety of websites and social media platforms. This form of censorship is the most effective because it eliminates messaging from international sources and the opposition party. The Maduro regime has blocked access to YouTube, Instagram, Periscope, online news sites, and VPNs to control the flow of information (Nugent, 2019). It is also common for live events or speeches from Juan Guaido streamed on social media or other websites to be inaccessible as the Maduro regime will shut down access to the platform (Nugent, 2019). Internet freedom has steadily decreased in Venezuela under the Maduro regime which can be demonstrated in Figure 1 that includes Freedom House scores and various examples. According to *Venezuela Sin Filtro*, an independent internet freedom watchdog in Venezuela, in 2019 there was a concert in Colombia to raise awareness and funds for aid to go to Venezuela and the Venezuelan government blocked live streams of the concert. Censorship is a threat to democracy and when people are unable to access information it leads them to distrust their government and potentially leave their country.

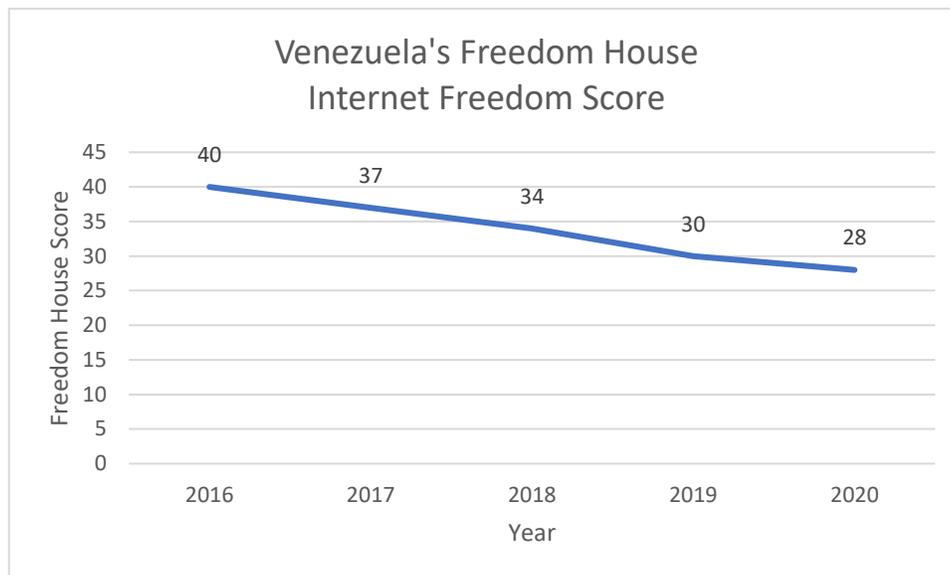


Figure 1 Source: Freedom House

Detentions and deportations of independent journalists have become common practice in Venezuela which has repressed independent media as people become fearful to report on issues. According to Reporters Without Borders, it is common for domestic journalists to face threats and physical violence whereas foreign journalists are arrested and deported. These are tools that the Maduro regime uses in order to suppress independent journalism and control the media. In 2018, 22 journalists were detained, and less than six months into 2019, 39 journalists had been detained (Share America). These numbers reflect a need for the Maduro regime to control journalists to maintain power. There have also been various reports of physical violence against journalists. One example is when Elyangelica Gonzalez, a reporter from *Univision*, was attacked by the Venezuelan military when covering a protest in 2017 (Share America). Luis Carlos Díaz, an employee of *Unión Radio*, was arrested on his way home from working at a local radio station and while under arrest was tortured by the Venezuelan government (Share America). Jorge Ramos, who worked for *Univision*, was deported from Venezuela after his crew's materials were confiscated because he asked Nicolás Maduro to address human rights abuses and the increasing issue of food insecurity in the country (Share America).

Another journalist Joseph Poliszuk has also been held by Venezuelan police and other security forces in connection with his investigative journalism that mostly addresses corruption

within the Venezuelan government (Nugent, 2019). Detentions of journalists became a larger issue during COVID-19. Many reporters believed that COVID-19 cases were being underreported by the government and many independent news organizations wanted to investigate. Between March 2020 and July 2020 15 reporters were detained by Venezuelan authorities (Pulitzer Center). Gleybert Asencio, Yonathan Torres, and Ronald Montaña, members of a digital news media source, *Crónico Uno*, were detained by Venezuelan forces when reporting on COVID-19 and were accused of falsely increasing the number of COVID-19 positive cases in their stories (Pulitzer Center).

Repression of journalists has forced reporters and their families to leave the country citing safety concerns (Reporters Without Borders). Tamoá Calzadilla ran the investigative team for *Últimas Noticias*, which forced her to publish information regarding protesters that had no factual basis (Human Rights Watch). This incident forced her quit her job as she could not continue to publish false or misleading information. Calzadilla's husband, David Maris, interviewed Leopoldo López's wife for his job, but the Bolivarian National Guard took his camera and equipment to stop publication of the interview (Human Rights Watch). These incidents forced Calzadilla and Maris to leave the country, they now work for Univision in Miami, Florida (Human Rights Watch). When journalists face abuses by the government the role of watchdog is eroded, and people lose faith in their government. Repressing freedom of the press not only forces journalists and their families to leave the country but pushes others to leave their homes as well.

Political Repression

Over the last eight years, Nicolás Maduro has consolidated government power to solidify his political power. There have been two main tactics used by Maduro to gain power and these

include holding fraudulent elections and altering the composition of the government. By using these tactics, the Venezuelan government has lost its democratic characteristics and moved towards an authoritarian regime. Since 2013, the Venezuelan population has slowly lost control of its government and these actions have forced many people to leave Venezuela in search of refuge.

Manipulating elections has been one of the main tools used by the Maduro regime to increase their power. There are three main examples that demonstrate how Nicolás Maduro has been able to effectively consolidate power through election manipulation. First, in 2017, Maduro announced the creation of National Constituent Assembly in 2017 “as a mechanism for conflict resolution” (Buxton, 2018). This move was used to bypass the legitimate national legislature of Venezuela (the National People’s Assembly). The action was widely regarded by the international community as another power move by the Maduro regime and the National People’s Assembly rejected the move as well. After this national decree and national elections for the NCA Smartmatic, the voting service for Venezuela, went public with information that the number of voters had been manipulated by the government demonstrating that election was unfair (Buxton, 2018). According to Buxton (2018), the Venezuelan government stated that 8.1 million Venezuelans had voted when, 30 minutes prior to polls closing, only 3.7 million Venezuelans had voted.

Second, in 2020 Venezuela held parliamentary elections which were severely restricted as many members of the opposition were not able to run (Sequera, Buitrago, 2020). The election was seen as a power move by the Maduro regime to hold power in all three branches of government. By severely restricting opposition parties, Maduro’s party was able to easily win a majority within the National People’s Assembly. Finally, and in conjunction with the 2020

elections, Nicolás Maduro placed food centers next to polling stations to influence the outcome of the election (Third Way). This action preyed on a population that is food insecure in order to alter the status quo (USAID).

During Nicolás Maduro's time in power, he has been able to gain control of both the legislature and the Supreme Court. While his power within the legislature mostly stemmed from election manipulation and repression of the opposition party, it was also supported by the Supreme Court. In 2015, Maduro exercised his power through a lame duck Congress to expand the Supreme Court to thirteen members (Vyas, Kurmanaev, 2015). This action allowed Maduro to effectively control the actions of the next Congress, but more importantly allowed the Supreme Court to create laws that allowed Maduro's party to win in the 2020 elections and control two opposing parties (Vyas, Kurmanaev, 2015). By manipulating the composition of the government, holding fraudulent elections, and creating the NCA, Nicolás Maduro has repressed the political system of Venezuela. Its population is unable to vote freely and all democratic norms that act as checks and balances have been eliminated. Without the ability to participate in government nor petition their government for changes, many Venezuelans feel as if there is no hope and the only way to create a better life is to migrate.

Repression of the Opposition Party

One human rights abuse that has occurred under Nicolás Maduro is repressing the opposition party. Many of the actions that repress the opposition party fall under a variety of human rights abuses such as lack of free speech, arbitrary detentions, and a lack of fair and free elections. Without a strong opposition party, the Maduro government has been able to strengthen itself to the point where it is nearly untouchable. The Venezuelan population has no legitimate alternative to the Maduro regime and without the opportunity to vote in an opposition party that

is focused on rebuilding their country, many Venezuelans have made the difficult choice to leave their home.

Nicolás Maduro has arrested not only dissidents and journalists that oppose his views, but also prominent political leaders of the opposition movement. Arbitrary detentions will be analyzed in the next section of this analysis, but it is important to recognize some important arrests. Most recently, two congressmen were arrested in 2020 by *Las Fuerzas Acciones Especiales* (Amnesty International). Congressman Renzo Prieto was arrested in March 2020 with two of his assistants after they participated in pro Guaido protest (U.S. Embassy Venezuela). This is the second time that Prieto has been arrested under the Maduro regime with his first arbitrary arrest occurring in 2014 which lasted four years as he was held at *El Helicoide* (Amnesty International). Congressman Gilber Caro was arrested at the end of 2019 and his detention continued into 2020 on charges of terrorism (Sequera, 2020). Both of these arrests are illegal due to the fact that members of Congress have immunity while they are members (Sequera, 2020). The arrest of Leopoldo Lopez in 2017 was beginning of long campaign against the opposition party (Third Way). Leopoldo Lopez was the face of the opposition movement until his three-year arrest that was spent in a military prison (LA Times). His arrest led to the rise of Juan Guaido who is now the leader of the opposition movement within Venezuela. Juan Guaido's actions have been severely limited by the Maduro regime to maintain its authoritarian government. As mentioned previously, live streams of Juan Guaido's speeches and social media posts regarding the opposition movement are frequently blocked by the government to eliminate any potential threats to the Maduro's power.

Finally, it is also important to address how manipulated elections have led to one party maintaining power in the legislature. While it has been noted that in 2020 the Supreme Court

helped eliminate potential competition, it should also be highlighted that many opposition members did not run for reelection to either protest the corrupt political system and fraudulent elections in Venezuela or did not run for the safety of them and their families (Sequera, Buitrago, 2020). Many opposition political members and dissidents have been forced to leave Venezuela as they receive threats and fear arbitrary arrest of them or their family members for holding political beliefs opposite of those of the government. For the reasons outlined above the opposition party in Venezuela is weak and poses a weak threat to the Maduro regime without a strong showing of support by the international community. While members of the opposition party and those who share their ideals leave the country, many Venezuelans are left with no option to reform their government and must look for a new place to restart their lives.

Arbitrary Detentions

Arbitrary detentions and house arrests are another tool in arsenal for Nicolas Maduro to use against those that threaten his power. While journalists and political figures are targets, many average citizens have also been arrested by the Maduro regime. Many average citizens are arrested at political protests supporting the opposition movement. Since 2014 over 15,000 people have been arrested in connection to these protests (Human Rights Watch). These protests are often met with excessive force by the police and military and hundreds of arrested (Amnesty International). While many of these arrests occur at protests, there are also reports of warrantless arrests occurring at people's homes and some are charged in military courts. It is also reported that torture occurs once people are under arrest.

Many university students, activists, and political leaders have been arrested by a variety of Venezuelan authorities. One of the most notorious holding locations is El Heliocoide which is well known for the human rights abuses that occur there. Originally El Heliocoide was going to

be a drive through shopping mall, but now it is used as a holding cell for hundreds of prisoners that range from student activists to well-known opposition leaders (Newland, 2019). Within the building there were a variety of holding cells, but one known as Guantanamo was the worst as it would hold roughly 50 prisoners with no light, air, or toilets and was very small (Newland, 2019). Many detainees recall being physically abused, receiving electric shocks, being suspended by their wrists, raped, and psychologically tortured (Newland, 2019). These types of actions were systematic and were put in place to create fear among the detainees.

Detentions of political figures is a common tool to silence the opposition party and there have been high profile detentions under the Maduro regime. In 2017, Leopoldo Lopez was placed under arrest for inciting violence at a protest against the Maduro regime (LA Times). After his arrest, Lopez was placed under house arrest until he was able to escape in 2020 to live in Spain and be reunited with his family while continuing to support the opposition movement. A second high profile case was in 2014 when Rosmit Mantilla was arrested (Newland, 2019). Mantilla was a well-known activist, supporter of gay rights, and after his detention was the first openly gay member of the National People's Assembly (Newland, 2019). Rosmit Mantilla was placed under arrest and held at El Helicoide until his eventual release, but afterwards he fled the country fearing that he would eventually be arrested again (Newland, 2019). After the 2020 parliamentary elections many opposition members, including Juan Guaido did not run citing that the election outcomes would not be fair, but with this the members lost immunity. Therefore, there are widespread concerns that Guaido could be subject to arrest or house arrest under the Maduro regime. Arbitrary detentions of citizens, journalist, university students, and political figures have instilled fear in the Venezuelan population and therefore has forced many citizens to flee to live safer and more predictable lives.

State Sponsored Violence

State sponsored violence instills fear in a general population which leads to them to live suppressed lives and forces people to immigrate. A major group that supports the Maduro regime and arbitrarily arrests and kills citizens is *Las Fuerzas de Acciones Especiales* (FAES). This group was created in 2017 under the guise of protecting communities vulnerable to violence and drug trafficking but has targeted these populations and charged them with crimes of resisting the authorities (Olmo, 2019). Many people have been arbitrarily detained or killed by these forces and some family members have stated that torture is common tactic used after an arrest (Olmo, 2019). Even as FAES becomes more active in these areas, many people will not report these situations to international organizations because they are fearful and there are few if any police reports owing to corruption and the fact that FAES is a government organization. The United Nations has investigated this group and they assassinated over 5,000 people in 2018 alone (Cumming-Bruce, 2019). While there has been an investigation, there has been little action against the group as the United Nations has no way to regulate what occurs within Venezuela's borders

While FAES does hold a prominent place in state sponsored violence *colectivos* play a large role as well. A *colectivo* is an armed group that is sponsored by the Venezuelan government (Gonzalez, 2019). These were created under Hugo Chávez and were paired with community councils to be closer to local actions (Gonzalez, 2019). These community councils were supposed to be spaces for communities to voice their opinions on how local funding should be spent and resembled democratic ideals (Bean, 2015). Any movement in human rights standards and democracy that could have derived from these communal councils was diminished with the introduction of the *colectivos* that reported back to the government. *Colectivos* have

taken on a bigger role under Maduro and are present at opposition rallies. It is common for them to join the police and military in controlling opposition protests and sometimes doing so with excessive forces (Oppmann, 2019). According to the 2021 Human Rights report from Human Rights Watch, *colectivos* have played an important role in the COVID-19 lockdowns that occurred in 2020. During lockdowns *colectivos* enforced stay at home orders in impoverished neighborhoods and those that violated the order received various punishments that included beatings and various torture methods (Human Rights Watch) In addition to *colectivos* there are various armed groups including the National Liberation Army and Patriotic Forces of National Liberation that conspire with police forces and the military to maintain control of sections of Venezuela (Human rights Watch). The methods used to control the population include murder, forced labor, and rape (Human Rights Watch). Their roles are not only paramilitary, but they are also there to support the Maduro regime and its ideologies as being leaders within their communities (Open Democracy). State sponsored violence has led to the detentions and deaths of many Venezuelans and with no mechanisms to protect themselves, a large portion of the population has left the country in search of a safer place to live.

COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has greatly impacted the future of migrants in South America. COVID-19 has altered the situation in Venezuela greatly and will lead to more migrants leaving the country. One of the situations that COVID-19 has exacerbated is the decaying health system in Venezuela. Since 2017, the number of cases and deaths for preventable illnesses has increased which forced the government to allow for some humanitarian aid that was distributed through nongovernmental organizations (Buxton, 2018). With limited medical supplies, testing capacities, lab capacities, and doctors COVID-19 has infected many people and has caused many

deaths. These resources have significantly declined since 2017 when the country's lab capabilities were processing at 20% capacity and 85% of routine medicines were unavailable (Buxton, 2018). According to the United Nations, 60 to 100 percent of essential drugs are not available in major cities such as Caracas as preventable diseases like measles and diphtheria have seen an increase in cases. In addition to the lack of medical supplies, Venezuela has suffered from a phenomenon known as brain drain. Since the Chávez regime doctors have been leaving the country for a variety of reasons. Between 2008 to 2009 2,000 doctors left Venezuela which accounted for 10 percent of the nation's doctors (Hernández and Gómez, 2011). According to the World Health Organization, there have been almost 260,000 COVID-19 cases and just under 3,000 deaths. While these numbers are lower than some of the statistics, there are concerns that Venezuelan government is not being transparent about the number of positive cases nor deaths in the country. This concern was highlighted in the section under repression of freedom of the press as journalists have been arrested while attempting to demonstrate the reality of COVID-19 in the country.

COVID-19 has impacted migration as it has greatly restricted movement as lockdowns have decreased migration flows. Many Venezuelans were unable to leave the country due to lockdowns, but now that borders have opened there have been increases in migration flows globally. Both during lockdowns and after lockdowns many Venezuelans have left for Colombia and Argentina as the border is porous and there are many ways to enter without going near shutdown ports of entry (The Associated Press). A fear that many countries now have is their ability to handle the influx of migrants and the potential threat of COVID-19 and COVID-19 variants. Many countries are dealing with this issue currently and it is important that NGOs and the international community continue supporting developing nations in migration and the

necessary medical resources to continue permitting immigration (Ellis, 2020). COVID-19 has disrupted the migration flow out of Venezuela, but as the healthcare system is affected by COVID-19 and information regarding cases is withheld by the government, more Venezuelans are seeking a country to live in.

Economic Sanctions

The Venezuelan economy relies predominately on oil and depends almost entirely on oil exports in order to import a majority of goods including food and medicine. This reliance was established under the Chávez government as many social programs were introduced while the government focused solely on exporting oil. While this approach worked for a few years under the Chávez government, it proved to be unsustainable and creates a highly volatile economy as the price of oil fluctuates. Therefore, when oil prices have gone down, as occurred in 2008, 2017, and 2020, the economy begins to crumble, and the people of Venezuela suffer. Oil prices have continued to fall since then with the coronavirus pandemic, which led to a global halt in transportation and production, which adversely affected the Venezuelan economy. In addition to this, the Maduro regime responded to the post Great Recession difficulties by printing more money which led to high levels of inflation (Third Way). According to Buxton (2018), this inflation hit 2,616% in 2017 and eventually this helped led to largest economic collapse that was not caused by a war in the last 45 years (Kurmanaev, 2019). The combination of the dependence on oil and the severe economic sanctions placed on Venezuela by a majority of the Western world have caused many Venezuelans to be unable to afford basic necessities, and there are few opportunities for economic advancement. This has led to increasing numbers of Venezuelan migrants in neighboring countries looking to start new lives.

American sanctions on Venezuela have played a prominent role in U.S. foreign policy since 2014 under the Obama Administration. In 2014, Congress passed the Venezuela Defense of Human Rights and Civil Society Act of 2014 which laid out a plan to work with the international community and international organization such as the Organization of American States to support Venezuelan society restore respect for human rights (Congressional Archives). This piece of legislation also allowed for sanctions on individuals that were aiding the human rights abuses in Venezuela (Congressional Archives). Acting upon this, President Obama issued an executive order sanctioning seven high level members of Venezuelan security forces and members of the government (Obama White House Archives). These sanctions highlighted the level of seriousness that the U.S. government took human rights abuses in Venezuela.

Under the Trump Administration, economic sanctions continued to play an important role in addressing the deteriorating situation in Venezuela. In addition to sanctions new executive orders were put into place that had a larger impact on the economy which therefore further pushed Venezuela into an economic down spiral. One of the biggest financial sanctions placed by the Trump Administration was prohibiting access to American markets by any entity of the Venezuelan government (FAS, 2021). This included the state-owned oil company, *Petróleos de Venezuela S.A.*, which adversely affected the economy leading to less jobs. This action in addition to Executive Order 13835, that prohibited the purchasing of Venezuelan debt and leaving the country unable to negotiate their debt leading to extreme belt tightening (FAS, 2021). Owing to the belt tightening by the new austerity policies that the government put into place, the few social programs that still existed under the Maduro regime lost significant funding. In addition to these broader sanctions, the Trump Administration's Treasury Department implemented a variety of individual sanctions including Nicolás Maduro, his wife and son,

multiple members of the Supreme Court, and leaders of the army and police (FAS, 2021). These sanctions help target those individuals that are benefiting from the suppression of the Venezuelan people while creating the least amount of damage to the economy overall.

Since early 2021, the European Union began implementing a variety of sanctions that has led to increased tensions between Venezuela and the European bloc. In February of 2021, the European Union placed sanctions on more than 19 individuals within the Venezuelan government which increased the total number of affected individuals to 55 (Emmott, 2021). These sanctions include travel bans and the freezing of assets (Emmott, 2021). Responding to these sanctions, the Venezuelan government declared the European Union Ambassador, Isabel Brilhante Pedrosa, a *persona non grata* and gave her seventy-two hours to leave country (Buchard, 2021). This was one of the most aggressive moves of the Maduro regime in response to actions taken by the European Union. Economic sanctions do not only adversely affect individuals, but also affect the greater population as whole. As leaders lose money, they often decrease funding to social programs and make conditions in the country unlivable, therefore it is unsurprising that as economic sanctions have become the main tool for fighting the Maduro government, more Venezuelans have left the country.

Supporting External Actors

Foreign aid from external actors can help authoritarian regimes maintain power while economic sanctions hurt the economy. Venezuela is no exception, and has received aid from Cuba, Russia, and China which has eased the effects of sanctions and provided some stability. Historically, Cuba was the biggest supporter of Venezuela as Fidel Castro supported Hugo Chávez from the start and the two nations helped build regional continuity for a short period of time. A majority of Cuban aid was provided through the military and members of the Cuban

army worked and currently work as the eyes on the ground for both Cuba and Chávez and Maduro. After the death of Chávez and Castro and the introduction of bigger players on the international stage, Cuba's role has diminished in the country although their presence is still felt. According to Ellis (2020), Cuban intelligence still plays an important role for the Venezuelan government as the intelligence that they gather provides a clearer picture on the threats facing the regime not only externally, but internally as the Venezuelan opposition movement continues to grow. This allows for the *colectivos* and FAES to be aware of internal threats which enables human rights abuses to occur. In terms of the economy, Cuba continues to buy oil from Venezuela but not at a high rate (Ellis, 2020). Even though Cuba is not a huge importer of Venezuelan oil, every dollar that is used on Venezuelan oil helps prop up the Maduro regime. While Cuban support for the Venezuelan government has decreased it is important to realize how history has created another ally for the Maduro regime.

Russia has played an increasing role in Venezuela under both the Chavez and the Maduro regime has come to power in Venezuela. Over the last 15 years, Russia has provided both financial and military aid to Venezuela that enabled human rights abuses. Russia has been one of the top consumers of Venezuelan oil and the amount of debt that Venezuela owes to Russia has proven to be extremely important. Rosneft, an entity currently owned by the Russian government, originally loaned \$17 billion to Venezuela (Ellis, 2020). When the government was unable to pay back the debts, Rosneft took the opportunity to exchange the debt for control of gas reserves allowing Russia to have unfettered access to Venezuelan oil (Farah and Babineau, 2019). This gave economic relief to the country as Venezuelan markets were unable to access American markets owing to sanctions put in place by the Trump Administration and allowed Russia continued access to a natural resource it wanted. Another way that Russia provided

Venezuela with a way to find relief from U.S. sanctions was the creation of cryptocurrency which proved to be ineffective (Farah and Babineau, 2019). Venezuela has also bought \$11 million worth of military equipment from Russia alone since 2005 in addition to the aid they receive from China (Farah and Babineau, 2019).

In addition to arms, Venezuela has also been the beneficiary of tactical support from Russia. Between 2019 and 2020, Russia deployed some of its military to the country which has bolstered the Maduro regime (Ellis, 2020). The amount of military aid Venezuela has received from Russia is what gives the country a formidable military and allows the Maduro regime to control its population as its police, paramilitary units, and military units benefit from these purchases. While it appears that this is minimal over a large period of time, it is important to note that the financial support, the purchasing of Venezuelan oil, and military support aids the Maduro government which in turn enables human rights abuses as the amount of funding that benefits the public has greatly decreased under Nicolás Maduro.

China has played an increased role in Latin American under its Silk Road Initiative and its Belt and Road Initiative. Venezuela was one of the countries to receive the highest amounts of foreign direct investment. China has loaned Venezuela \$62 billion since 2008 and was a large consumer of Venezuelan oil and despite U.S. sanctions there is evidence that China continued to buy oil through Rosneft (Ellis, 2020). In addition to buying oil, China's national oil company still holds a land grant in the Orinoco Belt region which is one of the most oil rich areas in the world (Rendon, 2021). This land grant does not expire until 2035 providing China with access to Venezuelan oil for years to come (Rendon, 2021). By loaning money and propping up the Venezuelan economy, the People's Republic of China is helping to dampen the effects of EU and U.S. sanctions which provides Nicolás Maduro with the opportunity to continue oppressing his

people. This support does not only come in the form of investment, but also in terms of military aid and basic necessities. In 2019, China aided Venezuela with roughly 40% of its food imports and has continued to provide military aid in the form of aircrafts and armored vehicles (Ellis, 2020). It has been widely known that the Maduro regime uses food as a tactic to force the Venezuelan people to vote a certain way or pursue other courses of action, in addition to this some armored vehicles provided by China have been used by the government to stop pro Guaidó or anti Maduro protests (Ellis, 2020). Chinese weapons and crowd control weapons for protests were used extensively in 2017 protests that led to 2,000 injuries and 163 deaths (Rendon, 2021). China has aided the Maduro regime financially and in terms of its military which allowed for Nicolás Maduro to maintain power and continue committing human rights violations.

Receiving Countries Policies

The final important variable is the policies that receiving countries have towards migrants in general but more particularly towards Venezuelan migrants. South American countries such as Colombia, Ecuador, Chile, Argentina and Peru have been impacted as well as the United States, Spain, and some Caribbean countries as seen in Figure 2 (Cheatham, Cara Labrador, 2021). In the article by Castilla and Sørensen (2019), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the International Organization for Migration estimated that over 5,380,000 migrants would have left Venezuelan by 2019 and the Brookings Institute estimated that the number could have been greater than six million which would have topped the Syrian Refugee Crisis. This means that as migrants start to travel again it is obvious that the international community must prepare for the influx of migrants that the Western Hemisphere will see coming out of Venezuela in the coming months.

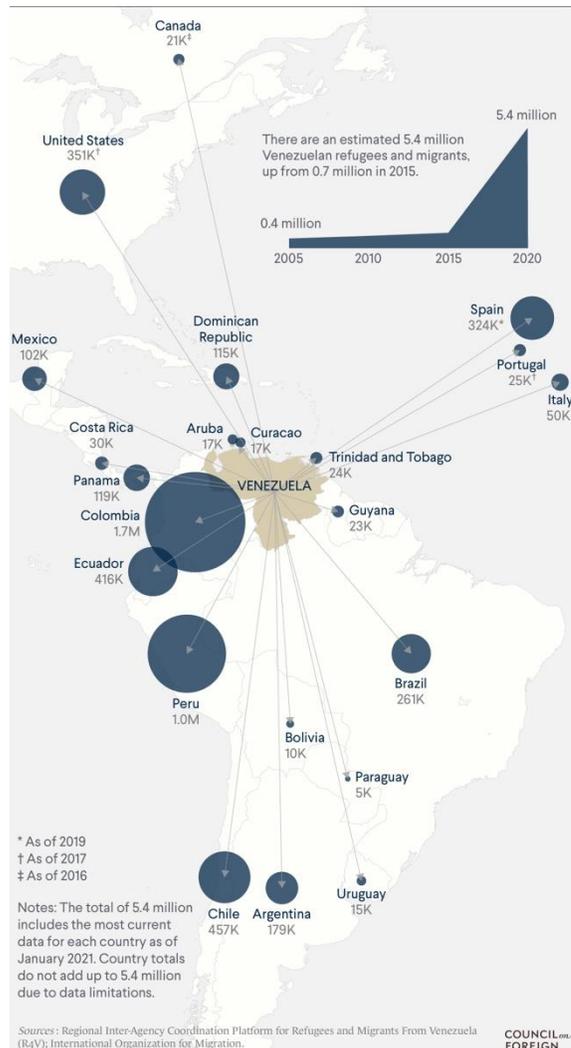


Figure 2 Source: The Council on Foreign Relations

Colombia is the country that have taken in the highest number of migrants since 2015. In 2021, Colombia made an unprecedented move by providing a new status to previously undocumented Venezuelans in the country. Colombian President Iván Duque has implemented a new plan that will allow Venezuelans to live and work in Colombia for 10 years which provides a new temporary status that migrants previously lacked (Otis, 2021). This will lead to increase in the number of migrants attempting to go to Colombia as this status allows them to build a life. It is estimated that by 2022 almost three to five million Venezuelans could live in Colombia, and it is possible that this number will climb with the addition of this legal status (Buschschlüter, 2021). According to the New York Times, President Duque did put emphasis on the need for

international support as his nation has suffered the most from this crisis and he did emphasize the need for other countries to follow Colombia's lead which will be difficult as the pandemic continues to damage the South American economy.

In comparison to Colombia, Peru, Ecuador, and Chile have reversed their open policies towards Venezuelan migrants. During the begin of the migration crisis, Peru had a welcoming policy allowing Venezuelans to live and work in the country, but within the last few years these policies have changed radically. Peru started to implement a series of laws that were focused on limiting migration which came in the wake of the Venezuelan migration crisis (Amnesty International). These laws have not changed since the beginning of the pandemic, but as countries such as Colombia and the United States begin to provide temporary status to migrants there is hope that their policies will change. In 2019, Ecuador followed Peru's lead and began to require visas from Venezuelans that wanted to work and live in the country as thousands rushed to the border (Reuters). Also in 2019, Chile created the democratic responsibility visa providing Venezuelans with legal status for up to two years, but this policy did not benefit Venezuelans who clearly needed a long-term solution (Reuters). These actions limited the number of legal migrants that came to those nations legally but increased the number of migrants crossing the borders illegally and gave employers the opportunity to exploit vulnerable people in need of a stable economic situation.

While Spain has taken in migrants, their stance on Venezuela is extremely complicated owing to their coalition government and the parties differing stances on the political issues in Venezuela. It is important to highlight that the colonial and immigration connection between Spain and Venezuela. It is common to see migration between colonial powers and their colonies, because of the shared history, culture, and language (Cerrutti and Parrado, 2015). It should also

be highlighted that there is a history of migration flows between Venezuela and Spain as during and after Spain's Civil War many Spaniards migrated to Venezuela. The United States has started to play a larger role internationally with the Biden Administration providing Temporary Protected Status (TPS) to Venezuelans until September 2022 when the situation in the country will be reevaluated to see if it is safe for Venezuelans living in the United States to return (Sands, Shoichet, 2021). While both the United States and Spain have provided safety for over 600,000 Venezuelans, these two countries can do more and are uniquely positioned to lead the charge on the Venezuelan migration and political issue.

Conclusion

By using qualitative data, this research paper has demonstrated the extent to which human rights abuses have played into the mass exodus of Venezuelans that has pushed South American countries to the brink of their resources. Variables such as political repression, oppressing the opposition party, economic sanctions, supporting actions by external state actors, violence, the policies of receiving nations, arbitrary detentions, state sponsored violence, and the coronavirus pandemic have provided a different outlook on how human rights abuses are tied to these variables which has a direct impact on the migration flows that the international community sees coming out of Venezuela. It is also important to highlight that these variables are also intrinsically connected to one another and many times these migrants are leaving for a variety reasons that are explained within these variables. While it is not possible to say that human rights abuses are the main variable that has led to emigration, it is obvious that it plays a large role in the current situation that the international community faces. The addition of some data provides a picture that demonstrates a delicate situation that has progressively gotten worse since the transition from Hugo Chávez to Nicolás Maduro. It also provides an alarming outlook

as to how a new variable, COVID-19, has played and will continue to play a large role in the next wave of migration that South America which is unequipped to handle the health situation with their own citizens let alone migrants.

This analysis provides support for nine hypotheses proposed in this paper. Repression of freedom of the press, the political system, and the opposition party has worsened under the Maduro regime leading to more people migrating to places where they work, speak, and vote freely as well have a better future. Economic sanctions put in place by the United States and the European Union have aided the downward spiral of Venezuela's economy which has forced many people to leave the country as they can't afford rising prices of basic necessities nor find economic opportunities. Supporting actions from external actors, such as Russia and China, have aided the Venezuelan government's systematic oppression of its citizens forcing the population to leave the country. Finally, the onset of COVID-19 has exacerbated many of these variables such as freedom of the press and has forced many Venezuelans to leave the country in search of a new home with economic opportunities and stronger healthcare system. While this research design is limited as it is impossible to understand why each of the over five million migrants have left the country, it is an attempt to see how human rights abuses affect multiple areas of life and plays a major role in migration flows.

Bibliography

2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices. U.S. Embassy in Venezuela. (2021, April 15). <https://ve.usembassy.gov/2020-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/>.

Ap. (1992, February 05). Venezuela Crushes Army Coup Attempt. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/1992/02/05/world/venezuela-crushes-army-coup-attempt.html>

Amnesty International *Renzo Prieto: almost 4 years detained, without trial and 31 deferred hearings: Amnistia Internacional: Venezuela*. Renzo Prieto: almost 4 years detained, without trial and 31 deferred hearings | Amnistia Internacional | Venezuela. (n.d.). <https://www.amnistia.org/en/blog/2018/02/4849/renzo-prieto-almost-4-years-detained-without-trial-and-31-deferred-hearings>.

Authors, M. (2020, July 28). *Covering the Pandemic: Arrests of Journalists and Healthcare Workers in Venezuela*. Pulitzer Center. <https://pulitzercenter.org/stories/covering-pandemic-arrests-journalists-and-healthcare-workers-venezuela>.

Bader, Julia, Faust, Jörg 2014. "Foreign Aid, Democratization, and Autocratic Survival" *International Studies Review* 16 (4) 575-595

Bean, Anderson M. 2015. "Venezuela, Human Rights, and Participatory Democracy" *Critical Sociology* 42 (6) 827-843

Bremmer, I. (2019, April 5). *The Quick Read About... Russia's Presence in Venezuela*. Time. <https://time.com/5565120/russias-presence-in-venezuela/>.

Burchard, H. V. (2021, February 24). Venezuela expels EU ambassador in reaction to sanctions. Retrieved from <https://www.politico.eu/article/venezuela-expels-eu-ambassador-in-reaction-to-sanctions/>

Burt, Jo-Marie 2006. "Quien habla es terrorista: The Political Use of Fear in Fujimori's Peru" *Latin American Research Review* 41 (3) 32-62

Buschschlüter, V. (2021, May 16). *'We gave Venezuelan migrants a licence to dream'*. BBC News. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-57070813>.

Buxton, Julia 2018. "Venezuela: Deeper Into The Abyss" *Revista de Ciencia Política*. 38 (2) 409-428

Castilla-Villanueva, César Antonio, Sørensen Nyberg, Ninna, 2019. "Venezuelans Flee Accelerating Collapse: Latin Americas Evolving Migration Crisis" *Danish Institute for International Studies*

Cerrutti, Marcela, Parrado, Emilio, 2015. "Intraregional Migration in South America: Trends and

a Research Agenda” Annual Review of Sociology 41 p. 399-421

Cheatham, Amelia, Cara Labrador, Rocio 2021. Venezuela: The Rise and Fall of a Petrostate. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.cfr.org/background/venezuela-crisis>

Cumming-Bruce, Nick. (2019, July 05). Miles de asesinatos, encubrimientos y criminalización: Las acusaciones más graves del informe de la ONU sobre Venezuela (Published 2019). Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/es/2019/07/05/espanol/america-latina/venezuela-faes-derechos-humanos.html>

Davenport, Christian 1995. “Assessing the Military’s Influence on Political Repression.” Journal of Political and Military Sociology 23 (1) 119-144

Diaz, Jaclyn (2021, May 24) More Than 100,000 Haitian Immigrants Can Apply For An Extension To Stay In The U.S. Retrieved from <https://www.npr.org/2021/05/24/999678185/biden-administration-extends-temporary-protected-status-for-haitians-in-u-s>

Donno, Daniela 2013. “Elections and Democratization in Authoritarian Regimes” American Journal of Political Science 57 (3) 703-716

Durand, Jorge, Massey, Douglas S. 2010. “New World Orders: Continuities and Changes in Latin American Migration” The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science 630 20-52

Ellis, Evan R. 2020. “Venezuela: Pandemic and Foreign Intervention in a Collapsing Narcostate” Center for Strategic and International Studies

Emmott, R. (2021, February 22). EU hits 19 Venezuelans with sanctions over December election. Retrieved from <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-venezuela-politics-eu/eu-hits-19-venezuelans-with-sanctions-over-december-election-idUSKBN2AM22F>

Escribà-Folch, Abel, Wright, Joseph 2010. “Dealing with Tyranny: International Sanctions and the Survival of Authoritarian Rulers” International Studies Quarterly 54 (2) 335-359
Everything you need to know about human rights in Venezuela. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/americas/venezuela/report-venezuela/>

Everything you need to know about human rights in Venezuela. Everything you need to know about human rights in Venezuela|Amnesty International | Amnesty International. (n.d.). <https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/americas/venezuela/report-venezuela/>.

Farah, Douglas, Babineau, Kathryn 2019. “Extra Regional Actors in Latin America” Prism 8 (1) 96-113

Gonzalez, Juan S. 2019. “The Venezuelan Crisis and Salvador Allende’s Glasses” Prism 8 (1) 40-55

Hafner-Burton, Emilie M., Hyde, Susan D, Jablonski, Ryan S. 2014. "When Do Governments Resort to Election Violence?" *British Journal of Political Science* 44 (1) 149-179

Kim, HeeMin, Whitten-Woodring, Jenifer, James, Patrick 2014. The Role of the Media in the Repression-Protest Nexus: A Game-theoretic Model. *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*

Kurmanaev, A. (2019, May 17). Venezuela's Collapse Is the Worst Outside of War in Decades, Economists Say. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/17/world/americas/venezuela-economy.html>

Licht, Amanda R. 2010. "The Impact of Foreign Aid on Leader Survival" *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 54 (1) 58-87

Maria Delgado, Opposition Leader Flees Venezuela, Heads for Spain and the United States. (2020, October 24). Retrieved from <https://www.miamiherald.com/news/nation-world/world/americas/venezuela/article246692032.html>

Nel, Philip, Righarts, Marjolein 2008. "Natural Disasters and the Risk of Violent Civil Conflict" *International Studies Quarterly* 52 (1) 159-185

Newland, K. V. and C. (2019, January 24). *El Helicoide: From an icon to an infamous Venezuelan jail*. BBC News. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-46864864>.

Nugent, C. (2019, April 16). *Inside the Battle to Get News to Venezuelans*. Time. <https://time.com/5571504/venezuela-internet-press-freedom/>.

Olmo, Guillermo 2019. Venezuela: La FAES, la polémica policía de élite creada por Nicolás Maduro a la que se acusa de ser un "grupo de exterminio". (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-50677411>

Oppmann, P. (2019, May 24). *The Venezuelan radio host leading an armed 'colectivo' in support of Maduro*. CNN. <https://www.cnn.com/2019/05/24/americas/venezuela-colectivos-oppman-intl/index.html>.

Otis, J. (2021, February 26). 'A Huge Opportunity': Venezuelan Migrants Welcome Colombia's New Open-Door Policy. Retrieved from <https://www.npr.org/2021/02/26/971776007/a-huge-opportunity-venezuelan-migrants-welcome-colombias-new-open-door-policy>

Palau, M. (2020, October 09). Venezuelans once again fleeing on foot as troubles mount. Retrieved from https://apnews.com/article/virus-outbreak-transportation-medellin-immigration-colombia-98d010ec0c97c02ec7682250b14a50e0?utm_source=dailybrief&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=DailyBrief2020Oct9&utm_term=DailyNewsBrief

Peruvian authorities should regularize Venezuelans' migratory status. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/06/peru-should-regularize-venezuelans-migratory-status-covid19/>

Pop-Eleches, Grigore, Robertson, Graeme B. 2015. "Information, Elections, and Political Change" *Comparative Politics* 47 (4) 459-478

Reeves, P. (2020, April 10). Many Venezuelan Hospitals Lack Basics To Function, Let Alone Handle COVID-19. Retrieved from <https://www.npr.org/2020/04/10/831569313/many-venezuelan-hospitals-lack-basics-to-function-let-alone-handle-covid-19>

Rendon, Moises *When Investment Hurts: Chinese Influence in Venezuela*. When Investment Hurts: Chinese Influence in Venezuela | Center for Strategic and International Studies. (2021, May 27). <https://www.csis.org/analysis/when-investment-hurts-chinese-influence-venezuela>.

Reuters. Chile offers 'democratic responsibility visa' to Venezuelan migrants. (2019, June 22). Retrieved from <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-chile-venezuela-immigration/chile-offers-democratic-responsibility-visa-to-venezuelan-migrants-idUSKCN1TN0MN>

Reuters. Venezuelan migrants flood into Ecuador ahead of new visa restrictions. (2019, August 26). Retrieved from <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-venezuela-politics-colombia/venezuelan-migrants-flood-into-ecuador-ahead-of-new-visa-restrictions-idUSKCN1VG1SX>

S. A., By, -, & ShareAmerica. (2019, May 1). *Press freedom under attack by Maduro in Venezuela*. ShareAmerica. <https://share.america.gov/press-freedom-under-attack-by-maduro-in-venezuela/>.

Sands, G., & Shoichet, C. E. (2021, March 08). Biden administration grants humanitarian protections to Venezuelans in the US. Retrieved from <https://www.cnn.com/2021/03/08/politics/biden-administration-tps-venezuela/index.html>

Santarelli, Maria What the IMF World Economic Outlook Reveals About Venezuela and the World. Retrieved from <https://www.bu.edu/gdp/2020/10/20/what-the-imf-world-economic-outlook-reveals-about-venezuela-and-the-world/>

State Department (2019) 2019 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Venezuela. Retrieved from <https://www.state.gov/reports/2019-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/venezuela/#:~:text=Significant%20human%20rights%20issues%20included,security%20forces%3B%20harsh%20and%20life%2D>

Sequera, V. (2020, January 21). *Disappeared Venezuelan legislator being held in state detention: lawyer*. Reuters. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-venezuela-politics/disappeared-venezuelan-legislator-being-held-in-state-detention-lawyer-idUSKBN1ZK23N>.

Sequera, V., & Buitrago, D. (2020, December 07). U.S., EU say they do not recognize Venezuela parliamentary vote. Retrieved from https://www.reuters.com/article/us-venezuela-election-results/maduro-allies-win-majority-in-venezuelan-congress-in-disputed-election-idUSKBN28H0L3?il=0&utm_source=dailybrief&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=DailyBrief2020Dec7&utm_term=DailyNewsBrief

Sequera, V., & Buitrago, D. (2020, December 7). *Maduro allies win majority in disputed Venezuela congress election*. Reuters. <https://www.reuters.com/article/venezuela-election-results-idINKBN28H0P4>.

Third Way 2019. "Country Brief: Venezuela" Third Way

USAID. (2020, May 27). *Food Assistance Fact Sheet - Venezuela Regional Response: Food Assistance*. U.S. Agency for International Development. <https://www.usaid.gov/venezuela/food-assistance>.

UN Human Rights report on Venezuela urges immediate measures to halt and remedy grave rights violations. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.ohchr.org/en/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=24788&LangID=E>

UN Human Rights report on Venezuela urges immediate measures to halt and remedy grave rights violations. OHCHR. (n.d.). <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=24788&LangID=E>.

Venezuela : Ever more authoritarian: Reporters without borders. RSF. (n.d.). <https://rsf.org/en/venezuela>.

Venezuela: Attacks Against Freedom of Expression Must Cease Immediately. Human Rights Watch. (2021, January 14). <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/01/14/venezuela-attacks-against-freedom-expression-must-cess-immediately#>.

Venezuela: Freedom in the World 2017 Country Report. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://freedomhouse.org/country/venezuela/freedom-world/2017>

Venezuela: Freedom in the World 2018 Country Report. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://freedomhouse.org/country/venezuela/freedom-world/2018>

Venezuela: Freedom in the World 2019 Country Report. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://freedomhouse.org/country/venezuela/freedom-world/2019>

Venezuela: Freedom in the World 2021 Country Report. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://freedomhouse.org/country/venezuela/freedom-world/2021>

Venezuela: Freedom in the World 2021 Country Report. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://freedomhouse.org/country/venezuela/freedom-world/2021>

Venezuela: Freedom on the Net 2016 Country Report. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://freedomhouse.org/country/venezuela/freedom-net/2016>

Venezuela: Freedom on the Net 2017 Country Report. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://freedomhouse.org/country/venezuela/freedom-net/2017>

Venezuela: Freedom on the Net 2018 Country Report. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://freedomhouse.org/country/venezuela/freedom-net/2018>

Venezuela: Freedom on the Net 2019 Country Report. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://freedomhouse.org/country/venezuela/freedom-net/2019>

Venezuela: Freedom on the Net 2020 Country Report. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://freedomhouse.org/country/venezuela/freedom-net/2020>

Venezuela: Further Information: Monitoring of Threats to Lawmakers Continues. Amnesty International | Amnesty International. (n.d.). <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/amr53/2704/2020/en/>

Venezuela: Overview of U.S. Sanctions (2021) Retrieved from Congressional Research Service <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/IF10715.pdf>

Venezuela's Journalists Can't be Silenced. Human Rights Watch. (2020, October 28). <https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/03/19/venezuelas-journalists-cant-be-silenced#>.

Venezuelan opposition leader Leopoldo Lopez released from prison and placed under house arrest. (2017, July 08). Retrieved from <https://www.latimes.com/world/la-fg-lopez-house-arrest-20170708-story.html>

Vyas, K., & Kurmanaev, A. (2015, December 23). Maduro's Allies Stack Venezuela's Supreme Court. Retrieved from <https://www.wsj.com/articles/maduro-s-allies-stack-venezuelas-supreme-court-1450912005>

Walldorf Jr., William 2014-15. "Sanctions, Regime Type, and Democratization: Lessons from U.S.-Central American Relations in the 1980s" *Political Science Quarterly* 129 (4) 643-673

World Report 2021: Rights Trends in Venezuela. (2021, January 13). Retrieved from <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2021/country-chapters/venezuela>

World Report 2021: Rights Trends in Venezuela. Human Rights Watch. (2021, January 13). <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2021/country-chapters/venezuela#dc3816>.

Yuki. (2021, February 3). *Blackouts: The Issue of Electricity in Venezuela*. The Borgen Project.
<https://borgenproject.org/electricity-in-venezuela/>.