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# Unrest in Venezuela from 2014 to Present Day

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A Violence is said to be intrinsic to human nature. No matter how much we strive for the attainment of peace, we tend to be intemperate. There have been several violent as well as peaceful protests in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Protest means a statement or action expressing disapproval or objection to something.<sup>2</sup> Protests can also be viewed as the endpoint of human patience and tolerance after which it becomes impossible to contain anger or suffering. Such is the case in Venezuela. Venezuela is a country that has been suffering since the late 1990s and it is still in the state of constant struggle with things like inflation, shortages of goods, corruption, mismanagement, crimes, high mortality rates etc. The New York Times has recently called the crisis the worst the world has ever seen apart from war.<sup>3</sup> These issues need to be addressed for awareness purposes and also for all the developing countries to understand the gravity of certain situations.

Venezuela for a very long time was governed by rightwing governments. In 1992, Hugo Chávez formed a group named the Revolutionary Bolivarian Movement-200 intending to overthrow the existing government and take over thereafter, and also attempt a coup d'état. He attempted another coup while he was in prison. Both the coup attempts failed and fighting resulted in the death of nearly 300 people. Hugo Chávez went to Venezuelan Military Academy of Sciences in Caracas. As he lived in Caracas he witnessed endemic poverty, therefore this experience made him want to attain social justice. He was influenced by the life and political thought of South-American revolutionary Simon Bolivar and Marxist revolutionary Che Guevara.<sup>4</sup> He took the office of President in 1999. According to the World Bank, Chávez's social measures reduced poverty from about 49% in the year 1998 to 25%.<sup>5</sup> The United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), shows that Venezuela achieved the second-highest rate of poverty reduction in the region from 1999-2012. A year before Chávez took office, oil export was only at 77%. Under his government, from 1999 to 2011, monthly inflation rates were high in comparison to world standards but were lower than

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<sup>2</sup> A.S. Hornby, *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, 1221 (2010).

<sup>3</sup> Anatoly Kurmanaev, *Venezuela's Collapse is the Worst Outside of War in Decades, Economists Say*, The New York Times, (March 21, 2020, 5:00 pm), <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/17/world/americas/venezuela-economy.html>.

<sup>4</sup> *Hugo Chávez*, Wikipedia, (March 21, 2020, 5:13 pm), [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hugo\\_Ch%C3%A1vez](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hugo_Ch%C3%A1vez).

<sup>5</sup> *Id.*

that from 1991 to 1998. While Chávez was in office, his government was accused of several criminal activities such as abuse of the economy for personal gain, propaganda, buying the loyalty of the military, assisting terrorists such as the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, officials involved in the drug trade, intimidation of the media and human rights abuses of its citizens. Government price controls put in place in 2002 which initially aimed for reducing the prices of basic goods caused economic problems such as inflation and shortages of basic goods. The murder rate under Chávez's administration also quadrupled leaving Venezuela as one of the most violent countries in the world. Javier Corrales, a political scientist at Amherst College in Massachusetts, who also researched Venezuela in 1990 said that until the price of oil collapsed significantly in the 1980s, Venezuela was the richest country in Latin America. When oil prices plummeted, Venezuela was suddenly in grave debt. The country's leaders pursued neoliberal, market-oriented solutions to get assistance from the International Monetary Fund. The government privatized state-owned companies, eliminated price controls on gas and other consumer goods and cut back on social programs. It was all done to try and make the economy run more efficiently.<sup>6</sup> Unfortunately, it did not work.

On 5 March 2013, Chávez died of cancer and Nicolás Maduro, who was a Vice President at the time, took Chávez's place. With the growing violence during Chávez's reign, demonstrations began against violence in January 2014. According to the Associated Press, the attempted rape of a young student on a university campus in San Cristóbal, in the western border state of Táchira, led to protests from students well before the protests began in the Venezuelan capital city of Caracas and complained about deteriorating security under President Nicolás Maduro and his predecessor, the late Hugo Chávez. But what triggered them was the harsh police response to their initial protest, in which several students were detained and allegedly abused, as well as follow-up demonstrations to call for their release. As these protests expanded, it attracted non-students and led to more detentions. Eventually, other students joined, and the protests spread to Caracas and other cities, with opposition leaders getting involved.<sup>7</sup>

In Venezuela, one person is murdered every 21 minutes. In the first two months of 2014, nearly 3000 people were murdered which is 500% more than in Chávez's governance. Former Miss Venezuela was killed along with her ex-husband in a roadside robbery and their daughter was shot in her leg. According to the Institute for Research on Coexistence & Citizen Security, 91%

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<sup>6</sup> *Id.*

<sup>7</sup> [Venezuelan protests \(2014–present\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Venezuelan_protests_(2014–present)), Wikipedia, (March 22, 2020, 5:32 pm), [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Venezuelan\\_protests\\_\(2014%E2%80%93present\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Venezuelan_protests_(2014%E2%80%93present)).

of the murders go unpunished.<sup>8</sup> The Venezuelan Violence Observatory reported in March 2014 that the country's murder rate was nearly 80 deaths per 100,000 people, while statistics provided by the government only shows 39 deaths per 100,000.<sup>9</sup>

Venezuela was ranked the highest in global misery index in the year 2013 and the country with the second-highest inflation rate (56.2%) in the world after Syria.<sup>10</sup> One of the economic policies of the Venezuelan government was strict price controls which led to sporadic hyperinflation. And as a result, have caused severe shortages of food and other basic goods. Lack of maintenance and investment led to a decrease in the production of oil thereby reducing oil prices especially in early 2015. Chávez had already declared an “economic war” due to economic shortages in June 2010. Most critics point out that years of mismanagement, corruption and anti-democratic governance has led to the miserable condition of the Venezuelans. Inflation has led to acute and escalating starvation throughout the country. 94% of the Venezuelans live in poverty and about 10% have left the country for a better life.<sup>11</sup>

In a 2014 survey by Gallup, nearly 75% of Venezuelans believe corruption is widespread in their government. Leopoldo López said that the people of Venezuela are fighting a very corrupt authoritarian government that uses all the power, money, media, laws and judicial system to maintain control. Corruption in Venezuela has been ranked high by the World Standards.<sup>12</sup> However, it is difficult to measure reliably, but one prominent measure is the Corruption Perceptions Index, produced annually by a Berlin-based NGO, Transparency International (TNI). TNI public opinion data says that most Venezuelans believe the government is not efficient in fighting against corruption, that corruption has increased and that government institutions such as the judicial system, parliament, legislature and police are the most corrupt. According to the Corruption Perceptions Index 2019, Venezuela is currently the 7th most corrupt country in the world (173 of 179) and its judicial system has been deemed the most corrupt in the world.<sup>13</sup> The World Justice Project reported that "Venezuela is the country with the poorest performance of all countries analyzed, showing decreasing trends in the performance of many areas. The country ranks last in the surrender of accounts by the government due to an increasing concentration of executive power and weakened checks and

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<sup>8</sup> *Id.*

<sup>9</sup> Roberto A. Ferdman, There have already been almost 3,000 murders in Venezuela since the start of the year, Quartz, March 8, 2014, at A1.

<sup>10</sup> Sussanah Guthrie, List ranks world's most miserable countries, The News Daily, Nov. 10, 2014, at A1.

<sup>11</sup> Venezuelan protests (2014–present), Wikipedia, (March 22, 2020, 5:39 pm), [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Venezuelan\\_protests\\_\(2014%E2%80%93present\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Venezuelan_protests_(2014%E2%80%93present)).

<sup>12</sup> *Id.*

<sup>13</sup> Corruption Perceptions Index, Wikipedia, (March 24, 2020, 3:58 pm), [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Corruption\\_Perceptions\\_Index](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Corruption_Perceptions_Index).

balances."<sup>14</sup> Another area of major concern is the increase in crime and violence, and violations of fundamental rights, particularly the right to freedom of opinion and expression.

The Venezuelans demanded for a recall election against President Maduro. The largest demonstration of the protest occurred on September 1, 2016 for the same. Over 1 million people or 3% of the nation's total population gathered for the protest. However, the recall referendum was suspended by the government-leaning National Electoral Council. The opposition organized yet another protest on 26 October 2016, with over 1.2 million Venezuelans participating.<sup>15</sup> Vatican-mediated dialogue between the opposition and the government was attempted after some of the largest protests occurred in late-2016 and ultimately failed in January 2017. Concentration on protests subsided in the first few months of 2017 until the 2017 Venezuelan constitutional crisis occurred when the pro-government Supreme Tribunal of Justice of Venezuela attempted to assume the powers of the opposition-led National Assembly and removed their immunity, though the move was reversed days later, demonstrations grew "into the most combative since a wave of unrest in 2014". During the 2017 protests, 2.5 million to 6 million protesters were involved. The 2019 protests began in early January after the National Assembly declared the May 2018 presidential elections invalid and declared Juan Guaidó acting president, resulting in a presidential crisis.<sup>16</sup> The presidency is in dispute even in 2020 as to who the President is.

Venezuela is in the state of utmost crisis. What we need in today's world, especially to develop, is stability which is highly lacking in this poor country. It is difficult to fight back one let alone so many problems at once. The Venezuelans have been suffering from the beginning of this century and there has been no intervention as it is the internal affairs of Venezuela. Hopefully, Venezuela restores its lost economy and democracy soon.

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<sup>14</sup> Venezuela, World Justice Report, (March 24, 2020, 4:08 pm), [https://worldjusticeproject.org/sites/default/files/country-profiles/Venezuela\\_CP.pdf](https://worldjusticeproject.org/sites/default/files/country-profiles/Venezuela_CP.pdf).

<sup>15</sup> With massive marches, Venezuelan opposition pressured Maduro to reactivate referendum, Ambito, (March 24, 2020, 4:04 pm), <https://www.ambito.com/mundo/con-multitudinarias-marchas-oposicion-venezolana-presiono-maduro-que-reactive-referendo-n3960181>

<sup>16</sup> Venezuelan protests (2014–present), Wikipedia, (March 24, 2020, 4:15 pm), [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Venezuelan\\_protests\\_\(2014%E2%80%93present\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Venezuelan_protests_(2014%E2%80%93present)).