

The People of Venezuela vs Nicolás Maduro

Venezuela has been at the forefront of world news over the past decade and the fraudulent regime of Nicolás Maduro is the epicenter of conflict and crisis within this country and its economy. Venezuela is what is known as a ‘petro state’ which means that its economy or government income depends heavily on the export of oil or natural gas. Venezuela’s economic and political power is highly concentrated in an elite minority, political institutions are weak and unaccountable, and corruption is widespread (CFR.org). For example, some other countries that would be considered petro states are Iran, Libya, Nigeria, and Saudi Arabia all fit into the attributes of the so-called ‘petro state’. According to Diana Roy and Amelia Cheatham at CFR.org, “Petrostates are thought to be vulnerable to what economists call Dutch disease, a term coined during the 1970s after the Netherlands discovered natural gas in the North Sea.” Dutch disease happens when global economies depend too heavily on oil or natural gas exports to support their GDP. As Roy and Cheatham would go on to explain, “As these labor-intensive export industries lag, unemployment could rise, and the country could develop an unhealthy dependence on the export of natural resources... Petrostate economies are then left highly vulnerable to unpredictable swings in global energy prices and capital flight.” This dependence creates another problem for Venezuela's governance because this resource curse often results in weak ties between the government and its citizens. This ‘Dutch disease’ has plagued Venezuela and its economy since Nicolás Maduro took office in 2013. At the time of writing, Maduro is still the current president of Venezuela and has been at the center of controversy surrounding the

2024 election in Venezuela. On July 29 of this year, CNE, which is the organization responsible for running the election declared Nicolás Maduro the winner of the election with 51.2% of the votes, compared to his counterpart Edmundo González who received just 44.2% of the vote. The results of this election came as no surprise to the citizens of Venezuela, who have seen this fraudulent election process take place since 2013. According to CNN, ConVzla, which is an opposing organization to Maduro's regime, released data that found 63% of the vote actually went to Edmundo González and that Maduro only received 30% of the vote. This means that Maduro should've lost the election by almost double the amount of total votes, and is the reason why the United States Government is now considering Venezuela under "dictatorial rule". According to the U.S. Department of State, "As he has done for years to retain power, Maduro manipulated the electoral process and timeline to his advantage; electoral irregularities included everything from intimidation and disenfranchisement of voters to improper tabulation of the results to outright bans on the participation of Venezuela's most popular political parties and candidates. Maduro and his inner circle have continued to imprison civic, military, and political leaders and have used the distribution of food as a tool for social control." The rigging of elections and dependency on oil production has snowballed into a ripple effect that has been gripping Venezuelan citizens and has created a massive conflict between Maduro and the people of Venezuela.

According to the U.S. Department of State, one-third of Venezuelan citizens, or 9.3 million citizens are severely food insecure. According to the United Nations, 7 million Venezuelans need humanitarian assistance, more than 5.4 million Venezuelans have fled the country, and the World Food Program reports that 59% of households in Venezuela don't have the money to buy food. In a study conducted in 2017, the average Venezuelan lost roughly 24

pounds since Maduro took over. It is this economic crisis and the suffering of the Venezuelan people that have erupted this conflict into international news and has even forced the hand of outside nations to provide relief. Maduro's selfish decisions, suppression of competitors, and refusal to listen to the public outcry for change have created a dysfunctional conflict cycle that seems to climax around every election. This avoidance by Maduro has led to protests, violence, and mass flight among its citizens. As said by The U.S. Department of State, "Since retaining power, the Maduro regime continues to disregard and repress the voices of the Venezuelan people in their calls for a return to democracy. Maduro is dismantling Venezuela's democratic institutions, economy, and infrastructure through abuse of state power and through alliances with outside nations including Cuba, Russia, Iran, and China, that repress the Venezuelan people further."

This conflict centers on tangible and intangible issues, being that the Venezuelan people rely on Maduro to handle the economy in a way that operates in the best interest of the people. As Abigail and Cahn taught us, tangible issues focus on material resources that cannot be divided equally. Instead of Maduro looking out for the best interests of the Venezuelan people and dividing Venezuelan's economic resources in an effective manner, he chooses to line the pockets of his regime and the wealthy elitists controlling the oil industry. Obviously, not every citizen can be provided with whatever resources they want, but nothing Maduro has done under his presidency was for the interests of the Venezuelan people. This conflict also has aspects of intangible issues, as the repeated fraudulent elections and suppressions of opposing candidates has caused serious distrust between the citizens of Venezuela and Maduro. Behavioral issues shown by Maduro have killed the political process of Venezuela and transitioned their government from a Democracy, to a greedy dictatorship. In Venezuela's current state, Maduro holds all the cards and

Venezuela is not the only country aware of this disgraceful fraud. When deciding what type of dysfunctional conflict cycle that this crisis falls under, it is clear that avoidance plays a key factor in perpetuating this conflict. Maduro avoids this conflict by refusing to listen to the demands of the Venezuelan people as well as refusing to give up any power. Rather than addressing the country's dependence on oil exports, Maduro chooses to kick the can down the road and instead line the pockets of his regime and other elitists controlling the country's economy. This avoidance by Maduro has led to the repeated 'gunny-sacking' as Cahn and Abigail mention as, storing up emotions of hurt and anger causes things to build up until they explode. This is particularly important in the case of Venezuela because this 'gunny-sacking' doesn't apply to Maduro, but applies to the citizens of Venezuela. Everytime an election comes around, emotions heighten, and citizens build up hope that this could finally be the change that solves the crisis. Then to have Maduro re-elected in a blatantly fraudulent election causes public outrage, protests, and even deaths. It is this election pattern of conflict that also represents the cycle of dysfunctionality, and highlights the clear undesired repetitive pattern that has been gripping the country for eleven years now. This crisis and conflict is a great example of what Abigail and Cahn called UPRs because these rigged elections keep individual citizens in a state of perpetual demoralization. They know that an election is coming up, they want to be heard, and in a democracy, the only way to make a change is by voting, but with Maduro's regime controlling the CNE, this makes political change impossible. Due to the power and control Maduro has over the country, competition is irrelevant, and any quality candidates running against him are hopeless.

Venezuela clearly needs this conflict to be resolved, before the crisis gripping the country can be put to rest. Outside sources have tried their hand at providing relief to the citizens

of Venezuela, and internally solving this conflict has been shown to be impossible. So how can we begin to resolve this conflict? Transformative Justice is the most logical and would be the most effective way of resolving this conflict. As Dr. McKinnon taught us, Transformative Justice works best when oppression is the root of the conflict and causing harm to the people of Venezuela. Transformative Justice would be particularly effective in the case of Venezuela because as we have seen over the past eleven years, this system or government has transitioned from a fully functioning Democracy, to an all out corrupt Dictatorship. Transformative Justice focuses on changing this system, as well as unifying and helping the victimized parties. Key aspects of Transformative Justice revolve around the stoppage and prevention of violence. As we have seen for several years, this conflict has cause protests, riots, and deaths among citizens, as well as, perpetuating the ongoing food crisis which has effects on the safety of the people of Venezuela as well. Maduro has armed forces as well as many powerful figures on his payroll, so resolving this conflict in a safe manner is incredibly crucial, especially for the desperate citizens of Venezuela. Transformative justice would be particularly effective in this case because, as Mia Mingus states, “Transformative justice responses and interventions 1) do not rely on the state; 2) do not reinforce or perpetuate violence such as oppressive norms or vigilantism; and most importantly, 3) actively cultivate the things we know prevent violence such as healing, accountability, resilience, and safety for all involved.” Each aspect of Transformative Justice applies to the ongoing conflict in Venezuela. First, this process does not rely on the state, and as we know now, the state of Venezuela is extremely corrupt under its current regime. Secondly, this would put a stop to the oppressive norms Venezuelan citizens have been now accustomed to under Maduro’s reign. Lastly, Transformative justice would put healthy ways of operation into effect and relieve the suffering citizens of Venezuela. This would also help the country moving

forward, by reconstructing their economy in a way that isn't so dependent on oil exports, and doesn't only benefit the wealthy elites. This would stop this dysfunctional conflict cycle, and prevent one from arising in the future. Researching this conflict was extremely intriguing as it is so relevant, yet has been happening for over a decade. Although foreign nations like the United States have tried their best to assist in resolving this conflict, it is simply not enough. An outside force needs to step in and use a transformative justice approach to save the desperate country of Venezuela and put an end to Maduro's corrupt and selfish reign.

References

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