

Why has Democracy Receded in Venezuela?

SANDRA E. ESCOBAR

California Polytechnic University, Pomona

This thesis is going to evaluate the crisis in Venezuela and analyze the causes of their democracy backsliding by comparing the country's timeline and evaluating the different events that have led to the present-day crisis. Many countries have gone through a democratic recession, which has been caused by their economic instability, the choices of their legislative branch, the effects that foreign governments have had on a country and the effects a populist regime has had on a country's political participation. I will be testing these arguments by assessing data from Freedom House to measure democracy in Venezuela. Additionally, I will be analyzing data sets from the World Bank and International Monetary Fund to see how regime changes have affected the economy, if there is any kind of change. Finally, I will analyze data from the latinobarometer by utilizing the survey data from the people of Venezuela to show whether they have trust in their government and to see if they have made an impact using protest and elections.

INTRODUCTION:

Why has democracy receded in Venezuela? In this thesis, I have tested explanations that argue that economic stability of this country has in fact an effect on democracy. Economic instability is a cyclical issue where economic instability is the cause of democratic recession and is the symptom of democratic recession. The pressures of an unstable economy can lead to pressure from the citizens of this country and from foreign investors to take action to pull themselves out of an economic crisis. Through my findings, there is considerable evidence that their economic crisis has an effect on all factors that related to a receding democracy. It affects the country's politics, its foreign relations, and it affects citizens' political participation. These factors are coinciding issues that have led Venezuela to the current crisis.

LITERATURE REVIEW:

In recent years, Venezuela's citizens have been suffering due to the economic crisis that has been triggered by a backsliding democracy. Backsliding democracy, according to many articles that I have researched, is the deliberate elimination of the political institution that is maintaining democracy. In order to analyze the causes as to why Venezuela's democracy is receding, my research consists of first finding the literature on how different nations have had their democracy

recede. Finding the main reasons for this kind of breakdown, I will then be analyzing the socioeconomic conditions in the countries that have a backsliding democracy to try and explain what is happening in Venezuela. This analysis will additionally consist of looking at the influence of the government through their legislative or judicial branches, along with the military's strength and control of the government. I will also analyze the effects of populist regimes on a country and the impact it has on democracy. Finally, I will assess foreign influences, such as the United States and their role on democratic backsliding. With these themes, I will then look at how they relate to Venezuela and find an explanation to what has happened to this country.

Conceptualization of Democracy

Democracy, according to Robert Dahl, has been the cause of confusion over the meaning, the fact that the world has changed and has developed over thousands of years, the definition of democracy is not the same as what it was during the Athenian time (Dahl, 2019 3). There has been scholarly debate in the usage and the definition of democracy. In this paper, I will first conceptualize the definition of democracy and its relation to the democratic breakdown in Venezuela.

Robert Dahl breaks down the greek word *demokratia*, *demos* meaning the people and *kratia* meaning rule or authority, making it "rule by the people" (Dahl, 2019 3).

“Democracy has been variously conceived of as a distinctive set of political institutions and practices, a particular body of rights, a social and economic order, a system that ensures certain desirable results, or a unique process of making collective and binding decisions” (Dahl, 2019). For a democracy to thrive in governments that are moving toward democratization, the leaders must be able to withstand the protest of the people and be more considerate of their voices and protect their new found freedoms and be able to respond to the needs of the citizens (Diamond, 2008). In order for a new democracy to thrive, there should be participation from civilians in a multiparty election that are free and fair. Opposition should be significant in not just a presidential election, but in legislative elections as well. For a democracy to survive, the people of that nation must trust in the system. John Locke and Baron de Montesquieu conceptualized liberal democracy, which is a constitutional government that restrains and divides power of the majority, which can protect individual freedom. In order for a democracy to be considered legitimate, there are three factors that need to be met. “Legitimacy means acceptance of the existing political institutions and a belief that those in power have the right to rule, the capacity of a regime to find solutions to the basic problems facing any political system, and the capacity to actually to implement the policies formulated with the desired results.” (Linz & Stepan 1978, 16-22). With this definition of democracy, this will be the basis on the analysis of how democracies backslide.

Economic Crisis

Economic issues have been cited as one reason for democracies backsliding, research has shown that the economic crisis has an effect on political regimes. “[I]nflationary crisis inhibited democratization from the 1950s through the early 1970s but may have facilitated it in the late 1980s and that recessionary crises facilitated democratic breakdown but had no effect on democratic transition throughout this period”. (Gasiorowski 1995). Here the author has used the data from 97 of the largest third world countries to discuss how economic downturn affects democracy. Discussing that, an economic crisis undermines legitimacy to not only a democratic regime but an authoritarian regime as well, which then triggers the breakdown of democracy. This a finding that supports the claim that an economic crisis does trigger a democratic breakdown.

In Indonesia, the financial crisis in 1997, “exposed the weaknesses of Suharto’s economic policies, namely cronyism and corruption” (Lawson-Remer, 2013). Suharto’s policies were so bad that national companies went bankrupt, and foreign capital was no longer present in the country. Along with Indonesia, Brazil and Mexico shows how autocracy has the potential to trigger a transition. In order for a nation that just started to adopt democracy, there has to be a robust middle class, according to Lawson-Remer. Poland as an example, is a nation that had succeeded in their democratic transition which was due to their strong middle class. In contrast to Poland, Ukraine did not have economic stabil-

ity after the fall of the Soviet Union and was easily swayed by autocratic elites. When a government fails to deliver equality and opportunities that would improve the lives of the citizens, populist authoritarians could become a possibility. “Merely providing the civil freedoms of the ballot box and marketplace participation is not enough; citizens must also realize substantive freedoms that generate the capability to live full and meaningful lives.” (Lawson-Remer, 2013). Thailand was a nation where the people resented the government for favoring foreign investors, which allowed populist to be elected to the government, stating that high inflation had increased the likelihood of a breakdown. Economic instability is either the cause of backsliding democracies or economic instability is caused by backsliding democracies. Looking at Sub-Saharan African nations there are many obstacles that are keeping them from reaching democracy. There is no real hope of seeing democracy in this area in Africa (Adjangba, 1999). There is a lack of economic development, a lack of political participation and the lack of human rights in these areas and trying to bring democracy there is not supported. “[T]here is a strong correlation between a stable and working democracy and socio economic development.” (Adjangba, 1999).

Although many literatures presented in this research discuss how the economy has affected a country’s government and what type of regime they end up with, it is a different story when it comes to Russia. Russia, over the years, has been less democratic and yet their economy has a similar market economy as the western European countries. The reason for this is due to the reforms that took place between 1991 and 1993 (Åslund, 2007). The economic rise is also due to the private sector which contributes 65 percent of the GDP as well as the regularity that Russian companies take the state to court (Åslund, 2009). Russia was more focused on improving their economy instead of strengthening democracy and changing the government from communist to a strong democratic regime. During the year that Yeltsin was in power, there were reform changes which were capitalized by private corporations. “Moreover, the powerful and resourceful International Monetary Fund and the World Bank were engaged in the building of capitalism, but no international organization is responsible for democracy building.” (Åslundm, 2009).

In Kenya there was a decline in their economy and has gone through a steady decline in their GDP starting from 1995 up to 2000. In order to obtain help from the IMF and the World bank, there had to be an agreement to allow IMF agents to take charge of their accounts. The High Court decided that the Kenya Anti-Corruption Authority was unconstitutional, which resulted in both the IMF and the World Bank to discontinue their aid. (Holmquist, Oendo, 2001). All across Kenya, the people agreed that it was necessary to comply with these two institutions in order to obtain the aid. It is well known that the regime is corrupted and this corruption brought economic instabili-

ty. Just like in Bangladesh, the economic downfall was caused by the governments lack of taking any kind of initiative to make the necessary changes to help their people.

Populist Regime

Looking at populist governments and how they have failed in different nations helps to see how this type of regime might have been the cause to an economic crisis and the crisis in Venezuela. What is a populism? Populism focuses on the rights of the people as a whole and opposes the interest of the elite. Latin America has a history with populist regimes. Although there is a push for the people, there is no real improvement and “do not redistribute more than non-populist democracies.” (Houle & Kenny, 2018). The Pink Tide nations in Latin America, are the nations that were under left-wing populist leadership. The populist government of Venezuela, Brazil, and Argentina use blame shifting to keep their power by blaming the previous government or the IMF, for causing the initial economic crisis. In Brazil, the economic despair that Brazil faced was due to the governments failed attempt to turn their crisis around and had failed to pass policies that actually worked. In the example of Argentina, the populist government had in their administration a couple that was in charge of the economic growth, Nestor and Cristina, a husband and wife. These two had severely reduced the effectiveness of Argentina’s economy. “Under the couple’s erratic style of personalized populism, South America’s second-largest economy was soon hamstrung by state protectionism, currency controls, and yet another round of sovereign default.” (Lansberg-Rodriguez, 2016). The populist movement in these countries had devastated the opportunity for these counties to prosper. The stress of being in an economic crisis can lead to the people wanting a change, and in the cases of the South American countries, there have been many regime changes either by vote or through a coup.

Weak Government : Legislative and/or Judicial

Democracy does not merely backslide because the economy of a country is bad. Russia is an example of a country with little democracy, but with a thriving economy. Democracy can end up backsliding when the government is too weak to make necessary legislation to keep them thriving. When a leader in a new democracy is under pressure of growing the economy and is working with a weak government, these leaders will then turn on their country and start to accumulate power. As the power begins to concentrate in the executive branch, the other branches take notice and doubt the ability of the new democracy to make the changes necessary for them to be able to pass policies that would promote general welfare. The new leader will take advantage of their new position and start rolling back on constitutional restraints (Kapstein & Converse, 2008). Institutional weakness is likely to happen in new democracies, it takes time after

all, to build up a strong and credible democracy. In order to have a stable economy, their government must pass policies to have a central bank strong enough to fight inflation. The judiciary must be separate from intrusion from politics, establishing their own authority. There has to be political parties that are supposed to be able to have a platform and ideal that would attract a coalition of people that share their views on what a government should look like, and would have to appease their constituents. “The longer a democratic regime endures, the less likely is a return to authoritarian rule.” (Kapstein & Converse, 2008).

The political parties in Africa are too weak to be effective for the people in part due to a lack of legislature and judicial system as an autonomous institution. The political parties are seen as narrowly ethnically based. There is a chronic inability for the legislative to pass a good piece of social legislation as well as an inability to have a clear platform for the government. The judicial system has been heavily influenced by the executive power that relies on presidential decrees. There is a lack of institutional consolidation, “democracy requires also established judicial procedures and rules of political conduct,” (Adjangba, 1999).

In many of the countries being looked at throughout the world, many of their issues stem from the economy. For example, in Bangladesh, the economic issue is the center of their politics. Bangladesh has two political parties that have been arguing back and forth on who is in power. Their government instability is due to the fact that these two parties have been the cause of deadlocks and prolonged boycotts. The government was oppressing and harassing political opponents for both parties and brought in thugs and criminal activities. The government is very centralized, many of “the civil bureaucracy and mid-level managers have become extremely wary of taking initiatives or making decisions in an atmosphere of partisan witch-hunt.” (Jahan, 2003). These politicians do not have the courage to step up and make any kind of move without orders from whoever is above them. When the new coalition was in power the cabinet was then bloated so that making any kind of change would be difficult to pull off. There is no transparency when it comes to making decisions, the cabinet members have no power in the decision making process and that the decisions are made elsewhere.

In the Philippines, democracy seemed to be thriving with a high voter turnout during elections in 1992, 1998, 2004 and 2007. There was so much participation from the people of the Philippines, with people volunteering to make sure that the elections are free and fair (Dressel, 2011). The government had also placed strict regulations in order to keep the separate branches in check, but their democracy is still fragile. The elections are free and fair but there are issues with authoritarianism coming back, an issue with military coups, making the Philippines a “dysfunctional dem-

Backsliding Democracy

ocracy” (Dressel, 2011). The rule of law, or their judicial system has not been particularly strong. There is no access to Philippine’s Supreme Court by the poor and was perceived as corrupt and had been influenced by politicians. The elite have taken advantage of the judicial system and have avoided prosecution, especially when it dealt with corruption.

Kenya the political unrest was caused by the IMF returning to the country to try and provide them with aid. As the people protested and rallied for change, they were violently broken up by the opposition of the National Convention Executive Council. There has been an increase of illegal repression that led up to their elections. (Holmquist, Oendo, 2001) There is no trust in the regime and there is no trust in the opposition. Just as the previous examples of weak government, Kenya has an issue with corruption in the government, which has left them in despair.

Foreign Influence: United States of America

In addition to the struggles of an economic crisis and a weak government, another problem that backsliding democracies face is that the United States has been a major influencer in their government. The United States has “spent \$3 trillion trying to bring democracy to Iraq”(Downes & Monten, 2013). There are foreign countries that are imposing democracy and have brought the regime change into nations that are autocratic and bring war. There is no real proof that this kind of intervention is driving these countries toward democracy. A regime change does not fix it all, many countries are undeveloped in their economy, they have a lack of experience with a representative government and are ethnically heterogeneous. The focus is to conduct an analysis of military interventions to democratize nations. “FIRC initiated by democracies on average gain no significant democratic benefit compared with similar states were democracies did not intervene”(Downes & Monten, 2013). There is no guarantee that there will be a democratic change in the states that obtain foreign intervention. Regime change is suppose to be a path to democracy and the removal of leaders may be a quick fix but in the end it is unlikely to succeed. The optimistic view of democratization is that military forces are useful for spreading democracy. “Neoconservatism holds that the United States not only has a moral imperative to promote democracy but also a strategic interest in doing so because democracies do not fight one another.” (Downes & Monten, 2013). The spread of democracy, in the neoconservatives prospective, is an optimistic possibility that democratization can be accomplished using military forces A pessimist would say that a regime change can invoke a nationalist backlash against political institutions. A conditionalist would argue that “U.S military interventions exert a positive effect on democratization only when the objective of these interventions is explicitly to liberalize the target state.” (Downes & Monten, 2013). In a case from 1950 to 1990 James Meernik had found that the intervention had little impact.

Foreign intervention is not done just by a military movement, aid to a country can also be considered foreign

intervention along with the foreign policy on trade. In Latin America, the impact of foreign economies pressuring politics has caused the democratic breakdown (Muller, 1985). The impact of exhausting the import industry has created a crisis of low economic growth along with high inflation, causing the search for a better government to handle these pressures. This then led to a coup to try and find a way to deal with the crisis (Muller, 1985). In comparing Niger and Benin, there is a difference in what foreign aid can do for a country. In their case, aid is referred to as grants or loans, and this kind of assistance has never been consistent. In Benin, the government receives aid from foreign donors. The United States went as far as cancelling Benin’s debt, in contrast Niger has not received aid or support. Benin was able to sustain stability and had received the incentive that was promised to countries that democratized (Gazibo, 2005). Both of these countries were facing civil instability when the citizens were in need of more social programs which also led to an economic overload. Benin received the aid necessary to accomplish democratization, while Niger is in a democratic breakdown. Niger had two military coups and never reached democracy and the lack of aid had increased the unrest in the political sphere. Niger had a democratic election and yet they were still unable to gain foreign aid, in a country that was in desperate need of it. Inflation and economic crisis got worse and the country’s spending was increasing and Niger’s main export was no longer profitable. The lack of foreign aid has kept this country from reaching democracy.

Military Control

Why do some democracies endure while others break down? Democratic government is terminated by military forces and there are two types of democratic breakdowns, exogenous termination and endogenous termination. “Breakdowns are exogenous when the source of the event comes from outside the government and endogenous when the event springs from within the government.” (Maeda, 2010). These two ways are important to recognize as the reasons why democracies break down, according to Maeda. Democratic termination has been endogenous in the years between 1950 and 2004, about 40 percent of termination. Looking at the endogenous way that democracies break down, the study is focused on coups d’ etats. The most persistent type of coups is a promissory coups, which convinces people that they are going to promote democracy by holding elections. (Bermeo, 2016). There have been twelve successful promissory coups between 1990 and 2012, and there was a rise in promissory coups rising from 35 percent to 85 percent after 1990. After a successful coup many of the elections reflect that the people that were in favor of the coup will be elected and according to Bermeo, elections are not a reliable way to reach democracy.

In Africa the military has been a major factor in their politics and remain an autonomous institution that has threatened democracy. Even though there have been

policies that have been put into place to reduce the power the military has over the government, “the militaries continue nevertheless to retain so much institutional autonomy in Africa that they still represent a latent threat to democracy.” (Adjangba, 1999). In Thailand the military does not have as strong of a hold on the government, but in 1997 the military had convinced Parliament and the Prime Minister to pass a new constitution. In 2006 there was a coup against the Prime Minister Thaksin and the military became the main focus in Thai politics. (Freedman, 2007). The military, in both of these coups, have used their power to place their own leaders into the government making the government undemocratic. The military had a big hold in Thailand, their power extended to controlling business and the economy and even taking control of the media and radio. Their control over the media was to suppress the news about military shootings that were happening during the coup in order to keep the people from knowing the truth about the military’s control.

There has been an increase of the military growing their influence in the Philippine government. In fact, there has been an increase of retired officers filling political positions in the presidential administration. In the Philippines, there is a long history of the citizens being in control of their military, however there have been coups that have repeatedly occurred in 2007 (Dressel, 2011). A military that is autonomous and strong can give them enough power to take over a democratic regime and turn a government into an autocratic one.

Counter Argument

There was one article that wrote that there is no democratic rollback in the world. Steven Levistky and Lucan Way have argued that there is no real democratic rollback, there is no democratic erosion and or no democratic decline. There is no evidence to show that there is a democratic recession. They claim that since the world has seen a wave of nations transitioning toward democracy, it has made it seem more optimistic. Along with this optimism, the new democracy causes fear of the democratic recession when these democracies have reverted back to the previous regime. “There is little evidence that the democratic sky is falling or (depending on your choice of fable) that the wolf of authoritarian resurgence has arrived.” (Levistky & Way, 2015). The basis of their research is to look at the number of democracies between 2000 to 2013. There was no real change in democracies and in fact there has been a slight increase of democracy. According to these two authors, they wrote that the mid-2000 is significant because the claim is that this is the start of the democratic recession. They also point out that there are three out of four reports that show that there is no democratic recession. “Only Freedom House shows a decline between 2005 and 2013, and that decline (from .63 to .62) is extremely modest.” (Levisky & Way, 2015). The fact that there was a growing number of countries becoming democratic, it gives the illusion that there is a problem with democracies backsliding.

METHODOLOGY:

In my research I was able to find the many reasons why democracy backslides. I will take those factors and try to answer my research question: Why has democracy receded in Venezuela?

Dependent Variables

In this research paper, my focus is the recession of democracy in Venezuela. The crisis in Venezuela has become a focus in the media, and my question is, how did a thriving country get to this point. The focus in this paper is going to look at the different ways a state that was once democratic ends up undemocratic. I will be examining four different theories that would explain the possible reasons why Venezuela’s democratic government has receded leaving behind a crisis that leaves people to live in a country that can no longer provide them with food or a place to live. Possible reasons to why there is a recession, I will test the possibility of the economy having an effect on democracy. I will also measure survey responses of the people of Venezuela to track the people’s civic freedoms and try to explain how Venezuela has had the same regime for several years. I will also measure the effects of the United States and foreign nations’ involvement in Venezuelan politics in the form of oil importation. I will also look at the politics surrounding oil in Venezuela and the impact that foreign investors have on the country. My dependent variable will be Venezuela’s democracy. To measure my dependent variable, I will make use of data publicly available from Freedom House to measure democracy in Venezuela, as it offers a systematic and consistent scoring over time.

Explanatory Variables

In this thesis, I examine scholarly arguments to account for reasons behind why some countries’ democracies recede. As discussed above in the literature review, these arguments tend to center around: economy, regime change, weak political participation, and foreign interventions.

In examining the economy, I will make use of data from the World Bank and International Monetary Fund to analyze the economy through three different time frames, starting with the years before Hugo Chavez became president, the early Hugo Chavez years, the later Chavez years and the Nicolas Maduro years to analyze whether the crisis was caused because of the choices made by Hugo Chavez when it came to policies made for the country or was it due to the lack economic stability, or is there a connection between all of these factors that have left this country in a devastating state. Looking to see if the recession was caused by a struggling economy or if the economic disparity comes from the lack of democracy. Analyzing how each regime handles the economic growth as well as the social programs for the people of Venezuela. I will examine the economic growth in Venezuela and see how it aligns with Freedom Houses’ rating of their democracy. I want to find

a connection to the decline of their democracy to the decline to their economy.

When considering regime change, I draw on the existing literature to investigate two factors cited by scholars: the regime change and a weak government. To test the argument that a regime change, specifically looking at populist regimes and how these regime changes has affected the crisis in Venezuela. Looking, as well as a weak government and how the lack of legislation has affected Venezuela. Analyzing the data from latinobarometro.org, by using the survey data from the people of Venezuela will show their trust in their government as well as see if they have had any kind of impact through protest and elections. I will also look into how much Chavez had affected their government and political opposition.

I investigate the intervention from a foreign government in Venezuela as well as other countries. To examine whether foreign aid or foreign intervention has any effect on a country's democracy and if it had an effect on the crisis. I will analyze data from the World Bank that show economic participation in Venezuela.

Methodology

In this thesis project, I will make use of qualitative methodology. Specifically, I will examine four cases (selection strategy discussed below) using an over time analysis within-country variation. In utilizing this selection approach, I will be able to focus on the issues that a democratic state can face that would cause them to recede back into an authoritarian state.

Case Selection

In this thesis project, I will examine Venezuela itself and track democracy throughout the years between 1958 and 2018. I want to analyze how democracy has changed throughout the different regimes in Venezuela. I want to also see how their economy, oil politics, foreign relations, and their political participation has affected their democracy. My hypothesis is that the main reason that their democracy had declined was due to their unstable economy.

ANALYSIS:

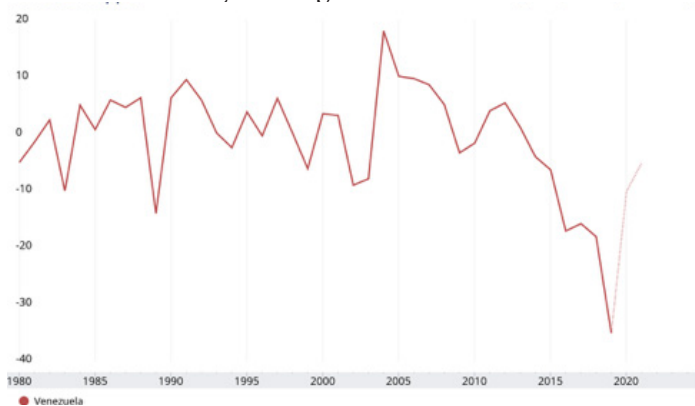
<i>Years</i>	<i>Economic Stability</i>	<i>Oil Value</i>	<i>Foreign Relationship</i>	<i>Political Participation</i>
<i>Before Hugo Chavez</i>	Medium	High	High	High
<i>Early Chavez Years</i>	Medium	Low to High	High	High
<i>Later Chavez Years</i>	Low	High to Low	Low: Very few trading partners	Low

<i>Years</i>	<i>Economic Stability</i>	<i>Oil Value</i>	<i>Foreign Relationship</i>	<i>Political Participation</i>
<i>Maduro Years</i>	Low	Low	Low: Very few trading partners	Low

By analyzing the different regime changes in Venezuela, I can track how much each of these factors had affected their democracy. I can take a closer look at each factor and how each factor has caused democratic recession and to try and rule out all the other factors. I want to prove that Venezuela's democratic decline is due to their lack of economic responsibility. Many authors in the literature that I have found all point to a weak economy being the cause of a democratic decline. I believe it is the same in Venezuela.

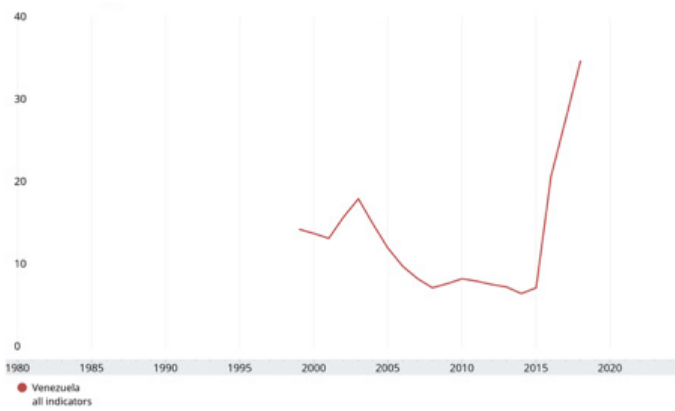
Economy

The years that followed 1980, there was a stagnation of Venezuela's economic growth, which led to a rise in poverty and was the beginning of military coups. In order to understand this economic downturn and why it has not been able to change I will start by looking at policies that were put into place before Hugo Chavez took office (1999-2013). In the time between 1989- 1998, there was a policy that was in effect, passed by President Carlos Andres Perez called El Gran Viraje (The Great Turnaround), which devalued the exchange rate, it liberalized trade, deregulated finances and privatization, freed interest rates, and eliminated nearly all restrictions on foreign investments (Di John, 2005 109). In Figure 1, it can be seen that these economic reforms had affected the economy causing fluctuations.

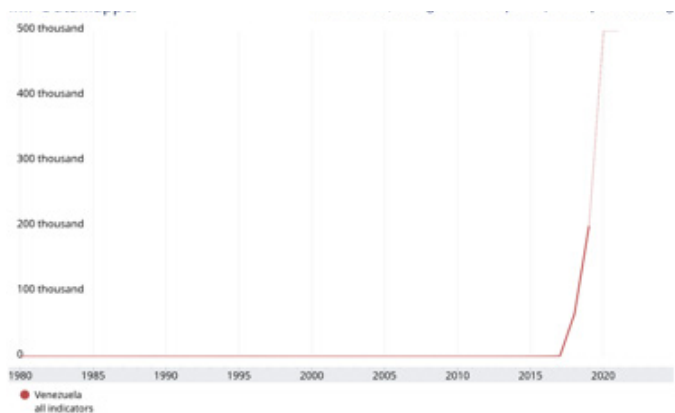


During the time that Hugo Chavez took power, he had promised to the people to make changes that would help the poor and change the economic policies. In reality, Chavez had not made any changes to the policies from the previous government, instead he had similar types of policies. (Faria, 2008 525). Chavez did not plan to make any changes, just made the necessary changes to keep him in power.

In analyzing the data from the World Bank and IMF, it can be seen that the country's GDP has seen many fluctuations but the worst their GDP had looked was in the



later years of Hugo Chavez's presidency. Chavez passed away in 2013, and even after his death the economy never recovered. According to the IMF, their GDP growth graph shows that the country is at its all time low, dipping under -30%. During Chavez's early years in office, he has seen a rise in their GDP, showing their highest growth in the country's history. Although the country was prospering during his time, which is all due to the success of oil exports. In Figure 2, it shows the trend in unemployment. Just like the GDP, unemployment rates dropped during Hugo Chavez's presidency and the rise of unemployment has occurred after his death.



In Figure 3 inflation looks to be in a stagnant state throughout the years and the rise in inflation occurs in 2015 and is still rising. In 2002, Hugo Chavez was forced out of office and in that same year the economy saw a dip, after he regained power, the year that followed the economy saw a bump which led to a spike in their GDP (Sullivan, 2016 5). During this time the opposition had protested Chavez and held a strike which was the cause of the downturn which can be attributed to the reduction of oil exports. In 2003 the government was able to maintain the oil production and return the export numbers back to the numbers they had before the strike. The 2004 spike was due to the rise in the world's oil prices which prompted Chavez to use these profits to start social programs, winning him the 2006 reelections (Sullivan, 2016 5). Chavez deeply depended on the revenues the country obtained through oil exports to keep the country going.

The government had centralized the economy by

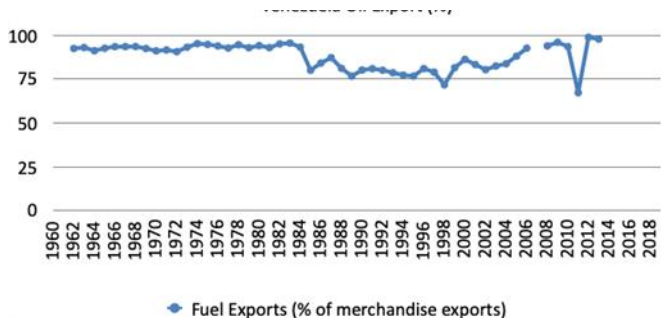
eliminating private ownership of production in different industries. Strategically the government had taken over energy production such as oil, electricity, and telecommunications in order to become powerful and guarantee they get to keep their seat in power. The economic problems surrounding Venezuela stem from their dependence on oil exports and less on other means of exports and production. Since the mass production of petroleum began in the 1920s, it had become the major export, surpassing coffee as the primary export product (Briceno-Leon, 2005 1). Coffee was a major export from 1830 to 1920 and was 57 percent of the country's GDP (Purcell, 2013 150). The changes made in economic policy were focused on taking advantage of the wealth that the oil industry has brought to the country. Chavez's plan to fulfill the promises he had made to the people was to use the profits from oil exports to fund social programs and social spending that have helped fight poverty by implementing programs in education, health care and in poverty reduction. Although all of these programs were in fact reducing poverty, it had also caused a shortage when it came to food staples and had caused high levels of inflation (Sullivan, 2008 30). The government only focused on exporting oil and nothing else, even though oil rents are not an infinite resource.

The economy in Venezuela in 2014 was low and it continued to drop since then. At this time Nicolas Maduro had a growing problem among his colleagues. He did not have the same charisma that Hugo Chavez had and has been struggling to win over the country. In Figure 1, it shows the GDP trend in Venezuela and how much it has suffered in recent years. It has hit its all time low in 2019. The tension of the downward spiral of their economy had forced Maduro to repress protest making his regime closest to the Cuban regime, although Maduro's power is much weaker than that of Hugo Chavez (Mijares, 2015 80). The issues with the economy for years have been blamed on the efforts of foreign government to destabilize Venezuela in order to change the current regime. Many scholars have pointed out that the possibility of this crisis is the fact that their current leaders are not as efficient at tackling problems as Hugo Chavez was. When Maduro took power, his plan to change economic reforms was non existent, instead he kept all the policies made by Chavez. The major difference between Chavez and Maduro is that Maduro took on price speculation, hoarding, corruption and contraband (Ellner, 2015). In 2014 there was a limit put into place that would put profit margins on all business transactions up to 30 percent. The *Sundde*, created by the Law of Just Prices, was inspecting over 4,000 businesses and 900 of these businesses were subjected to sanction. Some businesses were forced to lower their prices, other businesses were seized and the merchandise were then turned over to community councils. The *Sundde* also confiscated semi-truck that were involved in the transportation of contraband and jailing the truck drivers, and *contraands* were just imports from Colombia. Maduro has been unable to handle the increase of the open-market exchange making the bolivares, the

Venezuelan currency, 160 bolivares to the dollar (Ellner, 2015). The uneven ratio of the open-market and the exchange rate was the cause of the rise of contraband transportation and the rise of corruption. This has also caused the prices of imported goods to sky rocket. The government's opposition leaders have attributed these issues with the exchange rate controls that were put into place by Hugo Chavez. Jose Guerra, an economist for the opposition, claims that the state's efforts in centralizing the economy has never worked and is the reason for the Venezuelan economy's downfall.

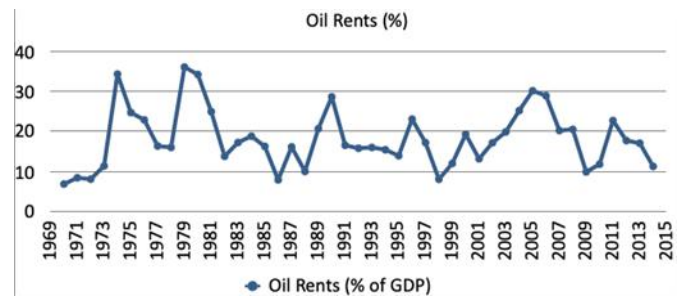
Oil Politics

Venezuela's exploitation of petroleum has been going on since 1975 and has been dependent on its revenue for years. The fact that petroleum is found underground the government took advantage of this and made sure that this resource was nationalized (Briceno-Leon, 2005 2). All of the revenue that the country receives from the exportation of petroleum, that money does not reach people or corporations. (Briceno-Leon, 2005 3). In Figure 1, there is a significant dip in foreign investment that happened between 2007 and 2009. This can be traced to Hugo Chavez's decision to obtain 60-80% in oil ventures. Comparing Figure 4 and Figure 5,

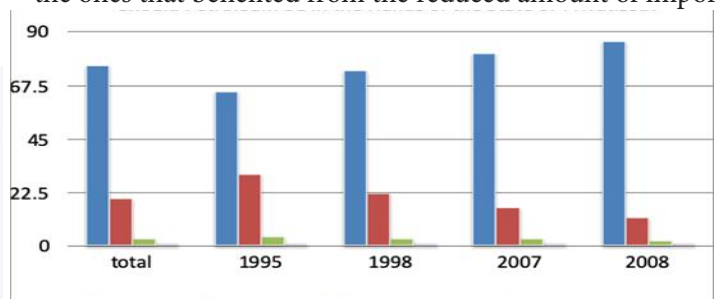


creating a new class in society. The growth of the middle class was due to the expansion of the state offering public employment (Briceno-Leon, 2005 6). Oil became a source of power for the people and the government.

Between 1920-1930, oil had gone from 2.5 percent of the GDP to 39 percent of the GDP which also dropped the production of agriculture and reduced the dependence of agricultural exports. When Latin America's exports were dependent on agriculture, most Latin American countries had attempted to keep themselves competitive against the world by devaluing their currency to keep them stable. Unlike these other countries Venezuela did not devalue their currency, instead their petroleum export had pressured them to revalue their currency (Purcell, 2013 150). The revenue from oil is due to the fact that Venezuela can sit on its natural resource and wait for the opportune moment to have a better bargaining power to get a more favorable rent. In Figure 6,



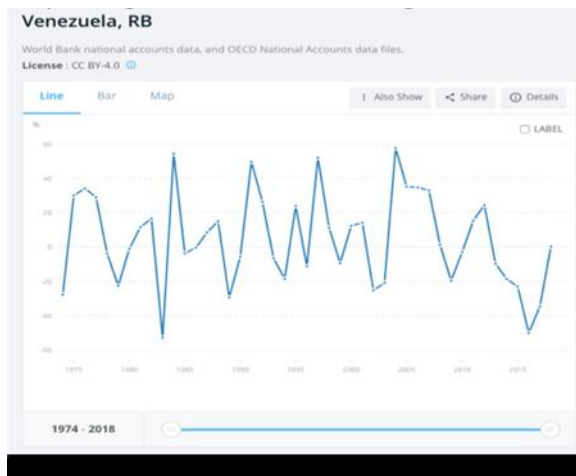
the value of their oil has gone up and down throughout the years, giving them the chance to take advantage of the peaks of the height of the value of their oil. The impact of the exportation of oil has stretched from the economy, to society and into their politics. The national and foreign bourgeoisie are the ones that benefited from the reduced amount of imports



coming into the country (Kornblihtt, 2015 66). In Figure 7, shows the opinion of the people on petroleum and who should control the petroleum, and according to the people the control of petroleum should belong to the state.

Chavez's plan for the money from oil was to invest it into social companies that would produce the things that the country needs and stop importing products. The first recipient of these investments was in agriculture, which received 50 percent of the investments (Purcell, 2013 147). In Figure 8, it shows the importing patterns in Venezuela, which shows a small drop off of their importation after 2005. This was the time that Hugo Chavez decided to stop importing goods. Hugo Chavez was a champion of the middle class and the poor when he started to campaign

they show the percentage of exports in Venezuela, and it shows that most of the exports are from the oil industry. Venezuelas' bourgeoisie was created when the private sector had transferred the income from the petroleum to their own hands, legally or illegally (Briceno-Leon, 2005 5). The government would give the bourgeoisie the credits and contracts of importation rights as well as giving them tax exemptions,



for presidency, and for every election after he became president he lost supporters in the middle class and was being highly supported by the poor. His popularity grew when he had announced to the people that the power of the oil is now in their hands (Briceno-Leon, 2005 17). His popularity grew especially when he had contracted the Cuban government to implement literacy and health programs. Allowing Cuban doctors to enter into the poorest areas in Venezuela and import medicines from Cuba as well. This new relationship with Cuba had brought great concerns to the United States, since the U.S has to protect their investment in Venezuelan oil. During Nicolas Maduro's presidency, the United States had decreased its importing of oil from Venezuela, but not just Venezuela, the U.S had decreased overall importation from all around the world and focused its importation from Canada (Sullivan, 2016 41). Although the U.S was one of Venezuela's major importers, the Venezuelan government has expanded their market to Asia and even Cuba. Venezuelans had access to gasoline at virtually no cost, which was true up until recent years costing the government \$12 billion dollars a year (Sullivan, 2016 42).

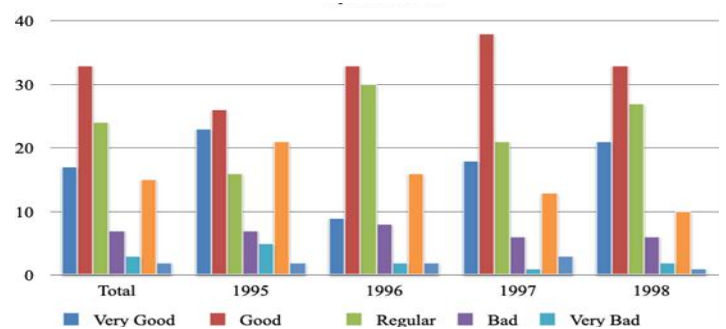
Hugo Chavez died from cancer in 2013 and in 2014 Venezuela had a new president, Nicolas Maduro. During this time, the prices of oil dropped along with foreign investments (Mijares, 2015 76). Venezuela's main importer of their oil was the U.S and China, but both nations had reduced their demands for international oil, resulting in the dropping of oil prices (Mijares, 2015 79). There was no way to depend on oil at this point and it was only getting worse with how much it was costing the government to offer social programs. The loss of the revenue from oil was causing tension between the politicians that were once loyal to Chavez and Maduro.

Foreign Relations with Venezuela

The United States began its interest in Venezuela after World War I, and the U.S's demand for oil grew more and more. The U.S was not interested in Venezuela and what

their government was up to until geologists informed the U.S government that Venezuela's oil reserves would be depleted at the rate they were extracting it. During the WWI era the British had control of the oil in Venezuela, but the United States stepped in and began pouring in money and influence into the country, ultimately winning them dominance over the oil fields. This new alliance was beneficial to both nations and have had a good interdependent relationship, especially during World War II, the Korean War and the Arab-Israeli wars (Rabe, 2011 viii).

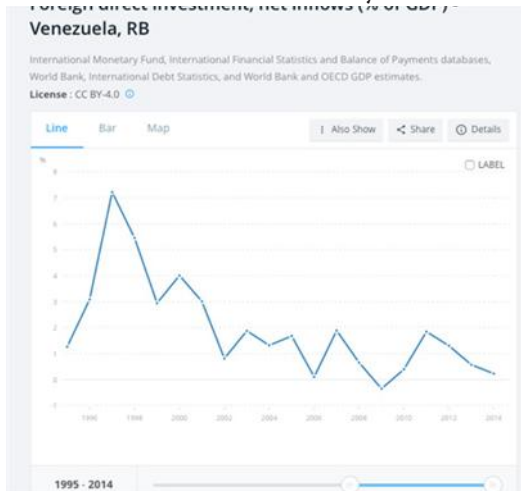
The United States' interest in Venezuela is to protect the oil industry, it is one of the countries that the U.S imports its oil from. The United States agenda of spreading democracy and the attempt to stop the spread of socialist ideas that have been spreading, had led to the start of political tensions between the U.S and Venezuela. Over the years that Hugo Chavez was in power, the tension between Venezuela and the United States grew and in 2005 Venezuela had cut its ties to the United States military exchange program (Sullivan, 2008 34). The United States had expressed their concerns over the Venezuelan government and their ties to Iran and Cuba. The claims that there have been serious human rights violations in the country since Hugo Chavez had changed the constitution and the name of the country. There was a push for the government to recognize that there was a serious issue when it came to civil freedoms. In Figure 9,



the chart shows the opinion of the people in the United States have been overwhelmingly positive before Hugo Chavez was in power and the surveys stopped that year. Hugo Chavez would demonize the United States and would accuse the U.S of spying and plotting to invade Venezuela. In 2001, the United States government had politically intervened and met with Chavez opponents who were looking for support of the removal of Chavez (Sharma, Tracy, Kumar, 2004 67). At this time the media was still owned by big business and were against Chavez's policies and obtained funding through the U.S National Endowment for Democracy to fund the protest and opposition of

Chavez. Giving thousands to labor unions and industry and commerce (Sharma, Tracy, Kumar, 2004 68). The massive protest in 2002 was funded by the Catholic Church, supported by the elite and the upper class along with a part of the armed forces and the CIA (Sharma, Tracy, Kumar, 2004 68). The power that Hugo Chavez obtained was being pushed by the rich elite and the United States.

Nicolas Maduro was once the Foreign Minister under Hugo Chavez, and is now president and his view on alliances is based on like minded leftist countries. In Figure 10, the flow of investment into the country has been decreasing



throughout the time that Hugo Chavez was in office. The fact there has been political instability in the country throughout the years has put investors off from investing into Venezuela. Regionally, Venezuela had started losing allies in Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay, as these nations began removing leftist leaders and opposing support of Maduro. The country relies on their allies China and Russia, in which China had invested \$65 billion (Sullivan, 2016 28). In the beginning of 2014, the U.S and Venezuela seemed to look like it would improve, but Venezuela was being accused by the U.S government of oppressing protest which led to Venezuela to expel three U.S diplomats. Venezuela accused these diplomats of being the ones that organized and funded the protesters (Sullivan, 2016 29). The drift between these two countries became worse when the U.S had implemented additional visa restrictions on Venezuelan government officials on the basis of human rights violations and public corruption, which prompted Maduro to accuse the U.S of plotting a coup and plotting to destabilize the country. The United States in 2015 then decided to implement more sanctions that would block assets if there is a violation of democratic process, violation of human rights, the limitations of peaceful assembly or public corruption (Sullivan, 2016 31).

The failing economy at this point has lost Venezuela's foreign investments, which also lost them access to military technology from the west. From this point, Maduro had to create a stronger tie to Russia through the Russian arms industry (Mijares, 2015 80). Maduro's attempt to legitimize himself as the president is by relying on the fact that he will be following the foreign policy plans that Hugo Chavez

started. The Plan de la Patria is the "development of a new international geopolitics in which the multicentric and pluri-polar world takes shape, which allows the balance of the universe to be achieved and guarantees planetary peace on the planet" (Mijares, 2015 81). Maduro is forced to stay connected to Russia and China for their foreign relations, since economically they are limited in what they can do. In 2017 the authoritarian administration led by Maduro had forced the United States to place sanctions against Venezuela, prohibiting U.S enterprises from doing any kind of business with the country while Maduro is in office (Malhotra, 2017 1). The effects of these sanctions will not be evident as of yet but the issue with these sanctions is the effect this will have on the United States. The U.S has always imported their oil from Venezuela so the effects can also reach the U.S owned gas companies and could drive the prices higher. This will also push Venezuela's attention to the Asian market and further those relations (Malhotra, 2017). This is implying that the Asian market would become a more powerful exporting economy.

Political Participation

In 1999, Hugo Chavez became president of Venezuela and along with his presidency he brought the Chavismo movement. The Chavismo movement is a populist movement that links politicians and voters. The basis of Chavismo is to turn the people against the elite and claims that anything goes among Hugo Chavez's supporters (Hawkins, 2003 1137). Chavismo began when Hugo Chavez and fellow officers were trying to make a change in Venezuela, to stop corruption. The rise of Hugo Chavez came from his travel across the country and meeting Venezuelans and by 1997 a group of supporters were organized to form the Fifth Republic Movement, the political party that would push for the election of Chavez. The party has been heavily relying on the popularity of Hugo Chavez and because of his strength, the party was also relying on Chavez to make the decisions and to come up with policies to implement. The party is weak without Chavez and is not capable of training new political leaders (Hawkins, 2003 1152). The advantage of Chavismo allowed Hugo Chavez to reform their constitution with little opposition, and make critical changes to economic reform along with foreign relations.

In order to understand the dominance of the Chavismo movement, I look at the years before Hugo Chavez took office. In order to understand how Hugo Chavez came to office we look at the Democratic Action and the Christian Democratic Party, which have been the dominating political parties in Venezuela for 40 years. These two parties had come together after the fall of a dictatorship led by General Marco Pérez Jiménez, and signed the Pacto de Punto Fijo in 1958. This was a document that would agree to respect the electoral outcomes and "share power and patronage" (Cameron, Major, 2001 255) and it was the basis of a stable democratic rule that had survived for four decades. This pact had inspired the 1961

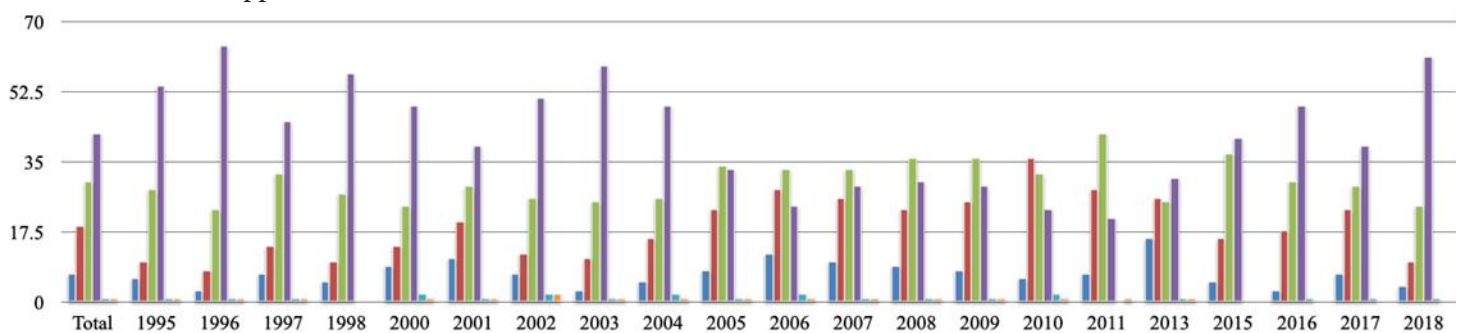
constitution, which has been referred to as Puntofijista. With this we look at how Puntofijismo has affected the future of Venezuela. This new Puntofijismo, has allowed the packing of the government with politicians that would be favorable to keeping oil politics alive (Mejia, 2018 23). This form of government did not last and many people, including Hugo Chavez caught on. The two political parties have been highly accused of corruption by the 1970s, and the growing unrest of the Venezuelan people regarding the government's mishandling of the wealth they have obtained from oil. The years of trying to fight against corruption, this allowed Hugo Chavez to take the opportunity to form his own party, after a failed coup, which allowed him to win the 1998 election and was the president of Venezuela.

The political participation in Venezuela had begun during the time that Puntofijismo began (1958), it was also when democracy had blossomed in Venezuela. Organized civil society, since then has perpetuated a rise in organizations (Acosta, 2007 76). In 1983 Luis Herrera Campins had devalued their currency and sent the country into its first economic crisis, also known as "el viernes negro", black Friday (Acosta, 2007 77). This economic downturn affected the many citizens' living conditions also sparked a large protest in the streets of Caracas which, in time, had turned into violent protests in order to put pressure on the government to make necessary changes to pull them out of their depression. Protests had increased, and in 1998 the protests were focused on the differences between the social classes.

During the time that Hugo Chavez took office he had divided the populace and the elite and although he was a popular candidate, his popularity did not last which led to a coup in 2002. In late 2001 to early 2002, Chavez's leftist agenda had led many political parties, unions, and business leaders to form a coalition, along with a massive protest that had pulled Chavez out of office for a short amount of time, these protests had led to the death of 18 people (Sullivan, 2008 8). Protest and strikes continued after Chavez regained his office, but the opposition was so determined to remove

him from office they motioned to pass a referendum that would reduce his power, but according to the new constitution the referendum would not be able to be motioned until he reached the midpoint in his term (Sullivan, 2008 9). This led to a strike in the oil industry that led to an economic downturn. In Figure 4, there is a dip in oil exportation in 2003 but then it went back up in 2004. Although protests had increased since Hugo Chavez took office, the effectiveness of these protests have gone down. Maduro faced protest in 2014 when student took to the streets to protest an attempted rape and robbery of a student. This protest sparked a bigger protest that turned violent. Maduro had suppressed the protestors in a harsh manner and put opposing leaders in prison for allegedly inciting a riot (Sullivan, 2016 12-13).

The impact that Hugo Chavez had on the Venezuelan government had affected the way the people voted in elections, and the reason is in the opposition party. Hugo Chavez had completely taken control of the government including the checks and balances and the unicameral assembly (Corrales, Penfold-Becerra 2007 99). In 1999, Hugo Chavez changed the constitution in order to remove the power from the other institutions and consolidated them to the power of the president to strengthen his own power. One of the ways that he achieved this is by controlling the Constituent Assembly and manipulating the system of selection and was able to fill the Assembly with his supporters. He also eliminated the Senate and took total control of the military without the approval of the legislature. By eliminating public financing to political parties Chavez had created an obstacle for the opposition to be a part of the government and removing the opportunity for the opposition party to make any effective changes. He made sure that the old system would be replaced and all the focus and power would be on the president (Corrales, Penfold-Becerra 2007 101). By 2005 the opposition parties had lost hope of being competitive against the Chavez administration. In Figure 11, the graph shows the opinion of the



people in Venezuela, which shows that throughout the years, before, during, and after Hugo Chavez, there has been no trust in the political parties. The political party system in Venezuela has always been a battle between corrupt parties and in the current regimes there is no trust in the opposition since they have no power and have not made any kind of difference in the government or in the lives of the people of Venezuela.

The Venezuelan government had also had issues with the military and the fact that many military personnels decided to interfere with a government they felt was ineffective. It is evident with the several coups that went on for years. The earliest coups occurred in 1945 and 1958, when the junior and mid-level officers felt that the government was interfering with the military's professionalism and their autonomy (Norden, 1998 148). According to the literature in this paper, militaries that were autonomous have had the chance to defy the government and make decisions based on their own needs. The military's push for autonomy in Venezuela was due to the fact that political leaders were attempting to take more control of the military (Norden, 1998 149). The lack of a set Commander in Chief, and not being the responsibility of either the executive or the legislative branch has allowed the military to make its own decisions in the government. The attempted coup in 1992 was prompted by the obvious corruption that military officers had witnessed throughout the years and were trying to promote a better democracy (Norden, 1998 153). There has not been a successful coup since the removal of Hugo Chavez in 2002. The country's hope relies on the election of a new president and the push from the opposing party.

CONCLUSION:

Venezuela has been deeply affected by the economic conditions the government had ignored to fix. The growing amount of money the country was receiving was due to the oil revenues they received from exporting to the United States and has been the only real inflow of money into the country. The reason why Venezuela is experiencing a democratic decline is not just because of the economy, it is in part because of all of the factors that I looked at. The economy, oil politics, foreign states getting involved in the country and political participation within the country. Venezuela mishandled their economic growth which led to the country depending on oil revenues, which changed their politics to only focus on the oil. The Venezuelans policies all depended on the oil revenues and what to do with the money. Hugo Chavez took advantage of the inflow of money from oil exports to manipulate the people by offering them social programs that would benefit the poor. This kind of manipulation was the main reason that Hugo Chavez was able to be in power for so long. This also leads to the way Hugo Chavez handled the relationships between Venezuela and the United

States. During the time that Hugo Chavez was in power, he had caused a rift between both countries. Although it did not affect the exportation of oil, it took the alliance with Cuba, Russia and China to slow the United States importation of oil. Hugo Chavez had taken complete control of the government causing the country to protest, which has turned to violence. The more the people pushed the government, the more they restricted their political rights. Silencing the media and when Nicolas Maduro took power, he went ahead and restricted the people's protest and even jailed the opposition. Hugo Chavez shrunk the opposition and centralized the powers and restricted the political participation in Venezuela, all leading up to their democracy becoming non-existent. The concept of democracy by John Locke and Baron de Montesquieu, that I wrote about earlier in this research paper, will show that Venezuela does not fit the concept that Locke and Montesquieu had laid out. Throughout the history of Venezuela's government there has always been a push back and coup attempts. They have not accepted the existing political institutions and do not believe that those in power have the right to rule. Venezuela is in an economic crisis where they can not find solutions to the basic problems facing any political system, and they failed to actually implement the policies formulated with the desired result. The fact that democracy is vulnerable and the downfall of a weak democracy can lead to a domino effect of falling democracies, especially in Latin America, where many nations are experiencing some unrest.

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