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When Words Are Not Enough:

The Development of Human Trafficking in Venezuela Under the Maduro Administration

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By Holly Prather

A thesis presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for completion of the Bachelor of
Arts degree in International Studies

Croft Institute for International Studies
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List of Acronyms

- 1) ELN - Ejército de Liberación Nacional (National Liberation Army, Colombia)
- 2) ENCOVI - Encuesta Nacional de Condiciones de Vida de la Población Venezolano (National Survey on the Life Conditions of the Venezuelan Population)
- 3) FARC - Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia)
- 4) ILDIS - El Instituto Latinoamericano de Investigaciones Sociales (Latin American Institute of Social Investigation)
- 5) LAPOP - Latin American Public Opinion Project
- 6) ODO - Observatorio de Delito Organizado (Observatory of Organized Crime)
- 7) ONCDOFT - Oficina Nacional Contra la Delincuencia Organizada y Financiamiento al Terrorismo (National Office against Organized Crime and the Finance of Terrorism)
- 8) OVV - Observatorio Venezolano de Violencia (Venezuelan Observatory of Violence)
- 9) PDVSA - Petróleos de Venezuela, S.A. (Petroleum of Venezuela)
- 10) UNESCO - United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization
- 11) UNHCR - United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

Abstract

This thesis discusses the role the Maduro administration has played in the development of human trafficking in Venezuela. It does so by employing a qualitative analysis of primary sources such as governmental and NGO reports to determine the links between the Maduro administration and the increase of human trafficking. I argue that the Maduro administration has chosen to employ social policy, the *Misiones* (Misiones), as the state's approach to human trafficking instead of enforcing anti-trafficking laws. This, in conjunction with unsound economic policy in response to the 2014 decline in oil prices, gives the Maduro administration a substantial role in the development of human trafficking in Venezuela, most visibly noted by the economic crisis, elevated levels of crime, and the mass exit migration of the population.

Chapter One

Introduction

‘Roxane’, a young woman from Venezuela, sought to provide the money and food necessary to support her family. She was lured, like many others, by the promise of a well-paying job as a barmaid on the pristine beaches of Curaçao¹, earning enough money to repay travel debts, support her family, and return home in a mere six months. As she stated, “Even though I thought not everything was going to be easy, I believed that it could be a good opportunity” (Petit, 2018). The lie became obvious as soon as the plane landed. Put to work immediately, she now found herself as an illegal immigrant living with six other women in one room, accumulating debts at a massive rate for basic items such as water and electricity. She was trapped and unable to leave.

Human trafficking, a form of modern-day slavery, is the action of illegally obtaining control over another human being, usually for the purposes of forced labor or sexual exploitation. It strikes hardest during times of crisis or instability, eager to take advantage of vulnerable populations, particularly women and children. Venezuela is no exception. Experiencing a profound economic, social, and humanitarian crisis, Venezuela is estimated to have experienced a three hundred percent increase in human trafficking between 2014-2016, with an estimated six hundred thousand victims by 2018 (Urrutia and Ramírez, 2018).

This thesis uses the human trafficking definition given by the United Nations in their Protocol on Human Trafficking signed into effect in 2003:

“Trafficking in persons” shall mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual

¹ This island is located approximately 40 miles off the northern shore of Venezuela in the Caribbean Sea. It belongs to the Leeward Antilles, a small group of Islands off the Venezuelan coast.

exploitation, forced labor or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs” (United Nations, 2003).

For the purposes of this thesis, human trafficking covers the recruitment, harbor, transfer, and transportation of one human being by another through a wide variety of means including threat, coercion, and deception with the objective of exploitation. There is also a clear distinction between sex trafficking and human trafficking. While sex trafficking is a term used solely for the trafficking and sexual exploitation of persons, human trafficking also includes forced labor, slavery, servitude, and the removal of organs.²

Research Question

This thesis centrally examines the question: What role has the Maduro administration played in the development of human trafficking in Venezuela? Nicolás Maduro, the current president of Venezuela, is the successor and mentee of Hugo Chávez. Maduro assumed the presidency in 2013 after the death of Chávez and has focused on maintaining regime control and expanding Bolivarian socialism. I argue that the Maduro administration has contributed to the development of human trafficking in several distinct areas. By delegating the majority of his enforcement resources to maintaining regime control, Maduro has devoted little to the execution of public policy and law created to deter human trafficking. Instead, Maduro used the *Misiones* (Missions)—social aid programs—to prevent human trafficking. However, the 2014 decline in oil prices in conjunction with the administrative mismanagement of oil income, the institution of price controls, and the expansion of a convoluted system of exchange rates, has created noticeable ‘push’

² There is a current debate concerning human trafficking and prostitution; whether or not prostitution should be considered human trafficking. While human trafficking covers the exploitation of prostitution, prostitution in and of itself is not considered trafficking because some individuals voluntarily choose to enter the service, they are not forced.

factors that enable human trafficking. The push factors include the economic crisis, elevated levels of crime, and mass emigration of the Venezuelan population.

In attempts to further Bolivarian socialism and maintain political competitiveness, the Maduro administration has not devoted much energy to effectively implementing and complying with anti-human trafficking laws within Venezuela. Instead Maduro has utilized autocratic legalism to further his own political agenda (Corrales, 2015, 38). While the Maduro administration has implemented and continued public and social policies, such as the *Misiones*, that are designed to combat poverty and human trafficking, the 2014 decline in oil prices and subsequent economic crisis has compromised their effectiveness in deterring the development of human trafficking.

The mass emigration of the national population shows that many Venezuelans see opportunities abroad as the most effective means of survival. However, as emigration continues to grow, so to does the human trafficking industry. As migration and trafficking are driven by similar root causes—persistent poverty, high unemployment, internal conflicts resulting in widespread violence and civil disorder, oppressive political regimes and grave violation of human rights—the growth of the first tends to facilitate the growth of the second (Aronowitz, 2001, 170). As various countries begin to implement stricter entry controls in order to stem the tide of immigrants, many turn towards illegal sources of entry which allows the human trafficking industry to easily target the needy and vulnerable (Modolo and Texidó, 2018). Forced to choose between the harsh reality of Venezuela and the risk of being trafficked, many still choose to take the risk, aware that they might be trafficked but unable to support themselves or their families in their current situation (Mo, 2018, 252).

Methodology

This thesis utilizes a qualitative methodology based on the analysis of primary sources. It uses 1) reports by Venezuelan government agencies; 2) Venezuelan laws and policies; 3) reports by non-governmental organizations (NGO); and 4) newspapers articles. These sources primarily stem from Venezuelan organizations but relevant outside material and literature are also employed. All language translations are my own.

The first part of the thesis, broken down into three separate sections, focuses on the analysis of public and social policies employed by the Maduro administrations in its effort to combat human trafficking. In addition, it also performs an analysis of Venezuela's various legal codes pertaining to human trafficking. Policy analysis stems mainly from various reports created by Venezuelan governmental institutions such as the *Defensoria del Pueblo* (Defense of the People) or the *Oficina Nacional Contra la Delincuencia Organizada y Financiamiento al Terrorismo* (National Office against Organized Crime and Finance of Terrorism; ONCDOFT). It also analyzes reports from NGOs in Venezuela such as *Asociación Civil Paz Activa* (Active Peace Civil Association) and think tanks such as *El Instituto Latinoamericano de Investigaciones Sociales* (Latin American Institute of Social Investigation; ILDIS). The legal review examines and analyzes documents such as Venezuela's Constitution, the penal code, migration law, and other laws that specifically target human trafficking.

The second part of this thesis, also divided into three sections, focuses on an analysis of the economic decline and elevated levels of crime and insecurity in Venezuela as well as the migration crisis that has occurred over the past half-decade. The primary reports utilized in the section analyzing crime and insecurity in Venezuela are taken from the Venezuelan NGO *Observatorio Venezolano de Violencia* (Venezuelan Observatory of Violence, OVV). The section

on the economic decline in Venezuela utilizes data obtained from the World Data Bank as well as newspaper reports documenting the effects of the economic policies. The section on migration utilizes the September 2018 Declaration of Quito as well as newspaper articles from Venezuela and various countries in the region pertaining to the migration crisis.

One key difficulty I have encountered is the lack of transparency found in the Venezuelan government which makes it difficult to accurately assess data. Maduro's autocratic administration makes the accumulation of accurate quantitative and qualitative data difficult, at least from governmental sources. However, used cautiously, and in combination with NGO and outside data, information taken from governmental sources can still be useful and provide institutional information concerning various factors involved in the development of human trafficking.

Thesis Overview

This thesis consists of five chapters. The first chapter is an introduction to the theme of human trafficking in Venezuela. The second is the theoretical background, focusing on a discussion of human trafficking literature and Bolivarian Socialism—the key political drive behind the Maduro administration. The third chapter, divided into three sub-chapters, gives a detailed analysis of the policies enacted by the Maduro administration, both specifically in an attempt to combat human trafficking, and also more generally, to alleviate the burdens on the more vulnerable population groups in Venezuela. It also performs a legal analysis to establish the statutes and enforcement resources available to the Maduro administration and how effectively they have been used to combat human trafficking in Venezuela. The fourth chapter, also divided into three sub-chapters, analyzes the economic decline and elevated rates of crime and insecurity in Venezuela as additional factors in the development of human trafficking in Venezuela. It also takes a look at

the migration crisis and its relationship to human trafficking. The fifth, and final chapter, is the conclusion which summarizes the argument and key contributions to the thesis, offering insight into possible future research.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

Introduction

This literature review is divided into two sections. The first delves into patterns of human trafficking, investigating the key ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors and how they affect its development as well as some causes of human trafficking that are not prevalent in the case of Venezuela. The second section discusses contemporary Venezuelan politics, focusing on the ideology of Bolivarian Socialism. Attending to this ideology is crucial to understanding decisions made by the Maduro administration and the role it has played in the development of human trafficking in Venezuela. The concluding section highlights my argument as well as the contribution made by my thesis to the academic literature.

Patterns of Human Trafficking

A global market, the human trafficking industry is associated with the interaction between the demand for cheap labor and/or sex and the supply of vulnerable or exploitable individuals or groups who wish to close the high-income gap between their current economic means and potential future earnings (Aronowitz, 2001, 172; Hernandez & Rudolph, 2015, 121). As such, human trafficking generally flows from developing to developed countries, or rural to urban areas. While human trafficking exists in a shadow world, making accurate, quantifiable data almost impossible to collect, there exist certain patterns—certain ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors—that can help identify regions or areas where human trafficking might be more prevalent or that can explain how it has

developed in a certain region. The most repeated factors are: 1) migration flows; 2) institutional quality of the state; and 3) crime (Hernandez and Rudolph, 2015).

First, because transnational human trafficking can be closely linked with human smuggling, human trafficking tends to follow other migratory or trafficking routes (Guinn, 2008, 131-132). Because the desire to close the economic wage gap is strong, individuals feel the pull to migrate from one country to the next, or from rural to urban areas³. Another large incentive for migration, particularly into developed countries, is a generous welfare system, which can attract individuals even without job certainty (De Giorgi & Pellizzari, 2009; Jean and Jimenez, 2011). The key difference between smuggled persons and trafficked victims is whether or not, after having arrived in the destination country, the person is either free to walk away or is placed into a system of debt-bondage and exploited (Aronowitz, 2001, 167). Countries which have higher migratory flows tend to be followed closely by an increase in human trafficking.

Second, the institutional quality of the state is an important deterrent of human trafficking. The most effective way to combat human trafficking is to have a sound legal framework that employs prevention methods, strongly punishes the trafficker, and provides protection for the victim (Guinn, 2008; DeStefano, 2007). If the trafficker is confident in his ability to operate with impunity and without interference from the government, then he will not cease to do so. However, if a country lacks such a strategy and the means to enforce it, then outside pressure from others may be applied as an incentive to do so. For instance, governments in Latin America have long noted the existence of trafficking markets and yet the problem was not significantly addressed until the United States “expressed its concern and exerted pressure on national governments within the region” with the development of the *Trafficking Victims Protection Act* in 2000 (Guinn, 2008,

³ Trafficking is not always transnational; it can occur within countries although the flow is generally from rural to more developed areas.

138). When political corruption runs rampant or the state lacks the ability or chooses not to enforce its legal code regarding human trafficking, there is little hope to be had that the government will play an effective role in combating human trafficking.

Third, in the interplay between human trafficking and elevated levels of crime and insecurity, human trafficking tends to follow other criminal trafficking patterns. While similar to human trafficking and migration, this differs in that countries can have entrenched facets of criminal activity which facilitate the development of human trafficking without having elevated levels of migration. For example, the border between Venezuela and Colombia has historically been extremely porous, allowing for the easy movement of criminal organizations and the establishment of smuggling and trafficking routes. Because many trafficking cases are not single transfers, victims may be trafficked in-country first and then sent through a string of intermediaries before reaching their final destination, which means they tend to follow well-established routes in order to minimize costs (Guinn & Steglich, 2003, 37-40). In terms of organized crime, the Maduro administration has been infiltrated by various criminal organizations. The most notable entity is the ‘Cartel de los Soles’, a drug trafficking organization that has permeated the highest levels of the military and government (“Venezuela: A Mafia...”, 2018). When the government is compromised as such, it makes it extremely difficult to prosecute traffickers.

There are, however, some cited causes of human trafficking besides crime, migration, and institutional quality that are not prevalent in Venezuela. Nnebedum mentions in her book on human trafficking that there are several socio-economic factors that influence human trafficking including education and literacy (2017, 89-94). Individuals in countries with low levels of literacy are more vulnerable to human trafficking. As Nnebedum states,

“Individuals with little or no education are disadvantaged in terms of job opportunities. These individuals are ready to migrate at all costs to find jobs. Being uneducated, they are not well informed about the migration process and can fall victim to human traffickers” (91).

Low levels of education, signaled by literacy rates, has an influence on human trafficking because it can drive migration while at the same time leaving the individuals disadvantaged in the migration process. It stands to reason, then, that Venezuela, exhibiting other socio-economic factors that influence human trafficking such as poverty or government instability and corruption, should also display low levels of literacy.

However, such is not the case. Venezuela has extremely high levels of literacy, comparable to other countries in the region. In 2016 Venezuela ranked in the top third worldwide in terms of literacy rates with a percentage of 97.1 (UNESCO, Indexmundi). From 2011 to 2016, Venezuela has seen a 2.36 percentage increase in literacy rates, from 94.77 to 97.13. In 2016, the female literacy rate was 97.21, higher than the male literacy rate of 97.04, which is abnormal considering that males are generally considered the primary income earners in many countries. This shows that Venezuela is concerned about the literacy of its female population as well, especially considering the majority of trafficked individuals are women and children. Therefore, it is hard to argue that Venezuela has low levels of literacy despite the shrinking of the economy. In addition, according to UNESCO, in 2016 82.96 percent of students enrolled in school survived to the last grade of primary and the primary to secondary transition rate was 98.55 percent. Therefore, in the case of Venezuela, it would be difficult to argue such a connection as Nnebedum finds between illiteracy and human trafficking exists given its high levels of literacy and education retainment rates. While illiteracy certainly plays a role in the development of human trafficking in other places, such as countries in Africa, it does not seem to play a role in Venezuela (Nnebedum, 2017, 89-91).

Bolivarian Socialism

To understand the political, social, and economic decisions made by the Maduro administration, particularly as it pertains to human trafficking, it is important to first understand the ideology that governs it. This ideology, so named ‘Bolivarian’ or “Twenty-first century’ socialism, finds its roots in the Hugo Chávez presidency. In office from 1999 until the time of his death in 2012, Chávez transformed the entire political structure of Venezuela through policies designed to limit and obstruct the opposition as well as heighten, extensively, the power of the executive branch. Chávez was able to achieve such a conversion by concentrating power in the hands of the military, which in turn, along with key governmental supporters, became his *chavistas*, his loyal supporters. The creation of a highly loyal and powerful support base combined with funds from the Petroleos de Venezuela, S.A. (PDVSA), the national oil company, allowed Chávez to mobilize popular support and limit opposition movements (Corrales and Penfold, 2015, 15-47).

Three important issues—national sovereignty, poverty eradication, and participatory democracy—were the cornerstone of this new wave of socialism (Burbach et al., 2013, 52). Mitigating social inequality was crucial to Chávez’s approach. Armed with the financial resources gained from the PDVSA during a period of high oil prices, Chávez was able to focus his reforms on three key areas: land reform, the promotion of cooperatives, and the reactivation of closed factories under workers’ co-management (participatory democracy at work) (Álvarez, 2010, 38; Bruce, 2008, 43). However, the most important social policy was that of the *Misiones*—social programs to eradicate poverty. As a result of the *Misiones*, “poverty levels dropped by 24.5 percent between 2003-2006, and the number of households in extreme poverty fell by 16 percent in the same period” (Bilbao, 2008, 108-11). As there exists an inverse relationship between poverty and

human trafficking, an ideology dedicated in large part to the eradication of poverty—balancing the scales of social justice—can also become a strong deterrent against human trafficking. Yet, there are scholars, such as Grier and Maynard who question the true impact of Chávez’s drive to eradicate poverty when they say, “We find that average income rose significantly slower under Chávez than it would have without him...Venezuela...did not produce any greater levels of health improvement, poverty abatement, or inequality reduction, as it likely would have without his leadership and policies” (2016, 2). Thus, while Chávez was driven to enact social justice, some might question the efficacy of his policies.

During the mid 2000’s Chávez called for a radicalization of Bolivarian socialism. He proposed a renewed focus on three fronts: increasing social ownership over the means of production, encouraging greater workplace democracy, and directing production towards social needs. In order to achieve this, Chávez called for more executive power—indefinite term limits—as well as social, land, and educational reforms and an attack on existing capitalist structures within Venezuela (Burbach, 2013, 65). This caused immediate and strong backlash amongst the opposition, polarizing the two sides to a great degree. It also caused much discontent in the Bolivarian project itself with many former supporters of Chávez coming out against these constitutional reforms. It all came to a head on December 2007 when the citizenry voted down these constitutional reforms, effectively limiting the radicalization of Bolivarian socialism (Ibid, 65-66). As such, polarization between supporters and opponents of Bolivarian socialism remained strong.

Maduro inherited a political regime dedicated to the ideals of national sovereignty, poverty eradication, and participatory democracy when he ascended to the presidency in 2013. Chávez’s transformation of the country ran deep. Because of previous efforts to socialize and universalize

the means of production and the distribution through the state, Maduro inherited a population largely dependent on the government for sustenance and livelihood. With a powerful executive branch and substantial governmental control, decisions made by the Maduro administration had a large impact on the development of human trafficking. In continuing to realize and radicalize Bolivarian socialism, Maduro sought to find a way to satisfy his constituents, allowing him to maintain regime control, as well as the general population, which needed to be satiated to prevent revolt.

While oil prices were high, Maduro was able to do both. However, in 2014, as Maduro faced an increasing decline of oil prices, the system broke down, and the country spiraled into a profound economic crisis. Characterized by a severe lack of resources, violent repression by the government, and the mass emigration of the population, this crisis has been named the worst in Venezuela's history. In response, Maduro has prioritized maintaining regime control to the detriment of the general population.

Argument

This thesis employs a Political-Economic Institutional Approach to explain the role the Maduro administration has played in the development of human trafficking in Venezuela. Such an approach, outlined below, examines various economic and political factors that the Maduro administration has chosen to utilize or ignore and how they could contribute to the increase of human trafficking. It also looks at how these factors, in combination with the social crisis caused by the 2014 decline in oil prices, has produced certain 'push' factors of human trafficking in Venezuela. I argue that the Maduro administration has chosen to employ social policy, the *Misiones* (Misiones), as the state's approach to human trafficking instead of enforcing anti-

trafficking laws. This, in conjunction with unsound economic policy in response to the 2014 decline in oil prices, gives the Maduro administration a substantial role in the development of human trafficking in Venezuela, most visibly noted by the economic crisis, elevated levels of crime, and the mass exit migration of the population. While there are certainly other factors, the Political-Economic Institutional Approach utilized by this thesis denotes these as the core concepts surrounding human trafficking in Venezuela and Maduro’s role in its development. Such an approach is illustrated in the following diagram:

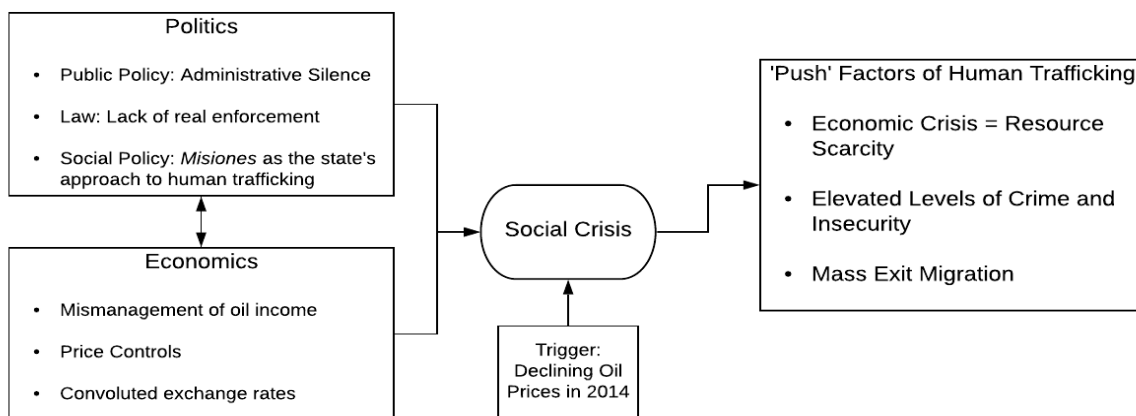


Figure 2.1: Political-Economic Institutional Approach

Not much is known about human trafficking in Venezuela other than that it has seen an exponential increase. There was a report published on transnational crime in Venezuela by Urrutia and Ramírez in 2018 that does cover some aspects of human trafficking, but it is the only one in recent history. In light of this, it is pressing that the scholarly world devote greater resources to understanding human trafficking in Venezuela and the role that the Maduro administration has played in its development. Therefore, this thesis is important to other scholars studying human trafficking because it provides a model for an institutional approach in assessing potential governmental roles in the development of the trafficking trade. The more that is known about human trafficking, the more efficient organizations can become in identifying and preventing it in

similar future situations. So, by addressing a specific social repercussion of the crisis, and by utilizing a Political-Economic Institutional Approach, which is distinct in nature, this thesis is an important contribution to the literature of human trafficking in Venezuela, and by extension, the literature on human trafficking.

Chapter Three

Looking Inward: Policy, Law, and the State

Introduction

This chapter investigates the political aspects behind the development of human trafficking. Are the policies created by the Maduro administration to combat human trafficking being enforced effectively? What about the law regarding this matter? If not, what alternatives are being used? I argue that while both policy and law clearly denote human trafficking as a crime, they are not enforced as Maduro has chosen to employ his resources elsewhere, in controlling dissent. As an alternative, Maduro has utilized the *Misiones* as the state's approach to human trafficking, but the economic crisis has compromised their effectiveness. In sum, by choosing to prioritize regime control and failing to provide a viable, efficient alternative in the face of the crisis, the Maduro administration has allowed for the increase of human trafficking in Venezuela.

Section 3.1: Public Policy and Human Trafficking

Introduction

This section examines the state of human trafficking in Venezuela and the effectiveness of specific public policies designed to combat human trafficking, that is the *Working Plan with the UNHCR for Refugees* and the *National Formation Plan of the Rights of Human Trafficking Victims*. It argues that the Maduro administration has exhibited silence on enforcing these public policies, particularly when compared to other facets of crime in Venezuela. This section uses data taken from Venezuela's governmental institutions, *Defensoria del Pueblo* and *ONCDOFT*. It will also pull from similar reports conducted by neighboring countries as well as relevant newspaper and academic articles.

Section 3.1.1: Human Trafficking in Maduro's Venezuela

The trafficking of Venezuelans has become quite common under the Maduro regime. In Bogotá, Colombia, of the 93 cases of trafficking from 2016 until July 2018 that have been overseen by the district administration, a staggering 75% of the victims were from Venezuela (*El Espectador*, 2018). Out of all the foreigners that work as prostitutes in the capital of Bogotá, 99.8% are from Venezuela (Gaviña, 2018). In Spain, trafficked Venezuelans have increased 50% since 2016. Spanish police rescued 13 women in late June of 2018, the majority of Venezuelan nationality (Bonachera and Romero, 2018; *Tal Cual*, 2018). In June of 2018, Peruvian police rescued 12 Venezuelan trafficked women (*Andina*, 2018). The Dominican Republic rescued 21 in May of 2018 (Pauliono, 2018). Even more horrifying are the stories of trafficked men and women found dead on the beaches of islands like Curaçao, thrown out the boat and left to the mercy of the sharks as they attempted to swim ashore (*Noticias Barquisimeto*, 2018). Many of the trafficking victims were duped by promises of a better life, of work as barmaids or waiters, of a chance to feed or take care of their families back home. Some knew of the danger, but their families needed food, medicine, and money to survive. Once caught in the web, the victims could not leave, their debts accumulated, and their family members were threatened with violence or even death. Only the truly desperate turned to the police⁴.

In some cases, Venezuelans are not only the victims but the perpetrators. One of the most famous cases revolves around the arrest of Miss Venezuela 2016, Mariana Pares, on June 20, 2018, for leading a human trafficking ring in Vienna, Austria. Having promised young Venezuelan and Colombian women jobs in Vienna with high wages and fast regularization as immigrants, Pares

⁴ As illegal immigrants, fear of deportation, or returning to the harsh reality in Venezuela keeps many from denouncing their captors sooner.

took away their passports on arrival, locked them in a room, and forced them into commercial sex under psychological threats (Rosa del Pino, 2018). Thanks to one woman who managed to escape, fifteen women were rescued and Pares and five others were arrested as the ring leaders (ibid). In a bust of a Peruvian trafficking ring, it was found that two of the three operators were of Venezuelan nationality (*Andina*, 2018). In 2017, one Venezuelan woman was arrested for leading a trafficking group dedicated to sexually exploiting women in Panama (*Diario Las Américas*, 2017). As the availability of food and medicine in Venezuela continues to shrink, there has been a growing number of Venezuelans who have become operators and leaders of human trafficking rings. Human trafficking has become quite normalized in the continuing implosion of the Venezuelan economy. As Buada Blondell reiterates, “What would be a scandal in earlier years, has become normalized for many Venezuelan families who live close to the complex humanitarian emergency” (2018). Even those who know they run the risk of being trafficked see almost no alternative as the day-to-day situation worsens in Venezuela.

Table 3.1: Venezuelan States with Higher Incidence to Human Trafficking (Defensoría del Pueblo, 2016)

TYPES OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING	STATES WITH HIGHER INCIDENCE
SEXUAL EXPLOITATION	Nueva Esparta, Anzoátegui, Sucre, Aragua, Carabobo, metropolitan area of Caracas, Vargas, Bolívar, Falcón, and Zulia
SEXUAL TOURISM	Nueva Esparta, Anzoátegui, Sucre, Carabobo, Bolívar, Falcón, Archipiélago Los Roques, Coche Island, Morrocoy, Canaima and Gran Sabana
LABOR EXPLOITATION	Bolívar ⁵

There are some Venezuelan states and populations more vulnerable to human trafficking. This table, taken from a 2016 report by the Venezuelan *Defensoría del Pueblo* (Defense of the Public), showcases the states with a higher incidence of human trafficking. The northernmost states

⁵ While Bolívar contains mostly labor cases, the report does also mention that all three types have been found in Bolívar (2016, 23).

bordering the Caribbean are associated with sexual exploitation, six of which are also involved with sexual tourism. The Leeward Antilles Island Chains, of which the Islands of Aruba, Bonaire, and Curaçao are the most well know, are only a short boat ride away from the northern coast of Venezuela. This makes it easy for human trafficking rings to recruit and transport their victims. Bolívar, the largest Venezuelan state, is the only state in the table not located along Venezuela’s northern border. Because of its proximity to Brazil, Bolívar allows for the easy recruitment and transportation of trafficking victims, as well as a popular transit state for both external and internal trafficking. In addition, the Venezuelan-Colombian border has historically been very porous, and so states like Zulia are in a prime position to be exploited by those wishing to go north to the Caribbean or west to Colombia.



Figure 3.1: Map of Venezuela

Section 3.1.2: The Enforcement of Public Policy

Though human trafficking has become a serious issue, the Maduro administration has been largely inactive. Only 20 trafficking cases have been registered with the Defensoría de Pueblo

between 2009 and 2014 compared with 195 cases in Colombia between 2013-2015⁶ (Defensoría de Pueblo: Colombia 2016, 18) and in Ecuador where 161 victims were rescued between 2013-2015 (Defensoría de Pueblo: Ecuador, 2018, 27). Under the Chávez administration from 2006-2011, five plans, or public policies directed towards human trafficking were enacted, of which three still remain active (Defensoría de Pueblo: Venezuela, 2016, 32). The Maduro administration, in the same time frame, has only announced two. The first is oriented towards elaborating on diagnostics about human trafficking in frontier zones and capacitating communities in the attention and protection of victims (Ibid, 31). In 2015, the plan was amplified to include more states, yet, as of 2016, it was still undergoing the process of finalization. According to the UNHCR’s office, the plan would include “national and regional guiding bodies in relevant matters such as documentation, education, health, housing, work, with emphasis in childhood and women” (ACNUR.org, 2014). The second was announced on July 30th, 2018, in an attempt to “give full attention to all victims so that they can break this phenomena of exploitation” (*Correo del Orinoco*, 2018).

Table 3.2: Public Policies Initiated to Combat Human Trafficking (Defensoría del Pueblo, 2016)

Name	Year	Status
Plan of action to Prevent, Suppress, and Punish the Crime of Trafficking in Persons and to Fully Assist the Victim	2006	In Revision
Plan of National Action against Sexual Abuse and Commercial Sexual Exploitation	2007	In Revision
Pilot Plan for the Fight against Pornography of Boys, Girls, and Teens in the Educational Institutions of the Metropolitan District of Caracas	2007	Finalized
Working Plan between the Administrative Service of Identification, Immigration, and Foreign Status, the National Institute of Civil Aeronautics and the Airlines of Venezuela	2011	Finalized
Working Plan with the National Institute of Tourism the Ministry of Popular Power for Tourism	2011	Finalized
Working Plan with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees	2014	In Progress ⁷

⁶ This are only the case numbers of internal trafficking. If external trafficking is added, the number jumps to 331.

⁷ As of 2016

National Formation Plan on the Rights of Human Trafficking Victims	2018	In Progress
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Facing escalating social and economic challenges, the Venezuelan state has provided few institutional resources to combat trafficking. First, the state has a paucity of data. ONCDOFT, identifies this as a weakness in the fight against human trafficking: “The lack of qualified personnel, due to low remuneration and incentives...high turnover of staff” (2013). This is echoed by the Defensoría de Pueblo report, which states that the highest obstacle is the felt absence of the “Availability of data, research, studies and a systematization of the public policy allowing a baseline from which to build an approximation to the topic” (16). Second, the state has deployed its law enforcement capabilities to deal with certain types of violent crime. Venezuela’s Interior Minister Nestor Reverol claims that murder rates fell 26% and kidnappings 54%⁸ during the first six months of 2018 as compared to the period before (Dobson, 2018). Comparing the availability of crime statistics with the felt absence of data concerning human trafficking, it seems that the government does not see human trafficking as a priority. In fact, Reverol stated in March of 2018 that “We are here to confront the reality [of high crime in Venezuela]. We have studied the elements which affect crime, taking into account the different sectors and actors which belong to the state... and we have constructed a plan” (ibid). Such data collection and planning are noticeably absent when talking about human trafficking.

Instead of using his law enforcement capabilities to enforce these policies designed to combat human trafficking, the Maduro administration has triaged its formal and informal enforcement units to deal with political dissent and the threat of insurgency, rather than crimes like trafficking. Without the petro resources once available to the Chávez administration to reinforce

⁸ Reverol has offered no net crime data to prove his findings, as such, they must be taken cautiously.

political control, the Maduro administration has resorted to other methods, jailing dissidents and forcefully quelling opposition, instead of focusing on the repercussions of the economic and social crisis such as human trafficking (Maya, 2013, 78-80). In doing this, Maduro sends the message that his primary concern is maintaining regime control at whatever cost.

Conclusion

The lack of data and manpower fully acknowledged by the government itself strongly suggests that human trafficking has remained a largely silent topic in the Maduro administration, making it more difficult for vulnerable populations to find the assistance they need. If the government cannot or is unwilling to provide the necessary aid, then the operators of human trafficking rings are that much more confident in their impunity.

Section 3.2: Legislative Review

Introduction

The low number of official trafficking cases and reported victims signals a type of bureaucratic doublespeak. This section builds upon the first by examining Venezuelan law concerning human trafficking. Such an analysis reveals that while human trafficking is certainly considered a crime, there is little in the way of prevention or victim aid. In addition, the Maduro administration has spent little energy enforcing what laws they do have, signaling that the punishment of human trafficking as a violation of human rights is not a priority. The data for this section is Venezuelan laws, including its constitution and penal code.

Section 3.2.1: The Law Concerning Human Trafficking in Venezuela

Venezuela establishes that human trafficking is a clear violation of human rights. In the 1999 constitution set forth by Hugo Chávez (still the ruling constitution today), Article 54 in the section on Civil Rights reads: “No person may be subjected to slavery or servitude. The trafficking of persons and, in particular, that of women, children, girls and adolescents in all its forms, will be subject to the penalties foreseen in the law.”⁹ Thus, it is extremely clear that human trafficking is a criminal act, and as such, should be punished under the law. Moreover, Article 23 states that “the treaties, pacts, and conventions relating to human rights, signed and ratified by Venezuela, have constitutional hierarchy and prevail over internal legislation, insofar as they contain provisions concerning the enjoyment and exercise of such rights that are more favorable than those established by this Constitution and the laws of the Republic, and shall be immediately and directly applied by the courts and other organs of the Public Power.”¹⁰

According to the Venezuelan constitution, any international treaty, pact, or convention that Venezuela has ratified which goes above and beyond that of Venezuelan law concerning human rights, and the exercise thereof, supersedes Venezuelan law. Thus, the constitution has not only outlined human trafficking as a crime; it has also given primacy to other international treaties if their human rights laws are more stringent or clearer than that of Venezuelan law.

In terms of international treaties, pacts, and conventions signed and ratified by Venezuela, there are quite a few. Since 1968, Venezuela has signed a total of nine¹¹, the most important of

⁹ “Ninguna persona podrá ser sometida a esclavitud o servidumbre. La trata de personas y, en particular, la de mujeres, niños, niñas y adolescentes en todas sus formas, estará sujeta a las penas previstas en la ley.”

¹⁰ “Los tratados, pactos y convenciones relativos a derechos humanos, suscritos y ratificados por Venezuela, tienen jerarquía constitucional y prevalecen en el orden interno, en la medida en que contengan normas sobre su goce y ejercicio más favorables a las establecidas por esta Constitución y en las leyes de la República, y son de aplicación inmediata y directa por los tribunales y demás órganos del Poder Público.”

¹¹ In addition to the Palermo Protocol in 2001, Venezuela has also ratified and signed 8 other major international treaties, pacts, and conventions: 1) 1968: Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and of the Prostitution of Others; 2) 2002: United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime; 3) 2002: Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution, and Child Pornography; 4) 2005: Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea, and Air; 5-8) Venezuela has also ratified the following conventions with the International Labor Organization: number 29, Forced Labor (1945), number 105, Abolition of Forced Labor (1964), number 138, Minimum Age for Admission to Employment (1973), and number 182, Worst Forms of Child Labor (1973).

which was the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress, and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children in 2001 (part of the Palermo Protocols) (Defensoría de Pueblo: Venezuela, 2016, 26). It is clear that Venezuela has had a long history of condemning, at least on paper, the crime of human trafficking. In addition to the constitution and the international treaties signed by Venezuela, there are a string of laws dealing with human trafficking—initiated by Chávez—and culminating with Maduro’s Protection of Boys, Girls, and Adolescents in 2015.

In 2004, Chávez introduced the Immigration and Aliens Act, which stated that the illegal immigration of foreigners into, as well as the act of promotion or the facilitation of human trafficking through or into the republic, would be punished by a prison sentence of four to eight years (see Articles 55 and 56). In the same act, Article 57 states that those who commit human trafficking crimes employing violence, trickery, or abuse against the victims will receive eight to ten years. These punishments are lower than its neighbor Colombia’s, which mandates 13-23 years as well as fines up to 1,500 times the minimum wage (US TIP Report, 2015, 123). The Penal Code of Venezuela (originally published in 2000 and partially reformed in 2005), states in Article 174 that whatever person who subjects another to slavery will receive a punishment of six to twelve years, a slight improvement over the Immigration and Aliens Act.

In 2012, Venezuela published a law that expands the punishment for trafficking. Article 41 of the Organic Law against Organized Crime and Financing of Terrorism states that human trafficking will be punished by “twenty to twenty-five years in prison as well as the cancellation of security against the costs incurred for the recuperation and reinsertion of the victim into society. If the victim is a boy, girl, or adolescent, the prison sentence will be twenty-five to thirty years.”¹²

¹² “...será penado o penada con prisión de veinte a veinticinco años y la cancelación de indemnización por los gastos a la víctima para su recuperación y reinsertión social. Si la víctima es un niño, niña o adolescente será penado o penada con prisión de veinticinco a treinta años.”

As seen, the government recognized a need to expand punishment to deal with a growing problem. Even though the prosecution of human trafficking seems to be developing, there is little mention of any laws designed to help prevent or provide aid to the victims¹³.

Section 3.2.2: Anti-Trafficking Law under the Maduro Administration

The Maduro administration has also created new versions of two existing laws: The Organic Law on the Right of Women to a Life Free of Violence (first created in 2007 but reformed in 2014) and the Organic Law for the Protection of Children and Adolescents (first created in 2001 but reformed in 2015). The first speaks to “creating conditions to prevent, address, punish, and eradicate violence against women in any of its manifestations and environments” (Art. 1).¹⁴ This includes the educational, social, governmental, and judicial help necessary to ensure the eradication of gender-based violence including, but not limited to, psychological, physical, sexual, and domestic violence as well as sexual assault, forced prostitution, illegal smuggling, and human trafficking (Art. 15). Prosecution for the promotion, facilitation, or recruitment to the human trafficking of women, boys, and girls is fifteen to twenty years (Art. 56). It also guarantees the participation of the state and society in upholding and enforcing this law as well as creating educational programs for the education and prevention of gender-based violence (Art. 6,7). However, as Marcano and Palacios note, despite Venezuela’s efforts to decrease gender-based violence, Venezuela continues to be a country that suffers a high index of violence among the female population, calling into question the ability of the law to effect real change in society (2017,

¹³ In contrast, the United States Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA, 2000) is a comprehensive federal law that uses a three-pronged approach including prevention, protection, and prosecution. By applying a comprehensive law such as this, Venezuela could begin to see real and effective change in the fight against human trafficking. By focusing on only prosecution, there is nothing preventing the victim from being caught in the web in the first place.

¹⁴ “...creando condiciones para prevenir, atender, sancionar y erradicar la violencia contra las mujeres en cualquiera de sus manifestaciones y ámbitos...”

74). According to a United Nations Committee report in 2014, the members of the committee were concerned with the “lack of information in relation to the forms, prevalence, and causes of violence against women,” as well as, “insufficient shelters for the victims,” of which there are only six, even though according to this law, there should be one in each of the twenty-three states of Venezuela (*El Nuevo Herald*, 2014.). They were also concerned with the prevalence of human trafficking in Venezuela, particularly on the border. Therefore, despite the longevity of this law, and its reformation and improvement under the Maduro administration, the justice system does not seem to be advancing the rights of women on this issue.

The Organic Law for the Protection of Children and Adolescents promises rights, and the protection of those rights, to the full extent of the law. Article 33 address the right of the children and adolescents to the protection against sexual exploitation and abuse, including free and permanent programs offering assistance to victims and Articles 38 and 40 explicitly prohibit any form of slavery, forced labor, or illicit transit. According to this law, the state must also develop policies and programs directed at the prevention against mistreatment, abuse, sexual exploitation, etc. (Art. 125-128). It also penalizes psychological, physical, and sexual violence against minors as well as sex with especially vulnerable victims, lewd acts, forced prostitution, sexual slavery, sexual assault, labor violence, and the illegal trafficking of women and minors (Art. 56). While this law has a more comprehensive focus on making sure the minors of Venezuela are able to freely exercise all the rights given to them under the law, it is still important to the theme of human trafficking in that, by ensuring the full enjoyment of these rights, the risk of vulnerability decreases, particularly as communities and the state are able, and obliged, to use the resources necessary to prevent and suppress violence enacted against children and to give the necessary aid to victims. In

short, this law has provided a strong foundation for guaranteeing the rights of minors in Venezuela, giving them wide legal protections, and combating human trafficking, at least on paper.

Conclusion

The law has created a clear judicial foundation to fight human trafficking, though there is less focus on prevention and victim aid. As the current political, economic, and social crisis has escalated, the Maduro administration has transferred state resources away from helping these vulnerable groups to maintaining order and regime control. While there is substantial legal rhetoric and posturing concerning the punishment of human trafficking, the practical applications of these laws and policies are weak, resulting in little real enforcement. Institutional devaluation of the problem has directly contributed to the growth of human trafficking.

Section 3.3: Venezuela's *Misiones*: A Review of Social Policy

Introduction

Having established that the Maduro administration has chosen to devote little energy to the effective enforcement of anti-trafficking policy and law, this section investigates social policy in Venezuela as a possible viable alternative. By situating the *Misiones* as the primary vehicle of poverty reduction and humanitarian aid in Venezuela, I argue that the Maduro administration has allowed them to function as the state's approach to human trafficking. So long as there is adequate Petro-financing, the *Misiones* function well as a source of poverty alleviation. However, the 2014 decline in oil prices and subsequent economic crisis has compromised their effectiveness as a deterrent against human trafficking. The data for this section is drawn mainly from reports made

by NGOs in Venezuela, most notably *Asociación Civil Paz Activa*. In addition, it also uses relevant articles and figures from the World Data Bank.

Section 3.3.1: History of Venezuela's *Misiones*

In 2003, Chávez created his famous *Misiones*—government social aid programs—to mitigate the political damage his regime was facing. These aid packages have since become the social face of Bolivarian socialism, the attempt to bridge the wide gap of inequality and bring everybody together under one national identity (D'Elia, 2006, 189; 195). In accordance with Chávez's Plan for the Social and Economic Development of the Nation (2001-2007), these missions would help fight poverty and social inequality, "...as a result of the universalization of social rights, guaranteeing the equity of access to resources by means of attention, material conditions, and well-being..." (Lineas Generales..., 2001, 91)¹⁵. In his fifteen years in office, Chávez created a total of 28 *Misiones*, all attempting to help some sector recognize and obtain their full rights under the law.

When Maduro became president, he continued to promote and fund them to maintain the popular vote. On the campaign trail back in 2014, Maduro stated: "The only one that can maintain, consolidate, and amplify the *Misiones* created by the Bolivarian Revolution is Nicolás Maduro when you make me president" (*Nicolasmaduro.org.ve*, 2014)¹⁶. During the first year of his presidential term, Maduro created seven new *Misiones* and has even elevated a few to the title of 'Grand Mission', because of their importance to the people and to his solidification as president. To date, these *Misiones* still play an important role in the political economy of Venezuela as

¹⁵ "...Como resultado de la universalización de los derechos sociales, garantizando, la equidad de acceso a recursos a medios de atención y a condiciones materiales y de bienestar..."

¹⁶ "El único que puede mantener, consolidar y ampliar las misiones creadas por la Revolución Bolivariana, es Nicolás Maduro cuando ustedes me hagan presidente."

Maduro tweeted in November of 2018: “We will continue to strengthen...the missions, and grand missions that Comandante Chávez left for us, in order to open the paths of happiness and freedom in the Fatherland” (*El Universal*, 2018)¹⁷.

Section 3.3.2: Analysis of the *Misiones*

Conceived to pay back the grand social debt—created by decades of unequal economic growth—owed to the Venezuelan population, the *Misiones* address keys areas of education, health, nutrition, work, and housing (D’Elia, 2006, 2006). Although there have been more than 30 created, the table below summarizes the more important, or long-lasting *Misiones* and *Grandes Misiones* (grand missions), in order to better understand the diversity of needs and outreach.

Table 3.3: *Misiones* Enacted by Chávez and Maduro (D’Elia, 2006)¹⁸

Mission	Official Date of Creation	Purpose
Mission Barrio Adentro	April 16, 2003	Matters of Health
Missions Robinson I, II	Jul 1, 2002; October 28, 2003	Alphabetization, Schooling
Mission Sucre	July 10, 2003	Help with University Education
Mission Miranda	October 19, 2003	Organization of Military Reserves
Mission Mercal	January 10, 2004	Secure access to basic food goods
Mission Vuelvan Caracas	March 12, 2004	Endogenous Development
Mission Habitat	August 20, 2004	Access to land, housing, and spaces for better quality of life
Missions Identidad	February 3, 2004	Identity Cards for the entire population
Mission Guaicaipuro	October 12, 2004	Help for Indigenous Populations
Mission Piar	October 18, 2004	Help for small mine workers
Mission Zamor	January 2005	Land recovery
Mission Cultura	July 14, 2005	Sociocultural Development

¹⁷ “Seguiremos fortaleciendo...las misiones y grandes misiones que nos dejó el comandante Chávez, para abrir los caminos de la felicidad y la liberación de la Patria.”

¹⁸ For additional source material, see: *Noticias 24*

Mission Negra Hipolita	January 14, 2006	Help for Homeless Population
Grand Mission Barrio Nuevo, Barrio Tricolor	November 2013 ¹⁹	Community/Neighborhood Development
Grand Mission Eficiencia o Nada	April 2013	Fight Corruption, Bureaucracy
Mission Electrica Venezuela	September 2013	Transform National Electric System
Grand Mission Negro Primero	October 16, 2013	Increase National Defense
Mission Nevado	December 2013	Rescue and Protect Street Animals
Mission Transporte	November 13, 2013	Help for Transport Workers

As seen, while various *Misiones* have promoted the general welfare of the people, including specific groups such as the military, they touch on many different areas of social needs. From basic literacy to sociocultural development, the *Misiones* attempt to transform the lives of those involved. Because they touch on so many different areas, not just one or two, the *Misiones* can function as a strong deterrent against human trafficking. As the social groups that are generally left out of the political process begin to receive the attention and care they need in such areas as health, education, sanitation, housing, etc, they are less tempted to look elsewhere for the resources their government has been neglecting to give them. When their basic needs are finally being meet, their desire to move elsewhere is lessened, and they are less likely to be tricked by traffickers into taking ‘jobs’ elsewhere (Molland, 2005, 29-30; Chuang, 2006, 155-156). Their allure as a viable alternative in approaching the problem of human trafficking is based on their holistic attention to the broader social system and the different variables that determine human development.

However, according to a report done in 2006, while there were certain, tangible benefits, the *Misiones* also tended to arrive in an incomplete and badly organized form, compromising their effectiveness (D’elia, 2006, 200-227). They were beneficial in that, for many of the poorer

¹⁹ Originally created in August of 2009 as Mission Barrio Nuevo, Barrio Tricolor, but was later elevated by Maduro in 2013 to Gran Mission and is labeled as such in Table 3.3.

neighborhoods whose access to basic goods had been severely limited, the introduction of new and secure access to goods such as education and health improved the quality of life. In addition, the relational quality between the social workers and the community members improved and neighbors began to care for each other and the community as a whole. (Ibid, 213-214). Because of the elevated trust and confidence between the mission volunteers and the various neighborhoods, the community as a whole became more adept at repelling external threats such as criminals or police abuse, including human traffickers. However, the *Misiones* also suffered from organizational and bureaucratic inefficiencies. As it states,

“The Missions have in common the characteristic of arriving in incomplete form. Phases are superimposed on top of each other in such a way that allows for the deficiency of attention and the inefficiency of the effort and resources involved. Additionally, the missions impose an accelerated form of execution that, sometimes, prioritizes completing goals instead of defeating the problem at hand²⁰” (ibid, 214).

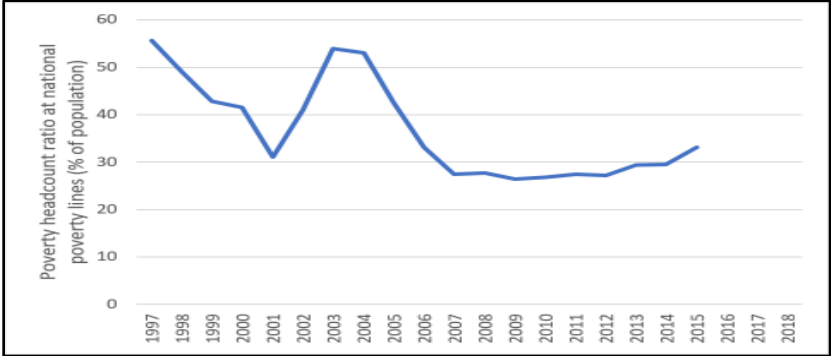
When social aid becomes a political tool, *Misiones* such as these can easily turn into checkbox exercises where governments use them as the means to promote their own agenda instead of implementing structural changes²¹. The *Misiones* allowed for the redistribution of oil rents to the low-income population that had been previously excluded from national wealth increases, which in turn gave them a stronger presence in the political and social system. As a political tool, despite the bureaucratic inefficiencies, the *Misiones* also helped Maduro in his ever more desperate attempts to remain president of an increasingly disillusioned population.

²⁰ “Además, las Misiones tienen en común la característica de llegar en forma incompleta. De esta manera, se van superponiendo fases sobre fases que hacen deficiente la atención e ineficientes los esfuerzos y recursos involucrados. Adicionalmente, las Misiones imponen un ritmo acelerado de ejecución en el que a veces cumplir la meta vale más que vencer el problema” (214).

²¹ Social funds like Venezuela’s *Misiones* have also been used by several other governments in Latin America such as Mexico and Brazil to help reduce negative economic shocks, particularly in the 1980’s and 90’s as countries began to implement neoliberal policies (Penfold-Becerra, 2007, 66-67).

In their function as the state’s approach to human trafficking, the success of the *Misiones* has also largely depended on available public funds. Historically, as oil prices increased during the latter half of the 2000’s, Chávez was able to funnel an increasingly large amount of oil revenue into his social aid programs. For Chávez, it had some short-term benefits in that social spending levels per capita increased 314% between 1998 and 2007 (Yudiana, 2017). As the table below indicates, such spending by Chávez had a direct effect on poverty in Venezuela. Beginning in 2004, poverty levels fell and hovered steadily around 30% until Maduro assumed presidency in 2013. While poverty levels have certainly continued to climb since then, the graph does make the point that when the money was available, social spending increased and poverty declined.

Table 3.4: Poverty in Venezuela (World Data Bank)



The continuing importance of the *Misiones* and their role in abating poverty and deterring human trafficking under the Maduro administration is seen in the fact that, even though GDP has dropped significantly since the economic crisis, the amount of the social spending as a percentage of the GDP has actually increased, from 42% in 2016 to a spectacular 70% in 2017 (Mallet-Outtrim, 2016). It’s an interesting conundrum; because the Chávez administration spent so much money on the programs, the Maduro administration is forced to do the same, regardless of the fact that there is far less money now than there was under Chávez. Essentially, under Chávez social spending became a larger portion of the budget because there was more money, while under Maduro it has become a substantial portion of the budget because there is less money.

As the most functional deterrent against human trafficking, and in terms of general poverty alleviation, the Maduro administration continues to attempt to fund them, although their effectiveness has certainly been compromised not only by organizational mismanagement but by the lack of available public funds. Social needs are no longer being addressed as severely limited access to food and medicine have devastated communities. As Gallegos reports,

“In early 2015 Venezuela suffered chronic shortages of basic consumer goods. Finding food staples like rice, milk, sugar, beef, and chicken was tough. Basic personal care products like deodorant and shampoo were practically nonexistent. It had been roughly two years since store shelves were regularly stocked with toilet paper rolls in Caracas, the city in Venezuela where consumers were most likely to find scarce products” (2016, 33).

As the *Misiones* were designed to address needs such as these, it seems as if they cannot handle the widespread collapse of the economic system, no matter how large a percentage of the GDP social spending occupies.

Conclusion

The political aspect of the political-economic institutional approach shows that by choosing to utilize the *Misiones* as the state’s approach to human trafficking instead of enforcing anti-trafficking law and policy, the Maduro administration can no longer give the Venezuelan population the resources it needs to fight the development of human trafficking. The Venezuelan population must find another effective means of survival, turning their attention towards migration, making them extremely vulnerable to human trafficking rings.

Chapter 4

Looking Outward: Economy, Crime, and Migration

Introduction

This chapter examines the economic factors associated with the development of human trafficking as well as investigating some of the ‘push’ factors resulting from the social crisis in Venezuela, including elevated levels of crime and the mass exit migration of the Venezuelan population. It answers questions such as: What economic role did the Maduro administration play in the development of human trafficking? How is its development seen in the elevated levels of crime and the migration crisis? I argue that mismanagement of oil income by the Maduro administration as well as the decisions to implement price controls and create a convoluted exchange rate system caused Venezuela’s economic system to collapse when oil prices declined in 2014. In addition, the inability of the government to mitigate crime and migration has also led to noticeable ‘push’ factors of human trafficking.

Section 4.1: Human Trafficking and Economy

Introduction

This section investigates the economic decline of Venezuela and its consequences for the Maduro administration. By understanding why the economy has reached such a critical point today, one can also understand some underlying economic factors in the development of human trafficking. In addition, an analysis of Venezuela’s economy also helps to understand some push factors behind the large migration crisis in Venezuela, one of the most notable aspects of the increase in human trafficking. This sections draws its data from World Data Bank figures and the relevant literature on oil revenues and the economic policies adopted by Chávez and Maduro.

Section 4.1.1: Managing Oil Revenue

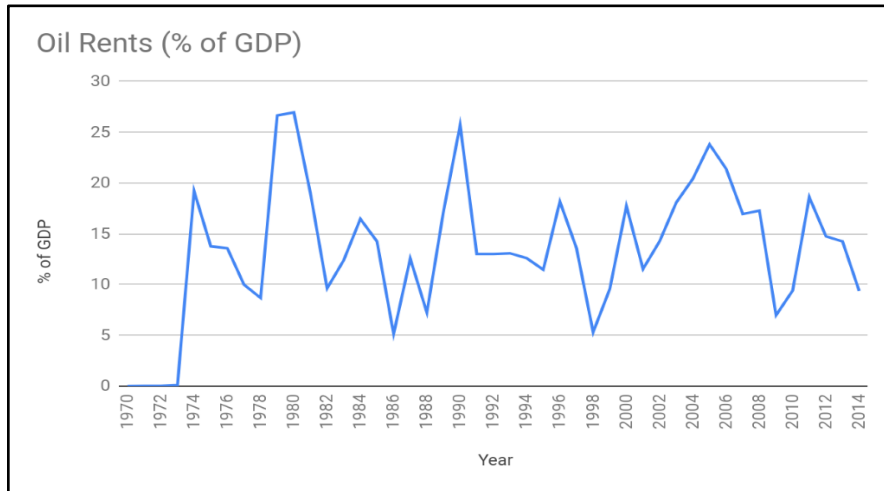
The economic decline of Venezuela is tragedy at its worst. Long a nation dependent on oil revenue, Venezuela has been at times one of the richest countries in Latin America, and now, one of the poorest. Naím and Toro have even named it Venezuela’s “suicide”, so marked is the difference (2018, 126). While there are many factors involved, it has been the unsound economic policy and ideology of the Maduro administration that has contributed most to Venezuela’s current situation²².

Maduro’s economic ideology finds its historical roots in the Chávez administration. The world experienced a tremendous boom in oil prices during the first decade of twenty-first century (Vera, 2015, 547). Chávez capitalized on this and Venezuela saw substantial economic success from 2003 to 2008. Experiencing real (inflation-adjusted) GDP growth of 87.3%, Chávez began to dramatically increase governmental and social spending, prioritizing oil-led national development (Weisbrot and Sandoval, 2008, 6). Utilizing such a volatile resource—as shown in the table 4.1—underpinned both Chávez’s success and Maduro’s failure. During the periods of the oil booms, most notably the first half of the 1970’s, the first half of the 1990’s, and the majority

²² At first glance, one might be tempted to point towards oil as the source of Venezuela’s economic woes. Indeed, such a resource can be troublesome for the best of the governments. As Ross notes in his book on the oil curse, economic growth in oil states has been unusually volatile (2012, 190). While the countries have certainly developed, they are quite underdeveloped in terms of where they should be considering the rather large economic windfalls gained from such a resource (Ibid, 189-221). Even so, oil in and of itself is not the culprit; rather it is the governmental mismanagement of oil as a resource that can cause such economic problems. For example, during the 1974-1989 slump in oil prices, most, but not all, of the oil states suffered; Oman and Malaysia’s per capita income rose 89 and 78 percent, respectively. Ross cites good government leadership as an important factor, as they were able to build well-diversified economies and, for Malaysia in particular, a strong manufacturing sector (2012, 194). Thus, one cannot simply blame oil for Venezuela’s economic highs and lows. Some might also point to the economic tenets of socialism as the root of Venezuela’s woes. An ideology based on state control of resources—particularly one as volatile as oil—can lead to a myriad of disastrous effects, including corruption, kleptocracy, crime, social repression, etc. Yet, Venezuela was not the only Latin American country to elect a socialist government in the last 20 years; Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, Nicaragua, and Uruguay have all done so, and, aside from Nicaragua, no other country has imploded (Naím and Toro, 2018, 128). Thus, socialism is also eliminated as the cause of Venezuela’s economic decline.

of the first decade of the 2000's, oil rents (price of crude oil minus cost of production) occupied significantly larger percentages of the annual GDP.

Table 4.1: Oil Rents in Venezuela (% of GDP) (World Data Bank)

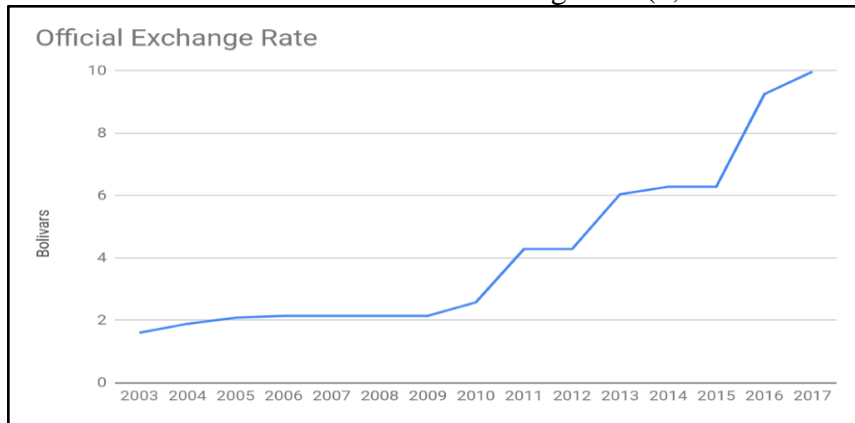


The volatility of oil is also shown by the sharp increases and decreases; a few years of high prices—a boom cycle—followed by years of plummeting prices—a bust cycle—which can trick governments into spending too much during the years of plenty only to be saddled with high debts and no money to pay them during a price slump. One can also see how the comparatively stable price incline from 2000-2008 allowed Chávez to use the high oil windfalls to enact his economic, political, and social policies. Although the data is not included in the table, oil prices fell again in 2014, which has caused trouble for Maduro in his attempts to maintain regime control. He had neither the money nor the public approval of Chávez, so he turned to repression as a means of control. In the face of economic constraints, Maduro has chosen to emphasize the welfare of his regime instead of focusing on the welfare of his people. Such a decision can allow for the increase of human trafficking, particularly when the general population no longer has the resources to stave off its development.

Section 4.1.2: Price Controls and Exchange Rates

In addition to structural dependence on petro-finance, Maduro has also pursued two other economic policies that—in the context of declining oil prices—have created additional problems: a fixed exchange rate and price controls on goods. Although the Venezuelan bolivar has been pegged to the dollar since 2003, the exchange rate remained relatively stable until Maduro assumed presidency in 2013 as shown by table 4.2 (*The Guardian*, 2003). Since then the Maduro administration has overseen a dramatic devaluation of the bolivar.

Table 4.2: Official Bolivar to USD exchange rate (1,000s of Bolivars) (World Data Bank)



In an effort to combat capital flight and create a stable currency regime, Maduro has added three parallel exchange rates since 2016 in addition to the official rate: a second at 12 thousand bolivars per dollar, a third at 50, and most recently, a fourth at 200 (Disilvestro and Howden, 2016). The official exchange rate, as shown in the table, is only used for the importation of food and medicine, which is strictly controlled by the government. The second two are used for the import of all other goods (which restricts investment and imports as obtaining USD dollars in exchange for products has become increasingly more difficult) and the last is used only by individuals. The political elites that can use the governmental exchange rate to obtain dollars benefit while the poor can only utilize the lower rates. This is another example of how the Maduro administration has prioritized regime control by satisfying his government constituents with

favorable exchange rates and thus marginalizing the general population in the process. Such marginalization plays a role in the development of human trafficking in that it increasingly limits their purchasing power, making them vulnerable to characteristic ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors of human trafficking, namely the desperate need to close the economic wage gap.

The Maduro administration has also significantly increased the range of price controls on goods, including 1,400 pharmaceuticals, 140 food items, and more than 240 personal hygiene items (Gallegos, 2016, 38). As Venezuela’s inflation rose price controls created unrealistic prices for these products. Businesses lost money on each product they made because the actual prices should be much higher than they are to account for inflation. Goods became incredibly scarce. If and when products were delivered to stores, they sold out in hours, if not minutes (Ibid, 33-57). People hoarded what they could because they made substantial gains by buying it cheap at the governmentally-regulated price and then crossing the border into Colombia to re-sell it. Because of such actions, the black market became an incredibly substantial force in the Venezuelan economy, not only for people looking to resell goods, but also to trade bolivars for dollars. In sum, Maduro inherited an economic system completely dependent on oil revenue to fund its various programs. Facing weak oil prices and declining revenues, Maduro expanded the price control regime and created the multiple exchange rate system. The black-market trade grew, and commodity shortages expanded. Such a market also provides additional avenues through which traffickers could operate, particularly at the Venezuela-Colombia border.

In August 2018, Maduro finally admitted the reality of the high inflation rates in the country and created a series of drastic monetary changes. In the face of a 1,000,000% inflation according to the IMF, Maduro decided to roll out a new ‘sovereign bolivar’ replacing the ‘bolivar fuerte’ as the national currency. This new bill struck off five zeros in an attempt to curb inflation. In doing

so, the official exchange rate was also devalued by 96 percent, from 9,975 to about 60 bolivars per dollar, or at least what was 6,000,000 bolivars before the new bills were rolled out. He also substantially increased the minimum wage (*Clarín*, 2018). However, such measures do not address the large restriction of goods and capital in the country.

Conclusion

Such a reversal of Venezuela's economic fortune makes authors such as Johnson comment that, "Such success makes the sorry state of Venezuela's oil industry today, not to mention that of the country at large, all the more surprising—and tragic" (2018, 50). As the economy continues imploding, the more vulnerable populations will be increasingly exposed to the often-grim reality of looking for means of survival outside of one's own country. This in turn has created a large mass exit migration in Venezuela, drawing an ever-increasing number into potential trafficking situations.

Section 4.2: Crime and Insecurity

Introduction

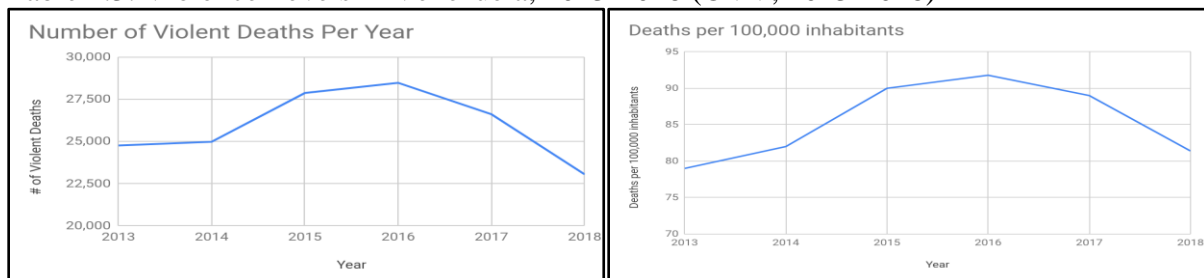
This section investigates the elevated levels of crime and insecurity in Venezuela. I argue that the Maduro administration has exacerbated the levels of crime and insecurity in Venezuela by not only allowing, but encouraging, the presence of organized crime and militarized rebel groups. By doing so Maduro allows traffickers to operate with impunity as well as utilize well established drug trade and smuggling routes. This section draws its sources primarily from the Venezuelan NGO *Observatorio Venezolano de Violencia* and governmental institution *Observatorio de Delito Organizado* as well as LAPOP surveys conducted in Venezuela.

Section 4.2.1: National Crime in Venezuela

Some of the major driving forces behind crime in Venezuela have been a corrupt police force and military, an inefficient judicial system, violent and overcrowded prisons run by ‘pranas’ or prison gang leaders, and the availability of illegal weapons (OASC, 2018, 2). Although crime has been increasing for the majority of Maduro’s presidency, whether or not crime and insecurity is continuing to increase or is finally decreasing is difficult to empirically verify as the data are conflicting. However, what remains empirically true is that the Maduro administration has faced abnormally high levels of crime and insecurity in Venezuela. The flourishing of organized crime and the use of violent political repression has resulted in a large and sustained increase of crime for several years, giving traffickers the chance to create and maintain a foothold in Venezuela.

According to the LAPOP survey conducted in Venezuela during 2016-2017, 67.4 percent of respondents reported that they felt ‘unsafe’ or ‘very unsafe’ in their neighborhoods, a small increase from 66.7 in 2014, but over 20 percentage points higher than the 43.7 in 2012 (Rodriguez and Zechmeister, 19). In addition, crime victimization nearly doubled in 2016-17, from 24.4 percent in 2014 to 40.5 percent (ibid, 21). These indicators show that residents of Venezuela are being seriously adversely affected by the rising levels of crime. When, in 2017, “over 73 Venezuelans die a violent death every day,” quality of life and personal security decreases dramatically (OASC, 2018, 1)

Table 4.3: Violence Levels in Venezuela, 2013-2018 (OVV, 2013-2018)



However, as shown in the table, according to the Venezuelan NGO, *Observatorio Venezolano de Violencia* (Venezuelan Observatory of Violence, OVV) there has actually been a notable decrease of crime from 2017-18. Crime certainly increased the most between 2014 and 2015, a jump of 2,895 or 11.6 percentage points for the number of violent deaths. The OVV gives six main reasons for the large increase of crime in 2015: an augmentation of organized crime, weakening of state security bodies, privatization of security, militarized repression, impoverishment of society, and finally, institutional destruction (OVV-LASCO, 2015). In contrast it seems that violent crime has actually decreased from 2017 to 2018 by 13.4 percent. One might conclude that Maduro has finally been successful in restoring levels of peace to the country, but in reality the violent deaths have decreased in 2018 mostly due to emigration, lack of resources to steal or people to kill, and police repression (OVV-LASCO, 2018). That is, the lack of people in Venezuela and the brutal police repression have caused the numbers in the crime statistics to decrease, not an increase in security and peace levels.

Section 4.2.2: Organized Crime in Venezuela

According to the Venezuelan governmental institution *Observatorio de Delito Organizado* (Observatory of Organized Crime), of the 811 cases of reported crime over the first six months of 2018, drug trafficking, contract killing, and extortion ranked highest with 16.5, 16.4, and 16.3 percent of cases reported, respectively. Kidnapping and contraband occupy the next two spots with 12.2 and 11.5 percent respectively (ODO, 2018, 13). It is clear that organized crime has become a significant and diverse force in Venezuela.

After Venezuela cut ties with the US's DEA in 2005, it has since become a regional, and perhaps even global, hub for drug trafficking, particularly with its proximity to Colombia and the

Caribbean. Many investigations by the US and independent sources have indicted many of Venezuela's top governmental officials as heavily involved in the drug trade (as well as other illegal activities). This includes National Assembly President Diosdado Cabello—second in power behind Maduro—despite claims to innocence by the Venezuelan government (Cordoba and Forero, 2015; Drug Trafficking...,2018). In fact, Venezuela's largest drug trading group, Cartel de los Soles, is so named for the gold stars worn by Venezuelan military officials (McDermott, 2018)²³. Although the Maduro administration would claim otherwise, they have been incredibly complicit in the expansion of organized crime, and thus human trafficking, in Venezuela. Because Maduro depends on support from the military, he has turned a blind eye to the expansion of organized crime in their ranks. It is hard for the government to fight crime in any substantial way when many key government players benefit from it.

With the prevalence of drug trafficking in Venezuela, especially among high ranking officials, one can cautiously extrapolate to other types of organized crime including that of human trafficking. If kidnapping and contraband also rank among the most utilized types of organized crime, then human trafficking, if not as visible or bureaucratically documented, will likely rank very high as well, particularly as the government does little to combat it through law enforcement. Trafficking victims smuggled out of the country on airplanes likely use the same, or similar routes, as those used by drug traffickers. If not headed north, then they can be easily smuggled through Venezuela into Colombia along the same routes used to smuggle contraband drugs, gasoline, weapons, and goods between the two countries. As noted in section 3.1, many trafficking victims

²³ Due to the porous nature of Venezuela and Colombia's border, and the US pressure on the Colombian government to eradicate drug production/trade in Colombia, Venezuela has been receiving an ever-increasing share of the drug trade that was once primarily Colombia's. In fact, in 2013, the US estimates that "about 131 tons of cocaine, about half of the total cocaine produced in Colombia, moved through Venezuela" (Cordoba and Forero, 2015).

are found in Colombia or the Caribbean (although they have been documented in Spain and the rest of South America as well).

Section 4.2.3: Rebel Groups along Venezuela-Colombia Border:

The presence of militarized rebel groups, most notably that of Colombia's ELN (National Liberation Army), along the Venezuela-Colombia border also provides a major opening for the development of human trafficking. Maduro has always been friendly towards these groups, allowing them to establish a foothold in the border areas of Venezuela. Historically Chávez, "provided at least tactical and probably material support," to Colombian rebels, a trend continued by Maduro (Boraz, 2007, 245; "ELN en...", 2016). When Maduro temporarily closed the border in 2015, he blamed smugglers and Colombian migrants for violence along the border rather than the rebel groups operating there (Forero, 2015). The ELN, and other criminal groups along the border, have now become an entrenched part of the borderland region.

In some rural areas, the ELN has become a de facto state power, resolving civil conflicts, maintaining order, punishing criminals, officiating public projects, and imposing taxes ("ELN en...",2016). In recent years, dissident members of the now largely disbanded FARC rebels have crossed the border as well, seeking refuge in Venezuela. These ex-FARC mafia and the ELN have been increasingly recruiting Venezuelan migrants fleeing the crisis in order to strengthen their criminal structures and that of organized crime in the area as a whole ("Colombia's ELN"... ,2018). Criminal activities include drug and contraband smuggling and extortion, of which one can easily extrapolate to human trafficking as well (Jones et al., 2007, 113-114; Feingold, 2005). The allure to join these groups is strong as migrants receive monthly salaries of around 50,000 Bolivares (or roughly \$300 according to late 2018 exchange rates), more than 27 times the minimum monthly

wage in Venezuela (Ibid). The smuggling of migrants, to which human trafficking is closely linked, from Venezuela to Colombia, and then on to other countries, is more feasible with the use of ELN's trafficking networks. The regularity and ease with which contraband and humans are smuggled, and likely trafficked, is evidenced by the substantially increasing black market and continued entrenchment of rebel groups. In the context of rising insecurity and violent crime and the expansion of state-led organized crime syndicates and rebel groups in border areas, the institutional conditions for greatly expanding human trafficking have increased as well.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the entrenched presence of rebel groups along the Venezuela-Colombia border as well as the expansion of organized crime—some of which are connected to state actors—provides a likely conduit for human trafficking activity. Maduro has allowed military and political officials to directly participate in organized crime, thereby securing their support. The criminalization of the Venezuelan government and the resultant lack of security has direct implications for the involvement of the Maduro administration in the development of human trafficking.

Section 4.3: Migration: A Crisis Without Precedent

Introduction

This final section in chapter 4 investigates the large migration crisis Venezuela is currently experiencing under the Maduro administration as the most visible face of the increase of human trafficking in Venezuela. Of particular importance in this crisis is the response of other regional countries. The region has done the best it can but, with the strain on their resources, many Venezuelans are now being forced to look for illegal means of entry which greatly facilitates the

development of human trafficking. This section utilizes a wide range of sources including reports from *Consultores 21*, a Venezuelan company that studies public opinion, The United Nations, the World Bank, the Declaration of Quito, and other relevant literature.

Section 4.3.1: Migration under Maduro

Over the last fifteen years Venezuela has witnessed a “large-scale reverse migration,” with scores of Venezuelans seeking asylum elsewhere (Olivares, 2014). As of the end of 2018, an estimated 10 percent, some 3-4 million of Venezuela’s population, have fled the country, creating what has become known as the region’s worst migratory crisis, comparable to that of the Syrian war refugee crisis (Tharoor, 2018). Such a reversal of fortune has become known as the “Bolivarian Diaspora”, a commentary on the millions of Venezuelans that can now be found living outside of their home country.

Under the Maduro administration, political repression has significantly expanded, and as oil prices began to decline, the country’s economic downturn has prompted many in the general population to flee, unsure of economic survival within their own country. As Latouche reiterates, “Maduro’s mishandling of the national economy led to widespread poverty and mass civil unrest starting in 2015...His regime brutally repressed protests” (2018). The repression of such protests has included the assassination of 124 people and the injury of 1,958 more. From April to May of 2017, at least 5,000 were arrested, leading the UNHCR to declare that grave and systematic violations of human rights had been committed in Venezuela (Pereda, 2017, 142). This, in combination with severe economic distress, has given much of the population cause to flee. Such an unprecedented flood of people desperate to find a means of survival makes them incredibly vulnerable to traffickers, particularly as many of the migrants are poor and lack the funds and networks to secure safe access to other countries and decent jobs upon arrival.

Migration and survey data indicate that while many Venezuelans would prefer to stay in the country if possible, it is increasingly difficult to justify doing so. Consultores 21, a long-time Venezuelan company dedicated to studying market and public opinion, conducted a recent survey (late 2017) asking nearly 2000 homes about current migration topics and issues. Of those surveyed, the largest reason for leaving was the economic situation, at 63%, and the political situation, at 29%²⁴. The survey also found that, on average, 1.97 persons have emigrated from each nuclear family, and that 90% of the Venezuelans that wish to leave believe the economic and political situation in the country will only worsen. Half of those surveyed believed that those who have emigrated would return if things change, while only 26%²⁵ said they believed that the immigrants would not return at all. By the end of 2017, numbers from the United Nations Office of Immigration and ENCOVI estimated that approximately 1,500,000 immigrants had left Venezuela over the last 13 years and spread across 15 countries, with 925,000 from 2015-2017 alone. From 2015-2017, Venezuelan migration increased 132% globally, and a staggering 895% to other Latin American countries (Reyes, 2018). The most recent estimate of numbers has placed the number of Venezuelan immigrants at three million, with a little over a million residing in Colombia, half a million in Peru, and the rest spread primarily across the United States, Spain, South, and Central America (Haq, 2018). Such numbers are only forecasted to increase until such a time as economic and political tensions ease in Venezuela.

Section 4.3.2: International Response

The response of other countries to the unprecedented flood of Venezuelan immigrants is critical to the development of human trafficking. Scholars argue that when countries begin to

²⁴ The number advances to 35% for those aged 45 and above.

²⁵ 26% for the popular class, 33% for middle and middle-upper class.

implement stricter entry controls, emigrants—especially the poor, most vulnerable populations who generally lack all the necessary legal documents—are forced to turn towards illegal means of entry, thereby allowing traffickers easier access to the supply of humans needed for trafficking (Modolo and Texido, 2018; Hathaway, 2008, 32-35). As the safe, legal options for emigrants dwindle and disappear, traffickers take advantage of an increasingly desperate and unprecedented flood of people leaving Venezuela. A robust, positive response by receiving countries is helpful in reducing the development of human trafficking.

In general, South American countries have been incredibly generous in granting work and residence permits, perhaps remembering that not long ago, their citizens, particularly those of Colombia, were the ones migrating to Venezuela. As Eduardo Stein, UNHCR-IOM Joint Special Representative for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela has stated, “Countries in Latin America and the Caribbean have largely maintained a commendable open-door policy to refugees and migrants from Venezuela,” (2018). Still, as the number of Venezuelan immigrants continue to grow, the reception capacity of the receiving countries is “severely strained, requiring a more robust and immediate response from the international community if this generosity and solidarity are to continue” (ibid). Thus, while many of the Latin American countries have been rather generous in their responses, the overwhelming number of Venezuelan immigrants and refugees have begun to create considerable strain, placing vulnerable populations in more danger of being trafficked.

According to the October 2018 World Bank Report: *Migración Desde Venezuela a Colombia (Migration from Venezuela to Colombia)*, Colombia now hosts more than a million Venezuelan immigrants, approximately a tenth of whom are designated irregular migrants. Such irregularity stems mainly from lack of proper legal documentation, either from the difficulties in

obtaining such documents in Venezuela due to the now astronomical costs, or the theft of such documents during the migratory process (16). Those who have the legal documents required find it much easier to migrate and access the type of job and personal security they feel is necessary for survival. On the other hand, as Colombian authorities are now requiring immigrants to have passports in order to be processed legally—an option not necessarily available for many of the poorer migrants—many are forced to turn to more illegal options in order to cross the border, a direct link to an increase in human trafficking (Graham, 2018).

According to an InSight Crime report, 75% of registered trafficking victims that Colombians authorities have helped since 2016 are of Venezuelan nationality (Human Trafficking..., 2018). Colombia is not the only country to enact stricter border controls: in the latter half of 2018, the governments of Ecuador, Peru, and Brazil announced that they would now be requiring Venezuelan passports for entry as well in order to stem the tide of immigrants. Even though legal entries may have slowed, “reports immediately surfaced of migrants falling into the hands of “coyote mafias,” which operate as human trafficking networks, as they moved through less traveled routes” (Restrictions on...,2018). Here there is a direct link between stricter border controls and higher levels of human trafficking, and one that must be accounted for as governments continue to struggle through how to handle this migratory crisis.

In light of such concerns, the Declaration of Quito on 4 September, 2018—an attempt by several Latin American Governments to create a regional response to this crisis—has promised to “combat human trafficking and the illegal trafficking of migrants²⁶,” as well as, “continue working on the implementation of public policies designed to protect the human rights of all the migrants in their respective countries in concordance with national legislation and applicable international

²⁶As stated in the Declaration of Quito, Article 2: “Combate a la trata de personas y al tráfico ilícito de migrantes,”

and regional instruments²⁷.” Article 8, in continuation of article 2, states that the States of the regions should:

“Coordinate forces with the Organization of American States (OAE), the International Organization of Migration (IOM), and other international organisms, to the end of combating human trafficking and the illegal trafficking of migrants, amidst the migratory flow of Venezuelan citizens and in conformity with disposition of pertinent international instruments²⁸.”

Such declarations make clear that the governments of the various countries involved in the migratory crisis, including the ones mentioned above, are aware of the growth and development of human trafficking as they seek to find satisfactory answers to the problems facing them. While the Declaration of Quito does not give any concrete steps as to how they will attempt to solve the problem of human trafficking, it does lay a foundation that can be built upon and improved

Conclusion

In conclusion, there is a direct link between human trafficking and the migration crisis the Maduro administration has created. This crisis showcases perhaps most clearly the increase of human trafficking in Venezuela and the role the Maduro administration has played in its development. It also highlights how decisions the Maduro administration have made in other areas such as the economy or the increase of organized crime has made the administration complicit in the development of human trafficking.

²⁷ As stated in the Declaration of Quito, Article 2: “Continuar trabajando en la implementación de políticas públicas destinados a proteger los derechos humanos de todos los migrantes en sus respectivos países, en concordancia con las legislaciones nacionales y los instrumentos internacionales y regionales aplicables.”

²⁸ As states in the Declaration of Quito, Article 8: “Disponer que los Estados de la región coordinen esfuerzos a través de la Organización de Estados Americanos (OEA), la Organización Internacional para las Migraciones (OIM), y otros organismos internacionales, a fin de combatir la trata de personas y el tráfico ilícito de migrantes, dentro del flujo migratorio de ciudadanos venezolanos y de conformidad con las disposiciones de los instrumentos internacionales pertinentes.”

Chapter 5: Conclusion

This thesis argues that the Maduro administration has played a substantial role in the development of human trafficking. There has been very little practical application of anti-trafficking law and policy. Instead, the Maduro administration has allowed the *Misiones* to function as the state's approach to human trafficking. However, the current social crisis in Venezuela, triggered by the 2014 decline in oil prices, has compromised the effectiveness of the *Misiones*. This, in conjunction with unsound economic policy, has created distinct 'push' factors of human trafficking: a large resource scarcity, elevated levels of crime and insecurity, and a mass exit migration. Even though the Maduro administration may espouse strong anti-trafficking rhetoric, the felt absence of effective action gives little assurance to those vulnerable to human trafficking schemes. Even so, there are some causes of human trafficking that are not prevalent under the Maduro administration, such as lack of education and low literacy rates. Consistently high levels of literacy in Venezuela indicate that while Venezuela exhibits many of the socio-economic indicators of human trafficking, this is not one of them, meaning that human trafficking can develop in many diverse situations.

A legislative review of Venezuela's various laws surrounding human rights and human trafficking demonstrates that human trafficking is clearly established as a crime in Venezuela, and at least on paper, the administration seems to care about its development within the country. Even so, the Maduro administration does little in effectively and practically applying these laws, creating a large lack of legal compliance. As such, the autocratic legalism employed by the Maduro administration signals to the populace that the Maduro administration is interested primarily in

maintaining regime control, and not in the legal assurance of their rights under the law, including access to the legal resources necessary to fight the development of human trafficking in Venezuela.

Even though the *Misiones* functioned well as the state's alternative approach to human trafficking for a while, the 2014 decline in oil prices and subsequent economic crisis, as well as organizational inefficiencies, has compromised their effectiveness. The population no longer has a secure access to goods previously promised by the government, and as such, they no longer trust in their government to provide a decent quality of life in their current position. This makes them extremely vulnerable to human traffickers as they begin to look outwards towards other countries to provide the resources their government no longer can, particularly distressing in light of the fact that because of Bolivarian socialism, the general population is largely dependent on the government for food, medicine, and other necessary resources.

On a more macro scale, an analysis of the economic decline in Venezuela reveals how and why the economy has reached such a critical point and the unfortunate consequences this has on the development of human trafficking. By examining the factors involved in Venezuela's economic decline, and their relation to human trafficking, we can trace their extension to the elevated levels of crime and insecurity in Venezuela and the large mass exit migration of the population, some of the most notable aspects in the increase of human trafficking in Venezuela. Such high levels of violent crime, driven by such diverse factors as political repression or the simple desire to survive, have driven many into the arms of traffickers as they look for safety and security amidst the violence. When knowingly facing the possibility of becoming a trafficking victim, and still choosing to take the risk in the face of high levels of crime and economic deprivation within Venezuela, it shows the true desperation of the Venezuelan people.

The large migration crisis that Venezuela is currently experiencing has become, perhaps, the most incriminating role the Maduro administration has played in the development of human trafficking. With the connection between (il)legal smuggling and human trafficking, it follows logically that development of the first is followed closely behind with the development of the second. In addition, although the region has done the best it can to mitigate the crisis, many Venezuelans are now being forced to look for illegal means of entry which also greatly facilitates the development of human trafficking.

In order to stop the rapid increase of human trafficking in Venezuela, the Maduro administration desperately needs to practically, and effectively, implement their anti-trafficking rhetoric. All talk and no action does not bode well for those in Venezuela affected by human trafficking. On a larger scale, the government would do well to turn the tide of migrants fleeing the country by stabilizing their economy and reducing the levels of violence and organized crime. Unfortunately, it seems as if the Maduro administration continues to focus primarily on maintaining regime control. As such they are focused on implementing and applying such policies that enable them to stay in control, not the ones concerned with reducing human trafficking. As such, a stronger international response is required in order to draw effective attention of the issue to the Maduro administration. In the face of the dysfunctional government, this may be the only viable solution, and as such, the only way to stem the development of human trafficking in Venezuela.

Literature on human trafficking in Venezuela is scarce. Because of the recent manifestation of the crisis, and of the relatively short duration, so far, of the Maduro administration, there has yet to be a large body of developed literature. Therefore, this thesis, by utilizing a Political-Economic Institutional Approach, which analyzes a plurality of political and economic factors

leading to the development of human trafficking, is an important contribution to the literature on human trafficking in Venezuela under the Maduro administration.

If this thesis were to be researched further, a more detailed, thorough analysis of the various causes and factors of human trafficking in Venezuela would be extremely beneficial. Field research at the Venezuelan-Colombian border would be very beneficial as it would allow for the collection of raw, primary data as well as a more concrete, accurate look into the situation unfolding in Venezuela. Overall, a more extensive, detailed look into the themes touched upon in this thesis would help corroborate the findings and add to its accuracy as a paper. Unfortunately, due to the lack of empirically verifiable data on human trafficking, this thesis is unable to make direct causal claims, although it does establish probabilistic links between decisions made by the Maduro government and the development of human trafficking when possible.

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