

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Background

Food security, as defined by the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO), is when all people constantly have physical, social, and economic access to sufficient, protected and nutritious food that accommodates their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.<sup>1</sup> For any state to function properly, the gears that run the complicated web of society and the apparatus of government which runs it, must always be maintained. Regardless of culture, religion, or country, food is a universal basic need that has enabled human societies evolve from hunter-gatherer societies into fledgling civilizations.

Maintaining a constant state of food security is itself a momentous task, therefore the discussion invariably transitions to the consequence of failing to achieve this, food insecurity. Securing reliable sources of food were and remain important tasks undertaken by state and non-state actors and compared to other objectives such as garnering political legitimacy or securing disputed territories, the nature of food security distinguishes itself as deeply tangible in every sense of the word. When access to food sources decreases people inevitably resort to desperate measures of making their concerns known. These are the primary reasons for food riots, a collective action that unfortunately continues to persist.

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<sup>1</sup> “SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND,” Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. Accessed February 28, 2021, <http://www.fao.org/cfs/home/products/onlinegsf/1/en/>.

Considering human history, instances of food insecurity are common. China under the Qing dynasty endured periods of violent insurrection by its citizens, due to chronic shortages of food and unreasonably soaring prices, pushing citizens to physically storm government offices and the homes of wealthy nobles, clamoring for cheaper grain prices and financial loans.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, as an example in September 2007, Italy experienced a 30% increase in the price of pasta, and in response a food riot, aptly named the “Pasta Protests”, erupted against the Italian government, and around the same time in Haiti, protesters fumed their frustrations against the governments due to the skyrocketing price of rice.<sup>34</sup> While the so-called Pasta Protests were mainly symbolic in nature and were aimed at boycotting the producers, the 2008 Haitian food riots forced the resignation of the Haitian government after weeks of violent protests.<sup>5</sup> Since its establishment in 1961, the World Food Program (WFP) has been at the forefront of food security issues, tasked by the United Nations with delivering food aid in humanitarian emergencies around the world.

Each year the WFP administers more than 15 billion food rations and operates in 88 countries. According to its estimates, around 800 million people are undernourished, 159 million children under the age of 5 experience stunted growth,

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<sup>2</sup> R. Bin Wong. “Food Riots in the Qing Dynasty” *The Journal of Asian Studies*, No. 4, Vol. 41 (August 1982): 767-788. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2055449>.

<sup>3</sup> Patel, Raj, and Philip McMichael. "A Political Economy of the Food Riot." *Review (Fernand Braudel Center)* 32, no. 1 (2009): 9-35. Accessed February 28, 2021. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40647787>.

<sup>4</sup> Gabriele Pileri. “Angry Italians hold "pasta strike" over price hike”, Reuters, last modified September 13, 2007, <https://www.reuters.com/article/oukoe-uk-italy-pasta/idUKELK34872520070913>.

<sup>5</sup> Jim Loney Joseph Guyler Delva, "Haiti's Government Falls After Food Riots", Reuters, Last modified 2008, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-haiti-idUSN1228245020080413>.

and a further 50 million children suffer from food wasting.<sup>6</sup> Food insecurity demonstrably holds the potential to not only disrupt the livelihoods of common people, but also topple entire governments.

Venezuela has yet to see its current government resign, despite its protracted political, social, economic, and humanitarian crisis. In the 2010s, the country lost 62% of its gross domestic product, saw its government shift from a fledgling democracy towards authoritarianism, and over 4 million Venezuelans have fled the country en masse to escape dreadful living conditions.<sup>7</sup> According to a 2019 World Food Program assessment, it is estimated that 7.9 percent of the population in Venezuela (around 2.3 million people) are experiencing severe food insecurity, with an additional 24.5 percent (7 million) classified as being moderately food insecure. Overall, the WFP projects that one in three Venezuelans is food insecure and in need of assistance. WFP analysis has determined that food insecurity is prevalent nationwide, with even local states holding the lowest rates of food insecurity, one out of five people are estimated to be food insecure.<sup>8</sup> Further demonstrating the fact, despite being the nation's capital and highest concentration of wealth, sights of children and the elderly scavenging for food in garbage piles remain common in Caracas.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> World Food Program, *WFP Strategic Plan (2017-2021)*, (Rome: World Food Program, 2017), 8.

<sup>7</sup> Bull, Benedicte, and Antulio Rosales. "The Crisis in Venezuela: Drivers, Transitions, and Pathways." *European Review of Latin American and Caribbean Studies / Revista Europea De Estudios Latinoamericanos Y Del Caribe*, no. 109 (2020): 1-20. Accessed February 28, 2021. doi:10.2307/26936900.

<sup>8</sup> World Food Program, *Venezuela Food Security Assessment Main Findings*, (WFP Regional Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean, September 2019), 1-3.

<sup>9</sup> Jorge Rueda and Scott Smith, "Many Venezuelans Struggle To Put Food On The Table In Crisis", *AP News*, February 29, 2020, <https://apnews.com/article/f4f75ce230272c79311dc8a72f7c72d1>.

The path for Venezuelans in the past decade has been anything but uncomplicated, as many basic services such as medicine, food are severely lacking in Venezuela. Furthermore, the multidimensional nature of the crisis far extends beyond Venezuela's domestic food insecurity. In addition, whatever of these services are available remain unaffordable to most Venezuelans, due to hyperinflation of the Venezuelan Bolivar.<sup>1011</sup> In their attempt to seek decent livelihoods, millions of Venezuelans have opted to leave the country, in what is Latin America's largest displacement of people in recent history.

In 2015 alone, around 566,000 Venezuelans left Venezuela for neighboring countries Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Brazil, Argentina, Chile, and Central America. Other out-of-region destinations include the United States, Canada, the Caribbean states, and even as far flung as Spain. Among the first to depart with relative ease were wealthier Venezuelans, following them were the financially and educationally deprived. Moreover, many airlines ceased operations in Venezuela due to volatile exchange rates, thereby skyrocketing the price of tickets. As a result, land and sea based routes have become the dominant route by which Venezuelan migrants make the trek to neighboring countries, of which many crossings display irregular patterns. Additionally, many migrants have been reported to be in poor health due to years of malnutrition and the physically taxing journey on foot, further exposing millions of migrants and refugees to hazardous conditions and circumstances,

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<sup>10</sup> Mariela Nava Mayela Armas, "In Venezuela, Not Even The Dollar Is Immune To Effects Of Hyperinflation", *Reuters*, March 15, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-venezuela-politics-inflation-idUSKCN1QV38P>.

<sup>11</sup> Ari Shapiro, "How Venezuela's Currency Became So Worthless", podcast by Ari Shapiro, *All Things Considered*, NPR, April 8, 2019, audio, 5:33, <https://www.npr.org/2019/04/08/711169832/how-venezuelas-currency-became-so-worthless>

including but not limited to exploitation, extortion, discrimination, and gender based violence.<sup>12</sup>

The 1960s saw the Democratic Action Party (*Accion Democratica*) take power in Venezuela and attempt land reforms to address the drastic inequality in the countryside. A 1960 agrarian law reform provisioned for the expropriation of large, “inefficient” estates and to the peasantry, with the stated objective of establishing a productive small-farm sector. However, this reform was concocted to address the needs of the new government, and did not adjust to the inherently incompatible nature of those needs: maintenance of its rural base and issuing reforms that avoided alienating its political rivals and the business community, thereby politicizing early agrarian reforms.<sup>13</sup>

Oddly, the massive food insecurity observed in Venezuela was not always the status quo. During the administration of Hugo Chávez, the country was at the apex of food security. According to Venezuelan government statistics, the average caloric intake rose from 91% of recommended levels in 1998 to 101.6% in 2007, essentially eliminating the issue of food insecurity for much of the population. Furthermore, rates of malnutrition-related deaths dropped by more than 50% since 1998 from 4.9 to 2.3 deaths per 100,000 people, between 1998 and 2006. This was mainly due to then-president Chavez’s projects centered around the concept of

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<sup>12</sup> Castilla, César, and Ninna Nyberg Sørensen, “Venezuelans flee accelerating collapse: LATIN AMERICAS EVOLVING MIGRATION CRISIS,” *Danish Institute for International Studies*, (March 1 2019): 1-4, doi:10.2307/resrep21353.

<sup>13</sup> Daniel Brian Lavelle, “Petro-Socialism and Agrarianism: Agrarian Reform, Food, and Oil in Chavista Venezuela” (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2016), 17, eScholarship Publishing.

endogenous development, which taken from the ideas of economist Osvaldo Sunkel, promotes “...an adaptation of import substitution policies which prioritize equity, human development, and development adjusted to specific local conditions and employing local resources”.<sup>14</sup>

Additionally, the Chavez administration utilized communal councils, which facilitated the conditions necessary for the involvement of citizens in the implementation of state-backed projects ranging from housing, infrastructure, agriculture, and economic development. This was a direct consequence of Venezuela’s historical background, in which the idea of participatory democracy, or popular power (*poder popular*) as it is known in Venezuela, decrees that public and state-run institutions must include direct participation in planning, decision making, governance, and citizen participation in neighborhood-based communal councils.<sup>15</sup> Shedding more light on Venezuela’s historical food security policies show that during the bulk of the Chavez (2002-2013) and Maduro administrations (2013-ongoing), that the government played, and continues to play a central position in the country’s food supply acquisition for two reasons.

Firstly, the institution of state-subsidized food markets, officially known as *mercales*, played a significant role in improving food security in Venezuela. The *mercales* provided steady and affordable access to food, in 2008 alone 1.25 million metrics worth of food were sold in these markets, with much of the food being

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<sup>14</sup> Clark, Patrick, "Sowing the Oil? The Chavez Government's Policy Framework for an Alternative Food System in Venezuela," *Humboldt Journal of Social Relations* 33, no. 1/2 (2010): 142, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23263229>.

<sup>15</sup> Clark, Patrick, "Sowing the Oil? The Chavez Government's Policy Framework for an Alternative Food System in Venezuela," 142.



imports, being heavily affected by price controls. Secondly, the role of bilateral trade agreements permitted the social and physical access of food to these markets, in which agricultural products were bought by Venezuela in exchange for oil. Between 2004 and 2009, trade between Argentina and Venezuela reached \$1.7 billion worth of food and agricultural products.<sup>16</sup> The dependence of food imports by Venezuela constitutes symptoms indicative of, firstly Venezuela's agricultural sector and its incapability to meet domestic food demands, and secondly a continuing structural failure of the country's official food policy.

To illustrate further, recently in 2019 Venezuela continues to export domestically produced food to international buyers, despite the ongoing food crisis and the mediocre revenue generated from these sales.<sup>17</sup> Economists have long pointed out Venezuela's over-dependence on oil revenues, citing it as a prime example of a failed petrostate and a sufferer of the so-called "Dutch Disease", describing the unhealthy and unsustainable nature of its dependence.<sup>18</sup> The ongoing food crisis in Venezuela has seen its roots extend far beyond its domestic borders, spurring millions of desperate people to flee in exceedingly hazardous conditions, reflecting the complex nature of food insecurity, in this case glued to an ever expanding web of political, social, economic issues, its origins protruding in both the history of Venezuela and present status quo, as well as domestic and foreign

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<sup>16</sup> Clark, Patrick, "Sowing the Oil? The Chavez Government's Policy Framework for an Alternative Food System in Venezuela," 144.

<sup>17</sup> Mayela Armas and Corina Pons, "In Hungry Venezuela, Food Producers Step Up Exports To Survive", *Reuters*, October 23, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-venezuela-exports-insight-idUSKBN1X215M>.

<sup>18</sup> Amelia Cheatham and Rocio Cara Labrador, "Venezuela: The Rise And Fall Of A Petrostate", *Council On Foreign Relations*, last updated January 22, 2021, <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/venezuela-crisis>.

sources.

## **1.2 Research Questions**

Acknowledging the need to identify the factors that have contributed to the current severe degree of food insecurity in Venezuela, as well as consequent migration crisis presently affecting states in proximity of Venezuela, this research will focus on the following research questions as stated:

1. How has the failure of socialist Chavismo policies under Hugo Chavez and Nicolas Maduro led to the deteriorating food security situation in Venezuela?
2. To what extent has the deteriorating food security situation in Venezuela contributed to the regional migration and refugee crisis?
3. To what extent has the mass exodus of migrants from Venezuela impacted the border security of neighboring Colombia and Brazil?

## **1.3 Research Objective**

This thesis should be able to reach the following objectives:

1. To examine and identify the failures of socialist Chavismo policies as factors of the Venezuelan food crisis.
2. To examine the impact of the Venezuelan migrant crisis on the regional border security of Latin America, specifically in the approximate neighboring countries of Colombia and Brazil.



## **1.4 Research Significance**

The intention of this thesis and its findings aims to shed light on the consequences of failing to maintain food security, in the hope that parties that remain vulnerable or are yet to be vulnerable to such conditions quickly recognize the harrowing symptoms of food security and take proper action to address it.

Additionally, it is the hope that, through this academic dissertation, that the public at large will be made aware of such dangers of food insecurity, as they remain the single most vulnerable party during periods of food shortages and its ensuing scenarios.

Furthermore, it aims to highlight what specific factors, particularly in the form of government policy, may lead to acute and/or chronic food shortages. It is extremely vital that an understanding of what policies work and do not work to sustain adequate levels of food security. Thus, it is entirely intended that the interconnectedness of the political, social, and economic dimensions of this topic be fully explored and accurately reported to readers of this paper. However, it is not the intention of this thesis to denounce, disparage, or otherwise debunk economic theories. To further illustrate the point, in this case, should the research find that the socialist policies implemented by the Venezuelan government are the primary instigators of food insecurity, I do not wish to inject moral judgment upon socialist or socialist-leaning economic and/or political theories.

## **1.5 Structure of Thesis**

The first chapter of this thesis will consist of the background, research questions, research objectives, and the significance of research, in order to provide

the reader clear information about the topic of discussion.

The second chapter of this thesis will into two parts; literature reviews which will cover books, peer-reviewed journals, reports, and other sources bearing relevance to this research topic; and the theoretical concepts being utilized as a framework to discuss Venezuela under Chavismo and its interlinkage with food security and mass migration.

The third chapter contains the methodology used in this research, which include the research approach, research method, data collection technique, and data analysis technique.

The fourth chapter will focus on analyzing the data that has been collected and analyzed regarding food security in Venezuela under Chavismo, its relation to the mass migration crisis of Venezuelans, and the effects of migration on border security in Colombia and Brazil.

The fifth chapter consists of the conclusion and recommendations, completing all that has been discussed in this research. This section will also provide recommendations on how food security in Venezuela can be improved and how Brazil and Colombia should treat the migration crisis.