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Comparative Politics

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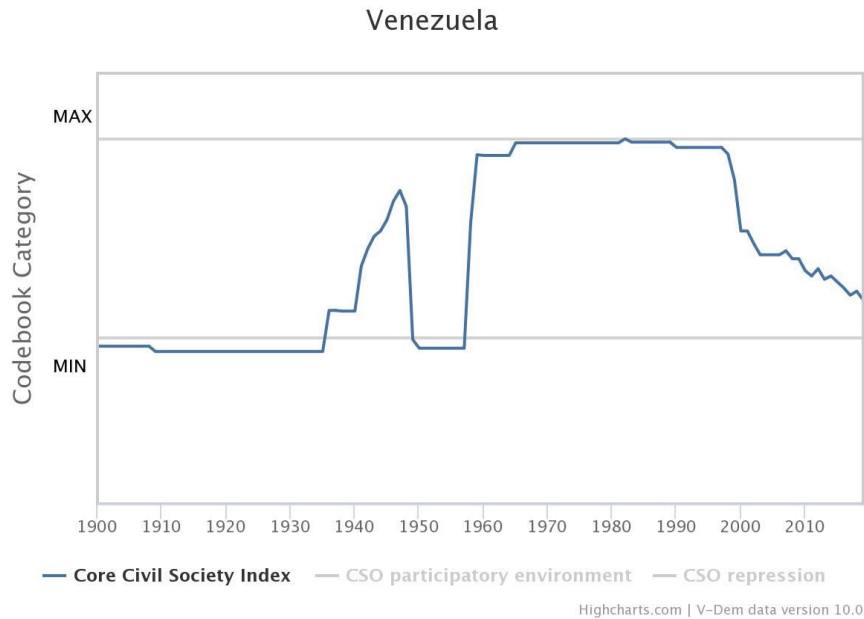
What Led to Social Capital and Widespread Resistance in Venezuela?

Over the past ten years, Venezuela has faced immense pressure from resistance organizations and social groups to increase political opportunities and shift the political atmosphere of the nation. There was a breaking point in this time frame in which there was a shift from passive action to widespread protests and violence. Using Tarrow's article as a foundation, I will analyze the point at which the citizens of Venezuela decided that it was an appropriate time to mobilize and take systematic action. I will look at the economic situation in Venezuela as well as the Core Civil Society Index.

To understand the political environment in Venezuela, I will provide a brief overview of the recent history of the nation. Two of the most important aspects to understand are the contests for the presidency as well as the wealth of oil in the region. President Hugo Chavez was the leader of Venezuela for nearly fifteen years. He created a legacy of social welfare and was incredibly popular among the poor citizens of Venezuela. Prior to his death, he tapped Nicolas Maduro to become the next president. President Maduro quickly consolidated all of the power under the presidency. Along came a thirty-five-year-old political outsider named Juan Guaido. Guaido claimed that Maduro's presidency was not supported by the constitution and that he was in fact the president. This is the crux of the political issue in Venezuela. At the same time that

this was occurring, the oil wealth in the nation was also evaporating and causing higher levels of unemployment and more social unrest (Specia, 2019).

The situation in Venezuela combined all of the aspects that Sidney Tarrow outlined in his book titled *Power in Movement*. In his book, he describes the necessary aspects to having a successful political movement. The primary aspects that Tarrow focuses on are regime change, opportunity, and threat. Venezuela, beginning in 2014, started to have all of these aspects and exhibited the prime opportunity for rebellion and action (Tarrow, 2011). With the death of the long-standing president, there was a regime change that took effect. The threat of consolidation of power under the presidency led to rage over the lack of distribution of power. Finally, with increasing poverty, there was more opportunity for citizens to protest and want more of the wealth to be distributed to them as well. In the following graph, you will see the Core Civil Society Index for Venezuela. As is shown in this graph, there is a decline in the Core Civil Society Index. This index shows the ability for citizens to freely demonstrate and pursue their political and civic goals. The graph shows the decline in the index meaning that citizens did not feel as though there was much ability to express their civic or political beliefs. Such a limit on their abilities to organize is one of the factors that led to the discontent among citizens of Venezuela.



(V-Dem, 2019)

Along with the limitations on political activity in Venezuela, the economic situation was becoming direr. The model that I looked at to explain the economic situation was the poverty rate. Beginning around 2012, the poverty rate began to rise. This coincided with the death of Chavez. With many citizens losing their job and going into worse economic situations, they became more upset with the current systems. The poverty rate can also be an indicator of the unemployment rate. Unemployed citizens have a greater ability to spend time protesting and are typically more willing to protest as well. Below you will find the graph of the poverty rate in Venezuela.



(World Bank, 2019)

The decreasing ability to legally organize and increasing poverty rate helped to lead to the protests that were seen in Venezuela. When Guaidó announced that he would be the interim president and tens of thousands of protestors rushed to the streets, all of the pent up energy finally hit the breaking point. When the protests erupted, the protestors were met with counter-protesters and armed military. As Tarrow discusses in his paper, the military and control that was exercised over the protestors was utilized to create a sense of control and demonstrate that the Maduro government was in charge. The protestors, led by Guaidó, still felt as though they had an opportunity and that this was the optimal time to continue to protest and attempt to gain power in the government. Even when outside nations and states came out in support of Guaidó and the protestors, the experience in the nation itself did not change. So long as the military continued to support Maduro, the Maduro government could remain in control. While

other states may allow some protest in order to give off the resemblance of freedoms, Venezuela never allowed its citizens to openly and freely protest.

The situation in Venezuela will continue to be dire. Neither side, the Maduro camp or the Guaido camp, are likely to concede any of their supposed power which will lead to continued violence and fighting in the country. With the military supporting Maduro and the public supporting Guaido, there will continue to be fighting between these two groups. On top of that, the economic situation will not begin to shift in a positive direction because the majority of democratic nations around the world do not support the current leadership and favor Guaido instead. The lack of international support and sanctions on Venezuelan goods makes it very difficult for the economic situation to begin to shift. One of the only ways that the protests could end is through the use of concessions. As Tarrow discusses, when the regime in charge begins to give minor concessions to the protesters, the protests may begin to end. These concessions would most likely not be genuine and would rather be just for show, but no matter the intent of the concessions they would have the same effect. Citizens of Venezuela would feel empowered once again and slowly begin to shift their support from Guaido to Maduro and in turn, end the protests. The other necessary aspect to end the protests is to slow the progression of inflation and put more money into the citizens' pockets. With an increase in jobs and revenue, citizens would be happier with the government and once again stop protesting. For the Maduro camp, the goal should be to find ways to both give minor concessions and slightly increase the economic situation in the nation.

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