



Figure 1. The national flag of Venezuela.
(Source: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/flag-of-Venezuela>)

Understanding a Modern-Day Migrant Crisis

An Examination of Venezuelan History and the Varying Cultural Memories of President Hugo Chávez's Role in the Crisis

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The Venezuelan migrant crisis is one of the worst the world has ever seen. In order to understand the complex issue, the goal of this project is to provide a historical context of the country from a high-level view, and then zoom in on one of the main culprits of the situation: Hugo Chávez. The project provides a further historical understanding of Chávez before observing a context through the lens of collective memory. The important takeaway is that despite some of the facts, large groups of people have different memories of Chávez and the role he played in causing the crisis. One of the most important aspects of cultural memory is that it enables people to learn from past experiences and apply that knowledge in the present. Considering this is a current crisis, these alternative understandings of memory could help develop ways to avoid circumstances like this in the future.



Figure 6. Geographical location of Venezuela.
(Source: <https://gisgeography.com/venezuela-map/>)

Contemporary History of the Venezuelan Economy

- Venezuela once had the highest per capita income in Latin America in 1973
- The country is located on the largest known oil reserves in the world
- Venezuela is a "petrostate," which is a country whose economy is deeply reliant on exporting oil and natural gas, causing significant "boom" and "bust" cycles
- Reckless government spending, uncontrolled monetary expansion, and a collapse in tax revenues led prices to rise out of control and caused hyperinflation the country has not recovered from

Takeaway: The current dire economic circumstances have made living conditions so difficult for a lot of the population that many believe their best action is fleeing Venezuela seeking improved lives in other countries.

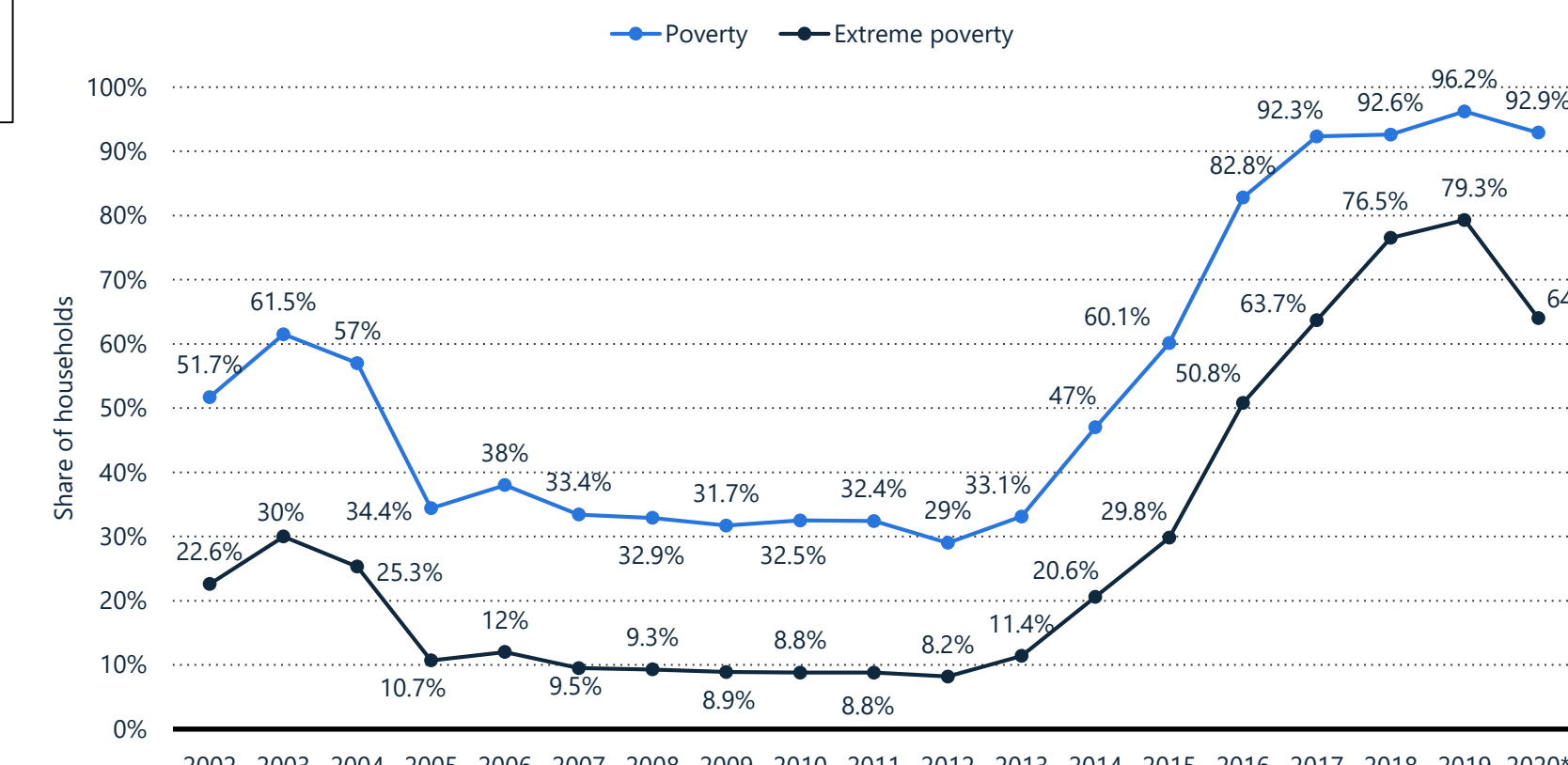


Figure 2. This graph shows the percentage of households in poverty and extreme poverty in Venezuela from 2002-2020.
(Source: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1235189/household-poverty-rate-venezuela/>)

Contemporary History of Venezuelan Politics

- The Puntofijo Pact was a formal arrangement between representatives of Venezuela's three main political parties in 1958, marking the end of the military dictatorship and start of a new democracy
- Hugo Chávez was president from 1998 until his death in 2013
- His predecessor was his former right-hand-man, Nicolás Maduro
- Maduro pushed for an early vote in the 2018 election to limit the opposition's ability to organize a campaign to unseat him, and many countries consider the election results fraudulent
- Juan Guaidó, the newly elected head of the National Assembly, declared himself as the country's acting president, which several countries support

Takeaway: Along with the economic crisis, the intense political situation has led many citizens to lose faith in the government, acting as another primary motivator to leave Venezuela. Migrants desire a country with better economic circumstances and a more stable government.



Figure 3. This photograph shows passionate protesters in Caracas in 2017 voicing their frustrations with President Nicolás Maduro.
(Source: <https://financialtribune.com/articles/international/64393/venezuelans-clog-roads-in-anti-government-protests/>)

The Migration Crisis

- Resulting primarily from the economic deterioration and political disillusionment, about 6 million citizens have fled to neighboring countries and beyond since 2014
- This is the largest migration without a natural disaster or war causing the mass exodus
- It is difficult to characterize Venezuelans as refugees since they technically are willingly leaving the country
- Several countries are strained with resources to take in so many migrants, along with conflicting ways of how to handle the situation
- Few signs of improvement since the crisis started



Figure 4. Children play at Los Hijos de Dios settlement, occupied by about 60 families. These dire living circumstances due to economic and political crisis has motivated millions of Venezuelans to leave their homes and migrant to other countries.
(Source: <https://www.wsj.com/articles/venezuelas-fatal-embrace-of-cuba-11639152017?mod=djemwhatsnews>)

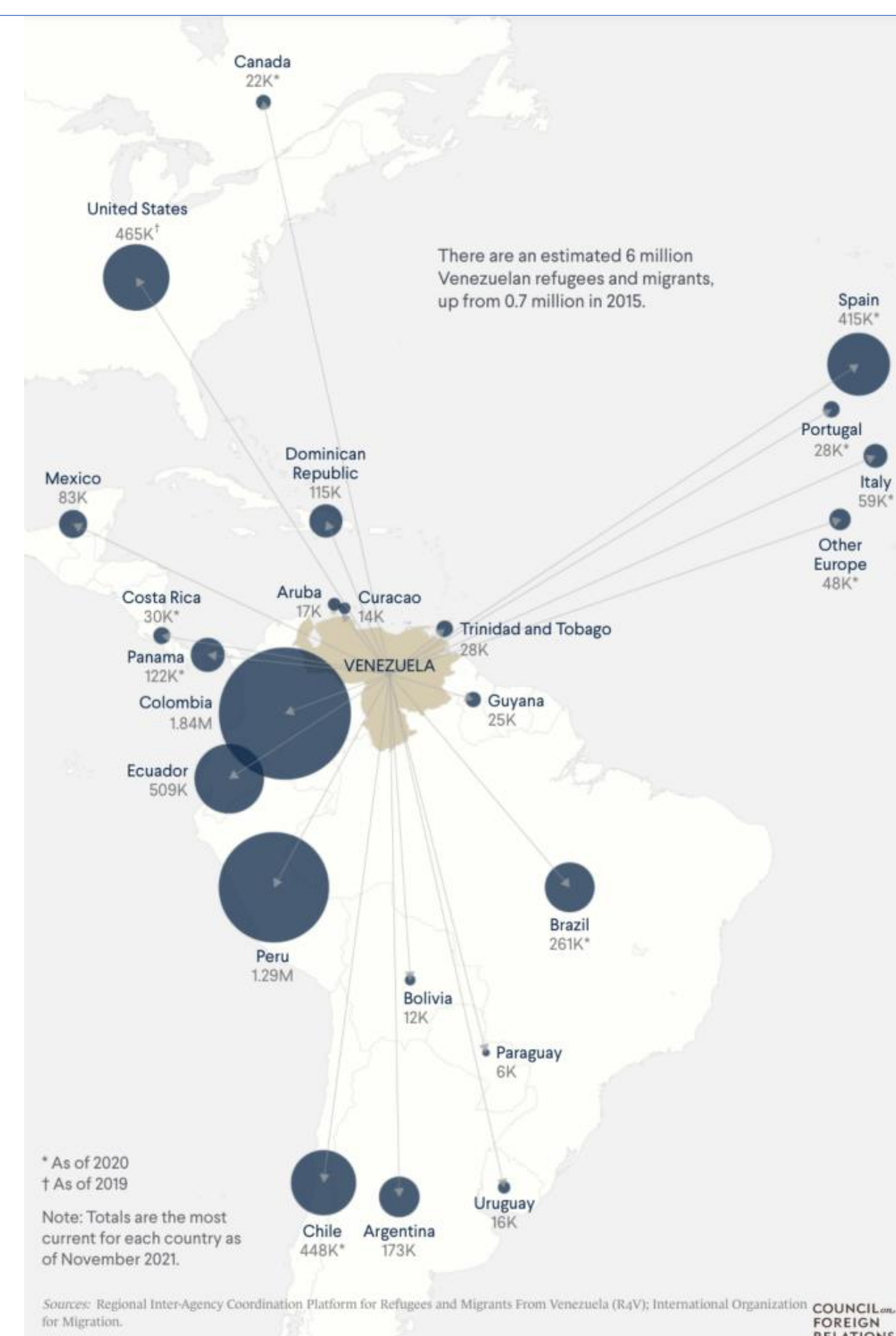


Figure 5. This graphic illustrates where Venezuelan migrants have gone to since 2015 through 2021.
(Source: <https://disasterphilanthropy.org/disasters/venezuelan-refugee-crisis/>)

Hugo Chávez Historical Timeline

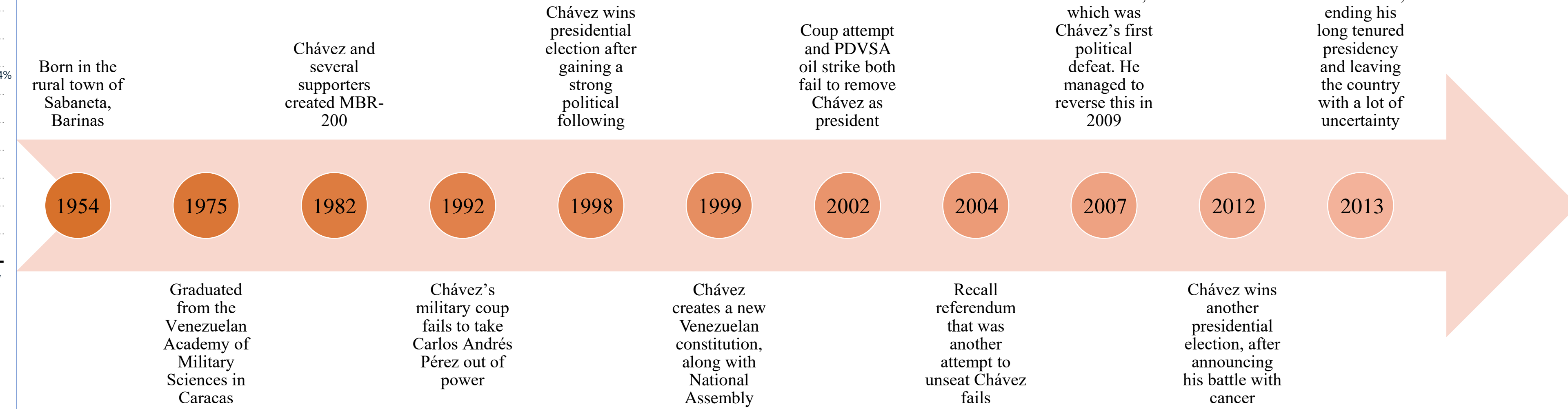


Figure 7. Chávez as a young second lieutenant.
(Source: <https://notevenpast.org/por-ahora-legacy-hugo-Chavez-frias/>)



Figure 8. An iconic photograph of Chávez wearing his famed military uniform and hat.
(Source: <https://diariobarricada.com/hugo-Chavez-frias-cuando-un-amigo-se-va/>)



Figure 9. A rally of Chavistas, demonstrating the strong support of Chávez.
(Source: <https://venezuelanalysis.com/news/12298>)

Varying Cultural Memories of Hugo Chávez

Chavistas

This group represents the impressive following that Chávez developed as a politician. These people believe that despite the dire circumstances they currently face amidst the migration crisis, Hugo Chávez was a revolutionary who improved the lives of many during his presidency. His charisma and willingness to fight for the common man are what appeal to this group. Generally, these supporters come from lower socioeconomic status and supported most decisions Chávez made.



Figure 10. A photograph of a Hugo Chávez monument in Venezuela.
(Source: <https://www.telesurenglish.net/news/Venezuela-Creates-Hugo-Chavez-Peace-Prize-Putin-a-Frontrunner-20161008-0006.html>)

Repented Chavistas

This group represents those that initially supported Chávez during the beginning of his presidency, but, over time, have come to disagree with his policy and believe that much of what he claimed he would do was ineffective in improving the country. This group could be recognized as early as 2001, after Chávez began to radicalize in office. These people could be further broken down as "Light Chavistas," "Light Anti-Chavistas," and "Hard Anti-Chavistas," as they took their repentances to different levels when they developed regret for once supporting him.



Figure 11. "Culpable" means "guilty" or "at fault" in English.
(Source: <https://www.elnuevodiario.com.ni/internacionales/56318-miles-personas-dicen-no-Chavez-diversas-partes-mun/>)

Anti-Chavistas

This group represents those that never supported Chávez from the beginning. Most of these individuals were important in the old government and often were part of the upper class and elites that opposed Chávez's socialist policies. Many of them supported or participated in the several attempts to unseat Chávez. Much of the middle class began to become Anti-Chavistas over the course of his presidency.



Figure 12. Opponents thought Chávez wanted to become a dictator like Castro.
(Source: <https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB1001424127887323884304578328252463429328>)

Takeaway: These three different groups of people highlight how collective memories can vary across social groups. Understanding these differences can broaden perspectives when working to understand historical topics.

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