



Written by [Warren Mass](#) on August 18, 2016

## Police in Venezuela Destroy Almost 2,000 Guns

Police in Venezuela (shown) destroyed nearly 2,000 shotguns and pistols on August 17, in a very public display of gun control held in a city square in the country's capital city of Caracas.

"We are going to bring disarmament and peace," Interior Minister Nestor Reverol told Reuters news service, delivering the government's official explanation for the destruction of the guns. Reuters reported that Venezuela's President Nicolás Maduro promoted Reverol this month, just days after the United States accused the former anti-drug czar of taking bribes from cocaine traffickers.



As was noted in an [article in \*The New American\*](#) in May, U.S. intelligence officials had warned that "Venezuela is descending into economic and political chaos that is likely to end in street violence, military suppression of citizens' rights, and a possible coup to remove President Nicolás Maduro."

That article noted that crime is out of control, largely because of a desperate populace that cannot find food:

Venezuela has the world's highest crime rate, and street crime has turned the capital city of Caracas into the most dangerous city in the world; there is now one murder perpetrated every 28 minutes. Citizens are chasing down stray cats and dogs (and the occasional unlucky pigeon) to stave off hunger.

As was noted in [another article in \*The New American\*](#) in May, Venezuela's problems began in 2011 when the country was run by the late Marxist President Hugo Chávez. Chávez began imposing price controls as his government's "solution" to government-caused inflation. With 95 percent of Venezuela's income coming from oil, the collapse of oil prices drastically shrank the government's income. However, rather than reducing spending, Chávez instead decided to print more money to cover the shortfall. Predictably, when the purchasing power of the inflated bolivar began to decline, prices began to rise.

As inevitably happens, the price controls led to shortages of goods, and human nature being what it is, people stocked up on personal goods whenever they became available. Chávez condemned those doing so, calling it "hoarding." After Chávez died in March of 2013, and Maduro (who had been Chávez's Marxist protégé) took control, Maduro directed his attorney general, Luisa Ortega Díaz, to inform the nation that those found hoarding "would face serious consequences" and then ordered prosecutors to arrest anyone found buying more than the government thought they needed.

However, shortages became even worse, as is generally the case under Marxist or communist governments. Chávez had patterned himself after Cuban dictator Fidel Castro, whom he admired as a mentor and friend during his 14-year presidency, and Cuba's food shortages since Castro brought communism to the island nation in 1959 were legendary.



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Last summer, in what must surely be one of his most destructive moves yet, Maduro ordered the few remaining food producers to sell their produce to the government at below-cost prices and then offered it for sale in government-owned stores. This threatened to drive not only the food producers out of business, but also the few private stores that still were open. There is little wonder that food shortages in Venezuela went from very bad to intolerable.

On June 14, more than 400 citizens of Cumana, a city of 800,000 a few hundred miles west of Caracas, were arrested following the latest food riot.

A [June article in \*The New American\*](#) described the bleak situation in Venezuela:

Food is so scarce that even the dogs are starving. Government price controls, often set below the cost of production, have left grocery store shelves empty. Starving Venezuelans are protesting the policies by looting stores an average of 10 times a day. A vigorous black market has sprung up, but because the country's currency, the bolivar, has become essentially worthless, increasing numbers of the hungry have been forced to revert to simple direct barter. Flour and napkins are traded for prescription drugs and other medicines necessary to keep the sick from dying.

While the nation was for all practical purposes already a *de facto* dictatorship, what made this situation official was Maduro's announcement on July 11 that he was putting the head of the armed forces, Defense Minister Vladimir Padrino, in charge of transporting and distributing basic products, controlling prices, and stimulating production.

"All the ministries, all the ministers, all the state institutions are at the service and in absolute subordination" to Padrino's "Great Sovereign Supply Mission," Maduro said.

The *Wall Street Journal* quoted Luis Manuel Esculpi, a security analyst in Caracas and former head of the armed forces commission in the Congress, as saying, "This is now a completely militarized government. The army is Maduro's only source of authority." The *Journal* article noted, "Generals are already in charge of state companies importing the bulk of Venezuela's food; they run the country's largest bank, a television station and a state mining company. The armed forces have swiftly repressed all opposition rallies as well as the food riots that flare up daily across the country."

*The New American's* July 13 article quoted a statement from Venezuelan resident Nelson Agelvis describing what life is like under Maduro: "Any ruler who is all-powerful, who controls all instances of power ... the executive branch ... the judicial and electoral, and who keeps the military happy ... is a dictator."

And because Venezuela is a dictatorship, private gun ownership must go. Three years ago, Maduro announced, "I hereby sign into law this gun control law, for peace in our nation," justifying his actions because of the nation's rising crime rate. The bill provided for sentences of up to 20 years in prison for any civilian convicted of illegally carrying or selling a firearm and also restricted the sale of ammunition to civilians, and banned weapons from being shown in public places.

However, with people rioting in the streets because they are hungry and cannot find food, Maduro must be getting nervous. There are still enough guns in circulation to arm a rebellion. But instead of solving the problem by eliminating the things responsible for it — government price controls, rationing, and interference in the production and distribution of food — he has opted to remove the threat to his regime presented by an armed citizenry. It is the path long favored by totalitarian rulers, and would-be rulers, throughout history.



*Photo: AP Images*

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