

# Venezuelan v. US Budget Priorities

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Global Research, December 13, 2013

Region: [Latin America & Caribbean, USA](#)  
Theme: [Global Economy, Poverty & Social Inequality](#)

Both countries are polar opposites. Bolivarian fairness defines Venezuela. Government of, by and for wealth, power and privilege describes America.

Venezuela treats all its people equitably. America exploits millions of ordinary ones callously. Conditions today are worse than ever in modern times.

Force-fed austerity when vital aid is needed defines the United States of I Don't Care! Wealth and poverty extremes are unprecedented. So are deprivation levels.

A [US Conference of Mayors](#) (USCM) survey showed emergency food aid requests in 25 large cities plus Washington increased on average by 7% year-over-year.

The time frame studied was from August 2012 through September 2013.

According to USCM executive director Tom Cochran:

“(T)here’s no question that the slow pace of recovery is making it difficult – and, for many, impossible – to respond to the growing needs of the hungry and the homeless.”

Around 43% of emergency food requests came from employed people. Another 9% were homeless. Over 20% were elderly. Imagine letting millions of children go hungry.

Reasons for hunger were unemployment, low pay, poverty, and high housing costs.

Homelessness in surveyed cities rose 4%. Growing hunger in America comes at a time Congress cut vital food stamp benefits.

An initial \$11 billion is gone over the next three years. Eligible recipients will receive less than \$1.40 per meal in 2014.

Much larger cuts are planned going forward. Tens of millions of Americans rely on vital Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) aid to get by.

It’s woefully inadequate. It’ll be less so ahead. SNAP recipients and other needy Americans need emergency food pantries to survive.

They’re the sustenance safety net of last resort. They’re struggling more than ever to keep up with growing demand. There isn’t enough contributed food to feed everyone needing it.

A previous article discussed a congressional budget deal no responsible government would accept.

It reflects social injustice. It's the latest initiative doing so. Numerous others preceded it. Many more will follow.

At issue is waging war on vital safety net protections. Just societies prioritize them. Government resources are used responsibly.

Not in America. Federal revenues increasingly go for militarism, homeland repression, and generous corporate handouts.

Monied interests alone benefit. Popular needs go begging. Ordinary people are left high and dry. They're increasingly on their own. Neoliberal harshness is official US policy.

What kind of nation ignores vital needs? What kind lets millions of its people go hungry and homeless?

What kind prioritizes global dominance? What kind serves monied interests at the expense of public ones?

What kind ignores its constitution's general welfare clause? It states "The Congress shall have the power...to provide for the general welfare of the United States."

Having power means using it responsibly. It's about treating its people equitably. It's doing so when most needed. Not in America. Now now. Not ever.

Things today are nightmarish for growing millions. Social America is on the chopping block for elimination.

Major safety net programs are targeted. Death by a thousand cuts is planned. Millions are increasingly on their own.

America is a let 'em eat cake society. Sink or swim defines policy. Republicans, most Democrats and Obama are in lockstep.

Gutting vital New Deal/Great Society programs is planned. Imagine any country eliminating vital social justice benefits. Imagine the world's richest one doing it.

Imagine a president calling it "shared sacrifice." Ordinary people sacrifice so rich ones can share.

Imagine him saying we're broke. We have no choice. Imagine one lie after another ad nauseam.

Imagine him prioritizing imperial ruthlessness. Imagine him devastating the lives of millions doing so.

Previous articles discussed social safety net cuts. They targeted Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid. More major cuts ahead are planned.

Others reduced spending on:

- Head Start for comprehensive education, health, nutrition, and parent involvement services to low-income families with children;

- earlier SNAP cuts;
- Pell Grants for higher education;
- federal wages, pensions and other benefits;
- low-income heating assistance;
- children’s health;
- community health centers;
- disease prevention programs;
- medical research;
- community development block grants for housing;
- FEMA first responder funding;
- WIC (Women, Infants, and Children) grants to states for supplemental foods, healthcare, and nutrition education for low-income families;
- vital infrastructure and transportation needs;
- environmental projects;
- job training;
- longterm unemployment insurance;
- energy efficiency and renewable energy programs; and
- other across-the-board sequester cuts hitting important domestic programs hardest.

What’s more important than nourishing food, shelter, clothing, healthcare when most needed, and education to the highest levels?

What kind of nation increasingly ignores them? What kind reflects I don’t care? Venezuela is polar opposite.

It mandates free universal healthcare, education to the highest levels, subsidized housing and food, as well as much more.

Its 2014 budget prioritizes serving public needs. In 2013, 37% of budgetary spending went for social services. In 2014, 62% is planned.

National Assembly finance committee member Jose Avila said:

“Our political orientation is to include those most in need. We must address the social sector and ensure access to food, housing, education, health and sport.”

He stressed how Chavez initiatives cut poverty in half. Extreme poverty fell over 70%. In 1998, it was 20.3%. It' now 7%.

“Our economy is at the service of the Venezuelan people,” Avila added.

On November 5, Venezuela's National Assembly approved its first round of discussions on its Draft Law on the Budget for the Fiscal Year 2014.

Committee on Finance and Economic Development president Ricardo Sanguino presented it.

It projects 4% 2014 economic growth. It exceeds previous year spending by 39%.

Sanguino said the draft law relates directly to the 2013 - 2019 National Plan for the Bolivarian Socialist Management, the Annual Operative Plan, and various 2014 Institutional Operative Plans.

Budget priorities reflect a strong commitment to Bolivarian principles. Since 2003, health, education, housing and nutrition spending grew from 39% to 48.8% of budgeted priorities.

Venezuela's population numbers 30.5 million. “Mission Food” helps 17.5 million. It does so through nationwide subsidized supermarkets (Mercal, Pdval and Abastos Bicentenarios).

“Children of Venezuela” helped over 736,500 needy ones. The 2011 established “Great Housing Mission” provided homes for over half a million families.

Elderly Venezuelans receiving pensions increased from around 627,000 in 2003 to 2.5 million in 2013.

Venezuela is a social justice success story. It's constitutionally mandated. Its Preamble states:

Constitutional provisions “establish a democratic, participatory and self-reliant, multiethnic and multicultural society in a just, federal and decentralized State that embodies the values of freedom, independence, peace, solidarity, the common good, the nation's territorial integrity, comity and the rule of law for this and future generations.”

They're “guarantee(d) the right to life, work, learning, education, social justice and equality, without discrimination or subordination of any kind...”

Bolivarianism “promotes peaceful cooperation among nations and further strengthens Latin American integration in accordance with the principle of nonintervention and national self-determination of the people, the universal and indivisible guarantee of human rights, the democratization of imitational society, nuclear disarmament, ecological balance and environmental resources as the common and inalienable heritage of humanity...”

America's Constitution has no such language. It shows in official policies. It's reflected in today's budget priorities. In Venezuela, constitutional provisions are more than just words.

They reflect reality. Significant amounts of state revenues go for social safety net programs. In America, increasingly less spending does so en route to eliminating it altogether.

Venezuela remains a work in progress toward improving social conditions equitably. America reflects a bipartisan commitment to wrecking them.

Both countries are social justice worlds apart. Which one matters most? Which is more equitable, fair and just?

Which assures a better future for all its people? Which backs its promises with governance of, by and for everyone?

Which cares only about wealth, power and privilege? Which threatens humanity's survival? Which prioritizes a better future? Which wants it for everyone?

What's more important than public welfare? Which system do you favor?

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