



# Venezuela: Country Focus

# **Venezuela: Country Focus**

## **Country of Origin Information Report**

**July 2026**



Manuscript completed in July 2026

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Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2026

PDF ISBN 978-92-9418-654-6 doi: 10.2847/3655113 BZ-01-26-050-EN-N

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Cite as: EUAA, Country of Origin Information Report - Venezuela: Country Focus – July 2026, [COI Report - Venezuela: Country Focus | European Union Agency for Asylum](#)

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# Acknowledgements

The EUAA acknowledges as the drafter of this report:

- James Restrepo, an independent expert on Country of Origin Information (COI)

The following national COI departments reviewed this report:

- Belgium, Centre for Documentation and Research (Cedoca), Office of the Commissioner General for Refugees and Stateless Persons
- The Netherlands, Office for Country Information and Language Analysis, Ministry of Justice (OCILA)
- Sweden, Swedish Migration Agency, Unit for Migration Analysis

The review carried out by the mentioned departments contributes to the overall quality of the report, but does not necessarily imply their formal endorsement of the final report, which is the full responsibility of the EUAA.





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## Disclaimer

This report was written according to the [EUAA COI Report Methodology \(2023\)](#). The report is based on carefully selected sources of information. All sources used are referenced.

The information contained in this report has been researched, evaluated and analysed with utmost care within a limited timeframe. However, this document does not claim to be exhaustive. If a particular event, person or organisation is not mentioned in the report, this does not mean that the event has not taken place or that the person or organisation does not exist.

Furthermore, this report is not conclusive as to the determination or merit of any particular application for international protection. Terminology used should not be regarded as indicative of a particular legal position.

'Refugee', 'risk' and similar terminology are used as generic terminology and not in the legal sense as applied in the EU Asylum Acquis, the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees.

Neither EUAA nor any person acting on its behalf may be held responsible for the use which may be made of the information contained in this report.

On 19 January 2022, the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) became the European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA). All references to EASO, EASO products and bodies should be understood as references to the EUAA.

The drafting of this report was finalised on 9 June 2026. Any event taking place after this date is not included in this report. More information on the reference period for this report can be found in the methodology section of the [Introduction](#).





## Glossary and abbreviations

Term	Definition
<b>AGC</b>	Autodefensas Gaitanistas de Colombia (Gaitanista Self-Defense Forces of Colombia), also known as the Gulf Clan or Urabeños
<b>CEAS</b>	Common European Asylum System
<b>CECOT</b>	Centro de Confinamiento del Terrorismo (Terrorism Confinement Centre), in El Salvador
<b>CEPAL</b>	Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe (Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean)
<b>CGR</b>	Contraloría General de la República (Office of the General Comptroller)
<b>CICPC</b>	Cuerpo de Investigaciones Científicas, Penales y Criminalísticas (Scientific, Penal and Criminalistic Investigation Service Corps)
<b>CLAP</b>	Comités Locales de Abastecimiento y Producción (Local Committees of Supply and Production)
<b>CNCC</b>	Cuerpo Nacional Contra la Corrupción (National Anti-Corruption Corps)
<b>CNE</b>	Consejo Nacional Electoral (National Electoral Council)
<b>colectivos</b>	pro-government paramilitary organisations accused of carrying out widespread abuses, often in coordination with state security forces, against protesters and political dissidents (2.2.1.)
<b>CONAS</b>	Comando Nacional Antiextorsión y Secuestro (Kidnapping and Anti-extortion National Command)





Term	Definition
<b>CONATEL</b>	Comisión Nacional de Telecomunicaciones (National Telecommunications Commission)
<b>DAET</b>	Dirección de Acciones Estratégicas y Tácticas (Directorate of Strategic and Tactical Actions)
<b>DGCIM</b>	Dirección General de Contrainteligencia Militar (General Directorate of Military Counterintelligence)
<b>Dublin III regulation</b>	Regulation (EU) No 604/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 June 2013 establishing the criteria and mechanisms for determining the Member State responsible for examining an application for international protection lodged in one of the Member States by a third-country national or a stateless person (recast)
<b>ELN</b>	Ejército Nacional de Liberación (National Liberation Army)
<b>EMC</b>	Estado Mayor Central (Central General Command)
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>EU+ countries</b>	Member States of the European Union and associated countries
<b>FBL</b>	Fuerzas Bolivarianas de Liberación (Bolivarian Liberation Forces)
<b>Escuderos</b>	Protection for the Tren de Aragua leaders
<b>FAES</b>	Fuerzas de Acciones Especiales (Special Action Force)
<b>FARC dissidents</b>	Dissidents of the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia- Ejército del Pueblo (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia-People's Army)
<b>FMV</b>	Federación Médica Venezolana (Venezuelan Medical Federation)





Term	Definition
<b>FPLN</b>	Fuerzas Patrióticas de Liberación Nacional or <i>boliches</i> (Patriotic Forces of National Liberation)
<b>FTO</b>	Foreign Terrorist Organizations (US-designation)
<b><i>gariteros</i></b>	Those responsible for surveillance in Tren de Aragua
<b>GNB</b>	Guardia Nacional Bolivariana (Bolivarian National Guard)
<b>GPPBB</b>	Gran Polo Patriótico Simón Bolívar (Simón Bolívar Great Patriotic Pole)
<b>IACHR</b>	Inter-American Commission on Human Rights
<b>ICJ</b>	International Commission of Jurists
<b>IISS</b>	International Institute for Strategic Studies
<b><i>impuesto de guerra</i></b>	Also called <i>matraca</i> , <i>colaboraciones</i> – ‘war tax’
<b>INE</b>	Instituto Nacional de Estadística (National Statistics Institute)
<b>IOM</b>	International Organization for Migration
<b><i>Megabandas</i></b>	Large, heavily armed criminal organisations typically comprising between 100 and 1 000 members (2.2.2)
<b>Member States</b>	Member States of the European Union
<b>Minerven</b>	Compañía General de Minería de Venezuela (Mining Company of Venezuela)
<b>MUD</b>	Mesa de la Unidad Democrática (Democratic Unity Roundtable)
<b>OAS</b>	Organization of American States





Term	Definition
<b>OCC</b>	Observatorio Ciudadano de Corrupción (Citizens' Observatory of Corruption)
<b>OHCHR</b>	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
<b>ONCDFT</b>	Oficina Nacional Contra la Delincuencia Organizada y Financiamiento al Terrorismo (National Office Against Organized Crime and Financing of Terrorism)
<b>OVCS</b>	Observatorio Venezolano de Conflictividad Social (Venezuelan Observatory of Social Conflict)
<b>OVF</b>	Observatorio Venezolano de Finanzas (Venezuelan Finance Observatory)
<b>OVP</b>	Observatorio Venezolano de Prisiones (Venezuelan Observatory of Prisons)
<b>OVV</b>	Observatorio Venezolano de Violencia (Venezuelan Observatory of Violence)
<b><i>patriotas cooperantes</i></b>	Cooperating patriots
<b>PCC</b>	Primeiro Comando da Capital
<b>PCV</b>	Partido Comunista de Venezuela (Communist Party of Venezuela)
<b>PDVSA</b>	Petróleos de Venezuela (Petroleum of Venezuela)
<b>PNB</b>	Policía Nacional Bolivariana (Bolivarian National Police)





Term	Definition
<b><i>Pran, pranes and pranato</i></b>	The term <i>pran</i> ( <i>pranes</i> in plural) refers to a type of criminal gang that originated within Venezuela's penitentiary system. <i>Pranato</i> is the criminal system dominated by <i>pranes</i> . <i>Pran</i> can also refer to the individual leader or leaders of a <i>pran</i> (the type of criminal gang).
<b>PROVEA</b>	Programa Venezolano de Educación Acción en Derechos Humanos (Venezuelan Program of Education and Actions for Human Rights)
<b>PSUV</b>	Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela (United Socialist Party of Venezuela)
<b>PUD</b>	Plataforma Unitaria Democrática (Democratic Unitary Platform)
<b>RCD (recast)</b>	Reception conditions directive — Directive 2013/33/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 June 2013 laying down standards for the reception of applicants for international protection (recast)
<b>Refugee Convention</b>	The 1951 Convention relating to the status of refugees and its 1967 Protocol (referred to in EU asylum legislation and by the CJEU as ‘the Geneva Convention’)
<b><i>Salvoconducto</i></b>	Letter-of-safe-passage
<b>SEBIN</b>	Servicio Bolivariano de Inteligencia Nacional (Bolivarian National Intelligence Service)
<b><i>Sindicatos</i></b>	Originated as construction-sector unions but have since evolved into powerful armed groups that now control illegal mining operations (2.2.3)





Term	Definition
<b>Sistemas</b>	Criminal organisations dominating illegal mining in states such as Bolívar. They were reportedly referred to as <i>pranes</i> or <i>sindicatos</i> . These structures, some comprising 'hundreds' of members, engage in extortion of mined gold, illegal mining, fuel and drug trafficking, sexual exploitation, and widespread extortion of local businesses (2.2.3)
<b>SNTP</b>	Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores de la Prensa (National Union of Press Workers)
<b>TSJ</b>	Tribunal Supremo de Justicia (Supreme Justice Tribunal)
<b>UNFFMV</b>	UN Fact-Finding Mission on Venezuela
<b>UNHCR</b>	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
<b>UNT</b>	Un Nuevo Tiempo (A New Era)
<b>WJP</b>	World Justice Project





# Introduction

This EUAA COI Country Focus report on Venezuela is intended to provide an overview of the key relevant issues for the assessment of applications for international protection from Venezuelan nationals. This report is an update of the [EUAA COI Report on Venezuela: Country Focus \(2023\)](#), and [EUAA COI Report on Venezuela: Country Focus \(2020\)](#), which may be read in conjunction with this report for greater context.

## Methodology

### Defining the terms of reference

The terms of reference for the update were developed by the EUAA's Country of Origin Information (COI) sector in consultation with the EUAA-IGC<sup>1</sup> Country of Origin Information Specialist Network on Latin America, and the drafter of the report, Mr. James Restrepo, who is a COI expert with regional expertise in the Americas. The terms of reference are available in Annex 2: Terms of Reference.

The reference period for the report is 1 October 2023–30 April 2026.

### Collecting information

#### Public sources

The information gathered is a result of research using public, specialised paper-based and electronic sources, as well as oral source interviews during the research period from 13 March to 14 May 2026. Some additional information was added during the finalisation of this report in response to feedback received during the quality control process.

This report has relied upon mainly Spanish-language sources in order to provide added value to the available COI. The expert drafter who wrote this report did so in English using Spanish and English sources. Legislation only available in Spanish was informally translated from Spanish into English by the expert drafter. Due to the volume of Spanish sources used, for the citation of all non-English sources, this report does not signal in the citation that a source is translated. This is for maximal readability and efficiency. In accordance with EUAA COI methodology, a range of different published documentary sources have been consulted on relevant topics for this report. These include:

- COI reports by governments;
- information from civil society, advocacy groups, and NGOs;
- human rights reports by governments and NGOs;

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<sup>1</sup> Intergovernmental Consultations on Migration, Asylum and Refugees (IGC) participating states are: Australia, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom and United States.





- reports produced by various bodies of the United Nations (UN) and OAS;
- Venezuelan government publications, including public statements, laws, policies, media outlets, and reports to the UN;
- Venezuela-based media and social media;
- academic publications and think tank reports; and
- reports of organisations specialised in specific topics, such as armed and criminal groups.

All sources used are listed in Annex 1: Bibliography.

### **Oral sources**

In addition to using publicly available documentary sources, two oral sources were interviewed and included in the report. All sources were assessed for their background, publication history, reputability, seriousness of their research, and recognition of their credentials by peers, the media, and international bodies. All interviews conducted by the expert drafter were in Spanish.

All oral sources are described in Annex 1: Bibliography.

### **Research challenges**

Freedom of expression is limited, and accessing information from local sources, especially about matters related to human rights issues, is difficult. Even though some topics are widely covered, others remain sensitive and with limited coverage. The government does not usually publish comprehensive official statistics and civil society largely fulfils this function with different methodological approaches.

Information on country conditions in Venezuela during the post–Nicolás Maduro period was limited both within the reference timeframe and during the drafting of this report. This constraint should be considered when evaluating the findings, particularly when comparing them with more recent developments and updated sources that were not available at the time of drafting. The situation in Venezuela has been highly dynamic since 3 January 2026, and the short time elapsed makes it difficult to identify stable or longstanding patterns.

### **Quality control**

This report was produced in line with the EUAA Report Methodology (2023) and the EUAA COI Writing and Referencing Guide (2023). To ensure that this report is aligned with the EUAA COI Methodology, it was peer reviewed by COI specialists from Belgium, The Netherlands, and Sweden, and additional information was added to the report as a result of the quality review process during the review implementation up until 29 May 2026. The report was internally reviewed subsequently. This report was finalised on 9 June 2026.





## Structure and use of the report

This report is an update of see [EUAA COI Report – Venezuela Country Focus November 2023](#). The structure of this report is as follows:

- Section 1: provides a general overview of the country, including demographic and economic context, the political landscape, the functioning of the judicial system, state security forces, state surveillance, and updates on relevant legislation. The report also provides information on political and socioeconomic developments following the US intervention in early January 2026.
- Section 2: covers recent developments in the security situation, including a brief update on the activities of key armed actors and current challenges along Venezuela's borders, particularly those shared with Colombia.
- Section 3: provides an update on recent developments of the most common profiles.
- Section 4: deals with the treatment of returnees and internal mobility.



# Maps

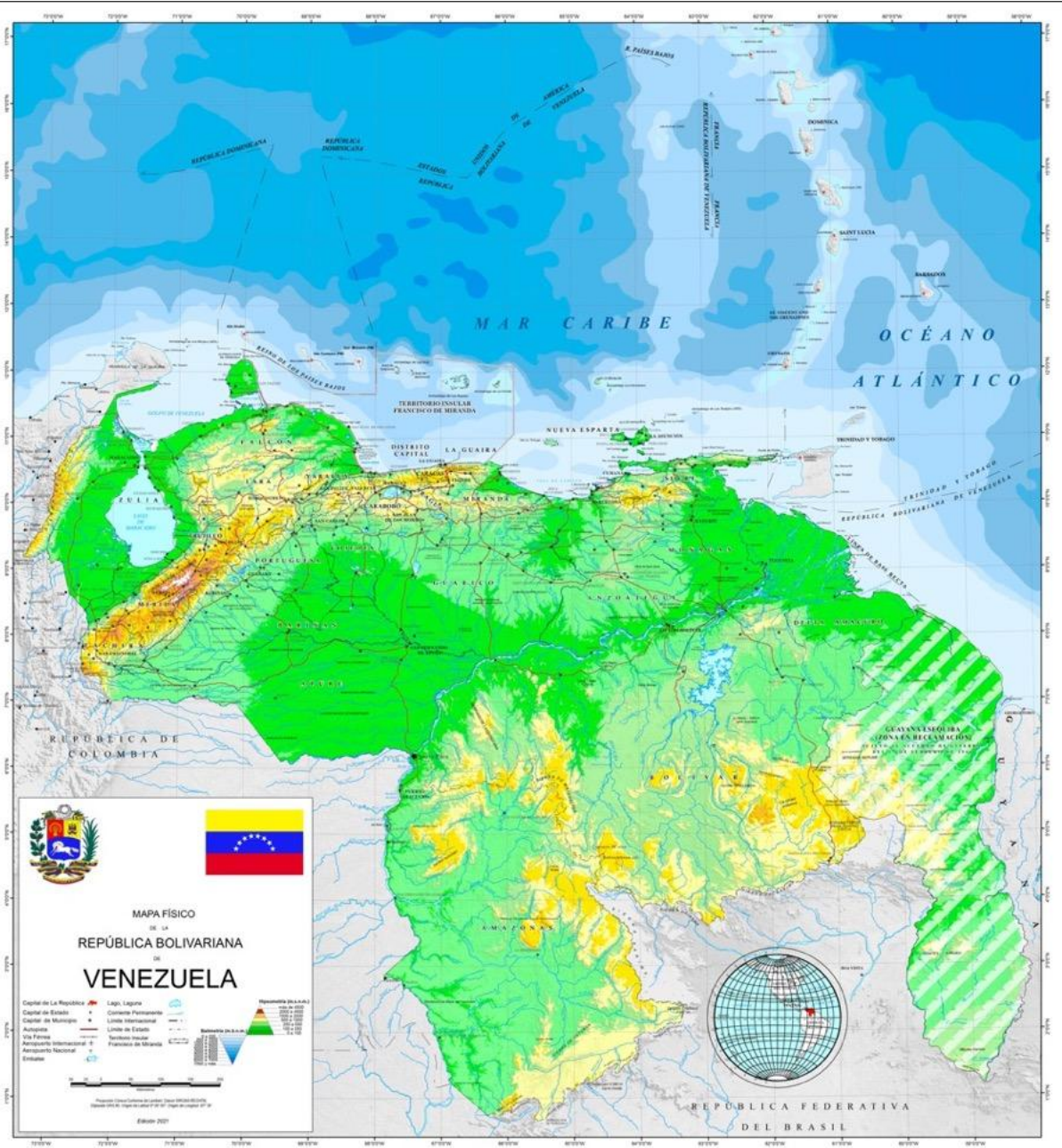
Two maps of Venezuela are provided below, a UN map of Venezuela from 2020, as well as the 2021 official map of the Venezuelan government. Venezuela considers the Essequibo region, which is administered by Guyana, as Venezuelan territory, as shown on the second map.<sup>2</sup>



**Map 1. Venezuela<sup>3</sup>**

<sup>2</sup> BBC, Essequibo: Venezuelans back claim to Guyana-controlled oil region, 4 December 2023, [url](#); DW, Why does Venezuela claim a large part of Guyana?, 8 December 2023, [url](#)

<sup>3</sup>UN Geospatial, Venezuela Map, 20 May 2020, [url](#)



Map 2. Official map of Venezuela<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Map 2: Venezuela, Mapa físico de la República Bolivariana de Venezuela, 2021, [url](#)



# 1. Country overview

The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (República Bolivariana de Venezuela), or Venezuela, is a federal presidential republic that consists of 23 states (estados), one capital district (Distrito capital), and one federal dependency (dependencia federal) that consists of 72 islands controlled by the central government.<sup>5</sup> In December 2023, Venezuelans backed then President Nicolás Maduro's referendum to annex the Essequibo, a 160 000 square-kilometre stretch that constitutes two-thirds of Guyana's territory that Venezuela claims since 1841.<sup>6</sup> Guyana insists that an 1899 international ruling settled the dispute.<sup>7</sup>

Transparency on government spending is 'virtually' non-existent<sup>8</sup> and the Venezuelan government seldom releases statistical information on crime, the economy,<sup>9</sup> the energy sector, and other key areas.<sup>10</sup> Sources reported that, under the previous administration of President Maduro, economists and academics who conducted statistical research were targeted by authorities,<sup>11</sup> including through arbitrary detentions and interrogations, and that local NGOs were forced to delay or stop publishing statistical information to avoid targeting.<sup>12</sup> In 2024, Venezuela and Haiti ranked lowest in Latin America<sup>13</sup> in the Statistical Performance Indicators (SPI),<sup>14</sup> a World Bank tool to measure how well countries produce and use data, with 39.5 and 38.7 points, respectively, below countries such as Nicaragua (55.8 points), El Salvador (73.7 points), and Colombia (83.4 points).<sup>15</sup> Worldwide, Venezuela ranks among the bottom 20 %, below countries such as Sudan (42.1 points), Afghanistan (54.4 points), and Iran (63.5 points).<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> SELA, Venezuela, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>6</sup> BBC, Essequibo: Venezuelans back claim to Guyana-controlled oil region, 4 December 2023, [url](#); DW, Why does Venezuela claim a large part of Guyana?, 8 December 2023, [url](#)

<sup>7</sup> BBC, Qué significa que Venezuela haya elegido un gobernador de la disputada región del Esequibo (y cuál es la respuesta de Guyana), 26 May 2025, [url](#); France 24, US, Guyana denounce Venezuelan naval incursion, 1 March 2025, [url](#)

<sup>8</sup> Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2026, Venezuela, March 2026, [url](#); Transparencia Venezuela et al., Civil society report on the implementation of Chapter II (Prevention) and Chapter V (Asset Recovery) of the United Nations Convention Against Corruption in Venezuela, 3 October 2024, [url](#), p. 7

<sup>9</sup> Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2026, Venezuela, March 2026, [url](#); UCAB, ¿Qué es la encovi?, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>10</sup> UCAB, ¿Qué es la encovi?, n.d., [url](#); SWI swissinfo.ch, Venezuela cumple un año sin cifras oficiales de inflación, 1 November 2025, [url](#); El Tiempo, Venezuela: el país de las cifras que no cuadran, ¿un instrumento crucial para la supervivencia del régimen de Nicolás Maduro?, 30 September 2025, [url](#)

<sup>11</sup> Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2026, Venezuela, March 2026, [url](#); El Observador, El régimen de Maduro silencia a analistas críticos y agrava el apagón estadístico sobre la economía venezolana, 11 July 2025, [url](#)

<sup>12</sup> El Observador, El régimen de Maduro silencia a analistas críticos y agrava el apagón estadístico sobre la economía venezolana, 11 July 2025, [url](#); El Nacional, Observatorio Venezolano de Finanzas rechaza persecución contra quienes difunden datos económicos, 14 June 2025, [url](#)

<sup>13</sup> Not including Aruba, British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, Cuba, Curacao, Puerto Rico (US), Sint Maarten (Dutch part), St. Martin (French part), Turks and Caicos Islands, and Virgin Islands (U.S.) for which information was not available. World Bank Group, Statistical Performance Indicators (SPI) (accessed 16 March 2026), n.d., [url](#)

<sup>14</sup> The SPI is a tool developed by the World Bank to 'measure the capacity and maturity of national statistical systems by assessing the use of data, the quality of services, the coverage of topics, the sources of information, and the infrastructure and availability of resources'. It includes as 'partners' several UN agencies, UK Foreign Commonwealth Office, and Open Data Watch. World Bank Group, Learn about the SPI, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>15</sup> World Bank Group, Statistical Performance Indicators (SPI) (accessed 16 March 2026), n.d., [url](#)

<sup>16</sup> World Bank Group, Statistical Performance Indicators (SPI) (accessed 16 March 2026), n.d., [url](#)



In March 2026, however, the Central Bank of Venezuela (BCV, Banco Central de Venezuela) released statistical information on the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), Consumer Price Index (CPI), and inflation, after nearly three years of failing to publish these indicators on a regular basis.<sup>17</sup> Crónica Uno reported that the figures show inconsistencies, most notably the government's claim of economic growth, despite persistently high inflation and falling oil-export revenues.<sup>18</sup>

## 1.1. Population

Venezuela's National Statistics Institute (Instituto Nacional de Estadística, INE) projected a population of 34 090 650 as of 30 June 2024.<sup>19</sup> The UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe, CEPAL) indicated that, for 2026, the projected population is 28 633 700.<sup>20</sup> The metropolitan areas with the largest populations are Caracas (2.58 million), Maracaibo (2.03 million), Valencia (1.44 million), Maracay (845 329), and Barquisimeto (812 384).<sup>21</sup> In 2024, an estimated 89 % of Venezuela's population lived in urban areas.<sup>22</sup> The largest projected age groups for 2025 were those aged 15-19 (9.98 % of the population), followed by ages 10-14 (9.8 %) and 20-24 (8.79 %).<sup>23</sup> About 70 % of the population identifies as Catholic, and between 20 and 25 % as Evangelicals.<sup>24</sup>

The Inter-Agency Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela (R4V) indicated that, as of November 2025, an estimated 7.9 million Venezuelans were living abroad.<sup>25</sup> The same source indicated that, as of February 2026, 6 947 649 Venezuelans were living in Latin America and the Caribbean, with the largest populations residing in Colombia (2.8 million), Peru (1.6 million), Brazil (761.3 thousand), Chile (669.4 thousand), and Ecuador (440.4 thousand).<sup>26</sup> Outside Latin America and the Caribbean, countries with the highest number of Venezuelans included US (987.6 thousand), Spain (602.5 thousand), Italy (64.3 thousand), and Portugal (31.2 thousand).<sup>27</sup> According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), irregular entries of Venezuelan nationals into countries such as Colombia, Mexico, Honduras, and Panama, declined between 2022 and 2025, while regular entries within South America increased.<sup>28</sup> IOM noted that 'mobility patterns may be changing in

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<sup>17</sup> Crónica Uno, Especialistas plantean ajustes en políticas macroeconómicas tras revisar cifras del BCV, 16 March 2026, [url](#); El Interés, BCV volvió a publicar datos de inflación: subió 51,94% en los dos primeros meses de 2026, 6 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>18</sup> Crónica Uno, Especialistas plantean ajustes en políticas macroeconómicas tras revisar cifras del BCV, 16 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>19</sup> Venezuela, INE, Instituto Nacional de Estadística, n.d., [url](#), accessed 24 May 2026

<sup>20</sup> CEPAL, CEPALSTAT, Venezuela (República Bolivariana de): perfil nacional social-demográfico, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>21</sup> Worldometer, Venezuelan population, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>22</sup> World Bank Group, Población urbana (% de la población total) - Venezuela, RB, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>23</sup> PAHO, Venezuela - Country Profile, 24 September 2025, [url](#)

<sup>24</sup> Berkeley Center, Maduro's Immorality and the Role of the Church in Venezuela, 15 June 2018, [url](#)

<sup>25</sup> R4V, Venezuelan Refugees and Migrants, November 2024, [url](#), p. 1

<sup>26</sup> R4V, Refugees and migrants from Venezuela [Last updated February 2026], n.d., [url](#)

<sup>27</sup> R4V, Refugees and migrants from Venezuela [Last updated February 2026], n.d., [url](#)

<sup>28</sup> IOM, Mobility Patterns in the Americas: Venezuela, 20 June 2025, [url](#)



structure and shifting towards more formal channels and/or nearer destinations within South America'.<sup>29</sup>

## 1.2. Economy

Venezuela possesses the largest proven oil reserves in the world,<sup>30</sup> accounting for 17 % of global reserves.<sup>31</sup> Oil production, however, remains far below potential due to mismanagement, lack of investment, and the impact of international sanctions.<sup>32</sup> After peaking at 3.5 million barrels per day in the 1970s, production fell to around 2 million barrels per day in the 2010s and declined further to approximately 1.1 million barrels per day by 2025.<sup>33</sup> On 16 December 2025, US President Donald Trump ordered a 'total and complete blockade' of all sanctioned oil tankers entering or leaving Venezuela after the Venezuelan regime was designated a "foreign terrorist organization" over what the administration described as the "theft of [US] assets, and many other reasons, including terrorism, drug smuggling and human trafficking".<sup>34</sup> On 13 March 2026, the US expanded sanctions waivers to Venezuela, enabling investment in the country's energy and petrochemical sectors and permitting fertiliser exports to mitigate price increases linked to the Iran war.<sup>35</sup> On 18 March 2026, the US Department of the Treasury further eased restrictions by allowing US companies to conduct business with the state-owned oil and gas company Petroleum of Venezuela (PDVSA, *Petróleos de Venezuela, S.A.*), subject to conditions, including that payments from oil sales be deposited into a U.S.-controlled account.<sup>36</sup>

Venezuela is rich in natural resources, including natural gas, iron, gold, diamonds and bauxite.<sup>37</sup> Most mineral deposits are concentrated in the southeast, particularly in the states of Bolívar, Amazonas, and Delta Amacuro, while coal reserves are primarily located on the Guajira Peninsula.<sup>38</sup> See section [Maps](#) for reference. The area covered by these three states is

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<sup>29</sup> IOM, *Mobility Patterns in the Americas: Venezuela*, 20 June 2025, [url](#)

<sup>30</sup> France 24, *Venezuela y el repunte de precios del petróleo: ¿puede ese país capitalizar la tormenta perfecta?*, 14 March 2026, [url](#); La Jornada, *Venezuela cuenta con las mayores reservas de petróleo del mundo; impacto de ataque de EU es aún incierto*, 3 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>31</sup> GMB, *DATOS-Industria petrolera de Venezuela: las mayores reservas del mundo, pero una infraestructura en decadencia*, 3 January 2026, [url](#); La Vanguardia, *Venezuela posee un 17% de las reservas petrolíferas del mundo, más que Arabia*, 4 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>32</sup> GMB, *DATOS-Industria petrolera de Venezuela: las mayores reservas del mundo, pero una infraestructura en decadencia*, 3 January 2026, [url](#); La Vanguardia, *Venezuela posee un 17% de las reservas petrolíferas del mundo, más que Arabia*, 4 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>33</sup> GMB, *DATOS-Industria petrolera de Venezuela: las mayores reservas del mundo, pero una infraestructura en decadencia*, 3 January 2026, [url](#). See also: BBC, *En qué estado se encuentra la industria petrolera venezolana y cuánto podría costar recuperarla*, 13 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>34</sup> Reuters, *Trump orders 'blockade' of sanctioned oil tankers leaving, entering Venezuela*, 17 December 2025, [url](#); CBC, *The U.S. imposed a blockade on sanctioned oil tankers tied to Venezuela. How is that working out?*, 7 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>35</sup> Bloomberg, *EE.UU. aliviará sanciones a Venezuela para liberar más petróleo por la guerra con Irán*, 17 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>36</sup> US, Department of the Treasury, *Venezuela Sanctions Regulations 31 CFR part 591, General License No. 52, Authorizing Certain Transactions Involving *Petróleos de Venezuela, S.A.**, 18 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>37</sup> SELA, *Venezuela, n.d.*, [url](#); BBC, *Qué otras riquezas naturales tiene Venezuela además del petróleo y cuáles son "críticas" para EE.UU.*, 11 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>38</sup> BBC, *Qué otras riquezas naturales tiene Venezuela además del petróleo y cuáles son "críticas" para EE.UU.*, 11 February 2026, [url](#). See also: Venezuela, Ministerio del Poder Popular para Ciencia y Tecnología, *Yacimientos minerales en Venezuela. Metalogénesis de las zonas geológicas.*, Parte I, 9 November 2020, [url](#)



known as the Mining Arc (Arco Minero), which represents about 12 % of the country's territory.<sup>39</sup> Venezuela also contains rare earth minerals such as coltan, although reports indicated that much of this extraction occurs illegally.<sup>40</sup> Sources pointed to several factors hindering mining development in Venezuela, including illegal mining in the Orinoco Mining Arc—particularly of gold, coltan, and diamonds—which is carried out by organised criminal groups operating in collusion with certain state actors, the absence of reliable statistics and official information on mineral deposits, inadequate infrastructure, and the lack of a stable legal framework.<sup>41</sup> For additional information on illegal mining, see section [2. Security situation](#). In March 2026, the National Assembly was reviewing a draft law aimed at opening mining activities to private and foreign investment and establishing a more predictable legal framework.<sup>42</sup> The bill would repeal mining legislation enacted in 1999 and 2015.<sup>43</sup> Additional information could not be found among the sources consulted within the time constraints of this report. On 6 March 2026, the US issued a license authorising the state-owned mining company Mining Company of Venezuela (Minerven, Compañía General de Minería de Venezuela C.A.) to conduct gold-related transactions with US companies.<sup>44</sup>

The economy is projected to contract by 3 % in 2026, following a growth of 0.5 % in 2025.<sup>45</sup> According to the BCV, the economy expanded by 6.65 % between June 2024 and June 2025, driven primarily by oil production, which accounted for 12.27 % of total GDP.<sup>46</sup> GDP per capita was estimated at 3 100 USD in 2025, compared with 4 510 USD in 2024 and 3 830 USD in 2023.<sup>47</sup>

Inflation reached 269.9 % in 2025, continuing a downward trend from its peak of 65 370 % (or 130 000 %<sup>48</sup>) in 2018.<sup>49</sup> However, BCV figures differ, indicating that inflation in 2025 stood at 475 %, with the annual rate rising to 600 % by February 2026.<sup>50</sup> According to the Venezuelan Finance Observatory (OVF, Observatorio Venezolano de Finanzas), the poverty rate in 2024

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<sup>39</sup> BBC, Qué otras riquezas naturales tiene Venezuela además del petróleo y cuáles son "críticas" para EE.UU., 11 February 2026, [url](#); Transparencia Venezuela, Explotación de oro en Venezuela 2024: Devastación, caos y corrupción, March 2025, [url](#), p. 3

<sup>40</sup> BBC, Qué otras riquezas naturales tiene Venezuela además del petróleo y cuáles son "críticas" para EE.UU., 11 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>41</sup> BBC, Qué otras riquezas naturales tiene Venezuela además del petróleo y cuáles son "críticas" para EE.UU., 11 February 2026, [url](#); El Cooperante, Reuters: Minería en Venezuela enfrenta obstáculos por presencia de grupos armados, 13 April 2026, [url](#)

<sup>42</sup> SWI swissinfo.ch, Parlamento de Venezuela debate la aprobación de una ley de minas para inversión extranjera, 19 March 2026, [url](#); Infobae, Venezuela abrió el mercado minero al capital extranjero con una reforma impulsada por Washington, 9 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>43</sup> Infobae, Venezuela abrió el mercado minero al capital extranjero con una reforma impulsada por Washington, 9 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>44</sup> Infobae, Venezuela abrió el mercado minero al capital extranjero con una reforma impulsada por Washington, 9 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>45</sup> IMF, República Bolivariana de Venezuela: Country Data, October 2025, [url](#)

<sup>46</sup> Venezuela, BCV, La economía venezolana creció 6,65% en el segundo trimestre de 2025, 22 July 2025, [url](#)

<sup>47</sup> IMF, República Bolivariana de Venezuela: Country Data, October 2025, [url](#)

<sup>48</sup> France 24, Inflación en Venezuela en 2025 se disparó a 475%, 6 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>49</sup> IMF, República Bolivariana de Venezuela: Country Data, October 2025, [url](#)

<sup>50</sup> Revista Mercado, Inflación del 600 % en Venezuela agrava la escasez de dólares y frena la recuperación, 16 March 2026, [url](#); La República, Inflación de 600% en Venezuela contradice las fanfarronadas de Trump sobre la recuperación, 16 March 2026, [url](#)





was 86 %.<sup>51</sup> In Bolívar state, approximately 82 % of the population had been classified as 'destitute' in 2021.<sup>52</sup>

The overall unemployment rate in 2023 was 5.9 %, with unemployment at 6.5 % for women and 5.5 % for men.<sup>53</sup> The labour participation rate (the share of the population aged 15 and older that is economically active) stood at 52 % in 2025, continuing a long-term decline from 62 % in 2000.<sup>54</sup>

Since January 2026, Venezuelan and foreign investors are returning to the country, particularly to the oil industry and infrastructure.<sup>55</sup> On 22 May 2026, Bloomberg reported that a recent oil-industry event held at a Caracas hotel drew more than 1 000 participants, most of them from Venezuela's energy sector, driven by expectations that the country could see an economic rebound in a post-Maduro scenario.<sup>56</sup> The article noted that Venezuela's infrastructure requires billions of dollars in investment to recover from decades of corruption, disinvestment, and the loss of skilled professionals, and that ongoing power outages further complicate reconstruction efforts.<sup>57</sup> On 21 May 2026, the CEO of ConocoPhillips, a US-based hydrocarbon multinational, stated that Venezuela's initial measures to attract foreign investment 'are falling well short of what's needed to convince firms to invest', citing the heavy involvement of the state in oil production, which he said resembles conditions prior to the government's 2007 expropriations.<sup>58</sup> Additional information could not be found among the sources consulted within the time constraints of this report.

### 1.2.1. Infrastructure

Venezuela's infrastructure faces severe deterioration due to years of abandonment and decay, increasing production costs and timelines, and discouraging investment.<sup>59</sup>

Venezuela's oil infrastructure began to deteriorate during the administration of President Hugo Chávez (February 1999–March 2013), with conditions worsening under President Maduro (March 2013-January 2026) and further declining after the US imposed sanctions on

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<sup>51</sup> OVF, La pobreza en Venezuela se mantiene en niveles altos, alcanzando el 86% en 2024, 10 March 2025, [url](#)

<sup>52</sup> International Crisis Group, A Curse of Gold: Mining and Violence in Venezuela's South, 29 July 2025, [url](#), p. 18

<sup>53</sup> PAHO, Venezuela - Country Profile, 24 September 2025, [url](#)

<sup>54</sup> World Bank Group, Labor force participation rate, total (% of total population ages 15+) (modeled ILO estimate) - Venezuela, RB, 17 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>55</sup> Briceño-León, telephone interview, 13 May 2026; DW, Venezuela: el regreso de los inversores despierta esperanzas, 17 April 2026, [url](#)

<sup>56</sup> Bloomberg, Inversionistas regresan a Venezuela ante expectativas de un auge económico post-Maduro, 22 May 2026, [url](#)

<sup>57</sup> Bloomberg, Inversionistas regresan a Venezuela ante expectativas de un auge económico post-Maduro, 22 May 2026, [url](#)

<sup>58</sup> Bloomberg, Venezuela aún no ofrece condiciones "suficientes" para atraer inversión: ConocoPhillips, 21 May 2026, [url](#)

<sup>59</sup> Mongabay, Venezuela: nuevos acuerdos de gas reavivan advertencias por falta de infraestructura e impacto ambiental de una industria en la mira de EE.UU., 17 March 2026, [url](#); BBC, En qué estado se encuentra la industria petrolera venezolana y cuánto podría costar recuperarla, 13 January 2026, [url](#)





Venezuela in January 2019.<sup>60</sup> In January 2026, President Donald Trump stated that US companies would invest in Venezuela's oil infrastructure.<sup>61</sup>

The lack of public investment and the broader economic crisis have weakened Venezuela's health system, limiting financing and disrupting essential services such as water and electricity, conditions that hinder proper equipment sterilisation and adequate sanitation.<sup>62</sup> The National Survey of Hospitals (ENH, Encuesta Nacional de Hospitales) reported that the overall medicine-shortage index between January and July 2024 stood at 36 %, a one-percentage-point decrease compared with 2023; shortages in operating rooms reached 74 % in both 2023 and 2024.<sup>63</sup> The ENH also indicated that, as of July 2024, 47 % of hospitals experienced power-supply problems.<sup>64</sup>

Sources further noted that Venezuela's road infrastructure suffers from chronic under-maintenance and that no effective auditing mechanisms exist to ensure the safety of those using the country's road network.<sup>65</sup>

In December 2025, the Ministry of Communications reported that the government had carried out 1 749 infrastructure projects nationwide during the year; the majority of these projects (960 in total) involved the construction or rehabilitation of local offices of justices of the peace, while a further 193 focused on 'social infrastructure' and 78 on rainwater-management systems, in addition to investments in sports facilities and public monuments.<sup>66</sup>

## 1.3. Political landscape

### 1.3.1. Branches of Power

The Venezuelan Constitution outlines the five branches of power as follows:

- Executive Power, led by the President, who is the Head of State, the Executive Vice-President, and the Ministers;
- Legislative Power, in the National Assembly (Asamblea Nacional, AN);
- Judicial Power, consisting of the Supreme Justice Tribunal (TSJ, Tribunal Supremo de Justicia), the national court system, the Office of Public Prosecutions (Ministerio

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<sup>60</sup> BBC, En qué estado se encuentra la industria petrolera venezolana y cuánto podría costar recuperarla, 13 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>61</sup> BBC, En qué estado se encuentra la industria petrolera venezolana y cuánto podría costar recuperarla, 13 January 2026, [url](#); SWI swissinfo.ch, EE.UU. invertirá en infraestructura petrolera de Venezuela, líder en reservas mundiales, 3 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>62</sup> Correo del Caroní, Infraestructura en ruinas y cadenas de suministro rotas: el deterioro del sistema de salud en Venezuela, 16 September 2025, [url](#)

<sup>63</sup> Médicos por la Salud, Encuesta Nacional de Hospitales , Reporte semi-anual 2024, November 2024, [url](#), p. 3

<sup>64</sup> Médicos por la Salud, Encuesta Nacional de Hospitales , Reporte semi-anual 2024, November 2024, [url](#), p. 14

<sup>65</sup> Banca y Negocios, Estiman que recuperación de red vial nacional requiere inversión de US\$10 mil millones, 26 March 2025, [url](#); Correo del Caroní, Es prioritario invertir en mantenimiento de infraestructura vial del país, sostiene especialista, 7 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>66</sup> Correo del Orinoco, Más de mil 700 obras fortalecen infraestructura y servicios en Venezuela durante 2025, 29 December 2025, [url](#)



Público), the Public Defender's Office (Defensoría Pública), criminal-investigation organs, and the penitentiary system;

- Citizen Power, consisting of the Office of the Ombudsperson (Defensoría del Pueblo), the Public Ministry (Ministerio Público), and the Office of the General Comptroller (CGR, Contraloría General de la República); and
- Electoral Power, led by the National Electoral Council (CNE, Consejo Nacional Electoral).<sup>67</sup>

The President of Venezuela is elected for a six-year term and may be re-elected indefinitely.<sup>68</sup> Until 3 January 2026, when the US launched a military operation in Venezuela, the presidency was held by Nicolás Maduro, first elected in 2013,<sup>69</sup> with Delcy Rodríguez serving as Vice-President following her appointment by Maduro in June 2018.<sup>70</sup> Maduro's presidency was considered illegitimate by the opposition and the international community after allegations of widespread fraud during the presidential elections of 28 July 2024.<sup>71</sup> The National Assembly consists of 277 members,<sup>72</sup> elected for five-year terms, with the possibility of indefinite re-election.<sup>73</sup> TSJ judges are nominated by federal employees and later ratified by the National Assembly,<sup>74</sup> serving 12-year terms.<sup>75</sup> The Public Ministry, headed by the Attorney General, is responsible for the administration of justice, including the investigation and prosecution of criminal cases.<sup>76</sup>

Sources indicated that, although the separation of powers is formally enshrined in the Constitution, it is effectively absent in practice; the system of checks and balances is described as non-functional, with the branches of public power operating as extensions of the executive branch.<sup>77</sup> The National Assembly, dominated by the ruling party, is widely characterised as a 'rubber-stamp' body that rapidly approves legislation aimed at consolidating state control.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Venezuela, Constitución de la República Bolivariana de Venezuela (Amended), 2009, [url](#), Arts. 136, 186, 225, 273, 292

<sup>68</sup> Venezuela, Constitución de la República Bolivariana de Venezuela (Amended), 2009, [url](#), Art. 230

<sup>69</sup> NPR, The rise and fall of Nicolás Maduro, 5 January 2026, [url](#); WOLA, Two months without Maduro in Venezuela: Democratic transition or authoritarian adaptation?, 11 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>70</sup> Reuters, Who is Delcy Rodríguez, the vice president that Trump says replaced Maduro?, 3 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>71</sup> WOLA, One year since the presidential election of July 28, 2024: the Venezuelan crisis, 14 August 2025, [url](#)

<sup>72</sup> CNN, Cómo se compone la Asamblea Nacional de Venezuela y cuántos diputados tiene, 25 May 2025, [url](#); AFP, Elecciones parlamentarias en Venezuela entre desinformación y fuerte despliegue military, 25 May 2025, [url](#)

<sup>73</sup> Venezuela, Constitución de la República Bolivariana de Venezuela (Amended), 2009, [url](#), Art. 192

<sup>74</sup> Euronews, Al menos 24 muertos y más de 2.200 detenidos en las protestas contra los resultados en Venezuela, 7 August 2024, [url](#)

<sup>75</sup> SELA, Venezuela, n.d., [url](#); Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2026 Country Report — Venezuela, 2026, [url](#), p. 11

<sup>76</sup> ICJ, Sin voluntad de Justicia en Venezuela: Un Ministerio Público que fomenta la impunidad, April 2024, [url](#), p. 12

<sup>77</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2026 Country Report — Venezuela, 2026, [url](#), p. 11; Efecto Cocuyo, Poderes Públicos alineados con permanencia de Maduro en el poder: implicaciones, 21 August 2024, [url](#). See also: OAS, IACHR, Venezuela: Graves violaciones a los Derechos humanos en el Contexto electoral, 2025, [url](#), p. 82

<sup>78</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2026 Country Report — Venezuela, 2026, [url](#), p. 11; Bloomberg, Venezuela Lawmakers Give First Nod to Landmark Amnesty Bill, 5 February 2026, [url](#)



## 1.3.2. Political factions and opposition

### (a) Ruling coalition

The Simón Bolívar Great Patriotic Pole (GPPBB, Gran Polo Patriótico Simón Bolívar)<sup>79</sup> is the ruling coalition, which includes the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV, Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela),<sup>80</sup> the dominant governing party led by Diosdado Cabello.<sup>81</sup> Other parties within the GPPBB include the Communist Party of Venezuela (PCV, Partido Comunista de Venezuela), the Christian Movement (Movimiento Cristiano), the People's Electoral Movement (MEP, Movimiento Electoral del Pueblo), the Tupamaro Revolutionary Movement (Movimiento Revolucionario Tupamaro), the We Can Movement (Movimiento Podemos), the Alliance for Change (Alianza para el Cambio), the We Are Venezuela Movement (Movimiento Somos Venezuela), the Future Movement (Movimiento Futuro),<sup>82</sup> and Venezuelan Popular Unity (UPV, Unidad Popular Venezolana).<sup>83</sup> The GPPBB was founded in 2011 as a broad coalition of political parties to support President Hugo Chávez in the 2012 presidential elections.<sup>84</sup>

### (b) Political opposition

The Democratic Unitary Platform (PUD, Plataforma Unitaria Democrática) is the main opposition coalition in Venezuela.<sup>85</sup> Created in 2021<sup>86</sup> and led by María Corina Machado,<sup>87</sup> it is described as a "very broad and diverse" alliance that brings together parties across the political spectrum, including centrist, social-democratic, and right-leaning groups.<sup>88</sup> The PUD is composed of ten political parties, among them Citizen Encounter (Encuentro Ciudadano), the Social Christian Party (COPEI, Partido Social Cristiano), the Progressive Movement (Movimiento Progresista), Convergence (Convergencia), and A New Era (UNT, Un Nuevo Tiempo).<sup>89</sup> Sources interviewed by the Research Directorate of the Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB) of Canada indicated that the coalition is internally fragmented, limiting its ability to

<sup>79</sup> GPPBB is also spelled out as Great Patriotic Pole (GPP, Gran Polo Patriótico).

<sup>80</sup> Venezuela, Prensa Presidencial, Gran Polo Patriótico: Coalición política construida bajo los ideales del comandante Hugo Chávez Frías, 15 March 2025, [url](#)

<sup>81</sup> Prensa Latina, Gran Polo Patriótico: rol histórico en futuro Parlamento de Venezuela (+Foto), 11 April 2025, [url](#); Xinhua, Líder de partido gobernante venezolano resalta importancia de mantener la unidad de fuerzas revolucionarias, 10 April 2026, [url](#)

<sup>82</sup> Venezuela, Prensa Presidencial, Gran Polo Patriótico: Coalición política construida bajo los ideales del comandante Hugo Chávez Frías, 15 March 2025, [url](#)

<sup>83</sup> Ciudad CCS, UPV fortalece alianza con partidos del Gran Polo Patriótico, 12 April 2024, [url](#); PSUV, Conozca a los candidatos del Gran Polo Patriótico Simón Bolívar a las gobernaciones, 31 March 2025, [url](#)

<sup>84</sup> El Tiempo, Hugo Chávez lanzó su 'Gran Polo Patriótico', 10 October 2011, [url](#); PSUV, Más de mil movimientos sociales se han registrado en el Gran Polo Patriótico, 8 October 2011, [url](#)

<sup>85</sup> Infobae, La Plataforma Unitaria Democrática de Venezuela advirtió que el proyecto de amnistía presenta "omisiones graves", 7 February 2026, [url](#); El Carabobeño, Edmundo González resaltó ruta común de la Plataforma Unitaria, 22 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>86</sup> Canada, IRB, Venezuela: The Democratic Unitary Platform (Plataforma Unitaria Democrática, PUD), 6 March 2025, [url](#)

<sup>87</sup> Canada, IRB, Venezuela: The Democratic Unitary Platform (Plataforma Unitaria Democrática, PUD), 6 March 2025, [url](#); Clarín, Elecciones en Venezuela 2024: quiénes son los candidatos que se enfrentarán a Nicolás Maduro, 28 July 2024, [url](#)

<sup>88</sup> Canada, IRB, Venezuela: The Democratic Unitary Platform (Plataforma Unitaria Democrática, PUD), 6 March 2025, [url](#)

<sup>89</sup> Canada, IRB, Venezuela: The Democratic Unitary Platform (Plataforma Unitaria Democrática, PUD), 6 March 2025, [url](#)



maintain internal coherence or a "unified stand".<sup>90</sup> Despite this, the PUD generally advocates for improving relations with Western countries, restoring constitutional order and the rule of law, strengthening human rights protections, and promoting national reconciliation.<sup>91</sup> For the July 2024 elections, the PUD absorbed the Democratic Unity Roundtable (MUD, Mesa de la Unidad Democrática) and endorsed Edmundo González Urrutia after the government barred Corina Machado from running and prevented the registration of an alternative candidate.<sup>92</sup>

Come Venezuela (VV, Vente Venezuela) is a right-wing, liberal political party founded by Corina Machado in 2012.<sup>93</sup> In 2023, VV took the lead in the opposition movement and won the presidential primaries in 2024.<sup>94</sup> The disqualification of Corina Machado, however, led Corina Machado to support González Urrutia.<sup>95</sup>

The MUD was created in 2006 as a unified opposition coalition aimed at promoting democratic reforms and countering the political project of Hugo Chávez.<sup>96</sup> The coalition is composed primarily of centre-right parties, along with some former pro-Chávez parties.<sup>97</sup> The MUD has long served as the principal opposition force and is described as the most electorally successful coalition in the country's history.<sup>98</sup> Its most prominent current figure is Edmundo González Urrutia.<sup>99</sup> Since 2021, MUD has functioned as an electoral card for the PUD.<sup>100</sup>

UNT was founded in 1999 in Zulia state by Manuel Rosales, the state's governor, and is generally characterised as a centre-left party.<sup>101</sup> In 2006, UNT expanded its presence nationwide.<sup>102</sup> For the 2024 presidential elections, UNT initially registered Rosales as its candidate, but later, in April 2024, the party aligned itself with the PUD to support González Urrutia's candidacy.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Canada, IRB, Venezuela: The Democratic Unitary Platform (Plataforma Unitaria Democrática, PUD), 6 March 2025, [url](#)

<sup>91</sup> Canada, IRB, Venezuela: The Democratic Unitary Platform (Plataforma Unitaria Democrática, PUD), 6 March 2025, [url](#)

<sup>92</sup> Clarín, Elecciones en Venezuela 2024: quiénes son los candidatos que se enfrentarán a Nicolás Maduro, 28 July 2024, [url](#); BBC, Edmundo González, el diplomático al que la oposición y EE.UU. consideran ganador de las elecciones en Venezuela y que recibió asilo político en España, 2 August 2024, [url](#)

<sup>93</sup> El País, Vente Venezuela, the Chavista regime's favorite target, 11 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>94</sup> El País, Vente Venezuela, the Chavista regime's favorite target, 11 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>95</sup> El País, Vente Venezuela, the Chavista regime's favorite target, 11 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>96</sup> Geneva Summit for Human Rights and Democracy, Edmundo González, 2025, [url](#); SWI swissinfo.ch, La MUD, una coalición que nació para enfrentarse al chavismo, 7 December 2015, [url](#)

<sup>97</sup> SWI swissinfo.ch, La MUD, una coalición que nació para enfrentarse al chavismo, 7 December 2015, [url](#)

<sup>98</sup> Infobae, Maduro avanza a unas elecciones a la medida: 11 de los partidos políticos están intervenidos por la justicia Chavista, 17 March 2024, [url](#). See also: BBC, Edmundo González: The man taking on Maduro for Venezuela's presidency, 24 July 2024, [url](#)

<sup>99</sup> Venezuelanalysis, Venezuela: Presidential Field Narrows Ahead of July 28 Vote, 25 April 2024, [url](#)

<sup>100</sup> runrunes, En 5 puntos: Plataforma Unitaria anuncia su participación en las regionales con la tarjeta de la MUD, 31 August 2021, [url](#); Monitor ProDaVinci, Machado, Rosales, la tarjeta de la MUD y el CNE: ¿qué ha pasado con la candidatura unitaria este #26M?, [url](#)

<sup>101</sup> Caracas Chronicles, There Once Was a Party: Un Nuevo Tiempo, 15 February 2022, [url](#). See also: UNT, Un Nuevo Tiempo, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>102</sup> UNT, Un Nuevo Tiempo, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>103</sup> Infobae, Maduro avanza a unas elecciones a la medida: 11 de los partidos políticos están intervenidos por la justicia Chavista, 17 March 2024, [url](#); Venezuelanalysis, Venezuela: Presidential Field Narrows Ahead of July 28 Vote, 25 April 2024, [url](#)



First Justice (Primero Justicia) is an opposition political party founded in 2000, but that started as a political movement in 1992. The party emerged from a new generation of leaders aiming to revitalise Venezuelan politics after the deterioration of the traditional Fourth Republic parties. Early on, it positioned itself as a citizen-oriented movement promoting social justice, institutional reform, decentralisation, and anti-corruption efforts. Main figures of Primero Justicia include Henrique Capriles and Julio Borges.<sup>104</sup>

Democratic Action (Acción Democrática) is a centre-left, social-democratic opposition party founded in 1941 that promotes representative democracy, social reforms, civic nationalism, strong union involvement, and state intervention in key areas. The party functions more as a symbolic legacy and a marker of democratic tradition than as an effective vote-mobilising organisation.<sup>105</sup>

Popular Will (Voluntad Popular) is a liberal-progressive, social-democratic Venezuelan opposition party founded in 2009, focused on democracy, civil rights, and resisting authoritarianism. It emerged from Primero Justicia and its main leader was Leopoldo López.<sup>106</sup>

### (c) Representation in National Assembly, governorates, and mayoralties

In the May 2025 regional elections, the governing coalition won 23 of the country's 24 governorships,<sup>107</sup> with Cojedes being the only state secured by the opposition.<sup>108</sup> The GPPBB also secured 256 of the 285 seats in the National Assembly,<sup>109</sup> distributed as follows: PSUV and its allies (256 seats), Democratic Alliance (13 seats), UNT-Única (11 seats), Fuerza Vecinal (4 seats), and the Pencil Alliance (1 seat).<sup>110</sup> The elections also included, for the first time, the selection of a 'governor' and a 'legislative council' for the so-called "'Essequibo Guayana state'", in open defiance of an International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruling prohibiting Venezuela from holding elections in the disputed territory.<sup>111</sup> Sources reported accusations of a lack of transparency,<sup>112</sup> state repression, and high abstention rates, estimated between 70 and 90 %.<sup>113</sup>

<sup>104</sup> Política Electoral, Primero Justicia, 17 April 2026, [url](#)

<sup>105</sup> Política Electoral, Acción Democrática, 17 April 2026, [url](#)

<sup>106</sup> Política Electoral, Voluntad Popular, 17 April 2026, [url](#). See also: Caracas Chronicles, There Once Was a Party: Voluntad Popular, 8 September 2022, [url](#)

<sup>107</sup> SWI swissinfo.ch, El Partido Comunista de Venezuela anuncia decisión de no participar en comicios de julio, 11 June 2025, [url](#); Transparencia Venezuela, Elecciones regionales y legislativas de Venezuela 2025: Un proceso lleno de sombras, 27 June 2025, [url](#), p. 1

<sup>108</sup> Venezuela, Vicepresidencia, El PSUV arrasa con 23 gobernaciones en las elecciones regionales y parlamentarias 2025, 26 May 2025, [url](#)

<sup>109</sup> SWI swissinfo.ch, El Partido Comunista de Venezuela anuncia decisión de no participar en comicios de julio, 11 June 2025, [url](#); Transparencia Venezuela, Elecciones regionales y legislativas de Venezuela 2025: Un proceso lleno de sombras, 27 June 2025, [url](#), p. 1

<sup>110</sup> Transparencia Venezuela, Elecciones regionales y legislativas de Venezuela 2025: Un proceso lleno de sombras, 27 June 2025, [url](#), p. 5

<sup>111</sup> UN, FFMV, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 8 September 2025, [url](#), para. 13

<sup>112</sup> UN, FFMV, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 8 September 2025, [url](#), para. 1

<sup>113</sup> Transparencia Venezuela, Elecciones regionales y legislativas de Venezuela 2025: Un proceso lleno de sombras, 27 June 2025, [url](#), p. 11; BBC, El chavismo se adjudica una amplia victoria en las elecciones legislativas y regionales de Venezuela ante el boicot de la mayoría de la oposición, 26 May 2025, [url](#)



The opposition chose not to participate as part of a broader strategy to boycott the elections.<sup>114</sup>

In the 27 July 2025 municipal elections, the governing coalition won 285 of the country's 335 mayoralties, with most opposition victories concentrated in Cojedes state.<sup>115</sup> The elections were marked by low turnout (29.14 %), the use of state resources to promote ruling-coalition candidates, a lack of transparency, and political exclusion.<sup>116</sup> For information on the treatment of critics of the government and members of the political opposition, see section 3.1 Political opponents and activists, and human rights defenders.

### 1.3.3. Presidential elections of 2024

On 17 October 2023, the government and the opposition signed an agreement in Barbados, observed by Norway and Mexico, to hold presidential elections in 2024, following widespread international criticism of the 2018 electoral process.<sup>117</sup> On 22 October 2023, the opposition held primary elections to select a candidate to challenge President Maduro, electing María Corina Machado, a former lawmaker, with 93 % of the vote.<sup>118</sup> The opposition coalesced around the PUD.<sup>119</sup> However, the Comptroller General disqualified Machado and barred her from holding public office for 15 years.<sup>120</sup> For additional background information on the 2024 electoral agreement and the opposition primaries, see [EUAA COI Report – Venezuela Country Focus November 2023](#). Presidential elections were scheduled for 28 July 2024.<sup>121</sup>

Sources reported multiple irregularities in the months leading up to the 28 July 2024 presidential elections,<sup>122</sup> including the appointment of a new board of directors for the CNE in June 2024<sup>123</sup> and the disqualification of opposition presidential candidates through bans on

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<sup>114</sup> Transparencia Venezuela, Elecciones regionales y legislativas de Venezuela 2025: Un proceso lleno de sombras, 27 June 2025, [url](#), p. 11; BBC, El chavismo se adjudica una amplia victoria en las elecciones legislativas y regionales de Venezuela ante el boicot de la mayoría de la oposición, 26 May 2025, [url](#)

<sup>115</sup> Transparencia Venezuela, Elecciones municipales 2025 en Venezuela, 1 August 2025, [url](#), p. 7

<sup>116</sup> Transparencia Venezuela, Elecciones municipales 2025 en Venezuela, 1 August 2025, [url](#), p. 1; Acceso a la Justicia, Elecciones municipales 2025 en Venezuela: ¿qué ocurrió y cómo te afecta?, 5 August 2025, [url](#)

<sup>117</sup> International Crisis Group, Barbados Deal Sets Venezuela on a Rocky Path to Competitive Polls, 20 October 2023, [url](#); BBC, En qué consiste el acuerdo entre gobierno y oposición de Venezuela (y qué cambia), 17 October 2023, [url](#)

<sup>118</sup> Reuters, Machado dominates Venezuela presidential primary, but unclear if she can run, 24 October 2023, [url](#); PBS, Former lawmaker Maria Corina Machado dominates opposition's presidential primary in Venezuela, 23 October 2023, [url](#)

<sup>119</sup> CNN, Corina Yoris no pudo inscribir su candidatura: "Están cercenando el derecho a millones de venezolanos; son horas muy oscuras", 25 March 2024, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Venezuela opposition fails to register candidate for presidential election, 26 March 2024, [url](#)

<sup>120</sup> Reuters, Machado dominates Venezuela presidential primary, but unclear if she can run, 24 October 2023, [url](#); PBS, Former lawmaker Maria Corina Machado dominates opposition's presidential primary in Venezuela, 23 October 2023, [url](#)

<sup>121</sup> BBC, Cuáles son los resultados de las elecciones en Venezuela según las actas publicadas por la oposición, 6 August 2024, [url](#); Friedrich Naumann Foundation, Venezuela un año después de las elecciones robadas: Resistencia y Esperanza, 28 July 2025, [url](#)

<sup>122</sup> WOLA, Las próximas elecciones son una oportunidad importante para Venezuela, pero la falta de garantías aumenta las preocupaciones, 6 July 2023, [url](#); SWI swissinfo.ch, El Partido Comunista de Venezuela anuncia decisión de no participar en comicios de julio, 11 June 2025, [url](#)

<sup>123</sup> Reuters, Renuncia presidente del máximo organismo electoral de Venezuela antes de elecciones 2024, 15 June 2023, [url](#)



holding public office and obstacles to candidate registration.<sup>124</sup> In January 2024, the TSJ upheld María Corina Machado's disqualification, prompting condemnation from the opposition and several countries.<sup>125</sup> The US stated that it would re-impose sanctions on Venezuela, arguing that the ruling violated the terms of the Barbados agreement.<sup>126</sup> Corina Machado designated academic Corina Yoris as the opposition's candidate, but Yoris was prevented from registering her candidacy two days before the 25 March 2024 deadline, reportedly due to 'computer problems'.<sup>127</sup> After the CNE granted an extension, the opposition succeeded in registering González Urrutia as its official candidate for the presidential elections.<sup>128</sup>

Shortly after the midnight on 28 July 2024, the president of the CNE announced that Nicolás Maduro had won the presidential elections with 5.15 million votes (51.2 %), compared to González Urrutia's 4.44 million (44.2 %), following several hours of delay that the government attributed to a 'cyber-attack'.<sup>129</sup> The opposition rejected the official results and, on 29 July 2024, released electoral tally sheets indicating that González Urrutia had won with approximately 70 % of the vote.<sup>130</sup> Following the CNE announcement, mass protests erupted across the country, resulting in more than 2 000 detentions and 24 deaths.<sup>131</sup> The opposition, the US, and several other countries demanded the publication of the official tally sheets.<sup>132</sup> However, on 22 August 2024, the TSJ ruled that Maduro had won the election and declared the tally sheets published by the opposition to be "faked".<sup>133</sup> The original electoral acts were never released.<sup>134</sup>

On 1 August 2024, González Urrutia was recognised as the legitimate president by several governments and international bodies, including the US and the European Parliament.<sup>135</sup> On 2 September 2024, a terrorism-specialised tribunal issued an arrest warrant against González

<sup>124</sup> BBC, Edmundo González: The man taking on Maduro for Venezuela's presidency, 24 July 2024, [url](#); Le Monde, Venezuela's opposition manages to register a presidential candidate, 26 March 2024, [url](#)

<sup>125</sup> AP, EEUU anuncia revisión de sanciones a Venezuela tras descalificación de Corina Machado, 27 January 2024, [url](#); Los Angeles Times, OEA: Descalificación de Machado 'liquida posibilidad de elecciones libres' en Venezuela, 28 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>126</sup> AP, EEUU anuncia revisión de sanciones a Venezuela tras descalificación de Corina Machado, 27 January 2024, [url](#); Los Angeles Times, OEA: Descalificación de Machado 'liquida posibilidad de elecciones libres' en Venezuela, 28 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>127</sup> BBC, Edmundo González: The man taking on Maduro for Venezuela's presidency, 24 July 2024, [url](#); Le Monde, Venezuela's opposition manages to register a presidential candidate, 26 March 2024, [url](#)

<sup>128</sup> Le Monde, Venezuela's opposition manages to register a presidential candidate, 26 March 2024, [url](#); BBC, Venezuela opposition overcomes hurdles to register candidate, 27 March 2024, [url](#)

<sup>129</sup> WOLA, One year since the presidential election of July 28, 2024: the Venezuelan crisis, 14 August 2025, [url](#); BBC, El Consejo Nacional Electoral anuncia el triunfo de Nicolás Maduro en las elecciones presidenciales de Venezuela y la oposición rechaza los resultados, 28 July 2024, [url](#)

<sup>130</sup> Euronews, Al menos 24 muertos y más de 2.200 detenidos en las protestas contra los resultados en Venezuela, 7 August 2024, [url](#); CNN, El CNE proclama a Nicolás Maduro como ganador de las elecciones en Venezuela, 29 July 2024, [url](#)

<sup>131</sup> France 24, Venezuela termina 2024 en el más incierto futuro político, 17 December 2024, [url](#); Euronews, Al menos 24 muertos y más de 2.200 detenidos en las protestas contra los resultados en Venezuela, 7 August 2024, [url](#)

<sup>132</sup> DW, OEA exige publicar las actas electorales de Venezuela, 17 August 2024, [url](#); BBC, Venezuelan court upholds Maduro's disputed victory, 22 August 2024, [url](#)

<sup>133</sup> France 24, Nicolás Maduro vs. Edmundo González: cronología de una disputada posesión presidencial, 9 January 2025, [url](#); BBC, Venezuelan court upholds Maduro's disputed victory, 22 August 2024, [url](#)

<sup>134</sup> France 24, Nicolás Maduro vs. Edmundo González: cronología de una disputada posesión presidencial, 9 January 2025, [url](#); BBC, Venezuelan court upholds Maduro's disputed victory, 22 August 2024, [url](#)

<sup>135</sup> DW, EU Parliament recognizes Maduro rival as Venezuela president, 20 September 2024, [url](#); France 24, Nicolás Maduro vs. Edmundo González: cronología de una disputada posesión presidencial, 9 January 2025, [url](#)



Urrutia on charges of "conspiracy, usurpation of functions, forgery of public documents, incitement to disobey the laws, computer crimes, criminal association and conspiracy".<sup>136</sup> On 8 September 2024, González Urrutia travelled to Spain, where he was granted asylum by the Spanish government.<sup>137</sup> Following the elections, Corina Machado spent most of her time in hiding.<sup>138</sup> In December 2025, she was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize and arrived in Oslo only hours after the ceremony.<sup>139</sup> On April 2026, Corina Machado remained outside Venezuela.<sup>140</sup>

### 1.3.4. Government corruption

Corruption is 'rampant' (or 'systemic') in Venezuela,<sup>141</sup> affecting all levels of government.<sup>142</sup> Transparency International reported that the progressive erosion of democratic checks and balances has left Venezuela among the world's most corrupt countries.<sup>143</sup> In its 2025 Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI),<sup>144</sup> Venezuela ranked 180 out of 182 countries in perceived public-sector corruption, ahead only of Somalia (181<sup>st</sup>) and South Sudan (182<sup>nd</sup>).<sup>145</sup> A survey conducted by AtlasIntel and Bloomberg found that corruption is viewed as the country's most serious problem (59 % of respondents), followed by the undermining of democracy (37.3 %), poverty and unemployment (27.2 %), and issues within the justice system (23.8 %).<sup>146</sup> Criminality (6.4 %), authoritarianism (5.2 %), and migration (4 %) were among the least frequently cited concerns.<sup>147</sup>

Sources indicated that economic policies such as currency and price controls created strong incentives for black-market activity and collusion between state officials and organised crime.<sup>148</sup> Corruption is also widespread within the security and armed forces.<sup>149</sup> Customs

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<sup>136</sup> Perfil, La justicia de Venezuela ordenó la captura de González Urrutia, acusado de "conspiración" y "sabotaje", 2 September 2024, [url](#); BBC, Un juez en Venezuela ordena detener al candidato opositor Edmundo González Urrutia, acusado por la fiscalía de varios delitos, 3 September 2024, [url](#)

<sup>137</sup> RTVE, El líder opositor Edmundo González aterriza en Madrid procedente de Venezuela tras solicitar asilo político, 8 September 2024, [url](#); Agencia EFE, España concede el asilo a Edmundo González Urrutia, 20 December 2024, [url](#)

<sup>138</sup> El País, De la clandestinidad al Nobel: el año oculto de María Corina Machado, 8 December 2025, [url](#); CBC, Venezuela's Machado defies travel ban, arrives in Oslo to claim Nobel Peace Prize, 9 December 2025, [url](#)

<sup>139</sup> El País, De la clandestinidad al Nobel: el año oculto de María Corina Machado, 8 December 2025, [url](#); CBC, Venezuela's Machado defies travel ban, arrives in Oslo to claim Nobel Peace Prize, 9 December 2025, [url](#)

<sup>140</sup> Reuters, Venezuela's Machado plans to return home by end of year, urges swift elections, 20 April 2026, [url](#); Caracas Chronicles, En Madrid, María Corina proclamó el inicio del gran regreso, 20 April 2026, [url](#)

<sup>141</sup> Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2026, Venezuela, March 2026, [url](#); Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2026 Country Report — Venezuela, 2026, [url](#), p. 12

<sup>142</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2026 Country Report — Venezuela, 2026, [url](#), p. 12; Dialogue (The), Navigating Corruption: Implications for Venezuela's Future, 18 June 2024, [url](#)

<sup>143</sup> Transparency International, Prioritize rebuilding democracy in Venezuela to fight entrenched corruption, 8 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>144</sup> Transparency International indicated that the CPI is calculated based on 'at least 3 data sources drawn from 13 different corruption surveys and assessments. These data sources are collected by a variety of reputable institutions, including the World Bank and the World Economic Forum. CPI scores do not reflect the views of Transparency International or our staff.' Transparency International, The ABCs of the CPI: How the Corruption Perceptions Index is calculated, 11 February 2025, [url](#)

<sup>145</sup> Transparency International, 2025 Corruption Perception Index: Venezuela, 10 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>146</sup> AtlasIntel and Bloomberg, Latam Pulse Venezuela, March 2026, [url](#), p. 24

<sup>147</sup> AtlasIntel and Bloomberg, Latam Pulse Venezuela, March 2026, [url](#), p. 24

<sup>148</sup> Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2026, Venezuela, March 2026, [url](#). See also: USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2023: Venezuela, 22 April 2024, [url](#)

<sup>149</sup> USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2023: Venezuela, 22 April 2024, [url](#); Transparencia Venezuela, The faces of extortion in Venezuela 2024, 2025, [url](#), p. 16



operations in border regions, for example, are described as a 'significant source of corruption', involving military officials, including generals, who compete among themselves for control of lucrative illicit schemes.<sup>150</sup> These schemes typically involved clearing only a portion of imported goods through official channels while charging a 'fee' on the undeclared remainder.<sup>151</sup> Widespread corruption has also undermined the state's capacity to deliver essential goods and services to the population.<sup>152</sup> Transparencia Venezuela reported that extortion tied to paperwork, documents, and basic administrative services has become a normalised part of daily life in Venezuela; citizens routinely face demands for payment from public officials for administrative procedures, registry and notary-related documents, and essential services such as healthcare.<sup>153</sup> Examples of extortion reported by Transparencia Venezuela included the payment of 1 000 USD to repair an energy distribution transformer, processing of an application in exchange for food or lunches, payments ranging from 100 to 300 USD to book appointments with medical specialists and, in the case for some women, performing of sexual acts in exchange for not being fined, punished, or neglected in specific situations.<sup>154</sup>

Cases of corruption are rarely prosecuted or punished in Venezuela, particularly when they involve individuals aligned with the ruling coalition or party.<sup>155</sup> Enforcement of anti-corruption regulations is minimal.<sup>156</sup> Anti-corruption efforts are often 'performative,' aimed at projecting a positive image,<sup>157</sup> or to eliminate internal rivals, protect loyalists, and consolidate power within the ruling party.<sup>158</sup> High-level corruption cases, especially those tied to PDVSA, rarely resulted in meaningful prosecution, with investigations typically limited to lower-ranking officials.<sup>159</sup> Between 2023 and 2024, the government detained over 40 public officials, including high-ranking officials, businesspeople, mayors, regional officials, and military officers, on corruption charges.<sup>160</sup> Former minister and vice-president Tareck El Aissami, for example, was arrested in April 2024 and accused of orchestrating a large-scale corruption scheme within PDVSA;<sup>161</sup> his

<sup>150</sup> Infobae, Corrupción en Venezuela: cuatro generales se pelean el control de una aduana fronteriza donde se manejan cobros ilegales, 15 March 2026, [url](#); Transparencia Venezuela, The faces of extortion in Venezuela 2024, March 2025, [url](#), p. 11

<sup>151</sup> Infobae, Corrupción en Venezuela: cuatro generales se pelean el control de una aduana fronteriza donde se manejan cobros ilegales, 15 March 2026, [url](#); Transparencia Venezuela, The faces of extortion in Venezuela 2024, March 2025, [url](#), p. 11

<sup>152</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2026 Country Report — Venezuela, 2026, [url](#), p. 34; DW, La profunda crisis de la Administración Pública venezolana, 13 October 2023, [url](#)

<sup>153</sup> Transparencia Venezuela, The faces of extortion in Venezuela 2024, March 2025, [url](#), pp. 30-31

<sup>154</sup> Transparencia Venezuela, The faces of extortion in Venezuela 2024, March 2025, [url](#), pp. 30-31

<sup>155</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2026 Country Report — Venezuela, 2026, [url](#), p. 12. See also: Agencia EFE, Detienen a Tareck El Aissami, el 'exzar' del petróleo de Venezuela y fiel aliado de Maduro, 10 April 2024, [url](#)

<sup>156</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2026 Country Report — Venezuela, 2026, [url](#), p. 35; USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2023: Venezuela, 22 April 2024, [url](#)

<sup>157</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2026 Country Report — Venezuela, 2026, [url](#), p. 12; InSight Crime, Are Arrests of Venezuela Officials Simply For Show?, 3 February 2022, [url](#)

<sup>158</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2026 Country Report — Venezuela, 2026, [url](#), p. 12; InSight Crime, Are Arrests of Venezuela Officials Simply For Show?, 3 February 2022, [url](#)

<sup>159</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2026 Country Report — Venezuela, 2026, [url](#), p. 12; Dialogue (The), Navigating Corruption: Implications for Venezuela's Future, 18 June 2024, [url](#)

<sup>160</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2026 Country Report — Venezuela, 2026, [url](#), pp. 12, 36; Agencia EFE, Detienen a Tareck El Aissami, el 'exzar' del petróleo de Venezuela y fiel aliado de Maduro, 10 April 2024, [url](#)

<sup>161</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2026 Country Report — Venezuela, 2026, [url](#), pp. 12, 36; Agencia EFE, Detienen a Tareck El Aissami, el 'exzar' del petróleo de Venezuela y fiel aliado de Maduro, 10 April 2024, [url](#)



detention was widely described as part of an internal purge within the ruling party.<sup>162</sup> In September 2025, more than 14 members of the judiciary were arrested for alleged corruption, though observers indicated that these arrests were also part of a broader purge of the judicial system carried out by the Maduro government.<sup>163</sup> Additional information on these cases could not be found among the sources consulted within the time constraints of this report.

The Anti-Corruption Law established the National Anti-Corruption Corps (CNCC, *Cuerpo Nacional Contra la Corrupción*), an entity that reports directly to the President; however, no public information about the CNCC has been released since 2015.<sup>164</sup> The Office of the Comptroller General (CGR, *Contraloría General de la República Bolivariana de Venezuela*), which manages the electronic system for senior officials' asset declarations, is also responsible for investigating corruption.<sup>165</sup> The CGR, however, lacks independence<sup>166</sup> and, according to the UNCAC Coalition,<sup>167</sup> it has not published audit statements, reports, or sanction lists since 2018.<sup>168</sup> The National Assembly, dominated by the ruling coalition, has not provided meaningful oversight or acted as an independent check on executive power.<sup>169</sup>

Independent journalists,<sup>170</sup> opposition politicians, and activists who exposed corruption are routinely harassed, detained,<sup>171</sup> or pushed into exile.<sup>172</sup> Investigative reporting on government abuses often triggers state retaliation, including censorship, legal intimidation, and the closure of media outlets.<sup>173</sup>

## 1.4. Legislation

Sources indicated that authorities continued to rely on two previously enacted laws to justify targeting dissent and imposing severe penalties:

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<sup>162</sup> La Nación, El régimen de Nicolás Maduro ahora va por sus exaliados: detuvo a un poderoso exministro de Petróleo, 9 April 2024, [url](#); SWI swissinfo.ch, Exzar petrolero de Venezuela, un año desaparecido en la niebla de la corrupción, 20 March 2024, [url](#)

<sup>163</sup> Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2026, Venezuela, March 2026, [url](#); DW, Venezuela purga su sistema judicial, 16 September 2025, [url](#)

<sup>164</sup> Transparencia Venezuela et al., Civil society report on the implementation of Chapter II (Prevention) and Chapter V (Asset Recovery) of the United Nations Convention Against Corruption in Venezuela, 3 October 2024, [url](#), p. 8

<sup>165</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2026 Country Report — Venezuela, 2026, [url](#), p. 35; Transparencia Venezuela et al., Civil society report on the implementation of Chapter II (Prevention) and Chapter V (Asset Recovery) of the United Nations Convention Against Corruption in Venezuela, 3 October 2024, [url](#), p. 8

<sup>166</sup> SWI swissinfo.ch, La ley para combatir la corrupción en Venezuela, en entredicho, 11 May 2023, [url](#);

Transparencia Venezuela et al., Civil society report on the implementation of Chapter II (Prevention) and Chapter V (Asset Recovery) of the United Nations Convention Against Corruption in Venezuela, 3 October 2024, [url](#), p. 14

<sup>167</sup> The UNCAC Coalition is 'a global network of almost 400 civil society organizations (CSOs) in over 120 countries, committed to promoting the ratification, implementation and monitoring of the UN Convention against Corruption (UNCAC)'. UNCAC Coalition, About the Coalition, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>168</sup> UNCAC Coalition, Venezuela: Informe de la sociedad civil, 7 November 2025, [url](#)

<sup>169</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2026 Country Report — Venezuela, 2026, [url](#), p. 12; Miami Herald, Amid news of Maduro's capture, Venezuela grapples with the wreckage he left behind, 3 January 2026, [url](#),

<sup>170</sup> Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2026, Venezuela, March 2026, [url](#); Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2026 Country Report — Venezuela, 2026, [url](#), p. 12

<sup>171</sup> Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2026, Venezuela, March 2026, [url](#); Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2026 Country Report — Venezuela, 2026, [url](#), p. 12

<sup>172</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2026 Country Report — Venezuela, 2026, [url](#), p. 12

<sup>173</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2026 Country Report — Venezuela, 2026, [url](#), p. 12



- the 2017 Law Against Hatred, adopted by the Constituent Assembly, establishes prison sentences of 10 to 20 years for anyone who publicly "promotes, encourages, or incites hatred, discrimination, or violence"; and
- the 2012 Law Against Organized Crime and Terrorism Financing, which prescribes 25 to 30-year sentences for 'terrorist acts' intended to intimidate a population or to "severely destabilize or destroy" the fundamental political, constitutional, economic, or social structures of a country or an international organisation.<sup>174</sup>

Laws enacted or amended during the reference period included the following:

The Organic Law Liberator Simón Bolívar against the Imperialist Blockade and in Defense of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (Ley Orgánica Libertador Simón Bolívar contra el Bloqueo Imperialista y en Defensa de la República Bolivariana de Venezuela), was enacted in November 2024.<sup>175</sup> Article 2 outlines, as objectives of the Law, the following:

1. To safeguard and protect the independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity, and self-determination of the Nation, as inalienable rights, based on the independence and anti-imperialist doctrine of Simón Bolívar, the Liberator.
2. To guarantee the full enjoyment of the human rights of the Venezuelan people, including the right to peace, in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution and the international treaties ratified by the Republic.
3. To protect the national economy from actions that affect its harmonious development and erode the standard of living of the population.
4. To promote the establishment of criminal and civil liability for actions that violate the inalienable rights of the Nation and the human rights of the Venezuelan people.
5. To protect the rights of victims of unilateral coercive measures and other restrictive or punitive measures'.<sup>176</sup>

Sources indicated that the Law contains vague language that allows discretionary interpretation of its provisions to target civil-society organisations collaborating with international bodies.<sup>177</sup> The law establishes penalties including disqualification from running for office, imprisonment, fines, political bans, expulsion of foreign nationals, revocation of property rights, and the cancellation of operating licences for radio and television

<sup>174</sup> HRW, Punished for Seeking Change, 30 April 2025, [url](#). See also: UN, FFMV, Statement by Maria Eloisa Quintero, Expert Member of the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, to the 61st session of the Human Rights Council, 12 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>175</sup> Acceso a la Justicia, Ley Orgánica Libertador Simón Bolívar contra el Bloqueo Imperialista y en Defensa de la República Bolivariana de Venezuela, 20 December 2024, [url](#)

<sup>176</sup> Acceso a la Justicia, Ley Orgánica Libertador Simón Bolívar contra el Bloqueo Imperialista y en Defensa de la República Bolivariana de Venezuela, 20 December 2024, [url](#)

<sup>177</sup> UN, FFMV, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 8 September 2025, [url](#), para. 88. See also: BBC, Venezuela aprueba una severa ley para castigar hasta con 30 años de prisión a quienes apoyen las sanciones internacionales contra el país, 29 November 2024, [url](#)



broadcasters.<sup>178</sup> These sanctions apply to individuals or entities deemed to promote, invoke, support, or participate in acts considered to be 'against the security of the Nation or to threaten its sovereignty, independence, self-determination, territorial integrity, cultural values, national symbols, or interests'.<sup>179</sup>

The Law on Oversight, Regularisation, Action and Finance of Non-Governmental Organisations and Non-for-Profit Social Organisations (Ley de Fiscalización, Regularización, Actuación y Financiamiento de las Organizaciones No Gubernamentales y Afines), which entered into force in November 2024 and is commonly referred to as the 'Anti-NGO Law',<sup>180</sup> functions as a tool of political control over NGOs.<sup>181</sup> The law grants authorities broad discretionary powers over administrative sanctions and registration procedures.<sup>182</sup> Only a limited number of organisations have completed the required registration process, while others have opted to suspend their operations in Venezuela.<sup>183</sup> The UNFFMV reported that the registration process is marked by irregularities, including unequal treatment, denial of applications, and instances of bribery.<sup>184</sup>

On 30 January 2026, the National Assembly approved a sweeping reform of the oil and gas law, reversing the 2006 changes introduced under President Hugo Chávez that had imposed high taxes and strict conditions on foreign private companies.<sup>185</sup> Despite the reform, oil companies have remained hesitant to return to or invest in Venezuela, citing persistent political risk, legal instability, and significant infrastructural deterioration.<sup>186</sup>

### 1.4.1. Amnesty Law

On 19 February 2026, the National Assembly approved the Amnesty Law for Democratic Coexistence (Ley de Amnistía para la Convivencia Democrática).<sup>187</sup> The law grants amnesty for participation in political protests and in 'violent actions' that occurred during the brief 2002 coup, as well as for acts linked to demonstrations or elections in certain months of 2004,

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<sup>178</sup> Acceso a la Justicia, Ley Orgánica Libertador Simón Bolívar contra el Bloqueo Imperialista y en Defensa de la República Bolivariana de Venezuela, 20 December 2024, [url](#)

<sup>179</sup> Acceso a la Justicia, Ley Orgánica Libertador Simón Bolívar contra el Bloqueo Imperialista y en Defensa de la República Bolivariana de Venezuela, 20 December 2024, [url](#)

<sup>180</sup> AI, Venezuela passes "anti-NGO law" that punishes efforts to assist victims and defend human rights, 19 August 2024, [url](#)

<sup>181</sup> UN, FFMV, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 8 September 2025, [url](#), para. 86; Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2026 Country Report — Venezuela, 2026, [url](#), p. 16

<sup>182</sup> UN, FFMV, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 8 September 2025, [url](#), para. 86; Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2026 Country Report — Venezuela, 2026, [url](#), p. 16

<sup>183</sup> UN, FFMV, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 8 September 2025, [url](#), para. 86

<sup>184</sup> UN, FFMV, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 8 September 2025, [url](#), para. 87

<sup>185</sup> International Crisis Group, The Venezuela Paradigm: Is Trump's Model Intervention a Mirage?, 27 March 2026, [url](#); BBC, Qué cambia en Venezuela con la nueva Ley de Hidrocarburos y por qué es una ruptura radical con 50 años de modelo petrolero, 30 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>186</sup> Bnamericas, Por qué las grandes petroleras no se apresurarán a entrar en Venezuela, 18 February 2026, [url](#);

International Crisis Group, The Venezuela Paradigm: Is Trump's Model Intervention a Mirage?, 27 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>187</sup> WOLA, Two months without Maduro in Venezuela: Democratic transition or authoritarian adaptation?, 11 March 2026, [url](#); International Crisis Group, The Venezuela Paradigm: Is Trump's Model Intervention a Mirage?, 27 March 2026, [url](#)



2007, 2009, 2013, 2014, 2017, 2019, 2023, 2024, and 2025.<sup>188</sup> The law excludes individuals convicted of 'military rebellion',<sup>189</sup> labour activists facing prosecution, people charged with online 'incitement of hate',<sup>190</sup> and anyone accused of 'promoting, instigating, facilitating, financing, or participating in armed or forceful actions against the people, sovereignty, and territorial integrity of Venezuela'.<sup>191</sup>

There is no transparency regarding the implementation of the Amnesty Law and that the process is very opaque.<sup>192</sup> Observers noted that the law left several critical issues unaddressed, including the lack of recognition of victims of repression, the absence of accountability for state actions, and the failure to guarantee truth, justice, and reparations.<sup>193</sup>

Implementation of the law was delegated to the judiciary, which is widely accused of lacking impartiality.<sup>194</sup> Although the Amnesty Law allows for the closure of criminal, disciplinary, or civil proceedings for those covered by it, its scope is limited to specific acts and offences; as a result, most released detainees reportedly continue to face open cases, are denied the right to appoint private counsel, and are not granted access to their case files.<sup>195</sup> Foro Penal reported that some courts have refused to provide written decisions denying applications under the law, preventing relatives from filing appeals.<sup>196</sup> The same source also indicated that tribunals often treat the Amnesty Law as a 'mere recommendation' rather than a binding order from the National Assembly.<sup>197</sup> Many requests for release have not been accepted, especially those involving politicians close to Corina Machado and some journalists.<sup>198</sup>

Authorities indicated that, as of 25 March 2026, more than 11 400 applications had been submitted under the Amnesty Law and that 8 084 positive decisions had been issued, including 7 782 cases involving precautionary measures such as travel bans, and 302 cases

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<sup>188</sup> BBC, La Asamblea Nacional de Venezuela aprueba una ley de amnistía que organizaciones de derechos humanos consideran limitada, 20 February 2026, [url](#); Acceso a la Justicia, Ley de Amnistía para la Convivencia Democrática, 24 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>189</sup> BBC, La Asamblea Nacional de Venezuela aprueba una ley de amnistía que organizaciones de derechos humanos consideran limitada, 20 February 2026, [url](#); Acceso a la Justicia, Ley de Amnistía para la Convivencia Democrática, 24 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>190</sup> International Crisis Group, The Venezuela Paradigm: Is Trump's Model Intervention a Mirage?, 27 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>191</sup> HRW, Venezuela: Exclusions, Procedures Mar Amnesty Law, 13 May 2026, [url](#)

<sup>192</sup> WOLA, Two months without Maduro in Venezuela: Democratic transition or authoritarian adaptation?, 11 March 2026, [url](#); International Crisis Group, The Venezuela Paradigm: Is Trump's Model Intervention a Mirage?, 27 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>193</sup> WOLA, Two months without Maduro in Venezuela: Democratic transition or authoritarian adaptation?, 11 March 2026, [url](#); International Crisis Group, The Venezuela Paradigm: Is Trump's Model Intervention a Mirage?, 27 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>194</sup> WOLA, Two months without Maduro in Venezuela: Democratic transition or authoritarian adaptation?, 11 March 2026, [url](#); El País, Los militares y sus familiares son los grandes excluidos de la ley de amnistía en Venezuela, 22 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>195</sup> WOLA, Two months without Maduro in Venezuela: Democratic transition or authoritarian adaptation?, 11 March 2026, [url](#); Foro Penal, Situation of Political Prisoners in Venezuela, January – February 2026, 17 March 2026, [url](#), pp. 6-7; Amaya, telephone interview, 12 May 2026

<sup>196</sup> Foro Penal, Foro Penal denunció que tribunales “se están negando” a entregar copia de decisiones sobre la Ley de Amnistía, 25 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>197</sup> Foro Penal, Foro Penal denunció que tribunales “se están negando” a entregar copia de decisiones sobre la Ley de Amnistía, 25 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>198</sup> Amaya, telephone interview, 12 May 2026



involving detainees.<sup>199</sup> Sources, however, questioned the reliability of these numbers and that verification was 'difficult'.<sup>200</sup> There are allegations that some judges are charging an extortion fee to family members for the release of their relative under the Amnesty Law.<sup>201</sup> In a telephone interview, Roberto Briceño-León, Director of the Venezuelan Observatory of Violence (OVV, Observatorio Venezolano de Violencia) indicated, however, that family members prefer not to voice concern in public so as not to jeopardise the release of their imprisoned family member.<sup>202</sup>

On 24 April 2026, Interim President Rodríguez abruptly announced the termination of the Amnesty Law's application, a move that NGOs and observers described as arbitrary and unconstitutional.<sup>203</sup> The release of prisoners has been decreasing during the past few weeks, as has the approval level of applications.<sup>204</sup> As of 10 May 2026, Foro Penal reported that 457 political prisoners remained incarcerated in Venezuela, including 187 members of the military.<sup>205</sup>

## 1.5. Judicial system

The judiciary is organised into four tiers (courts of appeal, high tribunals, courts of first instance, and parish courts), which collectively handle civil and criminal matters.<sup>206</sup> In addition, specialised jurisdictions oversee civil, criminal, labour, tax and customs, administrative, juvenile, military, and agrarian cases.<sup>207</sup> The system is further complemented by justices of the peace, as well as the Prosecutor General's Office, the Ministry of Justice, and the Executive Office of the Magistracy, which supervises the lower courts.<sup>208</sup>

The judicial system is heavily influenced by the executive branch.<sup>209</sup> The Supreme Justice Tribunal (Tribunal Supremo de Justicia, TSJ) has been effectively captured and turned into an extension of executive power; most TSJ magistrates are members of the PSUV or former government officials.<sup>210</sup> In 2024, the TSJ appointed a new board of directors that included three judges who had previously run for elected office under the ruling PSUV before joining

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<sup>199</sup> Foro Penal, Foro Penal denuncia que tribunales niegan constancia de rechazo de amnistía para evitar apelaciones, 25 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>200</sup> El País, El abrupto final de la ley de amnistía frustra las expectativas de libertad en Venezuela, 27 April 2026, [url](#). See also: International Crisis Group, The Venezuela Paradigm: Is Trump's Model Intervention a Mirage?, 27 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>201</sup> Amaya, telephone interview, 12 May 2026; Briceño-León, telephone interview, 13 May 2026

<sup>202</sup> Briceño-León, telephone interview, 13 May 2026

<sup>203</sup> CNN, Delcy Rodríguez anunció el "fin de la Ley de Amnistía": cuántos detenidos políticos aún permanecen en prisión, 24 April 2026, [url](#); DW, Delcy Rodríguez anuncia que la amnistía "llega a su fin", 24 April 2026, [url](#)

<sup>204</sup> Amaya, telephone interview, 12 May 2026

<sup>205</sup> Foro Penal, Foro Penal, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>206</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2026 Country Report — Venezuela, 2026, [url](#), p. 11. See also: Acceso a la Justicia, ABC de la Justicia: Organigramas, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>207</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2026 Country Report — Venezuela, 2026, [url](#), p. 11. See also: Acceso a la Justicia, ABC de la Justicia: Organigramas, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>208</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2026 Country Report — Venezuela, 2026, [url](#), p. 11. See also: Acceso a la Justicia, ABC de la Justicia: Organigramas, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>209</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2026 Country Report — Venezuela, 2026, [url](#), p. 1211; Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2025: Venezuela, February 2025, [url](#)

<sup>210</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2026 Country Report — Venezuela, 2026, [url](#), p. 11. See also: Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2025: Venezuela, February 2025, [url](#)



the judiciary.<sup>211</sup> Many government contracts are awarded through 'emergency procurement', a mechanism that allows officials to bypass open bidding.<sup>212</sup> Because the judiciary is described as 'heavily politicized', it often steps in to "'legalize"' unlawful or irregular practices.<sup>213</sup>

The Citizen's Corruption Observatory (OCC, Observatorio Ciudadano de Corrupción) reported that Venezuela's witness-protection law, revised in 2021, lacks clear definitions and procedures for safeguarding whistleblowers in corruption cases.<sup>214</sup> This leaves decisions to the discretion of the Public Prosecutor's Office, discouraging the reporting of corruption and often resulting in reprisals.<sup>215</sup> According to the OCC, the agencies responsible for implementing the witness-protection law are understaffed and provide only minimal and sporadic protection.<sup>216</sup> The Public Ministry has not published statistics since 2017 and has not provided additional information to supplement the few institutional reports it has released.<sup>217</sup>

Sources indicated that access to justice for victims of civil-rights violations is effectively non-existent.<sup>218</sup> The judicial system applies the law selectively, targeting opposition figures and dissidents while shielding government officials from accountability.<sup>219</sup> The government also uses the courts to criminalise dissent, employing fabricated charges against opposition leaders to neutralise political rivals rather than uphold justice.<sup>220</sup> A number of foreign nationals have been detained and accused of engaging in 'mercenary', 'terrorist', or 'destabilising' activities.<sup>221</sup> The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) of the Organization of American States (OAS) reported that the Venezuelan government intensified these detentions in 2025 and that they are carried out in order to later 'us[e] them as bargaining chips for Venezuelan citizens deprived of liberty abroad'.<sup>222</sup> Consular visits are routinely denied.<sup>223</sup>

<sup>211</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2026 Country Report — Venezuela, 2026, [url](#), p. 11; Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2025: Venezuela, February 2025, [url](#)

<sup>212</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2026 Country Report — Venezuela, 2026, [url](#), p. 36

<sup>213</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2026 Country Report — Venezuela, 2026, [url](#), p. 36. See also: USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2023: Venezuela, 22 April 2024, [url](#)

<sup>214</sup> OCC, Informe de Venezuela: Seguimiento a los compromisos de las Cumbres Presidenciales de Lima 2018 y Los Ángeles 2022, November 2024, [url](#), p. 18. See also: OAS, IACHR, CIDH presentó ante Corte IDH caso sobre Venezuela por destitución injustificada de funcionario público, 23 February 2024, [url](#)

<sup>215</sup> OCC, Informe de Venezuela: Seguimiento a los compromisos de las Cumbres Presidenciales de Lima 2018 y Los Ángeles 2022, November 2024, [url](#), p. 18. See also: OAS, IACHR, CIDH presentó ante Corte IDH caso sobre Venezuela por destitución injustificada de funcionario público, 23 February 2024, [url](#)

<sup>216</sup> OCC, Informe de Venezuela: Seguimiento a los compromisos de las Cumbres Presidenciales de Lima 2018 y Los Ángeles 2022, November 2024, [url](#), p. 18

<sup>217</sup> ICJ, Sin voluntad de Justicia en Venezuela: Un Ministerio Público que fomenta la impunidad, April 2024, [url](#), p. 5

<sup>218</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2026 Country Report — Venezuela, 2026, [url](#), p. 13; Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2025: Venezuela, February 2025, [url](#)

<sup>219</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2026 Country Report — Venezuela, 2026, [url](#), p. 12; Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2025: Venezuela, February 2025, [url](#)

<sup>220</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2026 Country Report — Venezuela, 2026, [url](#), p. 12. UN, UN News, Venezuela: La persecución por motivos políticos se está intensificando, advierte la Misión Independiente, 22 September 2025, [url](#). See also: Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2025: Venezuela, February 2025, [url](#)

<sup>221</sup> UN, FFMV, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 8 September 2025, [url](#), para. 16

<sup>222</sup> OAS, IACHR, Annual Report 2025: Chapter IV.B – Venezuela, 26 February 2026, [url](#), para. 29

<sup>223</sup> OAS, IACHR, Annual Report 2025: Chapter IV.B – Venezuela, 26 February 2026, [url](#), paras. 29



Sources indicated that violations of due process are systematic.<sup>224</sup> Detentions were frequently carried out by unidentified individuals who provided neither arrest warrants nor reasons for the arrest, often using excessive force.<sup>225</sup> Those detained then faced legal proceedings and detention conditions marked by widespread abuses.<sup>226</sup> Hearings were held privately and conducted through digital platforms; detainees were unable to see, hear, or question the officers involved and were denied communication with public defenders before or during the proceedings.<sup>227</sup> Authorities routinely withheld information about detainees' whereabouts, and the criteria and timelines for their release remained unclear.<sup>228</sup>

The UN Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Venezuela (UNFFMV) reported that investigations and judicial proceedings remain 'virtually paralyzed for years, with hearings repeatedly suspended due to the absence of defendants, frequent changes of judges, or delays in basic procedures'; most cases stall at the preliminary stage, leaving victims without an effective judicial response.<sup>229</sup> The UNFFMV also found long gaps between procedural actions and cases dismissed by prosecutors without proper higher-level review, hindering evidence collection, essential procedures, and efforts to secure the appearance of alleged perpetrators.<sup>230</sup> Several detainees were photographed with incriminating items they did not possess at the time of arrest.<sup>231</sup> Following the 2024 elections, in the context of what observers described as 'indiscriminate' detentions of dissidents and protestors, detainees were sent to provisional detention centres where prosecutors opened cases based on real or fabricated criticism of the government using social-media posts or reports from 'cooperating patriots',<sup>232</sup> regime-affiliated groups, as evidence.<sup>233</sup> Authorities organised collective hearings involving up to 103 individuals and brought charges such as 'terrorism', 'incitement to hatred', and 'instigation to commit a crime'.<sup>234</sup>

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<sup>224</sup> UN, FFMV, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 8 September 2025, [url](#), para. 25; AI, Venezuela: Sociedad civil y voces disidentes enfrentan una incesante escalada de persecución, 16 April 2024, [url](#)

<sup>225</sup> UN, FFMV, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 8 September 2025, [url](#), para. 24; HRW, Punished for Seeking Change, 30 April 2025, [url](#)

<sup>226</sup> HRW, Punished for Seeking Change, 30 April 2025, [url](#); AI, The State of the World's Human Rights: Venezuela, 28 April 2025, [url](#), pp. 396-396; UN, FFMV, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 8 September 2025, [url](#), paras. 17-27, 53-84

<sup>227</sup> UN, FFMV, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 8 September 2025, [url](#), para. 25; HRW, Punished for Seeking Change, 30 April 2025, [url](#)

<sup>228</sup> UN, FFMV, Statement by Maria Eloisa Quintero, Expert Member of the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, to the 61st session of the Human Rights Council, 12 March 2026, [url](#); HRW, Punished for Seeking Change, 30 April 2025, [url](#)

<sup>229</sup> UN, FFMV, Crímenes de lesa humanidad: el rol de la Guardia Nacional Bolivariana, 11 December 2025, [url](#), paras. 244-246

<sup>230</sup> UN, FFMV, Crímenes de lesa humanidad: el rol de la Guardia Nacional Bolivariana, 11 December 2025, [url](#), paras. 244-246

<sup>231</sup> UN, FFMV, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 8 September 2025, [url](#), para. 24

<sup>232</sup> 'Cooperating patriots' (*patriotas cooperantes*) are civilians who infiltrate political opposition groups, civil associations, unions, businesses, schools, universities, hotels, clubs, and neighbourhood organisations to compile files and accusations against targeted individuals. Casla Institute, Annual Report 2023-2024 about Crimes Against Humanity, May 2024, [url](#), p. 3; OVCS, Patriotas Cooperantes: arma invisible para la represión política en Venezuela, 10 July 2023, [url](#)

<sup>233</sup> UN, FFMV, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 8 September 2025, [url](#), para. 25

<sup>234</sup> UN, FFMV, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 8 September 2025, [url](#), para. 25



Sources indicated that habeas corpus<sup>235</sup> is no longer an effective safeguard against violations, and that deliberate obstruction by justice officials has enabled these abuses.<sup>236</sup> Acceso a la Justicia reported that between 2021 and 2023, Venezuelan courts issued 207 rulings on habeas corpus applications: only one was granted, 118 were rejected, and the remaining 88 consisted of procedural actions that neither approved nor denied the request (such as declaring an application incomplete or requesting additional information).<sup>237</sup> The same source also noted that the Constitutional Chamber of the TSJ took more than six years to rule on the single granted application (filed in July 2017 and approved in December 2023) which concerned an individual arrested for homicide in 2010 and held in preventive detention ever since.<sup>238</sup>

Sources indicated that impunity remained a problem in Venezuela.<sup>239</sup> About 24.6 % of Venezuelans trust the justice system,<sup>240</sup> and adherence to the law is described as the exception rather than the rule.<sup>241</sup> The World Justice Project's (WJP) 2025 Rule of Law Index ranked Venezuela last out of 143 countries in overall adherence to the rule of law, and in the categories of 'constraints on government powers', 'regulatory enforcement', 'civil justice', and 'criminal justice'.<sup>242</sup>

Factors contributing to impunity include the absence of international-standard judicial procedures, deficiencies in evidence collection, reluctance to investigate serious human rights violations,<sup>243</sup> and a pattern in which investigations focus on the victims' prior political or personal activities rather than the perpetrators' intent.<sup>244</sup> The International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) indicated that additional obstacles include lack of information on case status, insufficient resources, and high turnover among prosecutors.<sup>245</sup> The US Department of State (USDOS) Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for Venezuela cited a 'general lack of transparency and technical criteria in the assignments of district attorneys to criminal investigations'.<sup>246</sup>

<sup>235</sup> Habeas corpus is 'a guarantee of human rights, particularly personal liberty, personal integrity, adequate judicial protection and due process'. Acceso a la Justicia, Effective Judicial Protection And Judicial Independence Of The Supreme Court Of Justice In Habeas Corpus Proceedings, March 2025, [url](#), p. 3

<sup>236</sup> Acceso a la Justicia, Effective Judicial Protection And Judicial Independence Of The Supreme Court Of Justice In Habeas Corpus Proceedings, March 2025, [url](#), p. 33; UN, FFMV, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 8 September 2025, [url](#), paras. 25, 64

<sup>237</sup> Acceso a la Justicia, Effective Judicial Protection And Judicial Independence Of The Supreme Court Of Justice In Habeas Corpus Proceedings, March 2025, [url](#), p. 26

<sup>238</sup> Acceso a la Justicia, Effective Judicial Protection And Judicial Independence Of The Supreme Court Of Justice In Habeas Corpus Proceedings, March 2025, [url](#), p. 26

<sup>239</sup> DW, Venezuela purga su sistema judicial, 16 September 2025, [url](#); ICJ, Sin voluntad de Justicia en Venezuela: Un Ministerio Público que fomenta la impunidad, April 2024, [url](#), p. 16; WOLA, Aproximaciones a la impunidad en Venezuela: la pérdida de la independencia judicial frente a crímenes de lesa humanidad, 27 June 2024, [url](#)

<sup>240</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2026 Country Report — Venezuela, 2026, [url](#), p. 11

<sup>241</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2026 Country Report — Venezuela, 2026, [url](#), p. 35

<sup>242</sup> WJP, WJP Rule of Law Index 2025, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>243</sup> UN, UN News, Venezuela: La persecución por motivos políticos se está intensificando, advierte la Misión Independiente, 22 September 2025, [url](#); ICJ, Sin voluntad de Justicia en Venezuela: Un Ministerio Público que fomenta la impunidad, April 2024, [url](#), p. 24

<sup>244</sup> ICJ, Sin voluntad de Justicia en Venezuela: Un Ministerio Público que fomenta la impunidad, April 2024, [url](#), p. 24

<sup>245</sup> ICJ, Sin voluntad de Justicia en Venezuela: Un Ministerio Público que fomenta la impunidad, April 2024, [url](#), p. 24

<sup>246</sup> USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2023: Venezuela, 22 April 2024, [url](#)



Transparencia Venezuela reported that, since 2000, judicial dismissals have been highly discretionary, and the Supreme Court has ruled that provisional judges may be removed through a simple administrative order.<sup>247</sup> According to the ICJ, cooperation between state security forces and investigators or prosecutors is 'problematic', as security agencies implicated in human rights violations often interfere with Public Ministry investigations.<sup>248</sup> Corruption is also prevalent in the justice system to obtain favourable rulings or procedural benefits.<sup>249</sup> Transparencia Venezuela documented cases including the arrest of a prosecutor and two Public Defender's Office representatives for receiving 360 000 USD from a member of criminal organisation Tren de Aragua in exchange for procedural advantages, as well as the detention of judicial employees, including a judge, who allegedly attempted to collect 100 000 USD from a woman to expedite her case.<sup>250</sup> Illegal charges at registry offices and notaries are also reported as common.<sup>251</sup> For additional information on Tren de Aragua, see section [2.1.2 Megabandas](#).

International Crisis Group indicated that judicial reform aimed at ensuring independence and dismantling the repressive structures that sustained *chavismo* has seen no meaningful progress since Maduro's fall.<sup>252</sup> On 19 February 2026, interim president Rodríguez reactivated a long-dormant 'reform commission', but it remains under the control of Interior Minister Diosdado Cabello, who has overseen it since its creation by Maduro in 2021.<sup>253</sup>

In March 2026, the UNFFMV indicated that state institutions previously identified as central to repression remain unchanged and unreformed, including the judiciary, the Office of the Ombudsperson, the Office of the Public Prosecutor, and the Office of the Comptroller General.<sup>254</sup> In a telephone interview, Víctor Amaya, Editor-in-Chief of Venezuelan news source Tal Cual, stated that justice-system reforms are frequently announced but do not result in substantive change, noting that 'everything is changed so that nothing changes'.<sup>255</sup>

### 1.5.1. Detention conditions

Sources indicated that detention conditions are 'harsh' and 'deplorable',<sup>256</sup> often amounting to cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment.<sup>257</sup> Detainees are reportedly subjected to torture,

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<sup>247</sup> Transparencia Venezuela, The faces of extortion in Venezuela 2024, 2025, [url](#), p. 54

<sup>248</sup> ICJ, Sin voluntad de Justicia en Venezuela: Un Ministerio Público que fomenta la impunidad, April 2024, [url](#), p. 24

<sup>249</sup> Transparencia Venezuela, The faces of extortion in Venezuela 2024, 2025, [url](#), p. 9; USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2023: Venezuela, 22 April 2024, [url](#)

<sup>250</sup> Transparencia Venezuela, The faces of extortion in Venezuela 2024, 2025, [url](#), p. 9

<sup>251</sup> Transparencia Venezuela, The faces of extortion in Venezuela 2024, 2025, [url](#), p. 12

<sup>252</sup> International Crisis Group, The Venezuela Paradigm: Is Trump's Model Intervention a Mirage?, 27 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>253</sup> International Crisis Group, The Venezuela Paradigm: Is Trump's Model Intervention a Mirage?, 27 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>254</sup> UN, FFMV, Statement by Maria Eloisa Quintero, Expert Member of the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, to the 61st session of the Human Rights Council, 12 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>255</sup> Amaya, telephone interview, 12 May 2026

<sup>256</sup> UN, FFMV, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 8 September 2025, [url](#), para. 24; SWI swissinfo.ch, «La cárcel en Venezuela es un campo de concentración», alerta peruano preso durante un año, 30 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>257</sup> UN, FFMV, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 8 September 2025, [url](#), para. 77



beatings, and prolonged incommunicado detention.<sup>258</sup> The UNFFMV reported that torture methods in detention centres include asphyxiation with plastic bags, beatings, electric shocks to the genitals, and threats of rape, and that tribunals have 'systematically' ignored complaints filed about these abuses.<sup>259</sup> In the case of children, detainees are threatened not to speak about prison conditions, and when they do, courts reportedly refuse to hear their cases or conduct investigations.<sup>260</sup>

Detention centres are overcrowded, poorly ventilated, and lack access to sunlight, potable water, adequate food, and healthcare.<sup>261</sup> In some facilities, detainees receive spoiled food or food containing insects, and water supplies are described as unfit for consumption.<sup>262</sup> In 2024, the Venezuelan Observatory of Prisons (OVP, Observatorio Venezolano de Prisiones) documented 105 deaths inside prisons and 40 deaths in police-station detention centres, most linked to lack of medical care and poor health conditions.<sup>263</sup> Some detainees have died as a result of torture and medical negligence,<sup>264</sup> and autopsy reports are not shared with families.<sup>265</sup> According to the OVP, overcrowding in some prisons reaches 200%.<sup>266</sup> In some prisons, *pranes*, criminal bosses who run criminal organisations from within the prisons, charge inmates for a place to sleep,<sup>267</sup> with reported amounts starting at 40 USD per month.<sup>268</sup> The penal system's lack of a central registry for political detainees leaves some individuals 'disappeared' for weeks or months, and even those with release orders are often kept in custody at the discretion of powerful security officials.<sup>269</sup> A leading human rights lawyer consulted by International Crisis Group stated that information on detainees' whereabouts is routinely withheld during jail visits, and some missing prisoners have still not been located.<sup>270</sup>

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<sup>258</sup> SWI swissinfo.ch, «La cárcel en Venezuela es un campo de concentración», alerta peruano preso durante un año, 30 January 2026, [url](#); OVP, Informe anual 2024, 2025, [url](#), p. 9

<sup>259</sup> UN, UN News, Venezuela: La persecución por motivos políticos se está intensificando, advierte la Misión Independiente, 22 September 2025, [url](#)

<sup>260</sup> UN, FFMV, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 8 September 2025, [url](#), para. 26

<sup>261</sup> OVP, Informe anual 2024, 2025, [url](#), pp. 19, 57; USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2023: Venezuela, 22 April 2024, [url](#)

<sup>262</sup> UN, FFMV, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 8 September 2025, [url](#), paras. 73-74; USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2023: Venezuela, 22 April 2024, [url](#)

<sup>263</sup> OVP, Informe anual 2024, 2025, [url](#), pp. 40, 57

<sup>264</sup> UN, FFMV, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 8 September 2025, [url](#), paras. 54-57

<sup>265</sup> UN, FFMV, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 8 September 2025, [url](#), para. 54

<sup>266</sup> OVP, Informe anual 2024, 2025, [url](#), p. 19

<sup>267</sup> OVP, Informe anual 2024, 2025, [url](#), p. 56; Briceño-León, telephone interview, 13 May 2026

<sup>268</sup> OVP, Informe anual 2024, 2025, [url](#), p. 56

<sup>269</sup> International Crisis Group, The Venezuela Paradigm: Is Trump's Model Intervention a Mirage?, 27 March 2026, [url](#); Briceño-León, telephone interview, 13 May 2026

<sup>270</sup> International Crisis Group, The Venezuela Paradigm: Is Trump's Model Intervention a Mirage?, 27 March 2026, [url](#)



## 1.6. State security forces

For background information on the structure of state security forces, see [EUAA COI Report – Venezuela Country Focus November 2023](#).

The Special Action Force (FAES, Fuerzas de Acciones Especiales), a police unit implicated in serious human rights abuses, was dissolved in 2022 and replaced by the Directorate of Strategic and Tactical Actions (DAET, Dirección de Acciones Estratégicas y Tácticas) following sustained international pressure.<sup>271</sup> According to sources, DAET operates with functions and methods similar to those of FAES, and former FAES officials involved in grave abuses now hold key positions within the new unit.<sup>272</sup>

State security forces continued committing extrajudicial killings,<sup>273</sup> arbitrary detentions,<sup>274</sup> torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment of different profiles, – including political activists, women, girls, and LGBTIQ+ persons –<sup>275</sup> enforced disappearances and sexual violence,<sup>276</sup> and engaged in corruption.<sup>277</sup> Cuban intelligence agencies reportedly provided training to Venezuelan security forces on repression tactics and interrogation, including under torture.<sup>278</sup>

State security forces at the national, state, and municipal levels, as well as the armed forces and *colectivos*, committed unlawful killings, including extrajudicial executions.<sup>279</sup> For information on *colectivos*, see section [2.1.1 Colectivos](#). During the post-electoral protests of 2024, 25 people were killed in circumstances that may amount to extrajudicial executions.<sup>280</sup> The UNFFMV reported that victims were struck by bullets in vital areas such as the abdomen, head, neck, and chest, often from distances of no more than 10 metres.<sup>281</sup> Human rights organisations identified the Bolivarian National Guard (GNB, Guardia Nacional Bolivariana), the Bolivarian National Police (PNB, Policía Nacional Bolivariana), the army, and *colectivos*, as

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<sup>271</sup> HRW, World Report 2024: Venezuela, 2024, [url](#); SWI swissinfo.ch, Misión ONU para Venezuela subraya que DAET ha heredado las tácticas represoras de la FAES, 20 September 2023, [url](#)

<sup>272</sup> HRW, World Report 2024: Venezuela, 2024, [url](#); SWI swissinfo.ch, Misión ONU para Venezuela subraya que DAET ha heredado las tácticas represoras de la FAES, 20 September 2023, [url](#)

<sup>273</sup> USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2023: Venezuela, 22 April 2024, [url](#); AI, The State of the World's Human Rights: Venezuela, 28 April 2025, [url](#), pp. 394

<sup>274</sup> UN, FFMV, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 8 September 2025, [url](#), para. 19; AI, The State of the World's Human Rights: Venezuela, 28 April 2025, [url](#), pp. 395

<sup>275</sup> UN, FFMV, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 8 September 2025, [url](#), paras. 65-67

<sup>276</sup> UN, FFMV, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 8 September 2025, [url](#), para. 10

<sup>277</sup> UN, FFMV, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 8 September 2025, [url](#), para. 40; Transparencia Venezuela, The faces of extortion in Venezuela 2024, 2025, [url](#), p. 10

<sup>278</sup> Casla Institute, Annual Report 2023-2024 about Crimes Against Humanity, May 2024, [url](#), p. 26

<sup>279</sup> USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2023: Venezuela, 22 April 2024, [url](#); Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, Venezuela, 16 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>280</sup> UN, FFMV, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 8 September 2025, [url](#), para. 10; AI, The State of the World's Human Rights: Venezuela, 28 April 2025, [url](#), p. 395

<sup>281</sup> UN, FFMV, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 8 September 2025, [url](#), para. 48



responsible for these killings.<sup>282</sup> For additional information on the treatment of demonstrators, see section [3.1 Political opponents and activists, and human rights defenders](#).

Following the July 2024 elections, authorities carried out Operation Knock Knock (Operación Tun Tun), described by sources as a massive and indiscriminate campaign of intimidation, repression, and arbitrary detentions.<sup>283</sup> Actions attributed to state security forces during this operation included beatings, blows with bats, suffocation with plastic bags during interrogations, sexual violence, psychological torture, and the denial of food, water, and healthcare to detainees.<sup>284</sup> For additional information, see section [3.1 Political opponents and activists, and human rights defenders](#).

The UNFFMV reported that, of the 25 deaths recorded during the post-2024 election protests, state security forces were responsible for at least 12.<sup>285</sup> The GNB and the Army reportedly fired live ammunition at protesters.<sup>286</sup> Security forces were also accused of using methods intended to cause 'severe suffering' to extract information, humiliate, or punish detainees.<sup>287</sup> The UNFFMV documented, for example, the case of a member of Voluntad Popular detained by DGCIM on 20 August 2024, who was repeatedly beaten with wooden and metal rods to coerce him into providing information about the party's leadership.<sup>288</sup> Another political activist detained twice by SEBIN in July 2024 was subjected to electric shocks to force him to reveal the whereabouts of opposition members and the identities of those safeguarding election records.<sup>289</sup> SEBIN, the GNB, and DGCIM were also accused of carrying out enforced disappearances of dissidents and government critics following arbitrary arrests. Victims were reportedly detained without warrants, and authorities either denied involvement in the arrest or refused to disclose the detainee's location.<sup>290</sup> One example is the case of Rory Branker, editor of the local news outlet La Patilla, who was arrested by SEBIN on 20 February 2025; authorities withheld information about his whereabouts until his release on 14 January 2026 as part of a broader government initiative to free political prisoners.<sup>291</sup>

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<sup>282</sup> AI, The State of the World's Human Rights: Venezuela, 28 April 2025, [url](#), p. 395; HRW, Punished for Seeking Change, 30 April 2025, [url](#)

<sup>283</sup> UN, FFMV, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 8 September 2025, [url](#), para. 19; HRW, World Report 2026: Venezuela, 2026, [url](#)

<sup>284</sup> UN, FFMV, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 8 September 2025, [url](#), paras. 65-69

<sup>285</sup> UN, UN News, Venezuela: La persecución por motivos políticos se está intensificando, advierte la Misión Independiente, 22 September 2025, [url](#)

<sup>286</sup> UN, UN News, Venezuela: La persecución por motivos políticos se está intensificando, advierte la Misión Independiente, 22 September 2025, [url](#)

<sup>287</sup> UN, FFMV, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 8 September 2025, [url](#), para. 65

<sup>288</sup> UN, FFMV, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 8 September 2025, [url](#), para. 66

<sup>289</sup> UN, FFMV, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 8 September 2025, [url](#), para. 66

<sup>290</sup> AI, Venezuela: Enforced disappearances amount to crimes against humanity, 15 July 2025, [url](#); USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2023: Venezuela, 22 April 2024, [url](#)

<sup>291</sup> RSF, Venezuela: liberated journalist Rory Branker still prosecuted, subject to restrictions, 6 February 2026, [url](#); mnesty International, Venezuela: Enforced disappearances amount to crimes against humanity, 15 July 2025, [url](#)





Sources indicated that extortion by state security forces is widespread and increasing.<sup>292</sup> A joint investigation by Alianza Rebelde Investiga (ARI) and Connectas described how members of the PNB took over extortion schemes in the Cota 905 neighbourhood after dismantling the powerful Koki gang in 2021, targeting local businesses and engaging in arbitrary detentions and the planting of incriminating evidence to extort detainees and their families.<sup>293</sup> Other reports noted that security forces extort individuals in exchange for releasing them without charges<sup>294</sup> or for avoiding the fabrication of serious offences such as 'treason'.<sup>295</sup> Demands reportedly range from 300<sup>296</sup> to 50 000 USD.<sup>297</sup> The UNFFMV documented the case of a detainee who paid 3 500 USD to the head of a DGCIM office to secure his release.<sup>298</sup> Allegations also include sexual extortion of women in exchange for release or improved detention conditions.<sup>299</sup> Sources further indicated that security forces detain relatives of wanted individuals to pressure them into surrendering.<sup>300</sup> The UNFFMV cited the case of a social activist whose spouse was detained for this purpose.<sup>301</sup>

Local news source NTN24 reported an extortion scheme inside the Helicoide prison, operated by PNB officers: individuals detained at PNB checkpoints in Caracas for minor or arbitrary reasons were transferred to the Helicoide, where fear of the facility was used to coerce payments, reportedly starting around 6 000 USD, to avoid harsher cells or referral to the Prosecutor's Office.<sup>302</sup> Officers searched detainees' phones, applied psychological pressure, and instructed families to bring cash.<sup>303</sup> Detainees were then forced to record videos stating they had been treated properly.<sup>304</sup> Officers concealed their identities, and the scheme reportedly expanded after July 2024. Several victims said they gathered money out of fear, and some subsequently left the country.<sup>305</sup>

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<sup>292</sup> Transparencia Venezuela, The faces of extortion in Venezuela 2024, 2025, [url](#), p. 10; UN, FFMV, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 8 September 2025, [url](#), paras. 40-41

<sup>293</sup> ARI and Connectas, Extorsión uniformada: Los policías que someten a la Cota 905, 8 August 2023, [url](#)

<sup>294</sup> UN, FFMV, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 8 September 2025, [url](#), para. 40; Transparencia Venezuela, The faces of extortion in Venezuela 2024, 2025, [url](#), p. 10

<sup>295</sup> Transparencia Venezuela, The faces of extortion in Venezuela 2024, 2025, [url](#), p. 10

<sup>296</sup> Transparencia Venezuela, The faces of extortion in Venezuela 2024, 2025, [url](#), p. 10

<sup>297</sup> UN, FFMV, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 8 September 2025, [url](#), para. 40

<sup>298</sup> UN, FFMV, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 8 September 2025, [url](#), para. 40

<sup>299</sup> UN, FFMV, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 8 September 2025, [url](#), para. 41; USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2023: Venezuela, 22 April 2024, [url](#)

<sup>300</sup> UN, FFMV, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 8 September 2025, [url](#), para. 42; El País, Los militares y sus familiares son los grandes excluidos de la ley de amnistía en Venezuela, 22 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>301</sup> UN, FFMV, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 8 September 2025, [url](#), para. 42

<sup>302</sup> NTN24, Policía Nacional Bolivariana, PNB, dirige en El Helicoide el mayor centro de extorsión en Venezuela, 8 July 2025, [url](#)

<sup>303</sup> NTN24, Policía Nacional Bolivariana, PNB, dirige en El Helicoide el mayor centro de extorsión en Venezuela, 8 July 2025, [url](#)

<sup>304</sup> NTN24, Policía Nacional Bolivariana, PNB, dirige en El Helicoide el mayor centro de extorsión en Venezuela, 8 July 2025, [url](#)

<sup>305</sup> NTN24, Policía Nacional Bolivariana, PNB, dirige en El Helicoide el mayor centro de extorsión en Venezuela, 8 July 2025, [url](#)





Impunity for security forces remained a serious problem; corruption, inadequate training, and limited resources, particularly in opposition-run areas, combined with widespread fear and distrust of police discouraged victims from reporting violent crimes.<sup>306</sup> In many cases, authorities moved quickly at the outset of investigations to assert that state security forces were not responsible for the alleged crimes.<sup>307</sup>

On 12 March 2026, the UNFFMV indicated that several senior government and military officials previously identified as responsible for crimes against humanity continue to hold high-level positions within both the executive branch and the security forces.<sup>308</sup> Sources also indicated that on 20 March 2026, interim president Rodríguez replaced 17 senior military commanders in an effort to consolidate control over the Armed Forces; among the changes was the appointment of a new Minister of Defense to replace General Vladimir Padrino López, who had been appointed by Maduro in 2014 and was one of his staunchest supporters.<sup>309</sup> Rodríguez also introduced additional changes across the armed forces, including new commanders at military bases, brigades, and the military academy.<sup>310</sup>

## 1.7. Monitoring mechanisms

Sources indicated that state surveillance remained widespread,<sup>311</sup> supported by the National Telecommunications Commission (CONATEL, Comisión Nacional de Telecomunicaciones) and the state-run provider CANTV.<sup>312</sup> Surveillance was further enabled by the use of 'cooperating patriots'.<sup>313</sup>

Reports also suggested that the government expanded its capacity for digital surveillance, reflected in the growing number of detentions of individuals for expressing dissent on social media.<sup>314</sup> According to the Digital Forensic Research Lab (DFRLab), an organisation of the Atlantic Council that researches disinformation and digital rights, this type of monitoring

<sup>306</sup> UN, UN News, Venezuela: La persecución por motivos políticos se está intensificando, advierte la Misión Independiente, 22 September 2025, [url](#); USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2023: Venezuela, 22 April 2024, [url](#)

<sup>307</sup> UN, UN News, Venezuela: La persecución por motivos políticos se está intensificando, advierte la Misión Independiente, 22 September 2025, [url](#)

<sup>308</sup> UN, FFMV, Statement by Maria Eloisa Quintero, Expert Member of the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, to the 61st session of the Human Rights Council, 12 March 2026, [url](#). See also: Infobae, Delcy Rodríguez designó a Vladimir Padrino López al frente del Ministerio de Agricultura, 13 April 2026, [url](#)

<sup>309</sup> CNN, Delcy Rodríguez cambia la cúpula militar de Venezuela mientras busca afianzar el control tras la captura de Maduro, 20 March 2026, [url](#); BBC, Venezuelan leader replaces senior military commanders, 20 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>310</sup> CNN, Delcy Rodríguez cambia la cúpula militar de Venezuela mientras busca afianzar el control tras la captura de Maduro, 20 March 2026, [url](#); Infobae, Sacudida militar: Delcy Rodríguez y los primeros 28 cambios en la Fuerza Armada venezolana, 21 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>311</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2026 Country Report — Venezuela, 2026, [url](#), p. 13; USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2023: Venezuela, 22 April 2024, [url](#); Casla Institute, Annual Report 2023-2024 about Crimes Against Humanity, May 2024, [url](#), p. 3; Amaya, telephone interview, 12 May 2026

<sup>312</sup> USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2023: Venezuela, 22 April 2024, [url](#); DFRLab, Los vigilantes en la mira: Tecnologías de vigilancia para el control político en Venezuela, March 2026, [url](#), p. 5

<sup>313</sup> Casla Institute, Annual Report 2023-2024 about Crimes Against Humanity, May 2024, [url](#), p. 3; OVCS, Patriotas Cooperantes: arma invisible para la represión política en Venezuela, 10 July 2023, [url](#)

<sup>314</sup> Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2025: Venezuela, February 2025, [url](#); DFRLab, Los vigilantes en la mira: Tecnologías de vigilancia para el control político en Venezuela, March 2026, [url](#), p. 4



intensified since the July 2024 elections, with authorities using intimidation, detentions, and digital platforms for surveillance and pressure.<sup>315</sup> China continued supplying Maduro-aligned authorities with technology used to monitor citizens' social, political, and economic activities.<sup>316</sup> According to Freedom House, freedom of expression 'is severely constrained in Venezuela, due in part to the deterrent effect of extensive government surveillance'.<sup>317</sup> Amaya indicated that

'the government has collected massive amounts of personal information. Some individuals are not registered in the Sistema Patria but nonetheless appear in it because they are part of the family or interpersonal network of someone who is registered and has listed them in their account. The system contains information on vehicles, homes, employment, the use of subsidies, affiliation with the health-care system, and consumption patterns. In supermarkets, fingerprint scanners were previously used at payment points, requiring customers to provide a fingerprint before completing a purchase, thereby capturing data on what they bought, where, and in what quantities'.<sup>318</sup>

A 26 December 2025 article, published on news source La Gran Aldea titled 'A Crystal Vault', described how the Venezuelan state has reengineered mechanisms of civil control through an expanding digital-identity and data-management architecture that centralises personal information across multiple platforms.<sup>319</sup> Systems such as the Sistema Patria, biometric registration, digital payment and subsidy tools, and interconnected databases allow authorities to collect and cross-reference data on identity, social networks, mobility, consumption, and access to public services; this integrated infrastructure forms a 'Crystal Vault' of citizen information that strengthens state oversight and reduces individual privacy.<sup>320</sup>

Information on surveillance of Venezuelans abroad conducted by Venezuelan diplomatic representations was scarce among the sources consulted within the time constraints of this report. Briceño-León indicated that diplomatic missions do not have enough resources to engage in the mass surveillance of Venezuelans abroad, but that cases of state intelligence agencies deployed abroad for this purpose have been reported.<sup>321</sup> Additional information could not be found among the sources consulted within the time constraints of this report.

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<sup>315</sup> DFRLab, Los vigilantes en la mira: Tecnologías de vigilancia para el control político en Venezuela, March 2026, [url](#), p. 41

<sup>316</sup> USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2023: Venezuela, 22 April 2024, [url](#); DFRLab, Los vigilantes en la mira: Tecnologías de vigilancia para el control político en Venezuela, March 2026, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>317</sup> Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2025: Venezuela, February 2025, [url](#)

<sup>318</sup> Amaya, telephone interview, 12 May 2026

<sup>319</sup> La Gran Aldea, Una bóveda de cristal: la reingeniería del control civil en Venezuela, 26 December 2025, [url](#)

<sup>320</sup> La Gran Aldea, Una bóveda de cristal: la reingeniería del control civil en Venezuela, 26 December 2025, [url](#)

<sup>321</sup> Briceño-León, telephone interview, 28 May 2026



Venezuelan authorities deploy a wide range of surveillance technologies that play a central role in government repression.<sup>322</sup> The mechanisms described in the following paragraphs were among those reported by sources.

### 1.7.1. Applications

The Patria System (Sistema Patria) and VenApp are the principal applications used by the government to monitor and control the population.<sup>323</sup> The Patria System, managed by the Patria Foundation (Fundación Patria) under the Office of the Vice-President,<sup>324</sup> is a digital platform functioning as a centralised mechanism for distributing social assistance.<sup>325</sup> To access benefits and maintain eligibility, citizens must regularly update personal information and complete random surveys on socio-economic conditions and consumer habits.<sup>326</sup> Some of the data collected concern individuals' relationships with relatives, neighbours, friends, and institutions, as well as information on banking transactions; this allows authorities to construct detailed maps of social networks, including connections involving people who are not themselves registered in the Patria System.<sup>327</sup> The platform's website is registered under the ruling PSUV rather than a government agency, further subordinating citizens to party interests.<sup>328</sup>

The Homeland Card (Carnet de la Patria) is an identity document that is linked to the Patria System.<sup>329</sup> It contains a QR code and is required to access government services, including CLAP food boxes.<sup>330</sup> According to the unofficial National Survey on Living Conditions 2025 (Encuesta Nacional sobre Condiciones de Vida, Encovi 2025),<sup>331</sup> approximately 7.63 million households, or 81.7 % of all households, received CLAP food boxes, down from 8.17 million in

<sup>322</sup> DFRLab, Los vigilantes en la mira: Tecnologías de vigilancia para el control político en Venezuela, March 2026, [url](#), p. 4; Freedom House, Carta abierta sobre la violencia política posibilitada por la tecnología en Venezuela, 6 August 2024, [url](#)

<sup>323</sup> DFRLab, Los vigilantes en la mira: Tecnologías de vigilancia para el control político en Venezuela, March 2026, [url](#), p. 36-37; Freedom House, Carta abierta sobre la violencia política posibilitada por la tecnología en Venezuela, 6 August 2024, [url](#); Amaya, telephone interview, 12 May 2026

<sup>324</sup> Freedom House, Carta abierta sobre la violencia política posibilitada por la tecnología en Venezuela, 6 August 2024, [url](#)

<sup>325</sup> DFRLab, Los vigilantes en la mira: Tecnologías de vigilancia para el control político en Venezuela, March 2026, [url](#), p. 36; Freedom House, Carta abierta sobre la violencia política posibilitada por la tecnología en Venezuela, 6 August 2024, [url](#)

<sup>326</sup> DFRLab, Los vigilantes en la mira: Tecnologías de vigilancia para el control político en Venezuela, March 2026, [url](#), p. 36

<sup>327</sup> DFRLab, Los vigilantes en la mira: Tecnologías de vigilancia para el control político en Venezuela, March 2026, [url](#), p. 36

<sup>328</sup> DFRLab, Los vigilantes en la mira: Tecnologías de vigilancia para el control político en Venezuela, March 2026, [url](#), p. 36

<sup>329</sup> USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2023: Venezuela, 22 April 2024, [url](#); DFRLab, Los vigilantes en la mira: Tecnologías de vigilancia para el control político en Venezuela, March 2026, [url](#), p. 36; El País, 'Sistema Patria': a new digital tool for social control in Venezuela, 24 April 2021, [url](#)

<sup>330</sup> DFRLab, Los vigilantes en la mira: Tecnologías de vigilancia para el control político en Venezuela, March 2026, [url](#), pp. 37, 40; El Nacional, El carnet de la patria, extorsión y vigilancia: los avances tecnológicos al servicio del control social en Venezuela, 14 May 2025, [url](#)

<sup>331</sup> The ENCOVI survey is a household survey in Venezuela covering measures such as food security, citizen security, demographics, and others. It is produced by the Universidad Católica Andrés Bello, in Caracas, in the absence of government statistical information. UCAB, ¿Qué es la encovi?, n.d., [url](#). The 2025 survey consisted of a sample of 11 352 households and was conducted between March and June 2025. ENCOVI, Encuesta Nacional sobre Condiciones de Vida 2025, 7 May 2026, [url](#), p. 2



2024.<sup>332</sup> In 2025, CLAP distributions reached 63 % of households classified as 'not poor', 84 % considered 'poor', and 87 % of those in 'extreme poverty'.<sup>333</sup> Citizens' dependence on social programs delivered through the Patria System compels them to register and continually provide personal information.<sup>334</sup>

VenApp is an application created in 2022 for reporting public services problems<sup>335</sup> through geo-localised alerts, such as broken water lines or subway delays.<sup>336</sup> It also functions as a chat-messaging platform.<sup>337</sup> In August 2024, the government introduced changes enabling users to report political protests and dissidents, and in October 2025, President Maduro requested the addition of a feature allowing citizens to report "everything they see, everything they hear".<sup>338</sup> According to DFRLab, VenApp has evolved into a tool of 'collective surveillance' that promotes the 'institutionalisation of reporting on neighbours'.<sup>339</sup>

## 1.7.2. CCTV

Sources indicated that state surveillance and monitoring through CCTV remained 'systematic', supported by advanced facial-recognition and license-plate-detection systems, partly enabled by Chinese technical assistance.<sup>340</sup> Belarus also reportedly supplied software capable of detecting license plates, individuals carrying firearms or knives, abandoned objects, smoke, gatherings, and performing facial recognition and transit monitoring.<sup>341</sup>

The national 911 emergency system, which integrates extensive CCTV networks, was reportedly used to identify and locate dissidents, demonstrators, and opposition members.<sup>342</sup> According to the Ministry of the Interior, more than 7 000 cameras were operational in December 2025, a 78.6 % increase compared to June 2025.<sup>343</sup> CCTV feeds from private spaces such as malls and residential complexes were allegedly incorporated into the 911 network, and the Ministry of Health announced plans to install cameras inside hospitals to monitor patients and healthcare staff and prevent alleged 'acts of sabotage' by the

<sup>332</sup> ENCOVI, Encuesta Nacional sobre Condiciones de Vida 2025, 7 May 2026, [url](#), p. 41

<sup>333</sup> ENCOVI, Encuesta Nacional sobre Condiciones de Vida 2025, 7 May 2026, [url](#), p. 41

<sup>334</sup> DFRLab, Los vigilantes en la mira: Tecnologías de vigilancia para el control político en Venezuela, March 2026, [url](#), p. 36; USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2023: Venezuela, 22 April 2024, [url](#)

<sup>335</sup> Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2025: Venezuela, February 2025, [url](#); Crónica, Maduro ordena crear una app para que los ciudadanos denuncien "todo lo que vean y oigan", 22 October 2025, [url](#)

<sup>336</sup> DFRLab, Venezuela: A Playbook for digital repression, July 2024, [url](#), p. 43

<sup>337</sup> DFRLab, Venezuela: A Playbook for digital repression, July 2024, [url](#), p. 44; CNN, Venezuela's Maduro, fearing US attack, promotes app to report suspect behavior, 5 November 2025, [url](#)

<sup>338</sup> Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2025: Venezuela, February 2025, [url](#); Crónica, Maduro ordena crear una app para que los ciudadanos denuncien "todo lo que vean y oigan", 22 October 2025, [url](#)

<sup>339</sup> DFRLab, Venezuela: A Playbook for digital repression, July 2024, [url](#), p. 44

<sup>340</sup> DFRLab, Los vigilantes en la mira: Tecnologías de vigilancia para el control político en Venezuela, March 2026, [url](#), p. 4; runrunes, Censura, vigilancia y castigo: así se aplica la represión digital en Venezuela, 21 May 2025, [url](#)

<sup>341</sup> DFRLab, Los vigilantes en la mira: Tecnologías de vigilancia para el control político en Venezuela, March 2026, [url](#), p. 23

<sup>342</sup> DFRLab, Los vigilantes en la mira: Tecnologías de vigilancia para el control político en Venezuela, March 2026, [url](#), p. 4; Freedom House, Carta abierta sobre la violencia política posibilitada por la tecnología en Venezuela, 6 August 2024, [url](#)

<sup>343</sup> DFRLab, Los vigilantes en la mira: Tecnologías de vigilancia para el control político en Venezuela, March 2026, [url](#), p. 12



opposition.<sup>344</sup> The mayor of Chacao, Caracas, Miranda state, stated that the municipality, covering 13 square kilometres with a population density of 3 inhabitants per square kilometre, had more than 310 cameras equipped for facial recognition and license-plate detection, with the capacity to identify "irregular events" such as demonstrations.<sup>345</sup> Sources consulted by DFRLab indicated that CCTV systems are reportedly disabled during police operations.<sup>346</sup>

### 1.7.3. Telecommunications and cybersurveillance

DFRLab indicated that the interception of telecommunications is considered the 'most intrusive component' of the state's surveillance apparatus.<sup>347</sup> CANTV, the state-run telecommunications provider, is reportedly used by authorities to monitor targets of interest, facilitated by the lack of judicial oversight and the subordination of the justice system to the executive, which eases the issuance of interception orders.<sup>348</sup> In 2021, telephone company Telefónica reported more than 1.5 million communication interceptions, which observers described as evidence of 'mass surveillance' by authorities.<sup>349</sup> Reports also described instances in which state security agents detained citizens to inspect the contents of their mobile phones, including photos, social-media accounts, and private chats.<sup>350</sup> CONATEL was likewise accused of monitoring communications and internet traffic, including activity on social-media platforms and messaging applications.<sup>351</sup>

## 1.8. Aftermath of US intervention

At the onset of his second presidency, President Trump revived a 'maximum pressure' strategy towards Venezuela.<sup>352</sup> He accused the Venezuelan government of large-scale cocaine trafficking, charged Maduro with leading the Cartel of the Suns (Cartel de los Soles), designated that group and Tren de Aragua as Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTOs), issued a secret directive in August 2025 authorising Pentagon action against select Latin American

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<sup>344</sup> DFRLab, Los vigilantes en la mira: Tecnologías de vigilancia para el control político en Venezuela, March 2026, [url](#), p. 12

<sup>345</sup> DFRLab, Los vigilantes en la mira: Tecnologías de vigilancia para el control político en Venezuela, March 2026, [url](#), p. 15

<sup>346</sup> DFRLab, Los vigilantes en la mira: Tecnologías de vigilancia para el control político en Venezuela, March 2026, [url](#), p. 15

<sup>347</sup> DFRLab, Los vigilantes en la mira: Tecnologías de vigilancia para el control político en Venezuela, March 2026, [url](#), p. 5

<sup>348</sup> DFRLab, Los vigilantes en la mira: Tecnologías de vigilancia para el control político en Venezuela, March 2026, [url](#), p. 5

<sup>349</sup> AFP, "Vigilancia masiva" en Venezuela: más de un millón de teléfonos "pinchados", 24 June 2022, [url](#); DFRLab, Los vigilantes en la mira: Tecnologías de vigilancia para el control político en Venezuela, March 2026, [url](#), p. 5

<sup>350</sup> Freedom House, Carta abierta sobre la violencia política posibilitada por la tecnología en Venezuela, 6 August 2024, [url](#)

<sup>351</sup> Freedom House, Carta abierta sobre la violencia política posibilitada por la tecnología en Venezuela, 6 August 2024, [url](#)

<sup>352</sup> CFR, U.S. Confrontation With Venezuela, 18 February 2026, [url](#); CNN, Qué ha cambiado en la política de Trump hacia Venezuela desde su primer mandato (y cómo eso explica las actuales tensiones en el Caribe), 14 October 2025, [url](#)



cartels, doubled the US bounty on Maduro to 50 million USD, and deployed a naval task force toward Venezuelan waters.<sup>353</sup> For information on these groups, see section [2.1](#) Armed groups.

In August 2025, the US began building up a large naval presence in the Caribbean, stating that its objective was to combat drug-trafficking networks allegedly linked to Venezuela and President Maduro,<sup>354</sup> including Tren de Aragua and the Cartel of the Suns.<sup>355</sup> By the end of March 2026, US forces had carried out 43 strikes in both the Caribbean and the eastern Pacific against boats allegedly transporting narcotics, resulting in 160 deaths.<sup>356</sup>

On 3 January 2026, the US carried out a military operation in Caracas aimed at capturing President Nicolás Maduro and his wife, Cilia Flores.<sup>357</sup> Following the operation, US President Trump stated that his administration would govern Venezuela until a "safe, proper and judicious transition" could occur and that the US would assume control over the sale of Venezuelan oil.<sup>358</sup> The number of fatalities remains unclear, though sources indicated that at least 47 members of Venezuelan security forces and 32 Cuban military personnel were killed.<sup>359</sup> On 7 January 2026, US Secretary of State announced that a three-phase plan for Venezuela, focused on stabilisation, recovery, and transition, would be implemented, accompanied by significant sanctions relief and a restructuring of trade relations.<sup>360</sup>

Both Nicolás Maduro and Cilia Flores were transported to New York, where they were indicted on four charges originally filed in 2020: 'Narco-Terrorism Conspiracy', 'Cocaine Importation Conspiracy', 'Possession of Machineguns and Destructive Devices', and 'Conspiracy to Possess Machineguns and Destructive Devices'.<sup>361</sup> As of 4 June 2026, no trial date had been set.<sup>362</sup>

On 5 March 2026, Vice-President Delcy Rodríguez was sworn in by the National Assembly as 'interim President', replacing Nicolás Maduro.<sup>363</sup> Although the structure of Maduro's

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<sup>353</sup> CFR, U.S. Confrontation With Venezuela, 18 February 2026, [url](#); Time, What's Happening With the U.S. and Venezuela, Explained, 8 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>354</sup> Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2026, Venezuela, March 2026, [url](#); New York Times (The), Trump Administration Authorizes Covert C.I.A. Action in Venezuela, 15 October 2025, [url](#)

<sup>355</sup> IISS, After the fall: what Maduro's capture means for criminal geopolitics, 7 January 2026, [url](#); CBS, U.S. to designate Venezuela's Cartel de los Soles as a foreign terrorist organization as USS Gerald R. Ford aircraft carrier arrives in Caribbean, 17 November 2025, [url](#)

<sup>356</sup> International Crisis Group, The Venezuela Paradigm: Is Trump's Model Intervention a Mirage?, 27 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>357</sup> BBC, Who is running Venezuela after US forces seized Maduro?, 26 March 2026, [url](#); PBS, 'I Think We're Under Attack': Inside Caracas the Night the U.S. Captured Nicolás Maduro, 10 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>358</sup> BBC, Who is running Venezuela after US forces seized Maduro?, 26 March 2026, [url](#); Guardian (The), Trump says US will 'run' Venezuela after Nicolás Maduro captured and taken to New York, 4 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>359</sup> Anadolu Agency, Venezuela confirms 47 troops killed in US operation to capture Maduro, 17 February 2026, [url](#); SWI swissinfo.ch, El ministro de Defensa venezolano informa que 47 militares murieron en el ataque de EE.UU., 16 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>360</sup> WOLA, Two months without Maduro in Venezuela: Democratic transition or authoritarian adaptation?, 11 March 2026, [url](#); Reuters, Rubio says US plan for Venezuela is stability, recovery, then transition, 7 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>361</sup> US, United States of America v. Nicolás Maduro Moros, Diosdado Cabello Rondón, Hugo Armando Carvajal Barrios, a/k/a "El Pollo", Clíver Antonio Alcalá Cordones, Luciano Marín Arango, a/k/a "Ivan Marquez", and Seuxis Paucis Hernández Solarte, a/ka/ "Jesús Santrich", 5 March 2020, [url](#)

<sup>362</sup> Reuters, Venezuela's Maduro adds Sean 'Diddy' Combs' lawyer to defense team, 4 June 2026, [url](#)

<sup>363</sup> CNN, Delcy Rodríguez asume formalmente como presidenta encargada y rechaza "agresión militar ilegítima" contra Venezuela, 5 January 2026, [url](#); El País, Delcy Rodríguez se instala en el poder en una Venezuela sin Maduro y a la sombra de Trump, 5 January 2026, [url](#)



authoritarian government remained in place,<sup>364</sup> sources indicated that since Maduro's capture, interim President Rodríguez has distanced herself from his style of governance and has cooperated closely with the US.<sup>365</sup> On the same day, 5 March 2026, the US and Venezuela re-established diplomatic relations after seven years.<sup>366</sup> On 8 March 2026, President Trump recognised Delcy Rodríguez as 'President'.<sup>367</sup>

Sources indicated that since becoming interim President, Delcy Rodríguez has undertaken a series of changes within the executive branch, the military, and the economic apparatus.<sup>368</sup> On 19 March 2026, Rodríguez removed Defence Minister Vladimir López Padrino and appointed General Gustavo González López as his replacement.<sup>369</sup> The following day, 20 March 2026, Rodríguez replaced several senior military commanders.<sup>370</sup> General González López, who remains on the US sanctions list, previously served as director of the Bolivarian National Intelligence Service (SEBIN, Servicio Bolivariano de Inteligencia Nacional), an agency implicated in state repression.<sup>371</sup> For additional information on SEBIN, see section [1.6 State security forces](#). Interim President Rodríguez also replaced the ministers of Electric Energy, Housing, Transportation, Employment, Culture, and University Education, and introduced changes within the General Directorate of Military Counterintelligence (DGCIM, Dirección General de Contrainteligencia Militar) and the Presidential Guard.<sup>372</sup> On 29 April 2026, Cabello rejected calls for new presidential and parliamentary elections, stating that they would be held 'when the time is right'.<sup>373</sup>

The AtlasIntel and Bloomberg survey found that 52.2 % of respondents believed civil liberties had expanded in the country following the US intervention, while 30.4 % felt they had diminished.<sup>374</sup> Regarding democratic conditions, 38.9 % of respondents said Venezuela was becoming 'a little more democratic' and 19.1 % 'much more democratic', compared with 22 %

<sup>364</sup> WOLA, Two months without Maduro in Venezuela: Democratic transition or authoritarian adaptation?, 11 March 2026, [url](#); NTN24, "Aunque Nicolás Maduro no está, la estructura del autoritarismo continúa intacta": Rafael Uzcátegui advierte 'autoimpunidad' del régimen de Venezuela con la Ley de Amnistía, 20 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>365</sup> BBC, Venezuelan leader replaces senior military commanders, 20 March 2026, [url](#); El País, Venezuela forgoes about Maduro and starts down an irreversible path, 23 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>366</sup> WOLA, Two months without Maduro in Venezuela: Democratic transition or authoritarian adaptation?, 11 March 2026, [url](#); International Crisis Group, The Venezuela Paradigm: Is Trump's Model Intervention a Mirage?, 27 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>367</sup> WOLA, Two months without Maduro in Venezuela: Democratic transition or authoritarian adaptation?, 11 March 2026, [url](#); International Crisis Group, The Venezuela Paradigm: Is Trump's Model Intervention a Mirage?, 27 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>368</sup> DW, Delcy Rodríguez destituye a embajador de Maduro ante la ONU, 25 March 2026, [url](#); Agencia EFE, Rodríguez nombra un nuevo ministro de Comercio Exterior y a embajadora ante la ONU, 25 March 2025, [url](#)

<sup>369</sup> FDD, Interim Venezuelan president ousts defense chief as Washington makes limited progress in Caracas, 26 March 2026, [url](#); CNN, Del SEBIN y la Guardia de Delcy Rodríguez al Ministerio de Defensa de Venezuela: quién es Gustavo González López, 19 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>370</sup> FDD, Interim Venezuelan president ousts defense chief as Washington makes limited progress in Caracas, 26 March 2026, [url](#); CNN, Del SEBIN y la Guardia de Delcy Rodríguez al Ministerio de Defensa de Venezuela: quién es Gustavo González López, 19 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>371</sup> BBC, Venezuelan leader replaces senior military commanders, 20 March 2026, [url](#); CNN, Del SEBIN y la Guardia de Delcy Rodríguez al Ministerio de Defensa de Venezuela: quién es Gustavo González López, 19 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>372</sup> El Pitazo, Estos son los seis cambios ministeriales que hizo Delcy Rodríguez el 18 de marzo, 19 March 2026, [url](#); Agencia EFE, Designados nuevos jefes de la Guardia de Honor Presidencial y la DGCIM, 18 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>373</sup> Efecto Cocuyo, Cabello insiste a la oposición: ¿Para qué quieren elecciones mañana? ¿Para que no reconozcan el resultado?, 29 April 2026, [url](#); Semana, Diosdado Cabello vuelve a rechazar posibles elecciones en Venezuela: "¿Para qué? ¿Para que no reconozcan el resultado?", 29 April 2026, [url](#)

<sup>374</sup> AtlasIntel and Bloomberg, Latam Pulse Venezuela, March 2026, [url](#), p. 32





who stated that the country was 'not democratic at all'.<sup>375</sup> Sources noted that, after the detention of Maduro, there is greater freedom in civic space and, to some extent, voice dissent.<sup>376</sup> Amaya noted that political parties and civil society organisations have retaken public activities, resuming field work, and publishing reports, and that participation in protests has also increased, but emphasised that the risk has not disappeared, as the repressive apparatus remains intact.<sup>377</sup> For additional information, see section [3.1. Political opponents and activists, and human rights defenders.](#)

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<sup>375</sup> AtlasIntel and Bloomberg, Latam Pulse Venezuela, March 2026, [url](#), p. 32

<sup>376</sup> Amaya, telephone interview, 12 May 2026; Briceño-León, telephone interview, 13 May 2026

<sup>377</sup> Amaya, telephone interview, 12 May 2026



## 2. Security situation

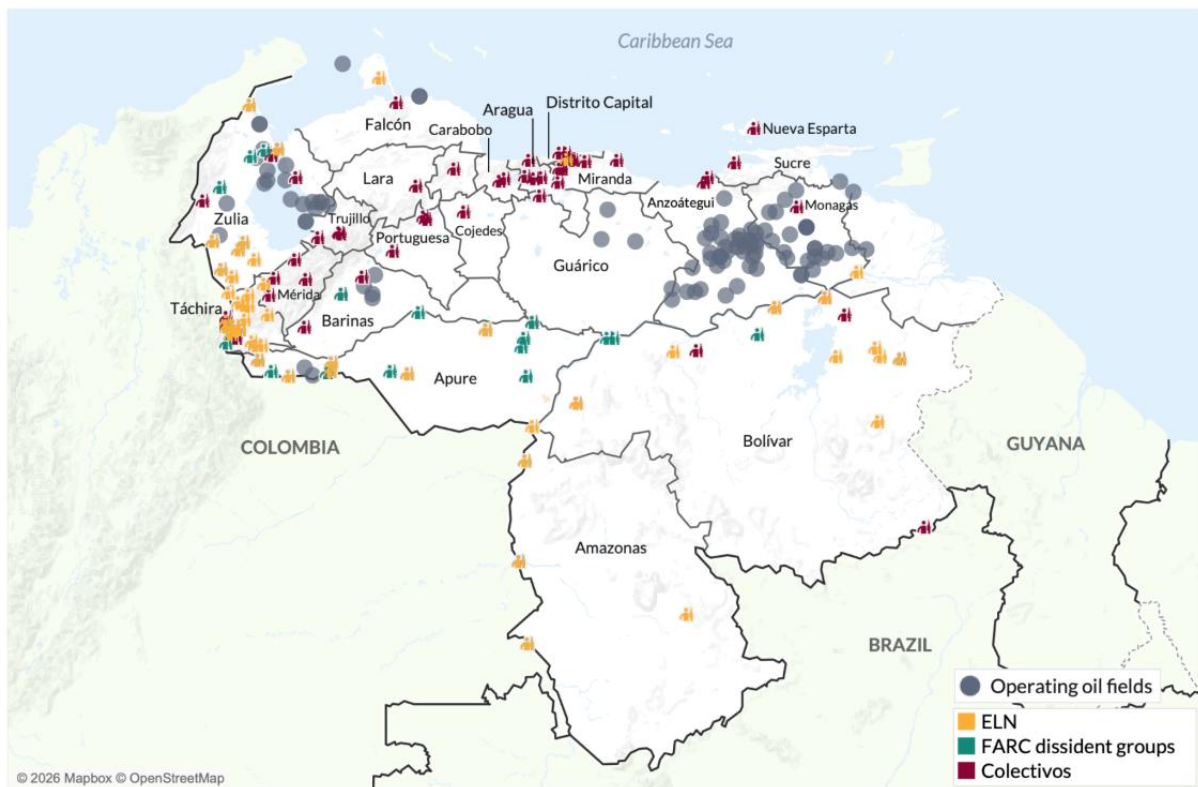
### 2.1. Armed groups

There is a wide range of criminal actors operating in Venezuela, including FARC dissident groups, the ELN, and a number of Colombian paramilitary successor organisations.<sup>378</sup>

Domestic structures include *megabandas*, notably the Tren de Aragua and Tren del Llano, alongside *sistemas (sindicatos mineros)*, *pranes*, and numerous regional or local gangs.<sup>379</sup>

Approximately 18 000 smaller gangs are estimated to operate across the country, many of which provide logistical, territorial, or operational support to larger criminal organisations, including the *megabandas*.<sup>380</sup>

ACLED provides a map of the presence of armed groups in Venezuela from October 2025:



Map 2: Presence of armed groups in Venezuela, October 2025.<sup>381</sup>

<sup>378</sup> Transparencia Venezuela, The faces of extortion in Venezuela 2024, March 2025, [url](#), p. 17; New York Times (The), Why It's Hard to Run Venezuela, 18 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>379</sup> Transparencia Venezuela, The faces of extortion in Venezuela 2024, March 2025, [url](#), p. 17; New York Times (The), Why It's Hard to Run Venezuela, 18 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>380</sup> El Debate, La red criminal que sostiene a Maduro en Venezuela: megabandas, pandillas y cartels, 12 April 2025, [url](#)

<sup>381</sup> In ACLED, Q&A: How stable is post-Maduro Venezuela?, 12 January 2026, [url](#)

### 2.1.1. *Colectivos*

*Colectivos* are pro-government paramilitary organisations<sup>382</sup> accused of carrying out widespread abuses, often in coordination with state security forces, against protesters and political dissidents.<sup>383</sup> Over time, they have consolidated political and social control in key neighbourhoods, preventing residents from protesting and pressuring them to vote for pro-government candidates.<sup>384</sup> Some *colectivos* reportedly conducted drills in late 2025 in preparation for a potential foreign invasion.<sup>385</sup>

Originally formed under Chávez as ideologically driven groups financed and armed by the state, *colectivos* have evolved into paramilitary structures that combine diminishing state support with increasing involvement in criminal activities to sustain their operations.<sup>386</sup> Their close ties to police, military, and political actors have granted them access to subsidised food programmes, enabling them to divert low-cost goods and resell them at higher prices in the areas they control.<sup>387</sup> *Colectivos* also maintain strong political connections with PSUV officials, from councillors and mayors to governors and the Minister of the Interior,<sup>388</sup> and in some cases act as intermediaries, brokering mutually beneficial arrangements due to their ability to influence local elections by directing residents to support specific candidates in exchange for favours.<sup>389</sup> For example, Caracas Mayor Carmen Meléndez has reportedly collaborated closely with the *colectivos* Tres Raíces and La Piedrita, which campaigned for her in return for concessions and contracts.<sup>390</sup> Amaya gave the view that

'colectivos are not homogeneous; they do not operate as a single unified organisation and conflicts can arise among them. What is consistent, however, is the fluid communication between *colectivos* and local authorities, as well as the integration that exists between civil and military authorities and these groups. It is therefore unlikely that a core colectivo based in Mérida would communicate with one in Miranda, but each maintains communication with authorities in its respective locality, and authorities do communicate with each other. The relationship is predominantly vertical rather than horizontal, although

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<sup>382</sup> El Mundo, El silencio y el miedo a los paramilitares chavistas se mezclan en las calles de Venezuela: "Estamos asustados, no sabemos qué va a pasar", 5 January 2026, [url](#); Clarín, Las bandas paramilitares, otra vez al acecho en las calles venezolanas, 5 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>383</sup> HRW, World Report 2026: Venezuela, 2026, [url](#); AI, The State of the World's Human Rights: Venezuela, 28 April 2025, [url](#), p. 395

<sup>384</sup> InSight Crime, The Colectivos' Role in the Struggle for Power in Post-Maduro Venezuela, 9 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>385</sup> InSight Crime, The Colectivos' Role in the Struggle for Power in Post-Maduro Venezuela, 9 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>386</sup> InSight Crime, The Colectivos' Role in the Struggle for Power in Post-Maduro Venezuela, 9 January 2026, [url](#); El Periódico, Colectivos armados, el factor decisivo en la reconfiguración del poder chavista tras la caída de Maduro, 14 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>387</sup> InSight Crime, The Colectivos' Role in the Struggle for Power in Post-Maduro Venezuela, 9 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>388</sup> InSight Crime, The Colectivos' Role in the Struggle for Power in Post-Maduro Venezuela, 9 January 2026, [url](#); El Periódico, Colectivos armados, el factor decisivo en la reconfiguración del poder chavista tras la caída de Maduro, 14 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>389</sup> InSight Crime, The Colectivos' Role in the Struggle for Power in Post-Maduro Venezuela, 9 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>390</sup> InSight Crime, The Colectivos' Role in the Struggle for Power in Post-Maduro Venezuela, 9 January 2026, [url](#); El Periódico, Colectivos armados, el factor decisivo en la reconfiguración del poder chavista tras la caída de Maduro, 14 January 2026, [url](#)



communication may occur between authorities even when it does not occur between *colectivos*'.<sup>391</sup>

*Colectivos* are reportedly under the influence of Interior Minister Diosdado Cabello,<sup>392</sup> and following the fall of Maduro, they emerged as key actors due to their alignment with Cabello.<sup>393</sup> Sources indicated that *colectivos* continued operating after Maduro's capture,<sup>394</sup> including by patrolling streets,<sup>395</sup> restricting civic space, and harassing or intimidating independent media, civil society organisations, and political actors.<sup>396</sup>

A small number of *colectivos* retain the ideological roots of the community movements from which they emerged; most now prioritise revenue generation by controlling territory, operating local businesses, and negotiating arrangements with political actors.<sup>397</sup> In the areas they dominate, *colectivos* have constructed a powerful system of local governance: they enforce rules and punishments within the communities they oversee, and they manage the distribution of subsidised food and certain public services, consolidating both social control and economic influence.<sup>398</sup>

*Colectivos* also engage in a range of criminal activities,<sup>399</sup> operating with near-total impunity due to their political protection.<sup>400</sup> Crimes attributed to these groups include kidnapping, robbery, extortion,<sup>401</sup> contract killings, small-scale drug distribution, and the illicit sale of subsidised food.<sup>402</sup> They additionally establish informal checkpoints within neighbourhoods, where they detain passersby and search their mobile phones for content deemed incriminating or critical of the government.<sup>403</sup>

*Colectivos* are heavily armed and well trained.<sup>404</sup> The strongest *colectivos* are found in the 23 de Enero neighbourhood of Caracas, located near the presidential palace; many of these groups have aligned under the Sergio Rodríguez Revolutionary Collectives National Front (Frente Nacional de Colectivos Revolucionarios Sergio Rodríguez).<sup>405</sup>

<sup>391</sup> Amaya, telephone interview,

<sup>392</sup> Independent, Inside the Venezuelan refugee shanty towns where post-Trump hope is dangerous, 8 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>393</sup> InSight Crime, The *Colectivos*' Role in the Struggle for Power in Post-Maduro Venezuela, 9 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>394</sup> DW, Venezuela: radiografía a los cien días de Delcy Rodríguez, 13 April 2026, [url](#); UN, FFMV, Statement by Maria Eloisa Quintero, Expert Member of the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, to the 61st session of the Human Rights Council, 12 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>395</sup> DW, Venezuela: radiografía a los cien días de Delcy Rodríguez, 13 April 2026, [url](#)

<sup>396</sup> UN, FFMV, Statement by Maria Eloisa Quintero, Expert Member of the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, to the 61st session of the Human Rights Council, 12 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>397</sup> InSight Crime, The *Colectivos*' Role in the Struggle for Power in Post-Maduro Venezuela, 9 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>398</sup> InSight Crime, The *Colectivos*' Role in the Struggle for Power in Post-Maduro Venezuela, 9 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>399</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2026 Country Report — Venezuela, 2026, [url](#), p. 6; InSight Crime, The *Colectivos*' Role in the Struggle for Power in Post-Maduro Venezuela, 9 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>400</sup> InSight Crime, The *Colectivos*' Role in the Struggle for Power in Post-Maduro Venezuela, 9 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>401</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2026 Country Report — Venezuela, 2026, [url](#), p. 6; El Periódico, *Colectivos armados, el factor decisivo en la reconfiguración del poder chavista tras la caída de Maduro*, 14 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>402</sup> InSight Crime, The *Colectivos*' Role in the Struggle for Power in Post-Maduro Venezuela, 9 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>403</sup> Time, Fear Grips Venezuela Amid a New Wave of Repression, 13 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>404</sup> InSight Crime, The *Colectivos*' Role in the Struggle for Power in Post-Maduro Venezuela, 9 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>405</sup> InSight Crime, The *Colectivos*' Role in the Struggle for Power in Post-Maduro Venezuela, 9 January 2026, [url](#)



## 2.1.2. *Megabandas*

Venezuela is home to numerous *megabandas*, defined as large, heavily armed criminal organisations typically comprising between 100 and 1 000 members.<sup>406</sup> These groups engage in a wide range of criminal activities, including drug trafficking, extortion, kidnapping, and contract killings.<sup>407</sup> Approximately nineteen *megabandas* have been identified nationwide, among them the Tren de Aragua, the Coqui organisation based in the Cota 905 neighbourhood of Caracas, the Tren del Llano, the Wuilexis group in Petare,<sup>408</sup> and the Carlos Capa organisation in Miranda.<sup>409</sup>

The origins of *megabandas* vary among sources. News source El Debate indicated that *megabandas* emerged out of government-backed 'Peace Zones' and Bolivarian circles, structures originally created to suppress protests but which later evolved into autonomous armed groups that now pose a significant threat to the state.<sup>410</sup> Casla Institute indicated that *megabandas*, which usually have the word "tren" (or 'train') as part of their name, originated around 2006, when existing criminal groups embedded themselves in pro-government railway unions to obtain benefits and extort workers; as they accumulated power, they began stealing materials and diverting state resources. When corruption halted the flow of funds, these groups had already evolved into heavily armed mega-gangs with territorial control and expanded into high-profit criminal activities such as kidnapping, extortion, drug trafficking, human trafficking, and arms smuggling.<sup>411</sup> El Nacional similarly reported that over time, these organisations have developed characteristics resembling insurgent or even terrorist entities, including the use of high-powered weapons, territorial control, regulation of community life, and the assumption of functions typically carried out by state institutions.<sup>412</sup> *Megabandas* apply principles associated with irregular warfare, such as blending into the civilian population, relying on local communities for protection, and building support networks through coercion or selective assistance.<sup>413</sup> These tactics make them difficult to identify and dismantle, and in many areas they have effectively become the de facto local government.<sup>414</sup>

Tren de Aragua is widely regarded as Venezuela's most powerful homegrown criminal organisation.<sup>415</sup> Although authorities announced in July 2024 that the group had been

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<sup>406</sup> El Debate, La red criminal que sostiene a Maduro en Venezuela: megabandas, pandillas y cartels, 12 April 2025, [url](#); EUISS, After Maduro: The future of Venezuela and the Caribbean, 7 January 2026, [url](#); InSight Crime, Carlos Luis Revete, alias 'El Koki', 8 February 2022, [url](#)

<sup>407</sup> EUISS, After Maduro: The future of Venezuela and the Caribbean, 7 January 2026, [url](#); InSight Crime, Carlos Luis Revete, alias 'El Koki', 8 February 2022, [url](#)

<sup>408</sup> El Debate, La red criminal que sostiene a Maduro en Venezuela: megabandas, pandillas y cartels, 12 April 2025, [url](#)

<sup>409</sup> InSight Crime, Banda de Carlos Capa, 10 February 2025, [url](#)

<sup>410</sup> El Debate, La red criminal que sostiene a Maduro en Venezuela: megabandas, pandillas y cartels, 12 April 2025, [url](#); Transparencia Venezuela, Tren de Aragua: Criminal network without borders, April 2025, [url](#), p. 7

<sup>411</sup> Casla Institute, Informe anual 2024-2025 sobre crímenes de lesa humanidad, May 2025, [url](#), p. 12

<sup>412</sup> El Nacional, Lecciones de Bukele para Venezuela, 17 April 2026, [url](#)

<sup>413</sup> El Nacional, Lecciones de Bukele para Venezuela, 17 April 2026, [url](#)

<sup>414</sup> El Nacional, Lecciones de Bukele para Venezuela, 17 April 2026, [url](#); International Crisis Group, Unpacking the Use of U.S. Wartime Powers against a Criminal "Invasion", 26 March 2025, [url](#)

<sup>415</sup> InSight Crime, Tren de Aragua, 25 April 2025, [url](#); International Crisis Group, Unpacking the Use of U.S. Wartime Powers against a Criminal "Invasion", 26 March 2025, [url](#)



dismantled, including the shutdown of its command centre in Tocorón Prison, Lara state,<sup>416</sup> multiple sources reported that Tren de Aragua and other *megabandas* continue to operate across the country.<sup>417</sup> Tren de Aragua is accused of crimes including express kidnappings, extortion,<sup>418</sup> bribery of public officials, killings,<sup>419</sup> human smuggling, illegal mining, violent robbery, and money laundering.<sup>420</sup> Tren de Aragua disputes the control of informal border crossings with Colombia with the ELN.<sup>421</sup>

Tren de Aragua has diversified its criminal portfolio and expanded beyond Venezuela, aided by large-scale emigration.<sup>422</sup> Cells have been identified in Colombia, Peru, and Chile, with sporadic presence in Ecuador, Bolivia, and Brazil.<sup>423</sup> Additional activity has been reported in the US, Mexico, Panama, Bolivia, and Spain.<sup>424</sup> According to Transparencia Venezuela, Tren de Aragua has attempted to establish operations in Spain involving migrant exploitation, human trafficking, and extortion.<sup>425</sup> In March 2024, the brother of the group's leader, 'Niño Guerrero', was detained in Barcelona and later extradited to Venezuela; he was reportedly attempting to build and expand the gang's criminal structure in Europe.<sup>426</sup> Sources also reported that, in February 2024, former Venezuelan Lieutenant Ronald Ojeda, who fled Venezuela in 2017 and received asylum in Chile, was kidnapped and killed in Santiago de Chile by members of Tren de Aragua; his killing was reportedly ordered by Diosdado Cabello.<sup>427</sup> In February 2025, the US designated Tren de Aragua as a 'Foreign Terrorist Organization' (FTO).<sup>428</sup> Alleged members have been detained in the United States and transferred to El Salvador.<sup>429</sup>

Estimates of the group's size vary widely, from 'hundreds' to 'several thousand' recruits, reportedly under the command of Héctor Rusthenford Guerrero Flores, known as 'Niño Guerrero', and the organisation is widely recognised for its 'extreme violence'.<sup>430</sup>

<sup>416</sup> SWI swissinfo.ch, Más extorsión y menos homicidios, la inseguridad se transforma en Venezuela, 11 July 2024, [url](#)

<sup>417</sup> SWI swissinfo.ch, Más extorsión y menos homicidios, la inseguridad se transforma en Venezuela, 11 July 2024, [url](#)

<sup>418</sup> SWI swissinfo.ch, Más extorsión y menos homicidios, la inseguridad se transforma en Venezuela, 11 July 2024, [url](#); USDOS, Designation of International Cartels, 20 February 2025, [url](#)

<sup>419</sup> USDOS, Designation of International Cartels, 20 February 2025, [url](#)

<sup>420</sup> Transparencia Venezuela, Tren de Aragua: Criminal network without borders, April 2025, [url](#), p. 3

<sup>421</sup> Transparencia Venezuela, Tren de Aragua: Criminal network without borders, April 2025, [url](#), p. 11

<sup>422</sup> IISS, After the fall: what Maduro's capture means for criminal geopolitics, 7 January 2026, [url](#); International Crisis Group, Unpacking the Use of U.S. Wartime Powers against a Criminal "Invasion", 26 March 2025, [url](#)

<sup>423</sup> USDOS, Designation of International Cartels, 20 February 2025, [url](#). See also: International Crisis Group, Unpacking the Use of U.S. Wartime Powers against a Criminal "Invasion", 26 March 2025, [url](#)

<sup>424</sup> Transparencia Venezuela, Tren de Aragua: Criminal network without borders, April 2025, [url](#), pp. 3, 16

<sup>425</sup> Transparencia Venezuela, Tren de Aragua: Criminal network without borders, April 2025, [url](#), p. 36

<sup>426</sup> Transparencia Venezuela, Tren de Aragua: Criminal network without borders, April 2025, [url](#), p. 36

<sup>427</sup> CNN, Un año del caso Ronald Ojeda: qué se sabe del secuestro y asesinato del exmilitar venezolano en Chile, 21 February 2025, [url](#); CIPER, Estas son las evidencias que apuntan al gobierno venezolano en la investigación por el asesinato del exteniente Ronald Ojeda, 29 December 2025, [url](#)

<sup>428</sup> USDOS, Designation of International Cartels, 20 February 2025, [url](#)

<sup>429</sup> ABC, The US wants to control Venezuela's finances. These armed groups could make it difficult, 29 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>430</sup> International Crisis Group, Unpacking the Use of U.S. Wartime Powers against a Criminal "Invasion", 26 March 2025, [url](#); Transparencia Venezuela, Tren de Aragua: Criminal network without borders, April 2025, [url](#), p. 8





Transparencia Venezuela estimates that Tren de Aragua has approximately 4 000 members.<sup>431</sup>

According to Transparencia Venezuela, the group's internal structure is headed by the *pran* (top leader in prison), followed by lieutenants who act as his 'ministers'.<sup>432</sup> Beneath them are the *luceros de la alta*, closest to the leadership, and the *luceros de la baja*, who interact more directly with the general prison population.<sup>433</sup> The *escuderos* serve as the *pran's* protectors, while the *gariteros* are responsible for surveillance.<sup>434</sup> Outside Venezuela, Tren de Aragua has adopted more 'flexible', network-based organisational models, with each cell managing its own criminal activities while maintaining coordination to avoid conflict and maximise profits.<sup>435</sup> The command structure inside Venezuela, however, continues to set the terms of alliances with local gangs abroad and provides resources such as weapons, money, and contacts, retaining the capacity to issue orders.<sup>436</sup>

Branches of Tren de Aragua adapt to local conflict dynamics.<sup>437</sup> In Brazil, the group collaborates with and provides services to the country's largest criminal organisation, the Primeiro Comando da Capital (PCC).<sup>438</sup> In Colombia, by contrast, Tren de Aragua has faced resistance from established armed actors, including the ELN, FARC dissident groups, and the AGC.<sup>439</sup>

Tren del Llano is one of the first *megabandas* emerging in Venezuela and currently operates in the area straddling the border between Guárico and Miranda states.<sup>440</sup> Following the killing of one of its leaders by state forces in 2021, the group withdrew from Sucre state.<sup>441</sup> Tren del Llano reportedly refused to align itself with the Maduro government and instead negotiated an agreement with Tren de Aragua to respect each other's territories.<sup>442</sup> The gang's primary activity is the extortion of merchants and agricultural producers in the region.<sup>443</sup> Sources reported that seven members of the Tren del Llano were killed during a police operation in Guárico State. The cell was accused of carrying out kidnappings and extortion targeting farm owners and businesses in the area.<sup>444</sup>

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<sup>431</sup> Transparencia Venezuela, Tren de Aragua: Criminal network without borders, April 2025, [url](#), p. 5

<sup>432</sup> Transparencia Venezuela, Tren de Aragua: Criminal network without borders, April 2025, [url](#), p. 8

<sup>433</sup> Transparencia Venezuela, Tren de Aragua: Criminal network without borders, April 2025, [url](#), p. 8

<sup>434</sup> Transparencia Venezuela, Tren de Aragua: Criminal network without borders, April 2025, [url](#), p. 8

<sup>435</sup> Transparencia Venezuela, Tren de Aragua: Criminal network without borders, April 2025, [url](#), p. 8

<sup>436</sup> Transparencia Venezuela, Tren de Aragua: Criminal network without borders, April 2025, [url](#), p. 10

<sup>437</sup> Transparencia Venezuela, Tren de Aragua: Criminal network without borders, April 2025, [url](#), p. 10

<sup>438</sup> Transparencia Venezuela, Tren de Aragua: Criminal network without borders, April 2025, [url](#), p. 10

<sup>439</sup> Transparencia Venezuela, Tren de Aragua: Criminal network without borders, April 2025, [url](#), p. 10

<sup>440</sup> InSight Crime, Tren del Llano, 31 May 2024, [url](#)

<sup>441</sup> InSight Crime, Tren del Llano, 31 May 2024, [url](#)

<sup>442</sup> InSight Crime, Tren del Llano, 31 May 2024, [url](#)

<sup>443</sup> InSight Crime, Tren del Llano, 31 May 2024, [url](#)

<sup>444</sup> El Nacionalista, Operativo en Guárico dejó siete abatidos integrantes del Tren del Llano y suman 16 entre marzo y abril, 1 May 2016, [url](#); El Periodiquito, Neutralizada presunta célula del "Tren del Llano". 1 May 2026, [url](#)





### 2.1.3. *Pranes, sindicatos and sistemas*

*Pranes*<sup>445</sup> are prison-based gangs that originate and operate from within Venezuela's penitentiary system.<sup>446</sup> Empowered and tolerated by authorities, they have exercised de facto control over numerous prisons, coordinating extortion, drug trafficking, and other criminal activities through inmate-run hierarchical structures.<sup>447</sup> At the end of 2023, the government launched security operations aimed at dismantling the *pranato* system; however, most top criminal leaders escaped without resistance and relocated to continue their activities elsewhere.<sup>448</sup> Following these raids, the *pranato* has reportedly been weakened and partially co-opted by police and military officials, who now charge fees in exchange for benefits such as smuggling drugs, mobile phones, and packages into prison facilities.<sup>449</sup>

*Sindicatos* originated as construction-sector unions<sup>450</sup> but have since evolved into powerful armed groups that now control illegal mining operations.<sup>451</sup> Together with *pranes*, they oversee extensive criminal networks known as *sistemas*.<sup>452</sup> These structures, some comprising 'hundreds' of members, engage in extortion of mined gold, illegal mining, fuel and drug trafficking, sexual exploitation, and widespread extortion of local businesses.<sup>453</sup> In El Callao, Bolívar state, for example, vendors reportedly pay monthly fees of 100 USD, while processing mills surrender 20 % of their gold as payment.<sup>454</sup> Their operations have also expanded into Guyana, where they raid mining camps and extort river traffic.<sup>455</sup>

Las Claritas is one of the most powerful and long-standing *sindicatos* involved in illegal mining in Bolívar state.<sup>456</sup> It is the only major group that has avoided security-force crackdowns, reportedly due to agreements with elements of the state.<sup>457</sup> Las Claritas controls key mining areas, organises extraction operations, extorts miners and traders, and enforces strict authority over nearby towns, imposing its own rules and punishments.<sup>458</sup> On 17 February 2025, a *sindicato* launched an attack on Guyanese forces along the Cuyuni River in the Essequibo region, wounding six Guyanese soldiers; Venezuelan authorities dismissed reports of the attack as 'fake news'.<sup>459</sup>

<sup>445</sup> *Pran* stands for *Preso Rematado Asesino Nato* ('a hardened inmate, born killer'). CNN, Why Latin America's prisons create some of the world's deadliest gangs, 10 December 2025, [url](#)

<sup>446</sup> New York Times (The), Why It's Hard to Run Venezuela, 18 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>447</sup> El Debate, La red criminal que sostiene a Maduro en Venezuela: megabandas, pandillas y cartels, 12 April 2025, [url](#)

<sup>448</sup> InSight Crime, The New Face of Venezuela's 'Pranato' System, 27 August 2025, [url](#)

<sup>449</sup> InSight Crime, The New Face of Venezuela's 'Pranato' System, 27 August 2025, [url](#)

<sup>450</sup> International Crisis Group, A Curse of Gold: Mining and Violence in Venezuela's South, 29 July 2025, [url](#), p. 5-6

<sup>451</sup> New York Times (The), Why It's Hard to Run Venezuela, 18 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>452</sup> International Crisis Group, A Curse of Gold: Mining and Violence in Venezuela's South, 29 July 2025, [url](#), p. 5-6

<sup>453</sup> International Crisis Group, A Curse of Gold: Mining and Violence in Venezuela's South, 29 July 2025, [url](#), p. 5-6

<sup>454</sup> International Crisis Group, A Curse of Gold: Mining and Violence in Venezuela's South, 29 July 2025, [url](#), p. 5-6

<sup>455</sup> International Crisis Group, A Curse of Gold: Mining and Violence in Venezuela's South, 29 July 2025, [url](#), p. 5-6

<sup>456</sup> InSight Crime, Las Claritas Sindicato, 15 August 2025, [url](#)

<sup>457</sup> InSight Crime, Las Claritas Sindicato, 15 August 2025, [url](#)

<sup>458</sup> InSight Crime, Las Claritas Sindicato, 15 August 2025, [url](#)

<sup>459</sup> Infobae, Guyana denunció que seis soldados de su Ejército fueron atacados desde Venezuela, 18 February 2025, [url](#); NTN24, Seis soldados guyaneses heridos en enfrentamiento con banda venezolana en el Esequibo, 18 February 2025, [url](#)





*Sistemas* maintain control through a combination of violence and selective philanthropy, using both executions and community projects to secure local loyalty.<sup>460</sup> A newer armed group, the Hugo Chávez Frías Organisation, also known as the Socio-Revolutionary Movement, reportedly composed of former Colombian guerrillas and new recruits, has also begun charging payments from those travelling along the Cuyuni River into mining areas on both sides of the border.<sup>461</sup>

#### **2.1.4. ELN**

The ELN is the last remaining insurgent group in Colombia and a dominant armed actor along the Colombia–Venezuela border.<sup>462</sup> It is estimated to have between 6 000 and 8 000 combatants.<sup>463</sup> On the Venezuelan side of the border, however, the ELN is widely viewed as a paramilitary organisation operating with state tolerance and, in some cases, in support of state interests.<sup>464</sup> The group’s strongholds in Venezuela are located in Zulia, Táchira, Apure, and Amazonas states, where it engages in extortion, drug trafficking, and illegal mining.<sup>465</sup>

The Colombia–Venezuela border has long served as the ELN’s most important strategic corridor, essential to its financing, its political-military project, and its overall survival.<sup>466</sup> In 2025, the ELN, acting in collaboration with Venezuelan state security forces, reportedly weakened the presence of FARC dissidents and the FBL along the border, taking control of extortion schemes<sup>467</sup> and drug-trafficking routes.<sup>468</sup> Most ELN commanders and fighters are believed to be sheltering in Venezuelan territory.<sup>469</sup>

Insight Crime provides a map of ELN presence in the Colombia-Venezuela border published in December 2025:

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<sup>460</sup> International Crisis Group, *A Curse of Gold: Mining and Violence in Venezuela’s South*, 29 July 2025, [url](#), p. 6

<sup>461</sup> International Crisis Group, *A Curse of Gold: Mining and Violence in Venezuela’s South*, 29 July 2025, [url](#), p. 6

<sup>462</sup> InSight Crime, *ELN in Venezuela*, 13 January 2026, [url](#); CBC, *U.S. attack in Venezuela creates risk, opportunity for guerrilla groups*, 10 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>463</sup> CBC, *U.S. attack in Venezuela creates risk, opportunity for guerrilla groups*, 10 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>464</sup> InSight Crime, *ELN in Venezuela*, 13 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>465</sup> InSight Crime, *ELN in Venezuela*, 13 January 2026, [url](#)

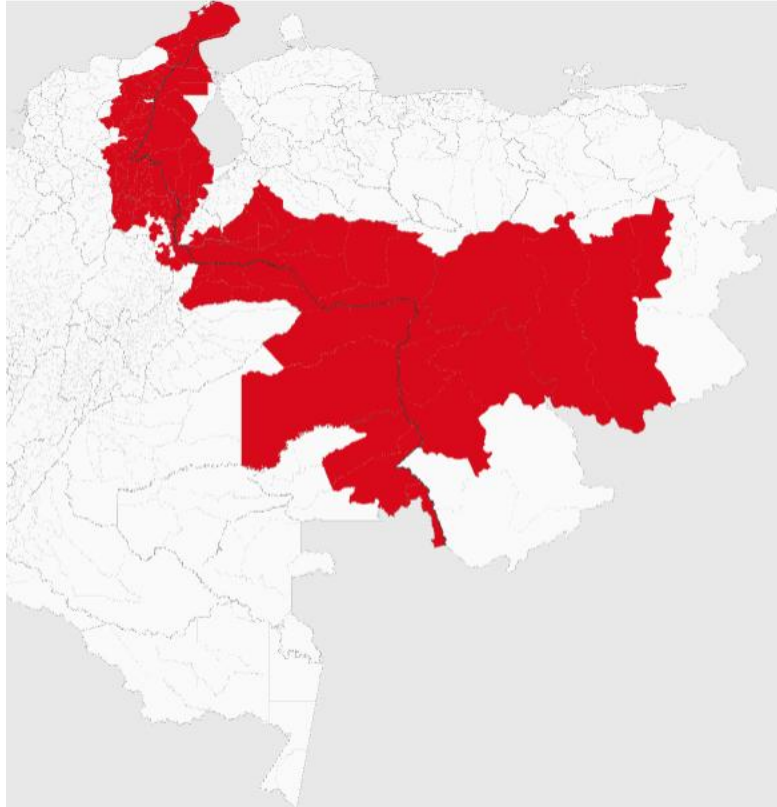
<sup>466</sup> InSight Crime, *Will Colombian Guerrillas Lose Their Safe Haven in Post-Maduro Venezuela?*, 22 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>467</sup> IWPR, *Apure-Arauca Sociedad Anónima*, 2023, [url](#); InSight Crime, *ELN in Venezuela*, 13 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>468</sup> InSight Crime, *ELN in Venezuela*, 13 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>469</sup> InSight Crime, *ELN in Venezuela*, 13 January 2026, [url](#)





Map 3: Presence of the ELN in the Colombia-Venezuela border, 2025.<sup>470</sup>

Sources reported that most extortion cases in the border region between Venezuela and Colombia are attributed to the ELN, with victims primarily including business owners, farm operators,<sup>471</sup> cattle ranchers,<sup>472</sup> and transportation workers.<sup>473</sup> A report by the Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR), based on interviews with local actors such as ranchers and farm owners, indicated that, according to the last available extortion statistics from 2021, approximately 75 % of the 8 600 cattle ranchers in Apure were being extorted by the ELN, with monthly payments ranging from 200 to 400 USD.<sup>474</sup>

A 2024 field investigation by Transparencia Venezuela in Táchira state found that ELN operatives reportedly position themselves openly at informal checkpoints, often alongside state security forces.<sup>475</sup> Extortion payments are made in cash, sex, food,<sup>476</sup> cattle, or 'logistical support'.<sup>477</sup> According to Transparencia Venezuela, extortion cases involving the ELN are

<sup>470</sup> InSight Crime, The Future of the ELN, 8 December 2025, [url](#)

<sup>471</sup> Transparencia Venezuela, The faces of extortion in Venezuela 2024, 2025, [url](#), p. 37; IWPR, Apure-Arauca Sociedad Anónima, 2023, [url](#)

<sup>472</sup> IWPR, Apure-Arauca Sociedad Anónima, 2023, [url](#)

<sup>473</sup> Transparencia Venezuela, The faces of extortion in Venezuela 2024, 2025, [url](#), p. 37; IWPR, Apure-Arauca Sociedad Anónima, 2023, [url](#)

<sup>474</sup> IWPR, Apure-Arauca Sociedad Anónima, 2023, [url](#)

<sup>475</sup> Transparencia Venezuela, The faces of extortion in Venezuela 2024, 2025, [url](#), p. 37

<sup>476</sup> Transparencia Venezuela, The faces of extortion in Venezuela 2024, 2025, [url](#), p. 37

<sup>477</sup> IWPR, Apure-Arauca Sociedad Anónima, 2023, [url](#)



rarely investigated or sanctioned by authorities.<sup>478</sup> These payments are commonly referred to as the 'war tax' (*impuesto de guerra*), *matraca*, or 'collaborations' (*colaboraciones*).<sup>479</sup>

The ELN has imposed extreme punishments in several Indigenous communities, including carrying out summary executions for violent offences such as sexual assault.<sup>480</sup> In the Yapacana mining area of Amazonas state, individuals who violate the group's rules face coercive ultimatums; some young people have reportedly been told they must either join the guerrilla forces or be killed.<sup>481</sup> Child recruitment by guerrilla groups, including of Indigenous children, is described as 'rampant'.<sup>482</sup> Children are recruited with gifts, small payments, and promises of affection, and are then sent to work in mines, collect extortion fees, enforce violent punishments, and transport drugs across borders.<sup>483</sup> In one reported case, a guerrilla group demanded a 4 000 USD payment to allow a recruited youth to return home.<sup>484</sup> Briceño-León added that recruitment is facilitated due to high levels of poverty that force some to join criminal groups. Once inside, however, it is very difficult to leave the group and those who try, flee to Colombia or other countries. There have been cases of deserters who have been killed by armed groups in Venezuela and their bodies later appear on the Colombian side of the border.<sup>485</sup>

The ELN uses Venezuelan territory both to evade targeted operations in Colombia and to capture local state infrastructure, enabling it to establish parallel authorities and control illicit economies.<sup>486</sup> ABC reported that the group reportedly has around 2 500 combatants in the Venezuela,<sup>487</sup> whereas InSight Crime indicated that 20 % of the 6 300 total number of combatants are stationed in Venezuela.<sup>488</sup> Transparencia Venezuela indicated that the ELN and FARC dissident groups control local schools in Zulia state to ensure the education of members' children who attend classes in Venezuela.<sup>489</sup>

After the US captured Maduro, the ELN publicly vowed to 'resist'.<sup>490</sup> However, members of the group reportedly adopted a lower profile and retreated toward the border region as a precautionary response to the new political and security environment.<sup>491</sup>

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<sup>478</sup> Transparencia Venezuela, The faces of extortion in Venezuela 2024, 2025, [url](#), p. 35

<sup>479</sup> IWPR, Apure-Arauca Sociedad Anónima, 2023, [url](#)

<sup>480</sup> International Crisis Group, A Curse of Gold: Mining and Violence in Venezuela's South, 29 July 2025, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>481</sup> International Crisis Group, A Curse of Gold: Mining and Violence in Venezuela's South, 29 July 2025, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>482</sup> International Crisis Group, A Curse of Gold: Mining and Violence in Venezuela's South, 29 July 2025, [url](#), p. 18

<sup>483</sup> International Crisis Group, A Curse of Gold: Mining and Violence in Venezuela's South, 29 July 2025, [url](#), p. 18; Briceño-León, telephone interview, 28 May 2026

<sup>484</sup> International Crisis Group, A Curse of Gold: Mining and Violence in Venezuela's South, 29 July 2025, [url](#), p. 18

<sup>485</sup> Briceño-León, telephone interview, 28 May 2026. See also: Vorágine, De ambos lados, la frontera binacional se abre a las desapariciones, 29 June 2025, [url](#)

<sup>486</sup> ABC, The US wants to control Venezuela's finances. These armed groups could make it difficult, 29 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>487</sup> ABC, The US wants to control Venezuela's finances. These armed groups could make it difficult, 29 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>488</sup> InSight Crime, National Liberation Army (ELN), 27 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>489</sup> Transparencia Venezuela, The faces of extortion in Venezuela 2024, 2025, [url](#), p. 39

<sup>490</sup> InSight Crime, Will Colombian Guerrillas Lose Their Safe Haven in Post-Maduro Venezuela?, 22 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>491</sup> InSight Crime, Will Colombian Guerrillas Lose Their Safe Haven in Post-Maduro Venezuela?, 22 January 2026, [url](#)



### 2.1.5. FARC Dissidents

FARC dissident factions that rejected the 2016 peace agreement<sup>492</sup> have continued operating from former FARC strongholds inside Venezuela, using Venezuelan territory to evade Colombian security forces and remain active in illicit economies such as drug trafficking, illegal mining,<sup>493</sup> and extortion.<sup>494</sup> Segunda Marquetalia maintains its base of operations in Apure state; the Acacio Medina Front, which is allied to Segunda Marquetalia, operates along the Orinoco River and in Amazonas state; the 33<sup>rd</sup> Front, which is part of the General Staff of Blocks and Front (EMBF, Estado Mayor de Bloques y Frentes), is active in Catatumbo on the Colombian side and in Zulia state; and the Estado Mayor Central (EMC) also maintains a presence in Apure.<sup>495</sup>

However, sustained military operations by Venezuelan state security forces since 2021, combined with the territorial expansion of the ELN,<sup>496</sup> have weakened these dissident structures.<sup>497</sup> Several top commanders were killed, prompting many fronts to withdraw or significantly reduce their presence in Venezuela.<sup>498</sup> In August 2025, the ELN ambushed and killed a commander of Segunda Marquetalia on the Venezuelan side of the border,<sup>499</sup> further diminishing the group's influence in Apure and Amazonas.<sup>500</sup> Segunda Marquetalia has nonetheless expanded its presence in Amazonas by recruiting local residents and tightening territorial control through extortion, including demanding gold from miners and pressuring Indigenous communities to grant access to their lands.<sup>501</sup> In Amazonas, the group has long cooperated with the ELN, establishing non-aggression pacts, dividing territory and mining sites, and jointly overseeing operations.<sup>502</sup> Both organisations impose strict control, extort miners and businesses, and enforce harsh forms of justice, including summary executions.<sup>503</sup>

<sup>492</sup> In 2016, the Colombian government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia-People's Army (FARC-EP, Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-Ejército del Pueblo) signed a Peace Agreement that ended an armed conflict that was present since 1964. At least 260,000 people died and over seven million were displaced. BBC, "Se acabó la guerra": después de más de 50 años de conflicto entra en vigencia el cese de fuego definitivo entre el gobierno de Colombia y las FARC, 29 August 2016, [url](#)

<sup>493</sup> InSight Crime, FARC Dissidents in Venezuela, 26 January 2026, [url](#); International Crisis Group, A Curse of Gold: Mining and Violence in Venezuela's South, 29 July 2025, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>494</sup> Transparencia Venezuela, The faces of extortion in Venezuela 2024, 2025, [url](#), p. 17

<sup>495</sup> InSight Crime, FARC Dissidents in Venezuela, 26 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>496</sup> The conflict between the ELN and the FARC-EP is longstanding, dating back to their formation in the 1960s. While the FARC-EP originated as a peasant-based insurgency, the ELN emerged as a more ideologically driven movement composed largely of students and union leaders. Structurally, the FARC-EP operated as a hierarchical organisation, whereas the ELN has historically functioned as a more federalised network. These ideological and organisational differences contributed to recurring clashes between the two groups—tensions that persisted even after the FARC-EP's demobilisation, continuing with the rise of FARC dissident factions. BBC, 3 claves para entender la larga rivalidad entre las FARC y el ELN (y cómo ahora llena de violencia la frontera entre Colombia y Venezuela), 4 January 2022, [url](#); SWI swissinfo.ch, El ELN y las FARC, dos caras de la lucha guerrillera en Colombia, 26 October 2016, [url](#)

<sup>497</sup> InSight Crime, FARC Dissidents in Venezuela, 26 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>498</sup> InSight Crime, FARC Dissidents in Venezuela, 26 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>499</sup> InSight Crime, FARC Dissidents in Venezuela, 26 January 2026, [url](#); La FM, De negociador de paz a ordenar el magnicidio de Miguel Uribe: este es el perfil del abatido 'Zarco Aldinever', mano derecha de Iván Márquez, 22 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>500</sup> InSight Crime, FARC Dissidents in Venezuela, 26 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>501</sup> International Crisis Group, A Curse of Gold: Mining and Violence in Venezuela's South, 29 July 2025, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>502</sup> International Crisis Group, A Curse of Gold: Mining and Violence in Venezuela's South, 29 July 2025, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>503</sup> International Crisis Group, A Curse of Gold: Mining and Violence in Venezuela's South, 29 July 2025, [url](#), p. 4





In Amazonas, dissident commander Jhon 40 was reportedly permitted to operate a mine and sold gold to state forces at a fixed price below market value.<sup>504</sup>

Although FARC dissident groups vowed to 'resist' following the US capture of Maduro, members reportedly began retreating toward the border region as a precautionary response to the shifting political and security environment.<sup>505</sup>

### 2.1.6. Colombian paramilitary successor groups

The Gaitanista Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AGC, Autodefensas Gaitanistas de Colombia), also known as the Gulf Clan (Clan del Golfo), Urabeños or Gaitanista Army of Colombia (EGC, Ejército Gaitanista de Colombia), emerged from the demobilisation of Colombia's paramilitary movement and have since become the country's dominant criminal organisation.<sup>506</sup> The AGC is involved in a wide range of criminal activities, including drug trafficking, extortion, and illegal mining.<sup>507</sup>

The group operates through a hybrid organisational model in which roughly one-third of local cells are directly controlled by the leadership based in Urabá, Antioquia department, while the remaining cells consist of local criminal groups that operate under the AGC name.<sup>508</sup> These affiliated groups are expected to provide services or follow strategic directives when required.<sup>509</sup> The AGC's model relies on financially self-sufficient local cells, many of which have diversified beyond drug trafficking into illegal mining, extortion, migrant smuggling, and micro-trafficking, while also taxing or overseeing other criminal activities within their territories.<sup>510</sup>

The AGC has also attempted to expand its influence into criminal economies along the Colombia–Venezuela border.<sup>511</sup> However, the strength of rival armed actors, particularly the ELN and FARC dissident factions, has prevented the organisation from gaining significant territorial control in the area.<sup>512</sup> Briceño-León similarly indicated that the AGC is not very strong along the border between Colombia and Venezuela due to the control exerted by the ELN; however, it has some presence in the state of Táchira where it has established alliances with local criminal gangs.<sup>513</sup>

### 2.1.7. Other groups

The Bolivarian Liberation Forces (FBL, Fuerzas Bolivarianas de Liberación), also known as the Patriotic Forces of National Liberation (FPLN, Fuerzas Patrióticas de Liberación Nacional) or

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<sup>504</sup> International Crisis Group, A Curse of Gold: Mining and Violence in Venezuela's South, 29 July 2025, [url](#), p. 16

<sup>505</sup> InSight Crime, Will Colombian Guerrillas Lose Their Safe Haven in Post-Maduro Venezuela?, 22 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>506</sup> InSight Crime, Gaitanistas – Gulf Clan, 18 March 2025, [url](#)

<sup>507</sup> InSight Crime, Gaitanistas – Gulf Clan, 18 March 2025, [url](#)

<sup>508</sup> InSight Crime, Gaitanistas – Gulf Clan, 18 March 2025, [url](#)

<sup>509</sup> InSight Crime, Gaitanistas – Gulf Clan, 18 March 2025, [url](#)

<sup>510</sup> InSight Crime, Gaitanistas – Gulf Clan, 18 March 2025, [url](#)

<sup>511</sup> InSight Crime, Gaitanistas – Gulf Clan, 18 March 2025, [url](#); Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2026 Country Report – Venezuela, 2026, [url](#), p. 6

<sup>512</sup> InSight Crime, Gaitanistas – Gulf Clan, 18 March 2025, [url](#)

<sup>513</sup> Briceño-León, telephone interview, 28 May 2026





*boliches*, are a Venezuelan guerrilla movement that operates with the acquiescence of the government.<sup>514</sup> Although the FBL maintains a military structure, it also pursues political objectives, including 'defending the Bolivarian Revolution', influencing local and regional political offices, and, to a lesser extent, participating in criminal economies that finance its operations.<sup>515</sup> The FBL also operates along the Colombia–Venezuela border alongside FARC dissident groups,<sup>516</sup> controlling illegal border crossings and extorting migrants and smugglers of cattle and gasoline.<sup>517</sup>

In August 2025, the US designated the Cartel of the Suns as a 'Foreign Terrorist Organization' (FTO), citing involvement in 'terrorist violence', drug trafficking, and support for Tren de Aragua, and asserting that the network was headed by President Maduro and other senior officials.<sup>518</sup> For information on the removal of Maduro by the US, see section [1.8 Aftermath of US intervention](#). Several countries, including Argentina, Ecuador, Paraguay, Peru, and Trinidad and Tobago, issued similar 'terrorist' designations.<sup>519</sup> Following Maduro's capture, however, the US Justice Department issued a revised indictment that removed the claim that the Cartel of the Suns was an organised cartel, and while prosecutors continued to accuse Maduro of drug-trafficking involvement, they now describe the Cartel of the Suns as a 'patronage system' and a broader 'culture of corruption' fuelled by narcotics profits.<sup>520</sup> Experts noted that Cartel of the Suns is a term coined by Venezuelan media in the 1990s to describe officials corrupted by drug money.<sup>521</sup> According to InSight Crime, the Cartel of the Suns refers to networks within Venezuela's armed forces implicated in criminal activities such as gasoline smuggling, illegal mining, corruption schemes, and especially drug trafficking.<sup>522</sup> Rather than a single hierarchical organisation, it functions as a loose constellation of cells embedded across the army, navy, air force, and National Guard, spanning all ranks and operating similarly to drug-trafficking structures.<sup>523</sup> The degree of coordination among these cells remains unclear.<sup>524</sup>

InSight Crime also reported that Mexican traffickers have begun retreating from Zulia state due to shifting political conditions, tighter state control over trafficking routes, and changes in Colombia's cocaine trade that have reduced the state's value as a logistics hub.<sup>525</sup>

<sup>514</sup> InSight Crime, FBL/FPLN, 14 February 2023, [url](#)

<sup>515</sup> InSight Crime, FBL/FPLN, 14 February 2023, [url](#)

<sup>516</sup> IWPR, Apure-Arauca Sociedad Anónima, 2023, [url](#); InSight Crime, FBL/FPLN, 14 February 2023, [url](#)

<sup>517</sup> InSight Crime, FBL/FPLN, 14 February 2023, [url](#)

<sup>518</sup> USDOS, Terrorist Designations of Cartel de los Soles, 16 November 2025, [url](#)

<sup>519</sup> InSight Crime, Cartel of the Suns, 16 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>520</sup> New York Times (The), Justice Dept. Drops Claim That Venezuela's 'Cartel de los Soles' Is an Actual Group, 6 January 2026, [url](#). See also: US, Department of Justice, Sealed superseding indictment, S4 11 Cr. 205 (AKH), n.d., [url](#)

<sup>521</sup> New York Times (The), Justice Dept. Drops Claim That Venezuela's 'Cartel de los Soles' Is an Actual Group, 6 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>522</sup> InSight Crime, Cartel of the Suns, 16 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>523</sup> InSight Crime, Cartel of the Suns, 16 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>524</sup> InSight Crime, Cartel of the Suns, 16 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>525</sup> InSight Crime, Why Mexican Traffickers Are Leaving Zulia, Venezuela, 5 November 2025, [url](#)



## 2.2. Security issues

After a decade of deepening political and economic instability, combined with pervasive corruption and an increasingly authoritarian government with controversial international alliances, conditions became highly favourable for the expansion of organised crime.<sup>526</sup> As a result, Venezuela has evolved not only into a major transit route for global cocaine trafficking but also into a hub for a wide range of illicit activities,<sup>527</sup> including extortion, kidnappings, illegal mining, and drug trafficking.<sup>528</sup> Institutions do not apply the Law against Kidnapping and Extortion.<sup>529</sup> According to the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), the removal of Maduro would not undo Venezuela's role as a major hub for transnational organised crime, since illicit economies are deeply embedded in state structures.<sup>530</sup> Venezuela's illicit economies accounted for more than 16 % of GDP in 2024.<sup>531</sup>

According to the Venezuelan Observatory of Violence (OVV, Observatorio Venezolano de Violencia), the principal driver behind the country's decline in violence is not improved living conditions or effective public-safety policy, but rather the collapse of criminal opportunities brought about by economic contraction and widespread poverty.<sup>532</sup> As the economy has shrunk, viable activity has become concentrated in a handful of resilient sectors (e.g., technology, food production, and mining) and criminal groups have redirected their operations toward these same areas.<sup>533</sup> The same source further indicated that emigration driven by poverty, stagnant wages, and deteriorating public services is reshaping crime dynamics in three significant ways.<sup>534</sup> First, some criminals are migrating due to reduced opportunities at home or in search of higher rewards abroad; second, the mass departure of young people, historically the primary victims and perpetrators of violent and territorial crime, has altered the demographic landscape; third, a new youth cohort is emerging to fill the economic and criminal gaps left behind, with some being recruited by major criminal groups as enforcers, while others turn to petty theft, which has become more profitable under dollarisation.<sup>535</sup> This shift has resulted in more injuries, even as lethal violence remains comparatively low.<sup>536</sup>

Extortion is widespread in Venezuela and is carried out by a range of actors, from state officials to criminal groups.<sup>537</sup> Although the exact number of cases is unknown, there is a broad perception among the population that extortion is increasing.<sup>538</sup> A report by

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<sup>526</sup> IISS, After the fall: what Maduro's capture means for criminal geopolitics, 7 January 2026, [url](#); InSight Crime, Venezuela profile, 9 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>527</sup> IISS, After the fall: what Maduro's capture means for criminal geopolitics, 7 January 2026, [url](#); InSight Crime, Venezuela profile, 9 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>528</sup> InSight Crime, InSight Crime's 2025 Homicide Round-Up, 11 March 2026, [url](#); Transparencia Venezuela, The faces of extortion in Venezuela 2024, March 2025, [url](#), p. 3

<sup>529</sup> Transparencia Venezuela, The faces of extortion in Venezuela 2024, 2025, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>530</sup> IISS, After the fall: what Maduro's capture means for criminal geopolitics, 7 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>531</sup> IISS, After the fall: what Maduro's capture means for criminal geopolitics, 7 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>532</sup> OVV, Annual report: Violence 2024, December 2024, p. 5

<sup>533</sup> OVV, Annual report: Violence 2024, December 2024, p. 5

<sup>534</sup> OVV, Annual report: Violence 2024, December 2024, p.

<sup>535</sup> OVV, Annual report: Violence 2024, December 2024, p.

<sup>536</sup> OVV, Annual report: Violence 2024, December 2024, p. 6

<sup>537</sup> Transparencia Venezuela, The faces of extortion in Venezuela 2024, March 2025, [url](#), p. 3; InSight Crime, Venezuela profile, 9 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>538</sup> Transparencia Venezuela, The faces of extortion in Venezuela 2024, March 2025, [url](#), p. 17; SWI swissinfo.ch, Más extorsión y menos homicidios, la inseguridad se transforma en Venezuela, 11 July 2024, [url](#)



Transparencia Venezuela identified several key sources of extortion, along with common types, methods, and targets:

- State security forces – Types: protection fees, payments to avoid fabricated accusations or arbitrary detention; methods: checkpoints, identity checks, threats; targets: citizens, businesses, transport operators.
- Armed groups – Types: territorial taxes, roadblocks, kidnapping for ransom; methods: patrols, checkpoints, forced contributions; targets: communities, traders, migrants.
- Prison gangs – Types: payments for protection, control of goods and services inside and outside prisons; methods: inmate networks, intermediaries, coercion; targets: detainees, visitors, vendors.
- Criminal organisations – Types: commercial taxes, transport levies, protection rackets; methods: collection points, threats, violence; targets: businesses, transport workers, informal sector.<sup>539</sup>

On 12 March 2026, the national association of farm producers reported a series of violent attacks against Venezuelan farmers to the Prosecutor's Office, including the murder of a farmer in Guárico, the arson of agricultural machinery, and extortion by organised criminal groups, warning that these incidents are endangering national food security.<sup>540</sup> In April 2026, the Scientific, Penal and Criminalistic Investigation Service Corps (CICPC, Cuerpo de Investigaciones Científicas, Penales y Criminalísticas) arrested a member of Los Negritos de San Vicente, a gang based in Aragua state accused of extorting dozens of local businesses.<sup>541</sup> Sources indicated that as Venezuela's economic crisis has reduced domestic criminal opportunities and purchasing power, Venezuelan gangs have increasingly expanded their extortion operations into other Latin American countries, including Argentina, Brazil, Peru, and Colombia.<sup>542</sup> SWI swissinfo reported that the groups that remain in Venezuela continue to extort residents in the country's poorest neighbourhoods 'without mercy', and that authorities seldom intervene, or, when they do, their actions typically have no meaningful consequences.<sup>543</sup>

Sources indicated that extortion by security forces typically involved detaining individuals on the street or at checkpoints and demanding payment in exchange for not fabricating a violation or infraction that would expose the victim to an uncertain and potentially prolonged process within the justice system.<sup>544</sup> Briceño-León explained that, when an individual refuses to pay an extortion fee to a state security official, false charges are typically filed against the victim and brought before a tribunal, where the person becomes vulnerable to further extortion by multiple actors, including judges, attorneys, and prosecutors. Faced with this prospect, victims often choose to reach an agreement with the security official to avoid

<sup>539</sup> Transparencia Venezuela, The faces of extortion in Venezuela 2024, March 2025, [url](#), pp. 6-7

<sup>540</sup> Agencia EFE, Gremial denuncia en la Fiscalía violencia y extorsión contra agricultores en Venezuela, 12 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>541</sup> Primera Edición Col, Desmantelan parte de la banda "Los Negritos de San Vicente" en Aragua y recuperan más de 4 mil dólares, 13 April 2026, [url](#)

<sup>542</sup> InSight Crime, Beyond Tren de Aragua: Venezuelan Gangs Spread Across Latin America, 25 August 2025, [url](#);

SWI swissinfo.ch, Más extorsión y menos homicidios, la inseguridad se transforma en Venezuela, 11 July 2024, [url](#)

<sup>543</sup> SWI swissinfo.ch, Más extorsión y menos homicidios, la inseguridad se transforma en Venezuela, 11 July 2024, [url](#)

<sup>544</sup> Amaya, telephone interview, 27 May 2026; Briceño-León, telephone interview, 28 May 2026



escalation. The profiles most frequently targeted for extortion by state security forces are 'vulnerable' individuals, such as young people and older adults, whose relatives are perceived as able to pay amounts that may reach up to 4 000 USD.<sup>545</sup> InSight Crime reported that amounts can reach up to 10 000, although through 'negotiations' they can be lowered to as low as 2 000 USD.<sup>546</sup> Another common profile includes people in 'vulnerable' situations, such as parents detained at checkpoints while on their way to collect their children from school, who opt to pay immediately to avoid fabricated charges and ensure they arrive on time.<sup>547</sup> Regarding extortion by criminal groups, sources indicated that if a payment is not made, criminals usually carry out retaliations, including the destruction of property, theft of merchandise, attacks,<sup>548</sup> or kidnapping.<sup>549</sup> Briceño-Leon and Amaya indicated that, based on their knowledge, people moving to another city to avoid extortion have not been targeted for that reason.<sup>550</sup>

Assistance to victims of extortion, particularly from state authorities and the justice system, is minimal.<sup>551</sup> Amaya explained that assistance from authorities is unlikely because the criminal group carrying out the extortion has political influence or political affiliation with the local authority, and complaints against officials have rarely resulted in prosecutions.<sup>552</sup> State efforts to combat extortion remain severely constrained due to pervasive corruption and the collusion of state actors at multiple levels of government with criminal organisations.<sup>553</sup> InSight Crime indicated that '[s]ome of these local initiatives include programs to prevent young people from joining gangs, education campaigns, independent data collecting and reporting mechanisms, applications to identify phone numbers linked to extortion, and community building, among others'.<sup>554</sup> The de facto dollarisation of the economy has further incentivised criminal groups to shift from robberies and theft to more lucrative forms of extortion.<sup>555</sup> InSight Crime also reported that, in a context of high corruption and institutional fragility, some public servants engage in bribery and extortion to advance files within the public administration, practices that criminal groups then exploit by impersonating or supplanting officials to carry out extortion schemes.<sup>556</sup>

Reliable statistics on violent deaths in the country are difficult to obtain, as the government does not publish official data and several local NGOs that previously monitored violence have been shut down.<sup>557</sup> OVV estimated that 6 884 violent deaths occurred in 2024; including 1 554 homicides, 767 police-related violent deaths, and 4 563 deaths classified as 'under

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<sup>545</sup> Briceño-Leon, telephone interview, 28 May 2026

<sup>546</sup> InSight Crime, Security Forces in Venezuela Extort Detainees Amid Political Repression, 24 September 2024, [url](#)

<sup>547</sup> Briceño-Leon, telephone interview, 28 May 2026

<sup>548</sup> Amaya, telephone interview, 27 May 2026; Briceño-Leon, telephone interview, 28 May 2026

<sup>549</sup> Briceño-Leon, telephone interview, 28 May 2026

<sup>550</sup> Amaya, telephone interview, 27 May 2026; Briceño-Leon, telephone interview, 28 May 2026

<sup>551</sup> Amaya, telephone interview, 27 May 2026; Briceño-Leon, telephone interview, 28 May 2026

<sup>552</sup> Amaya, telephone interview, 27 May 2026

<sup>553</sup> Transparencia Venezuela, The faces of extortion in Venezuela 2024, March 2025, [url](#), pp. 14, 16; InSight Crime, Es tanta la corrupción en Venezuela, que hasta los criminales se hacen pasar por funcionarios, 19 September 2025, [url](#)

<sup>554</sup> InSight Crime, Venezuela Security Policy: Combating Gang and Police-Driven Extortion, 18 October 2023, [url](#)

<sup>555</sup> Transparencia Venezuela, The faces of extortion in Venezuela 2024, 2025, [url](#), p. 13

<sup>556</sup> InSight Crime, Es tanta la corrupción en Venezuela, que hasta los criminales se hacen pasar por funcionarios, 19 September 2025, [url](#)

<sup>557</sup> InSight Crime, InSight Crime's 2025 Homicide Round-Up, 11 March 2026, [url](#)



investigation', a category marked by limited institutional transparency.<sup>558</sup> OVV calculated an overall rate of 26.2 violent deaths per 100 000 inhabitants for 2024.<sup>559</sup> The five most violent federal entities in 2024 were Aragua (58.8 violent deaths per 100 000 inhabitants), Distrito Capital (48.2), La Guaira (34.7), Miranda (34.6), and Bolívar (34.2).<sup>560</sup> Regionally, Venezuela was the second most violent country in Latin America in 2024, behind Ecuador (38.8) and over Colombia (25.4) and Honduras (25.3).<sup>561</sup> For 2023, OVV reported 6 973 violent deaths, including 4 064 classified as 'deaths under investigation', 1 956 as 'homicides', and 953 as police-related violent deaths.<sup>562</sup> The violent death rate for 2023 was 26.8 deaths per 100 000 inhabitants.<sup>563</sup>

Criminal activity in the mining sector is extensive, particularly in the states of Bolívar and Amazonas, where a diverse range of criminal organisations operate amid weak regulation and collusion with state security forces.<sup>564</sup> Armed actors present in these areas include Colombian groups such as the National Liberation Army (ELN, Ejército Nacional de Liberación)<sup>565</sup> and Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC, Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia) dissidents;<sup>566</sup> *colectivos*;<sup>567</sup> and *pranes* and *sindicatos*, which, according to International Crisis Group, are also collectively known as *sistemas* in mining areas in Bolívar.<sup>568</sup> Illegal mining has resulted in mass displacement of Indigenous communities, severe environmental degradation, and, in the Guayana region, the emergence of a major malaria hotspot.<sup>569</sup>

Indigenous communities face discrimination, exploitation, and extortion by armed groups, alongside sex trafficking and land seizures linked to illegal mining, all of which have gravely damaged the natural resources on which they depend.<sup>570</sup> Criminal groups controlling the mines impose arbitrary rules, and workers who disobey face harsh punishment; accidents are frequent, and child labour is widespread.<sup>571</sup> These groups also extend their control beyond the mining sites, where sexual exploitation and human trafficking are common in surrounding settlements.<sup>572</sup>

<sup>558</sup> OVV, Annual report: Violence 2024, December 2024, pp. 2, 19

<sup>559</sup> OVV, Annual report: Violence 2024, December 2024, pp. 2, 19

<sup>560</sup> OVV, Annual report: Violence 2024, December 2024, p. 8

<sup>561</sup> InSight Crime, InSight Crime's 2024 Homicide Round-Up, 26 February 2025, [url](#)

<sup>562</sup> OVV, Annual Report Violence 2023, 28 December 2023, [url](#)

<sup>563</sup> OVV, Annual Report Violence 2023, 28 December 2023, [url](#)

<sup>564</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2026 Country Report — Venezuela, 2026, [url](#), pp. 27-28; International Crisis Group, A Curse of Gold: Mining and Violence in Venezuela's South, 29 July 2025, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>565</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2026 Country Report — Venezuela, 2026, [url](#), p. 28; Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2026, Venezuela, March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>566</sup> International Crisis Group, A Curse of Gold: Mining and Violence in Venezuela's South, 29 July 2025, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>567</sup> HRW, World Report 2026: Venezuela, 2026, [url](#)

<sup>568</sup> International Crisis Group, A Curse of Gold: Mining and Violence in Venezuela's South, 29 July 2025, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>569</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2026 Country Report — Venezuela, 2026, [url](#), p. 28. See also: HRW, World Report 2026: Venezuela, 2026, [url](#)

<sup>570</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2026 Country Report — Venezuela, 2026, [url](#), p. 28. See also: HRW, World Report 2026: Venezuela, 2026, [url](#)

<sup>571</sup> International Crisis Group, A Curse of Gold: Mining and Violence in Venezuela's South, 29 July 2025, [url](#), p. 2; Transparencia Venezuela, Explotación de oro en Venezuela 2024: Devastación, caos y corrupción, March 2025, [url](#), p. 111

<sup>572</sup> International Crisis Group, A Curse of Gold: Mining and Violence in Venezuela's South, 29 July 2025, [url](#), p. 2; Transparencia Venezuela, Explotación de oro en Venezuela 2024: Devastación, caos y corrupción, March 2025, [url](#), p. 111





Members of the armed forces have reportedly appropriated some mines for personal gain, charging workers 'taxes' to extract minerals or forcing them to sell at below-market prices.<sup>573</sup> State security forces also establish checkpoints to collect payments from miners and Colombian guerrilla groups, such as in Yapacana, Amazonas state.<sup>574</sup> International Crisis Group reported that many miners and local residents view Venezuelan security forces as predatory.<sup>575</sup> The same source also reported on allegations that SEBIN personnel have transported high-ranking guerrilla members in official vehicles, and that ELN fighters pass through GNB checkpoints without interference.<sup>576</sup> Additional allegations suggest that security forces provide Colombian armed groups with advance information on upcoming military operations.<sup>577</sup>

Informal mines are frequently taken over by military units for their own profit, often through violent operations.<sup>578</sup> International Crisis Group indicated that in one instance, soldiers beat and detained displaced miners in harsh conditions; in another, during a 2023 operation, military-grade weapons were used, turning mining pits into battle zones, causing fatalities, and forcing many wounded miners to flee to Puerto Inírida, Colombia.<sup>579</sup>

Drug trafficking remains highly prevalent in Venezuela, particularly along its borders with Colombia and Brazil and across the Atlantic coast.<sup>580</sup> The vast Amazon region is difficult to police, and Brazilian authorities have criticised weak control over river routes and airspace in both Colombia and Venezuela.<sup>581</sup> Small aircraft frequently depart from the Orinoco region and from illegal airstrips in Amazonas, while semi-submersible vessels constructed in Guyana transport narcotics down the Orinoco River to larger ships operating in international waters.<sup>582</sup>

Insight Crime provides a map from May 2025 indicating the presence of criminal groups in the 'Mining Arch' and Essequibo:

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<sup>573</sup> International Crisis Group, A Curse of Gold: Mining and Violence in Venezuela's South, 29 July 2025, [url](#), p. 2; Infobae, Denuncian que las fuerzas de seguridad del régimen de Maduro permiten la explotación de oro en zonas protegidas de Venezuela, 9 November 2025, [url](#)

<sup>574</sup> International Crisis Group, A Curse of Gold: Mining and Violence in Venezuela's South, 29 July 2025, [url](#), p. 13; InSight Crime, Redes de contrabando abastecen la minería desenfrenada en Venezuela, 6 July 2023, [url](#)

<sup>575</sup> International Crisis Group, A Curse of Gold: Mining and Violence in Venezuela's South, 29 July 2025, [url](#), p. 13

<sup>576</sup> International Crisis Group, A Curse of Gold: Mining and Violence in Venezuela's South, 29 July 2025, [url](#), p. 13

<sup>577</sup> International Crisis Group, A Curse of Gold: Mining and Violence in Venezuela's South, 29 July 2025, [url](#), p. 13

<sup>578</sup> International Crisis Group, A Curse of Gold: Mining and Violence in Venezuela's South, 29 July 2025, [url](#), p. 16; Infobae, Denuncian que las fuerzas de seguridad del régimen de Maduro permiten la explotación de oro en zonas protegidas de Venezuela, 9 November 2025, [url](#)

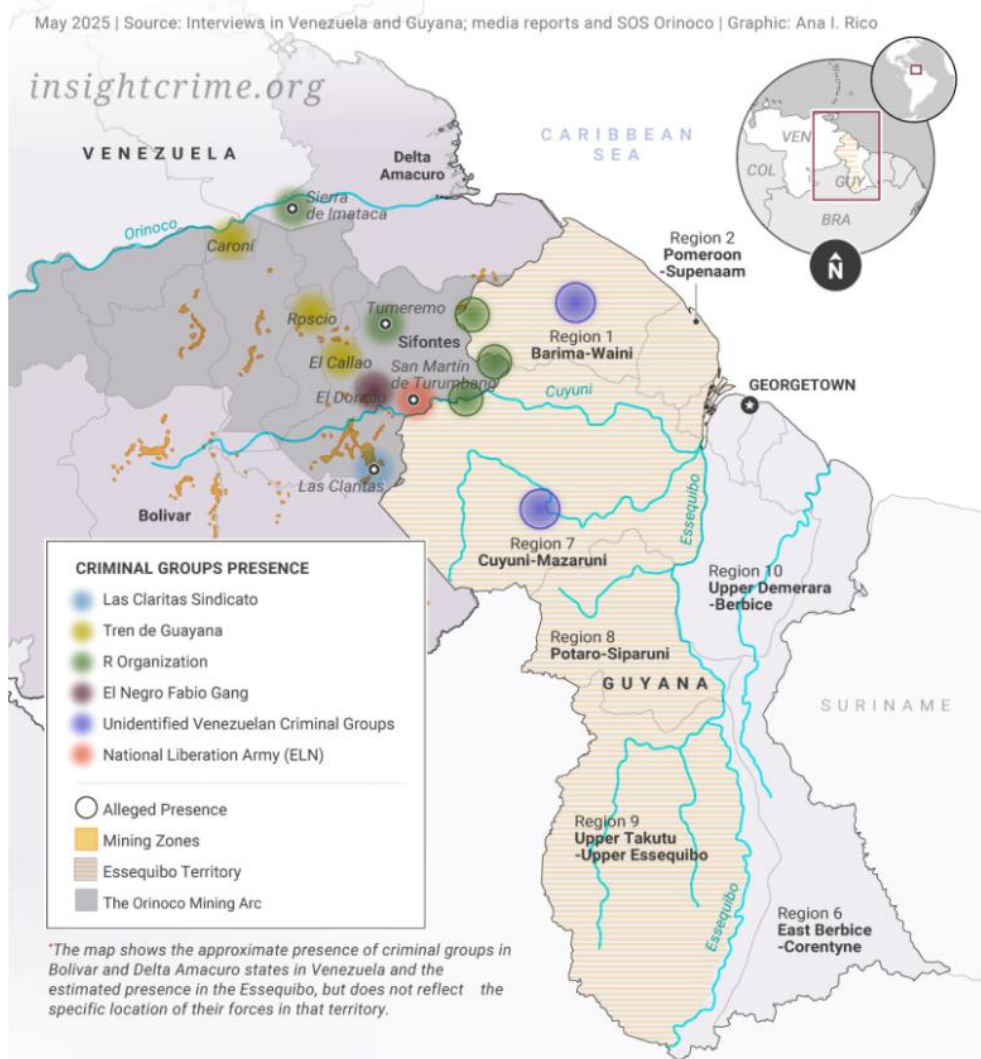
<sup>579</sup> International Crisis Group, A Curse of Gold: Mining and Violence in Venezuela's South, 29 July 2025, [url](#), p. 16

<sup>580</sup> International Crisis Group, A Curse of Gold: Mining and Violence in Venezuela's South, 29 July 2025, [url](#), p. 12; USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2023: Venezuela, 22 April 2024, [url](#)

<sup>581</sup> International Crisis Group, A Curse of Gold: Mining and Violence in Venezuela's South, 29 July 2025, [url](#), p. 12

<sup>582</sup> International Crisis Group, A Curse of Gold: Mining and Violence in Venezuela's South, 29 July 2025, [url](#), p. 12





Map 1: Criminal presence in Venezuela's Mining Arch and Essequibo, May 2025.<sup>583</sup>

### 2.3. Security situation at the border

Armed groups control strategic border areas with Colombia, Brazil, and Guyana, where they also manage key drug-trafficking routes, often operating in coordination with state security forces.<sup>584</sup> Colombian guerrillas control the border region<sup>585</sup> and use Venezuela’s Amazonas region as a hideout, where conditions are considered more 'comfortable'.<sup>586</sup> Beyond coercion, these groups use patronage to secure influence in mining towns, funding teachers, building schools, and transporting the sick to gain local support.<sup>587</sup> They have largely shifted from seeking national political influence to capturing local state structures and establishing parallel

<sup>583</sup> InSight Crime, 5 Crime Groups You Need to Know to Understand Post-Maduro Venezuela, 8 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>584</sup> International Crisis Group, A Curse of Gold: Mining and Violence in Venezuela’s South, 29 July 2025, [url](#), p. 2; EUISS, After Maduro: The future of Venezuela and the Caribbean, 7 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>585</sup> New York Times (The), Why It’s Hard to Run Venezuela, 18 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>586</sup> International Crisis Group, A Curse of Gold: Mining and Violence in Venezuela’s South, 29 July 2025, [url](#), p. 5

<sup>587</sup> International Crisis Group, A Curse of Gold: Mining and Violence in Venezuela’s South, 29 July 2025, [url](#), p. 5

authorities that allow them to control illicit markets.<sup>588</sup> Additionally, Mexican drug cartels such as Sinaloa and Jalisco, and Colombian paramilitary successor groups such as the AGC, control drug trafficking in the region.<sup>589</sup> Paramilitary successor groups also engage in extortion, kidnapping, contract killings, sex trafficking, and the control of informal border crossings.<sup>590</sup>

Extortion is widespread in border states such as Táchira, Bolívar, and Zulia.<sup>591</sup> Armed groups recruit Indigenous and other local youths to collect extortion payments and transport drugs from Colombia to Brazil, and they deploy them as fighters in Colombian conflict zones along the Venezuelan border.<sup>592</sup> Extortion is pervasive at illegal border crossings, known locally as *trochas*, and is carried out by illegal armed groups including Tren de Aragua and the ELN.<sup>593</sup> Forced disappearances are also reported, with Venezuelan NGO Fundaredes indicating that in 2024 it documented the forced disappearance of 35 people in Apure, Zulia, and Táchira, 23 of whom were migrants reportedly crossing back into Venezuela informally.<sup>594</sup>

In the Orinoco Mining Arc, criminal organisations control mining activities, particularly of gold, coltan, and diamonds.<sup>595</sup> Transparencia Venezuela reported that between 40 and 50 tonnes of gold are extracted annually, with an estimated value of 2.7 to 3.3 billion.<sup>596</sup> Of this amount, the state receives 8 % in royalties, criminal organisations capture around 20 %, and the political elite approximately 66 %.<sup>597</sup> Fundaredes indicated that many people who move to the Mining Arc seeking employment are coopted by criminal organisations, and many subsequently disappear.<sup>598</sup> The use of children in mining operations is widespread.<sup>599</sup> Cases of modern slavery are also reported, including labour and sexual exploitation, involuntary domestic servitude, labour trafficking, child labour, sexual slavery, and commercial sexual exploitation of children.<sup>600</sup> Criminal groups control the sex trade in mining areas, where encounters are paid

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<sup>588</sup> The Conversation, Venezuela's civil-military alliance is being stretched — if it breaks, numerous armed groups may be drawn into messy split, 6 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>589</sup> El Debate, La red criminal que sostiene a Maduro en Venezuela: megabandas, pandillas y cartels, 12 April 2025, [url](#)

<sup>590</sup> El Debate, La red criminal que sostiene a Maduro en Venezuela: megabandas, pandillas y cartels, 12 April 2025, [url](#)

<sup>591</sup> Transparencia Venezuela, The faces of extortion in Venezuela 2024, 2025, [url](#), p. 13; La Opinión, Especial I Viajar por Venezuela, un recorrido entre retenes y extorsiones, 6 April 2026, [url](#)

<sup>592</sup> International Crisis Group, A Curse of Gold: Mining and Violence in Venezuela's South, 29 July 2025, [url](#), p. 5

<sup>593</sup> Transparencia Venezuela, The faces of extortion in Venezuela 2024, 2025, [url](#), p. 40; La Opinión, Especial I Viajar por Venezuela, un recorrido entre retenes y extorsiones, 6 April 2026, [url](#)

<sup>594</sup> Fundaredes, Territorios del silencio: La realidad de los desaparecidos en zonas fronterizas de Venezuela, 26 May 2025, [url](#)

<sup>595</sup> BBC, Qué otras riquezas naturales tiene Venezuela además del petróleo y cuáles son "críticas" para EE.UU., 11 February 2026, [url](#); International Crisis Group, A Curse of Gold: Mining and Violence in Venezuela's South, 29 July 2025, [url](#), p. 17

<sup>596</sup> Transparencia Venezuela, Explotación de oro en Venezuela 2024: Devastación, caos y corrupción, March 2025, [url](#), p.

<sup>597</sup> Transparencia Venezuela, Explotación de oro en Venezuela 2024: Devastación, caos y corrupción, March 2025, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>598</sup> Fundaredes, Territorios del silencio: La realidad de los desaparecidos en zonas fronterizas de Venezuela, 26 May 2025, [url](#)

<sup>599</sup> International Crisis Group, A Curse of Gold: Mining and Violence in Venezuela's South, 29 July 2025, [url](#), p. 17; CECODAP, 5 preguntas sobre la niñez y la adolescencia en zonas mineras al sur de Venezuela, 8 March 2024, [url](#)

<sup>600</sup> International Crisis Group, A Curse of Gold: Mining and Violence in Venezuela's South, 29 July 2025, [url](#), p. 17; Transparencia Venezuela, The faces of extortion in Venezuela 2024, 2025, [url](#), p. 42



in gold.<sup>601</sup> Some women are trafficked, others arrive out of economic necessity, and some bring their children and leave them in "camps" that provide childcare.<sup>602</sup> Many women contract malaria and sexually transmitted infections.<sup>603</sup> Armed groups, criminal gangs, and miners reportedly commit sexual violence against sex workers and young recruits.<sup>604</sup> The National Guard conducts invasive searches to confiscate hidden gold.<sup>605</sup> Sexual and reproductive health services are largely unavailable in mining regions, including for sex workers, and many Venezuelans seek care in Colombian border towns such as Puerto Inírida and Puerto Carreño, creating tensions with local residents.<sup>606</sup>

In September 2025, the US began carrying out airstrikes against boats in the Caribbean that were allegedly transporting drugs originating from Venezuela.<sup>607</sup> For additional information, see section [1.8 Aftermath of US intervention](#).

## 2.4. State response

Transparencia Venezuela reported that information published by security agencies about security operations is discretionary and inconsistent, and that authorities withhold data such as budgets and execution of budgets, annual plans, completed goals, ongoing programs, evaluations, procurement records, staffing numbers, recruitment and dismissal procedures, and information on complaints filed against them.<sup>608</sup> Regarding extortion, for example, security agencies do not publish official statistics or patterns.<sup>609</sup> The National Office Against Organized Crime and Financing of Terrorism (ONCDFT, Oficina Nacional Contra la Delincuencia Organizada y Financiamiento al Terrorismo), the governing body responsible for designing and implementing public policies and strategies against organised crime and the financing of terrorism, does not publish information on its activities.<sup>610</sup>

According to Transparencia Venezuela, it is 'very difficult' for a Public Ministry prosecutor to investigate a crime independently without receiving counter-orders from superiors or political

<sup>601</sup> International Crisis Group, A Curse of Gold: Mining and Violence in Venezuela's South, 29 July 2025, [url](#), p. 18; Correo del Caroní, Explotación minera en Bolívar deriva en esclavitud moderna de mujeres y niñas, 21 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>602</sup> International Crisis Group, A Curse of Gold: Mining and Violence in Venezuela's South, 29 July 2025, [url](#), p. 18. See also: Correo del Caroní, Explotación minera en Bolívar deriva en esclavitud moderna de mujeres y niñas, 21 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>603</sup> International Crisis Group, A Curse of Gold: Mining and Violence in Venezuela's South, 29 July 2025, [url](#), p. 18; Correo del Caroní, Explotación minera en Bolívar deriva en esclavitud moderna de mujeres y niñas, 21 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>604</sup> International Crisis Group, A Curse of Gold: Mining and Violence in Venezuela's South, 29 July 2025, [url](#), p. 18; Transparencia Venezuela, Explotación de oro en Venezuela 2024: Devastación, caos y corrupción, March 2025, [url](#), p. 16

<sup>605</sup> International Crisis Group, A Curse of Gold: Mining and Violence in Venezuela's South, 29 July 2025, [url](#), p. 18

<sup>606</sup> International Crisis Group, A Curse of Gold: Mining and Violence in Venezuela's South, 29 July 2025, [url](#), p. 19. See also: Correo del Caroní, Explotación minera en Bolívar deriva en esclavitud moderna de mujeres y niñas, 21 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>607</sup> Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2025: Venezuela, February 2025, [url](#); PBS, U.S. kills 2 during latest strike on alleged drug boats traveling in the Caribbean, 5 May 2026, [url](#)

<sup>608</sup> Transparencia Venezuela, The faces of extortion in Venezuela 2024, 2025, [url](#), p. 50

<sup>609</sup> Transparencia Venezuela, The faces of extortion in Venezuela 2024, 2025, [url](#), p. 50

<sup>610</sup> Transparencia Venezuela, The faces of extortion in Venezuela 2024, 2025, [url](#), p. 57



authorities.<sup>611</sup> Regional and municipal police forces also face severe budget constraints due to central-government cuts, which are often used as a form of political control, making policing an unattractive profession.<sup>612</sup> The lack of job stability for prosecutors and the absence of judicial independence fuel impunity and corruption.<sup>613</sup>

On 23 April 2026, Diosdado Cabello stated that more than 12 000 police officers had been dismissed for corruption as part of a broader cleanup of Venezuela's justice and security system, citing widespread extortion, severe delays in judicial processes, overcrowded detention centres, and schemes in which detainees had to pay for court transfers.<sup>614</sup> Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted within the time constraints of this report.

In April 2023, Cabello also indicated that government intervention in the prison system has led to the dismantling of prison-gang structures led by *pranes*.<sup>615</sup> In September 2023, authorities raided the Tocarón prison, considered the main sanctuary and operations centre of Tren de Aragua, although most of the gang's leadership had long departed and the remaining inmates were transferred to other prisons without incident.<sup>616</sup> Sources reported that, although the authorities have weakened the pranato structure within prisons, the extortion scheme has effectively been assumed by prison officials, who now administer it directly.<sup>617</sup> At the same time, several senior pranes left the facilities without resistance to continue operating outside the prison system, in some cases after collecting their personal belongings, and none has been apprehended to date.<sup>618</sup>

According to local residents in border and mining areas, state officials, guerrillas, and criminal groups all commit abuses, but the region's remoteness means most mistreatment goes unnoticed.<sup>619</sup> InSight Crime reported that Venezuelan military officers stationed along the border often decide whether drug shipments can move by land and may provide protection, particularly around clandestine airstrips in Zulia, Apure, and Táchira, which are used for cocaine flights to Central America and the Caribbean.<sup>620</sup> The military also facilitates illicit flights by manipulating air-defense radar, with officers allegedly taking payments to switch off radar or issue codes that make flights appear legal.<sup>621</sup> Humanitarian sources consulted by International Crisis Group indicated that the government does not acknowledge problems such as forced displacement, violence by state agents, and child labour.<sup>622</sup> Humanitarian organisations must obtain permission from local officials and approval from criminal

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<sup>611</sup> Transparencia Venezuela, The faces of extortion in Venezuela 2024, 2025, [url](#), p. 50

<sup>612</sup> Transparencia Venezuela, The faces of extortion in Venezuela 2024, 2025, [url](#), p. 50

<sup>613</sup> Transparencia Venezuela, The faces of extortion in Venezuela 2024, 2025, [url](#), p. 50

<sup>614</sup> El Nacional, Cabello revela destitución de más de 12.000 policías por corrupción en Venezuela, 23 April 2026, [url](#)

<sup>615</sup> AVN, Cabello destaca proceso de depuración en centros penitenciarios para enfrentar la corrupción, 23 April 2023, [url](#)

<sup>616</sup> InSight Crime, The Tocarón Takeover, 17 August 2025, [url](#)

<sup>617</sup> InSight Crime, The New Face of Venezuela's 'Pranato' System, 27 August 2025, [url](#); Cotejo.info, Diosdado Cabello afirma que la extorsión carcelaria para asistir a juicios desapareció, 27 April 2026, [url](#)

<sup>618</sup> InSight Crime, The New Face of Venezuela's 'Pranato' System, 27 August 2025, [url](#)

<sup>619</sup> International Crisis Group, A Curse of Gold: Mining and Violence in Venezuela's South, 29 July 2025, [url](#), p. 17

<sup>620</sup> InSight Crime, Cartel of the Suns, 16 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>621</sup> InSight Crime, Cartel of the Suns, 16 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>622</sup> International Crisis Group, A Curse of Gold: Mining and Violence in Venezuela's South, 29 July 2025, [url](#), p. 19



organisations in order to operate in the field.<sup>623</sup> The control of border regions by illegal armed groups is facilitated by the protection of Venezuelan authorities.<sup>624</sup>

For additional information, see sections [1.5 Judicial system](#) and [1.6 State security forces](#).

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<sup>623</sup> International Crisis Group, A Curse of Gold: Mining and Violence in Venezuela's South, 29 July 2025, [url](#), p. 19

<sup>624</sup> IISS, After the fall: what Maduro's capture means for criminal geopolitics, 7 January 2026, [url](#); Transparencia Venezuela, Explotación de oro en Venezuela 2024: Devastación, caos y corrupción, March 2025, [url](#), p. 87



## 3. Profiles

### 3.1. Political opponents and activists, and human rights defenders

Sources indicated that during the reference period, the state continued a strategy of silencing and repression.<sup>625</sup> Authorities used laws such as the Anti-Hate Law and vague criminal charges to punish dissent, while most detentions involved secrecy and short-term enforced disappearances.<sup>626</sup> Other abuses against political opponents, activists, and human rights defenders included arbitrary detentions, prison isolation regimes, and violations of due process.<sup>627</sup>

In the months leading up to the 2024 and 2025 elections, a number of political parties, including Tupamaro, Fatherland for All (PPT, Patria para Todos), Podemos, MEP, PCV, Democratic Action (AD, Acción Democrática), Bandera Roja, Primero Justicia, Voluntad Popular, Copei, and National Integrity Unity Movement (MIN-Unidad, Movimiento de Integridad Nacional-Unidad), came under TSJ intervention, which replaced their leadership with individuals aligned with Chavismo.<sup>628</sup> The Comptroller General's Office also disqualified opposition politicians from running for office over alleged wrongdoing.<sup>629</sup>

Repression of dissent intensified after the July 2024 elections.<sup>630</sup> Since then, Venezuela has experienced ongoing repression and arbitrary and enforced disappearances of activists, journalists, and defenders of fundamental freedoms.<sup>631</sup> During the post-electoral protests of 2024, 25 people were killed and more than 2 220 were detained.<sup>632</sup> According to the UNFFMV, arrests occurred mainly in two contexts: first, spontaneous post-election protests against the results between 29 and 31 July 2024, where security forces carried out large and indiscriminate detentions, including of people 'who had simply been in the vicinity of a protest, even if they had neither participated in nor intended to attend the protests, or simply because they had been dressed in a manner that the authorities considered suspicious'. Second, during Operation Tun Tun, which targeted individuals, often from working-class areas, who

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<sup>625</sup> PROVEA, Política de silenciamiento: criminalización de la libertad de expresión en Venezuela, 2 March 2026, [url](#); OAS, IACHR, Annual Report 2025: Chapter IV.B – Venezuela, 26 February 2026, [url](#), para. 24

<sup>626</sup> PROVEA, Política de silenciamiento: criminalización de la libertad de expresión en Venezuela, 2 March 2026, [url](#); OAS, IACHR, Annual Report 2025: Chapter IV.B – Venezuela, 26 February 2026, [url](#), paras. 58, 169

<sup>627</sup> OAS, IACHR, Annual Report 2025: Chapter IV.B – Venezuela, 26 February 2026, [url](#), paras. 24-43

<sup>628</sup> Efecto Cocuyo, Cómo queda el Gran Polo Patriótico con intervención del PCV, 19 August 2023, [url](#); Crónica Uno, El TSJ intervino a ocho partidos, gremios, organizaciones deportivas y caritativas en 2023, 11 December 2023, [url](#). See also: El Nacionalista, TSJ interviene a 11 partidos que participarán en elecciones municipales, 16 July 2025, [url](#)

<sup>629</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2026 Country Report – Venezuela, 2026, [url](#), p. 35. See also: Clarín, Elecciones en Venezuela: el chavismo y su apego al poder tras un cuarto de siglo en el gobierno, 28 July 2024, [url](#)

<sup>630</sup> UN, FFMV, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 8 September 2025, [url](#), para. 3

<sup>631</sup> Transparency International, Venezuela: Transparency International Forced into Exile Amid Growing Repression of Civil Society, 13 March 2025, [url](#)

<sup>632</sup> UN, FFMV, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 8 September 2025, [url](#), para. 10



protested or questioned the election results in the streets or on social media; many were identified through video analysis or government-aligned informants.<sup>633</sup> The same source also indicated that targeted arrests of political leaders and activists, journalists and human rights defenders also occurred.<sup>634</sup>

There were also accusations of forced disappearances, torture, inhuman and degrading treatment, and sexual violence.<sup>635</sup> Authorities attributed the deaths to opposition activists, known as *comanditos*, and to criminal gangs allegedly hired by the opposition.<sup>636</sup> *Comanditos* are defined as community groups made up of civilians who opposed the government and rallied behind the political opposition during the presidential elections;<sup>637</sup> they also collected the copies of the electoral acts that demonstrated the commission of electoral fraud by the government.<sup>638</sup> The UNFFMV reported that the victims were struck by bullets in vital areas such as the abdomen, head, neck, and chest, and from distances no greater than 10 metres.<sup>639</sup> Authorities also encouraged citizens to report political protests and suspected dissidents through a government-backed app.<sup>640</sup> For more information on surveillance, see section [1.7 Monitoring mechanisms](#).

Transparencia Venezuela reported that, between January and April 2025, 56 people were detained for political reasons, and that, according to Cabello, around 70 people were detained during the week of the 2025 elections.<sup>641</sup> In September 2025, the UNFFMV indicated that, although close to 2 006 incarcerated dissidents had been released between July 2024 and September 2025, at least 200 new selective detentions of government critics had been reported.<sup>642</sup> The Venezuelan Program of Education and Actions for Human Rights (PROVEA, Programa Venezolano de Educación Acción en Derechos Humanos) documented 125 cases of targeting and criminalisation of citizens, activists, union leaders, and human rights defenders between January 2024 and October 2025.<sup>643</sup> These cases involved judicial abuse, arbitrary detentions, digital harassment, and targeted repression in states such as Trujillo and Zulia.<sup>644</sup>

<sup>633</sup> UN, FFMV, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 17 September 2024, [url](#), paras. 59-60

<sup>634</sup> UN, FFMV, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 17 September 2024, [url](#), para. 63

<sup>635</sup> UN, FFMV, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 8 September 2025, [url](#), para. 10

<sup>636</sup> UN, FFMV, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 8 September 2025, [url](#), para. 45

<sup>637</sup> CNN, Los "comanditos" de Venezuela se enfrentaron a Maduro. Ahora podrían encabezar una nueva oleada migratoria, 27 August 2024, [url](#); VOA, Los "comanditos" que la oposición en Venezuela creó para asegurarse la defensa de la elección presidencial, 10 July 2024, [url](#)

<sup>638</sup> CNN, Los "comanditos" de Venezuela se enfrentaron a Maduro. Ahora podrían encabezar una nueva oleada migratoria, 27 August 2024, [url](#)

<sup>639</sup> UN, FFMV, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 8 September 2025, [url](#), para. 48

<sup>640</sup> Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2025: Venezuela, February 2025, [url](#)

<sup>641</sup> Transparencia Venezuela, Elecciones regionales y legislativas de Venezuela 2025: Un proceso lleno de sombras, 27 June 2025, [url](#), p. 7

<sup>642</sup> UN, UN News, Venezuela: La persecución por motivos políticos se está intensificando, advierte la Misión Independiente, 22 September 2025, [url](#)

<sup>643</sup> PROVEA, Política de silenciamiento: criminalización de la libertad de expresión en Venezuela, 2 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>644</sup> PROVEA, Política de silenciamiento: criminalización de la libertad de expresión en Venezuela, 2 March 2026, [url](#)



On 7 May 2025, five political dissidents close to Corina Machado who had taken refuge in the Argentine embassy in Caracas were 'rescued' and transferred to the US. The individuals, who had remained in the embassy for more than 14 months, had been charged with "conspiracy" and "treason".<sup>645</sup> On 13 March 2025, Transparencia Venezuela announced that it would leave Venezuela and continue operating in exile due to threats and targeting of its members following the July 2024 elections.<sup>646</sup>

According to the IACHR, several detentions took place before January 2026, including:

- a journalist for the La Patilla web portal disappeared on 20 February 2025, and was accused of extortion and of disseminating false information;
- a PROVEA attorney, human rights defender, and university professor, who disappeared on 9 May 2025 and was subsequently accused of 'conspiracy' and other crimes;
- an attorney and political activist, arrested on 23 May 2025 and accused of terrorism.<sup>647</sup>

After the capture of Maduro by US forces on 3 January 2026, an interim government led by Delcy Rodríguez began promoting a narrative of reconciliation, announcing large-scale releases of detainees, and proposing the adoption of an Amnesty Law.<sup>648</sup> On 8 January 2026, the President of the National Assembly, Jorge Rodríguez, stated that a 'significant number' of Venezuelan and foreign nationals would be released from detention as a 'unilateral gesture by the Bolivarian government intended to reaffirm its stated commitment to advancing peace in the country'.<sup>649</sup> Foro Penal reported that, between 8 January and 24 February 2026, 436 verified releases were documented, along with an additional 109 full releases following the entry into force of the Amnesty Law on 19 February 2026.<sup>650</sup> Many of those released, however, continue to face restrictions or have not had their rights fully restored, and as of 24 February 2026, more than 573 individuals classified by Foro Penal as political prisoners remain in detention.<sup>651</sup> On 4 May 2026, the number was 457.<sup>652</sup> WOLA indicated that, between 8 January and 8 March 2026, human rights groups confirmed that at least 659 people were released from prison, including journalists, human rights defenders, and opposition figures, many of whom have since re-entered public life.<sup>653</sup>

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<sup>645</sup> BBC, EE.UU. afirma que rescató a los opositores venezolanos que estaban refugiados en la embajada de Argentina en Caracas desde hace más de un año, 7 May 2025, [url](#); France 24, El "rescate" y viaje a EE. UU. de cinco asilados venezolanos en la sede diplomática argentina en Caracas, 7 May 2025, [url](#)

<sup>646</sup> Transparency International, Venezuela: Transparency International forced into exile amid growing repression of civil society, 13 March 2025, [url](#)

<sup>647</sup> OAS, IACHR, Annual Report 2025: Chapter IV.B – Venezuela, 26 February 2026, [url](#), para. 39

<sup>648</sup> Foro Penal, Situation of Political Prisoners in Venezuela, January – February 2026, 17 March 2026, [url](#), p. 3; SWI swissinfo.ch, Delcy Rodríguez pide «madurez política» para lograr la «reconciliación» en Venezuela, 6 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>649</sup> Venezuela, Asamblea Nacional, Diputado Jorge Rodríguez anuncia excarcelación de importante grupo de venezolanos y extranjeros, 8 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>650</sup> Foro Penal, Situation of Political Prisoners in Venezuela, January – February 2026, 17 March 2026, [url](#), pp. 3-4

<sup>651</sup> Foro Penal, Situation of Political Prisoners in Venezuela, January – February 2026, 17 March 2026, [url](#), pp. 3-4

<sup>652</sup> Foro Penal, Balance de Presos Políticos en Venezuela al 04/05/2026 por Foro Penal, 9 May 2026, [url](#)

<sup>653</sup> WOLA, Two months without Maduro in Venezuela: Democratic transition or authoritarian adaptation?, 11 March 2026, [url](#)



Since the detention of Maduro, there is greater freedom in civic space and, to some extent, voice dissent.<sup>654</sup> Several leaders who had gone into hiding have resumed their activism, and that civil society has begun to reoccupy public spaces, 'testing how far [they] can go' and reclaiming the role of universities, unions, and the media,<sup>655</sup> and some activists who were in exile have returned to the country through formal channels without problem.<sup>656</sup> Faculty deans and human rights organisations have reportedly been contacted by the National Assembly to provide input on proposed regulatory reforms.<sup>657</sup> On 6 April 2026, the NGO Justice, Encounter, and Forgiveness (JEP, Justicia, Encuentro y Perdón) stated that the liberation of those who remain in prison is 'isolated and discretionary, without any structural policy aimed at guaranteeing the rights of detainees', and that 'incarcerations for political reasons continued to take place as a mechanism of control'.<sup>658</sup>

International Crisis Group reported that, following the release of political prisoners, estimates by human rights organisations of the number of people still incarcerated fell well short of the real total, in part because families feared reprisals if they denounced arrests.<sup>659</sup> On 26 January 2026, Diosdado Cabello described local NGOs as "'centres of extortion'", accusing them of charging relatives for the inclusion of incarcerated individuals on lists of political prisoners.<sup>660</sup> The Director of Foro Penal responded that only those who truly meet the criteria of political prisoners are included on the lists, noting that the government had recently released other categories of detainees.<sup>661</sup> The UNFFMV stated that there are no reliable or unified data on the identity or number of so-called political prisoners, and that official figures on those detained or released present major inconsistencies and cannot be independently verified.<sup>662</sup>

Despite the release of political prisoners, patterns of repression, institutional mistrust, and judicial opacity continue to persist.<sup>663</sup> The Centre for Defenders and Justice (CDJ, Centro para los Defensores y la Justicia) documented 122 attacks against human rights defenders between 1 January and 31 March 2026, a decrease of 48 % compared to the same period in 2025, when 236 cases were recorded.<sup>664</sup> The cases consisted of stigmatisation (82 instances),

<sup>654</sup> Amaya, telephone interview, 12 May 2026; Briceño-León, telephone interview, 13 May 2026

<sup>655</sup> WOLA, Two months without Maduro in Venezuela: Democratic transition or authoritarian adaptation?, 11 March 2026, [url](#); Amaya, telephone interview, 12 May 2026

<sup>656</sup> Amaya, telephone interview, 12 May 2026

<sup>657</sup> WOLA, Two months without Maduro in Venezuela: Democratic transition or authoritarian adaptation?, 11 March 2026, [url](#); Amaya, telephone interview, 12 May 2026

<sup>658</sup> CNN, Cae el número de excarcelaciones en Venezuela, dicen ONG, pese a que aún hay más de 500 presos políticos, 6 April 2026, [url](#)

<sup>659</sup> International Crisis Group, The Venezuela Paradigm: Is Trump's Model Intervention a Mirage?, 27 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>660</sup> Efecto Cocuyo, Cabello insiste en que hay más de 800 excarcelados y carga de nuevo contra las ONG: «Son centros de chantaje y extorsión», 26 January 2026, [url](#); Últimas Noticias, Diosdado Cabello: hasta la fecha van 808 excarcelaciones, 26 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>661</sup> Efecto Cocuyo, Cabello insiste en que hay más de 800 excarcelados y carga de nuevo contra las ONG: «Son centros de chantaje y extorsión», 26 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>662</sup> UN, FFMV, Statement by Maria Eloisa Quintero, Expert Member of the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, to the 61st session of the Human Rights Council, 12 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>663</sup> Foro Penal, Situation of Political Prisoners in Venezuela, January – February 2026, 17 March 2026, [url](#), p. 3; Amaya, telephone interview, 12 May 2026

<sup>664</sup> CDJ, Situación de las personas defensoras de derechos humanos en Venezuela – Primer trimestre 2026, 21 April 2026, [url](#)





intimidation (35), threats (4), and one cyber-attack.<sup>665</sup> Shortly after the US arrest of Maduro, the Venezuelan government issued an emergency decree authorising the detention of people demonstrating in favour of the US incursion; six people were reportedly briefly detained in Mérida, La Guaira, Miranda, Bolívar, and Caracas.<sup>666</sup> The New York Times reported that the number of those detained under the emergency decree was 31.<sup>667</sup> According to CDJ, '[f]ar from being isolated incidents, the recorded attacks reflect a sustained pattern of persecution aimed at suppressing civic action and weakening the Civic and Democratic Space'.<sup>668</sup> CDJ also indicated that the reduction in cases is the result of tightening restrictions on civic space, persistent stigmatisation of human rights defenders as 'enemies of the state', and the consolidation of social-control strategies.<sup>669</sup> This environment has forced activists to change how they operate, adopting self-protection measures, greater caution, and, in many cases, self-censorship to avoid reprisals and reduce the risk of criminalisation.<sup>670</sup>

International Crisis Group reported that Cabello's intolerance of dissent is displayed weekly on his live television programme, where he speaks from behind a desk topped with a large wooden club, launching harsh attacks against dissidents.<sup>671</sup> Since he oversees the police, significant parts of the intelligence services, and the *colectivos*, his denunciations 'are not mere rhetoric'.<sup>672</sup>

According to the Venezuelan Observatory of Social Conflict (OVCS, Observatorio Venezolano de Conflictividad Social), 1 926 protests were recorded between January and March 2026, an increase of 144 % compared to the same period in 2025.<sup>673</sup> Although most protests addressed two or more grievances (1 187 protests), common grievances included the right to political participation (1 078), the right to access justice (827), the right to demonstrate (588), and labour rights (482).<sup>674</sup> OVCS also reported that 21 protests were repressed by state forces between January and March 2026, a reduction of 45 % compared to the same period in 2025.<sup>675</sup> According to OVCS, the reduction was due to heightened scrutiny by international observers following the capture of Maduro in January 2026.<sup>676</sup>

Regarding the treatment of election observers, Amaya indicated that 'only the observers of the past elections (the Venezuelan electoral observatory) were accredited for the 2024 elections

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<sup>665</sup> CDJ, Situación de las personas defensoras de derechos humanos en Venezuela – Primer trimestre 2026, 21 April 2026, [url](#)

<sup>666</sup> Tal Cual, Prohibido celebrar: el silencio obligado en calles de Venezuela tras la captura de Maduro, 17 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>667</sup> New York Times (The), Cómo una pelea de globos de agua en Venezuela terminó en cargos de traición a la patria, 24 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>668</sup> CDJ, Situación de las personas defensoras de derechos humanos en Venezuela – Primer trimestre 2026, 21 April 2026, [url](#)

<sup>669</sup> CDJ, Situación de las personas defensoras de derechos humanos en Venezuela – Primer trimestre 2026, 21 April 2026, [url](#)

<sup>670</sup> CDJ, Situación de las personas defensoras de derechos humanos en Venezuela – Primer trimestre 2026, 21 April 2026, [url](#)

<sup>671</sup> International Crisis Group, The Venezuela Paradigm: Is Trump's Model Intervention a Mirage?, 27 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>672</sup> International Crisis Group, The Venezuela Paradigm: Is Trump's Model Intervention a Mirage?, 27 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>673</sup> OVCS, Venezuela- Primer trimestre 2026, 2026, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>674</sup> OVCS, Venezuela- Primer trimestre 2026, 2026, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>675</sup> OVCS, Venezuela- Primer trimestre 2026, 2026, [url](#), pp. 15-16

<sup>676</sup> OVCS, Venezuela- Primer trimestre 2026, 2026, [url](#), pp. 15-16





and had to participate as citizens, not as an organisation. There has been no repression against them and a number have been released from prison since January 2026. But it is also true that the National Electoral Council is practically dormant, as if it does not exist'.<sup>677</sup> Additional information could not be found among the sources consulted within the time constraints of this report.

### 3.2. Current and former government employees who support the opposition

Sources reported that, during the reference period, government employees faced discrimination and harassment for expressing their political beliefs.<sup>678</sup> After the presidential elections of 2024, illegal layoffs and forced resignations were carried out in government institutions such as PDVSA, National Electricity Corporation (Corpoelec, Corporación Eléctrica Nacional, S.A.), Venezuelan Television (VTV, Venezolana de Televisión), and public-sector healthcare services, targeting government employees who had publicly expressed concerns about the transparency of the elections.<sup>679</sup> Tal Cual reported that more than 100 PDVSA employees in Caracas were dismissed and around 30 employees in the western division of PDVSA were forced to resign.<sup>680</sup>

In the months leading up to the 2024 elections, the government of Lara reportedly instructed its employees to delete WhatsApp from their mobile phones and install Telegram instead, and those who did not comply within three days were dismissed.<sup>681</sup> In Zulia state, the Ministry of Health reportedly punished government employees who had participated in anti-government demonstrations or posted critical messages on social media by transferring them to remote health-care centres or work locations far from their homes.<sup>682</sup>

The UNFFMV indicated that, in August 2024, at least seven public officials were detained and charged with "intentional delay or omission of functions", including of prosecutors who refused to prosecute persons being investigated for simply participating in protests.<sup>683</sup> Government employees have also been dismissed for 'liking' posts by Corina Machado on

<sup>677</sup> Amaya, telephone interview, 27 May 2026

<sup>678</sup> SWI swissinfo.ch, El Partido Comunista de Venezuela denuncia «despidos ilegales» de empleados públicos, 20 August 2024, [url](#); USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2023: Venezuela, 22 April 2024, [url](#)

<sup>679</sup> SWI swissinfo.ch, El Partido Comunista de Venezuela denuncia «despidos ilegales» de empleados públicos, 20 August 2024, [url](#); Tal Cual, La represalia política de nuevo en Pdvsa: al menos 100 trabajadores obligados a renuncia, 21 August 2024, [url](#)

<sup>680</sup> Tal Cual, La represalia política de nuevo en Pdvsa: al menos 100 trabajadores obligados a renuncia, 21 August 2024, [url](#)

<sup>681</sup> Efecto Cocuyo, Instituciones públicas y privadas despiden a trabajadores por no apoyar resultados electorales, 18 August 2024, [url](#). See also: El Estímulo, María Corina Machado le habla a los empleados públicos: 5 frases claves de su mensaje, 21 August 2024, [url](#)

<sup>682</sup> Efecto Cocuyo, Instituciones públicas y privadas despiden a trabajadores por no apoyar resultados electorales, 18 August 2024, [url](#). See also: El Estímulo, María Corina Machado le habla a los empleados públicos: 5 frases claves de su mensaje, 21 August 2024, [url](#)

<sup>683</sup> UN, FFMV, Detailed findings of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 14 October 2024, [url](#), para. 604



social media or for writing terms such as 'fraud' in reference to the 2024 elections.<sup>684</sup> Tal Cual reported that screenshots of messages critical of the government are sent to human-resources departments to enable reprisals against employees.<sup>685</sup> Senior PDVSA executives have also instructed administrative and operational staff to attend pro-government rallies and have monitored their social-media accounts for signs of criticism of the government.<sup>686</sup> Amaya indicated the following:

'In Venezuela, estimates suggest there are between six and eight million public employees, although the exact number is unknown due to the government's lack of transparency. Teachers and health-care workers tend to speak more openly about political issues, as they face less institutional exposure than staff working inside ministries or government agencies, where censorship and the risk of punishment are greater. Public officials are generally reluctant to identify themselves, and those who report serious wrongdoing may face reprisals. Reporting corruption remains difficult. The case of Víctor Hugo Quero Navas, detained in January 2025, disappeared, and later found, in May 2026, to have died in July 2025 in prison without public disclosure, illustrates the extent to which information can be withheld within state institutions.<sup>687</sup> This pattern reflects a deeply entrenched "spiral of silence" among Venezuelan public workers'.<sup>688</sup>

According to a member of the Communist Party of Venezuela, harassment and repression are common in the workplace against government employees who express dissent.<sup>689</sup> The OVCS reported that between January and March 2026, the sectors with the highest number of worker protests were education (134), healthcare (49), transportation (42), and others (501).<sup>690</sup>

The ENH indicated that, between January and July 2024, 82 % of healthcare workers faced violence by relatives of patients, 45 % were victims of theft or robbery, 11 % experienced violence by para-state groups, and 11 % by state security forces, inside healthcare centres.<sup>691</sup> The Venezuelan Medical Federation (FMV, Federación Médica Venezolana) reported that, as of January 2026, five healthcare workers were in prison for political reasons, including:

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<sup>684</sup> SWI swissinfo.ch, El Partido Comunista de Venezuela denuncia «despidos ilegales» de empleados públicos, 20 August 2024, [url](#)

<sup>685</sup> Tal Cual, La represalia política de nuevo en Pdvsa: al menos 100 trabajadores obligados a renuncia, 21 August 2024, [url](#)

<sup>686</sup> Tal Cual, La represalia política de nuevo en Pdvsa: al menos 100 trabajadores obligados a renuncia, 21 August 2024, [url](#)

<sup>687</sup> Quero Navas was considered a political prisoner. Relatives reportedly approached various authorities repeatedly and periodically seeking information on his fate and whereabouts, without receiving any response or being granted communication with him. UNOHCHR, Venezuela: UN Working Group gravely concerned by enforced disappearance and subsequent death in custody of Víctor Hugo Quero Navas, 11 May 2026, [url](#)

<sup>688</sup> Amaya, telephone interview, 12 May 2026. See also: Caracas Chronicles, The Chain of Command That Concealed Víctor Hugo Quero's Death, 10 May 2026, [url](#)

<sup>689</sup> SWI swissinfo.ch, El Partido Comunista de Venezuela denuncia «despidos ilegales» de empleados públicos, 20 August 2024, [url](#)

<sup>690</sup> OVCS, Venezuela- Primer trimestre 2026, 2026, [url](#), p. 20

<sup>691</sup> Médicos por la Salud, Encuesta Nacional de Hospitales , Reporte semi-anual 2024, November 2024, [url](#), p. 18



- An obstetrician-gynaecologist from Aragua, detained in November 2024 for alleged 'incitement to hatred' and held in Tocarón prison. The individual suffers from hypertension, joint problems, depression, and dermatological conditions.
- A urological surgeon from Mérida, arrested on 20 October 2025 and held in Yare prison, charged with 'terrorism' and 'incitement to hatred'.
- A radiologist from Lara, detained on 19 July 2025 and held in Tocuyito prison, Carabobo state.
- Two physicians from Trujillo arrested on 10 September 2025 and held in the headquarters of the Kidnapping and Anti-extortion National Command (CONAS, Comando Nacional Antiextorsión y Secuestro) in Caracas.<sup>692</sup>

### 3.3. Deserters and draft evaders from military service

For background information, including legislation related to desertion, see [EUAA COI Report – Venezuela Country Focus November 2023](#), Section 4.5. Infobae reported that the main reasons for desertion included the economic situation, the politicisation of the security forces, and the refusal of discharge applications.<sup>693</sup> The Military Disciplinary Law (Ley de Disciplina Militar) classifies desertion as a 'serious offense'.<sup>694</sup> On 22 May 2025, the Armed Forces sent 80 military officers to the Disciplinary Council for failing to report to duty.<sup>695</sup>

Cases of treatment of deserters and draft evaders, as reported by sources, during the reference period, included:

- In February 2024, Ronald Ojeda, a former military officer living in Santiago Chile, was killed by a local branch of Tren de Aragua. Ojeda had been arrested and sentenced in 2017 in Venezuela for treason and rebellion after joining other military officers in issuing a communiqué stating that they would no longer obey President Maduro. The Office of the Attorney General of Chile indicated that it had evidence that the murder was ordered and paid for by the Venezuelan government.<sup>696</sup>

<sup>692</sup> Tal Cual, FMV pide liberación inmediata de cinco médicos detenidos por razones políticas, 19 January 2026, [url](#); El Diario, FMV exigió la liberación de cinco médicos detenidos por motivos políticos en Venezuela, 19 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>693</sup> Infobae, Ochenta sargentos de la Aviación venezolana fueron pasados a Consejo de Investigación por desertar de la Fuerza Armada, 6 June 2025, [url](#)

<sup>694</sup> Infobae, Ochenta sargentos de la Aviación venezolana fueron pasados a Consejo de Investigación por desertar de la Fuerza Armada, 6 June 2025, [url](#)

<sup>695</sup> Infobae, Ochenta sargentos de la Aviación venezolana fueron pasados a Consejo de Investigación por desertar de la Fuerza Armada, 6 June 2025, [url](#)

<sup>696</sup> BBC, La Fiscalía chilena acusa al gobierno de Venezuela de pagar por el asesinato del opositor Ronald Ojeda en Chile, 23 January 2025, [url](#)



- The detention of the partner of an exiled former lieutenant in January 2025 to pressure her husband to surrender. At the time of her detention, she was two months pregnant, gave birth in prison, and later received house arrest.<sup>697</sup>

On 17 February 2025, Cabello stated that among the deportees who had arrived the previous week, there were two deserters from the military, and that authorities would respect their human rights, while also noting that 'there would be consequences "for those who had outstanding matters with the justice"'.<sup>698</sup> Additional information on the two deserters could not be found among the sources consulted within the time constraints of this report.

Military personnel imprisoned were excluded from the Amnesty Law.<sup>699</sup> As of 27 April 2026, 185 military personnel remained in prison.<sup>700</sup>

### 3.4. Journalists

The UNFFMV indicated that 18 journalists were detained between August 2024 and August 2025 due to their perceived status as opponents.<sup>701</sup> Alleged reasons for targeting include publishing information critical of the government<sup>702</sup> or material deemed to be of 'public interest'.<sup>703</sup> Journalists and social-media content creators are typically charged with 'instigation to hate'.<sup>704</sup> Sources also reported the killing of a journalist on 22 June 2025 while livestreaming from his home in Maracay.<sup>705</sup> As of September 2025, 11 journalists remained in detention.<sup>706</sup>

Between January and April 2026, the Press and Society Institute (IPYS, Instituto de Prensa y Sociedad) recorded 36 violations of the right to freedom of expression, including the detention of journalists during coverage, the review and forced deletion of news material, physical and verbal attacks, the closure of broadcasting stations, and public warnings against

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<sup>697</sup> El País, Los militares y sus familiares son los grandes excluidos de la ley de amnistía en Venezuela, 22 February 2026, [url](#); SWI swissinfo.ch, Otorgan arresto domiciliario a presa política venezolana que dio a luz detenida, dice ONG, 19 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>698</sup> SWI swissinfo.ch, Dos militares desertores entre venezolanos deportados desde EEUU, dice titular de Interior, 17 February 2025, [url](#); Agencia EFE, Dos militares desertores entre venezolanos deportados desde EEUU, dice titular de Interior, 17 February 2025, [url](#)

<sup>699</sup> International Crisis Group, The Venezuela Paradigm: Is Trump's Model Intervention a Mirage?, 27 March 2026, [url](#); El País, Venezuela excluye de la amnistía a militares y a quienes instigaron una intervención extranjera, 20 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>700</sup> Foro Penal, Foro Penal, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>701</sup> UN, FFMV, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 8 September 2025, [url](#), para. 85

<sup>702</sup> UN, FFMV, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, A/HRC/57/57, 17 September 2024, [url](#), para. 100; Espacio Público, Informe 2025: Situación general del derecho a la libertad de expresión en Venezuela, 29 April 2026, [url](#)

<sup>703</sup> Espacio Público, Informe 2025: Situación general del derecho a la libertad de expresión en Venezuela, 29 April 2026, [url](#)

<sup>704</sup> Espacio Público, Informe 2025: Situación general del derecho a la libertad de expresión en Venezuela, 29 April 2026, [url](#)

<sup>705</sup> Infobae, Asesinato de tiktoker evidencia los riesgos de denunciar el crimen organizado en Venezuela, 30 June 2025, [url](#)

<sup>706</sup> UN, FFMV, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 8 September 2025, [url](#), para. 85



media outlets.<sup>707</sup> Between 3 January and 27 March 2026, CONATEL shut down four independent radio stations, more than half the total number closed throughout 2025.<sup>708</sup> On 3 May 2026, IPYS stated that, although there have been recent advances such as the Amnesty Law, 'freedom remains partial and reversible, without full guarantees'.<sup>709</sup> IPYS also reported that, in 2025 and 2026, journalists continued to avoid signing their work, resulting in a practice shaped by caution, calculation, and persistent uncertainty.<sup>710</sup> Coverage has become more distant, and on-the-ground reporting increasingly rare, with many topics going unreported and lines of questioning heavily modified.<sup>711</sup>

According to the National Union of Press Workers (SNTP, Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores de la Prensa), by 19 April 2026, 28 journalists and press workers had been released under the Amnesty Law.<sup>712</sup> The same source indicated, however, that the judicial files of eight workers and journalists had not been closed as mandated by the Amnesty Law.<sup>713</sup> Four requests for dismissal of charges were denied by the courts, and appeals have been filed in all of them, but appellate courts have yet to issue a decision.<sup>714</sup> In addition, three requests have received no response despite legal deadlines having expired, prolonging the legal uncertainty faced by those affected.<sup>715</sup>

The appointment in March 2026 of a new CONATEL director with sector experience has been considered a positive development, and independent media outlets have been granted access to both the parliament and the presidential palace for the first time in many years.<sup>716</sup> Sources indicated, however, that censorship persists despite limited signs of greater tolerance.<sup>717</sup>

### 3.5. LGBTIQ+

There is no constitutional protection against discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression,<sup>718</sup> nor laws that guarantee the fundamental rights of LGBTI persons.<sup>719</sup> There are no national laws that protect against discrimination based on

<sup>707</sup> IPYS, 3 de mayo en el país del silencio administrado, 3 May 2026, [url](#)

<sup>708</sup> International Crisis Group, The Venezuela Paradigm: Is Trump's Model Intervention a Mirage?, 27 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>709</sup> IPYS, 3 de mayo en el país del silencio administrado, 3 May 2026, [url](#)

<sup>710</sup> IPYS, 3 de mayo en el país del silencio administrado, 3 May 2026, [url](#)

<sup>711</sup> IPYS, 3 de mayo en el país del silencio administrado, 3 May 2026, [url](#)

<sup>712</sup> SNTP, A dos meses de promulgada la Ley de Amnistía, al menos 8 periodistas siguen judicializados, 20 April 2026, [url](#)

<sup>713</sup> SNTP, A dos meses de promulgada la Ley de Amnistía, al menos 8 periodistas siguen judicializados, 20 April 2026, [url](#). See also: IPYS, 3 de mayo en el país del silencio administrado, 3 May 2026, [url](#)

<sup>714</sup> SNTP, A dos meses de promulgada la Ley de Amnistía, al menos 8 periodistas siguen judicializados, 20 April 2026, [url](#)

<sup>715</sup> SNTP, A dos meses de promulgada la Ley de Amnistía, al menos 8 periodistas siguen judicializados, 20 April 2026, [url](#)

<sup>716</sup> International Crisis Group, The Venezuela Paradigm: Is Trump's Model Intervention a Mirage?, 27 March 2026, [url](#); Correo del Caroní, Quién es Enrique Quintana, el nuevo director de Conatel, 9 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>717</sup> International Crisis Group, The Venezuela Paradigm: Is Trump's Model Intervention a Mirage?, 27 March 2026, [url](#); IPYS, 3 de mayo en el país del silencio administrado, 3 May 2026, [url](#)

<sup>718</sup> ILGA, Venezuela, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>719</sup> OAS, IACHR, Annual Report 2025: Chapter IV.B – Venezuela, 26 February 2026, [url](#), paras. 207-208



sexual orientation or gender identity<sup>720</sup> or a hate crime law specifically protecting LGBTIQ+ individuals.<sup>721</sup> Venezuelan legislation provides some partial protections against discrimination via laws on protection of employment (based on sexual orientation - 2012), protection in housing (based on sexual orientation and gender identity - 2011), and against incitement to hatred based on sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression (2017).<sup>722</sup> With the introduction of the anti-NGO law in 2024, LGBTIQ+ organisations are among the civil-society groups that have faced severe restrictions on their activities.<sup>723</sup>

Consensual same-sex sexual acts are not criminalised.<sup>724</sup> Military penal code's criminalisation of homosexuality was abolished in 2023.<sup>725</sup> In its 2025 report on sexual minorities in Venezuela, Belgium's Commissioner General for Refugees and Stateless Persons (CGRS) observed that '[h]omosexual acts are not punishable and the sources consulted make no mention of judicial and/or police prosecution of sexual minorities or transgender persons solely on the basis of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity'.<sup>726</sup>

Recent public-opinion surveys indicated a 'moderate level of acceptance' of LGBTIQ+ rights in certain areas.<sup>727</sup> However, almost no openly LGBTIQ+ individuals hold senior political or government positions.<sup>728</sup> Furthermore, Amnesty International reported that, during 2025, state authorities used sexist and anti-LGBTIQ+ rhetoric in the media to discredit members and supporters of the opposition.<sup>729</sup>

However, the IACHR described the situation of LGBTIQ+ persons in Venezuela during 2025 as characterised by ongoing violations of their rights and continued efforts to obtain recognition,<sup>730</sup> including the absence of legal recognition of same-sex partnerships and legal gender-identity changes.<sup>731</sup> Similarly, BTI reported that the LGBTIQ+ community faced 'violence, social and labour exclusion' and restrictions on rights.<sup>732</sup> The UNFFMV indicated that there have been cases of LGBTIQ+ persons who were prevented from accessing healthcare or medicines, or detained, due to their perceived or real political affiliation.<sup>733</sup> The same source explained that

'LGBT individuals, opponents or perceived as such, have been subjected to searches and "detentions" for several hours in public spaces by security agents without apparent cause. This included the inspection of mobile phones for political or personal information, threats of sexual violence, and harassment

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<sup>720</sup> Outright International, Venezuela, Last updated: 12 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>721</sup> ILGA, Venezuela, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>722</sup> ILGA, Venezuela, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>723</sup> Belgium, CGVS, COI Focus – Venezuela - Seksuele en genderminderheden, 25 November 2025, [url](#), p. 3

<sup>724</sup> Equaldex, Venezuela, n.d., [url](#); Belgium, CGVS, COI Focus – Venezuela - Seksuele en genderminderheden, 25 November 2025, [url](#), p. 3

<sup>725</sup> Belgium, CGVS, COI Focus – Venezuela - Seksuele en genderminderheden, 25 November 2025, [url](#), p. 3

<sup>726</sup> Belgium, CGVS, COI Focus – Venezuela - Seksuele en genderminderheden, 25 November 2025, [url](#), p. 3

<sup>727</sup> Equaldex, Venezuela, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>728</sup> Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2026 – Venezuela, 19 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>729</sup> AI, The State of the World's Human Rights: Venezuela, 21 April 2026, [url](#), p. 394

<sup>730</sup> OAS, IACHR, Annual Report 2025: Chapter IV.B – Venezuela, 26 February 2026, [url](#), paras. 207-208

<sup>731</sup> Belgium, CGVS, COI Focus – Venezuela - Seksuele en genderminderheden, 25 November 2025, [url](#), p. 3

<sup>732</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2026 Country Report – Venezuela, 2026, [url](#), p. 13

<sup>733</sup> UN, FFMV, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 8 September 2025, [url](#), para. 81



based on their actual or perceived sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression. When these individuals were detained during post-electoral demonstrations, at least ten documented cases involved mistreatment and verbal abuse with homophobic and transphobic connotations'.<sup>734</sup>

The state has not published official statistics on violence or discrimination based on prejudice, and only limited information is available from civil society.<sup>735</sup> The UNFFMV indicated that LGBTIQ+ individuals face additional barriers that prevent them from filing complaints, and that they adopt self-censorship to avoid ridicule or revictimisation.<sup>736</sup> During 2024 the Venezuelan NGO OVV LGBTIQ+ recorded 40 cases of discrimination affecting 65 LGBTIQ+ persons.<sup>737</sup> It also documented 100 assaults, including 31 instances of humiliation, 21 cases of denial of access to a location, 8 threats, 6 assaults, 4 cases of sexual harassment, and 2 murders.<sup>738</sup> The same source indicated that, in early 2025, Operation Tun Tun expanded this repression, applying political and moral criminalisation to LGBTIQ+ individuals and adding measures such as arbitrary passport cancellations, which affected at least 20 human-rights defenders.<sup>739</sup> The same source reported the death in custody of two LGBTIQ+ individuals linked to state actors, alongside reports of torture, sexual-violence threats, and degrading treatment in facilities such as El Helicoide.<sup>740</sup> OHCHR reported that LGBTIQ+ persons who are, or are perceived as, political opponents were among those affected by a pattern of sexual and gender-based violence in places of deprivation of liberty.<sup>741</sup>

Venezuela does not permit citizens to change their gender identity on identification documents.<sup>742</sup> Article 146 of the Civil Registry Law technically permits name changes based on gender but requests are denied by the Civil Registry. Some cases have been successful, following a 2017 TSJ ruling that permits changes in some cases; however, there is no generally available mechanism to do so.<sup>743</sup> USDOS reported in 2024 that healthcare services for transgender people such as hormone therapy and psychological assistance were not widely available.<sup>744</sup> The same source indicated that '[a]s identity documents were required for access to education, employment, housing, health care, and other services, these discriminatory actions often led transgender and intersex persons to become victims of human

<sup>734</sup> UN, FFMV, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 8 September 2025, [url](#), para. 364

<sup>735</sup> OAS, IACHR, Annual Report 2025: Chapter IV.B – Venezuela, 26 February 2026, [url](#), paras. 207-208

<sup>736</sup> OAS, IACHR, Annual Report 2025: Chapter IV.B – Venezuela, 26 February 2026, [url](#), paras. 207-208; UN (United Nations), FFMV (Independent International Fact-finding Mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela), Crímenes de lesa humanidad: el rol de la Guardia Nacional Bolivariana, A/HRC/61/CRP.4, 11 December 2025, [url](#), para. 299

<sup>737</sup> OVV LGBTIQ+, Espacios públicos inseguros: 65 personas LGBTIQ+ fueron discriminadas en 2024 en lugares de entretenimiento, 22 January 2025, [url](#)

<sup>738</sup> OVV LGBTIQ+, Espacios públicos inseguros: 65 personas LGBTIQ+ fueron discriminadas en 2024 en lugares de entretenimiento, 22 January 2025, [url](#)

<sup>739</sup> OVV LGBTIQ+, Venezuela: La arquitectura del odio y la deuda histórica que asfixia a la población LGBTIQ+, 20 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>740</sup> OVV LGBTIQ+, Venezuela: La arquitectura del odio y la deuda histórica que asfixia a la población LGBTIQ+, 20 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>741</sup> UNOHCHR, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, A/HRC/60/61, 6 October 2025, [url](#), para. 84

<sup>742</sup> USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2023: Venezuela, 22 April 2024, [url](#), p. 61; ILGA, Venezuela, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>743</sup> Equaldex, Venezuela, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>744</sup> USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2023: Venezuela, 22 April 2024, [url](#), p. 61





trafficking'.<sup>745</sup> The Venezuela Observatory of LGBTIQ+ Violence stated that 'discrimination in the workplace is a constant reality, since many trans people must accept informal or poorly paid jobs due to a lack of opportunities, contributing to a cycle of poverty that limits access to basic resources and a dignified life'.<sup>746</sup> According to the Trans Murder Monitoring project, between 2023-2025, there were 7 murders of transgender people in Venezuela.<sup>747</sup> ILGA reported that, between 2008 and 2025, there were 140 murders of trans people documented by that organisation.<sup>748</sup>

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<sup>745</sup> USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2023: Venezuela, 22 April 2024, [url](#), p. 61

<sup>746</sup> El Aragüenio, ONG venezolanas dicen que falta de políticas expone a personas trans a la violencia, 2 April 2026, [url](#)

<sup>747</sup> TGEU, Trans Murder Monitoring Project, Filters: Venezuela 2023-2025, [url](#)

<sup>748</sup> El Aragüenio, ONG venezolanas dicen que falta de políticas expone a personas trans a la violencia, 2 April 2026, [url](#)





## 4. Freedom of movement

### 4.1. Treatment of persons returning from abroad

In October 2024, Acceso a la Justicia reported that, according to a new government directive, Venezuelans abroad with an expired passport or without a passport must request a letter-of-safe-passage (*salvoconducto*) at the nearest Venezuelan diplomatic representation, or, at a date yet to be announced, online.<sup>749</sup> The directive, which was not published in the official gazette, violates Article 50 of the Constitution, which guarantees the free entry of Venezuelans into the country without any authorisation.<sup>750</sup> The website of the Venezuelan Ministry of Foreign Affairs also stated that Venezuelans with an expired passport or without a passport must apply for a letter-of-safe-passage in order to return to Venezuela. Required documents include the original and copies of the police report (if lost or stolen), the original and a copy of the travel ticket validated by the airline, a copy of the applicant's ID (ID card or passport), a photo in JPG format on a CD or DVD, and proof of payment of any applicable consular fee. For children and adolescents, a copy of both parents' Venezuelan ID cards and passport bio pages is required, and if the minor travels alone or with only one parent, the non-travelling parent's authorisation must be apostilled.<sup>751</sup>

According to the government, around 20 200 Venezuelans returned to the country under the Great Mission Return to the Homeland (Gran Misión Vuelta a la Patria) between February 2025 and February 2026.<sup>752</sup> The program assists Venezuelans abroad who are in conditions of 'vulnerability' or detained in immigration detention centres abroad.<sup>753</sup> For additional information about the program, see section 2.4.1 of the [EUAA COI Report on Venezuela: Country Focus \(2023\)](#).

In July 2025, El Salvador repatriated 250 Venezuelans who had been deported to that country by the US in March 2025. The returned Venezuelans, who had been accused by the US of being members of Tren de Aragua and were returned in exchange for the release of 10 US citizens imprisoned in Venezuela, were imprisoned in the Centre for the Confinement of Terrorism (CECOT, Centro de Confinamiento del Terrorismo) in El Salvador. According to the

<sup>749</sup> Acceso a la Justicia, Salvoconducto para Venezuela: la polémica decisión del Gobierno que deja a miles sin regreso, 10 October 2024, [url](#). See also: AVAVIT [Instagram], Notas informativas de la reunión sostenida hoy con autoridades de SAIME Maiquetía, @INAC, Cancillería @CONSETURISMO, AVAVIT, @alav\_ve @AVEMAREP y aerolíneas para tratar el tema de los nuevos procedimientos para el ingreso de venezolanos al país con pasaporte vencido, 2 October 2024, [url](#)

<sup>750</sup> Acceso a la Justicia, Salvoconducto para Venezuela: la polémica decisión del Gobierno que deja a miles sin regreso, 10 October 2024, [url](#). See also: Venezuela, Constitución de la República Bolivariana de Venezuela (Amended), 2009, [url](#), Art. 50

<sup>751</sup> Venezuela, Ministerio del Poder Popular para las Relaciones Exteriores, Documentos de viaje, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>752</sup> Correo da Venezuela, 20.200 venezolanos regresaron al país en vuelos de repatriación durante el último año, 5 February 2026, [url](#); Infobae, Más de 20.000 venezolanos regresaron a su país en vuelos de repatriación durante el último año, 4 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>753</sup> TeleSUR, Venezuela: 263 ciudadanos retornaron al país mediante el Plan Vuelta a la Patria, 22 April 2026, [url](#)





repatriated Venezuelans, they were subjected to abuses by Salvadoran authorities, including torture and sexual violence.<sup>754</sup>

Human Rights First, a US-based NGO, reported that US authorities carried out 11 removal flights to Venezuela in March 2026, returning 1 726 people, including families and children.<sup>755</sup> The same source indicated that, from mid-January 2026, US officials operated three weekly flights after the program had been briefly paused for five weeks. Since late November 2025, all flights have departed from Phoenix, Arizona, and landed at Simón Bolívar International Airport in Maiquetía.<sup>756</sup> Between February and December 2025, the US conducted 76 removal flights to Venezuela, removing 14 310 Venezuelans, including families and children.<sup>757</sup>

According to Notiprensa Digital, upon arrival, Venezuelans returning under the Return to the Homeland Plan undergo established migration protocols, including individual interviews, case reviews, and verification and registration procedures. Afterwards, medical assistance and 'comprehensive guidance' from government institutions are provided before they are transported to their respective destinations within the country.<sup>758</sup> The reception operation involves interviews with CICPC, SEBIN, GNB, PNB,<sup>759</sup> and DGCIM.<sup>760</sup> Protocols reportedly include criminal-background checks, physical and psychological assessments, and assistance in accessing documentation.<sup>761</sup> Human Rights Watch reported in November 2025 that some returnees did not receive further psychological support.<sup>762</sup> Most interviewees said they had not experienced persecution or threats from Venezuelan authorities or armed or criminal groups; however, two former detainees reported that SEBIN agents visited their homes as part of a "monitoring process" and asked them, while being filmed, to discuss their detention in the US, the treatment received, and whether they had any ties to US agencies allegedly attempting to "destabilize the government".<sup>763</sup>

According to PROVEA, some exiles were detained upon return for social-media posts.<sup>764</sup> Tal Cual reported on 4 August 2025 that four Venezuelan TikTok influencers were detained upon return from the US and charged with 'incitement to hate' for posting messages critical of the

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<sup>754</sup> BBC, Bukele devuelve a Caracas a los migrantes deportados por EE.UU. a El Salvador a cambio de la liberación de 10 estadounidenses y decenas de presos venezolanos, 19 July 2025, [url](#); HRW, Estados Unidos/El Salvador: Deportados venezolanos fueron torturados, 12 November 2025, [url](#)

<sup>755</sup> Human Rights First, About us, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>756</sup> Human Rights First, ICE Flight Monitor: March 2026 Monthly Report, 14 April 2026, [url](#), 15

<sup>757</sup> Human Rights First, ICE Flight Monitor: December 2025 Monthly Report, 9 January 2026, [url](#), p. 5

<sup>758</sup> Notiprensa Digital, Más de 180 venezolanos retornan al país en nuevo vuelo de la Gran Misión Vuelta a la Patria, 25 April 2026, [url](#)

<sup>759</sup> Notiprensa Digital, Más de 180 venezolanos retornan al país en nuevo vuelo de la Gran Misión Vuelta a la Patria, 25 April 2026, [url](#); AVN, Revisarán antecedentes a migrantes venezolanos deportados de EEUU, 28 March 2025, [url](#)

<sup>760</sup> AVN, Revisarán antecedentes a migrantes venezolanos deportados de EEUU, 28 March 2025, [url](#)

<sup>761</sup> Orinoco Tribune, Venezuela: 728 Migrants Return From United States This Week, 12 July 2025, [url](#); HRW, "You Have Arrived in Hell": Torture and Other Abuses Against Venezuelans in El Salvador's Mega Prison, November 2025, [url](#), p. 79

<sup>762</sup> HRW, "You Have Arrived in Hell": Torture and Other Abuses Against Venezuelans in El Salvador's Mega Prison, November 2025, [url](#), p. 79

<sup>763</sup> HRW, "You Have Arrived in Hell": Torture and Other Abuses Against Venezuelans in El Salvador's Mega Prison, November 2025, [url](#), p. 80

<sup>764</sup> PROVEA, Política de silenciamiento: criminalización de la libertad de expresión en Venezuela, 2 March 2026, [url](#)





government while abroad.<sup>765</sup> According to PROVEA, these detentions constitute a 'symbolic punishment' for Venezuelans abroad expressing dissent.<sup>766</sup> One of the influencers was in the United States irregularly, and posted videos on how to break and enter into houses and how to beg on the streets with a baby. Upon deportation to Venezuela, the individual was charged with 'incitement to hatred' and 'child exploitation'.<sup>767</sup> On 26 February 2026, local news source La Patilla reported that the individual had been released and had resumed posting on social media.<sup>768</sup> Additional information could not be found among the sources consulted within the time constraints of this report.

Amaya indicated the following:

'At Maiquetía Airport, the country's main airport, numerous cases were previously reported in which individuals were detained, had their passports confiscated, or were sent back home. Others faced obstacles to departure or were denied exit altogether, in a context described as highly arbitrary. Recently, however, people with open judicial cases, including communicators and activists who had been living abroad, have returned and passed through Maiquetía without incident. This does not eliminate risk, but the airport is no longer perceived as the 'black hole' it once was. In the past, many travellers avoided Maiquetía and instead exited Venezuela via the land border with Colombia. Crossing into Colombia does not require a Venezuelan exit stamp, as Colombian authorities no longer demand it. Travellers could therefore leave Venezuela through a formal crossing without stamping their passport at the Administrative Service of Identification, Migration and Foreigners (SAIME, Servicio Administrativo de Identificación, Migración y Extranjería), proceed directly to Colombian Migration (Migración Colombia), which stamps the entry, and enter with their passport. The same applied when returning: travellers could exit Colombia with a Colombian exit stamp and enter Venezuela without passing through the SAIME booth, and if questioned, simply present their national ID and state they had been shopping'.<sup>769</sup>

The same source also indicated that, in his view, people who participated in protests have not been detained upon their return to the country after January 2026, but that two people who entered by land from Colombia were detained, but released shortly, and that authorities are now stamping passports without problems.<sup>770</sup>

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<sup>765</sup> Tal Cual, Detención de tiktokers deportados es un «castigo simbólico» para venezolanos en el exterior, 4 August 2025, [url](#)

<sup>766</sup> PROVEA, Política de silenciamiento: criminalización de la libertad de expresión en Venezuela, 2 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>767</sup> Tal Cual, Detención de tiktokers deportados es un «castigo simbólico» para venezolanos en el exterior, 4 August 2025, [url](#)

<sup>768</sup> La Patilla, Reapareció "Leito Oficial" tras ser excarcelado en Venezuela (VIDEO), 26 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>769</sup> Amaya, telephone interview, 12 May 2026

<sup>770</sup> Amaya, telephone interview, 27 May 2026



## 4.2. Internal mobility

An April 2026 report by Cúcuta newspaper La Opinión on land travel in Venezuela described the difficulties of traveling by road in the country, highlighting the large number of police and military checkpoints where drivers frequently face extortion by security forces who often demand money or goods from travellers and transporters, creating an environment of 'fear' and 'unpredictability', regulated by the unwritten rules of the checkpoints. According to the report, long-distance travel is slow and stressful due to constant stops, arbitrary inspections, and the risk of abuse, while transport workers face significant financial losses from repeated extortion along major routes. The article also noted that poor road conditions, fuel shortages, and limited nighttime mobility further complicate travel across the country.<sup>771</sup>

Amaya indicated that

'there are numerous checkpoints (*alcabalas*) on the roads, and street-level surveillance is widespread. Vehicles are routinely revised, and in some cases drivers are stopped for bribes. Phone inspections, previously common, have decreased significantly. Mobility challenges are often linked to gasoline shortages: while fuel is generally available in Caracas, remote areas face closures of gas stations, limiting travel. Corruption at checkpoints affects merchants and transporters, who may lose between 17 and 20 % of their cargo, particularly at military checkpoints, through demands for food or money. Internal mobility has increased in recent years as people relocate to areas with more reliable public services, especially electricity, such as Caracas or San Cristóbal'.<sup>772</sup>

Briceño-León indicated that

'the main mobility problem in Venezuela is the lack of gasoline. There are police and military checkpoints (*retenes* or *alcabalas*), and the extortion that occurs is carried out by security forces rather than criminal groups. The danger on the roads comes primarily from police and military actors. On occasions, police officers essentially beg for money because they had nothing to eat. Extortion of transporters is significant: merchants must pay with their own goods at the checkpoints they pass through. For this reason, people rarely travel at night; there is almost no night-time travel between cities. There is intercity public transportation, but it is very poor and very basic. In the past, people feared crime when traveling between cities; now they fear the security forces because of the abuses they may commit.<sup>773</sup>

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<sup>771</sup> La Opinión, Especial | Viajar por Venezuela, un recorrido entre retenes y extorsiones, 6 April 2026, [url](#)

<sup>772</sup> Amaya, telephone interview, 12 May 2026

<sup>773</sup> Briceño-León, telephone interview, 13 May 2026



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## Annex 2: Terms of Reference

### Reference period: 1 October 2023 – 30 April 2026

This report is meant to provide a targeted, brief update on a selection of specific topics relevant for international protection considerations in Venezuela, specifically in relation to evolving needs identified by the COI Specialist Network on Latin America. The report will complement and update certain topics already covered in the 2023 report and refer back to it where relevant. It will provide an overview of the reference period's developments between 1 October 2023 and 10 May 2026.

### Overview

- Population
- Economy
- Contemporary political landscape in the aftermath of 2024 election
- January 2026 – US operation and capture of Nicolas Maduro – impact on governance
- Interim Government of Delcy Rodriguez
- Political factions and opposition
- Judicial system: independence and challenges; recent amnesty proposals and legal reforms
- State security forces, including developments and integrity
- Legislation
- Availability of statistical information
- Monitoring mechanisms: Registration system, Carnet de la Patria, State tracking lists

### Security situation

#### **Armed groups, areas, activities (recruitment, extortion), and targeted persons**

- *Colectivos, megabandas*
- Other irregular armed groups and gangs
- State response

#### **Security situation at the border**

- Activity of main groups, including Colombian armed groups
- Targeting of Venezuelans/civilians
- State response





## Targeted profiles

### **Political opponents and activists, and human rights defenders**

- Including main parties
- Demonstrations
- Treatment of participants in protests
- Surveillance by the state

### **Government employees (including security forces), current and former, who support the opposition**

- Reprisals for non-participation in government events
- Ability to resign
- Monitoring by the state

### **Draft evaders from military service**

- Treatment, including reprisals and penalties

### **Journalists**

### **LGBTIQ+**

## Freedom of movement

### **Treatment of persons returning from abroad**

### **Internal mobility**



