



# OSAC Country Security Report

## Venezuela

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*This report is intended to supplement the U.S. Department of State Venezuela Travel Advisory and [Venezuela Country Information Page](#).*

### Embassy & Consulate Contact Information

The U.S. Embassy in Caracas suspended operations in 2019 and cannot provide protection or consular services to U.S. citizens in Venezuela.

U.S. citizens in Venezuela in need of assistance, or those concerned about a U.S. citizen in Venezuela, should email [ACSBogota@state.gov](mailto:ACSBogota@state.gov) or [VenezuelaEmergencyUSC@state.gov](mailto:VenezuelaEmergencyUSC@state.gov); or call 1-888-407-4747 (from the U.S. & Canada) or +1-202-501-4444 (from Overseas).

### OSAC Country Chapter(s)

Contact [OSAC's Americas team](#) with any questions.

### Venezuela Travel Advisory

The current U.S. Department of State [Travel Advisory](#) at the date of this report's publication assesses that travelers should not travel to Venezuela due to crime, civil unrest, kidnapping, and the arbitrary enforcement of local laws. Reconsider travel due to wrongful detentions, terrorism, and poor health infrastructure.

### Crime

The U.S. Department of State has assessed Caracas as being a **CRITICAL**-threat location for crime directed at or affecting official U.S. government interests.

The U.S. Department of State has included a Crime "C" Indicator on the Travel Advisory for Venezuela, indicating that there may be widespread violent crime and/or organized crime present in the country, and/or that local law enforcement may have limited ability to respond to serious crimes.

Venezuela has one of the highest numbers of violent deaths in the world. In 2024, there were more than 6,884 homicides. This number includes criminal homicides and deaths caused by police or military action. The lack of officially sourced crime statistics makes it difficult to verify this number, but if these statistics are accurate, Venezuela experienced 26.2 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants. While this is a 2% decrease from 2023, Venezuela still has one of the highest murder rates of the region, only below Honduras and Ecuador.

In 2024, a reduction in the overall levels of violence could be observed in Venezuela, continuing a trend observed in the past three years. This decrease follows a continued policy that targets and eliminates gang members with large-scale police raids, a crippled economy, extended control over drug traffic and extortion rackets by organized crime, and sustained migration of young Venezuelans. These factors also limit the opportunities for criminals to benefit from engaging in opportunistic, high-lethality crime. Furthermore, mass migration has provided a venue for Venezuelan organized crime to exploit by both by engaging in human trafficking and expanding to neighboring countries, with multiple reports of gang presence in Colombia, Peru, Chile, and the U.S. While violent deaths decreased, a largely dollarized economy has led to an increase in property crimes. Larger and larger numbers of employees receive a salary in U.S. dollars, which tempts petty criminals to risk committing crimes that were considered not lucrative a year ago.

In the western states such as Zulia and Tachira, and agricultural and cattle farming states such as Guarico and Apure, extortion rackets and “protection” schemes run by large gangs frequently issue videotaped, barefaced threats to prospective victims via WhatsApp and social media.

### Kidnapping Threat

The U.S. Department of State has included a Kidnapping “K” Indicator on the Travel Advisory for Venezuela, indicating that criminal or terrorist individuals or groups have threatened to and/or have seized or detained and threatened to kill, injure, or continue to detain individuals in order to compel a third party (including a governmental organization) to do or abstain from doing something as a condition of release.

The Department has determined that there is a risk of wrongful detention of U.S. nationals by the Maduro regime. Regime-aligned security forces have detained U.S. citizens for long periods. The Maduro regime does not notify the U.S. government of the detention of U.S. citizens and the U.S. government is not granted routine access to those U.S. citizens.

Colombian guerrilla groups have historically engaged in occasional kidnapping activity in Venezuelan territory. The ELN has reportedly held victims captive on the Venezuelan side of the border in recent years, though in most cases the abduction itself has taken place in Colombia. Other Colombian armed groups occasionally carry out kidnappings in Venezuelan border areas. Such groups are likely to transport their victims over the border and are more likely than criminal gangs to hold them captive for several weeks or months.

Kidnapping remains a problem in municipalities near the border with Colombia, particularly in the states of Táchira and Zulia. Since the termination of peace talks between the ELN and the Colombian government, the ELN and other guerrilla groups will likely continue to engage in kidnap for ransom. In the context of spiraling inflation, kidnappers will primarily target wealthy local nationals and expatriates with access to foreign currency.

In the central states, most kidnapping incidents occur in Caracas. However, kidnapping gangs also operate in nearby states such as Miranda, Carabobo, and Aragua, and sporadic cases occur further afield.

Most kidnappings involve criminal gangs of varying capabilities, some of which have links with law-enforcement agencies. A large proportion of the gangs that target the capital and Miranda state operate from or have links with gangs in high-crime Caracas neighborhoods such as Cota 905, El Cementerio, La Vega, and El Valle. Kidnappers are often well armed, with many even carrying grenades, which they use to force victims out of vehicles. The government had previously conducted large raids against these gangs to limit their activities. However, such raids have become less common.

## Terrorism

The U.S. Department of State has assessed Caracas as being a **LOW**-threat location for terrorism directed at or affecting official U.S. government interests.

The U.S. Department of State has included a Terrorism “T” Indicator on the Travel Advisory for Venezuela, indicating that terrorist attacks have occurred and/or specific threats against civilians, groups, or other targets may exist.

The Department of State is unaware of any large-scale terrorist attacks or actions recently conducted in Venezuelan territory. Venezuela maintains a permissive environment that has allowed for support of activities that benefited known terrorist groups. While individuals linked to FARC, ELN, and Hizb’allah supporters and sympathizers were all present in Venezuela, U.S. interests have not been targets of these groups in Venezuela.

Several Cuban-inspired leftist guerrilla groups emerged in the 1960s and 1970s, but they no longer pose a significant security threat, and exist in name only. Venezuela has approximately one million residents of Arab descent. A small proportion of that population has been known to collaborate with Middle Eastern extremist groups. Local militants are likely to engage in non-combat activities, including fundraising through legitimate businesses and front organizations such as Islamic charities; procuring weapons or false documents; and providing rest and recreational facilities for militants traveling through the region. Speculation over the level of government support for such groups arises occasionally. However, local militants are not likely to have had the intent to carry out any attacks in Venezuela.

Venezuela is also the home to Tren de Aragua, a recently designated Federal Terrorist Organization. Tren de Aragua concentrates mostly on human, firearm, and drug trafficking, but is also involved in extortion and gang violence in the region.

## Political Violence and Civil Unrest

The U.S. Department of State has assessed Caracas as being a **CRITICAL**-threat location for political violence directed at or affecting official U.S. government interests.

The U.S. Department of State has included a Civil Unrest “U” Indicator on the Travel Advisory for Venezuela, indicating that demonstrations, protests, and/or strikes occur frequently, and/or that local law enforcement may have limited ability to respond adequately. Civil unrest can develop quickly without prior notice, often interrupting logistics and services. Avoid demonstration activity, as even those planned to remain peaceful have the potential to turn violent.

## Elections/Political Stability

While Venezuela is legally a multiparty, constitutional republic, the regime of Nicolas Maduro claims control over all public institutions. In November 2021, the Maduro regime organized regional and municipal elections largely perceived as skewed in their favor. Election observers and media reported arbitrary arrests, criminalization of opposition parties’ activities, bans on candidates, and media censorship during the elections. The European Union was allowed to act as an election observer for the first time in 15 years, but the Maduro regime asked its observers to leave the country before they could present their final report. In the final report, the European Union noted significant structural deficiencies to the electoral system and provided the regime with 23 recommendations to improve electoral conditions.

In 2024, Venezuela held contested elections between incumbent Nicolas Maduro and challenger Edmundo Gonzalez. Observers, including representatives from the United Nations, U.S. Department of State, and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States, declared the election neither free nor fair and claimed Gonzalez the rightful winner. Nonetheless Maduro retained power, taking office again in January of 2025 and forcing Gonzalez to flee to Spain.

## Protests & Demonstrations

The regime has used violence to repress peaceful demonstrations and freedom of assembly. Civil disruptions are common in Venezuela in general, and particularly in Caracas. Demonstrations tend to occur at or near university campuses or gathering places such as public squares and plazas. In Caracas, the occasional unscheduled march through a busy thoroughfare causes major traffic disruptions and can bring traffic to a standstill. Candidates for political office call supporters to marches and public gatherings during national and municipal elections. Venezuela experiences protests and work stoppages by unions across both the public and private sectors. Use extreme caution and avoid large gatherings and demonstrations wherever they occur.

One major area of concern is the continued prominence of pro-government gang-militias known as *colectivos*. These gangs (e.g., “La Piedrita,” Los Tupamaros,” and “Alexis Vive”) self-identify as socialist, anti-capitalist, “anti-imperialist,” and Chavista. They are armed and have expressed a willingness to use weapons to “defend Chavismo,” a radical left-wing ideology based on the personality of former President Hugo Chavez. It is not always clear what they identify as the threats facing Chavismo, or how they would seek to defeat the

threats. In recent elections, media outlets reported incidents where pro-Chavista gangsters on motorcycles (known by the Spanish word in Venezuela for motorcyclist, *motorizado*) would surround voting centers in opposition-leaning neighborhoods to intimidate voters. Clashes between these groups and local law enforcement are rare.

Violence in the context of political protests has mainly involved government security forces and civilian government sympathizers against peaceful opposition demonstrators and is unlikely to become widespread. Significant attacks or acts of vandalism for political reasons affecting private-sector assets and government-owned infrastructure will continue to be rare.

The demands for a political change, decent wages, respect for collective contracts, access to medicine and food, and the guarantee of better public services are the main demands of Venezuelans, who challenged the mechanisms of state repression against the demonstrations and regularly hold rallies, street closings, stops, and marches across the country.

During the 2024 elections, violent protests overtook Caracas and many other Venezuelan cities. These protests included the use of molotov cocktails and bludgeons, and were met with heavy police responses, including the use of tear gas and live ammunition. Reports indicate at least 20 people were killed, and over 2,200 people were arrested and held. While most of these detainees have been released, an unknown number remain in police custody.

### Anti-U.S./Anti-Western Sentiment

Since the U.S. Embassy ordered the departure of all staff in 2019, anti-U.S. sentiment is not a concern in Venezuela, and demonstrations or targeting of U.S. organizations due to their affiliation has significantly decreased, as most of these demonstrations were regime sponsored. The Venezuelan regime has indicated a willingness to negotiate with U.S. officials but has continued to produce anti-U.S. sentiment.

### Law Enforcement

Pervasive corruption and impunity continue among all Maduro-aligned security forces and in other national and state regime offices, including at the highest levels, which the illegitimate regime has made minimal efforts to eliminate.

The Bolivarian National Police (PNB) answers to the Ministry of Interior, Justice, and Peace, and is responsible for general crime prevention and patrolling around government buildings and diplomatic facilities. PNB is divided by regions (REDIPS): Capital, Central, Occidental, Los Llanos, Guayana, and Los Andes. It currently has national coverage. Where it operates, the PNB is the first responder for major demonstrations and riots, as well as being responsible for traffic safety and patrolling major roads and highways.

The Bolivarian National Guard (GNB) is part of the Venezuelan armed forces and reports to the Defense Ministry. GNB provides support for drug investigations and anti-drug operations while also providing security at Venezuela's borders, ports, and airports. Additionally, it

reinforces the PNB for riot control and law enforcement activities, particularly in large-scale operations. It has also been engaged in political repression, preventing National Assembly deputies from accessing the Federal Legislative Palace to meet.

The Scientific, Penal, and Criminal Investigations Corps (CICPC) is part of the Ministry of Interior, Justice, and Peace. As Venezuela's main national investigative body, CICPC is roughly equivalent to the FBI. It is responsible for investigating most crimes (e.g., property crimes, violent crimes, fraud, and kidnapping). CICPC has specialized units, similar to SWAT, responsible for dangerous arrests and hostage situations. It also serves as Venezuela's representative to INTERPOL.

The Bolivarian National Intelligence Service (SEBIN) investigates crimes against the government and provides protective details for government officials. SEBIN has specialized tactical units, as well as an explosive ordnance disposal capability. SEBIN and DGCIM (the military counterintelligence agency) also serve as the Venezuelan government's civilian intelligence and counterintelligence agencies.

The National Anti-drug Office (ONA) was replaced in 2021 by the National Anti-Drug Superintendence (SUNAD), with the same functions. It reports to the Ministry of Interior, Justice, and Peace, and provides counternarcotic intelligence and analysis support to various other Venezuelan law enforcement agencies. It also supports drug rehabilitation centers and coordinates the government's anti-drug campaign.

Limited reports of harassment of U.S. citizens by Venezuelan airport authorities and some segments of the police do occur. Report any incident to the American Citizen Services (ACS) Unit at the U.S. Embassy in Bogotá at [ACSBogota@state.gov](mailto:ACSBogota@state.gov).

## Police Response

Police attempt to patrol most of Caracas, but are unable to provide the coverage necessary to deter violent crime, especially at night, and in the poorer areas of the city. While investigative police follow-up is intermittent and they rarely catch perpetrators of crimes, officers will generally respond to ongoing emergencies. Police response is generally slow to crime scenes and traffic accidents. They often do not arrive until many hours after the initial call.

Venezuelan regime officials have previously proposed increasing the budget for the military and local police to combat the rapidly rising crime rate. Corruption, inadequate police training and equipment, insufficient central government funding, and rapidly deteriorating economic conditions dramatically reduce the effectiveness of the security forces. Media reports often identify police abuse and police involvement in crimes, including illegal and arbitrary detentions, extrajudicial killings, kidnappings, and excessive use of force. The extrajudicial actions of the police coincide with an increase in the lethality of the police action and a lack of professionalism. Deaths of people at the hands of the police or military authorities under the argument that they resisted authority increased in a remarkable and worrying way.

The judicial system is notoriously corrupt and inefficient. Civil cases take years to process, and criminal cases take much longer. Politics have largely compromised the judicial system since former president Hugo Chávez put judges into the Supreme Court friendly to his government. Corruption is a major problem under the current administration as well, made worse by fact that Maduro has refused to undertake reforms that would alleviate deep-rooted problems such as corruption – because the regime uses corruption as a mechanism to reward and control its own allies in government. The judicial branch is beholden to the regime and so is the virtually the entire membership of the Supreme Court.

## Travelers with Special Considerations

For [specific traveler concerns](#) in Venezuela, review the local laws and circumstances on the Department of State’s Country Information Page.

- [Women Travelers](#)
- [LGB Travelers](#)
- [Travelers with Disabilities](#)
- [Student Travelers](#)
- [Faith-Based Travelers](#)

## Rule of Law, Arbitrary Detention, Official Harassment, Corruption, & Transparency

The U.S. Department of State has included a Risk of Wrongful Detention “D” Indicator on the Travel Advisory for Venezuela, indicating that there is a continued risk of the wrongful detention of U.S. nationals by Venezuelan authorities.

Regime-aligned security forces have detained U.S. citizens for long periods. The Maduro regime does not notify the U.S. government of the detention of U.S. citizens, and the U.S. government is not granted access to those U.S. citizens.

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## Cybersecurity

Be aware of the widespread theft of credit card data. Most ATMs do not accept U.S.-issued debit or credit cards, and malfunctions are common. Use only those located in well-lit, well-monitored areas.

public places. Criminals often hack ATM data and use it to make unauthorized withdrawals from users' accounts. Criminals target ATMs to rob people making withdrawals. Many ATMs do not have cash.

## Import/Export Restrictions

Satellite phones are freely used and sold in Venezuela. However, in one case in 2020, a satellite phone was used as "evidence" against a U.S. citizen charged with espionage, but the phone itself was not the cause of his arrest.

A country-specific listing of items/goods prohibited from being exported to the country or that are otherwise restricted is available from the U.S. International Trade Agency [website](#).

*Additional resources and reports can be found in the [OSAC Traveler Toolkit](#).*