



Venezuela 2016 Crime & Safety Report

Travel Health and Safety; Transportation Security; Stolen items; Theft; Murder; Kidnapping; Burglary; Carjacking; Financial Security; Fraud; Narco-Terrorism; Aviation; Narcoterrorism; Riots/Civil Unrest; Earthquakes; Landslides and mudslides; Employee Health Safety; Oil & Energy; Intellectual Property Rights Infringement; Drug Trafficking; Disease Outbreak

Western Hemisphere > Venezuela; Western Hemisphere > Venezuela > Caracas

2/12/2016

Overall Crime and Safety Situation

Post Crime Rating: Critical

Crime Threats

Venezuela has remained one of the deadliest countries in the world, as increasing violence and criminal activity resulted in unprecedented levels for 2015. The government often refutes claims of increasing crime and murder rates, but such refutations are unreliable. Mexican non-governmental organization (NGO) Citizen Council for Public Safety and Criminal Justice (Consejo Ciudadano para la Seguridad Pública y la Justicia Penal) listed Caracas as the second most violent city in the world in 2015, unchanged from previous years. Official crime figures are not released by the government, but unofficial reports indicate that all crime-related statistics have greatly increased over 2014. The majority of Caracas' crime and violence remains attributed to mobile street gangs and organized crime groups. Caracas is notorious for the brazenness of high-profile violent crimes (murder, robbery, kidnapping)

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committed in neighborhoods across the city, at all hours of the day and night. There is no evidence to indicate criminals are specifically targeting U.S. citizens.

It was once thought that these violent crimes only occurred in “poor” neighborhoods, but in 2015 even relatively affluent residential Caracas neighborhoods in Chacao, Baruta, and El Hatillo (where many government leaders, professionals, businesspeople, and foreign diplomats reside) saw regular incidents of kidnapping, home invasion, and armed robbery. U.S. Embassy employees are often victims of armed robberies and carjacking; however, there is no information to indicate that American citizens or affiliated personnel are specific targets for crime. Criminal factors attributed to this pervasive criminality still include: poorly paid, poorly trained, under-equipped, and often corrupt police force; an inefficient and politicized judicial system; a system of violent and largely overcrowded prisons that are under the control of prison gang leaders; and country-wide availability of millions of illegal weapons.

2015 proved to be a deadly one for law enforcement in Venezuela. Unofficial statistics indicated that 337 police officers and law enforcement personnel were killed countrywide, with many as victims of targeted assassination by criminals. Police were usually targeted to secure the victim’s weapons and ammunition for use in subsequent criminal activity.

Violent crime is the greatest threat in Caracas, affecting local Venezuelans and foreigners. Reliable official statistics are hard to come by, but since 2005, the Venezuelan NGO Venezuelan Violence Observatory (VVO) has tracked violence. In its annual report published on December 29, 2015, VVO stated that Venezuela had over 27,875 homicides in 2015, a rate of 90 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants. This number is up from VVO’s reported rate of 82 per 100,000 inhabitants in 2014 based on a total of 24,980 for the year. In Caracas, the rate is even higher, with a Security Justice and Peace report reflecting a rate 115 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants. In a rating of the 50 most violent cities in the world for 2015, four cities in Venezuela were listed: Caracas’ (#2) rate of 115 per 100,000; Valencia’s (#7) rate of

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71 per 100,000; Ciudad Guyana's (#12) rate of 62 per 100,000; and Barquisimeto's (#21) rate of 46 per 100,000.

The poorest areas, also known as "barrios," frequently provide safe haven for criminal gangs that utilize these neighborhoods as bases of operations. A majority of violent crime in Caracas—and Venezuela in general—occurs in barrios, and criminal "ownership" of some of these neighborhoods often prevents police from entering. The freedom with which many of these gangs operate is due to a lack of police presence in the barrios. In many areas, police presence is only observed after an incident has occurred. High levels of vehicle ownership and the negligible cost of fuel permit criminals the mobility to operate more widely in affluent areas so that wealthier victims may be targeted.

After homicide, the crimes of greatest concern in Caracas are kidnapping and robbery (carjacking, street robbery, home invasion). Kidnappings and robberies often become homicides, as victims who resist are routinely killed.

Robberies, particularly street robberies, are known to occur throughout Caracas and at any time. Armed criminals target pedestrians (standing or walking along the side of a road) and motorists (parked or stopped in traffic) alike. Often the criminals operate from a motorcycle, pulling up alongside their victim while brandishing a firearm and demanding valuables (cell phones, purses, jewelry). Robberies (and scams) continue to occur at ATMs throughout Venezuela. There have also been several reported incidents involving victims who had been robbed, and sometimes subsequently killed, after making large withdrawals while still inside banks. This suggests close surveillance of banks and/or possibly complicit bank employees. Robberies at banks and ATMs are increasingly common during the holiday season.

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Carjackings remain a serious concern. According to the Ministry of Interior, Justice and Peace, approximately 100 cars were stolen per day nationwide in 2015. Caracas accounts for 40-45 percent of the total number of complaints that occurred nationwide. Carjackings are most likely to occur during evening and nighttime hours and increasingly involve newer SUVs, especially with four-wheel drive. Carjacking victims have included business executives and foreign diplomats in Caracas.

Home invasions continued to occur routinely in Caracas during 2015. Home invaders primarily use one of two tactics. In the first tactic, an individual or small group targets a house or apartment, convincing the doorman ("vigilante"), maid, and/or resident that they are coming to perform some service (a home goods delivery, a telephone installation). Once inside the home, the criminals brandish weapons, threaten the occupants, and steal valuables. This tactic sometimes involves an insider who tips the criminals off to the presence of valuables and/or helps them to scam their way into the home. The second tactic involves groups of heavily armed criminals forcing their way into a house or apartment. This approach can be carried out by threatening the doorman, accosting a victim as s/he waits to enter the building, or "piggy backing" behind the victim (following close behind as the victim drives into his/her protected garage or parking area). Home invasions are often accompanied by gratuitous violence. Victims appear to be selected because of their perceived wealth, either from the home or neighborhood where they live or the car they drive.

Credit card fraud has been reported even at respected local restaurants and major hotel chains in Caracas.

Other Areas of Concern

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In its entirety, the land border between Colombia and Venezuela was closed in 2015 due to alleged political and security disputes. For this reason and due to continued FARC and ELN activity along with the presence of fuel smugglers and other organized criminal groups along the 1,000-mile border, Embassy employees are prohibited from traveling within 50 miles of the Venezuelan-Colombian border without prior Chief of Mission authorization.

Because of safety and security concerns, the following neighborhoods of Caracas are off-limits to U.S. employees of the Embassy unless they have special permission:

- In the western part of Libertador municipality: El Retiro, 23 de Enero, Blandin, La Vega, La Rinconada, Las Mayas, Tazon, Oropeza Castillo, Lomas de Urdaneta, Propatria, Casalta, Lomas de Propatria, Carapita, Antimano, Tacagua, Ruiz Pineda, Caricuao, La Quebradita, El Atlantico, Sarria, La Candelaria, San Martin, Coche, El Valle and La Yaguara.
- In the eastern part of Sucre municipality: Barrio Piritu, Barrio La Rubia, Barrio Altavista, Petare, Caucaguita, La Dolorita, Paulo Sexto, and El Llanito.
- In Baruta municipality: Las Minas, Santa Cruz del Este, Ojo de Agua, La Naya, and Las Minitas.

Pickpockets and grab artists operate throughout the greater Caracas metropolitan area but are especially active at busy bus and metro terminals, as well as in the historic downtown city center, in the area of Plaza Simón Bolívar, the Capitolio, the Sabana Grande neighborhood, and Parque Los Caobos.

The Embassy also mandates that all U.S. employees travel in an armored vehicle to/from Maiquetía “Simón Bolívar” International Airport. The Embassy judges the airport road

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especially dangerous after receiving numerous reports of robberies and murders in the areas around the terminal (street, parking lot, etc.).

Transportation-Safety Situation

Road Safety and Road Conditions

Driving regulations are similar to those in the US., although drivers frequently do not obey them. Defensive driving is an absolute necessity. It is common practice to ignore red traffic lights, especially after dark. Motorcyclists frequently weave in/out of lanes, passing on the right and the left, and driving into the oncoming lane to get around traffic congestion. Motorcyclists also frequently drive between the lanes on the freeway, especially when the cars around them are stopped in traffic. Traffic in Caracas is heavy at most times of the day, as an abundance of vehicles, running on heavily subsidized gasoline (ten gallons cost less than two cents), continue to fill the aging infrastructure of the capital city beyond capacity. Such overuse produces wear-and-tear on roads and freeways that authorities are often slow to fix. Since public works departments are slow to respond, road damage is often marked by passersby with a pile of rocks over a pothole or a stick protruding from an uncovered manhole. Traffic fatalities remain a common occurrence given the poor state of the roads and local aggressive driving habits.

Venezuelan traffic law mandates that individuals involved in a traffic accident not move their vehicle from the roadway until the traffic police arrive on the scene. Due to the lack of availability, police can sometimes take several hours to arrive, and those involved in the accident have been known to negotiate a settlement among themselves or simply leave the

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scene rather than wait for the police. Nonetheless, it is strongly recommended that people involved in an accident remain at the scene unless they feel their life may be in danger.

Traffic accidents involving motorcycles are extremely common due to the reckless manner in which they operate and due to failure to use safety equipment. Occasionally, groups of motorcycle operators will congregate around the scene of an accident involving another motorcyclist. Depending on the severity of the incident, these instances have the potential to escalate into a dangerous situation for the occupants of the other vehicle involved, even if they were not at fault.

Checkpoints are common, especially during inter-city trips. They are generally operated either by local police or by the Bolivarian National Guard (GNB). Stopping at checkpoints is mandatory, and drivers should be prepared to show vehicle registration paperwork, proof of insurance, and an identity document ("cedula" or passport). Police or guardsmen may search vehicles stopped at checkpoints.

Because roads are poorly maintained and roadside assistance in inter-city areas is extremely limited, travelers should ensure that their vehicle is in good working order before departing on a trip, paying special attention to their engine, brakes, tires, head and tail lights, horn, and fluid levels. Additionally, those planning an extended road trip should travel with a cellular phone (and charger), drinking water, some non-perishable food items, tools, a first-aid kit, jumper cables, a spare tire (with jack), flares or road reflectors, and a flashlight. Gas stations are occasionally without fuel or unexpectedly closed. Drivers should plan ahead and not permit the fuel tank to fall below half a tank. Drivers may want to consider bringing along some extra fuel, in case of emergencies, but should investigate the safest way to transport extra fuel before making that decision. For these reasons and increased criminality after dark, the Embassy strongly recommends against inter-city travel after dark.

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Venezuelans travel in large numbers before, during, and immediately after their major civil and religious holidays (Carnival, Easter, Christmas, New Year's Day). Roads are more congested, and travelers should anticipate increased delays.

If possible, drivers should avoid parking on the street. Where possible, drivers should park inside a residential compound, attended parking lot, or use valet parking. Where these options are not available, drivers should seek to park as close to their destination as possible. Keeping your vehicle within your line of sight should deter potential car thieves. The less time spent walking from a car to the destination, the less chance criminals will have to target the occupants. When you leave your vehicle, also ensure that all bags, purses, and/or valuables are out of sight. This is true even when parked in ostensibly secure locations, as thieves have been known to enter protected parking garages and break into parked vehicles. Check your vehicle interior and exterior for irregularities and abnormalities before getting into your vehicle. When stopped in traffic, leave space between your vehicle and the vehicle in front of you to allow you to maneuver in an emergency situation. When driving at night, use well-traveled, well-illuminated streets. Plan your route before you leave. If your residence has a garage gate, remain on the main street as it opens. This prevents you from potentially being pinned between the gate and a vehicle from the rear.

Public Transportation Conditions

Only use legitimate radio-dispatched taxis at designated taxi stands or have your hotel call a reputable taxi company directly. Most mall (centro commercial) taxis have also generally been reliable. Do not hail a taxi on the street.

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Aviation/Airport Conditions

Pursuant to U.S. law, the Transportation and Security Administration (TSA) is required to conduct technical security visits to all international airports from which U.S. and foreign airlines provide direct service to the U.S., just as many foreign governments conduct similar technical security visits at U.S. airports. With host-government collaboration, TSA reviews airport operations using standards established by the International Civil Aviation Organization. TSA visited airports in Venezuela most recently in 2015, to include the airports in Caracas, Maracaibo, and Barcelona and concluded that local practices meet recognized international safety standards. In addition, passengers flying directly from Venezuela to the U.S. are required to pass through an additional security screening immediately before boarding the airplane.

The most recent emergency landing drill was held in 2013 at Maiquetía Airport, the main airport serving Caracas. During this drill, many problems were observed that included crew members lack of knowledge on the usage of emergency slides to the lack of ability of nearest hospital to provide mass casualty assistance.

Though the government continues to announce its desire to improve Venezuelan civil aviation, the sector remains deficient in many ways. The average age of its domestic fleet is 25 years, and there have been several aviation accidents in recent years. The majority of these accidents have resulted from equipment failures due to poor maintenance and unavailability of spare parts for replacement. Many flights are either delayed or cancelled due to continuing failures of these aircraft, thereby leaving many passengers stranded for hours, if not days. Conviasa is a government owned and operated airline. The European Union

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currently prohibits Conviasa from flying its aircraft to Madrid due to safety concerns. The government announced the goal of reducing the average age of the domestic fleet to 10 years, but a lack of hard currency makes it difficult for airlines to purchase new planes.

Transit to and from the Maiquetía airport is risky. Use of airport taxis is strongly discouraged, as a number of travelers in airport taxis have been robbed or kidnapped by taxi drivers and their accomplices. Travelers have even been robbed when taking a taxi from the international terminal to the domestic terminal and vice versa. There have also been occasional instances of airport shuttles operated by local major hotels being robbed by armed individuals. For all these reasons, the Embassy requires American employees to travel to and from the airport in an armored vehicle. Private travelers are encouraged to prearrange airport pickup or drop-off with reputable companies. When arriving on an incoming flight, travelers should also set up a meeting place inside the terminal where they can safely connect with their driver. The Embassy encourages travelers to arrive and depart during daylight hours when possible. Drug traffickers use the Maiquetía airport as a transit point, and CICPC and ONA frequently arrest travelers attempting to smuggle illegal drugs out of the country.

Terrorism Threat

Post Terrorism Rating: Medium

Local, Regional, and International Terrorism Threats/Concerns

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The Embassy is unaware of any large-scale terrorist attacks or actions recently carried out in Venezuelan territory.

There were credible reports that Venezuela maintained a permissive environment that allowed for support of activities that benefited known terrorist groups. Individuals linked to the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), the National Liberation Army (ELN), Basque Fatherland and Liberty (ETA), and Hezbollah supporters/sympathizers were present in Venezuela.

Political, Economic, Religious, and Ethnic Violence

Post Political Violence Rating: High

Civil Unrest

Civil disruptions are common in Venezuela in general, 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 the city to a near standstill. Candidates for political offices also called supporters to marches and public gatherings during the most recent national and municipal elections. Travelers are advised to take extreme caution and avoid large gatherings and demonstrations wherever they occur.

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Venezuela experiences protests and work stoppages by unions across both the public and private sectors. 2015 also included a high number of demonstrations by groups to protest working conditions, criminality, and a lack of public services.

One major area of concern is the continued prominence of pro-government gang-militias known as “collectivos.” These collectivos (“La Piedrita,” Los Tupamaros,” and “Alexis Vive”) self-identify as socialist, anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist, and chavista. They are well-armed and have expressed a willingness to use their arms to “defend Chavismo,” although it is not always clear what they identify as the threats facing Chavismo or how they would seek to defeat the threats. In elections in recent years, 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. In October 2014, a major gun battle erupted between “collectivos” and police officials in downtown Caracas when police attempted to arrest a principle leader of the group. The gun battle resulted in the killing of one of the prominent leaders in which the “collectivos” called for the arrest of the police for improper arrest procedures. In addition, during the course of the incident, the “collectivos” took two police officers hostages.

Religious/Ethnic Violence

Approximately 92 percent of the population identifies as Roman Catholic. There are occasional reports of violence against Venezuela’s small indigenous population, but they are sporadic and unsystematic.

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Post-specific Concerns

Environmental Hazards

Venezuela is prone to both earthquakes and landslides. Information about earthquakes, landslides, and other natural disasters can be found at www.ready.gov.

Though low-level seismic readings have been registered throughout Venezuela recently, the most significant was in September 2009, when an earthquake near Caracas (that registered 6.3 on the Richter scale) injured 14 people and damaged many buildings. Anecdotal evidence suggests that many of the buildings in Caracas lack reinforcements to withstand a serious earthquake. Also, an earthquake would likely cause widespread damage to Venezuela's poorly maintained infrastructure. A medium- to large-scale earthquake would likely overwhelm local emergency response services. Underwater earthquakes are also possible and raise the possibility of causing tidal waves that could affect coastal areas.

Landslides are common during major rainstorms. In December 1999, one of the deadliest landslides in Venezuelan history occurred in Vargas state (near Maiquetía "Simón Bolívar" International Airport). Though the exact number of casualties could not be determined, it is estimated that between 10,000 and 30,000 victims were buried under tons of earth. Although there has not been a major landslide tragedy since then, landslides continue to kill, and the unrestricted and uncontrolled nature of development in some parts of the country seems likely to exacerbate the risk.

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Critical Infrastructure Concerns

Caracas is the economic and commercial center of Venezuela and its most populous city. As such, Caracas sees its share of industrial and transportation-related accidents. In general, Venezuelan infrastructure has suffered years of neglect and is deteriorating across the country. Across the country, bridges occasionally collapse and roads sometimes crumble or are washed away, creating major traffic disturbances in the affected region.

Although vehicle accidents involving the transportation of hazardous chemicals are rare, when they occur, roadways can be shut down for significant periods while cleanup takes place.

Because of the mountainous terrain, tunnels are an essential way to navigate Caracas. When accidents occur inside these tunnels, the flow of traffic can be blocked or severely restricted for hours.

In August 2012, an explosion occurred at one of Venezuela's main oil refineries in Falcón state, killing at least 48 people. It took emergency services almost three days to control the resulting fires.

Economic Espionage/Intellectual Property Thefts

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The World Economic Forum's World Competitiveness Report 2015-2016 states Venezuela fell from the 131st position (ranked in 2014-2015) to the 132nd position regarding strengths of intellectual property rights (IPR) protection. Venezuela remains listed on the Priority Watch List in the U.S. Trade Representative's 2015 Special 301 Report. Key concerns cited in the report relate to questions about the consistency of domestic laws and international obligations resulting from the 2008 reinstatement of the 1955 Industrial Property Law; the status of trademarks that were registered under the Andean Community law prior to Venezuela's withdrawal from the Andean Community; and lack of enforcement against counterfeiting and piracy, both physical and online.

IPR protection remains hindered by the lack of adequate resources for the copyright and trademark enforcement police (COMANPI) and for the special IPR prosecutor's office. Because of a shortage of personnel, limited budget, and inadequate storage facilities for seized goods, COMANPI has had to work with the Bolivarian National Guard and private industry to enforce copyright laws. COMANPI can only act based on a complaint by a copyright holder; it cannot carry out an arrest or seizure on its own initiative. In the past, the government's tax authority (SENIAT) has been more successful at enforcing IPR laws. It has taken action against some businesses importing or selling pirated goods based on presumed tax evasion. While such actions on the part of SENIAT have decreased over the past few years, SENIAT does continue to take action against pirated goods. Copyright piracy and trademark counterfeiting remain widespread, including piracy over the Internet. Pirated software, music, and movies are also readily available.

The Embassy is unaware of any confirmed cases of industrial espionage.

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Privacy Concerns

The Constitution provides for the inviolability of the home and personal privacy, but in some cases, government authorities infringe on citizens' privacy rights by searching homes without judicial authorization, seizing properties without due process, or interfering in personal communications.

Drug-related Crimes

The continued presence of the ELN and FARC in the border region continues to be a serious concern. Along with kidnapping and smuggling operations, both the ELN and FARC use the drug trade to finance their operations. Lack of international counter-narcotic cooperation in Venezuela, along with a shift in trafficking patterns has made Venezuela one of the biggest drug-transit countries in the region. There is also evidence of involvement in the drug trade by some high-level Venezuelan government officials. Although the press regularly reports seizures by law enforcement, large quantities of illicit drugs continue to flow through Venezuela to markets in the U.S. and Europe.

Kidnapping Threat

Kidnapping remains a major criminal industry in Venezuela. Kidnappings in Caracas happen primarily during the nighttime hours but are not uncommon during the day. The government officially does not track total kidnappings, but it is believed that kidnapping cases remained

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constant during 2015, as with the year prior. Criminologists continue to report that 80+ percent of kidnappings go unreported in fear of retaliation by kidnappers, and are both “express kidnappings” and traditional kidnappings for ransom. Investigations by the Criminal, Penal, and Scientific Investigation Bureau (“CICPC”) have identified multiple heavily-armed criminal gangs specializing in express kidnappings that operate in the wealthier neighborhoods of Caracas. CICPC’s specialized unit aimed at combating kidnapping has had some limited successes but has failed to reduce the number of kidnapping incidents significantly. Kidnappers continue to operate with little fear of arrest, prosecution, or incarceration. In addition, in early 2015, 13 CICPC officers were arrested as part of a larger kidnaping ring.

A majority of kidnappings are identified as “express kidnappings” which usually last less than 48 hours (sometimes as short as two hours). In previous express kidnappings, victims were driven around by their kidnappers and forced to withdraw various amounts of cash from multiple ATMs until the accounts balances were zero or the ATM card was locked by the bank. However, changes in law and banking practices have restricted daily withdrawal amounts, making the old practice less lucrative. In recent years, it has become more common for kidnappers to drive their victims around for several hours, disorienting the victim and giving the victim’s family and friend’s time to gather a ransom payment. Paying ransom for kidnapped victims is against Venezuelan law.

Kidnappings frequently occur in front of victims’ homes, while they are leaving hotels, when using unauthorized taxis from Maiquetía “Simón Bolívar” International Airport, and when walking in wealthier areas with limited vehicle and foot traffic.

The Embassy also has had reports of “virtual kidnappings” and “inside kidnappings.” “Virtual kidnappings” are where family and/or friends are persuaded to pay a ransom by scammers using information about a “victim” whom they have supposedly kidnapped. “Inside

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kidnappings” are when an insider, usually a domestic employee, is paid money or promised a share of the proceeds and in return provides keys or information to facilitate a kidnapping.

Police Response

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

Corruption, inadequate police training/equipment, insufficient central government funding, and rapidly deteriorating economic conditions dramatically reduce the effectiveness of 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. It is believed that complaints against police corruption and crimes have dramatically increased in Venezuela throughout 2015.

Government officials have proposed increasing the budget for the military and local police in an effort to combat the rapidly rising crime rate. Government critics remain wary that it can deliver on the promise to better fund the military and police especially in a time when the Venezuelan economy continues to undergo rapid inflation and an inability to secure foreign currency in order to import goods.

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How to Handle Incidents of Police Detention or Harassment

Harassment of U.S. citizens by airport authorities and some segments of the police are limited, but it does occur. Any incident should be reported to American Citizen Services (ACS) Unit at the U.S. Embassy. The ACS Unit can be reached at +58 (212) 907-8365 or by e-mail at ACSVenezuela@state.gov. After business hours, assistance may be obtained by calling the U.S. Embassy switchboard at 0212-907-8400 and requesting to speak with the U.S. Embassy Duty Officer.

Crime Victim Assistance

If you are the victim of a crime, contact local police using the designated emergency response number: 911. These calls will not be answered by English speakers; Venezuela's national language is Spanish.

Police/Security Agencies

The Bolivarian National Police (PNB) answers to the Ministry of Popular Power for Interior, Justice and Peace, and is responsible for general crime prevention and patrolling around government buildings and diplomatic facilities. Although a national police force, outside of Caracas the PNB only operates in a few cities across six states in Venezuela: Anzoátegui, Aragua, Carabobo, Lara, Táchira, and Zulia. Where the PNB operates, it is the first responder for major demonstrations and riots and is responsible for traffic safety and patrolling major

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roads and highways in the country. The government plans to increase the size of the PNB so that it can operate across the country, but there is no clear timeline for the proposed expansion.

The Bolivarian National Guard (GNB) is part of the armed forces and reports to the Ministry of Popular Power for Defense. They provide support for drug investigations and anti-drug operations and provide security at borders, ports, and airports.

Cuerpo de Investigaciones Científicas, Penales y Criminalísticas (CICPC) is part of the Ministry Interior, Justice and Peace. As Venezuela's main national investigative body, CICPC is roughly equivalent to the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation. It is responsible for investigating most crimes (property crimes, violent crimes, fraud, kidnapping). CICPC has specialized units, similar to SWAT, responsible for dangerous arrests and hostage situations. It also serves as Venezuela's representative to INTERPOL.

SEBIN (Bolivarian National Intelligence Service or Servicio Bolivariano de Inteligencia Nacional) serves as a counter-intelligence or "political" police force, investigating crimes against the government and providing protective details for government officials. SEBIN has specialized tactical units and an explosive ordinance disposal capability. SEBIN also serves as the government's civilian intelligence and counter-intelligence agency.

The National Antidrug Office (ONA) reports to the Ministry of Popular Power for Interior, Justice and Peace and provides counter-narcotics intelligence and analysis support to various other law enforcement agencies. It also supports drug rehabilitation centers and coordinates the government's anti-drug campaign.

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Medical Emergencies

There are many U.S.-trained and/or English-speaking physicians in Venezuela. Their staffs often do not speak English. Private clinics/hospitals are the only facilities recommended to be used by U.S. government personnel. The medical infrastructure continues to deteriorate, and as public facilities fail, private clinics experience increased crowding and critical supply shortages. Getting in to see a physician can be a trying experience and often requires a minimum of several hours in a waiting room. Medical supplies and equipment are strictly controlled by the government, leading to significant shortages of both.

Contact Information for Recommended Hospitals/Clinics

Rescarven

Tel: +58 (212) 610-0000

Ayuda24

Tel: +58 (212) 731-0930, +58 (414) 183-9519, +58 (416) 805-0150, +58 (412) 024-2845

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ventas@ayuda24.com

<http://www.ayuda24serviciodeambulancia.com/>

Salud Baruta

Tel: +58 (212) 944-2357 and 171

Urológico San Roman

Calle Chivacoa, Sección San Roman

Las Mercedes

Tel: +58 (212) 999-0111 and 992-2222

www.urologico.com

Centro Medico Docente La Trinidad

Av. Intercomunal La Trinidad

Tel: +58 (212) 949-6411

El Hatillo

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<http://www.cmdlt.edu.ve/>

Policlinica Las Mercedes

Av. Ppal. De Las Mercedes Con Cl. Monterrey, Caracas,

Tel: +58 (212) 993-2911

Clinica El Avila

Av. San Juan Bosco and 6ta. Transversa

Altamira

Tel: +58 (212) 276-1111, +58 (212) 276-1052

www.clinicaelavila.com

Instituto Medico La Floresta

Av. Principal de la Floresta and Calle Santa Ana

La Floresta

Tel: +58 (212) 209-6222

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www.clinicalafloresta.com

Hospital de Clinicas Caracas

Av. Panteon and Av. Alameda

San Bernardino

Tel: +58 (212) 508-6111

www.clinicaracas.com

Centro Medico de Caracas

Av. Eraso, Plaza el Estanque

San Bernardino

Tel: +58 (212) 555-9111

www.centromedicodecaracas.com.ve

Available Air Ambulance Services

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AeroMed

Av. Libertador, Edf. 75 Ofic. PH-2B

La Campiña

Tel: +58 (212) 761-6998

<http://www.aeromed.com.ve/>

Aero Ambulancias Silva

Av. Venezuela, Edf. EXA, PB Local 17

Tel: +58 (212) 953-1195

www.aeroambulanciassilva.com.ve

Life Flight

Av. Orionoco and Calle Mucuchies Centro Medico

Tel: +58 (212) 992-3665

lifeflight@cantv.net

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Country-specific Vaccination and Health Guidance

Travelers should also be aware that dengue fever and malaria are endemic in some parts of Venezuela. Other mosquito-borne endemic illnesses include chikungunya and zika. Cases of chikungunya have been isolated in Caracas, and while zika has not yet been identified in Caracas, it has been located in other locations. All are transmitted through mosquito bites. Travelers to malarial regions should procure antimalarial drugs before arriving. In the cases of dengue, malaria, and chikungunya, the most effective protective measures are those that prevent mosquito bites. See the CDC's website for a map of affected areas, and for more information on both illnesses.

For additional information on vaccines and health guidance, please visit the CDC at: http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/traveler/none/venezuela?s_cid=ncezid-dgmq-travel-single-001.

OSAC Country Council Information

Venezuela has an active OSAC Country Council that meets on a monthly basis. The local point of contact is:

Juan Carlos Pocaterra

Office: +58 (0424-226-9244

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juan_pocaterra@cargill.com

To reach the OSAC Western Hemisphere team, please email OSACWHA@state.gov.

U.S. Embassy Location and Contact Information

EmbassyAddress and Hours of Operation

The Embassy is open Mon-Fri, 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., except for Venezuelan and American holidays, and is located at:

Calle F and Calle Suapure

Urbanización Colinas de Valle Arriba

Baruta, Miranda, Venezuela

Embassy Contact Numbers

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Regional Security Office (RSO): +58 (212) 907-8403

Embassy Operator: +58 (212) 975-6411

ACS: +58 (212) 907-8365

Marine Post One: +58 (212) 907-8400

The after-hours Embassy Duty Officer can be reached by calling Marine Post One.

Website: <http://caracas.usembassy.gov/>

Tips on How to Avoid Becoming a Victim

Scams

Criminal activity at the Maiquetía “Simón Bolívar” International Airport is significant. Both arriving and departing travelers are sometimes victims of personal property thefts and muggings. The Embassy has received credible reports that individuals in official uniforms or bearing realistic (or real) credentials have been involved in the facilitation and perpetration of these crimes. For this reason, travelers should be wary of all strangers, even those who represent themselves as airport officials. Travelers are also urged not to pack valuable items or documents in their checked bags, storing such items instead in their carry-on luggage. The Embassy has also received occasional reports of airport officials (or individuals representing themselves as airport officials) attempting to extort money from travelers as part of the check-in or boarding process for departing flights.

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Situational Awareness Best Practices

Where possible, vary daily departure times and routes used to get to and from work. Avoid setting a regular pattern that can be used against you. Keep friends and colleagues apprised of your daily plans, and ensure they have a way of reaching you in an emergency. Remain alert to what is going on around you whenever you are out in public. Avoid suspicious individuals who may be looking for potential victims. If possible, seek a safer location, like a nearby store or bank. If there are no safe locations nearby, cross the street and alter your route.

Travelers should not accept packages from anyone and should keep their luggage with them at all times. Do not carry or wear valuable items like jewelry or watches that will attract the attention of thieves. Keep valuables out of sight, especially when traveling around Caracas. Do your best to maintain a low profile, avoiding activities or actions that would unnecessarily draw attention to you.

Do not physically resist any robbery attempt. While this is a personal decision, statistics show that victims who resist are more likely to be injured or even killed by their attackers. It is generally recommended not to resist attempted robberies or kidnappings as doing so may result in severe injury or death.

Make sure your entire family is aware of the security threats and is prepared to act appropriately in case of an emergency. The Embassy recommends that all family members,

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domestic staff, and doormen be instructed not to open doors or accept deliveries from unknown or unexpected strangers.

Keep the doors and windows closed and locked at all times in both your residence and your vehicle. The Embassy also recommends that all houses and apartments have a working alarm system, bars on windows, and solid external doors with a deadbolt-type lock.

Use extreme caution when using international credit cards, except in an emergency situation. ATMs inside hotels and banks are considered safer, though ATM users should always be aware of their surroundings when withdrawing money. The same holds true when withdrawing money from inside a bank via a teller.

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