



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.⁶²⁵ 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.⁶²⁶ Other abuses against political opponents, activists, and human rights defenders included arbitrary detentions, prison isolation regimes, and violations of due process.⁶²⁷

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.⁶²⁸ The Comptroller General's Office also disqualified opposition politicians from running for office over alleged wrongdoing.⁶²⁹

Repression of dissent intensified after the July 2024 elections.⁶³⁰ Since then, Venezuela has experienced ongoing repression and arbitrary and enforced disappearances of activists, journalists, and defenders of fundamental freedoms.⁶³¹ During the post-electoral protests of 2024, 25 people were killed and more than 2 220 were detained.⁶³² 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 protested or questioned the election results in the streets or on social media; many were identified through video analysis or government-aligned informants.⁶³³ The same source also indicated that targeted arrests of political leaders and activists, journalists and human rights defenders also occurred.⁶³⁴

There were also accusations of forced disappearances, torture, inhuman and degrading treatment, and sexual violence.⁶³⁵ Authorities attributed the deaths to opposition activists, known as *comanditos*, and to criminal gangs allegedly hired by the opposition.⁶³⁶ *Comanditos* are defined as community groups made up of civilians who opposed the government and rallied behind the political opposition during the presidential elections;⁶³⁷ they also collected the

copies of the electoral acts that demonstrated the commission of electoral fraud by the government.⁶³⁸ 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.⁶³⁹ Authorities also encouraged citizens to report political protests and suspected dissidents through a government-backed app.⁶⁴⁰ 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.⁶⁴¹ 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.⁶⁴² 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 2025.⁶⁴³ These cases involved judicial abuse, arbitrary detentions, digital harassment, and targeted repression in states such as Trujillo and Zulia.⁶⁴⁴

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'".⁶⁴⁵ 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.⁶⁴⁶

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.⁶⁴⁷

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.⁶⁴⁸ 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'.⁶⁴⁹

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 2026.⁶⁵⁰ 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.[651](#) On 4 May 2026, the number was 457.[652](#) 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.[653](#)

Since the detention of Maduro, there is greater freedom in civic space and, to some extent, voice dissent.[654](#) 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,[655](#) and some activists who were in exile have returned to the country through formal channels without problem.[656](#) Faculty deans and human rights organisations have reportedly been contacted by the National Assembly to provide input on proposed regulatory reforms.[657](#) 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'.[658](#)

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.[659](#) 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.[660](#) 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.[661](#) 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.[662](#)

Despite the release of political prisoners, patterns of repression, institutional mistrust, and judicial opacity continue to persist.[663](#) 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.[664](#) The cases consisted of stigmatisation (82 instances), intimidation (35), threats (4), and one cyber-attack.[665](#) 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.[666](#) The New York Times reported that the number of those detained under the emergency decree was 31.[667](#) 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'.[668](#) 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.[669](#) 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.[670](#)

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.⁶⁷¹ Since he oversees the police, significant parts of the intelligence services, and the *colectivos*, his denunciations 'are not mere rhetoric'.⁶⁷²

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 2025.⁶⁷³ 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).⁶⁷⁴ 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 2025.⁶⁷⁵ According to OVCS, the reduction was due to heightened scrutiny by international observers following the capture of Maduro in January 2026.⁶⁷⁶

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 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'.⁶⁷⁷ Additional information could not be found among the sources consulted within the time constraints of this report.

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