



VENEZUELA



U.S. Citizenship
and Immigration
Services

Research Unit
Refugee, Asylum and International Operations
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General Context

History of Immigration

- Open Immigration (1948-1958)
- Recruitment from Spain, Italy, Portugal
- Colombian farm laborers
- 1970s: Oil Boom
- People flee Argentina, Chile, Uruguay

Religion

- Predominantly Catholic
- Retaliation against government critics
- Anti-Semitic rhetoric & incidents

Population

- Mainly mestizo
- Afro-Venezuelans (along Caribbean coast)
- Indigenous (3/5 of population in Zulia state)

Economy

- World's largest proven oil reserves
- Oil = vast majority of exports & funds government budget



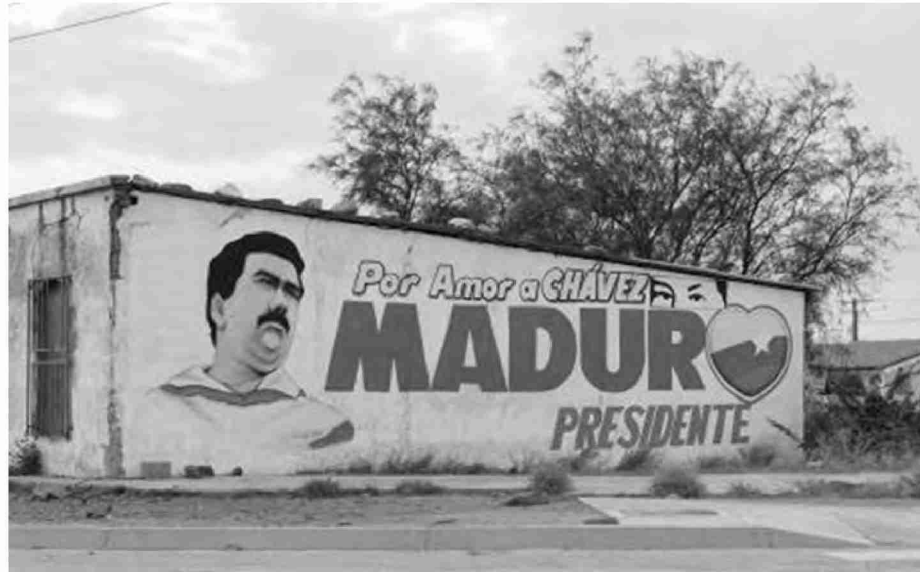
Hugo Chávez



President of Venezuela (1999-2013)

- Leader of the socialist “Bolivarian Revolution”
- ***Chavismo*** = movement that supports Chávez

Polarization



CHAVISTAS

- Supporters of Hugo Chávez and his Bolivarian Revolution (and Nicolás Maduro)
- Vast sector of the population living in poverty & the informal economy
- *Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela* (PSUV)

OPPOSITION

- Business, professional, & middle classes
- *Mesa de la Unidad Democrática* (MUD) = coalition of opposition parties
- Derogatory terms = *escualido, traidor, sifrino, guarimbero, pitiyanqui*

Ni-Nis = Support neither the government nor the opposition

Venezuela: Dual Presidencies?



Nicolás Maduro

- PSUV
- First assumed the presidency in 2013 after Chavez's death
- Re-elected in controversial vote in 2018



Juan Guaidó

- Voluntad Popular
- President of National Assembly
- Declared himself President in Jan. 2019
- Has sought to establish interim government until new elections can be held

Venezuela: Economic Crisis



- Inflation = could exceed 10 million percent in 2019
- 90% of the population lives in poverty



Venezuela: Humanitarian Crisis

Food Shortages

- Venezuelans lost an average of 24 lbs. in 2017
- CLAP = government food distribution mechanism



Health Crisis

- Deterioration of health indicators & return and spread of previously eradicated diseases
- Shortage of medical supplies, equipment & medicines = bring your own to hospitals



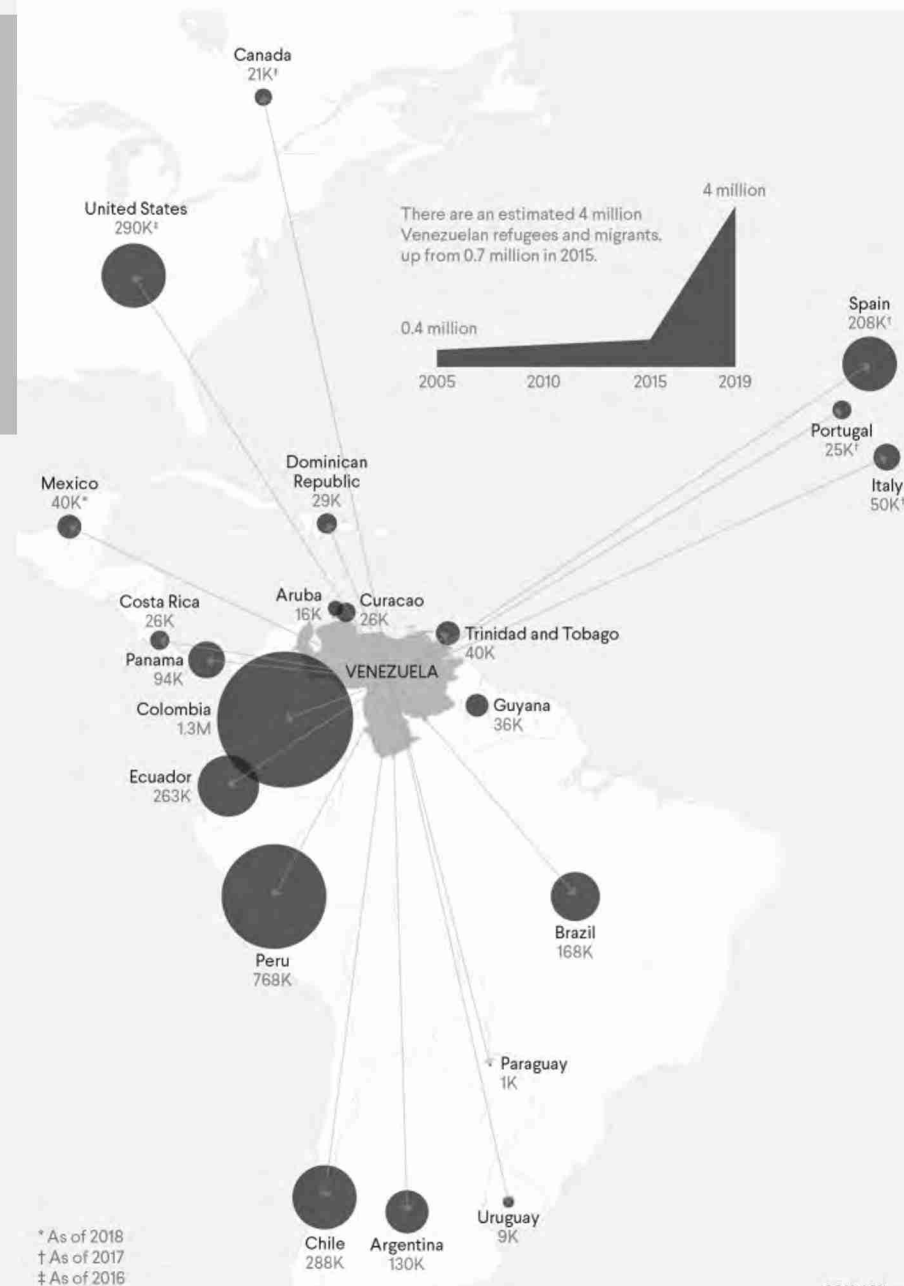
Where are Venezuelans Going?

Neighboring South American countries were initially welcoming, but some have created entry restrictions for Venezuelans

Regional xenophobia may prohibit access to basic human rights – employment, education, housing, etc.

The Exodus From Venezuela

Estimated refugees and migrants as of June 2019



Venezuela: State Repression

Over at least a decade, the Government and government-controlled institutions enforced laws and policies that have accelerated the erosion of the rule of law and the dismantlement of democratic institutions, including the National Assembly. These measures are aimed at neutralizing, repressing and criminalizing political opponents and people critical of the Government. This trend has accelerated since 2016, after the opposition won the majority of National Assembly seats, resulting in increased repression targeting the political opposition, and steadily reducing the already limited democratic space.

-OHCHR, July 2019

Venezuela: State Repression

- *Security measures & institutions*
- *Targeting of opposition members & individuals critical of the government*
- *Excessive use of force & deaths in the context of anti-government demonstrations*
- *Arbitrary detentions, torture & ill-treatment*



United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV)



- Formed in 2007/2008 as a single, pro-Chávez political party
- Left, moderate & right wings
- Supporters = urban & rural poor, military generals, state bureaucracy, *boliburguesia*

Mesa de Unidad Democrática (MUD)

- Coalition of political parties formed in 2008 to oppose *chavismo*
 - Pluralist coalition = broad ideological spectrum
 - Four largest parties:
 - *Primero Justicia*
 - *Acción Democrática*
 - *Un Nuevo Tiempo*
 - *Voluntad Popular*



Mesa de Unidad Democrática (MUD)

- No single leader & lack of unity
- United in opposition to the government & to compete in elections
 - Dec. 2015: won control of the National Assembly
- Supporters of the opposition
 - Upper & middle classes
 - Globalized/modern business groups
 - Opposition-linked civil society groups
 - High ranks of the Catholic Church
 - Most of the private media
 - Some trade unions (CTV)
 - Some members of the military



Major Political Developments & Elections

- 1998: Chávez elected President
- 1999: Approval of new constitution
- 2000: Chávez re-elected president
- 2001: National Assembly grants Chávez emergency powers; start of confrontation with the opposition
- April 2002: Coup; Chávez restored to power
- Late 2002/Early 2003: Oil strike
- Late 2002-Aug. 2004: Recall petition drives; recall referendum defeated
- Dec. 2005: Opposition boycotts National Assembly elections

Major Political Developments & Elections

- Dec. 2006: Chávez re-elected president
- Dec. 2007: Referendum to amend the constitution is defeated
- Feb. 2009: Referendum to abolish term limits passes
- Sep. 2010: Opposition gains seats in National Assembly; PSUV loses super-majority
- Oct. 2012: Chávez wins re-election
- Mar. 2013: Chávez dies of cancer
- Apr. 2013: Nicolás Maduro elected President
- Feb.-Jun. 2014: Anti-government protests
- Dec. 2015: Opposition wins control of National Assembly

Major Political Developments & Elections

- Jan.-Oct. 2016: Opposition focuses efforts to recall Maduro via referendum; blocked by National Electoral Council
- Mar. 2017: Supreme Court moves to strip National Assembly of powers
- Apr.- Aug. 2017: Anti-government protests
- Jul. 2017: Creation of pro-government National Constituent Assembly; unofficial referendum organized by opposition-controlled National Assembly
- May 2018: Maduro re-elected president amidst opposition boycott and allegations of fraud
- Jan. 2019: Maduro inaugurated; Juan Guaidó declares himself president
- Apr. 2019: Guaidó leads failed uprising

Protests

- Tradition of street protests – social, civil, economic, cultural & political rights
- Nature of protests & state response varies over time
- Increasing in number & intensity since 2014

PROTESTAS EN VENEZUELA AÑOS 2011 - 2018



TOTAL = 59.787

2014 Protests



2017 Protests



Public Employees & Political Discrimination

After the 2002 coup and 2002/2003 oil strike, Chávez “increasingly staffed state institutions with his supporters.”



“retaliatory measures are nothing new to Venezuelans, nor are requirements of political fealty as a precondition to well-paid government jobs. Perhaps a bigger surprise would be the presence of Maduro opponents in any of those positions”



Tascón List & *Maisanta* Program

Tascón List

- In 2003/2004, the names & ID numbers of signers of any of three petitions in support of a presidential recall referendum were published on Congressman Luis Tascón's website
- Taken down after Chávez won the August 2004 recall vote

Maisanta Program

- Created in mid-2004, a computer program with a database of personal information on over 12 million registered voters
- People were rated as “patriots,” “opposition,” or “abstainers”
- Widely distributed in the public sector; bootleg versions available

Used by public officials to exert pressure, threaten & discriminate against those who did not express support for the government

Loss of and/or refusal of access to government jobs, contracts & services

Petróleos de Venezuela Sociedad Anónima (PDVSA)



Political discrimination has been openly endorsed and practiced in the oil industry, which is one of the country's largest sources of employment and the backbone of the national economy.

-Human Rights Watch, Sep. 2008

Carnet De La Patria [The Homeland Card]



CARNET DE LA PATRIA

REPÚBLICA BOLIVARIANA DE VENEZUELA

NOMBRES: [Redacted]

APELLIDOS: [Redacted]

C.I: [Redacted]

F/ DE NACIMIENTO: / / [Redacted]

F/ EMISIÓN: / / [Redacted]

Initiated in 2017, the *carnet de la patria* is an identity document that is used for the delivery of social programs and benefits by the Venezuelan government.

It has allegedly been used to help monitor political activity.

Consejos Comunales [Communal Councils]

- Organizations that allow citizens to participate in local governance
- Help implement social programs & apply for state funding for projects
- Conceived of as a way to mobilize beneficiaries who would support the government
- Called on to take actions in support of the government or against the opposition



Circulos Bolivarianos

- Established in early 2000s to promote the Bolivarian Revolution & mobilize support for Chávez
- Allegations of violence & repression
 - Stigmatized by the opposition
 - Many were peaceful, although they involved armed elements
 - Allegations of violence during April 2002 coup
- Gradual decline after 2004
 - Do not play an important role or no longer exist

Colectivos

- Range from community organizations to armed pro-government groups
- Rose in prominence as *circulos bolivarianos* declined (including in government discourse)
- Became a catch-all term for militant *chavistas*
 - Accused by the opposition of doing tasks previously attributed to *circulos bolivarianos*
 - Opposition media holds them responsible for any aggression during confrontations
 - People are very afraid of them
- Allegations of repression & violence against protesters and government opponents

Both are pro-government, non-state groups accused by the opposition of intimidation & violence

But *circulos bolivarianos* are NOT equivalent to *colectivos*

Colectivos



Colectivos

- Most identify with the government & use weapons in a “para-state” role
- Not homogenous
 - Vary in organization, activities, & levels of support and motives for identifying with the government
 - Relationship with the state = ambiguous
 - Typically have access to government funding & goods
 - But relationships vary & it can be difficult to identify exact ties
- Types of *colectivos*
 - Long-standing groups whose origins pre-date *chavismo*
 - Groups formed during the height of *chavismo* (2007-2012)
 - “Disguised” *colectivos*

Colectivos in Caracas



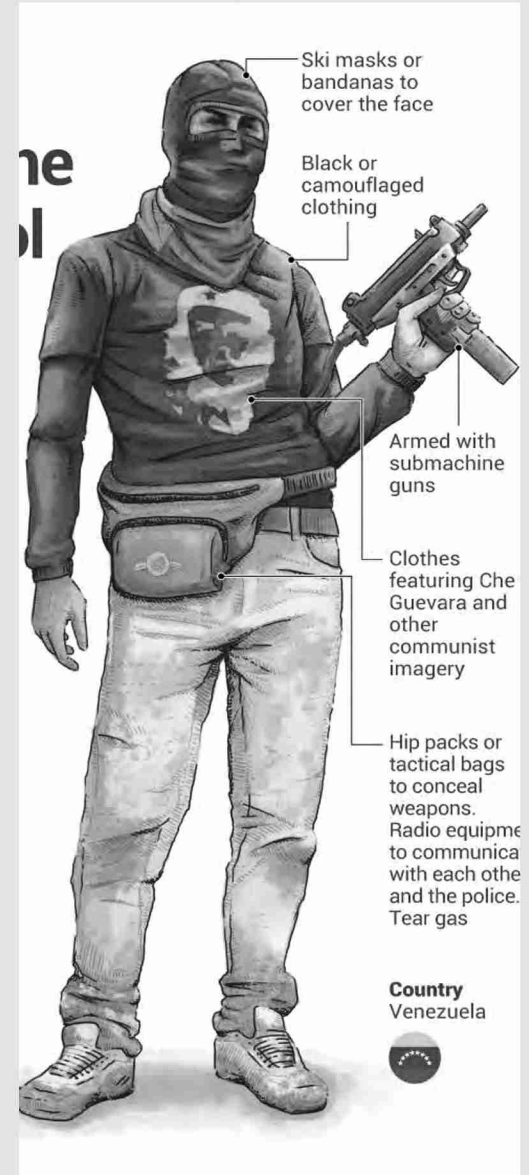
Colectivos

- Frente 5 de Marzo
- ◐ Ex-Frente 5 de Marzo
- La Piedrita
- Pérez Bonalde
- Tupamaros
- Alexis Vive
- Montaraz - Salvador Allende
- José Leonardo Chirinos
- Tres Raíces
- Coordinadora Simón Bolívar
- Divino Niño
- Lídice
- Sombra
- Not identified



Colectivo Expansion

Colectivos are groups that originated in Caracas and operate primarily in urban areas. However, armed colectivos now have presence in at least 16 of Venezuela's 23 states: **Miranda, Aragua, Carabobo, Lara, Portuguesa, Yaracuy, Falcón, Mérida, Trujillo, Táchira, Zulia, Sucre, Guárico, Bolívar, Monagas and Anzoátegui.**



Crime

- One of the most dangerous countries in the world
- “Mafia state” = degree of infiltration of organized crime into state institutions
- Various armed groups
 - *Colectivos*
 - *Pranes*
 - *Paracos*
 - Colombian guerrillas
 - *Megabandas*
 - Armed Forces (many members involved in criminal activity)
- Criminal groups have reportedly been calling themselves *colectivos*

Venezuelan Security Forces

- Bolivarian National Guard (GNB)
- Bolivarian National Police (PNB)
- Special Action Forces (FAES)
- Bureau for Scientific, Criminal and Forensic Investigations (CICPC)
- Bolivarian National Intelligence Service (SEBIN)
- Directorate General of Military Counterintelligence (DGCIM)



Venezuelan Security Forces

- Anti-Extortion and Kidnapping National Commando (CONAS)
- State Police Forces
- Municipal Police Forces
- Bolivarian National Army
- Bolivarian Navy
- Bolivarian Military Air Force
- Bolivarian Militia



Violence against Women

- “Serious” or “cultural” problem
 - Usually committed by partners, ex-partners, family members or people close to the victim
 - 50% of women = victims of some form of violence from partners, including physical violence, verbal abuse, and psychological abuse
- Also committed by state security forces and/or for political reasons
- Support services
- Impunity & lack of state protection

Leaving from & Returning to Venezuela

- Travel documents are increasingly difficult to obtain
- Government may cancel, invalidate, or deny renewal of passports of wanted or targeted individuals
- Returnees
 - What happens likely depends on their individual situation
 - Some returnees have been harmed:
 - Arrests & detentions
 - Imprisonment (without due process)
 - Disappearances
 - Threats, intimidation, & harassment
 - Beatings
 - Torture (while detained)
 - Cancellation of passports

Contact Info

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