



Venezuela Country Report December 2023

In 2013 Nicolás Maduro became President of Venezuela following Hugo Chávez's death. Maduro's party has [gained control](#) of most governmental institutions, moving Venezuela away from democracy toward authoritarian rule.

Venezuela is a [petrostate](#) – a country dependent on oil extraction and export. In 2014, due to a drop in global oil prices, Venezuela entered a deep recession. Inflation topped [65,300%](#) in 2018, making food and other necessities unaffordable.

The murder rate increased from 25 per 100,000 in 1999 (when Chávez was elected) to [82 per 100,000 in 2014](#).

Maduro's Special Action Forces (FAES) [detain](#), torture, and kill political opponents. From 2016 to 2019, police, army, and armed militias killed [18,000 people](#) in communities that do not support Maduro.

On 5 July 2019 the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, [Michelle Bachelet](#), released a report documenting the murders of 6,800 Venezuelans from 2018 to 2019 by security forces including the FAES. The report included evidence of [crimes against humanity](#) committed with the knowledge of high-ranking officials. The crimes included forced disappearances, arbitrary detention, torture, extrajudicial executions, and sexual and gender-based violence.

In 2023 Maduro's government increased its [crackdown](#) on dissidents before the upcoming presidential election. The government has issued an [arrest warrant](#) for the exiled US-based opposition leader, Juan Guaidó.

Civilians who remain in Venezuela have been forced to endure a severe [humanitarian emergency](#), including lack of access to health care, medicine and food. Maduro's health ministry censors health statistics and refuses to admit Venezuela's state of emergency despite [accepting aid](#) from the Red Cross in 2019.

In the decade since Maduro's accession to power, approximately [7.7 million people](#) have fled from Venezuela. Since 2015, on the Colombia side of the Venezuela-Colombia border approximately 1,500 refugees have [disappeared](#). The top ten destinations for Venezuelan emigrants are Colombia, Peru, the United States, Spain, Italy, Portugal, Argentina, Canada, France, and Panama.

In December 2023 Maduro announced his [intention to annex two thirds of the territory of neighboring Guyana](#). This invasion would allow Venezuela to exploit offshore oil reserves in Guyana territorial waters. It would nullify a border settlement reached in 1899 after international arbitration.

The invasion would violate the U.N. and O.A.S. Charters. The U.S. and other nations in the Americas have expressed opposition to Maduro's proposed annexation. Observers consider Maduro's announcement to be a nationalist ploy to gain support in the upcoming Venezuelan elections.

Because of Maduro's repression of dissidents and political opponents – including forced disappearances, torture, and murder, Venezuela is at **Stage 5: Organization**, **Stage 6: Polarization**, and **Stage 8: Persecution**.

Genocide Watch recommends that:

- The [United States](#) and other countries that host Venezuelan refugees should not deport them back to Venezuela.
- [The U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights](#) should push for release of unlawfully detained prisoners.
- As state-party to the [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#), the 2024 elections must be free and fair.
- UNHCR and Colombian authorities should investigate disappearances of refugees as a [priority](#).