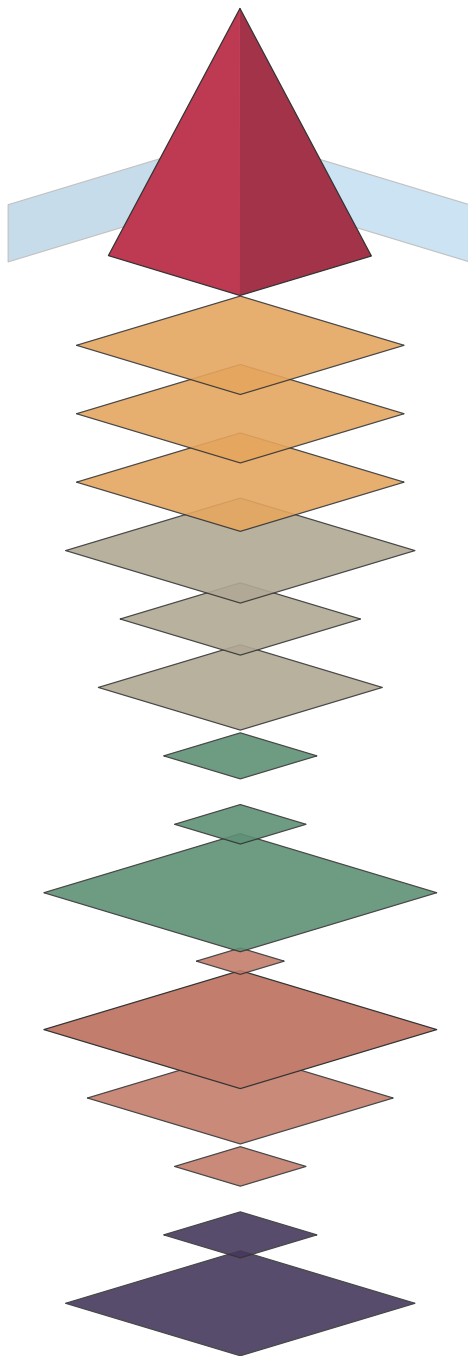




VENEZUELA



6.72

CRIMINALITY SCORE

24th of 193 countries

8th of 35 American countries

5th of 12 South American countries



CRIMINAL MARKETS

6.03

HUMAN TRAFFICKING	7.50
HUMAN SMUGGLING	7.50
EXTORTION & PROTECTION RACKETEERING	7.50
ARMS TRAFFICKING	8.00
TRADE IN COUNTERFEIT GOODS	5.50
ILLICIT TRADE IN EXCISABLE GOODS	6.50
FLORA CRIMES	3.50
FAUNA CRIMES	3.00
NON-RENEWABLE RESOURCE CRIMES	9.00
HEROIN TRADE	2.00
COCAINE TRADE	9.00
CANNABIS TRADE	7.00
SYNTHETIC DRUG TRADE	3.00
CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES	3.50
FINANCIAL CRIMES	8.00



CRIMINAL ACTORS

7.40

MAFIA-STYLE GROUPS	9.50
CRIMINAL NETWORKS	5.00
STATE-EMBEDDED ACTORS	9.00
FOREIGN ACTORS	7.50
PRIVATE SECTOR ACTORS	6.00



1.88

RESILIENCE SCORE



Funding provided by the United States Government.

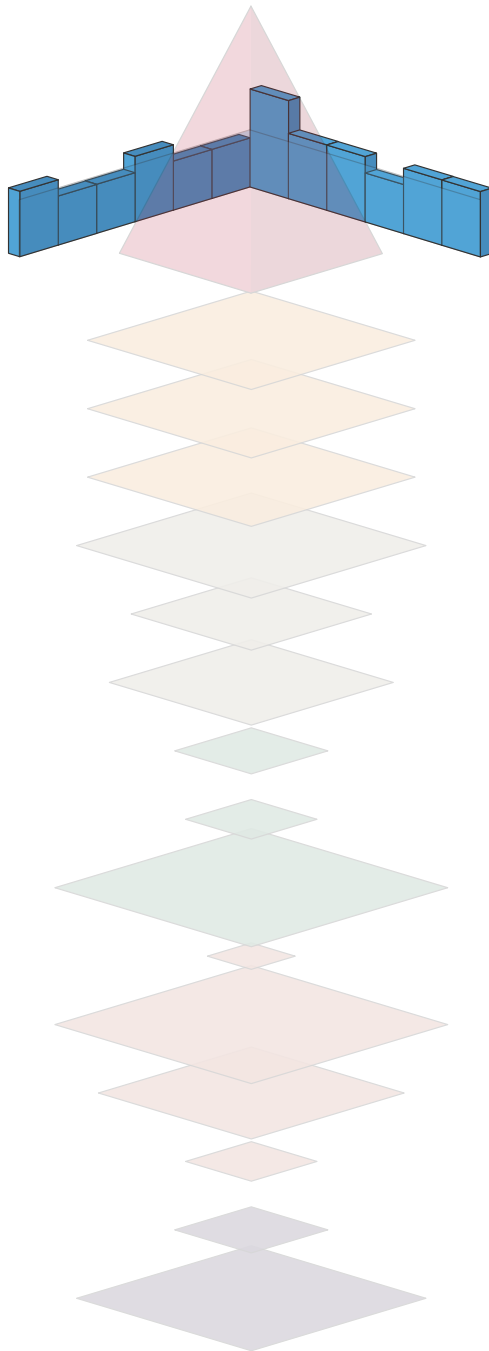


Funded by the European Union

ENACT is funded by the European Union and implemented by the Institute for Security Studies and INTERPOL, in affiliation with the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime.



VENEZUELA



1.88

RESILIENCE SCORE

185th of 193 countries

35th of 35 American countries

12th of 12 South American countries

POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE	2.00
GOVERNMENT TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY	1.50
INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION	1.50
NATIONAL POLICIES AND LAWS	2.00
JUDICIAL SYSTEM AND DETENTION	1.50
LAW ENFORCEMENT	1.50
TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY	3.00
ANTI-MONEY LAUNDERING	2.00
ECONOMIC REGULATORY CAPACITY	2.00
VICTIM AND WITNESS SUPPORT	1.50
PREVENTION	2.00
NON-STATE ACTORS	2.00



6.72

CRIMINALITY SCORE



CRIMINAL MARKETS 6.03



CRIMINAL ACTORS 7.40



CRIMINALITY

CRIMINAL MARKETS

PEOPLE

Venezuela remains a significant hub for human trafficking, where both domestic and foreign victims are exploited. Women are particularly vulnerable, often sexually exploited in Latin American countries that have received Venezuelan refugees. Criminal activities are facilitated by the lack of control of the police, and the complicity of migration authorities, boat captains and mafia groups operating at the borders. Venezuelans have been reported to take part in forced labour and sexual exploitation in the production of cocaine in the Catatumbo region of Colombia.

The country is a source country for human smuggling with Venezuelans using illegal crossings controlled by criminal groups to leave their country. As a result, these criminal networks have seen substantial financial gains from their involvement in this crime. Venezuelans with some means choose to leave the country through travel agencies run by smugglers that reach almost every country in Latin America. Transportation by land to Chile involves sophisticated transnational criminal structures, and victims have reported being abandoned on their way through inhospitable desert areas. Human smuggling activities also take place on the Venezuelan coast, particularly to transport people to Trinidad and Tobago, Aruba, Curaçao and Bonaire, with many of these boats sinking during the crossing. The humanitarian crisis in Venezuela continues to force people to flee.

Extortion and protection racketeering are widespread in Venezuela, carried out by criminal networks. These activities are prevalent in areas under the control or influence of criminal groups, such as the borders of the provinces of Arauca and Apure, commercial areas in Caracas and Zulia, and mining areas where small miners are forced to pay a percentage of the gold they extract to armed groups. Extortion is also carried out through fake kidnappings made from prisons through phone calls. Smuggled Venezuelans are extorted multiple times during their journey to a destination country, including paying with money, goods or sexual favours. Indigenous people in Bolívar experience extortion by paramilitary groups. Despite efforts to combat extortion, victims are often left with no choice but to comply with the demands of criminal actors.

TRADE

Illegal weapons are extensively available in Venezuela, with government corruption playing a major role in their circulation. Most gang bullets come from the state-owned firearms manufacturer, with some security forces' members selling their arms on the black market. The government's lack of accountability, and incentives for officials to seize and destroy arms, have created a vicious cycle, where police officers sell seized weapons to criminals. In this market, bullets have become the most profitable item, and gangs use them indiscriminately as a sign of status. Illicit weapons are also prevalent within the correctional system and are used by various unregulated groups, generating insecurity and crime. Notably, routes originating from Venezuela, particularly through Norte de Santander and Arauca, have emerged as significant conduits for the influx of Russian and European weaponry into Colombia.

Trade in counterfeit goods is prevalent in Venezuela, with the economic crisis driving the production and sale of fake products. At least a quarter of the country's market comprises counterfeit products, ranging from clothing and electronics to pharmaceuticals and foodstuffs. Fake famous brand franchises have also been detected, with commercial establishments infringing intellectual property rights offering services openly. The country has seen an increase in counterfeit medicines coming from China, Cuba and Russia, with these smuggled through the borders of Brazil and Colombia.

The illicit trade in excise goods is also commonplace in Venezuela, particularly due to the inflation of prices and the economic crisis. The illegal trade mainly comes from the border between Venezuela and Colombia, where prices are considerably cheaper. During the period that the borders between Colombia and Venezuela were closed, the illegal trade of products increased almost threefold, benefitting the criminal markets. This border is full of illegal crossings/trochas, controlled by mafias. These crossings are used to enter Venezuela with excise goods, including alcoholic beverages and tobacco products. Tobacco smuggling increased exponentially, accounting for approximately a quarter of the Venezuelan market.

ENVIRONMENT

An increase was registered in flora crimes in Venezuela, largely due to the country's economic crisis and lack of government control. The energy crisis has, as well, led to a rise in illegal tree cutting for firewood, which has resulted in a local market where people cut trees from protected areas to supply themselves or sell the wood on the streets. Additionally, there is a demand for timber from external countries such as the US and China, as well as European

countries. Environmental organizations in Colombia have reported illegal timber exports to Venezuela due to the high prices in neighbouring countries.

Wildlife trafficking and bushmeat consumption have also surged in Venezuela, particularly in the Orinoco Delta, due to smugglers coming from neighbouring countries. This has critically threatened deer, manatee and baquiro because of their consumption by foreign nationals. Locals, struggling to survive in the economic and humanitarian crisis, are also hunting animals in danger of extinction, such as yellow-headed parrots, cardenalitos, and red and blue macaws. Hunger in the country has also increased the poaching of dolphins, pink flamingos and sea turtles for local consumption. The market for animal products is predominantly ruled by domestic actors, but smugglers have also entered the market, responding to local and international demand.

Gold and oil smuggling are pervasive issues in Venezuela, driven by years of corruption and mismanagement in the state-owned oil company, as well as US sanctions. Corruption is widespread within the country's oil industry with state officials reported to be involved in fraud, bribery and currency scams that have resulted in billions of dollars in losses. Resulting shortages of gas and oil in the country have turned Venezuela into a destination country for smuggled oil. Decreased oil production has also forced the regime to compensate for losses with mineral resources located in the Orinoco Mining Arc (OMA). Currently, from all countries sharing the Amazon rainforest, Venezuela has the most illegal mining spots identified, with clandestine airstrips used to ship minerals, especially gold, out of the country. The proliferation of small illegal mines in the OMA has created a complex network of criminality. Non-state armed groups and Brazilian gangs operate directly in the mines or extort small miners to let them work, which has led to disputes between these groups resulting in increased violence and many deaths in recent years.

DRUGS

Although the Venezuelan government has reported a decrease in heroin seizures, it is uncertain whether this reduction is due to less drug trafficking, decreased consumption or a lack of government control. However, Venezuela remains a major country for the production and trafficking of cocaine, with high-ranking officials facilitating the drug trade. The Amazon River is a key drug trafficking route that includes Colombia, Venezuela and Brazil, with Brazil being the primary country for drug shipments to Europe. Criminal organizations use fast boats to transport cocaine to the Caribbean islands, and Venezuelans provide cheap labour to harvest, process and move the shipments.

The marijuana available on the local market has high levels of THC and, during the COVID-19 lockdown, the price of cannabis increased dramatically, surpassing the average

income of the population, leading to a constrained market. Marijuana plantations have been reported in various parts of the country for local consumption and small-scale export to the English-speaking Caribbean islands. It is possible that marijuana follows the same routes as cocaine from Colombia. Venezuela is not significantly involved in the transnational synthetic drug trade. However, the sale of various synthetic drugs, including methamphetamine and keratin, is surging in local markets. There are currently no indications of synthetic opioids being sold.

CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES

Cybercrime in Venezuela has been increasing over the years, with a surge in remote desktop protocol attacks and malware attacks. Notable cases include the hacking of Venezuelan military intelligence, which leaked information about Hezbollah agents in the country, as well as individuals involved in drug and arms trafficking, and money laundering. Digital media outlets and human rights organizations have been increasingly targeted by these crimes in recent years. Distributed denial-of-service attacks are often attributed to the media's coverage of corruption scandals, leading to suspicions of these being state-sponsored.

FINANCIAL CRIMES

Financial crimes market has been expanding in Venezuela in recent years, with a particular rise in fraudulent online activities through social media. Victims have been targeted with fake emails from the migration and administrative system, as well as other government platforms. The release of the Pandora Papers shed light on the involvement of high-ranking Venezuelan officials in offshore accounts and illegal activities, such as corruption in the national oil company. Many people in the country have also fallen victim to Ponzi schemes.

The prevalence of informal financial activities in Venezuela, such as currency sales and purchases, and foreign and local currency transfers, has created an environment that is conducive to fraudulent schemes of varying sizes. Moreover, the country's isolation from the global financial system has led to opaque international transactions that involve large cash transfers, providing opportunities for misappropriation and large-scale fraud.

CRIMINAL ACTORS

The Venezuelan state is plagued with criminal activities, and high-ranking officials are reportedly collaborating with criminal organizations to carry out various illegal operations, including drug trafficking and money laundering. Political elites in Venezuela are also accused of using the state-owned oil company to launder billions of dollars for their own benefit, as well as that of others in the government.

In terms of mafia-style groups, 'megabandas' control territory, possess heavy weaponry and have a clear hierarchy. The southern part of the country is the most affected as guerrillas and gangs fight for control of the territory, drug trafficking and gold extraction. These actors are also involved in extortion and have significant access to weapons. They control the penitentiary system and coordinate criminal operations within prisons. While the Venezuelan security forces launched various operations that resulted in the deaths of important leaders, these attacks have only been aimed at gangs that have attracted national attention for their violence, rather than being part of an overall strategy.

Foreign actors, particularly Colombian dissidents from the FARC and other guerrilla groups, have long used Venezuela as a base for their operations. The criminal situation in Venezuela is complex and involves a mix of internal and foreign actors with different interests that only align partially and temporarily. Colombian criminal groups are one of the dominant actors in Venezuela's major criminal markets, including cocaine, petrol and gold trafficking, and human smuggling. Brazilian crime syndicates are also increasing their stakes in southern Venezuela, and groups of Brazilian armed miners invade border areas rich in gold in the states of Bolívar and Amazonas.

Regarding criminal networks, experienced militia men from Iran and Lebanon are said to have been entering the

country to train Colectivos (government-backed armed groups that claim to protect the Bolivarian revolution) in counterintelligence and the repression of social protests, in exchange for passports and legal documentation that allow them to expand their operations throughout Latin America. The Colectivos control the black market for government-regulated food in some neighbourhoods, enjoying impunity for their actions, with high-level authorities placing direct orders for their activities. These groups have been accused of using violence against regime opponents during anti-crime operations, as well as being involved in local drug trafficking.

Private sector actors in the gold mining industry in Venezuela actively collaborate with criminal networks. These actors, including gold processing companies, work in conjunction with criminal groups to force miners to sell the gold they extract directly to them for further refining or processing. Furthermore, labour unions in the construction, oil and mining sectors are involved in criminal activities. Rather than representing the workers' interests, these pseudo-unions have been extorting workers in their sectors to secure them jobs. On the employer's side, they extort managers and bosses of different projects or construction sites, threatening them into hiring only the people that they indicate, or buying materials from certain companies. Disputes between the pseudo-unions result in several murders per year, many of them in the form of hired killings.

RESILIENCE

LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

Venezuela is widely considered to be a fragile state, currently facing severe economic and political crises that have led to extremely low governability and legitimacy, and have had an impact on the basic human needs of Venezuelans. The country's income has substantially decreased due to US sanctions, economic collapse and an unprecedented decline in oil and gas production, forcing the state to rely on alternative sources of income. The regime has deinstitutionalized its military forces, transforming them into a decentralized resistance force, which has led to the proliferation of other armed entities allied with the regime. The state has not prioritized the dismantling of organized crime groups that engage in criminal activities, and there is no political will to do so. Since 2014, the Venezuelan regime has not published its macroeconomic data, forcing NGOs and foreign governments to record any data related to the country's situation. The lack of transparency and accountability is evident in the absence of fair and free elections, openness, and fair electoral laws and frameworks. The re-election of president Nicolás Maduro was widely

regarded as fraudulent, leading to the non-recognition of his government by many countries, and the creation of a parallel opposition government led by Juan Guaidó. However, the credibility of the latter has also been marred by corruption cases, as it was not prepared to manage public funds with accountability. The high levels of corruption, crime and impunity in the country have led to their normalization.

Venezuela is party to international agreements on organized crime and has extradition treaties with several countries. Nevertheless, Venezuela fails to adhere to its international obligations and the country consistently refuses to receive international fact-finding missions to investigate human rights abuses. Additionally, Venezuela has become a safe haven for criminals wanted by INTERPOL, with fugitives hiding in the country. The criminal legal framework in Venezuela has not undergone significant changes, and the lack of judicial independence in the country has fostered criminality and human rights violations. National legislation against organized crime has not been effectively implemented.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND SECURITY

The justice system in Venezuela lacks independence, which contributes to the government's repression of opponents and serious human rights violations. Political actors are reported to give orders to judges, and those who refuse are often intimidated and vilified. The chief prosecutor eliminated the competitive selection process for prosecutors, resulting in judges and prosecutors being placed by high-ranking officials. The penitentiary system faces notable challenges such as corruption, weak security, poor infrastructure, overcrowding, insufficient staffing and poorly trained guards. Criminals within the system coordinate illegal activities outside prison walls, such as kidnappings, extortion and drug trafficking.

Venezuela's lack of control over its territories has forced the government to rely on non-state armed groups and corrupt military officials to maintain control and authority in those areas. While the government has repressed some illegal groups and regained control of disputed territories, law enforcement has been accused of torture and extrajudicial killings, exacerbating the problem of violence and compounding distrust within communities towards the police. The situation within security forces is dire, with widespread corruption, weak security and poor infrastructure contributing to the problems.

Venezuela's porous borders have also led to the proliferation of illegal activities by criminal groups. From the beginning of the Chavez regime, the Venezuelan state has welcomed Colombian guerrillas as ideological allies and as a military force that could help the government control the country's borders and deter an invasion from the US or Colombia. However, the state has lost control of its expansion, and illegal mining and drug trafficking have flourished in many territories. Some provinces have been de facto controlled by criminal groups fighting for transnational criminal markets. The lack of state presence, as well as the willingness of local authorities to accept bribes, further complicates the situation. Despite the Venezuelan government's efforts to regain control, the outcome remains uncertain.

ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL ENVIRONMENT

Money laundering remains a substantial problem in Venezuela. Despite some slight improvements, the vulnerabilities of the financial system, the extensive foreign exchange market, unregulated circulation of dollars and lack of transparency continue to hinder any state initiative. Drug trafficking, corruption and smuggling of goods are recognized as sources of illicit funds, with international sanctions reinforcing the extent of money laundering in the country. Venezuela's geographical location, weak supervision and enforcement, and limited bilateral cooperation also contribute to widespread financial abuses. International sanctions have led Venezuela to increasingly seek to sell its oil through grey markets abroad.

Several factors have weakened Venezuela's economic regulatory capacity, including financial sanctions, the decline of wages and the formal economy, corruption and lack of rule of law. Financial sanctions have led to the economy relying on grey transactions, cash and barter to bypass them and avoid international financial systems. The destruction of wages and the formal economy has pushed a significant portion of the population to engage in informal and illegal activities, further discouraging entrepreneurs from starting businesses. Further, the government's slow payment process is a considerable obstacle to investment. Although the country is expected to grow in the coming years, it is far from reaching the economic levels experienced decades ago, as the private sector has been almost dismantled by the state. Venezuela still has the highest inflation rate in the world, and the new economic measures aimed at promoting the use of the Bolivar show that economic decisions are still political rather than technical. The economic crisis has affected the living conditions of Venezuelans to a dire extent, with almost the entire population living below the poverty line and facing shortages of food, medicines and basic goods.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

The Venezuelan justice system remains flawed and lacks independence, violating victims' rights, despite recent reforms to a law on the protection of victims by the National Assembly. In some cases, judges have failed to protect victims of torture by ordering their return to detention centres where they were allegedly tortured. The Venezuelan government has not provided support for trafficking victims, as there are no specialized shelters available for them. Nevertheless, some civil society and religious organizations offer assistance to these victims. The high level of distrust of citizens towards authorities and security forces renders any kind of victim and witness support ineffective, or even non-existent.

The relationship between the Venezuelan regime's and independent media outlets as well as NGOs has been weak, as there is a limited tolerance towards criticism. The regime has implemented a decree forcing NGOs to register and provide detailed information about their financing, which is seen as an attempt to silence independent organizations that have been documenting and denouncing the human rights crisis in the country. Local NGOs are under scrutiny, and some have been accused of being terrorist groups and infiltrators for foreign intelligence agencies, resulting in personnel being detained, tortured and disappeared. The government has also been stripping critical radio and TV stations of their broadcast frequencies, blocking their social media, and carrying out arbitrary arrests and violence against reporters and civil society organizations. It has implemented repressive laws and regulations that restrict the exercise of their right to freedom of peaceful assembly, association and expression. Journalists are

frequently threatened or beaten-up during elections, with no safety guarantee for them.

This summary was funded in part by a grant from the United States Department of State. The opinions, findings and conclusions stated herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the United States Department of State.