

The background of the cover features a protest scene in Venezuela. A diagonal line divides the image into a blue upper-left section and a red lower-right section. Yellow stars, reminiscent of the European Union flag, are scattered across the top. In the foreground, a police officer in riot gear is seen from the side, facing a crowd. A sign in the crowd reads "#QUE SE VAYAN TODOS".

ELECTORAL REPRESSION, ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCES AND POLITICAL CONTROL IN VENEZUELA

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I. INTRODUCTION

Rather than an isolated moment, the current situation in Venezuela reflects the continuation of deeper structural and institutional trends identified in earlier reporting. Foro Penal and Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights (RFKHR) have jointly published two prior reports documenting patterns of political repression: [Enforced Disappearance as a Tool of Political Repression in Venezuela](https://rfkhumanrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/RFKHumanRights-VenezuelaDisappearances-EnglishReport.pdf) (2020) and [Criminal Justice as a Tool of Political Repression in Venezuela](https://rfkhumanrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/CriminalJusticeasToolofPoliticalRepressioninVenezuela.pdf) (2022). Both organizations have consistently worked to uphold the rights and dignity of the Venezuelan people in the face of widespread and systematic violations committed by the Maduro regime. The present report revisits and expands upon the findings of 2020 and 2022, reaffirming that the patterns of political repression identified then continue to hold true today. Notably, in the 2020 report five main purposes behind acts of political repression in Venezuela were identified:

- **Exclusion:** The use of repression to remove individuals from political life and neutralize them as critics or focal points for mobilization.
- **Intimidation:** directed at individuals who may not represent a direct political threat but belong to social groups, such as students, human rights defenders, journalists, judges, military officers, and activists, that the regime seeks to suppress.
- **Propaganda:** the targeting of individuals not necessarily viewed as threats to the regime, but whose persecution helps construct political narratives that deflect blame for State failures and sustain impunity.
- **Extraction:** the detention or imprisonment of individuals to obtain information, usually through torture, instrumental in persecuting others, typically family members or friends.
- **Personal interest:** the abuse of political power to defend or advance the private interests of public officials, without a strict political end.¹

Alongside these five purposes, the growing number of arbitrary detentions and enforced disappearances of foreigners and dual citizens in Venezuela following the 28 July 2024 presidential election, and their instrumentalization as “bargaining chips” in political negotiations with other governments points to the emergence of a sixth systematic objective of repression. The Maduro regime exploits these political prisoners as hostages or “bargaining chips”, openly leveraging their arbitrary detention for international recognition, political legitimacy, or even commercial advantages on the international stage.²

These six objectives outline the Maduro regime’s policy of repression. Building on these and other findings, the present report examines how enforced disappearance continues to be deployed as part of the regime’s evolving criminal policy, specifically in relation to the three most recent election processes: the 28 July 2024 presidential election, the 25 May 2025 parliamentary and gubernatorial elections and the 27 July 2025 municipal elections.

While the political climate and methods of repression may have evolved, the underlying rationale of neutralizing dissent and consolidating power present behind each repressive act remains unchanged. This continued course of action, alongside the emergence of new patterns, underscores the need for continued monitoring and renewed accountability efforts. In sum, it is essential to underscore that, as

1 Foro Penal & Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights. (2020). *Enforced Disappearance as a Tool of Political Repression in Venezuela*. <https://rfkhumanrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/RFKHumanRights-VenezuelaDisappearances-EnglishReport.pdf>, pp.11-12.

2 The *hostage* category has been recently included as the sixth category of political purposes for repression in the 2nd edition (2024) of Foro Penal’s “Manual de Litigio Estratégico. La Lucha Contra la Represión Política”.

asserted by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights,³ the human rights situation in Venezuela has not improved, it has worsened. With the country once again at a critical moment marked by evolving repressive tactics, we remain concerned and committed to documenting political persecution, understanding its evolution, and working toward accountability for the affected communities.

To guide the reader, this report first provides an overview of the recent political and electoral context in Venezuela, situating the present findings within the broader environment of repression. Second, it presents two datasets compiled by Foro Penal, documenting patterns of detention and enforced disappearance during the 2024 presidential election and subsequent electoral processes in 2025. Third, it outlines the applicable legal framework, clarifying how enforced disappearance is defined under Venezuelan and international law. Fourth, it highlights individual cases that illustrate the human impact behind the data and trends. Finally, the report concludes with recommendations aimed at strengthening accountability and reinforcing international protection mechanisms.

In this manner, placing the data in its political and electoral context is essential. To present findings in isolation would risk overlooking the regime's broader strategy of systematic suppression of dissent, manufacturing of external "threats," and instrumental use of repression to consolidate power and extract concessions from the international community. Understanding why the Maduro regime resorts to enforced disappearance and arbitrary detention, whether to silence critics, to neutralize electoral opposition, or to leverage foreign governments that question its legitimacy, requires situating each act of repression within the wider picture of authoritarian control. For this reason, the following section examines the recent political and electoral context in Venezuela, providing the foundation for the analysis that follows.

II. POLITICAL AND ELECTORAL CONTEXT IN VENEZUELA

The recent electoral cycles in Venezuela unfolded against a backdrop of entrenched structural repression and institutional manipulation. Beyond isolated incidents, the repression documented in this report reflects a broader strategy of using legal, institutional, and coercive tools to preserve the Maduro regime's grip on power, suppress dissent, and project an image of control both domestically and internationally. The following section revisits prior findings that show how repression has become embedded in Venezuela's institutional framework before situating the 28 July 2024 presidential election, the 25 May 2025 parliamentary and gubernatorial elections⁴ and the 27 July 2025 municipal elections within this trajectory.

Overview of Structural Repression

As documented in the 2020 and 2022 reports, State repression in Venezuela has intensified progressively over the past decade. The 2020 report noted that during demonstrations in 2014, 43 people were killed in connection with protests. By 2017, that number had nearly tripled to 124, indicating a sharp escalation in the use of lethal force.⁵ In parallel, institutional structures in Venezuela were reconfigured by the

3 Türk, V. (2025, June 27). HC Türk updates Council on the human rights situation in Venezuela. Interactive Dialogue on the Report of the High Commissioner on the Situation of Human Rights in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Geneva, Switzerland. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements-and-speeches/2025/06/hc-turk-updates-council-human-rights-situation-venezuela>; In response, the ANC declared the UN High Commissioner persona non grata: <https://www.asambleanacional.gob.ve/noticias/parlamento-solicitar-a-al-mp-acciones-legales-contra-alto-comisionado-volker-turk>.

4 DW. (2025, May 25). Elecciones regionales en Venezuela sin oposición mayoritaria. *Deutsche Welle*. <https://www.dw.com/es/elecciones-regionales-en-venezuela-sin-la-oposici%C3%B3n-mayoritaria/a-72664806>.

5 Foro Penal & Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights. (2020). *Enforced Disappearance as a Tool of Political Repression in Venezuela*. <https://rfkhumanrights.org/wp-content/>

Maduro regime to further concentrate power. In August 2017, the Supreme Court of Justice authorized President Nicolás Maduro to convene a National Constituent Assembly (ANC) to draft a new constitution. Functioning as a *de facto* parliament, the ANC dismissed Venezuela's Attorney General at the time replacing it with government ally, Tarek William Saab. The ANC took other alarming measures such as removing parliamentary immunity from opposing deputies. The 2022 report highlighted how the ANC played a direct role in moving up the presidential elections so that they would take place in 2018, circumventing standard electoral procedures for the 2019-2025 term.⁶ Nicolás Maduro would go on to win that contended election.⁷

During the same period, the judicial system experienced increasing interference. The 2020 report documented that the Judicial Commission of the Supreme Court increased its use of provisional appointments in order to reduce the number of judges with full independent tenure, with provisional judges rising from 66% to 88%.⁸ This erosion of judicial independence laid the groundwork for systemic persecution on political grounds. The 2020 report noted that between April and October 2017 alone, 757 civilians were tried before military courts.⁹ The use of military jurisdiction to try civilians was identified in both reports as a key structural factor fostering human rights violations and impunity.

Furthermore, enforced disappearances emerged as a central tactic of repression beginning in 2018. According to the 2020 report, the General Directorate of Military Counterintelligence (DGCIM) was responsible for the majority of enforced disappearances in 2018, carrying out 170 of the 200 documented cases. Strikingly, nearly two-thirds of those forcibly disappeared by the DGCIM were civilians (118), despite the agency's formal mandate as a military counterintelligence body. In 2019, the Venezuelan National Guard (GNB) became the leading perpetrator of enforced disappearances, with a broader range of security forces adopting this practice, signaling its widespread adoption among different agencies as a tool of political repression. Nonetheless, the DGCIM remained responsible for almost all enforced disappearances of military personnel in both 2018 and 2019. The 2020 report also noted that all individuals forcibly disappeared in 2018 in connection with protests were detained by the Bolivarian National Intelligence Service (SEBIN), suggesting they had been identified in advance.¹⁰

The 2020 report additionally found that in 2019, the Maduro regime increasingly directed the practice of enforced disappearance against military personnel. While the overall number of enforced disappearances rose significantly from 200 cases in 2018 to 524 cases in 2019, the proportion of civilian detentions resulting in enforced disappearance decreased, from approximately 33% in 2018 to 23% in 2019. Likewise, the percentage of civilians subjected to both enforced disappearance and torture fell from around 29% in 2018 to under 5% in 2019. In contrast, the rates for military personnel showed a marked increase. In 2018, approximately 68% of detained military officials were forcibly disappeared, a number that rose to 72.15% in 2019. Torture was reported in 83.6% of those cases in 2018, and this increased to nearly 95% in 2019.¹¹

The 2020 report further noted that military personnel remained forcibly disappeared for an average

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uploads/2022/01/RFKHumanRights-VenezuelaDisappearances-EnglishReport.pdf, p.9.

6 Foro Penal & Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights. (2020). *Enforced Disappearance as a Tool of Political Repression in Venezuela*. <https://rfkhumanrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/RFKHumanRights-VenezuelaDisappearances-EnglishReport.pdf>, p.8.

7 Mogollon, M. (2018, May 20). Venezuela's President Nicolas Maduro reelected amid boycott by opposition groups. *Los Angeles Times*. <https://www.latimes.com/world/la-fg-venezuela-election-maduro-20180520-story.html>; Efecto Cocuyo. (2018, May 21). Conozca las reacciones de los países que rechazan elecciones de Venezuela. *Efecto Cocuyo*. <https://efectococuyo.com/politica/conozca-las-reacciones-de-los-paises-que-rechazan-elecciones-de-venezuela/>.

8 Foro Penal & Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights. (2020). *Enforced Disappearance as a Tool of Political Repression in Venezuela*. <https://rfkhumanrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/RFKHumanRights-VenezuelaDisappearances-EnglishReport.pdf>, p.7.

9 Foro Penal & Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights. (2020). *Enforced Disappearance as a Tool of Political Repression in Venezuela*. <https://rfkhumanrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/RFKHumanRights-VenezuelaDisappearances-EnglishReport.pdf>, p.7; Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. (2017). Democratic institutions, rule of law, and human rights in Venezuela: Country Report (OEA/Ser.L/V/II). Organization of American States. <https://www.oas.org/en/iachr/reports/pdfs/venezuela2018-en.pdf>, para.257.

10 Foro Penal & Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights. (2020). *Enforced Disappearance as a Tool of Political Repression in Venezuela*. <https://rfkhumanrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/RFKHumanRights-VenezuelaDisappearances-EnglishReport.pdf>, p.27.

11 Foro Penal & Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights. (2020). *Enforced Disappearance as a Tool of Political Repression in Venezuela*. <https://rfkhumanrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/RFKHumanRights-VenezuelaDisappearances-EnglishReport.pdf>, p.24.

of two to four days longer than civilians. Additionally, civilians whose roles directly challenged the Maduro regime, such as journalists and members of the National Assembly, were held for longer periods than other civilians. These individuals, along with military personnel, were also subjected to enforced disappearance in significantly smaller numbers than civilians in general, underscoring a clear pattern of deliberate and selective targeting. The 2020 report thus highlighted that these were not simply failures of a collapsed justice system to comply with procedural deadlines under due process, but intentional strategies of repression.¹² These practices were accompanied by rising levels of arbitrary detention, with 15,160 politically motivated detentions recorded by Foro Penal between January 2014 and August 2019.¹³

The 2022 report, based on data from 481 cases of detention recorded between January 2020 and October 2021, documented the continued erosion of due process guarantees in Venezuela. Of the 481 selected cases, in only 7 was a warrant presented at the time of arrest. In most cases, authorities invoked the principle of “in flagrante delicto” during detention to justify the arrests, especially during protest-related repression operations. In practice, this principle was used abusively and without regard to the legal standards for detention without a warrant.¹⁴ Furthermore, among the 69 individuals in this period who reported having been forcibly disappeared, 15 were released without ever being brought before a court, 12 of them after the 48-hour legal threshold required by Venezuelan law had elapsed. One individual remained in detention for 136 days without ever being formally presented before a judge. Of the 54 cases that did proceed to court, 44 individuals (81%) were denied their right to be assisted by a lawyer of their choosing and forced to accept public legal defense, and 28 of those (64%) were brought before courts with special jurisdiction over terrorism or military matters.¹⁵ Similar irregularities were observed in cases of incommunicado detention. Of the 251 individuals who reported this form of detention, 19 were released without court proceedings, typically after one day or less in custody. Of the 232 who were presented before a judge, 29 (13%) were also forced to be represented by public defenders, and 10 of those (35%) were also sent.¹⁶

Forcing detainees to accept public defenders in this manner contravenes both domestic and international guarantees of the right to a defense. Article 139 of the Venezuelan Organic Code of Criminal Procedure enshrines the principle that an accused person may freely appoint a lawyer of their choosing, with a public defender to be assigned only if the accused does not designate private counsel.¹⁷ In line with this, international human rights law likewise protects the right to defend oneself through counsel of one’s own choosing.¹⁸ By denying detainees their chosen attorneys and imposing public defenders, authorities violate fundamental due process standards. Moreover, the resort to public defenders in such political cases gravely undermines the effectiveness of any defense. Venezuela’s public defenders lack independence from the government and have been widely criticized for failing to provide an effective

12 Foro Penal. (2019). *Reporte sobre la Represión en Venezuela*. <https://foropenal.com/reportesobre-la-represion-en-venezuela-agosto-2019/>, p.6.

13 Foro Penal. (2019). *Reporte sobre la Represión en Venezuela*. <https://foropenal.com/reportesobre-la-represion-en-venezuela-agosto-2019/>, p.6.

14 Foro Penal & Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights. (2022). *Criminal Justice as a Tool of Political Repression in Venezuela*. <https://rfkhumanrights.org/wp-content/uploads/assets/VZ-Report-June-2022-EN.pdf>, p.18.

15 Foro Penal & Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights. (2022). *Criminal Justice as a Tool of Political Repression in Venezuela*. <https://rfkhumanrights.org/wp-content/uploads/assets/VZ-Report-June-2022-EN.pdf>, p.20.

16 Foro Penal & Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights. (2022). *Criminal Justice as a Tool of Political Repression in Venezuela*. <https://rfkhumanrights.org/wp-content/uploads/assets/VZ-Report-June-2022-EN.pdf>, p.20.

17 Organic Code of Criminal Procedure, Decree No. 9.042 of 12 June 2012 (O.G. No. 6.078 Ext. of 15 June 2012), Article 139: The accused has the right to appoint a lawyer of his or her choosing as defense counsel. If the accused fails to do so, the judge shall appoint a public defender from the first procedural act, or at the latest, prior to the taking of the accused’s statement. If the accused prefers to conduct his or her own defense, the judge shall permit it only when it does not undermine the effectiveness of technical defense. The participation of defense counsel shall not diminish the right of the accused to make requests and observations personally.

18 See, for example: International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, 16 December 1966, United Nations, Treaty Series, vol. 999, p. 171 and vol. 1057, p. 407, entered into force 23 March 1976, Article 14(3)(d): In the determination of any criminal charge against him, everyone shall be entitled to the following minimum guarantees, in full equality: To be tried in his presence, and to defend himself in person or through legal assistance of his own choosing; to be informed, if he does not have legal assistance, of this right; and to have legal assistance assigned to him, in any case where the interests of justice so require, and without payment by him in any such case if he does not have sufficient means to pay for it; American Convention on Human Rights, 22 November 1969, OAS Treaty Series No. 36, entered into force 18 July 1978, UN registration 27 August 1979, No. 17955, Article 8(2)(d): Every person accused of a criminal offense has the right to be presumed innocent so long as his guilt has not been proven according to law. During the proceedings, every person is entitled, with full equality, to the following minimum guarantees: the right of the accused to defend himself personally or to be assisted by legal counsel of his own choosing, and to communicate freely and privately with his counsel.

defense.¹⁹ In many documented cases, detainees who expressly requested their own lawyers had those requests ignored, and State-appointed lawyers were imposed on them, offering no meaningful advocacy on the detainee's behalf.²⁰ Rather than safeguarding the rights of the accused, these imposed defenders have frequently functioned as an extension of the Maduro regime's oppressive apparatus, facilitating prosecutions at the expense of the detainees' right to a fair trial.²¹

The 2022 report also noted that these practices followed discernible patterns linked to the alleged cause of detention. Of the 481 cases analyzed, 211 involved participation in protests or demonstrations, 20 were linked to military rebellion, nearly all of whom were forcibly disappeared at the time of arrest, and 4 were tied to civil rebellion, with all detainees likewise being forcibly disappeared upon detention.²² Additionally, both the 2020 and 2022 reports consistently concluded that women were disproportionately subjected to enforced disappearance and incommunicado detention.²³ In the 2020 report, Foro Penal found that many of these cases pointed to women being used as leverage, detained to either extract information or exert pressure on their relatives and close associates through intimidation and punishment.²⁴

These systemic human rights violations have not gone unnoticed by the international community. Over the past several years, both the Organization of American States (OAS) and the Office of the Prosecutor International Criminal Court (ICC) have played significant roles in documenting abuses and advancing accountability efforts concerning Venezuela.

On 14 September 2017, the Secretary General of the OAS announced the appointment of an independent panel of three international experts to assess whether crimes against humanity had been committed in Venezuela and whether the situation merited referral to the ICC.²⁵ This initiative culminated in a May 2018 report where the panel concluded that there were reasonable grounds to believe such crimes had been committed.²⁶ Building on this initial effort, the OAS has issued a series of follow-up reports. In December 2020, it released a second report calling for the opening of an investigation to the Office of the Prosecutor.²⁷ In March 2024, a third report examined Venezuela's domestic accountability mechanisms,²⁸ and, most recently, in May 2025, the panel published a fourth report analyzing Venezuela's consolidation of what the panel referred to as a "policy of State terror".²⁹

Parallel to the OAS's efforts, and informed in part by its findings, several States Parties to the Rome

19 International Commission of Jurists. (2023). *Lawyers under attack: Barriers to the legal profession in Venezuela*. <https://www.icj.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Venezuela-Lawyers-under-attack-publications-briefing-paper-2022-ENG.pdf#:~:text=Making%20matters%20worse%2C%20these%20public,2017%20protests%20because%20the%20Government,p.17>.

20 Lawyers for Lawyers. (2024, November 26). *Venezuela: Rights of the defence are systematically denied* [Press release]. <https://www.lawyersforlawyers.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/Statement-Foro-Penal-Venezuela-1.pdf>.

21 International Commission of Jurists. (2023). *Lawyers under attack: Barriers to the legal profession in Venezuela*. <https://www.icj.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Venezuela-Lawyers-under-attack-publications-briefing-paper-2022-ENG.pdf#:~:text=Making%20matters%20worse%2C%20these%20public,2017%20protests%20because%20the%20Government,p.17>.

22 Foro Penal & Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights. (2022). *Criminal Justice as a Tool of Political Repression in Venezuela*. <https://rfkhumanrights.org/wp-content/uploads/assets/VZ-Report-June-2022-EN.pdf>, p.21.

23 Foro Penal & Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights. (2020). *Enforced Disappearance as a Tool of Political Repression in Venezuela*. <https://rfkhumanrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/RFKHumanRights-VenezuelaDisappearances-EnglishReport.pdf>, p.48; Foro Penal & Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights. (2022). *Criminal Justice as a Tool of Political Repression in Venezuela*. <https://rfkhumanrights.org/wp-content/uploads/assets/VZ-Report-June-2022-EN.pdf>, p.18.

24 Foro Penal & Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights. (2020). *Enforced Disappearance as a Tool of Political Repression in Venezuela*. <https://rfkhumanrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/RFKHumanRights-VenezuelaDisappearances-EnglishReport.pdf>, p.26.

25 Organization of American States. (2017, September 14). *Secretary General of the OAS announces the appointment of independent panel of international experts* [Press release]. OAS - Organization of American States. https://www.oas.org/en/media_center/press_release.asp?sCodigo=E-069/17.

26 Hernandez-Roy, C., & Le Roy, M. (2018). *Report of the General Secretariat of the Organization of American States and the Panel of Independent International Experts on the possible commission of crimes against humanity in Venezuela* (OEA/Ser.D/XV.19 2021). Organization of American States. <https://www.oas.org/documents/eng/press/Informe-Panel-Independiente-Venezuela-EN.pdf>.

27 Genser, J. (2020). *Fostering impunity: The impact of the failure of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court to open an investigation into the possible commission of crimes against humanity in Venezuela* (OEA/Ser.D/XV.23). Organization of American States. <https://www.oas.org/documents/eng/press/Crimes-Against-Humanity-in-Venezuela-II-ENG.pdf>.

28 OAS Panel of Independent International Experts on the Possible Commission of Crimes Against Humanity in Venezuela. (2023). *Venezuela's impunity gap enabling further crimes: an analysis of domestic accountability efforts in Venezuela*. Organization of American States. <https://raoulwallenbergcentre.org/images/reports/Venezuela-impunity-gap-report.pdf>.

29 OAS Panel of Independent International Experts on the Possible Commission of Crimes Against Humanity in Venezuela. (2024). *From detention to torture and disappearance: The consolidation of state terror in Venezuela*. Organization of American States. https://www.oas.org/fpdb/press/Report_2025.pdf.

Statute referred the Situation in Venezuela to the ICC Prosecutor in September 2018.³⁰ This led to the opening of a preliminary examination and, eventually, a formal investigation focused on crimes against humanity allegedly committed since at least April 2017. The investigation covers acts such as imprisonment or other severe deprivation of liberty, torture, sexual violence, and persecution on political grounds.³¹ After Venezuela's government sought to halt the investigation by requesting a deferral under the principle of complementarity, the Pre-Trial Chamber of the ICC authorized the Prosecutor to resume the investigation.³² The government appealed this decision, but in early 2024, the Appeals Chamber dismissed the appeal and upheld the Pre-Trial Chamber's findings, thereby reaffirming that the investigation could proceed.³³ In these proceedings, Foro Penal and RFKHR submitted observations on behalf of victims.³⁴ The proceedings before international bodies highlight the gravity of Venezuela's human rights crisis. This same context framed the country's 2024 presidential election, where repression and authoritarian control once again defined the electoral process.

The 28 July 2024 Presidential Election

Pre-Electoral Environment

As highlighted in the Carter Center's July 2024 report on the Observation of Venezuela's 2024 presidential election, the electoral process unfolded amidst a political crisis stemming from the contested legitimacy of Nicolás Maduro's presidency between 2018 and 2024. In response, the international community promoted a negotiated framework aimed at encouraging opposition participation and pushing the government to adopt minimum conditions for electoral competition. This process began with the 2021 regional elections and culminated in the Barbados Accord, signed on 17 October 2023 between the government and the opposition's Democratic Unitary Platform (PUD). The agreement laid out key electoral guarantees, including a timeline for the elections, the freedom to nominate candidates, provisions for international observation, and safeguards intended to protect the integrity of the process. Despite this framework, the government retained control over the executive, judiciary, legislature, armed forces, and the electoral authority.³⁵

As documented by Human Rights Watch, the government continued to tighten its control over the electoral process. On 28 February 2024, the National Assembly, without input from the opposition's Unitary Platform, approved a National Agreement that proposed a voting timeline and listed broad electoral guarantees. A few days later, on 5 March 2024, the National Electoral Council (CNE) confirmed that elections would be held on 28 July 2024. Rather than signaling a more inclusive process, these developments coincided with a new wave of State interference where the ANC removed all 15 CNE members and replaced them with individuals loyal to the ruling party. Simultaneously, authorities escalated their efforts to neutralize opposition actors through arbitrary arrests, disqualification of

30 Office of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court. (2018, September 27). *Statement of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court, Fatou Bensouda, on the referral by a group of six States Parties regarding the situation in Venezuela* [Statement]. <https://www.icc-cpi.int/news/statement-prosecutor-international-criminal-court-fatou-bensouda-referral-group-six-states>.

31 Office of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court. (2021, November 5). *ICC Prosecutor, Mr Karim A.A. Khan QC, opens an investigation into the Situation in Venezuela and concludes Memorandum of Understanding with the Government* [Press release]. <https://www.icc-cpi.int/news/icc-prosecutor-mr-karim-aa-khan-qc-opens-investigation-situation-venezuela-and-concludes>.

32 Public Information and Outreach Section of the International Criminal Court. (2023, June 27). *Situation in Venezuela: ICC Pre-Trial Chamber I authorizes the resumption of the investigation* [Press release]. <https://www.icc-cpi.int/news/situation-venezuela-icc-pre-trial-chamber-i-authorizes-resumption-investigation>.

33 Public Affairs Unit of the International Criminal Court. (2024, March 1). *Venezuela I situation: ICC Appeals Chamber confirms the decision authorising the resumption of the investigation* [Press release]. <https://www.icc-cpi.int/news/venezuela-i-situation-icc-appeals-chamber-confirms-decision-authorising-resumption>.

34 Foro Penal & Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights. (2023, November 8). *Foro Penal and Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights (RFKHR) call for the Honorable Appeals Chamber of the International Criminal Court (ICC) to uphold the Pre-Trial Chamber I Decision to resume investigations into crimes against humanity in Venezuela* [Press release]. <https://rfkhumanrights.org/our-voices/foro-penal-and-robert-f-kennedy-human-rights-rfKHR-call-for-the-honorable-appeals-chamber-of-the-international-criminal-court-icc-to-uphold-the-pre-trial-chamber-i-decision-to-resume-investigations-in/>.

35 The Carter Center. (2024). *Observation of the 2024 Presidential Election in Venezuela*. https://www.cartercenter.org/resources/pdfs/news/peace_publications/election_reports/venezuela/venezuela-final-report-2025.pdf, p.5.

candidates, and court-imposed interventions into the leadership structures of opposition parties.³⁶ After several candidates were nominated and then subsequently barred from running by the CNE, most notably María Corina Machado who was able to secure 90% of the nomination vote, Edmundo González, a career diplomat, was allowed to run as the opposition's candidate.³⁷

In the months leading up to the election, authorities increasingly targeted individuals and institutions perceived to be supporting González's campaign. One among many examples occurred on 19 June 2024, when ten opposition mayors from Trujillo and Nueva Esparta were abruptly disqualified from holding public office for 15 years, according to the CNE official website. No explanation was provided beyond a generic statement that each individual "present[ed] a prohibition to exercise public office in accordance with constitutional and legal provisions." Presidential candidate Edmundo González Urrutia, who had met with eight of the affected mayors just days earlier, denounced the measure as retaliation for supporting his candidacy.³⁸ In the final stretch before the vote, President Nicolás Maduro made increasingly hardline statements about the stakes of the election. On 16 July, 10 days before election day, President Nicolás Maduro warned of a "bloodbath" and a "fratricidal civil war" if he did not secure victory. "The fate of Venezuela in the 21st century depends on our victory on July 28. If you don't want Venezuela to fall into a bloodbath, into a fratricidal civil war caused by the fascists, we must ensure the greatest success, the greatest electoral victory in our people's history," he said during a public event in Caracas.³⁹

Election Day

On election day, long lines formed early in the day across several regions, with some voters arriving before sunrise.⁴⁰ Attorney General Tarek William Saab described election day as having unfolded peacefully, with only isolated violent incidents reported across the country. However, field reports and eyewitness accounts point to a different picture, marked by intimidation and interference in multiple regions, particularly in opposition-leaning areas.⁴¹

In the state of Táchira, armed civilian groups identified by witnesses as pro-government colectivos opened fire at the John Kennedy school in the municipality of Guásimos, killing 40-year-old Julio Valerio García, reportedly while he was waiting for election results.⁴² That same day, in Patiecitos, a Guásimos municipality, another individual was gravely injured in a separate shooting incident allegedly perpetrated by the same type of armed groups.⁴³ The attacks prompted authorities to advise residents to remain indoors, and local journalists suspended their coverage due to safety concerns. Additional reports cited the presence of armed men dressed in black at other polling sites across the State, intimidating voters and causing widespread fear.⁴⁴

36 Human Rights Watch. (2025). *Punished for Seeking Change: Killings, Enforced Disappearances and Arbitrary Detention Following Venezuela's 2024 Election*. https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/media_2025/05/venezuela0425%20web_0.pdf, p.12.

37 Human Rights Watch. (2025). *Punished for Seeking Change: Killings, Enforced Disappearances and Arbitrary Detention Following Venezuela's 2024 Election*. https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/media_2025/05/venezuela0425%20web_0.pdf, p.13.

38 Alcalde, C. (2024, June 19). Venezuela: Inhabilitan a 10 alcaldes opositores que respaldan candidatura de Edmundo González. *Voz De América*. <https://www.vozdeamerica.com/a/inhabilitan-a-10-alcaldes-opositores-que-respaldan-la-candidatura-presidencial-de-edmundo-gonzalez-7662586.html>.

39 Amaya, S. (2024, July 17). Maduro advirtió de "baño de sangre" en Venezuela si no gana las elecciones. *CNN En Español*. <https://cnnespanol.cnn.com/2024/07/17/maduro-bano-de-sangre-elecciones-venezuela-orix/>.

40 Sequera, V., Buitrago, D., & Armas, M. (2024, July 30). Venezuela's Maduro, opposition each claim presidential victory. *Reuters*. <https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/venezuelans-vote-highly-charged-election-amid-fraud-worries-2024-07-28/>.

41 Sequera, V., Buitrago, D., & Armas, M. (2024, July 30). Venezuela's Maduro, opposition each claim presidential victory. *Reuters*. <https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/venezuelans-vote-highly-charged-election-amid-fraud-worries-2024-07-28/>.

42 El Nuevo Siglo. (2024, July 28). Un muerto y varios heridos por tiroteo a centro de votación en Tachira | El Nuevo Siglo. *El Nuevo Siglo*. <https://www.elnuevosiglo.com.co/internacional/un-muerto-y-varios-heridos-por-tiroteo-centro-de-votacion-en-tachira>.

43 ETV. (2024, July 28). *Joven herido en Táchira tras ataque de colectivos en centro de votación*. <https://evtv.online/presidenciales-2024/joven-herido-en-tachira-tras-ataque-de-colectivos-en-centro-de-votacion/>; ETVV [@ETVVMiami]. (2024, July 29). *ETVV on X: "#VenezuelaVotaYCobra | Reportan situación irregular en el estado Táchira En Patiecitos, municipio Guásimos, se han registrado detonaciones. X (Formerly Twitter)*. https://x.com/ETVVMiami/status/1817724858014248991?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwtterm%5E1817724858014248991%7Ctwtgr%5E5a7172008815f6e160d29551031e7569204883fb%7Ctwtcon%5Es1_&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fevtv.online%2Fpresidenciales-2024%2Fjoven-herido-en-tachira-tras-ataque-de-colectivos-en-centro-de-votacion%2F.

44 El Nuevo Siglo. (2024, July 28). Un muerto y varios heridos por tiroteo a centro de votación en Tachira | El Nuevo Siglo. *El Nuevo Siglo*. <https://www.elnuevosiglo.com.co/>

In Monagas, at the CNF Simoncito Moscú polling center in Maturín, a woman was shot after a group of approximately 15 armed men opened fire near the entrance. The incident followed a protest led by residents of nearby neighborhoods, who denounced the exclusion of opposition witnesses from the polling station. According to city councilor Jhonatan Caripe, the center’s coordinator had permitted only pro-government witnesses to enter, and residents who demanded fair access were met with intimidation, death threats, and, eventually, armed aggression. Caripe stated he was the intended target of the attack, and that the elderly woman was injured while trying to protect him.⁴⁵

In Caracas, civil society monitors reported deliberate efforts to slow the voting process in opposition-leaning areas. According to journalist Eugenio Martínez, the delays were concentrated at polling tables historically unfavorable to the ruling party. Independent journalist Catalina Lobo-Guerrero reported similar findings in Petare, one of the capital’s largest working-class neighborhoods, where voters described protracted processing times and the presence of party operatives near voting lines.⁴⁶

In the border areas of Táchira near Cúcuta, further incidents were documented. In the municipality of Bolívar, Jesús Libardo Nieto was shot outside a polling center by armed men dressed in black. He required urgent medical treatment and was reportedly transferred across the border to Cúcuta for surgery. Other centers in the region reported similar tactics: armed intimidation, crowd control by colectivos on motorcycles, and threats aimed at deterring turnout among opposition sympathizers.⁴⁷

Across multiple regions, the Venezuelan Observatory of Social Conflict reported the presence of armed colectivos in at least six states and in the capital. These groups were documented patrolling near voting centers, issuing threats, and engaging in physical altercations. The cumulative effect of these actions was the creation of a hostile and coercive atmosphere on election day, especially in areas with significant opposition support.⁴⁸

Post-Electoral Developments

Domestic Responses

Following election day, both Nicolás Maduro and Edmundo González claimed victory amid widespread reports of irregularities and violent incidents. The CNE announced Maduro had secured a third term with 51% of the vote, while González obtained 44%.⁴⁹ This official account was quickly challenged by other data that painted a starkly different picture. Exit polling by Edison Research showed González with 65% of the vote and Maduro with 31%, while local firm Meganalisis projected González at 65% and Maduro under 14%.⁵⁰ María Corina Machado asserted that González won with 70% of the vote, citing independent quick counts. González refrained from urging public demonstrations or unrest but insisted on his electoral win.⁵¹

In response to growing skepticism surrounding the delayed announcement of election results, Maduro

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internacional/un-muerto-y-varios-heridos-por-tiroteo-centro-de-votacion-en-tachira.

45 La Silla Vacía. (2024, July 28). *Denuncian operación del chavismo para hacer más lentas las votaciones*. La Silla Vacía. <https://www.lasillavacia.com/en-vivo/denuncian-operacion-del-chavismo-para-hacer-mas-lentas-las-votaciones/>.

46 La Silla Vacía. (2024, July 28). *Denuncian operación del chavismo para hacer más lentas las votaciones*. La Silla Vacía. <https://www.lasillavacia.com/en-vivo/denuncian-operacion-del-chavismo-para-hacer-mas-lentas-las-votaciones/>.

47 El Nuevo Siglo. (2024, July 28). *Un muerto y varios heridos por tiroteo a centro de votación en Tachira* | El Nuevo Siglo. *El Nuevo Siglo*. <https://www.elnuevosiglo.com.co/internacional/un-muerto-y-varios-heridos-por-tiroteo-centro-de-votacion-en-tachira>.

48 Sequera, V., Buitrago, D., & Armas, M. (2024, July 30). *Venezuela’s Maduro, opposition each claim presidential victory*. Reuters. <https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/venezuelans-vote-highly-charged-election-amid-fraud-worries-2024-07-28/>.

49 Consejo Nacional Electoral [@cneesvzla]. (2024, July 29). *Presidente del Poder Electoral, Dr. Elvis Amoroso, anunció el primer boletín de los resultados de la Elección Presidencial 2024, con 80% de las actas transmitidas y una tendencia contundente e irreversible. #ElecciónPresidencial2024* [Video attached]. X (Formerly Twitter). <https://x.com/cneesvzla/status/1817953254208110756>.

50 Sequera, V., Buitrago, D., & Armas, M. (2024, July 30). *Venezuela’s Maduro, opposition each claim presidential victory*. Reuters. <https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/venezuelans-vote-highly-charged-election-amid-fraud-worries-2024-07-28/>.

51 Sequera, V., Buitrago, D., & Armas, M. (2024, July 30). *Venezuela’s Maduro, opposition each claim presidential victory*. Reuters. <https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/venezuelans-vote-highly-charged-election-amid-fraud-worries-2024-07-28/>.

and CNE president Elvis Amoroso, attributed the six-hour delay to what they described as a massive hacking of the CNE's transmission system. Maduro publicly claimed that the attack was orchestrated from abroad, stating, "We know from which country it came, and who ordered it," though he withheld specific details, asserting that the matter was under investigation by the Attorney General's Office.⁵² Amoroso echoed this narrative during the release of the initial election results, delivered just after midnight on election day, stating that the results were irreversible. According to Maduro, the alleged cyberattack sought to prevent the tallying and release of official results, describing the perpetrators as "demons" attempting to sabotage the process. Despite the lack of technical evidence presented publicly, both officials maintained that the electoral infrastructure had withstood the attack and used it to reinforce claims about the system's reliability and transparency. However, opposition leaders and civil society actors denounced the justification as a deflection tactic aimed at obscuring irregularities and delaying scrutiny of voting records.⁵³

Additionally, Maduro claimed that 2,000 individuals had been arrested during the following post-election protests.⁵⁴ In the context of the protests, Foro Penal confirmed 1,010 arrests, including Kennedy Tejeda, a volunteer lawyer from Foro Penal, while Human Rights Watch reported at least 20 people killed.⁵⁵

Meanwhile, the opposition reported it had secured copies of about 40% of the vote tallies.⁵⁶ On August 5, Attorney General Tarek Saab announced a criminal investigation targeting opposition leaders over a public letter urging military and police to uphold what they claim was the true electoral result. The letter was signed by González and Machado and called on security forces to "stand by the people." The investigation accused them of encouraging security officials to violate the law. This move came amid continued unrest and intensified security operations that human rights groups say have criminalized protest. The operation, nicknamed "Operación Tun Tun" led to arrests including minors, with almost all individuals denied due process, legal representation and charged with terrorism.⁵⁷

On August 22, the Venezuelan Supreme Court (TSJ) validated Maduro's alleged electoral victory in a ruling delivered by its electoral chamber, headed by Caryslia Rodríguez, a former PSUV official. The TSJ dismissed international calls for an impartial verification of the vote, declaring the case closed. The court endorsed the CNE's narrative, including the unproven claim of a cyberattack that delayed results on election night and rejected the opposition's assertion, based on over 80% of collected voting records, that González had won with 67% versus Maduro's 30%. The ruling deepened concerns of escalating repression. Caryslia Rodríguez accused Edmundo González of disrespecting the court and stated the TSJ would forward evidence of criminal acts to the Attorney General, including alleged fraud, document falsification, incitement, and usurpation of functions.⁵⁸ The opposition, along with international actors, maintained that the CNE, not the TSJ, should have been the body to resolve the electoral disputes.⁵⁹

52 Diario AS. (2024, July 29). *DISCURSO completo NICOLÁS MADURO GANADOR ELECCIONES VENEZUELA 2024* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yp_Ny8BHwOo, 9:15.

53 Singer, F. (2024, July 29). Maduro defiende su triunfo: "Pido respeto a la vida soberana de Venezuela, respeto a la voluntad popular." *El País América*. <https://elpais.com/america/2024-07-29/maduro-defiende-su-triunfo-hubo-un-hackeo-porque-los-demonios-no-querian-que-se-diera-el-resultado-hoy.html>.

54 Guanipa, M., & Sequera, V. (2024, August 4). Venezuelans march over contested election, number of detained rises. *Reuters*. <https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/venezuela-election-marches-must-be-peaceful-says-oas-body-2024-08-03/>.

55 Sequera, V., & Guanipa, M. (2024, August 6). Venezuela launches investigation against opposition leaders amid protest crackdown. *Reuters*. <https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/maduro-security-forces-round-up-venezuelans-involved-protests-operation-knock-2024-08-05/>.

56 Sequera, V., Buitrago, D., & Armas, M. (2024, July 30). Venezuela's Maduro, opposition each claim presidential victory. *Reuters*. <https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/venezuelans-vote-highly-charged-election-amid-fraud-worries-2024-07-28/>.

57 Sequera, V., & Guanipa, M. (2024, August 6). Venezuela launches investigation against opposition leaders amid protest crackdown. *Reuters*. <https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/maduro-security-forces-round-up-venezuelans-involved-protests-operation-knock-2024-08-05/>; For more on "Operación Tun Tun" see: Hernández, A. (2024, August 6). Venezuela: qué es la "Operación Tun Tun" con la que los cuerpos de seguridad arrestan masivamente a manifestantes y opositores. *BBC News Mundo*. <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/articles/cly33kp1q19o>.

58 Luigino Bracci Roa desde Venezuela. (2024, August 22). *TSJ EMITE SENTENCIA Y VEREDICTO sobre Elecciones Presidenciales de Venezuela, 22 de agosto de 2024* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9RRrSMKfdvY>, 19:31.

59 Moleiro, A., & Singer, F. (2024, August 22). El Supremo de Venezuela convalida la victoria de Maduro entre críticas por su falta de independencia. *El País América*. <https://elpais.com/america/2024-08-22/el-supremo-de-venezuela-convalida-la-victoria-de-maduro-entre-criticas-por-su-falta-de-independencia.html>.

International Responses

On July 29 and afterward, several governments issued public reactions. A significant block of countries in the Americas and Europe voiced serious concerns about the credibility of the vote and the transparency of the process. The United States declared that the official results did not reflect the will of the Venezuelan electorate,⁶⁰ and later recognized Edmundo González as the legitimate president-elect, citing what it described as overwhelming evidence of his victory.⁶¹ Similarly, countries including Argentina,⁶² Costa Rica,⁶³ El Salvador,⁶⁴ and Guatemala⁶⁵ outright rejected the results announced by the CNE as fraudulent. Others, such as Brazil, Mexico, and Colombia called for the release of disaggregated electoral data.⁶⁶ The European Union High Representative for Foreign Affairs called for full transparency and access to vote tallies.⁶⁷ In contrast, a handful of leaders from allied governments quickly endorsed the results and congratulated Nicolás Maduro on his re-election. Russia,⁶⁸ Cuba,⁶⁹ Nicaragua,⁷⁰ Bolivia,⁷¹ and Honduras⁷² framed the outcome as a reaffirmation of popular will and a victory against foreign interference.⁷³

On 30 July 2024, the OAS election observation office declared that it could not recognize the official results released by the CNE. The organization cited structural bias, legal irregularities, and the absence of verifiable vote documentation. It stated that 73% of vote tallies reviewed by the opposition showed González with more than twice the number of votes as Maduro. The OAS condemned what it called a coordinated strategy to subvert the electoral process and noted that multiple documented violations made the official results unreliable.⁷⁴

On 2 August 2024, the Associated Press published an analysis of nearly 24,000 vote tally sheets released by the opposition, covering results from 79% of voting machines. AP's decoding and vote tabulation showed González had secured 6.89 million votes, compared to 3.13 million for Maduro, directly contradicting the government's count, which claimed 6.4 million for Maduro and 5.3 million for

- 60 Kirby, J. (2024, July 29). *On-the-Record press gaggle by White House National Security Communications Advisor John Kirby* [Press release]. The White House. <https://bidenwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefing-room/press-briefings/2024/07/29/on-the-record-press-gaggle-by-white-house-national-security-communications-advisor-john-kirby-18/>.
- 61 Nichols, B. (2024, July 31). *Assistant Secretary Nichols addresses the OAS Permanent Council on Elections in Venezuela*. OAS Permanent Council. <https://usoas.usmission.gov/assistant-secretary-nichols-addresses-the-oas-permanent-council-on-elections-in-venezuela/>.
- 62 Ministry of Foreign Affairs, International Trade and Worship of the Argentine Republic. (2024, July 29). *Argentina rejects the results announced by the Venezuelan Electoral Council* [Press release]. <https://www.cancilleria.gob.ar/en/announcements/news/argentina-rejects-results-announced-venezuelan-electoral-council>.
- 63 Presidencia de la República [@presidenciacr]. (2024, July 29). [Image attached]. X (Formerly Twitter). <https://x.com/presidenciacr/status/1817783158202376591>.
- 64 Bukele, N. [@nayibbukele]. (2024, July 29). *Lo que vimos ayer en Venezuela no tiene otro nombre más que fraude. Una "elección" donde el resultado oficial no tiene relación con la realidad. Algo evidente para cualquiera. Rompimos relaciones diplomáticas con Maduro desde hace 4 años. No las reabriremos hasta que su pueblo pueda elegir a sus líderes en elecciones de verdad*. X (Formerly Twitter). https://x.com/nayibbukele/status/1818012270921691582?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E1818012270921691582%7Ctwgr%5E21edc63e221d503c3206d5489b884c216772cab%7Ctwcon%5Es1_&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Felsalvadorinenglish.com%2F2024%2F07%2F29%2Fpresident-nayib-bukele-speaks-out-on-venezuelan-elections%2F.
- 65 Arévalo, B. [@BArevalodeLeon]. (2024, July 29). *Venezuela merece resultados transparentes, certeros y apegados a la voluntad de su pueblo. Recibimos con muchas dudas los resultados anunciados por el CNE. Por eso, son imprescindibles los informes de las misiones de observación electoral, que hoy más que nunca, deben defender el voto de los venezolanos*. X (Formerly Twitter). <https://x.com/BArevalodeLeon/status/1817793490736001392>.
- 66 Ministério das Relações Exteriores. (2024, August 1). *Eleições Presidenciais da República Bolivariana da Venezuela — Comunicado Conjunto de Brasil, Colômbia e México* [Press release]. https://www.gov.br/mre/pt-br/canais_atendimento/imprensa/notas-a-imprensa/eleicoes-presidenciais-da-republica-bolivariana-da-venezuela-2014-comunicado-conjunto-brasil-colombia-e-mexico.
- 67 Reuters. (2024, July 29). *Leaders across Americas react to Venezuela election Results*. Reuters. <https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/latin-american-leaders-react-venezuela-election-results-2024-07-29/>.
- 68 Office of the President of the Russian Federation. (2024, July 29). *Congratulations to Nicolas Maduro on his re-election as President of Venezuela* [Press release]. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/74660>.
- 69 Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores de la República de Cuba. (2024, July 29). *Felicita el General de Ejército a Maduro por victoria electoral* [Press release]. <https://cubaminrex.cu/es/felicita-el-general-de-ejercito-maduro-por-victoria-electoral>.
- 70 Ortega Saavedra, D., & Murillo, R. (2024, July 28). *Mensaje al Presidente Nicolás Maduro Moros* [Press release]. <https://www.albatcp.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/MENSAJE-AL-PDTE-NICOLAS-MADURO-28-JUL-2024-Nicaragua.pdf>.
- 71 Arce Catacora, L. [@LuchoXBolivia]. (2024, July 29). *Felicidades al pueblo venezolano y al presidente @NicolásMaduro por la victoria electoral de este histórico 28 de julio. Gran manera de recordar al Comandante Hugo Chávez. Hemos seguido de cerca esta fiesta democrática y saludamos que se haya respetado la voluntad del pueblo venezolano en las urnas. Queremos ratificar nuestra voluntad de continuar fortaleciendo nuestros lazos de amistad, cooperación y solidaridad con la República Bolivariana de Venezuela, en el marco de la integración soberana de nuestros pueblos y en el objetivo compartido de avanzar hacia un mundo multipolar*. X (Formerly Twitter). <https://x.com/LuchoXBolivia/status/1817782326207926564>.
- 72 Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores y Cooperación Internacional de la República de Honduras. (2024, July 28). *Presidenta Castro y Canciller Reina envían felicitaciones al Presidente Nicolás Maduro* [Press release]. <https://sreci.gob.hn/node/1813>.
- 73 Reuters. (2024, July 29). *Leaders across Americas react to Venezuela election Results*. Reuters. <https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/latin-american-leaders-react-venezuela-election-results-2024-07-29/>.
- 74 Paraguassu, L., & Sequera, V. (2024, September 8). *Venezuela opposition candidate leaves for Spain*. Reuters. <https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/venezuela-revokes-authorization-brazil-represent-argentine-interests-country-2024-09-07/>.

González.⁷⁵ On September 7, Venezuelan and Spanish officials confirmed that Edmundo González had departed for Spain aboard a Spanish Air Force plane. He had taken refuge in the Spanish embassy days earlier following the issuance of an arrest warrant against him. Venezuelan prosecutors accused him of publishing vote tallies without authorization and charged him with usurpation of functions, falsification of public documents, and conspiracy.⁷⁶

That same day, Venezuela revoked Brazil's mandate to represent Argentina's diplomatic interests, including stewardship of the Argentine embassy in Caracas, where six opposition figures who assisted in González and Machado's campaign had sought asylum due to facing imminent arrest after Venezuela⁷⁷ alleged that the embassy was being used to plot assassination attempts against Maduro and Vice President Delcy Rodríguez.⁷⁸ Brazil expressed surprise at the revocation, while Argentina rejected the move as unilateral and politically motivated. Both Brazil and Argentina emphasized the inviolability of diplomatic premises under the Vienna Convention and warned against any attempt to detain the individuals sheltering inside. Brazil confirmed that the embassy remained under its protection pending a new designation by Argentina. Tensions escalated after the six opposition members sheltered in the embassy posted videos showing surveillance and reporting power outages. They claimed that⁷⁹ on 6 May, they left the diplomatic compound for the US.⁸⁰

The 25 May 2025 Parliamentary and Gubernatorial Elections

Pre-Electoral Environment

In the lead-up to the 25 May 2025 parliamentary and gubernatorial elections, Venezuelan authorities announced the dismantling of an alleged terrorist plot aimed at destabilizing the electoral process. Interior and Justice Minister Diosdado Cabello claimed that opposition figures had planned attacks on diplomatic facilities and other targets.⁸¹ These accusations preceded a wave of arrests that included more than 70 individuals, among them prominent opposition politician Juan Pablo Guanipa, a close ally of María Corina Machado. Guanipa was reportedly charged with terrorism, money laundering, and incitement to hatred. According to the government, the detentions were intended to prevent violent unrest; opposition groups characterized the arrests as politically motivated and part of a broader pattern of repression.⁸²

These arrests triggered widespread concern among civil society actors and opposition figures. Among those detained were human rights defenders, journalists, and civil society representatives, including Frewil Rangel, Raúl Amiel, Carlos Marcano, and Gorka Carnevalli, the latter being the director of the NGO Foro Hatillano. Eduardo Torres, a lawyer affiliated with the human rights organization PROVEA and known for representing political detainees, was also arrested. Foreign nationals, including Argentine lawyer Germán Guiliiani, were among the detainees, as was 84-year-old community leader Isidro León,

75 García Cano, R., Goodman, J., & Kastanis, A. (2024, August 3). Venezuela election: Masked assailants ransack opposition's headquarters. *AP News*. <https://apnews.com/article/venezuela-maduro-machado-biden-gonzalez-a625eb01979bc9cf5570d03242f198b1>.

76 Paraguassu, L., & Sequera, V. (2024, September 8). Venezuela opposition candidate leaves for Spain. *Reuters*. <https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/venezuela-revokes-authorization-brazil-represent-argentine-interests-country-2024-09-07/>.

77 Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights. (2024, December 17). *Urgent call to protect political asylees in the Argentine Embassy in Caracas* [Statement]. <https://rfkhumanrights.org/our-voices/urgent-call-to-protect-political-asylees-in-the-argentine-embassy-in-caracas/>.

78 Paraguassu, L., & Sequera, V. (2024, September 8). Venezuela opposition candidate leaves for Spain. *Reuters*. <https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/venezuela-revokes-authorization-brazil-represent-argentine-interests-country-2024-09-07/>.

79 Paraguassu, L., & Sequera, V. (2024, September 8). Venezuela opposition candidate leaves for Spain. *Reuters*. <https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/venezuela-revokes-authorization-brazil-represent-argentine-interests-country-2024-09-07/>.

80 García Cano, R., & Rincon, A. (2025, May 7). Venezuelan opposition members leave Argentine diplomatic compound after over a year and are in US. *AP News*. <https://apnews.com/article/venezuela-argentina-caracas-political-opposition-us-rubio-a41de1df4a7771c92abb39c82853a605>.

81 Luigino Bracci Roa desde Venezuela. (2025, May 28). *Diosdado Cabello, rueda de prensa sobre hechos conspirativos durante elecciones, 28 mayo 2025* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l8ewyl2n2bs>, 10:04.

82 Redacción BBC Mundo. (2025, May 26). *El chavismo se adjudica una amplia victoria en las elecciones legislativas y regionales de Venezuela ante el boicot de la mayoría de la oposición*. BBC News Mundo. <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/articulos/cz0d8xnn511o>.

affiliated with the opposition party Voluntad Popular. In Caracas, SEBIN officers were stationed for several hours in front of the headquarters of the National College of Journalists in what observers described as an intimidating posture.⁸³ Amid these developments, the PUD called for a boycott of the elections, citing the irregularities and repression surrounding the presidential elections held the previous year. Machado reaffirmed this position in a widely circulated video, instructing supporters not to vote on 25 May and instead focus on the past 28 July 2024 vote.⁸⁴

The May 2025 elections also marked the first time Venezuelan authorities organized a vote for positions representing the disputed territory of the Esequibo, a 160,000 km² area claimed by Venezuela but administered by Guyana. Voters were asked to elect a governor, eight national deputies, and seven regional legislators for the territory. The CNE described this as an implementation of the “mandate of the people” expressed in the 3 December 2023 referendum. The International Court of Justice had previously called on Venezuela to refrain from holding elections, or preparing to hold them, in the disputed territory.⁸⁵ Venezuelan authorities rejected this position and reiterated their refusal to recognize the Court’s jurisdiction.⁸⁶

Election Day

On 25 May 2025, elections were held to fill a total of 569 elected seats, including 285 members of the National Assembly, 24 governors, and 260 regional legislators. Prior to the election, the ruling party Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela (PSUV) already controlled 19 of the country’s 23 governorships and over 90% of seats in the legislature.⁸⁷ From the early hours of the day, observers across the country reported significant deployment of security forces and visible monitoring of voters by members of the PSUV, particularly in major urban centers.⁸⁸ According to the CNE, 94.77% of polling stations were installed without reported incidents by the official opening hour.⁸⁹ However, turnout remained notably low throughout the day, in part due to the widespread call for boycott issued by PUD. Only 42.6% of the registered electorate reportedly cast their votes, an unprecedentedly low figure, even by the official count.⁹⁰

As the day progressed, the ruling party intensified efforts to increase turnout through what it termed an “operación remate” (operation final push), deploying State resources and political operatives to mobilize voters in working-class neighborhoods and rural communities. These efforts led to a modest late day increase in participation in some regions, though it did not alter the overall trend of public disengagement.⁹¹ Shortly before midnight, the CNE announced sweeping victories for the Maduro regime. According to

83 Moleiro, A. (2025, May 24). Una oleada de arrestos de opositores marca las elecciones parlamentarias y regionales en Venezuela. *El País América*. <https://elpais.com/america/2025-05-24/una-oleada-de-arrestos-de-opositores-marca-las-elecciones-parlamentarias-y-regionales-en-venezuela.html>; Consejo Nacional de Periodistas [CNPVEN]. (2025, May 23). A 2 días de la jornada electoral del domingo 25 de mayo, Sebin monta alcabala frente a la sede del Colegio Nacional de Periodistas en la Av. Andrés Bello. X (Formerly Twitter). https://x.com/cnpven/status/1925993741191459037?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etfw%7Ctwterm%5E1925993741191459037%7Ctwgr%5E25414d421630f5bede90652722dc82bdc173f2fe%7Ctwcon%5E1%7Cref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwitsseo.com%2Fasignar-categoria%2Foperacion-tun-tun-deja-un-viernes-de-numerosas-detenciones-en-el-pais%2F.

84 Redacción BBC Mundo. (2025, May 26). *El chavismo se adjudica una amplia victoria en las elecciones legislativas y regionales de Venezuela ante el boicot de la mayoría de la oposición*. BBC News Mundo. <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/articulos/cz0d8xnn511o>.

85 International Court of Justice. *Arbitral Award of 3 October 1899* (Guyana vs. Venezuela), (Order) [2025]. www.icj-cij.org/sites/default/files/case-related/171/171-20250501-ord-01-00-en.pdf.

86 Redacción BBC Mundo. (2025, May 26). *El chavismo se adjudica una amplia victoria en las elecciones legislativas y regionales de Venezuela ante el boicot de la mayoría de la oposición*. BBC News Mundo. <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/articulos/cz0d8xnn511o>.

87 Redacción BBC Mundo. (2025, May 26). *El chavismo se adjudica una amplia victoria en las elecciones legislativas y regionales de Venezuela ante el boicot de la mayoría de la oposición*. BBC News Mundo. <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/articulos/cz0d8xnn511o>.

88 TalCual. (2025, May 25). Elecciones regionales 2025: baja participación y férreo control del partido de gobierno. *TalCual*. <https://talcualdigital.com/elecciones-regionales-2025-baja-participacion-y-ferreo-control-del-partido-de-gobierno/>.

89 TalCual. (2025, May 25). Elecciones regionales 2025: baja participación y férreo control del partido de gobierno. *TalCual*. <https://talcualdigital.com/elecciones-regionales-2025-baja-participacion-y-ferreo-control-del-partido-de-gobierno/>.

90 Moleiro, A., & Singer, F. (2025, May 26). Venezuela consume unas elecciones marcadas por la abstención, las acusaciones de farsa y la represión a opositores. *El País América*. <https://elpais.com/america/2025-05-26/venezuela-consuma-unas-elecciones-marcadas-por-la-abstencion-las-acusaciones-de-farsa-y-la-represion-a-opositores.html>.

91 Moleiro, A., & Singer, F. (2025, May 26). Venezuela consume unas elecciones marcadas por la abstención, las acusaciones de farsa y la represión a opositores. *El País América*. <https://elpais.com/america/2025-05-26/venezuela-consuma-unas-elecciones-marcadas-por-la-abstencion-las-acusaciones-de-farsa-y-la-represion-a-opositores.html>.

its official figures, the ruling coalition secured 82.6% of the vote in the parliamentary elections and won 23 out of 24 governorships, with over 90% of votes counted. The credibility of these results was immediately questioned, especially in light of the findings of independent observers such as The Carter Center, which had previously identified significant irregularities in the July 2024 presidential election⁹² as the CNE's refusal to release disaggregated polling-station results, its institutional bias in favor of the Maduro regime, arbitrary restrictions on opposition candidates and parties, and the abuse of state resources and media to ensure unequal campaign conditions.⁹³ Notably, no independent observation missions were present during the 25 May vote. To this date, the CNE has not published disaggregated results for the 25 May regional elections or the consultation held alongside the municipal contests.⁹⁴

Post-Electoral Developments

Domestic Responses

In the immediate wake of the 25 May 2025 elections, national sentiment reflected widespread disillusionment with the process and low voter turnout. In Caracas and other major urban centers, including Maracaibo, the atmosphere was notably subdued, and polling stations registered minimal participation.⁹⁵ At the capital's largest voting center, the Andrés Bello High School, only 793 of 11,542 registered voters had cast their ballots according to electoral staff. Similar patterns were observed in traditionally pro-government areas such as La Vega and Petare, as well as in opposition strongholds like Las Mercedes, where just 115 of 4,788 eligible voters cast their vote.⁹⁶

Opposition leader María Corina Machado framed the low turnout as a popular rejection of the regime. Pointing to the unprecedented abstention rate, she declared the day a success for the opposition.⁹⁷ In contrast, government officials celebrated the outcome. ANC President Jorge Rodríguez described the election as “perhaps the greatest victory the Bolivarian Revolution has ever achieved in municipal contests”, emphasizing the ruling party's gains in traditionally opposition-held municipalities such as Maracaibo and San Francisco.⁹⁸

International Responses

The European Union (EU) strongly criticized the political and legal environment in which Venezuela's 25 May 2025 parliamentary and regional elections were held, describing it as “highly restrictive.” In a statement issued from Brussels on 26 May, EU officials emphasized that the process failed to offer the conditions necessary for genuine democratic participation and, crucially, could not serve to retroactively legitimize the “unverified results” of the July 2024 presidential elections. The EU reiterated that Nicolás Maduro “still lacks the legitimacy of a democratically elected president,” pointing to continued abuses of state power by the ruling party and the systematic erosion of democratic safeguards. While condemning the repressive environment, the statement also acknowledged the Venezuelan people's ongoing efforts to pursue democratic change, affirming that the EU “remains fully aligned with the democratic aspirations of the Venezuelan people” and intends to continue engaging with national, regional, and international

92 The Carter Center. (2024, July 30). *Carter Center Statement on Venezuela Election* [Statement]. <https://www.cartercenter.org/news/pr/2024/venezuela-073024.html>.

93 Moleiro, A., & Singer, F. (2025, May 26). Venezuela consume unas elecciones marcadas por la abstención, las acusaciones de farsa y la represión a opositores. *El País América*. <https://elpais.com/america/2025-05-26/venezuela-consume-unas-elecciones-marcadas-por-la-abstencion-las-acusaciones-de-farsa-y-la-represion-a-opositores.html>.

94 TalCual. (2025, July 29). CNE divulga resultados de las municipales sin datos sobre votos ni porcentajes - TalCual. *TalCual*. <https://talcualdigital.com/cne-divulga-resultados-de-las-municipales-sin-datos-sobre-votos-ni-porcentajes/>.

95 Turkewitz, J. (2025, May 26). El gobierno de Venezuela se atribuye la victoria en las elecciones boicoteadas por la oposición. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/es/2025/05/26/espanol/america-latina/elecciones-venezuela-resultados.html>.

96 Turkewitz, J. (2025, May 26). El gobierno de Venezuela se atribuye la victoria en las elecciones boicoteadas por la oposición. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/es/2025/05/26/espanol/america-latina/elecciones-venezuela-resultados.html>.

97 Turkewitz, J. (2025, May 26). El gobierno de Venezuela se atribuye la victoria en las elecciones boicoteadas por la oposición. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/es/2025/05/26/espanol/america-latina/elecciones-venezuela-resultados.html>.

98 RTVE.es / AGENCIAS. (2025, July 28). El chavismo gana la mayoría de las alcaldías en Venezuela con una participación del 44%. *RTVE.es*. <https://www.rtve.es/noticias/20250728/chavismo-gana-mayoria-alcaldias-venezuela-participacion-44-por-ciento/16679110.shtml>.

actors to promote a genuine transition⁹⁹ Canada also rejected the legitimacy of the 25 May elections. Officials stressed that the vote was neither free nor fair, citing ongoing repression, arbitrary detentions, and restrictions on opposition voices for an immediate end to human rights abuses in Venezuela and urged the release of all those unjustly detained.¹⁰⁰

The 27 July 2025 Municipal Elections

Pre-Electoral Environment

As in the two previous electoral processes, the lead-up to the 27 July 2025 municipal elections was marked by increased repression of opposition actors. Opposition party Vente Venezuela reported that more than 40 people were detained in the hours leading up to the elections, including its coordinators in the states of Lara and Carabobo, Yanny González (president of the Barinas Nursing Association), student leader Simón Bolívar Obregón, and FetraBolívar president Fidel Brito.¹⁰¹ This came alongside persistent opacity from the electoral authority. Since 29 July 2024, the official CNE website has been offline due to an alleged cyberattack. Despite repeated assurances by CNE officials such as Conrado Pérez that the incident had been resolved, the website was never restored.¹⁰² Ahead of the mayoral elections, a series of external links were enabled to carry out certain automated system procedures, but no alternative access was provided for reviewing circuit-level results. In the municipal elections, the situation was the same.¹⁰³ In total, 2,806 positions were up for election: 335 mayoralties and 2,471 council seats. In addition, more than 37,000 community projects promoted by youth organized in 5,338 communes and communal circuits were put to a vote.¹⁰⁴

Election Day

Election day began with the normal installation of polling stations but saw very low voter turnout in the early morning hours, according to reports from journalists covering the event.¹⁰⁵ For this election, 15,731 polling centers and 20,410 polling stations were set up, with 15,935 also used for a popular consultation

99 EFE. (2025, May 26). La UE denuncia el entorno «altamente restrictivo» de las últimas elecciones en Venezuela. *Swissinfo*. <https://www.swissinfo.ch/spa/la-ue-denuncia-el-entorno-%22altamente-restrictivo%22-de-las-%c3%baltimas-elecciones-en-venezuela/89414450>.

100 Global Affairs Canada [@CanadaFP]. (2025, May 26). Yesterday's elections in #Venezuela were neither free nor fair as repression, arbitrary detentions, and silencing of opposition persist. We call for an end to human rights abuses and the immediate release of all unjustly detained. X (Formerly Twitter). <https://x.com/CanadaFP/status/1927083536281972775>.

101 Efecto Cocuyo [@efectococuyo]. (2025, July 25). Detienen en Carabobo a secretaria política de Vente Venezuela en esa región, Albany Colmenares. *Efecto Cocuyo*. <https://efectococuyo.com/la-humanidad/detienen-en-carabobo-a-secretaria-politica-de-vente-venezuela-en-esa-region-colmenares/>.

102 Globovisión Vídeos en Vivo. (2025, April 3). GV Kicosis | Entrevista a Conrado Pérez Briceño (2/5) [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iU6ZsO7aO0g>, 7:47.

103 TalCual. (2025, July 27). Elecciones municipales llegan con poca divulgación y apatía de los ciudadanos. *TalCual*. <https://talcualdigital.com/elecciones-municipales-llegan-con-poca-divulgacion-y-apatia-de-los-ciudadanos/>.

104 TalCual. (2025, July 27). Así se desarrollan elecciones municipales el #27Jul: reportan poca afluencia de votantes. *TalCual*. <https://talcualdigital.com/asi-se-desarrollan-elecciones-municipales-el-27jul-reportan-poca-afluencia-de-votantes/>.

105 Tal Cual [@DiarioTalCual]. (2025, July 27). 11:40 am | El centro electoral CVA de Las Mercedes, municipio Baruta, está totalmente vacío a esta hora. #EleccionesMunicipales2025 [Image attached]. X (Formerly Twitter). <https://x.com/DiarioTalCual/status/1949495828692779008>; Tal Cual [@DiarioTalCual]. (2025b, July 27). 11:54 am | En el Colegio Santo Tomás de Villanueva, de Baruta, se observan pocos electores. Un funcionario del Plan República informó que el proceso transcurre con normalidad y que no ha habido ningún inconveniente con las máquinas. #EleccionesMunicipales2025 [Image attached]. X (Formerly Twitter). <https://x.com/DiarioTalCual/status/1949500757889437792>; Tal Cual [@DiarioTalCual]. (2025a, July 27). 10:46 am | En la Escuela Municipal Andrés Bello de Chacao sí hay asistencia de electores, aunque no son gran cantidad, sí hay una pequeña cola de electores esperando pasar a votar. #EleccionesMunicipales2025 [Image attached]. X (Formerly Twitter). <https://x.com/DiarioTalCual/status/1949483750313926657>; Tal Cual [@DiarioTalCual]. (2025d, July 28). 6:00 PM. En el Colegio Santo Tomás de Villanueva hay poco más de 4.900 electores en tres mesas. La coordinadora del centro indicó que la participación ha estado entre 10% y 15% y no se han presentado incidencias. #EleccionesMunicipales2025 [Image attached]. X (Formerly Twitter). <https://x.com/DiarioTalCual/status/1949593395308966068>; Tal Cual [@DiarioTalCual]. (2025a, July 27). 9:20 am | En el centro electoral Dr. Jesús Arocha de Petare hay pocos electores, pero más que en los los centros de Libertador. El encargado del centro electoral dijo que acudieron todos los miembros de mesa y que el proceso fluye con normalidad. #EleccionesMunicipales2025 [Image attached]. X (Formerly Twitter). <https://x.com/DiarioTalCual/status/1949461029877895326>; Tal Cual [@DiarioTalCual]. (2025e, July 27). 12:53 pm | En el centro electoral Juan Manuel Cajigal de El Hatillo hay decenas de electores, tanto buscándose en los listados, como quienes ya ejercieron su derecho al voto. #EleccionesMunicipales2025 [Image attached]. X (Formerly Twitter). <https://x.com/DiarioTalCual/status/1949514302177615968>.

on youth-led community projects, according to Carlos Quintero, CNE vice president.¹⁰⁶ Polling hours were set until 6:00 p.m., though the CNE indicated that centers would remain open as long as voters were in line.¹⁰⁷ Eugenio Martínez, director of the electoral NGO Votoscopio, noted the repetition of the same irregularities reported in previous elections, stating that no verifiable information was provided on the different stages of the process, the electoral registry was not updated, and there was no detailed communication about the electoral calendar or audit procedures for this election.¹⁰⁸

Post-Electoral Developments

According to the limited information released by the electoral authority, the ruling party PSUV was awarded 285 of the 335 mayoral races. On Monday, 28 July, the CNE released the results of the municipal elections without providing the number or percentage of votes obtained by the winners. Through its Telegram channel, the electoral authority circulated three documents listing the elected mayors and councilors, both by list and nominal vote, but none of the documents included any information on vote counts or percentages.¹⁰⁹

Domestic Responses

Nicolás Maduro stated that the mayoral elections held on July 27 had “consolidated the victory” of the presidential elections a year earlier. “July 27, 2025, has consolidated the victory of July 28, 2024—the victory of institutionalism, legality, peace, stability, and Venezuela’s right to a future,” Maduro said during an event with ruling party supporters, who marched through various streets of Caracas to celebrate the municipal election results and the 71st birthday of the late Hugo Chávez.¹¹⁰

International Responses

On 30 July 2025, the European Union criticized the repressive environment surrounding the municipal elections and stressed that these elections in no way legitimized Nicolás Maduro as president. EU representatives underlined that the failure to present proper documentation of the 2024 presidential election results continues to undermine confidence in the country’s electoral processes.¹¹¹

Cuba, a close Maduro ally, praised the municipal elections. President Díaz-Canel publicly congratulated the Venezuelan authorities, characterizing the vote as a continuation of the Bolivarian and Chavista revolution and affirming Cuba’s support for Nicolás Maduro.¹¹² In contrast, the United States strongly condemned the electoral process. The U.S. Secretary of State reiterated that Maduro is not the legitimate president of Venezuela, denouncing the municipal elections as part of a broader strategy to entrench his rule and highlighting ongoing criminal indictments against him.¹¹³

106 TalCual. (2025, July 27). Así se desarrollan elecciones municipales el #27Jul: reportan poca afluencia de votantes. *TalCual*. <https://talcualdigital.com/asi-se-desarrollan-elecciones-municipales-el-27jul-reportan-poca-afluencia-de-votantes/>.

107 France 24. (2025, July 27). Venezuela celebra elecciones municipales sin la participación de parte de la oposición. *France 24*. <https://www.france24.com/es/am%C3%A9rica-latina/20250727-venezuela-celebra-elecciones-municipales-sin-la-participaci%C3%B3n-de-parte-de-la-oposici%C3%B3n>.

108 CNN en Español. (2025, July 27). Un año después de las elecciones presidenciales, Venezuela celebra comicios municipales sin un contrapeso significativo. *CNN en Español*. <https://cnnespanol.cnn.com/2025/07/26/venezuela/elecciones-municipales-contrapeso-orig>.

109 TalCual. (2025b, July 29). CNE divulga resultados de las municipales sin datos sobre votos ni porcentajes - TalCual. *TalCual*. <https://talcualdigital.com/cne-divulga-resultados-de-las-municipales-sin-datos-sobre-votos-ni-porcentajes/>.

110 TalCual. (2025e, July 29). Maduro dice que elección de alcaldes «consolida la victoria» de presidenciales de 2024. *TalCual*. <https://talcualdigital.com/maduro-dice-que-eleccion-de-alcaldes-consolida-la-victoria-de-presidenciales-de-2024/>.

111 Europa Press Internacional. (2025, July 30). La UE subraya que las elecciones locales en Venezuela no legitiman a Maduro como presidente. *Europa Press*. <https://www.europapress.es/internacional/noticia-ue-subraya-elecciones-locales-venezuela-no-legitiman-maduro-presidente-20250730120428.html>.

112 Díaz-Canel Bermúdez, M. [@DiazCanelB]. (2025, July 28). *Calurosas felicitaciones al gobierno y pueblo de #Venezuela, protagonistas de otra histórica jornada de elecciones. Sus resultados dan continuidad a la Revolución Bolivariana y Chavista y fortalecen su unión cívico-militar. Todo nuestro apoyo al hermano Presidente Nicolás Maduro*. [Images attached]. X (Formerly Twitter). <https://x.com/DiazCanelB/status/1949843346093982194>.

113 U.S. Department of State. (2025, July 27). *Standing with the Venezuelan People: One Year After Yet Another Sham Election* [Press release]. <https://www.state.gov/releases/office-of-the-spokesperson/2025/07/standing-with-the-venezuelan-people-one-year-after-yet-another-sham-election/>.

III. ATTACKS ON CIVIC SPACE

While electoral cycles have served as flashpoints that intensify repression, these processes alone cannot capture the broader context in which Venezuelans live. The shrinking of civic space, the systematic persecution of human rights defenders, and the dismantling of independent organizations are not episodic responses exclusive to election cycles but structural features of the Maduro regime. These patterns predate the 2024 presidential elections and have persisted throughout, shaping the environment in which every political process unfolds. In this way, the votes of 2024 and 2025 took place in a civic landscape already marked by intimidation, criminalization, and legal restrictions on civil society.

Documented attacks on defenders illustrate the depth of this pattern. In its 2025 World Report, Human Rights Watch highlighted that repression of independent actors remained a central feature of Venezuela's political system.¹¹⁴ Likewise, PROVEA registered 592 attacks against human rights defenders in the first half of 2024 alone, a surge that intensified after the July presidential elections. Among these cases was the enforced disappearance and arbitrary detention of Eduardo Torres, a PROVEA activist under Inter-American Commission on Human Rights precautionary measures, who remains held incommunicado at El Helicoide.¹¹⁵ Far from isolated incidents, such cases exemplify how persecution of civic actors forms part of the routine architecture of control.

Criminalization has also been a long-standing component of this strategy. Prosecutors have routinely brought charges such as “terrorism” and “treason” without evidence, while systematically denying detainees access to their chosen legal counsel and to family contact.¹¹⁶ Reports of torture and inhuman conditions of detention underline how the justice and penitentiary systems are mobilized not to protect rights but to dismantle resistance.¹¹⁷ This use of criminal law against defenders demonstrates that repression of civic space is not simply collateral to elections but an entrenched practice that ensures electoral processes unfold without independent oversight.

The legislative framework reinforces this hostile environment. The *Ley de Fiscalización, Regularización, Actuación y Financiamiento de ONG* (Anti-NGO Law), adopted in November 2024, imposes requirements and sanctions that make independent operation nearly impossible, forcing NGOs into suspension, closure, or silence.¹¹⁸ This law builds upon earlier measures such as the *Ley Contra el Odio* (Law Against Hate),¹¹⁹ the *Simón Bolívar Law*,¹²⁰ and new initiatives on “fascism” and “foreign cooperation”.¹²¹ Together, they have codified into law the restrictions and intimidation that defenders and organizations already faced in practice.

Years of repression against human rights defenders and organizations trace the path to Venezuela's current authoritarian consolidation. The restriction of civic space has not merely coincided with electoral authoritarianism; it has enabled it, ensuring that elections take place within boundaries already defined by repression.

114 Human Rights Watch. (2025). *World Report 2025*. https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/media_2025/01/World%20Report%202025.pdf, pp.523-529.

115 Programa Venezolano de Educación Acción en Derechos Humanos (PROVEA). (2025, July 27). *Defensores tras las rejas: vidas comunes, luchas extraordinarias*. <https://provea.org/actualidad/defensores-de-los-derechos/defensores-tras-las-rejas-vidas-comunes-luchas-extraordinarias-25/>.

116 Human Rights Watch: Prosecutors have charged hundreds with sometimes broadly defined crimes carrying harsh sentences, such as “incitement to hatred,” “resistance to authority,” and “terrorism.” <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2025/country-chapters/venezuela>

117 Foro Penal & Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights. (2022). *Criminal Justice as a Tool of Political Repression in Venezuela*. <https://rfkhumanrights.org/wp-content/uploads/assets/VZ-Report-June-2022-EN.pdf>, pp.39-40.

118 Dib, L., & Bare, A. (2025, April 9). *La nueva ley de fiscalización de ONG en Venezuela y el congelamiento de la financiación estadounidense son un golpe mortal para la sociedad civil*. Washington Office on Latin America. <https://www.wola.org/es/analysis/nueva-ley-fiscalizacion-ong-venezuela/>.

119 Balbi, M. (2017, November 20). *La ley contra el odio busca acabar con los vestigios de democracia en Venezuela*. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/es/2017/11/20/espanol/opinion/la-ley-contra-el-odio-busca-acabar-con-los-vestigios-de-democracia-en-venezuela.html>.

120 AlertaVenezuela. (2025, January 14). *The Simón Bolívar Law can lead to “civil death” with simple suspicions*. <https://en.alertavenezuela.org/the-simon-bolivar-law-can-lead-to-civil-death-with-simple-suspicions/>.

121 PROVEA. (2024, April 15). *Ley contra el odio y el fascismo, dos caras de una misma moneda*. Programa Venezolano De Educación Acción En Derechos Humanos (PROVEA). <https://provea.org/actualidad/ley-contra-el-odio-y-el-fascismo-dos-caras-de-una-misma-moneda-espacio-publico/>.

IV. PATTERNS OF ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCE DURING RECENT ELECTORAL CYCLES

Having outlined the structural foundations of repression and its manifestation during the 2024 and 2025 electoral processes, the following section turns to the data that anchors these findings. The information presented here was gathered by Foro Penal through its network of lawyers and volunteers, who work directly with victims of enforced disappearance and their families. Despite constant pressure and harassment from the Maduro regime,¹²² Foro Penal's staff continues to document these cases with rigor and commitment. This report is possible only thanks to their dedication, which ensures that victims and their families are heard.

While the broader context examined in this report spans the period from the 28 July 2024 presidential election through the 25 May and 27 July 2025 elections, the first dataset presented here reflects a monitoring window covering cases documented between 12 May 2025 and 18 July 2025. This monitoring window does not imply that politically motivated detentions outside these dates are excluded from our analysis. On the contrary, we are aware of a far larger universe of cases. For the purposes of this section, however, we will focus first on a defined sample of 96 cases for which detailed, systematically verified information was available. This sample is not intended to represent all detentions in Venezuela, but rather to serve as a cross-section that enables us to identify key patterns of repression in relation to the electoral cycle. By examining who is detained, by which agencies, where they are held, and under what circumstances they are released, the data points to tactical choices and deeper structural dynamics of repression.

It is important to note that this first dataset covers the population as a whole, which necessarily includes both Venezuelan citizens and foreigners. However, it does not provide a deep dive into the particular dynamics affecting foreign nationals and dual citizens. To capture this dimension, we present a second, complementary dataset of 109 cases. While there may appear to be overlap between the two datasets, they are distinct. The first sample of 96 cases provides a general overview, while the second highlights a group that has emerged as a specific target since July 2024. The latter illustrates how the Maduro regime increasingly instrumentalizes detention not only for domestic control but also as a bargaining tool in international relations.

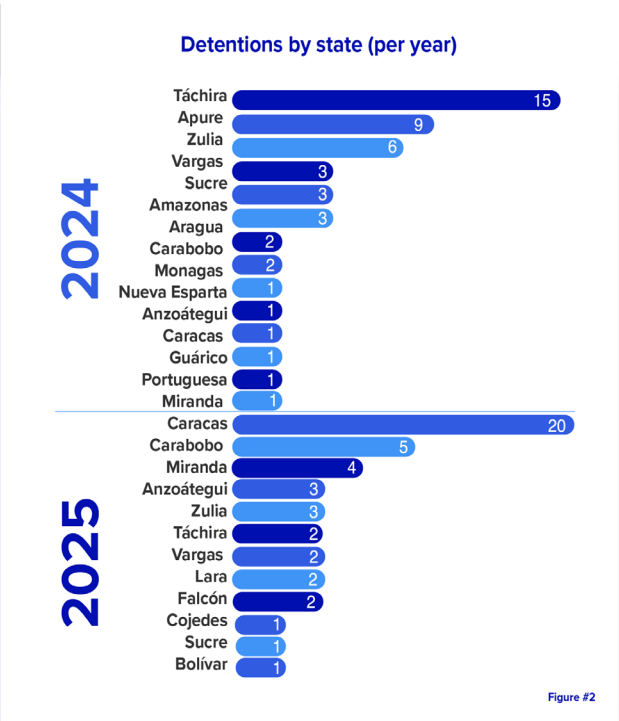
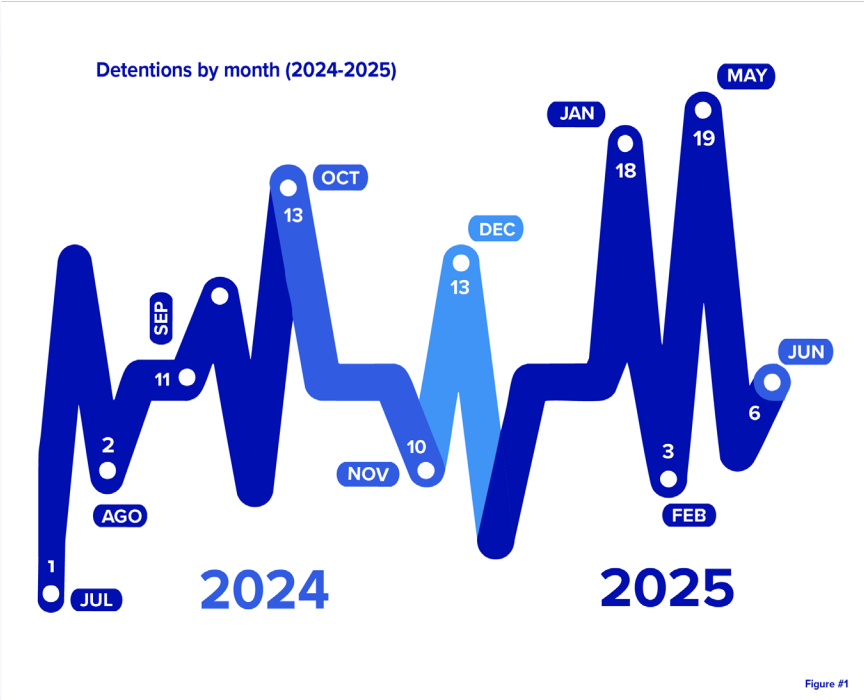
Both datasets should be read with their strengths and limitations in mind. They do not capture the total universe of politically motivated acts of repression in Venezuela, nor can they by themselves explain all of the causes behind the patterns observed. Where the evidence allows, we highlight consistent trends and situate them within the broader context documented in this and previous reports; where blind spots remain, we acknowledge these gaps. Taken together, the two datasets provide a layered perspective, where one situates repression within the broader electoral cycle, the other underscores its troubling evolution toward the targeting of foreign citizens and people with double nationality as political hostages.

Dataset 1: General population

The monthly breakdown of detentions provides a first indication of how repression has fluctuated in relation to Venezuela's electoral cycles. Within the sample of 96 cases, the number of detentions remains low around the July 2024 presidential election itself but rises steadily in the months that followed, with September through December registering between 10 and 13 cases each month. This consistency

122 On 28 May 2025, during an official press conference, Diosdado Cabello accused Foro Penal of being part of a "terrorist structure", see: Agencia Occidental de Noticias. (2025, May 28). | EN VIVO: DIOSDADO CABELLO | RUEDA DE PRENSA HOY #28MAY [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FNHQyWJn6vE>, 54:35.

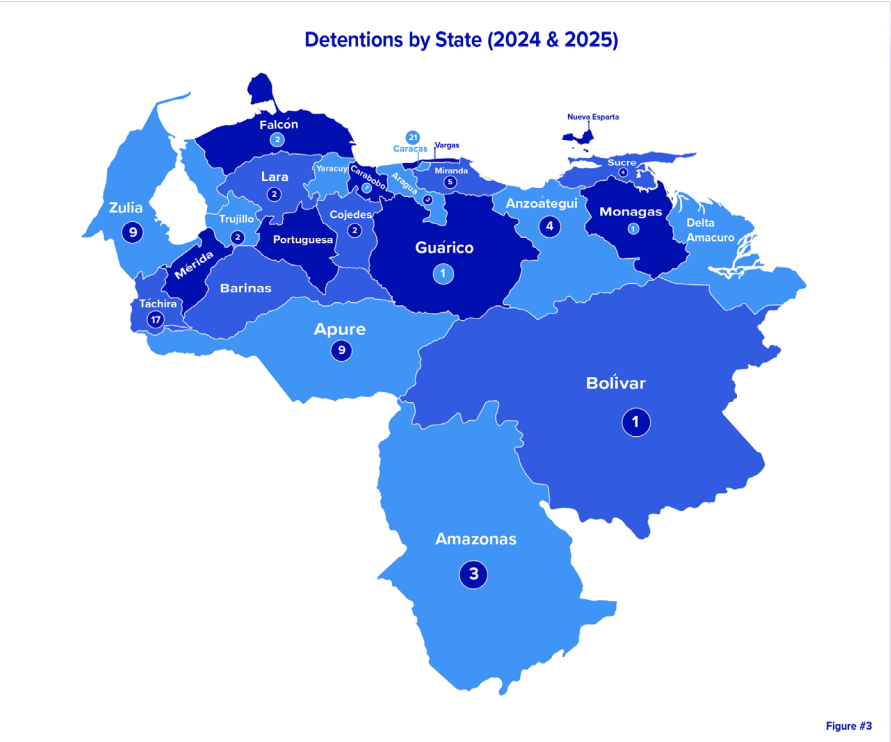
suggests that repression did not occur as an isolated reaction on election day, but rather as a sustained strategy in the aftermath of the contested results. In early 2025, the pattern intensifies. January records 18 detentions, the single highest monthly figure in this dataset, followed by another sharp peak in May with 19 detentions, coinciding with the parliamentary and gubernatorial elections. By contrast, February (3 cases) and June (6 cases) show notably lower levels of activity, indicating moments of relative pause between electoral events.



Although this 96-case dataset is evidently not exhaustive, its value lies in what it reveals about timing and method. By focusing on a systematically documented sample, we can observe the rhythm with which repression is deployed and its clear connection to moments of political tension. The clustering of detentions after July 2024 and their renewed escalation around the May 2025 elections are not random fluctuations; they point to a pattern consistent with broader findings of this report, that enforced disappearance in Venezuela intensifies when political mobilization is most likely. With this timeline in mind, we turn to the territorial distribution of detentions and enforced disappearances, to understand how repression has been geographically deployed and how this reflects the regime’s strategic priorities.

The geographic distribution of cases shows a marked contrast between 2024 and 2025. In the months following the contested presidential election of July 2024, detentions were concentrated in border states, particularly Táchira (15 cases), Apure (9 cases), and Zulia (6 cases). Smaller clusters were also recorded in Sucre, Vargas, and Amazonas. By contrast, in 2025 the overwhelming majority of detentions took place in Caracas (20 cases), with secondary concentrations in Carabobo (5 cases) and Miranda (4 cases), while other states registered only one or two cases each.

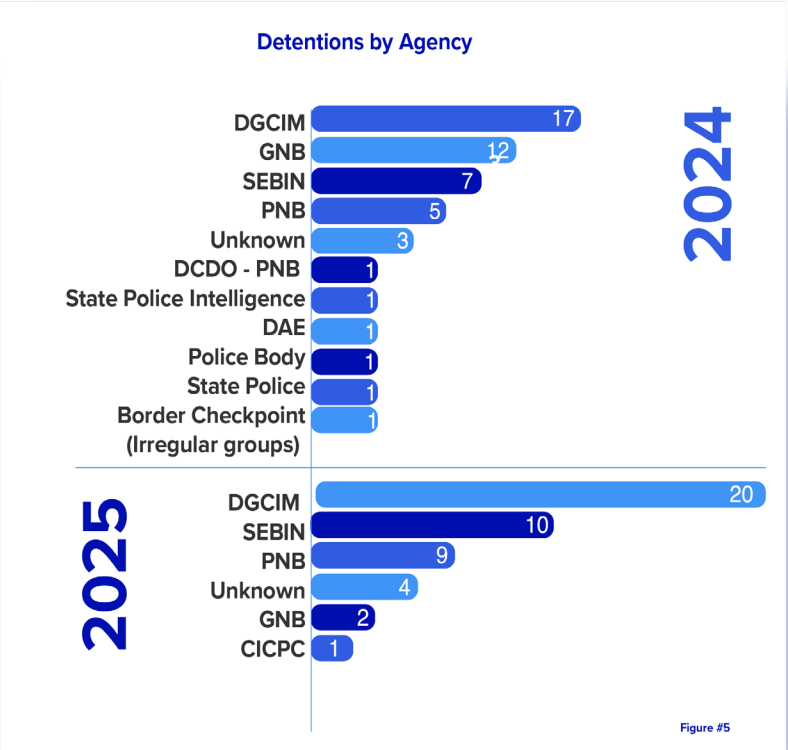
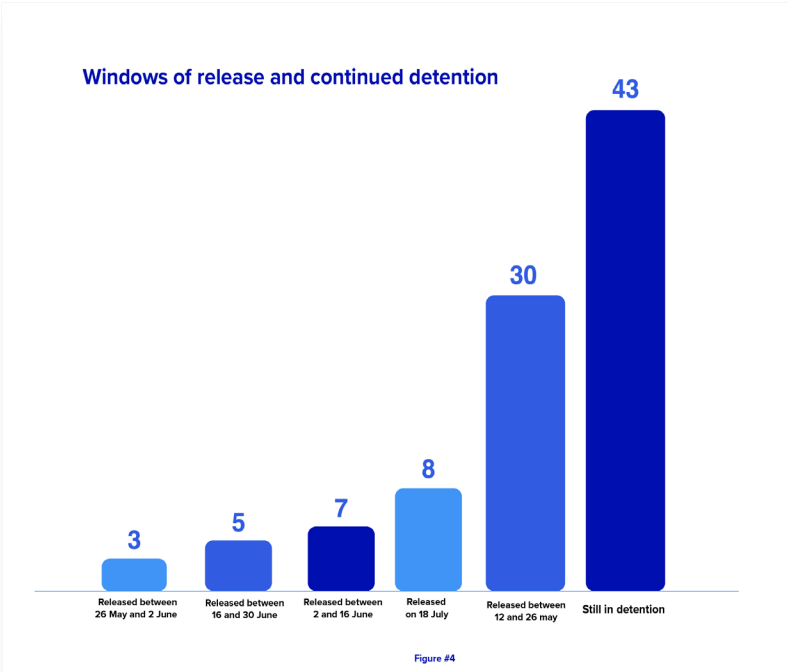
This change in geographic concentration should not be read as coincidental. The data suggests that enforced disappearance was deployed unevenly across the Venezuelan territory, with different areas becoming focal points of repression at different moments in the electoral cycles. In 2024, the weight of cases in border states such as Táchira and Apure is consistent with earlier reporting by Foro Penal and RFKHR of how these regions are frequently subject to heightened control, given their history of cross-border movement, protest activity, and the presence of armed groups. However, in 2025, the sharp concentration in Caracas reflects a shift toward the political center, where repression is more visible and directly connected to electoral processes. While this dataset alone cannot determine all the reasons behind these shifts, the contrast across years illustrates how repression in Venezuela is not territorially uniform but selective and situational, adapting to the regime’s perceived vulnerabilities in each phase of the political cycles. To complement the year-by-year breakdown, the data can also be viewed in aggregate and mapped by state, making visible the overall clusters of repression across the country.



When considered together, the 2024 and 2025 cases further confirm the uneven geographic distribution described above. The combined map highlights two dominant centers of repression, Caracas (21 cases), and the western border states of Táchira (17 cases), Apure (9 cases), and Zulia (9 cases). Secondary concentrations appear in Carabobo (7 cases), Miranda (5 cases), and Vargas (5 cases), while most other states registered only isolated cases. This aggregated view reinforces the earlier finding that enforced disappearance in Venezuela is concentrated in specific areas of political

and strategic importance. In addition to where and when enforced disappearances occurred, it is equally important to consider what happened to those affected. The following chart captures the timing of releases within the 96 cases documented.

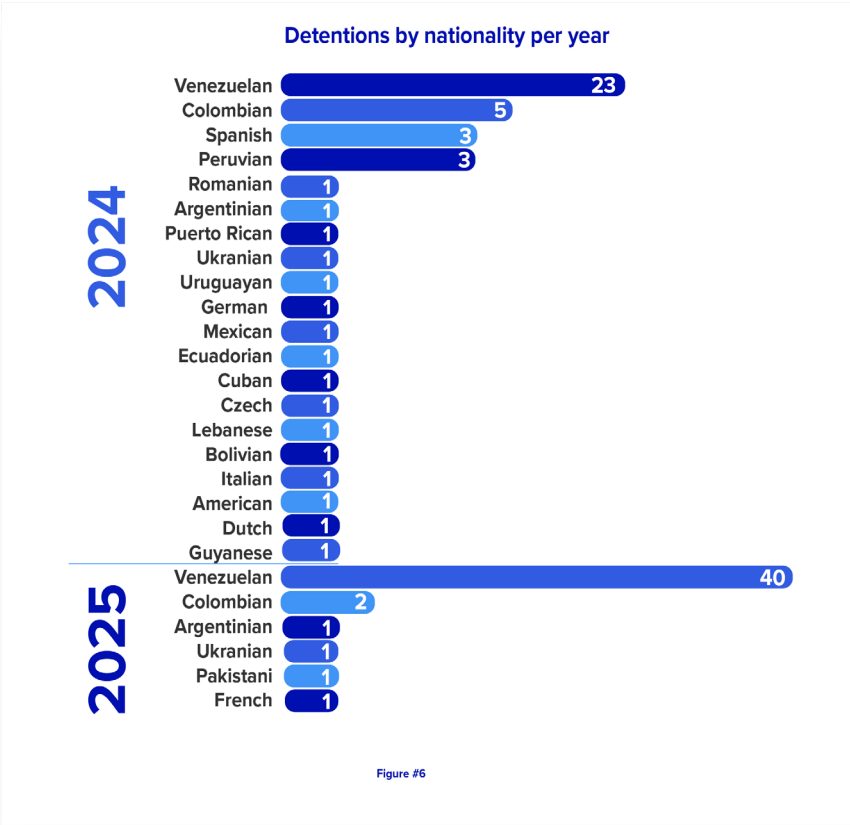
The data reveals two distinct patterns. First, a large release cluster occurred between 12 and 26 May, just days before the parliamentary and gubernatorial elections, when 30 victims were freed. This concentration stands out in contrast to the smaller, staggered releases that followed in June and July, culminating with a group of eight individuals released on 18 July, shortly before the municipal elections.



Second, a significant proportion of cases, 43 individuals, nearly half of the total, remain in detention at the close of the monitoring window for this dataset. The timing of releases is consistent with a broader practice in which release is managed in waves, often around electoral events, rather than as the result of due process. The sequencing of releases is also consistent with what Foro Penal has consistently described as a “revolving door” dynamic, in which new arrests are paired with selective releases. This practice allows the Maduro regime to manage political pressure without reducing the overall level of repression, reinforcing the instrumental use of enforced disappearance in Venezuela.

Having considered the timing and location of detentions, it is also crucial to examine who carried them out. The data shows that enforced disappearance in Venezuela is not the product of diffuse or isolated actors but is consistently concentrated in a handful of national-level security and intelligence bodies. Across the 96 cases analyzed, four institutions stand out: the *Dirección General de Contrainteligencia Militar* (DGCIM, General Directorate of Military Counterintelligence), *Servicio Bolivariano de Inteligencia Nacional* (SEBIN, Bolivarian National Intelligence Service), *Polici a Nacional Bolivariana* (PNB, Bolivarian National Police) and the *Guardia Nacional Bolivariana* (GNB, Bolivarian National Guard), which together account for more than 85% of the detentions documented. The DGCIM was the single most frequently identified perpetrator in both years, responsible for 17 cases in 2024 and 20 in 2025. The SEBIN also features prominently, with a sharp rise in 2025 (from 7 to 10 cases). The PNB maintained a steady role (5 cases in 2024, 9 cases in 2025), while the GNB, though significant in 2024 (12 cases), appears in only 2 cases in 2025.

These figures confirm that the practice of enforced disappearance and politically motivated detention is rooted primarily in the regime’s intelligence and national security structures. The continued prominence of DGCIM and SEBIN aligns with previous documentation of their role as institutional pillars of repression. The decline in cases attributed to the GNB in 2025 may reflect tactical shifts rather than diminished capacity.¹²³

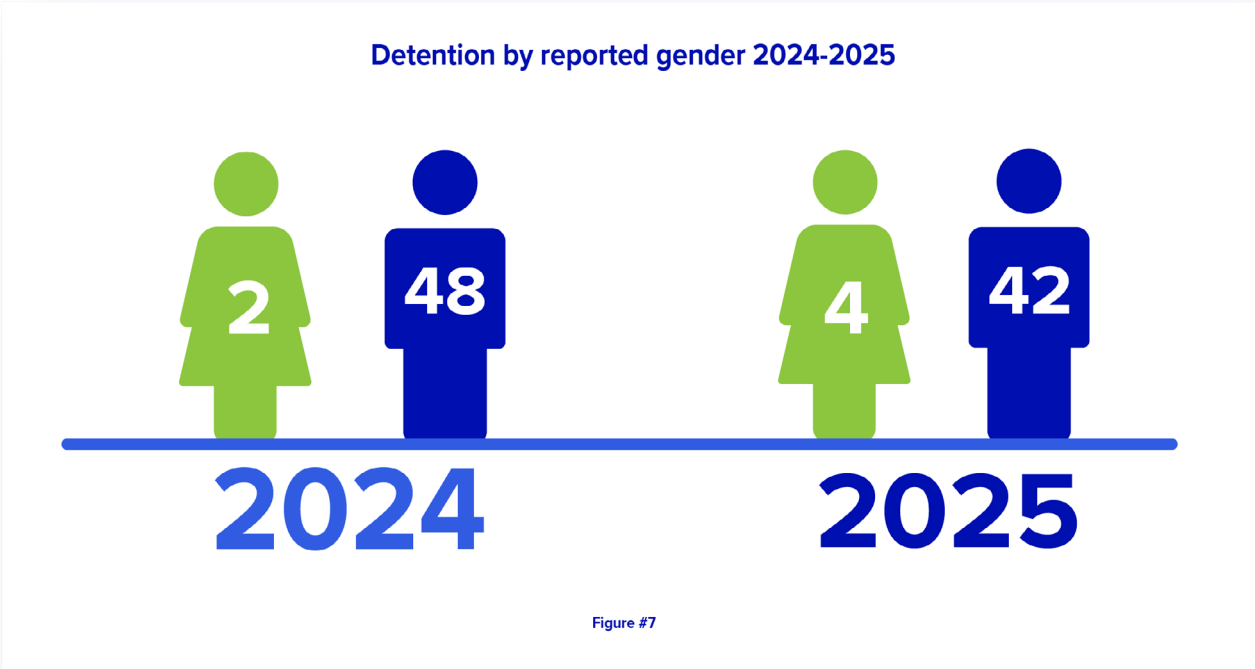


123 Consistent with this finding, the 2020 and 2022 reports highlighted the centrality of intelligence and security forces in carrying out enforced disappearances. The 2020 report noted the dominance of DGCIM and SEBIN in 2018 and the surge of GNB in 2019, alongside broader participation of state and municipal forces, while the 2022

While the agency data illustrates how repression is carried out and which security bodies drive it, the nationality breakdown shifts the focus to whom it targets. Examining the profiles of those detained reveals not only the domestic anchors of the practice but also its widening reach into the international sphere, further explored in the following section. Of the 96 cases analyzed in this dataset, 63 involved Venezuelan nationals, confirming that the main targets of enforced disappearance remain citizens inside the country. At the same time, a striking 33 cases (around one-third of the sample) involved foreigners which were not confined to neighboring countries. In 2024 alone, detainees came from more than twenty different countries across the Americas, Europe, the Middle East, and Asia. In 2025, Venezuelans represented the overwhelming majority, but detentions still included citizens of France, Pakistan, Ukraine, Argentina, and Colombia.

The presence of this amount of nationalities in a sample of this size is telling. It suggests opportunism in whom the regime targets, rather than a narrow or consistent focus. While the concentration of Venezuelans shows that enforced disappearance remains primarily anchored in domestic repression, the inclusion of this many foreigners signals a strategic expansion, where detentions are leveraged beyond internal control, turning foreign nationals into instruments of diplomatic pressure. The dataset in the following section, focused specifically on foreigners and dual-national Venezuelans, provides further insight into this emerging practice and its implications.

Taken together, the gender distribution closes out the analysis of this 96-case sample. Across both years, the dataset is dominated by male victims, who account for 90 of the 96 documented cases. Only six women were identified as victims of enforced disappearance in this period, two in 2024 and four in 2025. While the numerical imbalance is stark, it does not make the detention of women negligible. As highlighted in prior reports, women are often targeted in ways that differ from men, not always because of their political activity, but frequently as a means of exerting pressure on family members or associates. The limited female representation underscores that gendered dynamics remain relevant, even if not statistically prominent in this dataset. Recognizing these differentiated patterns is crucial for understanding the full impact of repression on families and communities.



..... report again placed the GNB at the forefront, followed by FAES, DGCIM, and the PNB, see: Foro Penal & Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights. (2020). *Enforced Disappearance as a Tool of Political Repression in Venezuela*. <https://rfkhumanrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/RFKHumanRights-VenezuelaDisappearances-EnglishReport.pdf>, p.27, 56; Foro Penal & Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights. (2022). *Criminal Justice as a Tool of Political Repression in Venezuela*. <https://rfkhumanrights.org/wp-content/uploads/assets/VZ-Report-June-2022-EN.pdf>, p.17.

Having examined the main sample of 96 cases across time, territory, agency, nationality, and gender, the analysis now turns to a second dataset of 109 cases, which focuses specifically on foreign nationals and Venezuelans with dual nationality, whose detention has become increasingly visible since July 2024 and reflects an emerging pattern which warrants separate analysis.

Dataset 2: Foreign Nationals and Dual Citizens

Background

In March 2025, Foro Penal published its *Special Report on Political Prisoners with Foreign Nationality in Venezuela*, documenting how the Maduro regime has increasingly targeted foreign citizens and Venezuelans with dual nationality through arbitrary detention and enforced disappearance. This report shows that these individuals were subjected to irregular judicial proceedings in the broader context of criminalization of political dissent, reflecting an evolution in the State's repressive strategy after the 28 July 2024 presidential elections. As of 27 July 2024, 17 Venezuelans with dual nationality were detained for political reasons; by the close of that reporting period on 28 February 2025, the number had more than doubled to 36.¹²⁴ With respect to foreign nationals, the findings were equally striking. Prior to 28 July 2024, Foro Penal had not recorded any politically motivated detentions of foreigners in Venezuela. From that date onward, however, the organization documented 29 new cases, underscoring a deliberate shift in the State's strategy directly tied to the electoral and post-electoral environment. In most of these cases, those detained were labeled by authorities as “mercenaries” or “terrorists,” without supporting evidence.¹²⁵

For Venezuelans with dual nationality, Foro Penal identified a differentiated pattern across two periods. Before the 28 July 2024 elections, 17 such cases had been registered, including five women. After that date, the number rose sharply to 36. In 90% of the pre-election cases, dual nationals were arbitrarily linked to so-called “operations”, a term used by the Maduro regime to describe alleged conspiracies, ranging from attempted coups d'état and military uprisings to sabotage of the national electricity grid and even assassination attempts.¹²⁶ Dual nationality Venezuelans detained after the 28 July 2024 election have frequently been subjected to enforced disappearance, held without their families or lawyers being informed of their whereabouts. In most of these cases, detainees were denied the right to private legal representation and were instead assigned public defenders without their consent, in violation of due process guarantees and of Article 49 of the Venezuelan Constitution, which establishes the right to a defense of one's own choosing.¹²⁷ For many, this meant confronting criminal proceedings in a country unfamiliar to them, often in a language they did not fully understand, and without access to the consular protection they had the right to receive, circumstances that heightened their vulnerability and further undermined the possibility of an effective defense.

The overarching objective of this pattern was made explicit on 31 January 2025, when U.S. Special Envoy Richard Grenell traveled to Caracas to negotiate the release of U.S. citizens detained in Venezuela and discuss agreements on the repatriation of Venezuelan migrants from the United States. As a direct outcome of these negotiations, six U.S. citizens were released.¹²⁸ These occurred without the judicial

124 Foro Penal. (2025). *Reporte Especial sobre Presos Políticos con Nacionalidad Extranjera en Venezuela*. https://foropenal.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/EXTRANJEROS-1_compressed-1.pdf, p.3.

125 Foro Penal. (2025). *Reporte Especial sobre Presos Políticos con Nacionalidad Extranjera en Venezuela*. https://foropenal.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/EXTRANJEROS-1_compressed-1.pdf, p.4.

126 Foro Penal. (2025). *Reporte Especial sobre Presos Políticos con Nacionalidad Extranjera en Venezuela*. https://foropenal.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/EXTRANJEROS-1_compressed-1.pdf, p.15.

127 Foro Penal. (2025). *Reporte Especial sobre Presos Políticos con Nacionalidad Extranjera en Venezuela*. https://foropenal.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/EXTRANJEROS-1_compressed-1.pdf, p.25.

128 Garcia Cano, R., & Goodman, J. (2025, January 31). Venezuela frees 6 Americans after meeting between Maduro and senior Trump official. *PBS News*. <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/world/senior-trump-official-travels-to-venezuela-for-talks-on-migrants>; Turkewitz, J. (2025a, March 18). ‘Welcome to Hell’: Five Months in a Venezuelan Prison. *The*

release orders required under Venezuelan law, which must be issued by the competent tribunal and communicated to penitentiary authorities for execution. The absence of such orders demonstrates how the government instrumentalized these individuals as “bargaining chips” in diplomatic negotiations, disregarding judicial guarantees for detainees.¹²⁹

This pattern has been further illustrated by statements from senior officials of Venezuela. On 20 August 2025, Jorge Rodríguez, President of the National Assembly, warned: “Whoever the foreigner is that enters this country without authorization, enters but does not leave. Here they stay, whether imprisoned or otherwise, they stay.”¹³⁰ His remarks came amid heightened regional tensions, including the deployment of U.S. military assets in the Caribbean, ongoing accusations of Venezuelan government ties to drug trafficking, and the U.S. government’s decision to raise the reward for information leading to Nicolás Maduro’s arrest to 50 million dollars.¹³¹

These developments mark a deepening of the criminalization of dissent, extending its reach from domestic opposition actors to foreign citizens and Venezuelans with dual nationality. Unlike domestic perceived opponents and their loved ones, who are often targeted for their activism or visibility, these individuals are uninvolved in political activity. Nevertheless, they are subsumed into the same repressive logic, treated as instruments within the regime’s broader strategy of control. Amnesty International arrived at the same conclusion, emphasizing that the detention and enforced disappearance of foreign nationals appear to form part of a broader strategy to exert political pressure on other states while reinforcing the government’s narrative of an alleged foreign conspiracy.¹³²

Building on this context, the data collected by Foro Penal for this report offers a systematic picture of how foreign nationals and Venezuelans with dual nationality have been targeted. By examining the timing, frequency, and circumstances of their detention, we can trace how repression evolved around the 2024 and 2025 electoral cycles and how it became embedded as a tool of both domestic control and foreign policy.

Data Analysis

The monthly distribution of detentions provides an initial view of how foreign nationals and Venezuelans with dual nationality were targeted across 2024 and 2025. In the first half of 2024, figures were limited, with January (7 cases), February (5 cases), March (2 cases), April (1 case), and May (1 case). A clear shift occurred in July (17 cases), around the presidential election, followed by sustained levels in August (9 cases), September (14 cases), and October (14 cases). Activity then declined toward the end of the year, though November (9 cases) and December (6 cases) still remained above the earlier months.

In 2025, detentions dropped sharply to January (2 cases) and February (1 case). Later in the year, new clusters appeared in May (5 cases), June (6 cases), and July (9 cases), before falling again in August (1 case). While these peaks were smaller than those seen in 2024, their timing is significant, as they show that arrests of foreigners and dual nationals did not end after the presidential election; they resurfaced during subsequent electoral months, albeit with reduced intensity.

Taken together, the sequence points to July 2024 as a turning point, from which foreigners and dual nationals were tactically targeted when the government intensified its repression to deter dissent and

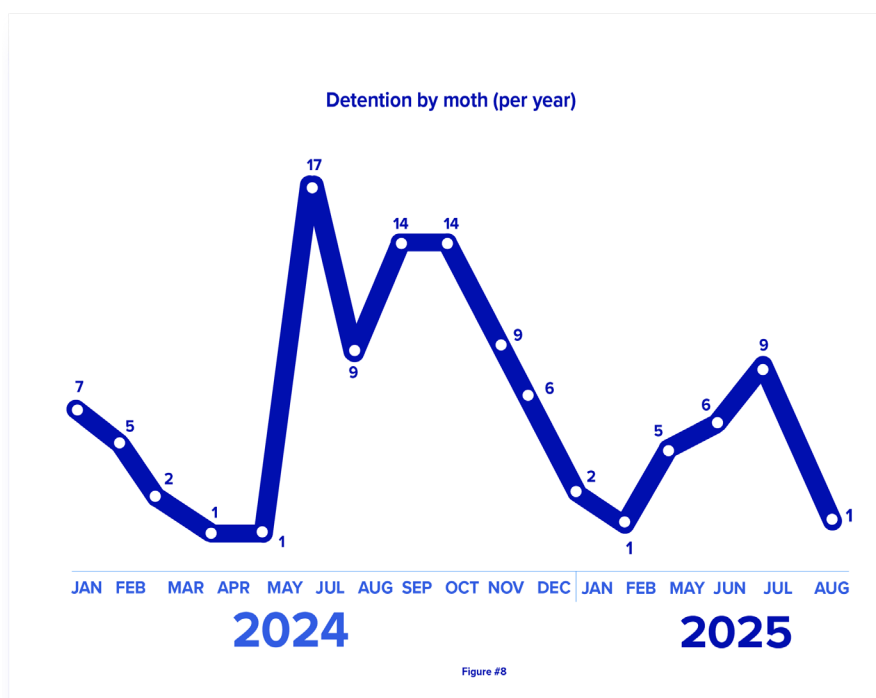
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New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/03/18/world/americas/americans-hostages-venezuela-prison.html>.

129 Foro Penal. (2025). *Reporte Especial sobre Presos Políticos con Nacionalidad Extranjera en Venezuela*. https://foropenal.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/EXTRANJEROS-1_compressed-1.pdf, p.4-5.

130 Luigino Bracci Roa desde Venezuela. (2025b, August 21). *Asamblea Nacional de Venezuela, 20 de agosto de 2025, sesión completa* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mbysyhoo6uE>, 1:20:18.

131 El Nacional. (2025, August 20). Jorge Rodríguez: “Extranjero que entre a este país sin permiso, entra, pero no sale.” *El Nacional*. <https://www.elnacional.com/2025/08/jorge-rodriguez-extranjero-que-entre-a-este-pais-sin-permiso-entra-pero-no-sale/>.

132 Amnesty International. (2025). *Detentions without a Trace: The Crime of Enforced Disappearance in Venezuela* (AMR 53/0083/2025). <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/amr53/0083/2025/en/>, p.44.

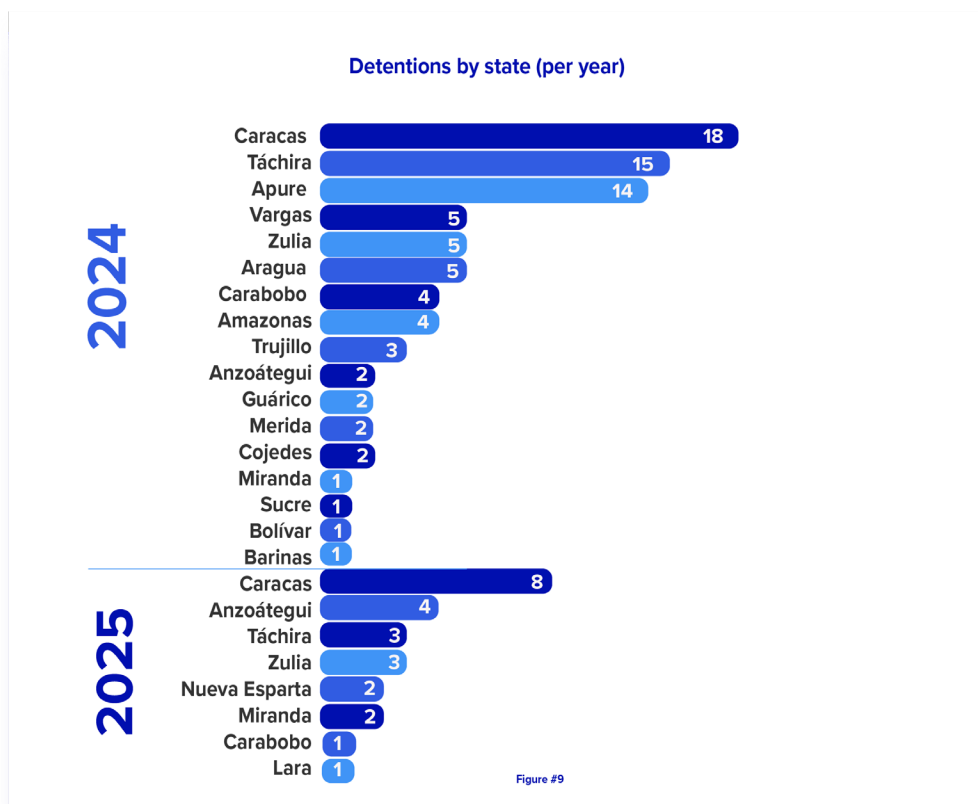


reinforce its leverage domestically and internationally. Overall, the monthly distribution points to a consistent strategy mirroring the broader use of politically enforced disappearance as a tool of repression around election cycles.

The territorial distribution of detentions provides insight into where foreigners and dual nationals were most vulnerable to interception across 2024 and 2025. In 2024, the largest clusters appeared in border states: Táchira (15 cases), Apure (14 cases), Zulia (5 cases), and Vargas (5 cases). These areas are marked by cross-border mobility and heavy security deployments, which create fertile conditions for arbitrary arrests. The fact that foreigners were disproportionately detained here suggests that the authorities may be leveraging these transit hubs as opportunities to apprehend individuals. In a context where the regime has sought to show reach and control, border regions with heavy flows of people provide a convenient pretext to stop, question, and disappear foreigners under the guise of migration or security checks. This opportunistic logic helps explain why such states have become hotspots, even if the detainees themselves were not necessarily engaged in cross-border activities.

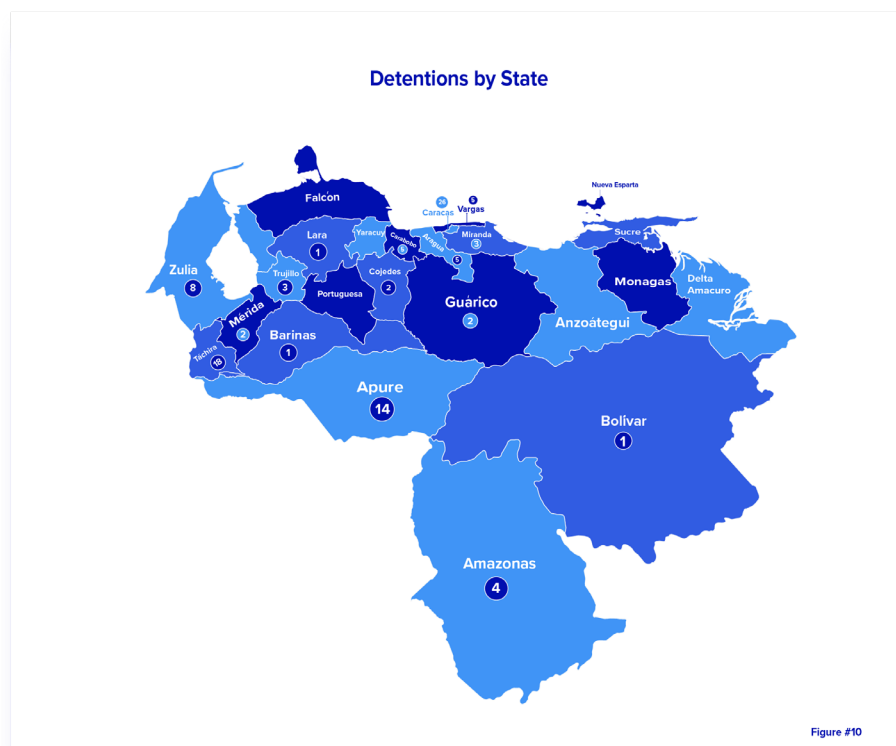
At the same time, Caracas (18 cases) stood out as the single largest concentration, underscoring that these detentions are not limited to opportunistic arrests in high-traffic border zones but also extend to the political and administrative center of the country. Smaller but notable numbers were also recorded in Aragua (5 cases), Carabobo (4 cases), Amazonas (4 cases), and several other states with one to three cases each, showing that the practice was not confined to a handful of hotspots but spread across a diverse territorial footprint.

In 2025, overall figures declined, yet Caracas again registered the highest share (8 cases), confirming its role as the epicenter of these operations. Detentions also appeared in Anzoátegui (4 cases), Zulia (3 cases), Táchira (3 cases), Nueva Esparta (2 cases), Miranda (2 cases), Carabobo (1 case), and Lara (1 case). Compared with the previous year, this distribution is more dispersed but still points to two consistent dynamics: the capital as the primary site of enforced disappearances, and border states as recurrent, if reduced, points of vulnerability. Taken together, the patterns suggest opportunistic targeting, shaped less by threats than by the vulnerability of those detained, with numerous arbitrary detentions in Caracas alongside opportunistic arrests in border regions where flows of people and the presence of security forces make enforced



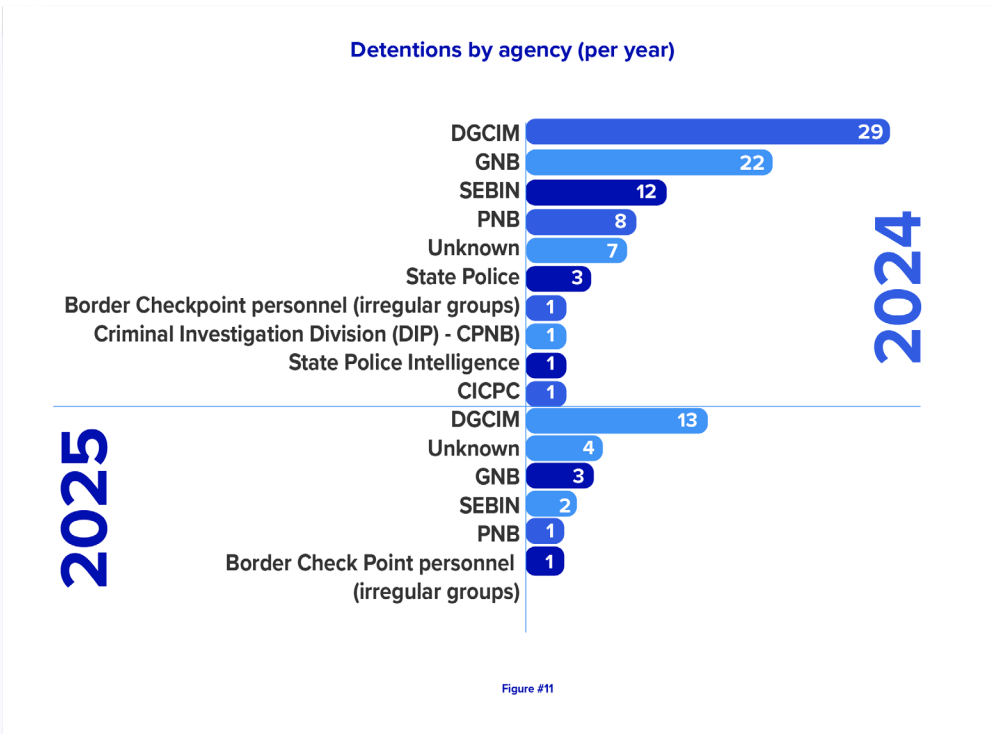
disappearance easier to disguise as routine law enforcement. Again, when viewed in aggregate, the map of enforced disappearances makes the uneven geography of these cases even more visible. Caracas (26 cases) and Táchira (18 cases) stand out as the two main centers. Apure (14 cases) and Zulia (8 cases) follow along the western border. Secondary clusters appear in Carabobo (5 cases), Aragua (5 cases), Vargas (5 cases), and Amazonas (4 cases). Most other states show only one to three cases.

This visual mapping reinforces the earlier finding that detentions of foreigners and dual nationals were not territorially uniform but concentrated in specific areas. Border states emerged as key points of interception, while Caracas consistently registered the largest share and reflected the centrality of the capital in how these detentions were carried out. Understanding this



geography also raises the question of which institutions had the capacity and mandate to operate across both border regions and the capital.

In 2024, DGCIM accounted for the largest share with 29 cases, followed by GNB with 22 cases, SEBIN with 12 cases, and PNB with 8 cases. Together, these four bodies were responsible for the overwhelming majority of incidents documented that year. Secondary actors played only a marginal role: state police accounted for 3 cases, CICPC for 1, and irregular border personnel for 1. Seven cases could not be attributed to a specific agency.



In 2025, the overall number of cases declined, but responsibility became even more concentrated. DGCIM alone was responsible for 13 cases, while GNB carried out 3 cases, SEBIN 2 cases, and PNB 1 case. Four cases remained unattributed, and one was linked to irregular border personnel. The contraction of GNB’s role coincides with the broader decrease in detentions at border crossings, while the persistence of DGCIM underscores the growing centralization of these operations within military counterintelligence structures.

Viewed together, the two years reveal a deliberate pattern in how responsibility was distributed among security institutions. In 2024, GNB’s prominence reflected its presence along border corridors, where many foreigners and dual nationals were intercepted. By contrast, in 2025, DGCIM assumed a central role, underscoring how these operations became increasingly concentrated in the hands of military counterintelligence. The persistence of unattributed cases is equally telling, as some arrests were carried out under conditions designed to conceal the identity of the perpetrators, or under circumstances in which victims, often isolated, vulnerable, and unfamiliar with Venezuela’s security forces, could not identify their captors. The data shows that these were not ordinary law enforcement actions dispersed across the policing system. They were targeted operations overwhelmingly carried out by certain security institutions, often under conditions of concealment, and shielded from accountability.

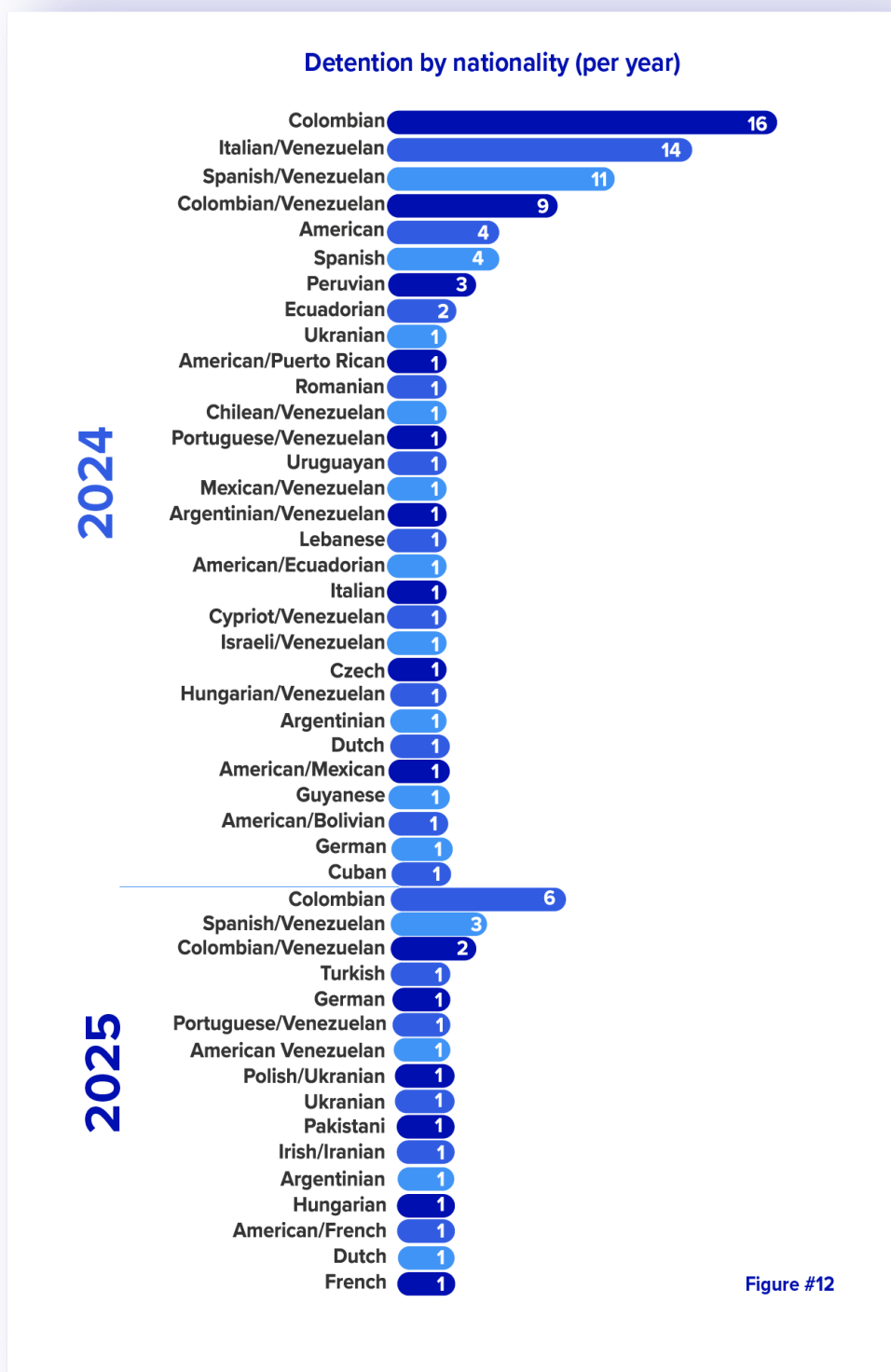


Figure #12

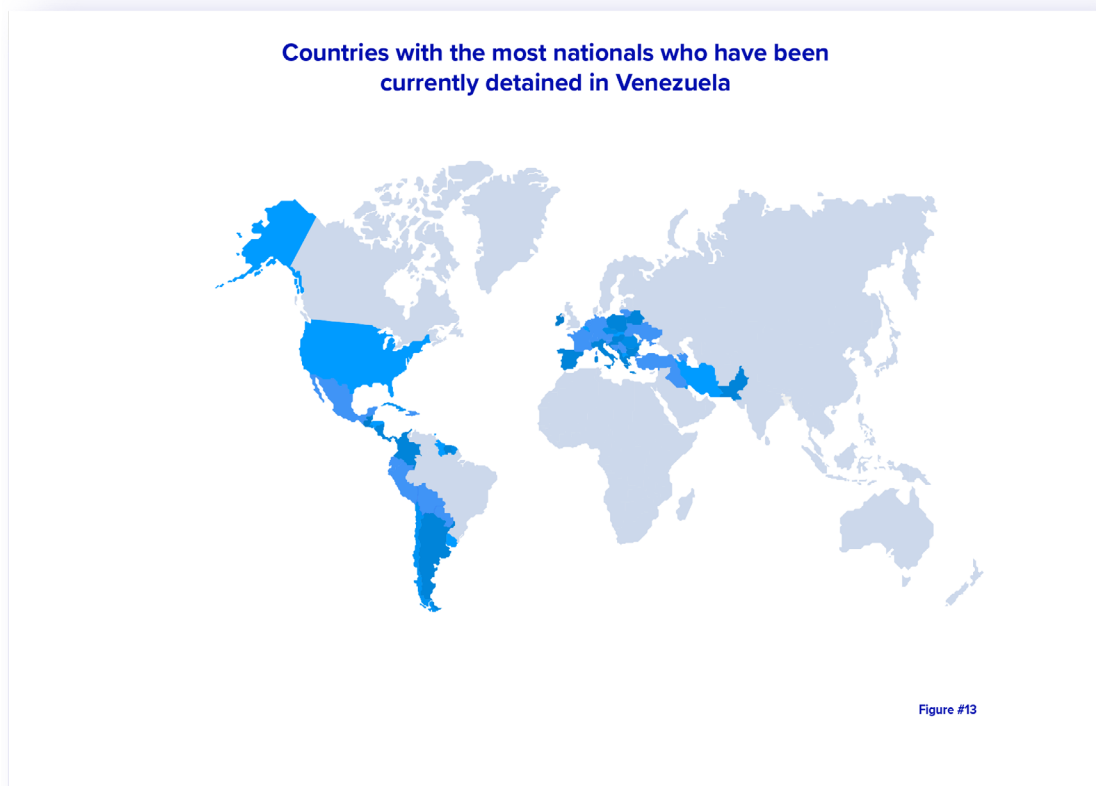
Having considered which institutions carried out these detentions, it is equally important to examine who was subjected to them. The nationality breakdown reveals a nearly even split between dual nationals (55 cases) and single-nationality foreigners (54 cases) detained across 2024 and 2025.

Within this balance, certain groups stand out across both years. Colombians (22 cases), Spaniards (15 cases including dual nationals), and Italians (15 cases including dual nationals) appear most frequently.

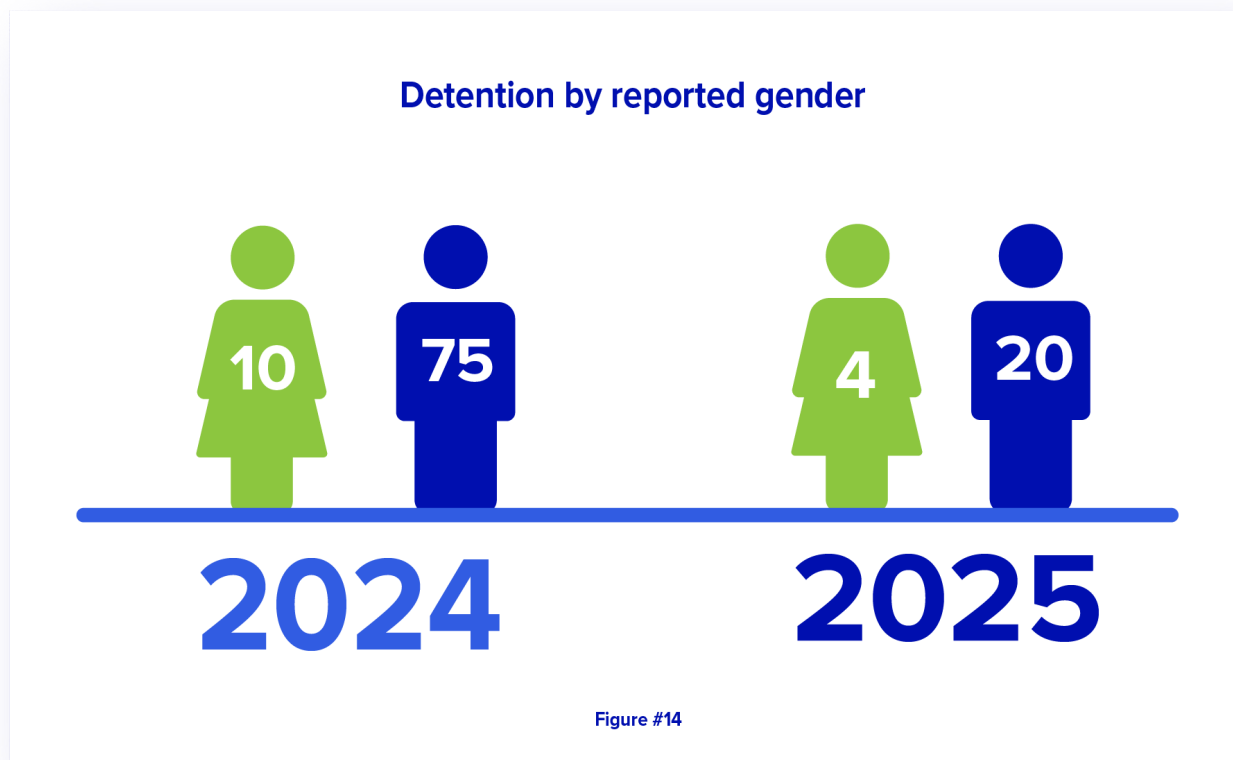
This recurrence is not incidental. In the case of Colombians, proximity to the border and the presence of Colombian communities inside Venezuela likely made them visible and vulnerable. Spaniards and Italians, by contrast, represent historic communities whose well-established presence in Venezuela meant that their nationals and dual nationals were both numerous and accessible. These patterns suggest that community size and visibility influenced who was most at risk, rather than individual political activity.

At the same time, the breadth of the data is remarkable. Across both years, the dataset records over 20 different nationalities from Latin America, Europe, the Middle East, and Asia. This diversity reflects how arbitrary the practice became, as enforced disappearances of foreigners were not confined to any single group or region but extended across communities with varying levels of integration and visibility.

Taken together, these patterns reveal a calculated opportunism. Foreigners and dual nationals were not detained because they posed specific threats, but because they represented a category of people whose relative isolation, weaker protection networks, and limited political leverage made them easier to disappear without consequence. By dispersing detentions across a wide range of nationalities while concentrating operations in certain security institutions, the Maduro regime was able to maximize pressure on foreign governments while minimizing accountability.



When viewed on a map, the scope of this practice becomes even clearer. The documented cases span more than 20 countries across four continents, from neighboring Colombia, Peru, and Guyana to European countries such as Spain, Italy, Germany, and Poland, as well as countries in the Middle East and Asia, including Lebanon, Türkiye, Pakistan, and Iran. This global spread reinforces that the phenomenon was not confined to regional dynamics but extended into distant communities with no direct connection to Venezuela. Having traced the global reach of this practice, it is equally important to consider the personal dimension of those affected. Gender reporting within the dataset shows a consistent imbalance across both years.



In 2024, men represented the overwhelming majority with 75 cases, compared to 10 cases involving women. The same pattern held in 2025, with 20 men and 4 women documented. Across the two years combined, men account for nearly nine out of ten cases.

Taken together, datasets 1 and 2 reveal that enforced disappearance in Venezuela is deliberate, selective, and adaptive. It serves multiple purposes such as suppressing domestic dissent and projecting power internationally. While dataset 1 illustrates how repression is tied to electoral cycles and managed through timing, territory, and selective releases, dataset 2 underscores its expansion into the realm of foreign policy, where human beings are treated as “bargaining chips”. Both confirm that enforced disappearance remains at the core of the Maduro regime’s repressive strategy, evolving in form but constant in purpose.

These findings also raise critical questions of legal definition and classification. In Venezuela, authorities frequently deny that enforced disappearance has occurred, pointing to eventual judicial presentation or providing vague information to families. To properly understand and confront this practice, it is therefore essential to clarify the legal framework, both under Venezuelan law and international human rights standards. The following section sets out these conceptual clarifications, demonstrating why restrictive interpretations risk trivializing grave violations and how international standards must guide accountability efforts.

V. LEGAL FRAMEWORK AND CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

The 2020 *Enforced Disappearance as a Tool of Political Repression in Venezuela* report defined enforced disappearance as the arbitrary detention or deprivation of liberty by, or with the acquiescence of, state agents, followed by a refusal to provide information on the whereabouts of the disappeared person, the maintenance of that person incommunicado, and a failure to bring them before a competent judicial authority within 48 hours of the initial arrest or detention.¹³³

Relevantly, article 180-A of the Venezuelan Penal Code (O.G. No. 5768 Ext. of 13 April 2005) defines and punishes the crime of enforced disappearance as follows:

Any public authority, whether civil or military, or any person in the service of the State who illegitimately deprives a person of their liberty, and refuses to acknowledge the detention or to provide information about the whereabouts or situation of the disappeared person, preventing the exercise of their constitutional and legal rights and guarantees, shall be punished with a prison sentence of fifteen to twenty-five years. Members or participants of groups or associations with terrorist, insurgent, or subversive purposes who, acting as members or collaborators of such groups or associations, forcibly disappear a person through kidnapping or abduction, shall be punished with the same sentence. Anyone acting as an accomplice or concealer of this crime will be penalized with a prison sentence of twelve to eighteen years.

The crime established in this article will be considered ongoing as long as the destination or location of the victim is not established.

No order or instruction from a public authority, whether civil, military, or of any other kind, nor a state of emergency, exception, or restriction of guarantees, may be invoked to justify forced disappearance.

The criminal action arising from this crime and its punishment will be imprescriptible, and those responsible for its commission will not be able to benefit from any leniency, including pardons and amnesty.

If those who have participated in acts constituting forced disappearances contribute to the reappearance of the victim alive or voluntarily provide information that clarifies cases of forced disappearance, the penalty established in this article may be reduced by two-thirds.

The working definition used on the 2020 report was formulated on the basis of internationally recognized standards,¹³⁴ while also reflecting the procedural requirements set forth in Venezuelan domestic law referenced above. Additionally, the Organic Code of Criminal Procedure of Venezuela provides that within 12 hours of arrest, the apprehended individual must be brought before the Public Prosecutor's Office, which in turn must present the individual before a competent supervisory judge within 36 hours. At that stage, the judge is required to inform the person of the circumstances of the arrest and either request the application of coercive measures or order their release.¹³⁵ While most legal systems establish a limited period between arrest and judicial presentation to assess the lawfulness of detention, it is important to clarify that the 48-

133 Foro Penal & Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights. (2020). *Enforced Disappearance as a Tool of Political Repression in Venezuela*. <https://rfkhumanrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/RFKHumanRights-VenezuelaDisappearances-EnglishReport.pdf>, p.4.

134 Foro Penal & Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights. (2020). *Enforced Disappearance as a Tool of Political Repression in Venezuela*. <https://rfkhumanrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/RFKHumanRights-VenezuelaDisappearances-EnglishReport.pdf>, p.14.

135 Constitution of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, O.G. No. 5453 Ext. 24 March 2000, Article 44 (1); Organic Code of Criminal Procedure, Decree No. 9.042 of 12 June 2012. Article 373, now Article 373 of the Organic Code of Criminal Procedure (O.G. N° 6.644 Ext. of 17 September 2021).

hour reference in our working definition is not intended as a formal threshold for determining whether an enforced disappearance has occurred. As noted then, the amount of time a person spends deprived of liberty is not relevant in classifying an act as an enforced disappearance.¹³⁶

In fact, the 48-hour timeframe to evaluate and analyze the legality of the detention does not negate the detainee's immediate rights. On the contrary, from the first moment of arrest every person has the right to communicate with their lawyers and family members, as provided for in Article 44(2) of the Venezuelan Constitution:

Personal freedom is inviolable, consequently:

(...)

2. Every detained person has the right to communicate immediately with their family members, lawyer, or someone they trust, and these individuals have the right to be informed about the location of the detained person, to be notified immediately of the reasons for the detention, and to have a written record in the file regarding the physical and mental state of the detained person, either by themselves or with the assistance of specialists..."

Additionally, international legal standards emphasize that the core elements of enforced disappearance, arbitrary deprivation of liberty, concealment of the person's fate or whereabouts, and the involvement or acquiescence of state agents, may be present regardless of the duration of the disappearance. The inclusion of the 48-hour benchmark in our working definition responds to the constitutional and procedural requirements set out in Venezuelan law and is relevant insofar as it offers an objective indicator of concealment or procedural irregularity. In this sense, while the duration of incommunicado detention may inform the analysis in the context of Venezuela, it is neither necessary nor sufficient, in and of itself, to determine whether a case of enforced disappearance has taken place.

This is important to clarify, as this issue has been examined recently by the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (FFM). In its report covering the period from 1 September 2023 to 31 August 2024, the FFM specifically addressed 13 cases in the context of the presidential elections in which individuals were presented before a judicial authority within the 48-hour statutory deadline established by Venezuelan law, yet no information regarding their fate or whereabouts had been provided to their relatives during that period of detention. The FFM noted that in some instances, the Attorney General acknowledged the detentions, often without disclosing details, and, in other cases, limited information was made available through social media. According to the Mission, these types of cases pose a challenge, given that under an "extensive interpretation" of international human rights law, they would qualify as cases of enforced disappearance; while, under a "restrictive interpretation", they would not meet the technical definition.¹³⁷

This distinction is not a semantic debate. The choice between an extensive or restrictive interpretation of enforced disappearance can determine whether a case is treated as a grave human rights violation or as an "irregular" detention. In contexts such as Venezuela, where the rule of law has been severely weakened, these interpretative differences are particularly consequential on victims, families, and monitoring efforts.¹³⁸ Additionally, this disjunctive frames the broader conversation on state responsibility,

¹³⁶ Foro Penal & Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights. (2020). *Enforced Disappearance as a Tool of Political Repression in Venezuela*. <https://rfkhumanrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/RFKHumanRights-VenezuelaDisappearances-EnglishReport.pdf>, p.16.

¹³⁷ Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. (2024). *Report of the Independent International Fact-Finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (A/HRC/57/57)*. United Nations Human Rights Council. <https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/57/57>, para.76.

¹³⁸ In 2019, the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances reported on the practice of "short-term" enforced disappearances already being perpetrated against opposition figures all the way back to 2014, see: Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances. (2019). Communications, cases examined, observations and other activities conducted by the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances. In *117th Session (11–15 February 2019) (A/HRC/WGEID/117/1)*.

institutional accountability, individual criminal responsibility, and the extent to which international mechanisms can meaningfully respond to patterns of political repression. It should be noted as well that, in focusing on these shorter-term cases, this report does not overlook the many enforced disappearances in Venezuela that have stretched over months or even years. Those longer episodes form an equally grave part of the Maduro regime's record and must be acknowledged as such, even if the present section concentrates on a particular subset.

We contend that adopting a restrictive interpretation in the Venezuelan context, or indeed in any context governed by an authoritarian regime, carries significant risks. It risks trivializing the seriousness of the violation and allows state authorities to exploit legal ambiguity to shield grave abuses from accountability. This has also been acknowledged by the FFM as it considers that in these so called "short-term enforced disappearances", " ... the authorities played with the boundaries of the law and used subterfuge to violate the rights of detainees".¹³⁹ This debate is also relevant to the question of the reliability and nature of the information provided to families of detainees on their fate and whereabouts. As we analyze further in this report, there are cases in which relatives received vague or informal updates on their loved ones, often through intermediaries or off-the-record remarks. Such instances raise questions as to whether the mere transmission of vague or unofficial information can interrupt the continuous nature of the disappearance, or whether concealment persists in practice.

These two recurring arguments, the duration of the enforced disappearance and the informal or partial information provided to families, risk diverting attention from the core elements of the violation. Both have been raised repeatedly to challenge whether a given case meets the threshold of enforced disappearance. However, as established by various international bodies and jurisprudence, particularly in the Latin American context, neither the duration of the disappearance nor the provision of unofficial or indirect information to the victim's relatives negates the existence of the disappearance.¹⁴⁰ These factors, while relevant to the analysis, cannot override the fundamental criteria established under international law. As we illustrate below, these attempts to disqualify certain acts from being categorized as enforced disappearance have already been addressed by other actors with longstanding experience in documenting and assessing this crime.

In relation to the duration of enforced disappearances, the United Nations Committee on Enforced Disappearances and the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances have issued a joint statement on so-called "short-term enforced disappearances" specifically for the purpose of emphasizing that duration is not a constitutive element of enforced disappearance under international human rights law.¹⁴¹ The joint statement additionally acknowledges that direct and indirect victims face a misleading perception that an enforced disappearance requires a long passage of time among its constitutive elements, still, these two bodies confirmed that "the obligations incumbent on States under the relevant instruments are the same regardless of the duration of an enforced disappearance."¹⁴²

As for the nature of the information provided to the relatives on the fate and whereabouts of the victim, this relates directly to the obligation of States to promptly provide information and maintain up-to-date records, which was already highlighted in the 2020 report.¹⁴³ However, in the current context where off-

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United Nations Human Rights Council. <https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/WGEID/117/1>, p.29, paras.23-25.

139 Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. (2024). *Report of the Independent International Fact-Finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela* (A/HRC/57/57). United Nations Human Rights Council. <https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/57/57>, para.76.

140 See, on the duration of the violation: European Court of Human Rights, *El-Masri v. "The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia"*, Judgement, 13 December 2012 (39630/09), para.240; and on the deprivation of communication as cruel and inhuman treatment: Inter-American Court of Human Rights, *Case of Velásquez Rodríguez vs. Honduras*. Merits. Judgment of July 29, 1988. Series C No. 4, para.156.

141 Committee on Enforced Disappearances & Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances. (2024). *Joint statement on so-called "short-term enforced disappearances"* (CED/C/11). Committee on Enforced Disappearances. <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/4069020?v=pdf>, p.2.

142 Committee on Enforced Disappearances & Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances. (2024). *Joint statement on so-called "short-term enforced disappearances"* (CED/C/11). Committee on Enforced Disappearances. <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/4069020?v=pdf>, para.6.

143 The 2020 report referred to Article XI of the Inter-American Convention on Forced Disappearance of Persons and Articles 17 and 18 of the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearances: Foro Penal & Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights. (2020). *Enforced Disappearance as a Tool of Political Repression in Venezuela*. <https://rfkhumanrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/RFKHumanRights-VenezuelaDisappearances-EnglishReport.pdf>, pp.17-20.

the-record or informal information is cited to argue that an enforced disappearance has not occurred, it becomes necessary to reiterate a few clarifications specific to this issue, as this obligation is central to the core element of the violation, which aims to remove the person from the protection of the law.

In this regard, it is especially concerning how Venezuelan authorities have sought to redefine the concept of enforced disappearance. In February 2025, Attorney General Tarek William Saab asserted: “Enforced disappearance is the kidnapping, the non-presentation before a police or judicial authority of the person, and their subsequent murder. An express enforced disappearance does not exist. Do not start making-up things that are not an enforced disappearance”.¹⁴⁴ According to this reasoning, enforced disappearance would only exist in cases of prolonged detention, would necessarily conclude with the death of the disappeared person, and would exclude situations where the person is eventually brought before judicial authorities, even if they were first held incommunicado, as routinely occurs in Venezuela. Statements such as this one are not only, as demonstrated below, inconsistent with international law but also dangerously distort the concept of enforced disappearance by minimizing practices that fall within its definition and could amount to international crimes.

In its General Comment on Article 10 of the Declaration on the Protection of all Persons from Enforced Disappearance,¹⁴⁵ the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances has noted that in order for a State to fulfill its obligation on promptly providing information on the place of detention of a person, it is not enough for the detention to take place in an officially recognized place. The State must also promptly make information on the place of detention available to the person’s family members, legal counsel, or any other individuals with a legitimate interest. Both the failure to provide such information and any obstacles to accessing it must be regarded as violations of this obligation.¹⁴⁶

This obligation has also been addressed by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights in *Munárriz Escobar et al. vs. Peru*, where the Court found that one of the key characteristics of enforced disappearance is the State’s refusal to acknowledge that the victim remains under its control or to provide information about their whereabouts. This refusal aims to create uncertainty about the person’s whereabouts, fate, to intimidate, and to suppress rights. In cases where the individual remains in State custody, the State, by virtue of its role as guarantor, is not only obligated not to deny the detention but also has the obligation to provide information about the detained person.¹⁴⁷ The contours of said information were further identified by the Court in *Vásquez Durand et al. vs. Ecuador*, where it commented that all detentions, regardless of their motive or duration, must be duly recorded in the pertinent document, clearly stating the causes of the detention, who performed it, the time of detention and the time of release, as well as evidence that the pertinent judge was notified, at a minimum, to protect against any illegal or arbitrary interference with physical liberty.¹⁴⁸ Additionally, in *Kurt v. Turkey*, the European Court of Human Rights considered the anguish and distress suffered by a mother due to the complete absence of official information regarding her son’s disappearance as a factor in its determination that she had been subjected to inhuman and degrading treatment, in violation of Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights.¹⁴⁹

144 Alonso, J. F. (2025, February 5). Tarek William Saab, fiscal general de Venezuela: “Usan los derechos humanos para dañar nuestra imagen, porque no formamos parte de la órbita de los centros de poder.” *BBC News Mundo*. <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/articles/ctwe5p4dp9do>.

145 United Nations General Assembly. (1993). Declaration on the Protection of all Persons from Enforced Disappearance (A/RES/47/133), 18 December 1992, Article 10:1. Any person deprived of liberty shall be held in an officially recognized place of detention and, in conformity with national law, be brought before a judicial authority promptly after detention. 2. Accurate information on the detention of such persons and their place or places of detention, including transfers, shall be made promptly available to their family members, their counsel or to any other persons having a legitimate interest in the information unless a wish to the contrary has been manifested by the persons concerned. 3. An official up-to-date register of all persons deprived of their liberty shall be maintained in every place of detention. Additionally, each State shall take steps to maintain similar centralized registers. The information contained in these registers shall be made available to the persons mentioned in the preceding paragraph, to any judicial or other competent and independent national authority and to any other competent authority entitled under the law of the State concerned or any international legal instrument to which a State concerned is a party, seeking to trace the whereabouts of a detained person.

146 Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances. (1996). *Report of the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances* (E/CN.4/1997/34). United Nations Economic and Social Council Commission on Human Rights. <https://docs.un.org/en/E/CN.4/1997/34>, para. 26.

147 Inter-American Court of Human Rights, Case of Munárriz Escobar y otros. vs. Peru. Preliminary Objection, Merits, Reparations and Costs. Judgment of August 20, 2018. Series C No. 355, para.80.

148 Inter-American Court of Human Rights, Case of Vásquez Durand y otros. vs. Ecuador. Preliminary Objections, Merits, Reparations and Costs. Judgment of February 15, 2017. Series C No. 332, para.127; This is compatible as well with Articles 17(3) of the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance and 11 of the Inter-American Convention on Forced Disappearance of Persons.

149 European Court of Human Rights, Kurt v. Turkey, Judgement, 25 May 1998 (15/1997/799/1002), paras.133-134.

In sum, the issues of duration and the nature of information provided to families are not mere technicalities, but fundamental aspects that shape how enforced disappearance is addressed. International human rights bodies and jurisprudence across regions have consistently affirmed that neither the brevity of the detention nor the provision of vague or unofficial information is sufficient to disqualify an act as enforced disappearance. In the Venezuelan context, where institutional opacity and deliberate obfuscation are recurrent features, applying a restrictive interpretation risks normalizing practices that are intended precisely to place victims outside the protection of the law. A contextually grounded understanding of enforced disappearance remains essential, not only for legal classification, but for ensuring accountability and acknowledging the suffering of victims and their families.

Against this backdrop, the following cases aim to illustrate how enforced disappearance continues to be deployed as a method of political repression in Venezuela. Drawing from the data-based conclusions and analytical framework developed in this report, these cases provide concrete examples of the patterns and methods described, placing particular emphasis on the human impact of these violations. While not exhaustive, they seek to contextualize the legal findings by documenting the individual experiences of those subjected to enforced disappearance. In doing so, this section aims to underscore that beyond statistics and legal categories, each instance of enforced disappearance represents the disruption of a human life and the deliberate infliction of suffering on individuals, families, and communities by the Maduro regime.

VI. REPRESENTATIVE CASES

Eduardo Torres Muñoz



Name: Eduardo Torres Muñoz

Age: 49

Role or affiliation: Lawyer, PROVEA

Location of disappearance: Libertador Municipality, Capital District

Status: Forcibly Disappeared (Ongoing)

Motive: *Intimidation*

Eduardo José Torres Muñoz, 49, is a Venezuelan lawyer and long-standing human rights defender. He is a member of the legal team at the Venezuelan Education-Action Program on Human Rights (PROVEA) and has represented hundreds of victims of State violence, both nationally and before international mechanisms. Eduardo also teaches law at the Central University of Venezuela and serves as a union leader, holding the position of Secretary for Claims and Collective Bargaining within the Association of University Professionals in Administrative and Technical Roles. He resides in the Libertador municipality of Caracas with his wife, Emiselys Núñez.

His primary legal focus has been on enforced disappearance cases. He has worked closely with mothers, wives, and relatives of disappeared persons, offering legal counsel in emblematic and ongoing cases of repression in Venezuela. Torres's prominence as a PROVEA human rights advocate, academic, and union leader made him a well-known figure within Venezuela's civil society. His work defending victims of enforced disappearance placed him at particular risk in the context of heightened repression ahead of the May 2025 parliamentary and gubernatorial elections.

On 9 May 2025, after finishing a meeting at the Parque Central Towers in Caracas, Torres called his wife to inform her he was walking home, located a few blocks from Fuerzas Armadas Avenue. That was the last communication she received from him. From the following day, Torres' family and colleagues from PROVEA visited multiple detention centers in Caracas, including SEBIN headquarters at El Helicoide, several National Police facilities (Maripérez, Boleíta, Petare), and the DGCIM offices in Boleíta Norte. Officials at all these locations denied knowledge of his detention or whereabouts.

It was not until 90 hours after his detention that the Attorney General, Tarek William Saab, confirmed via social media that Torres had been detained and indicted on charges of conspiracy, terrorism, treason, and criminal association.¹⁵⁰ However, no formal communication was made to his family or legal

150 CNN en Español. (2025, May 14). Fiscalía de Venezuela confirma la detención de abogado de la ONG Provea, a quien acusa de varios delitos. *CNN en Español*. <https://cnnespanol.cnn.com/2025/05/13/venezuela/fiscalia-detencion-abogado-provea-orig/>; Fiscal General de Venezuela - Tarek William Saab [@mpublicove]. (2025, May 13). "Fiscal General Tarek William Saab rechazó acusaciones temerarias del coordinador general de Provea" (Primera parte) El Fiscal General Tarek William Saab rechazó las acusaciones temerarias realizadas por Oscar Murillo, coordinador general de Provea, en las cuales denuncia la supuesta desaparición de un colaborador de su organización. El Fiscal General refirió que estos ataques a las actuaciones del sistema justicia venezolano en contra de los grupos desestabilizadores y contrarios a la paz de la República forman parte de una campaña sostenida para garantizar la impunidad. En su declaración, Saab informó que, en el caso de Eduardo Torres, contrario a lo que señala este vocero, ha sido detenido por su vinculación con una trama conspirativa para generar violencia durante las elecciones programadas para el 25 de mayo. Eduardo Torres a través de una estructura denominada Nodos de Formación Ciudadana, financiada por agentes extranjeros, usaba talleres de formación como fachada para organizar focos de violencia llamando a la destrucción de los centros electorales y propagando mensajes de odio y aniquilación hacia las autoridades del Estado legítimamente constituidas. Estos mensajes, eran difundidos además por este ciudadano, de forma pública a través de redes sociales. En dicha causa hay varias personas involucradas que ya han sido identificadas y se encuentran solicitadas por los tribunales competentes. Este ciudadano, destacó el Fiscal, fue presentado conforme lo establecen los lapsos procesales, garantizándole su derecho a la defensa y se le decretó medida privada de libertad por los delitos de conspiración,

representatives about his location, defense counsel, or the tribunal involved in his case. His family attempted to file an habeas corpus before the Ministry of Justice and later with the Criminal Judicial Circuit of Metropolitan Caracas.¹⁵¹ The filing was initially rejected and only formally admitted on 12 May 2025.¹⁵² By that time, over a month after his disappearance, his relatives still had no access to him and had not been informed of his detention conditions. On 17 May, PROVEA confirmed that SEBIN agents had finally recognized that Eduardo was being held at El Helicoide.¹⁵³

The only contact made by the family was with the public defender assigned to Torres' case, who confirmed that Eduardo was forbidden from receiving visitors. His wife reported searching hospitals and detention centers across the capital immediately after losing contact. She emphasized the particular cruelty of his disappearance, noting that his legal work was centered precisely on the kind of violations now being inflicted on him.¹⁵⁴ On 9 June 2025, 25 international civil society organizations signed an open letter calling for his release and raising alarm over the denial of access to his legal team and family.¹⁵⁵ His case was also recently highlighted by the FFM, as exemplary of the lack of legal protection human rights defenders have in Venezuela.¹⁵⁶ On 25 June 2025, Eduardo's father, Juan Torres, issued a public appeal calling for his release and denouncing the conditions of his detention. In a message posted on social

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terrorismo, traición a la patria y asociación. Instagram. [@mpublicove](https://www.instagram.com/p/DJm4H4qpVKS/?utm_source=ig_embed&ig_id=a49f74a0-54f2-43d6-9fd3-63ceafd7876b-; Fiscal General de Venezuela - Tarek William Saab). (2025b, May 13). (Segunda Parte) En este sentido, el Ministerio Público se encuentra evaluando desde el punto de vista jurídico si se procede a accionar en respeto a la legalidad interna de Venezuela frente a estas acusaciones temerarias realizadas por Murillo, que son utilizadas en el exterior para agredir a la Constitución y al pueblo venezolano. El Fiscal General reiteró que en todos los procedimientos penales del país existe un estricto apego a la legalidad, al debido proceso y los principios de derechos humanos que contempla nuestro ordenamiento jurídico. Instagram. https://www.instagram.com/p/DJm4ZVYJf3j/?utm_source=ig_embed&ig_id=d3f90622-deb9-424c-bb2a-9cc3b5fc336a.

- 151 PROVEA [@Provea]. (2025, May 12). *Tras más de 7 horas en el Palacio de Justicia, la Sr. Carolina Molinos, Presidenta Circuito Judicial Penal de Caracas, se negó a recibir el Hábeas Corpus a favor del defensor Eduardo Torres. Desaparecido desde hace 52 horas. #DóndeEstáEduardo Esto confirma la política de Estado de negar la admisión de recursos de Hábeas Corpus, incluso en casos urgentes como este. A las 8PM ninguna autoridad policial o militar ha dado información sobre su paradero, ni sobre los posibles motivos o condiciones de detención en las que se encuentra Eduardo Torres. De acuerdo con la información de testigos, Eduardo fue visto por última vez el pasado viernes a las 4PM en Parque Central, Caracas, luego de asistir a una reunión. Sus familiares sostuvieron comunicación con él a esa misma hora, en la que el activista informó que se dirigía a su casa, pero nunca llegó. Hoy, miembros de nuestro equipo legal permanecieron por más de 7 horas a las puertas del Palacio de Justicia, esperando una "autorización superior" que permitiera la consignación del recurso Hábeas Corpus a favor de nuestro compañero Eduardo Torres. Recordamos que el Hábeas Corpus es una acción necesaria y urgente, especialmente ante detenciones arbitrarias y desapariciones forzadas, como la de Eduardo Torres, detenido desde el viernes 9 de mayo, sin que hasta ahora se conozca el lugar de su detención ni el organismo responsable. No puede normalizarse esta práctica. Es inaceptable que se mantenga una política de bloqueo judicial contra un derecho que pertenece a las víctimas y cuya recepción es una obligación del Poder Judicial. Convocamos a los colegios de abogados del país a pronunciarse y rechazar esta política de negación de justicia. Estas acciones afectan directamente a las víctimas, obstaculizan el ejercicio profesional del derecho y atentan contra el derecho al debido proceso de cualquier persona que intente ejercer una acción de Hábeas Corpus en Venezuela. La recepción y admisión de la acción de Hábeas Corpus no es un acto discrecional, es un derecho consagrado en el Art. 27 de la Constitución Nacional y en los artículos 2, 3 y 4 de la Ley Orgánica de Amparo a la Libertad y Seguridad Personal, por lo que las autoridades judiciales están en la obligación de cumplir lo establecido en la CRBV y la ley y garantizar el derecho a la tutela judicial efectiva. Recordamos también que Torres es beneficiario de medidas cautelares de protección de la @CIDH por amenazas a su labor. Es responsabilidad del Estado venezolano garantizar la vida e integridad de Eduardo. Exigimos respeto al debido proceso y todos los procedimientos en el marco de la ley. @MinpublicoVEN @TarekWilliamSaab @MijpVzla @Defensoria_Vzla. X (Formerly Twitter). https://x.com/_Provea/status/1921720298686009776.*
- 152 PROVEA [@Provea]. (2025a, May 12). *Este lunes #12Mayo acudimos a la Sala Constitucional del TSJ a presentar un recurso de Hábeas Corpus a favor de nuestro compañero Eduardo Torres, detenido arbitrariamente el pasado viernes 09 de mayo y quien se encuentra en condición de desaparición forzada #DóndeEstáEduardo En compañía de la esposa y la madre del activista de DD.HH, ejercimos esta acción para solicitar a las autoridades judiciales que exijan información a los organismos policiales y/o militares que permita conocer el paradero y las condiciones de reclusión en las que se encuentra Eduardo Torres. Insistimos en que, ante la ausencia de información oficial sobre el paradero de Torres y sin haber sido presentado ante la autoridad judicial, estamos en presencia de un nuevo caso de desaparición forzada y de abierta violación al art. 44 de la Constitución y al art. 236 del Código Orgánico Procesal Penal, que establecen el derecho a la defensa y la obligación de presentación ante tribunales dentro de las 48 horas siguientes a la detención. Recordamos que este domingo, la esposa de Eduardo Torres, junto a miembros de nuestro equipo, esperó por más de 7 horas a las puertas del Palacio de Justicia de Caracas para que fuera recibido el escrito de Hábeas Corpus, pero las autoridades del Circuito Judicial Penal de Caracas, encabezadas por la jueza rectora Carolina Molinos Romero, no "autorizaron" la recepción del documento sin ofrecer detalles y en abierta violación del Art. 27 de la Constitución Nacional y de los artículos 2, 3 y 4 de la Ley Orgánica de Amparo a la Libertad y Seguridad Personal. Denunciamos y lamentamos que la negativa de los tribunales penales de no recibir escritos de Hábeas Corpus, se haya convertido en una práctica reiterada que viola los Pactos Internacionales de protección de Derechos Humanos, la Constitución y las leyes, y lesiona severamente el derecho a la tutela judicial efectiva generando graves riesgos para la vida y la integridad personal de las víctimas y sus familiares. Reiteramos que el Estado venezolano es responsable de garantizar la vida e integridad de nuestro compañero Eduardo Torres. Exigimos información sobre su paradero y su libertad plena e inmediata. X (Formerly Twitter). https://x.com/_Provea/status/1921993966146171046; Efecto Cocuyo. (2025, May 13). *Saab confirma detención de Eduardo Torres y amenaza a coordinador de Provea. Efecto Cocuyo.* <https://efectococuyo.com/politica/saab-confirma-detencion-de-eduardo-torres-y-amenaza-a-coordinador-de-provea/>.*
- 153 PROVEA [@Provea]. (2025, May 17). *Atención Hoy #17Mayo y tras 8 días negando su paradero, finalmente funcionarios del Sebin reconocieron que el defensor Eduardo Torres se encuentra detenido en los calabozos de El Helicoide. #LiberenAEduardoTorres Informaron que no tiene derecho a visitas, negando contacto con sus familiares y abogados de confianza. Violando su derecho a comunicarse. La última vez que Torres habló con su familia fue el viernes 9 de mayo a las 4:00 PM, cuando informó que iba caminando desde Parque Central hacia su casa por el centro de Caracas. Nunca llegó. Eduardo Torres, abogado laboral, activista y miembro de PROVEA, cuenta con medidas cautelares otorgadas por la @CIDH debido a las amenazas y hostigamientos que ha sufrido por su labor como defensor de derechos humanos. Exigimos: Información oficial sobre los cargos que se le imputan. Acceso inmediato a comunicación con su familia y abogados de confianza. Cese del aislamiento. Respeto a las garantías judiciales y a las medidas cautelares. Protección de su vida e integridad. Libertad plena. X (Formerly Twitter). https://x.com/_Provea/status/1923818425958211842.*
- 154 Redacción NTN24. (2025, May 12). *"Hemos recorrido los hospitales y no está": esposa del activista venezolano Eduardo Torres desaparecido en Caracas. NTN24.* <https://www.ntn24.com/noticias-actualidad/hemos-recorrido-los-hospitales-y-no-esta-esposa-del-activista-venezolano-eduardo-torres-desaparecido-en-caracas-555507>.
- 155 PROVEA. (2025, June 9). *Carta abierta al Gobierno de Venezuela por la liberación de Eduardo Torres, defensor de los derechos humanos* [Press release]. <https://provea.org/destacados/carta-abierta-al-gobierno-de-venezuela-por-la-liberacion-de-eduardo-torres-defensor-de-los-derechos-humanos/>.
- 156 Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. (2025, May 14). *Venezuela Fact-Finding Mission urges end to State use of isolation against detained opponents and warns about lack of effective judicial protection* [Press release]. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/05/venezuela-fact-finding-mission-urges-end-state-use-isolation-against>.

media, he described the anguish of having no contact with his son for over 40 days. He underscored that Eduardo’s “crime” was defending labor and human rights within the framework of the Constitution and laws of Venezuela. Emphasizing his son’s role as a lawyer, husband, and father of two, including a 12-year-old daughter who asks for him daily, Juan Torres questioned how others would feel if a loved one were held in similar conditions.¹⁵⁷

Lucas Hunter



Name: Lucas Hunter
Age: 37
Role or affiliation: Tourist
Location of disappearance: Paraguachón, Colombia (near Venezuelan border)
Date of Disappearance: 7 January 2025
Status: Released on 18 July 2025
Motive: *Hostage-taking*

Lucas Hunter, 37, is a dual French-American national who traveled to the La Guajira region of northern Colombia on 28 December 2024 for a holiday centered around sightseeing and kitesurfing. He had planned the trip with his sister, Sophie Hunter, who stayed behind due to illness. Lucas rented a motorbike in Palomino, Colombia to explore the area’s renowned kitesurf spots, with plans to return to work in London on 14 January 2025.

On 7 January 2025, Lucas inadvertently approached the Venezuelan border checkpoint at Paraguachón, most likely due to a navigational error in a region with poor connectivity. While still on Colombian soil, he was arrested by Venezuelan military forces. He was then taken to an Administrative Service for Identification, Migration and Immigration Affairs office (SAIME) and reportedly held in the presence of agents from the GNB, DGCIM, and other police forces.

Between 7 and 8 January 2025, Lucas sent WhatsApp voice notes and messages to his sister describing his situation. He stressed that Venezuelan authorities were aware he had not intended to cross into Venezuela and would be released shortly. He expressed confusion and distress over the situation due to his inability to communicate in Spanish and the intimidating presence of security agents. His last confirmed communication occurred on 8 January 2025 at 9:00 a.m. (UTC-4). Since his detention, neither his family nor French or U.S. consular authorities had received formal information about his status, charges, or location. No arrest warrant, charge sheet, or judicial order justifying his detention was ever issued. Repeated inquiries by the French Embassy in Caracas went unanswered during his detention. Mr. Hunter, who is asthmatic and requires an inhaler, was reportedly denied medical attention. The absence of interpretation services and his prolonged incommunicado detention had placed him in a situation of extreme vulnerability.

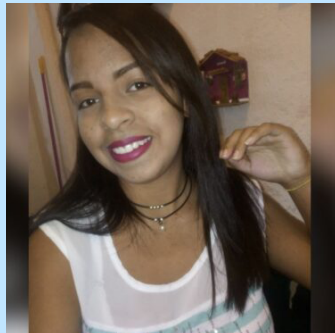
157 PROVEA [@_Provea]. (2025, June 25). “Estamos sufriendo” El padre de Eduardo Torres, Juan Torres, alza la voz tras más de 40 días sin saber las condiciones de su hijo. Eduardo cumple 49 años este #25Jun, aislado en el Sebin El Helicoide, sin visitas ni contacto con sus abogados o familia #LiberenAEduardoTorres: “El delito de Eduardo Torres es defender derechos humanos y laborales a través de la justicia que se haga con la Constitución y las leyes. Si eso es un delito, entonces todos los venezolanos estamos condenados”. Eduardo es abogado, trabajador de la UCV, defensor de derechos y miembro de PROVEA. También es esposo, hijo, hermano, padre de dos niños: “Tiene esposa y tiene dos hijos, uno mayor y una niña de 12 años que todos los días pregunta por su padre”. “Les pondría un ejemplo. . . Ustedes también tienen padre, tienen madre, tienen hermano, tienen hijo, tienen familia, tienen amigos. . . ¿Qué sentirían si tuvieran un familiar en estas condiciones? Eso es lo que estamos pensando nosotros”. Su familia exige su libertad inmediata y el fin de la persecución contra quienes defienden derechos en Venezuela. @MinpublicoVEN @MijpVzla Eduardo es beneficiario de medidas cautelares de protección de la @CIDH por el riesgo de su labor. JUSTICIA. X (Formerly Twitter). https://x.com/_Provea/status/1937964714698657890.

Lucas' family, particularly his sister, led extensive advocacy efforts. Repeated engagement by Sophie Hunter with consular offices and the Permanent Mission of Venezuela to the UN in Geneva did not result in any official acknowledgment or information. On 12 March 2025, the U.S. State Department granted Lucas the status of wrongful detainee.¹⁵⁸ Furthermore, on 22 March 2025, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) granted precautionary measures in favor of Lucas.¹⁵⁹ Petitions have been submitted to both the UN Working Group on Enforced Disappearances and the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, supported by his sister Sophie, Foro Penal, and RFKHR. Media coverage has highlighted the cruelty of his detention and the psychological toll on his parents, whose health deteriorated under the stress of prolonged uncertainty.¹⁶⁰

On 18 July 2025, after 192 days of incommunicado detention, Lucas Hunter was released as part of a coordinated prisoner exchange between the governments of Venezuela, El Salvador, and the United States. His release occurred alongside that of nine other U.S. nationals detained in Venezuela, in return for the repatriation of Venezuelan nationals previously deported from the United States and held in a maximum-security facility in El Salvador.¹⁶¹

- 158 Psalidakis, D., & Landay, J. (2025, March 7). US determined there are 9 wrongfully detained Americans in Venezuela. *Reuters*. <https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/rubio-monday-determined-there-are-9-wrongfully-detained-americans-venezuela-2025-03-07/>.
- 159 Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. (2025, May 22) Precautionary Measure No.247-25 Lucas Jonas Hunter regarding Venezuela (Resolution 27/2025). https://www.oas.org/en/iachr/decisions/mc/2025/res_27-25_mc_247-25_ve_en.pdf.
- 160 Barráez, S. (2025, March 6). Militares venezolanos detuvieron a un franco estadounidense en territorio colombiano: lleva 58 días desaparecido. *Infobae*. <https://www.infobae.com/venezuela/2025/03/06/militares-venezolanos-detuvieron-a-un-franco-estadounidense-en-territorio-colombiano-lleva-58-dias-desaparecido/>; Campaignolle, A. & Radio France Internationale. (2025, April 10). Au Venezuela, les prisonniers étrangers, monnaie d'échange pour le gouvernement. *RFI*. <https://www.rfi.fr/fr/monde/20250410-venezuela-prisonniers-etrange-monnaie-d-%C3%A9change-gouvernement-lucas-hunter>; Cotovio, V. (2025, April 17). La desesperada búsqueda de la familia de un estadounidense detenido en Venezuela. *CNN*. <https://cnnespanol.cnn.com/2025/04/17/venezuela/lucas-hunter-estadounidense-detenido-venezuela-orix>; Cotovio, V. (2025, April 17). Sister describes moment she found out her brother had been taken by Venezuela. *CNN*. https://edition.cnn.com/2025/04/17/world/video/american-detained-in-venezuela-pkg-digvid?fbclid=IwZXh0bgNhZW0CMTEAAAR6Zy-LOGjqfGILFL4tr3NAeVuoG8xgjN446dfeNqj50rbD5kTuUpuOK4yCuEQ_aem_KmAxrOqqzrvH7mFawscn-g; Delille, B., & Mariani, P. (2025, March 12). Au Venezuela, le touriste franco-américain Lucas Hunter potentiellement pris au piège de la diplomatie des otages de Nicolás Maduro. *Libération*. https://www.liberation.fr/international/amerique/au-venezuela-le-touriste-franco-americain-lucas-hunter-potentiellement-pris-au-piege-de-la-diplomatie-des-otages-de-nicolas-maduro-20250312_33iWYAE27JG5XASHLMOC2UAINQ/?fbclid=PAZXh0bgNhZW0CMTEAAafeG7Lvi-lbAKY8EER_S_Jzp7BdubF6ctaHETqFHfgDxglYzJ8LCzr4fAvrw_aem_8vD9nYmXAze81Pa7L0FePw; Hansler, J. (2025, March 12). This American went to Colombia to kite surf. He's been detained in Venezuela for months. *CNN*. <https://edition.cnn.com/2025/03/12/politics/american-detained-venezuela-lucas-hunter/index.html>; Le Dauphiné Libéré & Agence France-Presse. (2025, March 13). « Nous n'avons aucune preuve de vie » : Lucas Hunter, un Franco-Américain détenu depuis deux mois. *Le Dauphiné Libéré*. <https://www.ledauphine.com/faits-divers-justice/2025/03/13/nous-n-avons-aucune-preuve-de-vie-lucas-hunter-un-franco-americain-detenu-depuis-deux-mois>; Le Figaro & Agence France-Presse. (2025, March 13). « Nous n'avons aucune preuve de vie » : un Franco-Américain détenu au Venezuela depuis deux mois. *Le Figaro*. <https://www.lefigaro.fr/flash-actu/un-franco-americain-detenu-au-venezuela-depuis-deux-mois-20250313>; Le Parisien & Agence France-Presse. (2025, March 13). « Nous n'avons aucune preuve de vie » : Lucas Hunter, un Franco-Américain de 37 ans, détenu au Venezuela depuis janvier. *Le Parisien*. <https://www.leparisien.fr/faits-divers/nous-navons-aucune-preuve-de-vie-lucas-hunter-un-franco-americain-de-37-ans-detenu-au-venezuela-depuis-janvier-13-03-2025-VU44NMAKCVHJBQGDVNBTP04.php>; Pelisek, C. (2025, March 13). American Kite Surfer's Dream Trip Turns into Nightmare in Venezuela, as Family Pleads for Release After Months in Captivity. *People.com*. <https://people.com/american-kite-surfers-dream-trip-nightmare-venezuela-11696615>; Psalidakis, D., & Landay, J. (2025, March 7). US determined there are 9 wrongfully detained Americans in Venezuela. *Reuters*. <https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/rubio-monday-determined-there-are-9-wrongfully-detained-americans-venezuela-2025-03-07/>.
- 161 Roston, A., Hesson, T., & Sequera, V. (2025, July 19). El Salvador sends detained Venezuelans home in swap for Americans. *Reuters*. <https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/el-salvador-sends-detained-venezuelans-home-swap-americans-2025-07-19/>.

Maykelis Borges



Name: Maykelis Borges

Age: 26

Role or affiliation: Partner of government-opposing military officer, Lt. Cristian Hernández Castillo

Location of disappearance: Libertador Municipality, Caracas

Date of Disappearance: 29 January 2025

Status: Forcibly Disappeared (Ongoing)

Motive: *Extraction*

Maykelis Borges is a 26-year-old Venezuelan woman from the Jardines de El Valle neighborhood, located in the Libertador municipality of Caracas. She is a trained laboratory assistant but had been unemployed at the time of her detention. To support herself, she had been selling birthday cakes from home. Maykelis is also the partner of Lieutenant Cristian Hernández Castillo, a military officer who publicly opposed the Maduro regime. Hernández has since been accused of conspiracy.¹⁶²

At the time of her disappearance, Maykelis was two months pregnant and suffered from multiple health conditions that required strict medical oversight. These included iron-deficiency anemia, chronic urinary tract infections, low hemoglobin, arterial hypertension, and a heightened risk of preeclampsia, a condition that can be life-threatening without proper treatment. Her disappearance raised serious concerns about her physical well-being and the health of her unborn child.¹⁶³

On 29 January 2025, she was detained while running an errand toward Altamira alongside her friend, Eudi Jesús Andrade Boscán, a moto-taxi driver and motorcycle spare parts seller. Both were reportedly intercepted by DGCIM officers. No warrant was presented, and no official record of her arrest was made available to her family.¹⁶⁴ That same day, her family began looking for her, visiting various reclusion centers, the Attorney General's Office, and the offices of the Scientific, Penal, and Criminal Investigations Corps (CICPC). On 30 January, they filed a criminal complaint with CICPC's Special Victims Investigation Division. As of the date of this report, the family has received no formal confirmation of her detention or whereabouts. "Why is there no official information on where they are and why they were detained?" her family continues to ask.¹⁶⁵

Her partner, Cristian Hernández Castillo, has been accused by the Maduro regime of taking part in a military conspiracy. Cristian's uncle, Henry Alberto Castillo Molero, was also detained on 24 January 2025 in connection with the same accusations, reportedly as a mean to exert pressure on Cristian.¹⁶⁶ On

¹⁶² Tal Cual. (2025, May 17). Voluntad Popular: Presa política Maykelis Borges está en riesgo y puede perder a su bebé – Correo del Caroní. *Correo Del Caroní*. <https://correodelcaroni.com/pais-politico/voluntad-popular-presa-politica-maykelis-borges-esta-en-riesgo-y-puede-perder-a-su-bebe/>.

¹⁶³ La Patilla. (2025, May 19). Vente Venezuela exige fe de vida de Maykelis Borges, embarazada y con problemas de salud. *La Patilla*. <https://lapatilla.com/2025/05/19/vente-venezuela-exige-fe-de-vida-de-maykelis-borges-embarazada-y-con-problemas-de-salud/>.

¹⁶⁴ El Nacional. (2025a, May 15). Presa política Maykelis Borges enfrenta amenaza de aborto en la Dgcim. *El Nacional*. https://www.elnacional.com/2025/05/maykelis-borges-enfrenta-amenaza-de-aborto-en-la-dgcim/#google_vignette.

¹⁶⁵ Barráez, S. (2025, February 2). El régimen de Venezuela secuestró a la esposa embarazada de un teniente señalado de conspiración. *Infobae*. <https://www.infobae.com/venezuela/2025/02/02/el-regimen-de-venezuela-secuestro-a-la-esposa-embarazada-de-un-teniente-senalado-de-conspiracion/>.

¹⁶⁶ Redacción Crónica Uno. (2025, February 25). Familiares de tenientes en el exilio cumplen un mes desaparecidos, aunque el Estado admite su detención. *Crónica Uno*. <https://cronica.uno/familiares-de-tenientes-en-el-exilio-cumplen-un-mes-desaparecidos-aunque-el-estado-admite-su-detencion/>; PROVEA [@_Provea]. (2025, February 12). *Recibimos otra denuncia de presunta desaparición forzada desde hace 19 días a manos de la DGCIM contra familiar de teniente FANB en el exilio. El 24 de enero, Henry Castillo Molero fue detenido arbitrariamente en su residencia en El Valle, Caracas. Se desconoce su paradero. Según testimonios, funcionarios del DGCIM lo sacaron de su casa a las 10:00AM, en un operativo que incluyó el cierre de accesos en la zona y un despliegue policial. Desde su desaparición, drones han sobrevolado el edificio*

13 February 2025, Diosdado Cabello held a press conference linking both men to a supposed military plot, labeling them as terrorists.¹⁶⁷ While Cristian had indeed been part of a group of military personnel who denounced and resisted abuses by the government, this broad criminalization of dissent forms part of a longer pattern of repression targeting former members of the armed forces.

According to the Comité por la Libertad de los Presos Políticos, Maykelis could be currently held at the Instituto Nacional de Orientación Femenina (INOF) in Los Teques, approximately 29 kilometers outside Caracas. She is being held incommunicado, with no confirmed access to her family or legal counsel. Given her pregnancy and health complications, her ongoing disappearance under these conditions poses an acute risk to both her life and that of her unborn child.¹⁶⁸ She is in desperate need of an ultrasound and medical care.¹⁶⁹

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de su familia durante las noches, en lo que parece ser un intento de intimidación. Su detención podría ser un mecanismo de presión contra su sobrino, el teniente Cristian Hernández, exiliado y señalado por el gobierno de Maduro de conspiración. A pesar de la insistencia de sus familiares, en la sede del DGCIM en Boleíta niegan tener información sobre el paradero de Henry. La desaparición forzada está prohibida por la Constitución de Venezuela. Ninguna autoridad pública, sea civil o militar, incluso en estados de emergencia, excepción o restricción de garantías, puede practicar, permitir o tolerar la desaparición forzada de personas. Art. 45 CRBV. Además, el artículo 44 garantiza la inviolabilidad de la libertad personal, estableciendo que toda persona detenida tiene derecho a comunicarse de inmediato con sus familiares y abogado, y a ser informado de los motivos de su detención. El Estado venezolano debe informar sobre su paradero, respetar su derecho a la defensa y garantizar su vida e integridad personal. Exigimos la aparición con vida de Henry Castillo Molero @MinpublicoVEN @Defensoria_Vzla. X (Formerly Twitter). https://x.com/_Provea/status/1889452384201613700.

167 Venezolana de Televisión (VTV). (2025, February 13). *Vpdte. Sec. Cabello muestra vinculación de Operación Aurora y nuevos detenidos por planes terroristas* [Video]. Dailymotion. <https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x9e6zru>.

168 Comité por la Libertad de los Presos Políticos [@clippve]. (2025, July 10). ¡LIBERTAD PARA MAYKELIS BORGES! Maykelis Jacqueline Borges Ortuño tiene 34 semanas de embarazo y está detenida arbitrariamente desde el 29 de enero, cuando fue capturada en Altamira por funcionarios de la DGCIM. Desde entonces, permanece recluida en los calabozos del INOF, sin que se le haya permitido comparecer ante un tribunal ni contar con defensa privada. Su situación médica es grave: padece hipertensión arterial, tiene baja hemoglobina, sufre constantes infecciones urinarias y corre riesgo de preeclampsia. Estas condiciones ponen en peligro su vida y la de su bebé. Maykelis debe dar a luz en libertad, en su hogar, rodeada de cuidado y dignidad, no tras las rejas, en medio del abandono institucional. Exigimos al Estado venezolano: •Su liberación inmediata. •Atención médica especializada y urgente. •Respeto a su derecho al debido proceso y a la defensa privada. Parir no puede ser sinónimo de castigo. La vida y la maternidad deben ser protegidas, no perseguidas. #LibertadParaMaykelis #LiberenALasPresasPolíticas #LibertadParaTodos #VocesDeJusticia. X (Formerly Twitter). <https://x.com/clippve/status/1943312585924678046>.

169 Justicia, Encuentro y Perdón [@JEPvzla]. (2027, July 29). *Las denuncias por la situación de detención y el estado de salud de Maykelis Borges y Franyer José Hernández Valladares, quienes enfrentan vulneraciones graves a sus derechos humanos, nos llena de preocupación y ratifica nuestras denuncias sobre la existencia de personas presas por razones políticas en delicado estado de salud que requieren atención médica urgente. Maykelis Borges, detenida desde el 29 de enero, se encuentra en un embarazo de alto riesgo con 38 semanas de gestación y presenta signos de preeclampsia. A pocos días de su fecha estimada de parto, no ha recibido los estudios médicos necesarios, incluyendo un ecosonograma urgente, ni el seguimiento clínico adecuado. Su privación de libertad, presuntamente utilizada como medida coercitiva para obligar la entrega de un tercero, representa una clara violación a sus derechos humanos. Por otra parte, Franyer José Hernández Valladares, abogado y defensor de derechos humanos, detenido el 10 de abril bajo cargos de terrorismo e incitación al odio, presenta un cuadro clínico crítico que incluye cirrosis hepática, litiasis renal bilateral, hipertensión arterial, colonopatía, escabiosis infecciosa, entre otras patologías graves. A más de 100 días de su detención, no ha recibido atención médica especializada ni la dieta prescrita para su condición, lo que configura un trato cruel, inhumano y degradante. Estos casos reflejan un patrón sistemático de detenciones arbitrarias y la utilización del sistema penal para represalias políticas, vulnerando el debido proceso y los estándares internacionales de protección de los derechos humanos. Exhortamos a las autoridades a garantizar la atención médica oportuna y adecuada, respetar la integridad física y psicológica de estas personas privadas de libertad, y cumplir con las obligaciones constitucionales e internacionales en materia de derechos humanos. #JusticiaYLibertad. X (Formerly Twitter). <https://x.com/JEPvzla/status/1950214223877075200>.*

Nahuel Gallo



Name: Nahuel Gallo

Age: 34

Occupation: First Corporal, Argentine National Gendarmerie

Location of disappearance: San Antonio del Táchira Airport

Date of Disappearance: 08 December 2024

Status: *Propaganda / Hostage-taking*

Nahuel Agustín Gallo is a 34-year-old Argentine national and a First Corporal in the Argentine National Gendarmerie. At the time of his disappearance, he was on vacation and had traveled to Venezuela to visit his wife, María Gómez, a Venezuelan sports journalist, and their two-year-old daughter. The family resides in Mendoza, Argentina, where Gallo was stationed at a border post near Chile. María had returned to Caracas temporarily to care for her mother. According to their family, the trip was personal and had no connection to his work with the Gendarmerie.¹⁷⁰

Gallo flew from Santiago, Chile to Bogotá, Colombia, and then traveled by land to Cúcuta. On 8 December 2024, he crossed into Venezuela via the Francisco de Paula Santander International Bridge in Ureña and made his way to the San Antonio del Táchira airport, where he intended to board a flight to Caracas.¹⁷¹ However, after undergoing a document check around 8:40 a.m., Venezuelan authorities detained him, confiscated his phone, and he was left incommunicado.¹⁷²

At 10:57 a.m., Gallo managed to call his wife using a taxi driver's phone, telling her he was being taken for more questioning. That was the last time they spoke. The taxi driver later informed her that Gallo had been taken by DGCIM agents, identified by markings on the black van used for the transfer. Reportedly, Nahuel was initially taken from San Cristóbal to Caracas.¹⁷³ On December 17, his legal representation in Venezuela attempted to file a disappearance complaint before the Attorney General's Office. However, prosecutors informed them that the complaint would not be processed and refused to provide any official information on his fate or whereabouts. When his lawyers tried to file the complaint again at the central office in Caracas, the authorities refused to receive it.¹⁷⁴ Meanwhile, his mother-in-law personally went to the DGCIM headquarters in Boleíta, Caracas, seeking information. Officials told her that Nahuel was not being held there.¹⁷⁵

170 Molina, F. R., & Singer, F. (2024, December 14). El Gobierno de Milei denuncia la detención "arbitraria" de un suboficial argentino en Venezuela. *El País Argentina*. <https://elpais.com/argentina/2024-12-14/el-gobierno-de-milei-denuncia-la-detencion-arbitraria-de-un-suboficial-argentino-en-venezuela.html>.

171 Molina, F. R., & Singer, F. (2024, December 14). El Gobierno de Milei denuncia la detención "arbitraria" de un suboficial argentino en Venezuela. *El País Argentina*. <https://elpais.com/argentina/2024-12-14/el-gobierno-de-milei-denuncia-la-detencion-arbitraria-de-un-suboficial-argentino-en-venezuela.html>.

172 Inter-American Commission of Human Rights. (2025, January 3). CIDH otorga medidas cautelares a favor de Nahuel Agustín Gallo respecto de Venezuela. *Comisión Interamericana De Derechos Humanos (CIDH)*. https://www.oas.org/pt/CIDH/jsForm/?File=/es/cidh/prensa/comunicados/2025/001.asp&utm_content=country-ven&utm_term=class-mc.

173 Inter-American Commission of Human Rights. (2025, January 3). CIDH otorga medidas cautelares a favor de Nahuel Agustín Gallo respecto de Venezuela. *Comisión Interamericana De Derechos Humanos (CIDH)*. https://www.oas.org/pt/CIDH/jsForm/?File=/es/cidh/prensa/comunicados/2025/001.asp&utm_content=country-ven&utm_term=class-mc; Telenoche. (2025, July 4). "Mi hijo extraña a su papá": Habló la esposa de Nahuel Gallo, el gendarme detenido en Venezuela [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hd-lzl-jC9A>.

174 Inter-American Commission of Human Rights. (2025, January 3). CIDH otorga medidas cautelares a favor de Nahuel Agustín Gallo respecto de Venezuela. *Comisión Interamericana De Derechos Humanos (CIDH)*. https://www.oas.org/pt/CIDH/jsForm/?File=/es/cidh/prensa/comunicados/2025/001.asp&utm_content=country-ven&utm_term=class-mc.

175 Inter-American Commission of Human Rights. (2025, January 3). CIDH otorga medidas cautelares a favor de Nahuel Agustín Gallo respecto de Venezuela. *Comisión Interamericana De Derechos Humanos (CIDH)*. https://www.oas.org/pt/CIDH/jsForm/?File=/es/cidh/prensa/comunicados/2025/001.asp&utm_content=country-ven&utm_term=class-mc.

On December 27, 2024, the Attorney General's Office issued a public statement accusing Nahuel of involvement in terrorist activities.¹⁷⁶ However, the Argentine government officially denied any connection between Nahuel and such charges.¹⁷⁷ Despite being declared missing, on 2 January 2025, images of him surfaced online. He appeared in a blue uniform, walking with his head down in a location later identified as the Rodeo I Judicial Confinement Center in Miranda. These images were the first visual confirmation that he was alive but raised serious concerns about his treatment and conditions of detention.¹⁷⁸ His wife, upon seeing the photographs, commented: "I saw those images, and the impact on us was deeply distressing. He's alive, but seeing him like that, in uniform, head down, it was not the Nahuel I know. I have no assurance that Nahuel is in good health."¹⁷⁹

The regime's claims against Nahuel must also be seen in the context of political tensions between the Maduro regime and the government of Argentina. On 16 December 2024, Diosdado Cabello made televised remarks referring to Nahuel, questioning the legitimacy of his presence in Venezuela. Cabello criticized individuals who "travel the world on a salary of 500 USD" and dismissed explanations involving romantic relationships as a cover for covert operations. "They say they came to see their girlfriend, if you want to get married, come to Venezuela," he said, before alleging that the true intention was to "carry out a mission" and issuing vague references to perceived external threats.¹⁸⁰ Additionally, on 18 December 2024, Diosdado Cabello publicly alluded to Nahuel's alleged involvement in a conspiracy to extract dissidents sheltered in the Argentine embassy in Caracas. Cabello implied that Nahuel's real purpose in Venezuela was to support this mission under the guise of a family visit.¹⁸¹ These statements reinforced the regime's portrayal of Nahuel not as a visiting relative, but as a foreign agent engaged in covert operations. These remarks were broadcast nationally and served to publicly frame him as a threat to national security, despite the absence of any legal proceedings, detention orders, or access to due process.

On 1 January 2025, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) granted precautionary measures in Nahuel's favor (Resolution 1/2025), citing the seriousness and urgency of his situation, as well as the risk of irreparable harm to his rights to life and personal integrity.¹⁸² Despite this, the Maduro regime has failed to provide any official information regarding his location, legal status, or well-being. His family continues to receive no formal communication, and all updates on his condition have come from unofficial sources, including another detainee who, after being released from Rodeo I, told Nahuel's wife that he had seen and spoken to him months earlier.¹⁸³ Everything I know about Nahuel, I know unofficially," she said. "Someone who was released from El Rodeo told me, 'Yes, I met him four

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- 176 Gobierno de la República Bolivariana de Venezuela. (2024, December 27). *COMUNICADO Gendarme argentino se encuentra procesado por vinculación a acciones terroristas en Venezuela* Habiéndose cumplido con los plazos procesales correspondientes según lo prevé el Código Orgánico Procesal Penal, el Ministerio Público informa que el Sr. Nahuel Agustín Gallo ha sido detenido al haber intentado ingresar irregularmente a la República Bolivariana de Venezuela ocultando su verdadero plan criminal bajo el ropaje de una visita sentimental. En tal sentido dicho ciudadano se encuentra sometido a la respectiva investigación por su vinculación a un grupo de personas que intentaron desde nuestro territorio y con apoyo de grupos de la ultraderecha internacional ejecutar una serie de acciones desestabilizadoras y terroristas. El precitado imputado está a disposición del juez en base a lo establecido por nuestra Constitución y las leyes nacionales. Las declaraciones y acciones realizadas por el gobierno argentino, utilizando a los familiares del procesado, así como la resolución judicial tomada por la Cámara Federal de Mendoza, dejan clara la complicidad de las autoridades de esa Nación en los planes subversivos que buscan atacar por cualquier vía al Estado venezolano y a sus instituciones legítimas. Esta Fiscalía, así como todos los Poderes Públicos, nos mantenemos firmes en el supremo deber de preservar y defender la paz, la soberanía y el principio de autodeterminación de los pueblos, como pilares fundamentales sobre los cuales se erige nuestra República. Caracas, 27 de diciembre de 2024. Tarek William Saab Fiscal General de la República. Facebook. https://www.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=589618217126115&id=100082338247823&_rd=1; VTV. (2024, December 27). MP procesa a Nahuel Gallo por presunta vinculación con acciones terroristas en el país. *Venezolana De Televisión*. <https://www.vtv.gob.ve/nahuel-agustin-gallo-vinculacion-acciones-terroristas/>.
- 177 Singer, F., & Molina, F. R. (2024, December 27). Venezuela confirma casi 20 días después la detención de un gendarme argentino acusado de "terrorismo." *El País América*. <https://elpais.com/america/2024-12-28/venezuela-confirma-casi-20-dias-despues-la-detencion-de-un-gendarme-argentino-acusado-de-terrorismo.html>.
- 178 CNN en Español. Difunden imágenes del gendarme argentino detenido en Venezuela, Nahuel Gallo. (2025, January 2). *CNN en Español*. <https://cnnespanol.cnn.com/2025/01/02/venezuela/imagenes-gendarme-argentino-detenido-nahuel-gallo-orix>.
- 179 Radio Mitre. (2025, January 3). *María Gómez, esposa del gendarme Nahuel Gallo: "Está vivo"* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CCh6Hvoh4_s.
- 180 Luigino Bracci Roa desde Venezuela. (2024, December 17). *Diosdado Cabello, rueda de prensa del PSUV, 16 de diciembre de 2024* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8HHmJCPpr3A>, 42:30 min.
- 181 TVFANB MULTIMEDIA. (2024, December 19). *CON EL MAZO DANDO #508* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y_-oAVic4kk, 2:42:00.
- 182 Inter-American Commission of Human Rights. (2025, January 3). CIDH otorga medidas cautelares a favor de Nahuel Agustín Gallo respecto de Venezuela. *Comisión Interamericana De Derechos Humanos (CIDH)*. https://www.oas.org/pt/CIDH/jsForm?File=es/cidh/prensa/comunicados/2025/001.asp&utm_content=country-ven&utm_term=class-mc.
- 183 Telenoche. (2025, July 4). *"Mi hijo extraña a su papá": Habló la esposa de Nahuel Gallo, el gendarme detenido en Venezuela* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hd-lzl-jC9A>.

months ago. We were in the same corridor; I would see him in the courtyard.’ That’s the only thing I know, unofficially. From the government: never.”¹⁸⁴

Naomi Arnaudez



Name: Naomi Arnaudez

Age: 26

Role or affiliation: Lawyer and women’s rights activist, Voluntad Popular party member

Location of disappearance: Caracas

Date of Disappearance: 23 May 2025

Status: Forcibly Disappeared (Ongoing)

Motive: *Intimidation*

Naomi Arnaudez is a 26-year-old Venezuelan lawyer, political activist, and member of the opposition party Voluntad Popular. Though politically engaged, she also managed a local hardware store at the time of her arrest. Her mother describes her as a humble and collaborative young woman dedicated to both her community and country.¹⁸⁵ A professor from the University of Carabobo, where Naomi studied law, spoke of her unwavering commitment to justice and her strong awareness of Venezuela’s structural challenges.¹⁸⁶

Naomi was detained at approximately 7:00 a.m. on 23 May 2025, when officers from the Bolivarian National Police arrived at her home. Despite not presenting a warrant, the officers detained her on the spot without offering any explanation or information about her legal status or destination. At the time of her detention, Naomi was running a fever and suspected of having contracted dengue. She had planned to undergo medical testing that same day.¹⁸⁷ In the five days following her arrest, no official body acknowledged Naomi’s detention or provided information about her whereabouts. Her case remained invisible until 28 May, when she was publicly mentioned by Diosdado Cabello during a nationally broadcast press conference. Without providing any evidence, Cabello claimed that Naomi was part of a “terrorist network” working to disrupt the 25 May 2025 parliamentary elections, a network he alleged was connected to opposition figure Juan Pablo Guanipa. Cabello stated that Naomi and others were planning acts of violence to destabilize the country in the lead-up to the vote.¹⁸⁸ Despite her appearance in state narratives as a supposed co-conspirator, no official charges or evidence have been disclosed to this date.

Naomi’s detention occurred in the context of a broader wave of arrests targeting opposition actors, civil society members, and political dissidents in the weeks leading up to Venezuela’s 25 May elections. Her political party, Voluntad Popular, publicly condemned the detention as unjust and illegal, emphasizing

¹⁸⁴ Telenoche. (2025, July 4). “Mi hijo extraña a su papá”: *Habló la esposa de Nahuel Gallo, el gendarme detenido en Venezuela* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hd-lzl-jC9A>.

¹⁸⁵ Redacción Crónica Uno. (2025, May 24). Padres de abogada Naomi Arnaudez claman por la liberación de su hija y atención a su salud. *Crónica Uno*. <https://cronica.uno/padres-de-abogada-naomi-arnaudez-claman-por-la-liberacion-de-su-hija-y-atencion-a-su-salud/>.

¹⁸⁶ Castellanos, J. (2025, May 28). Palabras en favor de Naomi. *El Nacional*. <https://www.elnacional.com/2025/05/palabras-en-favor-de-naomi/>.

¹⁸⁷ Redacción Crónica Uno. (2025, May 24). Padres de abogada Naomi Arnaudez claman por la liberación de su hija y atención a su salud. *Crónica Uno*. <https://cronica.uno/padres-de-abogada-naomi-arnaudez-claman-por-la-liberacion-de-su-hija-y-atencion-a-su-salud/>.

¹⁸⁸ Televen Tv. (2025, May 23). *Diosdado Cabello dio a conocer la detención de Juan Pablo Guanipa - El noticiero primera emisión* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P0Q1_vKjFaY.

that no charges had been formally brought against her and no due process had been observed.¹⁸⁹ The lack of any judicial order, arrest warrant, or explanation has reinforced concerns that Naomi's case is part of a broader strategy of intimidation targeting the political opposition. As of now, she remains in detention, and concerns persist over her health condition due to her fever at the time of arrest and the denial of medical treatment.

Rory Branker



Name: Rory Branker

Age: 43

Role or affiliation: Journalist

Location of disappearance: Macaracuay, Caracas

Date of Disappearance: 20 February 2025

Status: Forcibly Disappeared (Ongoing)

Motive: *Intimidation*

Rory Branker is a 43-year-old journalist and editor at La Patilla, one of Venezuela's most prominent independent news outlets, known for its critical coverage of the Maduro government. The website has been blocked in Venezuela for years and is only accessible through a VPN.¹⁹⁰ Rory is well-known for his public criticism of Nicolás Maduro and his allies on social media. Years prior, he had managed a parody Twitter account of former president Hugo Chávez. Although the account went inactive after Chávez's death, it drew retaliatory attention.¹⁹¹ State media personality Mario Silva exposed Rory on live television, revealing personal information in an act of intimidation. The regime's hostility toward La Patilla has also been longstanding; in 2022, Diosdado Cabello declared, "Now we are coming for La Patilla" while referencing the forced judicial takeover of El Nacional, another critical media outlet that was handed over to Cabello following a defamation lawsuit linked to reporting on alleged drug trafficking involving him.¹⁹²

On 20 February 2025, around 5:40 p.m., Rory was intercepted by SEBIN agents while heading toward the Centro Ítalo Venezolano. Two motorcycles approached his car near Macaracuay. The officers, armed and in plain clothes, asked for Rory's identification and confirmed his identity before announcing his arrest. As backup was delayed, one officer took control of his vehicle, placing Rory in the back seat,

- 189 Voluntad Popular [@VoluntadPopular]. (2025, May 23). *#URGENTE | Denunciamos el secuestro y la arbitraria detención de Naomi Arnaudez, defensora de Derechos Humanos y activista por los derechos de la mujer. Naomi fue ilegal e injustamente detenida este viernes en horas de la madrugada en su vivienda en Caracas por funcionarios de la dictadura de Nicolás Maduro. Naomi es víctima de la escalada en la persecución del régimen en las últimas horas, profundizando la práctica de Terrorismo de Estado y los crímenes de lesa humanidad. Naomi ha estado presentando cuadros de fiebre muy alta y malestar general. Se presume que podría estar padeciendo de dengue. Su situación de salud es delicada. Sus familiares desconocen su paradero. Naomi no ha cometido ningún delito, es una activista, no una terrorista, y exigimos que sea puesta de inmediato en libertad. #LibertadParaNaomi y para todos los presos políticos en Venezuela.* X (Formerly Twitter). https://x.com/VoluntadPopular/status/1925984283245568400?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwtterm%5E1925984283245568400%7Ctwgr%5E0979c49726c56417d7772e1ec88bb3a6833949f9%7Ctwcon%5Es1_&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fcronica.uno%2Fpadres-de-abogada-naomi-arnaudez-claman-por-la-liberacion-de-su-hija-y-atencion-a-su-salud%2F.
- 190 Redacción Monitoreamos. (2025, March 20). Un mes sin respuestas: ¿Dónde está el periodista de La Patilla Rory Branker? *Monitoreamos*. <https://monitoreamos.com/venezuela/un-mes-sin-respuestas-donde-esta-el-periodista-de-la-patilla-rory-branker>; Moleiro, A. (2025, April 6). ¿Dónde está el periodista Rory Branker? La libertad de expresión se resiente en la Venezuela de Maduro. *El País América*. <https://elpais.com/america/2025-04-07/donde-esta-el-periodista-rory-branker-la-libertad-de-expresion-se-resente-en-la-venezuela-de-maduro.html>.
- 191 Redacción Noticias al Día a la Hora. (2015, September 16). *Creador de @ChavezOfficial confesó haber recibido amenazas del Gobierno. Noticias Al Día Y a La Hora*. <https://noticiasaldiayalahora.co/nacionales/creador-de-chavezofficial-confeso-haber-recibido-amenazas-del-gobierno/>.
- 192 IPYS Venezuela [@ipysvenezuela]. (2022, February 10). *1/3 #AvancelPYSve | Nuevamente a través de su programa «Con el mazo dando», Diosdado Cabello arremetió contra @ElNacionalWeb diciendo que ahora irá por la página web del medio, luego de haber recibido por orden de los tribunales venezolanos la sede del diario.* #9Feb. X (Formerly Twitter). <https://x.com/ipysvenezuela/status/1491620324240203776>; El Nacional. (2022, February 10). Diosdado Cabello: "Ahora vamos por La Patilla." *El Nacional*. <https://www.elnacional.com/2022/02/diosdado-cabello-ahora-vamos-por-la-patilla/>.

while a second officer followed on a motorcycle. At the Plaza Venezuela intersection, a third vehicle with SEBIN agents on board awaited him. Rory was transferred into that vehicle. Within hours, SEBIN agents arrived at Rory's residence. Armed, plainclothes officers entered his home using his own keys, without presenting a warrant, and seized 3 phones and 2 computers.¹⁹³ That night, he was allegedly held at El Helicoide, but his family was unable to get in contact with him there, or at any other location, afterwards.¹⁹⁴ To this day, his whereabouts remain unknown. On 21 February, his family filed a complaint before the Attorney General's Office, followed by several others, including Habeas Corpus submissions, all of which have gone unanswered.

Rory's enforced disappearance follows an established pattern. In August 2024, La Patilla journalist, Ana Carolina Guaita was detained under similar circumstances and held incommunicado until her release in December 2024.¹⁹⁵ Diosdado Cabello has repeatedly referenced Rory by name on his state-run program. Shortly after the detention, he accused him of extortion and spreading false information.¹⁹⁶ On 14 May 2025, Cabello escalated his rhetoric, stating that Rory was "singing more than Pavarotti" and naming several other journalists and colleagues, Davis, Andrés, Gustavo, Kenny, Liseth, as targets. He ominously added, "Tun-Tun is active" a phrase associated with imminent detentions.¹⁹⁷

Rory's family continues to search for him three times a week, visiting El Helicoide, the Division of Penal Investigations of the PNB in Maripérez, DGCIM in Boleíta, the PNB in La Yaguara, and even the penitentiaries of Tocarón in Aragua and El Rodeo in Miranda, all without results. No state entity has acknowledged his detention.¹⁹⁸ His mother, Cheryl Ann Branker, issued a public plea for information on her son's whereabouts, stating "My name is Cheryl Ann Branker. I want to know where my son, Rory Daniel Branker, is. It has been a week since I last saw him. I don't know if he has disappeared or where he is. This is killing me."¹⁹⁹ His family describes the uncertainty, isolation, and silence as a form of psychological torture, a deliberate effort to break both Rory and those who continue to fight for his freedom.²⁰⁰

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- 193 Redacción Monitoreamos. (2025, March 20). Un mes sin respuestas: ¿Dónde está el periodista de La Patilla Rory Branker? *Monitoreamos*. <https://monitoreamos.com/venezuela/un-mes-sin-respuestas-donde-esta-el-periodista-de-la-patilla-rory-branker/>; Moleiro, A. (2025, April 6). ¿Dónde está el periodista Rory Branker? La libertad de expresión se resiente en la Venezuela de Maduro. *El País América*. <https://elpais.com/america/2025-04-07/donde-esta-el-periodista-rory-branker-la-libertad-de-expresion-se-resente-en-la-venezuela-de-maduro.html>; Liberen a Rory Branker. (2025, March 3). Datos claves de la detención, a manos de funcionarios del régimen de Nicolás Maduro, del periodista Rory Branker. *Liberen a Rory Branker*. <https://branker.substack.com/p/datos-claves-de-la-desaparicion-del-periodista-rory-branker>.
- 194 Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores de la Prensa de Venezuela [@sntpvenezuela]. (2025, February 21). #AlertaSNTP | Han pasado 24 horas desde la presunta detención del periodista de @la_Patilla Rory Branker y aún su familia desconoce dónde se encuentra. Sus familiares recorrieron varios centros de detención en Caracas y en todos niegan que el comunicador se encuentre allí. #21Feb. X (Formerly Twitter). <https://x.com/sntpvenezuela/status/1893069942053855741>.
- 195 El País América. (2024, August 24). Ana Carolina Guaita, la periodista de padres opositores desaparecida tras ser detenida en Venezuela. *El País América*. <https://elpais.com/america/2024-08-24/ana-carolina-guaita-la-periodista-de-padres-opositores-desaparecida-tras-ser-detenida-en-venezuela.html>; RSF. (n.d.). Venezuela: detención del periodista Rory Branker, nuevo símbolo de la libertad de prensa que sigue siendo reprimida. Reporteros Sin Fronteras. <https://rsf.org/es/venezuela-detenci%C3%B3n-del-periodista-rory-branker-nuevo-s%C3%ADmbolo-de-la-libertad-de-prensa-que-sigue>.
- 196 Medina Ezaine, J. [@jesusmedinae]. (2025, February 27). ¡Atención! Diosdado Cabello, confirmó la privación ilegítima de libertad del periodista de la Patilla Rory Branker en venganza a Alberto Ravell. X (Formerly Twitter). https://x.com/jesusmedinae/status/1894948898159853890?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E1894948898159853890%7Ctwgr%5E2645be82e100956cf4b0ceac40e089f3252bb6d6%7Ctwcon%5Es1_&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Falcualdigital.com%2Fdiosdado-cabello-confirio-detencion-arbitraria-del-periodista-rory-branker%2F.
- 197 Redacción NTN24. (2025, May 15). Cabello menciona la detención del periodista Rory Branker y amenaza directamente a un grupo de medios: "El tun-tun está activo." *NTN24*. <https://www.ntn24.com/noticias-actualidad/cabello-menciona-la-detencion-del-periodista-rory-branker-y-amenaza-directamente-a-un-grupo-de-medios-el-tun-tun-esta-activo-556105>.
- 198 Redacción Crónica Uno. (2025, July 10). La familia del periodista Rory Branker tiene cinco meses a la espera de que les digan dónde está detenido. *Crónica Uno*. <https://cronica.uno/la-familia-del-periodista-rory-branker-tiene-cinco-meses-a-la-espera-de-que-les-digan-donde-esta-detenido/>.
- 199 Efecto Cocuyo. (2025, February 27). Madre del periodista Rory Branker exige su liberación y denuncia desaparición. *Efecto Cocuyo*. <https://efectococuyo.com/la-humanidad/madre-del-periodista-rory-branker-exige-su-liberacion-y-denuncia-desaparicion/>.
- 200 REDACCIÓN/Las Américas. (2025, July 20). Régimen venezolano guarda silencio sobre periodista secuestrado hace 122 días. *Diario Las Américas*. <https://www.diariolasamericas.com/america-latina/regimen-venezolano-guarda-silencio-periodista-secuestrado-hace-122-dias-n5377860>.

VII. CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this report confirm that enforced disappearance in Venezuela is not an incidental or isolated phenomenon but a deliberate and adaptive strategy of State repression. Far from being the result of procedural deficiencies, the practice is embedded in the country's political order and has been calibrated over time to neutralize dissent, consolidate control, and project strength. When viewed through the data collected across different periods, the evidence reveals not only the scale of the practice but also its consistency as a tool to erode civic space and undermine the rule of law.

This strategic use of disappearance becomes particularly visible when set against the country's electoral cycles. Both datasets examined in this report show how periods of heightened political contestation, most recently the July 2024 presidential elections and the municipal and parliamentary processes that followed in 2025, have been accompanied by an intensification of detentions and enforced disappearances. Elections, rather than serving as opportunities for democratic renewal, have become flashpoints for repression, with the State deploying these practices to ultimately ensure the continuity of power. In this manner, the timing of the violations is not coincidental but points to their political purpose.

The institutions entrusted with carrying out this strategy have remained remarkably consistent. Across both datasets, more than 85 percent of detentions were attributed to just four bodies: the DGCIM, the SEBIN, the PNB, and the GNB. Within this group, the DGCIM and the SEBIN stand out as enduring pillars of repression, with the SEBIN's role even expanding in 2025. The PNB likewise retained a steady presence, underscoring how ordinary policing structures have become instruments of political control. By contrast, the GNB's prominence has fluctuated, emerging as a leading perpetrator in some years but receding in others, reflecting tactical restructuring rather than any genuine decrease. Meanwhile, the near disappearance of state-level and municipal forces from recent data highlights a tightening of central control, with repression increasingly concentrated in the regime's core security and intelligence agencies.

For those subjected to enforced disappearance, the experience has not been defined solely by its length or by the vague and informal information their loved ones have received on their fate and whereabouts, if any at all, but by its cruelty and its purpose. International standards are clear that the elements of enforced disappearance, arbitrary deprivation of liberty, concealment of fate or whereabouts, and the involvement or acquiescence of state authorities, are present regardless of duration. Victims and their families endure the same climate of fear and uncertainty whether the concealment lasts for hours, days, months, or years. In this sense, both short- and long-term disappearances constitute equally grave violations, and accountability must include the call for the release of all victims, from those returned after brief concealment to those still held for months or even years without family contact. Testimonies and data alike reveal how disappearances are used selectively against groups deemed threatening to the regime, journalists, political activists, military personnel, and, increasingly, foreign or dual-national citizens whose detention carries diplomatic weight. For these individuals, the violations are compounded by their situation of particular vulnerability, as they face proceedings in an unfamiliar country, often in a language they do not master, they are exposed to differentiated harm that further underscores the arbitrariness of the practice.

Placed against this human reality, the legal framework reinforces the gravity of what is at stake. Under both Venezuelan law and binding international instruments, the right to liberty and due process are non-derogable. Enforced disappearance is recognized in international law and jurisprudence as a continuous violation that, when widespread or systematic, may constitute a crime against humanity. The patterns documented in this report: targeting linked to electoral cycles, coordination across security agencies, deliberate concealment, and repeated impact on civilian populations demonstrate intent and policy rather than isolated abuses. They reveal an organized system designed to sustain authoritarian rule

through fear and denial of rights.

Taken together, the evidence paints one coherent picture: enforced disappearance continues to be one of the Maduro regime's effective instruments of political control, steadily expanding in the range of victims it targets. It is deployed to suppress opposition during electoral contests, enforced through a centralized security apparatus, and experienced by victims and families as a profound assault on dignity and rights. The practice cannot be explained away as procedural irregularity; it is the outcome of a State policy that entwines repression with governance. As such, enforced disappearance in Venezuela demands not only documentation but sustained accountability efforts at the national, regional, and international levels. The consolidation of this pattern underscores that the issue is not diminishing but evolving, and that confronting it remains central to any genuine democratic transition.

VIII. RECOMMENDATIONS

To the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances (WGEID)

1. Reaffirm the “short-term” enforced disappearance standard in every Venezuela communication. Clarify that neither brief duration nor unofficial/indirect updates to relatives interrupt the State's responsibility while their fate and whereabouts are concealed.
2. Name the perpetrators and the places. In urgent appeals, specifically request information from DGCIM, SEBIN, PNB, and GNB and seek access/whereabouts for detainees at known facilities (e.g., El Helicoide; DGCIM Boleíta).
3. Coordinate on foreigners/dual nationals. Create a thematic track on their use as leverage; issue joint opinions with the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention and relevant Special Rapporteurs.
4. The Working Group should consistently recall in its communications with Venezuela that enforced disappearance, when committed in a systematic or widespread manner, may constitute a crime against humanity under international law. This entails not only the international responsibility of the State but also the individual criminal liability of those who order, carry out, or acquiesce in such practices. It should be underscored that this responsibility is non-derogable and does not lapse with time, in keeping with the imprescriptible nature of crimes against humanity.

To the United Nations (OHCHR, Fact-Finding Mission) and other international bodies

1. Sustained, public, and disaggregated monitoring. Report by time, place, agency, nationality, and gender, naming responsible bodies and mapping electoral timing.
2. Standardize doctrine on “short-term” enforced disappearances. Issue technical guidance harmonizing criteria across mandates to prevent restrictive readings that dilute responsibility.
3. Reinforce consular protection. Disseminate guidance to States on immediate notification, interpreter access, and medical verification for foreign detainees and dual nationals, given their documented vulnerability.
4. Enable accountability later. Recommend concrete evidence-preservation protocols (custody logs, transfer/booking records, communications) and request site access to principal detention locations.
5. Monitor and publicly assess the Anti-NGO Law and related legislation; urge moratoria/repeal where

provisions enable enforced disappearances or impede documentation.

To the International Criminal Court

1. Prioritize Venezuela I and widen evidentiary focus. Integrate the 2024–2025 enforced disappearance patterns, including foreigners/dual nationals and election-linked timing, into the charging narrative for enforced disappearance, imprisonment, torture, and persecution.
2. Map command responsibility. Use agency concentration (DGCIM/SEBIN dominance; tactical shifts in GNB; PNB involvement) to structure modes of liability and requests for cooperation on hierarchies, orders, and operational logs.
3. Probe justice-system participation. Examine imposed public defense and use of special jurisdictions as potential contributions to persecution and severe deprivation of liberty and the gross human rights violations that result from it.

To the international community

1. Condition engagement on verifiable benchmarks. Tie diplomatic/economic steps to measurable outcomes (i.e. end of incommunicado detention; immediate location disclosure; access to counsel of choice; publication of detainee registers) and deploy targeted sanctions against commanders of DGCIM/SEBIN and other units credibly linked to enforce disappearance in Venezuela.
2. Establish early-warning and rapid-response protocols (24/7 contact points; interpreter rosters; immediate medical checks; family liaison) and coordinate demarches within 24–48 hours of disappearance.
3. Support universal-jurisdiction investigations of enforced disappearance as a continuing and imprescriptible crime.
4. Fund legal defense and psychosocial support for families; support secure evidence-collection; urge transparency from electoral authorities, including publishing disaggregated results where relevant to accountability and prevention.

IV. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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ROBERT F. KENNEDY HUMAN RIGHTS

Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that has worked to realize Robert F. Kennedy's dream of a more just and peaceful world since 1968. In partnership with local activists, we advocate for key human rights issues, pursuing strategic litigation at home and around the world. And to ensure change that lasts, we foster a social-good approach to business and investment and educate millions of students about human rights and social justice.

FORO PENAL

Foro Penal is a non-governmental organization that has worked in defense of human rights in Venezuela since 2002, providing pro bono assistance to more than 15,000 victims of political repression, including victims of arbitrary detention, torture and murder. Currently, Foro Penal has more than 400 volunteer lawyers and approximately 7,000 activists in Venezuela and around the world providing legal and humanitarian assistance to victims.