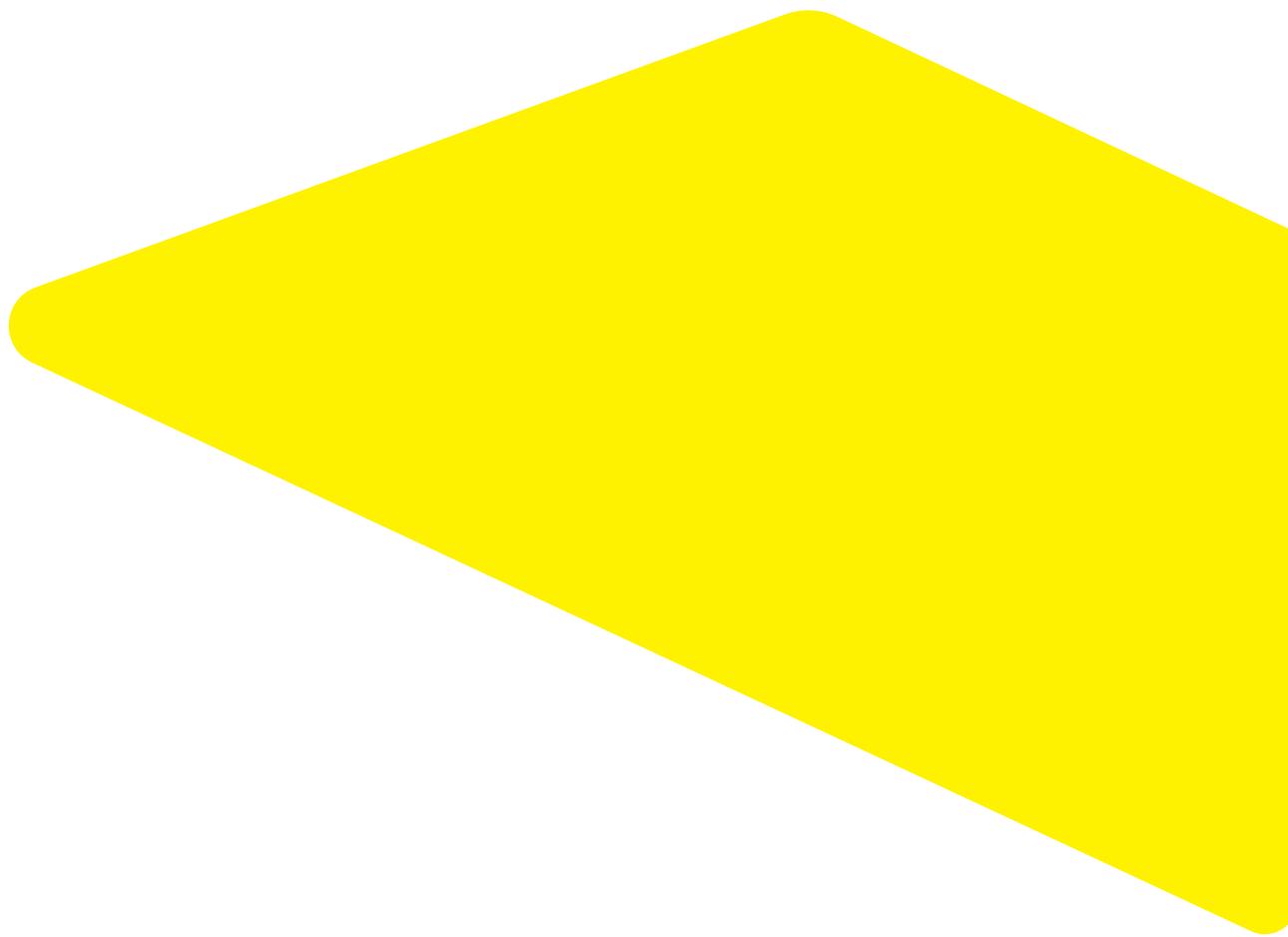




20 Frequently Asked Questions on the Current Venezuelan Situation (2026)





20 FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ON THE CURRENT VENEZUELAN SITUATION (2026)

1) What happened in Venezuela on January 3, 2026?

After four months of military presence in the Caribbean Sea, under the argument of an operation against drug trafficking, the United States carried out the so-called *“Operation Absolute Determination,”* in which Nicolás Maduro and Cilia Flores were detained and extracted to the U.S. Both were taken to the Metropolitan Detention Center in Brooklyn and are being tried before the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of New York under four charges: conspiracy to commit narco-terrorism; conspiracy to import cocaine into the United States; possession of machine guns and destructive devices; and conspiracy to possess weapons in support of criminal activities.

During the operation, bombings were recorded at seven different points in Venezuelan territory: Caracas, Capital District, especially in military zones and strategic infrastructure; La Carlota Air Base, this military airport was bombed and disabled, with destruction of hangars and equipment; Fuerte Tiuna, mainly a military complex, received impacts and explosions, as it is a communications center, headquarters of the Ministry of Defense and other key installations; El Volcán, in El Hatillo municipality, where transmission antennas and parts of the air defense are located; Higuerote, Miranda state, local airport and coastal zones, destroying equipment and a defense system; La Guaira and surroundings

of the port, containers, warehouses and security posts in the port of La Guaira, north of Caracas; and Meseta de Mamo, La Guaira, in naval facilities.

2) How many people were killed, injured and what material damages occurred during the U.S. attack?

Venezuelan authorities have not provided official information on the number of dead and wounded during the attack, nor on material damages. In a television program, the Minister of Interior and Justice, Diosdado Cabello, informally disclosed that “*100 people would have died*” and a similar number would have been wounded. For his part, the Minister of Defense, Vladimir Padrino López, stated during a funeral act that 47 Venezuelan soldiers, among them 9 women, would have lost their lives. The Díaz-Canel government revealed the identities of 32 Cuban security agents who would have died during the events. Independent journalism (Monitor de Víctimas and La Hora de Venezuela) identified that 77 people would have lost their lives, of whom 2 were civilians.

Different U.S. media outlets have reported that 7 U.S. soldiers were injured in the operation, by explosive fragments and bullets, but none seriously or fatally.

3) What has been the response of the Venezuelan government after the attack?

In her first speech after the events, Delcy Rodríguez denounced the attack as unjustified and stated that Venezuelan sovereignty had been violated. She affirmed that the country “*will never again be a slave nor a colony*” of any foreign power, rejecting the detention of Maduro and Flores, which would have as its true objective controlling the country’s resources, demanding their immediate release.

On 01/04/2026, President Donald Trump stated: “We are going to run the country until we can make a safe, adequate and judicious transition.”

That same day, Delcy Rodríguez lowered the tone of her discourse in a message addressed to Donald Trump, stating: “*We extend the invitation to the U.S. government to work jointly on an agenda of cooperation, oriented*

toward shared development, within the framework of international legality and strengthening a lasting community coexistence.”

Formally, the Venezuelan government did not declare a conflict with the United States, nor did it describe the events as an invasion, nor did it declare the detention of Maduro and Flores as a “*hostile act*.”

Subsequently, Donald Trump stated that the interim government is cooperating and that a process of economic opening has begun with emphasis on the oil sector under U.S. control, which even implies the reopening of the U.S. embassy in Venezuela.

4) What has the U.S. government said about its military action?

On the night of 01/03/26, during operations, Donald Trump announced via the social network Truth: “*The United States of America has successfully carried out a large-scale attack against Venezuela and its leader, President Nicolás Maduro, who has been captured along with his wife and transferred out of the country.*”

That same day, at a press conference, he stated: “*Overwhelming U.S. military power was used with coordinated actions by air, land and sea... No nation in the world could have achieved what the United States achieved yesterday.*” “*We are not afraid to put troops on the ground if necessary.*”

Donald Trump described the action as a mission to make Maduro accountable before U.S. justice for federal criminal charges, explaining that the operation was planned for months and executed with combined forces from different military branches and security agencies.

Marco Rubio, U.S. Secretary of State, stated that members of Congress were not notified in advance because the government was concerned about possible leaks regarding its decision to capture Maduro.

Later, Donald Trump stated that with the interim presidency they have a “*solid cooperation*,” that they “*have been very smart*,” ruling out a second wave of military interventions.

5) Why did people inside Venezuela not celebrate the detention of Nicolás Maduro if they consider him a dictator?

In her first speech after the attack, Delcy Rodríguez announced the entry into force of the Decree of State of External Commotion, whose Article 5 authorizes: *“the search and capture throughout national territory of any person involved in promoting or supporting the armed attack.”*

Different media outlets have reported that at least five people were detained for “celebrating” the detention of Nicolás Maduro: a couple of elderly people in Mérida state, Lubin and Pablo Montilla, aged 64 and 65, of very humble condition; Carlos José Guzmán Armas, 40, in Anzoátegui state for a TikTok video, accused of treason and incitement to hatred; two men in Carabobo for celebrating while riding a motorcycle, accused of “incitement to hatred” and “treason”; and Sandra Lovera for publishing content on TikTok.

According to statements by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), policies of State Terrorism have been promoted in Venezuela. As of January 3, Venezuela was the country with the highest number of political prisoners in the region: Foro Penal counted 811 and Justicia, Encuentro y Perdón more than 1,011.

6) Why are there media outlets saying there was internal betrayal against Maduro?

International media had reported that since March 2025 negotiations had begun in Qatar between the governments of the United States and Venezuela for Delcy Rodríguez to lead a transitional government in the country. In the first proposal Maduro would step aside from power but remain in the country, while in the second proposal he would go into exile. Although there is still no evidence of a third proposal contemplating his detention, two elements make the hypothesis of a negotiated detention credible: the low defensive capacity of Venezuelan troops during the attack and, secondly, the beginning of a cooperation process between both countries after the attack and detention.

7) What is the Decree of State of External Commotion?

Article 338 of the Constitution establishes that “*a state of internal or external commotion may be decreed in the event of internal or external conflict that seriously endangers the security of the Nation, its citizens, or its institutions.*” Article 339 states that “*the decree declaring a state of exception (...) shall be submitted, within eight days following its issuance, to the National Assembly.*” After the beginning of the anti-drug operation in the Caribbean Sea in September, Nicolás Maduro reported that a State of External Commotion would be decreed if a U.S. attack occurred. Delcy Rodríguez announced on January 3 that it would be executed from that moment on.

The decree authorizes total mobilization of the Armed Forces, militarization of public services and strategic industries, reinforcement of borders and activation of special security plans; empowers the Executive to restrict transit, suspend meetings and demonstrations, requisition goods and order compulsory cooperation and the imposition of “extraordinary services”; and orders police bodies to search for and capture those who promote or support the attack. Human rights organizations have warned that it will be used to maintain internal repression, despite the fact that there is no conflict declared with the country responsible for the attack.

8) Why did Delcy Rodríguez assume the functions of President of the Republic?

Since 2018, Delcy Rodríguez has served as Executive Vice President of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. The Constitution establishes the procedure in case of absence of the person exercising the role of head of state. When an “*absolute absence*” occurs (Article 233) during the first four years of the constitutional term, “*a new universal, direct and secret election shall be held within the following thirty consecutive days (...) and the Executive Vice President shall take charge of the Presidency of the Republic.*” By contrast, if a “*temporary absence*” is declared, the position is filled by the Vice President for 90 days, extendable for 90 additional days. The Supreme Tribunal of Justice (TSJ) appointed Delcy Rodríguez as “*acting president*” after declaring Nicolás Maduro’s absence to be “*temporary*.”

9) What does the plan for Venezuela announced by the United States consist of?

Donald Trump stated that the United States would be involved in Venezuela's political transition after the operation, and declared that the U.S. would "govern" the country until a "safe" and "adequate" transition is established, and that elections would be organized "when they can be held." Marco Rubio announced that this plan would consist of three simultaneous phases: "Stabilization," "Recovery" and "Transition."

So far, most details of this plan correspond to the economic area. Trump stated that Venezuela would deliver between 30 and 50 million barrels of oil to the United States, sold in markets at international market price. The revenues would be "for the benefit of the people of Venezuela and the United States." According to reports, the U.S. government would be analyzing ways to finance infrastructure reconstruction, such as the power grid, which is critical for basic services and also for oil production.

10) Will elections be convened soon in Venezuela?

U.S. authorities have declared that elections will be held in the country as soon as possible. For her part, the so-called "*acting president*," Delcy Rodríguez, has made no reference to the holding of elections in the future. María Corina Machado stated that "*eventually*," "*free and fair elections*" would be held. Henrique Capriles, for his part, considered that it was not viable to convene immediate presidential elections in the current situation, arguing that stabilizing the economy and political situation was the priority.

While the declaration of "*temporary absence*" of the president remains in force, it is constitutionally impossible to call new elections. This status must be reviewed in April by the National Assembly, which could ratify it for an additional 90 days. As the Constitution allows only one extension, in July Parliament must obligatorily declare the "*absolute absence*" and call elections. Venezuelan authorities are campaigning for the release of Maduro and Flores to maintain the illusion that their absence is temporary.

11) Are political prisoners being released in Venezuela?

According to the NGO *Justicia, Encuentro y Perdón* (JEP), as of January 3, 2026 there were more than 1,011 political prisoners in Venezuela. After the detention of Maduro and Flores, on January 6 Trump declared that there was “*a torture chamber right in the center of Caracas*” and that this facility was being closed. Although he did not reveal its name, it is assumed he was referring to El Helicoide.

From that moment on, expectations grew regarding the possible release of political prisoners, some of whom began to leave hours later. On January 9 Trump assured: “*Venezuela is releasing large numbers of political prisoners as a sign that they are ‘seeking peace.’ This is a very important and smart gesture.*”

There is no official list of those released. According to JEP’s report of January 19, the release of 163 cases had been confirmed by that date. People are receiving substitute measures of liberty, by which charges against them and related criminal proceedings remain in force. In addition, released persons have some of their rights suspended, such as freedom of expression and the right to free movement within the territory.

12) Has a process of transition to democracy begun in Venezuela?

Although U.S. authorities have expressed that “*transition*” is part of their three-stage plan for Venezuela, it is too early to affirm that something that can be called such is occurring in Venezuela. Although Nicolás Maduro is no longer exercising presidential functions, his vice president, Delcy Rodríguez, has the same problems of legitimacy of origin. In addition, the structure of repression and fraudulent management of public funds remains intact.

Improvement of economic indicators will not be sufficient to speak of a democratic transition if there is not full and free exercise of civil and political rights by the population, with guarantees of non-repetition of human rights violations.

13) Why are Venezuelan migrants not returning to the country?

Despite the detention of Nicolás Maduro and Cilia Flores, there is no evidence of a massive return of Venezuelan migrants to the country. The structure that allowed serious human rights violations continues without alteration. Moreover, arbitrary detentions for political reasons continue to be reported. Both outside and inside the country, Venezuelans are waiting for greater clarity about the future.

14) Could there be a massive outflow of Venezuelans from the country?

The detention of Nicolás Maduro and Cilia Flores, as well as U.S. tutelage over the Venezuelan government, has generated great expectations about changes in the political, economic and social situation of the country. For now, there is no evidence of Venezuelans leaving the country in significant numbers. However, if a cycle of political persecution is resumed as a consequence of the stabilization of Delcy Rodríguez's government, without political changes or substantial improvement in the economic situation, a new increase in forced out-migration could occur in the future.

15) Who is Delcy Rodríguez?

Delcy Rodríguez, a Venezuelan lawyer and politician, is one of the most powerful figures of chavismo in the last decade. She has simultaneously held strategic positions such as executive vice president, minister of hydrocarbons and head of bilateral commissions with China and Russia, from which she has woven networks of influence in the financial, energy, commercial and diplomatic sectors. Her rise was consolidated after Hugo Chávez's death, under Maduro's wing, and she has been accused of centralizing power, operating with high opacity and being internationally sanctioned for undermining democracy and human rights.

Between 2018 and 2021 Rodríguez was the highest authority of the Bolivarian Intelligence Service (SEBIN).

However, Delcy's figure cannot be understood separately from that of her brother, Jorge Rodríguez. A psychiatrist and political leader, he was

president of the National Electoral Council (2006–2007), a stage in which he led decisive electoral processes and consolidated his profile as a key political operator trusted by the Executive. He later served as mayor of the Libertador municipality of Caracas (2008–2017) and, under Nicolás Maduro's government, assumed an even more central role as Minister of Communication and Information and, since 2020, as president of the pro-government National Assembly. Jorge has led all negotiation spaces, including the one that concluded with the so-called *“Barbados Agreement,”* and has been very skillful in building a platform of support for his sister among universities, businesspeople, some non-government politicians and sectors of civil society.

The Rodríguez siblings have historically been identified as one of the power groups within chavismo after Hugo Chávez's death.

16) What does chavismo gain from the cooperation agreement with the United States?

Since the electoral fraud in the presidential elections of July 28, 2024, chavismo has suffered its worst legitimacy crisis. Accusations of corruption, governmental inefficiency and serious human rights violations had been personalized in Nicolás Maduro's figure. After the closure of credit lines and financing with its international allies, such as Russia and China, chavismo is attempting for its alliance with the United States to allow it to improve the country's economy and thereby improve its level of competitiveness in future elections that would allow it to retain power.

Demonstrating a significant level of pragmatism, the stage of chavismo led by the Rodríguez siblings will have to reduce the anti-imperialist component that was one of the ideological principles of Venezuelan Bolivarism.

17) What kind of tensions could exist within chavismo as a result of its cooperative relationship with the United States?

Delcy Rodríguez has described this stage as a *“new political moment.”* However, this relationship of subordination to Donald Trump's government is generating significant internal tensions, both within sectors of the Armed

Forces and among the more radicalized groups of chavismo. An important representative of this tendency is the current Minister of Interior and Justice, Diosdado Cabello, who controls the country's repression agencies as well as armed civilian groups. Cabello has been named in all international reports by human rights bodies for his responsibility in serious abuses.

Whether these tensions will be expressed politically or openly remains to be seen. Nevertheless, chavismo is carrying out its most important political reengineering since the days of Hugo Chávez, and these transformations will foreseeably have an impact on how the dominant coalition had been configured until now.

18) Does democratic transition in Venezuela mainly depend on the United States?

No. Although international pressure, especially from the United States, is today a determining factor, a real democratic transition does not mainly depend on unilateral external decisions. It will depend, above all, on two internal variables: the ability of chavismo to remain cohesive as a power bloc and the possibility that Venezuelan society manages to reorganize itself as an autonomous political actor with its own agenda.

A process driven almost exclusively from outside may produce functional changes—such as economic stabilization or institutional rearrangements—but it hardly rebuilds a democracy without internal actors capable of appropriating the process and sustaining it over time.

19) Can Delcy Rodríguez's government gain independence from the United States over time?

Yes. In processes of this type it is usual for external tutelage to be more intense in an initial phase and to become progressively more flexible. As the political and media impact of the events that originated the intervention decreases, the local actor usually recovers margins of autonomy to reorient its agenda, selectively complying with external demands while preserving intact the central structures of power. This reinforces the possibility of an authoritarian stabilization rather than a democratic transition.

20) What are the possible scenarios for Venezuela's future?

As of today we project three scenarios.

Scenario 1: Stability without democracy

A first likely scenario is that the plan promoted by the United States for Venezuela, in coordination with Delcy Rodríguez's government, ends up privileging the dimensions of "stabilization" and economic "recovery" over a true democratic "transition."

In this context, investments in the oil industry would allow a relative improvement in living conditions, provision of basic services, reduction of inflation and generation of better-paid jobs. In parallel, chavismo would manage to internally recombine, reach a new point of equilibrium and remain in power at least until 2030, the date scheduled for new elections.

This scenario may include the holding of electoral processes, but without these necessarily implying a real opening of the political system nor an effective possibility of alternation. It would be a sophisticated authoritarian normalization, where the regime gains functional legitimacy without dismantling its control structures.

Here, international pressure operates more as a mechanism of administration of authoritarianism than as a lever for democratization. Chavismo's cohesion and the absence of a civil society reorganized as a political actor sustain this stability without democracy.

Scenario 2: The civil and democratic exit

A second scenario, less automatic but politically more transformative, would be one in which the synergies between international pressure—mainly from the United States, but accompanied by other countries in the region and the European Union—and a sustained reactivation of Venezuelan society manage to open a progressive process of recovery of civil and political rights.

In this case, elections would not be the starting point but the culminating milestone of a prior process characterized by: restitution of civic space, release of political prisoners, guarantees for political and social organization,

certain reinstitutionalization of the State, fractures or displacements within the dominant bloc.

This scenario does not depend solely on the will of external actors, but above all on the capacity of Venezuelan society to reorganize itself as an autonomous actor and on the impossibility of chavismo continuing to govern as a cohesive bloc without deeply transforming itself.

Scenario 3: Power at war

A third possibility is that of an authoritarian regression derived from an internal fracture within chavismo, in which a sector of the governing bloc itself promotes a coup or an open rupture against Delcy Rodríguez's government.

This scenario would open a period of high uncertainty, possible political violence and internal confrontation, in which the central axis would cease to be international pressure or democratization and become the dispute for control of power within the regime itself. However, this scenario would not derive solely in the possibility that one sector of chavismo displaces another by force, but also that the compass opened by internal dispute allows a weakening of chavismo that enables the emergence of new conditions that ultimately lead to Scenario 2.



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