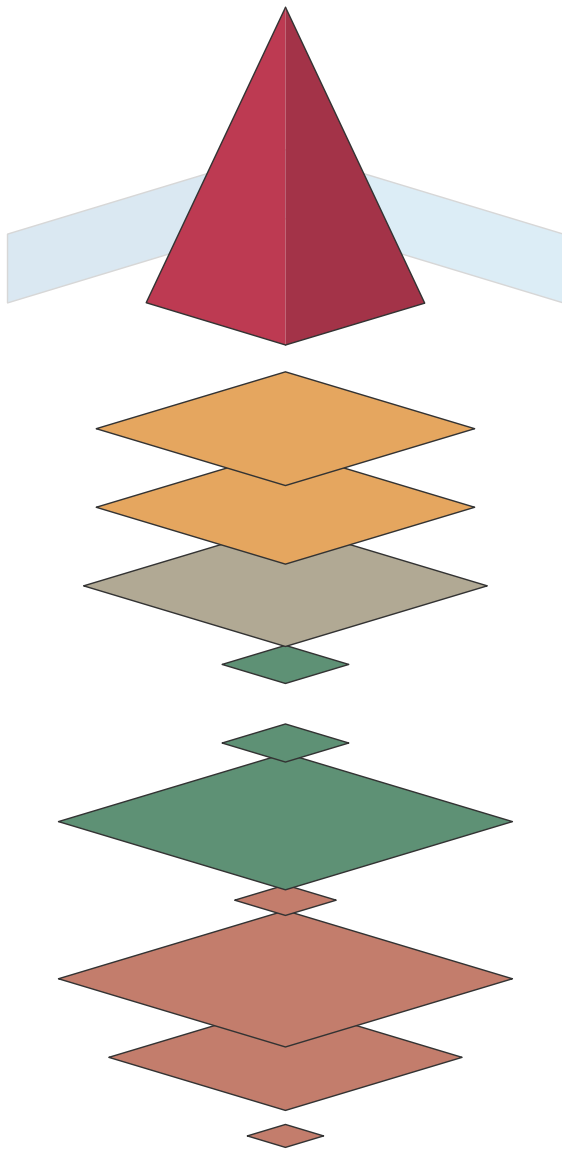




VENEZUELA



6.64 CRIMINALITY SCORE

18th of 193 countries
6th of 35 American countries
3rd of 12 South American countries



CRIMINAL MARKETS **5.65**

HUMAN TRAFFICKING	7.50
HUMAN SMUGGLING	7.50
ARMS TRAFFICKING	8.00
FLORA CRIMES	2.50
FAUNA CRIMES	2.50
NON-RENEWABLE RESOURCE CRIMES	9.00
HEROIN TRADE	2.00
COCAINE TRADE	9.00
CANNABIS TRADE	7.00
SYNTHETIC DRUG TRADE	1.50



CRIMINAL ACTORS **7.63**

MAFIA-STYLE GROUPS	9.50
CRIMINAL NETWORKS	5.00
STATE-EMBEDDED ACTORS	9.00
FOREIGN ACTORS	7.00



1.92 RESILIENCE SCORE

188th of 193 countries
35th of 35 American countries
12th of 12 South American countries



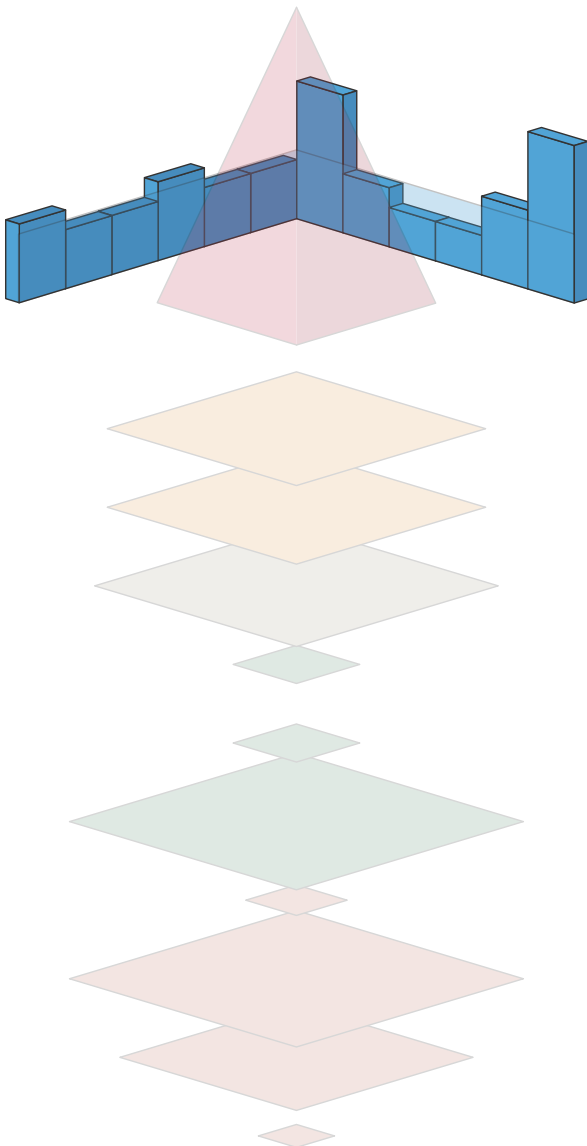
Funding provided by the United States Government.



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VENEZUELA



1.92

RESILIENCE SCORE

188th of 193 countries

35th of 35 American countries

12th of 12 South American countries

POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE	2.00
GOVERNMENT TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY	1.50
INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION	1.50
NATIONAL POLICIES AND LAWS	2.00
JUDICIAL SYSTEM AND DETENTION	1.50
LAW ENFORCEMENT	1.50
TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY	3.50
ANTI-MONEY LAUNDERING	1.50
ECONOMIC REGULATORY CAPACITY	1.00
VICTIM AND WITNESS SUPPORT	1.00
PREVENTION	2.00
NON-STATE ACTORS	4.00



6.64

CRIMINALITY SCORE

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CRIMINAL MARKETS

5.65



CRIMINAL ACTORS

7.63



CRIMINALITY

CRIMINAL MARKETS

PEOPLE

Human trafficking in Venezuela is exacerbated by social and economic deterioration, as well as the power of criminal groups, including those in common destination countries such as Colombia and Trinidad and Tobago. Venezuela is a source and destination country for labour and sex trafficking, and women and girls resorting to survival sex are often exploited for sex tourism domestically and abroad. Vulnerable children are also exploited by relatives for domestic servitude, or trafficked into armed groups operating in Colombia and on Venezuela's borders. National trafficking networks collaborate with corrupt officials to facilitate this illicit activity.

The exodus of millions of people from the country has made Venezuela a major source for human smuggling to Colombia, Aruba, Curaçao, Trinidad and Tobago, Brazil, Chile and the US, as well as a transit country for Iranian and Haitian individuals. After the closure of the Venezuelan-Colombian border in 2015, irregular crossings increased significantly, with a variety of actors, including officials from the national Venezuelan guard (GNB), Colombian mafia-style groups such as the National Liberation Army (ELN), and opportunistic Venezuelan individuals, facilitating the border crossing in exchange for payment or other forms of bribes. The fight for control over the smuggling market intensified between the ELN, dissident rebels from the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), criminal Colombian gangs (BACRIM), and Venezuelan gangs and colectivos (collectives). The COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on the market. The closure of the border with Colombia, together with tight restrictions in the latter, saw the price of smugglers' services increase. It even precipitated a reversal in migrant flows, with thousands of Venezuelans seeking the services of smuggling networks to return home because they could not make ends meet in Colombia.

TRADE

Venezuela is a source, transit, and destination country for trafficked weapons. Although transparency is lacking, it is clear that illegal weapons are prolific, entering via Colombia, Brazil, the US, as well as via government stockpiles and companies. Some weapons used by criminal organizations have even been sold by corrupt officials on the black market. The most commonly trafficked weapons are 38-calibre and 9mm semi-automatic pistols, in addition to AK-47 ammunition, often used by Colombian guerrilla groups. Criminal organizations traffic arms from Miami or between San Antonio del Táchira and Cúcuta. In addition,

Brazilian gangs, particularly Primeiro Comando da Capital, have smuggled Venezuelan military weapons into Brazil.

ENVIRONMENT

Venezuela is a source for flora and fauna crimes, including illegally extracted timber and Cucurito palm, facilitated by the lack of investigations, inventories, or government presence in national parks. Fauna crime is spurred by demand from the US, China and Europe. It mainly involves birds, turtles and snakes, and when caught, perpetrators often receive only minor penalties or fines. Criminal networks involved in wildlife trafficking include Los Depredadores, a gang dedicated to trading in dolphins; thefts from zoos have also occurred. The market is predominately run by domestic actors and is socially accepted, with food shortages resulting in the consumption of local fauna.

Venezuela is also a significant source for gold trafficking, and profits are accrued by both domestic criminal groups and the government. A number of companies operate mines with government approval, but most gold is illegally exported from Venezuela via private and commercial flights to the United Arab Emirates, Switzerland, Belgium, the Netherlands, Ireland, Morocco, Dubai, Turkey and the US, although the latter has imposed sanctions on Venezuelan gold. In Venezuela, top military officers allegedly receive large bribes in the state of Amazonas, where a former FARC combatant leads efforts to control illegal gold mines. Members of the national guard use the agency's influence to levy informal tax on gold production and routes leading from the mines, and a state mining company also reportedly obtains its gold from illegal mining projects. Furthermore, the military facilitates clandestine flights to transport the gold to the Caribbean.

Venezuela has the biggest reserves of oil in the world and smuggles gasoline, also used for cocaine production, to neighbouring countries. Gasoline smuggling involves the national guard and national oil company; however, due to recent fuel scarcities, fuel is now also smuggled from Colombia into Venezuela.

DRUGS

The synthetic drug and heroin markets appear minor in Venezuela, although heroin trafficking routes do exist between Venezuela and Puerto Rico. Cocaine, produced in neighbouring Colombia, is Venezuela's biggest criminal market. Government involvement is rife, with corrupt security forces participating in the market via the Cartel of the Suns (Cártel de los Soles). Once cocaine is imported from Colombia, clandestine flights depart daily for the US and Europe via Central America. Criminal organizations

also use boats to transport the drug to the Netherlands Antilles, St Martin, the British Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico. Cannabis is the most commonly seized drug in Venezuela, and it may follow the same routes as cocaine. The ELN is believed to have cannabis plantations on both sides of the Serranía de Perijá, and domestic criminal and prison networks are in charge of local distribution.

CRIMINAL ACTORS

Venezuelan mafia-style groups are violent and have substantial territorial control and weapons access. Megabandas, a new type of criminal organization originating in prisons, have developed control over territories, and are involved in arms, cocaine and non-renewable resource trafficking. The most notorious include El Juvenal, El tren del Norte, El tren del Llano, Los Capraccio, El Totó, El tren de Aragua and El Coqui. Criminal structures known as pranes also control illegal weapon and drug markets within prisons, engaging in violence and instigating deadly prison riots and attacks against state security officials. COVID-19 restrictions resulted in an increase in both the demand for contraband goods and in the power of the mafia. The colectivos are armed, unregulated groups financed by the government and, although their initial aim was to protect communities, many are accused of drug trafficking and violence against anti-government protestors. The most influential are Los Tupamaros, Alexis Vive, La Piedrita,

Colectivo Montaraz, and Colectivo Tres Raices in Caracas. Another group with mafia characteristics is the Patriotic Forces of National Liberation, previously known as the Bolivarian Liberation Forces, a pro-government guerrilla group that split in 2008. Other criminal actors include Colombian criminal groups, primarily FARC dissidents and ELN, who use Venezuela as a base for cocaine, gas, gold and human smuggling. FARC groups move drugs to Mexico and Brazil in return for high-grade weaponry and are also involved in gold and coltan extraction and smuggling. The ELN is involved in cocaine, arms and human smuggling and is tolerated by Venezuelan authorities and security forces who are accused of aiding its expansion. BACRIM groups are also involved in cocaine and human smuggling.

Loosely organized criminal networks may use violence to commit theft, contract killing, extortion and the street sale of drugs. Their increasing membership may be ascribed to the current economic and humanitarian crises. The cocaine trade is reportedly aided by state actors and armed forces; many officials are accused of facilitating drug trafficking through airports and via connections with Colombian guerrilla groups as members of the loosely knit *Cártel de los Soles*. In addition, the GNB has allegedly collaborated with Colombian drug traffickers, and political elites have also been accused of cocaine trafficking and of using the state-owned oil company for money laundering.

RESILIENCE

LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

The Venezuelan state is accused of involvement in contraband, cocaine smuggling, money laundering, patronage, the illegal exploitation of natural resources, exchange-rate manipulation, and corruption schemes related to the distribution of food and medicine. Many officials, including President Nicolás Maduro, are under investigation or have been indicted. The regime's credibility suffers due to mass emigration and a humanitarian crisis caused by the socio-economic meltdown and political instability. Venezuela's democratic institutions are weak, with power concentrated in the executive branch, and the government has closed avenues for political dissent, restricted the media, voters and civil liberties, and prosecuted perceived opponents. Maduro's re-election was widely condemned as illegitimate, resulting in opposition leader Juan Guaidó proclaiming himself president, a claim supported by several dozen countries around the world, including the US.

Organized criminal groups have contributed to a rise in homicides, kidnappings, extortion and violence, and the

government often blames Colombian criminals as the only source of violence and crime. Venezuela has failed to comprehensively criminalize corruption, money laundering and human trafficking, and instead of solving deep-rooted problems national institutions have been used to increase the power of the executive branch. There is also a lack of public information with regard to corruption, crime and violence, and Venezuela is considered to have among the highest levels of corruption within government and wider society in the world.

Venezuela is party to international agreements on organized crime, human trafficking, corruption, drugs and wildlife protection, and has extradition treaties with Spain, Italy, Australia, Uruguay, Ecuador, Bolivia, Colombia and Chile. Nonetheless, Venezuela fails to adhere to its international obligations with regard to narcotics, and repressive measures and military tactics in response to crime have led to human-rights violations. National drug and arms legislation have had minimum results, and anti-human-trafficking measures are lacking. Venezuelan law covers organized crime and

terrorist financing, but important mechanisms to combat domestic criminal organizations are absent.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND SECURITY

Venezuela's judicial system lacks impartiality, does not operate independently from the executive branch, and is particularly vulnerable to corrupt practices. Most judges hold provisional appointments, leading to judicial paralysis. The prison system also suffers from corruption, weak security, poor infrastructure, overcrowding, insufficient staffing, and poorly trained guards, allowing for the rise of armed gangs. Conditions are aggravated by inefficient judicial procedures resulting in high pre-trial detention rates, and by the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, despite reforms, the police agency responsible for the forensic investigation and crime statistics is accused of human-rights violations, including extrajudicial killings. Its hard-line approach, and the lack of sanctions over misconduct, has compounded distrust within communities towards security forces.

Crime and human-rights violations, perpetrated by criminal groups and law enforcement, is rife along Venezuela's borders, particularly with Colombia. The closure of the border contributed to the growth of transnational organized crime and exacerbated corruption in the armed forces. The lack of national, state and municipal authorities, paired with local authorities' willingness to accept bribes, further complicate the situation, and local police and collectives often wield territorial control outside of the rule of law.

ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL ENVIRONMENT

Venezuela is at high risk for money laundering and terrorism financing due to a lack of political will, an unstable economy, limited bilateral cooperation, and weak anti-money laundering supervision and enforcement. The largest proportion of money laundering is generated by drug trafficking, as well as corruption and smuggling. Price controls and the foreign-exchange system is a source for currency manipulation and goods arbitrage, while the main law aimed at bribery, abuse of office, extortion, and money laundering is not considered effective.

International sanctions have resulted in the country increasingly selling oil via grey markets abroad. Venezuela remains dependent on oil revenues, and declining oil production and prices caused inflation to skyrocket. The state subsequently tightened its control over the economy and placed blame on the private sector for shortages. The cutting of three zeros off the value of the bolívar was followed by promises of increases in the minimum wage and the use of a non-existent state-backed cryptocurrency. Strong state intervention, political instability and foreign sanctions have also inhibited foreign investment, and private firms are competitively disadvantaged compared to public enterprises, particularly in terms of gaining access to foreign currency at the official exchange rate. The economic crisis

has caused citizens to struggle to meet basic needs, with most now living below the poverty line.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

Government institutions do not offer adequate protection for victims and witnesses of human-rights violations and modern slavery. Distrust in authorities is heightened by the deaths during government raids, and witnesses and victims' families refute claims that victims were armed. Many victims fear retaliation and do not trust authorities to conduct investigations. Initiatives to prevent organized crime are lacking, and national law does not address prevention, nor the protection of vulnerable groups. Actions perpetrated by security forces to fight criminal organizations have increased violence and amplified social exclusion, and the Venezuelan observatory of violence has pushed for the creation of programmes to dissuade young people from joining organized-criminal groups.

The relationship between the government and non-state actors is weak because the regime limits criticism, particularly by civil-society organizations and journalists. There have been accusations against the government for trying to control media coverage and of silencing independent outlets, and journalists are subject to intensifying harassment, arrests, and violence by police and intelligence agencies. As a result, numerous reporters have fled in fear of violence or arrest. Foreign journalists are also subject to arrest, persecution and cancelled visas.

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