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Venezuela: Overview of U.S. Sanctions Policy

Since 2005, the United States has imposed targeted sanctions on Venezuelan individuals and entities that have engaged in criminal, antidemocratic, or corrupt actions. U.S. sanctions have been imposed via both executive and congressional action. Under President Nicolás Maduro (2013-2026), the first Trump Administration expanded U.S. sanctions. The Biden Administration offered limited sanctions relief to try to incentivize Maduro to convene a free and fair presidential election. Maduro claimed victory in the 2024 election even after results indicated he lost. In January 2025, Maduro took office for a third term after a period of postelection repression.

The Trump Administration has designated Venezuela-linked criminal groups as terrorist organizations. The U.S. Department of the Treasury has increased sanctions on individuals, firms, and tankers tied to Venezuela's oil trade. In December 2025, U.S. seizures of sanctioned oil tankers began. On January 3, 2026, U.S. forces captured Maduro and his wife and transported them to New York to face narco-terrorism charges. President Trump said that Delcy Rodríguez, Maduro's vice president and oil minister, is willing to work with the United States as acting president. U.S. officials have said they intend to pressure the acting government to, among other aims, allow the United States to direct oil sales and proceeds, thereby limiting the role of U.S. adversaries in the sector.

Sanctions In Force

The United States has imposed individual, financial, and sectoral sanctions on the Venezuelan government, as well as sanctions on the former Maduro government and its supporters. This product does not discuss foreign aid and financing restrictions.

Visa Restrictions

The State Department has privately revoked the visas of thousands of Venezuelans, including current and former officials. It has publicly imposed visa restrictions on 14 Venezuelan officials for corruption or human rights abuses pursuant to Section 7031(c) of annual Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs appropriations measures.

Drug-Trafficking-Related Sanctions

The U.S. Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) has imposed asset-blocking sanctions on 11 individuals and 27 entities with connections to Venezuela by denoting them as Specially Designated Narcotics Traffickers pursuant to the Foreign Narcotics Kingpin Designation Act (P.L. 106-120, Title VIII, as amended; 21 U.S.C. §§1901 et seq.). In December 2025, OFAC imposed sanctions on two additional individuals under Executive Order (E.O.) 14059.

Terrorism-Related Sanctions

Since 2006, the Secretary of State has made an annual determination (most recently in May 2025) that Venezuela is not "cooperating fully with United States anti-terrorism efforts" pursuant to Section 40A of the Arms Export Control Act (22 U.S.C. §2781). The United States has prohibited all U.S. commercial arms sales and retransfers to Venezuela. In 2008, pursuant to E.O. 13224, OFAC classified two individuals and two travel agencies in Venezuela as Specially Designated Nationals (SDNs) subject to asset-blocking sanctions for financially supporting Hezbollah, a U.S.-designated Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO).

In February 2025, Secretary of State Marco Rubio designated Tren de Aragua (TDA)—a Venezuela-origin gang—as an FTO consistent with E.O. 14157. This designation enables new sanctions, law enforcement, and immigration actions against TDA and its members. President Trump invoked the Alien Enemies Act to enable the removal of alleged TDA members to El Salvador; that invocation remains subject to legal challenges. In June and July, OFAC sanctioned TDA leaders, and in December, OFAC sanctioned a network of individuals and entities for providing material support to TDA.

In July 2025, OFAC designated the Cartel de los Soles (Cartel of the Suns) as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist. In November, Secretary of State Rubio designated the group an FTO. Since September, the U.S. military has carried out lethal strikes on drug vessels at sea, some purportedly tied to TDA or the Cartel of the Suns.

Export Controls and Non-Proliferation

U.S. Department of Commerce export controls related to Venezuela affect dual-use technology, including expanded restrictions since 2020 on sales to military or military-intelligence end users.

Targeted Sanctions Related to Antidemocratic Actions, Human Rights Violations, and Corruption

In response to Maduro's repression, Congress enacted the Venezuela Defense of Human Rights and Civil Society Act of 2014 (P.L. 113-278; 50 U.S.C. §1701 note). Among its provisions, the law required the President to impose sanctions on people the President identified as responsible for significant acts of violence, serious human rights abuses, or antidemocratic actions. Congress extended these sanctions through 2023 in P.L. 116-94. President Obama issued E.O. 13692 to implement P.L. 113-278 in March 2015, and Treasury issued regulations in July 2015 (31 C.F.R. Part 591). The E.O. targets (for asset blocking and visa restrictions) people involved in actions or policies undermining democratic processes or institutions; serious human rights abuses; actions that prohibit, limit, or penalize

freedom of expression or assembly; and public corruption. It includes any person who is a current or former leader of any entity engaged in any of those activities, as well as current or former government officials. To date, OFAC has imposed sanctions on 160 Venezuelans and eight entities pursuant to E.O. 13692, including Acting President Delcy Rodríguez, Defense Minister Vladimir Padrino López, and Interior Minister Diosdado Cabello.

Additional Sanctions

In 2017, President Trump imposed financial sanctions on Venezuela in response to the government's human rights abuses and antidemocratic actions. In August 2017, President Trump issued E.O. 13808, which largely prohibited access to U.S. financial markets by the Venezuelan government, including state energy company Petróleos de Venezuela, S.A. (PdVSA). In March 2018, President Trump issued E.O. 13827 to prohibit transactions involving the Venezuelan government's issuance of digital currency, coin, or token. In May 2018, President Trump issued E.O. 13835, which prohibited transactions related to purchasing Venezuelan debt and any debt owed to Venezuela pledged as collateral. OFAC has since issued time-limited licenses preventing the forced sale of CITGO, a U.S. subsidiary of PdVSA, to creditors. In December 2025, OFAC sanctioned an entity and its owner for purchasing drones from Iran pursuant to E.O. 13949 (Iran sanctions).

Broader Sectoral Sanctions

In November 2018, President Trump issued E.O. 13850. This E.O. set forth a framework to block the assets of, and prohibit certain transactions with, any person determined by the Secretary of the Treasury to operate in designated sectors of the Venezuelan economy or to engage in corrupt transactions with the Maduro government. In January 2019, pursuant to E.O. 13850, OFAC designated PdVSA as operating in the oil sector of the Venezuelan economy, and the Secretary of the Treasury determined that the company was subject to U.S. sanctions. The E.O. froze all property and interests in property of PdVSA subject to U.S. jurisdiction and prohibited U.S. persons from engaging in transactions with the company. OFAC also sanctioned Venezuela's Central Bank, National Development Bank, and state-owned gold company, Minerven. To date, OFAC has imposed sanctions pursuant to E.O. 13850 on 27 individuals, 95 entities, and 57 vessels. Since mid-December, the United States has seized six vessels transporting Venezuelan oil. Secretary Rubio has repeatedly asserted that such seizures will continue.

Sanctions on the Maduro Government

In August 2019, President Trump issued E.O. 13884, freezing the assets of the Maduro government in the United States. The order prohibited U.S. persons from engaging in transactions with the Maduro government unless authorized by OFAC. It also authorized financial sanctions and visa restrictions on non-U.S. persons who assist the Maduro government. As of January 15, 2026, five individuals, one entity, and several vessels and aircraft were designated under E.O. 13884. OFAC also issued licenses authorizing transactions involving the delivery of food, agricultural

commodities, and medicine; remittances; international organizations; and communications.

Licenses Issued and Revoked

During the Biden Administration, OFAC issued and amended licenses to allow certain transactions. In late 2022, after Maduro-opposition negotiations restarted, OFAC issued General License (GL) 41, which allowed U.S. oil company Chevron to resume production in Venezuela and import and export petroleum products at its joint ventures (JVs). In October 2023, Maduro and the opposition signed an agreement that included elections. In response, OFAC issued GL 43, which authorized transactions with Minerven, and GL 44, which authorized transactions by any company involving the oil and gas sector for six months. In January 2024, OFAC revoked GL 43 after Venezuela's supreme court upheld a ban on the candidacy of María Corina Machado (winner of the 2023 opposition primary). In April 2024, the Administration announced it would not renew GL 44, the oil sector license. Instead, OFAC issued a general license giving companies 45 days to wind down operations authorized by GL 44.

In March 2025, OFAC amended Chevron's GL to require the company to wind down operations in Venezuela. Most specific licenses that had allowed other companies to operate in Venezuela expired. Since April 2025, any country that imports Venezuelan oil could face a 25% tariff on its exports to the United States. This tariff has been subject to legal challenge. In July 2025, Treasury reportedly issued a specific license allowing Chevron's JVs to resume operations but prohibiting them from making cash payments to the Venezuelan government.

Post-Maduro Energy Deal

On January 6, 2026, President Trump stated that Venezuelan officials would turn over "Sanctioned Oil," reportedly worth some \$3 billion. According to the U.S.-Venezuela energy deal, the United States would market and sell Venezuelan oil and deposit proceeds into "U.S.-controlled" accounts. Proceeds would be used for the benefit of the "American people and the Venezuelan people." OFAC reportedly is considering an expanded license for Chevron and has issued new licenses for other companies to import and export Venezuelan oil.

Congressional Considerations

Congress may assess how U.S. sanctions are advancing U.S. interests and consider legislation to expand or ease sanctions on the acting government and/or Venezuela-linked FTOs. Congress also could consider legislation to increase transparency regarding any licenses modified or granted for oil companies to operate in Venezuela. In the 119th Congress, House-passed legislation (H.R. 1486) would authorize targeted sanctions on foreign adversary entities that, among other measures, provide material support to national security entities in Venezuela. Congress also may conduct oversight on how FTO designations are linked to the use of military force and how sanctions may be changed and/or licenses expanded. Also see, CRS Insight IN12637, *Venezuela Oil Sector: Context for Recent Developments*; CRS Insight IN12618, *U.S. Capture of Venezuela's Nicolás Maduro: Considerations for Congress*.

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