



Updated June 4, 2025

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. In response to increasing repression under President Nicolás Maduro, in power since 2013, the first Trump Administration expanded U.S. sanctions to include financial and sectoral sanctions, as well as sanctions on the Maduro government. The Biden Administration offered limited sanctions relief through licenses to try to incentivize the Maduro government to convene free and fair presidential elections in July 2024. Maduro claimed victory in a July 28 election that international observers concluded did not meet international standards. Precinct-level vote tabulations indicated that opposition candidate Edmundo González Urrutia won with 67% of the vote.

On January 10, 2025, Maduro took office for a third term after a period of postelection repression. After the attorney general issued an arrest warrant accusing González of terrorism, González went into exile in Spain. Opposition leader María Corina Machado is in hiding. Maduro's party claims to have won 23 of 24 gubernatorial races (including in the disputed Essequibo region claimed by Guyana) and some 253 of 285 legislative seats in a May 25 election that most opposition supporters boycotted and U.S. officials dismissed as a "sham." The Trump Administration announced a 25% tariff on countries that buy Venezuelan oil and allowed licenses that had enabled Chevron and other energy companies to operate in Venezuela to expire.

Sanctions In Force

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

Visa Restrictions

Since FY2018, the State Department publicly has imposed visa restrictions on 14 Venezuelans for corruption or human rights abuses pursuant to Section 7031(c) of annual Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs appropriations acts. The State Department also has revoked the visas of nearly 2,000 Venezuelans, including those of Venezuelan officials and their families.

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 Executive Order (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).

On February 20, 2025, Secretary of State Marco Rubio designated Tren de Aragua—a Venezuela-origin gang and U.S.-designated Transnational Criminal Organization—an FTO pursuant to E.O. 14157. President Trump then invoked the Alien Enemies Act to enable the removal of alleged Tren de Aragua members to El Salvador; that move has been subject to legal challenge.

Export Controls

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

Drug-Trafficking-Related Sanctions

OFAC has imposed asset-blocking sanctions on 11 individuals and 25 companies 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.).

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 peaceful 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. As of June 1, 2025, Treasury had imposed SDN sanctions on roughly 151 Venezuelans and three entities pursuant to E.O. 13692. Those individuals include President Maduro, his wife, and his son; Vice President Delcy Rodríguez; and Defense Minister Vladimir Padrino López. Between September 2024 and January 2025, the U.S. Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC)

imposed financial sanctions on 45 officials for their role in electoral fraud or repression.

Additional Financial Sanctions

President Trump imposed additional 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 prohibited access to U.S. financial markets by the Venezuelan government, including state energy company *Petróleos de Venezuela, S.A. (PdVSA)*, with certain exceptions intended to minimize the impact on the Venezuelan people and U.S. interests. 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. Since then, OFAC has issued licenses preventing the forced sale of CITGO, a U.S. subsidiary of PdVSA, to creditors.

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 (companies or individuals) from engaging in transactions with the company. OFAC also sanctioned Venezuela's Central Bank, National Development Bank, and state-owned gold company, Minerven. OFAC has imposed sanctions pursuant to E.O. 13850 on five individuals and 11 entities.

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. There are five individuals and one entity 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 services. A 2021 Government Accountability Office report found that overcompliance with U.S. sanctions had limited some humanitarian assistance.

Licenses Issued and Revoked

During the Biden Administration, OFAC issued and amended licenses to allow certain transactions. In November 2022, after Maduro-opposition negotiations restarted, OFAC issued General License (GL) 41, which allowed Chevron to resume oil and gas production in

Venezuela and import and export petroleum products at its joint ventures in Venezuela. Chevron's general license and other actions (i.e., OFAC specific licenses and authorizations permitting foreign companies to work with PdVSA) fueled oil production growth in Venezuela in 2023.

In October 2023, after Maduro and the opposition signed the Barbados Agreement, which included a road map for holding competitive elections, Treasury 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. U.S. officials said that the licenses could be revoked if the Maduro government did not create a process to allow all candidates to run in the 2024 election and release wrongfully detained Americans and Venezuelan political prisoners. In January 2024, OFAC revoked GL 43 after Venezuela's supreme court upheld a ban on the candidacy of María Corina Machado.

In April 2024, the Biden Administration announced it would not renew the oil sector license, citing the Maduro government's violations of the Barbados Agreement. Instead, OFAC issued a new license giving companies 45 days to wind down operations that were authorized by GL 44. OFAC stated that companies could seek specific licenses to work in Venezuela and that projects that were under way before GL 44 took effect could continue.

On January 22, 2025, Secretary of State Rubio spoke with González, whom he called the "rightful president of Venezuela," and Machado. On March 4, 2025, OFAC amended Chevron's GL, which effectively required the company to wind down operations in Venezuela before May 27, 2025. Most specific licenses that had allowed other companies to operate in Venezuela probably have expired. Any specific license that Chevron may have at this time is not publicly available, although it reportedly only allows the company to maintain its assets in the country. Since April 2, 2025, any country that imports Venezuelan oil may be subject to a 25% tariff on its exports to the United States. This tariff has been subject to legal challenge.

Congressional Considerations

Since 2014, Congress has been broadly supportive of U.S. policies aimed at hastening a return to democracy in Venezuela, including the use of targeted sanctions. In the 118th Congress, H.R. 6831, ordered to be reported by the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, would have reauthorized targeted sanctions (authorized through 2023 in P.L. 116-94) on individuals who engage in corruption, human rights abuses, and/or antidemocratic actions. The Senate did not act on a related bill (S. 3363).

Congress may assess how U.S. sanctions policy is advancing U.S. interests in Venezuela and consider legislation to expand or ease sanctions. In the 119th Congress, legislation has been introduced (H.R. 328/S. 261) to prohibit U.S. energy investments in Venezuela until González's victory is recognized. Another measure (S. 37) would codify financial sanctions on Venezuelan debt and on cryptocurrency and related technologies in Venezuela. S. 37 would also authorize sanctions on countries supporting a nondemocratic government in Venezuela.

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IF10715

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