

# [***Venezuela Risks Going Back to Being the Pariah of South America | Opinion***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6C04-KG11-DY68-1002-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Byline:** Gabriel Leão

**Highlight:** Venezuela's potential confrontation with Guyana would bring catastrophic losses.

**Body**

Populism is an intrinsic part of Latin American ***politics***. It has already reached American shores through former president and once again candidate [*Donald Trump*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/donald-trump?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships). Still, populism seems to have reached a new level in the 21st century in Venezuela, ruled with an iron grip by Nicolás Maduro, who has "inherited" it from the controversial leader Hugo Chávez. After neglecting real democratic elections and threatening to put its hands on Guyanese oil, Venezuela is becoming more of a problem that has caught the attention of the [*U.S.*](https://www.newsweek.com/us-military-venezuela-guyana-essequibo-nicolas-maduro-1850475?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships), the [*U.K.*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/dec/28/venezuela-mounts-military-exercises-as-uk-sends-warship-to-support-guyana), and Brazil, affecting not only South American ***politics*** but the entire continent.

We live in a world engulfed in localized conflicts—the Russian-Ukrainian and the Israel-Hamas wars—and the large-scale armed conflicts in Burkina Faso, Somalia, Yemen, Myanmar, Nigeria, and Syria. Venezuela might join them as another problematic region sowing pain, death, and impoverishment that affects not only the combatant nations but the neighboring areas, as the country made moves for the region of [*Essequibo*](https://www.newsweek.com/venezuela-guyana-essequibo-map-referendum-1849209?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships), which currently belongs to Guyana, expelled two [*American oil companies*](https://apnews.com/article/guyana-venezuela-oil-exploration-essequibo-exxonmobil-e42ba79e0fca008670b3902808319844), and held a referendum in December in which voters supported the annexation of the region to Venezuela. This move sent red flags to the U.N., while prompting the U.S. and the [*U.K*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/dec/24/britain-to-send-patrol-ship-to-guyana-amid-venezuela-border-dispute). [*armed forces to announce*](https://apnews.com/article/guyana-us-military-assistance-venezuela-essequibo-8765aa50e4ff5e6e0af61bb527389c0f) that they would increase military aide to Guyana.

Another alarming issue hailing from Venezuela is its bogus electoral process that upholds a [*15-year ban*](https://www.dw.com/en/venezuelas-top-court-upholds-ban-on-opposition-candidate/a-68099577) on the opposing primary winner, María Corina Machado, once again setting off the U.N. The situation has made Washington reimpose sanctions, which was already expected. However, [*Brazil's push for a just democratic process*](https://agenciabrasil.ebc.com.br/en/internacional/noticia/2024-03/brazil-criticizes-blocking-candidacies-elections-venezuela) calls attention to President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva's [*allyship*](https://www.miamiherald.com/news/local/news-columns-blogs/andres-oppenheimer/article287417915.html) to the deceased Chávez and backing of the incumbent Maduro.

Brazil's foreign relations branch stated its "[*expectation and concern*](https://agenciabrasil.ebc.com.br/en/internacional/noticia/2024-03/brazil-criticizes-blocking-candidacies-elections-venezuela)" regarding Venezuela's elections. Venezuela signed the [*Barbados Agreements*](https://www.gov.br/mre/en/contact-us/press-area/press-releases/barbados-agreements-on-political-dialogue-in-venezuela)—adhering to free elections that included the opposition, Plataforma Unitaria Democrática—which it now disregards. The agreement was part of international efforts to bridge the dissident groups, while promoting negotiations for free and fair elections.

The lack of fully democratic elections and the power play for oil are just the latest chapters of Venezuela's pariah status bleeding out. Since September 2023, [*more than 4 million*](https://www.unhcr.org/news/press-releases/over-4-million-venezuelan-refugees-and-migrants-struggle-meet-basic-needs) Venezuelan refugees and immigrants have been struggling in the Americas to secure their basic needs, going to extreme lengths to survive. The Venezuelan crisis dates back to 2013, the tail end of Chávez's tenure.

Venezuela's so-called Bolivarian Revolution is the scion of populist ***politics*** that led the country to high murder rates, a lack of essential products, business closures, and economic losses, not to mention corruption from the upper echelon to the lower classes. A tendency in populist governments is to claim that combating corruption protects the people.

Amid the crisis, Venezuela has seen some minor improvements; nevertheless, a conflict against the combined forces of the U.S. and the U.K. alongside another suspicious election in the country, as happened in [*2013*](https://english.elpais.com/elpais/2013/04/10/inenglish/1365607401_841893.html), and [*2018*](https://www.newsweek.com/venezuela-elections-maduro-win-934233?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships), would turn Venezuela once more into the pariah of the Americas.

Venezuela's potential confrontation with Guyana would bring catastrophic losses to the third smallest sovereign state in mainland South America, with a low population density already enduring one of the worst economies in the region. Thus, strife with Venezuela without diplomacy or even military allies from other nations would be the harbinger of doom to the Guyanese people, further positioning Venezuela as a bully—a pariah.

The attempt to have Essequibo's oil would backfire, Venezuelan youth would be sent to a war they wouldn't stand a chance of winning; the absence of a rightfully elected leader would speak volumes to the outside world, and in the end, the people would endure even more indescribable horrors.

One of the ways that Venezuela can avoid such a dire scenario is by considering Brazil's position as an intermediary in foreign relations, a country that is an ally but cannot support the current Venezuela, a scenario that in previous Lula administrations would be unthinkable.

Still, it would take a lot from Maduro and his staff to swallow their pride and stop viewing neighboring countries as America's lapdogs. If Venezuela keeps presenting itself in this way, the national political class will continue to prove that they are, in fact, the main oppressors of the Venezuelan people.

*Gabriel Leão works as a journalist and is based in São Paulo, Brazil. He has written for outlets in Brazil, the U.K., Canada, Mexico, and the U.S. such as* WIRED*,* Al Jazeera*,* Vice*,* Dicebreaker*,* Scarleteen*,* Women's Media Center*,* Clash*,* Anime Herald*,* Anime Feminist*, and Brazil's* ESPN Magazine *having started his career at Brazil's* TV Cultura *as an intern. Leão also holds a master's degree in communications and a post-grad degree in foreign relations.*

*The views expressed in this article are the writer's own.*

[*Link to Image*](https://d.newsweek.com/en/full/2389213/venezuelas-president-nicolas-maduro-speaks.jpg)

**Graphic**

Venezuela's President Nicolas Maduro speaks

JUAN BARRETO/AFP via Getty Images

Venezuela's President Nicolás Maduro speaks during the summit of the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA) bloc in Caracas on April 24, 2024.

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