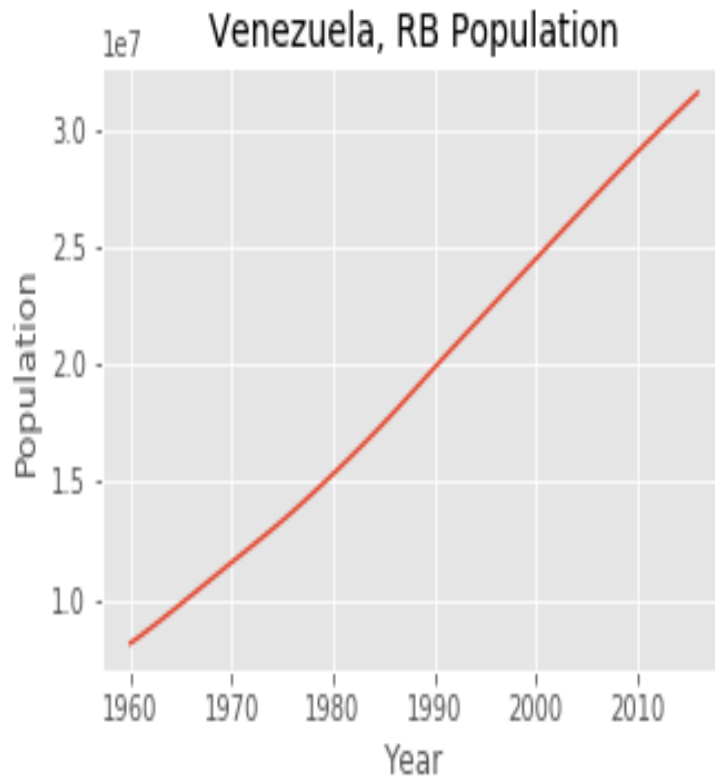


Venezuela, RB



Venezuela ((listen) VEN-■-ZWAYL-■; American Spanish: [bene■swela]), officially denominated Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (Spanish: República Bolivariana de Venezuela), is a federal republic on the northern coast of South America, consisting of a continental land and a large number of small islands and islets in the Caribbean Sea, whose capital and largest urban agglomeration is the city of Caracas. It has a territorial extension of 916,445 km² (353,841 sq mi). The continental territory is bordered on the north by the Caribbean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean, on the west by Colombia, Brazil on the south, Trinidad and Tobago to the north-east and on the east by Guyana. With this last country, the Venezuelan Government maintains a claim for Guayana Esequiba over an area of 159,542 km² (61,600 sq mi). For its maritime areas, it exercises sovereignty over 71,295 km² (27,527 sq mi) of territorial waters, 22,224 km² (8,581 sq mi) in its contiguous zone, 471,507 km² (182,050 sq mi) of the Caribbean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean under the concept of exclusive economic zone, and 99,889 km² (38,567 of mi) continental shelf. This marine area borders those of thirteen States. The country has extremely high biodiversity and is ranked 7th in the world's list of nations with the most number of species. There are habitats ranging from the Andes Mountains in the west to the Amazon basin rain-forest in the south via extensive llanos plains, the Caribbean coast and the Orinoco River Delta in the east. The territory now known as Venezuela was colonized by Spain in 1522 amid resistance from indigenous peoples. In 1811, it became one of the first Spanish-American territories to declare independence which was not securely established until 1821, when Venezuela was a department of the federal republic of Gran Colombia. It gained full independence as a separate country in 1830. During the 19th century, Venezuela suffered political turmoil and autocracy, remaining dominated by regional caudillos (military strongmen) until the mid-20th century. Since 1958, the country has had a series of democratic governments. Economic shocks in the 1980s and 1990s led to several political crises, including the deadly Caracazo riots of 1989, two attempted coups in 1992, and the impeachment of President Carlos Andrés Pérez for embezzlement of public funds in 1993. A collapse in confidence in the existing parties saw the 1998 election of former coup-involved career officer Hugo Chávez and the

launch of the Bolivarian Revolution. The revolution began with a 1999 Constituent Assembly, where a new Constitution of Venezuela was written. This new constitution officially changed the name of the country to República Bolivariana de Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela). Venezuela is a charter member of the UN, OAS, USAN, ALBA, Mercosur, LAIA and OEI. The country is a federal presidential republic consisting of 23 states, the Capital District (covering Caracas), and federal dependencies (covering Venezuela's offshore islands). Venezuela also claims all Guyanese territory west of the Essequibo River, a 159,500-square-kilometre (61,583 sq mi) tract dubbed Guayana Esequiba or the Zona en Reclamación (the "zone under dispute"). Venezuela is among the most urbanized countries in Latin America; the vast majority of Venezuelans live in the cities of the north, especially in the capital (Caracas) which is also the largest city in Venezuela. Oil was discovered in the early 20th century and, today, Venezuela has the world's largest known oil reserves and has been one of the world's leading exporters of oil. Previously the country was an underdeveloped exporter of agricultural commodities such as coffee and cocoa, but oil quickly came to dominate exports and government revenues. The 1980s oil glut led to an external debt crisis and a long-running economic crisis. Inflation peaked at 100% in 1996 and poverty rates rose to 66% in 1995 as (by 1998) per capita GDP fell to the same level as 1963, down a third from its 1978 peak. The recovery of oil prices in the early 2000s gave Venezuela oil funds not seen since the 1980s. The Venezuelan government then established populist social welfare policies that initially boosted the Venezuelan economy and increased social spending, temporarily reducing economic inequality and poverty. However, such policies later became inadequate, as their excesses – including a uniquely extreme fossil fuel subsidy – are widely blamed for destabilizing the nation's economy. The destabilized economy led to a crisis in Bolivarian Venezuela, resulting in hyperinflation, an economic depression, shortages of basic goods and drastic increases in unemployment, poverty, disease, child mortality, malnutrition, and crime. By late 2017, Venezuela was declared to be in default with debt payments by credit rating agencies.

== Etymology == According to the most popular and accepted version, in 1499, an expedition led by Alonso de Ojeda visited the Venezuelan coast. The stilt houses in the area of Lake Maracaibo reminded the Italian navigator, Amerigo Vespucci, of the city of Venice, Italy, so he named the region Veneziola, or "Little Venice". The Spanish version of Veneziola is Venezuela. Martín Fernández de Enciso, a member of the Vespucci and Ojeda crew, gave a different account. In his work *Summa de geografía*, he states that the crew found indigenous people who called themselves the Veneciuela. Thus, the name "Venezuela" may have evolved from the native word.

== History ==

Pre-Columbian history === Evidence exists of human habitation in the area now known as Venezuela from about 15,000 years ago. Leaf-shaped tools from this period, together with chopping and planoconvex scraping implements, have been found exposed on the high riverine terraces of the Rio Pedregal in western Venezuela. Late Pleistocene hunting artifacts, including spear tips, have been found at a similar series of sites in northwestern Venezuela known as "El Jobo"; according to radiocarbon dating, these date from 13,000 to 7,000 BC. It is not known how many people lived in Venezuela before the Spanish conquest; it has been estimated at around one million. In addition to indigenous peoples known today, the population included historical groups such as the Kalina (Caribs), Auaké, Caquetio, Mariche, and Timoto-Cuicas. The Timoto-Cuica culture was the most complex society in Pre-Columbian Venezuela, with pre-planned permanent villages, surrounded by irrigated, terraced fields. They also stored water in tanks. Their houses were made primarily of stone and wood with thatched roofs. They were peaceful, for the most part, and depended on growing crops. Regional crops included potatoes and ullucos. They left behind works of art, particularly anthropomorphic ceramics, but no major monuments. They spun vegetable fibers to weave into textiles and mats for housing. They are credited with having invented the arepa, a staple in Venezuelan cuisine. After the conquest, the population dropped markedly, mainly through the spread of new infectious diseases from Europe. Two main north-south axes of pre-Columbian population were present, who cultivated maize in the west and manioc in the east. Large parts of the llanos were cultivated through a combination of slash and burn and permanent settled agriculture.

=== Colonization === In 1498, during his third voyage to the Americas, Christopher Columbus sailed near the Orinoco Delta and landed in the Gulf of Paria. Amazed by the great offshore current of freshwater which deflected his course eastward, Columbus expressed in a letter to Isabella and Ferdinand that he must have reached Heaven on Earth (terrestrial paradise): Great signs are these of the Terrestrial Paradise, for the site conforms to the opinion of the holy and wise theologians whom I have mentioned. And likewise, the [other] signs conform very well, for I have never read or heard of such a large quantity of fresh water being inside and in such close proximity to salt water; the very mild temperateness also corroborates this; and if the

water of which I speak does not proceed from Paradise then it is an even greater marvel, because I do not believe such a large and deep river has ever been known to exist in this world. His certainty of having attained Paradise made him name this region 'Land of Grace', a phrase that has become the country's nickname. Spain's colonization of mainland Venezuela started in 1522, establishing its first permanent South American settlement in the present-day city of Cumaná. In the 16th century, Venezuela was contracted as a concession by the King of Spain to the German Welser banking family (Klein-Venedig, 1528–1546). Native caciques (leaders) such as Guaicaipuro (circa 1530–1568) and Tamanaco (died 1573) attempted to resist Spanish incursions, but the newcomers ultimately subdued them; Tamanaco was put to death by order of Caracas' founder, Diego de Losada. In the 16th century, during the Spanish colonization, indigenous peoples such as many of the Mariches, themselves descendants of the Kalina, converted to Roman Catholicism. Some of the resisting tribes or leaders are commemorated in place names, including Caracas, Chacao and Los Teques. The early colonial settlements focused on the northern coast, but in the mid-18th century, the Spanish pushed farther inland along the Orinoco River. Here, the Ye'kuana (then known as the Makiritare) organized serious resistance in 1775 and 1776. Spain's eastern Venezuelan settlements were incorporated into New Andalusia Province. Administered by the Royal Audiencia of Santo Domingo from the early 16th century, most of Venezuela became part of the Viceroyalty of New Granada in the early 18th century, and was then reorganized as an autonomous Captaincy General starting in 1777. The town of Caracas, founded in the central coastal region in 1567, was well-placed to become a key location, being near the coastal port of La Guaira whilst itself being located in a valley in a mountain range, providing defensive strength against pirates and a more fertile and healthy climate. === Independence and 19th century === After a series of unsuccessful uprisings, Venezuela, under the leadership of Francisco de Miranda, a Venezuelan marshal who had fought in the Revolution and the French Revolution, declared independence on July 5, 1811. This began the Venezuelan War of Independence. A devastating earthquake that struck Caracas in 1812, together with the rebellion of the Venezuelan llaneros, helped bring down the first Venezuelan republic. A second Venezuelan republic, proclaimed on August 7, 1813, lasted several months before being crushed, as well. Sovereignty was only attained after Simón Bolívar, aided by José Antonio Páez and Antonio José de Sucre, won the Battle of Carabobo on June 24, 1821. On July 24, 1823, José Prudencio Padilla and Rafael Urdaneta helped seal Venezuelan independence with their victory in the Battle of Lake Maracaibo. New Granada's congress gave Bolívar control of the Granadian army; leading it, he liberated several countries and founded Gran Colombia. Sucre, who won many battles for Bolívar, went on to liberate Ecuador and later become the second president of Bolivia. Venezuela remained part of Gran Colombia until 1830, when a rebellion led by Páez allowed the proclamation of a newly independent Venezuela; Páez became the first president of the new republic. Between one-quarter and one-third of Venezuela's population was lost during these two decades of warfare, which by 1830, was estimated at about 800,000. The colors of the Venezuelan flag are yellow, blue, and red: the yellow stands for land wealth, the blue for the sea that separates Venezuela from Spain, and the red for the blood shed by the heroes of independence. Slavery in Venezuela was abolished in 1854. Much of Venezuela's 19th-century history was characterized by political turmoil and dictatorial rule, including the Independence leader José Antonio Páez, who gained the presidency three times and served a total of 11 years between 1830 and 1863. This culminated in the Federal War (1859–1863), a civil war in which hundreds of thousands died in a country with a population of not much more than a million people. In the latter half of the century, Antonio Guzmán Blanco, another caudillo, served a total of 13 years between 1870 and 1887, with three other presidents interspersed. In 1895, a longstanding dispute with Great Britain about the territory of Guayana Esequiba, which Britain claimed as part of British Guiana and Venezuela saw as Venezuelan territory, erupted into the Venezuela Crisis of 1895. The dispute became a diplomatic crisis when Venezuela's lobbyist, William L. Scruggs, sought to argue that British behavior over the issue violated the United States' Monroe Doctrine of 1823, and used his influence in Washington, D.C., to pursue the matter. Then, US President Grover Cleveland adopted a broad interpretation of the doctrine that did not just simply forbid new European colonies, but declared an American interest in any matter within the hemisphere. Britain ultimately accepted arbitration, but in negotiations over its terms was able to persuade the US on many of the details. A tribunal convened in Paris in 1898 to decide the issue and in 1899 awarded the bulk of the disputed territory to British Guiana. In 1899, Cipriano Castro, assisted by his friend Juan Vicente Gómez, seized power in Caracas, marching an army from his base in the Andean state of Táchira. Castro defaulted on Venezuela's considerable foreign debts and declined to pay compensation to foreigners caught up in Venezuela's civil wars. This led to the Venezuela Crisis of

1902–1903, in which Britain, Germany and Italy imposed a naval blockade of several months before international arbitration at the new Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague was agreed. In 1908, another dispute broke out with the Netherlands, which was resolved when Castro left for medical treatment in Germany and was promptly overthrown by Juan Vicente Gómez. === 20th century === The discovery of massive oil deposits in Lake Maracaibo during World War I proved to be pivotal for Venezuela and transformed the basis of its economy from a heavy dependence on agricultural exports. It prompted an economic boom that lasted into the 1980s; by 1935, Venezuela's per capita gross domestic product was Latin America's highest. Gómez benefited handsomely from this, as corruption thrived, but at the same time, the new source of income helped him centralize the Venezuelan state and develop its authority. He remained the most powerful man in Venezuela until his death in 1935, although at times he ceded the presidency to others. The gomecista dictatorship system largely continued under Eleazar López Contreras, but from 1941, under Isaías Medina Angarita, was relaxed. Angarita granted a range of reforms, including the legalization of all political parties. After World War II, immigration from Southern Europe (mainly from Spain, Italy, Portugal, and France) and poorer Latin American countries markedly diversified Venezuelan society. In 1945, a civilian-military coup overthrew Medina Angarita and ushered in a three-year period of democratic rule under the mass membership Democratic Action. Initially, under Rómulo Betancourt, until Rómulo Gallegos won the Venezuelan presidential election, 1947 (generally believed to be the first free and fair elections in Venezuela). Gallegos governed until overthrown by a military junta led by Marcos Pérez Jiménez and Gallegos' Defense Minister, Carlos Delgado Chalbaud, in the 1948 Venezuelan coup d'état. Pérez Jiménez was the most powerful man in the junta (though Chalbaud was its titular president) and was suspected of being behind the death in office of Chalbaud, who died in a bungled kidnapping in 1950. When the junta unexpectedly lost the election it held in 1952, it ignored the results and Pérez Jiménez was installed as President, where he remained until 1958. The expansion of the Venezuelan economy in this period was based on the indebtedness of the Venezuelan nation and that was one of the causes of the economic crisis in Venezuela in the 1960s, in which important projects such as the Urban Center El Recreo de Marcel Brauer on Avenida Casanova in Sabana Grande district were paralyzed. During Pérez Jiménez's administration, the State intervened areas of the economy that were traditionally carried out by private companies. The Pérez Jiménez government was characterized by its state capitalism and not by liberal capitalism. It was an antecedent of the populist and paternalistic economic regime of the later democratic regimes. The national private entrepreneurship increasingly had less space to grow and prosper. The State was the great capitalist in the Venezuela of Pérez Jiménez and was the largest national shareholder of major hotel chains such as Sheraton. In the government of Pérez Jiménez, Venezuela's debt grew more than 25 times and went from 175 million to more than 4,500 million bolívares in just 5 years (approximately 15 billion dollars in 2018). The malaise over the debts of Venezuela reached the barracks and the national business. Pérez Jiménez responded that: "there is no debt, but commitments". The Finance Minister failed to convince Pérez Jiménez to order the cancellation of debts. As of January 14, 1958, the Venezuelan business community decided to divorce itself completely from the regime, nine days before the collapse of the government. The military dictator Pérez Jiménez was forced out on January 23, 1958. In an effort to consolidate the young democracy, the major political parties (with the notable exception of the Communist Party of Venezuela) signed the Punto Fijo Pact. Democratic Action and COPEI would dominate the political landscape for four decades. In the 1960s, substantial guerilla movements occurred, including the Armed Forces of National Liberation and the Revolutionary Left Movement, which had split from Democratic Action in 1960. Most of these movements laid down their arms under Rafael Caldera's presidency (1969–74); Caldera had won the 1968 election for COPEI, being the first time a party other than Democratic Action took the presidency through a democratic election. The new democratic order had its antagonists. Betancourt suffered an attack planned by the Dominican dictator Rafael Trujillo, and the leftists excluded from the Pact initiated an armed insurgency by organizing themselves in the Armed Forces of National Liberation, sponsored by the Communist Party and Fidel Castro. In 1962 they tried to destabilize the military corps, with failed revolts in Carúpano and Puerto Cabello. At the same time, Betancourt promoted an international doctrine in which he only recognized elected governments by popular vote. As a result of the debt that Marcos Pérez Jiménez had left, it was necessary an economic adjustment program in Venezuela. The Economic Recovery Plan of 1960, was formulated by Tomás Enrique Carrillo Batalla. The construction industry was revitalized through the "rediscount" of the Central Bank of Venezuela. The Economic Recovery Plan fulfilled its objectives and in 1964, Venezuela was able to return to an anchored exchange rate, with free purchase and sale of foreign

currency. This system lasted until the Venezuelan Black Friday of 1983, although the model was already running out at the end of the seventies. The consolidation of the democratic system and the dissipation of fears of political radicalization of the country, contributed to normalize the demand for foreign currency, stabilizing the parallel exchange rate. For much of the period between 1950 and 1973, the Venezuelan economy was characterized by its stability and sustained strength, factors that contributed decisively to being able to maintain a fixed exchange rate without major inconveniences. In the period of Carlos Andrés Pérez, as a result of the Arab-Israeli war (the Yom Kippur war), the average price of a barrel of oil went from 3,71 to 10,53 dollars and continued to rise to exceed 29 dollars in 1981. The income of the public sector went from 18,960 million bolivars in 1973 to 45,564 million in 1974. The economic bonanza also had the characteristics of an economic bubble, but Venezuelans remember the "Ta barato, dame dos". The increased inflow of funds to savings and loan entities and mortgage banks allowed an increase in the mortgage loan portfolio, which also tripled. In general, Venezuela was a prosperous country in the governments of Rómulo Betancourt, Rafael Caldera and Carlos Andrés Pérez. In 1975 the iron industry was nationalized and the following year the oil industry, creating Petróleos de Venezuela, S.A. (PDVSA). Both Caldera and Pérez partially broke with the Betancourt Doctrine. The election of Carlos Andrés Pérez in 1973 coincided with the 1973 oil crisis, in which Venezuela's income exploded as oil prices soared; oil industries were nationalized in 1976. This led to massive increases in public spending, but also increases in external debts, which continued into the 1980s when the collapse of oil prices during the 1980s crippled the Venezuelan economy. As the government started to devalue the currency in February 1983 to face its financial obligations, Venezuelans' real standards of living fell dramatically. A number of failed economic policies and increasing corruption in government led to rising poverty and crime, worsening social indicators, and increased political instability. During the presidency of Luis Herrera Campins, at the beginning of the 1980s, important infrastructure works were completed, such as the Parque Central Complex (which became the largest housing complex and the tallest towers in Latin America), Teresa Carreño Cultural Complex (the largest cultural center in South America at that time), the Brígido Iriarte Stadium and the United Nations Park. Most of these works had been previously planned. Until the mid-eighties, the Venezuelan economy showed a very positive behavior, characterized by the absence of internal or external imbalances, high economic growth, largely due to the sustained and very high gross fixed investment of those years, 10 under unemployment and great price stability. This translated into sustained increases in the average real wage and an improvement in the condition of life. In 1983 the bolivar was devalued on Black Friday, unleashing a strong economic crisis, which hit investments in the most important financial centers of the Venezuelan capital, such as Sabana Grande. In the government of Jaime Lusinchi, an attempt was made to solve the problem. Unfortunately, the measures failed. After a long period of accelerated economic expansion that lasts for six decades (value of the stock of homes by families), an extreme higher value is reached towards 1982. From this historical value begins then a systematic fall that mounts to 26 hundred up to 2006, and that configures a genuine unique experience in contemporary economic life.. However, the economic deactivation of the country had begun to show its first signs in 1978. In the 1980s, the Presidential Commission for State Reform (COPRE) emerged as a mechanism of political innovation. Venezuela was preparing for the decentralization of its political system and the diversification of its economy, reducing the large size of the State. The COPRE operated as an innovation mechanism, also by incorporating issues into the political agenda that were generally excluded from public deliberation by the main actors of the Venezuelan democratic system. The most discussed topics were incorporated into the public agenda: decentralization, political participation, municipalization, judicial order reforms and the role of the State in a new economic strategy. Unfortunately, the social reality of the country made the changes difficult to apply. Economic crises in the 1980s and 1990s led to a political crisis in which hundreds died in the Caracazo riots of 1989, two attempted coups d'état in 1992, and the impeachment of President Carlos Andrés Pérez (re-elected in 1988) for corruption in 1993. Coup leader Hugo Chávez was pardoned in March 1994 by president Rafael Caldera, with a clean slate and his political rights reinstated.

=== Bolivarian government: 1999–present === The Bolivarian Revolution refers to a left-wing populism social movement and political process in Venezuela led by the late Venezuelan president, Hugo Chávez, the founder of the Fifth Republic Movement and later the United Socialist Party of Venezuela. The "Bolivarian Revolution" is named after Simón Bolívar, an early 19th-century Venezuelan and Latin American revolutionary leader, prominent in the Spanish American wars of independence in achieving the independence of most of northern South America from Spanish rule. According to Chávez and other supporters, the "Bolivarian Revolution" seeks to build a mass movement to implement

Bolivarianism—popular democracy, economic independence, equitable distribution of revenues, and an end to political corruption—in Venezuela. They interpret Bolívar's ideas from a populist perspective, using socialist rhetoric. ===== Hugo Chávez: 1999–2013 ===== A collapse in confidence in the existing parties led to Chávez being elected president in 1998, and the subsequent launch of a "Bolivarian Revolution", beginning with a 1999 Constituent Assembly to write a new Constitution of Venezuela. Chávez also initiated Bolivarian missions, programs aimed at helping the poor. In April 2002, Chávez was briefly ousted from power in the 2002 Venezuelan coup d'état attempt following popular demonstrations by his opponents, but he was returned to power after two days as a result of demonstrations by poor Chávez supporters in Caracas and actions by the military. Chávez also remained in power after an all-out national strike that lasted from December 2002 to February 2003, including a strike/lockout in the state oil company PDVSA. The strike produced severe economic dislocation, with the country's GDP falling 27% during the first four months of 2003, and costing the oil industry \$13.3 billion. Capital flight before and during the strike led to the reimposition of currency controls (which had been abolished in 1989), managed by the CADIVI agency. In the subsequent decade, the government was forced into several currency devaluations. These devaluations have done little to improve the situation of the Venezuelan people who rely on imported products or locally produced products that depend on imported inputs while dollar-denominated oil sales account for the vast majority of Venezuela's exports. The profits of the oil industry have been lost to "social engineering" and corruption, instead of investments needed to maintain oil production. Chávez survived several further political tests, including an August 2004 recall referendum. He was elected for another term in December 2006 and re-elected for a third term in October 2012. However, he was never sworn in for his third period, due to medical complications. Chávez died on 5 March 2013 after a nearly two-year fight with cancer. The presidential election that took place on Sunday, 14 April 2013, was the first since Chávez took office in 1999 in which his name did not appear on the ballot. Venezuela under Hugo Chávez suffered "one of the worst cases of Dutch Disease in the world" due to the Bolivarian government's large dependence on oil sales. Poverty and inflation began to increase into the 2010s. Nicolás Maduro was elected in 2013 after the death of Chavez. Chavez picked Maduro as his successor and appointed him vice president in 2013. Maduro was elected President in a shortened election in 2013 following Chavez's death. Despite the demand for a recount and claims of manipulation by his competitor, Maduro was announced victorious. Venezuela devalued its currency in February 2013 due to the rising shortages in the country, which included those of milk, flour, and other necessities. This led to an increase in malnutrition, especially among children. In 2014, Venezuela entered an economic recession. In 2015, Venezuela had the world's highest inflation rate with the rate surpassing 100%, becoming the highest in the country's history. Economic problems, as well as crime and corruption, were some of the main causes of the 2014–2018 Venezuelan protests, which left hundreds of protesters killed. ===== Nicolás Maduro: 2013–present ===== Nicolás Maduro has been the President of Venezuela since April 14, 2013, after winning the second presidential election after Chávez's death, with 50.61% of the votes against the opposition's candidate Henrique Capriles Radonski who had 49.12% of the votes. The Democratic Unity Roundtable contested his election as fraud and as a violation of the constitution. However, the Supreme Court of Venezuela ruled that under Venezuela's Constitution, Nicolás Maduro is the legitimate president and was invested as such by the Venezuelan National Assembly (Asamblea Nacional). Opposition leaders and international media consider the government of Maduro to be a dictatorship. Beginning in February 2014, hundreds of thousands of Venezuelans have protested over high levels of criminal violence, corruption, hyperinflation, and chronic scarcity of basic goods due to policies of the federal government. Demonstrations and riots have left over 40 fatalities in the unrest between both Chavistas and opposition protesters, and has led to the arrest of opposition leaders such as Leopoldo López and Antonio Ledezma. Human rights groups have strongly condemned the arrest of Leopoldo López. In the 2015 Venezuelan parliamentary election, the opposition gained a majority. The following year, in a July 2016 decree, President Maduro used his executive power to declare a state of economic emergency. The decree could force citizens to work in agricultural fields and farms for 60-day (or longer) periods to supply food to the country. Colombian border crossings have been temporarily opened to allow Venezuelans to purchase food and basic household and health items in Colombia in mid-2016. In September 2016, a study published in the Spanish-language *Diario Las Américas* indicated that 15% of Venezuelans are eating "food waste discarded by commercial establishments". In October 2016, Fox News Latino reported that during a month-long riot at the Táchira Detention Center in Caracas, 40 inmates dismembered and consumed three fellow inmates. There have been close to 200 prison riots

in Venezuela in 2016, with the cause being attributed to a worsening social situation, increasing poverty, and food shortages leading to overcrowded prisons. In March 2017, opposition leaders branded President Nicolas Maduro a dictator after the Maduro-aligned Supreme Tribunal, which had been overturning most National Assembly decisions since the opposition took control of the body, took over the functions of the assembly, pushing a lengthy political standoff to new heights. However, the Supreme Court quickly backed down and reversed its decision on April 1, 2017. A month later, President Maduro announced the Venezuelan Constituent Assembly election, 2017 and on August 30, 2017, the 2017 Constituent National Assembly was elected into office and quickly stripped the National Assembly of its powers. In December 2017, President Maduro declared that leading opposition parties will be barred from taking part in next year's presidential vote after they boycotted mayoral polls. ==

Geography == Venezuela is located in the north of South America; geologically, its mainland rests on the South American Plate. It has a total area of 916,445 km² (353,841 sq mi) and a land area of 882,050 km² (340,560 sq mi), making Venezuela the 33rd largest country in the world. The territory it controls lies between latitudes 0° and 13°N and longitudes 59° and 74°W. Shaped roughly like a triangle, the country has a 2,800 km (1,700 mi) coastline in the north, which includes numerous islands in the Caribbean and the northeast borders the northern Atlantic Ocean. Most observers describe Venezuela in terms of four fairly well-defined topographical regions: the Maracaibo lowlands in the northwest, the northern mountains extending in a broad east-west arc from the Colombian border along the northern Caribbean coast, the wide plains in central Venezuela, and the Guiana Highlands in the southeast. The northern mountains are the extreme northeastern extensions of South America's Andes mountain range. Pico Bolívar, the nation's highest point at 4,979 m (16,335 ft), lies in this region. To the south, the dissected Guiana Highlands contain the northern fringes of the Amazon Basin and Angel Falls, the world's highest waterfall, as well as tepuis, large table-like mountains. The country's center is characterized by the llanos, which are extensive plains that stretch from the Colombian border in the far west to the Orinoco River delta in the east. The Orinoco, with its rich alluvial soils, binds the largest and most important river system of the country; it originates in one of the largest watersheds in Latin America. The Caroní and the Apure are other major rivers. Venezuela borders Colombia to the west, Guyana to the east, and Brazil to the south. Caribbean islands such as Trinidad and Tobago, Grenada, Curaçao, Aruba, and the Leeward Antilles lie near the Venezuelan coast. Venezuela has territorial disputes with Guyana, formerly United Kingdom, largely concerning the Essequibo area and with Colombia concerning the Gulf of Venezuela. In 1895, after years of diplomatic attempts to solve the border dispute, the dispute over the Essequibo River border flared up. It was submitted to a "neutral" commission (composed of British, American, and Russian representatives and without a direct Venezuelan representative), which in 1899 decided mostly against Venezuela's claim. Venezuela's most significant natural resources are petroleum and natural gas, iron ore, gold, and other minerals. It also has large areas of arable land and water. ===

Climate === Venezuela is entirely located in the tropics over the Equator to around 12° N. Its climate varies from humid low-elevation plains, where average annual temperatures range as high as 35 °C (95.0 °F), to glaciers and highlands (the páramos) with an average yearly temperature of 8 °C (46.4 °F). Annual rainfall varies from 430 mm (16.9 in) in the semiarid portions of the northwest to over 1,000 mm (39.4 in) in the Orinoco Delta of the far east and the Amazonian Jungle in the south. The precipitation level is lower in the period from November to April and later in the year from August to October. These periods are referred to as hot-humid and cold-dry seasons. Another characteristic of the climate is this variation throughout the country by the existence of a mountain range called "Cordillera de la Costa" which crosses the country from east to west. The majority of the population lives in these mountains. The country falls into four horizontal temperature zones based primarily on elevation, having tropical, dry, temperate with dry winters, and polar (alpine tundra) climates, amongst others. In the tropical zone—below 800 m (2,625 ft)—temperatures are hot, with yearly averages ranging between 26 and 28 °C (78.8 and 82.4 °F). The temperate zone ranges between 800 and 2,000 m (2,625 and 6,562 ft) with averages from 12 to 25 °C (53.6 to 77.0 °F); many of Venezuela's cities, including the capital, lie in this region. Colder conditions with temperatures from 9 to 11 °C (48.2 to 51.8 °F) are found in the cool zone between 2,000 and 3,000 m (6,562 and 9,843 ft), especially in the Venezuelan Andes, where pastureland and permanent snowfield with yearly averages below 8 °C (46 °F) cover land above 3,000 meters (9,843 ft) in the páramos. The highest temperature recorded was 42 °C (108 °F) in Machiques, and the lowest temperature recorded was −11 °C (12 °F), it has been reported from an uninhabited high altitude at Páramo de Piedras Blancas (Mérida state), even though no official reports exist, lower temperatures in the mountains of the Sierra Nevada de Mérida are known. ===

Biodiversity === Venezuela lies within

the Neotropic ecozone; large portions of the country were originally covered by moist broadleaf forests. One of 17 megadiverse countries, Venezuela's habitats range from the Andes Mountains in the west to the Amazon Basin rainforest in the south, via extensive llanos plains and Caribbean coast in the center and the Orinoco River Delta in the east. They include xeric scrublands in the extreme northwest and coastal mangrove forests in the northeast. Its cloud forests and lowland rainforests are particularly rich. Animals of Venezuela are diverse and include manatees, three-toed sloth, two-toed sloth, Amazon river dolphins, and Orinoco crocodiles, which have been reported to reach up to 6.6 m (22 ft) in length. Venezuela hosts a total of 1,417 bird species, 48 of which are endemic. Important birds include ibises, ospreys, kingfishers, and the yellow-orange Venezuelan troupial, the national bird. Notable mammals include the giant anteater, jaguar, and the capybara, the world's largest rodent. More than half of Venezuelan avian and mammalian species are found in the Amazonian forests south of the Orinoco. For the fungi, an account was provided by R.W.G. Dennis which has been digitized and the records made available on-line as part of the Cybertruffle Robigalia database. That database includes nearly 3,900 species of fungi recorded from Venezuela, but is far from complete, and the true total number of fungal species already known from Venezuela is likely higher, given the generally accepted estimate that only about 7% of all fungi worldwide have so far been discovered. Among plants of Venezuela, over 25,000 species of orchids are found in the country's cloud forest and lowland rainforest ecosystems. These include the flor de mayo orchid (*Cattleya mossiae*), the national flower. Venezuela's national tree is the araguaney, whose characteristic lushness after the rainy season led novelist Rómulo Gallegos to name it "[l]a primavera de oro de los araguaneyes" (the golden spring of the araguaneyes). Venezuela is among the top 20 countries in terms of endemism. Among its animals, 23% of reptilian and 50% of amphibian species are endemic. Although the available information is still very small, a first effort has been made to estimate the number of fungal species endemic to Venezuela: 1334 species of fungi have been tentatively identified as possible endemics of the country. Some 38% of the over 21,000 plant species known from Venezuela are unique to the country. === Environment === Venezuela is one of the 10 most biodiverse countries on the planet, yet it is one of the leaders of deforestation due to economic and political factors. Each year, roughly 287,600 hectares of forest are permanently destroyed and other areas are degraded by mining, oil extraction, and logging. Between 1990 and 2005, Venezuela officially lost 8.3% of its forest cover, which is about 4.3 million ha. In response, federal protections for critical habitat were implemented; for example, 20% to 33% of forested land is protected. The country's biosphere reserve is part of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves; five wetlands are registered under the Ramsar Convention. In 2003, 70% of the nation's land was under conservation management in over 200 protected areas, including 43 national parks. Venezuela's 43 national parks include Canaima National Park, Morrocoy National Park, and Mochima National Park. In the far south is a reserve for the country's Yanomami tribes. Covering 32,000 square miles (82,880 square kilometres), the area is off-limits to farmers, miners, and all non-Yanomami settlers. Venezuela was one of the few countries that didn't enter an INDC at COP21. == Government and politics == Following the fall of Marcos Pérez Jiménez in 1958, Venezuelan politics were dominated by the Third Way Christian democratic COPEI and the center-left social democratic Democratic Action (AD) parties; this two-party system was formalized by the puntofijismo arrangement. Economic crises in the 1980s and 1990s led to a political crisis which resulted in hundreds dead in the Caracazo riots of 1989, two attempted coups in 1992, and impeachment of President Carlos Andrés Pérez for corruption in 1993. A collapse in confidence in the existing parties saw the 1998 election of Hugo Chávez, who had led the first of the 1992 coup attempts, and the launch of a "Bolivarian Revolution", beginning with a 1999 Constituent Assembly to write a new Constitution of Venezuela. The opposition's attempts to unseat Chávez included the 2002 Venezuelan coup d'état attempt, the Venezuelan general strike of 2002–2003, and the Venezuelan recall referendum, 2004, all of which failed. Chávez was re-elected in December 2006, but suffered a significant defeat in 2007 with the narrow rejection of the Venezuelan constitutional referendum, 2007, which had offered two packages of constitutional reforms aimed at deepening the Bolivarian Revolution. Two major blocs of political parties are in Venezuela: the incumbent leftist bloc United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV), its major allies Fatherland for All (PPT) and the Communist Party of Venezuela (PCV), and the opposition bloc grouped into the electoral coalition Mesa de la Unidad Democrática. This includes A New Era (UNT) together with allied parties Project Venezuela, Justice First, Movement for Socialism (MAS) and others. Hugo Chávez, the central figure of the Venezuelan political landscape since his election to the Presidency in 1998 as a political outsider, died in office in early 2013, and was succeeded by Nicolás Maduro (initially as interim President, before narrowly winning the Venezuelan presidential election,

2013). The Venezuelan president is elected by a vote, with direct and universal suffrage, and is both head of state and head of government. The term of office is six years, and (as of 15 February 2009) a president may be re-elected an unlimited number of times. The president appoints the vice president and decides the size and composition of the cabinet and makes appointments to it with the involvement of the legislature. The president can ask the legislature to reconsider portions of laws he finds objectionable, but a simple parliamentary majority can override these objections. The president may ask the National Assembly to pass an enabling act granting the ability to rule by decree in specified policy areas; this requires a two-thirds majority in the Assembly. Since 1959, six Venezuelan presidents have been granted such powers. The unicameral Venezuelan parliament is the Asamblea Nacional ("National Assembly"). The number of members is variable – each state and the Capital district elect three representatives plus the result of dividing the state population by 1.1% of the total population of the country. Three seats are reserved for representatives of Venezuela's indigenous peoples. For the 2011–2016 period the number of seats is 165. All deputies serve five-year terms. The voting age in Venezuela is 18 and older. Voting is not compulsory. The legal system of Venezuela belongs to the Continental Law tradition. The highest judicial body is the Supreme Tribunal of Justice or Tribunal Supremo de Justicia, whose magistrates are elected by parliament for a single two-year term. The National Electoral Council (Consejo Nacional Electoral, or CNE) is in charge of electoral processes; it is formed by five main directors elected by the National Assembly. Supreme Court president Luisa Estela Morales said in December 2009 that Venezuela had moved away from "a rigid division of powers" toward a system characterized by "intense coordination" between the branches of government. Morales clarified that each power must be independent adding that "one thing is separation of powers and another one is division".

=== Suspension of constitutional rights ===

Parliamentary Elections were held in Venezuela on 6 December 2015 to elect the 164 deputies and three indigenous representatives of the National Assembly. In 2014, a series of protest and demonstrations began in Venezuela, attributed to inflation, violence and shortages in Venezuela. The government has accused the protest of being motivated by 'fascists' opposition leaders, capitalism and foreign influence, despite being largely peaceful. President Maduro acknowledged PSUV defeat, but attributed the opposition's victory to an intensification of the "economic war". Despite of that, Maduro said "I will stop by hook or by crook the opposition coming to power, whatever the costs, in any way". In the following months, Maduro fulfilled his promise of preventing the democratically- and constitutionally-elected National Assembly from legislating. The first steps taken by PSUV and government were the substitution of the entire Supreme Court a day after the Parliamentary Elections contrary to the Constitution of Venezuela, acclaimed as a fraud by the majority of the Venezuelan and international press. The Financial Times described the function of the Supreme Court in Venezuela as "rubber stamping executive whims and vetoing legislation". The PSUV government used this violation to suspend several elected opponents, ignoring again the Constitution of Venezuela. Maduro said that "the Amnesty law (approved by the Parliament) will not be executed" and asked the Supreme Court to declare it unconstitutional before the law was known. In January 16, 2016, Maduro approved an unconstitutional economic emergency decree, relegating to his own figure the legislative and executive powers, while also holding judiciary power through the fraudulent designation of judges the day after the election on 6 December 2015. From these events, Maduro effectively controls all three branches of government. On 14 May 2016, constitutional guarantees were in fact suspended when Maduro decreed the extension of the economic emergency decree for another 60 days and declared a State of Emergency, which is a clear violation of the Constitution of Venezuela in the Article 338th: "The approval of the extension of States of emergency corresponds to the National Assembly." Thus, constitutional rights in Venezuela are considered suspended in fact by a large number of publications and public figures. On 14 May 2016, the Organization of American States were considering the application of the Inter-American Democratic Charter sanctions for non-compliance to its own constitution. In March 2017, the Venezuelan Supreme Court took over law making powers from the National Assembly but reversed its decision the following day.

=== Foreign relations ===

Throughout most of the 20th century, Venezuela maintained friendly relations with most Latin American and Western nations. Relations between Venezuela and the United States government worsened in 2002, after the 2002 Venezuelan coup d'état attempt during which the U.S. government recognized the short-lived interim presidency of Pedro Carmona. In 2015, Venezuela was declared a national security threat by U.S. President Barack Obama. Correspondingly, ties to various Latin American and Middle Eastern countries not allied to the U.S. have strengthened. For example, Palestinian foreign minister Riyad al-Maliki declared in 2015 that Venezuela was his country's "most important ally". Venezuela seeks alternative hemispheric integration via such proposals as the

Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas trade proposal and the newly launched pan-Latin American television network teleSUR. Venezuela is one of four nations in the world—along with Russia, Nicaragua, and Nauru—to have recognized the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Venezuela was a proponent of OAS's decision to adopt its Anti-Corruption Convention and is actively working in the Mercosur trade bloc to push increased trade and energy integration. Globally, it seeks a "multi-polar" world based on strengthened ties among undeveloped countries. On April 26, 2017, Venezuela announced its intention to withdraw from the OAS. Venezuelan Foreign Minister Delcy Rodríguez said that President Nicolás Maduro plans to publicly renounce Venezuela's membership on April 27, 2017. It will take two years for the country to formally leave. During this period, the country does not plan on participating in the OAS. Venezuela is involved in a long-standing disagreement about the control of the Guayana Esequiba area. === Military === The Bolivarian National Armed Forces of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (Fuerza Armada Nacional Bolivariana, FANB) are the overall unified military forces of Venezuela. It includes over 320,150 men and women, under Article 328 of the Constitution, in 5 components of Ground, Sea and Air. The components of the Bolivarian National Armed Forces are: the Venezuelan Army, the Venezuelan Navy, the Venezuelan Air Force, the Venezuelan National Guard, and the Venezuelan National Militia. As of 2008, a further 600,000 soldiers were incorporated into a new branch, known as the Armed Reserve. The President of Venezuela is the commander-in-chief of the national armed forces. The main roles of the armed forces are to defend the sovereign national territory of Venezuela, airspace, and islands, fight against drug trafficking, to search and rescue and, in the case of a natural disaster, civil protection. All male citizens of Venezuela have a constitutional duty to register for the military service at the age of 18, which is the age of majority in Venezuela. === Law and crime === According to some sources, Venezuela was the most murderous place on Earth in 2015, but researchers like Dorothy Kronick have shown that NGOs have manipulated unofficial statistics. The number of homicides in Venezuela has been inflated, which has even been recognized by opposition intellectuals. The reliability of the Venezuelan Observatory for Violence has been questioned since 2016. . In Venezuela, a person is murdered every 21 minutes. Violent crimes have been so prevalent in Venezuela that the government no longer produces the crime data. In 2013, the homicide rate was approximately 79 per 100,000, one of the world's highest, having quadrupled in the past 15 years with over 200,000 people murdered. By 2015, it had risen to 90 per 100,000. The country's body count of the previous decade mimics that of the Iraq War and in some instances had more civilian deaths even though the country is at peacetime. The capital Caracas has one of the greatest homicide rates of any large city in the world, with 122 homicides per 100,000 residents. In 2008, polls indicated that crime was the number one concern of voters. Attempts at fighting crime such as Operation Liberation of the People were implemented to crack down on gang-controlled areas but, of reported criminal acts, less than 2% are prosecuted. In 2017, the Financial Times noted that some of the arms procured by the government over the previous two decades had been diverted to paramilitary civilian groups and criminal syndicates. Venezuela is especially dangerous toward foreign travelers and investors who are visiting. The United States Department of State and the Government of Canada have warned foreign visitors that they may be subjected to robbery, kidnapping for a ransom or sale to terrorist organizations and murder, and that their own diplomatic travelers are required to travel in armored vehicles. The United Kingdom's Foreign and Commonwealth Office has advised against all travel to Venezuela. Visitors have been murdered during robberies and criminals do not discriminate among their victims. Former Miss Venezuela 2004 winner Monica Spear and her ex-husband were murdered and their 5-year-old daughter was shot while vacationing in Venezuela, and an elderly German tourist was murdered only a few weeks later. There are approximately 33 prisons holding about 50,000 inmates. They include; El Rodeo outside of Caracas, Yare Prison in the northern state of Miranda, and several others. Venezuela's prison system is heavily overcrowded; its facilities have capacity for only 14,000 prisoners. ==== Corruption ==== Corruption in Venezuela is high by world standards and was so for much of the 20th century. The discovery of oil had worsened political corruption, and by the late 1970s, Juan Pablo Pérez Alfonso's description of oil as "the Devil's excrement" had become a common expression in Venezuela. Venezuela has been ranked one of the most corrupt countries on the Corruption Perceptions Index since the survey started in 1995. The 2010 ranking placed Venezuela at number 164, out of 178 ranked countries. By 2016, the rank had increased to 166 out of 178. Similarly, the World Justice Project ranked Venezuela 99th out of 99 countries surveyed in its 2014 Rule of Law Index. This corruption is shown with Venezuela's significant involvement in drug trafficking, with Colombian cocaine and other drugs transiting Venezuela towards the United States and Europe. Venezuela ranks fourth in the world for cocaine seizures, behind

Colombia, the United States, and Panama. In 2006, the government's agency for combating the illegal drug trade in Venezuela, ONA, was incorporated into the office of the vice-president of the country. However, many major government and military officials have been known for their involvement with drug trafficking; especially with the October 2013 incident of men from the Venezuelan National Guard placing 1.3 tons of cocaine on a Paris flight knowing they will not face charges. == States and regions of Venezuela == Venezuela is divided into 23 states (estados), a capital district (distrito capital) corresponding to the city of Caracas, and the Federal Dependencies (Dependencias Federales, a special territory). Venezuela is further subdivided into 335 municipalities (municipios); these are subdivided into over one thousand parishes (parroquias). The states are grouped into nine administrative regions (regiones administrativas), which were established in 1969 by presidential decree. The country can be further divided into ten geographical areas, some corresponding to climatic and biogeographical regions. In the north are the Venezuelan Andes and the Coro region, a mountainous tract in the northwest, holds several sierras and valleys. East of it are lowlands abutting Lake Maracaibo and the Gulf of Venezuela. The Central Range runs parallel to the coast and includes the hills surrounding Caracas; the Eastern Range, separated from the Central Range by the Gulf of Cariaco, covers all of Sucre and northern Monagas. The Insular Region includes all of Venezuela's island possessions: Nueva Esparta and the various Federal Dependencies. The Orinoco Delta, which forms a triangle covering Delta Amacuro, projects northeast into the Atlantic Ocean. === Largest cities === == Largest metropolitan areas == == Economy == The Central Bank of Venezuela is responsible for developing monetary policy for the Venezuelan bolívar which is used as currency. The President of the Central Bank of Venezuela serves as the country's representative in the International Monetary Fund. The U.S.-based conservative think tank The Heritage Foundation, cited in The Wall Street Journal, claims Venezuela has the weakest property rights in the world, scoring only 5.0 on a scale of 100; expropriation without compensation is not uncommon. Venezuela has a mixed economy dominated by the petroleum sector, which accounts for roughly a third of GDP, around 80% of exports, and more than half of government revenues. Per capita GDP for 2016 was estimated to be US\$15,100, ranking 109th in the world. Venezuela has the least expensive petrol in the world because the consumer price of petrol is heavily subsidized. As of 2011, more than 60% of Venezuela's international reserves was in gold, eight times more than the average for the region. Most of Venezuela's gold held abroad was located in London. On 25 November 2011, the first of US\$11 billion of repatriated gold bullion arrived in Caracas; Chávez called the repatriation of gold a "sovereign" step that will help protect the country's foreign reserves from the turmoil in the U.S. and Europe. However government policies quickly spent down this returned gold and in 2013 the government was forced to add the dollar reserves of state owned companies to those of the national bank to reassure the international bond market. Manufacturing contributed 17% of GDP in 2006. Venezuela manufactures and exports heavy industry products such as steel, aluminium and cement, with production concentrated around Ciudad Guayana, near the Guri Dam, one of the largest in the world and the provider of about three-quarters of Venezuela's electricity. Other notable manufacturing includes electronics and automobiles, as well as beverages, and foodstuffs. Agriculture in Venezuela accounts for approximately 3% of GDP, 10% of the labor force, and at least a quarter of Venezuela's land area. The country is not self-sufficient in most areas of agriculture. In 2012, total food consumption was over 26 million metric tonnes, a 94.8% increase from 2003. Since the discovery of oil in the early 20th century, Venezuela has been one of the world's leading exporters of oil, and it is a founding member of OPEC. Previously an underdeveloped exporter of agricultural commodities such as coffee and cocoa, oil quickly came to dominate exports and government revenues. The 1980s oil glut led to an external debt crisis and a long-running economic crisis, which saw inflation peak at 100% in 1996 and poverty rates rise to 66% in 1995 as (by 1998) per capita GDP fell to the same level as 1963, down a third from its 1978 peak. The 1990s also saw Venezuela experience a major banking crisis in 1994. The recovery of oil prices after 2001 boosted the Venezuelan economy and facilitated social spending. With social programs such as the Bolivarian Missions, Venezuela initially made progress in social development in the 2000s, particularly in areas such as health, education, and poverty. Many of the social policies pursued by Chávez and his administration were jump-started by the Millennium Development Goals, eight goals that Venezuela and 188 other nations agreed to in September 2000. The sustainability of the Bolivarian Missions has been questioned due to the Bolivarian state's overspending on public works and because the Chávez government did not save funds for future economic hardships like other OPEC nations; with economic issues and poverty rising as a result of their policies in the 2010s. In 2003 the government of Hugo Chávez implemented currency controls after capital flight led to a devaluation of the currency. This led

to the development of a parallel market of dollars in the subsequent years. The fallout of the 2008 global financial crisis saw a renewed economic downturn. Despite controversial data shared by the Venezuelan government showing that the country had halved malnutrition following one of the UN's Millennium Development Goals, shortages of staple goods began to occur in Venezuela and malnutrition began to increase. In early 2013, Venezuela devalued its currency due to growing shortages in the country. The shortages included, and still include, necessities such as toilet paper, milk, and flour. Fears rose so high due to the toilet paper shortage that the government occupied a toilet paper factory, and continued further plans to nationalize other industrial aspects like food distribution. Venezuela's bond ratings have also decreased multiple times in 2013 due to decisions by the president Nicolás Maduro. One of his decisions was to force stores and their warehouses to sell all of their products, which led to even more shortages in the future. In 2016, consumer prices in Venezuela increased 800% and the economy declined by 18.6%. Venezuela's outlook was deemed negative by most bond-rating services in 2017.

=== Tourism === Tourism has been developed considerably in recent decades, particularly because of its favorable geographical position, the variety of landscapes, the richness of plant and wildlife, the artistic expressions and the privileged tropical climate of the country, which affords each region (especially the beaches) throughout the year. Margarita Island is one of the top tourist destinations for enjoyment and relaxation. It is an island with a modern infrastructure, bordered by beautiful beaches suitable for extreme sports, and features castles, fortresses and churches of great cultural value.

=== Shortages === Shortages in Venezuela have been prevalent following the enactment of price controls and other policies during the economic policy of the Hugo Chávez government. Under the economic policy of the Nicolás Maduro government, greater shortages occurred due to the Venezuelan government's policy of withholding United States dollars from importers with price controls. Shortages occur in regulated products, such as milk, various types of meat, chicken, coffee, rice, oil, precooked flour, butter prices, luxuries such as breast implants, and goods including basic necessities like toilet paper, personal hygiene products, and even medicine. As a result of the shortages, Venezuelans must search for food, wait in lines for hours and sometimes settle without having certain products. Maduro's government has blamed the shortages on "bourgeois criminals" hoarding goods. A drought, combined with a lack of planning and maintenance, has caused a hydroelectricity shortage. To deal with lack of power supply, in April 2016 the Maduro government announced rolling blackouts and reduced the government workweek to only Monday and Tuesday. A multi-university study found that, in 2016 alone, about 75% of Venezuelans lost weight due to hunger, with the average losing about 8.6 kg (19 lbs) due to the lack of food. By late-2016 and into 2017, Venezuelans had to search for food on a daily basis, occasionally resorting to eating wild fruit or garbage, wait in lines for hours and sometimes settle without having certain products. By early 2017, priests began telling Venezuelans to label their garbage so needy individuals could feed on their refuse. In March 2017, Venezuela, with the largest oil reserves in the world, began having shortages of gasoline in some regions with reports that fuel imports had begun.

=== Petroleum and other resources === Venezuela has the largest oil reserves, and the eighth largest natural gas reserves in the world, and consistently ranks among the top ten world crude oil producers. Compared to the preceding year another 40.4% in crude oil reserves were proven in 2010, allowing Venezuela to surpass Saudi Arabia as the country with the largest reserves of this type. The country's main petroleum deposits are located around and beneath Lake Maracaibo, the Gulf of Venezuela (both in Zulia), and in the Orinoco River basin (eastern Venezuela), where the country's largest reserve is located. Besides the largest conventional oil reserves and the second-largest natural gas reserves in the Western Hemisphere, Venezuela has non-conventional oil deposits (extra-heavy crude oil, bitumen and tar sands) approximately equal to the world's reserves of conventional oil. The electricity sector in Venezuela is one of the few to rely primarily on hydropower, and includes the Guri Dam, one of the largest in the world. In the first half of the 20th century, US oil companies were heavily involved in Venezuela, initially interested only in purchasing concessions. In 1943 a new government introduced a 50/50 split in profits between the government and the oil industry. In 1960, with a newly installed democratic government, Hydrocarbons Minister Juan Pablo Pérez Alfonso led the creation of OPEC, the consortium of oil-producing countries aiming to support the price of oil. In 1973, Venezuela voted to nationalize its oil industry outright, effective 1 January 1976, with Petróleos de Venezuela (PDVSA) taking over and presiding over a number of holding companies; in subsequent years, Venezuela built a vast refining and marketing system in the U.S. and Europe. In the 1990s PDVSA became more independent from the government and presided over an apertura (opening) in which it invited in foreign investment. Under Hugo Chávez a 2001 law placed limits on foreign investment. The state oil company PDVSA played a

key role in the December 2002 – February 2003 national strike which sought President Chávez' resignation. Managers and skilled highly paid technicians of PDVSA shut down the plants and left their posts, and by some reports sabotaged equipment, and petroleum production and refining by PDVSA almost ceased. Activities eventually were slowly restarted by returning and substitute oil workers. As a result of the strike, around 40% of the company's workforce (around 18,000 workers) were dismissed for "dereliction of duty" during the strike. === Transport === Venezuela is connected to the world primarily via air (Venezuela's airports include the Simón Bolívar International Airport in Maiquetía, near Caracas and La Chinita International Airport near Maracaibo) and sea (with major sea ports at La Guaira, Maracaibo and Puerto Cabello). In the south and east the Amazon rainforest region has limited cross-border transport; in the west, there is a mountainous border of over 2,213 kilometres (1,375 mi) shared with Colombia. The Orinoco River is navigable by oceangoing vessels up to 400 kilometres (250 mi) inland, and connects the major industrial city of Ciudad Guayana to the Atlantic Ocean. Venezuela has a limited national railway system, which has no active rail connections to other countries. The government of Hugo Chávez tried to invest in expanding it, but Venezuela's rail project is on hold due to Venezuela not being able to pay the \$7.5 billion and owing China Railway nearly \$500 million. Several major cities have metro systems; the Caracas Metro has been operating since 1983. The Maracaibo Metro and Valencia Metro were opened more recently. Venezuela has a road network of nearly 100,000 kilometres (62,000 mi) in length, placing the country around 45th in the world; around a third of roads are paved. == Demographics == Venezuela is among the most urbanized countries in Latin America; the vast majority of Venezuelans live in the cities of the north, especially in the capital Caracas, which is also the largest city. About 93% of the population lives in urban areas in northern Venezuela; 73% live less than 100 kilometres (62 mi) from the coastline. According to a study by sociologists of the Central University of Venezuela, over 1.5 million Venezuelans, or about 4% to 6% of the country's population, left Venezuela following the Bolivarian Revolution. Though almost half of Venezuela's land area lies south of the Orinoco, only 5% of Venezuelans live there. The largest and most important city south of the Orinoco is Ciudad Guayana, which is the sixth most populous conurbation. Other major cities include Barquisimeto, Valencia, Maracay, Maracaibo, Barcelona-Puerto La Cruz, Mérida and San Cristóbal. === Ethnic groups === The people of Venezuela come from a variety of ancestries. It is estimated that the majority of the population is of mestizo, or mixed, ethnic ancestry. Nevertheless, in the 2011 census, which Venezuelans were asked to identify themselves according to their customs and ancestry, the term mestizo was excluded from the answers. The majority claimed to be mestizo or white — 51.6% and 43.6%, respectively. Practically half of the population claimed to be moreno, a term used throughout Ibero-America that in this case means "dark-skinned" or "brown-skinned", as opposed to having a lighter skin (this term connotes skin color or tone, rather than facial features or descent). Ethnic minorities in Venezuela consist of groups that descend mainly from African or indigenous peoples; 2.8% identified themselves as "black" and 0.7% as afrodescendiente (Afro-descendant), 2.6% claimed to belong to indigenous peoples, and 1.2% answered "other races". Among indigenous people, 58% were Wayúu, 7% Warao, 5% Kariña, 4% Pemón, 3% Piaroa, 3% Jivi, 3% Añu, 3% Cumanágoto, 2% Yukpa, 2% Chaima and 1% Yanomami; the remaining 9% consisted of other indigenous nations. According to an autosomal DNA genetic study conducted in 2008 by the University of Brasília (UNB), the composition of Venezuela's population is 60.60% of European contribution, 23% of indigenous contribution, and 16.30% of African contribution. During the colonial period and until after the Second World War, many of the European immigrants to Venezuela came from the Canary Islands, which had a significant cultural impact on the cuisine and customs of Venezuela. These influences on Venezuela have led to the nation being called the 8th island of the Canaries. With the start of oil exploitation in the early 20th century, companies from the United States began establishing operations in Venezuela, bringing with them US citizens. Later, during and after the war, new waves of immigrants from other parts of Europe, the Middle East, and China began; many were encouraged by government-established immigration programs and lenient immigration policies. During the 20th century, Venezuela, along with the rest of Latin America, received millions of immigrants from Europe. This was especially true post-World War II, as a consequence of war-ridden Europe. During the 1970s, while experiencing an oil-export boom, Venezuela received millions of immigrants from Ecuador, Colombia, and the Dominican Republic. Due to the belief that this immigration influx depressed wages, some Venezuelans opposed European immigration. The Venezuelan government, however, were actively recruiting immigrants from Eastern Europe to fill a need for engineers. Millions of Colombians, as well as Middle Eastern and Haitian populations would continue immigrating to Venezuela into the early 21st century. According to the World Refugee Survey

2008, published by the US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, Venezuela hosted a population of refugee and asylum seekers from Colombia numbering 252,200 in 2007, and 10,600 new asylum seekers entered Venezuela in 2007. Between 500,000 and one million illegal immigrants are estimated to be living in the country. The total indigenous population of the country is estimated at about 500 thousand people (2.8% of the total), distributed among 40 indigenous peoples. The Constitution recognizes the multi-ethnic, pluri-cultural, and multilingual character of the country and includes a chapter devoted to indigenous peoples' rights, which opened up spaces for their political inclusion at national and local level in 1999. Most indigenous peoples are concentrated in eight states along Venezuela's borders with Brazil, Guyana, and Colombia, and the majority groups are the Wayuu (west), the Warao (east), the Yanomami (south), and the Pemon (southeast).

=== Languages === Although the country is mostly monolingual Spanish, many languages are spoken in Venezuela. In addition to Spanish, the Constitution recognizes more than thirty indigenous languages, including Wayuu, Warao, Pemón, and many others for the official use of the indigenous peoples, mostly with few speakers – less than 1% of the total population. Wayuu is the most spoken indigenous language with 170,000 speakers. Immigrants, in addition to Spanish, speak their own languages. Chinese (400,000), Portuguese (254,000) and Italian (200,000), are the most spoken languages in Venezuela after the official language of Spanish. Arabic is spoken by Lebanese and Syrian colonies on Isla de Margarita, Maracaibo, Punto Fijo, Puerto la Cruz, El Tigre, Maracay, and Caracas. Portuguese is spoken not only by the Portuguese community in Santa Elena de Uairén but also by much of the population due to its proximity to Brazil. The German community speaks their native language, while the people of Colonia Tovar people speaks mostly an Alemannic dialect of German called coloniero. English is the most widely used foreign language in demand and is spoken by many professionals, academics, and members of the upper and middle classes as a result of oil exploration by foreign companies, in addition to its acceptance as a lingua franca. Culturally, English is common in southern towns like El Callao, for the English-speaking native influence evident in folk songs and calypso Venezuelan and French with English voices. English was brought by Trinidadian and other British West Indies immigrants. A variety of Antillean Creole is spoken by a small community in El Callao and Paria. Italian instruction is guaranteed by the presence of a constant number of schools and private institutions because the Italian government considered mandatory language teaching at school level. Other languages spoken by large communities in the country are Basque and Galician, among others.

=== Religion === According to a 2011 poll (GIS XXI), 88 percent of the population is Christian, primarily Roman Catholic (71%), and the remaining 17 percent Protestant, primarily Evangelicals (in Latin America Protestants are usually called Evangelicos). The Venezuelans without religion are 8% (atheist 2% and agnostic or indifferent 6%), almost 3% of the population follow other religion (1% of them are of santería). There are small but influential Muslim, Buddhist, and Jewish communities. The Muslim community of more than 100,000 is concentrated among persons of Lebanese and Syrian descent living in Nueva Esparta State, Punto Fijo and the Caracas area. Buddhism in Venezuela is practiced by over 52,000 people. The Buddhist community is made up mainly of Chinese, Japanese, and Koreans. There are Buddhist centers in Caracas, Maracay, Mérida, Puerto Ordáz, San Felipe, and Valencia. The Jewish community has shrunk in recent years due to rising antisemitism in Venezuela, with the population declining from 22,000 in 1999 to less than 7,000 in 2015.

== Culture == The culture of Venezuela is a melting pot, which includes mainly three different families: The indigenous, African, and Spanish. The first two cultures were in turn differentiated according to the tribes. Acculturation and assimilation, typical of a cultural syncretism, caused an arrival at the current Venezuelan culture, similar in many respects to the rest of Latin America, although the natural environment means that there are important differences. The indigenous influence is limited to a few words of vocabulary and gastronomy and many place names. The African influence in the same way, in addition to musical instruments like the drum. The Spanish influence was predominant (due to the colonization process and the socioeconomic structure it created) and in particular came from the regions of Andalusia and Extremadura, the places of origin of most settlers in the Caribbean during the colonial era. An example of this includes buildings, music, the Catholic religion, and language. Spanish influences are evident in bullfights and certain features of gastronomy. Venezuela was also enriched by other streams of Indian and European origin in the 19th century, especially from France. In the latest stage in the major cities and regions oil of U.S. origin and manifestations of the new immigration of Spanish, Italian and Portuguese, increasing the already complex cultural mosaic. For example, from United States comes the influence of taste for baseball, US-style fast food, and current architectural constructions.

=== Art === Venezuelan art was initially dominated by religious motifs. However, in the late 19th century, artists

began emphasizing historical and heroic representations of the country's struggle for independence. This move was led by Martín Tovar y Tovar. Modernism took over in the 20th century. Notable Venezuelan artists include Arturo Michelena, Cristóbal Rojas, Armando Reverón, Manuel Cabré; the kinetic artists Jesús Soto, Gego and Carlos Cruz-Díez; and contemporary artists as Marisol and Yusef Merhi. === Literature === Venezuelan literature originated soon after the Spanish conquest of the mostly pre-literate indigenous societies. It was originally dominated by Spanish influences. Following the rise of political literature during the Venezuelan War of Independence, Venezuelan Romanticism, notably expounded by Juan Vicente González, emerged as the first important genre in the region. Although mainly focused on narrative writing, Venezuelan literature was advanced by poets such as Andrés Bello and Fermín Toro. Major writers and novelists include Rómulo Gallegos, Teresa de la Parra, Arturo Uslar Pietri, Adriano González León, Miguel Otero Silva, and Mariano Picón Salas. The great poet and humanist Andrés Bello was also an educator and intellectual (He was also a childhood tutor and mentor of Simón Bolívar). Others, such as Laureano Vallenilla Lanz and José Gil Fortoul, contributed to Venezuelan Positivism. === Music === Indigenous musical styles of Venezuela are exemplified by the groups Un Sólo Pueblo and Serenata Guayanesa. The national musical instrument is the cuatro. Typical musical styles and pieces mainly emerged in and around the llanos region, including Alma Llanera (by Pedro Elías Gutiérrez and Rafael Bolívar Coronado), Florentino y el diablo (by Alberto Arvelo Torrealba), Concierto en la llanura by Juan Vicente Torrealba, and Caballo Viejo (by Simón Díaz). The Zulian gaita is also a very popular style, generally performed during Christmas. The national dance is the joropo. Venezuela has always been a melting pot of cultures and this can be seen in the richness and variety of its musical styles and dances: calipso, bambuco, fulía, cantos de pilado de maíz, cantos de lavanderas, sebucán, and maremare. Teresa Carreño was a world-famous 19th century piano virtuoso. In the last years, Classical Music has had great performances. The Simón Bolívar Youth Orchestra, under the baton of its principal conductor Gustavo Dudamel and José Antonio Abreu, has hosted a number of excellent presentations in many European concert halls, notably at the 2007 London Proms, and has received several honors. The orchestra is the pinnacle of El Sistema, a publicly financed voluntary sector music education program now being emulated in other countries. In the early 21st century, a movement known as "Movida Acústica Urbana" featured musicians trying to save some national traditions, creating their own songs but using traditional instruments. Some groups in this tradition are Tambor Urbano, Los Sinvergüenzas, the C4Trio, and Orozco Jam. Afro-Venezuelan musical traditions are most intimately related to the festivals of the "black folk saints" San Juan and St. Benedict the Moor. Specific songs are related to the different stages of the festival and of the procession, when the saints start their yearly paseo – stroll – through the community to dance with their people. === Sport === The origins of baseball in Venezuela is unclear, although it is known that the sport was being played in the nation by the late 19th century. In the early 20th century, North American immigrants who came to Venezuela to work in the nation's oil industry helped to popularize the sport in Venezuela. During the 1930s, baseball's popularity continued to rise in the country, leading to the foundation of the Venezuelan Professional Baseball League (LVBP) in 1945, and the sport would soon become the nation's most popular. The immense popularity of baseball in the country makes Venezuela a rarity among its South American neighbors—association football is the dominant sport in the continent. However, football, as well as basketball, are among the more popular sports played in Venezuela. Venezuela hosted the 2012 Basketball World Olympic Qualifying Tournament and the 2013 FIBA Basketball Americas Championship, which took place in Poliedro de Caracas. Although not as popular in Venezuela as the rest of South America, football, spearheaded by the Venezuela national football team is gaining popularity as well. The sport is also noted for having an increased focus during the World Cup. According to the CONMEBOL alphabetical rotation policy established in 2011, Venezuela is scheduled to host the Copa América every 40 years. Venezuela is also home to former Formula 1 driver, Pastor Maldonado. At the 2012 Spanish Grand Prix, he claimed his first pole and victory and became the first and only Venezuelan to have done so in the history of Formula 1. Maldonado has increased the reception of Formula 1 in Venezuela, helping to popularize the sport in the nation. In the 2012 Summer Olympics, Venezuelan Rubén Limardo won a gold medal in fencing. === Cuisine === The Venezuelan cuisine, one of the most varied in the region, reflects the climatic contrasts and cultures coexisting in Venezuela. Among them are hallaca, pabellón criollo, arepas, empanadas, pisco andina, tarkarí de chivo, jalea de mango, patacón, and fried camiguanas. === Architecture === Carlos Raúl Villanueva was the most important Venezuelan architect of the modern era; he designed the Central University of Venezuela, (a World Heritage Site) and its Aula Magna. Other notable architectural works include the Capitolio, the Baralt Theatre, the Teresa Carreño Cultural

Complex, and the General Rafael Urdaneta Bridge. == Education == The literacy rate for the adult population was already 91.1 by 1998. In 2008, 95.2% of the adult population was literate. Net primary school enrollment rate was at 91% in 2005. Net secondary enrollment rate was at 63% in 2005. Venezuela has a number of universities, of which the most prestigious are the Central University of Venezuela (UCV), founded in Caracas in 1721, the University of Zulia (LUZ) founded in 1891, the University of the Andes (ULA), founded in Mérida State in 1810, the Simón Bolívar University (USB), founded in Miranda State in 1967 and the University of the East (UDO), founded in Sucre State in 1958. Currently, large numbers of Venezuelan graduates seek for a future elsewhere due to the country's troubled economy and heavy crime rate. In a study titled *Venezolana Community Abroad. A New Method of Exile* by Thomas Paez, Mercedes Vivas and Juan Rafael Pulido of the Central University of Venezuela, over 1.35 million Venezuelan college graduates had left the country since the beginning of the Bolivarian Revolution. It is believed nearly 12% of Venezuelans live abroad with Ireland becoming a popular destination for students. According to Claudio Bifano, president of the Venezuelan Academy of Physical, Mathematical and Natural Sciences, more than half of medical graduates in 2013 had left Venezuela. == Health == Venezuela has a national universal health care system. The current government has created a program to expand access to health care known as *Misión Barrio Adentro*, although its efficiency and work conditions have been criticized. It has reported that many of the clinics were closed and as of December 2014, it was estimated that 80% of Barrio Adentro establishments were abandoned in Venezuela. Infant mortality in Venezuela was 19 deaths per 1,000 births for 2014, lower than the South American average (by comparison, the U.S. figure was 6 deaths per 1,000 births in 2013). Child malnutrition (defined as stunting or wasting in children under age five) was 17%; Delta Amacuro and Amazonas had the nation's highest rates. According to the United Nations, 32% of Venezuelans lacked adequate sanitation, primarily those living in rural areas. Diseases ranging from diphtheria, plague, malaria, typhoid, yellow fever, cholera, hepatitis A, hepatitis B, and hepatitis D were present in the country. Obesity was prevalent in approximately 30% of the adult population in Venezuela. Venezuela had a total of 150 plants for sewage treatment. However, 13% of the population lacked access to drinking water, but this number had been dropping. During the economic crisis observed under President Maduro's presidency, medical professionals were forced to perform outdated treatments on patients. == See also == Index of Venezuela-related articles Outline of Venezuela == Notes == == References == == Bibliography == Articles Books Talks and interviews == External links == (in Spanish) Official government website (in English) Chief of State and Cabinet Members (in English) "Venezuela". The World Factbook. Central Intelligence Agency. (in English) Venezuela at UCB Libraries GovPubs (in English) Venezuela at Curlie (based on DMOZ) (in English) Venezuela from the Library of Congress Country Studies (1990) (in English) Venezuela profile from the BBC News (in Swedish) Geographic data related to Venezuela at OpenStreetMap (in English) Maps on Venezuela – Cartographic features (in English) Key Development Forecasts for Venezuela from International Futures (in Arabic) Venezuela and Tourism from Sky Immigration Wikimedia Atlas of Venezuela