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What to know about Diosdado Cabello, the powerful Venezuelan minister who may be in jeopardy next

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By Max Saltman



Venezuela's Interior Minister Diosdado Cabello delivers a speech during a rally in support of ...



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In the wee hours of Saturday, shortly after Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro was captured, blindfolded and taken to the United States, video emerged of Interior Minister Diosdado Cabello surrounded by a group of armed men in Caracas.

Maduro's abduction "was a criminal, terrorist attack against our people," said Cabello, clad in a bulletproof vest and helmet. The sky was still dark, and the buzz of drones could be heard overhead.

"I ask people to stay calm," Cabello continued. "Trust our leadership. Trust in our military and political leaders during the situation we're facing."

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That morning, US Attorney General Pam Bondi released the unsealed US indictment against Maduro, accusing him of drug trafficking, among other offenses. Cabello's name was the second on the indictment, just below Maduro's. With Maduro in US custody, Cabello is arguably the most powerful Venezuelan official named in the superseding indictment.

"There's essentially three centers of power in Venezuela right now," said Brian Fonseca, a professor at Florida International University. "You have the Maduro center of gravity, which (acting president) Delcy Rodríguez is an extension of. You have (Vladimir) Padrino López, who is minister of defense. The third, arguably the most important, is Diosdado Cabello."

A loyalist

Saturday's indictment was not the first time the US had targeted Cabello. In 2018, the US Treasury sanctioned Cabello, his wife and his brother for "narcotics trafficking."

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Two years later, the US formally indicted him, putting a \$10 million bounty on his head (since raised to \$25 million) and charging that he was a key figure in the "Cartel de los Soles," an alleged drug-trafficking network headed by figures within Venezuela's government. For his part, Cabello has denied being a drug trafficker, calling the accusations a "big lie."

Cabello, 62, is one of the last remaining regime officials from the late president Hugo Chávez's old guard, a true believer in the cause who personally participated in Chávez's failed coup in 1992.

"He was actually in the group of tanks that tried to ram their way into the presidential palace," Elías Ferrer, director and founder of Orinoco Research, told CNN in November. "I think that gives us a good idea of who he is."

Cabello helped Chávez build his political movement and eventually served as his vice president. During a brief, aborted anti-Chávez coup d'etat in 2002, Cabello even became president himself for a few hours before stepping aside to allow Chávez to return to power.

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Appointed interior minister in 2024, Cabello now commands the state's vast apparatus of internal repression. Rights advocates have accused Cabello's Interior Ministry of stewarding a crackdown campaign as tensions rose with the United States in late 2025, including political kidnappings and disappearances.

In November, Ámbar Castillo denounced Cabello after the disappearance of her daughter Samanta, who vanished after police detained her at their family home in western Caracas.

"I hold Diosdado Cabello, the minister of interior and justice, responsible for the persecution our family is facing," Castillo said in a video posted on social media.



In this image from March 8, 2013, President Nicolás Maduro, left, embraces National Assembly President Diosdado Cabello after Maduro was sworn in as Venezuela's acting president at the National Assembly in Caracas, Venezuela. (*Fernando Llano/AP*)

Cabello also commands militia members loyal to the state. Since Maduro's abduction, the minister has posted numerous videos on social media of militias patrolling the streets of Caracas. In one of the videos, armed men shout, "Loyal always, traitors never!"

"He's got enormous influence right now over these internal mechanisms of security and intelligence," said Fonseca, the Florida International University professor. "I think that puts him probably in one of the most privileged places in terms of influence within the regime today, more so than Delcy, and I think even more so than Padrino López."

The entertainer

Unlike Rodríguez and Padrino, Cabello is also an entertainer. Shortly after Chávez died of cancer in 2013, Cabello began hosting a gossipy talk show every week on Venezuelan television called “**Con el Mazo Dando**” — Spanish for “Hitting it with the Club.”

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The show, which often runs over three hours, is filmed in front of a live studio audience. The format is simple: Cabello cracks jokes, shares what he claims is exclusive intelligence regarding Venezuela’s enemies and makes fun of American politicians.

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio is a favorite target, with Cabello often calling him “the Crazy Cuban.” On the episode broadcast just before Maduro was captured, Cabello sarcastically referred to US President Donald Trump as “Lord Emperor.”

Despite the jokey atmosphere, rights advocates have denounced “Con el Mazo Dando” as another tool of repression. In July 2025, Amnesty International criticized Cabello for announcing the arrest of a journalist on the program. The organization had previously accused Cabello in 2015 of using the show as a platform to “harass” activists.

Is Cabello next?

Fonseca believes that Cabello's future, like that of many figures in Venezuela's

regime, is in jeopardy.



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"Cabello is in survival mode," Fonseca said. "If the Americans can go in and capture Maduro, that's a message to Cabello, Rodríguez and Padrino: No one is untouchable."

The interior minister is in a uniquely poor position to make a deal with the United States, Fonseca explained. Alongside the heavy sanctions and indictments against him, his personal beliefs might impede any compromise.

"He's either going to moderate, or he's gone," Fonseca said. "He's spent his entire life in opposition to the United States. That's really hard to back away from. I think his best chances are exile, or jail, or he fights to the death."

CNN's Germán Padínger contributed to this report.



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