

QUARANTINE



A

CONVENIENT | Restraint?

Mayo 2020

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1 VENEZUELAN CONTEXT DURING THE PANDEMIC



FROM ONE CRISIS TO ANOTHER

Since 2015, Venezuela has endured a worsening political, social and economic context, in the form of shortage of food and medicines, a surge in crime rates, a booming informal economy, institutional weakness, mass migration and widespread poverty. This has been the result of government policies that have undermined the rule of law and encouraged grand corruption and violation of fundamental rights, leading up to the current complex humanitarian emergency (CHE) faced by the country, as recognised by the United Nations and its various agencies such as the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and the World Food Programme.

The expansion of the CHE has been quite peculiar, because in recent years, Nicolás Maduro has publicly stated that he advocates human rights, as set out in the Constitution, as well as the guarantees and duties of citizens and the State in this area. Similarly, his administration advances a social policy of inclusion, through numerous social programmes aimed—according to key government spokespersons—to support and ensure exercise of these rights by the most vulnerable groups. But, in spite of these efforts, the people and the nation are still suffering a major economic and social calamity.



HEALTHCARE: A TERRIFYING SCENARIO

The **health care crisis** is one of the most pressing issues in this complex scenario, and has been characterised by **opacity in access to public information on budgets and funds invested, the operation of health care centres, epidemiological bulletins, and disease indicators, among other data.** In addition, there has been an ongoing **deterioration of hospitals**, due to low budgets, precarious public services, a flight of human talent, and a marked **lack of medical and surgical equipment and supplies** in the last several years.

This grim picture shows also a **proliferation of diseases**, including some that were considered eradicated, such as malaria, chagas disease, dengue fever, chikungunya, among others. A 2018 report by the World Health Organisation showed “decreases in all analysed regions, except in the Americas, **due precisely to the rise of malaria in Venezuela.**”¹ In our country, “the number of cases **increased by 886%.** In 2017, **456 patients died**, according to the organisation.”² The **shortage of medicines**—which stands at around 80%,³ as reported by the Venezuelan Pharmaceutical Federation—is yet another factor exacerbating the crisis.

1 <https://cronica.uno/oms-las-americas-registro-aumento-de-malaria-por-repunte-en-venezuela/>

2 Ídem.

3 <https://www.laprensalar.com.ve/nota/12151/20/02/fejarven-reporta-80-en-porciento--de-escasez-de-medicamentos>



BEGGING FOR FOOD

As for the **food sector**, Maduro's policy focuses on the purchase and sale of subsidised food under the **Local Supply and Production Committees (CLAP)** social programme, whose **haphazard** design and **massive** implementation have been marked by **discrimination and corruption**. Four years after the programme was conceived, the CLAP programme **has fallen short of their goal ensuring right to food**, as established by the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, namely: availability, stability, accessibility, sustainability and adequacy.

The CLAP programme has historically been involved in **irregularities in the sale of food** by the government in various communities that **have not been able to access subsidised food**

for months. In the midst of the quarantine declared due to the COVID-19 pandemic, residents of the state of Anzoátegui⁴ have protested the lack of CLAP food promised by the mayor, while communities in Valera,⁵ in the state of Trujillo, have reportedly not had access to food at regulated prices for several months. The School Food Programme only delivers food to one school in the municipality of San Rafael de Trujillo,⁶ which can be extrapolated to get an overview of the situation in many other regions of the country

In addition, a **considerable decline** has been witnessed in the **agricultural sector in recent years**. Aquiles Hopkins, president of agriculture and livestock producers federation FEDEAGRO, said that "between 2008 and 2017,

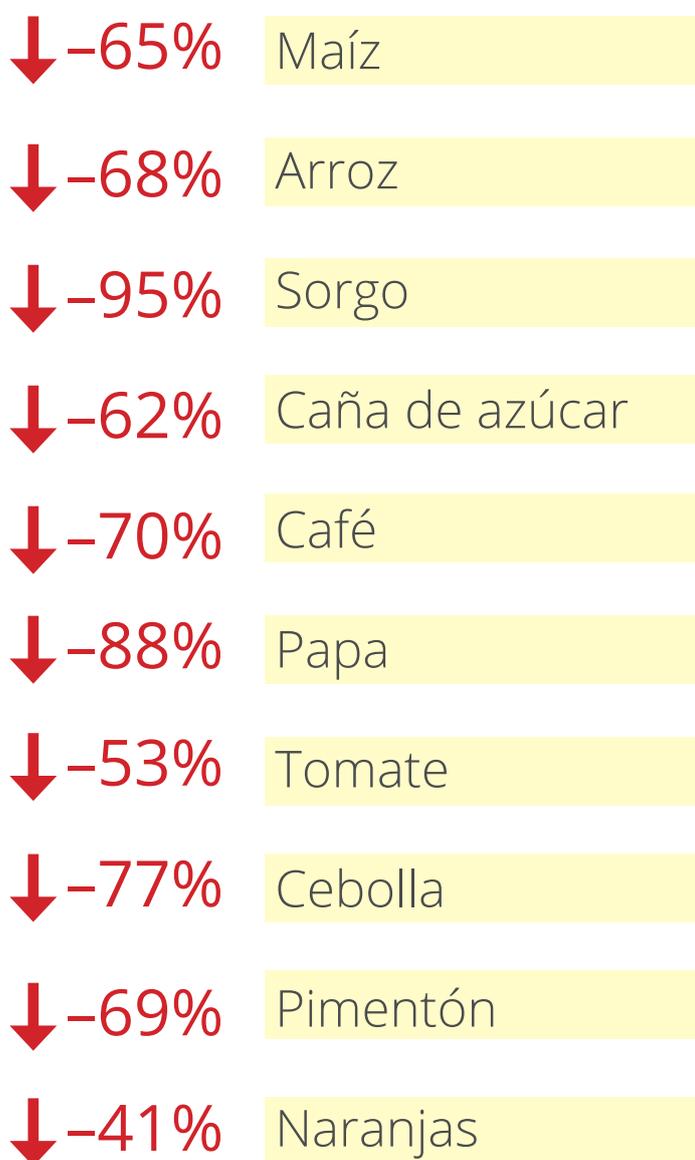
4 <https://elpitazo.net/oriente/vecinos-en-soledad-anzoategui-cierran-acceso-en-el-puente-angostura-por-alimentos/>

5 <https://elpitazo.net/los-andes/habitantes-de-valera-cocinan-con-lena-durante-la-cuarentena>

6 <https://elpitazo.net/los-andes/un-mes-sin-comida-tienen-cuatro-escuelas-de-carvajal-en-trujillo/>

production of corn fell by 65%; rice by 68%; sorghum by 95%; sugar cane, 62%; coffee, 70%; potatoes, 88%; tomatoes, 53%; onions, 77%; bell peppers, 69% and oranges, 41%.⁷ These indicators are a clear proof of the lack

Entre el 2008 y el 2017, la producción cayó:



of timely attention to the productive sector, **expropriation of agricultural property, price controls** with no consideration for production costs, a **surge of imports, insufficient funds in state-owned banks to fund agricultural activity, inconsistent supply of fertilisers, agrochemicals, spare parts and other inputs.**

According to research carried out by Transparencia Venezuela on state-owned companies,

*“in the last 19 years, **agricultural raw materials and food have been handled as proselytising instruments of political domination by the ruling class.** In this sector, probably more than in any other, **the military has dominated bureaucracy and concentrated supervision and command.**”⁸*

⁷ <https://www.elimpulso.com/2018/05/30/fedeagro-sector-agricola-venezolano-registra-caida-sostenida-en-los-ultimos-11-anos/>

⁸ <https://transparencia.org.ve/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Capi%CC%81tulo-3.-Rehenes-de-la-Gran-Corrupcio%CC%81n.-TV-1.pdf>



NO WATER, NO POWER, NO GAS

Another variable to consider in Venezuela's humanitarian emergency and the current quarantine due to the pandemic, is the collapse of public services. **Irregular supply of water, cooking gas, electricity and urban waste disposal is commonplace**, especially in rural parts of the country. The latest measurement of **water supply** service by the Venezuelan Observatory of Public Services (OVSP) shows that only **"16.7% of households have a continuous water supply."**⁹ In terms of electricity, the OVSP highlights that "cities that report the highest frequency of blackouts every day, according to data from December 2019 are **San Cristóbal (Táchira) with 81%, Maracaibo (Zulia) with 77% and Barquisimeto (Lara) with 75.5%**. These are followed by **Barinas (Barinas) with 57.4%, Punto Fijo (Falcón) with 37.9% and Porlamar (Nueva Esparta) with 25.5%**. Lower

rankers include **Ciudad Bolívar (southern Venezuela) with 19.2%, Barcelona, in eastern Venezuela, with 15.5% and the capital Caracas with 9.5%.**¹⁰

Given the above scenario and with the declaration of the pandemic, the OCHA notes in its latest report that "nationwide, failures in public services such as electricity and water have been reported, especially in the states of **Bolívar, Carabobo, Cojedes, Guárico, Lara, Falcón, Portuguesa, Táchira, Trujillo and Zulia**. **These service interruptions pose challenges for people in their efforts to follow the COVID-19 preventive hygiene recommendations in their communities.**"¹¹

9 <http://www.observatorioovsp.org/ovsp-solo-un-167-de-los-hogares-recibe-agua-de-manera-continua/>

10 <http://www.observatorioovsp.org/ovsp-revela-importantes-frecuencias-de-interrupciones-del-servicio-electrico/>

11 https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/documents/files/20200402_ven_covid-19_flash_update_no2.pdf



Foto: EFE

ECONOMIC RECESSION

Economically, the COVID-19 pandemic finds Venezuela in the midst a six-year recession and a **35% drop in Gross Domestic Product (GDP)** only in 2019, for a fifth consecutive year in decline. "In February 2020 Ecoanalítica estimated that Venezuela's GDP would drop an additional 10% this year. The pandemic changed that scenario and, based on preliminary figures from that macroeconomic consulting firm, the **contraction would likely be now around 20%.**"¹²

According to Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) projections for 2020, the pandemic will lead to a contraction in Latin America, with "Venezuela experiencing the sharpest decline, with an **18-percent contraction**, followed by Argentina, Mexico and Ecuador, with 6.5%."¹³

Noteworthy also is that the economic crisis has driven Venezuelans into the informal economy, working every day just to cover basic sustenance. Thus, **formal salary jobs have lost relevance.** Data from the 2018 Living Conditions Survey shows that the **rise in unemployment** among people between ages 15 and 24 years totals 23%, more than double the average of the overall population."¹⁴

The Trade Union of Non-Dependent Workers in the Commerce, Service and Allied Sectors (SINTRANDECOS), as well as the Alianza Sindical Independiente (ASI Venezuela) trade union, point out that "there are more than **5 million informal workers** in the country, of which 65% are women who are heads of household, 39% suffer from occupational illnesses due to precarious working conditions, and **approximately 60% live in poverty.**"¹⁵

12 <https://cronica.uno/crisis-por-covid-19-doblaría-caída-del-pib-en-venezuela-este-2020/>

13 <https://www.eluniversal.com/economia/68230/cepal-pandemia-provocara-peor-recesion-en-historia-de-america-latina-con-caida-de-53-del-pib>

14 <https://elucabista.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/RESULTADOS-PRELIMINARES-ENCOVI-2018-30-nov.pdf>

15 <https://cronica.uno/mas-de-5-millones-de-trabajadores-informales-en-venezuela-no-perciben-ingresos-para-enfrentar-crisis-por-el-covid-19/>

To add insult to injury, the oil industry has progressively deteriorated, with oil prices below production costs. This devastating scenario has been the result of years of public management plagued by irregularities and bad decisions. In addition, the International Monetary Fund rejected Nicolas Maduro's US\$5-billion loan request, made under the argument that the funds are necessary to face the pandemic. These circumstances make observing the quarantine all the more difficult for resource-poor families in Venezuela, who struggle to find food and medicines as it is.





AN OIL COUNTRY WITH NO FUEL

Another variable that plays a vital role in the current social dynamics is the shortage of fuel, which has exacerbated during the quarantine, affecting the **mobility of the population** and the **exercise of basic rights such as access to health care and food**. On this matter, OCHA warns that “fuel shortage nationwide continues to affect the delivery of even essential and priority services and is one of the main logistical obstacles to humanitarian response.”¹⁶ As an example, the state of Lara went for 22 days without fuel¹⁷ for the transfer of food to distribution centres, and health care workers in Guárico¹⁸ operate under precarious conditions, having to walk up to 24 kilometres, from San Juan de los Morros to San Sebastian de los Reyes, due to the lack of transportation due to the petrol shortage.

Similarly, **institutions have weakened** considerably and their independence is seriously compromised, while there are **no checks and balances** to oversee government decisions. The **judiciary and policy makers have been permeated by corruption, nepotism, opacity, and poorly paid staff**, among other issues. In addition, the institutionalisation of anomie among people has led to the deterioration of the social fabric and the **normalisation of the social and governance crisis**.

There is an urgent need for diagnosis and planning of public sector institutions in order to promote higher levels of social justice, equity, prosperity and equality through a set of regulations and compliance with these standards. It is also necessary to foster capacity building of the general population to ensure their freedoms and rights are fully guaranteed by institutions.

¹⁶ <https://www.elnacional.com/venezuela/ocha-escasez-de-gasolina-afecta-la-distribucion-de-alimentos-en-venezuela/>

¹⁷ <https://www.laprensalarara.com.ve/nota/100000335/20/04/escasez-de-combustible-impide-traslado-de-alimentos-en-timotes>

¹⁸ <https://cronica.uno/personal-de-salud-de-guarico-debe-caminar-hasta-los-centros-asistenciales-en-el-sur-de-aragua/>



POLITICAL CONTEXT DURING STATE OF EMERGENCY

In Venezuela, COVID-19 started to spread in the midst of a political context that was brewing a new cycle of street protests. On March 10, 2020, one day before the World Health Organisation (WHO) declared the pandemic, a protest was held in Caracas and in several regions of the country, called by Juan Guaidó, president of the Parliament. In Caracas, security agencies dispersed the protest with tear gas. After the skirmish, the deputies formally approved the National Conflict Resolution in a session held in a public square. In the centre of Caracas, Maduro supporters also held an uneventful rally.¹⁹

Guaidó was calling for street protests, as he set an agenda of actions for the so-called Operation Freedom.²⁰ Soon the opposition's push came to a screeching halt due to the measures imposed by Nicolás Maduro on March 12 to combat the spread of COVID-19.

Did Maduro make an early move to thwart the opposition's plan to rekindle protests? For some, the coronavirus-related measures were drastic and were implemented too early.

On the day of the announcement, in a radio and television broadcast, Maduro assured that there were no confirmed cases of the disease in the country, and that 30 suspected cases were found to be negative: "At this hour today, having performed dozens of tests in suspected cases, [the virus] is not yet in Venezuela, but we have to prepare ourselves(...)".²¹

"It is going to **take months to control this** (...) it is difficult, it will be difficult," Maduro warned when he first spoke to the country about the pandemic.

On the next day, the first confirmed case of COVID-19 was officially announced.²²

¹⁹ <https://www.voanoticias.com/a/venezuela-caracas-juan-guaido-movilizacion-ejercicios-militares-maduro-/5322491.html>

²⁰ <https://twitter.com/jguaido/status/1237895236153532416/photo/2>

²¹ <http://mppre.gob.ve/2020/03/12/declaraciones-presidente-nicolas-maduro-covid-19/>

²² <https://www.elnacional.com/venezuela/confirman-primer-caso-de-coronavirus-en-venezuela/>

2 MADURO'S MEASURES



#STAYATHOME. IT'S AN ORDER!

The national emergency due to COVID-19 declared by Nicolás Maduro changed the already convulsed social dynamics in the country, due to greater uncertainty in several areas. A national state of alarm was decreed to combat the pandemic, as part of the state of emergency provided for in Article 388 of the Constitution of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, which reads:

"A state of alarm may be declared when disasters, public calamities or other similar events occur which seriously endanger the security of the Nation or its citizens. This state of emergency shall last up to thirty days, and may be extended for an additional thirty days".

Maduro said that day: *"We are going to take the first step in the areas where the highest incidence of this imported virus has been detected, and in the area where the cases from these flights arriving from Europe are quarantined, that is to say, area number 1 is quarantined starting at 5:00 a.m.:*

Caracas, La Guaira and Miranda, and at the same time we will quarantine the states of Zulia, Táchira and Apure, which are part of the western region and the Andean region.

*I mean, I repeat, Caracas, La Guaira, Miranda, Zulia, Táchira, Apure and Cojedes, which already has one confirmed case. We are talking about 7 states, 7 Integral Defence Zones. Starting at 5:00 a.m., they will enter phase 2 of collective quarantine, i.e. social quarantine, in a civil-military-police union, with the support of the conscience of the majority."*²³

In a country like Venezuela, which is experiencing a humanitarian emergency, with a health care system in ruins, it would be logical to think about the need for forceful prevention. And Maduro opted for strong actions, which in many countries were taken in later stages of the outbreak.

²³ Transmisión oficial, domingo 15 de marzo de 2020.

Maduro suspended school activities and public performances, ordered the temporary closure of restaurants, cinemas, and banned demonstrations, among other measures.

He even decreed the **suspension of the few international flights** that were still coming from and going to Colombia, Panama and the Dominican Republic, and later included flights from Europe. Venezuela was already practically isolated from the rest of the world, because of the 22 airlines flying to Simón Bolívar International Airport in 2014, only eight remained by early 2019.²⁴

Vice President Delcy Rodríguez reported that public and private sector workers serving essential sectors such as health services, food, electricity, gas, fuel, solid waste, security, telecommunications and transportation were exempted from the quarantine.

This state of alarm implied the beginning of **Phase III of the Bolivarian Shield Military Exercise 2020**” to ensure the security of the people’s health,²⁵ Maduro said. This measure was entrusted to the Strategic Operational Command of the National Armed Force, through the Strategic of Integral Defence Regions (REDIs) and their respective Operational Integral Defence Zones (ZODIs).

Between March 14–15, REDI and ZODI officials, together with health care staff, reviewed the health care centres, specifically the 46 hospitals selected as sentinel facilities to treat COVID-19 cases, while carrying out exercises to apply detection protocols, which included presence at access points to cities, communities, borders, airports, and naval patrolling around maritime terminals.

Regular service of the **Caracas underground (Metro) and railroad** transport system has been suspended since March 17.²⁶ **Only workers from sectors exempted from quarantine were allowed to use it, with mandatory use of protective masks.**

There was no time for people to adjust to the new restrictions, with the commercial and business sector in particular being hardly hit.

²⁴ <https://elestimulo.com/ocho-aerolineas-internacionales-continuan-en-venezuela/>

²⁵ <https://rpp.pe/mundo/venezuela/coronavirus-covid-19-nicolas-maduro-decreta-el-estado-de-alarma-en-venezuela-y-pide-no-subestimar-crisis-noticia-1251527?ref=rpp>



MANY MEASURES, LITTLE PROTECTION

As a relief, Economic Vice President Tareck El Aissami announced a series of measures “to protect first of all Venezuelan families, the Venezuelan working class,”²⁷ including:

1. Mandatory job security until December 31, 2020. This measure is not new, as layoff restrictions have been **in force for 10 years**; thus, the mandate has nothing to do with the pandemic. This announcement could be an attempt by the Maduro administration to boost its image internationally.
2. Special Payroll Plan to SMEs and other businesses through the Patria system, to ensure payment of salaries. **This is the same action taken during currency reconversion on August 20, 2018.**
3. Payment of bonuses to the overall population.
4. Suspension of rent payments for 6 months, **with no type of financial support to landlords who in many cases live off these rents.**
5. Prioritised investment in food through the Centralised Public Procurement Plan. The centralisation of CLAPs and the massification of purchase and sale of food has been in force for **more than 4 years and has spurred corruption, violation of human rights and coercion of the population.**
6. Suspension for up to 6 months of payments of capital and interest on credits. This measure could be considered a manipulation, since **for the last 5 years no bank or financial entity, public or private, has been granting credits**, because they are suspended *de facto* after they became impractical **due to inflation**. Credit cards lost value because the largest credit lines available are **barely enough to buy a loaf of bread**. This action

²⁷ Transmisión oficial, miércoles 25 de marzo de 2020.

makes a mockery of Venezuelans. The debts for mortgage loans that were granted before 2015 vanished with inflation, and **amount today to less than one cent of a dollar**. In addition, the increase in the legal reserve, imposed more than a year ago, has prevented banks from granting commercial or any other type of loan.

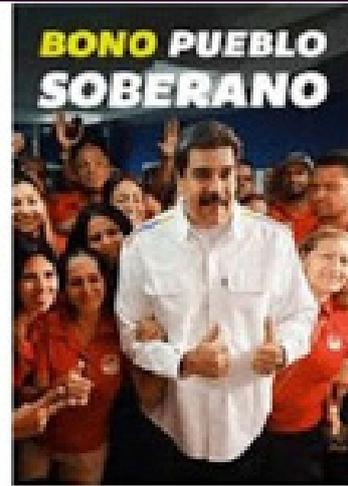
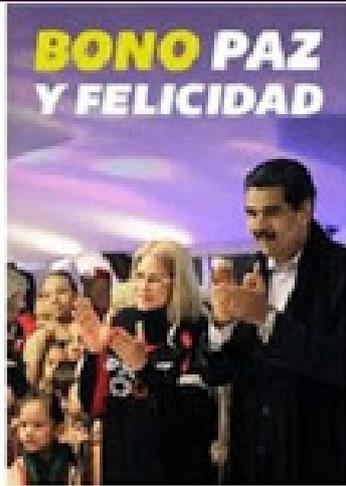
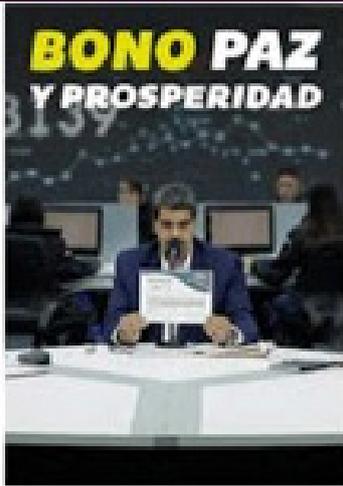
7. Suspension of credit risk reclassification. This means protecting clients' credit history. However, in practice, it is conditioned by the previous measure and the current context.
8. 8. Single productive portfolio and financial investment for strategic sectors (food, agro-industry and their chains, pharmaceutical industries and drugstores, industries that manufacture household items, household cleaning, personal hygiene, disinfectants, bleach-based products, alcohol, etc.). This committee will bring together all the banking portfolios in the country; however, the **investment of budgeted funds in many strategic sectors is suspended**, for example in the agri-food sector.
9. Exemption from taxes, duties and payment for any import of raw materials, capital goods and other inputs. The only fiscal measure taken by the State has been with regard to individuals, and only refers to the exemption from Income Tax (ISLR) and the payment of VAT to people earning less than 3 minimum wages, i.e., it only includes people who earn **US\$3 per month**, who **really do not pay any Income Tax** to begin with, according to official salary tables. Moreover, this measure was published in the Official Gazette in early April and the deadline for filing taxes is March 31, and this year – despite the quarantine and the state of alarm – the Maduro administration did not grant an extension.

In response to these announcements, Venezuela's Chamber of Commerce (Fedecámaras) proposed a series of cross-cutting measures to be applied by the government, the private sector, workers, social, political and economic stakeholders. The proposals include:

1. Ensuring supply of food, medicine and medical supplies.
2. Ensuring employment and health security for workers.
3. Provision of public services and fuel supply.
4. Establishing emergency financial conditions.
5. Tax flexibility.
6. Communication plan for disease prevention and control.
7. Postponement of new legislative or administrative regulations.

In addition, entrepreneurs have added proposals with specific approaches for the sectors of food processing, agriculture, industry, trade, telecommunications, tourism, real estate, construction, insurance and banking.

Maduro has not heeded the proposals of the private sector, and thus, economic collapse may come in the future, with an irremediable impact on the social and political context. It is important to **implement timely measures in favour of the existing companies in the country, regardless of the sector, since they are decisive stakeholders in macroeconomic development**.



PROPPING UP THE ECONOMY WITH DEVALUED BONDS

Another measure is the granting of *Bonos de la Patria* monetary bonuses to the most vulnerable groups. Below is a review of the bonuses given during the pandemic:

MARZO

Loyalty March

Bs. 300.000

US\$ 4,06

(March avg. exchange rate 73,901.44 Bs./\$)

Discipline and Solidarity

Bs. 350.000

US\$ 4,74

(March avg. exchange rate 73,901.44 Bs./\$)

ABRIL

Special bonus for medical staff, **1 Petro**

Bs.4.762.197,48 / US\$ 36,91

Easter **Bs. 350.000**

US\$ 2,71

(April avg. exchange rate: 129,008.41 Bs./\$)

Health and Life **Bs. 350.000**

US\$ 2,71

(April avg. exchange rate 129,008.41 Bs./\$)

Stay at Home

Bs. 450.000

US\$ 3,49

(April avg. exchange rate 129,008.41 Bs./\$)

MAYO

Labour Day

Bs. 450.000

US\$ 2,53

(May avg. exchange rate: 178,016.58 Bs./\$)

There is no clear information to verify **how many people are actually receiving this type of aid, or how the beneficiaries are selected**, as there are no reports or evaluation. In other words, monies are distributed arbitrarily.

Furthermore, these economic aids, which average US\$ 3.00, **fail to protect the most vulnerable families** in the midst of the pandemic; on the contrary, the bonuses **are not real and effective compensation** in a context of uncertainty, hyperinflation, fuel shortage, and rising food prices, since they do not allow the most vulnerable groups to afford basic foodstuff or medicines.

When we review the economic support given to people in other countries to cope with quarantine, the comparison shows Bonos de la Patria in a very bad light. The **U.S.** implemented a one-time **US\$3,000** stimulus payment to families that have declared their income to be below US\$75,000. In addition, a subsidy of between **US\$600 and US\$1200** was given to a large part of the population in various states, including Puerto Rico.

In **El Salvador**, “the government provided financial assistance to **200,000 families** affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.²⁸ In Panama, bonuses between **US\$75 and US\$100** were given to people who lost their jobs. In **Colombia**, senior citizens and beneficiaries of the “Families in Action” programme would receive an **additional bonus**.²⁹ **Peru** granted a single **US\$108** bonus for poor and extremely poor households. **Argentina** announced **US\$46** bonuses for minimum wage retirees

and beneficiaries of social plans and US\$47 per child for those receiving the Universal Allowance per Child (AUH). Puerto Rico agreed to **US\$500** incentives for independent workers.

These money transfers are part of a social protection policy implemented by governments in various types of emergencies to protect the most vulnerable groups. **It is the duty of the authorities to make information on users of certain economic aids available to the public and to facilitate monitoring, so that the data are visible and shared by various stakeholders** (beneficiaries, governments, civil society, etc.). This information allows authorities to identify possible inclusion or exclusion errors in targeting, as well as duplication of benefits delivered through one or more social programmes or economic aids. **Transparency of information is important to control possible political clientelism and benefits being received by certain interest groups by eliminating or, at least, correcting the discretionality in the use of public funds.**

²⁸ <https://www.dw.com/es/el-salvador-entregan-ayuda-econ%C3%B3mica-a-200000-familias-afectadas-por-el-covid-19/a-52949340>

²⁹ <https://cnnspanol.cnn.com/2020/03/25/que-est-an-ofreciendo-los-paises-de-america-latina-para-aliviar-la-crisis-economica-por-la-pandemia-de-coronavirus/>

³⁰ Ídem.

3 VIRUS AND SOCIAL CONTROL



WHO CAN AFFORD TO STAY HOME?

In Venezuela, the vast majority of the population make their income on a day to day basis, in a country suffering the ravages of a complex humanitarian emergency. Only a part of the population can afford to observe a strict quarantine, and thus, the social isolation measure was not complied with, especially in resource-poor sectors.

In many cases, **security forces** and in other cases—especially in Caracas—**groups of armed civilians** announced out loud in the streets the restrictive measures and sanctions, sometimes in an **intimidating tone**.³¹

There are reports about the actions of the civil and police authorities that contravene the rights to personal **freedom and free movement of citizens**, who in addition to the daily tragedy facing the country, are also exposed to aggression in the streets.

As the days went by, the control of mobility due

to the coronavirus became increasingly tighter. Mayors, governors, and in some cases, the military, began to issue decrees and regulations nationwide, based on Maduro's announcements. Reports of abuse against people who fail to comply with mandatory quarantine soon began to proliferate.

The **humiliating treatment** of people who dared go out was evident, with punishment and public derision. Many were **held in detention for hours** because they were not wearing face masks, and in Caracas, for example, the use of face masks was mandatory in transport systems such as Metro and the railway.³¹ Measures included **fines, confiscation and even arrests**.

³¹ <https://twitter.com/RayliLujan/status/1240806467751546882>

³² <https://www.elnacional.com/venezuela/personas-que-no-usen-tapabocas-no-podran-ingresar-al-metro-ni-al-ferrocarril/>



REPRESSION DURING THE QUARANTINE

LARA

Measures

- March 17, 2020:
- Governor Carmen Melendez, a former military officer, banned the transit of people after 2 p.m., threatening them with “radical” measures.³³ These include:
 - - community work
 - - arrests³⁴
 - - fines for up to 100 tax units. Re-offenders: 500 tax units and 48 hour detention (the value of a tax unit is Bs.1,500, as per Official Gazette No. 41839, of March 13, 2020).
 - -Governor Meléndez announced on Twitter a special deployment of security forces on main roads to “ensure peace and integrity of the people”.³⁵

Reported cases

The decree triggered complaints of abuse and humiliation from the general public. Some were forced to do squats for failing to comply with the lockdown.³⁶

³³ <https://www.laprensalarara.com.ve/nota/15168/2020/04/gobernadora-establece-horario-de-circulacion-hasta-las-2-pm>

³⁴ <http://www.ultimasnoticias.com.ve/noticias/pulso/en-lara-radicalizan-cuarentena-social/>

³⁵ <https://twitter.com/gestionperfecta/status/1255650738073714695>

³⁶ <http://www.ultimasnoticias.com.ve/noticias/pulso/en-lara-radicalizan-cuarentena-social/>

TRUJILLO

Measures

The ruling-party mayor of the city of Boconó, Luis Hidalgo, restricted business hours, temporarily suspended business licenses, banned street vendors and imposed sanctions similar to those applied in proceedings for offences against public order.³⁷

He also **suspended the supply of fuel to individuals and public transport.**³⁸

Reported cases

The public complaint about the **humiliating treatment** by the police against people in breach of the decree, who were forced to do squats by law enforcement officials.³⁹

ANZOÁTEGUI

Measures

The mayor of the Urbaneja municipality, Manuel Ferreira, announced:

- fines of Bs. **7,500,000**, little over US\$40;
- the decree would include street vendors, who would have pay up to Bs. **11,250,000** for repeat offenses, a costly punishment considering that their monthly salary is just Bs.400,000.⁴⁰

Reported cases

April 28, 2020: The Anzoátegui Human Rights Foundation (FDDHHANZ) reported arbitrary arrests in the Simón Bolívar municipality by the local police. The measure is allegedly being applied by other mayors in the state.⁴¹

37 <https://diariodelosandes.com/site/boconeses-comenzaran-a-restringir-sus-actividades-por-covid-19/>

38 <https://diariodelosandes.com/site/alcalde-de-bocono-queda-totalmente-suspendido-el-suministro-de-gasolina-para-vehiculos-particulares-y-transporte/>

39 <https://www.elnacional.com/venezuela/asi-humillaron-a-un-grupo-de-personas-en-bocono-por-incumplir-la-cuarentena/>

40 <https://elpitazo.net/oriente/alcalde-de-lecheria-anuncia-sanciones-para-quienes-incumplan-decretos-municipales-por-pandemia/>

41 <https://elmercurioweb.com/noticias/2020/4/28/fddhhanz-hay-alcaldes-que-estnbnspincurriendo-a-privaciones-ilegtimas-de-la-libertad>

GUÁRICO

Measures

March 25, 2020: Ruling-party governor José Vásquez announced:

- Restriction of the use of public transportation (except for health, food, telecommunications and basic services, with a permit).
- Closure of businesses that do not sell food.
- Relocating street vendors.⁴²

Reported cases

VARGAS (LA GUAIRA)

Measures

In this north-central state, recently renamed La Guaira, the pro-government and former military governor, Jorge Luis García Carneiro, implemented the following:

- Multa de **2.000.000 millones de bolívares** a quien no use mascarilla o tapabocas, unos US\$ 27 en un país en el que el salario mínimo mensual no supera los US\$ 4.⁴³
- Street vendors were banned.

Reported cases

A resident of the Guaracarumbo sector reported that in early April she and her boyfriend were arrested simply for being in a square after the curfew. They were detained for more than 12 hours and forced to exercise by order of security officials.⁴⁴

BOLÍVAR

Measures

The governor, former military officer Noguera Pietri, announced:

- The circulation of the CoronaBus, at 7 p.m., to control and detain for 24 hours those without a safe pass (except doctors and nurses on duty). Mayor of Caroní Tito Oviedo decreed:
- business hours are from 6 a.m. to 2 p.m. in Ciudad Guayana (except pharmacies and medical services).⁴⁵

Reported cases

On the night of March 23rd in Puerto Ordaz, the first people on the streets without a safe pass were arrested and given a lecture.

42 <https://www.vtv.gob.ve/medidas-guarico-primer-caso-covid19/>

43 <https://www.eluniversal.com/caracas/65047/bs-2-millones-en-multa-recipientes-guareños-que-salgan-a-la-calle-sin-tapaboca>

44 <https://talcuadigital.com/con-carcel-multas-y-charlas-se-sanciona-a-quienes-incumplen-la-cuarentena/>

45 <https://www.correodelcaroni.com/salud/coronavirus/4817-detendran-por-24-horas-a-quienes-incumplan-cuarentena-en-la-noche-en-el-estado-bolivar>

NUEVA ESPARTA

Measures

Opposition Governor Alfredo Díaz implemented restrictive measures, including:

- the suspension of the entry and departure of flights and marine transport, but the control is in the hands of the military, specifically the Integral Defence Operating Zone (ZODI) Nueva Esparta.⁴⁶

Reported cases

- Four members of a baseball academy were arrested on Margarita Island after 41 people from the academy tested positive for coronavirus. The academy trains major league hopefuls. The announcement was made by the Public Prosecutor's Office.
- On April 18, 2020, Carmen Hernández, an epidemiologist with the Nueva Esparta state government, was arrested for violating Article 54 of the Organic Law on National Security.
- April 24, 2020: Maduro threatens to imprison Governor Alfredo Diaz for the coronavirus outbreak in Nueva Esparta.⁴⁹

COJEDES

Measures

March 28, 2020: Enrique José Arocha, commander of the Integral Operational Zone (Zodi) 34 Cojedes announced.⁵⁰

- the impoundment of vehicles of drivers who violate the curfew and preventive measures.
- Circulation of people and vehicles is restricted to 7:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. (except health, food, public services and security sectors).
- Business hours are Monday to Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m.;
- Pharmacies from 8:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.

Reported cases

46 <https://talcualdigital.com/gobierno-se-lavo-las-manos-en-casos-del-covid-19-en-nueva-esparta/>

47 <https://cnnespanol.cnn.com/2020/04/20/alerta-detienen-a-director-de-academia-de-beisbol-en-venezuela-asociada-a-la-mlb-tras-contagio-masivo-por-coronavirus/>

48 <https://talcualdigital.com/gobierno-se-lavo-las-manos-en-casos-del-covid-19-en-nueva-esparta/>

49 <https://www.infobae.com/america/venezuela/2020/04/23/nicolas-maduro-amenazo-con-encarcelar-al-gobernador-opositor-de-nueva-esparta-alfredo-diaz-por-el-brote-de-coronavirus-en-el-estado/>

50 <https://elpitazo.net/los-llanos/zodi-cojedes-retendra-vehiculos-de-conductores-que-violen-la-cuarentena/>

PORTUGUESA

Measures

Mayor of the Guanare municipality Oscar Novoa, decreed on April 6, 2020:

- Business hours from Monday to Saturday from 6:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. (except bakeries, pharmacies and health care centres)
- Shopkeepers who fail to comply with the schedule and health regulations will be sanctioned with fines of 2,000 tax units and must attend prevention lectures. If they reoffend, they will be fined with 4,000 to 10,000 tax units and their license will be revoked.⁵¹

Reported cases

ZULIA

Measures

Maracaibo Mayor Willy Casanova issued a decree imposing fines, business closures and arrests to control movement of people.⁵²

Reported cases

- On March 28, the Zulia State Police (CPBEZ) arrested two men for organising a party with some 50 people.
- May 9: Three sports coaches arrested in Maracaibo, when they were training five teenage athletes between the ages of 13 and 16, according to César Garrido, Public Safety director and director general of the Maracaibo municipality.⁵⁴

51 <http://www.ultimasnoticias.com.ve/noticias/pulso/en-guanare-aplicaran-multas-y-revocaran-licencias-a-comercios/>

52 <https://www.panorama.com.ve/ciudad/Alcaldia-multara-negocios-que-incumplan-la-cuarentena-en-Maracaibo-20200316-0062.html>

53 <https://elpitazo.net/occidente/policia-detiene-a-dos-hombres-por-incumplir-medidas-de-covid-19-en-maracaibo/>

54 <https://extravenezuela.com/2020/05/09/detenidos-tres-entrenadores-de-beisbol-en-maracaibo-por-violar-cuarentena/>

APURE

Measures

March 18: Governor Ramón Carrizalez Rengifo, of the ruling party, decreed:

- Closure of businesses (except those selling food, medicine or basic necessities)
- He demanded that mayors fine businesses that fail to comply with the decree.
- He suspended activities in educational, recreational and cultural centres, and physical and sporting activities.
- Closure of event venues, concert halls, bars, museums, liquor stores, spas and swimming pools.
- Suspension of popular festivals, cults, religious services and funerals.⁵⁵

Reported cases

- On Monday, March 16, passers-by, bikers, drivers and others were detained in the town of Achaguas by the National Guard for not wearing masks.
- They were kept in overcrowded jails and exposed to coronavirus.
- They were released in a few hours. Their vehicles were retained until the following day.⁵⁶

METROPOLITAN AREA (CAPITAL DISTRICT AND MIRANDA)

Measures

Dario Vivas, head of government of the Capital District, announced the implementation of the “Special Mobility Control Plan”, with 42 checkpoints (community councils and Special Action Forces, FAES).⁵⁷

- In Catia, in western Caracas, a “mobility pass” or transit permit was issued for individuals. Some communal councils are asking people to show their *Carnet de la Patria* at checkpoints.

Reported cases

- March 30, 2020: 18 people were arrested in Los Palos Grandes, Miranda, for having a party. Two of the detainees tested positive for COVID-19.
- A party in the Los Roques archipelago went viral in social media, featuring several artists invited by “El Duke” Amoroso, son of Comptroller General Elvis Amoroso.
- Maduro said about this on March 23: “They were at a party, that’s normal. There was a party. Why would they criticise him?”⁶⁰

55 <https://elpitazo.net/los-llanos/gobernacion-de-apure-exige-a-alcaldes-multar-a-comerciantes-que-incumplan-normas-sanitarias/>

56 <https://elpitazo.net/los-llanos/gobernacion-de-apure-exige-a-alcaldes-multar-a-comerciantes-que-incumplan-normas-sanitarias/>

57 <https://www.americaeconomia.com/politica-sociedad/sociedad/venezuela-ensaya-mayor-control-social-en-barriada-de-caracas-en-medio-de>

60 <https://talcualdigital.com/con-carcel-multas-y-charlas-se-sanciona-a-quienes-incumplen-la-cuarentena/>

- Wednesdays and Sundays were set as non-operating days for businesses. The measure was not fully complied with.
- The mayor of Chacao, Gustavo Duque, implemented a traffic restriction on April 3, between 6 p.m. and 6 a.m.⁵⁸
- A large number of municipal police checkpoints were set up in and around the capital.
- Widespread military and police presence in densely populated areas such as Catia and Petare.⁵⁹

- In Charallave, Miranda, a group of young people was detained by the municipal police and forced to shout: "I must use a face mask"⁶¹.
- April 24: A commission of the Criminal Investigation Department (DIE) of the Bolivarian National Police arrested eight people for having a party in Las Mercedes, Caracas, including two beauty pageant participants.⁶²
- 20 people arrested in Coche, in the Libertador municipality of the Capital District, who were playing dominoes and listening to loud music, despite wearing their facemasks.⁶³

SUCRE

Measures

- On March 16, hours for food and medicine dispensers were restricted to 8 a.m. to 4 p.m.
- Closing of borders with Monagas, Nueva Esparta and Anzoátegui states.
- Closure of the waterway with Trinidad and Tobago, as well as the borders between the municipalities.
- Only one individual per family group is allowed to go out to buy food and medicine.

Reported cases

- Sucre Governor Edwin Rojas threatened to jail anyone who breaks the quarantine. "It's better to be locked up than to be buried in a cemetery," he said.⁶⁵
- May 14: Five baseball coaches arrested in Cumaná for breaking quarantine.⁶⁶

58 <https://efectococuyo.com/coronavirus/conozca-los-horarios-de-circulacion-en-las-regiones-durante-la-cuarentena/>

59 <https://elestimulo.com/caracas-amanece-militarizada-en-su-segunda-semana-de-cuarentena/>

61 <https://twitter.com/Lobo21Jose/status/1245330881385914369>

62 <http://www.ultimasnoticias.com.ve/noticias/sucesos/detuvieron-a-dos-misses-por-violar-la-cuarentena/>

63 <https://quepasaenvenezuela.org/2020/03/25/veinte-detenidos-por-violar-cuarentena/>

65 <https://efectococuyo.com/coronavirus/gobernacion-de-sucre-amenaza-con-encarcelar-a-ciudadanos-que-no-usen-tapabocas/>

66 <http://www.ultimasnoticias.com.ve/noticias/pulso/sucre/detenidos-cinco-entrenadores-de-beisbol-en-cumana-por-violar-cuarentena/>

Measures

- Violating the quarantine and not wearing a face mask could be punished with jail.
- Penalties for establishments that do not sell food and medicine in violation of the quarantine include fines, closure, and confiscation of merchandise.⁶⁴

Reported cases

FALCÓN

Measures

- Chavista governor Victor Clark decided on March 16:
- to limit circulation after 2 p.m.;
- popular festivals, cultural events, mass events were prohibited;
- closure of the border with Zulia;⁶⁷
- Children are not allowed to go out.⁶⁸

Reported cases

6 de mayo 2020: Policía de Falcón retuvo 200 ciudadanos por incumplir cuarentena⁶⁹.

CARABOBO

Measures

On April 15, Carabobo Governor Rafael Lacava ordered that food and medicine stores may be open to the public until 2 p.m.⁷⁰

Reported cases

TÁCHIRA

Measures

April 6: Communication Minister Jorge Rodríguez announced a curfew in the border municipalities of Táchira: Simón Bolívar and Pedro María Ureña from 4 p.m. to 10 a.m. to prevent the entry of “paramilitaries” during the quarantine.

Reported cases

⁶⁴ <https://efectococuyo.com/coronavirus/gobernacion-de-sucre-amenaza-con-encarcelar-a-ciudadanos-que-no-usen-tapabocas/>

⁶⁷ <https://www.ntn24.com/america-latina/venezuela/gobernador-de-falcon-cerro-frontera-con-el-zulia-por-el-coronavirus-120224>

⁶⁸ <https://www.lamananadigital.com/cuerpos-de-seguridad-cierran-locales-comerciales-que-no-venden-alimentos/>

⁶⁹ <https://notifalcon.com/2020/05/06/retenidos-mas-200-falconianos-en-operativo-de-polifalcon-por-incumplir-la-cuarentena/>

⁷⁰ <https://efectococuyo.com/coronavirus/hay-que-inflexibilizar-la-cuarentena-lacava-reduce-horario-de-comercios-en-carabobo/>

- The so-called “Protector” of Táchira, Freddy Bernal, said on April 18 that the municipality of García de Hevia was included in the curfew. The municipalities of Libertador, Fernández Feo and Torbes were declared in lockdown.
- Businesses may open from 8 a.m. to 12 p.m.⁷¹

ARAGUA

Measures

- April 5: Maracay Mayor Pedro Bastidas prohibited movement of people and vehicles in the Girardot municipality after 2 p.m.
- Supermarkets and pharmacies can open until 1 p.m.
 - He threatened business owners with revoking licenses if they break quarantine
 - Transit between municipalities was banned.
 - He threatened offenders with lectures about prevention measures.⁷²

Reported cases

- April 3, 2020: To date, 25 people from the Lamas municipality in Aragua have been arrested for breaking the quarantine.
- Fifteen underage individuals were also arrested and placed in the custody of the Council for the Protection of Children and Adolescents. There, a lecture would be given to their parents or representatives about COVID-19.⁷³

MÉRIDA

Measures

- On April 1, a decree was issued in Mérida restricting pedestrian and vehicular traffic from 2 p.m. to 5 a.m.

Reported cases

⁷¹ <http://www.ultimasnoticias.com.ve/noticias/pulso/tres-municipios-aislados-y-tres-en-toque-de-queda-en-tachira/>

⁷² <https://efectococuyo.com/la-humanidad/alcalde-de-maracay-prohibe-circulacion-de-personas-y-vehiculos-despues-de-las-200-pm/>

⁷³ <https://cronica.uno/lo-mas-reciente-del-3-de-abril/>

- March 18: Restriction of public transportation schedule in the 23 municipalities from 5 a.m. to 8 a.m. and from 5 p.m. to 7 pm.⁷⁴

BARINAS

Measures

March 23, 2020: Governor Argenis Chávez decided:

- hours for the sale of food and medicine in municipal markets from 6 a.m. to 3 p.m. From 6 a.m. to 4 p.m. other businesses (butcher shops, bakeries, grocery stores, etc.)
- banned circulation without facemask and gloves.
- driving restriction for unauthorised vehicles
- police and military agencies are in charge of the protection of citizens.
- March 31: Partial closure of roads and food shops will work until noon.⁷⁶

Reported cases

On April 4, Maritza Rodríguez, a nurse at the Luis Razetti hospital, was arbitrarily arrested as she was on her way to the hospital after she was given a ride by a truck driver, who was later detained at a GNB checkpoint. The nurse was arrested for carrying some medicines.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ <https://elpitazo.net/los-andes/restringen-horario-del-transporte-publico-en-merida-por-la-cuarentena/>

⁷⁵ <https://twitter.com/lafuerzadchavez/status/1242201003828695042/photo/1>

⁷⁶ <https://elpitazo.net/los-llanos/gobernador-de-barinas-radicaliza-restricciones-para-la-movilizacion/>

⁷⁷ https://www.civilisac.org/civilis/wp-content/uploads/1587433925910_REPORTE-ABRIL-2020-FUNDEHULLAN-VENEZUELA.pdf

YARACUY

Measures

Yaracuy Governor Julio Leon Heredia decreed:

- The sale of food from 7 a.m. until 2 p.m. Monday to Friday. - On weekends, commercial activity (including grocery stores, restaurants and supermarkets) and open air markets were prohibited.
- After 3 p.m., movement of individuals without justification was prohibited, and those who violate the order will be arrested, "as well as people who take children and adolescents to commercial establishments."⁷⁸
- As of April 11, a fine of 10 minimum wages was established, as well as the obligation of community work in squares, parks, avenues and streets.⁷⁹
- The mayor of the Peña municipality, Juan Parada, ordered in mid-April the deployment of security agencies in Sabanita I, Yaritagua, "to prevent anyone from entering and leaving".⁸⁰

Reported cases

⁷⁸ <https://www.elinformador.com.ve/coronavirus/en-yaracuy-ajustan-medidas-de-cuarentena/>

⁷⁹ <https://elpitazo.net/occidente/seran-sancionados-con-trabajo-comunitario-quienes-incumplan-la-cuarentena-en-yaracuy/>

⁸⁰ <https://contrapunto.com/nacional/regiones-nacional/cuarentena-radical-aplican-en-comunidad-de-yaracuy-en-la-que-se-detecto-caso-sospechoso-de-covid-19/>



IS INFORMATION THE REAL VIRUS?

The quarantine also intensified the control of information. Management of communication about the situation exposed the hegemonic character of communications in Venezuela. Information on the disease has been centralised and there has been **no mention of health authorities** in the information reports. **There is no media presence** when reports are broadcast, a feature that has been especially characteristic in Venezuela for several years.

In relation to information provided by Nicolas Maduro directly – and his closest collaborators, Jorge Rodriguez, Minister of Communications, and his sister Delcy Rodriguez, Executive Vice President – on the progress of the pandemic (number of infected patients, deaths, tests performed, health care, etc.) the data has been questioned by experts and opposition leaders.

This information cannot be clearly assessed due to the **opacity around these figures and details**.⁸¹

Also noteworthy is the **stigmatisation of infected patients**, in some cases by Maduro himself, who in some speeches emphasised that the majority of cases were from “eastern Caracas” (traditionally upper middle class), of people who can afford to travel abroad. On another occasion, referring to two people infected in the same bakery, he warned that people should know the name of the business, located in Maracay, Aragua.⁸² This clearly runs counter the constitutional right to personal, physical, psychological and moral integrity of citizens, set forth in Article 46 of the National Constitution.

80 <https://runrun.es/rr-es-plus/402235/cronologia-de-incongruencias-y-opacidad-en-cifras-oficiales-de-coronavirus-19-en-venezuela/>

81 <https://cronica.uno/gobierno-de-maduro-estigmatiza-a-contagiados-con-covid-19-con-su-discurso/>

82 <https://cronica.uno/gobierno-de-maduro-estigmatiza-a-contagiados-con-covid-19-con-su-discurso/>

A **political manipulation** of information is also evident. According to a report on the Venezuelan news website Runrun.es, as of May 4, 2020, Maduro's political rival countries have been cited in 49 **television reports** as responsible for the spread of the virus:

- **Colombia** and President Ivan Duque (88 times)
- **United States** and President Donald Trump (44 times)
- **Brazil** and President Jair Bolsonaro (25 times).
- The list also features **Panama**, with 8 mentions, **Peru** with 7, **Ecuador** with 5 and **Chile** with 5.⁸³

Journalists and even health care workers have been arrested for reporting misdeeds.

In a report on the situation of freedom of expression between January and April 2020, NGO Espacio Público reported **43 cases of violations of the right to freedom of expression** in relation to the coverage or disclosure of COVID-19 information. In April alone, the organisation reported **25 arrests for searching for and disseminating information**, "most of which were made for making comments on social media, and in the case of journalists, for publishing information about COVID-19."⁸⁴

On March 17, Bolivarian National Guard (GNB) officers arrested **Dr. Julio Molino, 72**, who, along with two of his colleagues, complained about the harsh situation at the Núñez Tovar Hospital in Maturín, Monagas. Molino was charged in court with incitement to hatred, **incitement to panic, public-order crimes, and conspiracy**. The doctor was placed under house arrest.

Espacio Público also reported social media blocks, general service failures, website and information platform blocks.

*"In the last two months, there have been 32 cases of violations of online freedom of expression, which include access blocks, harassment and threats through social media in retaliation for disseminating information or opinions," the report said. Espacio Público highlighted the blocking of pandemic-related initiatives by the National Assembly, e.g. on March 18 "through NIS filtering (against) the website **coronavirusvenezuela.info** according to the report by Ve sin Filtro. On April 16, state-owned telecommunications company CANTV and private operator Movistar applied DNS blocks, the former on website **pvenezuela.com** and the latter preventing access to the website **teleconsulta.presidenciave.org**. On April 22, CANTV again blocked the domain **ve.presidencia.com**, which offers COVID-19-related information". The report noted the events on April 26, when the website **heroesdesaludve.info** was cloned. The site was promoted by the National Assembly to offer economic support to health workers. The attack was reportedly performed through "phishing", "users who accessed the site through CANTV were redirected to another deceitfully similar website to obtain the personal data in the sign-up form."⁸⁵*

The restrictive measures also prompted a number of protests nationwide. The Venezuelan Observatory for Social Conflict (OVCS) reported a total of **716 protests in April 2020 alone**, that is, **24 demonstrations per day**, despite the quarantine. Of these, **464** were due to **power outages, and water supply and household gas** service interruptions. The most active states were Táchira (125 protests) and Mérida (115), followed by Miranda (72), Falcón (50) and Anzoátegui (46).⁸⁶

83 <https://runrun.es/rr-es-plus/406236/una-etiqueta-a-conveniencia-para-el-coronavirus/>

84 <http://espaciopublico.org/abril-detenciones-buscan-imponer-el-silencio/>

85 <http://espaciopublico.org/situacion-general-del-derecho-a-la-libertad-de-expresion-enero-abril-de-2020/>

86 <https://www.elnacional.com/venezuela/la-cuarentena-no-frena-las-protestas-ovcs-registro-716-manifestaciones-en-abril/>

The study reveals that **there was a decrease in street demonstrations** compared to the same period in 2019. These 716 protests in the country are **64% less than in April 2019, when 1,963 protests were reported.**

A particular factor in the midst of the pandemic has been the acute shortage of fuel throughout the country. According to the OVCS, at least **176** protests in April 2020 were due to the **shortage of fuel**, a crisis heralded by the destruction of the oil industry,⁸⁷ which some claim the government attempted to blame on the COVID-19 emergency.

⁸⁷ <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-52145210>



LIFTING THE QUARANTINE WITH NO FUEL?

Is Maduro willing to resolve the fuel issue? Is it a control tool that he will use to his advantage? Will the quarantine measures ever be relaxed? On March 23, Nicolás Maduro said in an interview with a state-run TV station that “Venezuela wants peace, it wants progress, it wants harmony and, sooner rather than later, it wants to go back to normal, a **relative and monitored** normality”.⁸⁸

This “relative and monitored” normality was cited by Tareck El Aissami, Vice President of the Economic Area, who reported on May 8, 2020 that he was considering applying restricted schedules to reactivate the economic sectors that were in lockdown due to the quarantine, including those involving “a large mobilisation of the labour force and certain types of services.”⁸⁹

But only two days later, on 10 May, Maduro himself went to Twitter to call for further

restrictive measures: *“I call on ministers, governors, mayors and leaders of our people to **bring discipline to the social, collective and conscious quarantine. Let’s not slack off, it’s dangerous! No mass or public events. Discipline and cohesion must be raised to the highest level. Let’s not lose heart!**”*⁹⁰

On 12 May, he extended the quarantine for an additional 30 days, which some experts attribute largely to the lack of fuel,⁹¹ and the uneasiness over water supply and power failures, leading to an increasing number of demonstrations.⁹²

Venezuela is experiencing the worst crisis, and under special circumstances. One of them is the permanent **State of Economic Emergency** (14 decrees plus their respective extensions), in force since 2016 in violation of the National Constitution, which establishes a **120-day** maximum. Transparencia Venezuela

88 <https://www.caraotadigital.net/nacionales/se-persigue-lograr-que-venezuela-marche-a-una-normalidad-relativa-y-vigilada-dijo-maduro>

89 <https://efectococuyo.com/economia/el-aissami-dice-que-estudian-bandas-horarias-para-reactivar-sectores-de-la-economia/>

90 <https://twitter.com/NicolasMaduro/status/1259652616772030466>

91 <https://www.infobae.com/america/agencias/2020/05/15/cuarentena-en-venezuela-confinamiento-obligado-por-escasez-de-gasolina/>

92 <https://www.elmundo.es/internacional/2020/04/17/5e9843cbfdfff2c848b4591.html>

has identified this issue as one of the factors in the **Grand Corruption pattern**,⁹³ as the government has ruled “in state of emergency” for four years without resolving the economic issue, but **only to evade the constitutional oversight that the National Assembly must exercise over the decisions of the Executive Branch.**

The other factor is the new State of Alarm, decreed by Maduro, which according to Article 338 of the Constitution should be in force for 30 days, with a possible extension of an additional **30 days**. Noteworthy is that Article 339 of our Constitution establishes that the decree must be submitted to the National Assembly within eight days of its coming into force, a requirement that was not met under the argument of alleged contempt of Parliament. This decree affects **freedom of transit**, Article 50 of the National Constitution, and of **assembly**, Article 53, as well as the rights to education, Article 102, to **sport**, Article 111, and to **culture**, Article 98.

The goal is to protect the population from a dangerous virus, and therefore the State of Alarm should not be used to exacerbate the violation of constitutional guarantees of the people – who are already suffering the ordeal of the complex humanitarian emergency – or to take political advantage of the situation.

⁹³ <https://transparencia.org.ve/project/actualizacion-patron-de-gran-corrupcion-un-esquema-para-el-desfalco-y-la-violacion-de-ddhh/>

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A Convenient Restraint?



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