



WORLD AFFAIRS COUNCIL
of Philadelphia

Venezuela

Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela



Key Facts



World Freedom Press Global Index Ranking (Overall): Ranked 148 (49.10)

Head of State / Head of Government: The United States recognizes Juan Guaido as the Interim President of Venezuela & President Nicolas Maduro (since 19 April 2013)

Capital city: Caracas

Population: 31,689,176 (July 2018 est.)

Official Language(s): Spanish

Ethnic Groups: unspecified Spanish, Italian, Portuguese, Arab, German, African, indigenous populations

Currency: Venezuelan Bolívar

Gross domestic product (PPP): 482.4 billion USD (2014)

Internet penetration: 53.1%

Most trusted medium of information: N/A

Legal System: civil law system based on the Spanish civil code

Political system: federal presidential republic

Journalists Jailed/Killed 2019: 0

Media Environment: Government supervises a mixture of state-run and private broadcast media; 13 public service networks, 61 privately owned TV networks, a privately owned news channel with limited national coverage, and a government-backed Pan-American channel; state-run radio network includes

roughly 65 news stations and another 30 stations targeted at specific audiences; state-sponsored community broadcasters include 235 radio stations and 44 TV stations; the number of private broadcast radio stations has been declining, but many still remain in operation. Media is completely divided between government supporters, with outlets owned or controlled to different extents by the state, and media critical with the government, which are not necessarily close to parties of the opposition. The communication and information field has been one of the most affected by authoritarianism and repression,

Media Issues: Venezuela's president since 2013, Nicolás Maduro persists in trying to silence independent media outlets and keep news coverage under constant control. The climate for journalists has been extremely tense since the onset of a political and economic crisis in 2016 and is exacerbated by Maduro's frequent references to "media warfare" in an attempt to discredit national and international media criticism of his administration. Harassment of independent media intensified in 2017 and 2018, and RSF registered a record number of arbitrary arrests and violence against reporters by the police and intelligence services. The National Telecommunications Commission (CONATEL) strips overly critical radio and TV stations of their broadcast frequencies, while foreign reporters are often arrested, questioned and deported. Many Venezuelan journalists fled the country in 2018 because of the threats and physical dangers. A 2010 law provides for sanctions in the event of any content "calling the legitimately constituted authority into question." This has led to arbitrary arrests and defamation prosecutions. The print media are meanwhile often threatened by strange newsprint shortages.

Popular Forms of Media Consumption

Print: The offer of print media in Venezuela is decreasing worryingly, especially since the appointing of Nicolás Maduro as president in 2013. According to the NGO Espacio Público (Public Space), in that year there were 134 newspapers in Venezuela, whereas in 2018 only 64 are still working in the whole country. One of the main reasons for this decrease is the lack of newsprint paper, which has forced many newspapers to temporary shutdowns, final shutdowns, decreasing their frequency, sizing down their number of pages or migrations to the digital format.

Radio: In 2017, 54 stations closed, of which 52 in the inner and rural part of the country. According to the survey of Instituto Delphos, radio is most popular among the older, less wealthy and rural population.

Digital Media: Internet penetration in Venezuela It is one of the lowest rates in the Latin American region. This can be partially explained due to the fails in the connectivity infrastructure and the low speed of the connections. Together with the digital sites of traditional media, including newspapers that could not keep their printed version.

Social Networks: They have become a key element in the organization of demonstrations or social movements, as well as a source of not state-controlled information. Even though they are still very polarized and the control of the government is not completely avoided, social networks have increased the variety of opinions and widened the public discourse. Social media, as well as digital news media, have allowed a certain customization of messages and the production of contents aimed at smaller audiences. This has fostered the appearance of media focused on specific topics such as sports, environment, religion or local matters; in this sense, the access to international networks has also increased the volume of available information and content. According to the survey of Delphos, 16.1 percent of Venezuelans considered social networks their main source of political information. The survey of Hinterlaces put this figure at 18 percent, showing also how Venezuelans trust social networks (23 percent in 2018, 32 percent

in 2017) more than media in general (22 percent in 2018 and 25 percent in 2017). Social media are clearly preferred by younger and wealthier groups of people.