

# PERCEPTIONS OF PEACE IN VENEZUELA

## FROM CRIMINAL PEACE TO CITIZEN'S PEACE

FULL STUDIES ON

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### CONFLICTS

Conflict is pervasive. Since the early twenty-first century, Venezuela has recorded one of the world's highest homicide rates. A long-running standoff pits a militarised government against a divided opposition, with elections, sanctions, and control over oil rents as key battlegrounds. Violence clusters around the country's western border, where guerrilla remnants, paramilitary-style groups, smugglers, and state forces overlap and each profit from illicit economies. Further south, the Orinoco mining arc sees brutal struggles over gold that devastate Indigenous territories. In cities, mega gangs and pro-government armed groups impose a criminal order that mixes open fighting with extortion and fear. For many, peace means surviving multiple shifting frontlines rather than ending a single conflict.



### THE THREE PILLARS OF PEACE



#### PHYSICAL INTEGRITY

Extremely high levels of lethal violence and abuses perpetrated against civilians are the norm, despite the absence of civil war per se. More than seven million Venezuelans had left the country by 2023. Mining-related violence is concentrated in Miranda and Bolívar. Recent declines in violent incidents can be widely attributed to massive outmigration, hard policing, and pacts between the security forces and criminal groups rather than to the stronger enforcement of the rule of law. Selective killings in poor neighbourhoods and the militarisation of border- and mining zones reflect the co-optation of the state by criminal groups. For residents, insecurity manifests as robberies, arbitrary police raids, and the need to negotiate with armed actors to move, work, or do business.



#### HUMAN RIGHTS

Venezuela's authoritarian government narrowed freedoms of association, expression, and due process. Years of political hardening and economic collapse coincide with the rise of armed collectives and militarised borders that decide who can move, speak, or trade. Residents of barrios such as Catuche and Cota 905 describe rights to protest and to circulate as conditional on political loyalty and on the presence of criminal groups. Border dwellers and Indigenous communities south of the Orinoco face discrimination, mining violence, and almost no public services. Many interviewees noted that there is "no right to anything" and seek protection or problem-solving via the family, churches, or local brokers instead of courts or elected institutions, which they regard as distant, paralysed, or complicit.



#### CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION

The responsible institutions have been captured by the executive. A pro-government Constituent Assembly, weakened courts, and a sidelined parliament leave little room for negotiation. The government has been effective at dividing the opposition and maintaining relative power. Once regarded as a model of political stability, the country has seen both government and opposition undermine the legitimacy of institutions by hindering their powers or creating parallel bodies. In some areas, pacts between the security forces and gangs create a fragile criminal peace: shootings decline, but residents must depend on these illegal groups to settle disputes and enforce order. Elsewhere, neighbourhood organisations and churches sustain dialogue and social support but have little influence over national politics.

### NOTIONS OF PEACE

For our Survey Results in Venezuela scan:



Fieldwork done between 2019-2022