

# Freedom on the Net 2025 - Venezuela



## Key Developments, June 1, 2024 – May 31, 2025

Internet freedom declined significantly in Venezuela during the coverage period. The July 2024 presidential election and its aftermath, in which incumbent Nicolás Maduro claimed victory despite credible evidence that opposition candidate Edmundo González Urrutia won in a landslide, featured a brutal campaign of repression against perceived government opponents. The regime blocked independent news sites and communications platforms; conducted large-scale arbitrary detentions, including for online activities; manipulated online discussion through influence operations; and encouraged informers to report instances of dissent through a digital complaint mechanism.

- The nongovernmental organization (NGO) VE sin Filtro reported that more than 200 domains were blocked between July 2024 and January 2025, roughly corresponding with the start of the electoral campaign and Maduro’s disputed inauguration. Among the blocked websites were those created by the opposition to publish its own voting tallies, which showed that González had won. Censorship circumvention tools and social media and communications platforms were also blocked during the coverage period.<sup>1</sup> As of May 2025, 61 independent news sites, as well as platforms including X, Signal, YouTube, TikTok, and Telegram, remained blocked (B1).<sup>2</sup>
- Following Maduro’s fraudulent victory, authorities launched “Operación Tun-Tun” (Operation Knock-Knock) to arbitrarily arrest perceived dissidents en masse. The campaign used social media to disseminate videos of arrests and forced confessions in order to discourage Venezuelans from attending antigovernment protests or speaking out online.<sup>3</sup> Social media accounts affiliated with the high-ranking official Diosdado Cabello also doxed many perceived critics (B4, B5, B8, and C7).<sup>4</sup>
- The Maduro regime continued to manipulate online content, particularly in the context of the July 2024 presidential election and its aftermath; the NGO Cazadores de Fake News characterized the manipulation efforts as “surpass[ing] episodes from previous years.”<sup>5</sup> Such operations included attempts to smear and discredit the opposition and the use of coordinated inauthentic behavior to promote progovernment narratives (B5).<sup>6</sup>
- In November 2024, the National Assembly passed the Simón Bolívar Law. Among other provisions, it subjected digital media outlets that “promote” coercive or restrictive measures against Venezuela to substantial fines, and allowed such outlets’ operating licenses to be revoked.<sup>7</sup> The law’s broad language sparked concerns that news sites could be punished simply for publishing information about international sanctions.<sup>8</sup> In August 2024, the legislature approved a law that would allow the government to

dissolve NGOs if they were found to promote vaguely defined hate speech or fascism or to engage in political activity.<sup>9</sup> Most media outlets still operating in the country—including digital outlets—are classified as NGOs (B6).<sup>10</sup>

- After the presidential election, the Maduro regime announced a new feature on VenApp, a state-developed application that was ostensibly created to receive and address governance complaints, that would allow individuals to report political protests and other expressions of dissent to the authorities.<sup>11</sup> Although Apple and Google removed the app from their stores, the government and its supporters encouraged the use of other digital platforms to inform on protesters, and VenApp’s Android Package Kit (APK) file continued to be available for download (B8 and C5).<sup>12</sup>
- During the coverage period, numerous people were arbitrarily detained for expressing perceived dissent on social media or in conversations on the messaging platform WhatsApp.<sup>13</sup> Digital journalists also faced detention.<sup>14</sup> Some of those detained for their online activities were forcibly disappeared, including Carlos Correa, executive director of the freedom of expression organization Espacio Público, who was missing for eight days before being released in January 2025 (C3 and C7).<sup>15</sup>

## Political Overview

Venezuela’s democratic institutions have been deteriorating since 1999, but conditions have grown sharply worse in recent years due to harsher government crackdowns on the opposition and the ruling party’s use of thoroughly flawed elections to seize full control of state institutions. The authorities have closed off virtually all channels for political dissent, restricting civil liberties and prosecuting perceived opponents without regard for due process. Although the country’s economy has returned to growth after years of recession, a severe, politically driven humanitarian crisis continues to cause hardship and stimulate mass emigration.

*This report has been abridged for Freedom on the Net 2025 due to [ongoing budget constraints](#). Please consider making a [donation](#) to support future editions of this vital resource.*

*For additional background information, see last year’s [full report](#).*

## A Obstacles to Access

A1 0-6 pts

<b>Do infrastructural limitations restrict access to the internet or the speed and quality of internet connections?</b>	<b>3 / 6</b>
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A2 0-3 pts

<b>Is access to the internet prohibitively expensive or beyond the reach of certain segments of the population for geographical, social, or other reasons?</b>	<b>0 / 3</b>
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A3 0-6 pts

<b>Does the government exercise technical or legal control over internet infrastructure for the purposes of restricting connectivity?</b>	<b>3 / 6</b>
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*Score Change: The score declined from 4 to 3 due to reports of localized disruptions to internet connectivity that coincided with opposition leader María Corina Machado’s speeches.<sup>16</sup>*

A4 0-6 pts

**Are there legal, regulatory, or economic obstacles that restrict the diversity of service providers?** | 2 / 6

*Score Change: The score improved from 1 to 2 due to an increase in the number of internet service providers in recent years, with new entrants offering fiber-optic services on existing infrastructure and contributing to market diversification.*<sup>17</sup>

**A5 0-4 pts**

**Do national regulatory bodies that oversee service providers and digital technology fail to operate in a free, fair, and independent manner?** | 0 / 4

## **B Limits on Content**

**B1 0-6 pts**

**Does the state block or filter, or compel service providers to block or filter, internet content, particularly material that is protected by international human rights standards?** | 1 / 6

*Score Change: The score declined from 2 to 1 due to prolonged blocks on websites with political, human rights, and news content as well as on communications and social media platforms.*

**B2 0-4 pts**

**Do state or nonstate actors employ legal, administrative, or other means to force publishers, content hosts, or digital platforms to delete content, particularly material that is protected by international human rights standards?** | 1 / 4

**B3 0-4 pts**

**Do restrictions on the internet and digital content lack transparency, proportionality to the stated aims, or an independent appeals process?** | 0 / 4

**B4 0-4 pts**

**Do online journalists, commentators, and ordinary users practice self-censorship?** | 1 / 4

**B5 0-4 pts**

**Are online sources of information controlled or manipulated by the government or other powerful actors to advance a particular political interest?** | 1 / 4

**B6 0-3 pts**

**Are there economic or regulatory constraints that negatively affect users' ability to publish content online?** | 1 / 3

**B7 0-4 pts**

**Does the online information landscape lack diversity and reliability?** | 1 / 4

## B8 0-6 pts

**Do conditions impede users' ability to mobilize, form communities, and campaign, particularly on political and social issues?** | 3 / 6

*Score Change: The score declined from 4 to 3 because the authorities responded to antigovernment protests with significant repression, including the use of digital tools that discouraged people from attending demonstrations and enabled them to inform on protesters. 18*

## C Violations of User Rights

### C1 0-6 pts

**Do the constitution or other laws fail to protect rights such as freedom of expression, access to information, and press freedom, including on the internet, and are they enforced by a judiciary that lacks independence?** | 1 / 6

### C2 0-4 pts

**Are there laws that assign criminal penalties or civil liability for online activities, particularly those that are protected under international human rights standards?** | 0 / 4

### C3 0-6 pts

**Are individuals penalized for online activities, particularly those that are protected under international human rights standards?** | 1 / 6

*Score Change: The score declined from 2 to 1 because an opposition activist was sentenced to 15 years in prison in connection with social media commentary that was critical of the government. 19*

### C4 0-4 pts

**Does the government place restrictions on anonymous communication or encryption?** | 2 / 4

### C5 0-6 pts

**Does state surveillance of internet activities infringe on users' right to privacy?** | 2 / 6

### C6 0-6 pts

**Does monitoring and collection of user data by service providers and other technology companies infringe on users' right to privacy?** | 2 / 6

### C7 0-5 pts

**Are individuals subject to extralegal intimidation or physical violence by state authorities or any other actor in relation to their online activities?** | 1 / 5

*Score Change: The score declined from 2 to 1 due to a significant increase in enforced disappearances of perceived government opponents, 20 including those who were targeted in reprisal for their online activities.*

Are websites, governmental and private entities, service providers, or individual users subject to widespread hacking and other forms of cyberattack?

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### Footnotes

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