

Venezuela: What's Next & What to Do?

Project Terms of Reference

Venezuela has undergone an epic decline and experienced – from various causes – a profound deterioration of its institutions, economy, and political culture.

The oil industry is in steep decline, with little prospect of resuscitation. Government mismanagement and profligate policies have bankrupted national coffers and left the economy in historic decay. U.S. sanctions have worsened these conditions and humanitarian crises, driving an exodus of several million citizens. The political class has been utterly incapable of constructive dialogue; human rights violations and violence have surged; elections have lacked legitimacy; foreign powers have taken sides with little positive result. The country's multi-layered crises have deep roots for which there are no easy solutions. It faces a long, arduous road back to normalcy regardless of how the current deadlock is overcome.

Our team proposes to provide you with research, analysis, and recommendations on the following aspects of the Venezuelan situation to assist you in developing and promoting solutions that, consistent with your objectives, reduce the suffering of the Venezuelan people, enhance human rights and inclusiveness, and help set the country on a more favorable course into the future.

KEY QUESTIONS

The Team has formed five sub-teams (members listed below) to research, analyze, and explore policies in five key areas: Internal Politics, External Politics, Economics, Humanitarian Issues, and Border Security.

Internal Politics

- What can be done to defend and strengthen independent civil society in pursuit of a pacted solution to the country's political crisis? How can organizations and networks become more effective and expand civic activism and space? How can civil actors collaborate effectively with political actors, and with whom?
- What actors, currents, and trends within the ruling coalition and the opposition can be leveraged to support a pacted solution? What are all sides' concerns, and what can be offered to address those concerns?
- What impact has the recent history of political, social, and economic crisis had on the social cohesion of Venezuelan society and cultural identity? How can citizens bridge political and cultural divides in order to begin forging a new, unified common identity?

External Politics

- How can the Biden Administration adjust its sanctions regime and what inducements can it offer to bring the government and its opponents (parties as well as civil society) to a



serious negotiation? How can the Biden Administration effectively pivot to a policy of support for a process like that pursued by Norway?

- How can the international community, including the OAS, EU and ICG, the Lima Group, UN, and others, develop and promote a peaceful negotiation among Venezuelan stakeholders? Under what conditions might such strategies win the cooperation of Russia, China, and Cuba?

Economics

- What are current trends in the Venezuelan economy – is the contraction bottoming out? – and what impact will current reforms (privatization, de facto dollarization, looser currency controls) have in the short and medium term? What other reforms are necessary to support economic recovery in the short, medium, and long term?
- What near-term strategies can be employed to prepare for revitalization of Venezuela's oil industry and to diversify its economy? How can sustainability be incorporated into economic diversification?

Humanitarian Issues

- How can the PAHO deal be expanded to include commitments in other areas, such as electoral conditions?
- What is the latest data on international contributions to the UN Humanitarian Response inside Venezuela; how can the data collection and sharing be improved; and what are best practices in aid distribution that ensure neutrality, minimize interference, and can be copied for future deliveries?
- How can international aid organizations support their local partners in addressing the health crises in Venezuela, which has been further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic?

Border Security

- What are the impacts on security of illegal trafficking of narcotics, guns, people, and contraband on the Colombia-Venezuela border? What is the history of state presence and irregular groups' presence (including FARC, ELN and criminal groups) in the border area, and what voids do armed groups fill there? What can be done to reduce the influence of these groups?
- What incentives do elites in Venezuela and Colombia have to address – unilaterally or in cooperation – their border security challenges? What can the United States do to change elites' narratives in the area and help forge a common vision on security issues?
- How can the United States encourage the Colombian government to better uphold its commitment to the FARC peace deal and unfreeze stalled negotiations with the ELN? What is the trend in Venezuelan government engagement with ELN, dissident FARC, and BACRIM militants in the area? How can border violence be reduced and put Venezuela on a more favorable course for the future?

GOALS

Produce analysis and actionable recommendations to assist you in understanding and formulating policy in the following areas: a) the drivers behind Venezuela's political crisis and strategies to advance democratic solutions; b) the capacities and failings of Venezuela's health, humanitarian, and border security infrastructures and solutions to revitalize those systems; and c) the origins of Venezuela's economic strife and fiscal policies to diversify the nation's economy and simulate medium- and long-term recovery. Based on an understanding of WOLA's interests, and an analysis of ongoing policies and programs, the Team hopes to identify ways that these five topic areas can be improved and augmented within Venezuela.

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

In addition to researching published material, the Team will consult with government and non-government experts on Venezuela and U.S. policy. They will also conduct research using published academic papers, policy memos, NGO knowledge products, think tank articles, and speeches from key figures, among other sources.

PRODUCTS

The Team will develop and deliver products reflecting its agreement with you on the content defined in these Terms of Reference, including brief memos (1-2 pages), background papers, oral briefings, and presentations as appropriate.

TOPIC AREAS AND TEAM MEMBERS

Politics – Internal

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Economics

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