The Exile Effect: Venezuela's Overseas Opposition and Social Media

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Principal Findings

What's new? As Nicolás Maduro forces dissidents to flee Venezuela, exiles have come to play important roles, influencing both the opposition's political strategy and international policy toward Caracas. Analysis of social media suggests that exile can lead opposition members to use strident rhetoric and advocate aggressive ideas more often than domestic counterparts.

Why does it matter? Internationally facilitated negotiations remain Venezuela's best path to peace, and the new U.S. administration might very well pursue them. Their success rests on all parties' willingness to accept compromise. Conciliatory attitudes could be undermined not only by crackdowns in Venezuela but also by prominent exiles' views.

What should be done? Opposition leaders and their foreign backers should not listen exclusively to hardline exile voices at the expense of those favouring negotiation. They should seek input from the full spectrum of opposition perspectives – including activists in Venezuela who are suffering hardship – as they seek to resolve the crisis.

Executive Summary

Venezuelans abroad are an increasingly powerful voice within the opposition. Over five million have fled their homeland in recent years. While the majority left to escape economic collapse and humanitarian crisis, among them are numerous political activists fleeing repression by President Nicolás Maduro's *chavista* government. These people, exiles in effect, often continue their activism abroad. They remain influential within the opposition in Venezuela, and they also help shape their host nations' policies toward Caracas. But while they are high-profile, they tend to lean toward a tougher line than their counterparts at home. Indeed, a social media study suggests that exiles' rhetoric becomes comparatively more strident after they go abroad. This "exile effect" could be an impediment to peace talks, which will require Maduro, the opposition and their external backers to compromise. Host nations should ensure that exiles' voices do not dominate policy discussions to the exclusion of those more open to a negotiated political settlement.

Responsibility for the economic, humanitarian and political predicament that Venezuela faces, and that has driven millions to flee its borders, lies first and foremost with President Maduro's government. The government has, since 2013, egregiously mismanaged the economy and, after mass protests in 2016 and 2017, increasingly denied its opponents power and political space. While the government lacks the formal legal power to banish its political opponents from the country, it has been able to achieve close to the same effect by threatening them with jail time, banning them from public office and otherwise persecuting them. This wave of repression has grown particularly intense since early 2019, when then-National Assembly chair Juan Guaidó asserted his parallel claim to the presidency.

These actions have not gone unchallenged. Maduro's crackdown prompted his opponents to embark on a campaign, led by Guaidó, to bring down the government and spur a return to democracy. The effort was backed by nearly 60 governments and supported by U.S.-led "maximum pressure" campaign of political censure, military threats and economic sanctions.

This effort has foundered, however. Parliamentary elections in early December 2020 consolidated Maduro's control over almost all parts of the Venezuelan state. Most of the opposition boycotted the polls arguing, rightly, that they were neither free nor fair. That strategy has had huge costs. While most Western and Latin American countries have not recognised the new parliament, which is composed almost entirely of Maduro loyalists, they have not embraced the opposition's argument that the former Assembly, in which it held the majority, retains its mandate. Their somewhat ambiguous stance undercuts Guaidó's claim to be "interim president", and indeed most of the opposition's allies, including the EU and the Lima Group (an alliance of Western Hemispheric countries that backed the U.S. "maximum pressure" strategy), have moved away from describing him as such.

Maduro's rivals now face the urgent task of unifying themselves behind a more viable political strategy – a challenge made greater by their increasing fractiousness. Since his failed attempt at leading a military uprising in April 2019, Guaidó has faced growing internal sniping. On one hand, he is criticised by more conciliatory factions,

which view negotiations with the government as the best way to restore democracy and alleviate the humanitarian crisis. On the other hand, he has come under attack from more intransigent groups that believe coercive pressure by outside powers is the most reliable way to achieve their goals.

After leaving Venezuela, exiles come to align more with the latter category. For those activists who are forced out, the experience is disorienting. It can change the way they talk about the country's crisis and the policies they advocate for resolving it. Analysis of Twitter activity by opposition leaders shows that, after they leave the country, exiles come to post content that differs from that posted by activists who stay. Compared to their domestic counterparts, exiles tend to level more abrasive criticism at the Maduro government. They are also more inclined to support coercive foreign actions targeting the regime, including economic sanctions and even military intervention. There are of course many possible reasons for this tendency, including the freedom that the exiles have gained to speak their minds without fear of retribution. But the bottom line is that as a group, they tend to pull the opposition away from compromise.

This "exile effect" matters in part because exiles can also be highly influential – both in feeding their views back into debates in Venezuela and in shaping host state policy. They lobby foreign governments and serve in the parallel national administration led by Guaidó. Their growing reach and political clout resemble, in certain regards, that of the Cuban opposition diaspora in its early years.

The tendency of exiles to take more stringently anti-government views is also potentially consequential because, as Crisis Group has argued elsewhere, the road out of Venezuela's crisis requires accommodation. That will likely happen only if both opposition leaders and their external backers follow the lead of conciliatory voices in the coalition rather than the more aggressive views that some exiled activists express.

Opposition leaders and host nation governments should be conscious of the exile community's leanings and consider the full range of perspectives among Venezuelan activists when developing policy. This does not mean they should ignore exiles' important voices. They should, however, take pains, when forming a strategy that can bring an end to the country's crisis, to also seek the input of activists on the ground in Venezuela who have endured the consequences of the harsh maximum pressure campaign. So long as Maduro's repressive policies continue, Venezuela's exiles will have the right, the motivation and the capacity to speak out. But finding a path out of the country's predicament will also mean listening to those on the front lines of the crisis who may be more open to compromise.

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I. Introduction

Attempts by the Maduro government and the opposition coalition to negotiate a mutually agreeable solution to Venezuela's political and humanitarian crisis stalled in September 2019, and – despite a limited resumption of talks after the COVID-19 pandemic began – they have largely remained dormant since then.[1] Formal talks between government and opposition began after National Assembly chair Juan Guaidó orchestrated massive protests in early 2019 in a bid to topple the government and once an April civil and military uprising ended in failure. Talks were short-lived, however. After the U.S. imposed a new round of sanctions that August, Maduro's government suspended its participation in the negotiations, which the opposition a month later declared "exhausted".[2]

Maduro has, for now, overcome the threat posed by Guaidó and continues to concentrate power. After the parliament failed in 2020 to agree on appointments to the National Electoral Council, the Supreme Court – stacked with pro-Maduro judges – appointed its own. With this and other moves, Maduro assured his government's sway over the electoral system. Parts of the opposition, supported by the EU, sought improvements in conditions for parliamentary elections so as to enable them to participate, including a delay to allow for deployment of a European election monitoring mission. Caracas snubbed these approaches, spurring the mainstream opposition parties to boycott the poll and setting the stage for a landslide government victory based on a reported 31 per cent turnout.[3]

Venezuela's opposition has often been divided over strategy to end Maduro's reign. A 2015 electoral victory by the coalition Mesa de la Unidad Democrática (MUD) and Guaidó's claim to the presidency in 2019 temporarily united opponents. But in both cases, the opposition began to fracture after mass demonstrations failed either to bring down the government or to lead to a restoration of democracy.

The mainstream opposition faces challenges from both harder-line and more conciliatory elements, who disagree about the appropriate degree of engagement with the Maduro government. In 2017, more militant opposition members – including former parliamentarian María Corina Machado and exiled former mayor of Caracas Antonio Ledezma – formed the Soy Venezuela movement, which called on Maduro's opponents to create a parallel national unity government and refuse to

[1] Corina Pons and Mayela Armas, "Exclusive: Venezuela socialists, opposition leaders begin secret talks amid pandemic", Reuters, 21 April 2020.

[2] Crisis Group Latin America Report N°79, *Imagining a Resolution of Venezuela's Crisis*, 11 March 2020.

[3] Crisis Group Latin America Report N°85, *Venezuela: What Lies Ahead after Election Clinches Maduro's Clean Sweep*, 21 December 2020; Alonso Moleiro and Francesco Manetto, "Maduro se hace con el control del Parlamento en Venezuela, con una abstención del 70%", *El País*, 7 December 2020; and "Venezuela: Declaration by the High Representative on Behalf of the EU on the Elections for the National Assembly", Council of the European Union, 7 December 2020.

recognise Maduro.[4] More conciliatory members also broke from the mainstream opposition in pursuit of greater engagement with the government. When Maduro called early presidential elections in May 2018, the MUD chose to boycott, but Henri Falcón, leader of the party Avanzada Progresista, opted to participate. The Mesa de Diálogo Nacional (National Dialogue Table) has pursued its own negotiations with Maduro.[5]

These blocs diverge over the merits of negotiating with the Maduro administration, as well as on the use of more aggressive policies to unseat his government. Soy Venezuela are outspoken in their support for a foreign-backed intervention to overthrow Maduro, arguing for the prior appointment of a "government in exile".[6] On the other side are figures like Henri Falcón, Henrique Capriles and Henry Ramos Allup, who, despite their differences, support a non-violent path to political change. Guaidó's own stance has fluctuated. He has supported high-level negotiations as well as stated that he would be open to backing a U.S.-led intervention.[7]

Over the past months, schisms among Maduro's opponents have been particularly severe. Disagreements intensified in the lead-up to the December 2020 parliamentary elections. While Guaidó supported a boycott, former presidential candidate Capriles called for the opposition to negotiate better conditions for the elections so as "not to leave civil society without options".[8] This fragmentation could intensify in the aftermath of the December elections. That vote has made Guaidó's legal claim to the presidency, and thus his leadership of the opposition, more tenuous.

Maduro's government has made concerted efforts to weaken and break up the political opposition. After Maduro assumed the presidency in 2013, and especially following mass protests in 2016 and 2017, the government regularly resorted to imprisonment and intimidation to silence opponents. Many fled abroad, forced out by threats of detention or the urge to speak freely without fear of punishment. This has physically split the opposition, compelling its members to operate across multiple borders, primarily in Colombia, Spain and the United States.[9]

The government's periodic release of jailed politicians amounts to little more than gesture. It is certainly not a signal that the government is easing the repressive

[4] Crisis Group Latin America Report N°71, *Friendly Fire: Venezuela's Opposition Turmoil*, 23 November 2018.

[5] "Presidente Nicolás Maduro sostiene encuentro con Mesa de Diálogo en Venezuela", TeleSUR, 2 March 2020.

[6] Crisis Group Report, *Friendly Fire: Venezuela's Opposition Turmoil*, op. cit.; and María Angélica Correa, "'Capriles está con el régimen de Maduro': María Corina Machado", *El Tiempo*, 4 September 2020.

[7] "Guaidó consideraría intervención militar de EEUU junto a militares venezolanos", Radio Televisión Martí, 4 May 2019.

[8] In an attempt to secure more favourable electoral conditions, Capriles secretly negotiated with the Maduro government with EU support, albeit without gaining major concessions. "Venezuela: Remarks by the High Representative/Vice-President Josep Borrell at the EP Plenary Debate on the EU Diplomatic Mission in Venezuela in View of Possible Elections", European Union External Action Service, 7 October 2020; "Capriles y Guaidó: las elecciones parlamentarias provocan un cisma en el seno de la oposición de Venezuela", BBC Mundo, 3 September 2020.

[9] Based on Crisis Group data on opposition activists in exile. A number of other Latin American countries, such as Ecuador and Peru, host large numbers of Venezuelan refugees but fewer nationally known opposition figures.

policies that have driven so many into exile. When, in September 2020, Maduro announced that he would pardon 110 opponents facing charges, including jailed and exiled opposition members, critics suspected that he aimed to dampen international criticism or persuade the opposition to take part in an unfair election.[10] But according to prisoner rights groups, only 50 of those pardoned had been charged with political offences.[11] Guaidó considered the prisoner release a ploy: "They free them to try to legitimise the manoeuvres of the moment. … It is a trap, and we are not going to fall into it".[12]

Accordingly, exile has become a central part of Venezuela's political landscape. One of Maduro's most outspoken opponents – and Guaidó's political mentor – Leopoldo López, recently fled to Spain despite his earlier pledges not to leave the country.[13] Following the installation of the new *chavista*-dominated National Assembly early in January, more senior members of the shadow government, possibly including Guaidó himself, may choose that same option.

This report looks at what happens to Venezuelan exiles' views of their country's crisis – and how to resolve it – after they flee abroad. It includes analysis of their social media posts using quantitative methods explained further below. It also draws upon interviews with opposition figures inside and outside the country, diplomats and other knowledgeable observers, as well as the published writings of prominent exiles. The report builds upon Crisis Group's years of research on dynamics inside the Venezuelan opposition since the country's socio-economic meltdown began and its political divides hardened accordingly.

[10] "Guaidó dice que Maduro ha indultado a opositores para 'legitimar' los próximos comicios", *El Diario*, 1 September 2020. See also "Detailed Findings of the Independent International Fact-finding Mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela", Human Rights Council, 15 September 2020; and "Outcomes of the Investigation into Allegations of Possible Human Rights Violations of the Human Rights to Life, Liberty, and Physical and Moral Integrity in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela", UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2 July 2020.

[11] Scott Smith, "Washington says pardons by Venezuela's Maduro are token acts", *The Washington Post*, 31 August 2020.

[12] "Guaidó dice que Maduro ha indultado a opositores para 'legitimar' los próximos comicios", *El Diario*, 1 September 2020.

[13] Prior to his 2014 arrest, López announced that he faced the option of exile or detention. He vowed that he would "never leave Venezuela". "Venezuela: Palabras de Leopoldo López desde la estatua de Martí", *PanAm Post*, 19 February 2014.

II. The Effects of Exile

Exiled Venezuelan opposition politicians typically remain active in politics, particularly seeking to influence their host countries' policies toward the government in Caracas. Many members of Guaidó's shadow cabinet live overseas, and other activists run parallel embassies in those countries that recognise him as interim president.[14] Exiles regularly meet with host country leaders, organise rallies with the broader diaspora community, and lobby for harsher policies against Maduro's government.[15]

A. *The Experience of Exile*

Although many opposition figures in Venezuela and abroad harbour hardline positions against the Maduro government, there is a widespread perception that those who flee typically embrace a more hostile stance after leaving the country.[16] There are multiple possible explanations. Exile can be both psychologically and physically destabilising.[17] Families are often split. One Venezuelan recounted that he now lives in Chile, his daughter in Germany, his stepson in the U.S. and his sister in Honduras.[18] Professional and personal networks have to be rebuilt, even though many Venezuelans believe they will return home one day.[19] Whatever one's future plans, leaving Venezuela behind can take an emotional toll and shape political attitudes. In an essay in *Caracas Chronicles*, exiled Venezuelan Francisco Toro writes: "Exile is an emotionally devastating experience. That's well recognised. What not everyone grasps is that it's also a politically transformative one".[20]

Of course, other factors contribute to the way in which exiled activists express their views. Exile offers greater freedom of expression, allowing activists to unleash pent-up antagonism to Maduro. Even without direct threats from the government, opposition members living in Venezuela may self-censor out of fear of retaliation; such

[14] Following the assumption of the new National Assembly in January 2020, both the Lima Group and the EU have opted not to describe Guaidó as Venezuela's legitimate president, although the U.S., Canada, Britain and Colombia continue to recognise him as such. "La Unión Europea deja de reconocer a Juan Guaidó como 'presidente interino' de Venezuela", France 24, 6 January 2021; "EU, Lima Group sour on Venezuela's Guaidó", Argus Media, 6 January 2021.

[15] See, for example, Arian Campo-Flores, "Venezuela's opposition man in D.C. seeks to rally U.S. support", *The Wall Street Journal*, 15 February 2019.

[16] Fernando Peinado, "Madrid, capital del exilio venezolano en Europa", *El País*, 29 January 2019; and Tim Padgett, "Venezuelan dictatorship means Venezuelan exiles must learn from Cuban exiles' mistakes", WLRN, 3 August 2017. Crisis Group telephone interview, former Venezuelan exile, 1 October 2020. "On your first question, if the experience of exile radicalises people, and why, I have to say yes".

[17] "The Dehumanizing Experience of Exile", Médecins Sans Frontières, 3 August 2018.

[18] Lucas Goyret, "Psicólogo venezolano en el exilio: Es como si Pablo Escobar fuese el presidente", *La Patilla*, 1 September 2018.

[19] Tom Phillips, "Venezuelan exiles dream of returning home as they wait for Maduro's fall", *The Guardian*, 30 April 2019.

[20] Francisco Toro, "My name is Francisco, and I am a toxic exile", *Caracas Chronicles*, 1 October 2020.

constraints disappear once overseas.[21] A former Venezuelan politician said: "[Outside Venezuela], there's no political cost to doing or saying anything".[22]

By contrast, there may be social costs to being perceived as too moderate in the diaspora, where outspokenness is valued. One exiled politician reported a process of socialisation, in which publicly expressing more centrist views leads to being shunned: "To come out with an idea a little different, a little more centrist, is almost unacceptable".[23] Indeed, some opposition members reported being trolled on social media, accused of being *chavistas* for supporting positions more accommodating to the Maduro government.[24] "When they are in exile, especially in the U.S.", said a former U.S. official, "they are exposed to our own radicals. ... I think they start to think that is somehow normal. That becomes their tribe and identification, and I think at some point they don't want to disappoint".[25]

Exiled leaders can also grow disconnected from the priorities of those who remain at home. As conditions shift – with Maduro strengthening his grip on power and the humanitarian crisis becoming more dire – exiles may no longer have as well-informed or well-grounded understanding of what strategies are politically feasible and their likely effects in Venezuela.[26] Above all, they may be less aware of the broad discontent in Venezuela with politicians from across the ideological spectrum. Despite the public's many grievances, a majority of voters appear not to regard the mainstream opposition as a clearly desirable alternative to the government: one November 2020 poll showed that over 62 per cent of Venezuelans support neither Maduro nor Guaidó.[27] In Toro's words: "The country you remember, the one you knew, stays frozen in time. ... The real country continues to evolve and, in almost every way, to deteriorate".[28]

B. *The Case of Cuba: Model or Cautionary Tale?*

As the Venezuelan diaspora becomes bigger and more politically powerful, members of the opposition take different views about whether the well-established Cuban diaspora in the U.S. is a model or a cautionary tale.

Those who consider it a model tend to cite the enormous impact Cuban-Americans have had in setting policy toward the island.[29] Concentrated in the key U.S. electoral swing state of Florida, the Cuban diaspora has long played an outsized role in ensur-

[21] Maren Williams, "In exile, Venezuelan cartoonist finds space to criticize government oppression", Comic Book Legal Defense Fund, 9 November 2016.
[22] Crisis Group telephone interview, former Venezuelan exile, 1 October 2020.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Padgett, "Venezuelan dictatorship means Venezuelan exiles must learn from Cuban exiles' mistakes", op. cit.
[25] Crisis Group email interview, former U.S. official, 28 September 2020.
[26] Crisis Group telephone interview, former Venezuelan exile, 1 October 2020. "You lose a sense of reality, and especially of political possibility".
[27] These voters have become known as the *ni-ni* (the non-aligned). "Encuesta de Datanálisis Aseguró que más del 62% de los venezolanos no está ni con Guaidó ni con Maduro", *Contrapunto*, 23 November 2020.
[28] Toro, "My name is Francisco, and I am a toxic exile", op. cit.
[29] David Noriega, "Miami's Venezuelans are starting to drive U.S. policy like their Cuban neighbors", *Buzzfeed*, 25 May 2014.

ing that Washington keeps pursuing its strategy of isolating Havana.[30] Such policies include travel restrictions and economic sanctions, which were partially eased when the Obama administration sought to normalise relations with Cuba.[31] The diaspora's influence grew during Donald Trump's presidency, as he appointed Floridian and Cuban-American political figures to key positions of responsibility for Latin American policy.[32] Trump also reversed a number of Obama's policies, by significantly tightening travel restrictions and sanctions and re-designating Cuba as a State Sponsor of Terrorism.[33]

Other Venezuelans view the Cuban experience with circumspection. They believe that hardline exiles have promoted policies that ended up harming Cubans living inside the country, arguing that the decades-long embargo is at least partly to blame for Cuba's high levels of poverty, even as it has proven ineffective at bringing about regime change.[34] While these policies are still popular among the Cuban diaspora, many in the island's domestic opposition hold a different view.[35]

For more conciliatory members of the Venezuelan opposition, the prospect of their own diaspora becoming more like the Cubans of Florida – supporting long-term policies of isolation to squeeze Maduro even if they may hurt ordinary Venezuelans – raises concerns.[36] In his account of the Venezuelan exile experience, Toro refers

[30] Cuban-Americans advocated for tighter travel restrictions during the George W. Bush administration, which complied in part because it was highly conscious of this constituency's voting strength in Florida. As the president's former chief of staff, Karl Rove, once said: "When people ask me about Cuba, it makes me think of three things: Florida, Florida, Florida". Lisandro Pérez, "Cuban Americans and U.S. Cuba Policy", in Josh Dewind and Renata Segura (eds.), *Diaspora Lobbies and the U.S. Government: Convergence and Divergence in Making Foreign Policy* (New York, 2014).

[31] "US-Cuba Relations", Council on Foreign Relations, 2 February 2021; Christopher Marquis, "Bush plans to tighten sanctions on Cuba, not ease them", *The New York Times,* 15 May 2002; and Peter Baker, "U.S. to restore full relations with Cuba, erasing a last trace of Cold War hostility", *The New York Times*, 17 December 2014.

[32] Ed Augustin, "'Playing a card': how Trump used Cuba to gain points in Florida", *Miami New Times*, 9 October 2020. *The New York* Times called Florida Senator Marco Rubio, a Republican of Cuban descent, the "virtual secretary of state for Latin America". Peter Baker and Edward Wong, "On Venezuela, Rubio assumes U.S. role of ouster in chief", *The New York Times*, 26 January 2019. Trump installed a number of Rubio's allies in key positions, including Mauricio Claver-Carone as head of Western Hemisphere Affairs at the National Security Council (and later president of the Inter-American Development Bank). Cuban-American John Barsa headed the U.S. Agency for International Development, and Cuban-American former state legislator Carlos Trujillo served as the U.S. representative to the Organization of American States. See also Sabrina Rodriguez, "How Marco Rubio runs Trump's Latin America policy", *Politico*, 3 August 2020.

[33] Mark P. Sullivan, "Cuba: President Trump partially rolls back Obama engagement policy", Congressional Research Service Insight, 21 June 2017; and Darlene Superville, "Trump tightens Cuba sanctions as he woos Cuban-American vote", AP, 23 September 2020.

[34] Hellen Yaffe, "Cuba is poor, but who is to blame – Castro or 50 years of the US blockade?", *The Conversation*, 2 December 2016; and Nicholas Kristoff, "The embargo on Cuba failed. Let's move on", *The New York Times*, 23 January 2019.

[35] Chris Girard and Guillermo J. Grenier, "Insulating an Ideology: The Enclave Effect on South Florida's Cuban Americans", *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences,* vol. 30, no. 4 (2008), p. 530. S.A. Anddy, "Cuban opposition still divided over US détente", Institute for War and Peace Reporting, 19 March 2016.

[36] One former exiled politician noted: "I was in Miami. It's very toxic from the political point of view because of the Cuban exile community, because they have more than 60 years of trying to recover

to the supporters of such policies (including himself) as "toxic exiles", defined as "someone who, warped by the trauma of exile, adopts political views detrimental to the people left back home".[37] One journalist warned that she saw among Venezuelan exiles the same "collective spell and conspiratorial wishful thinking that [Cuban exiles] suffer from".[38]

their country. It is a huge frustration". Crisis Group telephone interview, former Venezuelan exile, 1 October 2020.

[37] Toro, "My name is Francisco, and I am a toxic exile", op. cit.

[38] Tweet by Catalina Lobo-Guerrero, @clobo_guerrero, 8:02pm, 6 October 2020. The same concerns have been raised by a number of commentators. "Witch-hunting Venezuelan exile trolls look set to trash whatever doubt remains that they've become witch-hunting Cuban exile trolls". Padgett, op. cit.

III. Exile Activity on Social Media

To test and better understand whether opposition leaders adopt more intransigent positions outside the country, Crisis Group conducted a study comparing the activity of a group of prominent Venezuelan opposition figures in exile to that of opposition leaders still in Venezuela.

A. *Definitions, Caveats and Methods*

To study how exile influences the online discourse of Venezuelan activists, Crisis Group first identified 357 members of the opposition elite with active Twitter accounts.[39] About two thirds of these are politicians, either mayors or members of the National Assembly, while the rest are unelected activists, journalists and judges. A total of 94 of these 357 went into exile during some period between January 2013 and May 2020. Of those 94, 86 left after Maduro took office in April 2013.[40] The study examined analyses of more than five million tweets by the 357 opposition members from 1 January 2013 – shortly before Maduro took office – to 31 May 2020.[41] Combined with hand-collected information about the timing of exile, this novel source of data offers the opportunity to understand how opposition rhetoric correlates with leaving the country.

The study takes a broad approach to the term "exile". In its strictest sense, the term describes individuals who are legally barred from their home country. That definition is not a good fit for Venezuela, where the penal code does not contemplate formal expulsion and exclusion, and where opposition leaders tend to flee and stay abroad because of political persecution rather than because they have to as a matter of law. For example, the government stripped lawmaker Winston Flores of his parliamentary immunity, leaving him vulnerable to prosecution for treason for his alleged role in the April 2019 uprising. He fled in response but is not legally barred from returning.[42]

Accordingly, the present study treats political leaders and activists who left under threat of persecution as "exiles" and considers that the term applies to all the 94 Venezuelans living abroad whose activities the study surveyed. The underlying assumption is that because of their elite status, these 94 people likely fled due to their tenuous situation in the country (rather than, say, in search of job opportunities). The assumption is borne out by the study data: more than 90 per cent of these individuals in the study appear to have fled political persecution, detention or threats of violence, or left for unspecified political reasons. Four seem to have left voluntarily, and another five have given no public explanation.

[39] For additional statistical methods and results, see Jane Esberg and Alexandra Siegel, "How Exile Shapes Online Opposition: Evidence from Venezuela", Stanford Immigration Policy Lab Working Paper, 2021.

[40] Online information from news sites, social media and biographical sketches was used to build the data on whether, when and where activists went into exile. If the exact date of exile could not be determined, the date of the first news article mentioning that an activist lived abroad was used.

[41] Data were collected through Twitter's Historical PowerTrack API, a platform that allows tweets to be downloaded as data.

[42] Further confusing the definition, media outlets often apply the term "exiles" to the entire diaspora, including the majority who have left for economic reasons.

The data used here are incomplete in the sense that they reflect a relatively small sample of the opposition. This sample covers most of the opposition elite: it includes all opposition deputies – at home and in exile – who served in Venezuela's National Assembly between 2000 and 2020; opposition mayors elected between 2013 and 2020; and unelected activists and journalists publicly recognised as government opponents in online mentions and lists of activists (identified through Google searches).[43] Nevertheless, in its focus on political elites, it likely misses a number of opponents, and particularly underrepresents local organisers in favour of national activists. Nor do results capture the impact of exile on non-elite Venezuelans who flee, although they make up the vast majority of the diaspora.

B. *Twitter's Importance*

Twitter is widely used in Venezuela. About 21 per cent of Venezuelans use the social media platform as of 2019, roughly similar to the share of U.S. citizens with accounts.[44] In 2014, one study ranked the country fourth in the world in terms of Twitter penetration.[45] Venezuelan social media users are on average younger and more educated than the general population, consistent with broader global patterns.[46] Reflecting its political importance in Venezuela, the government has attempted to push sympathetic hashtags on the platform, including by reportedly paying supporters for tweeting and using bots.[47]

Twitter is vital for the opposition. Since 2014, the government has tightened restrictions on information. Most news comes from state-run television and radio stations, and the government has limited what independent groups can cover.[48] Social media offers a direct way for political figures to communicate with the broader public, allowing them to circumvent state-run media.[49] In a video released after his arrest, Voluntad Popular leader Leopoldo López called on Venezuelans "to become your own media outlet".[50] Twitter is important enough to opposition organising that the *chavista* government has a history of blocking it on days of planned protests.[51]

[43] The widest possible set of National Assembly deputies are included because they tend to be nationally prominent and to remain politically active even after leaving the legislature, whereas mayors tend to be earlier in their political careers. Results are qualitatively similar using only politicians elected after 2010.

[44] Alfredo Jose Morales et al., "Measuring Political Polarization: Twitter Shows Two Sides of Venezuela", *Chaos: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Nonlinear Science*, vol. 25, no. 3 (2015).

[45] "The Netherlands ranks #1 worldwide in penetration for Twitter and Linkedin", Comscore, 26 April 2011.

[46] Laura Silver et al., "Use of smartphones and social media is common across most emerging economies", Pew Research Center, 7 March 2019.

[47] "New Accounts, Old Tricks: Pro-Maduro Regime Propaganda on Twitter", Atlantic Council, Digital Forensic Research Lab, 22 July 2020.

[48] Ciara Nugent, "'Venezuelans are starving for information': The battle to get news in a country in chaos", *Time*, 16 April 2019.

[49] Kevin Munger et al., "Elites Tweet to Get Feet off the Streets: Measuring Regime Social Media Strategies during Protest", *Political Science Research and Methods*, vol. 7, no. 4 (2019).

[50] Uri Friedman, "Why Venezuela's revolution will be tweeted", *The Atlantic*, 19 February 2014.

[51] "Twitter, Facebook and Instagram restricted in Venezuela on day of planned protests", Netblocks, 16 November 2019.

Social media is both a particularly important mode of communication for those in exile and a useful yardstick of their political rhetoric. Because of their physical distance from home, exiles rely even more on Twitter than the domestic opposition as a means of communicating with the Venezuelan population. Exiles also tend to have greater reach on Twitter than their domestic counterparts, with on average nearly twice the number of followers than in-country activists.[52] Given limitations on traditional media, Twitter and Facebook are the most direct ways of disseminating opinions inside Venezuela from abroad. Additionally, Twitter offers a continuous record of opposition leaders' public statements.

That said, there are important limits as to what this record can show. It reveals how the content of activists' tweets change, not whether or how their real political preferences or offline behaviour are influenced. True, interviews with opposition figures and experts suggest that exiles' changing opinions on Twitter roughly correlate with genuine shifts in attitude upon leaving the country. But the data only speaks to rhetorical evolution.

C. *Shifting Tone and Content*

Crisis Group's study focused on two categories of tweets of Venezuelan exiles that demonstrate a shift in tone and content over time.

The first category includes tweets that convey *stringent criticism* that could be seen as directly or implicitly challenging the Maduro government's claim to legal and moral authority. These criticisms, though often grounded in truth, appear aimed at de-legitimising the government and are often especially trenchant.

In deeming criticism of the government to be stringent for these purposes, the study focused on tweets mentioning one or more of three topics. First are charges that the government engages in drug trafficking via the alleged military-led Cartel de los Soles.[53] Second are accusations of fascism or despotism. Third are allegations that the government has called upon Russian or Cuban intervention to prop it up, via military presence or financial support.[54] The study focused on these lines of criticism not because they are necessarily inaccurate or unfair, but because they lie at the sharpest end of the spectrum of political rhetoric commonly used with respect to the Maduro-led government.

Crisis Group researchers developed a list of words that referred to these themes.[55] If any of these words appeared in a tweet, the post was classified as including stringent criticism. Based on this methodology, some 8 per cent of tweets reviewed by

[52] Based on data from Twitter Historical PowerTrack API. Friedman, "Why Venezuela's revolution will be tweeted", op. cit.

[53] The U.S. Department of Justice charged Maduro on such counts. "Nicolás Maduro Moros and 14 Current and Former Venezuelan Officials Charged with Narco-terrorism, Corruption, Drug Trafficking and Other Criminal Charges", press release, U.S. Department of Justice, 26 March 2020.

[54] See, for example, Rolando Cartaya, "Tropas de Cuba, Rusia, y China en frontera colombo-venezolana motivaron advertencias de EEUU", Radio Televisión Martí, 6 October 2018.

[55] If a tweet contained one of the terms in a topic dictionary, it was classified as related to one of the relevant categories. For more details about the methods used to build the dictionaries, see Esberg and Siegel, "How Exile Shapes Online Opposition: Evidence from Venezuela", op. cit. While these classification methods will generate some false positives, in an audit of 500 tweets classified as including criticism, 93 per cent were relevant.

Crisis Group qualified as stringently criticising the government. The following is a randomly chosen sample of tweets that fall in this **first category**:

- We want to state that we do not recognise any measure emanating from a usurping, illegal, illegitimate, and unconstitutional regime, sanctioned by the most important democracies in the world. #TheCorruptAreInMiraflores.[56]
- 198 years after the Battle of Carabobo, Venezuelans once again fight to regain our autonomy. Yesterday they were Spanish, today they are Cubans, Iranians, guerrillas, drug traffickers who are taking over Venezuela. #BattleForLiberty.[57]

The **second category** of tweets that the study considered includes those that justify *aggressive foreign action* to squeeze or unseat the government, ranging from economic sanctions to military intervention.[58] Tweets were classified in the same way as for stringent criticism, by identifying whether a set of key words were present.[59] A random selection of tweets in this second category includes:

- The dictatorship itself recognises that sanctions do not prevent #Venezuela from obtaining food, medicine or medical supplies. We have said it clearly: sanctions are against the Maduro regime and its officials for the corrupt, drug-traffickers, and violators of #HumanRights.
- We bet on the opening of a humanitarian channel through the humanitarian intervention of a coalition of countries in favour of saving the population.
- The register that shows that millions of Venezuelans throughout the country attended the march on January 23 serves as an argument to the international community, the UN and the OAS for a military intervention.[60]

[56] Miraflores is Venezuela's presidential palace.

[57] The Battle of Carabobo in 1821 was the decisive battle in Venezuela's war for independence against the Spanish, led by Simón Bolívar.

[58] As examples of this rhetoric, see Correa, "'Capriles está con el régimen de Maduro': María Corina Machado", op. cit.; and "#Comunicado María Corina, Ledezma, Arria, Calderón Berti, Aguiar, Aristeguieta Grameko y Carlos Ortega piden acción internacional que le devuelva la paz a Venezuela", Diego Arria website, 18 June 2020. María Corina Machado, for example, backed the idea of an Operación de Paz y Estabilización in Venezuela, which among other steps included sanctions, blockades and a multilateral "peace operation" to depose Maduro. "María Corina propone el despliegue urgente de una Operación de Paz y Estabilización en Venezuela", Vente Venezuela, 8 June 2020.

[59] The data included under this category incorporate all tweets referencing aggressive foreign action, meaning some tweets may include critical discussion of those policies. In practice, however, a test of the positive or negative valence of each tweet demonstrated that support for aggressive foreign action was much more common than opposition to those policies: 35 per cent of posts about sanctions and 58 per cent about military intervention reference those policies positively, compared to 14 per cent and 3 per cent, respectively, that discuss them negatively. The remaining tweets were indeterminate for purposes of this test. (These tweets may or may not have had a valence; the test, however, could not determine it.) The sizeable gap between positive and negative valence tweets demonstrates that the results discussed below are driven by increases in positive – but not negative – references to aggressive foreign action. For a discussion of the classification methods used and to see the results of additional statistical analysis including only positive-leaning tweets on the topic, see Esberg and Siegel, "How Exile Shapes Online Opposition: Evidence from Venezuela", op. cit.

[60] This tweet references the anti-government protests of 23 January 2019.

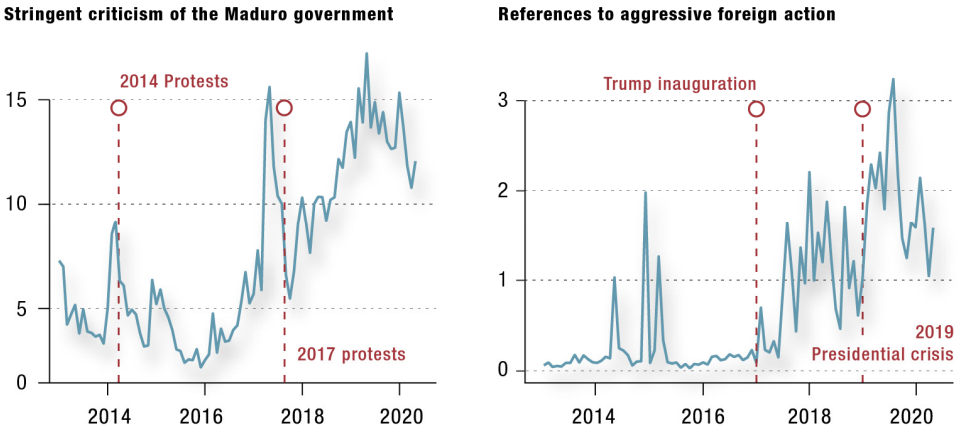
D. *How Exile Affects Content*

Crisis Group's study of opposition tweets (comprising tweets by all 357 members of the study – 94 outside the country, 263 inside – during the period 1 January 2013 to 31 May 2020) shows that both stringent criticism and advocacy for aggressive third-country policies increased over time for the whole population, but that they increased more rapidly among exiles.

Figure 1 looks at the entire opposition community that Crisis Group studied (ie, activists both in and outside Venezuela) and shows that, not surprisingly, the use of pointed rhetoric increased as the humanitarian and political crisis in Venezuela deepened.[61] This rhetoric tended to jump most markedly during important political events, for example during the 2014 and 2017 mass protests.[62]

Figure 1 also demonstrates that references by this overall cohort to aggressive foreign action against the Venezuelan government (ie, sanctions or military intervention) increased as well, with spikes after Trump's election in late 2016 and during the 2019 crisis in which Guaidó declared himself president (right panel). The number of tweets by opposition members in this second category – aggressive foreign action – is relatively low, constituting less than 1 per cent of overall tweets. Still, tweets in this second category represent some 35,000 posts over the period in question, and references to these subjects have become more frequent over time.[63]

Figure 1: Percentage of tweets related to key topics among all activists, 1 January 2013-31 May 2020

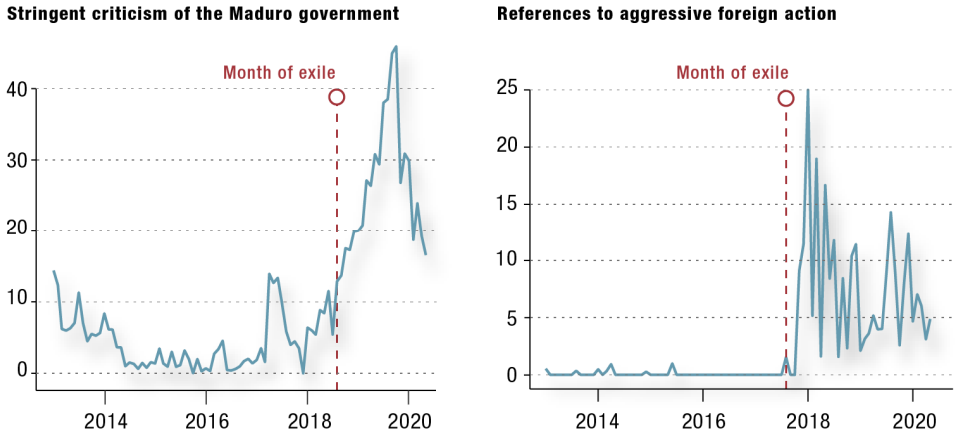


Data description: Stringent criticism of Maduro (left) and references to sanctions or military intervention (right) increase over time among all activists, particularly around politically salient events.
Source: Twitter Historical PowerTrack API. CRISIS GROUP / JE / CB-G.

[61] The increase was swifter among those living in exile, as discussed further below and demonstrated in the statistical analysis in Esberg and Siegel, "How Exile Shapes Online Opposition: Evidence from Venezuela", op. cit.
[62] On these protests, see Crisis Group Latin America Briefings N°s 30, *Venezuela: Tipping Point*, 21 May 2014; and 36, *Power without the People: Averting Venezuela's Breakdown*, 19 June 2017.
[63] Based on the classification of tweets described in Esberg and Siegel, "How Exile Shapes Online Opposition: Evidence from Venezuela", op. cit.

Next, Figure 2 zooms in on the exile experience, illustrating how two specific exiles altered their rhetoric after leaving Venezuela. Since the data is at the level of the individual user, these graphs show the percentage of exiles' tweets per month related to the two topics tracked. These graphs exemplify the effects discussed in this report. As shown in the graph to the left, after escaping detention in 2018, one politician became about twice as likely to tweet harsh criticism of the government. In the panel to the right, a different politician rarely discussed sanctions and military intervention prior to fleeing the country in 2017; shortly thereafter, however, he began tweeting about aggressive third-party policies regularly. These are, of course, just two samples and effects vary among users. But these examples provide two clear cases of individuals changing their behaviour after fleeing.

Figure 2: Example exile tweet histories, 1 January 2013-31 May 2020



Data description: After leaving, two example exiles become more likely to tweet stringent criticism of Maduro (left) or refer to aggressive foreign actions (right).

Source: Twitter Historical PowerTrack API. CRISIS GROUP / JE / CB-G.

Beyond the fact that these two individuals do not represent all exiles, the data should be viewed in light of certain caveats. First, broader political changes and the deepening crisis have played a part in hardening opposition rhetoric, as illustrated in Figure 1. Across the board, whether or not they have left the country, opposition figures have tended to speak in stronger terms as Venezuela's plight has worsened: indeed, one of the most outspoken opposition politicians, María Corina Machado, is still based in Venezuela.

Secondly, the timing of exile may also contribute to changes in rhetoric. Exile is more likely following periods of intense turmoil – for example, after the 2019 presidential crisis when the regime stripped political immunity from a number of legislators.[64] The finding that some individuals become more pointed in their public critiques when abroad may therefore be a function of when they leave.

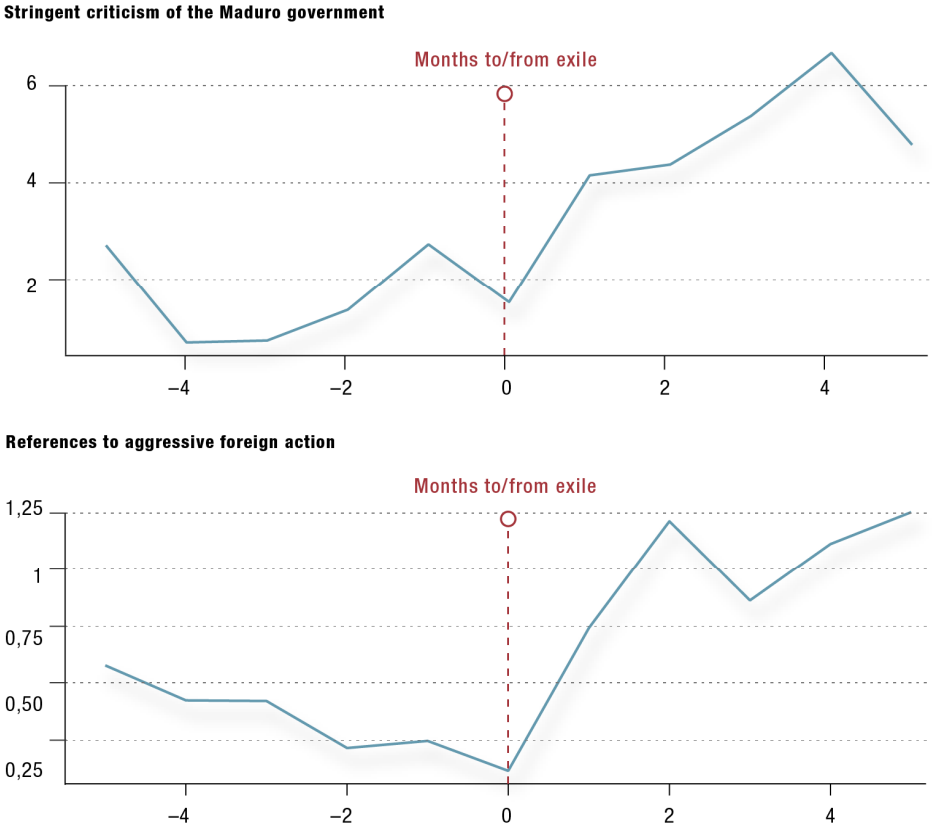
Figure 3 addresses these considerations, however. It does so by comparing changes in rhetoric used by exiles and those who stay. It is based on data pooled from all 94 exiles and all 263 individuals who remained in-country, with month 0 representing the time of the exiles' departure. Starting six months before exile, it shows the differ-

[64] Jorge Rueda, "Venezuela: Retiraran inmunidad a más diputados", Associated Press, 22 May 2019.

ence, over time, between how often exiles criticise the regime or reference aggressive foreign action and how often in-country activists use it.[65]

Looking through this lens, Figure 3 demonstrates a sustained jump in exiles' Twitter activity featuring pointed criticism (top panel) and references to aggressive foreign policies (bottom panel) from the time exile began, relative to members of the opposition who stayed behind. It shows that opposition figures who subsequently went into exile were, before leaving, about two percentage points more likely than other in-country opposition figures to use pointed rhetoric. But after leaving, this difference approximately doubled.[66] Similar increases are apparent in tweets about foreign intervention and sanctions.[67]

Figure 3: Rhetoric before and after exile, relative to in-country activists



Data description: Relative to in-country activists, exiles become more likely to tweet about stringent criticism of Maduro (left) and refer to sanctions or military intervention (right) after leaving Venezuela.

Source: Twitter Historical PowerTrack API. CRISIS GROUP / JE / CB-G.

[65] For each exile within six months of leaving, the percentage of tweets on the topic from in-country activists in a given month was subtracted from the exile's percentage of tweets in the same month. This was then averaged across all exiles for the period directly preceding and following exile. For a statistical analysis designed to further address these concerns, see Esberg and Siegel, "How Exile Shapes Online Opposition: Evidence from Venezuela", op. cit.

[66] Ibid.

[67] There is no effect of exile on the volume of tweeting, meaning that opposition figures tweet at fairly consistent rates before and after they leave Venezuela.

A final point on the study: in addition to finding increased tweeting of stringent criticism and aggressive policy recommendations, the study also found a decreased focus on certain kinds of practical domestic issues by exiles. In particular, after leaving the country, opposition activists become 50 per cent less likely to criticise the government's inability to provide services – by referring to gas shortages, blackouts and food scarcity – relative to those who remain in country.[68] Instead, they tend to focus on broader critiques related to the government's legitimacy and how to impose costs on it.

[68] Esberg and Siegel, "How Exile Shapes Online Opposition: Evidence from Venezuela", op. cit.

IV. Exerting Influence at Home and Abroad

When activists leave Venezuela, their influence often increases. In addition to keeping a hand in discussions in Venezuela itself, they may also develop clout in the countries where they resettle and the ability to shape policy there.

Despite living overseas, exiles' opinions are discussed and disseminated throughout Venezuela. Media content produced abroad, prominently featuring exiles, makes its way into the country and has a major influence.[69] Exiles' messages also are relayed through social media. According to a 2014 survey, 74 per cent of Venezuelans learned about others' political beliefs via Twitter, the most of any of the 22 countries polled.[70] As an exiled politician said, there are "Twitter phenomena … who try to condition, often with success, local politics".[71] These are often activists and pundits whose opinions spread within Venezuela, shaping the debate about Maduro and the range of policy options available.

The harder-line stances of exiles affect local politics by exacerbating divisions among opposition politicians, particularly between activists abroad and at home. "What's possible in Miami isn't possible in Venezuela", the exiled politician explained, adding that development of harder-line views abroad "does a lot of damage to local politics".[72]

While they are not always successful, exiles play a highly visible role in lobbying for shifts in foreign states' policy toward Venezuela. Many exiles serve in Guaidó's parallel cabinet, while others run parallel embassies in countries that recognise him as the legitimate president. For example, exiled politician Carlos Vecchio heads the opposition embassy in the U.S., and in that role discussed Venezuela policy with former Vice President Mike Pence, when he was in office, and legislators.[73] Vecchio has been an outspoken sanctions supporter and has actively pursued military intervention in Venezuela.[74] Antonio Ledezma, a former mayor of Caracas, has consistently promoted humanitarian intervention in Venezuela. He has been active in trying to define policies toward Venezuela in Spain, where political debate on the subject has tended to be fierce.[75] Meanwhile, opposition exiles in Bogotá have maintained strong links to Colombia's ruling party and President Iván Duque's government, as well as the

[69] Crisis Group telephone interview, former Venezuelan exile, 1 October 2020. "Exiles like those in Miami have a great deal of influence because of media capacity". For example, a tweet by Antonio Ledezma discussing military intervention was shared 8,600 times and liked 8,300 times, by both those in Venezuela and abroad.

[70] Friedman, "Why Venezuela's revolution will be tweeted", op. cit.

[71] Crisis Group telephone interview, former Venezuelan exile, 1 October 2020.

[72] Ibid.

[73] Alex Daugherty, "A Venezuelan is top diplomat for Guaidó's government in the US", *The Miami Herald*, 8 February 2019.

[74] See Uri Friedman, "In Washington, the Venezuelan opposition has already won", *The Atlantic*, 19 June 2019; Luc Cohen, "Venezuela bypassing U.S. sanctions through Europe, opposition envoy says", Reuters, 24 September 2019; and "Venezuela: opposition leader Guaidó asks US military for 'strategic planning' help", *The Guardian*, 13 May 2019.

[75] "Exiliados venezolanos en España instan a Pedro Sánchez a rechazar la convocatoria a parlamentarias", *El Nacional*, 18 September 2020.

U.S. embassy's Venezuela Affairs Unit, which has replaced the U.S. diplomatic outpost in Caracas.[76]

Venezuelans living in the U.S. also represent an increasingly significant voter bloc in populous Florida, a key state in the U.S. electoral college, where the majority of the Cuban diaspora also resides.[77] In recent years, the diaspora has played an important role in defining U.S. attitudes and policies toward Venezuela, although the transition to the Biden administration may reduce its influence. President Trump actively courted Venezuelan and Cuban voters during the 2020 elections, and these groups as well as other Latino voters were widely credited with winning Florida for him.[78] Trump appeared to fine-tune his appeal to Venezuelan voters by embracing hardine approaches to the crisis, tightening sanctions in the lead-up to the November polls and leaving open the possibility of military intervention – the last move a striking contrast to his frequent rhetoric about wanting to keep the U.S. out of foreign entanglements.[79]

[76] Ethan Bronner and Ezra Fieser, "Mercenaries, spies and double agents gather en masse in Bogotá", Bloomberg, 16 April 2019.
[77] Christopher Sabatini, "Trump and Biden in Florida: The Battle for the Cuban and Venezuelan Vote", Chatham House, 13 October 2020; and Brittany Blizzard and Jeanne Batalova, "Cuban Immigrants in the United States", Migration Policy Institute, 11 June 2020.
[78] Carmen Sesin, "Trump cultivated the Latin vote in Florida, and it paid off", NBC, 4 November 2020; "How Trump won big with Latinos in Florida – and then some", *South Florida Sun Sentinel*, 4 November 2020.
[79] Jonathan Blitzer, "The fight for the Latino vote in Florida", *The New Yorker*, 16 September 2019.

V. Conclusion

The cycle of repression, exile and grievance described in this report is an outgrowth of Venezuela's political and economic crisis. The parties should take care that it does not prevent the resolution the country so desperately needs.

As Crisis Group has previously suggested, internationally mediated negotiations between the *chavista* government and the opposition remain the best hope for the country to emerge peacefully from the present morass. Maduro's government has the lion's share of responsibility for establishing conditions for negotiations, since his administration has undermined the electoral system's integrity, intensified the crackdown on opponents and, according to UN investigators, perpetrated grave human rights violations. But for negotiations to have any chance of success, all key parties – the government, the opposition and external actors – will need to compromise.

Crisis Group has outlined the key elements of such a compromise elsewhere. They include:

- The government will need to accept reforms that create conditions for free and fair presidential elections. Even before that, for talks to stand any chance of success, it will have to ease the repression that has destabilised the country and caused much of the opposition elite to flee.
- The opposition will need to climb down from two demands, namely that the prior parliament should be recognised until free elections are held (in order to preserve Guaidó's "interim presidency") and that Maduro step down as a pre-condition to settlement. It should also be ready to embrace the idea of a gradual transition that guarantees members of the Maduro government and its associated *chavista* movement freedom from persecution and the continued right to political participation.
- The opposition's external backers in Washington, the EU and the Lima Group should take a more nuanced approach to sanctions than they did under the "maximum pressure" framework. They should subject existing sanctions to a rapid humanitarian review and scale them back where necessary to allow pandemic relief aid and otherwise prevent avoidable harm to the population. They should also signal that they are prepared to ease other sanctions progressively so long as the Venezuelan government advances toward the restoration of civil and political rights, with sanctions to be lifted entirely if the parties reach a negotiated settlement.
- Given the importance of China, Russia and Cuba in providing backing for Maduro, including enabling his government to bypass sanctions and avoid censure at the UN Security Council, it is vital that the U.S., EU and Latin American countries engage these countries and seek out their support for negotiations leading to a definitive settlement.

Many of these steps would be politically difficult, and they will require pragmatic elements within both camps to win out over hardliners. While exiled activists have a range of views, the evidence presented above suggests that many fall in the hardline camp – and that the experience of exile may continue to push them to hew to harder lines than they otherwise might. Both opposition leaders in Venezuela and their ex-

ternal backers should bear this "exile effect" in mind. To ensure they are getting the full spectrum of views, outside actors should engage with a wide range of opposition factions – conciliatory, moderate and intransigent – abroad and in-country. They should also bear in mind that opposition activists still in Venezuela are the principal victims of both state policies and international measures taken to punish the Maduro government. The impetus for compromise is most likely to come from within this group. Amid the clamour of exile and other opposition politicking, the messages coming from Venezuela itself must not be lost.

Caracas/Bogotá/New York/Brussels, 24 February 2021

Appendix A: Map of Venezuela

Appendix B: About the International Crisis Group

The International Crisis Group (Crisis Group) is an independent, non-profit, non-governmental organisation, with some 120 staff members on five continents, working through field-based analysis and high-level advocacy to prevent and resolve deadly conflict.

Crisis Group's approach is grounded in field research. Teams of political analysts are located within or close by countries or regions at risk of outbreak, escalation or recurrence of violent conflict. Based on information and assessments from the field, it produces analytical reports containing practical recommendations targeted at key international, regional and national decision-takers. Crisis Group also publishes *CrisisWatch*, a monthly early-warning bulletin, providing a succinct regular update on the state of play in up to 80 situations of conflict or potential conflict around the world.

Crisis Group's reports are distributed widely by email and made available simultaneously on its website, www.crisisgroup.org. Crisis Group works closely with governments and those who influence them, including the media, to highlight its crisis analyses and to generate support for its policy prescriptions.

The Crisis Group Board of Trustees – which includes prominent figures from the fields of politics, diplomacy, business and the media – is directly involved in helping to bring the reports and recommendations to the attention of senior policymakers around the world. Crisis Group is co-chaired by President & CEO of the Fiore Group and Founder of the Radcliffe Foundation, Frank Giustra, as well as by former UN Deputy Secretary-General and Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Lord (Mark) Malloch-Brown.

After President & CEO Robert Malley stood down in January 2021 to become the U.S. Iran envoy, two long-serving Crisis Group staff members assumed interim leadership until the recruitment of his replacement. Richard Atwood, Crisis Group's Chief of Policy, is serving as interim President and Comfort Ero, Africa Program Director, as interim Vice President.

Crisis Group's international headquarters is in Brussels, and the organisation has offices in seven other locations: Bogotá, Dakar, Istanbul, Nairobi, London, New York, and Washington, DC. It has presences in the following locations: Abuja, Addis Ababa, Bahrain, Baku, Bangkok, Beirut, Caracas, Gaza City, Guatemala City, Jerusalem, Johannesburg, Juba, Kabul, Kiev, Manila, Mexico City, Moscow, Seoul, Tbilisi, Toronto, Tripoli, Tunis, and Yangon.

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February 2021

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A Way Out of Latin America's Impasse over Venezuela, Latin America Briefing N°38, 14 May 2019 (also available in Spanish).

The Keys to Restarting Nicaragua's Stalled Talks, Latin America Report N°74, 13 June 2019 (also available in Spanish).

A Glimmer of Light in Venezuela's Gloom, Latin America Report N°75, 15 July 2019 (also available in Spanish).

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Imagining a Resolution of Venezuela's Crisis, Latin America Report N°79, 11 March 2020 (also available in Spanish)

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Miracle or Mirage? Gangs and Plunging Violence in El Salvador, Latin America Report N°81, 8 July 2020 (also available in Spanish).

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Disorder on the Border: Keeping the Peace between Colombia and Venezuela, Latin America Report N°84, 14 December 2020 (also available in Spanish).

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