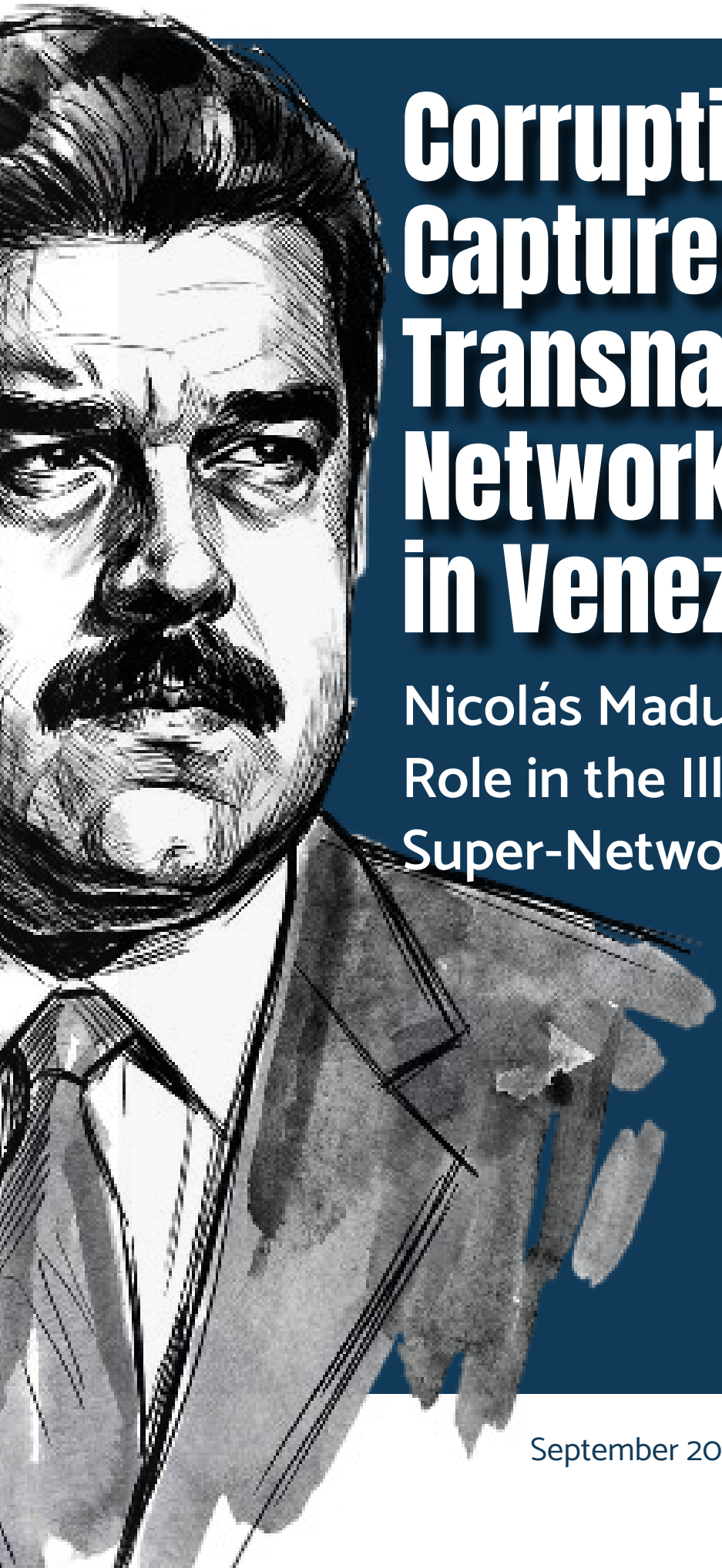


Corruption, State Capture, and Transnational Networks in Venezuela

Nicolás Maduro Moros's Role in the Illicit Super-Network

TRANSPARENCIA Venezuela
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Empirical Basis. This report is based on a database of verified information and primary sources—official gazettes, court rulings, appointment documents, corporate registries, and family ties, among others—compiled by Transparencia Venezuela over a ten-year period, as well as on the analysis of these databases with the support of expert consultants and network analysis technology. Based on this database, the three datasets used here were constructed: the "super network," with 30,467 relational records corresponding to 13,521 actors; the "business database," with 865 companies, finalized in March 2026; and the "inventory of corruption cases," with 154 cases, of which 110 involve legal proceedings in 26 countries.

Appendices and documents accompanying this report:

Appendix A. Inventory of international corruption cases originating in Venezuela (110 cases)

Appendix B. Inventory of domestic cases (44 cases)

Appendix C. Inventory of attached court records (12 documents)

Appendix D. Transparencia Venezuela, *Combating Kleptocracy in Venezuela* (full report)

Twelve court records, each listed individually in Appendix C.

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Introduction

This report explores Nicolás Maduro Moros's position within a power structure shaped by institutional capture, grand corruption, the extraction and circulation of public resources, business structures, oil revenues, sanctions-evasion mechanisms, a weakened justice system, coercive capabilities, and illicit economies. It draws on administrative decisions, records of public actions and decisions over the past 20 years, journalistic and academic investigations, databases, sanctions, court records, and structural network analyses. The report examines how these dimensions are connected and clarifies the role Maduro played in shaping one of the national and transnational corruption structures for which evidence exists.

Nicolás Maduro Moros was serving as vice president of the Republic when, following Hugo Chávez's death, he assumed the presidency in 2013. He was elected in the April presidential election. The 2018 and 2024 elections, which extended his term, were contested, as discussed in Chapters 2 and 7. He remained president until his arrest on January 3, 2026, after which Delcy Rodríguez was sworn in as acting president. Unless otherwise noted, this report focuses on events before that date.

The question of Nicolás Maduro's responsibility is woven throughout this document. Here, however, the term is not treated as a single category or as a predetermined conclusion about criminal liability. Instead, this report aims to identify, distinguish, and examine the different levels of responsibility that may be considered in light of the available evidence: (i) acts and decisions directly attributable to Maduro; (ii) the exercise of his presidential powers, including his appointments and delegations of authority; (iii) his influence on the structure and functioning of institutions; (iv) his structural position within networks of power and corruption; (v) his ties to individuals, companies, and institutions later linked to investigations; and (vi) allegations, accusations, or proceedings initiated by national and international authorities. These dimensions may overlap, but they are not the same, so each should be assessed in light of the specific evidence that supports it.

Accordingly, this report does not aim to establish individual criminal liability or to replace determinations reserved for the competent judicial authorities. An investigation, indictment, administrative sanction, or mention in a source does not amount to a conviction. Similarly, proximity to someone under investigation, membership in the same organization, holding an institutional position, or playing a central role within a network does not, on its own, demonstrate knowledge, intent, coordination, financial gain, or participation in a specific criminal act. When judicial proceedings are ongoing, the respective jurisdictions must determine, in accordance with applicable law and due process, whether crimes were committed and whether the individuals under investigation or charged bear individual responsibility.

This clarification does not limit the scope of the analysis presented here. Instead, it helps frame a broader question more precisely: which documented decisions, institutional capacities, relationships, and patterns allow us to reconstruct Nicolás Maduro's role within the criminal system under examination, regardless of the definitive legal classification that certain facts may ultimately receive? In some cases, the evidence makes it possible to directly attribute a presidential decision, appointment, delegation of authority, or regulatory act. In others, it helps us trace institutional chains, identify continuity among certain actors, observe overlaps between the public and private spheres, or establish positions of structural significance. In still other cases, the evidence allows us only to confirm that an authority, investigation, or judicial proceeding made certain allegations. The report aims to preserve these distinctions throughout the analysis.

This approach is especially important in network analysis. The super-network examined includes 30,467 relational records involving 13,521 actors and places Nicolás Maduro first in structural intermediation within the modeled system. This finding helps clarify his exceptional topological relevance and potential to connect different parts of the structure. However, it does not mean that every path, relationship, or action by a third party can automatically be attributed to Maduro. The removal analysis also shows that the network remains significantly connected even when the node with the highest intermediation is removed. The structure is therefore valuable both for understanding Maduro's position and for ensuring that the entire phenomenon is not reduced to a single individual.

On this basis, the report moves from structural analysis to an examination of mechanisms and how they manifest. It begins by reconstructing the super-network and mapping the relative positions of Nicolás Maduro and his wife, Cilia Flores. It then explores the capture and reconfiguration of the state, the transnational dimensions of corruption cases, the development of kleptocratic structures, and the role of Petróleos de Venezuela, S.A. (PDVSA). Next, it considers how the regime has adapted to sanctions, how the justice system operates, and the regime's capacity for coercion and repression. Finally, it identifies points of convergence between state institutions and illicit economies. This progression helps us move from individual relationships and decisions to broader institutional patterns—and, in turn, to understand their economic, political, and criminal consequences.

The purpose of this document is not to compile accusations against Nicolás Maduro or automatically attribute to him acts committed by members of his government, his political circle, or the networks under examination. Instead, it seeks to clarify what the available evidence supports, which forms of liability it reasonably allows us to consider, and where it is prudent to leave legal attribution open. The following chapters are guided by this distinction.

Chapter 1 introduces the relational architecture and places it within the super-network, distinguishing among structural centrality, the capacity to coordinate, and legally attributable responsibility. Chapter 2 examines how the state was captured and reconfigured, identifying the decisions, appointments, extraordinary powers, and institutional changes that enabled governing capacities to become concentrated and controls to weaken. Chapter 3 sets this institutional infrastructure alongside specific cases of grand corruption originating in Venezuela

and their international reach. It pays particular attention to documented links among executive-branch decisions, appointed officials, and economic actors, as well as cases under investigation in various jurisdictions. Chapter 4 expands the analysis to the kleptocratic dimension, examining the formation of business and wealth structures linked to the political elite and the so-called presidential family.

Chapter 5 focuses on PDVSA, assessing how presidential decisions, leadership changes, and control mechanisms shaped the management of the state's primary source of foreign revenue, along with cases of corruption associated with the oil sector. Chapter 6 analyzes the response to international sanctions and shows how the structure adapted through new intermediaries, financial instruments, trade routes, and external relations. Chapter 7 examines the justice system, considering how the loss of autonomy may have limited accountability, fostered impunity, or enabled judicial powers to be used for political discipline. Chapter 8 explores the coercive dimension, focusing on decisions, chains of command, and institutional capacities associated with repression and the maintenance of political order. Finally, Chapter 9 analyzes the convergence of state institutions and illicit economies, identifying which decisions, omissions, protection mechanisms, regulations, or forms of collaboration can be documented—and which, by contrast, do not support the attribution of individual responsibility.

Together, these nine analytical chapters offer a framework for assessing Maduro's responsibility without beginning with a predetermined conclusion. Instead, they address the question progressively, distinguishing among his structural position, the exercise of his authority, decisions directly attributable to him, institutional functioning, documented connections, and conduct whose legal characterization rests exclusively with the competent authorities.

1 The System's Architecture: Nicolás Maduro Within the Super-network of Corruption and Power

1.1. Empirical Basis and Structural Approach
1.2. Nicolás Maduro's Immediate Network
1.3. Nicolás Maduro as a Sender and Receiver
1.4. Nicolás Maduro Functional Subnetworks
1.5. Cilia Flores's Network
1.6. Joint Immediate Network of Nicolás Maduro and Cilia Flores
1.7. Structural Intermediation in the Super-network
1.8. Targeted Removal of Actors and Structural Resilience
1.9. From Relational Architecture to Institutional Capture

Corruption cases help us identify events, individuals, and transactions. On their own, though, they don't show how these pieces connect. In this chapter, we take a broader view, moving from individual episodes to the network of relationships where political power, state institutions, public and private companies, family members, intermediaries, public resources, and channels under investigation across different jurisdictions come together.

The super-network helps us examine this architecture and better understand which positions connect its different components. One finding is especially relevant to the rest of the report: Nicolás Maduro occupies the central intermediary position in the modeled system. Still, the structure he coordinates extends beyond his own position and retains considerable capacity to persist and adapt.

1.1. Empirical Basis and Structural Approach

The super-network version used in this analysis brings together 30,467 relational records involving 13,521 distinct actors—a term that, in this report, includes individuals, legal entities, and institutions. It brings together public officials, state institutions, public and private companies, family members, businesspeople, financial intermediaries, contractors, logistics structures, and actors linked to investigations, sanctions, legal proceedings, and acts of corruption documented across various jurisdictions. Unless otherwise noted, the figures in this chapter include activities prior to 2013 and do not distinguish the period before the presidency. The network's main value lies in bringing together information that, when viewed separately, may seem fragmented across files, institutions, time periods, and countries, but takes on a different dimension when we reconstruct the relationships among the people and organizations involved.

Network analysis helps us move from individual cases to a broader view of the structure. It shows not only who is connected to whom, but also where relational power is concentrated, which actors link different domains, which trajectories span multiple institutions, and where the public and private spheres overlap. It also helps identify positions whose continuity is especially important to keeping the super-network connected. Although the structure does not replace the documentary evidence supporting each relationship, it makes it easier to observe patterns that might be difficult to detect by reading thousands of records separately.

This report focuses on Nicolás Maduro and Cilia Flores, who each hold exceptionally significant positions within the structure analyzed, though their networks differ in character. Maduro's network is shaped above all by ties involving appointments, positions, delegated authority, and connections to key parts of the state apparatus—particularly in the economic and financial, oil, executive and administrative, diplomatic, and security spheres. Cilia Flores's network has a different makeup, with a greater share of business, family, and

institutional-administrative relationships. Some actors also connect these spheres to broader corporate, financial, and administrative structures.

This difference does not mean the two networks operate separately. Looking at them together helps us identify specific points of convergence among institutions, families, officials, and business structures. The analysis aims to show how these environments differ, where they intersect, and the roles Maduro and Cilia Flores play within a much broader super-network.

To explore this, we first examine Nicolás Maduro's closest relationships, distinguishing those in which he acts as both sender and receiver, and map his main functional subnetworks. Next, we analyze Cilia Flores's network, with particular attention to its family, institutional-administrative, and business components, as well as her exposure to investigations and sanctions. Finally, we bring both networks together to identify where they converge and how they differ.

The report also explores the structural intermediation capacity of the actors who hold the most prominent positions in the super-network. Among other indicators, it considers betweenness, which highlights the actors most frequently appearing on the shortest paths that connect different parts of the system. Nicolás Maduro ranks first in structural intermediation, while Cilia Flores ranks ninth. The group also includes José David Cabello Rondón, PDVSA, Hugo Chávez, Tareck El Aissami, Diosdado Cabello, Rafael Ramírez, Nervis Villalobos, and Néstor Reverol.

The analysis also examines what happens when nodes are removed, helping assess how much the super-network depends on the positions with the highest intermediation. This exercise offers useful insight into the kind of power represented by the super-network. A structure may concentrate a substantial share of its intermediation in certain leaders while still having enough redundancy to remain connected if those leaders are removed. For this reason, the report looks not only at centrality, but also at dependency, redundancy, and structural resilience.

Together, these analyses aim to map the relational architecture connecting political power, state institutions, public resources, companies, family members, intermediaries, and networks under investigation for corruption within the super-network originating in Venezuela. The central question is not only who holds a significant position, but also how the capacity for coordination is distributed and sustained across a structure that extends well beyond any one of its members.

1.2. Nicolás Maduro's Immediate Network

1.2.1. Structure of Directed Relationships within Nicolás Maduro's First-degree Network

Nicolás Maduro's first-degree network comprises 497 actors: Maduro himself and the 496 actors directly connected to him. Within the subnetwork formed by this group, 4,824 directed, non-self-referential relationships are identified, including both those that directly involve Maduro as well as those among the actors in his immediate circle. When the analysis extends to two degrees of separation, the network expands considerably.

Of these 4,824 relationships, 1,297 directly involve Nicolás Maduro, while the remaining 3,527 connect actors in his immediate circle to one another. This means his network is not simply a radial structure centered on Maduro; it also includes a broader web of connections among his immediate associates.

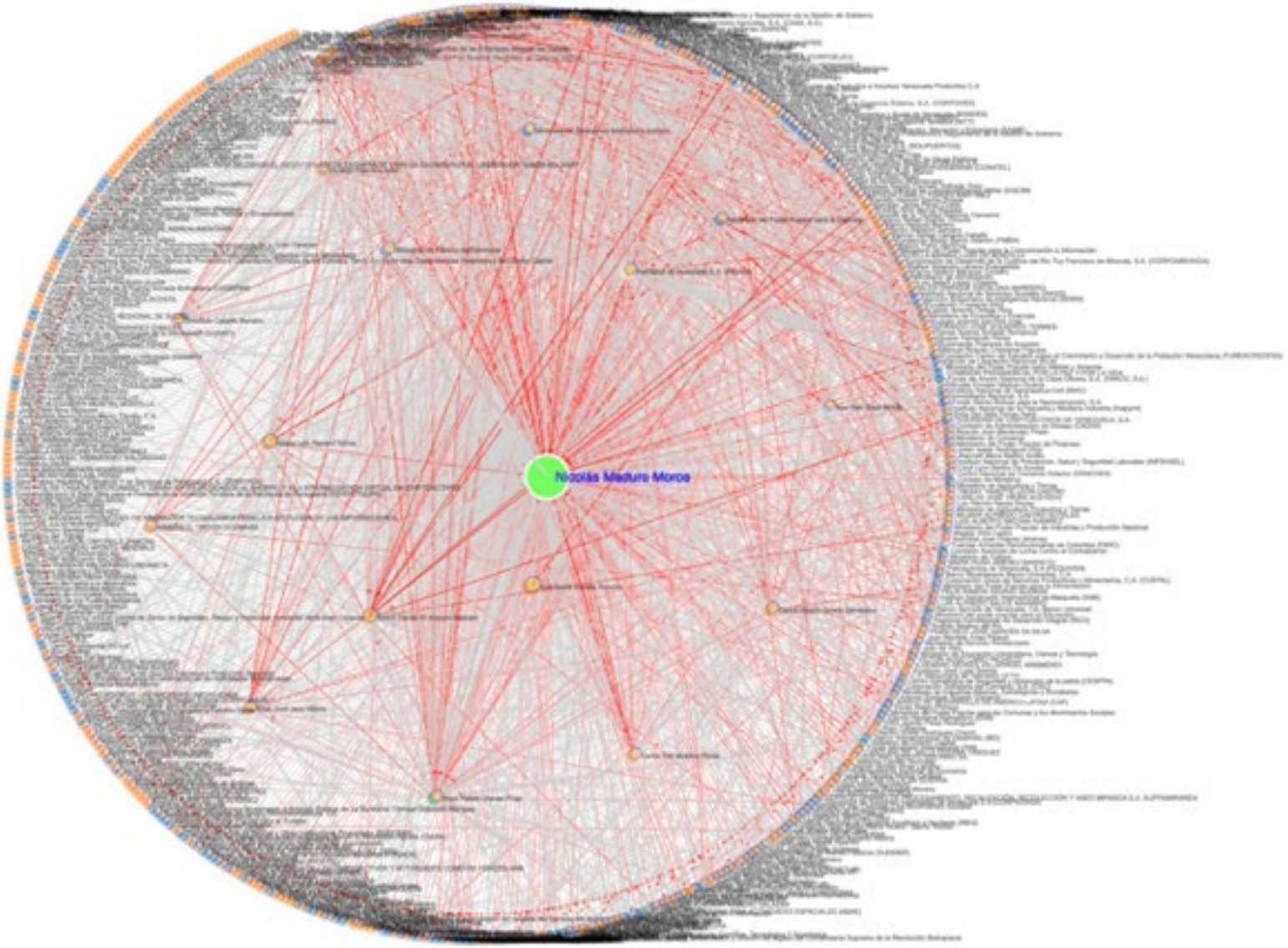
The following sections take a closer look at the 1,297 relationships that directly involve Maduro, including appointments, public offices, and other institutional ties, as well as connections to strategic state-owned enterprises and records from investigations, sanctions, and other documentary sources.

This structure is significant because Nicolás Maduro holds the top position in the super-network's intermediation and has an exceptional number of direct relationships. At the same time, his immediate circle is not connected to him only through direct, radial links. The thousands of relationships among other network members reveal a structure with many internal connections. As will be discussed later, this helps explain how Maduro's exceptional centrality can coexist with the network's considerable structural resilience.

Figure 1



Direct relationships within Nicolás Maduro's first-degree network. Network organized according to the direct centrality indicator, with 497 actors in the first-degree network



Source: Transparencia Venezuela database

1.2.2. Concentration of Direct Interactions and Capacity for Intervention

Nicolás Maduro Moros ranks first in both direct centrality and structural betweenness in a super-network of 13,521 actors, highlighting the significance of his position. In terms of direct centrality, he has 496 immediate neighbors and a notably high number of documented relationships, primarily appointments, positions, and other institutional ties.

He also ranks first in betweenness, suggesting that he may link different parts of the network. His position appears frequently on the shortest paths between other actors, making him the network's main topological bridge. This measure helps show how well the network's different components are connected, though it does not mean that every shortest path reflects an actual flow of information, resources, or decisions under Maduro's control.

1.2.3. A Closer Look at Concentrations of Directed Relationships

An analysis of the 1,297 directed relationships in the Transparencia Venezuela database for Nicolás Maduro shows a strong concentration in institutional categories. Appointed individuals account for 65.15% of the relationships, while positions held account for 23.36%. Together, these categories make up 88.51% of the directed relationships in Maduro's first-degree network.

This pattern suggests that Nicolás Maduro's immediate network is shaped less by business or contractual ties and more by formal appointments and control over positions within the state apparatus. This concentration points to centralized decision-making, with positions assigned directly and strategic posts filled within the institutional system analyzed.

The prevalence of appointment-based relationships in the state apparatus also suggests that ties within Nicolás Maduro's first-degree network follow a clear vertical hierarchy, with appointment authority serving as the primary means of coordination. The second most statistically significant category, "Positions Held," reinforces this pattern by showing how these appointments are formalized within the state's organizational structures.

In practical terms, this structure reflects a concentration of key functions: the executive branch not only holds central positions but also actively shapes the institutional system through recurring, systematic appointment decisions.

This pattern suggests that power is overly concentrated within Venezuela's executive branch, giving it influence over areas and institutions where it should not play such a dominant role. Civil society organizations and national and international monitoring NGOs have repeatedly expressed concern that the executive branch has co-opted and subordinated other branches of government and sectors of public administration, drawing them into a system that enables institutional and economic opacity as well as corrupt practices. As a result, the separation of powers has weakened, and institutional oversight mechanisms have become less effective.

1.2.4. Investigations and Criminal Exposure

While Nicolás Maduro's network is mainly defined by administrative and institutional relationships, it also includes a notable range of connections involving criminal risks, investigations, and oversight beyond national borders. These connections fall into several categories, including:

- **Related news:** 36 entries (2.78%)
- **Corruption cases (general category):** 36 records (2.78%)
- **Specific corruption subcategories**—including Local Supply and Production Committees (CLAP), gold, foreign exchange controls, illegal financing, smuggling, money laundering, budget overruns, and administrative irregularities—include 51 additional records (3.93%).
- **International sanctions:** 3 records (0.23%)
- **Human rights violations:** 3 records (0.23%)
- **International trials:** 4 records (0.31%), corresponding to categories in the United States and London.

Taken together, the categories associated with investigative, sanction-related, or judicial proceedings account for 10.25% of the relationships in Nicolás Maduro's first-degree network. This figure helps show that, despite the mechanisms of impunity Nicolás Maduro established around his government's actions, international sanctions and the documentation of information about corruption created some risk that these events could come to light. Ultimately, although efforts have been made to ensure the highest possible level of impunity within the Venezuelan state, even limited information about corruption and human rights violations forms a body of evidence that could eventually help establish criminal liability.

Additionally, complementary categories that are smaller in volume but equally relevant from a qualitative standpoint have been identified:

- **Family members:** 8 records (0.62%)
- **Business ties:** 1 record
- **Company formation:** 1 record
- **Contract signed:** 2 records

Direct business relationships in Nicolás Maduro's immediate network are limited, unlike the denser web of such ties among some members of his inner circle. In particular, the categories explicitly related to corporate or business ties directly linked to Maduro include just two signed-contract entries: one under "Business ties" and one under "Company formation." This pattern suggests that his structural position is shaped less by direct corporate or contractual exposure and more by a strong concentration of relationships connected to appointments, positions held, and institutional coordination.

The picture shifts when we include intermediary actors. Cilia Adela Flores de Maduro has 58 interactions classified as "Associated Partner," representing 35.80% of the 162 relationships in her immediate network. For instance, Yoswal Alexander Gavidia Flores, identified as Nicolás Maduro's stepson, has six business relationships: five of the "Partner-linked" type and one of the "Company Founder" type. For the latter, the associated evidence identifies him as a member of the board of directors and director of Inversiones Difusión Latina Radio 2017 C.A.

Carlos Erik Malpica Flores presents an even more significant profile: he has 49 direct interactions with Nicolás Maduro (28 involving "Positions Held," 18 involving "Designated Individuals," two involving "Acts of Corruption," and one involving "Related News") and, at the same time, has 24 business or financial interactions, including 23 **"Associated Partner"** relationships and one **"Owner"** relationship. This helps us identify specific pathways connecting the central political actor to the business sphere through individuals in his family circle and trusted associates.

The contrast between these two layers is important for understanding how the network is organized. Nicolás Maduro's direct corporate exposure is limited, while actors closely linked to him account for considerably more business, corporate, or financial relationships. This distribution suggests a structure in which different roles are assigned to different actors: the central political figure is primarily responsible for appointing, organizing institutions hierarchically, and coordinating them, while certain members of his inner circle connect that structure to business and asset networks. Taken together, the evidence points to an indirect business dimension of Maduro's network and shows that part of it converges within his family circle.

1.3. Nicolás Maduro as a Sender and Receiver

1.3.1. Nicolás Maduro as a Sender

An analysis of the interactions in which Nicolás Maduro Moros appears as the sender reveals a marked concentration on relationships intended to reshape and guide the state apparatus. Maduro appears as the sender in **1,002 interactions, reaching 449 different recipients**.

The makeup of these interactions is especially notable: of the 1,002 records directed to third parties, **842 fall into the "Designated Individuals" category (84.03%), while 53 fall into "Positions Held" (5.29%)**. Together, these categories make up 89.32% of the interactions initiated by Nicolás Maduro.

The same pattern can be seen among the main recipients. The **Ministry of Popular Power for Foreign Affairs** accounts for the most records (69), followed by **Petróleos de Venezuela S.A. (PDVSA)** (29), the Vice Presidency of the Republic (24), Carlos Erik

Malpica Flores (20), and the Presidency of the Republic (16). These figures offer a clearer picture of how Maduro's role as a sender connects with key areas such as foreign policy, oil revenue administration, executive coordination, and presidential management.

Position	Node/recipient agent	Entries
1	Ministry of People's Power for Foreign Affairs	69
2	Petróleos de Venezuela S.A. (PDVSA)	29
3	Office of the Vice President	24
4	Carlos Erik Malpica Flores	20
5	Office of the President	16
6	Ministry of the People's Power for the Office of the President and Monitoring of Government Operations	11
6	Presidential Commission for Peace and Life	11
6	National Workers' Savings Fund (FANCO S.A.)	11
6	Nelson José Merentes Díaz	11
10	National Assembly	10
10	Foundation for the Study of the Growth and Development of the Venezuelan Population (FUNDACREDESA)	10
12	Delcy Eloína Rodríguez Gómez	9
12	Rodolfo Clemente Marco Torres	9
14	Central Bank of Venezuela (BCV)	8
14	Council of Ministers	8
14	Hugo Rafael Chávez Frías	8
14	Ministry of Health	8
14	Carmen Teresa Meléndez Rivas	8

Source: Transparencia Venezuela database
Note: All actors "tied" at the threshold of the most frequent group are included. These values correspond to relational records and do not necessarily equate to the same number of independent administrative acts, since a single provision may generate multiple relationships if it encompasses multiple designations or institutional components.

The distribution shows that Nicolás Maduro's issuances are concentrated among a select group of the 449 identified recipient entities, rather than being evenly distributed. The leading recipients are primarily central executive branch institutions, strategic state-owned enterprises, and individuals who have held key roles in public administration. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, PDVSA, the Office of the Vice President, the Office of the President, the Ministry of the Presidency, the Central Bank, and the Council of Ministers together highlight the network's reach across diplomatic, oil, financial, and executive-administrative spheres.

Among individuals, **Carlos Erik Malpica Flores** stands out, with 20 interactions attributed to him by Maduro. As the corresponding subnetworks show, his prominence reflects not only the frequency of these connections but also the range of titles and positions associated with administrative, financial, and business spheres. **Nelson José Merentes Díaz** has 11 interactions, while **Rodolfo Clemente Marco Torres** and **Delcy Eloína Rodríguez Gómez** each have 9. This finding helps identify a core group of individuals whose roles in the network complement the concentration seen among formal institutions.

The case of **Delcy Rodríguez** merits particular attention. There are nine direct interactions between her and Nicolás Maduro: eight are classified as "**Appointments**," and one as "Delegation of Powers." The sequence and variety of these interactions carry greater structural significance than their frequency alone. Over time, Maduro appointed Delcy Rodríguez to positions across several institutional areas, including communications policy, diplomacy, PDVSA administration, executive-branch coordination, economic management, the Central Bank, and oil policy. Since 2013, throughout Maduro's administration, Rodríguez has progressively taken on senior roles in Communication and Information, Foreign Affairs, executive leadership at PDVSA, the Vice Presidency, Economy and Finance, and Hydrocarbons.

The **Delegation of Powers** adds a distinct dimension to these appointments. It not only placed Rodríguez in an institutional role but also formalized the transfer of authority to exercise certain presidential powers. This significance becomes clearer in later interactions, where Rodríguez appears as the issuer of appointments made under presidential delegation. Taken together, the evidence shows that the Maduro–Rodríguez relationship involved more than a series of appointments: it also included a formal mechanism through which she exercised part of the president's decision-making authority.

This does not mean that every subsequent action by Delcy Rodríguez can be attributed to Nicolás Maduro, or that the existence of a delegation proves he was aware of, approved, or responsible for every decision made in the exercise of her powers.

The structural significance is more specific: the documentation shows a formal chain of authority between them, extending to other officials and institutions through appointment relationships. In this context, Delcy Rodríguez has been regarded as one of Maduro's

key allies since Chávez's death, and her powers have clearly expanded over time in the diplomatic, economic, and energy spheres.

Structurally, Nicolás Maduro's role in issuing directives is expressed mainly through institutional mechanisms such as appointments, the assignment of positions, and the delegation of authority. The high proportion of **Individuals designated** and **Positions filled**—89.32% of records directed at third parties—together with the concentration of key recipients in strategic areas of the state, points to a vertical structure in which the president repeatedly shapes positions and formal chains of authority.

Therefore, Maduro's structural importance as a networker depends not only on how many relationships he establishes, but also on the types of relationships and the spheres in which they unfold. As noted, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, PDVSA, the Vice Presidency, the Presidency, and the Central Bank—along with individual actors such as Malpica Flores, Merentes Díaz, Marco Torres, and Delcy Rodríguez—serve as points of connection between the president and various parts of the state apparatus.

1.3.2. Nicolás Maduro as a Recipient

In the super-network of corruption, Nicolás Maduro Moros appears as a recipient in **297** interaction **records** involving 98 different actors.

These records are best interpreted with care. Some actors appear more often in interactions where Maduro is the recipient, but that does not necessarily mean they have greater "influence" over him. More often, these are individuals whose documented careers include multiple positions, appointments, or institutional ties connected to Maduro. So, the frequency is best understood as a sign of recurring institutional connections within his immediate circle—not as a direct measure of influence, information flow, or decision-making capacity related to the presidential node.

Position	Node/agent	Entries
1	Carlos Erik Malpica Flores	29
2	Simón Alejandro Zerpa Delgado	11
2	Antonio José Pérez Suárez	11
4	Alejandro Antonio Fleming Cabrera	10
5	Rocco Albisinni Serrano	9
5	Vladimir Padrino López	9
7	Américo Alex Mata García	8
7	Pedro Rolando Maldonado Marín	8
9	Rodolfo Clemente Marco Torres	7
9	Ysmel Romer Serrano Florez	7
11	Carlos Alberto Osorio Zambrano	6
11	Ernesto Emilio Villegas Poljak	6
11	Hugo Rafael Chávez Frías	6

Source: Transparencia Venezuela database
Note: All actors "tied" at the frequency threshold are included. The values correspond to relational records in the database and do not necessarily represent an equal number of independent administrative acts. Therefore, the observed frequency should be interpreted as an indicator of institutional recurrence and not necessarily as a direct measure of influence over Nicolás Maduro.

The most notable case is that of **Carlos Erik Malpica Flores**, with 29 records listing Maduro as the recipient. Of these, 26 are categorized as "**Positions Held**," while the remaining three comprise two records of "**Acts of Corruption**" and one of "**Related News**." This high frequency mainly reflects the documented accumulation of positions and roles across various administrative spheres during Maduro's administration. It also complements the finding from the previous section, where **Malpica Flores** ranks among the main recipients of Maduro's interactions, and underscores his importance as an actor with recurring connections to the institutional core examined here.

A similar pattern, though on a smaller scale, appears for **Simón Alejandro Zerpa Delgado**, whose 11 records all fall under "**Positions Held**"; **Alejandro Antonio Fleming Cabrera**, with 10 records in the same category; **Rocco Albisinni Serrano**, with 9; and **Pedro Rolando Maldonado Marín**, with 8. In these cases, the frequency mainly reflects the succession or accumulation of institutional positions documented in the database.

On the other hand, **Vladimir Padrino López's** profile presents a different picture. Of the nine records in which Maduro appears as a recipient, seven correspond to "**Positions Held**"; the other two relate to international sanctions and allegations associated with drug trafficking, according to the sources included in the super-network. This means the total

frequency reflects relationships of different kinds, so it should not be read as nine equivalent episodes of institutional interaction.

The cases of **Delcy Rodríguez** and **Tareck El Aissami** also show why it's helpful to read this ranking alongside the relationships in which Maduro appears as the initiating actor. Although Delcy Rodríguez is not listed among the main active actors in this section, the super-network records—as noted in the previous section—eight direct appointments by Maduro and one formal delegation of powers from Maduro to Delcy. Tareck El Aissami, meanwhile, appears in three "Positions Held" relationships in which Maduro is the recipient actor, while the available documentation also points to other presidential appointments and delegations between them. For this reason, the frequency shown in the table above does not provide a complete measure of the intensity or variety of each actor's institutional relationships with Maduro, though it does help identify relevant figures in his inner circle.

To this extent, the evidence points to a concentration of records involving individuals who held a range of positions and roles across different parts of the state apparatus associated with Nicolás Maduro. These include Malpica Flores, Zerpa Delgado, Pérez Suárez, Fleming Cabrera, Padrino López, Marco Torres, Osorio Zambrano, and others, who appear repeatedly across this structure. While the accumulation of positions or the recurrence of these relationships does not, by itself, prove informal subordination, shared knowledge, or joint participation in specific illicit acts, it offers an important perspective: Maduro's immediate circle includes a relatively small group of individuals who appear repeatedly in different positions and areas of the state.

In summary, analyzing Nicolás Maduro as a "receiver" helps us identify the actors who appear most often in his history of appointments, positions, and other documented relationships. This perspective complements the analysis of Maduro as a "sender" and helps highlight individuals with a recurring institutional presence around the presidential node.

1.4. Nicolás Maduro's Functional Subnetworks

1.4.1. Institutional Economic-Financial Subnetwork

The economic-financial subnetwork is an important part of Nicolás Maduro's immediate network. The documented interactions show recurring involvement through appointments, positions held, and delegated authority across institutions responsible for monetary policy, public finances, state funds, international financing, and strategic resources. Key entities include the Central Bank of Venezuela (BCV), the Ministry of Economy and Finance, the National Development Fund (FONDEN), and the Bank for Economic and Social Development (BANDES), as well as a small group of individuals who held roles in several of these institutions.

The main actors in this component include:

- Central Bank of Venezuela (BCV)
- Ministry of Economy and Finance
- National Development Fund (FONDEN)
- Bank for Economic and Social Development (BANDES)
- Nelson José Merentes Díaz
- Simón Alejandro Zerpa Delgado
- Carlos Erik Malpica Flores
- Delcy Eloína Rodríguez Gómez
- Tareck Zaidan El Aissami Maddah
- Álex Naín Saab Morán

These actors each play distinct roles. For example, **Merentes Díaz, Zerpa Delgado, Malpica Flores, and Delcy Rodríguez** are primarily involved in the state's financial and institutional administration. Tareck El Aissami connects this core group with economic coordination, public funds, development banking, industry, and the oil sector. **Álex Naín Saab Morán**, in turn, primarily represents the structure's outreach to transnational business, contractual, and financial networks. This distinction helps show that the subnetwork extends beyond the formal financial apparatus: it also connects the state's capacity to allocate resources and appointments with economic implementation involving companies, contractors, and international operations.

Delcy Rodríguez Gómez holds a particularly significant position within the economic-financial subnetwork. As noted above, her documented roles include serving as director and vice president for international affairs at PDVSA, the Ministry of Economy and Finance, the executive branch's representative on the BCV board of directors, and sectoral vice president for the economy. Her sphere of influence included banking and finance, trade, investments, FONDEN, BANDES, SUDEBAN, SENIAT, public funds, and state-owned banks, as well as her subsequent leadership in the hydrocarbons sector.

Therefore, Rodríguez's significance extends beyond the positions she held: Nicolás Maduro formally delegated presidential powers to her, and Rodríguez subsequently made numerous appointments while exercising those delegated functions. This sequence documents a chain of authority linking the presidential office to various administrative and economic areas. While this does not mean that every decision Rodríguez made can be directly attributed to Maduro, it does show a direct and sustained institutional relationship between them.

Tareck Zaidan El Aissami Maddah played a different, but equally relevant, role. In addition to serving as Vice President of the Republic during Maduro's administration, he was involved in appointments linked to the **Ministry of Economy and Finance, FONDEN,**

BANDES, CAF, the IDB, and the Agricultural Bank of Venezuela. He later also served in the Sectoral Vice Presidency of the Economy and led the Ministry of Industries and National Production and the Ministry of Petroleum. His network also includes numerous business ties and records related to international investigations and sanctions.

When we consider the roles of **Delcy Rodríguez** and **Tareck El Aissami** together, it becomes clear that the economic coordination centered on Maduro involved more than just ministers specializing in finance. It also operated through vice presidencies and officials with broad responsibilities, who could work across ministries, sovereign wealth funds, public banks, state-owned enterprises, and international financing mechanisms. This broader pattern points to an interinstitutional economic-financial architecture rather than a strictly financial structure.

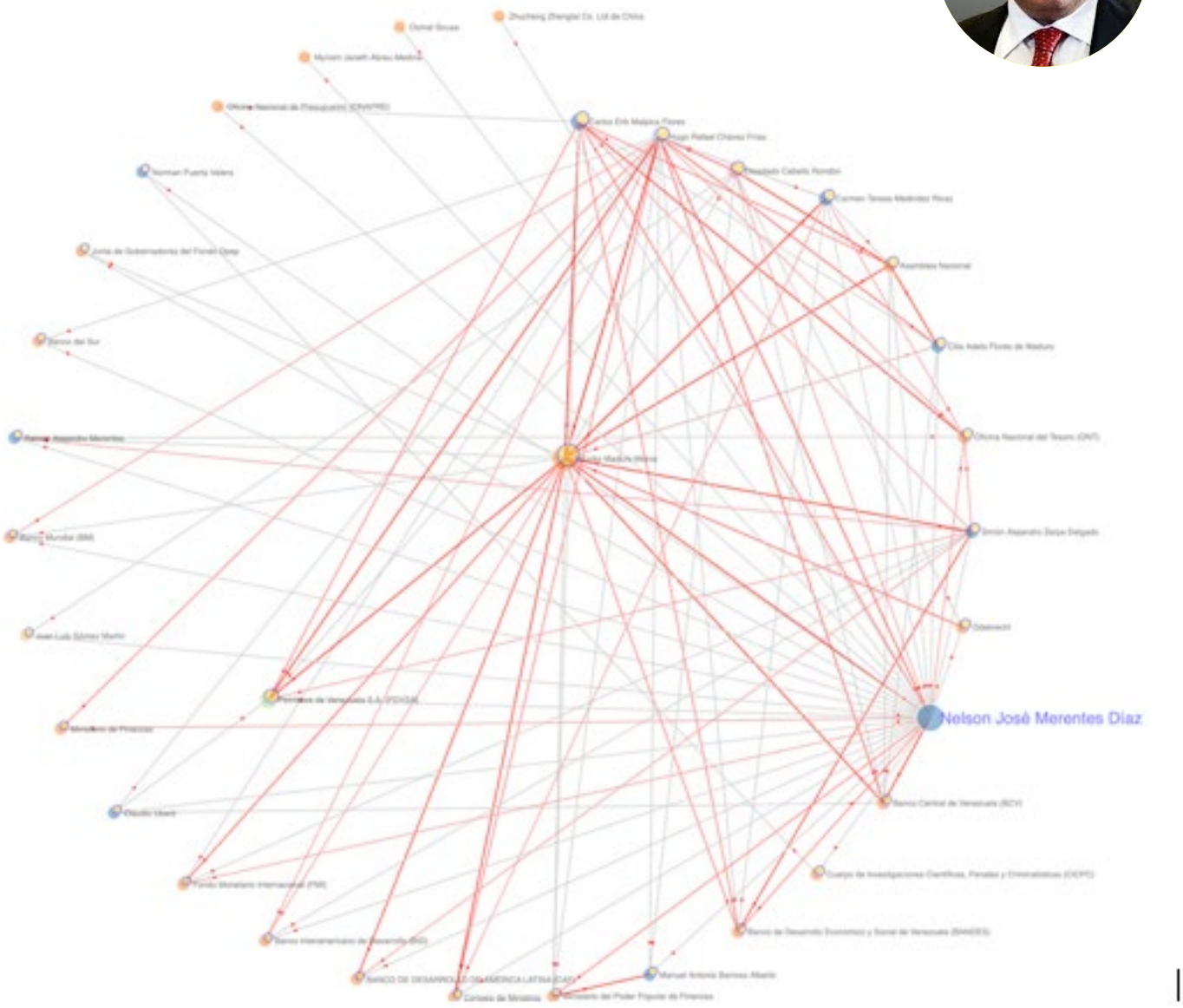
Álex Naín Saab Morán also stands out for his role as a link between state resources and programs and an extensive business and transnational network. He has been associated with oil operations, gold trading, the creation of and ties to companies, and the Local Supply and Production Committees (CLAP), a state food subsidy program created in 2016. Records also relate to money-laundering investigations in various jurisdictions. In addition, documented direct ties connect Saab and Maduro in these contexts.

In 2019, the U.S. Department of the Treasury sanctioned **Saab, Álvaro Pulido,** and **members of the Flores-Gavidia family** for their alleged involvement in a network linked to the CLAP program. According to the department, Saab also allegedly paid bribes and illicit commissions to gain access to Maduro and secure government contracts. This background helps explain his inclusion in the economic-financial component, where he serves as a liaison between the political-institutional core and transnational business and financial networks.

Nelson José Merentes Díaz's immediate subnetwork shows a strong concentration of formal financial roles. Over the course of his career, he served as president of the **Central Bank of Venezuela and minister of finance**, and represented Venezuela before **multilateral financial organizations**. He also maintained ties with the National Treasury Office, ONAPRE, and BANDES. Taken together, these appointments and responsibilities position Merentes as a link between monetary policy, budget management, public debt, and international financial representation.

Figure 2
Nelson José Merentes Díaz's network within Nicolás Maduro's sphere of influence





Source: Transparencia Venezuela database

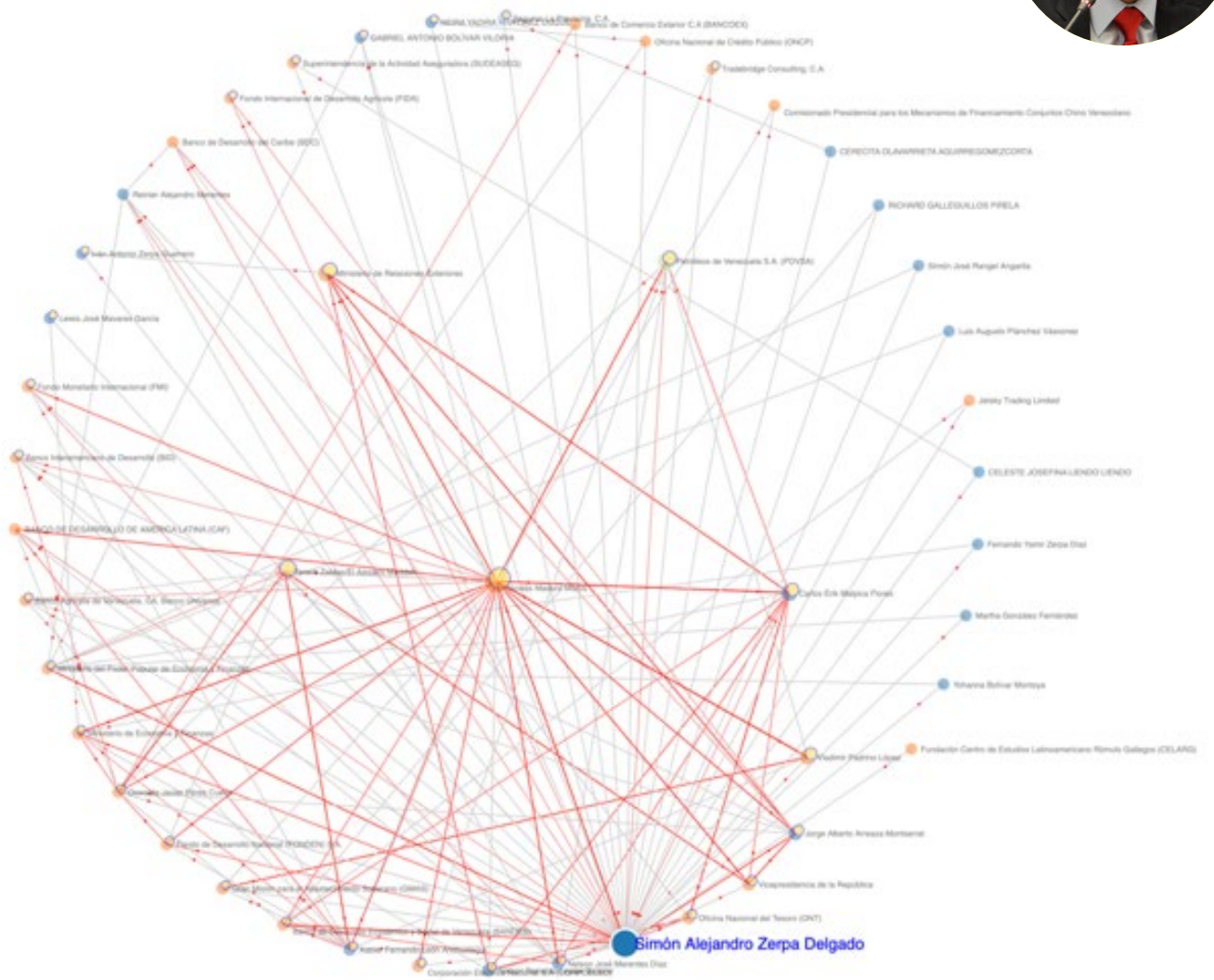
The recurrence of appointment-based relationships linked to Nicolás Maduro and, previously, Hugo Chávez—along with this subnetwork's ties to Carlos Erik Malpica Flores and other administrative officials—highlights the continuity and concentration of functions within the financial sector. Merentes's subnetwork brings together areas related to monetary policy, budget execution, debt management, and representation before multilateral organizations. This configuration helps identify a point of institutional convergence among different mechanisms for managing public resources, while the accumulation of positions alone does not constitute evidence of participation in illicit activities.

A similar pattern can be seen in the career of **Simón Alejandro Zerpa Delgado**, who held a succession of positions within the state's economic core: Minister of the People's Power for Economy and Finance; president of BANDES; president of FONDEN; external director of PDVSA; presidential commissioner for Sino-Venezuelan joint financing mechanisms; and representative or governor to multilateral organizations such as the IMF, the IDB, CAF, and the Caribbean Development Bank.

Figure 3

Simón Alejandro Zerpa Delgado's network within Nicolás Maduro's network of influence





Source: Transparencia Venezuela database

This career path connects public finances, multilateral financing, debt, and sovereign wealth funds. The broader network also includes numerous appointments associated with agencies such as the National Public Credit Office (ONCP), administrative units within the Ministry of Popular Power for Economy and Finance, BANDES, and other financial institutions. These roles cover areas such as payment processing, budget administration, procurement, account management, agreement signing, and debt management.

Zerpa's subnetwork also points to connections with the business sector and transnational financial operations documented in the database sources. These include records of financial transactions involving BANDES France and foreign companies, as well as international sanctions. Together, these elements help illustrate the breadth of his structural role, spanning local financial administration, financing mechanisms, and external economic relations.

Finally, the documented link between **Simón Alejandro Zerpa Delgado and Tradebridge Consulting, C.A.**—a company authorized to contract with the Venezuelan government—offers another perspective on his connection to the private sector. Viewed alongside his previous institutional roles, this link helps illustrate how certain actors can carry their experience and positions within the state's financial apparatus into subsequent business structures.

Taken together, this component points to a marked concentration of functions within the state's economic and financial administration, as well as several connections to companies and transnational networks. **Merentes, Zerpa, Malpica, Rodríguez**, and **El Aissami** hold positions primarily tied to the institutional apparatus and the management of public resources. **Saab**, meanwhile, emerges as one of the network's main links to its external business and contractual sphere.

The overlap among these functions reveals a structure connecting state decisions and resources with economic implementation mechanisms beyond the immediate bureaucratic core. Overall, this structure provides evidence of institutional concentration and coordination.

1.4.2. Oil Subnetwork

The oil subnetwork is one of the most important economic components of Nicolás Maduro's network. Its significance comes not only from oil's historic role in Venezuelan public finances, but also from **Petróleos de Venezuela S.A. (PDVSA)'s** extensive connections within the super-network: the company is involved in **448 interactions with 275 distinct actors**. These connections bring together appointments and positions held, contracts, corporate structures, and records related to investigations and corruption.

The direct relationship between Nicolás Maduro and PDVSA reflects both aspects. A total of 29 direct entries have been identified between the two actors—the same entries listed in the table in section 1.3.1 as having been issued by Maduro to PDVSA: 19 correspond to

Designated Persons, two to **Positions Held**, four to **Acts of Corruption**, two to **Related News**, one to International **Trials** —United States—**Operation Money Flight**, and one to **Acts of Corruption—Money Laundering**. For categories that are not based on actions—acts of corruption, related news, sanctions, and legal proceedings—the direction of the link does not indicate authorship; instead, it reflects the documentary connection between the two actors. As a result, the Maduro–PDVSA connection appears in the super-network not as a solely administrative relationship—as might be expected given Maduro's role as president—but as a combination of his formal authority to reshape the company's leadership and the company's exposure to multiple investigations and corruption allegations.

This pattern is especially clear in the appointments. The documentary evidence includes decisions by Nicolás Maduro concerning the presidency, board of directors, vice presidencies, and other positions at PDVSA. These include the appointments and confirmations of **Eulogio Del Pino, Nelson Martínez, Manuel Quevedo, Ysmel Serrano, Carlos Erik Malpica Flores, Rodolfo Marco Torres, Simón Zerpa Delgado, Víctor Aular, Asdrúbal Chávez, and Delcy Rodríguez**, among others. This subnetwork shows that the president's relationship with the oil industry extends beyond PDVSA as an abstract entity; it is also reflected in the specific makeup of its management and financial structure.

Among the most significant actors in this component are:

- Petróleos de Venezuela S.A. (PDVSA)
- Ministry of Popular Power for Petroleum
- CITGO Petroleum Corporation
- PDV Caribe, S.A.
- Rafael Darío Ramírez Carreño
- Eulogio Antonio Del Pino Díaz
- Nelson Pablo Martínez
- Manuel Salvador Quevedo Fernández
- Ysmel Romer Serrano Florez
- Carlos Erik Malpica Flores
- Rodolfo Clemente Marco Torres
- Simón Alejandro Zerpa Delgado
- Asdrúbal José Chávez Jiménez
- Antonio José Pérez Suárez

- Delcy Eloína Rodríguez Gómez
- Tareck Zaidan El Aissami Maddah
- Álex Naín Saab Morán

These actors each play a **distinct role within the subnetwork**. The first group consists of the institutional leaders of PDVSA and the oil sector, including presidents, directors, vice presidents, and ministers. The second group connects the industry with public finances and resource management; its members include Malpica Flores, Marco Torres, Zerpa Delgado, and Delcy Rodríguez. A third component supports the marketing and international reach of oil, involving entities such as CITGO and PDV Caribe, along with private operators and intermediaries. Finally, the subnetwork includes relationships documented in investigations into bribery, money laundering, irregular trading, sanctions evasion, and the misappropriation of funds.

1.4.2.1. Institutional Leadership of PDVSA

The succession of appointments offers a clear picture of Maduro's recurring role in managing the state-owned company. **Manuel Salvador Quevedo Fernández**, for example, has six direct ties to Maduro and seven to PDVSA. In November 2017, Maduro appointed him president of PDVSA—a position he held until April 2020—as well as chairman of its Board of Directors. The evidence also points to new appointments at the oil company during his tenure, including his confirmation by Delcy Rodríguez in 2018.

Ysmel Romer Serrano Florez has a particularly strong track record in marketing and supply. He has ten direct ties to Maduro and seven to PDVSA. Maduro appointed him executive vice president of PDVSA, vice president of Commerce and Supply, internal director, and president of PDV Caribe. Together, these roles place him at an important intersection between the company's management structure and its hydrocarbon marketing functions.

The network also identifies **Nelson Pablo Martínez, Eulogio Antonio Del Pino Díaz, and Asdrúbal José Chávez Jiménez** as leaders in the sector. During the period under review, PDVSA's presidency passed through several hands: Eulogio Antonio Del Pino Díaz served from January to August 2017 and was confirmed as chairman of its Board of Directors in June of that year; Nelson Pablo Martínez served from August to November 2017; and Manuel Salvador Quevedo Fernández served from November 2017 to April 2020. Asdrúbal Chávez was appointed Minister of Petroleum and Mining and later became interim president of CITGO. Together, these figures illustrate a succession of operators linking presidential authority directly to the leadership of PDVSA, its subsidiaries, and its international assets.

Rafael Darío Ramírez Carreño, meanwhile, represents continuity between the administrations of Hugo Chávez and Nicolás Maduro. Within the super-network, he has five direct ties to Maduro and thirteen to PDVSA. His tenure as president of the oil company began under Chávez and continued into the early days of the Maduro administration. Maduro later appointed him to political and diplomatic leadership positions. The network also connects him to numerous records of national and international investigations into PDVSA's operations and resources.

1.4.2.2. Intersection Between Oil and Public Finance

A second characteristic of this component is the close connection between oil and financial structures. **Carlos Erik Malpica Flores** is one of the clearest examples of this overlap. Maduro appointed him to PDVSA's Board of Directors as an internal director in December 2014 and as the company's Vice President of Finance in June 2015. For a time, these responsibilities overlapped with his tenure at the National Treasury and other administrative roles, making him a link between the state's financial apparatus and the country's largest public enterprise.

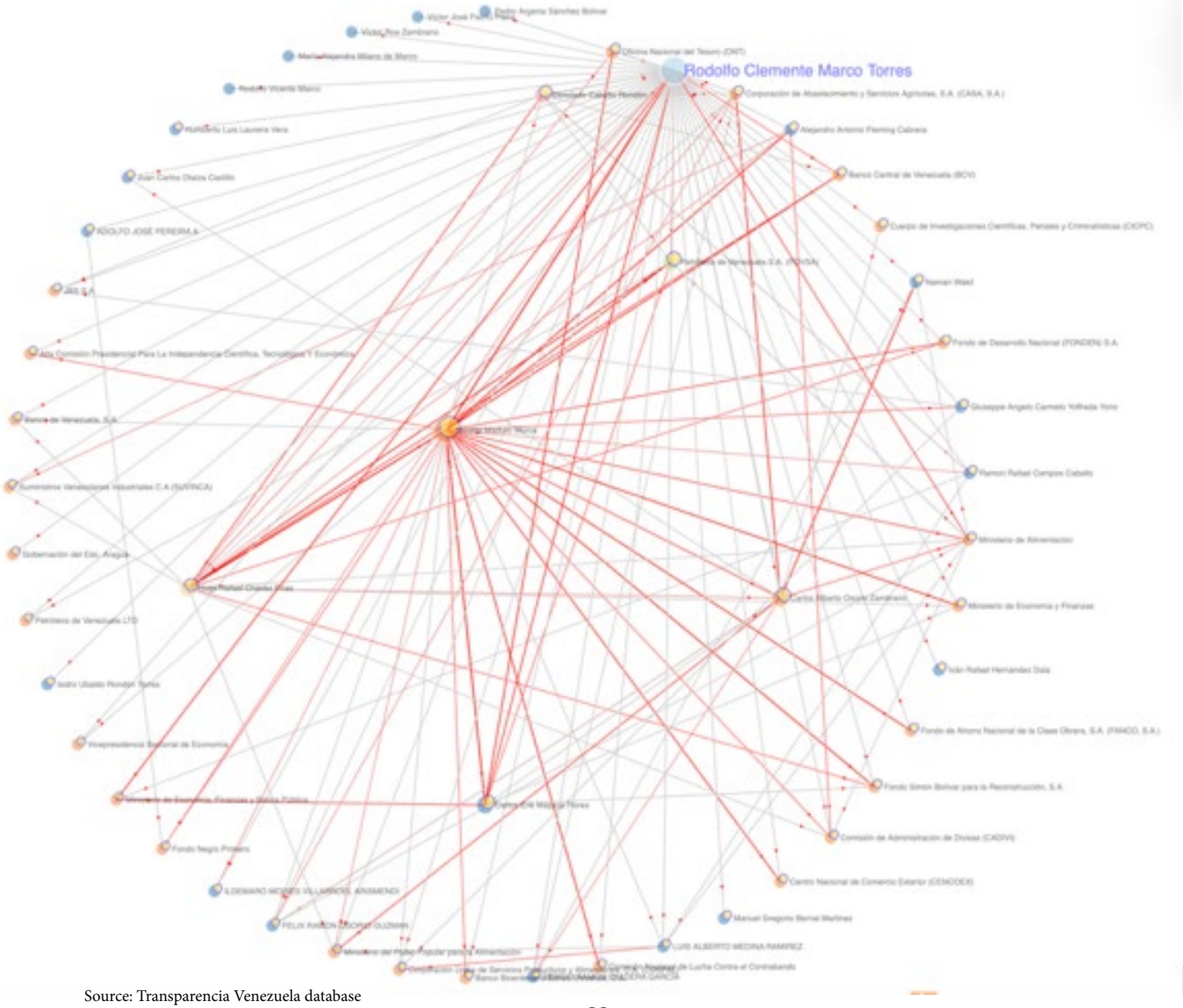
This connection is particularly significant in light of the documentation on the **Money Flight case**—a money-laundering scheme linked to PDVSA operations and detailed in section 3.3. Although U.S. authorities have not publicly charged Malpica in that case, some accounts associate him with the period when the operations took place. At the time, he headed the National Treasury and later served as a Director and Vice President of Finance at PDVSA. This information offers context but does not constitute a judicial determination of Malpica's liability.

Simón Alejandro Zerpa Delgado and **Rodolfo Clemente Marco Torres** held similarly overlapping roles. Zerpa combined positions in the Ministry of Economy and Finance, BANDES, FONDEN, and multilateral organizations with his appointment as an external director of PDVSA. Marco Torres, for his part, has 16 direct ties to Maduro and was appointed an external director of PDVSA in 2018, after holding positions at the Bank of Venezuela, Banco Bicentenario, the Central Bank of Venezuela (BCV), the Ministry of Economy and Finance, and later the Ministry of Food. In both cases, their structural significance stems from how one person connected financial decisions, public-resource management, and the oil company's corporate leadership.

Figure 4

Rodolfo Clemente Marco Torres's network within Nicolás Maduro's network of influence





Source: Transparencia Venezuela database

In this context, Marco Torres can be seen as a link between different sectors, rather than as the oil sector's primary operator. His significance comes from the way his roles connect finance, foreign exchange, food, and oil. Records related to investigations into alleged import overpricing and international sanctions add another layer of exposure, which is important to distinguish from his formally documented positions. Taken together, these records help us understand the overlap between institutional roles and investigative risk, while recognizing that holding these positions does not prove the allegations under investigation.

1.4.2.3. Delcy Rodríguez and Tareck El Aissami in the Subnetwork: Cross-Sectoral Leadership

Including Delcy Rodríguez helps shed light on a new phase in this subnetwork. In 2015, Maduro appointed her director and vice president of International Affairs at PDVSA. In these roles, she worked within a corporate structure that included dozens of international subsidiaries. The super-network also records appointments Rodríguez made to positions at PDVSA and the Ministry of Petroleum. Her career therefore connects the diplomatic and economic-financial roles discussed in the previous section with the direct management of the energy sector.

Later, in 2024, Maduro appointed her Minister of the People's Power for Petroleum. During her tenure, the ministry oversaw at least 111 companies in the sector—65 in Venezuela and 46 abroad—including PDVSA, the Venezuelan Petroleum Corporation, Pequiven, INTEVEP, PDVSA Gas, and PDV Marina. It did not, however, include PDV Holding Inc., the owner of CITGO.

Tareck El Aissami is another figure who connects economic policy with the oil sector. He served as Minister of Petroleum and took part in appointing officials within the ministry. He is also linked to the PDVSA-Crypto case (section 3.6), an investigation involving PDVSA and the National Superintendency of Cryptoassets (Sunacrip). According to the investigation, since 2019, at least USD 16,960 million was embezzled through oil allocations to companies without administrative oversight. The scheme came to light in February 2023, leading police to arrest 60 people, and El Aissami resigned from his posts. Months later, Venezuelan authorities arrested him as well, identifying him as the leader of a corruption network.

The former minister's departure marked the collapse of one of the pillars of the Maduro government's financial architecture, given the large volume of public funds he managed through oil sales. Political analysts have noted that the PDVSA-Crypto operation revealed a power struggle among factions within the ruling party, including the faction represented by El Aissami.[1]

1 Las Americas Newspaper. Power Struggle Marks Tareck El Aissami's Downfall. Available at: https://www.diariolasamericas.com/america-latina/lucha-el-poder-marca-caida-tareck-el-aissami-n5332595 March 23, 2025

The network helps trace Tareck El Aissami's continued influence, from his time as Sectoral Vice President for the Economy and his tenure as head of the Ministry of Petroleum to records linking individuals in his inner circle with oil marketing, PDVSA-Cripto, Bancamiga, and other businesses.

1.4.2.4. Oil Marketing, Private Intermediaries, and Sanctions Evasion

The super-network includes a layer of relationships tied to the international trade of crude oil and the involvement of private intermediaries. This aspect has become especially significant as international sanctions have tightened.

For example, Antonio José Pérez Suárez has been linked to Maduro on eleven occasions. Since 2020, following his presidential appointment, he has served as PDVSA's vice president of Trade and Supply. He is connected both to records concerning PDVSA-Cripto and to investigations into accounts receivable from oil sales and possible ways of evading sanctions. His role is particularly important within the organization because it is directly tied to the sale and supply of PDVSA's main export product.

Another key figure in this layer is Álex Naín Saab Morán. At least 19 recorded connections link Saab directly to oil, PDVSA, or hydrocarbons. These include records tied to the sale of Venezuelan oil through Libre Abordo, which is owned by **Joaquín Leal and Alessandro Bazzoni**; investigations in Mexico into crude oil exchange operations; and Trenaco's project to drill wells in the Orinoco Oil Belt. Taken together, these records point to a direct connection between Saab and PDVSA, particularly through investigations into a structure set up to market Venezuelan oil.

1.4.2.5. Exposure to Corruption and Legal Proceedings

The breadth of the oil subnetwork is also reflected in the range of investigation categories linked to PDVSA. Of the 448 incident records associated with this node, 80 fall under the general category **"Acts of Corruption"**; 48 are specifically classified within the "PDVSA-Cripto" scheme; 17 relate to **"Operation Money Flight"**; 7 relate to investigations into bribes linked to Sargeant Marine; and another 7 relate to **"Sanctions Evasion."** There are also numerous records related to money laundering, embezzlement, bribery, and legal proceedings across various jurisdictions.

It's important to note that these figures represent relational records, not an equal number of cases or independent incidents. A single investigation can generate multiple relationships when it involves different individuals, companies, and transactions. Even so, the range of categories shows that within the super-network, PDVSA is not only a highly central institution as a state-owned enterprise but also a point of convergence for numerous cases, investigations, and transnational criminal risk structures.

Taken together, the evidence helps us describe the oil subnetwork linked to Nicolás Maduro as a structure connecting institutional leadership, financial management,

international marketing, and corruption risks. Maduro appears to be directly connected to PDVSA through repeated decisions about its leadership and, through various actors, to the industry's financial, operational, and commercial functions. Quevedo, Serrano, Malpica, Ramírez, Marco Torres, Zerpa, Rodríguez, El Aissami, Pérez Suárez, and others each play distinct coordinating roles within this structure, while Saab and other intermediaries extend its reach into transnational business and commercial networks.

This first chapter focuses on topological analysis: PDVSA's position within the network and the actors who connect it to each component. Chapter 5 presents the reconstruction of designations, cases, and amounts, examining the capture and institutional deterioration of PDVSA, the corruption risks, and the transformation of its model.

1.4.3. Security and Defense Component

The security and defense component appears in the first-degree network through four nodes: **Vladimir Padrino López, Néstor Luis Reverol Torres, Gustavo Enrique González López**, and a record corresponding to the **National Liberation Army (ELN)**. Given the small number of nodes, it's best to avoid drawing structural conclusions from this component alone. It would also be helpful to clearly describe the nature and source of the ELN-related entry, which is interpreted in Chapters 8 and 9. Taken together, this pattern suggests the coexistence of an apparently formal institutional framework and parallel operational relationships, especially in sensitive areas such as territorial control and illicit economies.

- Vladimir Padrino López
- Néstor Luis Reverol Torres
- National Liberation Army (ELN)
- Gustavo Enrique González López

This subnetwork, marked by coordination between the military command and ties to criminal armed groups, helps sustain and protect the political-economic core. Its main role is not administrative; instead, it helps preserve the coercive stability of the corruption system.

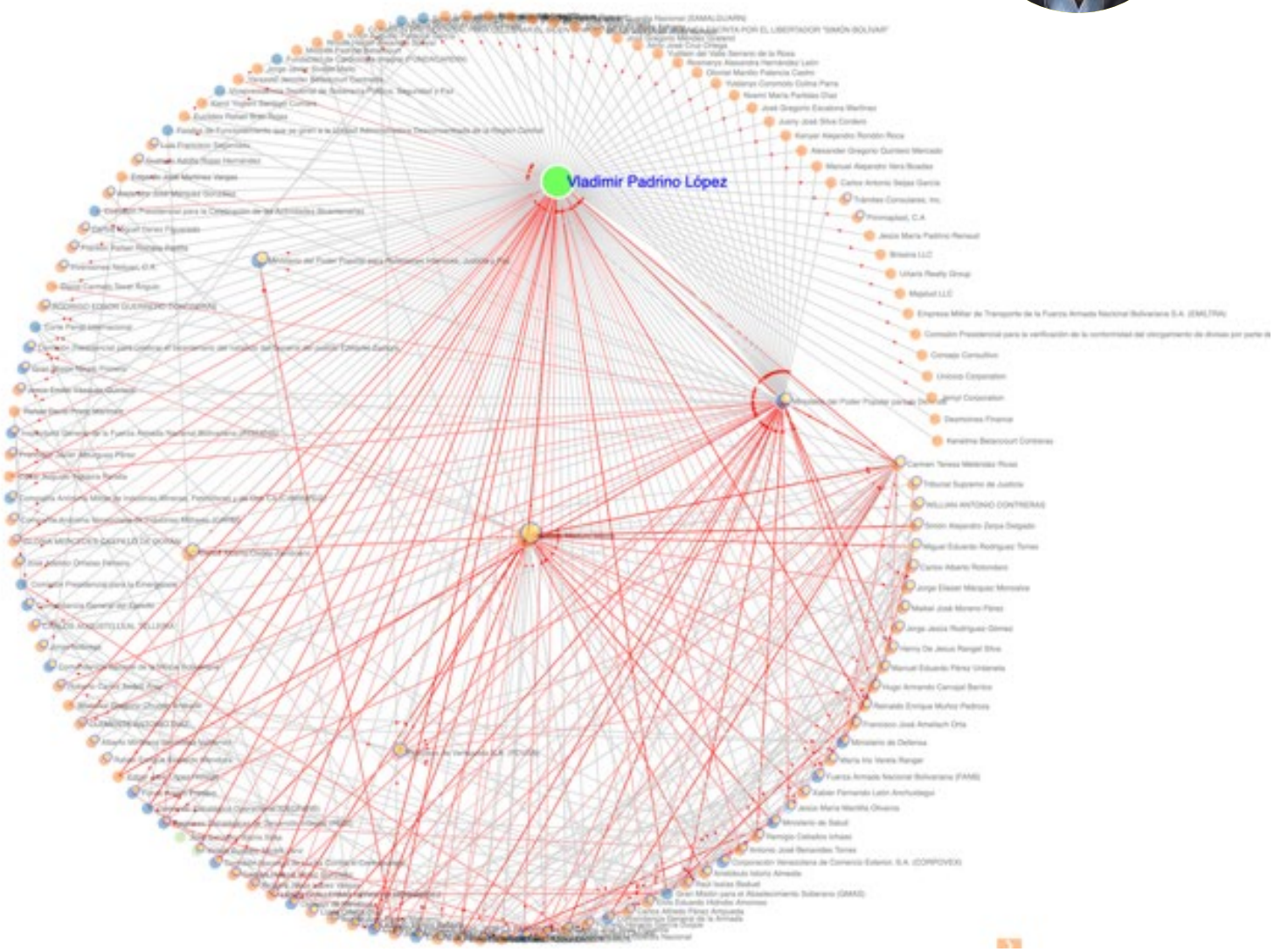
Meanwhile, the directed relationships in Vladimir Padrino López's first-degree network suggest that this node serves as the operational hub of **Nicolás Maduro's Security/ Military cluster**. The table shows frequent interactions classified as **"Positions Held"** and **"Designated Individuals,"** especially within the Ministry of Popular Power for Defense, the Strategic Operational Command (CEOFANB), the Strategic Regions for Comprehensive Defense (REDI), the Bolivarian National Guard, and various decentralized administrative units that directly manage budget allocations. This pattern suggests a sustained ability to appoint and delegate individuals responsible for funds, budgetary projects, procurement committees, and logistical structures.

As a result, control reaches beyond the military chain of command to include the financial circuits of the defense sector.

Figure 5

Vladimir Padrino López's network within Nicolás Maduro's sphere of influence





Source: Transparencia Venezuela database

The network also includes interactions linked to alleged “Acts of Corruption”, with references to CAMIMPEG, CORPOVEX, the CLAP program, and relationships with generals involved in business activities and government contracts (the “Club 35” case published by OCCRP). It also refers to international investigations into alleged drug trafficking and human rights violations.

In Vladimir Padrino López’s case, the combination of official roles—including Minister of Defense, Sectoral Vice President for Political Sovereignty, and member of presidential commissions on foreign exchange controls—with records linked to opaque contracting schemes and business structures involving family members points to an overlap between coercive authority, budget administration, and access to strategic revenues.

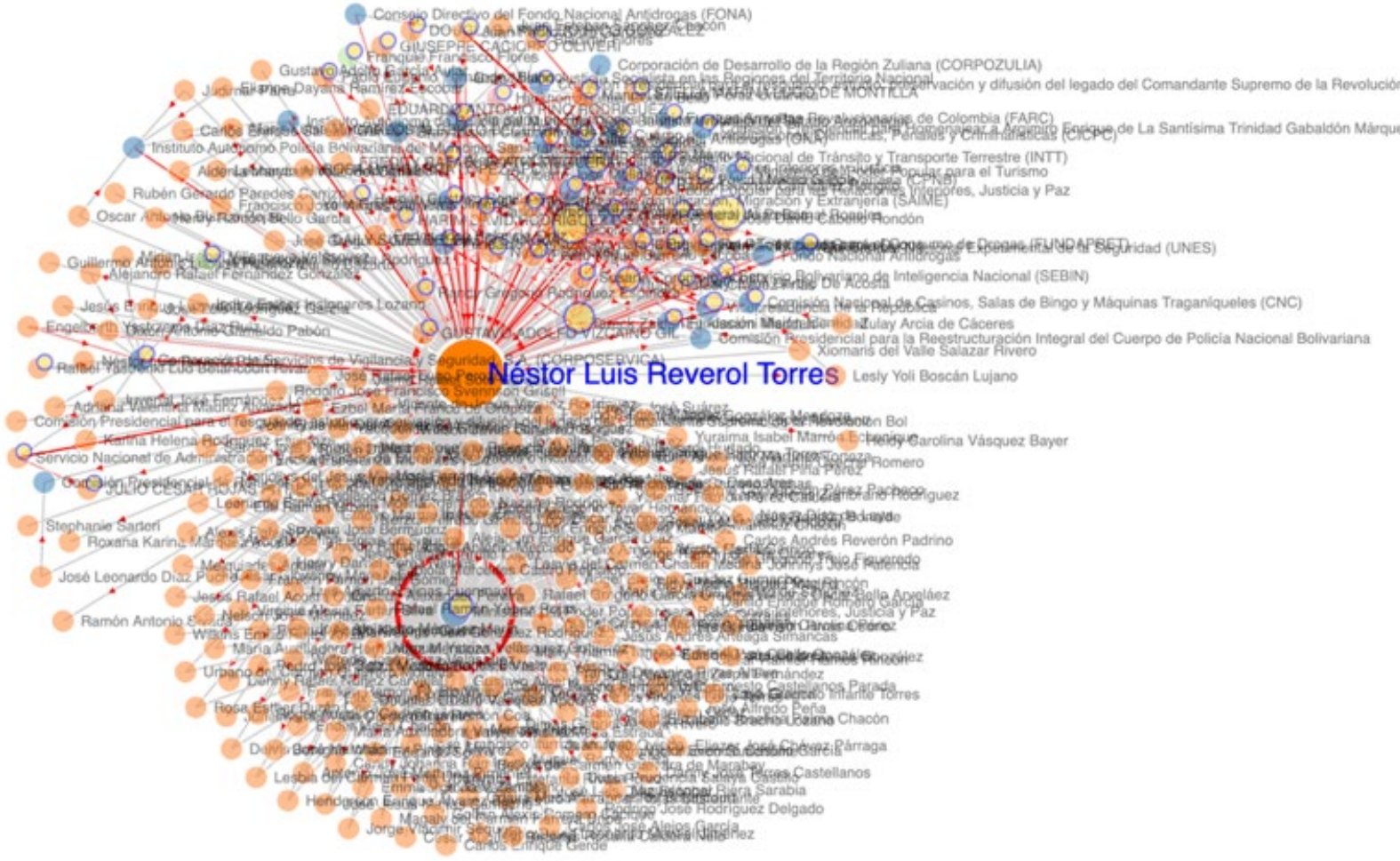
Structurally, **Padrino López’s** network extends beyond traditional, formal military command. It also encompasses state-owned enterprises such as CAVIM, CAMIMPEG, and AGROFANB; sovereign supply programs (GMAS); and mechanisms of territorial control. One hypothesis, which remains unproven, is that Nicolás Maduro’s subnetwork in the security and military sector has served as a platform for coercive stabilization while also providing a space for interaction between the armed forces and strategic economic circuits. The concentration of appointments and budget delegations suggests that Padrino López’s primary role is to consolidate institutional loyalties through control of resources and positions. This supports the hypothesis that the military dimension is the principal mechanism for shielding the political-economic core of the modeled system.

However, through **Néstor Luis Reverol Torres**, Nicolás Maduro’s network expanded to include 274 actors. Reverol is a prominent figure in the Security/Military cluster, given his history of overseeing police and administrative agencies and managing seized assets. These are especially sensitive areas for maintaining the coercive stability of the super-corruption network and the Venezuelan state’s criminal-institutional architecture. His connections include the Ministry of Popular Power for Internal Relations, Justice, and Peace, as well as security and institutional management bodies such as the General Police Council, the Bolivarian National Police, SAIME, and surveillance agencies. This pattern suggests a sustained ability to **establish hierarchies, appoint commanders, and organize internal security mechanisms**. In this way, he plays a key role in coercive governance through chains of command and operational networks with access to resources, identities, and territorial control.



Figure 6

Néstor Luis Reverol's network within Nicolás Maduro's sphere of influence



Source: Transparencia Venezuela database

Through Reverol, Maduro's network incorporated elements that helped strengthen the management of **criminal risks and exposure**. These included records linked to **international sanctions** and positions with the authority to manage strategic information and assets, such as the presidency of the National Service for the Administration and Disposal of Secured or Seized/Confiscated/Forfeited Assets, as well as roles in foundations and agencies related to drugs and security.

Finally, family or relational ties (for example, references to appointments of close associates), along with the coexistence of functions related to public safety, documentation, identification, and the administration of forfeited assets, show how institutional coercion and control over operational channels overlap. Structurally, **Reverol** complements the cluster's military command function and helps stabilize it through police, bureaucratic, and asset control. In this way, he reinforces the political core's ability to maintain its loyalties.

The coercive capacities associated with this component are examined in Chapter 8. Their convergence with illicit markets and forms of territorial control is analyzed in Chapter 9.

1.4.4. Diplomatic Subnetwork and International Support

The diplomatic subnetwork linked to Nicolás Maduro has two distinct but closely connected dimensions. The first is the institutional apparatus responsible for carrying out Venezuelan foreign policy; the second encompasses relations with foreign governments that provided political, economic, energy, financial, or security cooperation during his administration.

The **Ministry of the People's Power for Foreign Affairs** serves as the main institutional hub of this component. The super-network records **69 direct interactions initiated by Nicolás Maduro**—the highest number among all actors who received interactions from him. To put this figure in context, it is helpful to consider his political career: 57 of these interactions took place between 2006 and 2012, when Maduro served as Minister of Foreign Affairs, while the remaining 12 occurred from 2013 onward. This strong connection reflects both his direct leadership of the Foreign Ministry in earlier years and his continued influence over the diplomatic structure as president.

This continuity helps clarify the institutional structure. Unlike other branches of government, with which Maduro began interacting primarily after becoming president, the Foreign Ministry was already familiar territory. He had spent several years gaining experience, building connections, and acquiring the authority to appoint officials there. During that period, the "super network" records numerous decisions involving diplomatic and administrative posts. Later, after he became president, it also records new appointments at the helm of foreign policy.

Among the most significant actors in the diplomatic sphere during Maduro's presidency are:

- Ministry of the People's Power for Foreign Affairs
- Delcy Eloína Rodríguez Gómez
- Jorge Alberto Arreaza Montserrat
- Samuel Reinaldo Moncada Acosta
- Rafael Darío Ramírez Carreño

The career paths of these figures also highlight connections between different institutional spheres. Delcy Rodríguez was appointed Minister of Foreign Affairs in 2014 and later took on roles in the Vice Presidency, economic management, and the oil sector. **Jorge Arreaza** later served as Foreign Minister, **Samuel Moncada** held key diplomatic responsibilities, and **Rafael Ramírez** moved from leading the oil sector to representing the country internationally. Together, these career paths connect foreign policy with other economic and political parts of the network.

The external dimension has a different shape. The super-network records direct interactions between Nicolás Maduro and Vladimir Putin, Hassan Rouhani, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, and Raúl Castro. However, these interactions were relatively infrequent, so the figures cannot be considered central actors based only on the number of direct interactions. Their importance lies mainly in the substance and context of the bilateral cooperation underlying these relationships.

In **Russia's** case, the relationship extended beyond traditional diplomacy. During Maduro's administration, Russia worked with Venezuela in the political, energy, and military spheres and became one of its main international supporters. This collaboration included defense support, maintenance, and assistance with military systems; Russian involvement in Venezuela's energy sector; and diplomatic support in international forums. As a result, the relationship directly connected the diplomatic subnetwork with the energy and military components of the structure.

Iran played a distinct role, with a primary focus on energy, trade, and technological cooperation between two states facing severe international restrictions. During Maduro's administration, the two countries expanded their arrangements for exchanging fuels, hydrocarbons, and commercial goods, later formalizing a long-term bilateral cooperation framework. This relationship also connected diplomatic ties with the Venezuelan state's energy and trade needs.

Turkey's relationship with Venezuela was primarily political and commercial. During the Maduro era, Turkey became a more prominent partner in a range of economic exchanges, including the trade of Venezuelan gold and other transactions amid escalating sanctions. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's presence in the super-network is therefore relevant to understanding this bilateral link. However, the only recorded direct interaction with Maduro does not support attributing to Erdoğan a structural centrality comparable to that of Venezuelan actors in the diplomatic component.

Finally, **Cuba** presents a distinct configuration with greater structural depth. The super-network records a direct interaction between Nicolás Maduro and Raúl Castro, as well as evidence of Cuban influence and presence within the Venezuelan government.

Cooperation between Venezuela and Cuba has grown over the years through arrangements that exchange oil for services, alongside technical and professional support. During Maduro's administration, the relationship also continued to involve security and intelligence. This makes it helpful to view Cuba not only as a diplomatic ally, but also as an external state actor whose ties with Venezuela shape several parts of the state apparatus. This aspect is especially significant because it connects the diplomatic network with the **security and military spheres**. Various sources have documented the presence of Cuban personnel and their cooperation in intelligence, security, and institutional support in Venezuela. Together, these ties bring international cooperation, political support, and security capabilities into one relationship—a combination not seen to the same degree in the other external relationships examined here.

Taken together, the evidence points to a network of international support in which each country plays a distinct role. Russia connects Venezuela's political core with diplomatic, energy, and military cooperation; Iran contributes through energy, trade, and technology; Turkey is involved mainly in trade and asset exchanges; and Cuba has a relationship marked by greater historical continuity, spanning political, economic, security, and intelligence matters. Because these relationships serve different purposes, their importance cannot be measured solely by the number of direct interactions recorded in the super-network.

In this context, the diplomatic dimension extends well beyond protocol. Nicolás Maduro's time as foreign minister, his later role as president in shaping foreign policy, and documented cooperation with allied governments show how foreign policy also helped mobilize resources, capabilities, and political support on the international stage.

1.4.5. Executive-Administrative Component and Coordination with the Judicial System

This executive-administrative cluster is the main formal channel through which Nicolás Maduro's presidential authority is represented within the government. Unlike the financial, oil, military, and diplomatic subnetworks, it is not centered on a single sector. Instead, it brings together public administration across the executive branch through appointments, the allocation of responsibilities, the delegation of authority, and coordination among its various levels.

This component is particularly dense. Four of its main institutional nodes account for 59 direct links to Nicolás Maduro: the **Vice Presidency of the Republic**, with 24; the **Presidency of the Republic**, with 16; the **Ministry of the People's Power for the Office of the Presidency and Monitoring of Government Management**, with 11; and the

Council of Ministers, with 8. The categories of **"Appointed Individuals"** and **"Positions Held"** are most prominent in these relationships, suggesting that a substantial part of Maduro's immediate network is connected to the composition and reorganization of the executive branch itself.

Among the main institutional and individual actors in this component are:

- Office of the Vice President of the Republic
- Presidency of the Republic
- Ministry of the People's Power for the Office of the Presidency and Government Management Oversight
- Council of Ministers
- Supreme Court of Justice (TSJ)
- Public Prosecutor's Office
- Delcy Eloína Rodríguez Gómez
- Tareck Zaidan El Aissami Maddah
- Carlos Erik Malpica Flores
- Carmen Teresa Meléndez Rivas
- Vladimir Padrino López
- Néstor Luis Reverol Torres
- Tarek William Saab Halabi
- Gladys María Gutiérrez Alvarado
- Maikel José Moreno Pérez
- Juan José Mendoza Jover
- Calixto Antonio Ortega Ríos

The Office of the Vice President of the Republic plays a particularly important role. Its 24 direct interactions with Maduro reflect appointments to the Executive Vice Presidency and to sectoral vice presidencies overseeing areas such as the economy, planning, social development, political sovereignty, security, and public works, among others. Those who held these positions include J**orge Arreaza, Tareck El Aissami, Carmen Meléndez, Ricardo Menéndez, Rafael Ramírez, Néstor Reverol, and Delcy Rodríguez**.

This structure shows how, institutionally, the Vice Presidency served as a link between presidential authority and the state's specialized components. Several figures active in the economic, oil, military, or administrative subnetworks also held sectoral vice-presidential positions, formally connecting areas across different institutions.

A similar role can be seen in the **Office of the President, the Ministry of the Presidency, and the Council of Ministers**. The super-network includes appointments of ministers, deputy ministers, presidential commissioners, and officials responsible for monitoring public policies, as well as sectoral vice presidencies overseeing economic, territorial, security, and sovereignty matters. Figures such as **Carlos Erik Malpica Flores, Carmen Meléndez, Vladimir Padrino López, Néstor Reverol, and Carlos Alberto Osorio Zambrano also appear in these roles**.

Together, these relationships form an **executive core that helps coordinate different areas**. Its importance stems not only from Maduro's formal position as president, but also from the recurring decisions to bring individuals into these structures, transfer them, or reassign them—placing them in roles linked directly to the Presidency and Vice Presidency, where they would later oversee financial, energy, military, territorial, or security matters.

1.4.5.1. Coordination with the Judicial System

The relationship between this executive core and the justice system has a distinctive structure. Its importance stems not from frequent exclusive interactions between Maduro and the Supreme Court of Justice, but from the way the **presidential network overlaps with a judicial structure connected to several actors in his political and institutional sphere**.

In the current super-network, the Supreme Court of Justice has recorded 112 interactions with 51 different actors. Among those most frequently connected to the Court are Maikel José Moreno Pérez, with 17 records; Gladys María Gutiérrez Alvarado, with 15; Juan José Mendoza Jover, with 10; and Calixto Antonio Ortega Ríos, with 5.

The TSJ's internal structure also reflects successive appointment paths and leadership roles. Gladys Gutiérrez served as president of the TSJ and of the Constitutional Chamber during part of the period analyzed. Maikel Moreno served as a justice, president of the Criminal Cassation Chamber, vice president, and later president of the Court. Juan José Mendoza Jover served as a justice of the Constitutional Chamber and second vice president, while Calixto Ortega Ríos served as a senior justice of that same Chamber.

The connection to the political core is also clear among figures in the immediate networks of Maduro and the TSJ. These include **Delcy Rodríguez, Cilia Flores, Diosdado Cabello, Gladys Gutiérrez, Juan José Mendoza Jover, Tarek William Saab, Vladimir Padrino López, Calixto Ortega Ríos, and Tibisay Lucena**.

Some of these connections can be traced directly through documentation. In 2010, the National Assembly, then presided over by **Cilia Flores**, took part in appointing TSJ justices, including Juan José Mendoza Jover. Later, during **Diosdado Cabello's** presidency of the National Assembly, additional justices were appointed in 2014 and 2015. In 2017, the **National Constituent Assembly, presided over by Delcy Rodríguez**, ratified the justices

of the Supreme Court of Justice. While these events involved different processes and took place at different times, together they highlight continuing links between the actors in the political core examined here and the formation or ratification of the country's highest judicial body.

The Public Prosecutor's Office is another important part of this picture. Within the super-network, it has **134 interactions with 77 different actors**, primarily through positions held and appointments. **Tarek William Saab**, who is directly connected to Maduro and later led the Public Prosecutor's Office, is a key figure in this component. His role is reflected in the many appointments and personnel changes involving prosecutors and other officials.

Taken together, the evidence helps us distinguish **two complementary levels within this cluster**. The first is a highly concentrated executive-administrative core organized around the Presidency, the Vice Presidency, the Office of the Presidency, and the Council of Ministers. The second shows how this core connects with the justice system, as seen in the overlap of actors, appointment and ratification processes, and links to the Supreme Court of Justice (TSJ) and the Public Prosecutor's Office.

From a structural perspective, this component helps show how the President's ability to shape the administration intersects with the institutions responsible for producing, interpreting, and enforcing legal decisions. Considered alongside independent evidence that the separation of powers has eroded, this structure is consistent with a gradual weakening of institutional checks and balances. At the same time, a judge's, prosecutor's, or official's position—and their proximity to the presidential inner circle—does not, on its own, show that a specific judicial decision was made at the executive branch's direction.

Chapter 2 discusses the institutional conditions of state capture that frame this interplay. Chapter 7 focuses specifically on judicial capture, impunity, and their disciplinary effects.

1.5. Cilia Flores's Network

1.5.1. Immediate Structure

Cilia Adela Flores de Maduro's immediate network differs in structure from Nicolás Maduro's. While his network focuses mainly on appointments and positions within the state apparatus, hers brings together business, institutional, and family ties, as well as records of investigative exposure, sanctions, and reputational concerns.

For this analysis, we standardized family relationships and classified them by kinship. This allowed us to distinguish direct from indirect family ties and separate business associations that had previously been classified as kinship ties.

The resulting network has three main components. The **first is business and corporate**, consisting primarily of relationships classified as **"Partner-linked,"** which connect Cilia Flores to companies and corporate structures through intermediaries. The second is **"Institutional-administrative"**, consisting mainly of positions held, appointments, and relationships with public institutions. This component includes individuals who have held various positions within the state apparatus. The recurrence of these career paths helps us identify institutional concentration and continuity, though it does not, on its own, demonstrate informal subordination, personal trust, or coordinated participation in illicit conduct.

The third component is the **family** component, which consists of documented kinship ties. Its importance within the network comes not from the number of identified family members, but from the fact that some are connected to public offices, companies, economic activities, or investigations. **Carlos Erik Malpica Flores** offers a clear example of how family ties, government roles, financial structures, and business relationships can intersect.

One of the most notable features of Cilia Flores's network is the way these components come together. Some nodes or actors link family, public, and private spheres, creating bridges between areas that are distinct in formal terms. The evidence helps us trace these intersections and understand their structural significance.

As a result, Cilia Flores's position in the super-network is defined less by an ability to reshape institutions at the macro level and more by her place at the intersection of family, institutional, and business relationships. The following subsections explore these components individually, including their quantitative distribution and the actors central to the main structural overlaps.

1.5.2. Categories of Interaction

Cilia Adela Flores de Maduro's immediate network includes 162 interactions, connecting her directly with 113 distinct actors. The largest category is **"Associated Partners,"** with 58 interactions (35.80%). This is followed by institutional relationships from **"Positions Held,"** with 28 (17.28%), and **"Appointed Individuals,"** with 22 (13.58%). Together, these two categories account for 50 interactions (30.86%), covering both the positions and appointments Cilia Flores received and the appointments she made as part of her duties. This distinction is discussed in sections 1.5.4 and 1.5.7.

Family-related interactions, meanwhile, total 29 (17.90%) and involve 29 different family members.

Category	Interaction	% of total
Associated Individuals	58	35.80 %
Positions held	28	17.28 %
Appointees	22	13.58 %
Confirmed family relationships	29	17.90 %
Reported/unverified kinship	4	2.47 %
Corruption incidents*	12	7.41 %
International sanctions	4	2.47 %
Related News	5	3.09 %
Total	162	100.00 %

Source: Transparencia Venezuela database
Note: The aggregated category of corruption incidents includes 10 entries under "Corruption Incidents," one under "Corruption Incidents—Administrative Irregularities," and one under "Corruption Incidents—Gold."

Taken together, these interaction categories reveal a clear picture of how business associations, institutional trajectories, and documented family relationships come together. The key features of this family component are outlined below.

1.5.3. Family Subnetwork

Cilia Adela Flores de Maduro's immediate family subnetwork consists of 29 ties to various family members, representing 17.90% of the directed relationships in her first-degree network. These ties include nine nephews and nieces, six siblings, three children, and two cousins, as well as a spouse, an ex-husband, a stepson, a brother-in-law, a former brother-in-law, a brother-in-law-in-law, a co-father-in-law, a former daughter-in-law, and a nephew-in-law. Together, these connections link different branches of **the Flores, Malpica, and Gavidia families**, along with **Nicolás Maduro** and his immediate family circle.

This subnetwork is especially noteworthy because family ties overlap with other kinds of relationships. Some relatives are connected only through genealogy, while others are also linked through public offices, appointments, business relationships, partnerships, or investigative cases. In this way, the family subnetwork offers a point of connection between institutional and business components.

One particularly significant case is that of **Carlos Erik Malpica Flores**, Cilia Flores's nephew. Across the complete super-network, he is involved in 417 relational records connecting him to 162 different actors. Of these records, 203 correspond to **"Positions Held"** and 145 to **"Appointed Individuals,"** highlighting the breadth of his institutional career. These figures do not represent 348 distinct positions or administrative acts; instead, they include relationships arising from appointments, delegations, and decisions in which Malpica appears as a designee, an official, or the issuer of new appointments.

His documented career connects him, over time, to several important roles within the state apparatus. While Nicolás Maduro held leadership positions in the National Assembly and later in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Malpica carried out administrative and support work and served as executive secretary-general of the Ministry of Popular Power for Foreign Affairs, with delegated authority. He later served as senior director of the Pro-Patria 2000 Foundation, presidential commissioner for economic and financial affairs, deputy treasurer, and then national treasurer. He also served as senior director of BANDES and was authorized to lead the National Treasury Office, overseeing contracting, administration, and payment processing. He then joined PDVSA as an internal director on its Board of Directors and Vice President of Finance, while also serving on the Simón Bolívar Fund for Reconstruction.

The continuity of this career path is especially significant given his direct relationship with Nicolás Maduro. The super network contains 49 entries linking the two individuals: 28 classified as **"Positions Held,"** 18 as **"Designated Individuals,"** 2 as **"Corruption Incidents,"** and 1 as "Related News." Rather than pointing to a relationship tied to a single position, the evidence traces a career across the National Assembly, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Presidency, public finance, and PDVSA.

This institutional dimension is complemented by business and asset-related connections. Malpica has 23 **"Associated Partner"** relationships and one **"Owner"** relationship, linking him to companies incorporated into the super network in Venezuela and other jurisdictions. It is worth noting that the "Associated Partner" category documents a corporate association, but does not by itself establish ownership, effective control, or economic benefit.

Finally, his network includes a distinct component related to investigative reporting and sanctions: 13 entries under **"Acts of Corruption,"** 2 sources associated with allegations of **drug trafficking**, 6 under **"International Sanctions,"** and 3 under **"Related News."** The documented contexts include journalistic investigations into companies linked to members of the Malpica family, measures adopted by various jurisdictions, and references to operations carried out during his tenure at the National Treasury and PDVSA. In particular, the overlap in timing between his financial **roles** and operations later examined in the **"Money Flight"** case provides relevant context. However, because Malpica has not been publicly charged by U.S. authorities in that case, this temporal or institutional proximity does not imply criminal liability.

Malpica is not the only case in which different types of ties overlap. **Walter Jacob Gavidia Flores**, Cilia's son, combines institutional relationships with a significant presence in the business world. **Iriamni Malpica Flores**, her niece, has primarily corporate connections, while **Numidia Rocío Flores**, her cousin, and **Giuson Fernando Flores**, her brother, focus much of their interaction on the institutional sphere. The latter two, along with **Magaly Gutiérrez Viña** and **Érika Alexandra Albornoz Gavidia**, are discussed in the following subsection because of their involvement in administrative and legal roles.

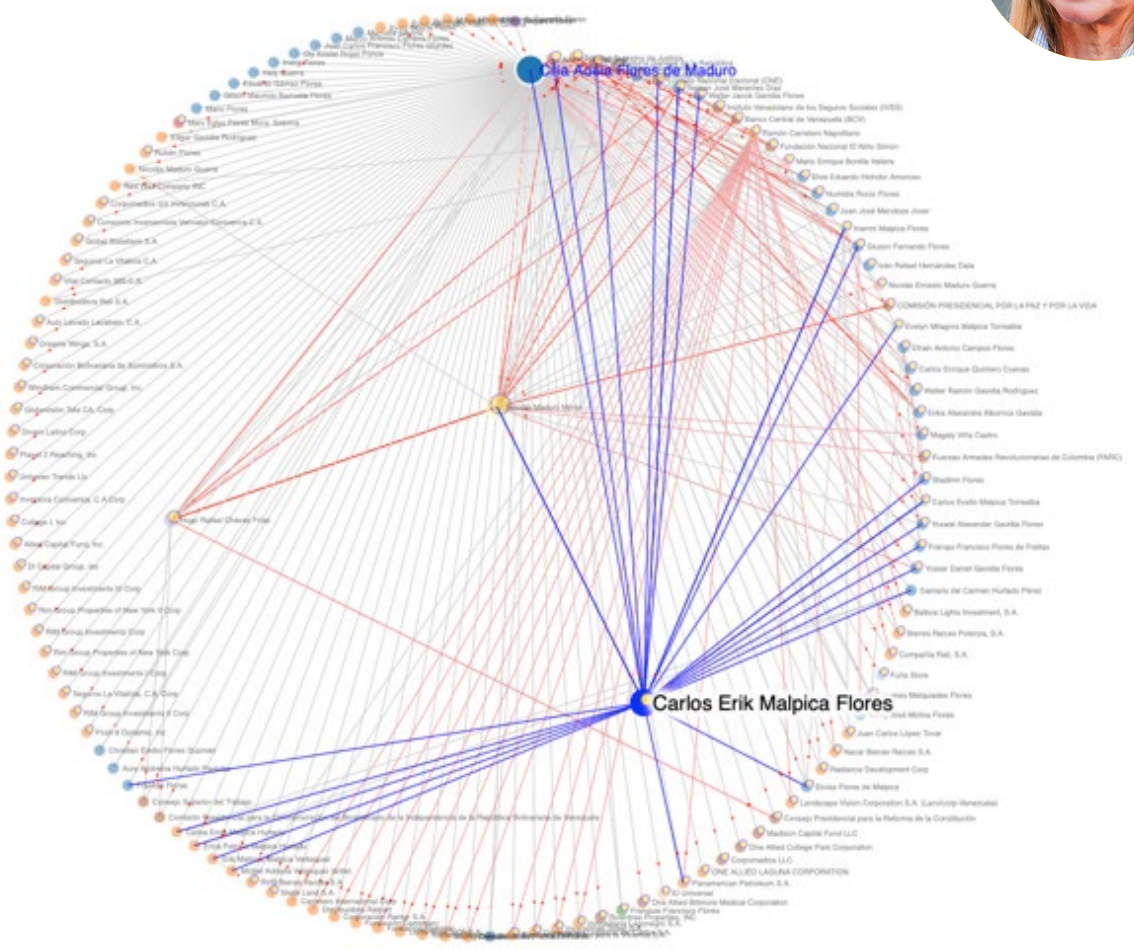
The family component also includes Franqui Francisco Flores de Freitas, Cilia Flores's nephew, whose connections span family and institutional relationships, as well as interactions linked to the legal proceedings in the United States concerning conspiracy to import cocaine.

Overall, the family subnetwork has a varied structure. Some members remain within the family sphere, while others also build connections with public institutions, companies, financial roles, or investigations. The Flores family's structural significance stems not from its size or density, but from the fact that some members combine kinship ties with key positions in other areas of the super-network.



Figure 7.

Family subnetwork of Cilia Adela Flores de Maduro



Source: Transparencia Venezuela database

1.5.4. Institutional-Administrative Component

The institutional-administrative component comprises 50 directed relationships within Cilia Flores's first-degree network: 28 classified as **"Positions Held"** (17.28%) and 22 as **"Appointed Individuals"** (13.58%). Together, these represent 30.86% of the directed relationships in her first-degree network and, after the business component, form its most significant relational dimension.

It is important to note that these 50 interactions do not mean Cilia Flores made 50 appointments. This category includes both the positions and designations she received and relationships arising from appointments, confirmations, and institutional decisions in which she was involved. The super-network documents her career in the National Assembly, the Office of the Attorney General of the Republic, and various presidential commissions. It also records decisions made in the course of her institutional duties concerning administrative staff, contracting bodies, the Central Bank of Venezuela, and the Supreme Court of Justice.

This component also draws attention to a group of actors whose trajectories intersect with the family dimension discussed in the previous section. The cases of **Magaly Gutiérrez Viña, Numidia Rocío Flores, Érika Alexandra Albornoz Gavidia, and Giuson Fernando Flores** illustrate this intersection particularly clearly. Their significance reflects not only kinship or family ties, but also documented appointments and the subsequent assumption of administrative, contractual, or legal roles in various institutions.

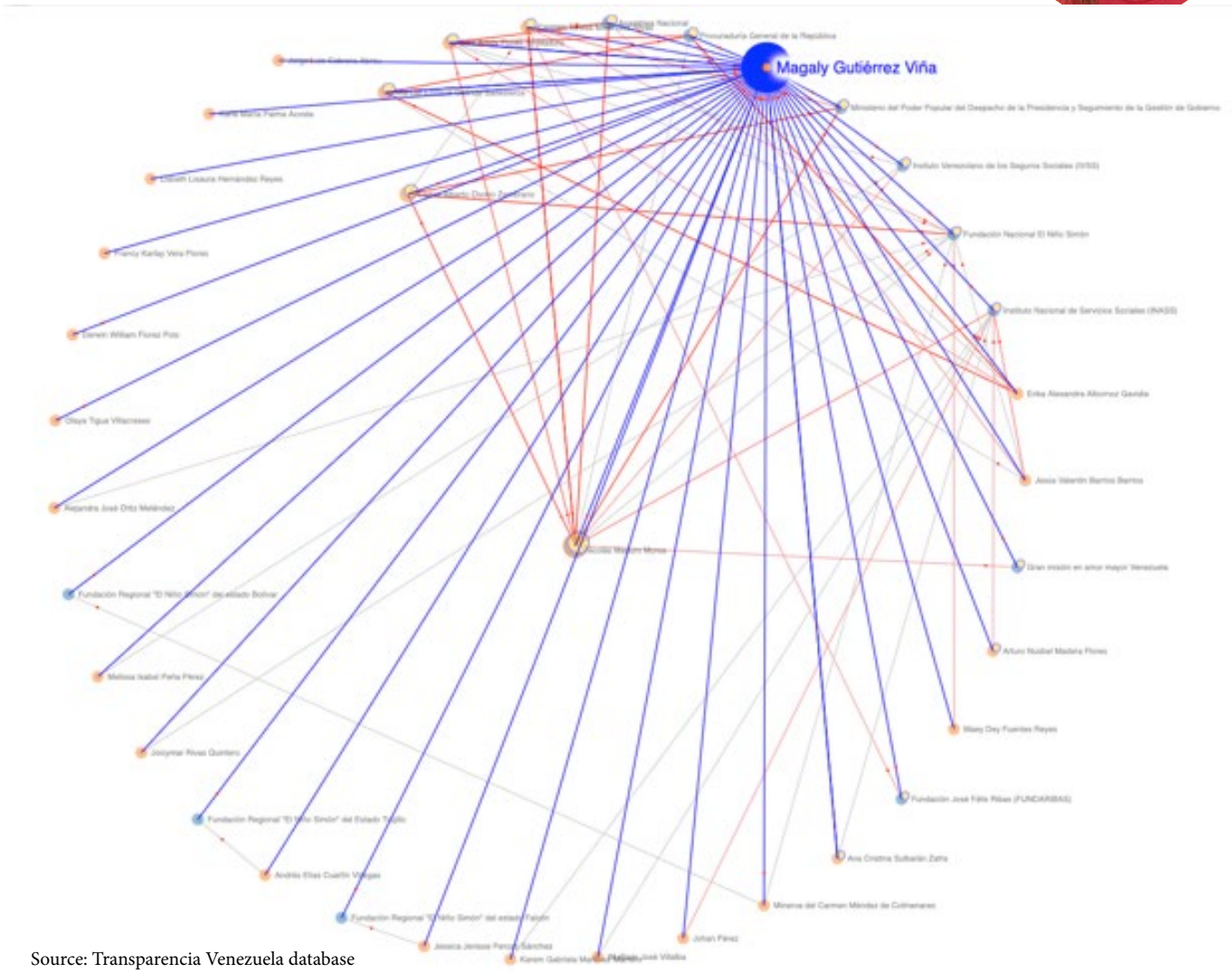
In the case of Magaly Gutiérrez Viña, Cilia Flores's former daughter-in-law, the available evidence points to several appointments made by Cilia Flores in the National Assembly and, later, in the Office of the Attorney General of the Republic. These included roles such as acting director general of Human Development, director general of the Office of the President of the National Assembly, acting manager of Human Resources, and comprehensive coordinator of the Attorney General's Office. Several appointments also explicitly granted signing authority or powers related to human resources, contracts, competitive bidding, and other administrative procedures.

Her institutional career continued with later appointments that were no longer directly attributable to Cilia Flores. The super-network also includes other roles within the Attorney General's Office and, during Nicolás Maduro's administration, her appointment as head of the Venezuelan Social Security Institute (IVSS), along with positions at other social policy agencies. Taken together, the evidence documents a long period of institutional continuity, while not establishing that Cilia determined the subsequent appointments made by other officials.



Figure 8

Magaly Gutiérrez Viña's institutional-administrative subnetwork within Cilia Adela Flores de Maduro's network



Source: Transparencia Venezuela database

Numidia Rocío Flores, Cilia's cousin, has also built a career spanning multiple institutions. During Cilia Flores's presidency of the National Assembly, she was appointed Director General of Human Development, authorized to sign employment contracts, and served as an alternate member of the Public Procurement Commission's technical committee. These roles gave her a formal part in personnel management and internal hiring processes.

Later, Numidia Rocío Flores held positions at the Comptroller General's Office, particularly after her appointment by **Manuel Enrique Galindo Ballesteros**. Her responsibilities there included human resources, the separation of powers, the boards of directors of institutional foundations, and procurement commissions, along with certain administrative authorities. Taken together, her career reflects both her movement among and her lasting presence within oversight and public administration institutions.

Figure 9

Numidia Rocío Flores Subnetwork

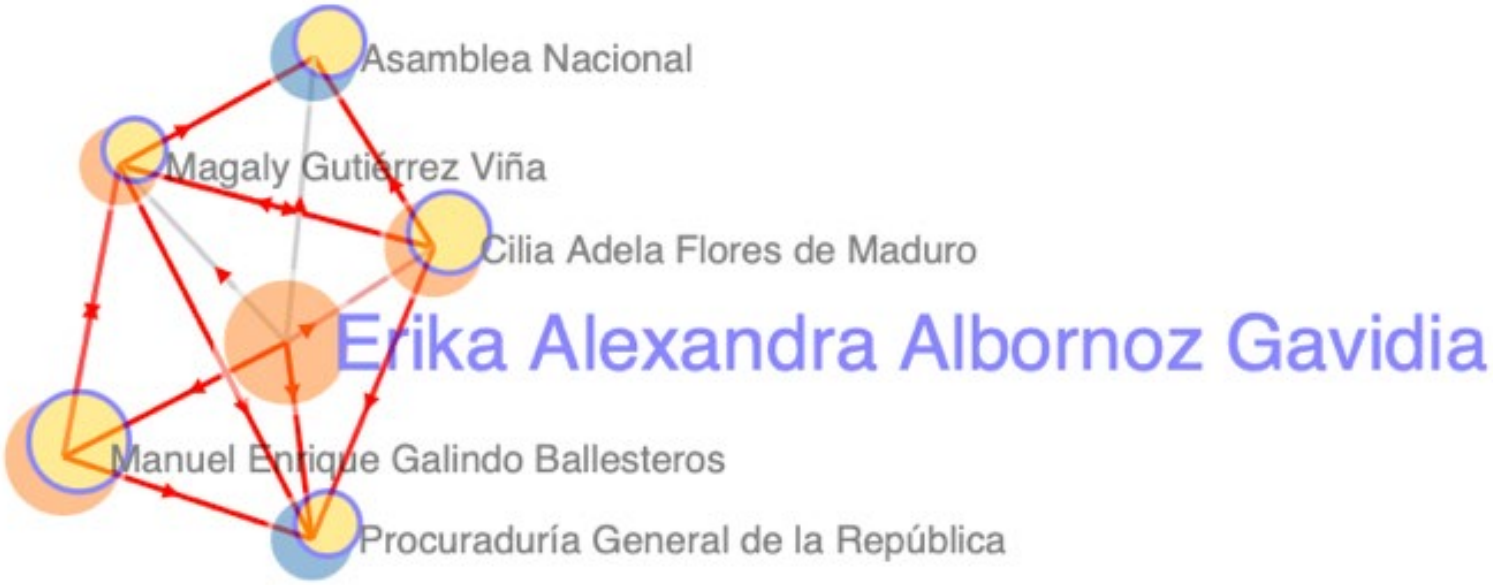


Source: Transparencia Venezuela database

Furthermore, **Érika Alexandra Albornoz Gavidia's** career path, as Cilia Flores's niece-in-law, offers a clear example of how family ties and administrative responsibilities can intersect. The super-network records that Cilia appointed her acting administrative manager of the Office of the Attorney General of the Republic in 2012. Later, by decision of Manuel Enrique Galindo Ballesteros, she served on the Procurement Commission and held roles as acting general administrative manager and asset manager, as well as serving in the technical division of the Permanent Procurement Commission. Together, these positions show her involvement in administration, asset management, and public procurement within the Attorney General's Office.

Figure 10

Érika Alexandra Albornoz Gavidia's Subnetwork



Source: Transparencia Venezuela database

Finally, **Giuson Fernando Flores**, Cilia Flores's brother, has built an institutional career that extends beyond his family ties. The super-network records show that he held positions in the National Assembly and the Latin American Parliament. They also note that, in 2013, Cilia Flores appointed him general manager of litigation at the Office of the Attorney General of the Republic. He later held other positions within the institution and was appointed Deputy Comptroller of the Republic in 2015. He also headed the Administrative Service for Identification, Migration, and Foreigners (Saime), a role he left after January 3, 2026. This case is significant because it illustrates how one actor remained connected across the legislative, judicial, and fiscal oversight spheres, while also highlighting the link between his relationship with Cilia Flores and her direct appointment of him.



Figure 11

Giuson Fernando Flores's Subnetwork



Source: Transparencia Venezuela database

These career paths point to a verifiable pattern of overlap between Cilia Flores's network of relationships and administrative, legal, procurement, and oversight roles within the state apparatus. In some cases, Cilia is directly linked to the initial appointment; in others, the same individuals later take on institutional roles following decisions made by third parties. This pattern highlights the continuity and institutional movement of certain actors linked to Cilia Flores, as well as the concentration of relevant administrative responsibilities across their career paths.

1.5.5. Business, Corporate, and Financial Component

The business component is the largest individual category within **Cilia Adela Flores de Maduro's** immediate network. The super-network records 58 interactions categorized as **"Associated Partner,"** accounting for 35.80% of the 162 directed relationships in her first-degree network. This makes the business component the largest of all interaction categories.

Two main strands emerge within this cluster: one linked to Panamanian businessman **Ramón Carretero Napolitano**, and the other to Venezuelan businessman **Raúl Antonio Gorrín Belisario**. Both are connected to extensive company networks and transnational operations, though their trajectories and methods differ. Their significance stems not only from the number of companies associated with them, but also from documented connections to government officials, contractors, relatives of Cilia Flores, and operations that were later investigated.

In **Ramón Carretero Napolitano's** case, the super-network reveals an extensive corporate structure, concentrated primarily in Panama and spanning construction, real estate, logistics, services, and hydrocarbons. These companies include **(i) Fundación Rammar, (ii) Corporación Ramar S.A., (iii) Fundación Carremarc, (iv) Carretero International Corp, (v) Inversiones Telaio S.A., (vi) Inmobiliaria Lagonegro S.A., (vii) Corporación Logística del Caribe S.A., (viii) Balboa Lights Investment S.A., (ix) Bienes Raíces Potenza S.A., (x) Panamerican Petroleum S.A., (xi) Red Wax Company INC, and (xii) Radiance Development Corp**, among others.

Carretero Napolitano's significance, however, extends beyond the large number of companies he accumulated. Documentation also shows that, between August 2013 and February 2014, his companies signed three contracts with the Propatria 2000 Foundation, worth approximately USD 700 million, to carry out infrastructure projects.[2] During that period, the Propatria 2000 Foundation was led by Carlos Erik Malpica Flores, Cilia Flores's nephew and one of the people whose record in the state's financial administration was previously examined.

Transparencia Venezuela documented transfers totaling at least USD 5.8 million from companies associated with Carretero Napolitano to Juan Carlos López Tovar and Iriamni Malpica Flores, Cilia Flores's niece and **Carlos Erik Malpica Flores's** sister. These records offer a clearer documented link than a simple coincidence of company names: they connect a government contractor with two members of the Malpica family.[3]

2 Transparencia Venezuela en el Exilio (2026), Cilia Flores: More than 30 years amassing power with Chávez and Maduro: https://transparenciave.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/FINAL-Cilia-Flores-mas-de-30-anos-amasando-poder-con-Chavez-y-Maduro_MAR-2026-1.pdf

3 Transparencia Venezuela, "His Name Is Carretero, but His Businesses Are Thriving Under Maduro and His Family": https://transparenciave.org/se-llama-carretero-pero-sus-negocios-vuelan-con-maduro-y-familia/

The second strand is linked to **Raúl Antonio Gorrín Belisario**. Thirty-one companies connected to Gorrín have been identified, and some of the structures and operations examined list members of Cilia Flores's inner circle.[4] His relevance extends beyond the corporate sphere, as judicial investigations in the United States have linked him to currency exchange schemes, bribery, and money laundering. For example, in 2018, U.S. authorities accused Gorrín of taking part in a scheme in which he allegedly paid bribes to high-ranking Venezuelan officials in exchange for access to currency exchange transactions at favorable rates. Court documents also describe how companies and bank accounts were used to make and conceal those payments. In 2022, a U.S. jury convicted **former national treasurer Claudia Díaz Guillén** and her husband for their roles in the scheme, while Gorrín remained charged as an alleged co-conspirator. These charges apply to Gorrín and the other participants identified in those proceedings, not to Cilia Flores.[5]

In 2024, a new indictment filed in the United States connected Gorrín to the Money Flight case for the first time. Before that, Gorrín had been under investigation in connection with the Alejandro Andrade case.[6]

The coexistence of the financial networks coordinated by **Carretero and Gorrín** highlights that the business dimension of the network linked to Cilia Flores is made up of more than one distinct circuit. One is primarily connected to government contracting, Panamanian companies, and documented relationships with members of the Malpica family. The other links business structures to transnational financial and foreign exchange operations that have been the subject of judicial investigations. Both networks come together within the broader super-network, alongside other actors from political and family circles.

4 Transparencia Venezuela en el Exilio (2026), Cilia Flores: Over 30 Years Building Power Under Chávez and Maduro: https://transparenciave.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/04/CILIA-FLORES-OVER-30-YEARS-BUILDING-POWER-UNDER-CHAVEZ-AND-MADURO.pdf

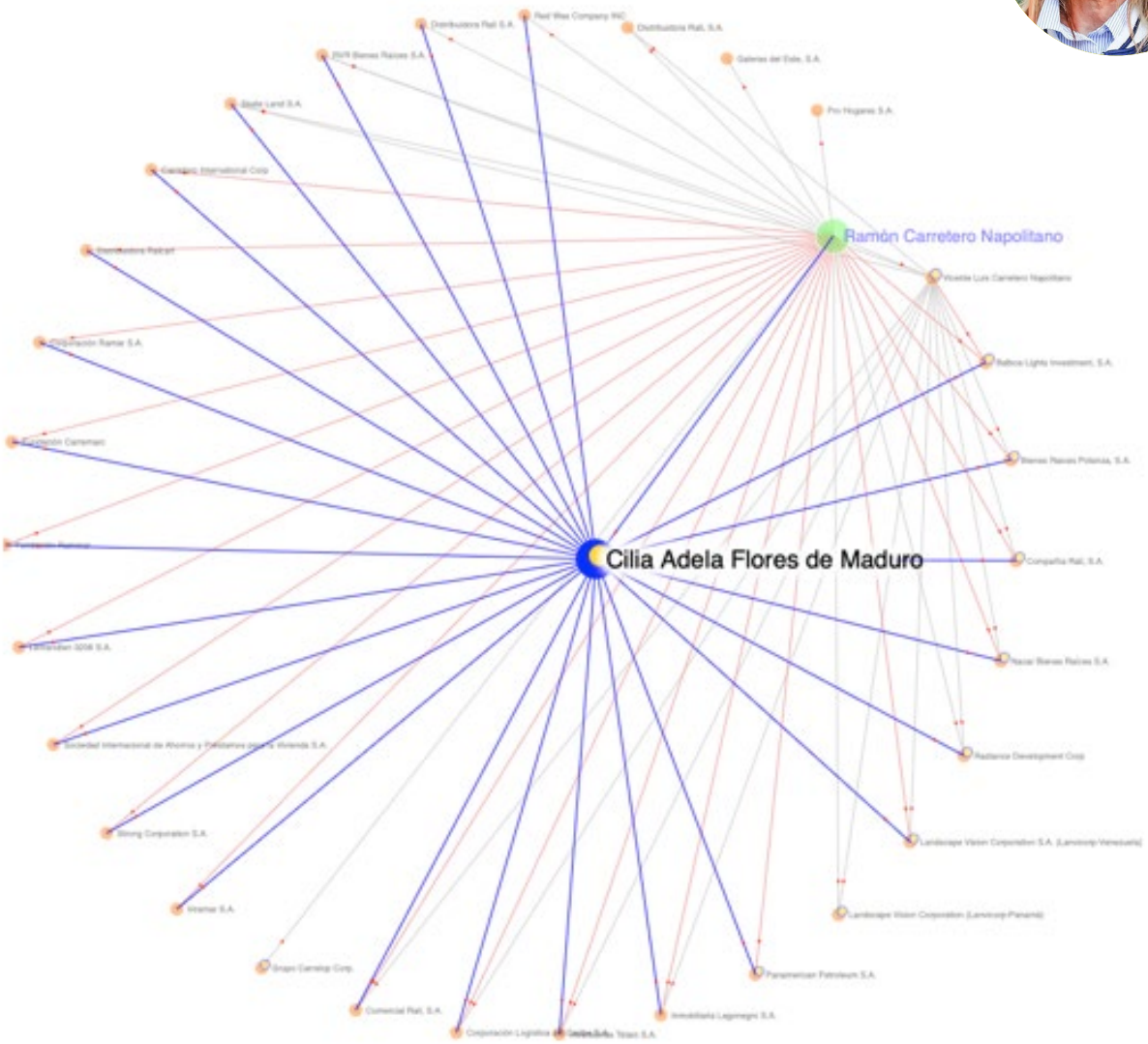
5 United States Attorney´s Office (2020). Former Venezuelan National Treasurer and her Spouse Charged in Connection with International Bribery and Money Laundering Scheme: https://www.justice.gov/usao-sdfl/pr/former-venezuelan-national-treasurer-and-her-spouse-charged-connection-international?

6 United States Department of Justice (2024). "Venezuelan Television News Network Owner Charged in Alleged $1.2B Money Laundering Scheme": https://www.justice.gov/archives/opa/pr/venezuelan-television-news-network-owner-charged-alleged-12b-money-laundering-scheme



Figure 12

Cilia Adela Flores de Maduro's Business and Financial Subnetwork



Source: Transparencia Venezuela database

Taken together, the business and corporate component stands out as one of the most distinctive features of Cilia Flores's immediate network. This does not necessarily mean that she controls every company in this cluster, but it does show that her network of relationships spans a wide range of corporate structures. Some are also connected to government contractors, members of her family, and operators under investigation for alleged transnational financial schemes. These connections make the component particularly relevant for forensic analysis.

1.5.6. Investigative and Sanction-Related Exposure

Cilia Adela Flores de Maduro's immediate network includes 21 connections associated with investigative, sanctions-related, or reputational exposure. These account for 12.96% of the 162 directed relationships in her first-degree network. Of these, 12 are classified as **"Acts of Corruption"** (7.41%), 4 as **"International Sanctions"** (2.47%), and 5 as **"Related News"** (3.09%).

The "Acts of Corruption" category includes connections added to the super-network based on sources reporting irregularities, investigations, or allegations; it does not indicate a judicial finding of liability. Likewise, international sanctions are administrative decisions made by foreign authorities, not criminal convictions. "Related News" provides contextual information, and its relevance depends on the quality and content of each source. The 21 entries should therefore be understood as distinct indicators of exposure, not as 21 proven illegal acts.

This section first highlights the direct sanctions imposed on Cilia Flores. On September 25, 2018, the Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) of the U.S. Department of the Treasury designated her, along with other members of Nicolás Maduro's political circle, under the executive order applicable to Venezuela. The U.S. authority based the designation on her status as a current or former official of the Venezuelan government.[7]

Another area of focus is the U.S. investigations and measures concerning Raúl Antonio Gorrín Belisario. In January 2019, the Treasury Department outlined a scheme involving currency exchange operations and bribes linked to Gorrín, noting in particular that he had purchased gifts for Cilia Flores.[8]

A third dimension concerns the involvement of members of the Gavidia-Flores family and the CLAP scheme. In July 2019, the U.S. Department of the Treasury sanctioned **Álex Naín Saab Morán, Álvaro Pulido Vargas, Walter Jacob Gavidia Flores, Yosser Daniel Gavidia Flores**, and Yoswal Alexander Gavidia Flores, among others, over their alleged participation in a network that the agency said was linked to overpriced contracts and corruption in the CLAP program. The U.S. resolution stated that Saab had made payments and paid commissions to Cilia Flores's three sons in exchange for access to government officials and public contracts. It also noted Carlos Erik Malpica Flores's involvement in earlier dealings with Saab.[9]

7 U.S. Department of the Treasury (2018), Treasury Targets Venezuelan President Maduro's Inner Circle and Proceeds of Corruption in the United States: https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/sm495

8 U.S. Department of the Treasury (2019), Treasury Targets Venezuela Currency Exchange Network Scheme Generating Billions of Dollars for Corrupt Regime Insiders: https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/sm583

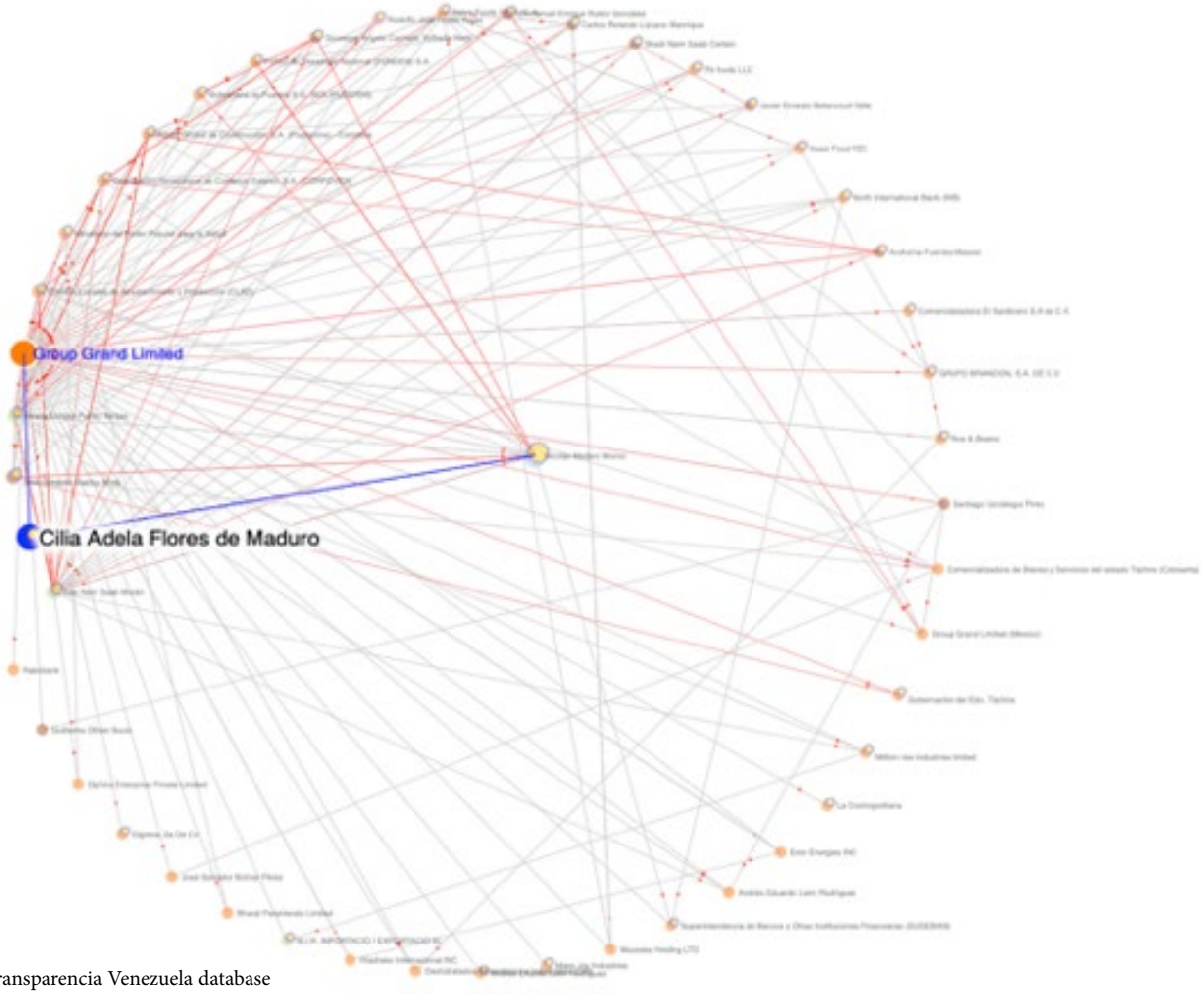
9 U.S. Department of the Treasury (2019), Treasury Disrupts Corruption Network Stealing From Venezuela's Food Distribution Program, CLAP: https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/sm741

Within this structure, **Group Grand Limited** stands out as a particularly significant entity. The Treasury Department identified it as one of the key companies **Saab and Pulido** used in a corporate network to acquire, assemble, and distribute food connected to CLAP contracts. U.S. authorities say Group Grand Limited and its variants, registered in several jurisdictions, formed part of a network of shell companies that helped facilitate these operations.



Figure 13

Subnetwork of interactions between Cilia Adela Flores de Maduro and Group Grand Limited



Source: Transparencia Venezuela database

Another important development was the criminal case brought in the United States against **Efraín Antonio Campo Flores and Franqui Francisco Flores de Freitas**, Cilia Flores's nephews. In 2016, a federal jury found them guilty, and the following year, they were sentenced to 18 years in prison for conspiring to import cocaine into the United States.[10] During the investigation, the defendants said they were acting under the DEA's direction and planned to use some of the proceeds from drug trafficking to fund Cilia Flores's December 2015 election campaign. The U.S. Attorney's Office included this claim in its reconstruction of the case.

From a structural perspective, several individuals who appear in family, institutional, or business circles also feature in investigations, prosecutions, or convictions. **Cilia Flores's children and Carlos Erik Malpica** are linked to the **Saab–Pulido–Group Grand Limited network**. Gorrín is associated with the business and financial dimension of a formal investigation that directly references Flores. Meanwhile, **Campo Flores and Flores de Freitas** connect the family dimension to a transnational criminal proceeding that resulted in a conviction.

1.5.7. Cilia Flores as a Decision-Maker

Because categories of interaction such as **"Designated Individuals,"** delegations of signing authority, and similar administrative decisions make it possible to trace institutional actions carried out by Cilia Flores while she held public office, the super-network shows a series of formally documented appointments and delegations, particularly during her terms as head of the National Assembly and the Office of the Attorney General of the Republic. As noted, the recipients of these interactions include **Magaly Gutiérrez Viña, Numidia Rocío Flores, Giuson Fernando Flores, and Érika Alexandra Albornoz Gavidia**.

In **Magaly Gutiérrez Viña's** case, Cilia Flores made a series of appointments in the National Assembly and, later, in the Attorney General's Office. These appointments involved roles related to human development, human resources, office coordination, and administration. Some also included delegated signing authority and responsibilities for administrative procedures, contracting, and personnel management. Together, these actions document an ongoing institutional relationship between the two.

Numidia Rocío Flores, Cilia's cousin, was appointed Director General of Human Development during Cilia Flores's presidency in the National Assembly. She also received documented authority related to employment contracts and participation in hiring processes. In this case, the family ties coincide with administrative actions attributable to Cilia. This connection is relevant to analyzing possible patterns in how family members were incorporated into the state apparatus.

10 United States Attorney´s Office (Diciembre, 2017), Nephews Of Venezuela First Lady Each Sentenced To 18 Years In Prison For Conspiring To Import Cocaine Into The United States: https://www.justice.gov/usao-sdny/pr/nephews-venezuela-first-lady-each-sentenced-18-years-prison-conspiring-import-cocaine

A similar pattern appears in the cases of **Giuson Fernando Flores**, Cilia's brother, who was appointed general manager of Litigation at the Attorney General's Office in 2013, and **Érika Alexandra Albornoz Gavidia**, her niece-in-law, who was appointed administration manager in charge of the institution in 2012. In both cases, the record points to an institutional decision by Cilia Flores that benefited a member of her immediate family.

This pattern becomes especially significant when considered alongside the structure described in sections 3.3 and 3.4. The familial and institutional dimensions not only coexist among the directed relationships in Cilia Flores's first-degree network; in certain cases, they are directly connected through documented appointment decisions. This offers stronger evidence than network proximity alone, making it possible to identify specific instances in which family ties and the exercise of public authority intersect.

Accordingly, Cilia's primary significance as a decision-maker lies in her documented ability to make personnel decisions and delegate certain powers as part of her institutional duties. The "super network" helps identify cases in which these decisions affected people in her family and social circles. It also provides an empirical basis for examining possible patterns of relational concentration within public administration, while recognizing that the legal and procedural circumstances of each appointment require further verification.

1.5.8. Cilia Flores as a Recipient

As a recipient, Cilia Flores is connected to several types of relationships. First are the institutional appointments she received from Hugo Rafael Chávez Frías and Nicolás Maduro Moros. Chávez appointed her to the Presidential Council for Constitutional Reform (2007) and the Bicentennial Commission (2008), and named her Attorney General of the Republic (2012). Maduro, in turn, appointed her as a member and later coordinator of the Presidential Commission for Peace and Life (2013). Together, these appointments highlight her recurring presence in important institutional forums through decisions made by the Presidency.

Second are the family ties centered on Cilia Flores, including her relationship with Nicolás Maduro and her extensive network of relatives. Some of these relatives also hold public office, participate in business structures, or appear in investigative files. As noted earlier, the significance of these connections depends not only on kinship but also on how certain individuals overlap with other areas of the super-network.

Finally, Cilia Flores is mentioned or linked in relationships documented in investigative, sanction-related, or journalistic contexts. These include records connected to the CLAP program and legal proceedings involving members of her family circle. Because these relationships carry different evidentiary weight, it is helpful to interpret each in light of its category and source.

Taken together, examining Cilia Flores as a recipient helps trace the institutional, familial, and investigative contexts that converge around her. Her ninth-place ranking among the actors with the greatest structural intermediation capacity (betweenness indicator) should be understood in light of the super-network's full topology, rather than as an automatic result of any particular set of incoming relationships.

1.5.9. Network Expanded to Two Degrees

By extending Cilia Adela Flores de Maduro's network to two degrees of separation, we can see it grow from 113 directly connected actors to a broader structure of 905 actors and 2,402 interactions. This wider view helps reveal structures that aren't apparent in the directed relationships of her first-degree network and shows how far the previously identified family, institutional, and business components extend through a single intermediary actor.

The distinction between these two levels is important: the first includes relationships directly documented with Cilia Flores, while the second also includes actors connected to her immediate neighbors. This makes it possible to trace how her immediate network reaches into broader spheres.

The two-degree extension clearly shows that the three dimensions identified in Cilia Flores's immediate network—family, institutional-administrative, and business-corporate—reach beyond her direct connections. Family members connect to new institutions and corporations; administrative actors link to other public agencies and contracting and oversight structures; and business nodes extend the network through corporate and financial channels with transnational reach.

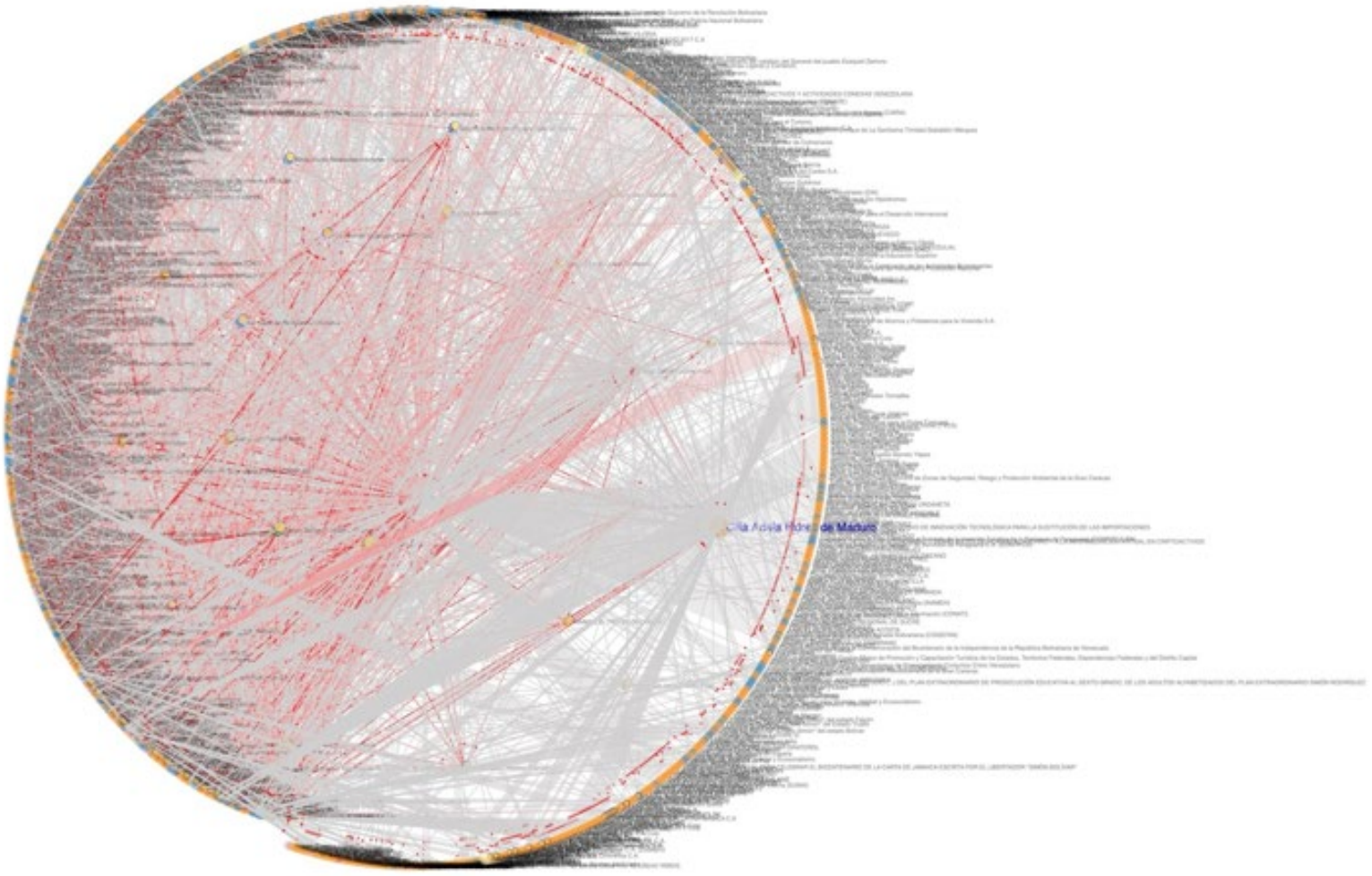
Nicolás Maduro Moros is one of the key channels through which this network expands institutionally. His direct relationship with Cilia Flores connects her circle to a much broader structure of appointments, positions, and institutions linked to the Executive Branch, PDVSA, public finances, foreign policy, and security agencies. This connection does not mean that Maduro's relationships should be attributed to Cilia; instead, it helps show how two networks with distinct roles are structurally connected through a direct relationship between their central figures.

A different pattern emerges in the case of **Magaly Gutiérrez Viña**. As documented in section 3.4, her career includes positions in the National Assembly, the Attorney General's Office, and other public institutions, with responsibilities related to human resources, administration, and procurement. Her significance within the expanded network lies in how these institutional relationships directly connect Cilia to other areas of public administration.



Figure 14

Magaly Gutiérrez Viña in the context of Cilia Adela Flores de Maduro's expanded network (two degrees of separation)



Source: Transparencia Venezuela database

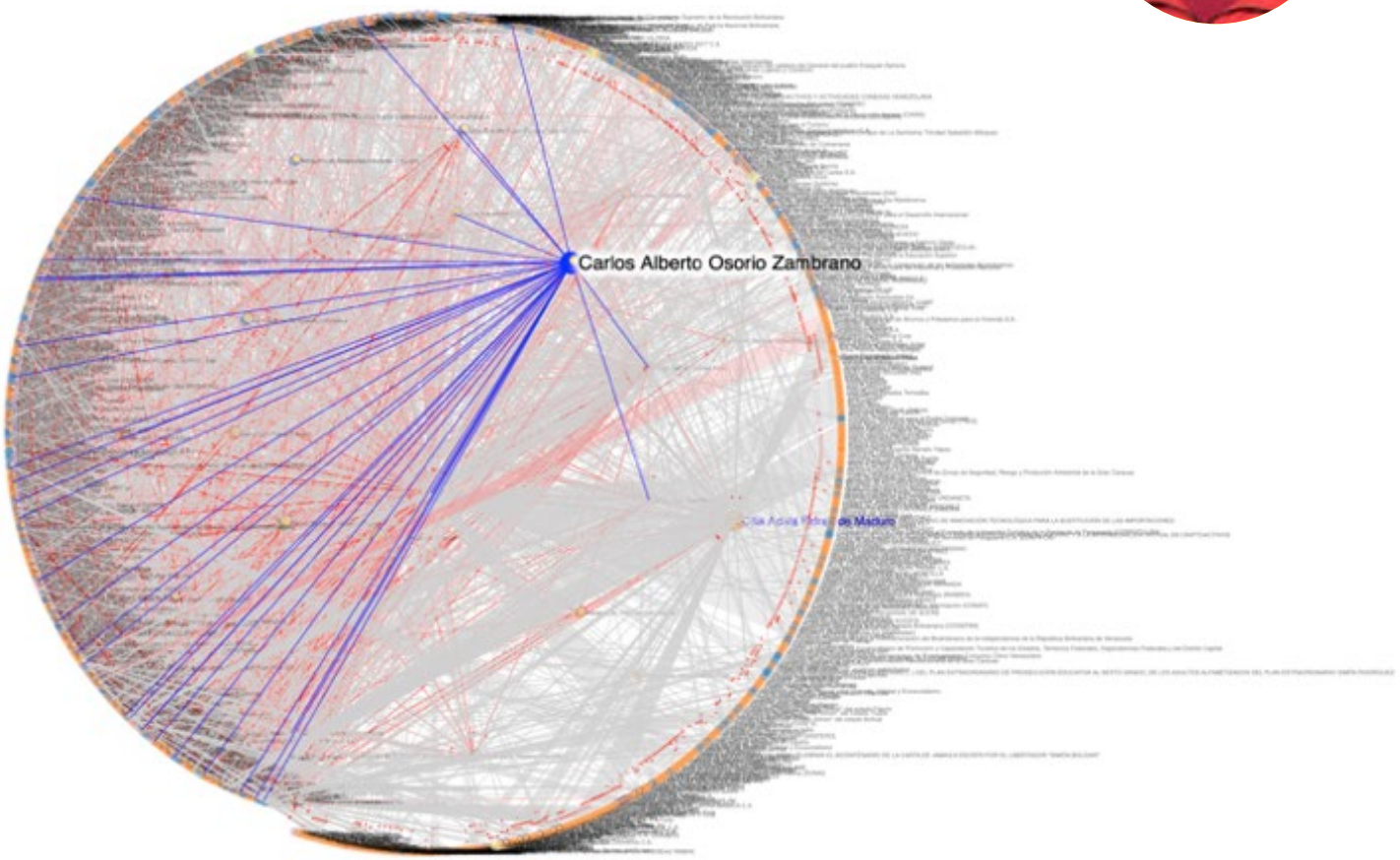
The second-degree network also helps us explore career paths like those of **Carlos Alberto Osorio Zambrano, Érika Alexandra Albornoz Gavidia,** and **Manuel Enrique Galindo Ballesteros**, who connect Cilia's immediate circle with other parts of the institution. To better understand their significance, it's helpful to consider both their positions in the network and the documentary evidence about their career paths, rather than relying only on a visual reading of the network:

- **Carlos Alberto Osorio Zambrano** helps extend the network into various areas of the executive branch and the food sector. His presence offers a clear example of how the network's expansion, which begins with Cilia Flores's closest associates, also reaches institutions and people beyond her immediate circle.



Figure 15

Carlos Alberto Osorio Zambrano in the context of Cilia Adela Flores de Maduro's network of influence (two degrees of separation)

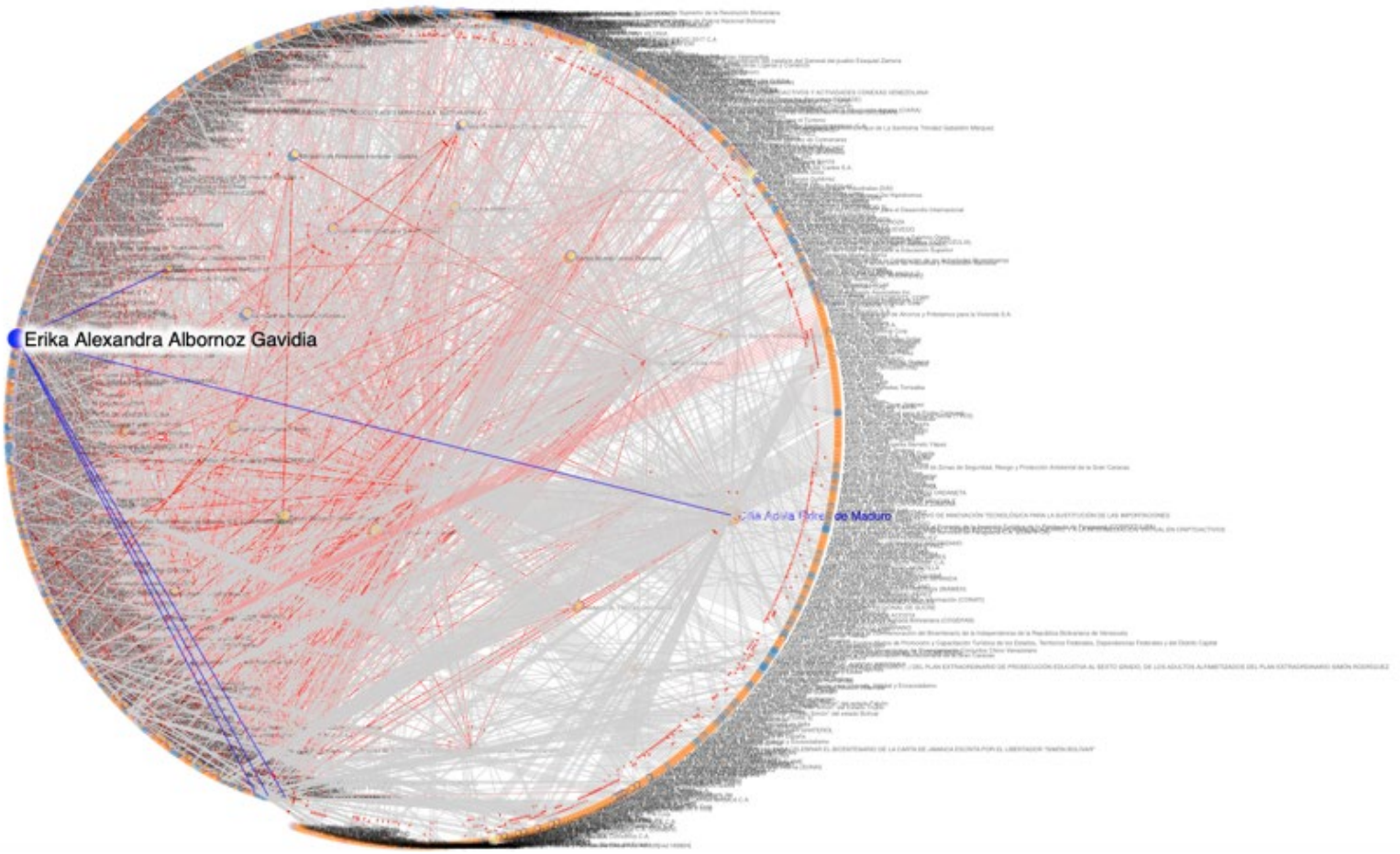


Source: Transparencia Venezuela database

- **Érika Alexandra Albornoz Gavidia:** The second-degree expansion adds helpful context to her direct family relationship with Cilia Flores, her appointment to the Attorney General's Office, and her subsequent work in administration, asset management, and procurement.

Figure 16

a Alexandra Albornoz Gavidia within the context of Cilia Adela Flores de Maduro's expanded network (two degrees of separation)



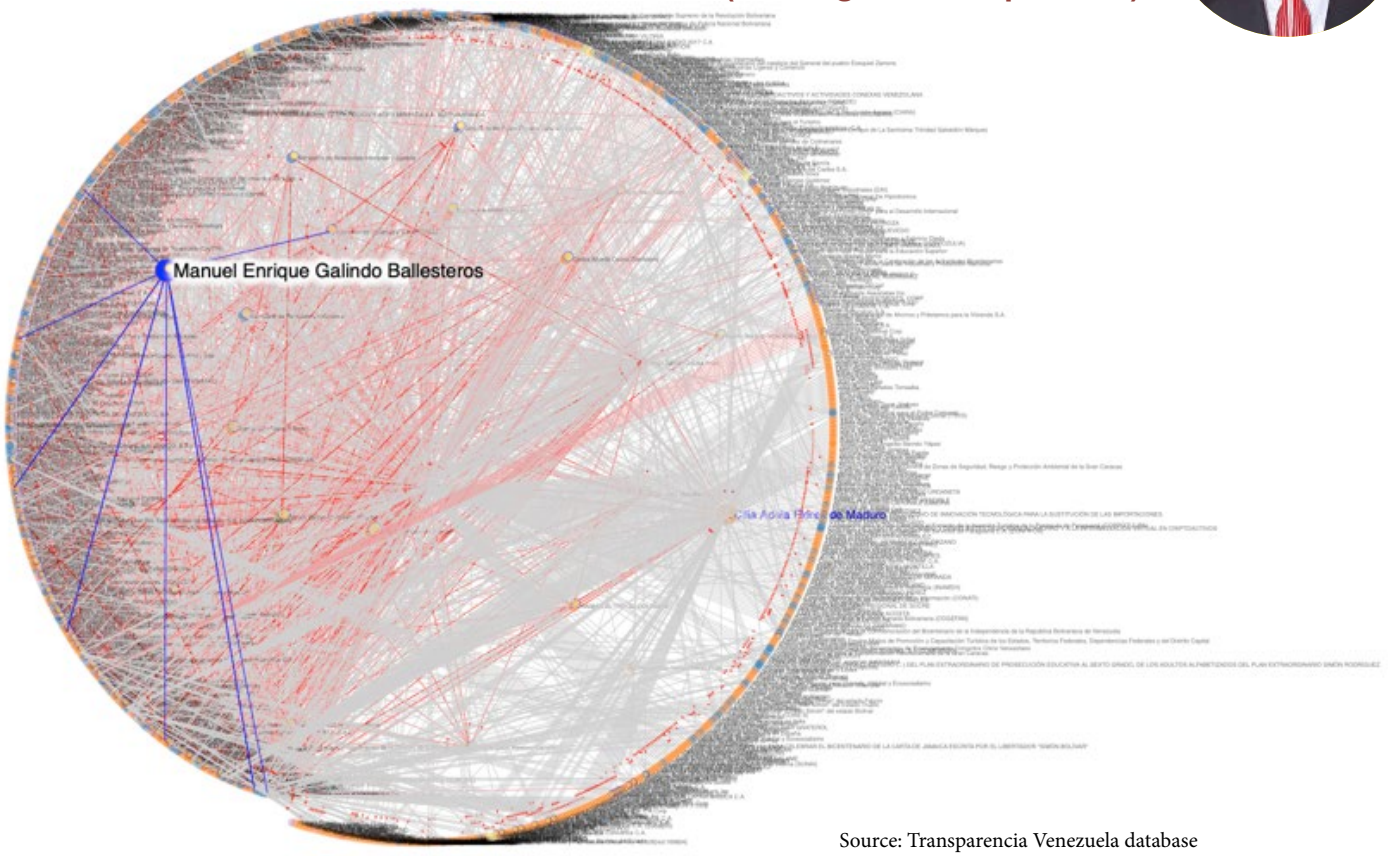
Source: Transparencia Venezuela database

- **Manuel Enrique Galindo Ballesteros:** He is notable for his role in the appointments and subsequent institutional moves of several individuals who had previously been linked to Cilia Flores, particularly within the Attorney General's Office and the Comptroller's Office. His career helps illustrate a degree of continuity across different institutional phases, though it does not establish coordination with Cilia or justify attributing Galindo's later decisions to her.



Figure 17

Manuel Enrique Galindo Ballesteros in the context of Cilia Adela Flores de Maduro's network of influence (two degrees of separation)



Source: Transparencia Venezuela database

Taken together, the shift from **113 immediate connections to a broader network of 905 actors** shows that Cilia Flores's sphere of influence reaches well beyond her direct interactions. While this does not establish that she effectively influences all 905 actors, her immediate relationships connect her, at most two degrees away, to a much wider network of institutions, companies, family members, and political actors.

1.6. Joint Immediate Network of Nicolás Maduro and Cilia Flores

The joint immediate network of Nicolás Maduro Moros and Cilia Adela Flores de Maduro includes all relational records in which either person directly participates as a sender or receiver. Together, their networks contain 1, 473 unique relational records and 589 distinct actors.

Nicolás Maduro is involved in 1, 317 relational records in the corpus, including 20 self-relations. Excluding those from the structural analysis leaves 1, 1,297 directed relationships that directly involve Maduro and do not refer back to himself. He has 496 immediate neighbors. Cilia Flores is involved in 162 records and is directly connected to 113 distinct actors. Six direct interactions between Maduro and Cilia appear in both individual networks; in the joint network, each is counted only once.

Comparing the two networks reveals a shared core of 20 actors directly connected to both Maduro and Cilia. This group includes institutions and individuals of particular significance, such as the National Assembly, the Central Bank of Venezuela, the Supreme Court of Justice, the Office of the Attorney General, Carlos Erik Malpica Flores, Magaly Gutiérrez Viña, Giuson Fernando Flores, Juan José Mendoza Jover, Nelson José Merentes Díaz, Nicolás Ernesto Maduro Guerra, Yosser Daniel Gavidia Flores, Yoswal Alexander Gavidia Flores, and Group Grand Limited, among others.

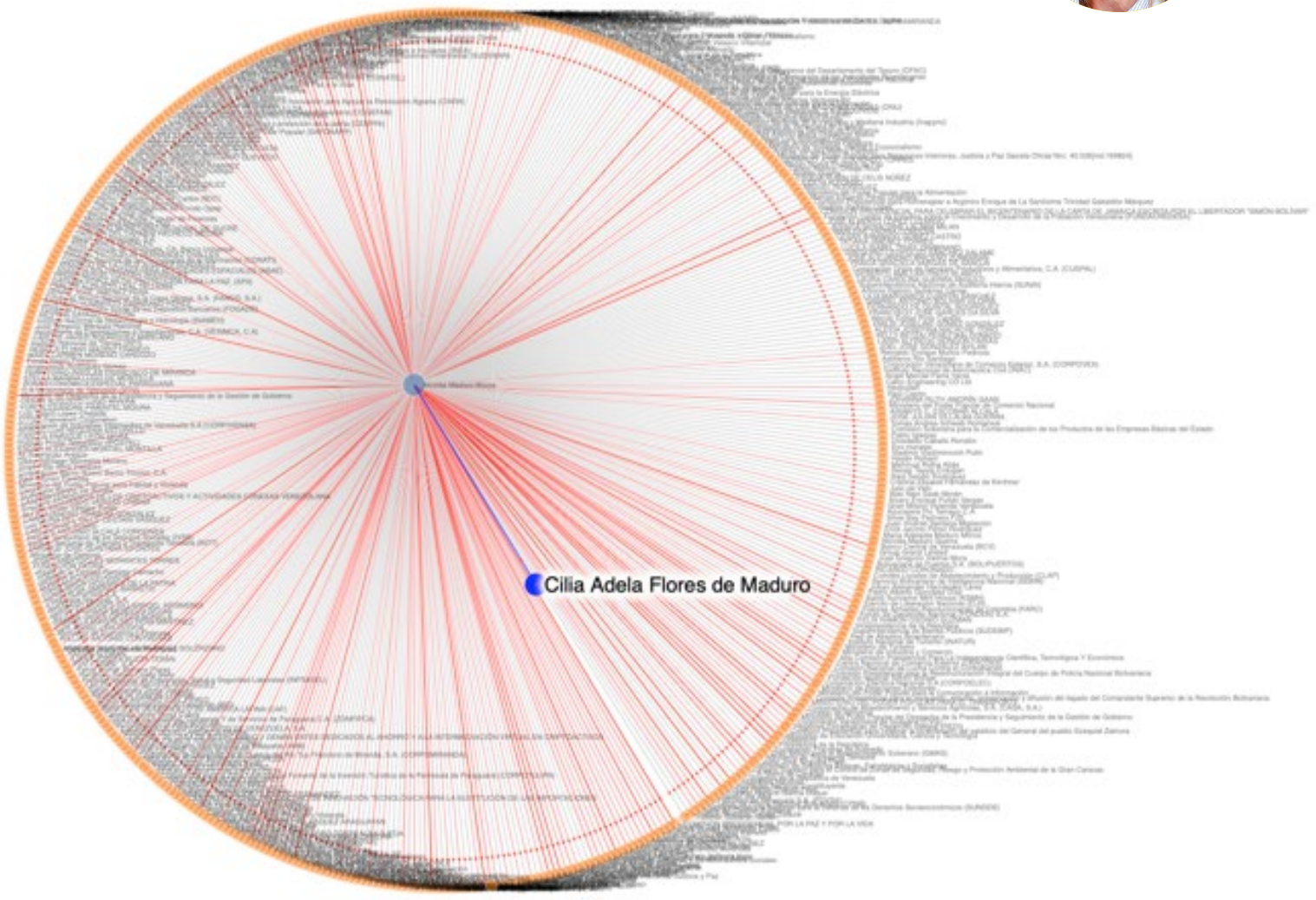
This overlap is structurally significant because it helps show where Maduro' s and Cilia' s immediate circles converge. Still, the presence of the same actor in both networks does not establish that Maduro and Cilia coordinate their actions, nor does it necessarily mean that the third party' s actions can be attributed to them. To understand what the overlap means, it is important to examine the nature of the relationship documented in each case.

At the same time, the two networks differ in clear ways. Maduro' s immediate circle includes 475 actors who are not part of Cilia' s, compared with 92 actors unique to Cilia' s network. This distribution helps show that their networks are not equivalent or interchangeable: Maduro' s extends mainly through the institutional apparatus and the state' s appointment chains, while Cilia' s includes, proportionally, more business, family, and institutional-administrative relationships.



Figure 18

Directed relationships within the first-degree networks of Nicolás Maduro and Cilia Adela Flores de Maduro



Source: Transparencia Venezuela database

Figure 18 shows the overlap between the immediate networks of Nicolás Maduro Moros and Cilia Adela Flores de Maduro—that is, the relationships in which at least one of them is directly involved. It is best understood as a joint first-degree network, rather than as a depiction of indirect relationships, broader influence, or coordination among all the actors shown.

The 20 actors they share, alongside 475 connected exclusively to Maduro and 92 connected exclusively to Cilia, show that their networks include both areas of overlap and distinct connections. They are not two separate structures: they share relevant individuals and institutions and have six direct interactions between their central nodes. However, they also do not form a single, functionally uniform network. Most of their immediate connections do not overlap, and each network has its own relational makeup.

From a structural and descriptive perspective, this pattern highlights the complementary ways their immediate networks are composed. Nicolás Maduro has a comparatively broader reach across state institutions, offices, and formal appointment chains. Cilia Flores, in turn, has a smaller immediate network by comparison, with a higher proportion of business and family connections alongside its institutional and administrative ties. The actors they share are the specific points where these relational spheres intersect.

1.7. Structural Intermediation in the Super-network

Analyzing the super-network helps us rank actors by their relative role as structural intermediaries—that is, by how often they appear on the shortest paths connecting other actors. This offers a useful way to understand each actor's topological relevance and potential influence on the network's structure. The higher an actor ranks, the more often they appear on shortest paths linking different parts of the network. This perspective helps us identify which positions play a particularly important role in keeping the network connected.

Nicolás Maduro Moros ranks first in the super-network's structural intermediation ranking. The ten highest-ranked actors are listed below:

Position	Node/agent	Type
1	Nicolás Maduro Moros	PRESIDENT
2	José David Cabello Rondón	Individual
3	Petróleos de Venezuela S.A. (PDVSA)	Public company
4	Hugo Rafael Chávez Frías	Public official - President
5	Tareck Zaidan El Aissami Maddah	Public official - High-level
6	Diosdado Cabello Rondón	Public official
7	Rafael Darío Ramírez Carreño	Public official
8	Nervis Gerardo Villalobos Cárdenas	Individual
9	Cilia Adela Flores de Maduro	Individual
10	Néstor Luis Reverol Torres	Individual

Source: Transparencia Venezuela database

Among the actors with the greatest potential for intermediation are political leaders, high-ranking officials, a strategic state-owned enterprise, and individuals connected to the economic, oil, and security sectors.

In this context, Nicolás Maduro can be considered the primary structural bridge in the modeled super-network. Cilia Flores ranks ninth, ahead of actors such as Néstor Reverol, Group Grand Limited, Carlos Alberto Osorio Zambrano, Álex Saab, Carlos Erik Malpica Flores, and Raúl Gorrín. Her position in the ranking is therefore consistent with her role as a structural bridge between different domains, as explained in the previous sections.

Furthermore, the top positions show that structural intermediation capacity is shared among actors from different components of the super-network. This finding offers a way to understand its architecture not only as a political or financial hierarchy, but also as a "multiplex" structure in which the most topologically relevant positions span institutional, economic, energy, business, family, distributive, and security spheres.

1.7.1. Intermediation Across Layers and Functional Components

The distribution of the top positions in the ranking helps us identify six functional components that overlap at the points of greatest structural intermediation.

(i) **Political and institutional component:** Nicolás Maduro ranks first, followed by Hugo Chávez in fourth place, Tareck El Aissami in fifth, and Diosdado Cabello in sixth. The National Assembly also appears in 24th place. Considered alongside the relationships documented in the super-network, these rankings show that many structurally important routes converge on actors connected to political leadership, the executive branch, and other central state institutions.

(ii) **Oil, energy, and economic component:** PDVSA ranks third, while Rafael Darío Ramírez Carreño ranks seventh. PDV Caribe appears in 20th place, followed by Ysmel Romer Serrano Florez in 25th. Together, the main state-owned oil company and several actors documented as connected to its leadership, administration, or marketing highlight the oil sector's structural importance within the super-network. This finding is consistent with the earlier analysis of PDVSA: the sector brings together institutional, financial, and commercial functions, as well as several investigative files.

(iii) **Supply, food, and resource distribution component:** Carlos Alberto Osorio Zambrano ranks 12th; Gravetal Bolivia S.A. ranks 14th; Productora y Distribuidora Venezolana de Alimentos S.A. (PDVAL) ranks 15th; and the Local Supply and Production s (CLAP) ranks 22nd. Their proximity to the top positions shows that supply- and food-related structures are an important part of the network. Their topological relevance connects this sphere with institutions, companies, officials, and economic structures examined elsewhere in the super-network.

(iv) **Corporate, financial, and transnational component with investigative exposure:** Nervis Gerardo Villalobos Cárdenas ranks 8th; Group Grand Limited, 11th; Álex Naín Saab Morán, 13th; Carlos Erik Malpica Flores, 16th; and Raúl Antonio de la Santísima Trinidad Gorrín Belisario, 19th. These actors come from diverse backgrounds, so it is helpful not to treat them as part of a single scheme. Even so, the sources incorporated into the super-network connect them, in different contexts, to business structures, financial operations, public procurement, the oil sector, government programs, or transnational investigations. Their high rankings suggest that several actors mentioned in these case files also play an important role in linking different sectors of the super-network.

(v) **Familial and institutional-administrative component:** Cilia Flores ranks 9th, and Carlos Erik Malpica Flores ranks 16th. As shown in previous sections, both individuals connect family relationships to other parts of the network, though in different ways. In Cilia's case, family, institutional-administrative, and business relationships converge. Alongside his family ties, Malpica has an extensive record in public office and in the financial, oil, and business sectors. Their high positions in the structural intermediation ranking (betweenness indicator) reflect the importance of these points of intersection within the super-network.

(vi) **Coercive and security component:** Néstor Luis Reverol Torres ranks tenth, and Vladimir Padrino López ranks 23rd. The documentation connects both men to key institutions involved in security, law enforcement, defense, and military command. Their presence among the actors with the greatest intermediation capacity (betweenness indicator) shows that the coercive apparatus forms part of the super-network's structurally connected layers rather than standing apart from it.

(vii) **Repressive and disciplinary aspects of the coercive component:** The security apparatus within the "super network" takes on an additional dimension when considered alongside its coordination with the justice institutions and mechanisms of repression analyzed in Chapters 7 and 8 of this report. The reviewed documentation describes the involvement of intelligence and security agencies—such as the DGCIM, the Sebin, and the Bolivarian National Police—in reported incidents of arbitrary detention, torture, and persecution of dissidents. It also highlights actions by judicial and prosecutorial institutions that allegedly contributed to the execution, cover-up, or impunity of such acts. This convergence illustrates how coercive capacities could complement mechanisms of institutional subordination and help maintain the political order by functionally linking the security and justice spheres with other components of the analyzed structure.

Furthermore, several of the components mentioned above intersect with **illicit activities and exposure to transnational criminal proceedings**. Among the sources of the

super-network, figures such as Tareck El Aissami, Nervis Villalobos, Group Grand Limited, Álex Saab, and Raúl Gorrín appear, depending on the case, to be linked to investigations, charges, sanctions, or proceedings involving corruption, money laundering, oil operations, sanctions evasion, or other misconduct. This is significant because these investigative contexts also involve actors who play a substantial intermediary role.

The diplomatic component examined above reflects external relationships that vary in nature and scope. However, no foreign state or leader appears among the 25 actors with the greatest capacity for structural intermediation. This suggests that the importance of connections involving actors from these countries stems from the documented interactions, rather than from a dominant position in the global ranking. For example, Russia, Iran, and Cuba are examined within the diplomatic subnetwork through the political, energy, military, commercial, or security relationships documented in the sources.

Therefore, it may be helpful to view the international dimension as an external influence spanning certain parts of the network—particularly its political, energy, financial, and security components—rather than as a sphere whose centrality is established by the ranking examined here.

Overall, the distribution of the top positions points to a multi-layered intermediation structure. Still, it's worth interpreting these positions with care: the ranking shows where topological intermediation is concentrated, but on its own, it doesn't tell us who controls the network, what resources flow along each route, or who is aware of, directs, or legally accountable for other actors' actions.

1.8. Targeted Removal of Actors and Structural Resilience

The intermediation ranking helps us identify the actors with the greatest topological relevance, but it does not, on its own, show how much the network's overall connectivity depends on each actor's continued presence. To explore this dimension, we conducted a node removal analysis.

Because the relationships in the super-network represent semantically distinct categories and do not uniformly indicate directed flows, we projected the records onto a simple, undirected network for this analysis. We consolidated repeated relationships between the same pair of actors into a single connection and excluded self-relationships from the topology. The resulting network consists of 13,521 actors and 21,650 unique connections, distributed across 960 connected components. Initially, the main component includes 10,566 actors, or 78.15% of the universe, and structural fragmentation stands at 38.92%.

In the first simulation, we removed only **Nicolás Maduro**, who ranks first in intermediation. After his removal, the main component shrinks from 10,566 to 10,507 actors and represents

77.71% of the remaining nodes. Meanwhile, the number of components rises from 960 to 987, isolated nodes increase from 127 to 144, and fragmentation grows from 38.92% to 39.60%. These results show that removing the actor with the highest intermediation affects the super-network's connectivity, though it does not break apart the main component.

This analysis also shows that a prominent position in the betweenness ranking does not necessarily mean that removing a node will have an equally large impact. For example, removing only **PDVSA**—which ranks third—reduces the main component to **77.65%** and raises fragmentation to **39.70%**, a slightly greater effect than removing only Maduro across several robustness metrics. In other words, intermediation and structural indispensability are related, but they are not the same.

The structure also retains a large principal component even when several nodes are removed at once. If **Nicolás Maduro, José David Cabello Rondón,** and **Diosdado Cabello Rondón** are removed simultaneously, the principal component still accounts for **77. 22%** of the remaining nodes. When the top five positions in the ranking are removed, it retains **76. 52%**; and when the top ten are removed together, it still accounts for 74. 92%, even as fragmentation increases to **43. 85%**.

For comparison, these targeted removals were compared with random removals involving the same number of actors. When ten nodes are selected at random, the principal component retains an average of 78.11% of the remaining nodes, while fragmentation reaches 98%. This suggests that removing actors at the top of the ranking causes considerably greater structural deterioration than an equivalent random removal, although it does not cause the super-network to collapse.

This simulation helps clarify the difference between the importance of intermediation and its indispensability to the structure. Taken together, the evidence points to a super-network in which intermediation is concentrated among a relatively small group of actors, while considerable redundancy remains in its connections. Nicolás Maduro holds the top position in structural intermediation within the analyzed universe; **Cilia Flores** ranks ninth, within a substantially different relational configuration; and a broader structure is organized around both of them, connecting political, institutional, economic, oil-related, business, family, and security components.

The central finding is that, in the case of the corruption super-network, a concentration of intermediation does not necessarily mean structural dependence. In this sense, removing a highly central actor can significantly weaken connectivity, but it does not, on its own, dismantle a structure that retains alternative routes and multiple points of connection.

These results describe only the robustness and structural resilience of the modeled system. It is important to keep in mind that removing a node from the network does not simulate the actual departure of a political figure, nor does it predict processes of succession, adaptation, institutional reorganization, coercion, or redistribution of functions.

1.9. From Relational Architecture to Institutional Capture

Structural analysis offers an initial, cross-cutting insight: the configuration examined is not simply a set of isolated relationships centered on Nicolás Maduro. Rather, it connects institutions, public resources, state-owned enterprises, economic actors, family members, security components, and transnational investigative reporting networks. Maduro holds a central position in structural intermediation and has an exceptional ability to coordinate these connections. At the same time, links among other actors—and the results of the removal exercise—show that the structure includes redundancies and alternative routes that extend beyond his individual role.

This combination of concentration and resilience invites a further question. If much of Maduro's immediate network consists of appointments, positions, delegations, and ties to strategic institutions, it is helpful to look not only at who makes up the structure but also at the institutional changes that enabled these positions, resources, and capabilities to become concentrated and reproduced. The following chapter explores this issue through an analysis of the capture and reconfiguration of the Venezuelan state.

2 Capture and Reconfiguration of the Venezuelan State

2.1. The Concept of State Capture
2.2. A Gradual Process of Capture Under Nicolás Maduro
2.3. Permanent States of Emergency, 2016–2025
2.4. Table of States of Exception and Economic Emergency, 2016–2025
2.5. Militarization of Economic and Supply Functions
2.6. Consequences of the Capture
2.7. Summary: From Institutional Capture to Specific Cases

A corruption network of the scale described and analyzed in the previous chapter cannot be sustained through clandestine agreements between individuals alone. It also depends on institutional capacities: the ability to change rules, manage resources with less oversight, weaken institutional safeguards, and limit the state's ability to curb or investigate the discretionary use of power.

This chapter explores how these conditions took shape and deepened within the Venezuelan state. State capture is about more than corrupt officials working within government; it reflects a much deeper transformation in which public rules, agencies, resources, and powers are put in service of the interests of the group that holds power. From this perspective, state capture provides the institutional foundation for many of the dynamics examined in the chapters.

2.1. The Concept of State Capture

A reconstruction of how the Venezuelan state's structure was transformed into an instrument designed to (i) facilitate illicit activities, (ii) protect those involved and ensure impunity, and (iii) generate resources that would later be embezzled.

For the purposes of this report, we define "state capture" as the process by which a political, economic, criminal, or business group—or an alliance among them—manages to shape state rules, institutions, and decisions to serve its particular interests. In doing so, it displaces the public interest and undermines republican principles such as the separation of powers, the rule of law, equality before the law, accountability, and citizen oversight.

This goes beyond corrupt individuals holding public office. State capture involves a structural change to the public decision-making system: the state's institutions, laws, resources, and powers are no longer primarily focused on protecting the public interest and are instead used, wholly or in part, to preserve and expand the interests of the group exercising that control.

2.2. A Gradual Process of Capture Under Nicolás Maduro

Capture typically unfolds gradually. By the time Maduro assumed the presidency, the system of checks and balances and the rule of law had already been weakened. First Chávez and then Maduro began to occupy or control strategic positions, allowing them to change the rules, neutralize checks and balances, and use public resources to strengthen their power. This process may include:

2.2.1. Political capture: concentration of decision-making power in a single group and the weakening of political pluralism and mechanisms for political alternation

Following the opposition's victory in the 2015 parliamentary elections, the Democratic Unity Roundtable (Mesa de la Unidad Democrática) launched a referendum in 2016 to revoke Nicolás Maduro's mandate. As a first step, the National Electoral Council (CNE) asked for signatures from 1% of voters registered in the Electoral Registry, in accordance with Resolution No. 070906-2770, published in the Electoral Gazette No. 405.[11] Although the regulation applies at the municipal, state, or national level, depending on the office being recalled, the CNE applied the 1% requirement in every state.

The opposition submitted the signatures. However, on October 20, 2016, criminal courts in five states suspended the effects of the signature drive, citing an ongoing investigation into alleged fraud and data falsification.[12] The CNE complied with the court orders and suspended the process "until further court order." As a result, the next phase—collecting signatures equivalent to 20% of the electorate—never took place.

For that stage, the CNE had stipulated that the 20% threshold must be met in each state. The Electoral Chamber of the Supreme Court of Justice upheld this requirement in Ruling No. 147 of October 17, 2016[13], establishing that the referendum could only be called if the required percentage was reached in each state. However, this criterion contradicted Article 72 of the Constitution of the Republic, which requires support from at least 20% of registered voters in the relevant constituency—in this case, the country as a whole.

2.2.2. Regulatory capture: the use of legislative or regulatory power to pass laws, decrees, regulations, or decisions that favor the capturing group, protect its interests, or hinder oversight

With the National Constituent Assembly (ANC) established in July 2017 under the pretext of drafting a new Constitution, the Maduro government gained a way to legislate with little oversight. In practice, the ANC replaced the Parliament elected in December 2015, where the opposition held a qualified majority, and passed laws such as the Anti-Hate Law, the Constitutional Law on CLAPs, and the Anti-Blockade Law.[14] The latter gave the executive

11 Electoral Gazette No. 405. Rules governing the procedure for promoting and requesting recall referendums for elected officials. Available at: https://www.sumate.org/documentos/Normas_para_Regular_Procedimiento_de_Promocion_y_Solicitud_de_Referendos_Revocatorios_de_Mandatos_de_Cargos_de_Eleccion_Popular.pdf September 6, 2007

12 El Pitazo. Criminal courts annulled the collection of 1% of signatures in several states. Available at: https://elpitazo.net/pitazo-electoral/tribunales-penales-anularon-recoleccion-del-1-de-firmas-en-varios-estados/ October 20, 2016

13 Supreme Court of Justice. Ruling No. 147 of the Electoral Chamber of the Supreme Court of Justice. Available at: https://vlexvenezuela.com/vid/sentencia-n-147-tribunal-1044995957 October 17, 2016

14 Transparencia Venezuela. The Need to Repeal Venezuela's Restrictive Regulatory Framework. Available at: https://transparenciave.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/04/FINAL-Necesidad-de-derogar-marco-normativo-restrictivo-en-Venezuela_ABR-2026-1.pdf April 2026

branch discretionary authority to manage public resources. The Constituent Assembly also appointed officials to the Central Bank of Venezuela and named the Republic's attorney general.

2.2.3. Institutional capture: placing individuals loyal to the group in key institutions to undermine their autonomy and turn them into instruments of private interests

Of the 29 family members listed in the "super-network" (section 1.5.3), at least 17 have served in senior public roles across various agencies.[15] As mentioned, this is the case of Carlos Erik Malpica Flores, Cilia Flores's nephew, who held several roles at the same time: national treasurer, director of the Propatria 2000 Foundation, internal director of PDVSA, and director of the Simón Bolívar Fund for Reconstruction. Together, these positions gave him substantial control over the Republic's resources.

Three of her brothers also held leadership roles: Giuson Fernando Flores headed the Administrative Service for Identification, Migration, and Foreigners (Saime); Bladimir Flores held senior positions in the Scientific, Penal, and Criminal Investigations Corps (CICPC); and Roger Flores worked in the Human Resources Department of the Public Defender's Office. Walter Ramón Gavidia Rodríguez, Flores's ex-husband, headed the "Juntos Todo Es Posible" Corporation until shortly after January 3, 2026.

2.2.4. Capture of the justice system: subordination of judges, prosecutors, and investigative bodies to ensure impunity, persecute opponents, resolve disputes in the group's favor, or prevent investigations into its activities

The capture of the judiciary is discussed in Chapter 7.

Prosecutors from the Public Prosecutor's Office—Farik Mora Salcedo[16] and Dinorah Bustamante Puerta—as well as Judge Carol Padilla[17] were behind the persecution carried out by the Maduro government against legislators and opposition leaders, including Juan Requesens, Roberto Marrero, and Fernando Albán, who died in October 2018 while in state custody. In a 2023 report, the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Venezuela noted that it had reason to believe public officials were involved in his death.[18]

15 Transparencia Venezuela. Cilia Flores: More Than 30 Years Accumulating Power with Chávez and Maduro.
Available at: https://transparenciave.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/FINAL-Cilia-Flores-mas-de-30-anos-amasando-poder-con-Chavez-y-Maduro_MAR-2026-1.pdf March 2026

16 Transparencia Venezuela. Fight against corruption or conspiracy: what is known about the latest purge in Venezuela's judiciary, which has resulted in dozens of arrests and dismissals.
Available at: https://transparenciave.org/lucha-contra-la-corrupcion-o-conspiracion-que-se-sabe-de-la-ultima-purga-en-el-poder-judicial-en-venezuela-que-ha-dejado-decenas-de-detenciones-y-destituciones/ September 13, 2025

17 Armando.info. Carol Padilla: Profile of a Hand-Picked Judge.
Available at: https://armando.info/carol-padilla-perfil-de-una-jueza-por-encargo/ August 18, 2019

18 Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Venezuela. The State Apparatus, Its Mechanisms of Repression, and Restrictions on Civic and Democratic Space.
Available at: https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/hrcouncil/ffmv/A_HRC_54_CRP8_260923.pdf
September 18, 2023

2.2.5. Economic capture and capture of public resources: the use of contracts, concessions, state-owned enterprises, permits, foreign currency, public credit, subsidies, land, or other resources to benefit allies and finance the group's continued hold on power

In 2019, the U.S. Department of the Treasury sanctioned Álex Saab and his partner, Álvaro Pulido Vargas, for their alleged role in a corruption network that secured "lucrative commercial contracts with the Venezuelan government." These contracts included overpriced agreements to distribute food through the CLAP program. According to the official report, Saab allegedly obtained the contracts without a bidding process, reportedly thanks to his connections with "high-ranking Venezuelan political officials."

Earlier, in 2011, Saab and Pulido Vargas had secured a contract to build housing for low-income individuals.[19] According to the indictment, the businessmen took advantage of the exchange rate controlled by the Maduro government to make a profit. To access preferential dollars, they allegedly bribed officials and submitted fraudulent import documents for goods and materials that never arrived in Venezuela. The amount involved in the case is approximately USD 350 million.

2.2.6. Capture of oversight bodies: weakening or subordination of comptroller's offices, audit agencies, parliaments, electoral bodies, and other institutions responsible for overseeing the exercise of power

The Maduro government has typically approved the national budget without making it public. As a result, citizens have been unable to see what resources the government has available or how they are distributed throughout the fiscal year. Since 2016, Maduro has kept the Budget Law—which must be approved and enacted by the National Assembly—secret.[20] Some spokespeople share only the total amounts, without providing more detail about how the funds were allocated. Information about supplemental appropriations isn't available yet either.

2.2.7. Electoral manipulation: the use of state institutions and resources to alter the conditions of political competition, favor the ruling group, or prevent an effective change in government

From January through June 2024, Transparencia Venezuela documented 152 irregularities in the lead-up to the July 28, 2024, presidential election.[21] The report found that mayors, ministers, and other senior officials used state-run communication channels to promote

19 U.S. Department of Justice. Two Colombian Businessmen Charged with Money Laundering in Connection with a Bribery Scheme in Venezuela. Available at: https://www.justice.gov/archives/opa/pr/two-colombian-businessmen-charged-money-laundering-connection-venezuela-bribery-scheme July 25, 2019

20 Transparencia Venezuela. Opacity and Inequality: Analysis of the 2024 National Budget. Available at: https://transparenciave.org/opacidad-y-desigualdad-analisis-del-presupuesto-nacional-2024/ June 2, 2024

21 Transparencia Venezuela. Campaigning and Corruption: 152 Events Recorded Before the Electoral Campaign in Venezuela. Available at: https://transparenciave.org/proselitismo-y-corrupcion-158-eventos-registrados-antes-de-la-campana-electoral-en-venezuela/ July 11, 2024

Maduro's candidacy. It also found that public employees were required to follow Nicolás Maduro's social media accounts and submit screenshots as proof. In addition, the report mentions that National Guard vehicles were used in campaign activities. Although the electoral body declared Nicolás Maduro the winner, it did not present the election results or any other evidence.

2.2.8. Information Control: Control, intimidation, or co-optation of the media and the use of public resources to limit citizens' access to independent information

In 2024, the NGO Espacio Público documented at least 311 cases involving violations of freedom of expression.[22] In the weeks before and after the presidential election, journalists and media workers faced ongoing intimidation. Reports documented arbitrary detentions and restrictions imposed by the military, making it harder for them to cover events. That year, at least 23 media outlets were shut down, most of them radio stations in Bolívar, Zulia, and other states.

At least 32 websites were also blocked by the state-owned Compañía Anónima Nacional Teléfonos de Venezuela (Cantv) and private operators.

2.2.9. Co-optation of civil society: the co-optation, intimidation, or weakening of social organizations, labor unions, universities, professional associations, and other institutions capable of exercising independent oversight of those in power

In Venezuela, the Venezuelan Program for Education and Action on Human Rights (Provea)[23] describes a policy of "structural labor violence." This includes a lack of respect for union autonomy, a systematic policy of repression and persecution targeting union leaders who organize protests, and the creation of parallel unions that serve the Maduro government's interests and undermine union efforts. As a result, the labor movement has weakened and is now fragmented and dispersed. This policy was introduced during Hugo Chávez's administration and further developed under Maduro.

2.2.10. Criminal capture: the infiltration of public institutions by criminal organizations to obtain protection, control territories, facilitate illicit activities, launder funds, influence public decisions, or ensure impunity—or vice versa

Criminal capture is discussed in Chapter 9.

In 2023, Transparencia Venezuela published the report "Illicit Economies Under the Cloak of Impunity,"[24] which analyzes the symbiotic relationship between state institutions and criminal actors, identifying four key characteristics of criminal networks.:

22 Espacio Público. 2024 Report: General Situation of the Right to Freedom of Expression in Venezuela. Available at: https://espaciopublico.ong/libertad-expresion-venezuela-2024-informe-espacio-publico/ May 2, 2025

23 Venezuelan Program for Education and Action on Human Rights. Shared Vision: Labor Rights. Available at: https://provea.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Laborales.pdf 2022

24 Transparencia Venezuela. Illicit Economies Under the Cloak of Impunity. Available at: https://transparenciave.org/economias-ilicitas/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/RESUMEN-EJECUTIVO_Economias-ilicitas.pdf September 2023

1. They benefit from the support and involvement of non-criminal actors, including public officials who provide information or permits and private individuals who help facilitate their activities.
2. They operate as open systems, able to bring in additional actors, take part in illegal markets, and use a range of money-laundering methods.
3. Non-criminal actors bring a range of institutional capabilities to these networks. This can help the networks grow stronger while also weakening the agencies responsible for upholding democratic governance.
4. Their structures can remain stable even when key actors change. In other words, if a link responsible for security or oversight fails, the criminal network can adapt and continue operating.

2.3. Permanent States of Emergency, 2016–2025

During Nicolás Maduro's administration, economic emergency decrees shifted from being exceptional, temporary responses to specific situations to becoming a sustained means of concentrating power. Most of these declarations occurred between 2016 and 2021. During that period, Maduro issued 32 decrees related to states of emergency and economic emergencies, and in 2025 he issued four more.[25] According to the Venezuelan Constitution, a state of emergency may last 60 days and can be extended for an additional 60 days.

Over time, this mechanism normalized the use of extraordinary powers, weakened parliamentary oversight, and concentrated budgetary and economic decision-making within the executive branch. As oversight diminished, executive discretion grew, increasing the risk of abuse, corruption, and state capture.

The powers that gradually accumulated in the hands of the executive branch included the ability to modify and execute the national budget, authorize expenditures that had not been originally planned, redirect resources to special funds, intervene in the Debt Law and its rescheduling, adopt tax measures, and modify aspects of the exchange-rate system. The executive also gained powers over the production, distribution, and marketing of food, medicines, and supplies, along with extraordinary mechanisms for public procurement. In addition, it could take measures affecting public and private companies deemed strategic, create special mechanisms tied to certain economic zones and mining activities, and later regulate operations involving cryptoassets.

25 Transparencia Venezuela. Delcy Copies Maduro's Emergency Decrees: They Did Not Resolve Any Emergency, but Served to Facilitate Political Control and Corruption. Available at: https://transparenciave.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/08/FINAL-14-de-agosto-Delcy-copia-los-decretos-de-emergencia-de-Maduro_AGO-2026.pdf August 2026

The table below outlines the timeline of Maduro's decrees on economic matters and their effects.

2.4. Table of States of Exception and Economic Emergency, 2016–2025

Date	Decree	Duration	Powers / Relevant Changes	Weakened institutional oversight	Risk of corruption / contracting
January 14, 2016	2,184	60 days	Primarily economic powers: allocating resources; adopting foreign exchange, fiscal, budgetary, and supply measures.	National Assembly: was required to approve the decree; subsequently, the Supreme Court of Justice (TSJ) allowed it to take effect despite parliamentary rejection. [26]	High: greater budgetary discretion and less parliamentary oversight.
March 11, 2016	2,270	60 days	Retains economic powers and expressly adds authority over the administration and allocation of the budget.	Reduces the National Assembly's control over spending.	High: possibility of reallocating resources without following the standard budget procedure.
May 13, 2016	2,323	60 days	Introduces a state of exception, in addition to a state of economic emergency. Incorporates security, sovereignty, and foreign policy.	Expands the scope of the state of emergency from economic to political and security matters.	Very high: expands administrative discretion and allows for extraordinary measures against economic actors.
July 12, 2016	2,371	60 days	Extension of Decree No. 2,323.	Normalizes the continuation of the exceptional regime.	End: the exceptional status is no longer temporary.
September 13, 2016	2,452	60 days	Retains economic and budgetary powers; incorporates measures related to the currency system and expands the ability to assume the functions of other bodies.	National Assembly: Gradual erosion of its powers.	Very high: concentration of financial and budgetary decision-making.
November 13, 2016	2,548	60 days	Extension. Retains previous powers.	The Supreme Court of Justice (TSJ) declares the extension constitutional despite the National Assembly's rejection.[27]	Very high: consolidation of the absence of a parliamentary check on executive power.
January 13, 2017	2,667	60 days	Expands the scope of powers; incorporates new economic, budgetary, and security measures.	The transfer of powers from the National Assembly continues.	Very high: greater discretion in hiring, spending, and administration.
March 13, 2017	2,742	60 days	Extension and maintenance of powers.	Continuity of the regime.	End.
May 13, 2017	2,849	60 days	It once again expands the powers and deepens the extraordinary authority of the Executive Branch.	The de facto replacement of legislative oversight continues.	Very high.
July 13, 2017	2,987	60 days	Extension.	Continuation.	End.
September 15, 2017	3,074	60 days	A new step: expands extraordinary powers to about 25; includes the economy, security, and resource management.	The National Assembly denounces that the regime violates constitutional limits and favors the concentration of power.[28]	Very high: Contracting and spending are progressively slipping out of parliamentary control.
November 10, 2017	3,157	60 days	Extension.	Continuation.	End.

26 Transparencia Venezuela (2016). Budget Monitoring Report (January–May 2016)
27 Transparencia Venezuela. Timeline of Supreme Court Rulings. https://transparenciave.org/project/timeline/
28 https://transparenciave.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Acuerdo-en-rechazo-al-decreto-de-estado-de-excepcion.pdf

Date	Decree	Duration	Powers / Relevant Changes	Weakened institutional oversight	Risk of corruption / contracting
January 9, 2018	3,239	60 days	Measures regarding the production, distribution, and marketing of goods; food and medicine; security and administration.	Greater direct administrative intervention in markets.	Very high: procurement and distribution of essential goods become areas of high discretion.
March 9, 2018	3,308	60 days	Extension.	Continuation.	End.
May 10, 2018	3,413	60 days	Maintains and expands economic and administrative powers.	Less parliamentary oversight.	Very high.
July 9, 2018	3,503	60 days	Extension.	Continuation.	End.
September 10, 2018	3,610	60 days	Turning point: The catalog covers approximately 36 faculties. Tax, exchange rate, production, commercial, and budgetary powers are expanded.[29]	Concentration of powers from various bodies within the Executive Branch.	Critical: Maximum economic and administrative discretion.
November 9, 2018	3,655	60 days	Extension.	Continuation.	High/critical.
January 11, 2019	3,736	60 days	Retains the broad powers of the previous regime.	Weakened parliamentary oversight.	Critical.
March 12, 2019	3,779	60 days	Extension.	Continuation.	High/critical.
May 10, 2019	3,844	60 days	It maintains approximately 35 extraordinary powers.	Continuation.	Critical.
July 9, 2019	3,906	60 days	Extension.	Continuation.	High/critical.
September 7, 2019	3,980	60 days	Retains economic, budgetary, foreign exchange, supply, and administrative powers.	Legislative oversight is virtually nonexistent.	Critical.
November 6, 2019	4,019	60 days	Extension.	Continuation.	Critical.
January 5, 2020	4,090	60 days	It retains broad economic, administrative, and security powers.	A state of emergency has become a routine mechanism of government.	Critical.
March 5, 2020	4,145	60 days	Extension.	Continuation.	High/critical.
May 4, 2020	4,194	60 days	Retains authority over the economy, supply, production, and administration.	Weakened parliamentary oversight.	Critical.
July 2, 2020	4,242	60 days	Extension.	Continuation.	High/critical.
August 30, 2020	4,275	60 days	Continues extraordinary intervention in the economy, production, prices, and supply.	The executive branch remains the center of decision-making.	Critical.
October 28, 2020	4,358	60 days	Extension.	Continuation.	High/critical.
December 26, 2020	4,396	60 days	The special measures remain in effect.	Continuation.	High/critical.
February 23, 2021	4,440	60 days	Final extension of the 2016–2021 cycle.	The exceptional status remains in effect through April 2021.	Critical: more than 5 years of cumulative exceptional status.

29 Transparencia Venezuela. Table of Decrees Declaring a State of Emergency. https://transparenciave.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Tabla-decretos-Estados-de-Emergencia-DDHH-UCAB.pdf

Date	Decree	Duration	Powers / Relevant Changes	Weakened institutional oversight	Risk of corruption / contracting
April 9, 2025	5,118	60 days	New state of emergency after nearly 4 years. Allows for extraordinary economic, tax, trade- , investment, and production measures.[30]	Reactivates the Executive Branch's extraordinary powers.	High: Economic discretion is expanded once again.
August 8, 2025	5,157	60 days	Measures to preserve economic stability, protect the financial, fiscal, and monetary systems, boost investment and production, and respond to external factors[31].	Strengthening of executive powers in economic matters.	End.

Source: Transparencia Venezuela database

Transparencia Venezuela has noted that these decrees weakened a vital democratic safeguard: the National Assembly's role in overseeing public administration.[32] More than 30 state-of-emergency decrees significantly weakened institutional checks and balances. The opposition-majority Parliament elected in 2015 gradually lost its powers, while the Supreme Court of Justice—shaped to suit Maduro and his wife, Cilia Flores—approved extensions of the state of emergency.

2.5. Militarization of Economic and Supply Functions

The coercive dimension of this militarization is explored in Chapter 8, while Chapter 9 looks at its links to territorial control and the growing convergence between institutions and illicit economies.

Among the arbitrary measures was the decision to place the Bolivarian National Armed Forces in charge of distributing and selling food and other basic necessities under Decree No. 2,323, dated May 13, 2016. The forces were also tasked with "monitoring" the Local Supply and Production Committees (CLAP). That same year, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights reported that the military forces lacked the training needed to carry out public safety control duties.[33]

The same Decree No. 2,323, dated May 13, 2016, gave Maduro the authority to suspend potential political sanctions against high-ranking officials. The measure was intended to prevent Parliament from issuing votes of no confidence and removing ministers from office.

30 Access to Justice (2025). Decree Declaring a State of Economic Emergency. Available at: https://accesoalajusticia.org/decreto-que-declara-el-estado-de-emergencia-economica/ May 5, 2025

31 Access to Justice (2025). Constitutionality of the 60-day extension of the State of Economic Emergency that expired on October 8, 2025. https://accesoalajusticia.org/constitucionalidad-de-la-prorroga-por-60-dias-del-estado-de-emergencia/, October 9, 2025.

32 Transparencia Venezuela. Anti-Corruption Manual: 12 Actions and a Mandate. Available at: https://transparenciave.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Manual_contra_la_corrupcion_12_acciones_un_mandato-1.pdf 2019

33 Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. IACHR Expresses Concern Over the Declaration of a State of Exception and Economic Emergency in Venezuela. Available at https://www.oas.org/es/cidh/prensa/comunicados/2016/071.asp June 1, 2016

The Great Mission for Sovereign Supply was also established by Decree No. 2,367, dated July 7, 2016,[34] and the military high command was given the authority to coordinate the production, distribution, and marketing of essential goods. Transparencia Venezuela noted that no details had been provided about how its resources would be monitored, allocated, and managed, or how financial coordination would work across the various agencies under its responsibility.[35]

By then, a remarkable structure was already in place, bringing economic and security functions together. It included not only the executive branch but also the Bolivarian National Armed Forces, with General Vladimir Padrino López leading the Ministry of Defense.

2.6. Consequences of the Capture

The capture of the state changes how citizens relate to public authorities: rights and institutions are no longer applied equally to everyone and may instead be used to reward, punish, protect, or exclude. In Venezuela, this shift is reflected in the abuses documented in specific chapters of this report. Chapters 3 and 4 examine systemic corruption and the misuse of public resources, along with directed contracting, economic favoritism, and the use of public institutions for private gain. Sections 1.5 and 2.2.3 address nepotism, patronage, and influence peddling. Chapter 7 explores the political use of the justice system, the persecution of opponents, and the impunity enjoyed by those who are part of or support the capturing group. Chapter 8 addresses restrictions on rights and freedoms, as well as reprisals against whistleblowers, journalists, and watchdog organizations. Sections 2.2.7 and 7.4 analyze the manipulation of electoral processes. Chapters 4 and 6 focus on money laundering and the concealment of funds obtained through corruption. Finally, Chapter 9 examines the infiltration of state structures by organized crime.

The main consequence of state capture is that the law can no longer effectively hold power in check and may instead become a tool of that power, leading to:

- **Erosion or elimination of the separation of powers:** Beginning in 2016, Maduro turned to the Electoral Branch and the Judiciary to limit the National Assembly' s authority. Through two rulings issued in March 2017, the Supreme Court of Justice assumed the powers of the Legislative Branch (see section 7.4);

34 Pandectas Digital. Decree No. 2,367, establishing the Great Mission for Sovereign Supply. Available at: https://pandectasdigital.blogspot.com/2016/07/decreto-n-11-en-el-marco-del-estado-de.html July 2016

35 Transparencia Venezuela. Budget monitoring report. Available at: https://transparenciave.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Infor-de-Seguimiento-Pres-julio-20161.pdf July 2016

- **Loss of judicial independence:** The Maduro- Flores duo shaped the judicial system to serve their own interests, filling it with members of the United Socialist Party of Venezuela, as well as family members and associates who held positions in the Public Prosecutor' s Office, the Supreme Court of Justice, the Executive Directorate of the Judiciary, and the Public Defender' s Office (see sections 7.3 and 8.4);
- **Weakening of the system of checks and balances** (see section 2.2.6);
- **Erosion of democracy and the alternation of power:** The National Electoral Council called several elections at inopportune times, with schedules that raised questions. It also imposed restrictions on voter registration, limitations on political parties' participation, and disqualifications of political leaders, with the collaboration of the Comptroller General' s Office (see sections 2.2.7 and 7.4);
- **Concentration of political and economic power** (see Chapters 2 and 4);
- **Rising corruption and impunity:** Rather than investigating cases of corruption, the Public Prosecutor' s Office used its powers to pursue Maduro' s opponents. In 2017, the Prosecutor' s Office opened an investigation into bribes that Odebrecht paid to Venezuelan officials in exchange for contracts. Shortly thereafter, it shelved the findings, which identified Maduro as one of the key figures in the corruption network (see section 3.1 and chapter 7);
- **Loss of legitimacy and trust in institutions**;
- **Unequal application of the law** (see Chapter 7);
- **Deterioration of public services:** Officials' discretionary decisions are reflected, in part, in the allocation of resources to build hospitals and hydroelectric plants whose construction never began or was left unfinished. The authorities not only failed to investigate what happened to those projects, but the deterioration of Venezuela' s health and electrical systems has also affected citizens' quality of life;
- **Distortion of economic competition** (see Chapter 4);
- **Weakening of civil society and the independent press** (see sections 2.2.8 and 2.2.9);
- In its most extreme forms, the **transformation of the state into an instrument to protect and perpetuate the interests of the captoring group**.

2.7. Summary: From Institutional Capture to Specific Cases

The mechanisms examined in this chapter show that state capture involves more than simply occupying certain positions. The concentration of extraordinary powers, the weakening of parliamentary oversight, the reduced autonomy of judicial and electoral

institutions, budgetary opacity, and the Armed Forces' growing role in economic functions expanded opportunities for decision-making, contracting, resource allocation, and the exercise of power, even as checks and balances were progressively weakened. In this sense, capture transforms the conditions under which the state operates; it is not merely the sum of individual acts of corruption.

However, identifying these institutional conditions alone does not establish how they led to specific acts of corruption or how far those acts extended beyond Venezuela. To explore this question, the following chapter moves from institutional capacities to specific cases. It examines the scale of the grand corruption documented since 2013, its international reach, and the case files that help trace funds, officials, businesspeople, and intermediaries across multiple jurisdictions.

3 Systemic Grand Corruption and the Transnational Reach of Venezuelan Cases

3.1. Scale of Corruption Documented Since 2013
3.2. Internationalization of the Cases
3.3 Money Flight as a Case Study
3.4. Álex Saab and the Procurement System
3.5. High-ranking Officials and Individuals Indicted or Wanted in Other Jurisdictions
3.6. Impunity and the Venezuelan Institutional Response
3.7 From Cases of Grand Corruption to the Building of an Economic Structure

State capture becomes easier to understand when its effects can be traced to specific operations, financial losses, intermediaries, companies, and legal proceedings initiated outside Venezuela. Since 2013, Transparencia Venezuela has documented 154 cases of corruption. Of these, 110 have led to legal proceedings in 26 countries. In the 96 cases for which figures are available, the amounts involved exceed USD 36,115 million.

This chapter explores this empirical and transnational dimension. Rather than automatically attributing responsibility to Nicolás Maduro for every case that has emerged during his administration, it seeks to identify the mechanisms, appointments, decisions, actors, and institutional structures that connect Venezuela's political core to cases of grand corruption—and how these cases then extend to companies, financial systems, and international jurisdictions.

3.1. Scale of Corruption Documented Since 2013

Criminal, academic, and journalistic investigations conducted in recent years offer a clear picture of corruption in Venezuela, describing it as systemic, structural, and transnational. They point to the co-optation of the justice system, the Comptroller's Office, the National Assembly, public finances, and military leadership. They also highlight how state-owned enterprises, intermediaries, and international financial systems have been used to facilitate the embezzlement and laundering of money, without leading to sanctions against those responsible.

Since 2013, when he was elected president of Venezuela, Nicolás Maduro has remained at the political center of a network linked, directly or indirectly, to at least 154 alleged corruption cases involving more than USD 36,115 million, according to data compiled by Transparencia Venezuela. That figure corresponds to 96 of the cases. In many investigations, the total amount of misappropriated public funds has not been determined or made public. In some cases, details are available only through press reports or official statements that do not specify the amount involved; in others, the information is spread across multiple judicial documents.

The appointment of individuals to strategic positions and the awarding of contracts to businesspeople linked to Maduro and his wife, Cilia Flores, created favorable conditions whose scope is examined in Chapters 4 and 5. Court records and independent investigations indicate that the executive branch created incentives for awarding multimillion-dollar contracts without oversight of public funds, while the judicial branch remained at the service of impunity.

The Venezuelan Attorney General's Office has not pursued any investigation into Nicolás Maduro. The only known investigation involving him—the one launched in 2017 in connection with the Odebrecht bribery scandal—was closed without a determination of liability. The Venezuelan justice system has also closed cases against former officials and

other individuals who now face international charges for alleged money laundering, much of it linked to Petróleos de Venezuela S.A. (PDVSA).

3.2. Internationalization of the Cases

Since Maduro took office after Hugo Chávez's death, Transparencia Venezuela has documented 154 cases, 110 of which have been filed in courts across 26 countries:

Country of jurisdiction	Number of Cases
United States	37
Argentina	20
Spain	10
Colombia	7
Switzerland	4
Ecuador	4
Liechtenstein	3
Italy	3
Dominican Republic	3
Brazil	2
Bulgaria	2
Aruba	1
Bolivia	1

Country of jurisdiction	Number of Cases
Costa Rica	1
Curaçao	1
El Salvador	1
France	1
Guatemala	1
Haiti	1
Israel	1
Mexico	1
New Zealand	1
Panama	1
Portugal	1
Peru	1
Uruguay	1

Source: Transparencia Venezuela database

At least 651 people are linked to the total number of cases:

- 413 people, including bankers, businesspeople, and intermediaries.
- 238 people, including officials from PDVSA and its subsidiaries, Corpoelec, the National Treasury Office, mayors, judges, and prosecutors.

The complete list of international cases is presented in Appendix A.

36 Transparency Venezuela. Odebrecht Report 2018.
Available at: https://transparenciave.org/project/odebrecht-informe-odebrecht-2018/ 2018

3.3. Money Flight as a Case Study

The Money Flight case,[38] which is being prosecuted in the United States, shows how concentrating appointment powers in the Office of the President may have enabled officials overseeing the National Treasury and PDVSA's finances to carry out irregular foreign exchange transactions. Between December 2014 and May 2015,[38] PDVSA took on debt in bolivars and paid businesspeople in dollars at a preferential exchange rate. Rather than settling its USD 57,420,955 debt, the oil company made two payments of USD 600 million as the contract was renewed under the same terms. In total, PDVSA paid USD 1.2 billion.

At least 22 individuals were named in this case, including former PDVSA officials, bankers, businesspeople, and managers. As of January 2026, at least six of the accused had pleaded guilty and been sentenced: Mathias Krull, Gustavo Adolfo Hernández Frieri, Abraham Edgardo Ortega, Carmelo Urdaneta Aquí, Álvaro Ledo Nass, and Luis Fernando Vuteff. The case is pending before the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Florida. Court documents for each defendant are compiled in Appendix C of this report. This chronological account presents the full case, which is also referenced in the other chapters.[39] [40] [41] [42] [43] [44]

During the period in which the operations were carried out, on December 30, 2014, Nicolás Maduro appointed his nephew-in-law, Carlos Erik Malpica Flores, as PDVSA's internal director,[45]. In June of the following year, Malpica Flores became PDVSA's Vice President of Finance.

Among the fugitives[46] is Raúl Antonio de la Santísima Trinidad Gorrín Belisario,[47] a billionaire businessman who received €68.2 million from the Money Flight scheme and is listed as the nominal owner of companies that sources within the super network link to Cilia Flores and her sons Walter Jacob, Yosser, and Yoswal Gavidia Flores.[48] His fortune is linked to Venezuela's National Treasury Office during the tenure of Alejandro Andrade and Claudia

37 Transparencia Venezuela. Money Flight: U.S. courts issue new rulings regarding the billion-dollar embezzlement from PDVSA. September 9, 2024. Available at: https://supremainjusticia.org/money-flight-la-justicia-de-eeuu-emite-nuevos-dictamenes-por-el-milmillonario-desfalco-a-pdvsa/
Case Number – Money Flight: 1:2018cr20685.

38 U.S. Department of Justice. Two members of a multimillion-dollar Venezuelan money laundering network were arrested. Available at: https://www.justice.gov/archives/opa/pr/two-members-billion-dollar-venezuelan-money-laundering-scheme-arrested July 25, 2018

39 Case Number – Money Flight: 1:2018cr20682.

40 Case Number – Money Flight: 1:2018cr20685.

41 Case Number – Money Flight: 1:2018cr20685

42 Case Number – Money Flight: 1:2018cr20685

43 Case Number – Money Flight: 1:2023cr20089.

44 Case Number – Money Flight: 1:22-cr-20306.

45 Pandectas Digital. Appointment of Carlos Erik Malpica Flores as internal director of PDVSA in Official Gazette No. 40,571 of December 30, 2014. Available at: https://pandectasdigital.blogspot.com/2017/09/gaceta-oficial-de-la-republica_713.html

46 Transparencia Venezuela. Grand Corruption in Venezuela, Human Rights, and Impunity. April 2023.
Available at: https://transparenciave.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Gran-Corrupcion-venezolana-Derechos-Humanos-e-impunidad.pdf

47 Case Number – Money Flight: 24-20468cr-altman/lett.

Patricia Díaz Guillén. Both were convicted in the United States for participating in a bribery scheme designed to favor companies such as Gorrín's,[49] in currency exchange operations during the Hugo Chávez administration.

In 2020, the Venezuelan courts dismissed the case against Gorrín and Víctor Aular, PDVSA's former vice president of finance, finding that the company had repaid the debt without affecting its finances. The court also recognized a profit of 3.4 billion bolivars from the early loan repayment, though the available case file does not make it possible to determine the equivalent amount in foreign currency.

Mario Enrique Bonilla Vallera[50] and Francisco Antonio Convit Guruceaga[51] are other businessmen named in *Money Flight* also appear on the U.S. fugitive list, which includes 49 people.

Bonilla Vallera is also listed as the nominal owner of companies linked to the Maduro-Flores family. He was tasked with managing $200 million from PDVSA, funds that later ended up in the bank accounts of Flores's children. After working at the Attorney General's Office during Cilia Flores's tenure, he became a businessman and built an extensive network of international companies, enabling him to conduct opaque business dealings.[52]

Since 2009, Convit Guruceaga and his partners, Leopoldo Alejandro Betancourt López[53] and Pedro Trebbau López, have built a fortune after their Venezuelan company, Derwick Associates de Venezuela S.A., secured 12 contracts to construct power plants across several states—despite having no prior experience in the sector.

The businessman was living in Venezuela when Venezuelan state security forces arrested him in February 2025. The arrest came after reports emerged that he had been in contact with U.S. authorities to provide information about Money Flight. According to media reports, Convit escaped from the Bolivarian National Intelligence Service (Sebin) headquarters in Caracas on August 25, 2025, and fled to the United States.[54]

48 Transparencia Venezuela. Raúl Gorrín's Fortune in the Shadow of Power in Venezuela.
Available at: https://transparenciave.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/FINAL-INFORME-LA-FORTUNA-DE-RAUL-GORRIN.pdf
49 Case Number – Case of Bribes to Former National Treasurers: 9:2018cr80160.
50 Case Number – Money Flight: 1:2018cr20685.
51 Ibid.
52 Armando.info. Cilia Flores's children bought a street all to themselves.
Available at: https://armando.info/los-hijos-de-cilia-flores-se-compraron-una-calle-para-ellos-solos/ November 10, 2019
Armando.info. A boss in diapers, thanks to a group of friends.
Available at: https://armando.info/jefe-en-panales-por-obra-y-gracia-de-un-bouquet-de-amigos/ February 16, 2020
53 Transparencia Venezuela. Alejandro Betancourt, the "bolichico" who has gotten off scot-free in the courts of several countries.
Available at: https://transparenciave.org/alejandro-betancourt-el-bolichico-que-ha-salido-bien-librado-ante-la-justicia-de-varios-paises/
September 21, 2025
54 El Pitazo. How Did Francisco Convit Escape? Here's What We Know.
Available at: https://elpitazo.net/politica/como-se-fugo-francisco-convit-esto-es-lo-que-se-sabe/ August 31, 2025

3.4. Álex Saab and the Procurement System

Among Nicolás Maduro's inner circle was Colombian businessman Álex Naín Saab Morán[55], who had been in charge of food imports for the Local Supply and Production Committees (CLAP), the former president's flagship program, since 2016. Through contracts with inflated prices, he sold subsidized products while Venezuela was facing a severe humanitarian crisis: poverty stood at 87%, and people were losing an average of 8 kilos per person each year.

In 2019, the U.S. Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) imposed sanctions on Saab Morán[56], and Álvaro Pulido Vargas, alleging that they bribed Maduro's stepsons—Walter, Yosser, and Yoswal Gavidia Flores—as well as other government officials to secure contracts that were later inflated in value. They then laundered the money through a sophisticated network of shell companies.

An investigation initiated by prosecutors in Miami, Florida, found that the Saab-Pulido duo laundered approximately $350 million in the United States. The money came from fraudulent imports to Venezuela intended for the housing sector. The U.S. Attorney's Office for the Southern District of Florida filed eight charges against both men: one count of conspiracy to launder money and seven counts of money laundering.

In June 2020, Cape Verdean police arrested Saab Morán at the request of the United States. He was extradited to the United States in October 2021 to face money laundering charges. Rather than ordering an investigation into him, Venezuela defended him, asserting that he was a Venezuelan "government official" entitled to diplomatic immunity. In December 2023, the Joe Biden administration granted him a pardon in exchange for the release of Americans imprisoned in Venezuela.

Shortly afterward, Maduro appointed him president of the International Center for Productive Investment, the agency responsible for attracting foreign capital. He was later named Minister of Industries and National Production. In January 2026, after the capture of Maduro and Cilia Flores and Delcy Rodríguez's swearing-in as acting president, the Colombian businessman left the government. In May 2026, he was extradited to the United States to face charges of money laundering and conspiracy to carry out illicit financial transactions.[57]

Chapter 4 explores Álex Saab's place within the business and kleptocratic structure, while Chapter 6 examines his role in transnational efforts to adapt to and evade sanctions.

55 Transparencia Venezuela. Report on the CLAPs.
Available at: https://transparenciave.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Informe-CLAP-2020.pdf 2020
56 Case Number – Álex Saab Case in the United States: 1:19-cr-20450
57 Transparencia Venezuela. From "Free Álex Saab" to Deporting Him as a Foreign National.
Available at: https://transparenciave.org/de-free-alex-saab-a-deportarlo-como-extranjero/ May 18, 2026

3.5. High-ranking Officials and Individuals Indicted or Wanted in Other Jurisdictions

Several current and former officials appointed by Nicolás Maduro to high-ranking positions are also listed as fugitives in the United States. The information about the charges is current as of January 3, 2026. Periods that overlap indicate simultaneous designations, and the charges include money laundering, sanctions evasion, or drug trafficking. Those listed include Tareck El Aissami, Joselit de la Trinidad Ramírez Camacho, Néstor Reverol, Vladimir Padrino López, José Gregorio Vielma Mora, and Maikel Moreno.



Tareck El Aissami

- Executive Vice President of the Republic (2017–2018)
- Minister of Industries and National Production (2018–2021)
- Minister of Petroleum (2020–2023)
- President of PDVSA (2020–2023)

In the United States, he is implicated in a sanctions-evasion case[58] that also involves one of his key allies, Samark López Bell.[59] The former official allegedly used U.S. companies to coordinate international travel on a private jet. In connection with the case, which investigators began looking into in 2019, a businessman and a pilot were sentenced.

The U.S. Department of the Treasury considers that El Aissami allegedly "plays an important role in international narcotics trafficking" and that his "front man" is López Bello, who is said to be involved in laundering money derived from drug trafficking.

In Venezuela, El Aissami was accused of participating in the PDVSA-Crypto scheme. According to the Prosecutor's Office, he was allegedly responsible for discretionarily allocating crude oil shipments to the National Superintendency of Cryptoassets (Sunacrip) and shell companies. After selling the oil on international markets, these entities allegedly failed to return the proceeds to PDVSA's accounts. Further details about the amount, time period, and procedural status of the case are provided in section 3.6.[60]

The case was announced in March 2023. A year later, the former minister's arrest became public when then-Attorney General Tarek William Saab said he would face charges of treason, embezzlement of public assets, and money laundering. As of the time this report was completed, no official information was available about El Aissami's place of detention.

58 Case Number – Tareck El Aissami Sanctions Evasion Case: 1:19-cr-00144

59 BBC. The U.S. accuses Tareck El Aissami, former vice president of Venezuela and minister of industries, of violating sanctions imposed on him for alleged drug trafficking. March 8, 2019. Available at: https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-47503863

60 Transparencia Venezuela. PDVSA-Crypto Scandal Involves $16.6 Billion. June 2023. Available at: https://transparenciave.org/trama-pdvsa-cripto-compromete-mas-16-600-millones/



Joselit de la Trinidad Ramírez Camacho

National Superintendent of Cryptoassets (Sunacrip) (2018–2023)

Ramírez Camacho is also named in the same sanctions-evasion case[61] that prompted an investigation into Tareck El Aissami in the United States.

He is also considered one of the key figures implicated in the PDVSA-Cripto case and was among the first people arrested by Venezuelan authorities in March 2023. His role was to design an oil-trading scheme that used cryptocurrencies to circumvent international financial controls and U.S. sanctions. Through this mechanism, the trail of public funds became nearly impossible for Venezuelan regulatory agencies to trace.

The trial began on April 20, 2026. Before then, the Prosecutor's Office had not shared any public updates on the case's progress or the legal status of those involved, including more than 60 individuals.



Néstor Reverol

- President of Corpozulia (2013)
- Commander-in-Chief of the Bolivarian National Guard (2014–2016)
- Minister of the Interior and Justice (2016–2020)
- Minister of Electric Power (2020–2024)
- Sectoral Vice President of Public Works and Services (2019–2024)
- President of Corpozulia (2024–2025)

The United States is seeking Reverol in connection with a drug trafficking case that came to light in 2015, after Maduro appointed him Minister of the Interior and Justice[62]. The U.S. Attorney's Office charged him in a New York court with accepting bribes from drug traffickers in exchange for helping them transport drug shipments to the United States. The alleged events took place between 2008 and 2010, when he led the National Anti-Drug Office during Hugo Chávez's term in office.



Vladimir Padrino López

- Strategic and Operational Commander of the Bolivarian National Armed Forces (2013–2014)
- Minister of Defense (2014–2026)
- Head of the Great Sovereign Supply Mission (2016–2018)

61 Case Number – Tareck El Aissami Sanctions Evasion Case: 1:19-cr-00144.

62 BBC. Venezuela: Maduro appoints Néstor Reverol, a general accused in the United States of drug trafficking, as interior minister. August 3, 2016. Available at: https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-36961309
Case Number – Drug Trafficking Case – Néstor Reverol: 1:2015cr00020.

In 2019, the United States began investigating the former defense minister, believing there was evidence that he had helped drug trafficking groups fly through Venezuelan airspace without being detected or intercepted in exchange for bribes. The alleged conspiracy is said to have taken place between March 2014 and May 2019.[63]



José Gregorio Vielma Mora

- Governor of Táchira (2012–2017)
- Acting Coordinator of the Ureña–San Antonio del Táchira Special Border Economic Zone (2016)
- Protector of the State of Táchira (2017)
- Minister of Foreign Trade and International Investment (2017–2018)

In the United States, he is accused of being part of a corruption network linked to the CLAPs[64], which paid bribes to secure contracts to import food and medicine into Venezuela.

From July 2015 through at least 2020, the defendants allegedly received $1.6 billion in Venezuelan public funds and transferred approximately $180 million to the United States from bank accounts in Antigua, the United Arab Emirates, and other countries.



Maikel Moreno

- Judge of the Criminal Cassation Chamber of the Supreme Court of Justice (TSJ) (2014–2022)
- President of the Criminal Cassation Chamber of the TSJ (2015–2017)
- President of the Supreme Court of Justice (2017–2022)
- Justice of the Criminal Cassation Chamber of the TSJ (2022–present)

In 2020, U.S. prosecutors charged him with accepting bribes to influence the outcomes of more than 20 civil and criminal cases in Venezuela and with conspiring to launder money. According to court documents, he allegedly authorized the seizure and sale of a General Motors automobile plant valued at approximately USD 100 million in exchange for a personal share of the proceeds. He also allegedly accepted bribes to authorize the dismissal of charges against Venezuelan citizens or their release. One of those individuals was a defendant allegedly involved in a multimillion-dollar fraud scheme against Venezuela's state-owned oil company.[65]

63 Case number: Case regarding flight authorizations by Vladimir Padrino López: 1:19-cr-00176.
64 Case Number: Case involving a corruption network linked to the CLAPs: 1:2021cr20509.
65 Case Number. Case of Maikel Moreno, President of the Supreme Court of Justice, under investigation by the U.S.: 1:20-mj-02407-JJO.

3.6. Impunity and Venezuela's Institutional Response

Mechanisms of impunity are examined in Chapter 7.

The Public Prosecutor's Office's response to corruption in Venezuela has often followed a pattern of announcements, arrests, and indictments, with few cases resulting in public judicial outcomes. Although corruption has led to the loss of billions of dollars, official information about the progress of investigations, trials, and convictions remains limited or unavailable. The same is true of efforts to recover embezzled funds transferred to overseas bank accounts, which many former officials, bankers, businesspeople, and facilitators have used to purchase luxury goods.

The Venezuelan justice system has yet to provide clear updates on cases involving irregularities at Petrozamora, Petropiar, and Petrowarao. These cases include overpriced contracts and the manipulation of oil production figures to secure higher royalty payments and increase the budget allocated to the company.[66] It has also remained silent on the case of former Minister Haiman El Troudi. Swiss authorities linked his wife and mother-in-law to at least USD 42 million, which may have come from business dealings with Odebrecht. Although the Swiss justice system shared this information with Venezuela, authorities shelved the investigation and did not allow it to proceed.[67]

In 2023, the Venezuelan Attorney General's Office announced the arrest of former PDVSA officials and businesspeople linked to the allocation of oil shipments to the National Superintendency of Cryptoassets and private individuals, without administrative controls or safeguards. This section provides a detailed reconstruction of the case, known as PDVSA-Cripto; other chapters refer back to it. The case involved an oil-marketing network operating parallel to PDVSA, with inexperienced intermediaries and payments made through barter, cryptoassets, and debt settlements. Section 6.2 explains the financial mechanism. The operations took place between 2019 and 2023, and the proceeds never entered PDVSA's accounts. The case remains ongoing in Venezuela.[68]

Transparencia Venezuela estimates that the amount involved was USD 16,960 million, though no Venezuelan authority has officially confirmed the figure. The trial of more than 60 accused individuals began on April 20, 2026. Those among them include former Minister of Petroleum Tareck El Aissami, Hugbel Roa, Joselit de la Trinidad Ramírez Camacho, and Samark López.[6] The complete list of national cases is provided in Annex B.

66 Transparencia Venezuela. Tarek William Saab's Departure from the Attorney General's Office Does Not Guarantee Independence. Available at: https://transparenciave.org/salida-de-tarek-william-saab-de-la-fiscalia-no-garantiza-independencia/ March 3, 2026

67 Corruptometer | Transparency Venezuela. Inaction by the National Prosecutor's Office Leads to the Closure of Venezuelan Corruption Cases Open Around the World. Available at: https://corruptometro.org/noticias/inaccion-de-la-fiscalia-nacional-empuja-el-cierre-de-causas-por-corrupcion-venezolana-abiertas-en-el-mundo/ January 31, 2024.

68 Transparencia Venezuela. PDVSA-Crypto Scandal Involves $16.6 Billion. Available at: https://transparenciave.org/trama-pdvsa-cripto-compromete-mas-16-600-millones/ June 19, 2023

69 Transparencia Venezuela. What Is Known About the Trial of the 64 Individuals Implicated in the PDVSA Crypto Case. Available at: https://transparenciave.org/lo-que-se-sabe-del-juicio-a-los-64-implicados-en-el-caso-pdvsa-cripto/ April 30, 2026

3.7. From Cases of Grand Corruption to the Building of an Economic Structure

The cases examined in this chapter point to corruption that extends beyond Venezuela's institutional and territorial boundaries. The 154 cases documented since 2013, proceedings opened in 26 countries, and more than USD 36,115 million involved in quantified cases and cases such as Money Flight, Saab–Pulido, and PDVSA-Cripto show how recurring mechanisms connect public resources, officials, contractors, intermediaries, companies, and international financial systems. The judicial response also highlights a significant imbalance: investigations in foreign jurisdictions are often more visible, while public information about investigations and their outcomes in Venezuela remains limited.

Still, tracing the money and reconstructing case files can answer only part of the question. Grand corruption can also reshape economic power, creating wealth, companies, intermediaries, and market positions that continue to have an impact long after the original transactions. The following chapter explores this transformation, shifting from individual corruption cases to the business structure identified around the political elite and the so-called presidential family.

4 Kleptocracy: From Resource Extraction to the Building of an Economic Elite

4.1. Formation and Evolution of the Kleptocratic Structure

4.2. The Business Foundations of the Kleptocracy

4.3. The So-called “Presidential family” within the Business Network

4.4. Related Companies, Sectors, Jurisdictions, and Individuals

4.5. Changes Observed since January 2026

4.6. How Kleptocratic Leaders Build Wealth and Control Strategic Revenues

Corruption doesn't end with officials embezzling public funds. It's also important to ask what happens to that money and what economic structures help generate it. This chapter explores how the extraction of state rents can contribute to the formation of a business elite connected, through various kinds of relationships, to Venezuela's political core.

The research presented in this chapter, compiled by Transparencia Venezuela, identifies 865 companies across at least 34 economic sectors that are linked to networks of officials, family members, businesspeople, intermediaries, and facilitators. Of these, 201 appear to be linked to the so-called "presidential family." In this way, the chapter examines kleptocracy not only as the appropriation of wealth, but also as a process through which privileged access to the state can be converted into economic, corporate, and patrimonial power—with the potential to last beyond a person's time in public office.

4.1. Formation and Evolution of the Kleptocratic Structure

In Venezuela, several groups that hold significant political power—including the presidential family (Nicolás Maduro, Cilia Flores, their children, and other relatives), siblings Delcy and Jorge Rodríguez Gómez, and the Cabello Rondón and Cabello Contreras families—have used their positions to exploit the state, its resources, and its institutions. Over time, they have built their own criminal networks and a new economic class funded by corrupt proceeds.

At first, members of this extensive corruption network relied on transnational schemes to launder money from corruption and illicit economies. However, personal sanctions and criminal proceedings launched in 26 countries against many people implicated in corruption cases over the past 10 years have restricted the international movement of funds of questionable origin. Since 2019, new investment groups have emerged across 34 economic sectors in Venezuela, backed by opaque funding and directly linked to high-ranking government leaders, particularly the presidential family.

Transparencia Venezuela's investigation into kleptocracy highlights two key moments in its development. The second occurred during Nicolás Maduro's administration and unfolded in two phases:

- The first period began in 2003, when exchange and price controls were implemented. These measures created opportunities for risky activities that led to hundreds of corruption cases, investigated by judicial systems in 26 countries.
- The second period spanned 2018 to 2021. In 2018, the economy was partially liberalized, partnerships with the private sector in state-owned enterprises were strengthened, cryptoassets began to be used in public transactions, and imports were made easier for groups close to the ruling elite. This environment fostered money laundering within

the country as commerce and services expanded, particularly in the capital and other cities in the central-northern region.

- Within this same context, a second phase began in 2021. After COVID-19 quarantine measures were eased, the government's "Venezuela se arregló" campaign gained momentum. The campaign reflected several developments: the opening of nightclubs and the construction of unoccupied high-rise towers in the Las Mercedes neighborhood—considered Caracas's "red-light district"—; the rapid expansion of department stores and household-appliance sales across the country; and the revival of state-owned enterprises, now in the hands of "private allies" . It also highlighted the return of international-caliber concerts and shows, which had not been seen in many years, as well as the resumption of vehicle sales—a market that had been closed since 2013—particularly for high-end models.

This investment is especially striking in a country where the consumer market has not grown and, according to the National Survey on Living Conditions (ENCOVI) conducted by Andrés Bello Catholic University, income-based poverty reached 94.5% and extreme poverty reached 76.6% in 2021.[70]. The country also faces an unsustainable debt burden and has been in undeclared default since 2017.[71] It has experienced triple-digit inflation for years, including periods of hyperinflation. The only assurance these investments had was their proximity to and ties with the Maduro government and his family.

In light of the waste observed in some sectors of the country, an investigation explored who was making these investments and how they were connected to those in power. This led to the identification of networks of kleptocrats, popularly known as "enchufados." Where did the resources come from to support the notable emergence of new companies and the expansion of existing ones? Who owns the capital invested in a country marked by instability and the multidimensional crises described above?

This chapter is guided by the hypothesis that the business expansion observed since 2019 channeled resources of illicit origin. This hypothesis is supported by documented links between the owners, shareholders, and executives of these companies and 35 high-ranking government officials, including Nicolás Maduro and the presidential family. However, the specific flow of funds in each case has not yet been established.[72]

Furthermore, the government supported this network by introducing new legislation, selectively imposing taxes and controls, and creating new forms of expropriation. These measures, along with million-dollar fines, widespread extortion, unequal market conditions,

70 https://www.proyectoencovi.com/encovi-2021

71 https://saldarladeuda.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/DEUDA.pdf; https://transparenciave.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/FINAL-Aumenta-la-deuda-externa-a-mas-de-170.360-millones-de-dolares_MAR-2026-2.pdf

72 Transparencia Venezuela, "Combating Kleptocracy in Venezuela." Full report, included as Appendix D of this report.

and the lack of transparency established in previous years, contributed to capital flight and helped privileged power groups expand their economic influence.

4.2. The Business Foundations of the Kleptocracy

Since 2024, Transparencia Venezuela has systematically investigated and verified data on companies suspected of having ties to high-ranking government officials, using criteria developed through a methodology designed by experts from a range of disciplines. This work has resulted in a database that included 865 companies as of March 2026.

The database has helped identify groups within the ruling elite connected through family ties or political relationships; allied businesspeople who serve as intermediaries; those who facilitate company creation, including lawyers, accountants, consultants, and registration firms; companies connected to the state through contracts or strategic partnerships; and companies that benefit from preferential foreign exchange rates. Key findings include:

- A total of 865 companies operate across at least 34 economic sectors.
- Of these, 592 were registered in Venezuela, while 276 were registered abroad, primarily in Panama (124), the United States (46), Colombia (35), and Spain (16).
- Thirty-five members of the political elite are directly or indirectly linked to people listed as owners, executives, representatives, agents, accountants, or auditors of these companies.
- More than 1,630 individuals are associated with the identified companies. They include shareholders, executives, agents, accountants, auditors, and people allegedly linked to the companies. Many appear across multiple companies with different business purposes.
- A total of 183 companies signed contracts or strategic alliances with government agencies or entities, primarily with Petróleos de Venezuela or its subsidiaries and the Venezuelan Mining Corporation.
- Sixty companies received more than USD 2,240 million from the foreign exchange authority at the official rate, which was well below market value.

4.3. The So-called “Presidential family” within the Business Network

The presidential family is identified as the most influential power group. Its membership is defined using two criteria: kinship with Nicolás Maduro Moros or Cilia Flores and, in one explicitly noted case, a role as a contractor and economic operator for the group.

Based on family ties, the group includes Nicolás Maduro Moros, president of the Republic until January 2026; his wife, Cilia Flores, a former deputy in the National Assembly (2000–2011 and 2015–2025); Nicolás Maduro Guerra, Maduro Moros's son and a former deputy to the National Assembly; María Adelaida Maduro Moros, Maduro Moros's sister and head of the Public Defender's Office from 2016 to 2022; Laura Guerra Angulo, Maduro Moros's former sister-in-law and president of the Central Bank of Venezuela until January 2026; the brothers Walter, Yoswal, and Yosser Gavidia Flores, Cilia Flores's sons; Carlos Erik Malpica Flores, a former national treasurer and Cilia Flores's nephew; and Iriamni Malpica Flores, a former official of the National Electoral Council and Cilia Flores's niece. Also included, based on his role rather than family ties, is Álex Naín Saab Morán, a former Minister of Industries, diplomatic delegate, and government contractor.

The presidential family is linked to 201 companies, representing 23% of those identified so far. This figure reflects the group's scope excluding the Maduro branch, which was added after the database was finalized. The companies operate in at least 25 economic sectors. Of the 201 companies, 145 are active in a specific sector, while the corporate purpose of 56 could not be determined. Identified sectors include real estate and financial services, construction, trade and imports, media, hydrocarbons, mining and metallurgy, agri-food, sports equipment, and gyms, among others.

4.4. Related Companies, Sectors, Jurisdictions, and Individuals

Table of companies by economic sector linked to the presidential family

Economic Sector	No. of companies
Unidentified Services[73]	43
Real Estate Services	27
Financial Services	22
Construction	17
Various Economic Sectors[74]	13
Food Retail	11
Media	10
Import and Retail	10
Agri-Food	8
Pharmaceutical	4
Bars, restaurants, nightclubs, and parks	4
Sports equipment and gyms	3

73 This group of companies avoids disclosing its corporate purpose or name. The information does not appear in the databases consulted.
74 In this case, the companies are authorized to conduct activities in multiple economic sectors according to their articles of incorporation; in some cases, they span more than a dozen sectors.

Economic Sector	No. of companies
Mining and metallurgy	3
Hydrocarbons and services	3
Transportation and logistics	3
Advertising, marketing, and consulting services	2
Textiles and footwear	2
Electronics and home appliances	2
Healthcare	2
Sports equipment	2
Solid waste	2
Hotels and tourism services	2
Vehicles and auto parts	2
Department stores	1
Accounting and legal services	1
Jewelry and costume jewelry	1
Machinery and equipment	1

Source: Transparencia Venezuela database

The companies are registered in 16 countries, distributed as shown in the following table:

A country-by-country list of companies linked to the presidential family

Countries	No. of companies
Venezuela	65
Panama	62
United States	23
Colombia	17
United Arab Emirates	5
Turkey	4
Hong Kong	4
Ecuador	2
Spain	2
Singapore	1
Mexico	1
Switzerland	1
Belize	1
United Kingdom	1
British Virgin Islands	1
Malta	1
Unknown	10
Total	201

Source: Transparencia Venezuela database

There are 200 individuals linked to companies owned by the presidential family; the most prominent ones, based on the number of companies with which they are associated, are as follows:

Key individuals linked to the presidential family and number of companies

Individuals	No. of Companies
Raúl Antonio de la Santísima Trinidad Gorrín Belisario	31
Ramón Carretero Napolitano	25
Mario Enrique Bonilla Vallera	14
Raúl Eduardo Saavedra Leterni	12
Carlos Manuel Mackay Villalobos	9
Álvaro Enrique Pulido Vargas	9
Amir Luis Saab Morán	9
Juan Carlos López Tovar	8
José Simón Elarba Haddad	8
Francesco Antonio Vona Aschettino	8
Gustavo Adolfo Perdomo Rosales	8
Yorwing Anthony Rodríguez Arteaga	8

Individuals	No. of Companies
Jean Carlos Rodríguez Arteaga	7
Henry Jesús Camino Muñoz	6
Carlos Eduardo Rivas Mosqueda	6
Jesús José Rafael Velásquez Gamero	5
Emmanuel Enrique Rubio González	5
Luis Alberto Saab Morán	5
Germán Enrique Foucault Ray	5
Carlos Rolando Lizcano Manrique	5
Jorge Cruz Hernández Hernández	4
Katia Saab Morán	4
Shadi Nain Saab Certain	4
Adrián Antonio Perdomo Mata	4

Source: Transparencia Venezuela database

Of the 201 companies linked to the presidential family, at least 21 entered contracts with government agencies or entities, while at least 7 received preferential foreign exchange rates.

4.5. Changes Observed since January 2026

For background on the structural context of Cilia Flores, Carlos Erik Malpica Flores, Raúl Gorrín, Ramón Carretero, and Álex Saab within the super-network, please see Chapter 1. Here, we take a closer look at the subsequent changes in the business structure associated with them.

According to this report, this network—described as kleptocratic—maintained control of major companies in its respective sectors until January 3, 2026. Following the capture of Nicolás Maduro, the following changes were identifie:

- The arrest and extradition of Álex Saab. No information is available regarding the status of his investments, companies, or assets;
- The possible arrest of Raúl Gorrín;[75]
- The replacement of members of the presidential family in public office[76]: Walter Gavidia Rodríguez (Cilia Flores's ex-husband) left the "Juntos Todo es Posible" Corporation. Edgar Gavidia Rodríguez (Cilia Flores's former brother-in-law) retired from his position as a justice of the Supreme Court of Justice. Giuson Fernando Flores (Cilia Flores's brother) was removed from his position at the Directorate of the Administrative Service for Identification, Migration, and Foreigners (Saime). Magaly Gutiérrez Viña (Cilia Flores's former daughter-in-law) was removed from her positions at the Venezuelan Institute of Social Security and the Ministry of Health, while Laura Guerra Angulo (Nicolás Maduro's former sister-in-law) left her position as president of the Central Bank of Venezuela.

4.6. How Kleptocratic Leaders Build Wealth and Control Strategic Revenues

The corporate investigation shows that the kleptocracy under examination extends beyond company ownership and the accumulation of wealth by certain individuals. The network of 865 companies, their presence across dozens of economic sectors, their connections to public contracts and preferential exchange rates, and the identification of 201 companies linked to the so-called presidential family all point to a structure in which political relationships are closely intertwined with economic, business, and corporate capabilities. Changes observed after January 2026 also suggest that certain personal and institutional positions may shift, although it remains unclear what will happen to the assets, companies, and economic relationships that had been established.

Within this economic architecture, one institution stands out for its significance, which far exceeds that of any business sector in Venezuela: PDVSA. The company has historically been the state's primary source of foreign revenue, ranks third in intermediation within the "super network," and has repeatedly been linked to appointments, contracts, international trade, and major corruption scandals. For this reason, the following chapter takes a closer look at how PDVSA's institutional transformation turned the oil sector into one of the key areas for understanding the relationship between power, public revenue, and corruption.

75 https://efe.com/mundo/2026-02-05/alex-saab-raul-gorrin-detencion/
76 https://transparenciave.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/FINAL-Cilia-Flores-mas-de-30-anos-amasando-poder-con-Chavez-y-Maduro_MAR-2026-1.pdf

5 PDVSA: Capture, Institutional Decline, Corruption, and the Transformation of the Oil Model

5.1. A Look at PDVSA's Institutional Transformation

5.2. Changes to Oversight, Contracting, and Marketing

5.3. Corruption Cases at PDVSA

5.4. Impunity and Judicial Handling of Oil-Related Cases

5.5. From PDVSA's Capture to Sanctions Evasion

PDVSA is more than just another sector in the structure analyzed. It has long served as a source of state revenue, a strategic enterprise, a setting for political appointments, a platform for contracting, a means of conducting international relations, and a recurring focus of investigations into grand corruption. This chapter traces the appointments, cases, and amounts associated with the sector. Its position within the super-network—third in terms of intermediation—was analyzed in Chapter 1, so it is not repeated here.

With this context in mind, the chapter explores how changes in PDVSA's corporate governance, control and contracting mechanisms, and, later, marketing model reshaped the conditions under which the Venezuelan state managed its primary source of external revenue. The cases examined reveal a particularly significant convergence of institutional governance, discretionary power, private intermediation, asset loss, opacity, and transnational financial reach.

5.1. A Look at PDVSA's Institutional Transformation

Beginning in 2003, PDVSA came under the direct control of President Hugo Chávez. Through regulatory reforms, changes in corporate governance, bilateral and multilateral agreements, and the dismantling of formal oversight bodies for public entities, the company became more closely aligned with the strategy of the Presidency and the ruling party. It also helped finance political allies across the region and support social programs as part of a broader political control strategy, while changing partners for geopolitical reasons.[77] All of this happened without meaningful attention to maintenance, innovation, or the development of the production chain at each stage. Meanwhile, the risks of abuse of power grew and were exploited.

When Nicolás Maduro became president, PDVSA faced even greater challenges as executive measures affected the company's internal management and weakened institutional and civic oversight.

5.2. Changes to Oversight, Contracting, and Marketing

2014 When international oil prices unexpectedly fell, PDVSA faced cash-flow challenges and deactivated its automated payment module (the SAP system), which had managed supplier accounts payable according to each obligation's due date. The company switched to a manual system, prompting contractors and suppliers with overdue receivables to pressure—and, in some cases, bribe—industry executives and employees responsible for preparing payment lists to secure a place on the

77 https://transparenciave.org/petroleo-como-se-fraguo/

list or move up in priority. That same year, the Public Procurement Law[78] was amended for the fifth time since 2000. The changes introduced new exceptions to the law, which may have made procurement less transparent and created more opportunities for corrupt practices.

2016 Following the 2015 National Assembly elections, which gave opposition parties a qualified majority, a five-year period of states of exception and economic emergency decrees began.[79] These measures gave Maduro decision-making power without parliamentary oversight. In 2016, national budgets and management reports for most public bodies and entities[80] —including PDVSA— were published for the last time.

2018 An executive decree was approved to establish a special, transitional framework for the oil industry's operational and administrative management. From then on, strategic partnerships were formed with private entities, enabling the transfer of assets from oil companies and service providers in a process that lacked transparency.[81]

2019 The clandestine sale of oil began in response to sanctions imposed by the United States on PDVSA.

2020 The Constitutional Anti-Blockade Law was passed, once again reshaping the legal framework, especially in economic matters. Among other things, it introduced exceptional ways to contract, purchase, and pay for goods and services; allowed for discretionary and opaque public-private partnerships; and classified these exceptional mechanisms as confidential and secret. The Maduro government invoked the "Anti-Blockade Law" to conduct opaque business transactions using public funds.

2023 To help settle debts and support the negotiations that led to a temporary easing of international sanctions, operational control and the marketing of oil production from certain joint ventures were transferred to minority partners, including Chevron, Repsol, Eni, and Maurel & Prom.

78 Between 2000 and 2014, Venezuela's public procurement regime underwent five successive legislative reforms or replacements: 2000, 2001, 2008, 2009, and 2010; in 2014, a new Decree with the Rank, Value, and Force of Law on Public Procurement was enacted, which expressly repealed the 2010 law. https://acading.org.ve/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/2021-08-06_CAVECON_Propuesta-Contraciones-Publicas.pdf?utm_source=chatgpt.com

79 https://transparenciave.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/04-Estados-de-excepcion-Y-DE-EMERGENCIA-ECONOMICA.pdf

80 https://transparenciave.org/cero-en-transparecia-presupuestal-100-en-discrecionalidad-y-abuso-de-lo-publico/

81 https://transparenciave.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/PDVSA-privatizacion-controlada-por-las-familias-en-el-poder-y-militarizada.pdf

5.3. Corruption Cases at PDVSA

Since Nicolás Maduro took office as president, at least 61 cases of corruption have been reported within the company. Some of them include:

Operation Atlantic.

Between 2012 and 2013, PDVSA and Administradora Atlantic 17107, C.A., recorded loans and repayments. Raúl Gorrín, a businessman close to Nicolás Maduro and Cilia Flores, was involved. At the time, Nicolás Maduro served on PDVSA's board of directors.[82] In 2013, while serving as President of the Republic, he reappointed all the board members who had approved the operation. The amount committed was USD 4,850,000.

PDVSA Case – Rantor Capital – Eaton Global Services Limited.

It took place in 2015 and 2016 as part of a scheme orchestrated by Mario Bonilla Vallera and Raúl Gorrín, who were linked to Cilia Flores's children.[83] In the United States, the case is known as "Money Flight." Section 3.3 provides details, including the amount involved, the defendants, and the status of the proceedings.[84] An arrest warrant has been issued for Bonilla Vallera, who is currently considered a fugitive from the United States.

PDVSA-Crypto Scheme.[85]

This case involved a network of oil-trading operations running parallel to PDVSA, with multiple inexperienced intermediaries and payment methods that included barter, cryptoassets, and debt offsets. These operations failed to meet minimum accounting requirements. The main figure implicated was Oil Minister Tareck El Aissami. However, the period in which the losses occurred, together with the silence of oversight bodies—prior bodies (internal audit, Ministry of Economy, Ministry of Planning), political bodies (National Assembly), and subsequent bodies (Comptroller General's Office)—suggests the possibility of knowledge and tolerance at the highest levels of the Executive Branch. This report does not consider that possibility proven and notes that it requires additional documentary verification. The amount and time period involved are detailed in section 3.6.[86]

A complete reconstruction of these cases was presented in Chapter 3.

82 https://transparenciave.org/conoce-la-junta-directiva-de-pdvsa-en-el-momento-del-desfalco/
83 https://transparenciave.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Asi-se-fraguo.pdf
84 See section 3.3 of this report, "Money Flight as a Case Study" (p. 80).
85 See section 3.6 of this report, "Impunity and the Venezuelan Institutional Response."
86 https://transparenciave.org/trama-pdvsa-cripto-un-desfalco-sin-precedentes/

5.4. Impunity and Judicial Handling of Oil-Related Cases

The structural composition of the oil subnetwork was presented in Section 1.4.2. Chapter 7 takes a closer look at the mechanisms of judicial capture and impunity, helping to explain how these cases have been handled.

In Venezuela, cases such as Rantor Capital—known as "Money Flight" in the United States—and Operation Atlantic have been dismissed. The courts have ruled that the financial transactions did not constitute crimes in the country. As a result, the individuals involved have been able to bring the cases before judges in other countries, such as Spain, where they are being investigated for the same acts.

In the United States, by contrast, investigations have been opened and accountability has been established. In the Money Flight case, the U.S. justice system has convicted six of the accused individuals, as detailed in Section 3.3.

In general, the Venezuelan Attorney General's Office announces when it opens investigations but offers little follow-up information about their progress, the amount of funds allegedly embezzled, or the status of those implicated. It also does not publish official data on preliminary investigations, trials, convictions, or corruption cases that have been dismissed. In cases such as that of Haiman El Troudi, whose family was implicated by Swiss authorities for allegedly handling money from business dealings with Odebrecht, rulings have been issued prohibiting any investigation into the matter.[88]

5.5. From PDVSA's Capture to Sanctions Evasion

This chapter showed that PDVSA's significance goes well beyond its role as an oil company. Changes in its leadership, corporate governance, controls, contracting, and marketing brought it into close contact with public revenue, presidential decisions, financial operators, private intermediaries, and cases of transnational corruption. The gap between cases investigated or sanctioned outside Venezuela and the domestic judicial treatment of several of those same incidents raises further questions about impunity, which are explored in Chapter 7.

Sanctions created a new challenge for this structure by limiting PDVSA's access—as well as that of certain officials and companies—to conventional markets, banks, and counterparties. The question, then, is not only how oil revenues were managed, but also how the corruption network kept operating amid increasing financial and commercial isolation. The following chapter traces this adaptation through new intermediaries, cryptoassets, irregular fleets, alternative payment mechanisms, and external economic relations.

87 https://transparenciave.org/clan-convit-sobreseimientos-con-irregularidades-y-detencion-de-jueces/
88 https://corruptometro.org/noticias/inaccion-de-la-fiscalia-nacional-empuja-el-cierre-de-causas-por-corrupcion-venezolana-abiertas-en-el-mundo/

6 Sanctions, Cross-Border Adaptation, and Evasion Mechanisms

6.1. Development and Operation of International Sanctions
6.2. Cryptoassets as an Alternative Financial Mechanism
6.3. Oil Barter Agreements and External State Networks
6.4. Private Brokers of Sanctioned Oil
6.5. Further Use of Cryptoassets and Stablecoins
6.6. Relation between External Pressure and System Adaptation

Sanctions changed the system's operating conditions, but they did not necessarily eliminate its ability to function. As access to conventional financial markets and channels was restricted for PDVSA, officials, and companies linked to Venezuela, the intermediaries, routes, payment instruments, and jurisdictions they relied on also shifted. This chapter explores how the system adapted, examining the roles of cryptoassets, fragmented oil trading, intermediary firms, irregular fleets, and economic ties with Russia, China, Iran, and Cuba.

Rather than focusing only on whether specific sanctions were evaded, the analysis aims to understand how a structure facing growing external pressure reorganized its financial and commercial mechanisms to maintain access to markets, liquidity, and trade channels. Evasion is one part of a broader phenomenon: the network's transnational adaptation.

6.1. Development and Operation of International Sanctions

Sanctions were designed as external tools to help limit the ruling coalition's discretion. Vendata documents when sanctions were imposed, the different forms they took, and the range of people and entities they targeted. This record shows that sanctions were introduced gradually as fundamental rights were violated, public institutions weakened, and public-finance decisions were made in nontransparent and arbitrary ways. Over time, both the number of individuals sanctioned and the number of countries imposing sanctions increased.[89]

In a domestic context where checks on power had been dismantled, the network enjoyed guaranteed impunity, and the conditions needed to hold competitive elections, encourage citizen participation, and demand accountability had been eliminated—alongside growing censorship, repression, and systematic human rights violations—sanctions became the primary external check, and until recently, the only one. They were intended to limit the elite's use of public resources and its repression, curb illicit activities, and encourage a democratic solution.[90]

But Nicolás Maduro and his government not only continued these illicit actions and abuses; they also intensified repression, corruption, and the lack of institutional transparency, while using the state apparatus to stay in power. To do so, they relied on allies in areas such as sanctions evasion, money laundering, citizen oversight systems, arms procurement, and support in international forums.

89 Vendata, "Sanctions and Sanctioned Entities 2008–2018": https://vendata.org/site/sanciones-y-sancionados-2008-2018/
90 https://transparenciave.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Sanciones-Internacionales-TV-.pdf

6.2. Cryptoassets as an Alternative Financial Mechanism

In 2017, Nicolás Maduro introduced a digital token called the Petro, presenting it as a cryptocurrency that could support financial transactions outside the SWIFT system and help collect proceeds from oil and mineral sales. To support this effort, an encrypted digital system and a blockchain were designed. At first, they met certain standards for the Petro to qualify as a digital currency of the Venezuelan state. However, the token was never under the control of the Central Bank of Venezuela, the country's highest monetary authority.

The Venezuelan Cryptoasset Treasury (TCV) was also established to manage the state's cryptoassets, but it had no ties to the National Treasury Office or the Ministry of Economy and Finance. Because financial administration agencies did not communicate or share information, the cryptoassets were managed without formal or public oversight, and public asset accounts were never consolidated.[91]

The government also supported the development of domestic cryptocurrency exchanges to help make cryptocurrency transactions more accessible. It also encouraged cryptoasset mining by private companies and with support from public agencies.

The regulations governing the Petro and the broader crypto ecosystem gave the Executive Branch, through Vice President Tarek El Aissami, broad authority to change how cryptoassets were regulated and used. This authority was established through the Constituent Decree of April 9, 2018, and other provisions that created the Superintendency and the Treasury of Cryptoassets (Gazettes 3.3.670 and 3.671). These provisions opened the door to unilateral, opaque changes, including the dismantling of the Petro's blockchain, which eliminated transaction traceability and made it possible to alter transactions.

After sanctions were imposed on PDVSA in 2019, oil sales began to take place through intermediaries in Russia, China, and Iran, as well as traders who had previously worked as government contractors on infrastructure projects, food procurement, and other activities. Payments were made through exchanges involving food, diluents, gold, and cryptoassets. Bitcoin was the main currency at first, although the Petro was also promoted. Later, Tether (USDT) and USDC stablecoins took its place.

The government said the Petro, backed by oil reserves, would protect sovereignty and independence in the face of the international financial blockade. In practice, however, international cryptocurrencies were exchanged internally through the Crypto Treasury and converted into foreign currency. These funds remained at the disposal of the government elite and never entered the National Treasury. Some of the cryptocurrencies were mined by state agencies, while others were received as payment for sales of sanctioned oil and

91 https://transparenciave.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/Nuevas-formas-de-corrupcion-y-lavado-de-dinero.pdf

minerals. They should therefore have been recorded as extraordinary public revenue, but they were not.

In reality, the lack of controls and transparency, the breach of the principle of Treasury unity, and the fragmentation of oil sales among multiple intermediaries enabled funds to be diverted from sales that were never collected—as quantified in Section 3.6. State-owned cryptocurrencies were also lost through digital wallets distributed among members of the ruling elite and managed as personal spoils. This took place between 2019 and 2023.

This case, known as PDVSA-Cripto,[92] was unprecedented. For the first time, the Executive Branch, through the Public Prosecutor's Office and the National Anti-Corruption Police, acknowledged that high-ranking active officials were involved in the theft from the country's most important company. The case also led to the departure of Vice President Tareck El Aissami and his associates, who represented a significant faction of political and economic power.[93] After receiving initial coverage in official media, the case was not mentioned again until April 20, 2026, following Maduro's arrest, when the trial began.[94]

6.3 Oil Barter Agreements and External State Networks

6.3.1. Russia

In 2019, the Russian oil company Rosneft was actively involved in the trade and transportation of sanctioned Venezuelan crude oil.[95] Furthermore, PDVSA and the Venezuelan government's collection and payment system was managed through financial institutions in Moscow. This arrangement allowed them to collect on a debt that had had to be restructured and further strengthened Russia's ties with Venezuela's public financial administration. The government of Nicolás Maduro allowed Russia to manage the country's public funds. In return, it received euros and dollars in cash, which arrived on transatlantic flights, with the involvement of Evrofinance Mosnarbank, Gazprombank, and a complex financial network that ran through the United Arab Emirates and Turkey.

Russia also took part in the sale of monetary gold from the reserves of the Central Bank of Venezuela (BCV), as well as non-monetary gold illegally extracted from the Orinoco Mining Arc. Venezuelan and Russian citizens have been charged with oil smuggling paid for with USDT, as well as smuggling and fraud through the company **NDA GmbH**.[96]

92 https://transparenciave.org/trama-pdvsa-cripto-un-desfalco-sin-precedentes/
93 https://transparenciave.org/un-ano-pdvsa-cripto-otro-caso-condenado-al-silencio/
94 https://transparenciave.org/lo-que-se-sabe-del-juicio-a-los-64-implicados-en-el-caso-pdvsa-cripto/
95 https://transparenciave.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Acuerdos-con-Rusia-alianza-geopolitica.pdf
96 https://www.justice.gov/usao-edny/pr/five-russian-nationals-and-two-oil-traders-charged-global-sanctions-evasion-and-money

6.3.2. China

He companies including China Concord Petroleum Co., China Aerospace Science and Industry Corp. (CASIC, the commercial arm of a defense company), and, more recently, Oceanic Steamships Ltd., Shanghai Huitong Shipping Co., Xinjin No. 1 Tianjin Ship, Pyay Shipping Ltd., Nanjing Haigao Shipping Co., Ltd., and Merluza Group Ltd.—all registered in China—[97], have provided logistics services for transporting sanctioned Venezuelan oil. They conducted ship-to-ship transfers on the high seas and renamed Merey crude as Singma, Mal, Miri, or Kimanis, thereby changing the crude's stated origin.

Casic received supertankers that PetroChina seized from PDVSA following the bankruptcy of the joint venture CV Shipping and a legal dispute. As a result, Casic now markets Venezuelan oil on vessels that previously belonged to PDVSA.

China has used companies registered in offshore jurisdictions to acquire sanctioned Venezuelan oil. In the early years, payments did not reach Venezuela. Instead, they were deposited into accounts in Russia or China to settle existing debts, purchase military equipment and supplies for joint-venture oil companies linked to PDVSA, finance infrastructure, energy, and telecommunications projects, and cover state imports of machinery, among other purposes. Digital payment platforms, the China Money Laundering Network (CMLN), and messaging apps such as WeChat and Telegram have also been used from China to facilitate sanctions evasion in these transactions.

Although Hangzhou Energy Trading is registered in China and its alleged owners are reportedly from the country, it is believed to be owned by **Ramón Carretero Napolitano** and **Carlos Erik Malpica Flores**. In 2023, the two became PDVSA's second-largest exporters.[98]

6.3.3. Iran

Iran helped circumvent sanctions by sending gasoline, diluents, and light crude oil in exchange for extra-heavy crude oil and jet fuel. Maduro also authorized the transfer of approximately nine metric tons of gold to Iran, valued at about $500 million, as payment for 1.5 million barrels of gasoline and technical assistance for refineries. Mahan Air helped deliver the gold.[99] According to the U.S. Department of the Treasury[100], Iran also used Venezuela's gold market to finance Hezbollah's operations, creating a revenue and logistics mechanism for the network of intermediaries within the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps.[101]

97 https://transparenciave.org/que-rol-juega-china-en-la-evasion-de-sanciones-de-venezuela/ https://transparenciave.org/las-flotas-irregulares-pierden-peso-pero-siguen-en-venezuela/
98 https://transparenciave.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/07/Sanciones-y-lavado-de-dinero_JUNIO-2026.pdf
99 https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-05-08/maduro-said-to-tap-sanctioned-dealmaker-to-ship-gold-to-iran
100 https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/sb0443

In 2020, at least eight Iranian ships were reported to have arrived, while the United States seized another four. To reduce the risk of seizure in subsequent years, direct shipments declined, and ship-to-ship (STS) transfers became a common way to exchange oil. Even so, three ships from Iran were reported to have arrived in 2021, four in 2022, and another four in 2023.

Russia, China, and Iran contributed to the trade in sanctioned oil through sanctioned and clandestine fleets. These fleets often use vessels registered in regulatory havens, falsify registrations or list vessels as out of service, turn off navigation signals (AIS), conduct illicit ship-to-ship (STS) transfers, and alter the crude oil's stated origin.[102]

6.3.4. Cuba

The autocratic cooperation between the governments of Venezuela and Cuba—built on an exchange of oil, economic cooperation, and diplomatic support through security and intelligence services, propaganda, health and sports programs, as well as capabilities and mechanisms for withstanding international isolation and embargoes—[103] continued after sanctions were imposed. It was reflected, among other areas, in the relationship between PDVSA and Cubametales. This relationship helped keep Venezuelan oil flowing abroad despite international restrictions. According to internal PDVSA sources cited by Transparencia Venezuela—which the recipient of this report could not verify—Cubametales is estimated to have made 31 shipments of Venezuelan crude oil during 2025 and to have held contracts to purchase approximately 65,000 barrels per day. This is 29% higher than the volume in 2024 and seven times greater than the amount recorded in 2023.[104] [105]

Although Cuba was facing a severe fuel shortage, some of the oil managed by Cubametales never reached the island. Instead, it was resold to Asian intermediaries, or Cuba was used temporarily as a crude oil storage site before the oil continued on to China. The scheme came to light after the oil tanker Skipper was seized in December 2025. The vessel had transferred fuel to Cubametales, and its cargo was also linked to resale operations. Shinefull Energy was also involved in the case. The company is linked to Panamanian businessman Ramón Carretero Napolitano, who—in addition to having ties to Carlos Erik Malpica Flores—is close to **Raúl Guillermo Rodríguez Castro, the grandson of former Cuban President Raúl Castro**.[106]

101 https://www.securefreesociety.org/research/neutralizing-iran-military-footprint-in-venezuela/
102 https://transparenciave.org/en-enero-sigue-la-incautacion-de-busques-petroleros-pero-tambien-las-flotas-fantasmas/; https://transparenciave.org/el-40-de-los-tanqueros-que-llegan-a-venezuela-son-irregulares/; https://transparenciave.org/48-tanqueros-irregulares-estuvieron-en-venezuela/ ; https://transparenciave.org/increased-presence-of-sanctioned-oil-tankers-in-venezuela-in-september/ ; https://transparenciave.org/46-tanqueros-hicieron-operaciones-furtivas-o-ilicitas-en-aguas-venezolanas-en-agosto/ ; https://transparenciave.org/julio-2025-36-tanqueros-furtivos-rondaron-puertos-petroleros-venezolanos/
103 https://red-forma.com/articulo/la-influencia-cubana-en-venezuela-un-caso-modelico-de-cooperacion-autocratica-armando-chaguaceda/
104 The New York Times (December 13, 2025): https://www.nytimes.com/es/2025/12/13/espanol/america-latina/venezuela-maduro-petroleo-cuba.html
105 https://transparenciave.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/07/Sanciones-y-lavado-de-dinero_JUNIO-2026.pdf
106 https://transparenciave.org/los-negocios-crudos-de-carretero-y-el-misterio-del-petroleo-cubano/

Cuba was reportedly not only a recipient of Venezuelan crude oil but also played a role as an intermediary in a network that helped sell and distribute it while evading sanctions. It reportedly took on other responsibilities as well, including providing close-in security for Nicolás Maduro and Cilia Flores.[107]

6.4. Private Intermediaries in the Trade of Sanctioned Crude Oil

Following Rosneft's withdrawal—prompted by the threat of U.S. sanctions—and the collapse of the centralized scheme that operated throughout 2019 and early 2020, Venezuelan oil marketing entered a more fragmented and less visible phase, supported by a network of private intermediaries. Several companies gained prominence during this period, including Elemento Ltd., Swissoil Trading S.A., Libre Abordo, Montgamastre Ventures, Waker International DW-LLC, Paglobal Energy, and Ripple Oil Trading, along with nearly a hundred others.

Registered in Valletta, Malta, Elemento Ltd. maintained a steady stream of crude oil purchases from PDVSA between 2019 and 2020, then resold the oil to third parties through opaque schemes. The U.S. Department of the Treasury identified the company as part of a network that connected PDVSA to international markets—primarily in Asia—through intermediaries who took on the formal risks of the transactions. Based in Geneva, Swissoil Trading S.A. frequently acted as a buyer or consignee of Venezuelan shipments, taking on financial and logistical responsibilities that helped facilitate exports without PDVSA appearing directly as a trading partner.

The company was also identified as part of a marketing network operating out of Mexico and associated with Joaquín Leal, who worked alongside Álex Saab and Álvaro Pulido, figures historically linked to Venezuelan political power. They led the initial schemes to exchange oil for goods—including food, tanker trucks, and other supplies—and set in motion a pattern that continued even after Saab's first arrest in June 2020.

The fragmented trading model made it easier for intermediaries with no track record in the energy sector to enter the picture. Many of these companies were incorporated in opaque jurisdictions such as Hong Kong, Panama, Belize, the United Arab Emirates, or Uganda. This network—made up of short-lived companies incorporated in opaque jurisdictions, with no energy-sector experience, and operated by individuals previously linked to the executive branch—does not appear to reflect ordinary market dynamics and is consistent with a coordinated scheme. However, there is no documented evidence that Nicolás Maduro personally directed the scheme as a whole.

107 https://diariodecuba.com/internacional/1767787390_64707.html

Among the operators identified in this layer are **Álvaro Pulido, Majed and Khaled Khalil Majzoub, Jorge Giménez, Ramón Carretero Napolitano, Leopoldo Alejandro Betancourt López, and Wilmer Ruperti**. They have managed companies that were reincorporated under new names, in different countries, and under different nominal owners. For each individual, it is important to clearly describe the nature of the link to Venezuelan officials, along with the facts and sources that support it. This report does not treat that link as established in this passage.

Álex Saab's case is unique: his close relationship with the president made him a trusted contractor and supplier across various sectors. Saab began coordinating the scheme described above with several private operators and officials from allied governments through short-lived front companies. His arrest in Cape Verde did not halt PDVSA's commercial activities. After his release and return to Venezuela, he was appointed Minister of Industries and President of the International Center for Product y Investment, roles he held until his arrest in Caracas on February 4, 2026, following Maduro's capture. He was extradited to the United States on May 16, 2026.

6.5. Further Use of Cryptoassets and Stablecoins

After the PDVSA-Crypto scandal came to light in 2023, the Petro faded from the government's narrative, and the administrative framework was taken down.[108] The National Superintendency of Cryptoassets (Sunacrip), which oversees and regulates cryptoasset transactions, came under the administration of a Restructuring Board. At the same time, all exchange companies authorized to operate in Venezuela up to that point were shut down, along with public and private cryptocurrency mining farms. These activities resumed in 2025.

In Venezuela, cryptoassets are increasingly used for both lawful and illicit purposes. Lawful uses include protecting savings from devaluation and inflation, buying and selling goods, and sending remittances. Illicit uses include money laundering linked to corruption, currency exchange fraud, and evasion of international sanctions.

Amid a total loss of legitimacy and tightening sanctions, the Venezuelan government began gradually promoting dollar-pegged cryptocurrencies in 2024, including USDT (Tether) and USDC (Circle). It used them to collect proceeds from oil sales and as an important alternative for providing dollar liquidity to the local foreign exchange market. Later, beginning in June 2025, USDT was permitted for facilitating imports and private-sector payments.[109] Russia supported Nicolás Maduro's government by providing cybersecurity services to the entities managing state and parastatal cryptoassets. These services helped protect the wallets of high-ranking officials from being tracked by firms such as Chainalysis and Elliptic.

108 https://transparenciave.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/Nuevas-formas-de-corrupcion-y-lavado-de-dinero.pdf
109 https://transparenciave.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/FINAL-Criptos_El-nuevo-paradigma-del-mercado-cambiario-venezolano.pdf

The introduction of USDT and other stablecoins into the Venezuelan economy depended on non-traditional financial intermediaries: Kontigo and Crixtopay, cryptocurrency exchange platforms authorized locally in 2025. These platforms effectively served as digital currency exchange houses, linking the local banking system with the crypto world. Users could register and transfer bolivars from their bank accounts to the platforms in just a few minutes. Because regulations governing Venezuela's cryptoasset market and banking system were weak, it was difficult to trace the source of funds, identify digital wallet owners, or determine how funds were moving. Kontigo enabled users to transfer these cryptocurrencies to wallets on international exchanges, where they could be converted into foreign currencies and deposited into overseas bank accounts. Once USDC reached international wallets, such as those on Binance or Coinbase, the funds were available abroad for lawful use. In November 2025, financial intermediaries in the United States ended their ties with Kontigo.

PDVSA and government agencies paid some contractors in stablecoins through Kontigo/Crixto, replacing payments in bolivars with payments in cryptodollars. The government described this approach as innovative, but in practice it bypassed traditional budgetary controls and made the money harder to trace. To facilitate these payments, it relied on wallets operated by intermediaries who sought to obscure the funds' original paths. Those funds often originated with sanctioned Russian or Iranian companies.

Investigations by Transparencia Venezuela found that the government used these platforms to distribute USDT at the official dollar exchange rate to a select group of companies, which benefited from the exchange rate difference.

6.6. Relation between External Pressure and System Adaptation

The evidence reviewed suggests that sanctions did not operate within a static structure. As certain financial channels, companies, and trading methods were exposed or restricted, counterparties, business vehicles, oil routes, and payment instruments diversified.

The involvement of private intermediaries, exchanges with allied states, operations through irregular fleets, and the growing use of cryptoassets and stablecoins point to an ability to reorganize in ways that helped preserve transactions and access to liquidity under increasingly restrictive conditions. These mechanisms are not equivalent, nor do they imply the same degree of responsibility for all the actors involved. Taken together, however, they are consistent with a transnational adaptation of operating practices.

This capacity to adapt raises an important question: reorganizing operations in response to external controls is much more feasible when internal mechanisms for investigation, accountability, and sanctions provide limited checks and balances. For this reason, the following chapter examines the role of the justice system in fostering impunity and selective protection.

7 Justice and Impunity: Capture, Protection, and Institutional Discipline

7.1. Background on the Capture of the Judiciary

7.2. Further Deterioration During Nicolás Maduro's Administration

7.3. Appointment and Composition of the Supreme Court of Justice

7.4. Judicial Decisions with Political and Institutional Implications

7.5. Justice, Grand Corruption and Impunity

7.6. Summary: The Dual Role of the Justice System

Impunity stems not only from the absence of justice institutions. It can also take hold when these institutions investigate selectively, fail to pursue cases, protect certain interests, or use their powers against those who challenge the government. In this chapter, we take a closer look at this dual role of the justice system in Venezuela.

Drawing on the composition and actions of the Supreme Court of Justice, the Public Prosecutor's Office, and other judicial bodies, we trace how a process of capture—one that began before Nicolás Maduro's presidency—deepened and unfolded during his administration. Our analysis focuses not on whether the judicial system lost its independence, but on what that loss of autonomy meant: weaker checks and balances, absent or closed investigations into grand corruption, and the use of legal mechanisms to restrict political and social opponents. In this way, justice and impunity emerge as two sides of the same institutional architecture.

7.1. Background on the Capture of the Judiciary

Nicolás Maduro further deepened the judicial capture that Hugo Chávez began in 1999, consolidating political, social, and economic control over Venezuela and helping ensure impunity. Chávez gave the Supreme Court of Justice—later made up of justices aligned with the government—the final say on jurisdictional and governmental matters, as well as on court administration. He also declared a "judicial emergency" and removed about 491 judges from office, citing low productivity and, in some cases, illicit enrichment. A study reviewing 45,474 judicial decisions from 2003 to 2014 found that the Supreme Court issued no rulings contrary to the government's interests during that period.[110]

Many judges faced persecution, imprisonment, and torture. One of them was María Lourdes Afiuni, the former 31st Supervisory Judge of Caracas. During a nationally televised broadcast, Chávez called for her to be sentenced to 30 years in prison. Her trial became a landmark case, creating an unprecedented deterrent effect on other members of the judicial system.[111]. Afiuni was arrested in 2009 and, in August 2026, was released from the judicial process on humanitarian grounds because of her health condition.

7.2. Further Deterioration During Nicolás Maduro's Administration

Maduro continued implementing policies that weakened the judiciary, making its decisions less independent and creating instability among judges and prosecutors. Most held

110 "The Supreme Court of Justice at the Service of the Revolution," as cited by Runrun.es, "Report with More Than 45,000 Rulings Reflects the Supreme Court's Subordination to the Government": https://runrun.es/nacional/venezuela-2/175724/informe-con-mas-de-45-000-sentencias-refleja-el-sometimiento-de-tsj-al-gobierno/

111 Transparencia Venezuela (2019). Supreme Injustice. The Chavista judiciary convicted Judge Afiuni without proving the crime of which she was accused. https://supremainjusticia.org/justicia-chavista-condeno-a-la-jueza-afiuni-sin-lograr-probarle-el-delito-del-que-se-le-acusaba/

temporary positions and received inadequate salaries, conditions that made corruption more likely.[112] With support from the Supreme Court of Justice and the legislative branch, Maduro maintained control over the country's broader institutional structure. In this effort, he relied on his partner, Cilia Flores, who led pro-government lawmakers in the National Assembly. Flores served as a deputy for 11 years under Chávez (2000–2011) and remained in Parliament for another 10 years (2015–2025). The National Assembly continued to appoint Supreme Court justices aligned with the government. Those justices, in turn, appointed allies to other positions in the judiciary, influenced rulings, and kept those who did not follow the guidelines under control.

The Fact-Finding Mission on Venezuela, in its September[113] and December 2021[114] reports on the Venezuelan justice system concluded that its capacity to protect human rights had been gradually and systematically eroded. The Mission reported that high-level political actors, along with high-ranking officials in the judiciary and the Public Prosecutor's Office, pressured and directly interfered with judges and prosecutors to influence decisions affecting members of the opposition and people perceived to be affiliated with it. This took place amid a high rate of interim appointments, arbitrary dismissals of judges and prosecutors who did not share the government's views, and reprisals against those who did not follow government directives.

The Mission also noted that judges and prosecutors played an active role in the repressive scheme, particularly in cases involving arbitrary detentions. They concealed periods of incommunicado detention and short-term enforced disappearances, gave abuses the appearance of legality by issuing arrest warrants after the fact, and repeatedly and improperly used the concept of "flagrante delicto" to justify arrests without a warrant.

Judicial officials were also accused of systematically disregarding complaints of torture and sexual violence during arrests and interrogations; sending detainees to the same detention centers as their alleged aggressors, including SEBIN and DGCIM facilities; accepting illegal evidence—obtained under duress, fabricated, or "planted" by security agencies; denying people the right to private attorneys and imposing public defenders; restricting access to case files; and allowing excessive judicial delays that, in many cases, kept people in pretrial detention for years.

112 Transparencia Venezuela, "Supreme Injustice." For the tenth consecutive year, Venezuela's criminal justice system has been rated the worst in the world. https://supremainjusticia.org/por-decimo-ano-consecutivo-la-justicia-penal-venezolana-es-evaluada-como-la-peor-del-mundo/ October 31, 2024.

113 UN Human Rights Council. Detailed Conclusions of the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/FFMV/A-HRC-48-CRP.5_SP.pdf. September 16, 2021.

114 UN Human Rights Council. Report of the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. https://docs.un.org/es/A/HRC/48/69 December 18, 2021

The Mission determined that, in practice, security and intelligence agencies took the place of the Public Prosecutor's Office in criminal investigations, without oversight from the Prosecutor's Office. This deepened impunity within chains of command and among political authorities. In the case of certain police forces, the conviction rate was less than 1 percent, and convictions were limited to very low-ranking perpetrators, with no investigations into high-level officials or political authorities.

7.3. Appointment and Composition of the Supreme Court of Justice

In 2014, one year after Chávez's death, the following justices were appointed:

- Edgar Gavidia Rodríguez, brother of Cilia Flores's former husband.[115]
- Elsa Janeth Gómez Moreno, aunt of Walter Gavidia Flores's wife. Walter is Cilia Flores's son.[116]
- María Carolina Ameliach, cousin of Francisco Ameliach, who was then governor of Carabobo and a national leader of the ruling PSUV party.[117] Canada sanctioned her in April 2019.
- Indira Maira Alfonzo Izaguirre, who was close to Francisco Ameliach and previously served as an official with the National Assembly and the National Electoral Council. She was later appointed president of the National Electoral Council (2020–2021) by the Supreme Court of Justice (TSJ). Canada sanctioned her on November 23, 2017[118] and the United States sanctioned her in 2020.
- Juan José Mendoza,[119] a former deputy from the ruling party. The United States, Switzerland, the European Union, Canada, and Panama have sanctioned him.
- Maikel José Moreno Pérez,[120] sanctioned by the United States, Canada, the European Union, Switzerland, and Panama. He is also under investigation for alleged acts of corruption in a case in the Southern District of Florida.

115 Supreme Injustice. Edgar Gavidia Rodríguez, Close to Power.
Available at: https://supremainjusticia.org/portafolio/edgar-gavidia-rodriguez-2/
116 Transparencia Venezuela. Supreme Injustice. Elsa Janeth Gómez Moreno. With ties to the presidential family.
Available at: https://supremainjusticia.org/portafolio/elsa-gomez-moreno/
117 Transparencia Venezuela. Supreme Injustice. Ameliach, a judge who doesn't like nosy people.
Available at: https://supremainjusticia.org/ameliach-una-magistrada-a-la-que-no-gustan-los-curiosos/
118 Transparencia Venezuela. Supreme Injustice. Indira Alfonzo Aguirre.
Available at: https://supremainjusticia.org/?s=indira+alfonzo
119 Transparencia Venezuela. Supreme Injustice. Mendoza, the scourge of opposition parties and the president's protector, is also barred from traveling to the U.S. or Canada. https://supremainjusticia.org/mendoza-el-azote-de-los-partidosopositores-y-el-protector-del-presidente-tampoco-puede-viajar-a-eeuu-o-canada/
120 Transparencia Venezuela. Supreme Injustice. Maikel José Moreno Pérez, 20 years on the Supreme Court already guaranteed.
Available at: https://supremainjusticia.org/portafolio/maikel-jose-moreno-perez-2/

On December 23, 2015—one month before the opposition took control of the National Assembly in January 2016—Chavista deputies further strengthened their hold on the Supreme Court by appointing 13 more principal justices and 21 alternate justices. All were also linked to the ruling party, particularly to the Maduro-Flores couple.[121] Among them:

- **Calixto Ortega Ríos**, a former pro-government deputy and former chargé d'affaires at the Venezuelan Embassy in Washington, was appointed by Maduro in 2013. He was sanctioned by the United States, Canada, and Panama.[122]
- **Christian Tyrone Zerpa** fled Venezuela in 2019 and admitted that his appointment was a direct order from the Maduro-Flores duo to ensure control over election results and challenges against the opposition.[123] Canada sanctioned him in 2018.
- **Tania D'Amelio Cardiet** served as a deputy for the ruling party from 2000 to 2010 and as an electoral rector. Canada and the United States imposed sanctions on her.[124]

In 2022, the National Assembly, dominated by pro-government members, once again changed the structure of the Supreme Court, reducing the number of justices from 32 to 20. In 2026, the Assembly, led by Jorge Rodríguez and dominated by government supporters, sought to raise the number back to 32. To support this effort, it presented a preliminary list of more than 500 candidates, including some controversial figures. The selection of the new justices also became part of the dialogue agenda launched in August 2026.[125]

7.4. Judicial Decisions with Political and Institutional Implications

Here are some of the irregularities attributed to the judiciary that helped Maduro retain power:

1. In 2013, following Chávez's death, the Supreme Court of Justice authorized Nicolás Maduro, then vice president of the Republic, to assume the presidency of Venezuela and run in the special presidential election held that April, even though the decision conflicted with the text of the National Constitution. Cilia Flores, then attorney general of the Republic, supported this position before the court and played a key role in the transition. As a result, Maduro was able to maintain his hold on power outside the constitutional framework, without institutional resistance.

121 BBC (2015). Why Do the Justices Appointed by the National Assembly Matter So Much? December 23, 2015. Available at: https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias/2015/12/151222_venezuela_tsj_magistrados_dp

122 Transparencia Venezuela. Supreme Injustice. Calixto Antonio Ortega Ríos, Close to Power. Available at: https://supremainjusticia.org/portafolio/03/

123 Transparencia Venezuela. Supreme Injustice. Electoral Chamber judge who upheld the ruling finding the National Assembly in contempt fled to the U.S. and says he regrets his actions. Available at: https://supremainjusticia.org/magistrado-de-la-sala-electoral-que-avalo-sentencia-de-desacato-de-la-an-huyo-a-eeuu-y-dice-estar-arrepentido/

124 Transparencia Venezuela. Supreme Injustice. Tania D'Amelio Cardiet. From the National Assembly to the CNE to the TSJ. https://supremainjusticia.org/portafolio/tania-damelio-cardiet/

125 Transparencia Venezuela (2026). The Supreme Court of Justice That Venezuela Needs. https://transparenciave.org/el-tribunal-supremo-de-justicia-que-necesita-venezuela/ July 30, 2026.

2. For more than 20 years, the Supreme Court of Justice has taken on functions that belong to the National Assembly, including appointing rectors of the National Electoral Council, the body responsible for conducting elections in Venezuela and part of the Electoral Branch. Despite the provisions of the Venezuelan Constitution, the Supreme Court of Justice appointed the council members in 2003 and 2005, during the Chávez administration, and again in 2014, 2016, and 2020, during the Maduro administration.[126]
3. The justices not only appointed the electoral council members but also helped shape bodies subordinate to the National Electoral Council. This played a significant role in how the council operated and made it easier for discretionary practices to take hold, including delays or gaps in publishing resolutions, timelines, and manuals. It also meant that verifiable information was lacking on contracts with electoral technology providers, audits, and disaggregated election results.

   Unwritten rules also emerged that kept opposition members out of electoral commission appointments. The opposition could chair the Political Participation Commission, but had no representation on the National Electoral Board or the Civil and Electoral Registry Commission. The justices have also played a role in shaping electoral regulations.[127]

   In June 2020, the Supreme Court appointed two justices from Maduro's inner circle and Cilia Flores to lead the National Electoral Council. Indira Alfonzo Izaguirre became the body's president, while Gladys Gutiérrez Alvarado was named its chief electoral officer.[128] That year, the National Electoral Council updated the electoral system by creating a national allocation list, adjusting the balance between individual and list seats, and revising the population base. These changes were intended to increase the number of deputies in the National Assembly from 167 to 277.[129]

   The electoral cycle that began in 2024—with the presidential election on July 28—continued with regional and parliamentary elections in May 2025 and concluded with municipal elections in July of that year. Throughout this cycle, abuses and corruption deepened, as electoral authorities fell short of basic verification and transparency standards. Patterns identified across these three elections included state control, political restrictions, statistical manipulation, insufficient technical safeguards, and the reporting of voting results without supporting evidence.[130]

126 Transparencia Venezuela. The Challenge of Appointing CNE Commissioners (2026). https://transparenciave.org/el-reto-de-designar-a-los-rectores-del-consejo-nacional-electoral/

127 Transparencia Venezuela (2026). The Challenge of Appointing a New CNE. https://transparenciave.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/FINAL.-El-reto-de-designar-un-nuevo-cne.pdf February 2026

128 Transparencia Venezuela (2020). Supreme Injustice. Two CNE Rectors Appointed by the TSJ Are Sanctioned by Foreign Governments. Available at: https://supremainjusticia.org/dos-rectoras-del-cne-impuesto-por-el-tsj-estan-sancionadas-por-gobiernos-extranjeros/

129 Transparencia Venezuela (2026). The Challenge of Appointing a New CNE. https://transparenciave.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/FINAL.-El-reto-de-designar-un-nuevo-cne.pdf February 2026

130 Transparencia Venezuela (2025). Fraud and Repression: How the Dictatorship Is Consolidating Its Power. https://transparenciave.org/fraude-y-represion-de-como-la-dictadura-se-consolida/ December 22, 2025.

4. The Supreme Court dissolved the opposition-majority National Assembly elected in 2015 through more than 50 rulings issued over 14 months. In 2017, the Supreme Court of Justice issued two rulings, No. 155 and No. 156. In these rulings, the Constitutional Chamber assumed the powers of the Legislative Branch, removed deputies' immunity, and authorized Maduro to adopt "the civil, economic, military, criminal, administrative, political, legal, and social measures deemed relevant and necessary to prevent a state of emergency (…)".[131] These rulings were widely seen as a blow to the Venezuelan Constitution and sparked the 2017 protests, which were met with a brutal crackdown.

   These decisions gave Maduro the legal basis to convene a National Constituent Assembly—which took over the functions of the National Assembly elected in 2015—and pass several laws criminalizing dissent. These included the Anti-Hate Law (which promotes censorship, undermines freedom of expression and association, and establishes penalties of up to 20 years in prison) and the Anti-Blockade Law (which authorizes the nullification of laws and imposes secrecy on all public proceedings). Both laws remain in effect through 2026.

   Between 2017 and 2020, the National Constituent Assembly passed 32 laws deemed unconstitutional[132] and appointed members of the Citizen Branch who were all close to the Maduro-Flores couple: Attorney General Tarek William Saab, who was part of the repressive apparatus; Ombudsman Alfredo Ruíz Angulo, who failed to address abuses through inaction; and Comptroller General of the Republic Elvis Hidrobo Amoroso, who disqualified opposition candidates and failed to investigate known cases of corruption during his tenure. Amoroso later presided over the National Electoral Council, which declared Maduro president in 2024, although the results had still not been published by 2026. In previous years, these positions had also been filled without respecting the Venezuelan Constitution.

5. The Supreme Court of Justice supported Maduro's initiatives by providing them with legal backing. For example, it ruled that the decrees he issued declaring a state of exception and an economic emergency were constitutional. These decrees followed the National Assembly's decision to grant the president legislative powers, despite being dominated by his government. As a result, Maduro was able to govern Venezuela for five years with extraordinary powers granted by a National Assembly aligned with his government and endorsed by the Supreme Court of Justice. His powers increased from 11 in January 2016 to 36 in September 2018. Among other things, he gained control over the foreign exchange system and cryptoassets; the production, distribution, and sale of food and medicine; and mining activities and special economic zones.[133]

131 Transparencia Venezuela. With Two Rulings, the Supreme Court Dealt the Final Blow to Democracy in Venezuela. Available at: https://transparenciave.org/dos-sentencias-tsj-le-dio-ultimo-zarpazo-la-democracia-venezuela/

132 Súmate (2019). Executive Summary on the National Constituent Assembly. Available at: https://www.sumate.org/documentos/RESUMEN_EJECUTIVO_ANC_SUMATE.pdf

133 Transparencia Venezuela (2026). Delcy Copies Maduro's Emergency Decrees: They Did Not Resolve Any Emergency, but Served to Facilitate Political Control and Corruption. https://transparenciave.org/delcy-copia-los-decretos-de-emergencia-de-maduro-no-resolvieron-ninguna-emergencia-pero-sirvieron-para-el-control-politico-y-la-corrupcion/, August 14, 2026

7.5. Justice, Grand Corruption, and Impunity

Specific cases were examined in Chapters 3 and 5. However, the Supreme Court did not issue decisive rulings against grand corruption. No cases of major significance reached the Court, as very few high-level officials were investigated, while the lower courts prosecuted only mid-level or lower-ranking officials.

Overall, legal proceedings against officials appear to have been driven more by political retaliation than by the pursuit of justice. The PDVSA-Cripto case, discussed in Section 3.6, offers one example.[134]

The lack of transparency surrounding this case makes it impossible to determine with certainty the legal status of the more than 60 individuals on trial, including former ministers, senior PDVSA officials, and members of Congress who were arrested while in office. Most of the Supreme Court of Justice's rulings related to grand corruption involve extradition requests filed by the Public Prosecutor's Office against former officials or individuals who were no longer aligned with the government's interests. In one instance, the Supreme Court's Criminal Chamber sharply criticized prosecutors from the Public Prosecutor's Office and questioned whether the countries receiving the requests were actually processing the extraditions after they had been approved.[135]

Nor have the Public Prosecutor's Office taken strong action, or trial courts issued meaningful decisions, against high-profile civilian and military officials allegedly involved in criminal networks linked to drug trafficking, extortion, illegal exploitation, gold trafficking, fuel smuggling, and other serious offenses. In drug-related cases, investigative agencies and courts often focus their efforts separately on small-time dealers.

At the Supreme Court of Justice, one of the appointees is Justice Maikel Moreno, who presided over the court from 2017 to 2022 and has been accused of favoring certain defendants charged with these and other crimes in exchange for bribes. Tarek William Saab, who served as attorney general from 2017 to 2026, dismantled the Public Prosecutor's Office's criminal investigation units and imposed strict secrecy on cases, including those involving drug trafficking. The Attorney General's Office also did not conduct effective investigations into the massacres in mining camps or gold-smuggling networks.

There are also documented cases of judges releasing accused individuals in exchange for bribes or a share of mining production. In the mines, groups known as "sistemas" act as judges in community disputes, imposing physical punishments and even deciding who owns property.

134 Transparencia Venezuela (2023). PDVSA-Crypto Scandal Involves $16.6 Billion. https://transparenciave.org/trama-pdvsa-cripto-compromete-mas-16-600-millones/

135 Transparencia Venezuela (2022). Supreme Injustice. Tarek William Saab's spate of extradition requests over corruption at PDVSA earns him a rebuke from the Supreme Court. https://supremainjusticia.org/la-feria-de-extradiciones-de-tarek-william-saab-por-la-corrupcion-en-pdvsa-le-valen-un-regano-del-tsj/, November 17, 2022.

7.6. Summary: The Dual Role of the Justice System

An analysis of the justice system reveals a persistent imbalance throughout much of the period under review. Judicial and prosecutorial institutions actively intervened in political disputes, restrictions on Parliament, and proceedings against opposition figures. By contrast, investigations and prosecutions involving large-scale corruption schemes and certain high-level criminal structures appear to have been far more limited, fragmented, or opaque. Taken together, these documented episodes suggest that the loss of judicial autonomy has had two consequences: it has weakened the state's ability to hold actors accountable while also making it easier to use legal instruments as a means of political discipline.

However, the concentration of power is not reflected in judicial decisions alone. When legal persecution is combined with arbitrary detentions and the involvement of intelligence agencies, police forces, military jurisdiction, and other forms of coercive power, the problem extends beyond the judiciary. The following chapter explores this broader dimension of the system, including the institutions, chains of command, and mechanisms through which force and repression reinforced the processes of capture and impunity described above.

8 Coercion, Repression, and How Political Order Is Maintained

8.1. Prosecution and Criminalization of Dissent
8.2. Civilians under Military Jurisdiction
8.3. Military, Police, and Security Forces
8.4. Territorial Control and Coercive Mechanisms
8.5. Summary of the Coercive Apparatus

While institutional capture weakens the checks on arbitrary power, coercion makes it more costly to challenge that power. This chapter takes a closer look at how the system operates when administration, regulation, or the justice system cannot adequately contain opposition, protest, or dissent. The evidence gathered highlights the roles of judicial bodies, police forces, intelligence agencies, military structures, and territorial mechanisms in surveillance, detention, prosecution, and repression.

This chapter does not seek to attribute the actions of the apparatus to every member of the institutions involved. Instead, it offers a clear account of their capabilities, formal chains of command, decisions, and the mechanisms through which coercion became part of maintaining political order. This dimension completes a broader picture in which institutional power, the judiciary, and force do not necessarily operate separately.

8.1. Prosecution and Criminalization of Dissent

The co-opted justice system has also been used to control society and target people who dissent or seek to exercise their political rights, protest, associate, or express themselves freely. The judiciary has endorsed serious human rights violations, including those committed by state security and intelligence agencies since 2014, a year after Maduro assumed the presidency. In 2012, the Supreme Court established anti-terrorism courts and, beginning in 2015, expanded their powers and strengthened their role in handling cases with significant political repercussions.[136]

As a result, judges, prosecutors, and public defenders have faced criticism for not doing enough to protect the public and those who oppose the government from arbitrary detentions and arrests, torture, and ill-treatment. They have also been criticized for often justifying detentions on the pretext of "crimes caught in the act," bringing serious charges such as terrorism and treason, and failing to uphold due process.[137]

The Public Defender's Office was identified as part of the repressive apparatus, as detainees—especially after the July 2024 elections—were assigned public defenders and could not choose private attorneys to represent them.[138] The Supreme Court of Justice also upheld the results of the July 28, 2024, election,[139] a decision that sparked nationwide

136 Access to Justice (2021). Organizational Chart of the Criminal Justice System for Terrorism in Venezuela. https://accesoalajusticia.org/funciograma-de-la-justicia-penal-de-terrorismo-en-venezuela/ July 28, 2021.

137 Transparencia Venezuela (2024). Supreme Injustice. OAS Panel of Experts Denounces the Venezuelan Justice System's Failure to Punish Crimes Against Humanity. https://supremainjusticia.org/panel-de-expertos-de-la-oea-denuncia-inaccion-de-la-justicia-venezolana-para-castigar-crimenes-de-lesa-humanidad/

138 Access to Justice (2024). UN Mission Accuses Public Defender's Office of Leaving Detainees Defenseless After July 28, https://accesoalajusticia.org/mision-onu-acusa-adefensa-publica-dejar-indefensos-detenidos-tras-28j/ October 24, 2024.

139 Transparencia Venezuela (2024). Supreme Injustice. An anonymous expert opinion from the Supreme Court of Justice (TSJ) upholds the National Electoral Council's (CNE) proclamation of Nicolás Maduro's victory following the July 28 elections. https://supremainjusticia.org/un-peritaje-anonimo-del-tsj-ratifica-la-proclamacion-de-nicolas-maduro-hecha-por-el-cne-tras-las-elecciones-del-28-de-julio/, August 22, 2024

protests. Authorities responded with unprecedented force, detaining 2,000 people in just two months, according to Maduro himself. Just 11 days before the presidential election, the Supreme Court had also established courts with jurisdiction over terrorism cases to try adolescents. In the two months after the election, these courts arrested and prosecuted at least 150 minors for protesting the results.[140]

8.2. Civilians under Military Jurisdiction

Although the Supreme Court is the judiciary's highest authority, it does not exercise hierarchical authority over military courts, which report to the Court-Martial. Still, it took no action in response to Maduro's order to try civilians en masse in military courts. The civilians were charged with military offenses, such as attacking a sentry and conspiring to rebel, even though Article 261 of the Venezuelan Constitution prohibits this. For example, during the 2017 protests, Major General Jesús Suárez, head of the Strategic Region for Comprehensive Defense, reported that 780 civilians had been detained and 251 had been sent to military courts as part of "Operation Zamora."[141]

8.3. Military, Police, and Security Forces

As a structural starting point, Section 1.4.3 examined the roles of Vladimir Padrino López and Néstor Luis Reverol in the security and defense sectors. This chapter takes a closer look at the coercive and repressive aspects of that context.

Maduro consolidated a state apparatus of repression, organized hierarchically and made up of state security and intelligence agencies. This apparatus helped him remain in power, suppress dissent, and exert social control over the population, with the complicity of actors within the judiciary and through the use of ambiguous laws to criminalize dissent.

This structure was responsible for abuses committed against the population during the protests of 2014, 2017, and 2024. The 2024 protests took place after Maduro declared victory, before the election results had been published. The agencies involved included the Bolivarian National Intelligence Service (Sebin), the General Directorate of Military Counterintelligence (DGCIM), and civilian and military security forces: the Bolivarian National Police (PNB, including the now-defunct FAES and its successor, the Directorate

140 Transparencia Venezuela (2024). Eleven days before July 28, the Supreme Court of Justice (TSJ) established three Juvenile Criminal Liability Courts with jurisdiction over terrorism cases. https://supremainjusticia.org/11-dias-antes-del-28j-el-tsj-creo-3-juzgados-de-responsabilidad-penal-del-adolescente-con-competencia-en-terrorismo/ October 25, 2024.

141 El País de Uruguay (2017). Maduro Orders Civilians to Be Tried by Military Courts. https://www.elpais.com.uy/mundo/maduro-ordena-juzgar-a-los-civiles-por-la-justicia-militar May 10, 2017.
Provea. Foro Penal/HRW | Venezuela: Abuses and Arbitrary Prosecutions of Civilians in Military Courts. https://provea.org/actualidad/foro-penalhrw-venezuela-abusos-y-procesamientos-arbitrarios-de-civiles-en-tribunales-militares/ May 15, 2017.

of Strategic and Tactical Actions, DAET), the Scientific, Criminal, and Criminalistic Investigations Corps (, CICPC), and, in particular, the Special Tactical Operations Unit (UOTE) and the Special Operations Group (GOES). These security agencies acted in collusion with corrupt actors within the judiciary. Among them were the Public Prosecutor's Office, which gave arrests the appearance of legality by fabricating evidence; the National Public Defender's Office, which was used to impose public defenders who undermined the victims' cases; and the terrorism courts, which violate due process through mass and remote hearings, prohibiting private defense counsel, failing to meet procedural deadlines, and rejecting allegations of torture. These actions were intended to quell protests and silence those who opposed the regime.

The practices used against detainees and civilians include arbitrary detention—often orchestrated by those in power through the so-called "Operation Tun Tun," and at other times carried out by officials at various levels to secure a steady income from a kidnapped person (each has their own prisoners); short-term forced disappearances; the detention of relatives of those being persecuted, who are used as bait;[142]; severe physical torture, including electric shocks to the genitals, beatings with bats and sharp objects, suffocation with plastic bags, exposure to toxic substances or immersion in water, and the use of body-deforming devices such as "la señorita" and "el pulpo"; sexual and gender-based violence; psychological torture; and inhumane conditions of incarceration. Detainees' personal belongings, money from bank accounts, and real estate are also stolen as "war booty."[143]

The use of state firepower in military operations has also been documented. For example, in April 2022, in the central state of Guárico, around 800 police officers and military personnel took part in "Operation Thunder," which aimed to take action against members of the mega-gang known as Tren del Llano. During the operation, residents of Altagracia de Orituco were mistreated, and many were imprisoned.[144] Then, on August 3, 2024, following that July's election—which took place without the publication of election results—another military incursion, dubbed "Operation Zaraza 2024," took place. It included an aerial bombardment in the municipality of Acevedo, Miranda state, also aimed at neutralizing Tren del Llano after the mega-gang raided a polling station. The attack affected rural communities in the area and led to the destruction of homes, arbitrary detentions, torture, and other human rights violations against residents.[145]

142 Transparencia Venezuela (2015). Supreme Injustice. SEBIN: When the Accused's Family Members Are Used as Bait. https://supremainjusticia.org/sebin-cuando-los-familiares-de-los-acusados-son-la-carnada/

143 Transparencia Venezuela (2023). Supreme Injustice. What You Need to Know About the $153 Million Compensation Award to a Venezuelan Detained by the DGCIM. https://supremainjusticia.org/lo-que-hay-que-saber-sobre-la-indemnizacion-por-153-millones-de-dolares-a-venezolano-detenido-por-dgcim/

144 Insight Crimen. Account of human rights abuses during "Operation Thunder" #OperationThunder Altagracia de Orituco – Venezuela. https://insightcrime.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/Recuento-de-abusos-a-los-derechos-humanos-durante-la-Operacion-Trueno-Jun-2024-1.pdf

145 Insight Crimen "Civilians Caught in Bombings and Crossfire: Report on Operation Zaraza 2024 and Its Impact on Human Rights"

Following the July 2024 announcement, security forces carried out arbitrary detentions under the so-called "Operation Tun Tun," which Maduro himself publicly estimated involved 2,000 people. No formal authorization has been documented, and the available evidence suggests that the relevant authorities neither investigated nor sanctioned these practices. Prisons were also reopened to detain people who protested the presidential election results. Extortion became widespread as well: payments ranging from very small amounts to thousands of dollars were demanded to keep people from being prosecuted for crimes such as terrorism and treason, to prevent their transfer to dangerous prisons, or to help them access food and medicine in detention centers.[146]

Maduro's persecution apparatus has been accused in Chile of carrying out the murder of military officer Ronald Ojeda. Reports from Chile's Attorney General's Office link Diosdado Cabello, then Venezuela's Minister of the Interior, and Alexander Granko Arteaga to the crime, along with members of the Tren de Aragua.[147]

8.4. Territorial Control and Coercive Mechanisms

The following list highlights the individuals who make up the chain of command within Venezuela's state security agencies. It reflects positions held as of January 3, 2026, with any appointments made after that date clearly noted. At the top of the list are Nicolás Maduro and the then-Minister of Defense, Vladimir Padrino López.

8.1.1. General Directorate of Military Counterintelligence (DGCIM)

- **Iván Rafael Hernández Dala:** Director General of the DGCIM since 2014 and head of the Presidential Honor Guard, which reported directly to Nicolás Maduro.
- **Rafael Antonio Franco Quintero:** Former director of the Special Directorate for Criminal and Forensic Investigations (DEIPC).
- **Hannover Esteban Guerrero Mijares:** Former director of the DEIPC, implicated in torture, disappearances, and the case that led to the death of Captain Rafael Acosta Arévalo.
- **Alexander Enrique Granko Arteaga:** Director of the Directorate of Special Affairs (DAE) and one of the main perpetrators of torture, sexual violence, and arbitrary detentions, often operating outside the formal chain of command.
- **Asdrúbal José Brito Hernández:** Director of the DEIPC.
- **Carlos Enrique Terán Hurtado** and **Wilman Nabor Hernández Aquino**: Former directors of the DEIPC.

146 Transparencia Venezuela. The Faces of Extortion in Venezuela 2024. https://transparenciave.org/economias-ilicitas/las-caras-de-la-extorsion-en-venezuela-2024/

147 Transparencia Venezuela. Tren de Aragua: The Criminal Network That Defies Borders. https://transparenciave.org/economias-ilicitas/tren-de-aragua-la-red-criminal-que-desafia-fronteras-transparencia-venezuela-en-el-exilio/

Other officials identified in the records of the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Venezuela have not been named publicly for security reasons, as they are alleged to have directly perpetrated severe torture and sexual violence.

8.4.2. Bolivarian National Intelligence Service (SEBIN)

- **Gustavo Enrique González López:** Served two terms as Director General of Sebin. He is accused of having full knowledge of and control over the torture and arbitrary detentions at El Helicoide and "La Tumba." In 2026, he served as Minister of Defense.
- **Carlos Alberto Calderón Chirinos:** Former director of Strategic Investigations and of El Helicoide. He is accused of ordering acts of torture ("placing bags over detainees' heads and administering electric shocks") and participating in extortion to secure detainees' release.
- **Ronny Fernando González Montesinos:** Former coordinator of Field Investigations. He is accused of directly participating in acts of torture and illegal detentions.
- **Miguel Antonio Muñoz Palacios:** Then deputy director of SEBIN. He was sanctioned for allegedly leading the "Pitbull Group," which engaged in kidnappings and extortion.
- **Yolander Parra Iztriago:** Chief Commissioner of Counterintelligence. He is linked to the surveillance of human rights organizations.

8.4.3. Police Officers

- **Elio Ramón Estrada Paredes:** Former director of the Bolivarian National Police (PNB) and commander-in-chief of the GNB under Maduro. He was responsible for establishing the DAET and overseeing lethal operations such as "Trueno."
- **José Miguel Domínguez Ramírez ("Miguelito"):** Director of the Directorate of Strategic and Tactical Actions (DAET) and deputy director of the PNB. He previously led a "colectivo."
- **Leonel Alberto García Rivas:** Deputy director of the DAET and head of Strategic Intelligence.
- **Florencio Ramón Escalona ("Terminator"):** Director of Operations for the DAET. He has been the subject of homicide investigations and was involved in the operation against dissident police officer Óscar Pérez, who was killed in a military operation along with a group of people after they had already surrendered.
- **Douglas Arnoldo Rico González:** Director of the Scientific, Penal, and Criminal Investigations Corps (CICPC) since 2016. He has been sanctioned over human rights violations committed by personnel under his command.
- **Rubén Darío Santiago Servigna:** Director of the PNB since July 2023.

8.4.4. Senior Military Commanders and Other Agencies

- **Vladimir Padrino López:** former Minister of Defense, accused of deploying the GNB to suppress protests and implicated in U.S. investigations into drug trafficking and corruption.
- **Domingo Hernández Lárez:** Strategic and Operational Commander of Maduro's FANB (CEOFANB), sanctioned for obstructing transparent electoral processes.
- Remigio Ceballos Ichaso: former Minister of the Interior and Justice, accused of playing a role in planning military operations involving documented human rights violations.
- **Elvis Hidrobo Amoroso:** President of the CNE and former Comptroller General, responsible for arbitrary political disqualifications of opposition leaders and for proclaiming the 2024 election results without publishing the election records.
- **Alfredo Ruíz Angulo:** former Ombudsman, accused of lacking independence and of systematically failing to act on allegations of torture and disappearances.

8.4.5. Judicial Branch Officials

- **Tarek William Saab:** Attorney General of the Republic, accused of leading the judicial persecution of the opposition and giving arbitrary detentions the appearance of legality.
- **Caryslia Beatriz Rodríguez:** President of the Supreme Court of Justice (2022–2026) and its Electoral Chamber. Served as Acting Mayor of Caracas for the PSUV (2021).
- **Christian Tyrone Zerpa:** Justice of the Supreme Court of Justice (2015–2019).
- **Maikel Moreno Pérez:** Former President of the Supreme Court of Justice and Justice of the Criminal Chamber (2014–2026).
- **Elsa Gómez Moreno:** Former Vice President of the Supreme Court of Justice and Justice of the Criminal Chamber (2010–2026).
- **Tania D'Amelio:** Second Vice President of the Supreme Court of Justice and President of its Constitutional Chamber (2026). Served as President of the National Electoral Council (2009–2022).
- **Juan José Mendoza Jover:** Justice (2014–2022) and former President of the Constitutional Chamber; a former military officer and former PSUV deputy.
- **Calixto Ortega:** MVR-PSUV deputy (2000–2013). Served as Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs for Relations with Europe (2013–2015), Justice of the Supreme Court of Justice (2015–2022), and Venezuela's representative to the International Criminal Court (2022).
- **María Carolina Ameliach Villarroel:** Justice of the Supreme Court of Justice (2010–2022) and a relative of PSUV Deputy Francisco Ameliach.
- **Indira Alfonzo Izaguirre:** Justice of the Supreme Court of Justice and former President of the Electoral Chamber (2014). Served as President of the National Electoral Council (CNE) (2020–2021) and Director of the Office of the President of the National Assembly (2003–2005), during Francisco Ameliach's term.

- **Michel Adriana Velásquez Grillet:** Justice of the Supreme Court of Justice in the Constitutional Chamber (2017–2026) and former wife of Carlos Erik Malpica Flores, nephew of Cilia Flores.
- **Katherine Nayartih Haringhton Padrón:** Deputy Attorney General (2017) and former President of the Caracas Criminal Judicial Circuit (2023–2025). Subject to international sanctions and accused of involvement in cases against political prisoners.
- **José Mascimino Márquez García:** Former judge on courts with jurisdiction over terrorism cases. Accused of threatening lawyers and pressuring detainees to admit to false charges by threatening them with maximum sentences. Arrested during an internal purge by the ruling party in 2023.
- **Carol Padilla:** Judge in anti-terrorism courts, accused of changing arrest dates to cover up enforced disappearances.
- **Hennit Carolina López Mesa and Grendy Duque Carvajal:** Judges in trial courts handling terrorism cases, accused of ignoring visible signs of torture on defendants.
- **Luisa Garrido:** Judge who failed to carry out orders to transfer detainees to civilian facilities and kept activists at El Helicoide despite reports of mistreatment.
- **Edgar Gavidia Rodríguez:** First Vice President of the Supreme Court of Justice and President of the Criminal Chamber (2014–2026).
- **Walter Jacob Gavidia Flores:** 47th Provisional Criminal Control Judge and 9th Trial Judge in Caracas (2008–2015). Also served as an executive director of the Propatria 2000 Foundation.
- **Jennifer Karina Fuentes Gómez:** Executive Director of the TSJ Judiciary (2025).
- **Irving Molina Flores:** Official with the Executive Directorate of the Judiciary and former criminal pretrial judge (2013).
- **Rogers Flores:** Director of Public Relations for the Public Defender's Office and a relative of Cilia Flores.
- **María Adelaida Maduro Moros:** Sister of Nicolás Maduro Moros and head of the Public Defender's Office (2016–2022).

8.5. Summary of the Coercive Apparatus

The evidence gathered in this chapter shows that coercion does not operate in isolation; rather, it forms part of the architecture analyzed here. Judicial bodies, police forces, intelligence services, military structures, and territorial mechanisms come together in various instances of surveillance, detention, prosecution, and the use of force. Formal

chains of command and documented positions help us understand how these capabilities were organized institutionally. Allegations of torture, arbitrary detention, extortion, and other violations can then be linked to the sources and actors identified in each case.

The significance of these capabilities extends beyond the repression of political opposition. Those who control force, territory, borders, information, and investigative capabilities also influence the conditions in which illicit markets operate. This intersection offers a further dimension of analysis, explored in the following chapter: the spaces where state institutions, security forces, armed organizations, and criminal economies converge around drug trafficking, fuel, mining, extortion, the prison system, and other sources of illicit revenue.

9 Illicit Economies and Criminally-Institutional Convergence

9.1. Institutional Factors Behind the Growth of Illicit Economies
9.2. Drug Trafficking and the Erosion of Investigative Capabilities
9.3. Involvement of High-ranking Officials and Maduro's Associates in Drug Trafficking
9.4. ELN, FARC, and the Presence of Colombian Armed Groups
9.5. Militarization of Anti-Drug Investigations
9.6. Armed Forces, Economic Resources, and State-Owned Enterprises
9.7. Fuel Smuggling
9.8. REDI, ZODI, and Territorial Control
9.9. Institutional Anti-Drug Organization
9.10. Protectors and Territorial Governance.
9.11. Peace Zones and Mega-Gangs
9.12. Peace Quadrants and Social Control
9.13. The Prison System, "Pranato," and Criminal Structures
9.14. Illegal Gold Mining and Criminal Governance.
9.15. Other Illicit Markets: Extortion and Illegal Fees
9.16. Convergence of State Institutions and Illicit Economies

The presence of illicit markets in a territory does not, by itself, prove that the state has been captured by crime. The key question is a different one: What happens when those tasked with regulating, investigating, or combating these markets are also connected to the conditions that enable their protection, regulation, expansion, or exploitation?

This chapter explores the boundary between institutions and criminality in Venezuela. It examines drug trafficking, fuel smuggling, illegal gold mining, armed organizations, mega-gangs, "pranato" (a system of prisoner governance that sparked a wave of crimes planned from within detention centers), and other illicit economies—not as one market or organization, but as distinct spaces where state, military, territorial, and criminal capacities may converge. The aim is to identify the mechanisms through which crime and institutions become intertwined, and to distinguish, in each case and where the evidence allows, among tolerance, omission, collaboration, regulation, participation, and responsibility.

9.1. Institutional Factors Behind the Growth of Illicit Economies

Nicolás Maduro's government relied on so-called illicit economies to strengthen social and institutional control and provide economic benefits to its inner circle. Decisions by the executive branch enabled criminal organizations to build national and international networks, with the support and protection of senior Venezuelan state officials. These relationships generated enormous economic benefits for both parties through activities such as drug trafficking, the exploitation and illicit trade of gold, smuggling—particularly gasoline—and extortion, among other crimes.

Since 2019, Transparencia Venezuela has monitored these illicit activities, which generate substantial revenues, as well as the close ties between criminal groups and certain powerful actors. The government's and its inner circle's decisions and measures, described here, had the effects outlined below, particularly in areas where these activities are most prevalent. This report does not establish that those who made these decisions were aware of these effects.

9.2. Drug Trafficking and the Erosion of Investigative Capabilities

Nicolás Maduro did not restore the cooperation agreements with the DEA or the British police that Hugo Chávez had severed in 2005. As a result, Venezuela's ability to investigate, prosecute, and combat drug trafficking weakened. This also created conditions that allowed the crime to spread across the country and made the international transit of drugs easier. In 2025, Maduro claimed that the DEA was "the world's largest drug cartel" and that Venezuela "is a country completely free of drug trafficking."[148]

148 La Iguana (2025). Maduro: Breaking Ties with the DEA Left Venezuela as a Drug-Free Territory. https://www.laiguana.tv/articulos/1423102-maduro-rompimiento-de-relaciones-con-la-dea-dejo-a-venezuela-como-territorio-libre-de-drogas/, October 24, 2025

The Transparencia Venezuela report "Drug Trafficking in Venezuela 2024: A Business That Profits Those in Power and Is Expanding" highlights evidence that actors such as the Sinaloa Cartel (Mexico), the Gulf Cartel (Mexico), Colombian guerrilla groups, mega-criminal gangs—such as the Tren de Aragua—and the so-called Los Soles Cartel are involved in Venezuela's drug trade. It also notes that these organizations have allies within formal institutions, helping them sustain their operations and share the profits.

According to Transparencia Venezuela's estimates, gross revenue from drug trafficking is approximately USD 8,236 million. This conservative figure underscores Venezuela's active role in the global drug market.[149] The nephews of Nicolás Maduro and his wife, Cilia Flores—Efraín Campos Flores and Franqui Francisco Flores de Freitas, who were convicted in 2017 of trafficking cocaine to the United States and later released in a 2022 prisoner exchange—shed light on the links between people close to Maduro and drug trafficking. During his aunt Cilia Flores's tenure as president of the National Assembly, from 2006 to 2011, Efraín Campos Flores worked at the Latin American and Caribbean Parliament, known as Parlatino.

9.3. Involvement of High-ranking Officials and Maduro's Associates in Drug Trafficking

The indictment filed in October 2026 in the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of New York against Nicolás Maduro and his wife, Cilia Flores, describes the alleged use of state resources and assets to facilitate drug trafficking. These resources include aircraft belonging to the state-owned oil company PDVSA, military vehicles, national ports, and Armed Forces bases, which the indictment alleges were used to transport narcotics. The document says these activities were carried out through a structure known as the Cartel de los Soles, allegedly led by Nicolás Maduro and Cilia Flores, alongside members of their inner circle—identified in the document as CC-1, CC-2, and CC-3—as well as high-ranking officers of the National Armed Forces (FAN), particularly the National Guard, and officials from the judiciary and intelligence agencies.

The organization allegedly operated in alliance with international criminal organizations and armed groups, including the FARC, the ELN, the Sinaloa Cartel, Los Zetas, and the Tren de Aragua. According to the court document, the alleged involvement of these high-ranking officials is summarized as follows:

- **Nicolás Maduro and Cilia Flores:** According to the indictment, beginning around 2006, they directed their security teams to oversee and coordinate the transport of cocaine shipments weighing between 1,000 and 2,000 kilos, with the involvement of officials from the National Guard's Special Operations Unit ( ). The indictment also

149 Transparencia Venezuela. "Drug Trafficking in Venezuela 2024: A Business That Profits Those in Power and Is Expanding." https://transparenciave.org/economias-ilicitas/narcotrafico-en-venezuela/

states that Flores offered PDVSA contracts to groups linked to the ELN in 2007 and, in 2010, directed the National Assembly's Legal Advisory Office to dismiss a drug-trafficking charge against an ally.

- **Nicolás Ernesto Maduro Guerra (Nicolasito):** The indictment alleges that between 2014 and 2015, Nicolás Maduro's son used a PDVSA aircraft to transport drugs to Margarita Island, in Nueva Esparta state, with protection from the National Guard.
- **High-ranking officials from security agencies (CC-1 and CC-3):** According to the document, they coordinated DGCIM officials' involvement in transporting drugs belonging to the FARC. They also used military personnel under their command to interrogate rival drug traffickers in support of their own drug operations, and supplied weapons to the FARC and the ELN in exchange for cocaine in 2017. The cocaine was later transported in FAN military vehicles to military bases.
- **Hugo Carvajal Barrios:** In June 2025, Hugo Chávez's former intelligence chief pleaded guilty to drug trafficking and narco-terrorism in the same case involving Nicolás Maduro and Cilia Flores. As of October 2026, he is awaiting sentencing.
- **Clíver Alcalá Cordones:** The general, who served as commander of the Armed Forces during Hugo Chávez's administration, was the first person sentenced in this case, in 2024. He received a 21-year prison sentence for supplying weapons to the FARC.

9.4. ELN, FARC, and the Presence of Colombian Armed Groups

In 2008, Hugo Chávez asked the Colombian government to consider the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the National Liberation Army (ELN) as belligerents[150] in the armed conflict. Maduro later reaffirmed Chávez's sympathy for the guerrilla groups, publicly supporting the FARC in Caracas in 2019 when he stated: "Iván Márquez and Jesús Santrich are welcome in Venezuela and at the São Paulo Forum whenever they wish to come; they are two leaders of peace (…). The FARC is welcome in Venezuela whenever it wishes to come"[151]. Since 2013, concerns have been raised about the presence of FARC and ELN camps, logistical networks, and safe havens in Venezuela, as well as the use of Venezuelan territory as a drug transit route.

However, clear and verifiable information has yet to emerge showing that the Maduro government has taken action against Colombian irregular groups operating in Venezuela and involved in drug trafficking, smuggling, extortion, and other crimes.

150 Europapress (2008) Colombia. Chávez Calls for the FARC to Be Designated a Belligerent Force and for the Geneva Protocols to Be Applied. https://www.europapress.es/internacional/noticia-colombia-chavez-pide-considerar-fuerza-beligerante-farc-aplicar-protocolos-ginebra-20080113211245.html, January 13, 2008.

151 RNC News. "Iván Márquez and Jesús Santrich are welcome in Venezuela." https://www.noticiasrcn.com/internacional/ivan-marquez-y-santrich-son-bienvenidos-a-venezuela-cuando-quieran-maduro-342270 July 29, 2019.

The presence of Colombian guerrilla groups in Venezuela reportedly increased after the 2016 peace agreement in Colombia. According to our reports on illicit economies, the ELN has been active in Amazonas and Monagas, as well as—most notably—in states along the Colombian border, including Barinas, Apure, Zulia, and Táchira.[152]

According to information from Transparencia Venezuela, FARC dissident groups have been active in at least 17 municipalities across four Venezuelan states—Apure, Barinas, Amazonas, and Zulia—and have also had a sporadic presence in Táchira, which they use as a corridor to Colombia. In mid-2022, Miguel Botache Santanilla, the dissident groups' top leader, known by the alias "Gentil Duarte," was killed on Venezuelan territory during a clash with other guerrilla groups, according to Colombia's then-Defense Minister, Diego Molano. In May 2021, alias Jesús Santrich (Seuxis Pausías Hernández), leader of the FARC-EP Segunda Marquetalia, was killed in Zulia state. That same year, two other guerrillas, "Romaña" and "El Paisa," died in Apure.[153] In Táchira, there are signs of collaboration between the Bolivarian National Armed Forces (FANB) and Colombian guerrilla groups, particularly the ELN.

Mayors and Governor Freddy Bernal, a member of the PSUV, have been accused of allegedly tolerating the activities of irregular groups and military personnel, including the transport of illicit cargo such as weapons and drugs. Local communities recognize the guerrillas as authorities: they act as "justices of the peace" to resolve conflicts, authorize certain activities, donate toys and food, and help address issues related to services such as household gas.

In mid-2023, Governor Bernal acknowledged the presence in the territory of 12 ELN units and FARC factions. He has also been sanctioned for his alleged ties to drug trafficking. In this state, as in others such as Zulia, criminal activity has displaced families and agricultural producers, who are pressured to allow clandestine airstrips on their farms.

Reports from Transparencia Venezuela also indicate that, in Bolívar state in the south of the country, the Venezuelan military—which maintains a territorial presence at at least 25 checkpoints in the area—acts in collusion with ELN and FARC groups. The reports also say that the military is lenient toward other criminal actors and carries out "selective" operations against groups that do not align with the network.

152 Transparencia Venezuela (2022). Illicit Economies Under the Cover of Corruption. Chapter 3. National Liberation Army. https://transparenciave.org/economias-ilicitas/ejercito-de-liberacion-nacional/

153 Transparencia Venezuela (2022). Illicit Economies Under the Cover of Corruption. Chapter 3. FARC Dissident Groups. https://transparenciave.org/economias-ilicitas/disidencias-de-las-farc/

9.5. Militarization of Anti-Drug Investigations

Maduro maintained the measure adopted in 2005 under the Law Against Illicit Trafficking and Consumption of Narcotic and Psychotropic Substances,[154] enacted by the National Assembly, which was dominated by Chávez's party. Article 121 of the law assigned the investigation of drug-related cases to all branches of the Bolivarian National Armed Forces, particularly the Bolivarian National Guard (GNB). As a result, civilian officials from the CICPC—the Scientific, Penal, and Criminal Investigations Corps—no longer had this authority.

This decision could create a conflict of interest: the military, especially GNB members, were responsible for both guarding the borders and investigating drug-trafficking crimes, increasing the risk of corruption. The situation is particularly sensitive along the border with Colombia, where Norte de Santander is home to one of the main centers of drug production, with thousands of hectares of coca crops and laboratories used to process the drug, according to international agencies.

9.6. Armed Forces, Economic Resources, and State-Owned Enterprises

The structural configuration of the security and defense sector was outlined in section 1.4.3, while chapter 8 describes its capacities for coercion, repression, and control.

Maduro has also given the military a privileged role through the "civil-military union" policy promoted by Chávez. The Armed Forces' co-optation was reinforced by economic benefits for its members: numerous highly lucrative government contracts went to companies established by military personnel, who were also appointed as ministers in the Executive Branch and as officials in more than 100 strategic state-owned enterprises, including PDVSA.

The military has maintained a bank exclusively for the Armed Forces, a television station, and several dozen companies involved in a wide range of activities. In addition, several military officers have been elected to public office representing the ruling party, the PSUV.[155] Many high-ranking military officers became part of a political elite that enjoyed significant economic benefits, drawing them away from their core responsibility of ensuring the country's security and defense.

For example, the military serves as a security force in the country's southern mining region. It has also taken on a role overseeing that wealth by managing the Venezuelan Mining Corporation (CVM), known as "the Queen of the South" because it controls supplies such as explosives and fuel, registers miners, and markets minerals. In 2019, the organization

154 Organic Law Against the Illicit Trafficking and Consumption of Narcotic and Psychotropic Substances. https://www.imolin.org/doc/amlid/Venezuela/Venezuela_LEY_ORGANICA_CONTRA_EL_TRAFICO_ILICITO.pdf

155 Transparencia Venezuela. Military Power, Crime, and Corruption. https://transparenciave.org/project/poder-militar-crimen-y-corrupcion

was headed by Army Major General Carlos Osorio Zambrano, a former president of PDVAL and former minister of food and transportation[156]. Canada, the United States, and Panama had sanctioned him for corruption. In 2024, Army Major General José Santiago Moreno Martínez replaced him, but after three months in office, Major General Rodolfo Marco Torres succeeded Moreno Martínez. Torres had held at least a dozen positions during the Hugo Chávez administration and had been sanctioned by Canada, the United States, and Panama for corruption and human rights violations. Active-duty and retired military personnel also participated in Strategic Alliances with the State, including through the company Zurisadai, owned by National Guard's General José Gregorio Almao Barroeta. The military also exercised its power through involvement in illicit activities—whether by action or omission—including drug trafficking, smuggling, and extortion.

9.7. Fuel Smuggling

The price controls imposed by Maduro, particularly on gasoline, encouraged smuggling. Members of the military have been accused of taking part in this activity alongside organized crime groups and Colombian irregular groups. The fuel subsidy decreed by Maduro meant that, in 2018, gasoline cost 99.9% less than it had in 1986. Between 2008 and 2018, corrupt officials and criminal groups are estimated to have obtained between USD 21,000 million and USD 31,000 million through this activity. In addition, estimates by Transparencia Venezuela indicate that fuel smuggling peaked at 120,000 barrels per day in 2018.

In Táchira and Zulia, where there are some 300 illegal routes or "trochas," a close relationship developed among the military, guerrilla groups (FARC, ELN), and criminal groups (Los Rastrojos and Los Urabeños). In these areas, the price of Venezuelan gasoline could rise by as much as 3,700 times after crossing the border. When oil refining capacity plummeted—from 59% in 2012 to 5% in 2020—gasoline shortages became widespread across Venezuela, changing the dynamics of smuggling and giving rise to a complex black market. Criminal syndicates began smuggling Colombian gasoline through the border states of Zulia and Táchira. This fuel cost $0.57 in Colombia and sold for as much as $3.50 per liter in Venezuela.

In 2020, Maduro also granted the National Guard control over gas stations across the country, a move that enabled bribery and the diversion of fuel to mining and border areas. In Zulia, gasoline was resold by Indigenous groups, including the Yukpa, and military personnel. In Bolívar, fuel supplied plants and mills involved in illegal mining. In Brazil, it was resold in the state of Roraima, with officials from both countries complicit.[157]

156 Transparencia Venezuela. Illicit Economies. Chapter II. The State in a World of Illicit Activities. https://transparenciave.org/economias-ilicitas/el-estado-presente-en-un-mundo-de-ilicitos/

157 Transparencia Venezuela. Illicit Economies. Gasoline Smuggling. https://transparenciave.org/economias-ilicitas/contrabando-de-combustible/

9.8. REDI, ZODI, and Territorial Control

Maduro also divided the country into strategic zones, giving the military control over certain territories through the Strategic Regions for Comprehensive Defense (REDI) and the Operational Zones for Comprehensive Defense (ZODI), which Chávez created in 2008. Reports have pointed to close ties among military detachments in these zones, Colombian guerrillas, and organized crime groups. In addition, Maduro directly appointed high-ranking Armed Forces officers—especially those stationed in border areas—bypassing the parliamentary oversight that was in place before the Chavista era. Some senior military officers have been accused of belonging to, or at least tolerating, drug-trafficking networks.[158] However, there is no record of any investigation into this matter involving a military leader or criminal boss.

9.9. Institutional Anti-Drug Organization

During Maduro's term, drug control agencies underwent several changes. In 2021, he established the National Anti-Drug Superintendency (Sunad) by presidential decree. The agency was given "greater technical and financial autonomy" to combat drugs, replacing the National Anti-Drug Office, which had been established in 2006. Its first head was Major General Richard López Vargas of the Bolivarian National Guard (2021–2024), a military officer sanctioned by the United States in March 2019 for blocking humanitarian aid from entering Venezuela at that time.

In 2024, following the disputed results of the presidential election, Maduro appointed Diosdado Cabello Rondón as Minister of Internal Relations, Justice, and Peace and Sectoral Vice President for Citizen Security and Peace. In these roles, he was responsible for coordinating and supervising law enforcement agencies and public policies on crime, particularly those addressing drug trafficking, illicit drug use, and money laundering.

In November 2024, Cabello Rondón—who was under investigation in a U.S. court case linked to drug trafficking—appointed Major General Danny Ramón Ferrer Sandrea to lead SUNAD. As of 2026, Ferrer Sandrea leads SUNAD and also serves as deputy minister of the Integrated Criminal Investigation System within the Ministry of the Interior. On January 10, 2025, the United States sanctioned him for supporting Maduro's repression and human rights abuses against democratic actors.

158 Transparencia Venezuela. "Drug Trafficking in Venezuela 2024: A Business That Profits Those in Power and Is Expanding." https://transparenciave.org/economias-ilicitas/narcotrafico-en-venezuela/

The Anti-Drug Committee was established in 2022, with then-Defense Minister Vladimir Padrino López as its chair. Padrino López remained in office for more than 11 years, until March 2026, and is under investigation by U.S. authorities for his alleged ties to drug trafficking. During his more than 10 years leading the ministry, no action was taken to dismantle any drug-trafficking group or to arrest or convict any of the ringleaders involved in this illicit activity in Venezuela. The government announced military operations that it said had seized tons of drugs, though it provided no details.

9.10. Protectors and Territorial Governance

Maduro maintained the position of "protectors," created in 2008 by Hugo Chávez. These central government officials received resources and infrastructure that enabled them to govern states or regions with more authority than the elected governors, who were generally members of the opposition. This arrangement weakened regional governments' autonomy and the principle of state decentralization.

The "protectors" were appointed in border states, especially in Táchira, where trade with Colombia is highly active and at least 300 "trochas," or informal paths, have been identified. Numerous irregularities occur along these routes. Some protectors have been accused of abuses and of colluding with military leaders and irregular groups in the region bordering Colombia, where illicit businesses—particularly drug trafficking—operate.

9.11. Peace Zones and Mega-Gangs

In 2013, Maduro also created the so-called "Peace Zones"—territories without a police presence that were ceded to criminal organizations in an effort to achieve a supposed pacification. These zones were established in urban centers across the states of Miranda, Zulia, Táchira, Aragua, and Guárico, as well as in Greater Caracas. This measure contributed to the emergence of larger, more structured groups known as "megagangs." With more than 50 members, high-powered firearms, and a clearly defined vertical command structure, these organizations include the notorious Tren de Aragua.

Megagangs engage in activities such as drug trafficking, extortion, smuggling, and other crimes. The close ties between government officials and criminal groups grew to the point that some group members[159] openly took part in certain social programs. Through the "peace zones," the government granted criminal groups recognition, official legitimacy, and territories without a police presence, allowing them to gain economic benefits and exert social control over local communities.

159 Transparency Venezuela. Organized Crime and Corruption in Venezuela: A Problem of State. https://transparenciave.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/03-Crimen-organizado-y-corrupcion-en-Venezuela.pdf

9.12. Peace Quadrants and Social Control

As discussed in Chapter 8, these mechanisms of territorial control form part of a broader coercive apparatus that brings together police, military, judicial, and surveillance capabilities.

In 2014, Maduro introduced the so-called "peace quadrants," dividing cities into zones ranging from two to five kilometers in size and patrolled by police and military personnel. In 2019, he reinforced the policy with a decree establishing the "Great Peace Quadrants Mission." Over time, criminologists, civil society organizations, and communities raised concerns about the measure. They noted that the complaint mechanism, which relied on a call center, was not working and warned that the policy could justify the militarization of neighborhoods, including the presence of the so-called militia (a corps of civilians and reservists granted constitutional status in 2020) and structures of the ruling party, such as the communal councils. Critics also argued that the measure could enable social control, the denunciation of dissidents and opponents, and the extortion of citizens—further reinforcing institutional violence.

9.13. The Prison System, "Pranato," and Criminal Structures

Nicolás Maduro continued Chávez's "Humanization of Prisons" policy, which had been in place since 2007 and contributed to the rise of the "pranato" phenomenon. In an effort to prevent violence, he put inmates in charge of managing detention centers. This helps explain how criminal groups such as the Tren de Aragua became established; the group was based at Tocorón prison in Aragua state. There were also allegations that the prison population may have been used for political purposes. These allegations were directed particularly at María Iris Varela, Minister of Penitentiary Affairs, who headed the prison system from 2011 to 2017 and again from 2018 to 2020, and who was accused of organizing her "personal army of prisoners" to defend the so-called Revolution.[160]

In 2023, Maduro ordered Operation Gran Cacique Guaicaipuro to take control of seven prisons and put an end to the "pranato." However, Tren de Aragua's leaders reportedly received advance warning and managed to escape before the intervention.[161]

With the "pranato," crimes such as human trafficking, small-scale drug trafficking, extortion, and kidnapping have spread across Venezuela, particularly in areas near prisons and along the border. In 2024, the Public Prosecutor's Office acknowledged that a "pran" had

160 Infobae (2021). The vice president of the Chavista Assembly, Iris Varela, assembled a personal army of prisoners. https://www.infobae.com/america/venezuela/2021/06/13/la-vicepresidente-de-la-asamblea-chavista-iris-varela-monto-un-ejercito-personal-de-presos/ June 13, 2021

161 InSight Crimen (2023). Is the "pranes" system over in Venezuela's prisons? https://insightcrime.org/es/noticias/termino-sistema-pranes-carceles-venezuela/ November 15, 2023.

paid bribes to judicial officials to secure the release of detained relatives.[162] Although the attorney general did not name him directly, the evidence pointed to him as the leader of the Tren de Aragua, known as "Niño Guerrero," who died in June 2026 during an operation in Bolívar state, in southern Venezuela.

9.14. Illegal Gold Mining and Criminal Governance

Maduro's 2016 decree establishing the Orinoco Mining Arc (AMO) contributed to the uncontrolled extraction and smuggling of minerals, especially gold. Those involved reportedly included criminal gangs, guerrilla groups, military personnel, and local, regional, and national government officials, working in a coordinated manner. The Transparencia Venezuela report, *Gold Mining in Venezuela 2024: Devastation, Chaos, and Corruption*, notes that by 2018, between 70% and 90% of the gold mined was leaving the country illegally. Individuals close to the president, senior officials, powerful groups, and allies were reportedly involved in these operations. The profits were shared among those involved, at the expense of public assets.[163]

This also helped give rise to local criminal groups, known as "sindicatos" (or "sistemas"), in the mines of Bolívar state. These groups became more widespread after the creation of the so-called Orinoco Mining Arc.[164] Illegal mining of gold and other minerals has fueled the growth of drug trafficking and other crimes in mining areas, involving criminal groups such as the Tren de Aragua and the so-called "sistemas." Gangs that control mines and engage in smuggling have also strengthened their influence, in some cases with the tacit approval of local authorities. Allegations made in the National Assembly by former officials of the Bolivarian National Intelligence Service and military personnel have implicated Francisco Rangel Gómez, the former governor of Bolívar state.

Criminal groups such as "El Totó's" gang have been accused of financing the campaigns of pro-government mayoral candidates, including Humberto Hurtado's campaign in the municipality of El Callao, Bolívar state. Some of these organizations have also taken on roles usually handled by local governments, such as supplying schools and hospitals, providing assistance, and resolving conflicts. This has earned them the respect of some residents in those areas. In 2021, criminal groups moved away from extreme violence and stopped carrying out massacres in Bolívar state. Instead, they shifted toward a "peace" agreement with the state, helping the broader network maintain its influence.

162 Transparencia Venezuela (2024). Supreme Injustice. The "Aragua Train" recruited a prosecutor from the Public Ministry and other officials from the justice system. https://supremainjusticia.org/el-tren-de-aragua-capto-a-un-fiscal-del-ministerio-publico-y-a-otros-funcionarios-del-sistema-de-justicia/, March 12, 2024

163 Transparencia Venezuela (2024). Gold Mining in Venezuela 2024: Devastation, Chaos, and Corruption. https://transparenciave.org/economias-ilicitas/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/Explotacion-de-oro-en-Venezuela-2024.-Transparencia-Venezuela-en-el-exilio.pdf

164 Transparencia Venezuela. Illicit Economies. Chapter III. The "Negro Fabio" Gang https://transparenciave.org/economias-ilicitas/banda-del-negro-fabio/

Transparencia Venezuela has documented allegations that some military personnel collect "protection money" or commissions in gold from miners in exchange for allowing them to work or transport machinery and fuel to certain restricted areas. Agencies have also been established to combat crime in the mining zone, including the Orinoco Mining Arc Protection Group (GPAMO), composed of the five branches of the military and established in 2022, and the Special Protection Units of the Orinoco Mining Arc (UEPAMO), created in 2024. However, these agencies could also form part of the institutional structure of impunity.[165]

During Maduro's term, the Parliament—dominated by the executive branch—passed several laws and decrees that favored the illegal exploitation of gold. One example is the Organic Decree-Law on Strategic Minerals (2015), through which Nicolás Maduro reaffirmed the state's reserve rights in the mining sector and introduced the concept of "strategic alliances." Unlike joint ventures, these alliances allow for opaque agreements with private partners holding up to an 80% stake. They were signed with businesspeople, some of whom have been implicated in corruption cases and have documented ties to those in power. These secret agreements provide no accountability for actual gold production and could involve violations of environmental and labor laws.

In 2021, BCV Resolution No. 21-01-04 was also approved, allowing the Central Bank of Venezuela (BCV) to decline to purchase gold and authorize its direct export by private entities—a scheme that increased opacity. The BCV's actions have led to international sanctions. In addition, the Anti-Blockade Law (2020) was enacted to protect Venezuela from international sanctions. This law allowed Maduro to sign confidential or classified contracts and shield opaque business dealings with state-owned companies such as Minerven (Compañía General de Minería de Venezuela C.A.) and the Venezuelan Mining Corporation (CVM).

9.15. Other Illicit Markets: Extortion and Illegal Fees

The Maduro administration has condoned systematic and widespread extortion by officials from the security forces (PNB, GNB, CICPC, SEBIN, DGIM), government agencies, and the justice system (judges and prosecutors) at every level. In Venezuela, illegal fees (known as "matraqueo") are collected at roadblocks and police and military checkpoints. This also happens at customs and ports, where exorbitant fines are imposed on the state or direct transfers are demanded to the accounts of corrupt officials. This practice generated USD 1,394 million in revenue in 2022, a figure that fell to USD 504 million in 2024 as import volumes declined. Payments are also demanded to release detainees or prevent evidence from being "planted" on them, especially during protests and elections. Bribes are collected

165 Transparencia Venezuela. Deadly Gold. https://transparenciave.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/04-Oro-Mortal.pdf

to speed up procedures at registration offices (Saren), notary offices, and identification offices (Saime), and even to access basic services such as healthcare—for example, to undergo surgery—and electricity repairs.

In many cases, currency devaluation and extremely low wages lead low-ranking officials to resort to extortion, a practice that sometimes borders on begging. Following the July 2024 announcement, made without publication of the election results, the Maduro government relaunched the so-called "Operation Tun Tun" as a policy of terror through mass repression, with the arrests discussed in Chapter 8. At the same time, widespread extortion—tolerated by the authorities—targeted detainees and their families. They were asked to pay sums ranging from very small amounts to thousands of dollars in exchange for their freedom or to avoid being implicated in serious crimes, such as terrorism and treason.

Nor were exemplary sanctions imposed on the criminal gangs extorting people throughout the country. In addition, many civilian and military officials are accused of sharing illegal profits with criminals, while citizens' rights—including freedom of movement, the right to work, property rights, and personal integrity—continue to be violated.

The authorities' inaction allows local criminal groups to operate with impunity. These include the "megagangs" (such as the Tren de Aragua and the Tren del Llano) and Colombian guerrilla groups (the ELN and FARC dissidents), which collect "vacunas" or protection fees from merchants, agricultural producers, fishermen, and transport operators. In border areas, this can force people to move to other countries or to other regions within the country. Prison gang leaders ("pranes") and prison system officials also extort inmates and their families, demanding payment for access to food or basic services in prisons.

9.16. Convergence of State Institutions and Illicit Economies

The markets examined in this chapter are diverse and do not form a single criminal organization. Drug trafficking, fuel smuggling, illegal gold mining, extortion, mega-gangs, prison structures, and armed organizations each involve their own actors, territories, incentives, and mechanisms. Rather than suggesting that all these entities answer to a central command, the shared finding is that institutional capacities and illicit economies repeatedly intersect through border controls, military structures, anti-drug agencies, territorial administration, economic and mining legislation, security forces, the prison system, and investigative or judicial bodies.

These intersections are where the idea of convergence between state institutions and crime becomes meaningful. Depending on the case, the available evidence may point to tolerance, omission, protection, regulation, collaboration, or participation. These categories are distinct, so it is important to consider them carefully. Alongside the findings of the previous chapters, they show how institutional capture, rent-seeking, economic

accumulation, transnational adaptation, impunity, and coercion can coexist with illicit markets and systems of criminal governance.

This final level of analysis brings together the report's main dimensions. The next step is to synthesize the evidence, identify the patterns that run throughout the report, clarify which forms of responsibility can be specifically attributed to Nicolás Maduro, and distinguish those from responsibilities associated with structures, institutions, or third parties—without automatically attributing them to those entities.

10 Conclusions



The analysis in this document suggests that the facts examined cannot be fully explained as a simple sum of corruption cases, administrative decisions, personal relationships, or independent illicit markets. Instead, the evidence points to an interconnected structure of power in which political, institutional, economic, oil-related, judicial, and coercive capacities overlap, alongside connections to business operators, transnational financial networks, and, in some areas, illicit economies.

Within this structure, Nicolás Maduro holds a highly significant position. He has the highest betweenness centrality in a super-network of 13,521 actors; he is directly connected to extensive chains of appointments and delegations; he exercised extraordinary powers that expanded the executive branch's discretion; he repeatedly intervened in the management of PDVSA and other strategic parts of the state; and his political and institutional circle intersects with individuals, companies, and organizations cited in numerous corruption cases and investigations in Venezuela and abroad. These elements are not interchangeable, but taken together, they support characterizing Maduro not as a peripheral figure in the phenomena studied, but as a central figure in the system's configuration, coordination, and continuity.

The question of responsibility raised by this evidence has several dimensions. The first concerns actions directly attributable to Maduro, such as appointments, delegations of authority, decrees, decisions about the structure of the executive branch, and changes in the leadership of strategic institutions. A second dimension relates to institutional changes during his administration: the concentration of power, weakened checks and balances, limited transparency in resource management, the militarization of economic functions, and reduced autonomy for judicial and oversight institutions. A third dimension comes into view when considering how these capabilities relate to 154 documented cases of corruption since 2013, business structures associated with the political elite, schemes linked to PDVSA, adaptations to sanctions, patterns of impunity, coercive capabilities, and points of convergence between institutions and illicit economies. Taken together, these layers underscore the importance of investigating the links between presidential decisions, chains of command, and the conduct of other actors. At the same time, they do not justify automatically attributing every action by officials, family members, businesspeople, military personnel, or intermediaries in Maduro's inner circle to him. It is therefore important to distinguish among responsibility for one's own decisions, responsibility arising from the exercise of authority, structural significance, and potential criminal liability for specific acts.

With this in mind, the report's findings should not be understood as a judicial determination of Nicolás Maduro's criminal liability—a matter for the competent courts that requires proof of the legal elements applicable to each act. Rather, the report helps delineate and organize the evidence needed to consider that question more precisely: which decisions can be attributed directly to him, which institutional capacities he helped shape or consolidate, which actors he connected through appointments and delegations, which patterns recur across seemingly

distinct areas, and which links still need further substantiation before individual responsibility can be established.

At the same time, structural analysis invites us to look beyond a single explanation centered on Maduro. Although he occupies the primary intermediary position, the super-network includes redundancies and alternative routes that extend beyond his individual node. For that reason, any process of investigation, accountability, or institutional recovery calls for examining both the individual responsibility of those who adopted or carried out decisions and the institutional, economic, and relational structures that allowed those practices to continue. Distinguishing between these two levels does not lessen the attribution of responsibility; instead, it provides a stronger foundation for it.

In the case of Cilia Adela Flores de Maduro, the evidence supports examining forms of responsibility distinct from those considered in relation to Nicolás Maduro. With respect to her own actions, the super-network documents appointments and delegations of signing authority she made during her tenure as head of the National Assembly and the Office of the Attorney General, several of which benefited members of her immediate family. At the institutional level, her ninth-place ranking in structural intermediation reflects the intersection of family, institutional-administrative, and business relationships, rather than an ability to reshape institutions. The documented connections also show her network converging with corporate structures and actors under investigation in other jurisdictions. None of these levels, whether considered alone or together, allows third parties' actions to be attributed to her. Their significance lies in identifying the specific points where kinship and the exercise of public authority come together in a single documented act.

The structure examined, then, is not limited to Maduro's individual responsibility. An investigative strategy focused exclusively on him would leave the very mechanisms identified in the analysis—state-owned enterprises, appointment chains, and business intermediation—intact and able to persist.

Appendix A

Complete Inventory of International Corruption Cases Originating in Venezuela

Table of international cases	
1	Operation Money Flight
2	Venezuelan citizens were scammed through MexiCLAP
3	PDVSA US Litigation Trust: lawsuit filed in the United States alleging insider trading
4	Sargeant Marine paid a multi-million fine for bribing PDVSA officials
5	The United States investigates bribes paid to PDVSA officials
6	Argentine companies under investigation for paying bribes to export agricultural machinery and elevators to Venezuela
7	Former Spanish ambassador accused of laundering PDVSA funds
8	Argentine businessman under investigation for alleged money laundering involving PDVSA Funds
9	Irregularities in bidding processes between PDVSA Ecuador and Odebrecht
10	In Argentina, Frigorífico Soychú S.A. is under investigation for food contracts involving alleged overpricing
11	The Vignati brothers are under investigation for irregularities involving the Argentina–Venezuela Trust
12	Argentina estimates an alleged overcharge of USD 94 000 000 on powdered milk exports to Venezuela
13	Money from Portugal laundered in Bulgaria
14	Allegations of irregularities in the invoicing of Unitek products to Venezuela
15	The billion-dollar embezzlement in Haiti involving Petrocaribe funds
16	A contractor received USD 160 million from PDVSA as part of a bribery scheme
17	Alba Petróleos de El Salvador under investigation for money laundering
18	Father and son convicted of laundering $100 million for former Venezuelan officials
19	Venezuelan gold is being sold illegally in the Dominican Republic
20	Blue Gold on the Happy Island: Gold Valued at Over USD 2 000 000 Seized in Aruba
21	Brazil launched Operation Hesperides in response to gold trafficking
22	The Swiss Attorney General's Office closed an investigation into Álex Saab and his business partner Álvaro Pulido
23	Colombia pursues Saab for money laundering
24	Naman Wakil: the Venezuelan tycoon arrested in the United States on corruption charges involving the state-owned companies PDVSA and CASA
25	400 metric tons of spoiled food in Cartagena
26	Businessman Who Negotiated with Venezuelan Military Officials on the Repair of Russian Sukhoi-30 Aircraft Arrested in the U.S.
27	The agreements between Mujica and Chávez left a bad taste
28	Allegations of kickbacks for grain sales and agricultural consulting services to Venezuela
29	Fonglocons sold fictitious goods to Venezuela from Ecuador
30	Financial services firms Morgan Stanley and Interactive Brokers under investigation by U.S. authorities

31	Between Venezuela and Ecuador, the Sucre was used for everything
32	The United States charges six people with money laundering linked to the CLAPs
33	Venezuelans created Banco Peravia to launder money
34	Lawmaker Calls on Ecuador's Attorney General's Office to Investigate Criminal Scheme Linked to Álex Saab
35	Samark López's two villas in Punta Cana
36	Assets Seized from Italian Company Under Investigation for Corruption in Contracts Related to the Great Venezuela Housing Mission
37	Venezuelans were carrying gold hidden on a private plane
38	Argentina is investigating alleged overpricing in the sale of frozen chicken to Venezuela
39	U.S. professor laundered money from Venezuelan corruption
40	Alleged overcharge Venezuela paid for food purchased from Granja Tres Arroyos estimated at $17 million
41	Drug-Dealing Nephews: Part of the money was to pay for their aunt Cilia's campaign
42	Two former Venezuelan prosecutors accused of receiving more than $1 million in bribes
43	The Saab-Pulido duo is accused of money laundering in the United States
44	Macro-case, Part 1: PDVSA's Lawsuit
45	300% markups at Corpoelec
46	Macro-case, Part 2: The Portuguese Conspiracy
47	U.S. authorities are on the trail of Tareck El Aissami and Samark López
48	Macro-case, Part 3: The Columbus-Swissinvest axis
49	Former ONA Chief Néstor Reverol charged with drug trafficking
50	Macro-case, Part 4: Reiter – Yssea partnership
51	Industrial equipment suppliers paid bribes at PDVSA
52	Venezuelan pilots indicted in the United States for arms smuggling
53	The United States accuses Darwin Padrón of bribery at PDVSA
54	A PDVSA consultant in the U.S. paid for yachts
55	Chávez's millionaire nurse under investigation in Spain
56	Former mayor of Guanta was convicted in the U.S. for an oil bribery scheme
57	Levy, the Argentine accused of laundering millions through his business dealings with Venezuela
58	New Zealand froze more than USD 17 000 000 belonging to the wife of a former PDVSA official
59	A bank of their own for money laundering
60	The U.S. charged two businessmen with laundering money derived from Venezuela's foreign exchange controls
61	Investigators in Italy look into a Venezuelan shipment of coltan
62	Peru's Public Prosecutor's Office is investigating a money laundering case involving the National Treasury Office
63	PDVSA bank accounts in Bolivia frozen

64	Spanish judge opens another case involving alleged money laundering by the founder of Spain's Podemos party
65	Former Petrocedeño manager implicated in PDVSA bribery scheme
66	Alleged member of the Los Soles Cartel is in U.S. custody
67	Edoardo Orsoni and the bribery allegations at Petrocedeño
68	Another Venezuelan businessman charged in the U.S. with laundering money from business dealings in the Orinoco Belt
69	United States charges businessmen with bribing a Venezuelan official at Citgo
70	Allegations that a Miami bank is controlled by the Venezuelan government and used to evade sanctions
71	Cuferca Executive accused of bribery
72	The U.S. and Colombia are investigating alleged smuggling of Venezuelan crude oil using Ecopetrol's infrastructure
73	The Soles Cartel and the FARC: alleged allies in the drug trade
74	The Iranian Conviasa plane
75	U.S. Justice Department charges Padrino López with authorizing suspicious flights
76	Money from Andorra being laundered in Colombia
77	Maikel Moreno, President of the Supreme Court of Justice, under investigation by the U.S.
78	Brazilian authorities close investigation into Nicolás Maduro over alleged illegal payments to Hugo Chávez's campaign adviser
79	Former National Assembly deputy charged with drug trafficking
80	Colombian Prosecutor's Office charges members of a network smuggling oil from Venezuela
81	Maduro's government fails to recover $10 billion from PDVSA held in Switzerland
82	Spain reveals $80 million embezzlement in the purchase of security systems for PDVSA
83	Italian court sentences Álex Saab and his wife for money laundering
84	Switzerland confirms freeze of 140 million francs in a case related to Venezuela
85	Venezuelan woman sought in Panama for alleged money laundering
86	The Rincón family and a former Venezuelan military officer implicated in alleged irregularities in the sale of vehicles to Bariven
87	Colombian Prosecutor's Office investigates the "Bolichicos"
88	Israeli intelligence reported alleged gold trafficking between Iran and Venezuela to finance Hezbollah
89	Hugo Chávez's former nurse's gold bars and Swiss bank accounts
90	The Oberto Anselmi brothers under investigation in France for alleged money laundering
91	Business dealings between Venezuela and Argentina facilitate fraud against the nation
92	Argentina's Attorney General's Office files charges against Kioshi Compresión S.A. for money laundering involving PDVSA officials
93	PDVSA contractor's account seized in Guatemala
94	Trinswol is under investigation in Argentina for irregular exports to Venezuela
95	Contractor Leonardo Santilli accused of bribing PDVSA officials
96	Nervis Villalobos's money laundering reached the Principality of Liechtenstein

97	Banco Espírito Santo diverted PDVSA funds
98	98. Argentina's Financial Intelligence Unit (UIF) alleges irregularities by Paramérica S.A. in its transactions with the Bilateral Trust
99	Colombian Prosecutor's Office uncovered illicit assets of Venezuelan hydrocarbon smuggling ring
100	Argentina investigated Novatech for selling overpriced technology products to Venezuela
101	Costa Rican authorities dismissed a case involving contracts with Suvinca for the purchase of hygiene products
102	Laboratorio Elea S.A., under investigation for irregularities in exports to Venezuela during the binational trust arrangement with Argentina
103	Sigen is investigating the Argentine company "Las Camelias" for alleged overpricing in sales to Venezuela.
104	Víctor Vargas faces criminal charges in Curaçao for a $1.5 billion fraud related to the collapse of Banco del Orinoco (BOD Group)
105	Argentina investigated Venezuela's payment of inflated prices to the company Exo, S.A.
106	Swiss Attorney General's Office is keeping an investigation into "Bolichico" Leopoldo Betancourt under wraps.
107	The markup that Venezuela would have paid to the Argentine company Ascensores Servas, S.A. is estimated at 97 percent.
118	Plus Ultra I: Case involving the controversial Spanish bailout of the airline owned by PDVSA contractors is dismissed
119	An audit in Argentina found markups in the sale of technology products to Venezuela by Coradir, S.A.
110	Bulgarian Prosecutor's Office investigates the embezzlement of nearly USD 600 000 000 belonging to PDVSA

Appendix B

Complete inventory of domestic cases

National Cases	
1	Allegations of overpricing and sabotage at Petrozamora
2	Officials Arrested for Facilitating Pelón's Release 2. Cheremos, "Alleged Member of *Tren del Llano*"
3	Allegations of overpriced purchases at Petropiar
4	Mayor of Las Tejerías arrested for alleged ties to "El Conejo"
5	Machinery was awarded directly and at inflated prices at Petropiar
6	National Anti-Corruption Police arrested First Supervisory Judge of Falcón State
7	Former PDVSA Gas Colombia official accused of embezzlement
8	The PDVSA-Crypto corruption scheme
9	Allegations of Tampering with Production Figures at PDVSA Oriente
10	Operation "Caiga Quien Caiga", phase II
11	PDVSA loses money on purchase of 400 tank trucks
12	Hugo Cabezas arrested for links to an alleged corruption scheme at Cartones de Venezuela
13	One loading buoy for the price of two
14	Public Prosecutor's Office is investigating Rafael Ramírez for alleged irregular loans through Corpozulia
15	Overpriced contracts in the Oil Belt
16	Prosecutor's Office is investigating the embezzlement of more than USD 566 000 000 from PDVSA
17	PDVSA paid exorbitant rent for an inefficient ship
18	Derwick Associates is among the companies under investigation for embezzling USD 200 000 000 from the nation
19	Irregular management at Petrocedeño
20	Finance Director of the Aragua Governor's Office arrested for embezzlement
21	1,393 alerts regarding price gouging detected at Bariven
22	Biodanica president arrested for alleged import fraud and improper use of foreign currency against the State
23	Huge profit made from reselling diesel
24	Constructora BJL in Táchira implicated in irregular imports
25	Theft of coils at PDVSA Industrial
26	Prosecutor's Office received new evidence regarding the investigation into alleged corruption at Carbozulia
27	Venezuelan justice authorities request Spain to extradite Chávez's nurse
28	Executive at Central La Pastora arrested for overbilling the government
29	Former President of Lácteos Los Andes arrested for alleged corruption scheme
30	Executive at Zaidelys C.A. arrested for irregular imports and overbilling
31	Former judge Benny Palmeri Bacchi and 18 others were arrested for trafficking 4.2 metric tons of cocaine
32	Fictitious company received $212 000 from the government for fake imports

33	An investigation is underway into the embezzlement of $200 000 000 in the Orinoco Oil Belt
34	Partners at Losophar Pharmaceuticals implicated in alleged import fraud
35	A former PDVSA contractor allegedly involved in overpriced contracts was arrested
36	Río Turbio Sugar Company linked to import fraud involving government funds
37	The Public Prosecutor’s Office requests arrest warrants for 11 officials for alleged sabotage at FPO
38	Former PDVSA Vice President of Finance under investigation for irregularities in a contract with the Argentine company Unitek
39	Irregular contracting at Petrowarao caused USD 9 000 000 in damages
40	Venezuelan businesswoman Kristina Antonorsi accused of defrauding PDVSA
41	Three members of Congress and two other Venezuelan government officials were part of an alleged drug trafficking network in Zulia and Falcón
42	Case involving the PDVSA-Rantor contract—which the United States links to Money Flight—is dismissed
43	A mayor and two senior prosecutors are arrested for diverting fuel for illegal mining
44	Former Minister Pedro Tellechea arrested for allegedly handing over PDVSA systems to U.S. Intelligence

Appendix C

List of Attached Court Documents

This appendix brings together the 12 judicial documents accompanying the report and links each one to the footnotes that cite it. Of the 16 footnotes that include a case number, 12 refer to an attached document. The case numbers in the footnotes match those on the documents, with any exceptions noted in the last column.

No.	Case	Court and case file	Record and date	Persons named in the record	Attached file	Cited note
1	Money Flight (2018 Indictment)	U.S. District Court, Southern District of Florida · 1:18-cr-20685-KMW	Criminal Complaint (AO 91)	Francisco Convit Guruceaga et al.	Criminal Complaint - Money Flight.pdf (33 pp.)	37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, and 44
2	Money Flight (plea agreement)	SDFL · 1:18-cr-20682-CMA (18-CR-20682-ALTONAGA)	Plea Agreement	Matthias Krull	Plea Agreement - Matthias Krull - Money Flight.pdf (12 pp.)	40
3	Money Flight (plea agreement)	SDFL · 1:22-cr-20306-DPG (22-CR-20306-GAYLES/TORRES)	Plea Agreement	Luis Fernando Vuteff	Plea Agreement - Luis Fernando Vuteff - Money Flight.pdf (14 pp.)	43
4	Money Flight (Sentencing)	SDFL, Miami Division · 1:23-cr-20089-KMW	Judgment in a Criminal Case	Álvaro Ledo Nass (USM 46489-510)	Judgment Álvaro Ledo Nass - Money Flight.pdf (7 pp.)	40
5	Money Flight (Indictment 2024)	SDFL · 24-20468-CR-ALTMAN/LETT	Indictment	Raúl Gorrín Belisario	Indictment - Raúl Gorrín - Money Flight.pdf (18 pp.)	39
6	Bribes to Former National Treasurers	SDFL · 18-80160-CR-DIMITROULEAS	Clerk's Notice Placing Defendant in Fugitive Status; indictment returned on August , 16, 2018; notice dated September 21, 2018	Raúl Gorrín Belisario	Fugitive Status - Case of Gorrín v. Alejandro Andrade and Claudia Patricia Díaz Guillén.pdf (1 p.)	49
7	Álex Saab in the United States	SDFL · 19-20450-CR-SCOLA/TORRES	Indictment, filed on July 25, 2019. Charges: 18 U.S.C. §§ 1956(h), 1956(a)(2)(A), 2, and 982(a)(1)	Álex Naín Saab Morán and Álvaro Pulido Vargas, alias "German Enrique Rubio Salas"	Indictment - Álex Saab.pdf (14 pp.)	56

No.	Case	Court and case file	Record and date	Persons named in the record	Attached file	Cited note
8	Corruption Network Linked to the CLAPs	SDFL · 1:21-cr-20509-JEM	Indictment	Álvaro Pulido Vargas, José Gregorio Vielma-Mora, Emmanuel Enrique Rubio González, Carlos Rolando Lizcano Manrique, and Ana Guillermo Luis	Indictment - José Gregorio Vielma Mora.pdf (25 pp.)	64
9	Evasion of Sanctions — Tareck El Aissami	U.S. District Court for the Southern District of New York · 1:19-cr-00144-AKH	Document 67, filed on March 13, 2020	Tareck El Aissami	Indictment - Tareck El Aissami.pdf (30 pp.)	58 and 61
10	Flight Autho-rization — Vladimir Pa-drino López	U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia · 1:19-cr-00176	Exhibit 10, filed on March 26, 2020	Vladimir Padrino López	Arrest Warrant - Vladimir Padrino López Case.pdf (1 p.)	63
11	Drug Trafficking — Néstor Reverol	U.S. District Court, Eastern District of New York · CR 15-00020	Indictment, January 21, 2015. Charges: 21 U.S.C. §§ 853(a), 853(p), 959(c), 960(b)(1)(B)(ii), and 963; 18 U.S.C. §§ 3238 and 3551	Néstor Luis Reverol Torres and Edylberto José Molina Molina, alias "Edilberto Molina"	Indictment - Néstor Reverol. pdf (5 pp.)	62
12	Maikel Moreno	SDFL · 1:20-mj-02407-JJO	Criminal Cover Sheet	Maikel José Moreno Pérez	Indictment - Maikel Moreno. pdf (11 pp.)	65



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