

Religious Landscape and Response in Venezuela

Outreach Aid to the Americas



The Catholic Church's Diminished Role



The Catholic Church has been for many years a respected institution in Latin America and the Caribbean, with deep influence in various areas of the public sphere. Many actors of Venezuela's Catholic community and leaders have spoken against Maduro's seizure of power and his economic policies. The church's influence and energies have mainly turned to humanitarian efforts.

In the last decades in Venezuela, there has been a major shift in faith towards evangelical Protestantism. This change is in part a consequence of the widespread decline in Catholic affiliation in Latin America.



Evolving Religious Landscape: The Rise of Evangelical Protestants



Most Venezuelans are affiliated with a religion; the majority are Roman Catholic and most of the rest are Evangelical Protestants, whose number continues to rise. As with Catholics, many evangelicals have made efforts to provide aid and protect fellow believers both inside and outside the country. These organizations are leveraging their networks and resources to tackle hunger, poverty, health and hygiene, and other issues. This has made them important actors in the nation's humanitarian crisis. In addition, evangelical pastors exert significant influence on their followers, including in political behavior. For this reason, then President Hugo Chávez and now Maduro pursued political support of their regimes by evangelical Protestants. Both presidents failed at sustaining evangelicals' support.



Interconfessional Cooperation

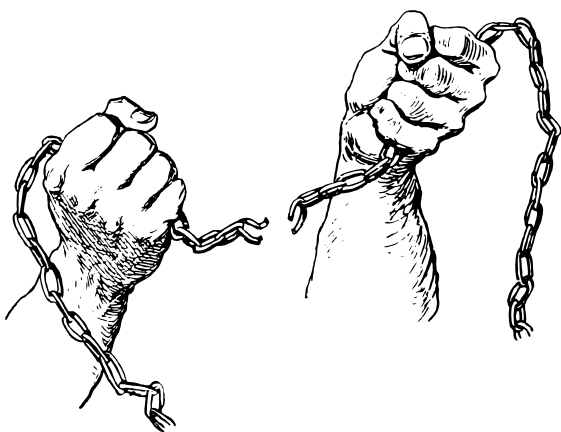
As faith-based actors respond to Venezuela's grave humanitarian challenges, groups from different traditions and denominations have come together to enhance their effectiveness. An example of this is the *Foro Interreligioso Social*, which brings together Catholic and Protestant churches to defend human rights and combat food insecurity during the pandemic, among other initiatives. These alliances are also important in advocating for religious freedom and peaceful, constructive political reforms.

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Assault on Religious Freedom

Religious freedom is a foundational element of liberal democracy. Despite Venezuela's constitutional guarantees for this right, many faith leaders have been harassed and intimidated for speaking up about the country's humanitarian crisis. Also, there have been attacks against churchgoers and churches themselves. These acts have mostly been directed against those perceived as opponents and critics of the Maduro regime.



The Maduro regime has also repeatedly used anti-semitic language, denying that the Holocaust occurred and linking Jews to the pandemic. Other religious communities have been and continue to be targeted by the authoritarian regime.