

**Politics**

The Rising Relevance of the Venezuelan Diaspora

Ten years into the humanitarian crisis, millions abroad face serious challenges to organizing. But their own initiatives—and lessons from other diasporas—suggest they have the potential to build stronger networks and defend their collective interests

Manuel D'Hers Del Pozo April 08, 2025



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As a nation, we've struggled to come to terms with the fact that we are now a migrant country. In the past ten years, crossing borders has become a survival strategy—allowing us to generate resources for those who remain in Venezuela and helping us all move forward with our life projects. This transformation has deeply influenced how we live and relate to our loved ones, but also how we perceive ourselves as a nation.

Today, neither the complex humanitarian emergency nor the massive migration wave takes us by surprise. Over the past decade, we've been forced to socially reorganize our families, communities, and shared identities.

The Venezuelan democratic community, both inside and outside the country, faces major challenges. The deepening authoritarianism of the Maduro regime is now compounded by cases like Donald Trump's administration in the United States, which showed us that even second and third countries can directly violate the human rights of migrant populations. This brings into question whether, in all this time, we've developed organizational initiatives that allow the diaspora—formally and informally—to participate actively in defending



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The challenge of a scattered diaspora

So, can our exodus be considered a diaspora?

A diaspora is generally defined as the geographic dispersion of a large group of people who share a common territorial origin, usually caused by traumatic conflict. Members of a diaspora typically retain loyalty to their homeland, long for return, and resist full assimilation into their host countries—allowing them to form and sustain communities with shared identity and purpose.

Seen from this lens, speaking of a Venezuelan diaspora makes sense. The systematic collapse of the country turned migration into forced displacement, giving rise to narratives marked by injustice, nostalgia, and pain. But beyond the idea of a Venezuelan diaspora as a “moral community,” it must also develop a certain level of organization that mobilizes around national interests. And it’s precisely in this organizational and governance dimension where the Venezuelan diaspora faces multiple difficulties.

...the wider and more precariously we are spread, the harder it is to find the time, energy, and tools to build an organized community.

In just a decade, a quarter of Venezuela’s population has left the country—an unprecedented event in our history. Unlike other Latin American nations, Venezuela had long been a destination for immigrants, not a country of emigration—much less forced emigration. Our exodus happened violently, without support networks to ease the arrival in host countries or the adjustment that follows. The majority migrated wherever they could, within their means.

This has led to considerable geographic dispersion, with Venezuelans spread across continents and even nuclear or extended families scattered throughout the world. On top of that, the severity of the humanitarian crisis dictated the



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Millions have moved without valid documents, without resources, and without a roadmap for their lives.

These two factors give rise to what we could call a “scattered diaspora”—a condition that underscores the logistical barriers families and communities face when trying to organize across borders. The Cuban diaspora is largely concentrated in the U.S., just as much of the Indian diaspora is in the U.K., enabling them to build robust advocacy platforms.

By contrast, in our case, the wider and more precariously we are spread, the harder it is to find the time, energy, and tools to build an organized community.

The Venezuelan state’s culture of denial

The Venezuelan state has systematically denied the humanitarian emergency and the massive exodus. Beyond deepening social suffering, this position directly affects how mobility is regulated; how migration under precarious conditions is managed; and how resources circulate between those inside and outside Venezuela.

The state has failed to meet the demand for basic documents—identity cards, passports, birth or residency certificates, civil status documents, educational records, transcripts, degrees, background checks, and apostilles. Waiting times to obtain or renew a passport can exceed 16 months. The official cost of a passport is 350 euros, but applying from abroad includes an additional 120 euros in cash consular “fees,” totaling 470 euros.

Efforts to suppress diaspora participation meant that only 1% of Venezuelans abroad could vote in the July 28, 2024, presidential election.

These bureaucratic hurdles—slow processing, administrative silence, and high



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legal life abroad, weakening the diaspora's ability to function.

Even though the government has eased foreign currency circulation inside Venezuela, major obstacles remain in sending resources across borders. A simple transfer from an international to a Venezuelan bank is still not feasible. These transnational bottlenecks hinder the diaspora's potential for co-development.

Authoritarian regimes, as **Camila Orjuela** notes, tend to recognize diasporas as threats to their political survival due to their transformative potential. The Venezuelan case proves it: efforts to suppress diaspora participation meant that only 1% of Venezuelans abroad could vote in the July 28, 2024, presidential election.

The required commitment

Other diasporas have shown that protests and activism—no matter how small—help raise global awareness of their countries' struggles. Rwandan migrants, for instance, set a powerful international precedent after the 1994 genocide. Their legal advocacy forced several countries to investigate fugitives and prosecute genocide perpetrators abroad. One such case was **Claver Berinkindi**, found guilty of genocide in a Stockholm court in 2016. The diaspora celebrated the fact that Sweden, rather than Rwanda, prosecuted him—knowing there were no guarantees of a fair trial in his home country.

The Sri Lankan diaspora did something similar in 2010, organizing a **people's tribunal** in Dublin that symbolically declared the Sri Lankan government guilty of war crimes and crimes against humanity against the Tamil minority. This landmark, though without legal weight, had enormous symbolic value: they made a transnational political struggle visible, named perpetrators, and demonstrated the wide-ranging impact a diaspora can have.

These examples remind us that our efforts are neither small nor in vain. Despite



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have shown a strong sense of mobilization, loyalty to their country, and shared identity.

Venezuelan migrant associations have created support networks to aid cultural and social integration in host countries. Individually and collectively, many of us send remittances, medicine, and food to people back home—helping sustain life and social reproduction. And increasingly, diaspora activism is also focused on political change: defending democracy, demanding justice, and paving the way for return.

The protests that followed the July 28 elections—held across the globe—show the diaspora’s unwavering commitment to electoral justice and denouncing post-election repression.

Meanwhile, the humanitarian goodwill of host countries is running out. In many places, Venezuelans are now being criminalized instead of protected. A glaring example: in early 2025, Donald Trump’s administration **revoked** Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for Venezuelans in the United States. Yet, Venezuelan organizations in the U.S. mobilized both socially and legally to fight back—leading a California judge **to suspend** the TPS cancellation for at least 18 months.

This shows us why diaspora organization must continue—with a clear sense of its relevance: to build networks, keep solidarity flowing, defend human rights, and maintain a visible political presence around the world.

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Manuel D'Hers Del Pozo

Anthropologist and Ph.D. fellow (2022-2025) in the Martí Franqués program at Universitat Rovira i Virgili. Researching care practices within the (im)mobility of Venezuelan migration.

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