



Northern Venezuela's Double Earthquake

Policy Leads: Aisha Foday, Aram Jung

Policy Analysts: Lediya Kajer, Evan Kung, Isabel Mylnarsky, Preet Shukla, Alishba Syed

Rapid Response Center, Institute for Youth in Policy

aisha@yipinstitute.org, aram@yipinstitute.org

Abstract - The following brief examines the catastrophic impacts of the devastating doublet in Northern Venezuela, analyzing how the disaster has intensified Venezuela's existing economic crisis and political instability. The earthquakes have resulted in tremendous loss of life and bodily harm, amounting to more than 3,500 deaths and over 16,700 injuries. Disillusioned Venezuelans point severe criticism at the national government and interim leader, Delcy Rodríguez for slow relief responses as opposition leader, María Corina Machado, seeks a political comeback, pointing to heightening the risk of prolonged political instability. The brief also reviews previous, failed attempts at preventing damages by instituting the COVENIN codes, and recommends policy to mitigate the effects of the natural disaster through humanitarian aid alongside military and technological assistance.

Keywords — Northern Venezuela, seismic doublet, casualties, humanitarian relief, Interim President Rodríguez, state of emergency, political unrest, Opposition Leader Machado, economic collapse, international aid

I. OVERVIEW

A. POINTED SUMMARY

- On June 24, 2026, magnitude 7.2 and 7.5, double-earthquakes, respectively, rocked Northern Venezuela, occurring just 39 seconds apart.¹

¹ Laura Martín Agudelo, 2026. Review of Venezuela's Double Earthquake Struck Faults Scientists Had Flagged. News From Science. https://www.science.org/content/article/venezuela-s-double-earthquake-struck-faults-scientists-had-flagged?_cf_chl_f_tk=pitxm8aepfgxc2mwypbyn5zeg2vyang2z3aoe.xsike-1783365472-1.0.1.1-tq7bqlak3xejzdnk8uo0_bz4dy2wknsvezkegwddra.

- The death toll exceeds 3,500 with more than 16,700 injuries.²
- International responders including the EU, China, and the United States have pledged humanitarian assistance, with US rescue teams being deployed to the area.³

B. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Violent twin-earthquakes have shaken the northern region of Venezuela, bringing down buildings in Caracas and La Guaira, while also causing damage to states of Trujillo, Carabobo, Aragua, and more.⁴ The earthquakes resulted from movement along the Caribbean–South American plate boundary. The earthquakes in this rare seismic doublet were of near-identical strengths, the first hitting at 7.2 magnitude and the later at 7.5, both classified as major earthquakes, causing both loss of life and costly

² Antonio María Delgado, 2026. "Death Toll from Venezuela's Twin Earthquakes Rises To 3,535." Miami Herald. <https://www.miamiherald.com/news/nation-world/world/americas/venezuela/article316395865.html>.

³ Elise Hammond, 2026. "June 24-25, 2026 — Venezuela Rocked by 7.5 And 7.2 Magnitude Earthquakes | CNN." CNN. <https://www.cnn.com/2026/06/24/weather/live-news/venezuela-earthquake-puerto-rico-tsunami>.

⁴ Visual Journalism Team. 2026. Review of Venezuela Earthquakes in Maps and Charts: Where They Hit and How Severe They Could Be. British Broadcasting Corporation, June 25, 2026. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/czx5k8pxdevo>.

damages.⁵ More than 3,500 individuals have been killed by this cataclysmic catastrophe and thousands more have been injured while Venezuelans abroad anxiously await news from their loved ones back home while also blaming the government's slow response to the natural disaster.⁶ The United Nations has estimated the physical damage at about \$37 billion, and has developed the "Humanitarian Response Plan for Venezuela" which has raised more than \$275 million while also providing critical services including mental health and psychosocial support.⁷

C. RELEVANCE

The catastrophic doublet is not an isolated tragedy for Venezuela; it comes in the wake of a readily deteriorating economy as 56% of the population lives in extreme poverty⁸ alongside political upheaval after the arrest of now former President Nicolás Maduro by the U.S. military.⁹ Now with the aforementioned \$37 billion worth of damages as well as Venezuela's sharp criticisms of acting President Delcy Rodríguez for

⁵PBS News. 2026. "The 2 Earthquakes That Struck Venezuela Are Known as a 'Doublet.' Here's What to Know about Them." PBS News. June 25, 2026.

<https://www.pbs.org/newshour/science/the-2-earthquakes-that-struck-venezuela-are-known-as-a-doublet-heres-what-to-know-about-them>.

⁶Maricela De La Cruz, 2026. "Venezuelans Abroad Share Fears after Devastating Earthquakes." KCRA.

<https://www.kcra.com/article/venezuela-devastating-earthquakes/71735573>.

⁷2026. Review of Venezuela Quake: UN Continues to Scale up as Damage Estimate Reaches \$37 Billion. UN News.

<https://news.un.org/en/story/2026/07/1167879>.

⁸European Commission. 2024. "Venezuela."

Civil-Protection-Humanitarian-Aid.Ec.Europa.Eu. 2024.

https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/where/latin-america-and-caribbean/venezuela_en.

⁹European Commission. 2024. "Venezuela."

Civil-Protection-Humanitarian-Aid.Ec.Europa.Eu. 2024.

https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/where/latin-america-and-caribbean/venezuela_en.

perceived incompetence of government relief efforts following the earthquakes, Venezuela's internal problems have only been exacerbated. Exiled opposition leader, María Corina Machado, has begun seeking a comeback, hopeful of a democratic transition of power, however, her efforts to return to the country were blocked by interim President Rodríguez who closed down commercial air traffic to the capital city after learning of Machado's plans.¹⁰ The earthquakes have significantly worsened Venezuela's fiscal crisis, prompting more than 100 economists to urge sanctions relief and renewed IMF financial assistance.¹¹ This will stand as more than a natural disaster for Venezuela as its economic and political future stands unclear in the face of financial uncertainty and civil unrest.

II. HISTORY

A. CURRENT STANCES

Right now, local groups like the Venezuelan Foundation of Seismological research possess strong seismic monitoring capabilities. However, they do not have the legal power to force cities or builders to fix that weak infrastructure that has been holding them back, evidenced by the recent events of Northern Venezuela's double earthquake. The government is too focused currently on fixing immediate economic problems, meaning that long-term safety plans and disaster preparation are put on the back of the priority list. International groups, like the UN, are urging the country to update its emergency plans,

¹⁰Jesús Sérvulo González, 2026. "Over 100 Economists Ask US to Lift Sanctions on Venezuela to Ease the Impact of the Earthquakes." EL PAÍS English. Ediciones EL PAÍS S.L.

<https://english.elpais.com/economy-and-business/2026-07-07/over-100-economists-ask-us-to-lift-sanctions-on-venezuela-to-ease-the-impact-of-the-earthquakes.html>.

¹¹García Cano, Regina, and Isabel DeBre. 2026. "Venezuela's Interim Leader Faces Political Test after Criticism over Quake Response." AP News. July 3, 2026.

<https://apnews.com/article/venezuela-earthquake-rescue-delcy-rodriguez-trump-machado-097c0eab303b9b461419868c15fddecb>.

but political tensions are currently making it too hard for outside funding or technical teams to get involved¹².

B. TRIED POLICY

In the late 1900s, Venezuela introduced new building rules called COVENIN codes after a major earthquake hit Caracas in 1967¹³. While these rules were updated over time, they proved largely ineffective for a few major reasons. Firstly, there was little to no enforcement. Local governments rarely checked to see if builders were actually following the safety rules. Secondly, a massive portion of the population lives and still lives in informal, self-built neighborhoods, and these past policies completely ignored these areas, leaving millions of people in homes that cannot withstand shaking and are the people most directly affected by such crises. Finally, not just this policy, but the majority of earthquake policies in Venezuela focused on what to do after an earthquake happened, like sending rescue teams, rather than going into cities beforehand to physically reinforce weak foundations, rebuild old bridges, or make sure these buildings were strong enough to not collapse in the event of an earthquake.

III. POLICY PROBLEM

A. STAKEHOLDERS

The policy problem surrounding Northern Venezuela's double earthquake involves a complex web of stakeholders, each with distinct roles, interests, and challenges. The Venezuelan government, led by interim President Delcy Rodríguez, bears primary responsibility for

coordinating disaster response, relief efforts, and long term recovery. Their interests lie in maintaining political control, avoiding further criticism, and ensuring regime stability. However, they face significant challenges, including perceived incompetence in relief efforts, resistance to international scrutiny, and deepening political tensions with opposition groups like María Corina Machado's movement. The opposition, particularly Machado and her supporters, seeks a democratic transition and accountability for the government's failures. Their interests include regaining political influence, exposing mismanagement, and pushing for early elections. Yet, their efforts are hindered by government restrictions, such as blocked air traffic, and the risk of further marginalization in a climate of heightened political polarization. The international community, including the UN, EU, U.S., China, and humanitarian organizations like the Red Cross, plays a critical role in providing aid, technical assistance, and financial support. Their interests revolve around addressing the humanitarian crisis, demonstrating global solidarity, and potentially influencing political outcomes. However, they encounter challenges such as government resistance to international aid, logistical hurdles in delivering assistance, and diplomatic tensions that complicate cooperation.

Local communities, particularly survivors in informal settlements, are the most directly affected by the disaster. Their immediate needs include access to food, shelter, medical care, and safe housing. Yet, they face systemic neglect, lack of infrastructure, and vulnerability to future disasters due to unsafe living conditions. Civil society groups and NGOs also play a vital role in supporting relief efforts and advocating for policy reforms, but they must navigate political sensitivities and ensure their aid reaches intended beneficiaries. The private sector and academic institutions contribute resources and expertise but

¹² Solano, Luisana. "Venezuela earthquakes LIVE: UN rapidly deploys aid and rescue teams." *UN News*, 25 June 2026, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2026/06/1167806>. Accessed 2 July 2026.

¹³ Habib, Yamily. "When Venezuela's Earthquake Hit, the People Showed Up. The Government Did Not." *Minú*, 27 June 2026, <https://wearemitu.com/wearemitu/news/venezuela-earthquake-government-failure/>. Accessed 2 July 2026.

must balance corporate social responsibility with the complexities of operating in a politically charged environment. Military and rescue teams, both domestic and international, are essential for search and rescue operations and delivering aid, though government restrictions and coordination challenges often constrain their work.

B. RISKS OF INDIFFERENCE

Ignoring the policy problem risks deepening the humanitarian crisis, with prolonged suffering, disease outbreaks, and mental health decline among survivors. Political instability could escalate into protests, riots, or violent clashes, further eroding trust in institutions. Economic collapse may worsen, with key industries crippled, sanctions tightening, and a brain drain of skilled professionals. Structural risks remain high, as millions in unsafe housing stay vulnerable to future disasters. Environmentally, poor waste management and disrupted infrastructure could trigger secondary crises like landslides. Internationally, Venezuela's resistance to aid may isolate it further, straining regional stability. Without reform, disaster preparedness gaps will persist, leaving populations at perpetual risk.

C. NONPARTISAN REASONING

A neutral, evidence based approach is essential. Prioritize saving lives and depoliticizing aid to ensure equitable distribution. Lessons from past failures, like unenforced building codes, highlight the need for enforcement, community engagement, and long term investment in resilience. Scientific expertise should guide reconstruction to ensure safety. Balance sovereignty and assistance by facilitating international support where gaps exist. Conditional aid tied to transparency may ensure accountability without undermining Venezuela's authority. Include local communities and opposition voices in decision making, but prevent political agendas from derailing relief.

Focus on preventive measures: enforce updated building codes, invest in early-warning systems, and establish clear protocols for access to international aid. A nonpartisan, compassionate approach is critical to address this crisis effectively.

IV. POLICY OPTIONS

A. Expand international humanitarian access through multilateral coordination

Given reports that Venezuelan government forces have blocked or impeded international rescue teams from entering affected areas¹⁴, one option is for the international community to press for a multilateral, neutral humanitarian corridor, coordinated through the UN or International Federation of Red Cross rather than relying solely on bilateral agreements. This approach could depoliticize aid delivery, increase the volume and speed of assistance reaching displaced populations, and provide independent monitoring of distribution given Venezuela's restricted media environment.¹⁵ However, the interim government has already shown resistance to outside scrutiny, dismissing criticism as "narratives manufactured in propaganda laboratories", and may resist ceding control over aid distribution, especially amid politically sensitive dynamics following the recent change in national leadership. This option is feasible, UN bodies have already called for restored information access, suggesting some diplomatic groundwork exists, but implementation would depend on the interim government's willingness to cooperate.

¹⁴ Catherine Nicholls, "June 29, 2026 - Venezuela Earthquake Death Toll Passes 1,700, Miraculous Rescues Offer Hope," CNN, June 30, 2026, <https://www.cnn.com/2026/06/29/world/live-news/venezuela-earthquake-hnk>.

¹⁵ "June 26, 2026, Over 900 Killed in Venezuela Earthquakes," CNN, June 27, 2026, <https://www.cnn.com/2026/06/26/world/live-news/venezuela-earthquake-hnk>.

B. Bilateral military/technical assistance, as already initiated by the U.S. and regional partners

The U.S. Southern Command has already sent forces, rescue teams, and equipment to Venezuela at the interim government's request, and countries like Mexico, Chile, and El Salvador have sent emergency teams.¹⁶ Formalizing and scaling this bilateral model is a second option. This leverages existing diplomatic channels and specialized disaster-response expertise (e.g., search-and-rescue, aerial damage assessment) without requiring new multilateral frameworks, and builds on a notable thaw in U.S.- Venezuela relations¹⁷; it also does little to address the underlying issue of restricted domestic information flows and government-controlled narratives. Feasibility is high in the long term, since deployment is already underway, but long-term sustainability depends on continued diplomatic goodwill.

C. Long-term reconstruction financing tied to institutional and infrastructure reform

Given that the earthquakes have exposed a healthcare system already weakened by economic crisis, power outages, and equipment shortages¹⁸, a third option is structuring international reconstruction financing (from institutions like the IMF, World Bank, or regional development

banks) around commitments to rebuild critical infrastructure and health systems more resiliently. This could address root vulnerabilities rather than just immediate relief, potentially reducing severity of future disasters given ongoing landslide and aftershock risks in the region.¹⁹ However, conditional financing may be difficult to negotiate amid Venezuela's political transition and could be perceived as leveraging a humanitarian crisis for political concessions; disbursement and reform timelines are typically slow relative to urgent recovery needs. The feasibility for this plan is moderate in the near term, given the scale of institutional reform required and Venezuela's freight financial relationships with international lenders, but more feasible as a medium-to-long-term track running parallel to immediate relief.

V. CONCLUSIONS

Northern Venezuela's 2026 seismic doublet has demonstrated how natural disasters can rapidly exacerbate existing economic instability. Although the earthquakes were unavoidable, the scale of the humanitarian crisis directly reflects structural weaknesses in Venezuela, including insufficient enforcement of seismic building standards and limited disaster preparedness. Immediate relief remains the foremost priority, but recovery efforts should also strengthen institutional resilience to reduce future vulnerability. A balanced response should combine expanded humanitarian coordination through neutral international organizations with targeted bilateral technical assistance to accelerate rescue as well as reconstruction. Longer-term reforms, including stronger enforcement of earthquake-resistant construction standards as well as investments in early-warning systems will

¹⁶ "Venezuela Is Reeling from Earthquakes, as the Rising Death Toll Nears 1,000," NPR, last modified June 26, 2026, <https://www.npr.org/2026/06/26/nx-s1-5870651/venezuela-earthquake-s-caracas>.

¹⁷ "June 26, 2026 — Over 900 Killed in Venezuela Earthquakes," CNN, June 27, 2026, <https://www.cnn.com/2026/06/26/world/live-news/venezuela-earthquake-hnk>.

¹⁸ "Venezuela Is Reeling from Earthquakes, as the Rising Death Toll Nears 1,000," NPR, last modified June 26, 2026, <https://www.npr.org/2026/06/26/nx-s1-5870651/venezuela-earthquake-s-caracas>.

¹⁹ [6] USGS, "2026 Venezuela Sequence Earthquake-Triggered Landslide Hazards," <https://www.usgs.gov/programs/landslide-hazards/science/2026-venezuela-sequence-earthquake-triggered-landslide-hazards>

be essential to rebuilding public trust while improving Venezuela's capacity to withstand future disasters. By pairing urgent humanitarian action with sustained rebuilding, policymakers can help mitigate both the immediate human cost and the broader political and economic consequences of the disaster.

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