

# From Refuge to Fear: The Trump Administration's Revocation of TPS for Venezuelans

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## Introduction

On February 5th of the current year, the Trump administration revoked a Temporary Protected Status (TPS) extension for Venezuelans, initially granted under the Biden administration. This decision will strip work authorization from thousands of Venezuelan immigrants, making them eligible for deportation. Kristi Noem, the newly appointed Secretary of Homeland Security, confirmed this on *Fox and Friends*, stating, "The people of this country want these dirtbags out...They want their communities to be safe."<sup>1</sup> TPS, which provides temporary protection from deportation and work authorization for Venezuelans fleeing the political and economic crisis in their home country, has been a crucial safeguard for many families. This issue is not only a matter of concern for the Venezuelan community but also relevant within the broader debate regarding U.S. immigration policy.

## Background

The Secretary of Homeland Security has the authority to designate a foreign country for Temporary Protected Status if conditions in that country temporarily prevent its nationals from returning safely or, in some cases, if the country is unable to adequately handle the return of its nationals. During the designated period, TPS beneficiaries, or those found preliminarily eligible upon initial review (prima facie eligible), are protected from deportation, can obtain an employment authorization document, and may be granted travel authorization.<sup>2</sup> Established by the Immigration Act of 1990, the program has been applied to nationals from various countries experiencing crises.<sup>3</sup>

Since 2010, Venezuelans have become one of the fastest-growing immigrant groups in the United States, with their population increasing by 318 percent between 2010 and 2023.<sup>4</sup> Following Hugo Chávez's electoral victory in 1999, a significant number of Venezuelans from middle-class and professional backgrounds began migrating to the U.S. In 2021, then-Secretary of Homeland Security Alejandro Mayorkas designated Venezuela for TPS, highlighting the ongoing political turmoil, economic devastation, and widespread human rights violations, which left many Venezuelans vulnerable to extreme poverty, violence, and persecution as the main reasons.<sup>5</sup> Venezuelan migrants face double disregard: first, from their

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<sup>1</sup> Jonathan Franklin, "Trump Ends Extension of Temporary Protected Status for Hundreds of Thousands of Venezuelan Migrants," *NPR*, January 29, 2025, <https://www.npr.org/2025/01/29/nx-s1-5279219/trump-ends-extension-of-temporary-protected-status-for-hundreds-of-thousands-of-venezuelan-migrants>.

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, "Temporary Protected Status," *U.S. Department of Homeland Security*, accessed February 28, 2025, <https://www.uscis.gov/humanitarian/temporary-protected-status>.

<sup>3</sup> "Immigration Act of 1990," *Immigration History*, 1990, <https://immigrationhistory.org/item/immigration-act-of-1990/>.

<sup>4</sup> Migration Policy Institute, "Inmigrantes Venezolanos en Estados Unidos," *Migration Policy Institute*, last modified May 2021, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/inmigrantes-venezolanos-en-estados-unidos>.

<sup>5</sup> Federal Register, "Termination of the October 3, 2023, Designation of Venezuela for Temporary Protected Status," *Federal Register*, February 5, 2025, <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2025/02/05/2025-02294/termination-of-the-october-3-2023-designation-of-venezuela-for-temporary-protected-status#:~:text=On%20March%209%2C%202021%2C%20then,such%20aliens%20to%20remain%20temporarily>.

own government, which fails to acknowledge the dire conditions driving their displacement; and second, from some of the countries to which they flee, where they often encounter indifference, hostility, or a lack of legal protections. In this context, the U.S. TPS designation provided a critical lifeline, acknowledging the severity of their circumstances and recognizing their vulnerability.

## Current State of the Issue and Its Implications

In his recent executive orders, President Trump clearly outlined a series of policy priorities focused on the national interest. Trump officials and many Republican lawmakers argue that the TPS policy has been exploited and extended improperly on too many occasions.<sup>6</sup> This debate underscores the complex intersection of U.S. immigration policy, national security, and the human rights of vulnerable populations, raising critical questions about how the U.S. should respond to global crises and whether TPS remains a viable tool for offering refuge.

The termination of TPS for Venezuelans impacts over 300,000 individuals—about half of the 600,000 Venezuelans with TPS currently residing in the United States under this status—because only those covered by the 2021 designation, and not the more recent 2023 redesignation, are at risk. According to *The Times*<sup>7</sup>, the policy change could take effect within the next two months. Lawful immigration pathways ensure a safe and organized process for individuals entering the U.S., enabling migrants to contribute productively, pay taxes, support their families, and integrate into local communities. By ending TPS and humanitarian parole programs, the U.S. is abandoning Venezuelan migrants fleeing a country that Secretary Rubio recently acknowledged imprisons and tortures innocent individuals<sup>8</sup>. Legislative offices—both Democratic and Republican—that previously supported these protections must act to reinstate them. Legal challenges to the termination of TPS are ongoing, with advocacy groups working to reverse the decision. The Association of Venezuelans in Massachusetts and Casa Venezuela of New England issued a statement strongly rejecting the measure, which they say "puts thousands of families who have sought refuge and opportunities in this country at risk of deportation."<sup>9</sup> This decision aligns with the broader framework of U.S. immigration policy under the Trump administration, particularly its "America First" approach, which generally advocates for isolationism and seeks to reduce the number of foreign nationals granted long-term status in the U.S. By limiting long-term status grants, the administration aimed to prioritize domestic

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<sup>6</sup> "Analysis of Trump Day 1 Executive Orders: Unconstitutional, Illegal, and Cruel," *National Immigration Law Center*, 21 Jan. 2025,

<https://www.nilc.org/articles/analysis-of-trump-day-1-executive-orders-unconstitutional-illegal-and-cruel/>.

<sup>7</sup> Federal Register, "Termination of the October 3, 2023, Designation of Venezuela for Temporary Protected Status," *Federal Register*, February 5, 2025,

<https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2025/02/05/2025-02294/termination-of-the-october-3-2023-designation-of-venezuela-for-temporary-protected-status#:~:text=On%20March%209%2C%202021%2C%20then,such%20aliens%20to%20remain%20temporarily.>

<sup>8</sup> *Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA)*, "Terminating Legal Pathways: The U.S. Is Abandoning Venezuelans," last modified March 2024, <https://www.wola.org/analysis/terminating-legal-pathways-u-s-abandoning-venezuelans/>.

<sup>9</sup> Telemundo Nueva Inglaterra, "Migrantes Venezolanos Reaccionan Ante la Revocación de la Extensión de TPS," *Telemundo Nueva Inglaterra*, accessed March 5, 2025,

<https://www.telemundonuevainglaterra.com/noticias/local/migrantes-venezolanos-reaccionan-ante-la-revocacion-de-la-extension-de-tps/2465649/>.

economic concerns and limit perceived burdens on social services. This policy change raises questions about U.S. priorities in foreign relations, particularly with Latin American countries. It also carries significant geopolitical ramifications, as it may signal a shift in the U.S. stance on the humanitarian crisis in Venezuela, potentially aligning with the narrative of Maduro's government rather than supporting those fleeing the country's devastating conditions. As Trump himself stated, "They're poisoning the blood of our country. That's what they've done. They poison mental institutions and prisons all over the world. Not just in South America," underscoring his administration's harsh stance on immigration from countries like Venezuela.<sup>10</sup>

## **Policy Recommendation**

One potential solution is to continue extending Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for Venezuelans fleeing their country's crisis. This extension could be accompanied by a pathway to permanent residency or citizenship, providing those who have legally established lives in the U.S. with the ability to plan for the future. Reforming the criteria for TPS eligibility could lead to more flexible and timely responses during global crises. This approach could include regular reviews and extensions of TPS for countries in prolonged states of emergency, ensuring that protections adapt as situations evolve. Additionally, a temporary program for Venezuelans could be introduced, granting legal status for a defined period while their homeland remains unstable. This would allow Venezuelans to live and work with dignity and security, even without a formal TPS designation. Such a solution would offer a temporary yet organized framework, as the international community works to address Venezuela's ongoing crisis.

## **Conclusion**

The recent termination of Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for Venezuelans has left many in a state of uncertainty. As the situation in Venezuela remains dire, many now face the looming threat of deportation to a country grappling with a severe humanitarian crisis. As a global leader, the United States has a responsibility to recognize the ongoing suffering in Venezuela and extend support to those seeking refuge. Moving forward, it is essential for U.S. policymakers to collaborate with advocacy groups to ensure fair treatment for Venezuelans and others in similar circumstances. Ultimately, a compassionate and responsible approach to immigration is necessary to address these pressing humanitarian concerns. Furthermore, it is important to highlight that although President Trump's mandate could potentially pave the way for more restrictive policies for Venezuelans, these measures could also extend beyond them, affecting migrants as a whole.

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<sup>10</sup> American Civil Liberties Union. "Trump on Immigration." *ACLU*, 2021, <https://www.aclu.org/trump-on-immigration>.

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