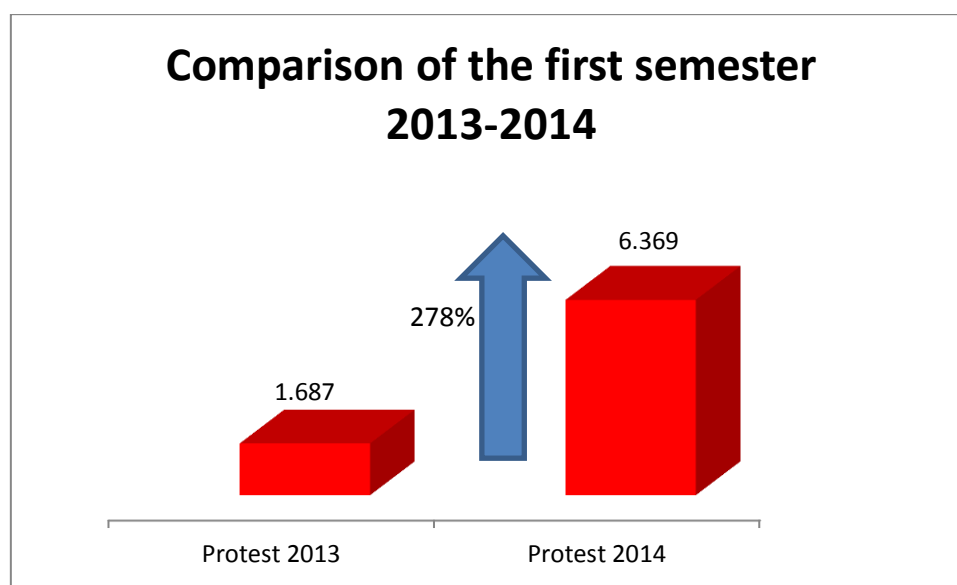




## Social Conflict in Venezuela in the first semester of 2014

The Venezuelan Observatory of Social Conflict (*OVCS for its initials in Spanish*) recorded, at least, **6369 protests in the first semester of 2014**; that is, an average of 35 protests per day throughout the Venezuelan territory.

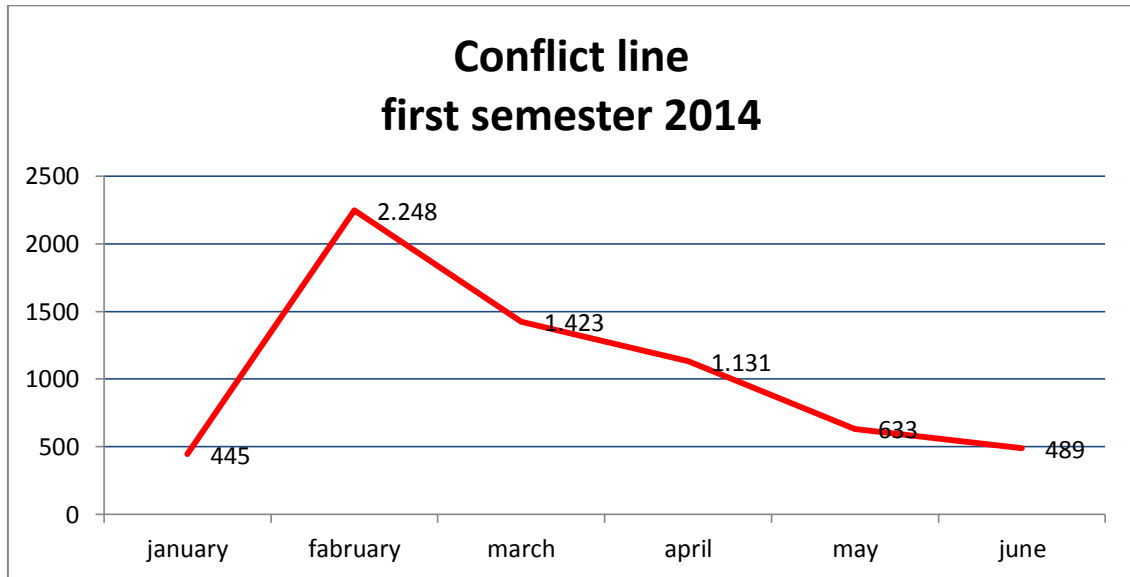
On the basis of the protests monitored by ConflictoVe in the first six months of 2014, **this semester had the highest number of protests in the last 10 years in Venezuela, a number that exceeds those that usually occur within a full year.** We have recorded, at least, **4682 protests more than the first semester of 2013, when they amounted to 1687, thus representing an increase of 278%.**



Observatorio Venezolano de Conflictividad Social (OVCS)

## In six month more protests than in one single year

The data collected during the first semester reveals an increase of the pacific protest in Venezuela. During this term protests amounted to a number far higher than the total of protests documented in one year with high conflictivity, taking 2012, the year with more protests in the last decade (5483 protests), as baseline.



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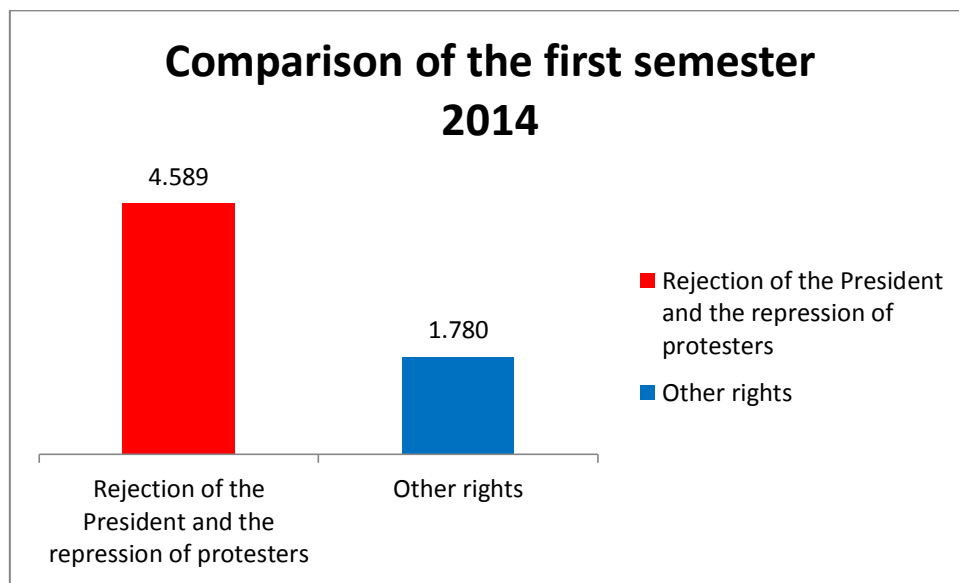
In the first week of February, a wave of peaceful protests began in Venezuela, mainly carried out by young people, university students and activists of opposition political parties whom were gradually joined by common people. The protests took place in the main cities of the country. The extraordinary increase of the protests had a common denominator: political motivation, an element that had been absent in street protest during the last years. For this reason, the protests recorded in the first quarter may be considered atypical but foreseeable in a country with a high annual rate of demonstrations -15000 in the last three years- against deficient public policies and decisions recently implemented by the Executive, mainly in connection with the guarantee of economic and social rights.

As shown in the chart, the protests reached their highest peaks in February and March, having a steady descent as of April. In this semester the number of protests increased proportionally to the increase of repression exercised by the Venezuelan government.

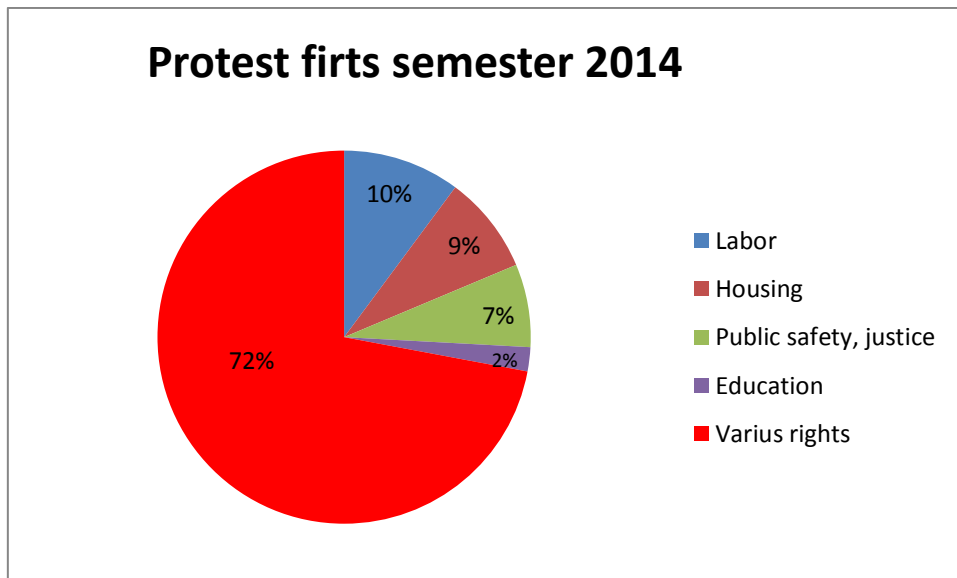
## Protests with political content

The wave of protests starting on February began with claims for the right to citizen security and in rejection to the high rates of crime and violence at the universities. In the following weeks the demands expanded to claims for other rights including right to food, life, freedom, personal integrity, and speech. It is worth noticing that demonstrators showed a common and articulating stand or approach in their actions: the rejection to President Nicolas Maduro, his government team, and the repressive actions implemented during those months.

We make a differentiation between the protests in **rejection of the President and the repression of protesters, about 4589, 72% of the total**, which were classified as “protests for various rights”, and those which, despite being also in relation with claims of rights and discontent with governmental measures adopted in connection with labor, housing, basic services, prisons, citizen security, **did not expressed a rejection to the President and his government team, 1780, 28% of the total.**



Observatorio Venezolano de Conflictividad Social (OVCS)



Fuente: Observatorio Venezolano de Conflictividad Social (OVCS)

**The most common form of protest used during this period was street and highway closure**, followed by concentrations, marches and ‘*cacerolazos*’, involving a large number of people in street actions. There were also numerous creative protests and a permanent use of electronic social networks to announce and promote protests as well as to report their development.

#### **Conflict escalation**

**The peaceful demonstrations were responded by the Venezuelan government with a disqualifying discourse, systematic repression actions**, militarization of some cities and criminalization of the protests. This situation provoked an escalation of the conflict with regrettable results for the country.

**The violence and repression against protesters reached exceptional figures in Venezuelan history, only comparable to the events that occurred in the *Caracazo* revolt in 1989**. According to official data published by the Public Prosecutor’s Office last June, there were **3306 protesters arrested, 973 injured and 42 dead** from February to June.

Public authorities gave their support to the disproportionate and excessive use of force by the Bolivarian National Guard (*GNB for its initials in Spanish*) and the Bolivarian National Police (*GNB for its initials in Spanish*), by congratulating the officers of said forces for their performance against the peaceful protesters, thus encouraging less than democratic practices for public order control

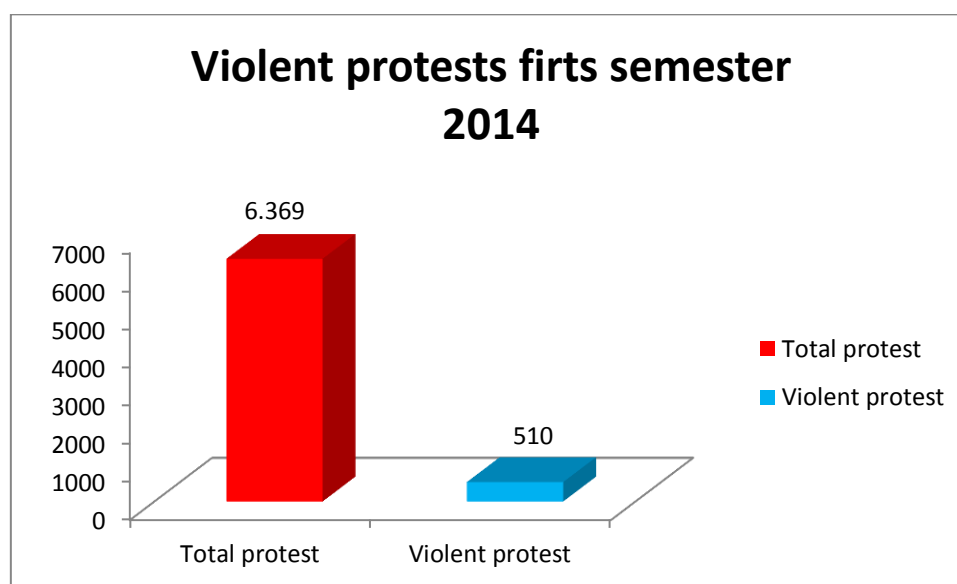
Besides suffering the repression of the State’s public forces, protesters were also assaulted by **paramilitary groups<sup>1</sup>, pro-government armed civilians, that acted with the acquiescence of and in coordination with the State**.

The participation of civilians to confront peaceful protesters was apparent on March 3, 2014 when President Nicolas Maduro made a call to pro-government *colectivos*, communal councils and civil units with military training to dissolve the protests: ‘*I make a call to the UBCH, the communal councils, the communes, the colectivos; any fire that is set out will be put off.*’ After this order, a spiral of violence broke out in the country.

During the first quarter, **violent acts by paramilitary groups in, at least, 437 protests were recorded**, that is, 31% of all protests occurring in that period. In most of the protests where those groups showed up, people wounded by gunfire were reported.

The repressive policy was justified with the argument that the country’s internal order had to be guaranteed. According to the Venezuelan authorities, all the protests were violent and pursued an insurreccional and desestabilizing objective.

However, the day-to-day follow-up carried out by Conflictove and OVCS evidenced that violent protests were a minority and, in most cases, they occurred in rejection of or response to the repression inflicted on protesters. In other cases, violence was part of the spiral of conflictivity that affected the whole country, mostly in the main cities. **During this period, 510 violent protests, 8% of the total, were recorded.** Therefore, the argument posed by the Venezuelan authorities lacked any grounds.



Observatorio Venezolano de Conflictividad Social (OVCS)

### **The repression pattern was characterized by:**

1. Joined attacks by the Bolivarian National Guard (GNB), Bolivarian National Police (PNB) and paramilitary groups.
2. Systematic employment of toxic substances and firearms.
3. Cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment of the imprisoned demonstrators.
4. Torture and sexual abuse of the imprisoned demonstrators.
5. Arbitrary detentions.
6. Illegal squattings.
7. Criminalization of the protests.
8. Attacks to the demonstrators during the transmission of mandatory presidential broadcastings in radio and television.
9. The harshest raids took place after 6pm.
10. Agression to journalists.
11. Persecution of leaders from opposition parties.
12. Persecution of leaders from university and social leaders.

Criminalization of the right to protest peacefully increased considerably in this period. On April 24, 2014, the Constitutional Courtroom of the Supreme Court of Justice (*TSJ for its initials in Spanish*) issued a decision by which a permit to exercise the human right of peaceful protest is to be requested and the State's security forces are authorized to disperse any protest lacking such permit. This decision principally affects the inhabitants of popular sectors and workers who are the ones that protest the most in Venezuela in a spontaneous manner and claiming for social rights.

During the months of more tension, that is, February, March and April, the Executive made several calls for holding peace meetings and establishing a dialogue. On March 25, 2014 a commission of chancellors from the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) arrived to Caracas with the task of encouraging the dialogue between the 'political forces and social sectors in order to reach an agreement that contributes to understanding and social peace'. However, the presidential discourse **failed to correspond with the facts**. While high-level meetings were being held, sometimes broadcasted nationwide on all TV channels, acts of repressions against peaceful protesters were reported from the streets.

The analysis of the Venezuelan conflictivity line allows us to infer that the protests related to claims for political rights are gradually diminishing, but have not disappeared from the national context. On the other hand, the serious economic crisis Venezuela is currently going through might become the trigger for an increase in people's discontent and popular protests in the incoming months.

*This trend research uses as main basis the follow-up of the situation through national and regional information means as well as sources from official bodies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Non-participant direct observation of some of the phenomena studied is also employed. **For access to daily monitoring of protests, please visit [www.conflictove.org.ve](http://www.conflictove.org.ve) and Twitter: @ConflictVe***

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