

Venezuela, Colombia, and Cartels

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Executive Summary

The Maduro-Petro axis now stands as one of the most coordinated and audacious threats to regional stability in the Americas. Their political and criminal networks have merged across Venezuela and Colombia, consolidating power through intimidation, illicit financial flows, and alliances with transnational armed groups such as the ELN and FARC dissidents—dynamics that have fueled violence, displacement, and narco-trafficking across both countries.

A Trump victory in 2024-2025 posed an existential threat to these regimes, prompting aggressive provocations and overt efforts to influence U.S. elections. These public confrontations mask a deeper reality: a robust infrastructure of crime and coercion that includes Venezuela's Cartel de los Soles and Tren de Aragua, criminal syndicates tied to cocaine production and trafficking, and networks operating with impunity across borders.

Civil society and grassroots movements in both countries have repeatedly demonstrated their rejection of these narco-regimes, even as international actors—including Spain, China, Russia, Iran, and aligned NGOs—amplify Maduro and Petro's narrative, normalizing criminal governance and marginalizing dissent. Without decisive international leadership, the consolidation of organized crime within state structures will continue unchecked, threatening democratic institutions, regional security, and human rights throughout the hemisphere.

Since the launch of the 2025-2029 U.S. presidential campaign, Maduro and Petro have waged a coordinated and hostile political offensive against Donald Trump, urging voters to support his opponent. Colombian Vice President Francia Márquez went further, openly calling for Americans to vote against Trump during her October 2024 visit to the United States, an unprecedented intervention in domestic U.S. politics.

By March 2025, these provocations escalated into personal attacks against Trump, reflecting a calculated understanding that a Trump victory could bring decisive action against transnational organized crime networks—the very infrastructure sustaining their political survival.

During this period, Petro attempted to manufacture international relevance by claiming privileged access to President Joe Biden, even alleging that sensitive security information was shared with him, claims widely regarded as implausible and self-serving.

As criminal indictments loomed, Maduro-Petro amplified their provocations. In August 2025, Maduro publicly dared Trump to act, stating, *"Come get me. I'll be waiting—don't be late,"* with Petro echoing this challenge in open solidarity.

Similar provocations followed in September 2025 and January 2026. At the 2025 United Nations General Assembly, Petro crossed a historic line by publicly urging U.S. military personnel to disobey their commander-in-chief—a deliberate act, according to sources close to the Maduro-Petro inner circle, designed to portray them as victims of so-called "American imperialism" if arrested.

Behind this aggressive rhetoric lies a deeply organized and well-resourced criminal apparatus. In Venezuela, the Cartel de los Soles and Tren de Aragua operate alongside Colombian allies such as Segunda Marquetalia, ELN, and FARC dissident factions, while also maintaining ties with Mexican cartels and international terrorist groups including Hezbollah and Hamas¹.

In Colombia, the "Total Peace" framework—implemented during Petro's 2022 presidential campaign—granted organized crime and illegal armed groups *uninterrupted criminal operations, territorial control, and de facto immunity*. These concessions have not only strengthened criminal governance but have also supplied the regimes with millions of dollars, providing a durable, illicit foundation for political power.

Venezuelans have endured fear and coercion for nearly two decades, and Colombians now face similar realities under the Petro administration, Senator Iván Cepeda and the Pacto Histórico. Illegal armed groups and organized crime are no longer adversaries of the state but instrumentalized partners, controlling territory, influencing public universities, and functioning as a de facto armed wing of the governing coalition.

¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xq5TDv3NL7w>

Following the U.S. seizure of Maduro on January 3, 2026, Maduro-Petro regime dispatched Iván Cepeda to Spain to condemn the action, signaling the continued political alignment of Colombia's leadership with a Venezuelan dictator who has lost multiple elections and retains power only through force.

Spain has repeatedly supported Maduro and Petro, often with little transparency, aligning de facto with regimes and actors including Belarus, Cuba, China, Nicaragua, Iran, Russia, and non-state entities such as Hezbollah and Hamas². This international backing has amplified the regimes' narrative, presenting them as legitimate leaders while marginalizing dissent.

Following Maduro's seizure, no spontaneous rallies occurred in support of him, except for a limited, state-sponsored protest in Colombia that relied on financial incentives and coercion of civil servants. By contrast, mass, spontaneous demonstrations erupted across the Americas and beyond, and in Colombia, particularly among Venezuelan refugees, signaling genuine rejection of narco-governance.

Criminal networks have expanded dramatically under Maduro and reached their peak under Petro's "Total Peace" initiative. Colombia has regained its position as the world's leading producer and exporter of cocaine, accompanied by increases in kidnappings, human and arms trafficking, extortion, urban terrorism, and illegal exploitation of natural resources [as in Venezuela].

The Petro administration has formally requested that the United Nations Secretary-General revise the methodology for monitoring coca cultivation, effectively seeking to silence discussion of the problem and weaken international scrutiny, further empowering criminal networks.

For nearly 20 years, the international community has failed Venezuela, normalizing negotiations with Maduro while waiting for him to relinquish power. That same pattern now threatens Colombia.

International funds have supported a revisionist narrative portraying criminal actors as heroes through state-backed media, films, and publications. Civil society organizations that challenge this narrative are routinely excluded from consultations, funding mechanisms, and international platforms, leaving only groups aligned with Petro and Maduro as recognized interlocutors.

Venezuelans and Colombians alike have increasingly turned to the United States as the only actor capable of addressing this multifaceted crisis, underscoring the urgent need for decisive, coordinated leadership to counter these narco-regimes and restore accountability in the region.

In both Venezuela and Colombia, those who speak out or openly express faith in democratic institutions face direct persecution and repression. Venezuelans and Colombians advocating for reform are targeted by the respective regimes, while opposition leaders in Colombia have been indicted under President Petro's administration, revealing a coordinated effort to silence dissent and consolidate criminal-political power.

Petro, like Maduro, projects himself internationally as a respected and legitimate leader, all while ignoring a stark reality: his political power depends less on democratic legitimacy than on accommodation with criminal actors and illegal armed groups embedded across Colombia.

His flagship "Total Peace" initiative-launched as a bold effort to end decades of conflict-has repeatedly faltered, with key negotiations, including those with the ELN, suspended amid continued violence and ceasefires collapsing as armed groups exploit gaps in enforcement and state control.

Maduro clings to power through repression and illicit networks, while Petro and his coalition now represented by Iván Cepeda-use the same structures to stay in office by any means³.

Bogotá, Colombia, January 13, 2026.

² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xq5TDv3NL7w>

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