

Colombia: Three Years of Misrule

by Fernando Mora¹

Summary

Since taking office, Gustavo Petro's administration has dramatically altered Colombia's political landscape by forging controversial alliances with armed groups and criminal organizations. Rather than restoring peace and stability, these strategies have undermined state authority, fueled violence and corruption, and eroded democratic institutions. This brief assesses how Petro's governance has contributed to Colombia's deepening crisis, highlighting the expansion of illicit economies, political repression, and the urgent need for accountability and reform.

The Pact of Chaos

For over six decades, Colombia has struggled with violence rooted in partisan conflict, insurgency, drug trafficking, and territorial battles among illegal armed groups. Today, under Gustavo Petro and Francia Márquez, these elements have transformed from symptoms of instability into central tools of governance. Violence, hate speech, disinformation, and administrative chaos are no longer byproducts—they are state strategies.

In a historic and alarming first, Petro faces allegations of forging the “*Pacto de la Picota*”, a political pact with organized crime. This alliance spans left-wing paramilitaries like the ELN and FARC dissidents tied to Maduro's regime, and right-wing mafias such as the Clan del Golfo and the Envigado Office. All are integrated into Petro's controversial “*Total Peace*” process.

As the Petro-Márquez administration nears the end of its third year of four, Colombia is spiraling into economic collapse, institutional decay, and deepening political instability. Far from delivering peace or justice, it has eroded the state and weakened democracy, leaving the country's recovery prospects grim.

Colombia's Role in the Global Cocaine Crisis

The *Pacto de la Picota* allegedly granted criminal groups immunity, territorial control, and continued drug trafficking—turning Colombia into the world's cocaine production powerhouse. The 2025 UNODC report reveals a 33% global cocaine surge in 2024, with Colombia responsible for 67% of coca cultivation and producing 2,600 tons of cocaine.

Coca farming, concentrated in Amazonian regions loyal to Petro, accelerates deforestation, pollution, and indigenous displacement, fueling environmental and social destruction. These illicit economies overlap with illegal mining, logging, and wildlife trafficking, intensifying rural instability.

Despite the UNODC's recommendations for comprehensive rural development, institutional reform, and alternative livelihoods, the agency notably overlooks Petro's political *pact* as a contributing factor to the current crisis. Furthermore, under alleged political pressure, the UNODC reportedly withheld data indicating a 6% increase in coca cultivation in 2024.

This increase, from nearly 264,000 hectares in 2023 to 279,840 in 2024, has exacerbated the crisis. Meanwhile, the Tren de Aragua gang, reportedly linked to Maduro, has established control over Bogotá's streets since former Mayor Claudia López's tenure. This gang is flooding the market with inexpensive cocaine, further embedding the drug trade into urban life and even influencing state-backed protests.

Political and Ideological Ties with Maduro

Petro's political and ideological ties to Maduro run deep, rooted in his M-19 guerrilla past and sustained through Maduro's financial and political support. His “*Total Peace*” plan legitimizes terrorist groups allied with Maduro, compromising Colombia's security. Since Petro's 2018 defeat, Maduro has backed Petro and his political allies and the ELN, who orchestrated the 2019 Bogotá police academy bombing.

¹Fernando is a leading human rights expert specializing in high-risk environments and conflict zones. He leverages his expertise in international law and conflict resolution to focus on peacebuilding, gender equality, and preventing conflicts over natural resources. Fernando has advised political leaders and global institutions

across four continents, holding senior positions at the UN, the Council of Europe, the OSCE, and the International Crisis Group. He has also partnered with organizations like the ICRC, OECD, WHO, and national governments to provide strategic solutions for complex political and humanitarian challenges.

Petro's coalition shifted propaganda operations to Caracas, exploiting Maduro's bot networks to fuel unrest and disinformation.

Repeated official visits to Caracas—including endorsing Maduro's illegitimate 2025 inauguration—highlight this alliance. Corruption scandals, illegal surveillance, and over 900 undocumented trips to Cuba and Venezuela expose the administration's secrecy and misuse of power.

Petro's government echoes Maduro's authoritarian playbook, using violence, intimidation, and repression against the judiciary, press, minorities, and 70% of Colombians. With allies like Bogotá's former mayor Claudia López, they deploy masked violence to suppress dissent and destabilize opposition ahead of the 2026 elections.

Erosion of State Sovereignty and Security

Under Gustavo Petro's so-called "Total Peace", the Colombian state has not achieved peace—it has relinquished sovereignty. The government's strategy has empowered at least five major cartels and 23 drug gangs now active in 31 of Colombia's 32 departments, with criminal control extending to 456 of the country's 1,119 municipalities. These groups, once political allies of Petro during his opposition years and presidential campaign, are no longer adversaries of the state. They are now its negotiating partners.

On June 21, 2025, the alliance between the government and organized crime was exposed. In the central civic square of Medellín—surrounded symbolically by institutions of democratic governance—Petro stood on stage with Defense Minister Pedro Sánchez, lawmakers, municipal officials who supported Petro, and leaders of La Oficina, one of Colombia's most violent criminal syndicates.

The event, the "Pact for Urban Peace," featured Petro publicly greeting José Leonardo Muñoz, alias *Douglas*, the government-endorsed spokesperson for Medellín's armed crime structures and alleged commander of the *Oficina de Envigado*.

The image was striking: a head of government legitimizing criminals implicated in massacres, assassinations, kidnappings, and extortion—

presenting them not as criminals, but as stakeholders. Defenders of the event called it a step toward peace; critics saw it for what it was—a choreographed show of strength by Petro's criminal allies and a calculated humiliation of the Colombian state.

That same day, on the other side of the country, the message was reinforced. In El Tambo, Cauca, 57 soldiers from Colombia's Third Army Division were surrounded, captured, and detained by the *Carlos Patiño* dissident faction of the FARC—another of Petro's political allies. Disguised in civilian clothing, the group took the soldiers hostage during a lawful state operation. The intent was clear: to demonstrate control over territory and impose costs on any assertion of state authority.

Although a rescue mission on June 23 freed the soldiers without casualties, the aftermath was damning. Over 20 of the captors were arrested—only to be released by direct order of Petro. This act was not just leniency; it was submission. A clear signal to criminal groups that Petro's government is more interested in preserving relationships than upholding the rule of law.

The events in Medellín and El Tambo were not isolated. Together, they formed a coordinated assertion of dominance by criminal actors who now speak from presidential platforms and negotiate from positions of power. The Petro's embrace of these groups—symbolic in Medellín, practical in Cauca—marks a profound erosion of democratic legitimacy. Petro has blurred the line between negotiation and complicity, between state authority and criminal power.

This is not peace. This is political theater designed to mask the state's retreat—and the consolidation of Petro's power through those who rule by fear.

Similarly, whenever the national government lacks a congressional majority or faces unfavorable court rulings - beyond Petro's insults - it threatens the country with potential violence reminiscent of the 2021 upheaval. Senior officials, including the current Minister of Health, frequently issue warnings, summoning, "Do you want another violent strike?"

These illegal armed groups and transnational organized crime syndicates collaborate effectively, resulting in a significant shift in power dynamics. This cooperation has resulted in increased funding and specialization in key areas throughout Colombia and the region.

Their transnational allies include Hezbollah, a strong supporter of the ELN, Hamas, and Maduro's dictatorial regime, as well as the Sinaloa Cartel from Mexico and the Tren de Aragua, which supports both the Venezuelan regime and Colombian criminal groups.

The Petro regime has forged a powerful and feared alliance with the Maduro dictatorship, the Colombian ruling party-El Pacto Histórico-and its Total Peace partners. This coalition wields significant influence locally, nationally, and internationally, with profound geopolitical consequences for Colombia and the entire region.

From the outset, this alliance has launched relentless rhetorical attacks and armed aggression against the Colombian people, seeking to establish permanent control over 75% of the country's territory-areas where they impose their own rule, not the state's.

Crushing Political Dissent and Opposition

Since taking office in August 2022, Gustavo Petro's administration has actively fostered a divisive political climate in Colombia. Vice President Francia Márquez has been particularly vocal in expressing hostility toward political opponents and segments of the white population, deepening social and racial tensions.

The apparent tolerance of this rhetoric by the international community, national institutions, and the ruling coalition, *Pacto Histórico*, is deeply concerning. It risks normalizing political violence and further destabilizing Colombia's already fragile democratic framework.

Petro and Márquez are widely perceived as exploiting the global surge in political extremism, using inflammatory rhetoric to mobilize their base. Their messaging appears to tacitly justify violence as a means of pressuring Congress, the judiciary, the electoral system, and most Colombians-over 70%-who do not support their agenda.

Petro has shown authoritarian tendencies. He has undermined democratic institutions through a strategy of populism, polarization, and post-truth narratives, gradually eroding checks and balances and steering the country toward autocratic rule. Petro's ties to the M-19 guerrilla group, of which he is a former member, remain a central concern.

His administration has encouraged supporters to rally under M-19 flags-a symbol associated with the 1985 Palace of Justice siege, often described as a massacre. This act is widely interpreted as a deliberate affront to the victims, particularly judges and their families, and a violation of both international human rights norms and Colombia's constitutional principles. His repeated use of the slogan "*Liberty or death*" to galvanize followers further underscores the administration's authoritarian posture.

The Petro-Márquez government has increasingly targeted political opposition and independent media through intimidation, smear campaigns, and legal harassment. Their party, *Pacto Histórico*, along with political allies and figures involved in the so-called "Total Peace" process, have been implicated in aggressive actions against critics, including attacks on opposition leaders and their families.

On June 7, 2025, Senator and presidential candidate Miguel Uribe Turbay was shot during a campaign event in Bogotá. The attacker, reportedly a teenager, was apprehended at the scene with a firearm. Uribe Turbay remains hospitalized in critical condition.

Despite Gustavo Petro publicly condemning the attack and pledged a transparent investigation, his comments-suggesting the motive may not be political and urging against premature conclusions-have sparked criticism, particularly from the Attorney General's Office.

The Attorney General has indicated that the attack may have political motivations and is investigating possible ties to organized crime. Officials are also exploring whether intellectual authors were involved. This marks a significant divergence from Petro's tone, raising tensions between the executive branch and judicial authorities.

Some commentators have drawn parallels between this attack and the 2023 assassination of Ecuadorian presidential candidate Fernando Villavicencio, noting similarities in the attackers' methods.

However, as of now, no confirmed links to FARC dissidents or specific criminal groups in Caquetá, in the Amazon region of southern Colombia, have been established. Petro's handling of the incident has intensified ongoing concerns about his administration's approach to political violence and democratic safeguards in Colombia.

Quiet Complicity

Since August 2022, national and international organizations, including major NGOs, have notably failed to confront escalating political violence under the Petro-Márquez administration. This campaign is marked by antisemitism, racism against white populations and dissenting minority groups, systemic discrimination against women, and the use of personal data to intimidate critics.

This repression intensifies in rhetoric and action against those challenging the government. Supported by Total Peace-aligned actors now controlling approximately 75% of Colombia, the administration has imposed a de facto state of siege. This involves systematically coercing, intimidating, and suppressing dissent through both formal and informal power mechanisms.

Colombia faces a severe erosion of fundamental rights: access to healthcare and essential medicines is critically low, one in four Colombians experiences food insecurity, and personal freedoms are increasingly restricted. The Petro-Márquez government routinely violates constitutional norms, undermining democratic governance and legal accountability. Since taking office, Petro and Márquez have consistently undermined institutional checks and balances, deepening Colombia's governance crisis.

Despite widespread concern, current reports inadequately capture the full humanitarian and human rights crisis. With illegal armed groups and organized crime controlling an estimated 75% of the country, independent observation is limited, distorting information. National and international understanding of Colombia's internal crisis remains incomplete and misinformed.

This information gap stems from six critical factors:

Inaccessibility: Conflict zones remain inaccessible due to armed control or heavy government surveillance, preventing impartial data collection.

NGO Alignment: Many national NGOs are closely aligned with the Petro-Márquez administration, leading to underreported abuses and skewed narratives.

Weakened Oversight: The appointment of prominent NGO leaders to diplomatic posts abroad has diminished domestic oversight and independent scrutiny.

Victim Fear: Victims are often too afraid to report abuses due to surveillance or retaliation; those who reach Bogotá frequently face delays or inaction from international organizations.

Information Control: Observers warn that the administration and its allies—including the Green Alliance and alleged digital disinformation networks—actively manage and control information flow to shape public perception.

Media Reliance: National and international media outlets often rely heavily on government statistics, which, while useful, fail to capture the full scope of Colombia's internal conflicts and systemic rights violations.

This combination of political repression, institutional collapse, and restricted transparency has created a volatile and underreported crisis demanding urgent international attention.

The Urgent Need for Accountability

Colombia's peacebuilding agenda faces mounting strain. While the "Total Peace" initiative centers on dialogue, it risks collapse without accountability, civilian protection, and the consistent application of the rule of law.

International actors are essential to upholding democratic values and protecting vulnerable populations. Yet, a troubling complacency persists: some partners show little willingness to hold the Petro-Márquez government accountable, even amid mounting evidence of institutional decay and human rights violations.

Despite credible reports of corruption, public fund misappropriation, and growing collusion between state actors and illegal armed groups, international support for the government remains largely intact. Under the banner of peace, criminal networks and political allies appear to benefit disproportionately undermining both justice and legitimacy.

To prevent Colombia's peace process from becoming a shield for impunity, international engagement must be principled, transparent, and grounded in human rights. Sustained oversight of democratic norms, fiscal governance, and civilian security is not optional—it is the foundation for lasting peace and global confidence.

Conclusion

Colombia stands at a dangerous crossroads. Under President Petro's administration, the very institutions designed to safeguard democracy, and the rule of law are being systematically dismantled. What is marketed as "Total Peace" has enabled the deepening of criminal influence, fueled violence, and eroded state sovereignty.

This is not a peace process—it is a power consolidation wrapped in impunity. As the government grows increasingly entangled with illegal networks, the country edges closer to authoritarianism and ungovernability.

The time for caution has passed. The international community, Colombian institutions, and civil society must confront this crisis head-on. Without immediate and decisive action to enforce accountability, protect civilians, and restore democratic checks and balances, Colombia risks losing not just peace—but its democracy itself.

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