

## Power and crime in South America

by Fernando Mora<sup>1</sup>

### Executive Summary

The Maduro-Petro axis represents a dangerous convergence of authoritarian rule, organized crime, and transnational corruption that threatens democracy and stability across Latin America. The Chávez-Maduro regime has transformed Venezuela into a criminalized state, offering safe haven, resources, and coordination to armed and illicit networks.

Under President Gustavo Petro, Colombia's policies of *"Total Peace"* and rapprochement with Caracas have extended this model across borders. This is not an ideological partnership for peace—it is a criminal compact designed to entrench power, expand illicit economies, and erode democratic norms.

Urgent international coordination is needed to expose, isolate, and counter this alliance through diplomacy, sanctions, intelligence cooperation, and support for civil society.

### Venezuela: A Criminalized State

Venezuela has become a hub for state-sanctioned organized crime. Armed groups such as the ELN, FARC dissidents, the Cartel de los Soles, and El Tren de Aragua operate with impunity, trafficking drugs, gold, and humans while engaging in systemic exploitation.

The Maduro regime fuses political and criminal power to maintain control—obliterating institutions, silencing dissent, and driving over nine million Venezuelans into exile. What remains is a state sustained by coercion, corruption, and collapse.

### Financing Political Movements

For over two decades, Venezuela has exported influence through illicit political financing. Former intelligence chief Hugo "El Pollo" Carvajal has testified that Venezuelan state funds were funneled to sympathetic political movements across the region—including the rise of Gustavo Petro.

Since Petro's 2022 election, allegations of illicit campaign financing and covert ties to Caracas have persisted. His public defense of Maduro and participation in disputed inaugurations underscore an alignment with authoritarian governance—and raise grave concerns about external interference in Colombia's democracy.

### Peacewashing

Petro's *"Total Peace"* initiative, presented as national reconciliation, has empowered and legitimized criminal actors tied to Venezuelan networks. Negotiations with the ELN, FARC dissidents, and El Tren de Aragua have blurred the line between state authority and organized crime.

This is peacewashing—the strategic use of peace rhetoric to conceal collusion with criminal power. Petro's own ideological lineage in the M-19 (once financed by the Medellín Cartel) and his coalition's push to centralize power mirror Maduro's authoritarian playbook.

### Transnational Organized Crime

The Maduro-Petro alliance has forged a cross-border criminal system extending across the Americas. Illicit revenues from Venezuela and Colombia sustain drug trafficking, human smuggling, and illegal mining networks.

Cocaine routed through Venezuela now reaches South and Central America, the United States, Africa, and Europe—intersecting with terrorist organizations such as Hezbollah and Hamas, often facilitated by Iranian logistical support. Political assassinations in Ecuador and Colombia, and attacks on Venezuelan dissidents in exile, reveal a coordinated infrastructure of violence underpinning this system.

### Policy Implications & Recommendations

The Maduro-Petro axis is not a diplomatic partnership—it is a transnational criminal-state network. Protecting regional democracy demands coordinated and sustained international action.

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OSCE, and the International Crisis Group. He has also collaborated with the ICRC, OECD, WHO, and various governments. Recognized for his sharp analysis and intercultural understanding, Fernando provides clear and effective guidance in complex political and humanitarian contexts.

#### 1. Diplomatic & Strategic Measures

- Build a multilateral coalition to isolate regimes complicit in systemic corruption.
- Use the OAS, UN, and regional platforms to expose and counter this criminal alliance.

#### 2. Targeted Sanctions & Accountability

- Impose individual sanctions on officials, financiers, and facilitators of organized crime.
- Support international investigations into illicit campaign financing and human rights abuses.

#### 3. Security & Intelligence Cooperation

- Expand joint intelligence operations to dismantle drug, gold, and human-trafficking routes.
- Reinforce anti-money-laundering systems and border security mechanisms.

#### 4. Civil Society & Institutional Support

- Strengthen independent journalism, watchdogs, and civic movements in affected states.
- Bolster democratic institutions and protection programs for activists and dissidents.

#### Conclusion

The Maduro-Petro axis is not about peace—it is about power, profit, and impunity. Through criminal operations and authoritarian alignment, it is dismantling democratic governance across Latin America.

Two key elections will take place in 2026 in Colombia and Peru. In both countries, organized crime is powerful. In Colombia, Petro's coalition, *El Pacto Histórico*, is the strongest Maduro's ally.

Defending freedom in the region requires a united front—governments, civil society, and international partners acting in concert to expose, disrupt, and dismantle this network before it consolidates further.

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