

# Petro vs. Colombia

By Fernando Mora<sup>1</sup>

Colombia is grappling with a profound political, humanitarian, and security crisis under Gustavo Petro. Since taking office in 2022, Petro and his coalition, Pacto Histórico, have masterminded escalating violence, economic instability, and the erosion of democratic principles—trends highlighted in the December 2024 report *Colombia Governed by Fear*, Fernando Mora, which have been echoed by both national and international organizations.

## Crisis of Governance

Petro's tenure has been characterized by political violence, authoritarian tendencies, inefficiency, and corruption. His signature initiative, *Total Peace*—designed to negotiate with illegal armed groups—has, instead, empowered criminal organizations, including the ELN, FARC dissidents, and the Gulf Clan, allowing them to control up to 75% of the country's territory. This shift in power is partly attributed to the secretive *Pacto de la Picota*, allegedly negotiated during Petro's 2022 presidential campaign.

While the country suffers, Petro has made over 64 international trips, costing taxpayers more than \$41 million, often leaving governance in a vacuum. His frequent health-related absences have further reduced his engagement with domestic affairs, while more than four million Colombians have emigrated since his inauguration.

## Humanitarian Collapse

Colombia now faces the displacement of over 12 million people, with many trapped in territories controlled by illegal armed groups. The International Committee of the Red Cross and the United Nations report rising violence, landmine usage, recruitment of minors, and attacks on human rights defenders—particularly in areas like Cauca, Chocó, Catatumbo, and Vichada. Despite

ongoing peace talks, implementation has stalled, and violence continues unabated.

NGOs and international observers have limited access to these regions, making it difficult to fully assess the scope of the crisis. Security forces remain underfunded and overstretched, while public trust in institutions continues to erode.

## Economic Instability

Petro's economic policies have exacerbated inflation, unemployment, and a sharp decline in foreign investment. His administration's regulatory unpredictability, hostility toward private enterprise, and failure to implement key reforms have undermined crucial industries. Additionally, his management of the energy sector—especially ECOPETROL and oil shortages—has raised concerns over potential fuel imports from Venezuela, which could make Colombia more dependent on a dictatorship at the expense of its domestic needs.

Although sectors like tourism and entertainment have seen modest growth, deeper structural problems persist. Changes in the presentation of economic data have raised concerns about transparency and the politicization of institutions such as DANE.

## Organized Crime and Drug Expansion

Under Petro's leadership, cocaine production reached records levels, with 2,664 metric tons produced in 2023— a figure that rose by 14% in 2024. Coca cultivation now covers 370,00 hectares across 16 departments. Major drug cartels are active in 456 of Colombia's 1,119 municipalities, a presence some analysts say has been bolstered by peace negotiation aimed at disarming armed groups.

These groups are also forming transnational alliances with organizations like Hezbollah, Hamas, and Mexico's Sinaloa Cartel, further destabilizing the region. Petro has appointed individuals with criminal backgrounds as "peace

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the UN, the Council of Europe, the OSCE, and the International Crisis Group. Additionally, Fernando has partnered with the ICRC, OECD, WHO, and national governments, providing strategic solutions to complex political and humanitarian issues.

managers," blurring the line between negotiation and collusion.

### **Human Trafficking and Migration**

Petro's-Márquez visa-free entry policy for African nationals, while framed as a diplomatic move, has transformed Colombia into a major transit hub for human trafficking. Criminal networks operating in the Darién Gap have been empowered, putting thousands of migrants at risk and overwhelming border communities.

### **Democratic Erosion**

Petro has repeatedly undermined judicial independence, attacked the media, and pressured opposition figures. His repeated invocation of the M-19 guerrilla group-linked to past atrocities-has fueled fears of political radicalization. Vice President Francia Márquez's inflammatory rhetoric has further divided the nation along racial and political lines.

With the 2026 elections approaching, Petro's coalition seems to be fostering instability to maintain their grip on power. A failed Senate vote on May 14, 2025, over a proposed national consultation showed signs of strategic abstention, hinting at a deliberate effort to avoid accountability.

### **International Alignment with Authoritarian Regimes**

Petro has forged closer ties with Venezuelan dictator Nicolás Maduro, attending numerous meetings in Caracas with unclear outcomes. Colombian officials have made over 837 trips to Cuba and Venezuela in less than three years, raising concerns about fiscal waste and geopolitical alignment.

There is increasing suspicion about Petro's potential ties to Venezuelan funding. A missing suitcase of cash, an implicated minister, and the death of an officer point to potential corruption at the highest levels. Petro's relationship with Maduro threatens to legitimize authoritarianism and undermine Colombia's democratic standing.

### **Uncertain Legitimacy**

Serious questions have arisen over the legitimacy of Colombia's 2022 presidential election. Petro's eldest son and brother have alleged knowledge of

funds from drug trafficking and organized crime used to support his campaign.

Petro's brother also claimed that agreements were made with criminal groups during the campaign-particularly the so-called *Picota agreement*-which, if true, would undermine democratic principles and the rule of law.

Over the past two years, additional accusations have surfaced, including a 2025 investigation linking Petro to an alleged contraband trafficker known as "Pitufo." Although the Attorney General's Office launched the investigation in 2023, it only came to light recently under the leadership of Petro's best ally, the Attorney General's Office. Petro, his coalition, and what has been described as Maduro's bot's army have largely suppressed coverage of both the investigation and the political trial filed on March 24, 2025, against Petro, keeping them out of national and international media and off Colombia's political agenda.

Unlike his big friend Maduro, whose lack of legitimacy is widely recognized, Petro's legitimacy remains uncertain and seems to depend on his current 'Total Peace' allies, the organized crime, with whom he has maintained agreements since 2018, when he was defeated by Iván Duque.

### **Conclusion**

Colombia is teetering on the brink. Under Petro's leadership, state authority has been weakened, crime has surged, the economy is faltering, and democracy is under threat. As the 2026 elections draw near, Petro and his allies appear to be exploiting instability to extend their influence. Without urgent national and international intervention, Colombia risks following the authoritarian path of its neighbors, jeopardizing the future of its democracy and the region.

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