

Civilians as Pawns: A Nation Held Hostage

by Fernando Mora¹

Once the face of opposition, Gustavo Petro now presides over one of the most calculated erosions of democracy in Colombia's modern history. His administration has not only weaponized public sentiment against democratic institutions but also empowered criminal networks—systematically undermining national sovereignty and the constitutional order.

Petro's rise to power was neither organic nor peaceful. Between 2018 and 2022, he reportedly received logistical and financial support from Nicolás Maduro's regime to orchestrate violent protests disguised as social justice. The 2021 *Estallido Social*² was not a spontaneous civic movement—it was a premeditated insurgency.

Militias linked to the Tren de Aragua, FARC dissidents, ELN, and remnants of M-19 executed coordinated, military-style operations in Bogotá, Cali, Medellín, and other cities—often with support from local officials. Their objective was clear: destabilize Colombia and topple the Duque administration. These actions were thoroughly documented and condemned by national and international observers.

At the same time, Petro's political bloc promoted the false notion that coca cultivation is a cultural right—directly sabotaging Colombia's anti-narcotrafficking strategy. This narrative misled the public, obstructed eradication programs, and drained state resources.

Meanwhile, his allies provided political cover for drug cartels, including Venezuela's Cartel de los Soles, led by Maduro himself. In doing so, Petro's circle effectively surrendered Colombia's security to transnational criminal networks.

This betrayal was laid bare during Petro's campaign. His eldest son and a key ally—soon appointed Peace Commissioner—entered

Bogotá's infamous Picota Prison to negotiate with high-profile criminals. Dubbed the *Pacto de la Picota*, this was no peace process—it was a surrender. It marked a turning point, where Petro's political project became indistinguishable from organized crime.

The message was reaffirmed on September 4, 2025, when First Lady Verónica Alcocer returned to Picota Prison—symbolically sealing the deals struck during Petro's campaign. It was a kiss-the-ring moment, signaling unwavering loyalty to the criminal forces that facilitated his rise. This government is no longer merely compromised—it is entangled in criminal collusion.

Since taking office in August 2022, Petro has allowed illegal armed groups to expand their influence under the guise of the “Total Peace” initiative—an extension of the Picota Pact. This program has granted political legitimacy and territorial power to criminal organizations. In vast regions of Colombia, these groups now wield more authority than the state itself.

While criminal networks grow stronger, Petro has systematically weakened the state's ability to respond. Security budgets have been slashed to record lows. Police and military units now depend on local mayors for basic supplies. In some areas, security forces have been ordered to remain in their barracks—effectively ceding territory to criminal groups.

Military assets are misused or left to rot. Helicopters sit grounded, while government aircraft are repurposed for use by influencers and allies—a blatant abuse of public resources.

On the ground, armed groups embed among civilians, forcibly recruit—including children—and carry out attacks that violate International Humanitarian Law and the Geneva Conventions. Civilians are used as human shields in operations against the state—an egregious war crime under international law.

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² Many people protested peacefully – that's a fact. But Petro and his current Total Peace allies also intervened, inciting chaos and violence.

These tactics violate the principles of distinction and proportionality, resulting in indiscriminate violence and civilian deaths. When political actors enable such abuses—whether through complicity or silence—they breach both humanitarian and human rights law, including Common Article 3 and Protocol II of the Geneva Conventions.

International law is unequivocal: public officials and military leaders can be prosecuted for war crimes and crimes against humanity. The pattern of arbitrary detention, torture, forced conscription, and repression under Petro's government aligns with these grave violations.

Petro's narrative—echoing Maduro—claims civilians support armed groups to resist coca eradication. This is demonstrably false. The tactics now employed in Colombia mirror those used by groups like Hezbollah and Hamas: embed among civilians, weaponize human rights discourse, and manipulate public sentiment to shield criminal operations³.

This is not resistance—it is psychological warfare. Civilians, particularly women and children, have become pawns in a brutal campaign of coercion and control.

Civilian blockades against military operations have become disturbingly routine. In some cases, soldiers have been tortured, burned alive, or executed—while the government remains silent. This silence is not indifference; it is deliberate.

Alongside political figures like Claudia López, Daniel Quintero, and Jorge Iván Ospina, Petro has spent years eroding public trust in the military. The result is the systematic dismantling of the very institutions meant to protect the Republic.

Today, criminal actors empowered by Petro's so-called peace deal control more territory, arms, and resources than the state. Democratic institutions are being deliberately dismantled, while the government aligns itself with violent networks that prey on the vulnerable.

The international community must act. War crimes and crimes against humanity demand prosecution. Sanctions must be imposed on those who enable or protect criminal organizations. Pressure must be applied—consistently and unequivocally—to restore democratic governance in Colombia.

This is no longer a domestic political crisis—it is a regional threat to peace, stability, and human dignity. Petro's presidency has crossed a red line. The question is no longer whether the Colombian state is under siege—it is whether it can survive.

The Use of Civilians in Criminal Warfare

Today, illegal armed groups and organized crime dominate at least 75% of Colombian territory. Fueled by narcotrafficking, human trafficking, arms smuggling, and illegal mining, they operate as parallel states—imposing their own laws, customs, and codes.

They enforce curfews, conduct extrajudicial trials, dictate social norms, and dominate education and commerce. Civilians are forcibly trained and used as human shields in clashes with military and police units.

In 2025 alone, there were 32 documented “civilian uprisings” in departments such as Nariño, Guaviare, Cauca, Putumayo, and Caquetá. In each case, 200 to 600 civilians—mobilized by criminal groups—blocked security operations, allowing drug lords to escape. Soldiers were kidnapped, tortured, and in some cases, burned alive before being released through ICRC-brokered deals.

One notable incident in Guaviare saw 40 individuals in white T-shirts emerge between criminals and government forces just as helicopters landed—shielding traffickers from arrest.

This pattern is no coincidence. Between 2018 and 2022, military operations across Colombia rarely encountered civilians during engagements with armed groups. That changed when these groups began using civilians

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tactically prompted by the messaging strategy Petro and his allies crafted in Caracas. Their slogan, “They are killing us,” painted military operations as systematic attacks on civilians.

This narrative gained global traction during the 2021 *Estallido Social*, with international organizations adopting the slogan without verifying its accuracy. Since Petro took office, these same organizations have remained silent—even as civilians are now systematically used to shield armed groups under the guise of “legitimate protest.”

Investigations reveal the truth: these are not spontaneous uprisings. They are tactical maneuvers orchestrated by criminal networks, enabled by Petro’s *Total Peace* policy and protected under the banner of political legitimacy.

The Petro government and its coalition, *Pacto Histórico*, have not merely tolerated this criminal entrenchment—they have facilitated and entrenched it, just as Maduro has done in Venezuela.

The question is no longer rhetorical: What was traded in exchange?

Worse, as the 2026 elections approach, illegal groups are now “recommending” that communities vote for Petro’s allies—often under veiled threats. Despite growing evidence, mainstream media continues to downplay these reports, obscuring a clear and present danger to Colombia’s democratic future.

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