

## Maduro Backs Petro

by Fernando Mora<sup>1</sup>

### Summary

For over 20 years, Venezuelan regimes under Chávez and Maduro have supported Gustavo Petro politically and financially. Since Petro's 2022 inauguration, their alliance has strengthened, including Petro's endorsement of Maduro's disputed 2025 election. Petro's "Total Peace" plan controversially legitimizes organized crime tied to Maduro, threatening Colombia's security and inviting foreign interference from Venezuela and its allies like Iran and Russia.

Venezuela has also fueled social unrest in Colombia through disinformation campaigns that back Petro's agenda. Meanwhile, Petro's government faces serious corruption and repression allegations, echoing Venezuela's authoritarian tactics. With the 2026 elections looming, these intertwined challenges pose grave threats to Colombia's democracy and stability.

### I. Petro-Venezuelan Regime Alliance

Chávez publicly acknowledged multiple times that he supported Gustavo Petro politically, even claiming to have provided financial backing since Petro's involvement with the M-19 guerrilla movement. Maduro later confirmed similar claims of financial support. These statements indicate a longstanding alliance between the Venezuelan regime and Petro, spanning over 24 years.

Chávez became Venezuela's president on February 2, 1999, after winning the 1998 elections. Early in his tenure, he launched constitutional reforms culminating in the 1999 referendum that established the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. Chávez's presidency initiated the "Bolivarian Revolution," a Venezuelan socialist movement characterized by populist and anti-imperialist rhetoric. While Chávez and his allies lived in luxury, the general population increasingly fell into poverty. The movement transformed Venezuela's

political landscape and paved the way for an increasingly authoritarian regime.

Maduro, Chávez's successor, was re-elected on May 20, 2018, in an election widely criticized for irregularities. Opposition parties boycotted the vote, citing fairness concerns. Despite a 46% turnout, Maduro claimed 68% of the vote and was sworn in for a second term on January 10, 2019. The election deepened Venezuela's political crisis and was condemned internationally amid widespread fraud allegations. On July 28, 2024, Maduro secured an illegal third term with 51.2% of the vote, amid widespread accusations of fraud, voter intimidation, and transparency failures. Opposition leaders and international observers condemned the election and the subsequent inauguration on January 10, 2025.

### II. Human Rights Crisis in Venezuela

Following the 2024 election, the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission documented a sharp increase in repression. Post-election protests resulted in at least 25 deaths, many caused by gunfire, and over 2,400 detentions, including children. Detainees faced charges under anti-terrorism laws, were denied legal counsel, and suffered torture, sexual violence, and other abuses. Accountability for security forces' abuses remains minimal. Human rights defenders, journalists, and opposition figures continue to face threats, surveillance, and legal harassment. Peaceful protests and even social media activity have triggered arbitrary arrests.

In 2025, conditions further deteriorated. Lawyer Eduardo Torres disappeared after his arrest on May 9; his fate remains unknown. Three government critics detained since 2024 died in custody due to neglect, including the denial of necessary medical care. Harassment of civil society intensified, further silencing dissent and shrinking civic space. The government also restricted access for international observers, obstructing independent monitoring efforts. Between 2024 and

---

<sup>1</sup>Fernando is a leading human rights expert specializing in high-risk environments and conflict zones. With expertise in international law and conflict resolution, he focuses on peacebuilding, gender equality, and preventing conflicts over natural resources. He 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. Additionally, Fernando has partnered with the ICRC, OECD, WHO, and national governments, providing strategic solutions to complex political and humanitarian issues.

2025, the Venezuelan government faced repeated international condemnation for systemic human rights violations, including arbitrary arrests, enforced disappearances, torture, and the suppression of political dissent.

### III. Maduro's Support for Petro

Despite Venezuela's known support for criminal and terrorist groups such as Hezbollah, Hamas, the ELN, Tren de Aragua, and FARC dissidents, Petro denies receiving any direct financial or political backing from Maduro, claiming instead that his policies promote peace and social justice. Critics reject this narrative, pointing to Petro's open admiration for Chávez's socialist policies and his ideological alignment with Maduro's far-left regional agenda.

Petro's "Total Peace" initiative effectively grants political legitimacy to terrorist groups allied with Maduro and other authoritarian regimes, posing serious risks to Colombia's national security and sovereignty. The involvement of Hezbollah and Hamas has alarmed the international community and further complicated Colombia's diplomatic relationships.

In addition, Petro's alleged connections with foreign powers such as Iran, Hamas, Türkiye, China, and Russia have raised concerns about potential external interference in Colombia's political affairs. These ties are perceived as threats to the country's sovereignty and democratic integrity, sparking fears that Petro's peace efforts may serve as a vehicle for foreign influence under the guise of stability.

Critics argue that Petro's peace agreements function as political cover for empowering criminal groups. His associates in the Total Peace initiative are reportedly in control-illegally-of territories covering at least 75% of Colombia, underscoring the scale of the challenge.

Since 2018, Maduro and his allies have actively supported Petro, particularly following Petro's 2018 presidential loss to Iván Duque. This support extended to the ELN guerrilla group, which was implicated in the January 17, 2019, terrorist car bombing at Bogotá's General Santander Police Cadet School. The attack killed 22 cadets and

injured more than 60, collapsing fragile peace talks with the ELN. President Duque responded by reactivating arrest warrants for ELN negotiators based in Havana.

On January 21, 2019, the ELN claimed responsibility for the attack, describing it as an act of retaliation. While the group's Havana-based leadership denied intellectual authorship, the ELN reaffirmed its ideological course and leadership under Commander Antonio García at its 6th National Congress in late 2024.

In 2019, Petro's political coalition Colombia Humana, the Polo Democrático party, and Bogotá Mayor Claudia López's Alianza Verde reportedly relocated their communications operations to Caracas, placing them under the influence of Maduro's digital propaganda network. A 2020 report by Constella Intelligence identified Venezuela as a hub for orchestrating protests and social media manipulation across Latin America, including in Colombia, Chile, and Ecuador.

The report revealed that fewer than 1% of users—mostly based in Venezuela—generated nearly 30% of protest-related content by using bots and fake accounts to spread disinformation. During Colombia's 2021 "social unrest," Maduro's bot network played an active role in organizing violent protests and city blockades. The campaign involved sending targeted SMS instructions and disseminating fabricated reports, including false allegations of military torture at warehouses in Cali, Bogotá, Medellín, and Barranquilla.

These disinformation efforts were explicitly aimed at supporting Petro's political agenda and those of his allies, by inciting unrest and violence. Despite clear signs of manipulation, many international organizations and foreign embassies in Colombia relied heavily on these reports as credible sources—amplifying Maduro's role in destabilizing Colombia's social and political landscape.

Today, Maduro's influence over Petro and Vice President Francia Márquez is evident. They often echo Maduro's aggressive rhetoric—occasionally repeating his grammatical and linguistic errors verbatim—while he continues to promote them through state-controlled media, including television, radio broadcasts, and a powerful

network of bots spreading curated narratives online.

#### IV. Petro's Debt

Since taking office in August 2022, Petro has visited Caracas six times, deepening his political alliance with Maduro. In a widely criticized move in 2025, Petro sent the Colombian ambassador in Caracas to attend Maduro's illegitimate inauguration—an event unrecognized by many democratic governments. The ambassador was seen visibly supporting Maduro throughout the event, a gesture broadly interpreted as an endorsement of the regime.

One of Petro's visits was overshadowed by a scandal involving the disappearance of approximately \$7,000 (around 29 million Colombian pesos) from the residence of Laura Sarabia, Petro's former Chief of Staff and current Minister of Foreign Affairs. Sarabia claimed the funds were part of official travel allowances and were used to repay personal debts, including a 50-million-peso loan to cover credit card bills. The controversy escalated when an anonymous source—allegedly connected to the late Colonel Óscar Dávila, who reportedly died by suicide—claimed the money belonged to Petro and had been entrusted to Sarabia. Both Sarabia and Petro have denied the allegation.

The case further deepened with accusations of illegal surveillance, including the wiretapping of Sarabia's former nanny, Marellys Meza, and the unauthorized use of polygraph tests. Additional questions arose about a suitcase allegedly containing the cash, with growing suspicion that the missing sum exceeded \$7,000—raising concerns about how many suitcases of money may have been sent to Caracas, and to what end.

Petro's administration has faced sharp criticism over more than 900 undocumented trips to Cuba and Venezuela by government officials. These visits often lacked disclosed budgets or clear objectives, prompting serious concerns about transparency and the potential misuse of public funds. In parallel, members of Petro's political coalition in the Colombian Congress have made multiple trips to Venezuela to publicly praise Maduro, but the frequency and cost of these delegations remain undisclosed.

Meanwhile, Petro continues to align himself with Maduro's regime and its allies in Colombia, including the ELN, FARC dissidents, Hezbollah, Hamas, Tren de Aragua, and various transnational criminal cartels that help sustain Venezuela's authoritarian grip on power. According to Maduro, since August 2022, Tren de Aragua—a violent criminal organization with a growing presence in Colombian cities—has become a strategic ally in Petro's state-financed protest efforts.

In May 2025, under Petro's direction, the CUT union called for a nationwide protest. Fewer than 400 individuals participated across the country. Many engaged in acts of violence, intimidation, and deliberate destruction of public property, with bus stations in Bogotá specifically targeted. Masked and hooded individuals, deliberately concealing their identities, played a central role in these coordinated attacks, contributing to an atmosphere of fear, impunity, and escalating lawlessness.

Much like Maduro in Venezuela, Petro-Márquez, their political coalition, and their allies involved in the Total Peace agreement have faced mounting criticism for their political agenda. Former Bogotá mayor Claudia López, a member of Alianza Verde, has also been accused of diverting public resources to support Petro's activities—both during his time in opposition and as head of government—including support for Primera Línea and its alleged armed wing.

These far-left actors are accused of deliberately inciting violence and social unrest as political weapons to intimidate opponents and destabilize the country in the lead-up to the 2026 presidential and congressional elections.

#### V. Like Maduro

Like Maduro, the Petro-Márquez administration has been described as the most corrupt and violent in Colombia's recent history. However, it is the first time in nearly a century that a Colombian government has been widely accused of using violence and threats as tools of political control.

Today, the judiciary, Congress, independent civil servants, journalists, and especially women, minorities, the LGBTQ+ community, certain civil

society leaders, and union members—along with at least 70% of the Colombian population—live in fear due to the Petro-Márquez administration's alleged threats and persecution.

These actions are reportedly backed by their political coalition, *Pacto Histórico*, the Green Party, and their associates involved in the *Total Peace* agreement, as well as Maduro's digital propaganda apparatus, often referred to as his "bot army."

Their apparent objective is to delay or disrupt the 2026 electoral process to cling to power—mirroring the authoritarian tactics used by Chávez and Maduro in Venezuela and Evo Morales in Bolivia.

Bogotá, Colombia 18 June 2025.