

Issue brief Enhancing US-Colombia coordination on Venezuela policy

How the US and Colombia can promote regional stability and pursue national interests without legitimizing Nicolás Maduro's regime

An issue brief informed by the Atlantic Council's US-Colombia Advisory Group
With Lucie Kneip and Geoff Ramsey

Bottom lines up front

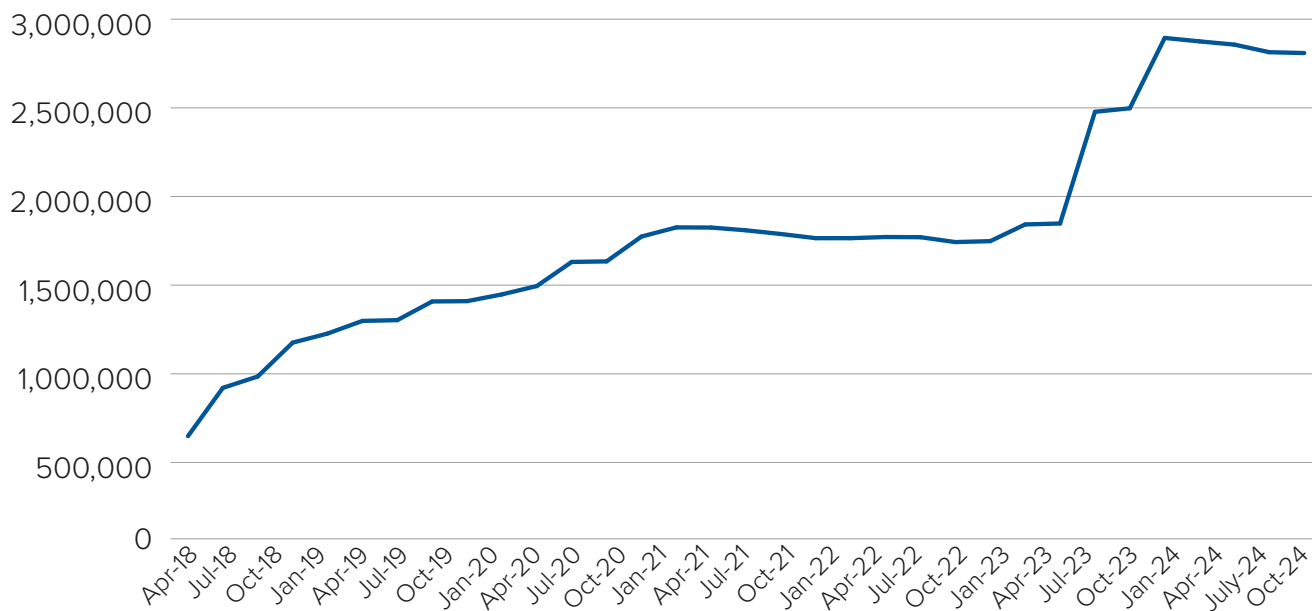
- While the United States seeks to prevent more migration from Venezuela, the strain of hosting 2.8 million Venezuelan migrants and refugees is putting Colombia on the back foot in its fight against transnational criminal groups.
- Bilateral efforts to improve security cooperation, reduce irregular migration sustainably, and improve opportunities for Venezuelan migrants and refugees in Colombia can benefit both countries.
- Colombia must balance between asserting regional leadership in managing the Venezuelan crisis—which requires a clear strategy—and keeping a communication channel open without legitimating Nicolás Maduro's rule.

As Venezuela's crisis has worsened, it has dramatically impacted migration and security in Colombia. Around eight million Venezuelans (one-quarter of the population) have fled the country in the past decade.¹ Colombia has received far more than any other country, hosting over 2.8 million Venezuelans as of November 2024. (See Figure 1.)²

Under the government of President Iván Duque, Colombia adopted policies to integrate fleeing Venezuelans and widen their access to regular status. In 2021, the government granted Venezuelan nationals access to regularized status, work authorization, and public services for ten years. The program reached 473,000 Venezuelans in its first year and formalized a process for tracking

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1. Lucie Kneip, "Amid Rising Insecurity in Venezuela, the US and Its Partners Must Prepare for a New Wave of Migration," Atlantic Council, August 20, 2024, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/amid-rising-insecurity-in-venezuela-the-us-and-its-partners-must-prepare-for-a-new-wave-of-migration/>.
 2. "Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela," R4V, May 2025, <https://www.r4v.info/en/refugeeandmigrants>.

Figure 1: Venezuelan refugees and migrants in Colombia



Source: Interagency Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela. Retrieved March 31, 2025.

the Venezuelan diaspora in Colombia. More than 1.9 million Venezuelans residing in Colombia have been able to access permits under the ten-year program, though more than half a million Venezuelans still lack access to regular status.³

Since assuming office in 2022, President Gustavo Petro has taken a different course. He has sought to limit the flow of Venezuelan migrants and refugees, dismantling migration management programs and allowing the regularization program to lapse in late 2023. Local governments have been placed under greater strain as they struggle to meet the added burden on local services caused by increased numbers of Venezuelan migrants. Meanwhile, data show that the number of Venezuelans in the country has plateaued since mid-2023.⁴

How Venezuela's crisis has spilled over into Colombia

Colombia's worsening security situation is also linked to Venezuela's crisis. Violent clashes between armed groups and security forces have increased along the Venezuelan border, particularly in the departments of Arauca and Norte de Santander. In Catatumbo, more than one hundred people were killed and more than sixty thousand displaced in January clashes between the National Liberation Army (ELN) and the 33rd Front of dissident rebels from the former Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) over control of coca fields.⁵ These and other armed groups and criminal organizations have deepened their presence on both sides of the border. The ELN has expanded its presence from 149 Colombian municipalities

3. Jennifer Gordon, "Decent Work for Displaced People: Lessons from the Experiences of Venezuelan Migrant and Refugee Workers in Colombia and Brazil," International Labour Organization, January 2024, https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/@americas/@ro-lima/documents/publication/wcms_906738.pdf.

4. "Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela."

5. Karen Pinto Duitama, "Hubo Más Desplazados en Catatumbo en Enero y Febrero que en Todo el País en 2024," *Republica*, March 26, 2025, <https://www.larepublica.co/economia/hubo-mas-desplazadas-en-catatumbo-en-enero-y-febrero-que-en-todo-el-pais-en-2024-4094943>; "Colombia Vows 'War' as Guerrilla Violence Kills 100," *France24*, January 20, 2025, <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20250120-colombia-troops-try-to-contain-guerrilla-violence-that-has-killed-100>.



Colombians displaced after attacks by National Liberation Army (ELN) rebels inside a shelter in Tibu, Colombia, February 3, 2025. Colombia has seen a resurgence in violence from the ELN and other armed groups, which reside on both sides of the Colombia-Venezuela border. REUTERS/Carlos Eduardo Ramirez.

in 2019 to 226 in 2024, and it has benefitted from using Venezuela as a safe haven beyond the reach of the Colombian military.⁶ Along with the recently designated Foreign Terrorist Organization Tren de Aragua, the ELN and other groups have exerted control over illegal gold mining operations in resource-rich areas. Venezuelan security forces maintain links to the ELN and other armed groups, including the Clan del Golfo and dissident factions of the former FARC, and the Venezuelan government has reportedly profited from illicit economies

including illegal mining, fuel smuggling, and drug and human trafficking.⁷ While Venezuela has developed a symbiotic relationship with armed groups and transnational criminal organizations in the area, Colombia struggles to mitigate the effects of criminal enterprises on its peace process and commercial activity.

In northern Colombia, migrants journeying north through the Darién Gap into Panama are often preyed upon by Colombia's largest and richest criminal group, the Clan del Golfo.⁸ Kidnap-

6. Julie Turkewitz, "At Least 80 Dead in Colombia Amid a New Surge of Violence," *New York Times*, January 20, 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/01/20/world/americas/colombia-catatumbo-rebel-violence.html>; "Venezuela, Colombia, and the ELN at the Crossroads of Peace," InSight Crime, October 3, 2022, <https://insightcrime.org/investigations/venezuela-colombia-eln-crossroads-of-peace/>; "The Guerrillas Are the Police": Social Control and Abuses by Armed Groups in Colorado's Arauca Province and Venezuela's Apure State," Human Rights Watch, January 20, 2022, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2020/01/22/guerrillas-are-police/social-control-and-abuses-armed-groups-colombias-arauca>.

7. Maximiliano Pérez Gallardo, "Colombian Catatumbo Burns: The Role of the ELN and Venezuela in the Wave of Violence," *France24*, January 24, 2025, <https://www.france24.com/es/am%C3%A9rica-latina/20250124-arde-el-catatumbo-colombiano-el-rol-del-eln-y-venezuela-en-la-ola-de-violencia>.

8. "The Unsolved Crime in 'Total Peace': Dealing with Colombia's Gaitanistas," International Crisis Group, March 19, 2024, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/latin-america-caribbean/andes/colombia/105-unsolved-crime-total-peace-dealing-colombias-gaitanistas>.

pings, killings, and sexual violence have been widely reported in the Darién.⁹

The migration and human trafficking crises are connected to broader security failures in Colombia. The breakdown in peace negotiations between the Colombian government and the ELN, for which Venezuela served as a guarantor, has created new complications for territorial control. Upon taking office, Petro introduced his *Paz Total* (Total Peace) strategy of negotiating ceasefires with different armed and criminal groups. Though the strategy was initially approved with overwhelming support in both chambers of Colombia's congress, the program has failed to deliver on its promises.¹⁰ Sixty-six percent of Colombians now believe the *Paz Total* project is moving in the wrong direction, and 85 percent believe Colombia's security situation is worsening.¹¹ Aside from the ELN, ceasefires with other armed groups including the Estado Mayor Central (EMC) and the Clan del Golfo (Gulf Clan) have lapsed.

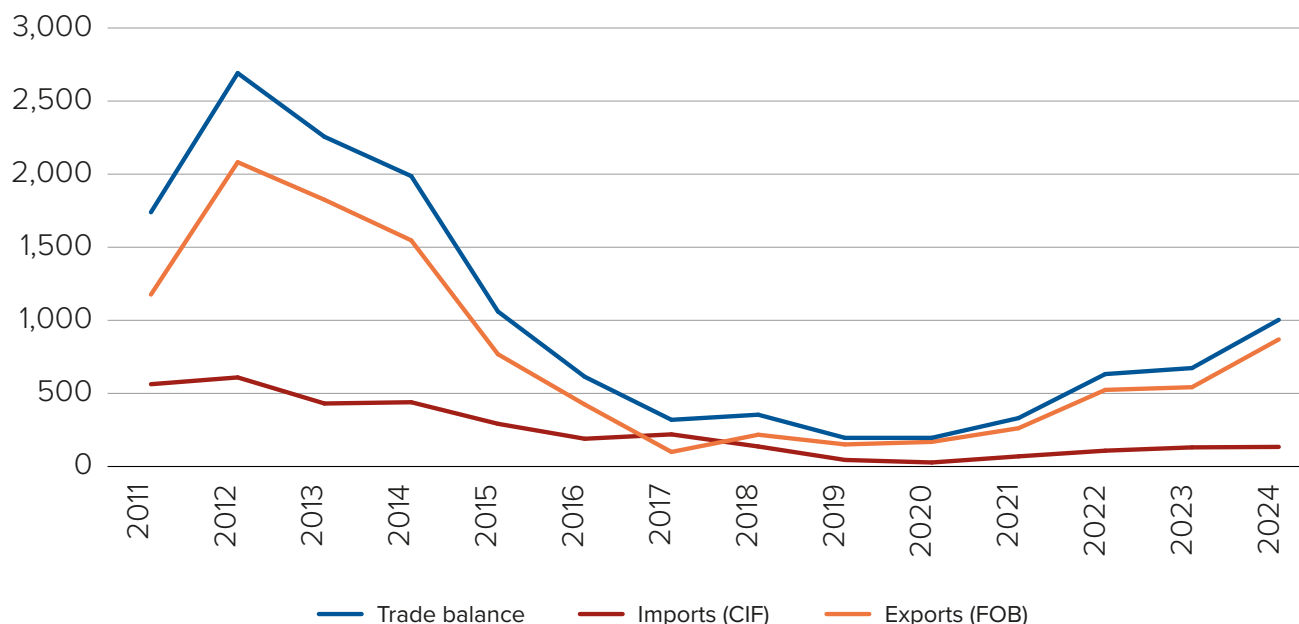
Petro's response to the 2024 stolen election

After previous administrations sought to distance Colombia from Venezuela and its deteriorating political, economic, and migratory crises, Petro officially restored diplomatic relations with Caracas in August 2022 shortly after assuming office. The current period of gradual rapprochement has seen the official reopening of the Colombian-Venezuelan border, some

resumption of trade, and a visit by Petro to the presidential palace in Miraflores in April 2024.¹²

Petro has joined fellow left-leaning leaders of Brazil and Mexico in maintaining some degree of engagement with Maduro. In the wake of the July 2024 stolen presidential election, Colombia, Brazil, and Mexico refused to recognize Maduro's self-proclaimed victory, while encouraging some form of political negotiation between Maduro and the opposition. When this failed, the countries continued to avoid recognizing the outcome of the election, maintained diplomatic and commercial relations with Caracas, and stressed the importance of avoiding conflict escalation.¹³ Petro cited the importance of disrupting armed groups from exerting control over the border regions and humanitarian concerns in both countries as rationale for maintaining relations.¹⁴ Colombia has shifted its messaging from electoral verification and transparency to urging Venezuela to respect human rights and release political prisoners, including twelve Colombians arrested in the aftermath of the July 28 election.¹⁵ In January 2025, Petro reiterated that Venezuela should allow the safe exit of the Venezuelan opposition members sheltering in the Argentine embassy in Caracas (overseen by Brazil) and return to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR)—the latter a petition Petro has posed to Maduro since the earliest days of his presidency.¹⁶ Petro has said that any political agreement should include new elections in Venezuela, saying that the July 28 vote “was not free.”¹⁷

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9. “El Darién: Más de 300.000 Venezolanos Atravesaron la Selva en 2024,” *Pitazo*, February 7, 2025, <https://elpitazo.net/migracion/el-darien-mas-de-300-000-venezolanos-atravesaron-la-selva-en-2024/>.
 10. “Senado de Colombia Aprueba la Ley que convierte a la Paz Total en Política de Estado,” *Universal*, October 25, 2022, <https://www.eluniversal.com/internacional/141192/senado-de-colombia-aprueba-la-ley-que-convierte-a-la-paz-total-en-politica-de-estado>.
 11. “A Path Forward for Colombia's 2016 Peace Accord and Lasting Security,” Atlantic Council, 2024, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/REPORT-COLOMBIA-SECURITY-5-1.pdf>.
 12. Victor Cohen, “Why Petro Won't Break Ties with Maduro,” *ColombiaOne*, January 8, 2025, <https://colombiaone.com/2025/01/08/colombia-petro-maduro-venezuela/>.
 13. “Second Joint Statement by Brazil, Colombia, and Mexico on the Elections in Venezuela,” Government of Mexico, press release, August 8, 2024, <https://www.gob.mx/sre/prensa/second-joint-statement-by-brazil-colombia-and-mexico-on-the-elections-in-venezuela?idiom=en>.
 14. Adriaan Alsema, “Petro to Shun Venezuela's Controversial Inauguration of Maduro,” *Colombia Reports*, January 8, 2025, <https://colombiareports.com/petro-to-shun-venezuelas-controversial-inauguration-of-maduro/>.
 15. Adriaan Alsema, “Colombia Asks Venezuela to Release Political Prisoners,” *Colombia Reports*, January 16, 2025, <https://colombiareports.com/colombia-asks-venezuela-to-release-political-prisoners/>.
 16. “Colombia Solicita a Venezuela Respetar Derechos de Opositores Aislados en Embajada de Argentina,” Associated Press, December 16, 2024, <https://www.latimes.com/espanol/internacional/articulo/2024-12-16/colombia-solicita-a-venezuela-respetar-derechos-de-opositores-aislados-en-embajada-de-argentina>; “¿Qué Significa el Regreso de Venezuela a la Corte Interamericana de Derechos Humanos?” *Semana*, November 1, 2022, <https://www.semana.com/mundo/articulo/que-significa-el-regreso-de-venezuela-a-la-corte-interamericana-de-derechos-humanos/202231/>.
 17. “Petro Sobre Venezuela: Debe Haber Nueva Elecciones, porque las que Hubo No Fueron Libres,” *Efecto Cocuyo*, February 26, 2025, <https://efectococuyo.com/politica/petro-sobre-venezuela-debe-haber-nuevas-elecciones-porque-las-que-hubo-no-fueron-libres/>.

Figure 2: Commercial trade balance of Colombia with Venezuela, 2011–2024, millions USD

Source: International Monetary Fund. Retrieved April 16, 2025.

Petro's re-opening of the Colombia-Venezuela border to formal migrant and commercial flows has led to an increase in trade (Figure 2).¹⁸ Colombian exports to Venezuela increased 49 percent between 2023 and 2024, rising from \$673.4 million to more than \$1 billion.¹⁹ The recovery of trade has provided tangible benefits to the Colombian private sector, though reasons for caution remain. Trade levels remain far below their pre-Maduro peak and security remains a high concern, particularly for businesses along the Colombia-Venezuela border.

Petro's ten-year plan to combat drug trafficking was launched in 2023 and aims to enable coca growers to transition to the formal economy through alternative means of income. However, little progress has been made in putting the strategy into

practice, and coca eradication has drastically decreased. As the fracturing and proliferation of criminal actors continue, the ability of state forces to disrupt organized crime networks or negotiate with groups continues to decrease, and investments in rural communities have little capacity for implementation.²⁰ Coca leaf cultivation increased by 10 percent in 2023, reaching 253,000 hectares, while cocaine production increased by 53 percent.²¹ The Petro administration has pointed to increased cocaine seizures as signs of progress, but increased seizures are expected considering the drastic increase in coca planted over the past five years. Despite record-breaking seizures, limiting the drug trade on the large-scale network side has proven difficult.²²

18. "IMF Data," International Monetary Fund, April 16, 2025, <https://data.imf.org/en>.

19. "De Colombia a Venezuela: Exportaciones Crecieron un 49% en 2024," *Nuevo Siglo*, February 8, 2025, <https://www.elnuevosiglo.com.co/economia/exportaciones-de-colombia-venezuela-crecieron-un-49-en-2024-alcanzando-us10036-millones>.

20. "Advancing US-Colombia Cooperation on Drug Policy and Law Enforcement," Atlantic Council, 2023, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/REPORT-US-COLOMBIA-COUNTERNARCOTIC-4.pdf>.

21. "Colombia: Potential Cocaine Production Increased by 53 Per Cent in 2023, According to New UNODC Survey," United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, press release, October 18, 2024, https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/press/releases/2024/October/colombia_-potential-cocaine-production-increased-by-53-per-cent-in-2023-according-to-new-unodc-survey.html.

22. Demian Bio, "Colombia-led Operation Seizes Almost 10% Of Annual Global Cocaine Production in a Single Bust," *Latin Times*, November 29, 2024, www.latintimes.com/colombia-led-operation-seizes-almost-10-annual-global-cocaine-production-single-bust-567475.

Opportunities and priorities for the United States and Colombia

Colombia

Given the shared interest between the United States and Colombia in promoting regional stability, Colombia has an opportunity to find creative ways to support democratic restoration in Venezuela through bilateral relations. Refusing to recognize Maduro as a democratic leader does not necessitate a break in relations; rather, Colombia can pair its communication with Caracas with ongoing diplomatic condemnation of the situation.

In economic and commercial negotiations, Colombia has a vested interest in pushing for transparency and security guarantees from Venezuela regarding trade operations in border regions. Where possible, it should promote democratic values, including respect for institutions, and consider the United States' interests in containing migration and preserving space for Western oil companies in Venezuela.

Colombia's reality includes a valid interest in maintaining some form of diplomatic communications with Caracas, but it could be encouraged to play a more active role in facilitating a political solution in Venezuela as productive middle-ground approach.

United States

As the Trump administration reorients its policy toward Venezuela, it should consider how to leverage sanctions to obtain economic or migratory concessions. Even if economic conditions in Venezuela improve, there is debate over whether they would be sufficient to stem migration flows.²³ Sanctions relief alone would be unlikely to completely deter migration in the long term, though economic improvement could contribute to would-be migrants deciding to remain in the country. The United States did not impose sectoral sanctions until 2017, but the migration crisis began in 2015 after acute economic turmoil, inflation, and crime increased. Oil licenses have succeeded in generating revenue for Venezuela, and the economy has experienced consistent (albeit small) growth since 2021.

But the economy still has a long way to go to regain its gross domestic product (GDP) levels from 2012.²⁴ GDP fell sharply beginning in 2013 when Maduro assumed power, and the economic crisis has impacted large swaths of the population. Returning to a strategy of maximum pressure by tightening sectoral sanctions would risk exacerbating the migration crisis and the humanitarian situation.²⁵

During US Secretary of State Marco Rubio's February visit with Panamanian President José Raúl Mulino, both expressed support for the joint repatriation program aimed at mitigating migration through the Darien Gap.²⁶ Crossings through the Darien fell 94 percent in January 2025 from the same month in 2024, partially due to strict enforcement from Panama and the Trump administration's hardline approach to migration.

Migration became a strained issue between the United States and Colombia after Trump threatened to impose tariffs and sanctions if Colombia did not agree to receive deportation flights of Colombian nationals. While Petro ultimately backed down, these tensions risk impacting consensus building toward Venezuela, particularly on migration policy.²⁷

The Trump administration deported hundreds of Venezuelans to a maximum-security prison in El Salvador (CECOT), based on what it alleged were links to Tren de Aragua. In parallel, Maduro has agreed to resume accepting deportation flights of Venezuelans. After an initial delay, as many as three deportation flights now arrive per week at Maiquetía International Airport—some from the United States.²⁸ If those flights are again cut off in response to US pressure, Washington might look to Colombia to accept deported Venezuelans given growing resistance to deportations of Venezuelans to El Salvador. Meanwhile, hundreds of thousands of Venezuelans who saw their access to Temporary Protected Status ended by the Trump administration now face few options apart from returning to the country they fled from.

Even before Trump returned to office, foreign assistance to Colombia had been under scrutiny, with proposals for steep

23. Francisco R. Rodríguez, "Sanctions and Venezuelan Migration," *FrancisCorrodriguez.net*, December 26, 2024, <https://franciscorodriguez.net/2024/12/26/sanctions-and-venezuelan-migration/>.

24. "República Bolivariana de Venezuela," *International Monetary Fund*, last visited July 10, 2025, <https://www.imf.org/en/Countries/VEN#whatsnew>.

25. Rodríguez, "Sanctions and Venezuelan Migration."

26. "Secretary Rubio's Meeting with Panamanian President Mulino," *US Embassy in Panama*, February 2, 2025, <https://pa.usembassy.gov/secretary-rubios-meeting-with-panamanian-president-mulino/>.

27. "President Trump's America First Priorities," *White House*, January 20, 2025, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/2025/01/president-trumps-america-first-priorities/>.

28. "Venezuela Recibe a 168 Migrantes Deportados por el Gobierno de Trump en un Avión de EE.UU.," *Efecto Cocuyo*, May 9, 2025, <https://efectococuyo.com/venezuela-migrante/venezuela-recibe-a-168-migrantes-deportados-por-el-gobierno-de-trump-en-un-avion-de-ee-uu/>.



Arturo Suarez, a Venezuelan deported from the United States to El Salvador's Terrorism Confinement Center (CECOT) reunites with family in Caracas on July 22 after being released as part of a prisoner swap. Suarez and others recounted instances of severe physical and mental abuse there. Reuters/Leonardo Fernandez Viloria.

cuts emerging in recent years. In light of Trump's drastic cuts to and restructuring of foreign aid, the Republican-majority House and Senate are likely to further this stance with cuts to Colombia funding in 2026, particularly after the closure of the US Agency for International Development (USAID) and restructuring of the US Department of State. Further cuts to development assistance to Colombia would limit the government's ability to continue fighting the drug trade on the front lines.

On the oil front, Trump announced that he would terminate a general license allowing US oil major Chevron to operate in Venezuela after a wind-down period lasting until May 27, 2025 and threatened a 25-percent tariff on countries buying Venezuelan oil.²⁹ Chevron eventually received permission to maintain a presence in Venezuela without continuing exports,

while the aforementioned oil tariffs were not imposed. Oil majors ENI, Repsol, and M&P also had their licenses revoked by the United States but were able to maintain their presence on similar terms as Chevron.³⁰ The license revocations received criticism for opening a path for Chinese and Russian oil companies to profit while extending their influence into the Western Hemisphere. The White House changed course in late July, with reports that Chevron would be able to resume pumping oil in Venezuela. It is possible that Chevron's ability to maintain a presence in Venezuela created space for Washington to negotiate more favorable terms for US companies in Venezuela while keeping China, Russia, and Iran at a distance. In 2024, 68 percent of Venezuela's oil exports went to China, while 23 percent went to the United States.³¹

29. Regina Garcia Cano, "Trump Cuts Financial Lifeline for Venezuela's Government by Ending Permit to Export Oil to US," Associated Press, February 26, 2025, <https://apnews.com/article/venezuela-maduro-trump-oil-license-chevron-election-4c0357961d7978e6fbac16127b0a759e>.

30. "US Revokes French Oil Company's Licence in Venezuela," Radio France Internationale, March 31, 2025, <https://www.rfi.fr/en/international/20250331-us-revokes-french-oil-company-s-license-in-venezuela-trade-tariffs-trump>.

31. "Trump Puts Tariffs on Countries that Buy Oil from Venezuela, Effective April 2," Institute for Energy Research, March 28, 2025, www.instituteforenergyresearch.org/fossil-fuels/gas-and-oil/trump-puts-tariffs-on-countries-that-buy-oil-from-venezuela-effective-april-2/.

There is significant bipartisan consensus in Washington that a return to democracy would benefit Venezuela and increase regional stability. The Trump administration is currently weighing how to recalibrate its policy towards Venezuela. Presidential Envoy for Special Missions Richard Grenell opened a channel of communication with the Maduro government after returning home from Caracas with six US hostages in February, and deportation flights to Caracas have resumed, indicating that the United States still has an interest in staying in touch with Maduro. There are signs that Washington and Caracas might be hashing out a deal behind the scenes. Following the prisoner exchange that saw the release of ten detained Americans and dozens of Venezuelans in exchange for El Salvador repatriating 252 Venezuelans, the US government granted Chevron a restricted license to resume certain operations in Venezuela despite US sanctions. The administration has characterized its policy toward Venezuela as one of “complex and ongoing negotiations.”³²

■ Recommendations

To the Colombian Ministry of Foreign Affairs

- Use existing diplomatic channels with Venezuela to continue advocating for Colombia’s expressed priorities, including a respect for human rights and the release of political prisoners. In both public and private diplomatic interactions, maintain space for negotiations on shared national priorities, such as increased trade and national security.

To the Colombian Ministry of Defense

- Invest in improving border security and infrastructure. Improve intelligence cooperation and invest in technological surveillance to disrupt criminal networks operating in border regions where state presence is most challenged. Invest in securing and maintaining roads, bridges, and checkpoints to improve access and surveillance. Renewing support for joint efforts to crack down on criminal networks benefitting from drug and human trafficking will mitigate these groups’ ability to profit from increased migration flows through promoting illicit economies.

To Migración Colombia

- Establish a regional integration network of receiving countries, led by Colombia, to share best practices and shape international policy on receiving, processing, and integrating Venezuelan migrants. This would ensure greater coordination across national and local governments to respond to migrant flows in the hemisphere and mitigate the number of migrants who feel journeying north is their only option.

To the Colombian Ministry of Labour

- Leverage the opportunities presented by Venezuelan migration, forging public-private partnerships to drive growth and innovation. Expand access to services, particularly employment opportunities, for Venezuelans living in Colombia. Work with local and international businesses to leverage the migrant population to bolster the workforce. In 2022, Venezuelan migrants contributed \$529 million in income taxes in Colombia.³³ This can help offset the costs of investing in increasing access for migrants. Expanding the workforce leads to more consumer spending, which creates more demand across various sectors.

To the US and Colombian governments

- Address the conditions that allow Colombian armed groups to recruit and expand their influence in border communities. Ramp up joint law-enforcement and security operations in areas along the border, particularly through increasing US Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) coordination with the Colombian National Police. Strengthen cooperation on real-time intelligence sharing related to drug trafficking and the proliferation of armed groups in border areas. Once the security situation is stabilized, collaboration should shift toward building state presence. Given the transnational nature of these networks, the United States and Colombia should also encourage other countries in the region, particularly Brazil and Panama, to coordinate efforts to dismantle trafficking and armed groups. Increasing intelligence cooperation with Colombian armed forces in regions most affected by conflict, particularly border regions, would help prevent violent clashes like those in Catatumbo.

32. Zach Schonfeld and Rebecca Beitsch, “Trump Administration Asks Supreme Court to End Protected Status for 600,000 Venezuelans,” *Hill*, May 1, 2025, <https://thehill.com/regulation/court-battles/5278280-trump-administration-supreme-court-venezuelans-deportation-protection-tps-noem/>.

33. “Venezuelan Migrants Drive USD 529.1M Boost to Colombia’s Economy: IOM Study,” International Organization for Migration, April 25, 2024, <https://www.iom.int/news/venezuelan-migrants-drive-usd-5291m-boost-colombias-economy-iom-study>.

- Incentivize employers interested in hiring migrants in Colombia. Provide support for worker certification programs, through which migrants can obtain recognition for previously held certifications. Promote incentive structures for corporations interested in hiring migrants and job-training programs for sectors with high labor demand, such as construction, tourism, and technology. Establishing microcredit financing lines for migrant-led businesses can generate additional employment and strengthen the local economy.
- Support regularization pathways in Colombia. Renewing support for programs that facilitate access to regular status of Venezuelans in Colombia beyond their immediate humanitarian needs would provide a way for the United States to work on the front end to stem northbound migration flows. While Colombia has rolled out extensive regularization programs in the past, management and implementation of these programs has regressed under the Petro administration, increasing the insecurity of in-country Venezuelan migrants.³⁴ Improving access to legal status would mitigate stagnation and facilitate migrants' ability to integrate into and contribute to Colombian society.

To the international community

- Leverage regional and multilateral forums like the Organization of American States, the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States, and the United Nations to help structure regional support for a solution to the Venezuelan crisis.
- Invest in migration coordination by working with Colombia to establish a regional integration network that leverages public-private partnerships and local expertise to share best practices, integrate services, and expand opportunities for formal, regularized migration pathways.

■ Conclusion

Colombia has a unique opportunity to consolidate its regional leadership in managing the Venezuelan crisis, but this requires a clearly articulated strategy. Colombia must balance pressure with pragmatism to prevent its relationships with the United States and Venezuela from becoming a threat to national stability. Strengthening the integration of migrants, reinforcing border security, and ensuring its relationships with both the United States and Venezuela remain functional will be key to Colombia's position as a strategic actor in the region.

34. Nastassja Rojas Silva, "The Progressive Paradox: Petro's Regressive Measures against Venezuelan Migration," *Latinoamérica21*, July 18, 2024, <https://latinoamerica21.com/en/the-progressive-paradox-petros-regressive-measures-against-venezuelan-migration/>.

About the authors

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About the Atlantic Council's US-Colombia Advisory Group

The Atlantic Council's US-Colombia Advisory Group is a nonpartisan, binational, and multi-sectoral group committed to advancing a whole-of-society approach to addressing the most vital policy issues facing the US-Colombia relationship—with a recognition of the broader implications for bilateral interests across the region more broadly.

At its founding in 2017, the Advisory Group was co-chaired by Senators Roy Blunt (R-MO) and Ben Cardin (D-MD). Upon Blunt's retirement, Senator Bill Hagerty (R-TN) assumed the honorary chairmanship alongside Cardin from 2023 until 2024.

About the center

The Atlantic Council's nonpartisan Adrienne Arsht Latin America Center (AALAC) broadens understanding of regional transformations while demonstrating the significance of Latin America and the Caribbean in a rapidly changing world. The center focuses on pressing political, economic, and strategic issues that define the region's trajectory, proposing constructive, results-oriented solutions to inform public-sector, business, and multilateral action based on a shared vision for a more prosperous, inclusive, and sustainable future.

AALAC builds consensus for action in advancing innovative policy perspectives and prioritizes impact across geographic priorities—including Argentina, Brazil, Central America, Chile, Colombia, Mexico, Venezuela and through its Caribbean Initiative—alongside thematic areas that incorporate global Atlantic Council expertise: investment promotion, commercial ties, economic development, transnational criminal organizations, energy security, technology, democratic institutions, and mitigating Chinese influence.