

News Tren de Aragua

Debunking 3 Myths About Tren de Aragua

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US President Donald Trump has put the Venezuelan gang **Tren de Aragua** at the center of his immigration enforcement efforts. But with so much news about the group, it can be difficult to separate fact from fiction.

Here, we break down what you really need to know about the gang that has quickly become one of the world's most infamous crime groups.

1. Gang Members Do Not Use Tattoos to Identify Themselves

Many Venezuelans who have been arrested or deported for allegedly belonging to Tren de Aragua say they were targeted because of their tattoos. But Tren de Aragua does not use tattoos or other symbols like colors or clothing to identify its members.

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In fact, many gangs in the region that once used tattoos to identify themselves, such as the MS13, have moved away from them precisely because they help law enforcement identify them.

Additionally, one or several gang members having the same tattoo does not necessarily mean that the gang uses the tattoo as an identifying marker.

2. The Gang Is Not Controlled by the Venezuelan Government

The Trump administration has claimed that Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro has directed Tren de Aragua to invade the United States. There is no evidence to support this.

While the gang once had the Venezuelan government's protection, that relationship has **ruptured**. Maduro has been delivering big blows to the gang for the past year and a half. He ordered a major raid that kicked the gang out of its prison headquarters in September 2023, and his government has worked with partners in Colombia to arrest several top leaders in recent months.

What's more, it is unlikely that Maduro could direct Tren de Aragua's activities, even if he wanted to. The gang's leadership has been shaken up, and decision-making within the group has become more horizontal.

3. The Gang Is Getting Weaker, Not More Powerful

The increased attention that Tren de Aragua is getting might make it seem like the gang is growing more powerful. But the opposite is true. The prison raid and the arrests of gang leaders have fragmented the group.

It now operates more as a loose collection of franchises than a cohesive organization, with branches in **Peru, Colombia, and Chile**. In the United States, the crimes attributed to the group do not appear to be coordinated at any level.

SEE ALSO: US Labels Tren de Aragua a Transnational Criminal Threat

Tren de Aragua is unlikely to grow more powerful with so much law enforcement attention focused on it. Instead, it will likely persist as a decentralized network whose branches share a name but little else.

Featured image: Officers escort handcuffed alleged Tren de Aragua members in a detention center in El Salvador. Source: NBC News