

Finally, the Borough of Chaguanas (located in central TT) remains a member of the Strong City Network, which is a global U.S.-funded network of mayors, policy makers, and practitioners united in building social cohesion and resilience to countering violent extremism in all its forms.

VENEZUELA

Overview: The Maduro regime continued to engage in criminal activities through usurpation of the judicial system and links with military/security services that further corruption and other illicit ends. The regime cooperates with non state armed actors where its interests align, including the provision of safe haven for Colombian-origin U.S.-designated terrorist groups such as ELN, FARC-EP, and Segunda Marquetalia. As enabled by the regime, terrorist groups, insurgents, and criminals have operated in large stretches of the nation's territory for profits from illicit activities and have built financial ties with elements of the Venezuelan state.

The regime treats non state armed groups selectively, at times dealing with them through cooperation and at other times through conflict. In Venezuela, ELN has been known to form symbiotic relationships with military and security officials to facilitate and protect drug and human trafficking routes and other forms of illicit activity. ELN has undertaken major growth and expansion since FARC demobilized in 2017. Credible open-source researchers estimated that the ELN has presence in 40 Venezuelan municipalities across eight states, more than double the geographic reach of FARC dissidents. ELN has replaced the former FARC as the most significant armed group in both Colombia and Venezuela.

2022 Terrorist Incidents: Select areas of Venezuela witnessed continued conflict between two rival FARC dissident factions, one led by FARC-EP commander Gentil Duarte, and the second, Segunda Marquetalia, led by Iván Márquez. Both factions fought to take over former FARC territories, alliances, and criminal economies in the country. In early 2022, ELN became involved because of disputes with FARC-EP's 10th Front in the Venezuela-Colombia border area.

On January 1, violent clashes broke out between ELN and FARC-EP's 10th Front in the border area between Colombia's Arauca department and Venezuela's Apure state. According to Human Rights Watch (HRW), Venezuelan security, military, and national guard forces directly coordinated operations against FARC dissidents with ELN and were complicit in committing abuses against civilians. HRW reported armed groups were involved in killings, disappearances, child recruitment, and forced displacement. The conflicts forced more than 3,300 people to flee their homes in Apure and displaced at least 3,860 people in Arauca, many of whom were members of Indigenous communities.

- In May, Duarte was assassinated in the Zulia state of Venezuela. After Duarte's death, Iván Mordisco was presumed to take charge. In July, Colombian defense minister Diego Molano said Mordisco was killed in an air raid in southern Colombia, though later reports stated that FARC-EP leaders claimed he was alive.

- On July 2, Iván Márquez was reportedly killed in Venezuela near the Colombian border, though later reports confirmed he was alive but seriously injured and had been treated in Caracas.

Legislation, Law Enforcement, and Border Security: According to the UN International Independent Fact-Finding Mission on Venezuela’s third report, published in September, the Venezuelan justice system continued to suffer from a severe lack of independence and impartiality — including on CT issues.

The regime continued to target political dissidents and civil society groups, using terrorism charges. Javier Tarazona, an activist and director of the NGO *FundaRedes* who had been imprisoned since July 2021, was charged with “treason, terrorism, and incitement to hatred” by the Third Control Court. In July, humanitarian worker Gabriel Blanco, activist Néstor Astudillo, and four other activists were arrested and charged by the Fourth Control Court for Terrorism.

Countering the Financing of Terrorism: Venezuela is a member of the Caribbean Financial Action Task Force, and its FIU, the National Financial Intelligence Unit (or UNIF), is a member of the Egmont Group. There were no significant changes in 2022.

For further information on money laundering and financial crimes, see the *2022 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report, Volume 2, Money Laundering and Financial Crimes*.

Countering Violent Extremism: There were no known CVE efforts underway in 2022.

International and Regional Cooperation: In August the Maduro regime and the Colombian government restored full diplomatic relations (severed in 2019) and announced intentions to restore military relations. On November 21 the Colombian government and ELN began peace talks in Caracas as the first major step in Colombian President Petro’s efforts to bring “total peace” to Colombia. The Maduro regime assumed the role of guarantor of the talks.

Maduro has managed to perpetuate his hold on power through deepening ties with Iran and Russia. For example, on June 10, Maduro met with Iranian President Raisi in Tehran, Iran, and signed a 20-year cooperation road map and pledged to boost bilateral ties. On July 24, the Russian space agency Roscosmos announced plans to install a GLONASS satellite navigation ground station in Venezuela.