



Colombian President Gustavo Petro. (AP)

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\$4.2 billion

34 percent

89 percent

20,000 hectares

25+ armed groups

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Five Figures that Sum Up Gustavo Petro's First Six Months

By [Jon Orbach](#)

AS/COA Online looks at major issues shaping the Colombian president's first half year in office.

Colombian President **Gustavo Petro** came to power on the heels of momentous protests and a widespread desire for change in his country—and the region. His victory in June 2022 added to what has been [a long streak of incumbent parties losing to the opposition](#) in Latin American presidential elections.

The former Bogotá mayor also made history August 7, 2022 when he was sworn in as Colombia's first leftist president, while his running mate **Francia Márquez** became the country's first Black vice president. Petro has taken steps toward big changes, whether it be calling for a halt to oil exploration, bumping up taxes on the wealthy, demanding a reconsideration of the war against drugs, or trying to negotiate peace with the dozens of rebel groups still in operation in the country.

So, as he marks a half year in office, how is he faring? As he pushes for major reforms, Petro's approval [sits at 39 percent](#), down from 48 percent in October. Given that protesters—frustrated by economic inequality—took to the streets during his predecessor's government, Petro in February announced a [\\$247 billion national development plan](#) that would seek to lift Colombians out of poverty. Still, [inflation reached 13.25 percent](#) in January—the highest it's been since 1999. AS/COA Online looks at five numbers to summarize his first six months in office.

\$4.2 billion

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"Es un país que parece haber recuperado su confianza", dijo el vicepresidente de AS/COA en una entrevista sobre el último número de *Americas Quarterly*, enfocado en el Uruguay

That's Petro's tax reform's final collection goal.

Petro entered office promising to tackle Colombia's inequality and to use a tax reform as a means to get there, creating funding for social programs by [taxing Colombia's extractive sectors, sugary drinks, and the wealthy](#), among others. While Petro's initial proposal sought to increase tax collection to \$10.8 billion, the reform that [passed Congress on November 3](#) is expected to raise [\\$4.2 billion in 2023](#), or about 1.4 percent of GDP.

Observers have [expressed concern](#) that the levies on the oil and mining sectors, which together make up about 30 percent of Colombia's foreign direct investment, may deter investment.



Understanding the Petro Government's Tax Reform

A day after his August 7 inauguration, Colombia's president sent the signature reform to Congress. AS/COA Online talks to experts about what it entails.

34 percent

That's [the portion of Colombia's export income](#) that crude oil alone generates.

But Petro has called for Colombia to lessen its reliance on fossil fuels and instead leverage greener forms of energy. At the [World Economic Forum in Davos](#), he and Minister of Mines **Irene Vélez** announced the administration's proposal to [stop approving any new oil or gas exploration projects](#). Existing contracts would be honored.

The government's messages, though, have been inconsistent. While Vélez said that the plan was "absolutely urgent," Minister of Finance **José Antonio Ocampo** said the country is open to new contracts given [the country's reliance on fossil fuel revenues](#) and that a [transition to greener energy](#) generation would take about 15 years. Vélez noted that [tourism could bring in the funds](#) the country would lose out on from not seeking new oil. The hydrocarbon sector made up [5 percent of GDP](#), compared to tourism's 1.5 percent as of September 2022.

While Petro backed Vélez over his finance minister, Ocampo told El País that the government, some cabinet ministers, and [Ecopetrol](#)—Colombia's largely state-owned petrol company—will [meet to discuss how to proceed](#).

89 percent

That's the rise in trade between Colombia and Venezuela in 2022 compared to the prior year, reaching [\\$582 million in 2022](#).

Caracas [broke off relations](#) with Bogotá in 2019 after then Colombian President **Iván Duque** recognized Venezuelan opposition leader **Juan Guaidó** as president. Petro, meanwhile, had made a campaign pledge to [reestablish ties](#) and, in August 2022, the two countries did so, [reopening their shared border](#) on January 1, 2023.

The renewed ties with Venezuela gave pause to the international community, given Colombia's long-standing close relations with Washington, particularly around security issues. At his UN General Assembly debut in September 2022, Petro called the war on drugs a "[resounding failure](#)." Moreover, Russia's ambassador to Colombia [thanked Petro](#) in late January for rejecting Washington's request to send arms to Ukraine.

On the other hand, Bogotá also hosted U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken in

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On the other hand, Bogotá also hosted U.S. Secretary of State **Anthony Blinken** in October, when the U.S. official said the two countries are “largely in sync” on drug policy.



Roundup: Secretary Blinken's Trip to Colombia, Chile, and Peru

The U.S. secretary of state headed to South America to meet with the new presidents and attend the OAS General Assembly.

20,000 hectares

That's the Petro government's goal for coca eradication in 2023, down about 60 percent from the 2022 goal of 50,000. The [UN Office on Drugs and Crime's 2022 drug report](#) showed that Colombia's coca production reached a record high in 2021, the most recent year on record. The Petro administration also [issued a decree](#) to formally end aerial fumigation of coca plants with glyphosate, a herbicide.

Petro has made calls to decriminalize coca growing and plans to focus on [paying farmers not to grow coca](#), among other methods.

25+ armed groups

That's the number of groups the government is negotiating with in the hopes of achieving peace. On October 26, 2022, [Congress approved a bill](#) allowing the Petro administration to negotiate with guerilla, paramilitary, and organized crime groups.

His self-titled “Total Peace” strategy aims to improve Colombia's security panorama by getting these groups to put their weapons down in exchange for benefits like reduced sentences. The National Liberation Army (ELN) is the most prominent group remaining with as many as 5,000 members.

Petro, a former M-19 guerrilla himself, and his government [opened talks](#) with the ELN in Caracas on November 21, 2022, the first time the rebel group has negotiated with a Colombian government since Duque [called off talks in 2019](#) following ELN attacks on a police training school in Bogotá that killed 21 people. Despite the ELN's denial of the ceasefire Petro announced on December 31 with the group, the two sides are [set to meet](#) in Mexico City on February 13 to resume talks.

Per a [February Datexco poll](#), just 26 percent of Colombians approve of how the Petro government is handling the armed conflict.

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