



2.1.1. Colectivos

Colectivos are pro-government paramilitary organisations³⁸² accused of carrying out widespread abuses, often in coordination with state security forces, against protesters and political dissidents.³⁸³ Over time, they have consolidated political and social control in key neighbourhoods, preventing residents from protesting and pressuring them to vote for pro-government candidates.³⁸⁴ Some *colectivos* reportedly conducted drills in late 2025 in preparation for a potential foreign invasion.³⁸⁵

Originally formed under Chávez as ideologically driven groups financed and armed by the state, *colectivos* have evolved into paramilitary structures that combine diminishing state support with increasing involvement in criminal activities to sustain their operations.³⁸⁶ Their close ties to police, military, and political actors have granted them access to subsidised food programmes, enabling them to divert low-cost goods and resell them at higher prices in the areas they control.³⁸⁷ *Colectivos* also maintain strong political connections with PSUV officials, from councillors and mayors to governors and the Minister of the Interior,³⁸⁸ and in some cases act as intermediaries, brokering mutually beneficial arrangements due to their ability to influence local elections by directing residents to support specific candidates in exchange for favours.³⁸⁹ For example, Caracas Mayor Carmen Meléndez has reportedly collaborated closely with the *colectivos* Tres Raíces and La Piedrita, which campaigned for her in return for concessions and contracts.³⁹⁰ Amaya gave the view that 'colectivos are not homogeneous; they do not operate as a single unified organisation and conflicts can arise among them. What is consistent, however, is the fluid communication between *colectivos* and local authorities, as well as the integration that exists between civil and military authorities and these groups. It is therefore unlikely that a core colectivo based in Mérida would communicate with one in Miranda, but each maintains communication with authorities in its respective locality, and authorities do communicate with each other. The relationship is predominantly vertical rather than horizontal, although communication may occur between authorities even when it does not occur between colectivos'.³⁹¹

Colectivos are reportedly under the influence of Interior Minister Diosdado Cabello,³⁹² and following the fall of Maduro, they emerged as key actors due to their alignment with Cabello.³⁹³ Sources indicated that *colectivos* continued operating after Maduro's capture,³⁹⁴ including by patrolling streets,³⁹⁵ restricting civic space, and harassing or intimidating independent media, civil society organisations, and political actors.³⁹⁶

A small number of *colectivos* retain the ideological roots of the community movements from which they emerged; most now prioritise revenue generation by controlling territory, operating local businesses, and negotiating arrangements with political actors.³⁹⁷ In the areas they

dominate, *colectivos* have constructed a powerful system of local governance: they enforce rules and punishments within the communities they oversee, and they manage the distribution of subsidised food and certain public services, consolidating both social control and economic influence.[398](#)

Colectivos also engage in a range of criminal activities,[399](#) operating with near-total impunity due to their political protection.[400](#) Crimes attributed to these groups include kidnapping, robbery, extortion,[401](#) contract killings, small-scale drug distribution, and the illicit sale of subsidised food.[402](#) They additionally establish informal checkpoints within neighbourhoods, where they detain passersby and search their mobile phones for content deemed incriminating or critical of the government.[403](#)

Colectivos are heavily armed and well trained.[404](#) The strongest *colectivos* are found in the 23 de Enero neighbourhood of Caracas, located near the presidential palace; many of these groups have aligned under the Sergio Rodríguez Revolutionary Collectives National Front (Frente Nacional de Colectivos Revolucionarios Sergio Rodríguez).[405](#)

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