



Colombian Election Disinformation Campaign: The Role of Venezuelan Leftists

Investigative Report

March 2022

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Disclaimer

This report was limited to open source and publicly available data. All information is cross-checked against multiple sources for full verification. However, some assessments or conclusions are based on incomplete information and represent the analyst's best judgment based on patterns and data availability.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

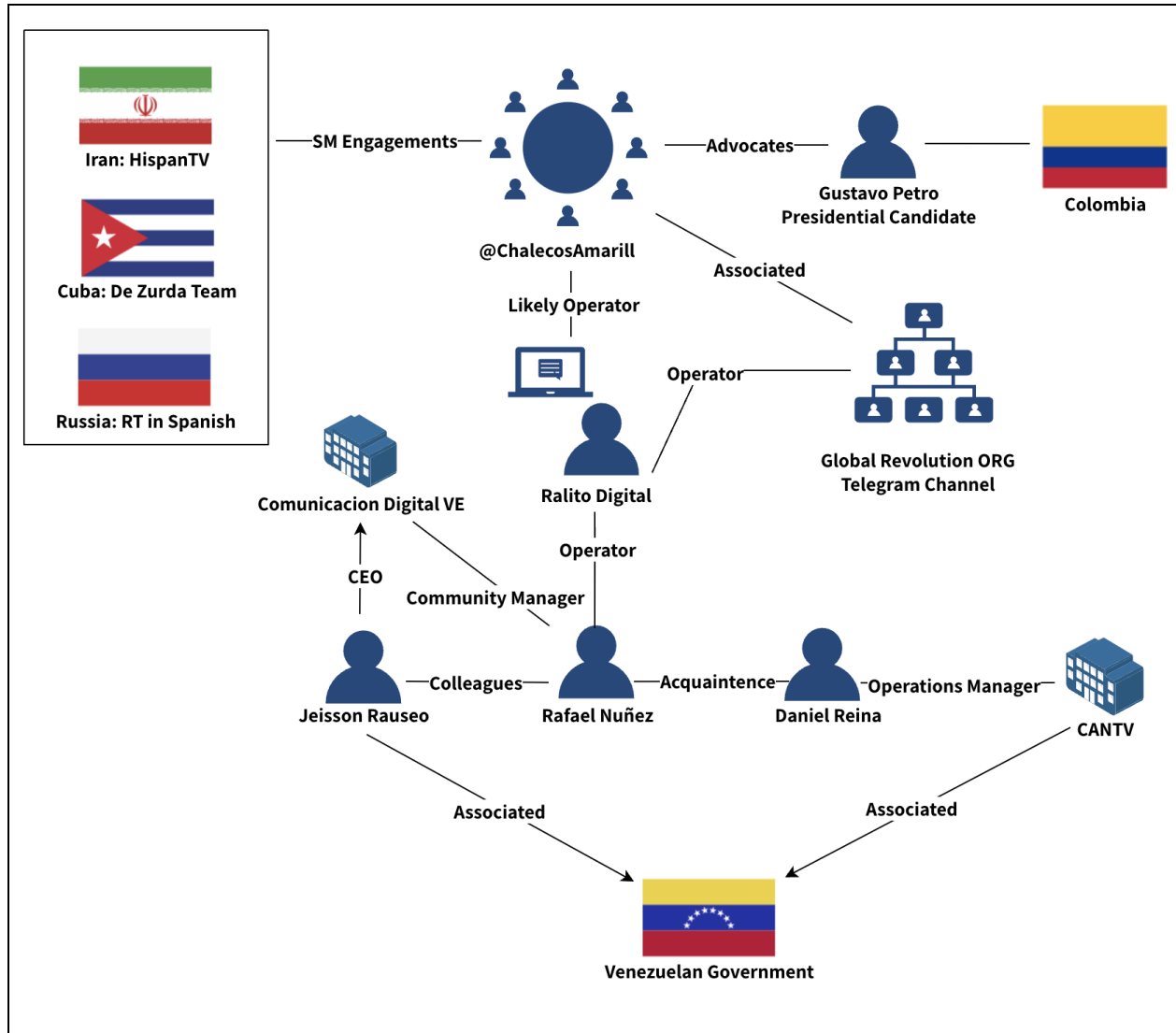
Nisos researchers uncovered a prolific disinformation campaign in which Venezuelan leftist organizations are driving social media narratives in support of current leftist, Colombian Presidential Candidate, and former M-19 revolutionary member, Gustavo Petro. The influential Twitter account, @ChalecosAmarill, is advocating for presidential candidates with foreign policy positions favorable to U.S. adversaries, including Russia, Venezuela, and Cuba. The activity includes engagement with bot/sock puppet social media networks involved in information operations with the aim of influencing the digital environment, especially in Colombia.

@ChalecosAmarill is affiliated with the now-suspended Twitter accounts @_Ralito and @RalitoDigital. Venezuelan national and left-wing supporter, Rafael Nuñez, is responsible for the content found on the Ralito accounts that remain active on other social media platforms. He serves as administrator of a Telegram channel found on @ChalecosAmarill's Twitter bio, GlobalRevolutionORG.

Nuñez serves as Community Manager of "Comunicacion Digital VE," a firm initially involved in developing pro-Venezuelan regime apps, according to reports. The company now offers "strategic and intelligent digital marketing." Its CEO has a Venezuelan government email address and previously served as social media director of Venezuela's Ministry of Communication and Information. Nuñez's social media posts demonstrate a close acquaintance with an executive at Venezuela's national telecommunications agency, CANTV.

Our assessment concludes a high likelihood that Nuñez and his associates are responsible for the content found on @ChalecosAmarill's Twitter account and engagement with known bot/sock puppet networks running various Colombia-focused digital campaigns in favor of Petro. Additionally, it is possible that Nuñez's efforts are a result of Venezuelan government interests.

**Many of the posts shown in the graphics throughout this report have been machine-translated from Spanish to English.*



Graphic 1: Rafael Nuñez's network.

COLOMBIA'S ELECTIONS

Before discussing the details of this investigation, it is important to note the weight the upcoming Colombian presidential election carries in the region and what it means for U.S. foreign policy. For decades, Colombia has been one of the United States' closest allies in Latin America, militarily and diplomatically. Most notably, both countries' counter-narcotics efforts have brought down several groups responsible for cocaine exports to the United States and Europe.^{1,2} Diplomatically, the United States has enjoyed Colombia's support in policies towards what U.S. Southern Command defines as "malign state actors," which include Cuba and Venezuela, both of which are allies of Russia and Iran in the region.³ Recent polls and media articles indicate Petro has a good chance of winning May's election, which could bring about difficult diplomatic decisions for Washington., as Petro's close-knit relationship with Cuba might influence some aspects of his proposed policies in the future.

Petro's growing popularity can be attributed to events that occurred over the past two years, including Colombian law enforcement's aggressive response to anti-government protesters in 2021. This response negatively impacted the current administration's popularity among Colombians. Recent polls show President Ivan Duque's political party, the Center Democratic party, falling behind the "Historic Pact Coalition" led by Petro, who publicly denounced law enforcement's response to protesters.⁴ Additionally, digital activism and disinformation campaigns in favor of Petro appear to be stronger than any other candidate in the Colombian presidential election.

¹<https://www.whitehouse.gov/ondcp/briefing-room/2021/07/16/ondcp-releases-data-on-coca-cultivation-and-potential-cocaine-production-in-the-andean-region/>

² <https://www.aetv.com/real-crime/meet-the-dea-special-agents-who-helped-bring-down-pablo-escobar>

³ <https://www.southcom.mil/Lines-of-Effort/Counter-Threats/>

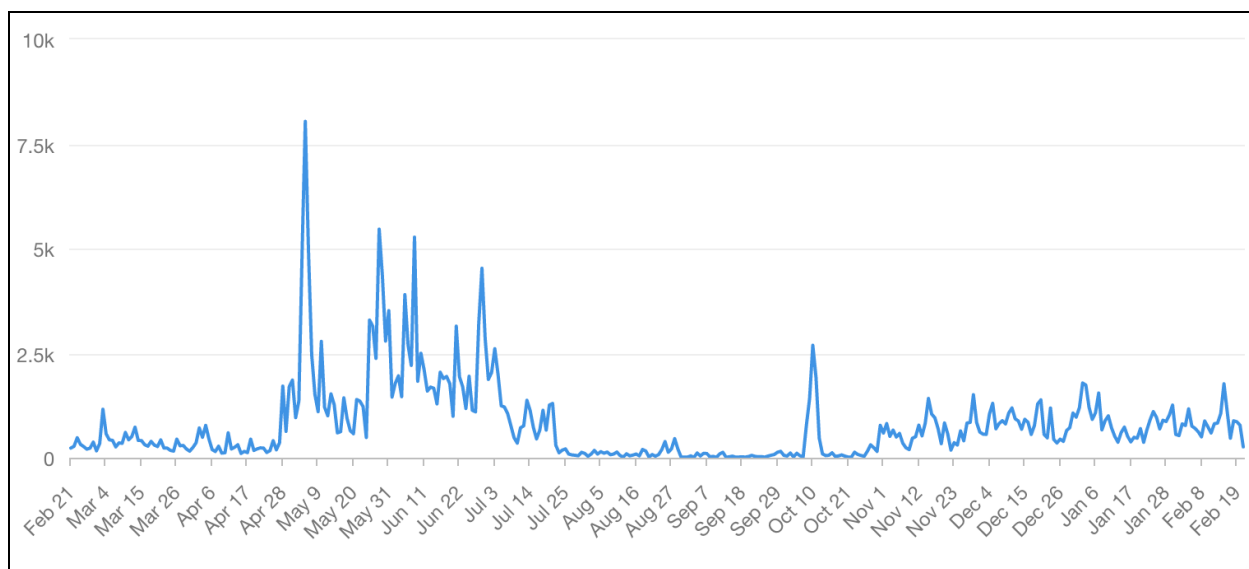
⁴ <https://www.as-coa.org/articles/poll-update-colombias-presidential-race-ahead-march-vote>

“CHALECOSAMARILL”

BACKGROUND

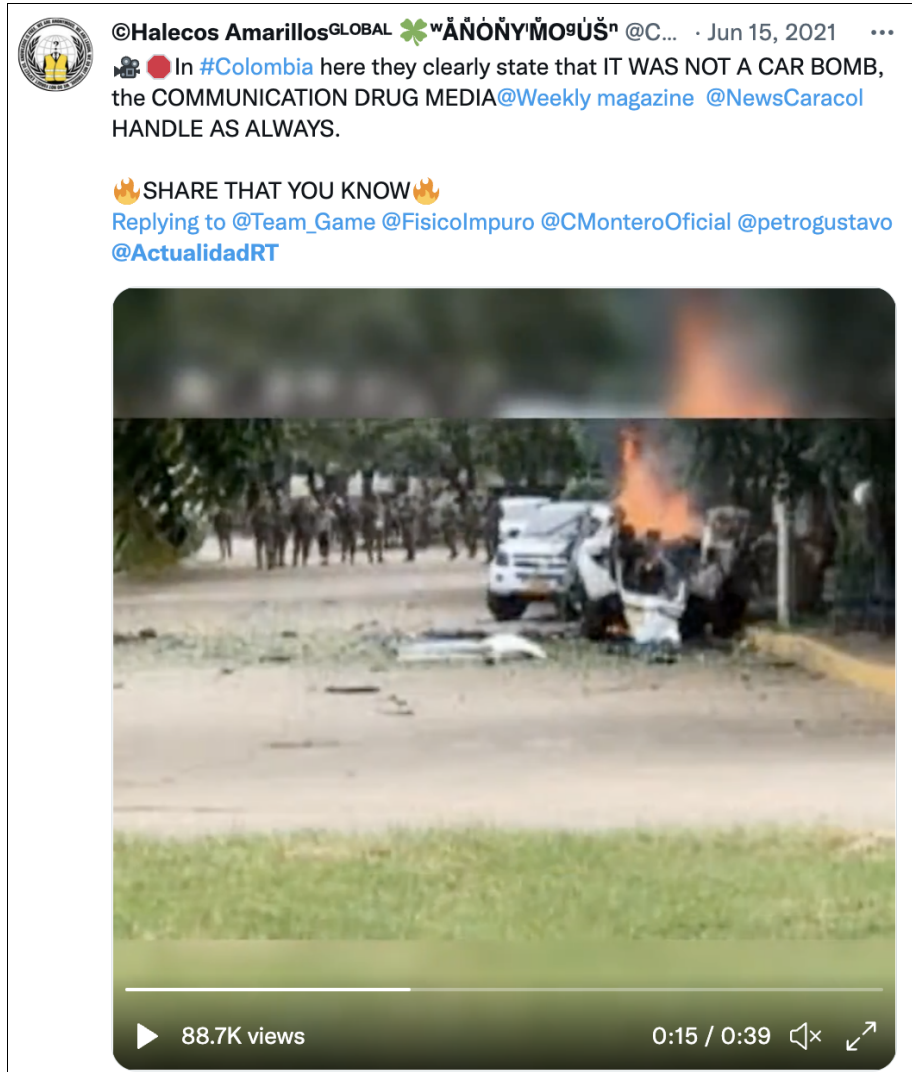
@ChalecosAmarill is a digital entity on Twitter with over 144.1k followers. Its username was likely inspired by the Yellow Vests (‘gilets jaunes’) protests that began in France in November 2018 and called for economic justice and political reform.⁵ @ChalecosAmarill’s social media content provides support for left-wing politicians and movements throughout Latin America, indigenous rights, Palestinian rights, and advocates for Julian Assange, the founder of Wikileaks.

On average, @ChalecosAmarill received 8.76k daily mentions and retweets on Twitter from February 2021 through February 2022. The majority of these accounts were located in Colombia, Venezuela, Spain, Mexico, and Chile. Although most Twitter users do not geotag or disclose their true location, @ChalecosAmarill received over 8k mentions from Colombia-based accounts on 5 May 2021, during anti-government protests in the country. This demonstrates the successful infiltration of Colombia-based social media narratives during political unrest.



Graphic 2: Timeline of Colombia-based Twitter accounts @-mentioning and retweeting @ChalecosAmarill.

⁵ <https://www.nprl.org/2018/12/03/672862353/who-are-frances-yellow-vest-protesters-and-what-do-they-want>



Graphic 4: @ChalecosAmarill’s post mentioning Petro (@PetroGustavo) and Russia’s Spanish language media outlet, RT en Español, in an inaccurate post about a car bomb that exploded in a Colombian military facility last summer.¹¹

¹¹ [https://twitter\[.\]com/ChalecosAmarill/status/1404943778100793357](https://twitter[.]com/ChalecosAmarill/status/1404943778100793357)



Graphic 5: @ChalecosAmarillo's post claiming that the congresspersons listed in this post make up a "narco dictatorship" under Colombia's current administration.¹²

¹² <https://twitter.com/ChalecosAmarillo/status/1493030815952998404>



Graphic 6: @ChalecosAmarill's post from 2020 spreading disinformation about Colombia's former president and @-mentioning Russia and Iran's state-sponsored, Spanish-language news outlet.¹³ The Iranian account has been suspended by Twitter for violating its terms of service.

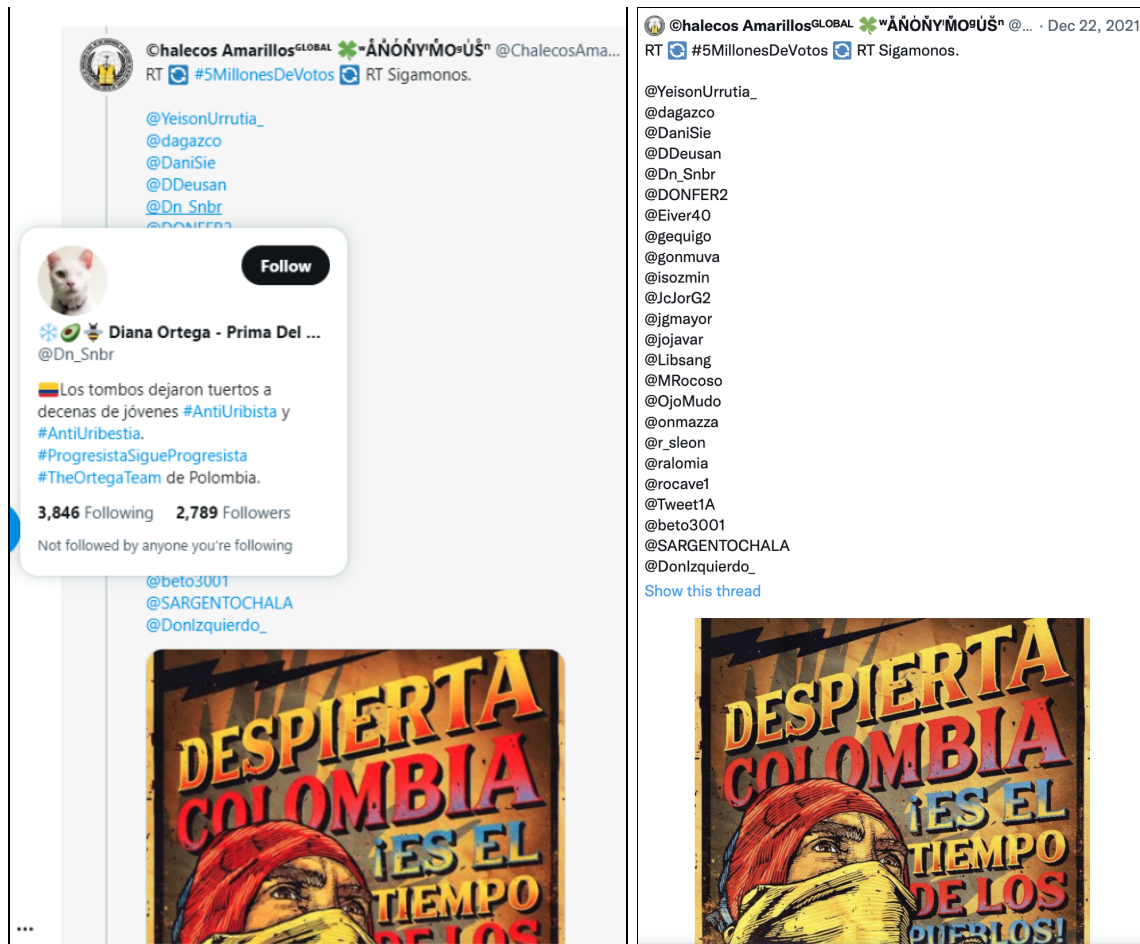


Graphic 7: @ChalecosAmarill's post claiming the United States financed coups in several countries, including Colombia, without providing additional information to support the claim.¹⁴

Sock puppet/bot networks

¹³ <https://twitter.com/ChalecosAmarill/status/1212587501908615168>

¹⁴ <https://twitter.com/ChalecosAmarill/status/1482418037038927877>



Graphics 9 & 10: (Left) Post from December 2021 highlighting @ChalecosAmarill tagging bots, including those appearing to be Petro supporters through the use of bee and avocado emojis during a digital campaign to get Colombians to vote for Colombia’s Humana party members in the congressional elections, using the hashtag #5millonesdevotos (‘5 million votes’). @ChalecosAmarill urged its network and audience to follow several accounts, including the identified bots. (Right) Snapshot of the same tweet in February 2022 showing that all the accounts tagged in that post were suspended by Twitter for violating its terms of service.

A Cuban sock puppet/bot network has also interacted with @ChalecosAmarill, including posts relevant to Colombia. The hashtag #DeZurdaTeam was found to be associated with a Cuban social network engaged in information operations supporting Cuba's government policies and opposing the United States’ economic sanctions targeting its government.¹⁵

¹⁵ <https://fsi.stanford.edu/publication/dezurdateam-twitter-network-promotes-pro-cuba-hashtags>



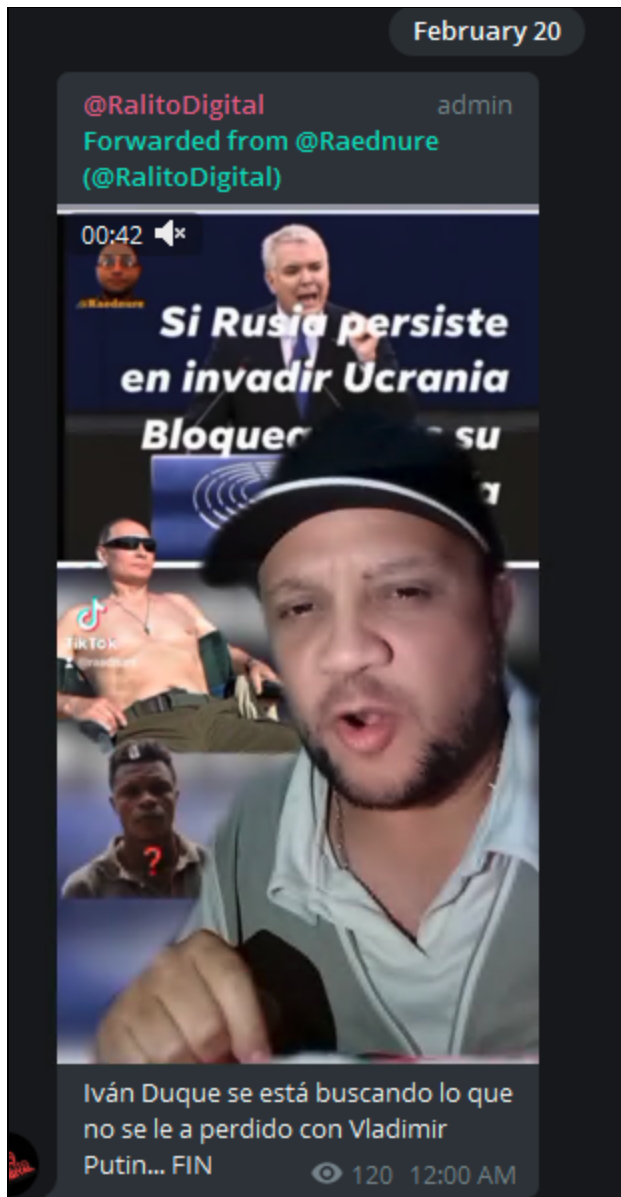
Graphic 11: Possible sock puppet account using the Cuban social network’s hashtag #DeZurdaTeam and @-mentioning @ChalecosAmarill in a post relevant to Colombia’s Mobile Anti-Disturbance Squadron. It also uses popular hashtags about COVID-19 in a likely attempt to draw additional attention from other Twitter users.

Using Twitter’s advanced search functionality, we were able to capture the interactions among the accounts pictured above.

Associated Accounts

- *Colombia-focused Twitter Account:* Using a keyword search to identify other accounts with similarities in Twitter bios, we identified an associated and less influential profile focused solely on Colombia, @amarilloscol. Although the profile only had about a month’s worth of content, from July through August 2021, @ChalecosAmarill appeared as one of its 25 followers.
- *Telegram Channel:* @ChalecosAmarill’s Twitter bio includes a link to Telegram Channel, GlobalRevolutionORG.¹⁶ An account, RalitoDigital, serves as its administrator (see graphic 12). Content advocating for the governments of Cuba, Venezuela, Nicaragua, and Russia is often shared by RalitoDigital and various other Telegram users.

¹⁶ t[.]me/globalrevolutionORG



Graphic 12: Example of RalitoDigital's post in the Telegram channel listed in @ChalecosAmarill's Twitter bio, indicating administrative status.

RALITO DIGITAL

Ralito Digital is a Venezuela-based digital entity found on Facebook, Instagram, Telegram, and TikTok. Ralito Digital posts video commentary about world politics, specifically, adverse opinions about the United States and its allies within the Telegram channel posted on @ChalecosAmarill's Twitter bio. Twitter suspended two accounts formerly attributed to the entity, @_Ralito and @RalitoDigital. The suspended accounts referenced @ChalecosAmarill in their bios. Archived posts demonstrate numerous



Graphics 15 & 16: Examples of @ChalecosAmarill's posts that @-mention @_Ralito.

The narrative found in the Ralito Digital accounts is similar to the narrative posted by @ChalecosAmarill and focuses more on Venezuela and its left-wing leadership under Nicolas Maduro's administration. These accounts advocate for Maduro's policies and denounce the United States and its allies, including Colombia. Several indicators point to a separate Venezuelan digital actor, @Raednure, as the entity behind the Ralito Digital accounts.



Graphic 17: @Raednure Twitter profile demonstrating the same bio found in the now-suspended Ralito Twitter accounts.



Graphic 18: @Raednure’s post showing gratitude for RT in Spanish’s Deputy Director, Inna Afinogenova’s, recognition of his feedback on her show’s programming.¹⁷ @ChalecosAmarill is also mentioned by @Raednure in this post.

¹⁷ [twitter\[.\]com/Raednure/status/1476325341178257413](https://twitter.com/Raednure/status/1476325341178257413)

Rafael Nuñez

@Raednure is found on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok. The user behind this account is Rafael Nuñez, Community Manager of Comunicacion Digital VE, a firm that specializes in “strategic and intelligent digital marketing.” Nuñez’s social media accounts indicate meetings with important individuals within Venezuela’s national telecommunications company, CANTV.¹⁸ On January 19, 2022, he posted pictures with CANTV’s Operations Manager, Daniel Reina. Nuñez alleges they grew up in the same town and have been friends for years.¹⁹ One of the pictures posted to Instagram shows Nuñez, Reina, and another individual meeting in an office, possibly indicating a work-related reunion.

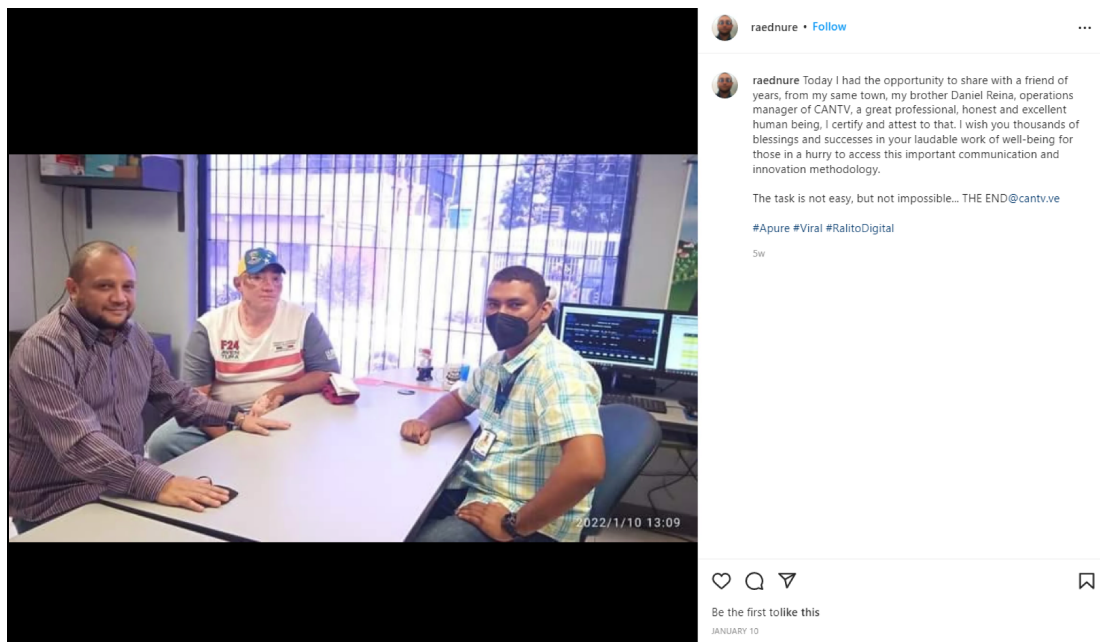


Graphic 19: Rafael Nuñez’s LinkedIn account highlighting his associations with Comunicacion Digital VE and Ralito Digital.²⁰

¹⁸ [instagram\[.\]com/p/CYkkYOHoOvs/](https://www.instagram.com/p/CYkkYOHoOvs/)

¹⁹ [instagram\[.\]com/p/CYkmTwzlix2/](https://www.instagram.com/p/CYkmTwzlix2/)

²⁰ [ve.linkedin\[.\]com/in/rafael-Nuñez-385896161](https://ve.linkedin[.]com/in/rafael-Nuñez-385896161)



Graphics 20 & 21: Pictures of Rafael Nuñez posted to Instagram highlighting a meeting with CANTV’s Operations Manager.

COMUNICACION DIGITAL VE

Nuñez’s association with Comunicacion Digital VE raises questions about the purpose of his digital activities. First, this company is not registered on Venezuela’s company registry website. Its publicly

available address and phone number are associated with a Venezuelan-Colombian company specializing in architectural design software, Grupo Abstract. However, there are no indications this firm is involved in Comunicacion Digital VE's leadership activities. Second, a Bloomberg report from 2018 noted that Comunicacion Digital VE served as an app developer and created various apps in support of Venezuela's socialist regime available in Google's app store.²¹ Following the Venezuelan presidential elections in 2018, it appears the company shifted focus and started to specialize in "strategic and intelligent digital marketing."²² @ChalecosAmarill's Twitter account was created in December 2018, several months after Nicolas Maduro was re-elected. Third, its CEO, Jeisson Rauseo, previously served as Director of Social Networks at Venezuela's Ministry of People's Power for Communication and Information (MINCI).²³ Although Rauseo claims to have left the organization in 2016, we identified another government-affiliated email address associated with Venezuela's National Institute for Socialist Training and Education.²⁴ Rauseo's various social media accounts serve different purposes. One of the lesser influential Twitter accounts, @jdbartolor, is followed by Venezuela's Minister of Foreign Affairs- Jorge Arreaza, regime-associated politician- Diosdado Cabello, Nicolas Maduro's political party- PSUV, and the Ministry of People's Power for Communication and Information, likely indicating a continuous relationship with Venezuela's government and potentially supporting a digital operation targeting Colombian politics.²⁵ Lastly, commercial data indicates the firm earned 1.5 million USD in sales (timeframe not listed).²⁶ That information would typically be found on Venezuela's Corporate Registry website, especially if government procurement occurred, but since the company does not appear to be registered in Venezuela, that information is not available.

²¹ <https://www.bloombergquint.com/onweb/confused-by-venezuela-s-currency-chaos-there-s-an-app-for-that>

²² <https://www.facebook.com/ComunicacionDigitalVE/>

²³ <http://ve.globedia.com/mayor-comunicacion-despliega-aragua-taller-digital>

²⁴ <https://kchikmo.wordpress.com/2016/09/02/el-cooperante-miente-sobre-mi-renuncia-al-mippci-aclaratoria/>

²⁵ twitter.com/JDBartoloR

²⁶ https://www.dnb.com/business-directory/company-profiles.comunicacion_digital_ve_c_a.d001ba5d7af4f1f9d5b9e7006ce42395.html



Graphic 22: Example of Jeisson Rauseo's Twitter (@jdbartolor) followers, which includes Venezuelan government leaders.

The company's murky corporate presence, its leadership's explicit digital activities, and other government links all point to a possible motive to steer the narrative in favor of Petro, which would benefit Venezuela and Cuba. Such outcomes would also favor Russia and Iran because of their diplomatic relationships with Venezuela and the island nation. Petro's digital support from legitimate supporters, bot/sock puppet networks, and foreign state-linked entities likely increase his chances of becoming Colombia's next president.