

Analysing the geoeconomic and geostrategic position of Colombia in the geopolitical equations of the Latin American region

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ABSTRACT

Colombia, as one of the strategic countries in Latin America, holds a significant position in the region's geoeconomic and geopolitical equations. Due to its unique geographical location, rich natural resources, access to both the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, and membership in regional and international organizations such as the Pacific Alliance and the Organization of American States, Colombia plays a vital role in shaping regional economic policies and trends. This article aims to examine Colombia's geoeconomic position within the geopolitical equations of Latin America and assess how this position contributes to the country's regional and global influence. Colombia's geographical location has turned it into one of the most critical international hubs in the region. Its access to two oceans and its placement along global transport corridors have enabled Colombia to become a transit hub and a center for regional trade. These characteristics have enhanced the country's geoeconomic role in strengthening its geopolitical position. Furthermore, Colombia's significant natural resources — including oil, coal, coffee, and agricultural products — have played a considerable role in both its domestic economic development and its bargaining power in political and diplomatic interactions. An analysis of Colombia's economic and geopolitical policies shows that the country aims to strengthen its regional influence by developing transportation infrastructure, regional ports, and railways, and participating in multilateral initiatives such as trade and economic agreements. Colombia's membership in the Pacific Alliance and its extensive economic interactions with Latin American countries provide valuable opportunities for the nation to enhance its geoeconomic standing and influence regional geopolitical equations. However, challenges such as internal insecurity, the influence of drug cartels, administrative corruption, and socio-economic inequalities remain significant barriers to Colombia's efforts to stabilize its position in regional geoeconomic and geopolitical equations. Alongside these domestic issues, the competition between global powers such as the United States and China in Latin America also plays a crucial role in determining Colombia's position. The United States, as Colombia's strategic partner, holds substantial influence over the country's policies and economy, while China is increasingly seeking to expand its influence in the region through economic investments and infrastructure projects. The findings of this study indicate that Colombia is pursuing geoeconomy-based economic policies to balance its geopolitical relations and increase its regional and international power. The development of trade corridors and economic infrastructure, the strengthening of regional economic ties, and the utilization of natural resources are among Colombia's key strategies to solidify its geoeconomic position in the region. In this context, Colombia strives to overcome internal challenges and leverage regional geopolitical opportunities to become a key player in Latin America's geopolitical and geoeconomic equations.

Keywords:

Colombia, Geoeconomy, Geopolitics, Latin America, Foreign Policy, Economic Development

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1. INTRODUCTION

Geoeconomics, as a modern branch of political geography, examines the interaction between economic activities and geographical factors and their impact on power dynamics and political equations (Flint, 2017). In this context, countries' geographical locations and economic resources play a pivotal role in shaping their geopolitical power. Colombia, as one of the key countries in Latin America, holds a unique position in these equations. Exploring its geoeconomic position can provide deeper insights into the region's geopolitical trends (O'Toole, 2019). Colombia's geographical location, with coastlines on both the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, and its strategic position between North and South America, makes it one of the main global trade corridors in the region (Rodriguez, 2021). This location allows Colombia to participate in international transit and trade projects, turning it into a regional hub for transportation and commerce (Salazar & Smith, 2020). Its access to two oceans enables Colombia to play a significant role in international shipping lines and maintain direct access to global markets (Garcia, 2022). In addition to its geographical location, Colombia is rich in natural resources that significantly impact geoeconomic equations. It is the fourth-largest oil producer in Latin America and a major exporter of coal, coffee, and flowers worldwide (World Bank, 2023). These resources not only meet domestic needs but also enhance Colombia's bargaining power in trade and diplomatic negotiations (Jones, 2020). At the same time, these natural resources have made Colombia a target for foreign investments, particularly from China and the United States (Gonzalez, 2021). From a geopolitical perspective, Colombia has sought to increase its influence in regional political and economic equations by joining regional organizations and trade agreements (Perez, 2019). One of the most important organizations Colombia is part of is the Pacific Alliance, recognized as one of the most dynamic economic coalitions in Latin America (UNCTAD, 2022). This

organization has connected Colombia to an extensive network of regional economic cooperation, allowing it to play a prominent role in regional trade trends (Martinez, 2021). However, Colombia faces multiple challenges in stabilizing its geoeconomic position. Internal insecurity caused by paramilitary groups and drug cartels is one of the biggest obstacles to the country's economic and political development (Bergquist, 2019). Additionally, economic inequalities, administrative corruption, and insufficient infrastructure reduce Colombia's competitiveness compared to other countries in the region (Sanchez, 2020). Moreover, the role of extra-regional powers, such as the United States and China, in Latin America's geopolitical equations has influenced Colombia's geoeconomic position (Smith, 2021). The United States, as Colombia's strategic partner, plays a significant role in supporting the country's efforts to combat drug trafficking and promote economic development. Meanwhile, China is increasing its influence in Colombia and other Latin American countries through infrastructure projects and investments in the energy sector (Zhao, 2022). Therefore, analyzing Colombia's geoeconomic position in regional geopolitical equations requires a deep understanding of the economic, political, and geographical factors affecting the country. This study aims to analyze Colombia's geoeconomic and geopolitical trends, assess their impact on regional and global power dynamics, and predict the country's future prospects in politics and economics.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study is descriptive-analytical in nature and employs a qualitative approach to examine Colombia's geoeconomic position in the geopolitical equations of Latin America. Data collection was conducted through documentary and library research from credible sources, including academic books, research articles, international reports, and databases. The data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis and comparative analysis to

identify the impact of geoeconomic factors on Colombia's geopolitical policies at both regional and global levels. This research methodology aims to provide a deeper understanding of the relationship between economics and politics within the framework of regional political geography.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Understanding Colombia's geoeconomic position requires a comprehensive examination of geoeconomics and geopolitics and the interaction between these concepts at regional and international levels. The theoretical framework of this study includes conceptual and theoretical approaches related to geoeconomics, geopolitics, regionalism, and the role of natural resources and trade corridors in shaping a country's power.

3.1 Geoeconomics: The Intersection of Economy and Geography

The term "geoeconomics" was first introduced by Edward Luttwak (1990), who argued that in the post-Cold War era, military competition has been replaced by economic rivalry, with countries leveraging economic tools to enhance their power and influence (Luttwak, 1993). In this context, natural resources, geographical position, transportation infrastructure, and participation in regional trade organizations are key factors in determining a country's geoeconomic power (Cowen & Smith, 2019). Colombia's unique geographical position and abundant natural resources provide significant potential for utilizing geoeconomic strategies. Its access to both the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans and its location along international trade corridors have positioned it as a key player in regional and global trade (Garcia, 2022).

3.2 Geopolitics: The Influence of Geography on Power

Geopolitics examines the impact of geographical factors on the power dynamics of states. Friedrich Ratzel (1897), one of the founders of this field, believed that a country's power is closely tied to its control over territory and resources (Dodds, 2020). Colombia's geographical location, acting as a bridge between North and South America and providing access to international waterways, plays a significant role in shaping its geopolitical policies (Rodriguez, 2021). Geopolitical theorists argue that controlling natural resources and strategic transportation routes is essential for enhancing a country's power in the international system (Flint, 2017). Colombia's natural resources, including oil, coal, and coffee, have strengthened its economic power within the region (Jones, 2020).

3.3 Regionalism and Economic Integration

Regionalism is a key tool for strengthening a country's geoeconomic position. According to new regionalism theories, countries can increase their bargaining power in global negotiations by forming unions and economic organizations (Söderbaum, 2016). Colombia has sought to enhance its economic and political influence in Latin America through membership in organizations such as the Pacific Alliance and the Organization of American States (OAS) (Martinez, 2021). These alliances provide platforms for economic cooperation and trade, strengthening diplomatic ties between member countries (Perez, 2019).

3.4 Natural Resources and Their Role in Geoeconomics

Geoeconomic theorists emphasize that natural resources are critical in shaping a country's economic power. Paul Kennedy (1987), in his book *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*, argued that access to and optimal utilization of natural resources play a vital role in enhancing a country's economic and political power (Kennedy, 1987). Colombia's vast natural resources, including oil, coal, coffee, and agricultural products, provide the country with significant potential to become an economic powerhouse in the region (World Bank, 2023). However, challenges such as corruption and weak infrastructure hinder the country from fully utilizing its resources (Sanchez, 2020).

3.5 Trade and Transit Corridors

One of the key components of geoeconomics is trade and transit corridors, which play a vital role in connecting global markets. According to Mackinder's (1904) theory, control over transit routes and trade corridors can enhance a country's geopolitical power (Dodds, 2020). Colombia has been working to develop its ports, railways, and transportation infrastructure to become a major transit corridor in the region (Salazar & Smith, 2020). Projects such as the Pacific Ocean Railway and Buenaventura Port aim to strengthen Colombia's position in global trade networks (Garcia, 2022).

4. RESEARCH FINDINGS

4.1 Colombia's Geographic Location and Its Impact on Geoeconomic Position

The findings of this study reveal that Colombia's strategic geographic location plays a significant role in shaping its geoeconomic position in Latin America. Colombia is the only country in the region with access to both the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, making it one of the main corridors for international trade (Garcia, 2022). Access to international waterways and strategic ports such as Buenaventura and Cartagena facilitates the trade of goods between Asia, Europe, and North America (Rodriguez, 2021).

Additionally, Colombia serves as a geographic bridge between the continents of North and South America, playing a crucial role in connecting the economies of both regions (Salazar & Smith, 2020). Furthermore, Colombia's proximity to the Panama Canal and access to this global transit route provide the country with a unique opportunity for economic development and participation in regional transit projects (Perez, 2019).

4.2 Natural Resources and Their Role in Colombia's Geoeconomic

Colombia is rich in natural resources, including oil, coal, gold, nickel, coffee, and agricultural products, which have made it one of the region's major producers of raw materials (Jones, 2020). According to World Bank statistics (2023), the oil and gas industry accounts for more than 50% of Colombia's exports. Colombia's coal reserves are among the largest in the region, playing a key role in energy supply and increasing the country's export revenues (World Bank, 2023). In addition to mineral resources, Colombia is one of the world's largest coffee producers. The export of agricultural products such as flowers, fruits, and sugar also makes a significant contribution to the country's economy (Sanchez, 2020). These natural resources have strengthened Colombia's bargaining power in regional economic negotiations and enabled its participation in global value chains (Zhao, 2022).

4.3 Regional Policies and Participation in Economic Organizations

Colombia has sought to strengthen its geoeconomic position by joining regional organizations such as the Pacific Alliance, MERCOSUR, and the Organization of American States (OAS) (Martinez, 2021). The Pacific Alliance, comprising Colombia, Chile, Mexico, and Peru, is considered one of the most successful trade blocs in Latin America. This organization aims to eliminate trade barriers and facilitate economic cooperation among its members (UNCTAD, 2022). Furthermore, through free trade agreements with countries such as the United States, Canada, and the European Union, Colombia has expanded its access to international markets (Gonzalez, 2021). These agreements have played a significant role in attracting foreign investment and boosting the country's economic growth (Smith, 2021).

4.4 Colombia's Security and Economic Challenges

Despite its geoeconomic potential, Colombia faces several challenges that negatively impact its position in geopolitical equations. The main challenges include internal insecurity, drug trafficking, and administrative corruption (Bergquist, 2019). The activities of paramilitary groups and drug cartels in Colombia are among the country's biggest obstacles to economic development (Jones, 2020). Internal insecurity has reduced foreign investment, lowered production, and increased economic inequality (Sanchez, 2020). Moreover, Colombia's weak transport infrastructure and inefficient systems at its ports and airports have reduced the country's competitiveness (Garcia, 2022). Despite government efforts to improve infrastructure, more investment is still needed in this area (Rodriguez, 2021).

4.5 The Role of Extraregional Powers in Colombia's Geoeconomic Position

The role of extraregional powers such as the United States and China is significant in Colombia's geopolitical and geoeconomic equations. The United States, as Colombia's strategic partner, plays a key role in combating drug trafficking and developing the country's economic infrastructure (Smith, 2021). Conversely, China has increased its investments in Colombia's infrastructure, energy, and agriculture sectors to strengthen its influence in the country and the Latin American region (Zhao, 2022). This competition between the United States and China has placed Colombia in a delicate position, forcing its policymakers to adopt balanced strategies (Gonzalez, 2021).

4.6 Future Outlook for Colombia's Geoeconomic Position

An analysis of Colombia's geoeconomic trends indicates that the country has the potential to become a regional hub in trade and transit (Salazar & Smith, 2020). However, realizing this potential requires overcoming internal challenges and improving economic infrastructure. Participating in transit projects such as China's Belt and Road Initiative could help develop Colombia's transport infrastructure and increase its access to Asian markets (Garcia, 2022). Additionally, implementing economic reforms and combating corruption could attract more foreign investment and improve economic conditions (Sanchez, 2020).

5. DISCUSSION

Colombia, with its strategic geographical position, holds significant importance in the geo-economic dynamics of Latin America. It is the only country in the region with access to both the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, making it one of the main corridors for international trade. Access to key strategic ports such as Buenaventura and Cartagena places Colombia on global trade routes, allowing it to serve as a vital link between global markets and play a crucial role in regional economic development. However, despite its prominent geographical position, Colombia still faces numerous economic

and security challenges that negatively impact its geo-economic standing. One of these challenges is the weakness of its transport infrastructure, which reduces Colombia's competitiveness compared to neighbouring countries. For instance, many of the country's ports and airports require significant upgrades to meet the growing demands of international trade. In terms of natural resources, Colombia is one of the largest producers of oil, coal, gold, and coffee in Latin America. These abundant resources account for a substantial portion of the country's exports. Particularly, the oil industry serves as a cornerstone of Colombia's economy, contributing significantly to its exports and GDP. However, heavy reliance on natural resources exposes Colombia to global price fluctuations, especially in the oil market. In times of declining oil prices, the Colombian economy may face crises. Moreover, the lack of diversification in exports and insufficient attention to other sectors, such as technology and manufacturing, could pose long-term challenges to the country's economic stability.

In addition to its natural resources, Colombia benefits from being situated in a region with a large population and major markets in Latin America, giving it significant advantages in regional trade. Colombia aims to strengthen trade relations with neighbouring countries and beyond through participation in economic organizations such as the Pacific Alliance and Mercosur. These regional policies allow Colombia to capitalize on economic cooperation within Latin America and influence regional economic and political processes. Furthermore, trade agreements with the United States, the European Union, and China have enabled Colombia to access major global markets and benefit from free trade opportunities. However, internal challenges such as corruption, insecurity, and economic inefficiencies hinder the optimal utilization of these opportunities. Internal security in Colombia remains one of the key obstacles to economic growth. Despite government efforts to combat paramilitary groups and drug cartels, these groups remain active in many parts of the country and pose serious threats to national stability. The presence of these groups, in addition to security threats, discourages foreign investment and increases government expenses to address these crises. Furthermore, social and economic inequality in certain regions has led to social unrest, which negatively impacts Colombia's development. Moreover, in some areas, there are still significant deficiencies in providing basic infrastructure such as electricity, water, and transportation, which can hinder foreign investment.

In foreign policy, Colombia seeks to leverage its economic relations with extra-regional powers such as the United States and China. The United States, as Colombia's traditional security and trade partner, plays a key role in combating drug trafficking and strengthening trade relations. However, in recent years, China has emerged as a major player in Colombia's economic relations. China has been investing in various sectors of Colombia's economy, particularly in infrastructure and energy, to increase its influence in the country. The competition between the United States and China in Colombia has prompted the country's policymakers to adopt complex and balanced strategies to benefit from both countries while safeguarding national interests. The findings of this study suggest that Colombia, with its strategic geo-economic position and abundant natural resources, has the potential to become a key economic and geo-economic player in Latin America. By investing in infrastructure, developing non-oil industries, and improving internal security, Colombia can capitalize on its strengths. However, security challenges, corruption, and internal inefficiencies remain serious threats to the country's economic and political growth. If Colombia can overcome these challenges and effectively utilize international and regional opportunities, it could become one of the leading geo-economic powers in Latin America.

6. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Colombia, with its strategic geographical location, holds immense potential to play a key role in the geo-economic dynamics of Latin America and even at the global level. The country's access to both the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans places it in a unique geo-economic position. Its ability to engage in trade with various countries through major ports like Buenaventura and Cartagena offers Colombia endless economic opportunities. From this perspective, Colombia has the capacity to become a crucial hub for regional and global trade exchanges, acting as a bridge between markets. However, despite this potential, the country still faces significant internal and international challenges that hinder the full realization of its capabilities. At the domestic level, Colombia struggles with structural and security challenges, particularly the presence of paramilitary groups and drug cartels, which pose serious threats to national stability. These groups not only jeopardize internal security but also directly impact the country's economic and social development. Despite considerable efforts to address these issues, the persistence of such challenges indicates that achieving lasting political and economic stability will require more time and comprehensive strategies.

Another major obstacle is systemic corruption within certain government sectors and public institutions. Corruption, especially in areas related to financial management and infrastructure projects, undermines the

efficiency of government institutions and erodes public trust. This issue diminishes Colombia's domestic credibility and indirectly affects its international relations and ability to attract foreign investment. Economically, Colombia's heavy reliance on natural resources, particularly oil, poses risks to the country's future economic stability. Fluctuations in global oil prices can quickly impact the Colombian economy, causing revenue instability and financial crises. The country needs to diversify its economy to reduce its vulnerability to global economic shocks. Economic diversification would help ensure sustainable growth and long-term development. Furthermore, focusing solely on natural resources deprives Colombia of opportunities in other sectors such as technology, industry, and services. Despite these challenges, Colombia has significant opportunities that, if properly utilized, could strengthen its position in geo-economic and geopolitical equations. One of these opportunities is Colombia's important role in international economic and trade relations. By expanding trade agreements and partnerships with neighbouring countries and global powers, Colombia can open new markets for its products and establish itself as a key player in international trade. The country should take advantage of its membership in organizations such as the Pacific Alliance and Mercosur to reinforce its role in regional economic and political processes. Additionally, by leveraging its natural resources and investing in infrastructure, Colombia can boost productivity across various industries.

At the global level, the competition between extra-regional powers such as the United States and China presents both challenges and opportunities for Colombian policymakers. The country must adopt smart strategies to benefit from its relations with both powers. Effectively utilizing Chinese investments alongside maintaining strong ties with the United States can help enhance Colombia's global geo-economic position. These interactions can contribute to infrastructure development, industrial growth, and even improved internal security. Moreover, advancements in sectors such as tourism, agriculture, and food production can help diversify Colombia's economy. Given its abundant natural and cultural attractions, the country has great potential to become a leading tourist destination. Likewise, enhancing its agricultural sector and focusing on high-quality production can give Colombia a competitive edge in global markets. Ultimately, Colombia is at a crucial juncture where it can significantly strengthen its position in Latin America and beyond by optimizing its natural and strategic potential. However, to achieve this goal, the country must address its internal challenges, particularly in security and corruption, while focusing on economic diversification and sustainable development. If Colombia follows this path, it has the potential to become a leading economic and geo-economic power in the region and play a more influential role in global affairs.

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