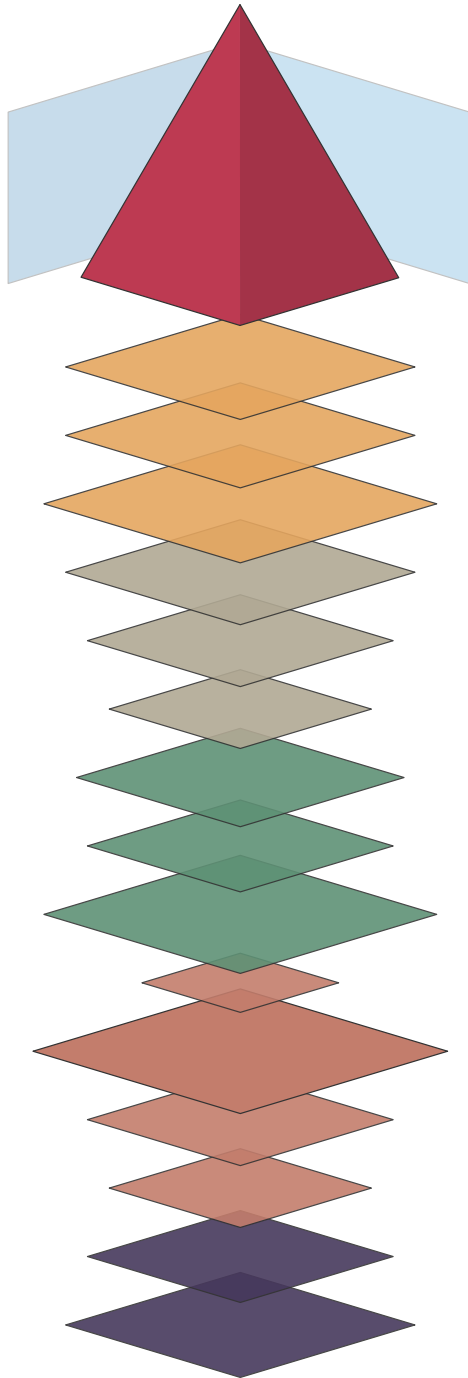
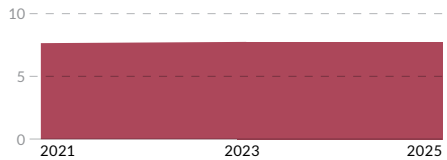


 **COLOMBIA**



7.82 $\nearrow 0.07$
CRIMINALITY SCORE

2nd of 193 countries -
1st of 35 American countries -
1st of 12 South American countries -



CRIMINAL MARKETS **7.43** $\nearrow 0.13$

HUMAN TRAFFICKING	8.00	0.00
HUMAN SMUGGLING	8.00	$\nearrow 0.50$
EXTORTION & PROTECTION RACKETEERING	9.00	$\nearrow 0.50$
ARMS TRAFFICKING	8.00	0.00
TRADE IN COUNTERFEIT GOODS	7.00	$\searrow 0.50$
ILLCIT TRADE IN EXCISABLE GOODS	6.00	$\nearrow 1.50$
FLORA CRIMES	7.50	$\nearrow 0.50$
FAUNA CRIMES	7.00	0.00
NON-RENEWABLE RESOURCE CRIMES	9.00	0.00
HEROIN TRADE	4.50	$\searrow 0.50$
COCAINE TRADE	9.50	0.00
CANNABIS TRADE	7.00	0.00
SYNTHETIC DRUG TRADE	6.00	0.00
CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES	7.00	0.00
FINANCIAL CRIMES	8.00	0.00



CRIMINAL ACTORS **8.20** 0.00

MAFIA-STYLE GROUPS	9.50	0.00
CRIMINAL NETWORKS	9.50	0.00
STATE-EMBEDDED ACTORS	7.50	0.00
FOREIGN ACTORS	7.50	0.00
PRIVATE SECTOR ACTORS	7.00	0.00



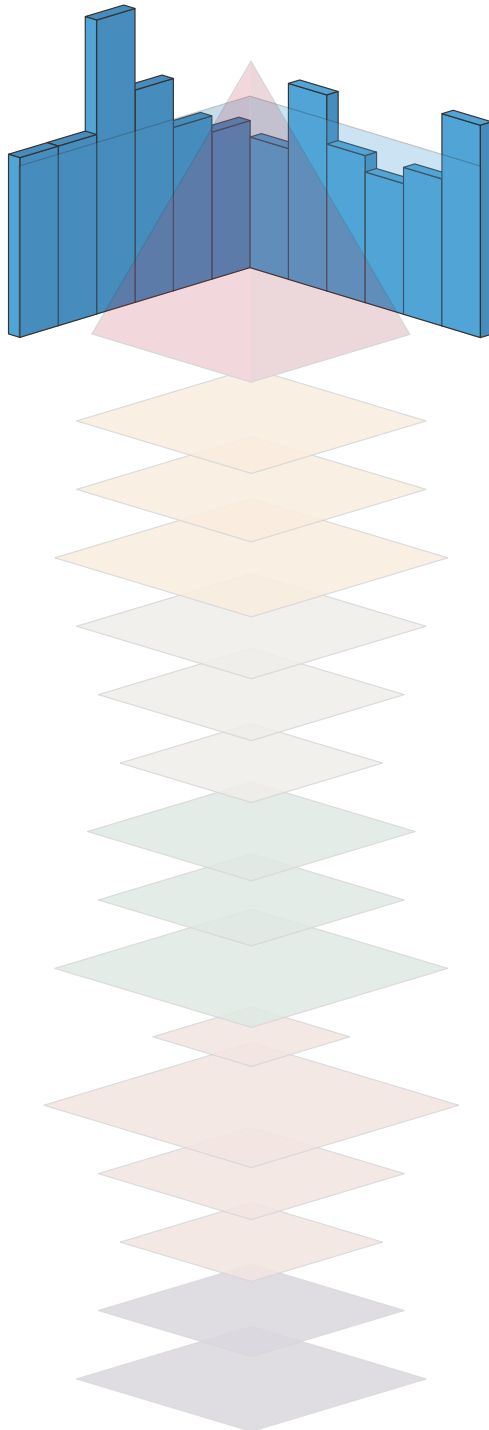
This project was funded in part by a grant from the United States Department of State.



Funded by the European Union

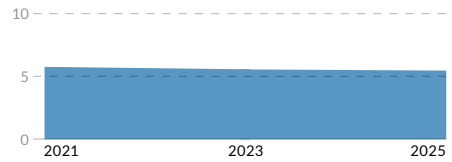
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 **COLOMBIA**



 **5.46** $\downarrow 0.17$
RESILIENCE SCORE

56th of 193 countries $\downarrow 6$
10th of 35 American countries $\downarrow 3$
4th of 12 South American countries -



POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE	5.50	$\downarrow 0.50$
GOVERNMENT TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY	5.50	0.00
INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION	9.00	0.00
NATIONAL POLICIES AND LAWS	6.50	0.00
JUDICIAL SYSTEM AND DETENTION	5.00	$\downarrow 0.50$
LAW ENFORCEMENT	4.50	$\downarrow 0.50$
TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY	4.00	$\downarrow 0.50$
ANTI-MONEY LAUNDERING	6.00	0.00
ECONOMIC REGULATORY CAPACITY	4.50	$\downarrow 0.50$
VICTIM AND WITNESS SUPPORT	4.00	$\uparrow 0.50$
PREVENTION	4.50	0.00
NON-STATE ACTORS	6.50	0.00



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CRIMINALITY

CRIMINAL MARKETS

PEOPLE

Colombia remains a major hub for human trafficking, serving as a source, transit and destination country. Criminal organizations such as Clan del Golfo and Venezuela's Tren de Aragua operate extensive trafficking networks, exploiting vulnerable individuals for forced labour, sexual exploitation and criminal activity. Victims include Colombian nationals, Venezuelan migrants and individuals trafficked from other South American countries. Traffickers use deception, coercion and violence, with social media frequently employed to lure victims under false pretences. The hospitality, agriculture and mining sectors provide cover for these operations, with forced labour prevalent in the coffee, strawberry, palm, coal, gold and emerald industries. Forced recruitment of children by armed groups has escalated, with reports of child recruitment significantly increasing in recent years. Authorities rescued hundreds of children from criminal organizations in 2024, yet the actual figures are probably much higher.

Human smuggling has grown into one of the country's most pervasive criminal markets, with the Darién Gap serving as a key transit corridor. The Clan del Golfo exercises near-total control over this region, charging high fees and forcing some migrants to carry drugs as payment. Tren de Aragua and other foreign criminal actors have expanded their operations, particularly along the Venezuela-Colombia border. Corrupt officials and private-sector actors in the transport and hospitality industries facilitate these smuggling networks. Migrants pay varying fees to cross Colombia, depending on their route, with many facing extortion upon arrival. Some criminal groups use human smuggling as a diversion for drug trafficking, utilizing the same maritime and overland routes. Alternative smuggling corridors are emerging, particularly through Medellín, Anorí, Montería and Necoclí.

Extortion is a pervasive criminal enterprise in Colombia, affecting businesses of all sizes, from small vendors to multinational corporations. Groups such as Clan del Golfo, the National Liberation Army (ELN) and dissidents from the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) dominate this market, leveraging fear and violence to extract payments. Mafia-style networks extort businesses in mining, cattle ranching, construction, retail and other industries. In urban areas, small businesses and street vendors are frequently targeted by criminal organizations offering a degree of 'protection' in exchange for payments. In rural regions, where extortion is deeply embedded, certain communities consider it an unavoidable cost of doing business. Nearly half of extortion cases are orchestrated remotely, often from within prisons. Criminal actors employ encrypted

messaging and digital payment methods to avoid detection. Government attempts to curb extortion by blocking mobile signals in prisons have largely failed. The Medellín extortion market alone is estimated to be worth millions annually, underscoring the profitability of this crime.

TRADE

Colombia has a well-developed arms trafficking market, with weapons flowing in from the United States, Central America and neighbouring Venezuela and Brazil. Port cities such as Buenaventura serve as key transit points. Mafia-style groups, local gangs and state-embedded actors are all involved in arms trafficking. Corrupt officials facilitate the movement of illicit firearms, with some high-ranking figures accused of directly supplying criminal groups. The use of drones and explosive devices by guerrilla factions has escalated, reflecting a shift in warfare tactics and, by extension, in the procurement of illicit weapons. In addition to sales, small arms rentals for criminal activities have become increasingly common in recent years. The widespread availability of firearms has had a direct impact on Colombia's homicide rate, with most murders committed using guns.

Counterfeit goods are a prevalent issue, with criminal networks trafficking fake pharmaceuticals, electronics and luxury items. Many of these products originate from China and South East Asia and are distributed through informal markets and online platforms. In Colombia, counterfeit products are sold openly in many settings – from San Andresito markets in major cities to streets, pharmacies and shopping centres in smaller towns – often in plain sight of authorities, who lack either the capacity or the will to address the issue. Criminal organizations also use the counterfeit trade to launder money. Despite enforcement efforts and significant annual seizures, which saw a notable increase during the reporting period, counterfeit goods remain widely available. The illicit alcohol trade also poses public health risks, with reported cases of poisoning from counterfeit spirits. Law enforcement actions have led to the arrest of key figures involved in this trade, but criminal networks continue to adapt and expand their operations. In addition to being a destination country, Colombia also acts as a source for counterfeit items entering neighbouring markets.

The illicit trade in excisable consumer goods, particularly cigarettes and alcohol, has expanded significantly. Smuggled items, particularly cigarettes, are primarily smuggled into Colombia from countries such as Uruguay, South Korea, the United Arab Emirates, China and India, with Maicao serving as a notable hub. In some regions, illicit cigarettes account for the bulk of market share. Mafia-style groups and smaller organizations exploit the illicit trade in cigarettes

and alcohol to launder money and profits from smuggling. The trade is enabled by corrupt security officials, especially in customs and near sales points, and private-sector actors in ports and markets. Foreign groups like Tren de Aragua are also reportedly involved, coercing vendors in some cities to sell trafficked goods.

ENVIRONMENT

Flora crimes in Colombia, particularly illegal logging, are widespread and deeply entrenched. It is estimated that nearly half of the wood in circulation is of illicit origin, much of it laundered through falsified permits or collusion with corrupt environmental officials. Organized criminal groups coordinate the extraction, transport and laundering of timber, often in conjunction with other illegal activities such as land grabs and drug production. The trade feeds both domestic markets and international demand, particularly from China and the Western Asia. Although recent years have seen a reduction in deforestation, much of the improvement is attributed to temporary truces by armed groups during negotiations rather than state-led enforcement. Corruption within regional environmental authorities perpetuates impunity.

Fauna crimes are facilitated by Colombia's rich biodiversity and the weak enforcement of environmental protection laws. The country functions primarily as a supplier of exotic animals, with species trafficked for fashion, cuisine, traditional medicine and the pet trade. Criminal networks engage in wildlife trafficking when the chance arises, often with the help of customs officials. Overall, the trade tends to be opportunistic rather than highly organized. High-profile arrests and international cooperation have intensified enforcement efforts, but the market persists due to high profits in destination countries such as China and the United States. The illegal wildlife trade intersects with other environmental and financial crimes. Species such as sharks, monkeys and frogs are targeted for export, with foreign nationals sometimes involved in their trafficking.

Non-renewable resource crime, particularly illegal gold mining, is a very pervasive and damaging illicit market. Mining is predominantly carried out by organized crime groups and smaller independent actors who operate with limited fear of prosecution. Illegal mining now affects most of Colombia's mining areas, and more than half of it occurs in protected zones. Armed groups extract rent from legal mining operations or participate directly in illegal extraction, often using it to launder proceeds from drug trafficking. Mining techniques cause extensive environmental harm, including deforestation, river contamination and biodiversity loss. The use of mercury, particularly in Afro-Colombian territories, has had devastating consequences for local communities. The Colombian government has recognized the severity of the issue and plans to deploy thousands of military personnel, but entrenched corruption and high profitability continue to fuel the expansion of this market.

DRUGS

Colombia remains the world's leading producer of cocaine, with production continuing to expand despite fluctuations in coca prices and law enforcement efforts. The cocaine trade operates through a highly structured supply chain, beginning with coca leaf farming and culminating in international trafficking networks. Coca cultivation is concentrated in rural, conflict-prone areas where armed groups provide protection to farmers in exchange for allegiance. The drop in coca leaf prices has forced many small-scale farmers into economic hardship, but large-scale criminal operations remain largely unaffected. Colombia's cocaine is transported through traditional routes to the United States and Europe, and to emerging markets in Asia, Africa and Oceania. Recent reports indicate increased diversification in smuggling methods, including the use of semi-submersibles, drones and shipments concealed in commercial exports. Criminal organizations like the Clan del Golfo, ELN guerrillas and FARC dissidents are heavily involved in the cultivation, production and export of cocaine, controlling the processing labs and trafficking routes. Smaller groups handle parts of the supply chain and micro-trafficking in cities. Foreign actors – including Mexican cartels and Venezuela's Tren de Aragua – have expanded their presence in recent years. Corruption among security forces and government officials facilitates the trade. The private sector also contributes, with some businesses helping to export drugs concealed in legal shipments or launder proceeds through financial schemes.

The heroin trade, historically significant in Colombia, has declined due to the increasing presence of synthetic opioids such as fentanyl. However, poppy cultivation persists, particularly in mountainous regions where criminal organizations continue production. Neighbouring countries, such as Ecuador, and the United States remain primary destinations for Colombian heroin, but declining demand and increased law enforcement interdictions have weakened this market. Increased law enforcement pressure has forced traffickers to adopt more discreet smuggling methods, including micro-trafficking and the use of human couriers. As the heroin trade is less profitable than cocaine, some criminal groups have been driven to diversify into synthetic drugs and illicit gold mining.

The synthetic drug market, especially 2CB ('pink cocaine'), has grown rapidly, with Medellín serving as a key production and distribution hub. Criminal groups produce synthetic drugs locally and import chemical precursors to maintain supply. The demand for synthetic drugs is increasing, particularly among younger urban consumers and in nightlife settings. Synthetic drugs are frequently sold in small-scale networks, often disguised as other substances to evade detection. Cannabis remains widely cultivated, particularly in Cauca, with high-potency strains exported to regional markets. The blurred legal framework for cannabis has allowed illicit actors to exploit loopholes, particularly in areas where regulatory enforcement is weak. Criminal

organizations control significant portions of the cannabis supply chain, leveraging pre-existing smuggling routes to move high-potency varieties internationally. The ‘creepy’ variety, known for its potency, is particularly sought after in markets such as Brazil and Chile. While mafia-style groups such as Clan del Golfo, ELN guerrillas and FARC dissidents are involved in local and international distribution of cannabis, its cultivation and production are held by local communities. Violence is pervasive in this market. Criminal groups exert violent control over areas they operate in, targeting local communities, rival organizations, security forces and state representatives.

CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES

Cyber-dependent crimes have escalated in Colombia, with millions of attempted cyberattacks recorded in recent years. Criminal actors have engaged in ransomware, data theft and malicious software deployment. Ransomware attacks are particularly prevalent, with primarily foreign actors behind them. Nevertheless, local groups are noted to be increasingly involved in ransomware and cyber-dependent crime in general. Criminal organizations, including Clan del Golfo, have incorporated cybercrime into their operations, targeting businesses and state institutions. Attacks primarily target private companies, government institutions and the health sector, with Bogotá experiencing the highest concentration. Colombia ranks among the most at-risk countries for ransomware attacks in Latin America. Law enforcement agencies lack the resources to effectively counteract cybercriminal networks, and outdated legal frameworks hinder prosecution efforts.

FINANCIAL CRIMES

Colombia faces persistent financial crimes, with tax evasion and corruption undermining the formal economy. Tax evasion is widespread, largely due to a high level of informality, ineffective collection mechanisms and corruption within financial oversight institutions. The formal financial sector is frequently exploited to disguise tax evasion schemes, with criminals leveraging front companies and real estate investments to move illicit funds. Cyber-enabled financial crimes have surged in recent years, exacerbating existing vulnerabilities. The number of financial fraud victims has significantly increased as well, with Colombia ranking among the weakest countries in financial-fraud security evaluations. The 2024 assassination of the brother of a former tax director highlighted the intersection of financial crime and violence, and the high risks associated with exposing illicit networks.

CRIMINAL ACTORS

Colombia’s criminal landscape is shaped by four major mafia-style groups: the Clan del Golfo, the ELN, the FARC Estado Mayor Central (FARC EMC) and the FARC Segunda

Marquetalia. The Clan del Golfo, the country’s largest criminal organization, operates a hierarchical structure, although recent leadership changes have led to internal disputes. The group dominates northwestern Colombia, engaging in drug trafficking, illegal mining and human smuggling. Despite peace negotiations with the Colombian government, the ELN maintains a decentralized command and is active along the Venezuelan border. The FARC EMC, a dissident faction of the 2016 Peace Accords, has expanded territorially, with negotiations for a ceasefire ongoing. However, internal divisions have led to fragmentation, limiting the reach of peace efforts. The Segunda Marquetalia, another FARC dissident group, remains engaged in drug trafficking and extortion along the Venezuelan border. These groups exert substantial territorial control and employ local criminal networks to enforce influence, creating persistent instability despite the government’s Total Peace initiative.

Colombia also hosts numerous smaller criminal networks that operate independently or under larger mafia-style organizations. Groups such as Los Pelusos, Los Puntilleros, La Oficina de Envigado, Espartanos and Shottas specialize in micro-trafficking, extortion, contract killings and smuggling. Many operate in urban centres, controlling drug distribution networks and influencing municipal politics. In Buenaventura, for instance, Shottas and Espartanos dominate port-related illicit activities. These networks are highly adaptable, collaborating with international partners to facilitate drug exports. The fragmentation of the cocaine trade has empowered smaller groups to gain prominence, often working with mafia-style organizations in a subcontracting model.

Criminal influence within Colombia’s state institutions is a long-standing issue, with actors infiltrating multiple levels of government. Corrupt officials within the police and armed forces have facilitated drug trafficking and illegal mining, providing critical logistical support for criminal operations. Local political figures in certain municipalities, as well as individuals from high-level political circles, have been linked to organized crime, securing electoral advantages through illicit financing. Recent efforts to combat this issue have led to a large-scale restructuring of the security forces. Nevertheless, entrenched corruption remains a major barrier to tackling organized crime.

Foreign criminal organizations, particularly Mexican and Venezuelan groups, play a crucial role in Colombia’s illicit economies. The Sinaloa Cartel and Jalisco New Generation Cartel finance and coordinate cocaine production, maintaining strong links with local actors such as the ELN and Clan del Golfo. Unlike domestic groups, these Mexican cartels avoid territorial control, acting instead as intermediaries in drug trade logistics. Venezuelan gangs, notably Tren de Aragua, have expanded into Colombian cities, specializing in human trafficking and extortion. Clashes with Colombian groups, particularly in Medellín and border regions, highlight their growing influence. Venezuelan state-linked actors, including the Cartel de los Soles, collaborate with ex-FARC members

in transnational drug operations. Additionally, Brazilian groups such as the Primeiro Comando da Capital facilitate cocaine trafficking into international markets, establishing links with Italian mafias. These foreign influences complicate Colombia's security environment and reinforce the country's role as a hub for global organized crime.

The private sector is instrumental in facilitating organized crime, particularly in money laundering and asset control. Industries such as construction, tourism and agriculture

provide infrastructure for illicit financial flows. Land ownership by mafia-style groups allows them to integrate criminal activities into legal markets, exerting influence over local economies. Financial institutions and business elites have faced investigations for complicity in laundering drug proceeds, though enforcement remains inconsistent. High-profile cases, such as the arrest of a fish industry businessperson linked to Mexican cartels, underscore the private sector's entanglement with criminal networks.

RESILIENCE

LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

Colombia's government is pursuing its Total Peace initiative, which aims to engage criminal groups such as guerrillas and paramilitaries in dialogue. However, its implementation has encountered obstacles, including lack of coordination, ineffective ceasefires and congressional resistance to judicial reforms. Corruption investigations involving high-level officials have contributed to public distrust. Additionally, the government's shift in drug policy toward interdiction rather than prosecuting coca growers has coincided with ongoing violence and the persistence of organized crime activities. Despite these efforts, many of these criminal structures remain relevant political actors, especially at the local level, actively participating in Congress, mayoral offices and other political spheres.

The country has implemented transparency mechanisms, but corruption and impunity continue to hamper their effectiveness. While there have been minor improvements in public perceptions of corruption, concerns persist regarding legislative proposals and the incomplete execution of anti-corruption strategies. Colombia is yet to implement the National Anticorruption Strategy outlined in its National Development Plan. This strategy includes measures to enhance public and journalistic access to information, improve government accountability, strengthen witness protection and increase the state's capacity to prevent and punish corruption. These shortcomings combined with high-profile corruption scandals have also influenced perceptions of accountability.

Colombia actively participates in international treaties and agreements addressing transnational crime, including the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime. However, the country has not ratified protocols related to migrant smuggling and firearms trafficking. In recent years, Colombia has continued to participate actively in transnational operations against organized crime. The country also maintains security partnerships, particularly with the United States and other South American countries,

where extradition remains a tool in legal proceedings against organized crime. For example, in 2024, a binational council with Ecuador was established to address environmental and organized crime in border regions. That same year, the country also signed an agreement with Brazil to step up efforts against transnational crimes in the Amazon – including drug trafficking and illegal logging – through increased military presence and joint operations. However, corruption and information leaks within security institutions present challenges for international cooperation.

Colombia has a comprehensive legislative framework to address organized crime, with laws covering areas such as organized criminal activity, drug and firearm control and environmental protection, including provisions for significant penalties for environmental offences. However, some gaps and inconsistencies remain. For example, existing legislation on human trafficking does not fully align with international standards, as it omits key elements like force, fraud or coercion. Current laws also insufficiently address the influence of criminal groups in political processes, highlighting the need for stronger measures against corruption and the use of illicit resources in politics and the private sector. Recent initiatives to promote peace and demobilization offer alternatives to incarceration and seek to incentivize disengagement from criminal activity, though their implementation faces ongoing challenges.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND SECURITY

Colombia's judicial system continues to face challenges in addressing organized crime. While the Special Jurisdiction for Peace (JEP) has processed high-profile cases, corruption and institutional inefficiencies persist. Reports indicate instances of judicial corruption, and some organized crime groups have operated from within detention facilities. Overcrowding and detention conditions have also been identified as areas of concern despite ongoing institutional reforms.

Law enforcement operations targeting organized crime have been affected by internal corruption and political considerations. Specialized units focus on drug trafficking, money laundering and other illicit activities, but their effectiveness has been reduced by internal scandals. Ceasefires under the Total Peace initiative have affected law enforcement strategies, and some reports suggest links between corruption within security forces and human trafficking networks.

Colombia's territorial integrity is shaped by porous borders with Venezuela, Ecuador, Peru and Brazil which facilitate illicit cross-border activities. Armed groups continue to operate in border regions, at times engaging with foreign actors. Limited state presence in rural and border areas has allowed organized crime to exert influence, with indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities particularly affected. Security infrastructure constraints remain a factor in Colombia's exposure to transnational criminal activities.

ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL ENVIRONMENT

Colombia has implemented measures to align its anti-money laundering (AML) framework with Financial Action Task Force standards. Financial crime enforcement has expanded, particularly concerning cryptocurrency transactions and cross-border illicit financial flows. However, Panama's financial system continues to be used for money laundering by Colombian entities, and some business structures remain vulnerable to exploitation. International cooperation on AML efforts has improved, but domestic enforcement results have varied, particularly in high-profile financial crime cases.

Organized crime groups maintain a presence in economic sectors such as construction, transportation and entertainment. Money laundering networks have had an impact on financial markets, creating regulatory challenges. Informal economic activities, including loansharking, continue in some regions. In rural areas, criminal groups exert control over local economies through alternative governance models.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

Colombia's victim and witness support systems have encountered challenges, particularly within the National Protection Unit, which has faced allegations of corruption and operational inefficiencies. Some key witnesses in criminal cases have been targeted. Legal frameworks exist for victim protection and reparations, but implementation has been inconsistent. In rural areas, communities are often reluctant to report crimes because of perceived links between criminal groups and law enforcement. For drug users, the country is developing an action plan centred on harm reduction, better access to care and treatment, and social inclusion to address the negative impacts of drug use. Its implementation and impact remain to be seen.

Crime prevention strategies include security and intervention programmes, but militarized approaches have influenced their application, overshadowing softer prevention measures. For example, drug crop substitution programmes designed to reduce the cultivation of drug-producing crops are losing momentum. There have also been attempts to implement non-police prevention strategies, including experimental approaches aimed at curbing criminal governance. Local governments have developed alternative policing models, while national prevention policies remain in development. The adoption of a 'human security' strategy has introduced additional space for prevention-focused initiatives, though implementation levels vary.

Independent media and civil society organizations continue to report on corruption and human rights issues. However, journalists and activists have faced threats and violence, particularly when covering organized crime. Indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities have reported security concerns. Civil society organizations remain active, but targeted violence has affected their operational capacity.

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