

Research challenges

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Colombia has dozens of active armed groups and hundreds of active local gangs. This report highlights only the main categories and groups, but there are many localised sub-groups or smaller factions which are too numerous to cover in detail within the page and time constraints of the current report. Additionally, armed groups frequently change names or composition; for example, as the conflict dynamics shift, leaders are killed, or groups merge or hybridise. Information presented in this report captures only a snapshot in time and space. It aims to highlight only the most significant groups to illustrate general dynamics and trends; local situations in Colombia are highly variable and under constant change. This cannot account for all specific local conditions.

Obtaining consistent statistical information on human rights violations, crime, and conflict in Colombia is difficult, due to the multitude of actors gathering information using different methodologies and definitions. Information on violations such as homicides, displacement, confinement, recruitment, targeted killings and other human rights abuses has been provided from a selection of key sources from the government, the UN, and civil society in Colombia. However, within these sources, discrepancies between local reporting on exact numbers arise due to differences in the approaches mentioned. Hence, it is not always possible to provide harmonised figures but rather an overall picture of key trends. Due to the nature of the conflict, research and tracking of civilian deaths and homicides in Colombia is not statistically clear among sources. This can be because of differences in how forms of violence/victimisation are defined, or because of the difficulties establishing whether deaths are related to armed conflict or criminality, as well as whether victims are civilians or combatants. The Colombian National Institute for Legal Medicine and Forensic Sciences (INMLCF, Instituto Nacional de Medicina Legal y Ciencias Forenses), which is one of the government entities that tracks homicides, defines homicides as being when a person kills another, without distinguishing a motive.3 Colombia's post-conflict Truth Commission defines people killed within the armed conflict as homicides, but does not distinguish civilian from combatant deaths. This report presents information on homicides and civilian impacts such as displacement and confinement from a variety of sources with varying methodologies; the intention is to provide an overall picture, not a singular truth about the situation.

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  Colombia, IMNLCF, Forensis: Datos Para La Vida 2020, April 2022, url, p. 85

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