

3.2.3. Lower Cauca River region in Antioquia

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The lower Cauca River (Bajo Cauca) region in Antioquia is a strategic corridor for illegal armed groups in the production of cocaine and the illegal exploitation of minerals.[335] The region is known for its mining activity, of which 85 % is illegal.[336] The illegal mining of gold reportedly produces over 5 billion USD per year.[337] Illegal armed groups disputing the lower Cauca River in Antioquia include the AGC, the ELN, and EMBF.[338] The AGC reportedly controls the gold production chain, including the provision of materials for the extraction, like explosives and mercury, extorts gold producers, and acts as an 'arbiter' in gold production disputes.[339]

The conflict in this region deteriorated with the recent advance of the AGC into the San Lucas Mountains which straddle eastern Antioquia and southern Bolívar, which is a bastion of the ELN for the exploitation of gold and the production of cocaine.[340] In an effort to defend their territories, the ELN established an alliance with Fronts 18 and 36 of the EMBF, which has succeeded in delaying the advance of the AGC.[341]

Illegal armed groups use violence and intimidation to impose their norms and demonstrate their power and authority in their areas of influence.[342] The AGC, for example, disseminate 'social behaviour' manuals and punish those who do not follow their norms; it also impose curfews and confine communities during armed confrontations with other illegal armed groups.[343] Both the AGC and the ELN use antipersonnel mines to prevent the advancement of their rivals, planting them in areas used by the local communities such as roads and harvesting fields.[344] The number of homicides in the region has increased, particularly in Cáceres (34 in 2024, 18 in 2023) and Tarazá (29 in 2024, 12 in 2023).[345] In 2024, the Office of the Ombudsperson indicated that, between January and September 2025, 2 425 people were displaced, with the municipalities most affected including Anorí (51 people in 26 families), El Bagre (500 people in 220 families), and Tarazá (129 people in 53 families).[346] The same source indicated that over 8 300 people were victims of confinement by illegal armed groups in the Antioquia department.[347] The civilian population is caught in the middle of armed confrontations and often find themselves in contradicting situations as one armed actor order them to leave the area whereas another actor orders them to do the opposite.[348]

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FIP, La batalla que estamos perdiendo en el Bajo Cauca, 3 October 2025, url; El Colombiano, Investigan a funcionarios del Bajo Cauca antioqueño por triquiñuela para 'maquillar' oro ilegal, 7 April 2025, url

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  FIP, La batalla que estamos perdiendo en el Bajo Cauca, 3 October 2025, url

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  FIP, La batalla que estamos perdiendo en el Bajo Cauca, 3 October 2025, url

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  Colombia, Defensoría del Pueblo, Más de 192.000 personas afectadas por desplazamiento forzado masivo y confinamiento en los primeros nueve meses de 2025, 7 November 2025, url

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  Colombia, Defensoría del Pueblo, Más de 192.000 personas afectadas por desplazamiento forzado masivo y confinamiento en los primeros nueve meses de 2025, 7 November 2025, url

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