

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

- [336](#)

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](#)

- [337](#)

FIP, La batalla que estamos perdiendo en el Bajo Cauca, 3 October 2025, [url](#)

- [339](#)

FIP, La batalla que estamos perdiendo en el Bajo Cauca, 3 October 2025, [url](#)

- [346](#)

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- [347](#)

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