

4.3.2. Social leaders

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Colombia has one of the highest rates of assassinations, threats, and stigmatisation of human rights defenders and social leaders in the world.655 Between January 2016 and May 2025, a total of 1 569 social leaders have been killed in the country, according to the Office of the Ombudsperson.656 Although the government has 'made concerted efforts' to address violence, the targeting of social leaders and human rights defenders continues. Killings, violent attacks, and threats to human rights defenders, social leaders, and former FARC-EP combatants remained 'important human rights concerns' in 2022,657 2023,658 2024,659 and such targeting continued in 2025.660 Sources indicated that 188 human rights defenders were killed in 2023 661 and 173 social leaders in 20243 .662 The Office of the Ombudsperson reported that 81 social leaders and human rights defenders were assassinated between 1 January and 31 May 2025.663 In contrast, OHCHR received 34 allegations of homicide of social leaders between January and June 2025.664 Indepaz's monitoring observatory reported 117 killings in 2025, as of 2 October 2025.665

Attacks against human rights defenders, including Afro-Colombian leaders, peasants involved in implementing the 2016 FARC-EP Peace Agreement, and environmental and land restitution leaders, were mainly concentrated in the departments of Antioquia, Arauca, Cauca,666 Norte de Santander, Bolívar, Putumayo, Nariño, Santander, Valle del Cauca, and Cesar.667 Social leaders, human rights defenders and other profiles such as communal and community leaders, leaders related to advocacy for indigenous, campesino and Afro-descendant rights, land/territorial and environmental rights,668 conflict victims' rights, union/labour rights,669 and those involved in illicit crop substitution, were also targeted,670 as well as farmers in coca-growing areas, as well as political figures.671

Members of Community Action Boards (Juntas de Acción Comunal, JACs) are the profile most commonly targeted among social leaders.672 ACLED indicated in October 2025 that targeted civilians are 'increasingly political', noting that most of the violence that they recorded is against social leaders (678 events; 15 %) and JACs (211 events).673 Because JACs are spread across the country, often in areas controlled by armed groups, and because they are often used as the intermediaries between an armed group and the local population, this raises their profile in terms of frequency of targeting. JACs are deeply embedded in their communities and know their local populace well, which is useful for armed groups who do not tolerate dissent and kill JACs members who refuse compliance.674 Social leaders who are environmental defenders are also victims of threats, family intimidation, attempts on their lives, displacement, and kidnapping, with the intent to force the environmentalists to abandon their cause; if they do not, homicides

are often used to silence them. According to Global Witness, between 2018 and August 2024, there were 361 assassinations of social/environmental leaders, mainly in Cauca, Nariño, Antioquia, and Chocó.675 The majority of the environmental leaders killed were indigenous leaders, followed by campesino and Afro-descendant leaders.676

The perpetrators of these assassinations are frequently unidentified.677 Sources indicate that most of the killings are carried out by armed and criminal groups; and impunity for the assassinations was a problem.678 Threats can come in-person, via letters/pamphlet, telephone, text messages, via third party, attempted murder, or surveillance. Leaflet threats from armed groups are common and designate some individuals as 'military objectives'; sometimes criminals also appropriate the names of powerful groups to scare their targets, though this 'does not mean the risk is less real'.679 Often when social leaders are threatened, this is coupled with forced displacement, and for those around them from the community.680 High levels of impunity for such killings continues.681

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> Figure 14: Indepaz - Assassinations of social leaders and human rights defenders 2016-October 2025682

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Figure 15: Social leaders assassinated in 2025 (October 2025)683

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