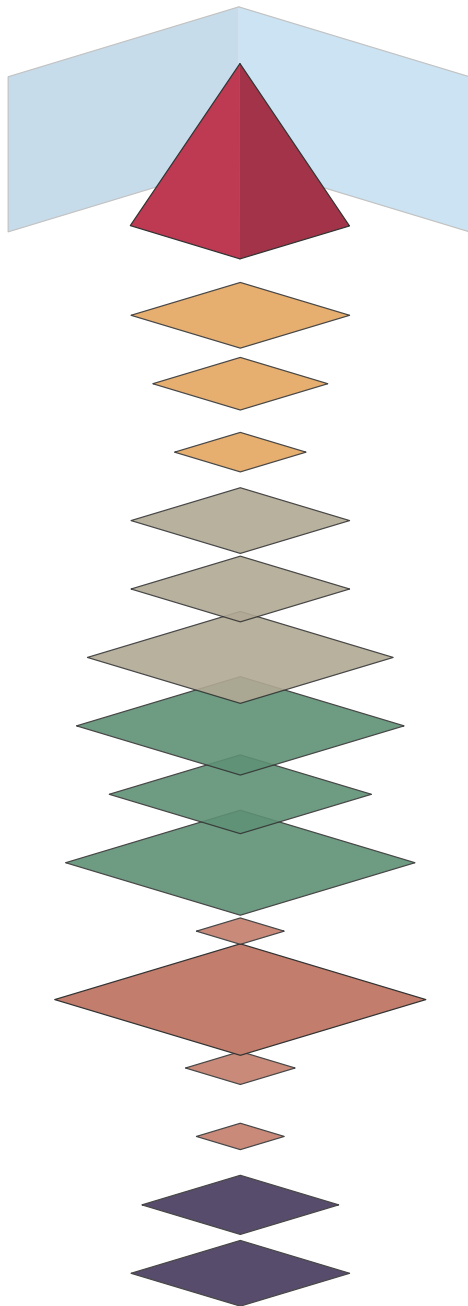


 **BOLIVIA**



 **4.95**  
**CRIMINALITY SCORE**

98<sup>th</sup> of 193 countries  
22<sup>nd</sup> of 35 American countries  
10<sup>th</sup> of 12 South American countries

 **CRIMINAL MARKETS** **5.00**

HUMAN TRAFFICKING	5.00
HUMAN SMUGGLING	4.00
EXTORTION & PROTECTION RACKETEERING	3.00
ARMS TRAFFICKING	5.00
TRADE IN COUNTERFEIT GOODS	5.00
ILLICIT TRADE IN EXCISABLE GOODS	7.00
FLORA CRIMES	7.50
FAUNA CRIMES	6.00
NON-RENEWABLE RESOURCE CRIMES	8.00
HEROIN TRADE	2.00
COCAINE TRADE	8.50
CANNABIS TRADE	2.50
SYNTHETIC DRUG TRADE	2.00
CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES	4.50
FINANCIAL CRIMES	5.00

 **CRIMINAL ACTORS** **4.90**

MAFIA-STYLE GROUPS	4.00
CRIMINAL NETWORKS	4.50
STATE-EMBEDDED ACTORS	6.00
FOREIGN ACTORS	5.00
PRIVATE SECTOR ACTORS	5.00

 **4.83**  
**RESILIENCE SCORE**



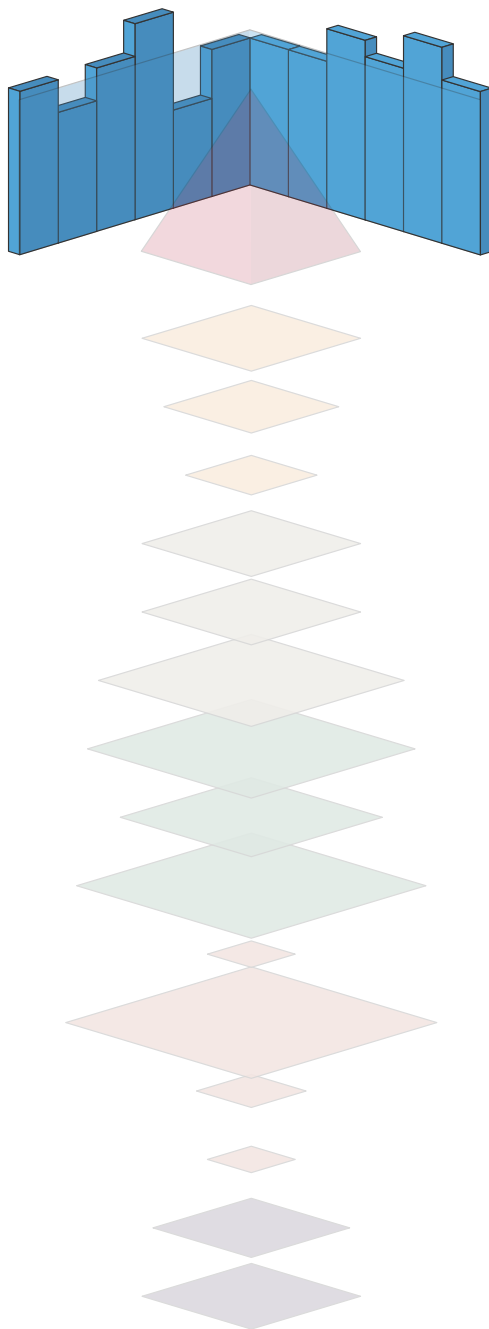
Funding provided by the United States Government.



Funded by the European Union

ENACT is funded by the European Union and implemented by the Institute for Security Studies and INTERPOL, in affiliation with the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime.

 **BOLIVIA**





**4.83**  
**RESILIENCE SCORE**

98<sup>th</sup> of 193 countries  
20<sup>th</sup> of 35 American countries  
7<sup>th</sup> of 12 South American countries

POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE	5.00
GOVERNMENT TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY	4.00
INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION	5.00
NATIONAL POLICIES AND LAWS	6.00
JUDICIAL SYSTEM AND DETENTION	3.00
LAW ENFORCEMENT	4.50
TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY	4.50
ANTI-MONEY LAUNDERING	4.50
ECONOMIC REGULATORY CAPACITY	5.50
VICTIM AND WITNESS SUPPORT	5.00
PREVENTION	6.00
NON-STATE ACTORS	5.00

**4.95**  
**CRIMINALITY SCORE**

 CRIMINAL MARKETS	5.00
 CRIMINAL ACTORS	4.90



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# CRIMINALITY

## CRIMINAL MARKETS

### PEOPLE

Bolivia remains a transit and destination country for people of multiple nationalities. Traffickers operate forced-labour and exploitation networks within Bolivia and in neighbouring countries, with women and children being the most vulnerable. Almost three-quarters of rescued victims fall into this category. Although there are laws against human trafficking, the government's implementation is poor, and local authorities struggle to enforce the laws due to a lack of funding, awareness or interest. The COVID-19 pandemic and the Venezuelan migration crisis have increased the number of refugees who are vulnerable to human trafficking, but poor indigenous people in rural areas are the most affected.

While Bolivia is not a major destination, it plays a crucial role as a transit location for people who want to leave Brazil and enter Peru on their way to North America, as well as for people who want to reach Argentina and Chile. Notable smuggling activity takes place on the border with Peru, with indigenous communities involved in the facilitation process. The Venezuelan crisis has further boosted the human-smuggling market. Criminal gangs profit from the situation by extorting or kidnapping people who are transiting through irregular crossings. Venezuelan mafia groups are believed to be behind this transnational flow of people, operating in the country through local allies. Reports indicate that smuggled people are often exploited for drug smuggling and sex work. They also face discrimination and xenophobia when trying to access basic services.

There are no known cases of extortion or protection racketeering linked to organized-crime groups. However, the crime is highly underreported due to the justice system's lack of credibility among the population.

### TRADE

Bolivia is a transit country for arms trafficking, serving as a gateway for guns from the US to criminal organizations in Brazil and Paraguay. Transnational mafias use Bolivian territory to supply arms to their subsidiaries and allies in other countries, and local criminal groups also have access to these weapons, which are often exchanged at border crossing points. However, the Bolivian government has done little to enforce gun laws, and a significant portion of the arms in circulation are illegal, contributing to a rise in violence levels. During the pandemic, smuggling methods became more sophisticated, and there have been reports of Brazilian gangs raiding Bolivian military bases, leading

to suspicions of complicity with low-level officials. In addition, there have been reports of the use by criminals of bullets manufactured by the Bolivian Ammunition Factory, supporting the hypothesis that public officials are involved in this market.

Counterfeit goods have also become increasingly prevalent in Bolivia due to the rise of informal markets during the pandemic. Counterfeit electronic products, clothing and pharmaceutical products are commonly found and often sold openly at fairs and shopping centres. Bolivian customs seizures experienced a substantial increase compared to pre-pandemic levels, but no criminal organizations have been identified or prosecuted for this crime. Additionally, counterfeit alcoholic beverages are produced within mafia-style groups in Bolivia, but the increase in contraband of international brands may be reducing the incentives to produce them on a large scale.

The illegal trade in excise goods is also a notable issue. Despite the government's efforts to reduce the illegal importation of these products, their economic impact is enormous, as they are a cheap option for low-income Bolivians. The market is transnational in nature, but the main actors are locals, particularly family clans. Public officials often take part in these activities, either by extorting or offering protection to smugglers. Because entire communities rely on the illicit trade in excise goods, acting against these markets is not politically convenient, and virtually no controls are exercised at street markets. The most common illicitly traded excise goods are alcoholic beverages, vehicles, and tobacco products.

### ENVIRONMENT

Deforestation in Bolivia has become a major problem, with millions of hectares of primary tropical forests being destroyed each year. The main drivers of deforestation are land clearance for agriculture and livestock, illegal logging and land trafficking. More than half of the land clearance violates environmental laws and regulations, and land traffickers often work with corrupt officials to falsify documents and launder legal records for the highest bidders. Criminal groups have been reported to use forced labour and to threaten and even kill indigenous leaders who oppose them. Moreover, the trafficking of illegal wood in Bolivia is considered a mere administrative transgression, which has allowed illicit trafficking to proliferate. The Bolivian state has been unable to control this crime due to scarce infrastructure and park rangers being poorly equipped.

As for wildlife trafficking, the country serves as a bridge for the illegal trade of species between Brazil and Peru. It involves capturing live specimens for the pet trade, and

harvesting animal parts and products for consumption, traditional use or religious festivals. Social media has facilitated the trade, and there is a big market for insects, with the majority of purchases made through the internet. Asian triads have recently taken over the market and have been sending parts of animals such as jaguars to Brazil and Peru for shipment to Asian markets. Efforts have been made to strengthen animal anti-cruelty laws in Bolivia, but these have not been sufficient, as evidenced by the low number of prosecutions for prohibited hunting and fishing, destruction or deterioration of state property, and biocide.

Bolivia's non-renewable-resource crimes are mainly focused on mining, oil and gas, with illegal gold mining being a significant concern due to its harmful effects on local indigenous populations and the environment. The cooperatives of informal miners, who are extremely powerful and influential, receive tax benefits and special treatment from the government. Illegal miners are violent and powerful, leading to clashes with cooperatives over the right to exploit areas in the country. Illegal mining often takes place in areas outside the government's control, leading to other crimes such as sexual exploitation, forced labour, and drugs and arms trafficking. Bolivia's porous borders and weak institutions make it an attractive country for smuggling, with organized groups using the country to smuggle Peruvian gold to larger markets. In addition, the country loses millions of dollars due to the illegal smuggling of subsidized petrol to neighbouring countries, as the price difference makes the trade profitable.

## DRUGS

Bolivia is not a major consumer of heroin, but its strategic location makes it a transit country for heroin trafficking from its neighbours Brazil, Paraguay and Peru. On the other hand, the cocaine market in Bolivia is complex due to the legal cultivation and consumption of coca leaves for traditional purposes. Almost half of the coca leaves being sold are commercialized illegally or used for non-traditional uses. As a result, Bolivia has become the world's third-largest cocaine producer. Drug traffickers increasingly use Bolivia as a transit point for cocaine shipments due to the country's weak state control and strategic location. Mexican and Colombian cartels operate in the country, while Brazilian gangs control the traffic into their country and shipments to Europe. To increase drug shipments to accommodate the oversupply, new illegal routes are being opened, especially through rivers and air transport.

The cannabis market in Bolivia is relatively small, and only a small proportion of seizures are related to local sales. Cannabis use is illegal in the country, even for medicinal purposes, but authorities do not actively target cannabis users. Colombian organizations facilitate trafficking through the northern regions via Peru, with a loose structure of hired men, while small family groups transport cannabis through the southern part of the country. Bolivia serves

as a natural passage for cannabis from Paraguay, one of the world's largest producers, to other markets such as Chile. Local production is limited and managed by informal low-level groups, and cannabis trafficking and production are usually separate from cocaine, except in some micro-trafficking cases.

Bolivia is primarily a transit country for synthetic drugs, with most drugs coming from Argentina and Brazil. Synthetic drugs are expensive in Bolivia, but there is a new trend towards the consumption of 'Chinese LSD', as the drug is affordable for the local market. Overall, the consumption of synthetic drugs is low in Bolivia, but there is evidence of consumption in bars and nightclubs in Cochabamba, as well as in elite high schools. Pharmaceutical drugs such as Tramadol, benzodiazepines and amphetamines require a prescription and are difficult to obtain. While Bolivia does not appear to be a producer of synthetic drugs, it may enable production in neighbouring countries such as Argentina as a transit point for precursors.

## CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES

Cyber-attacks are relatively rare in Bolivia, and when they do occur, they are often politically motivated. For instance, distributed denial-of-service attacks have targeted various websites, including the Bolivian government's official site, causing temporary disruptions in services. In all cases involving malware, foreign actors have been identified as the culprits. Due to the lack of development in state services, public officials and the police are not adequately trained to investigate or identify these types of crimes. Although a cybercrime police unit does exist, its focus is primarily on internet-related crimes, such as human trafficking, rather than computer-based crimes like the spreading of viruses and other malware.

## FINANCIAL CRIMES

Financial crimes in Bolivia are mainly limited to opportunistic crimes, rather than being driven by established criminal groups. Pyramid schemes are relatively rare, and there have been few cases of digital theft within private and governmental banks. Instead of widespread attacks on bank systems, cases have involved hackers gaining access to accounts due to poor password management by users.

In contrast, procurement fraud is common at municipal, departmental and national levels of the state, with the crime usually coming to light when new officials take office and investigate their predecessors. This type of fraud has become almost institutionalized due to the normalization of corruption in society. Heads of state institutions frequently receive a percentage of the value of public contracts they sign, and overpriced services and goods are commonly purchased.

## CRIMINAL ACTORS

Bolivian criminal organizations, particularly mafia-style groups, have gained power and control in the country, particularly in the contraband market. These groups have long-standing connections with international actors and public officials, and despite occasional arrests of key members, they have been able to maintain their influence over time. Mafia-style groups are also involved in the transportation of large shipments of cocaine base to neighbouring countries like Brazil, Argentina, Paraguay and even Europe and northern Africa. Criminal networks in Bolivia are engaged in various illegal activities, including drug trafficking and contraband. Family clans in La Paz and Oruro can be considered as belonging to this category as they operate loosely, moving small quantities of cocaine and providing other services within the drug-trafficking chain. Some are even testing their capacity to produce cocaine base. Similarly, criminal networks are involved in contraband and the illicit trade of excise goods.

Brazilian mafias have fought for control over drug-trafficking routes for Bolivian and Peruvian cocaine in Bolivian border towns. The Bolivian police are reportedly investigating the presence of Brazilian and Colombian drug lords in the country, and recent investigations have revealed the existence of branches of Brazilian mafia-style groups.

Mexican cartels and European traffickers, including Balkan and Italian mafias, are also present, and Paraguayan elites have been found to be involved in drug trafficking in Bolivia. Additionally, there is evidence of a growing Asian-Bolivian drug route using commercial planes that travel from South America to South East Asia, with Bolivian women being used as mules to transport cocaine to these markets. Reports suggest that Venezuelan mafia groups have been profiting from the trafficking and human smuggling due to the Venezuelan crisis, and they are increasingly active in the Chilean-Bolivian border region. The Bolivian state is plagued by corruption, with state-embedded actors facilitating or even participating in criminal networks involved in various illicit markets, including drug trafficking, financial crimes and trade in counterfeit goods. Weak governance, low salaries and an unprofessional bureaucracy create incentives for corruption, clientelism and patronage. The justice system crisis also contributes to high levels of impunity for state-embedded actors involved in criminal operations. Corruption within the justice system has allowed wealthy private actors to bribe their way out of investigations by institutions in charge of regulating money laundering and controlling crime. Private actors collaborate with criminals in businesses in various sectors such as real estate, wood export and the cattle trade, as well as soccer clubs, car dealerships and trading companies.

# RESILIENCE

## LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

Bolivia has a history of weak governance, with the ruling political party's intervention in the judiciary highlighting the country's democratic weaknesses. Although the new government has brought some stability to the country following recent political turmoil, Bolivia still performs below regional averages in most governance areas. The penetration of crime into the political system is also a significant issue, with drug dealers holding key political positions, and the state lacking interest in dismantling organized-crime groups. The country's failure to address its historical political-social conflict has resulted in social polarization, institutional distrust and violence, including deaths during protests. Efforts to tackle corruption in Bolivia remain insufficient, and the country has poor anti-corruption schemes and a weak rule of law. Despite the implementation of anti-corruption units within each ministry, the lack of independence to conduct investigations and the common practice of heads of state institutions taking a percentage of the value of public contracts they sign highlight severe deficiencies in the response to the problem. Although Bolivia's information law is strong on

paper, it is weak in practice due to a lack of appropriate government channels, and accountability and transparency are not priorities.

While Bolivia is a signatory to international agreements to combat organized crime, its compliance in practice is weak. International organizations have criticized Bolivian authorities for failing to comply with international obligations. Bolivia receives funding and support from other countries and various international NGOs to address security, health, environmental and social challenges, including the mitigation of the Venezuelan migration crisis. However, its relationship with the US has been tumultuous, with political accusations made in both directions. The Bolivian legal framework covers all types of crimes, but implementation remains a problem. Deficiencies in combating flora and fauna crimes are also concerning, with the logging of protected wood being an administrative offence, while the trafficking or transportation of it is not punishable with jail time. Also, permits to exploit mines are easy to obtain, and many miners do not comply with anti-exploitation, labour and environmental norms. Furthermore, Bolivia lacks legislation concerning the detention of people with INTERPOL red

notices issued against them, making it a haven for people escaping justice in their home countries.

## CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND SECURITY

The judicial system in Bolivia is widely regarded as an impediment to the fight against crime, with delayed criminal procedures and corrupt networks of lawyers, prosecutors and judges profiting from victims. Recent scandals have exposed instances of officials and authorities favouring jailed criminals sentenced for violence against women. Organized-crime cases brought to justice rarely result in sentences or serious criminal investigations. This judicial crisis is attributed to political interference, de-institutionalization, low budgets and inadequate technological and technical support. Additionally, Bolivia has one of the highest levels of prison occupancy in Latin America, with overcrowding exacerbated by arbitrary and politically motivated arrests and continued reliance on pre-trial detention, even when this violates the criminal code.

Bolivia's security forces, including the police and military, are widely distrusted due to human-rights abuses, corruption and a lack of control. Poor working conditions, inadequate training and low salaries are some of the issues affecting the police force, along with political interference. The police has been implicated in high-profile cases of drug trafficking and contraband, and there have been calls for a complete restructuring of law enforcement. The national customs office, with military support, is responsible for controlling the illicit trade in excise-goods markets. However, since the military got involved in contraband control, the market has become violent, and clans are using arms to protect themselves.

Bolivia's territorial integrity is threatened due to the extensive border it shares with countries that have notable criminal markets, porous borders with countless illegal passages, and territorial disputes with indigenous populations. The remoteness of the Bolivian borders, ranging from the high altitudes of the Andes to the Amazon rainforest and Paraguayan Chaco, makes it difficult to control smuggling and illicit traffic. Additionally, there are reports of increasing occurrences of *avasallamiento*, where groups invade land, mainly illegal mining sites, and force the government to recognize them as the owners.

## ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL ENVIRONMENT

Bolivia has been improving its capabilities against money laundering, with several laws and decrees being passed against the crime. However, Bolivia still remains one of the countries with the highest risk of money laundering in Latin America. Corruption also contributes to Bolivia's vulnerability, with officials charged with money laundering in other countries. Furthermore, Bolivia has yet to implement measures to prevent the misuse of crowdfunding and online gambling.

The Bolivian economy has traditionally relied on the exploitation of hydrocarbons and minerals, with the recent discovery of vast lithium reserves offering significant potential for economic development. However, dependence on mineral resources impedes economic diversification and perpetuates extractivism, leading to greater inequality. The national private sector is weak, and high taxes and bureaucracy make it challenging to establish formal companies or small businesses, contributing to one of the largest informal economies globally.

## CIVIL SOCIETY AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

In Bolivia, laws have been put in place to protect victims and witnesses. However, the system has weaknesses that prevent adequate support for victims, particularly those of sexual violence. Furthermore, human-smuggling victims are not protected by the state, and the vast majority of victims have not received attention or protection in the past two years. The lack of cooperation and coordination between government agencies in Bolivia acts as a barrier to effective prevention efforts, which remain difficult to measure. The government's response to crime seems to focus on the destruction and seizure of illegal drugs, rather than improving social conditions. Despite this, Bolivia has implemented an innovative coca policy that focuses on the social welfare, human rights and economic stability of coca-farming families. This policy has proven effective and sustainable in diversifying the economy and fostering political and economic stability. The direct participation of communities and grassroots organizations in finding more effective and sustainable approaches to drug control has been a crucial element of its success.

Bolivia is considered a partly free country due to its poor guarantees of political rights and civil liberties. Non-state actors play a key role in the country by making crimes visible and highlighting lack of government control in non-renewable-resource trafficking and flora and fauna crimes. The media has played an important role in denouncing corruption and crimes such as drug trafficking. It has put the spotlight on specific cases, leading to arrests and a strong response from the government. However, the government puts continued pressure on media outlets, and institutions do not have the capacity to keep data up to date. Female activists face constant harassment, preventing them from accessing several areas in the country, despite asking for government protection. Indigenous communities also struggle to enforce protection of their territories and are often dismissed by official authorities.

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