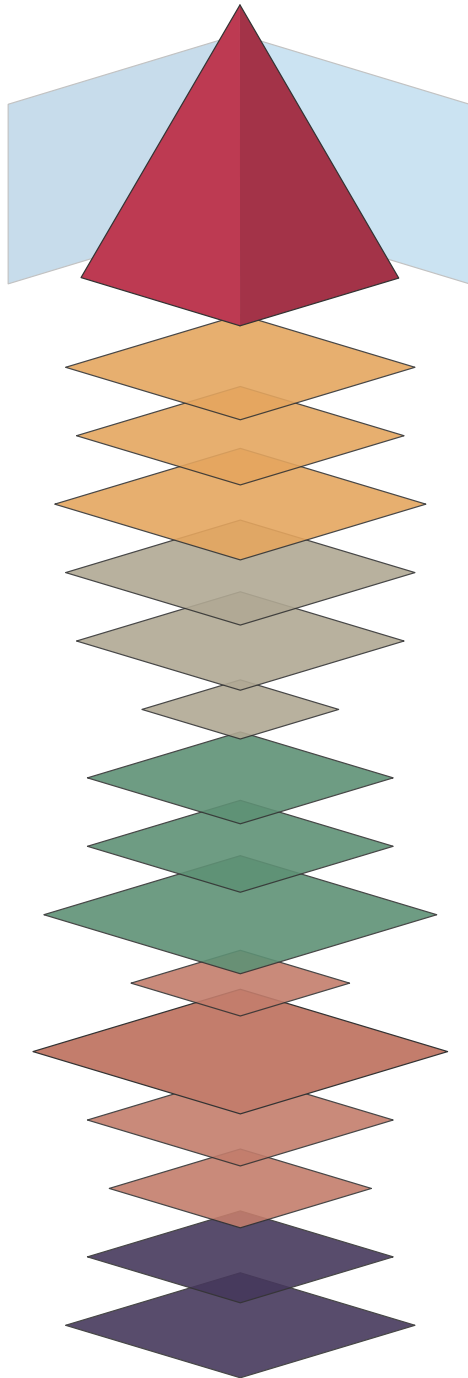




# COLOMBIA



7.75

## CRIMINALITY SCORE

2<sup>nd</sup> of 193 countries

1<sup>st</sup> of 35 American countries

1<sup>st</sup> of 12 South American countries



### CRIMINAL MARKETS

7.30

HUMAN TRAFFICKING	8.00
HUMAN SMUGGLING	7.50
EXTORTION & PROTECTION RACKETEERING	8.50
ARMS TRAFFICKING	8.00
TRADE IN COUNTERFEIT GOODS	7.50
ILLICIT TRADE IN EXCISABLE GOODS	4.50
FLORA CRIMES	7.00
FAUNA CRIMES	7.00
NON-RENEWABLE RESOURCE CRIMES	9.00
HEROIN TRADE	5.00
COCAINE TRADE	9.50
CANNABIS TRADE	7.00
SYNTHETIC DRUG TRADE	6.00
CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES	7.00
FINANCIAL CRIMES	8.00



### CRIMINAL ACTORS

8.20

MAFIA-STYLE GROUPS	9.50
CRIMINAL NETWORKS	9.50
STATE-EMBEDDED ACTORS	7.50
FOREIGN ACTORS	7.50
PRIVATE SECTOR ACTORS	7.00



5.63

## RESILIENCE SCORE



Funding provided by the United States Government.

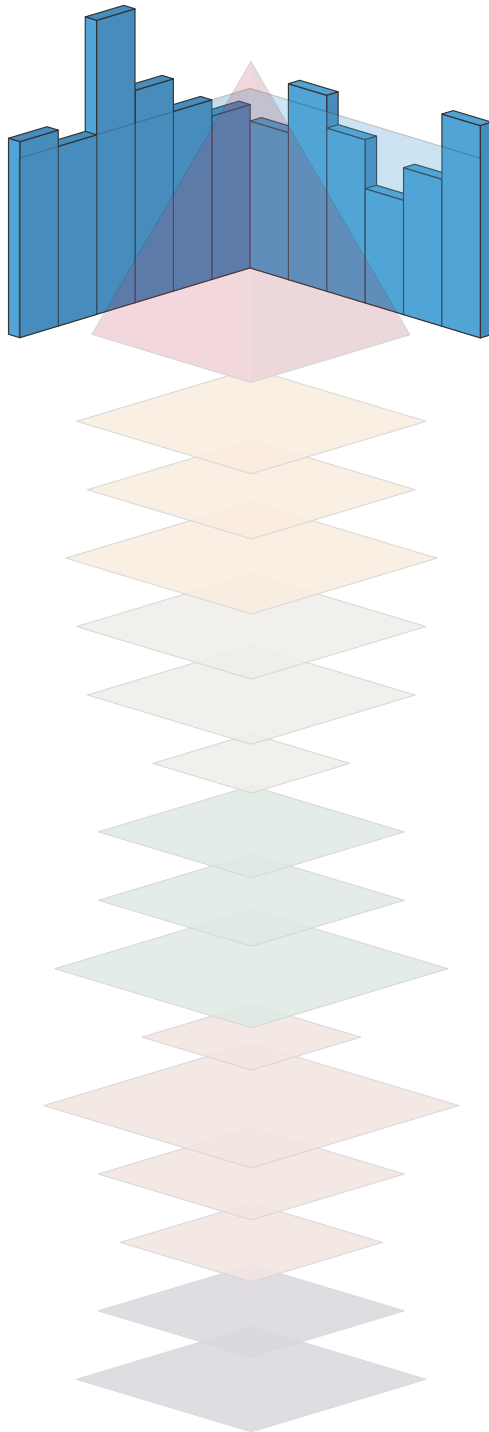


Funded by the European Union

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# COLOMBIA



## 5.63

### RESILIENCE SCORE

50<sup>th</sup> of 193 countries

7<sup>th</sup> of 35 American countries

4<sup>th</sup> of 12 South American countries

POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE	6.00
GOVERNMENT TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY	5.50
INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION	9.00
NATIONAL POLICIES AND LAWS	6.50
JUDICIAL SYSTEM AND DETENTION	5.50
LAW ENFORCEMENT	5.00
TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY	4.50
ANTI-MONEY LAUNDERING	6.00
ECONOMIC REGULATORY CAPACITY	5.00
VICTIM AND WITNESS SUPPORT	3.50
PREVENTION	4.50
NON-STATE ACTORS	6.50



## 7.75

### CRIMINALITY SCORE



CRIMINAL MARKETS **7.30**



CRIMINAL ACTORS **8.20**



# CRIMINALITY

## CRIMINAL MARKETS

### PEOPLE

Colombia is a country which is both a source of and a destination for human trafficking. Human traffickers operate within established networks of organized-crime and illegal armed groups. Sex work and sexual exploitation have come to the attention of authorities in some parts of the country, leading to campaigns against established sex tourism. Sophisticated human-trafficking networks, run by Colombians, traffic women into Asia and operate online. The situation has worsened with the mixed migratory flux crisis from Venezuela, with human-smuggling dynamics often correlated with exploitation dynamics. Venezuelans are being exploited at mines and at coca leaf crop and cocaine production sites, while women are being sexually exploited in the surrounding areas. Additionally, there have been cases of child exploitation for forced begging in major Colombian cities.

Colombia has become a hub for human smuggling, especially since the situation in Venezuela has deteriorated and millions of Venezuelans have left their country. Young children and teenagers are especially vulnerable to human-smuggling and forced-labour practices within Colombia. Criminal actors also smuggle African, Asian, Haitian, Ecuadorian and Cuban nationals through the country, and state actors profit from the human-smuggling industry. In the northern region of the country, on the border with Panama, there is a well-established route for people seeking to reach the US. The human-smuggling criminal market is related to other illicit financial flows and money-laundering dynamics, such as moving illegal gold and cash from and to Panama. The situation has created a network of criminal markets operating the route and include transnational and local mafias.

Colombian criminal violence is fuelled by extortion and protection racketeering perpetrated by organized-crime networks, especially in rural areas. Mafia-style groups engage in this illegal activity, charging merchants, landowners and businesses for protecting them against other criminal networks that might attack their territory. They also engage in cartel racketeering and use social-media platforms and digital strategies to intimidate and terrorize the population. In cities, smaller bands control streets and impose their taxation, extortion and security obligations on businesses that operate within their territories. These types of activities increase when conflicts break out among criminal groups. In rural areas, criminal groups charge landowners protection money or extort them to the point that they have to hand over their land rights. They also tax and extort illegal mining activities and drug transport in the territories they control. Their show of force indicates the amount of control these

groups enforce on a territory, affecting businesses and even intimidating street vendors into paying them.

### TRADE

Colombia's ongoing conflict with several armed groups has made it a destination country for illegally acquired arms. The economic collapse of Venezuela has also led to growing volumes of arms being diverted from the army into the hands of Colombian criminals. Each of these criminal actors has found their own methods for accessing arms from international networks. Firearms are the most common weapon used in murders in the country, which are often related to drug wars. Recently, traffickers have been bringing in arms shipments from Asia and the US into Chilean ports, which eventually reach Colombia through various routes. Despite the ongoing conflict, some authorities have called on Colombian civilians to arm themselves for protection, making the legal sale of weapons a risky enterprise. Colombia is currently among the countries in the world with the highest number of firearms used in homicides and suicides. Law enforcement is also concerned about artisanal firearms made by manipulating blank pistols, which are being sold and rented to criminals and gang members, including modified blank arms with bullets impregnated in cyanide.

Colombia is a notable player in the global counterfeit goods market, both as a transit point for illegal goods and as a manufacturer of fake products for export. The consumption of counterfeit goods is deeply ingrained in Colombian society, particularly in the fashion industry, where everyone knows where to buy them and openly discusses the fake nature of the products. The COVID-19 pandemic, constraints on global market flows and the high dollar price have led to an increase in the local market of falsified local products, with cities like Medellin, Barranquilla, Cali and Bogota being the most affected. Criminal organizations involved in the counterfeit market are typically small, fragmented and dynamic, with some cooperating with larger, more hierarchical organizations that specialize in a particular market or product. The market also promotes the use of criminal networks called *oficinas de cobro* to solve contractual issues through violence.

Due to the high dollar price, many products are being bought in Ecuador and Venezuela to avoid excise taxes in Colombia. In contrast, Colombian raw materials are seen as cheap for the dollarized Ecuadorian economy and are trafficked to support illegal manufacture. These products are then sold in both Colombia and dollarized or partially dollarized economies. The trade has shifted direction and adapted to more profitable dollar prices and better business opportunities. Cigarettes, car parts and alcoholic beverages

are among the contraband goods most commonly seized by authorities.

## ENVIRONMENT

Colombia's criminal organizations engage in deforestation primarily through extortion practices. The COVID-19 crisis has exacerbated the situation, leading to thousands of hectares of jungle being deforested, particularly around national parks and protected areas. Illegal wood selling is also widespread, with communities engaging in it due to lack of incentives for legal production. Illegal armed groups control certain areas, with dissidents from FARC (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia or Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) and the National Liberation Army being the major players in deforestation. They clear land for other illegal economies such as mining, coca cultivation and cattle raising, which is used as a modality for money laundering. As a result, Colombia is the most dangerous place in which to be an environmental activist, with the assassination of civil society leaders who dedicate themselves to environmentalist activities not being uncommon.

Colombia, one of the most biodiverse countries in the world, is plagued by wildlife trafficking, particularly of reptiles, which are traded for food and skins. Although efforts have been made to counter animal trafficking, the black market for animals is still thriving, with Europe being the primary destination. Birds are also heavily sought after as pets, especially on the Caribbean coast. The illegal trade is maintained by recruiting poor farmers to capture animals and resell them to organized-crime groups, which then take over the shipment and commercialization of the species. Environmental leaders, particularly those from indigenous communities who live in and protect their territories, are vulnerable due to impunity and lack of interest in prosecuting criminal organizations that control different territories.

Illegal gold mining is the most common and lucrative non-renewable-resource crime in Colombia. Law enforcement mainly focuses on detaining small-scale miners and destroying equipment, but has failed to pursue large investors, related corporate crimes and corruption. Illegal gold is often laundered and exported with Colombian paperwork. Criminal groups are increasingly branching into illegal mining due to rising gold prices and weakened environmental control caused by the pandemic. Other metals, like coltan and tungsten, are also mined in places controlled by illegal groups. The emerald trade has historically been a stronghold of the mafia and widely used as a money-laundering tool. The illegal oil trade has resurged, with Colombian bands smuggling Venezuelan oil into Colombia. Oil and petrol are still sought-after products for cocaine production.

## DRUGS

Although smaller than the cocaine trade, the Colombian heroin trade still generates considerable income for domestic trafficking organizations and has negative effects on society. Criminal clans in Cali run the trade and supply high-end markets in the US in collaboration with Mexican cartels. Poppy cultivation is disputed by independent drug dealers, local mafia groups and Mexican cartels, and it provides income for local communities in the Nariño and Cauca provinces. Drug dealers pay indigenous communities for extracting poppy latex, which they resell in Cali and Bogota for profit. While police have made some progress in confiscating heroin, most of it still transits through the country.

Colombia is the largest producer of cocaine in the world, which is trafficked to North American, European and Asian markets, as well as within the region, with Brazil being one of the largest consumer markets for cocaine worldwide. Colombia is producing more cocaine than ever before, and high levels of cocaine production are likely to persist in the short term. The Colombian government has attempted to push aerial fumigation again, despite warnings and evidence that this is not the most effective strategy to deal with coca plantations. There are indications that the country also exports cocaine base to other South American nations for further production. Local consumption has also increased, particularly in urban centres, where the sale of cocaine has become a major source of income for local mafia organizations.

Cannabis is the second most lucrative and trafficked drug after cocaine, but its profitability within the country remains unclear. Production is resource-intensive, and Brazilian groups have been increasingly importing Colombian 'creepy' cannabis due to its growing popularity and strong effects. In fact, most Colombian cannabis exports are of this sub-product, which contains higher THC levels than normal marijuana and is mainly produced in the Cauca region. Adult recreational consumption is still punished by authorities, and cannabis use remains stable among Colombian adults due to high social stigma. Regarding local consumption, illegal sales and legal cultivators who grow for personal use make up the market distribution in the main cities. After the US and Paraguay, Colombia is the country with the highest number of cannabis seizures.

Synthetic-drug trafficking in Colombia appears to be a small domestic industry, mainly managed by small groups in the country's urban areas. The consumption of synthetic drugs is increasing, particularly on the nightclub scene, and social-media networks have had an impact on consumption trends. The drug 2C-B, or 'tusi', has become popular due to social media influencers and platform users talking about its consumption, and its price has dropped considerably in recent years. However, experts warn that few samples were real 2C-B compounds, with most being ketamine with different mixes. Mexican cartels seem to control the

market in the region, using Colombia as a transit route between several countries, and there is no evidence of local production.

## CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES

Colombia has become one of the most heavily targeted countries in the region for cyber-attacks, trailing only behind Brazil and Mexico. Cybercrime has surged in Latin America, especially during the pandemic when people increasingly relied on online resources for banking and government services. This dependence has made them more vulnerable to cyber-dependent crimes. In recent years, Colombia has seen a notable increase in cybercrime complaints, with most of the fraudulent activities being conducted on sites posing as official and government channels in order to mine information. Ransomware continues to be the biggest problem, especially for small and medium-sized businesses. Personal-data violations have become the fastest-growing criminal activity in Colombia, followed closely by forceful access to information. The most affected cities include Bogota, Medellin, Cali, Barranquilla, Cartagena and Bucaramanga.

## FINANCIAL CRIMES

Financial crimes are a pervasive issue in Colombia, with cyber-enabled financial fraud being a common occurrence. Small and medium-sized businesses are often targeted by scammers who impersonate other companies and deceive them into acquiring services which they are unable to provide. Tax evasion is also a significant problem, with the country having one of the highest rates of tax evasion in the world. Criminal organizations are suspected of profiting from these modalities, with some political groups and powerful clans implicated in tax evasion scandals also being investigated for drug trafficking, money laundering and acting as figureheads for others. Misuse of public funds has also been a long-standing problem in Colombia, with government administrations suffering from related scandals.

## CRIMINAL ACTORS

Colombia is home to many powerful and sophisticated mafia-style groups, paramilitary forces and guerrillas which are involved in long-standing and complex conflict fuelled by drug trafficking. These groups are involved in transnational organized crime and low-level activities such as extortion with a substantial social impact. They also exert social control and governance over certain areas, imposing norms, regulating civilian activity and providing social services in lieu of the state. The state's decades-long fight against these groups continues to use up a large share of the country's budget and military and police resources.

Colombia's organized-crime networks, while fragmented, remain highly structured and adaptable to changes in the transnational crime landscape. These groups are constantly

searching for new ways to diversify their methodologies or work with smaller, more informal networks. These networks are responsible for a wide variety of criminal activities, including drug trafficking; trafficking of non-renewables, arms and flora and fauna; and human smuggling and trafficking. In addition, mafia-style groups are hiring criminal networks to operate and commit acts of violence in regions where they have no presence or control, which benefits these both parties.

The drug trade in Colombia involves a number of foreign actors, including Mexican cartels, European mafia representatives and Venezuelan gangs. Mexican cartels have a significant presence in the country, but they do not seem to be trying to establish territorial control or form their own armies. Instead, they buy cocaine from various Colombian criminal organizations and then transport and resell it in the US. Venezuelan gangs are increasingly involved in the drug trade in Colombia due to the rising migration crisis. They also specialize in human trafficking and smuggling and operate at different stages of illegal land routes at the Venezuelan-Colombian border. Brazilian gangs have become middlemen, buying Colombian cocaine and then shipping it to European markets. They also appear to have links with Italian mafias.

Corruption is rampant in Colombia at all levels of the state, but it is considered less systemic and violent than in other Latin American countries. However, corruption has grown in recent years, extending to sectors previously considered technical, and involving high-level public officials. The police and military have also been involved in various scandals, including collaboration with criminal networks and violent repression of social mobilizations, resulting in missing persons, deaths and impunity. Corruption scandals involving state actors have been exposed in exploitation around the Amazon, with complex networks including armed networks, private actors and state representatives acting against environmental leaders' efforts. Despite efforts to address corruption and violence by transitional justice and truth commissions, state-embedded actors continue to undermine progress.

Private-sector actors in Colombia are involved in a range of illegal activities, including offering bribes, aiding criminal organizations and engaging in money laundering. Criminal organizations continue to interfere with government institutions and private interests. Small-scale credits known as *gota a gota* are one example of illegal activities carried out by bankers, financial experts and business professionals. These loans are often controlled by larger criminal organizations and are acquired by individuals who are unable to access traditional banking or credit options. Some businesses and enterprises also profit from the grey area of lending money, offering their services through social media and apps. Additionally, there is a cohort of lawyers, accountants and legal professionals who assist drug dealers in negotiating deals with government authorities and negotiating extradition deals.

# RESILIENCE

## LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

The Colombian government has taken a hard-line approach to organized crime, aiming to weaken criminal groups, particularly in light of the peace deal negotiated with FARC. However, the government's focus on forced eradication of drug crops rather than softer crop-substitution programmes, and its iron-fisted approach to citizen security, have led to an increase in violence and criminal activity, particularly in rural areas and places controlled by armed groups and criminal networks. In 2021, Colombia experienced its highest number of violent homicides in seven years, with particularly chaotic situations in the Valle del Cauca department and Cali. The ongoing humanitarian crisis resulting from conflicts between non-state armed groups has further exacerbated the situation, with high levels of forced displacement and massacres. The government's inefficiency in implementing peace deals and recommendations has also contributed to security concerns. Although Colombia ranks high in Latin America in terms of government transparency and accountability, corruption and impunity remain significant obstacles to public trust in state bodies. The government's failure to deliver on transparency promises regarding the money intended for combating the COVID-19 pandemic, coupled with several high-profile corruption scandals in the last administration, have only heightened these concerns. Nevertheless, Colombia still performs above average in terms of access to information.

Colombia has ratified most of the relevant international treaties, but is yet to ratify the Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants and the Protocol against the Illicit Manufacturing and Trafficking in Firearms. The US and the EU have been key partners and allies of Colombia, providing support and funding to address issues such as drug trafficking, armed groups, peace accords and migration crises. Colombia has a robust legislative framework for identifying and combating organized crime, with a variety of laws pertaining to organized crime, drugs, firearms and trafficking. However, there are ongoing debates regarding government inaction in avoiding state abuse during national mobilizations, as well as corruption and wrongdoing in businesses dealing with seized assets, even by government authorities.

## CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND SECURITY

The judicial system in Colombia is considered stable and diverse, but it suffers from weak due process and a lack of adequate protection. Although the attorney general's office has specialized divisions for dealing with organized crime, corruption and insufficient resources have been a persistent challenge in the judiciary, making it difficult for many Colombians to access the judicial system. The

Supreme Court, the country's highest court, has also been embroiled in corruption scandals. In addition, the system is often criticized for its high recidivism rate and inability to effectively punish criminals. Currently, a different judicial system is operating transitional justice as part of peace agreements with FARC guerrillas. As for the penitentiary system, there are constant scandals of contraband and other illicit activities inside prisons where personnel and other authorities appear to be accomplices. There have even been records of inmates extorting money from people from within prisons, apparently with the knowledge of authorities. Recently, the prison system situation has worsened.

Colombia has specialized units to combat organized crime and one of the largest armed forces in the region. However, due to challenging terrain, corruption and inefficiencies within the system, security forces struggle to effectively combat criminal actors, leading to the consolidation of criminal control in some areas. While the country has the necessary resources and infrastructure to fight organized crime, it falls short on implementation. Police reform has become a major political issue following protests in response to police killings, but it is unlikely that legislation proposals will pass.

Colombia's borders with Venezuela and Ecuador are problematic and porous, allowing illegal armed groups to carry out operations and escape. The state has not been able to establish an effective presence for its law-enforcement bodies and state institutions and services in many areas, allowing criminal groups to exert territorial, social, economic and political control, especially in remote rural regions. In some areas, armed actors have taken over state responsibilities, such as imparting justice and territorial vigilance and control. This situation has led to the recycling of armed groups and the entry of new criminal organizations after the demobilization of FARC, although the Colombian state has made some marginal gains in regaining control of different regions.

## ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL ENVIRONMENT

The country still faces challenges in enforcing anti-money laundering regulations, particularly in the virtual services sector. Additionally, Colombia is grappling with the issue of Panama, which is classified as a jurisdiction under increased monitoring due to its involvement in money-laundering activities. To address these challenges, Colombia is increasing its efforts to collaborate with the international community, particularly with the US.

Despite economic volatility in neighbouring countries, Colombia has been successful in maintaining a strong hold on its economy. Urban areas have seen a decrease in

informal activity, although it still remains a considerable part of the economy. Rural areas, on the other hand, continue to struggle with informality due to a lack of investment opportunities and financial services. However, the country is making progress in strengthening its economic regulatory environment. Colombia has also shown significant progress in anti-corruption efforts, with the attorney general's office prosecuting several high-profile corruption cases.

## CIVIL SOCIETY AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

Colombia has legislation to protect victims of armed conflict, human trafficking and drug addiction, but the implementation of these laws often falls short, leading to delays and shortcomings. Government inefficiencies in investigating, prosecuting and convicting criminals highlight the need for improved crime-fighting strategies. Witness protection is also a concern, with individuals facing threats, especially from organized-crime networks. Rural and indigenous communities, as well as activists, lack sufficient protection from the government, making it difficult for them to seek justice through formal channels. The government's failure to comply with protocols to convene the National Commission of Security Guarantees and its criticism of peace mandates and peace accord implementation have created an institutional impasse, leading to a high number of petitions for protection from the transitional justice body.

Strategies to prevent organized crime in Colombia have been overshadowed by hard-line security initiatives, and drug-crop-substitution programmes are losing momentum.

However, non-police prevention strategies such as deploying units in a preventative manner and hotspot policing are being implemented. Although the government has suspended gun permits, individuals can still acquire guns legally.

Colombia's civil society plays a vital role in analyzing and preventing organized-crime activities in the country. There are several crime-related observatories and NGOs working to help vulnerable youths escape gangs. Despite threats and violence against civil-society organizations and leaders, non-state actors continue to implement projects and initiatives to benefit vulnerable populations. However, Colombia remains one of the most dangerous countries for journalists and environmental activists, who are frequently targeted with death threats, physical attacks, abduction and murder. Moreover, conflict dynamics have not diminished in the last two years, leaving human rights defenders and activists vulnerable to violent threats. Privately owned groups dominate the country's media landscape, and lack of transparency for media business interests and owners is a problem. During the 2021 social-mobilizations crisis, many journalists covering the protests were attacked, with the majority of incidents attributed to the police. The government and the armed forces also created blacklists of opposition leaders and activists to target their online activity.

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