

3. Armed conflict and peace processes in the Americas

Overview

Several armed conflicts meeting the non-international armed conflict (NIAC) threshold, as defined under international law, were active in Colombia and Mexico in 2021. In Colombia at least three parallel and overlapping conflicts continued: one between the government and the Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN) and another between the government and dissident armed groups of the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-Ejército del Pueblo (FARC-EP)'s former Eastern Bloc; and one between rival cartels the ELN and the Autodefensas Gaitanistas de Colombia (AGC). In Mexico three NIACs exist: one between the government and the Sinaloa Cartel and another between the government and the Cártel Jalisco Nueva Generación (CJNG); and one between the two rival cartels. In addition to these NIACs, there were various other situations of violence within the territories of Mexico and Colombia involving cartels, gangs and armed groups.

Six additional countries in the Americas—Brazil, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras and Venezuela—experienced high levels of violence in 2021, which did not however meet the threshold required to be considered NIACs. Despite this, they are referred to in this yearbook as ‘armed conflicts’ on the basis of the number of battle-related fatalities involved.

Brazil saw a rise in estimated battle and other conflict-related deaths in 2021, and violence against civilians caused as many deaths as battles. The nature of armed conflict in Brazil is complex and difficult to define, as illustrated by the fact that approximately 57 per cent of the 2620 battle-related deaths were attributable to violence between state forces and unidentified armed groups or violence between police and political militias, while 42 per cent involved inter-political militia violence. In Venezuela government forces committed acts of violence as the state challenged its loss of control over swathes of territory to gangs and armed groups. Skirmishes between the Venezuelan military and dissident FARC group 10th Front occurred near the border between Venezuela and Colombia, while the 10th Front and Second Marquetalia clashed over control of drug trafficking routes and territory.

Guatemala and El Salvador saw growing violence, authoritarianism and corruption in 2021. In Guatemala the government shut down an anti-corruption body and arrested prosecutors who had begun investigating President Alejandro Giammettei for alleged bribery. In El Salvador President Nayib Bukele consolidated power by dismantling institutional checks and balances.

Despite political violence and killings, 2021 closed on a more hopeful note in Honduras. Xiomara Castro, the region's only woman leader, was elected to president, replacing President Hernández. Even so, the country remains beset by high levels of poverty, violent crime and corruption.

In Haiti the assassination of the president deepened political instability. Mass displacement surged, driven by the compounding effects of extreme poverty, corruption, pervasive gang violence and natural disaster impacts.

There were three multilateral peace operations active in the Americas in 2021: two in Colombia and one in Haiti.

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