

# Civic Freedom Monitor: Colombia

Last updated: **September 13, 2026**

## Recent Developments

In August 2026, Colombia adopted Decrees 0980 and 1028, establishing a national policy to strengthen protection for human rights defenders and the right to defend human rights. The measures seek to shift the protection framework toward prevention, coordination, and structural guarantees, with particular attention to women defenders. The *Defensoría del Pueblo* welcomed the new policy while emphasizing that its effectiveness will depend on implementation, inter-agency coordination, and continued efforts to address violence, stigmatization, and other risks faced by defenders. Please see the News section below in this report for additional details.

*While we aim to maintain information that is as current as possible, we realize that situations can rapidly change. If you are aware of any additional information or inaccuracies on this page, please keep us informed; write to ICNL at [ngomonitor@icnl.org](mailto:ngomonitor@icnl.org).*

## Introduction

Civil society organizations (CSOs) have long played a vital role in shaping public policy, advancing development, and promoting peace in Colombia. CSOs were shaped by and evolved in response to the armed conflict that defined Colombia's political, social, and economic landscape for nearly 50 years. As a result, Colombia today has a robust and sophisticated civil society, encompassing human rights organizations, peacebuilding platforms, community strengthening initiatives, women's rights groups, and academic and research institutions. Many of these organizations operate as part of alliances or networks, amplifying their impact.

Colombia follows a civil law legal system. The 1991 Constitution guarantees freedom of association, expression, and assembly, and actively promotes the participation of CSOs in public life. It also elevates the many international human rights treaties and agreements ratified by Congress to the level of constitutional law, giving them precedence in Colombia's legal system. The Constitutional Court has played a critical role in protecting fundamental rights, including those related to access to public information, association, and assembly.

Nevertheless, CSOs face a complex and often contradictory web of laws, regulations, and policies that complicates their operations. Even after the peace accords were signed in 2016, Colombia's civic space has remained under threat, with human rights defenders and social leaders continuing to face lethal violence, gender-based attacks, and widespread intimidation.

***This Civic Freedom Monitor (CFM) country note was made possible through the research conducted by Camilo Sanchez, who is an Associate Professor of Law and Director of the International Human Rights Clinic at the University of Virginia.***

## Civic Freedoms at a Glance

|                               |                                                                                                                                     |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Organizational Forms</b>   | Nonprofit Corporations/Associations and Foundations                                                                                 |
| <b>Registration Body</b>      | Public Registries of Chambers of Commerce                                                                                           |
| <b>Approximate Number</b>     | Unknown                                                                                                                             |
| <b>Barriers to Formation</b>  | Excessive discretion in registration process                                                                                        |
| <b>Barriers to Operations</b> | Subjective application of regulations by government institutions                                                                    |
| <b>Barriers to Resources</b>  | No legal barriers                                                                                                                   |
| <b>Barriers to Expression</b> | Harassment of human rights organizations                                                                                            |
| <b>Barriers to Assembly</b>   | The Police Code adopted in 2016 establishes vague regulations on obstruction of public roads and limits spontaneous demonstrations. |

## Legal Overview

This section provides a brief overview of Colombia's legal framework for the promotion and protection of civic freedoms. Click a subheading for more, or [click here to expand all subheadings](#).

## RATIFICATION OF INTERNATIONAL AGREEMENTS

| Key International Agreements                                                                                          | Ratification* |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|
| International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)                                                          | 1969          |
| Optional Protocol to ICCPR (ICCPR-OP1)                                                                                | 1969          |
| International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR)                                              | 1969          |
| Optional Protocol to ICESCR (Op-ICESCR)                                                                               | No            |
| International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD)                             | 1981          |
| Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)                                    | 1982          |
| Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (OP-CEDAW)                     | 2007          |
| Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)                                                                           | 1991          |
| International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families (ICRMW) | 1995          |
| Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture                                                                   | 2025          |
| Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)                                                          | 2011          |

| Key Regional Agreements                                                                                                               | Ratification |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|
| American Convention on Human Rights                                                                                                   | 1973         |
| Additional Protocol to the Convention on Human Rights in the Area of Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights “Protocol of San Salvador” | 1997         |

\* Category includes ratification, accession, or succession to the treaty

## CONSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

Despite its armed conflict, Colombia maintains a strong array of rule-of-law institutions. The 1991 Colombian Constitution includes a comprehensive bill of rights, provisions securing the independence of the judiciary, and other checks and balances on executive power. Since 1991 the Constitutional Court has developed a progressive jurisprudence that affirms the rights of victims of human rights violations and protects individual liberties. The Colombian Constitution also recognizes the role of CSOs and establishes that the state has the obligation to support them and to recognize them as legitimate actors in the policy process.

Article 38 guarantees the exercise of the freedom of association: “The right of free association for the promotion of various activities that individuals pursue in society is guaranteed”. In addition, article 95 provides that “The following are duties of the individual and the citizen: ... to defend and publicize human rights as a basis of peaceful coexistence...”

Article 20 of the Constitution provides that “Every individual is guaranteed the freedom to express and disseminate his/her thoughts and opinions, to transmit and receive information that is true and impartial, and to establish mass communications media”.

Article 37 provides that “Any group of individuals may gather and demonstrate publicly and peacefully. The law alone may establish in a specific manner those cases in which the exercise of this right may be limited.”

Article 39 establishes that workers and employers have the right to form trade unions or associations without interference by the state. Their legal status will be recognized by the simple registration of their constituent act. The cancellation or suspension of legal status may only occur through legal means.

Moreover, the Constitution provides that the State “will contribute to the organization, promotion, and guidance of professional, civic, trade union, community, youth and charitable or nongovernmental public-purpose associations, without prejudicing their authority so that they may constitute democratic means of representation in the various functions of participation, agreement, control, and supervision of the public activities that they undertake.”

## NATIONAL LAWS, POLICIES, AND REGULATIONS

Relevant national laws, policies, and regulations include the following:

- The Civil Code regulates the establishment of companies, associations and societies for profit-making and nonprofit-making purposes. Nonprofit, charitable or welfare associations or societies may be established by private acts.
- Law 863 of 2003 (Article 8) establishes income tax exemptions for not-for-profit corporations, foundations and associations with legal standing, with respect to income from all activities and assets employed toward their aims and purposes. CSO must maintain separate books and accounts with respect to any business they carry out and such books need to be registered at the local

chamber of commerce.

- The Transparency and Access to Public Information Law of March 2014 requires all government agencies and employees to answer requests for information. It also establishes a minimum of information content that the government must publish and requires government entities to provide proof and arguments justifying cases where information is withheld.
- The [National Police Code and Coexistence](#) (Law 1801), which was approved by Congress in 2016, updated the 1970 Police Code provisions regulating public demonstrations and protests. In a [2017 ruling](#), the Colombian Constitutional Court found that the Code's chapter that regulates public demonstrations had violated the Constitution insofar as it had not been supported by a statutory law. The lack of a statutory law or regulation gives authorities broad discretion to decide on the legality of demonstrations in the public space.
- [Law 2197 of 2022](#) criminalizes social protest and legitimizes various forms of vigilantism. Much of the law was challenged legally, leading the Constitutional Court to strike down several provisions, while others were upheld but with interpretative limits to prevent police abuse.
- [Directive No. 07 of 2023](#) combats the stigmatization of human rights defenders and emphasizes their protection from threats and violence, while encouraging public policies to ensure their safety.
- [Decree 1231 of 2024](#) regulates the National Police's use of force, promoting actions grounded in human rights and legality. It mandates responsible, proportional police conduct and stresses communication before force is used, prohibiting excessive behavior. Clear guidelines differentiate the use of force based on the situation and establish supervisory responsibilities.
- Attorney General's [Directive 001 of 2024](#) provides guidelines for peaceful protest management, underscoring its constitutional right and setting investigative and prosecutorial limits. It ensures police conduct respects human rights, offering special protections for vulnerable groups and aligning legal procedures with international standards to maintain both protest rights and public order.
- Presidential Directive of September 9, 2024 on the duties of public officials in the exercise of freedom of expression and respect for freedom of the press. The Directive establishes guidelines to optimize the implementation of Colombia's international obligations regarding freedom of expression, particularly with regard to the interaction between the executive branch and journalism, in line with the standards of the Inter-American human rights system. Under the Directive, officials must avoid stigmatizing or discriminating against journalists and other relevant actors, promote a tolerant public discourse free of hate speech, and guarantee access to accurate information. They are expected to foster open communication channels, avoid censorship, and verify information before making public statements. The Directive also outlines specific preventative measures against stigmatization, including respectful communication, correcting misinformation fairly, and ensuring equitable treatment of journalists. The Secretariat for Communications and Press is tasked with overseeing compliance, implementing training programs, and maintaining open dialogue with media representatives to promote a democratic environment of open and responsible communication.
- Decrees 0980 and 1028 of 2026 establish a national policy to protect human rights defenders and strengthen the right to defend human rights. The decrees promote a shift from reactive protection measures toward prevention, coordination, and structural guarantees, with particular attention to

## PENDING REGULATORY INITIATIVES

Please help keep us informed; if you are aware of pending initiatives, write to ICNL at [ngomonitor@icnl.org](mailto:ngomonitor@icnl.org).

## Legal Analysis

This section provides an in-depth assessment of Colombia's legal environment for civic freedoms, including the barriers to the exercise of the freedoms of association (formation, operations, resources), expression, and peaceful assembly. Click a subheading for more, or [click here to expand all subheadings](#).

## ORGANIZATIONAL FORMS

The legal framework governing CSOs in Colombia is marked by vagueness and internal contradictions. For example, many laws and regulations refer to “non-governmental organizations (NGOs),” yet they fail to provide a clear legal definition of the term. In practice, Colombian law recognizes only two forms of non-profit legal entities: nonprofit corporations or associations and public charitable foundations. The term “association” does not denote a specific legal form under the Civil Code but reflects the constitutional freedom of individuals to form corporations.

Registering a CSO involves a two-step process. First, applicants must submit documents to the chambers of commerce, which manage public registries for commercial entities, government suppliers, and nonprofit organizations. These registries serve as a means of publicity rather than providing substantive oversight. The application must include:

- A memorandum of association and rules and regulations;
- minutes of the Executive Board or General Assembly approving the organization's creation;
- a detailed mission statement, including program and project information;
- the legal address and a list of the founders' names, addresses, and occupations;
- a detailed statement showing the organization's assets;
- an affidavit sworn by the organization's president or secretary; and
- a declaration from the members of the managing committee affirming that organizational funds will be used exclusively to further its stated aims and objectives.

Then, the registration needs to be submitted to either the state (Gobernaciones) or district (alcaldías) authority where the CSO seeks recognition.

Under Law 22 of 1987, Colombia's 32 governors and the Mayor of Bogota Capital District are authorized to inspect and supervise CSOs. Organizations are required to submit annual financial statements and activities reports to these authorities.

The cancellation of legal status is governed by Presidential Decree 1529 of 1990. Article 7 specifies that any individual can submit a request to cancel a CSO's legal status on grounds such as engaging in illegal activities, violating public order, or deviating from the purposes for which it was established. Upon receiving such a request, the relevant Governor's or Mayor's Office should open an investigation, conduct an on-site visit to the concerned CSO, and make a decision within ten working days.

## **PUBLIC BENEFIT STATUS**

Colombian law does not establish a distinct legal category for nonprofit organizations with public benefit status. However, the Constitution recognizes foundations as “institutions of public use,” intended to serve the “public benefit.”

Under Colombian tax law, CSOs engaged in health activities, sports, formal education, cultural, scientific or technological, ecological, environmental protection, or social development programs qualify for special tax benefits. These include reduced tax rates and, in some cases, full exemptions from income tax.

## **BARRIERS TO FORMATION**

Overall, the legal requirements for establishing and operating a CSO in Colombia are relatively straightforward. Some observers even argue that the process is too simple, raising concerns about potential abuse.

Although the Constitution allows CSOs to form for a wide range of purposes, in practice, restrictions emerge when an organization’s objectives conflict with government policies or ideology. Human rights organizations and other groups critical of the government, for example, often face greater challenges in obtaining or maintaining legal status.

## **BARRIERS TO OPERATIONS**

Although there are no express legal barriers to CSO operations, the subjective application of regulations by government institutions often results in a disparity between the original intent of the laws and their enforcement in practice. Human rights organizations, in particular, operate in a climate of harassment, as detailed below in the Barriers to Expression and Barriers to Assembly sections.

There are no legal restrictions on communication or engagement with international actors. However, cultural sensitivities can create informal barriers. Criticizing the government in international forums, for example, can be perceived as an act of disloyalty.

## **BARRIERS TO RESOURCES**

CSOs in Colombia are allowed to receive foreign funding through grants and donations. They are also permitted to acquire and dispose of property, invest resources, and import and export goods. However, to comply with anti-money laundering regulation, Colombian banks require an official Spanish translation of a document detailing the origin of funds when foreign currency is converted to pesos.

## **BARRIERS TO EXPRESSION**

Colombia remains one of the most dangerous countries in the world for human rights defenders, with dozens of labor rights activists, lawyers, indigenous activists, and community and religious leaders murdered every year. In recent years, human rights CSOs and their members have faced frequent reprisals and undue restrictions for their work supporting victims of the armed conflict. Violations take the form of illegal surveillance, smear campaigns, criminal prosecutions, invasions and arbitrary searches of CSO offices, and interference with phone and electronic communications. These practices create a hostile and unsafe environment for advocacy work.

Statements by government officials have contributed to this climate of risk, with international monitoring bodies warning that such rhetoric can legitimize or encourage violence against human rights defenders and their organizations.

## **BARRIERS TO ASSEMBLY**

Since 2016, a series of legal amendments and policy decisions have increasingly restricted the exercise of the right to peaceful assembly in Colombia.

In 2016, amendments to the Police Code granted local authorities broad powers over the use of public space and the exercise of the right to public demonstration. Human rights activists challenged these changes before the Constitutional Court, arguing that they did not comply with constitutional provisions and international human rights standards on the right to peaceful assembly. In April 2017, the Court ruled in favor of the plaintiffs but deferred the ruling's effect for two years to give Congress time to enact a new framework. As of 2025, Congress had yet to adopt replacement legislation, leaving a regulatory vacuum and creating uncertainty for local authorities tasked with policing assemblies.

Between 2019 and 2022, Colombia experienced a significant surge in social protests, with 12,478 demonstrations occurring across 862 municipalities from April 28 to June 4, 2021. Although most protests were peaceful, the government tended to treat them as a law enforcement issue, leading to confrontations between police and demonstrators in major cities. This response resulted in at least 50 deaths, numerous missing person reports, hundreds of injuries—including severe eye injuries from “less-lethal” weapons—and over 3,000 detentions. Regulations were implemented that authorized military intervention in protests. In response to this crisis, the IACHR conducted an emergency [visit to the country](#) and issued [a report](#) condemning these human rights violations and calling for structural police reform.

Courts have also, at time, curtailed assembly rights. In May 2021, during the Covid-19 pandemic, the Administrative Court of Cundinamarca suspended all demonstrations until biosecurity protocols were implemented or herd immunity was achieved. Civil society and academic experts criticized this ruling ([Spanish](#)) as incompatible with constitutional and international norms. The Council of State overturned the decision in June 2021, affirming that restrictions on peaceful assembly can only be established by Congress.

The adoption of the Citizen Security Bill ([Law 2197 of 2022](#)) in January 2022 further jeopardized assembly rights. Enacted after two months of mass protests marred by excessive force, the law introduced provisions that critics argues could criminalize protest, hinder human rights defenses, legitimize vigilante justice, enable urban paramilitarism, and authorize the shooting of civilians. Several provisions faced legal challenges, leading the Constitutional Court to strike down or reinterpret sections to prevent police abuse. However, Article 20, which criminalizes the “obstruction of public functions” with penalties of up to five years in prison, remains in force.

Additional details on restrictions on assembly in Colombia are provided below.

## **Vague Provisions**

In 2011, Colombia's Congress approved reforms to the Criminal Code, the Code of Criminal Procedure, and the Juvenile Criminal Code. Article 353(A) of the Criminal Code contains vague language regarding the obstruction of public ways during protests. It provides for prison terms of four to eight years and heavy fines. The broad and imprecise wording risks criminalizing legitimate protest activities protected under the Constitution.

## **Advance Notification**

The National Police Code (Decree No. 1355 of 1970) requires organizers to give written notice of public meetings or parades at least 48 hours in advance. Accordingly, spontaneous demonstrations are not permitted. Authorities may alter routes, dates, or times within 24 hours based on public order considerations. However, if there is no response by the authority within 24 hours, it is understood that the assembly may take place.

## **Enforcement and Excessive Force**

Although civilian authorities typically refrain from interfering with public meetings, there have been repeated instances of the use of excessive force by anti-riot police. The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and other international bodies have documented arbitrary killings, injuries from projectiles, and cases of torture and ill-treatment of protesters—including forced

nudity, death threats, and racially motivated abuse. Many detentions during protests have relied on “transfer for protective purposes,” an administrative measure granting police broad discretionary powers.

In September 2020, the Colombian Supreme Court confirmed these violations, expressing concern over the systematic and arbitrary interventions by police during protests. In response, the government adopted [Decree 003 of 2021](#), establishing a use-of-force protocol for the national police during protests. While CSOs welcomed certain provisions, they criticized the decree for failing to address all of the issues raised by the Court.

Shortly after the Decree’s implementation, Colombia witnessed intense street protests, during which numerous instances of police noncompliance with the established protocol were documented. The government’s issuance of [Decree 575 of 2021](#), which directed governors and mayors to coordinate “military assistance” to confront public disturbances, drew sharp criticism from the IACHR for its potential to disproportionately restrict freedom of expression and assembly. The Council of State provisionally [suspended](#) the decree in July 2021, citing risks to the right to protest.

Under President Gustavo Petro, new measures sought to reverse some of these problematic norms and practices. [Decree 1231 of 2024](#), which replaces Decree 003 of 2021, strengthens human rights protections and sets clearer standards for proportional use of force, emphasizing de-escalation and supervisory accountability. In parallel, Attorney General’s [Directive 001 of 2024](#) provides guidelines for managing peaceful protests, reinforcing constitutional protections, setting boundaries on investigations and prosecutions, and aligning police conduct with international standards.

Resolution 01840, which was issued on June 20, 2025, adopts guidelines for the use of less-lethal weapons by the National Police based on principles of necessity, legality, proportionality, and constitutionality and marks a significant step toward protecting civilian human rights during security force interventions. This resolution, which resulted from collaboration between the government, CSOs and the United Nations, also prioritizes dialogue and mediation before resorting to less lethal weapons, which can only be used by specially trained personnel. However, CSOs argue that while the guidelines represent progress in human rights protection, their true impact lies in effective implementation, proper supervision, and the commitment to transforming police doctrine and actions.

## Additional Resources

This section contains links to external reports and news reports relevant to civic freedoms. Click a subheading for more, or [click here to expand all subheadings](#).

## GLOBAL INDEX RANKINGS

| Ranking Body                                            | Rank                                                                      | Ranking Scale<br>(best - worst possible)      |
|---------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| <a href="#">UN Human Development Index</a>              | 83 (2023)                                                                 | 1 - 193                                       |
| <a href="#">World Justice Project Rule of Law Index</a> | 91 (2024)                                                                 | 1 - 142                                       |
| <a href="#">Transparency International</a>              | 99 (2025)                                                                 | 1 - 182                                       |
| <a href="#">Foreign Policy: Fragile States Index</a>    | 63 (2024)                                                                 | 179 - 1                                       |
| <a href="#">Freedom House: Freedom in the World</a>     | Status: Partly Free<br>Political Rights: 31<br>Civil Liberties: 39 (2025) | Free/Partly Free/Not Free<br>40 - 0<br>60 - 0 |

## REPORTS

|                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| UN Universal Periodic Review Reports                                  | <a href="#">Colombia UPR page</a>                                                                                                                                               |
| UN Human Rights Reports                                               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <a href="#">OHCHR: Colombia</a></li><li>• <a href="#">OHCHR: Situation of human rights in Colombia (2022)</a></li></ul>                 |
| U.S. State Department                                                 | <a href="#">2024 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Colombia</a>                                                                                                        |
| Peace and Conflict Studies                                            | <a href="#">Mobilizing for Peace: Civil Society's Influence on the Peace Process between the Colombian Government and the National Liberation Army (ELN) (2010-2021) (2024)</a> |
| IMF Country Reports                                                   | <a href="#">Colombia and the IMF</a>                                                                                                                                            |
| Corporación Transparencia Por Colombia                                | <a href="#">Civil Society Report: An input to the UNCAC Implementation Review Mechanism: Fourth year of review of UNCAC Chapters II and V (2022)</a>                            |
| Comisión Interamericana de Derechos Humanos (CIDH) (IAHCR in English) | <a href="#">Segundo Informe de Seguimiento de Recomendaciones: Situación de personas defensoras de derechos humanos y líderes sociales en Colombia (2026)</a>                   |
| ICNL Online Library                                                   | <a href="#">Colombia</a>                                                                                                                                                        |

## NEWS

### [Ombudsperson welcomes decrees protecting human rights defenders](#) (August 2026)

The *Defensoría del Pueblo* welcomed the adoption of Decrees 0980 and 1028 of 2026, describing them as an important step toward strengthening guarantees for human rights defenders and advancing a more preventive, rights-based approach to protection. The Ombudsperson's Office emphasized that the policy is the result of years of dialogue among civil society organizations, state institutions, and international actors through the National and Territorial Guarantees Mechanisms. It also stressed that the decrees' success will depend on effective implementation, strong inter-agency coordination, and sustained efforts to address the persistent violence, stigmatization, and security risks faced by human rights defenders across the country.

### [IACHR publishes second follow-up report on human rights defenders and social leaders in Colombia](#) (April 2026)

The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) presents its second follow-up report on recommendations on the situation of human rights defenders and social leaders in Colombia following the negotiations toward and the signing of the Peace Agreement. To draft this second report, the IACHR gathered and organized information from the State and civil society, as well as testimonies from defenders and social leaders. These sources included technical dialogues, official reports, resolutions, hearings, academic research, and media monitoring. Between 2020 and 2025, the IACHR observed a significant increase in compliance levels, reflected in progress on all previously pending recommendations and in the number of recommendations partially or substantially implemented. Nevertheless, the IACHR has pointed to ongoing challenges in the effective, coordinated and verifiable implementation of these public policies.

### [Colombia Adopts Sectoral Collective Bargaining Rules Under Decree 0234](#) (March 2026) (Spanish)

On March 10, 2026, the Government of Colombia issued Decree 0234 of 2026 to regulate multi-level

collective bargaining. The decree allows collective bargaining by economic sector or business group, with sectoral agreements establishing minimum working conditions applicable to all covered companies, without preventing firm-level improvements. It applies to the private sector and “trabajadores oficiales” and excludes career public servants.

### **NGOs criticize government response to court mandates on protecting human rights defenders** (December 2025) *(Spanish)*

On December 5, 2025, Cosesu, a coalition encompassing 17 NGOs, released a report scrutinizing the Colombian government’s sluggish response to Sentencia SU-546/23. This ruling by the Corte Constitucional declared an “unconstitutional state of affairs” due to systemic failures in safeguarding human rights defenders. Despite the Court’s extensive directives to curb violence against activist leaders, Cosesu highlights insufficient institutional actions and slow progress.

### **Large protests in Colombia in support of President Petro’s labour reforms** (June 2025)

Protests have been held in Colombia as supporters of left-wing President Gustavo Petro express their support for his proposed labour reform, with the country rattled by an eruption of violence amid fears of a return to darker days of assassinations and bombings. Petro signed a decree to hold a public referendum vote on the labour reform.

### **Statutory Bill 166 of 2024 is shelved** (May 2025)

On April 29, 2025, Statutory Bill 166 of 2024 was shelved. It sought to protect young people and social movements that have relied on the state to guarantee their right to protest, comply with the Peace Agreement and related international human rights recommendations, and prevent future social crises due to the lack of a clear legal framework that allows for the exercise of this right.

### **Thousands march across Colombia in anti-government protests** (June 2023)

Thousands of demonstrators marched through Colombia’s major cities to protest the government of leftist President Gustavo Petro. At least 90,000 people throughout the country took part in “The March of the Majority” in Bogota, Medellin, Cali, Pereira and Bucaramanga to protest against a raft of proposals to reform healthcare, pensions and the labor system. Protesters dressed in white also chanted against Petro’s attempts to give criminals immunity in exchange for laying down their arms. Since taking office in August last year, Petro has been seeking a “total peace” policy to end a 60-year armed conflict between the state and various illegal groups that are still active in the country.

### **Citizen Security Law receives new legal challenge** (December 2022) *(Spanish)*

In December 2022, the Constitutional Court admitted a new lawsuit against the Citizen Security Law. This lawsuit involves an article of the Law that states that whoever occupies, usurps, or invades private or public property in the middle of a demonstration may incur a prison term of four to ten years. For the plaintiff, the Law criminalizes in an “unreasonable and disproportionate” manner the fundamental rights of freedom of expression and public and peaceful assembly and demonstration since, most of the time, these types of protests occupy public property such as streets, parks, or public squares. It is the third lawsuit filed before the Constitutional Court regarding this Law.

### **UN calls on Colombian government to protect rights defenders who challenge corporate activity** (August 2022)

Activists who raise concerns about business projects in Colombia are under serious threat for speaking out, and UN human rights experts are urging the government to do much more to protect them. “Serious threats, including death threats, are commonplace in Colombia for defenders who raise concerns about corporate activity, in particular in land-intensive industries,” said Mary Lawlor, UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders.

### **Colombia Truth Commission presents final report on internal armed conflict** (June 2022)

The Colombia Truth Commission was set up as part of a 2016 peace deal between the government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). It was tasked with documenting abuses and explaining what caused the conflict to persist for so long. The Commission’s final report claims that at least 450,664 people were killed over nearly six decades of fighting and also criticizes entrenched

impunity in Colombia.

### [Mounting Security Challenges Await Colombia's Next President](#) (June 2022)

In the first round of Colombia's presidential elections, long-standing opposition leader Gustavo Petro and newly emerged outsider Rodolfo Hernández both handily defeated the conservative establishment candidate Federico Gutiérrez. The latter's third-place finish signals Colombians' resounding rejection of the country's status quo and a rebuke of the political establishment and predominant elites.

### [Colombia bars social leaders from speaking before UN security council](#) (May 2022)

The Security Council will meet in New York for its quarterly session on the implementation of a 2016 peace deal with now-defunct guerrilla group FARC. These sessions have always been attended by Colombia's foreign minister to represent the State and a social leader to represent civil society. This time only Duque will address the UN ambassadors. The decision is controversial because of the Duque's alleged non-compliance with the peace deal and a resurgence of violence in Colombia.

## **ARCHIVED NEWS**

[Colombia Responsible for Rape and Torture of Journalist Jineth Bedoya, Court Rules](#) (October 2021)

[IACHR Completes Working Visit to Colombia and Issues Observations and Recommendations](#) (June 2021)

[Egregious Police Abuses Against Protesters](#) (June 2021)

[55 Members of U.S. Congress Urge State Department to Denounce Police Brutality in Colombia](#) (May 2021)

[Judiciary Seeks to Prohibit Street Protests until Herd Immunity Achieved](#) (April 2021)

[Human Rights Organizations Call for Investigations into Police Violence by Independent Judges](#) (March 2021)

[Colombian Intelligence Unit Used U.S. Equipment to Spy on Journalists and Human Rights Defenders](#) (May 2020)

[Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders Releases Report on Colombia](#) (December 2019)

[Colombia's Peace Deal Promised a New Era. So Why Are These Rebels Rearming?](#) (June 2019)

['Terrible trend' of rights defenders killed, harassed](#) (May 2019)

[Regional Strike in Cauca Enters Twelfth Day](#) (March 2019)

[Colombia must act to stop killings and attacks against human rights defenders](#) (December 2018)

[Student strikes continue: The march of the pencils](#) (November 2018)

[Colombia's new defense Minister proposes to limit right to protest and attacks social leaders](#) (July 2018)

[Inter-American Court of Human Rights orders Colombia to investigate journalist's murder](#) (June 2018)

[Iván Duque wins election to become Colombia's president](#) (June 2018)

[IACHR Urges Colombia to Adopt Urgent Measures to Protect Human Rights Defenders](#) (March 2018)

[More than 100 human rights activists killed in Colombia in 2017](#) (December 2017)

[Colombia's FARC rebels keep famous acronym for new political party](#) (August 2017)

[EU envoy calls for Colombia's social leaders to have 'maximum protection'](#) (May 2017)

[Spike in killings as activists targeted amid peace process](#) (February 2017)

[Security Situation for Human Rights Defenders in Colombia Continues to Deteriorate](#) (January 2017)

[Colombia signs peace deal with FARC](#) (November 2016)

[Dejusticia sues the Police Code over protest regulation](#) (October 2016)(*Spanish*)

[The paradox of Colombia's peace deal for FARC](#) (August 2016)

[Colombia peasant protests shut down roads, spur violent police response](#) (June 2016)

[Massive Threats against Human Rights Defenders in Colombia](#) (April 2016)

[IACHR Condemns Killings and Threats Directed against Human Rights Defenders in Colombia](#) (February 2016)

[Colombian Government and FARC rebels sign key agreement](#) (December 2015)

[Colombian president and rebels declare peace](#) (October 2015)

[Student and rights activists among arrested 'ELN' bombing suspects](#) (July 2015)

[New book on Communications Surveillance and Privacy](#) (April 2015)

[New Presidential Decree on Access to Information and Transparency](#) (January 2015)

[Wave of Threats Hit Colombian Human Rights Defenders](#) (October 2014)

[Democratic and Social Reforms Needed for Lasting Truce in Colombia](#) (August 2014)

[Juan Manuel Santos reelected in Colombia's Presidential elections](#) (June 2014)

[Colombia not on IACHR human rights 'black list'](#) (April 2014)

[Colombia has its first Transparency and Access to Public Information Law](#) (March 2014)

[Protest Swell in Colombia's "Andean Spring"](#) (August 2013)

[First half of 2013 worst period on Colombia's record for human rights workers](#) (August 2013)

[Farc rebels and Colombian government reach deal over political participation](#) (June 2013)

[Constitutional Court Ruling Green-Lights Law on Transparency and Access to Information](#) (May 2013)

[United Nations' human rights office to remain in Colombia until 2016](#) (April 2013)

[Colombia civil society hand over proposals to FARC](#) (January 2013)

[Colombia's Congress passes military reform law despite objections of human rights groups](#) (December 2012)

[Human rights court visits Colombia for 'blacklist' revision](#) (December 2012)

[NGOs, victims, indigenous groups, and ex-paramilitaries demand involvement in peace negotiations between FARC and Colombian government](#) (October 2012)

[Civil society leaders in Santander threatened](#) (October 2012)

[Dozens arrested in Colombia protests](#) (October 2012)

[Attacks and assassinations against human rights defenders continue in Colombia](#) (October 2012)

[Colombia: Peace at last?](#) (October 2012)

[CIVICUS intervention in the UPR for Colombia](#) (October 2012)

[Supreme Court reverses plans to prosecute a local journalist](#) (August 2012)

[Colombian Congress to approve “\*Transparency and Access to Information Law\*”](#) (June 2012)

[Civil society report on UN Security Council Resolution 1325](#) (June 2012)

[Civil society “revolt” defends rule of law in Colombia](#) (July 2012)

[Attempted shooting of rights lawyer raises questions of political will](#) (May 2012)

[Official statistics report that at least 17 land rights leaders have been murdered in Colombia since June of last year](#) (April 2012)

[Violence against human rights defenders in Colombia on the rise](#) (March 2012)

[Colombia’s Domestic Intelligence Chief, convicted of criminal conspiracy](#) (September 2011)

[IACHR condemns continued threats and murders directed against human rights defenders and their families in Colombia](#) (March 2011)

[Human Rights Watch World Report 2011](#) (January 2011)

## **HISTORICAL NOTES**

The [National Police Code and Coexistence](#) (Law 1801), which was approved by Congress in 2016, updated the 1970 Police Code provisions regulating public demonstrations and protests.

In a [2017 ruling](#), the Colombian Constitutional Court found that the Code’s chapter that regulates public demonstrations had violated the Constitution insofar as it had not been supported by a statutory law, which, according to the Constitution, is required when regulating individual rights. To avoid a regulatory vacuum, the Constitutional Court deferred the application of its judgment to June 20, 2019, and urged Congress to pass a Statutory Law on the matter. However, as of April 2025, Congress had not started the discussion on a draft bill of the statutory law.

There has been a debate among legal experts as to what are the rules governing protests after June 20, 2019. To some experts, the previous 1970 Police Code should regain authority, which in the view of activists would be highly problematic since the that Police Code placed unconstitutional restrictions on the freedom of peaceful assembly. Other legal experts consider that in the absence of a statute, authorities should apply the rules set by the jurisprudence of the Constitutional Court. In any case, the lack of regulation allows authorities an unconstitutionally wide leeway to decide on the legality of demonstrations in the public space. Furthermore, when protesters block a road or street without notification, they may be subject to criminal conviction, fines, and terms of imprisonment pursuant to Colombia’s Criminal Code.

The passage of [Law 2197 of 2022](#), which criminalized social protest and legitimized various forms of vigilantism, sparked significant legal controversy. Much of the law was challenged legally, leading the Constitutional Court to strike down several provisions, while others were upheld but with interpretative limits to prevent police abuse. Since then, the Government has implemented executive orders to protect assembly rights, beginning with [Directive No. 07 of 2023](#), which combats the stigmatization of human rights defenders and emphasizes their protection from threats and violence. It encourages public policies to ensure their safety.

[Decree 1231 of 2024](#) further regulates the National Police’s use of force, promoting actions grounded in

human rights and legality. It mandates responsible, proportional police conduct and stresses communication before force is used, prohibiting excessive behavior. Clear guidelines differentiate the use of force based on the situation and establish supervisory responsibilities.

Furthermore, Attorney General's [Directive 001 of 2024](#) provides guidelines for peaceful protest management, underscoring its constitutional right and setting investigative and prosecutorial limits. It ensures police conduct respects human rights, offering special protections for vulnerable groups and aligning legal procedures with international standards to maintain both protest rights and public order.

## INTERNATIONAL CENTER FOR NOT-FOR-PROFIT LAW

<https://www.icnl.org/resources/civic-freedom-monitor/colombia>