

USDoS. Country Report on Terrorism 2021 - Chapter 5 - National Liberation Army (ELN)

National Liberation Army

Aka ELN; *Ejército de Liberación Nacional*

Description: The National Liberation Army (ELN) was designated as an FTO on October 8, 1997. The ELN is a Colombian Marxist-Leninist group formed in 1964. It remains focused on attacking the security services and economic infrastructure — in particular oil and gas pipelines and electricity pylons — and on extorting foreign and local companies. The ELN commits crimes and acts of terror throughout Colombia, including violence against civilian populations there and in Venezuela.

Activities: The ELN continued to target Colombia's infrastructure, particularly oil pipelines. It also launched mortar attacks on police stations and the military; placed explosive devices near roads; and engaged in sniper attacks, roadblocks, and ambushes. Additionally, the ELN continued to kidnap civilians and members of Colombia's security services.

Throughout 2017 the Government of Colombia and the ELN conducted peace talks but did not ultimately reach an agreement. Peace talks were intermittent throughout 2018 after being suspended early in the year following a series of ELN bombings that killed several police officers and injured dozens more. The government ended talks following a 2019 VBIED attack by the ELN on the General Santander National Police Academy. The attack was the deadliest Bogotá had experienced in years, killing 22 police cadets and injuring 87 more. Colombian officials also attributed numerous oil pipeline bombings to the ELN in 2019.

In 2020, the ELN called for an "armed strike" across the country; authorities reported that ELN executed 23 attacks, killing one soldier and injuring seven police officers.

The ELN continued to commit attacks throughout Colombia in 2021, including multiple attacks against oil infrastructure.

Strength: ELN consists of about 2,300 armed combatants.

Location/Area of Operation: Colombia and Venezuela

Funding and External Aid: The ELN draws its funding from the illicit narcotics trade, extortion of oil and gas companies and landowners, and illegal mining in Colombia and Venezuela. Additional funds are derived from kidnapping-for-ransom payments.