



2.3. Security situation at the border

Armed groups control strategic border areas with Colombia, Brazil, and Guyana, where they also manage key drug-trafficking routes, often operating in coordination with state security forces. [584](#) Colombian guerrillas control the border region [585](#) and use Venezuela's Amazonas region as a hideout, where conditions are considered more 'comfortable'. [586](#) Beyond coercion, these groups use patronage to secure influence in mining towns, funding teachers, building schools, and transporting the sick to gain local support. [587](#) They have largely shifted from seeking national political influence to capturing local state structures and establishing parallel authorities that allow them to control illicit markets. [588](#) Additionally, Mexican drug cartels such as Sinaloa and Jalisco, and Colombian paramilitary successor groups such as the AGC, control drug trafficking in the region. [589](#) Paramilitary successor groups also engage in extortion, kidnapping, contract killings, sex trafficking, and the control of informal border crossings. [590](#)

Extortion is widespread in border states such as Táchira, Bolívar, and Zulia. [591](#) Armed groups recruit Indigenous and other local youths to collect extortion payments and transport drugs from Colombia to Brazil, and they deploy them as fighters in Colombian conflict zones along the Venezuelan border. [592](#) Extortion is pervasive at illegal border crossings, known locally as *trochas*, and is carried out by illegal armed groups including Tren de Aragua and the ELN. [593](#)

Forced disappearances are also reported, with Venezuelan NGO Fundaredes indicating that in 2024 it documented the forced disappearance of 35 people in Apure, Zulia, and Táchira, 23 of whom were migrants reportedly crossing back into Venezuela informally. [594](#)

In the Orinoco Mining Arc, criminal organisations control mining activities, particularly of gold, coltan, and diamonds. [595](#) Transparency Venezuela reported that between 40 and 50 tonnes of gold are extracted annually, with an estimated value of 2.7 to 3.3 billion. [596](#) Of this amount, the state receives 8 % in royalties, criminal organisations capture around 20 %, and the political elite approximately 66 %. [597](#) Fundaredes indicated that many people who move to the Mining Arc seeking employment are coopted by criminal organisations, and many subsequently disappear. [598](#) The use of children in mining operations is widespread. [599](#) Cases of modern slavery are also reported, including labour and sexual exploitation, involuntary domestic servitude, labour trafficking, child labour, sexual slavery, and commercial sexual exploitation of children. [600](#) Criminal groups control the sex trade in mining areas, where encounters are paid in gold. [601](#) Some women are trafficked, others arrive out of economic necessity, and some bring their children and leave them in "camps" that provide childcare. [602](#) Many women contract malaria and sexually transmitted infections. [603](#) Armed groups, criminal gangs, and miners reportedly commit sexual violence against sex workers and young recruits. [604](#) The National Guard conducts invasive searches to confiscate hidden gold. [605](#) Sexual and reproductive health services are largely unavailable in mining regions, including for sex workers, and many

Venezuelans seek care in Colombian border towns such as Puerto Inírida and Puerto Carreño, creating tensions with local residents.[606](#)

In September 2025, the US began carrying out airstrikes against boats in the Caribbean that were allegedly transporting drugs originating from Venezuela.[607](#) For additional information, see section [1.8 Aftermath of US intervention](#).

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