

National Liberation Army (ELN)



OVERVIEW

AS OF MAY 2026

The National Liberation Army (ELN) is the oldest and one of the most powerful insurgent groups in Colombia. It seeks to control critical areas of the country—particularly those associated with drug trafficking—and frequently engages in armed confrontations with Colombian authorities. The ELN has uneven relationships with other Colombian insurgent groups, including the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia–People’s Army (FARC-EP) and Segunda Marquetalia—another FARC dissident faction—and variously cooperates and competes with them for resources and territory.

Operating Area

Operates throughout Colombia but is mostly concentrated in the country’s northwest and southwest; several leaders have resided in Cuba since traveling there in 2018 to engage in peace talks with the Colombian Government; some members also reside in Venezuela.

Members

Approximately 2,500 fighters

Tactics And Targets

The ELN conducts armed assaults, assassinations, extortion operations, and hostage-takings. The group mostly attacks the Colombian Government, military forces, and critical infrastructure but also targets civilians. The ELN equips its members with small arms, machineguns, mines, and IEDs.

Terrorist Group Designation

The US State Department designated the ELN as a foreign terrorist organization in October 1997.

KEY LEADERS



Eliecer Herlinto Chamorro Acosta

a.k.a. Antonio Garcia

Overall leader and military chief, responsible for international relations and military strategy; known to reside in either Cuba or Venezuela along with several other ELN leaders since 2018



Israel Ramirez Pineda

a.k.a. Pablo Beltran

Second in command; responsible for political matters and recruitment; known to reside in either Cuba or Venezuela along with several other ELN leaders since 2018



National Liberation Army (ELN) *(continued)*

KEY LEADERS *(continued)*



Gustavo Anibal Giraldo Quinchia

a.k.a. Pablito

Third in command; known to reside in either Cuba or Venezuela along with several other ELN leaders since 2018

NOTABLE ATTACKS

17 January 2019

Bogota, Colombia

The ELN conducts a VBIED attack on a Colombian police academy, killing 22 cadets and prompting the Colombian Government to end peace talks with the group.

27 January 2018

Barranquilla, Colombia

The ELN attacks a police academy, killing five police officers and injuring at least 41, prompting the Colombian Government to temporarily suspend peace talks with the group.

18 October 1998

Antioquia, Colombia

The ELN blows up a portion of a pipeline, killing at least 72 people and injuring at least 67.

