



SC: Security Council

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Issue: The Situation in Colombia

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Committee: Security Council  
Issue: The Situation in Colombia  
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## I. Introduction

The situation in Colombia refers to the ongoing violence between civilians and the Colombian police force since April 28th as the result of a widely unpopular tax reform proposed by the president of the country.

Colombia is a country that was hit hard by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic with the number of cases only slowing down after the start of August. To combat the pandemic, the government started investing more in healthcare. However, the expenditure on health, the lockdowns, and the decrease in jobs left the country in an unstable economic situation. Poverty rose rapidly. Public debt and fiscal deficits show no signs of a decline.

As a result of this economic recession and the need for monetary assistance, the president introduced a new tax reform in order to raise money to combat the aforementioned economic problems. The Colombian people, who were outraged by the sudden introduction of this bill, went on a national labor strike opposing the bill. However, these protests started to include many other diverse subjects and criticisms from the public, including a new universal basic income, fulfillment of the unkept promises from the government, equality for the people -one example being the LGBTQIA+ community- eradication of the corruption, political and social violence and the trial of the former president Álvaro Uribe Vélez. These protests which started off peaceful, later turned into violent clashes with the police force, leading to many reports of police brutality and gun violence, resulting in thousands of casualties from both the police and the protestors and the death of over a hundred citizens dying. The protests also resulted in many cases of vandalism, property damage, and arson. Therefore, the police implemented blockades and the military got involved in some cases, mainly in the cities Bogotá and Cali. The tax reform bill was quickly removed on May 2nd but there are still protests. Colombia still remains one of the most dangerous places to visit during the pandemic.

The state of the country is unclear as the protests continue. Despite not having a clear image of what the future will hold both in Colombia and in the world, this issue shows how the world and every nation has to be resilient amidst these uncertainties.



## II. Involved Countries and Organizations

### Colombia

From problems arising from the COVID-19 virus, to the violence from the protests after the tax reform bill, Colombia is the main focus of the issue. The Colombian government has since removed the bill to calm the violence. Yet the president claims that the blockades and use of force are justifiable, claiming “No-one can recommend that a country be tolerant of criminal acts” along with stating that he is “respectful of peaceful protests” but will not allow vandalism or “terrorism”(President Ivan Duque Marquez). On the other hand, the Colombian protesters first took the issue to the streets after the 28th of April starting with peaceful protests and a national labor strike. However, these protests due to systemic issues and political corruption caused the protests to become increasingly violent. After that some protesters became less supportive of the movement, but this didn't stop the violence within the country. Many protesters clashed with the police, aiming to make the government solve many of the issues within the country and are currently determined not to stop until they do.

### Mobile Anti-Disturbances Squadron (ESMAD)

ESMAD is a separate unit under the Director of the Colombian Police Force and has the aim of preventing, controlling, and neutralizing riots along with vandalism, destruction of property, and arson. The unit has been around since 1999 in order to decrease public disturbances and is said to be trained in various areas including human rights; however, the group was widely criticized by the Colombian people after the National University of Colombia riots which took place in 2006. It was even criticized by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights after the death of 6 civilians. Though despite all, this it is a unit which the government has persistently invested in, even though it is said to have injured over 800 civilians using violent methods, 43 of such incidents have been confirmed. ESMAD has also been involved in the 2021 protests and receives much criticism, with protesters wanting the unit to be dismantled or replaced.

### European Union (EU)

The European Union, despite its distance from the region of Colombia, has stated its opinions on the protests claiming that they are “closely monitoring the situation” and “condemn acts of violence”(Peter Strano, 2021). Apart from this, some countries, such as Spain, directly claim they are against the violence taking place in Colombia. Although the EU has not directly assisted the protestors in any way, or given



support to their cause as individual countries, must decide their own policies, it is clear that they are entirely against the acts of brutality taking place within the country.

### United Kingdom (UK)

The United Kingdom has taken a clear stance against the violence and is more in favor of the protestors rather than the police force and ESMAD. The parliament has even stated that they “demand an end to the unacceptable state violence against civilian protestors”. As a powerful and influential country in politics and diplomacy, it is important to know the stance of the UK on the issue.

### United Nations (UN) Human Rights Council

The issue has been of great importance to the UN Human Rights Council as Colombia’s actions against the protestors and handling of the situation are in direct violation of various human rights including the right to freedom of speech and expression, the right to live, no discrimination, no torture or inhumane action and the right to live. In response, the Human Rights Council has repeatedly warned and advised Colombia against discrimination, violence, and excess use of force (especially regarding the military and ESMAD). Furthermore, they have conducted multiple investigations regarding the accusations against human rights to find the people accountable along with urging the government to disclose the whereabouts of all detained prisoners. Unfortunately, the Human Rights Council has not been very effective in preventing the protests or being respected by the Colombian government, as 70 human rights defenders were reported to have been assaulted.

## III. Focused Overview of the Issue

The situation in Colombia relates to the Colombian government, the reasons behind the protests, and how the country got into this situation. This section will go over the economic, medical, and public reasons that led to the protests along with the current issues caused by them.

### 1. Prior to the Protests

Colombia, similar to other South American countries, has a history of allegations of corruption and other internal issues. Such allegations include police brutality, drug trafficking, systematic inequality, and political corruption. Colombia has a high level of poverty; some citizens find it difficult to find work despite the country being more developed than other Latin American countries. This is not only because of the corruption inside the government, but mainly because of income inequality which is not a recent problem in Colombia. In fact, these current protests have not been the only protests Colombia has experienced, either.



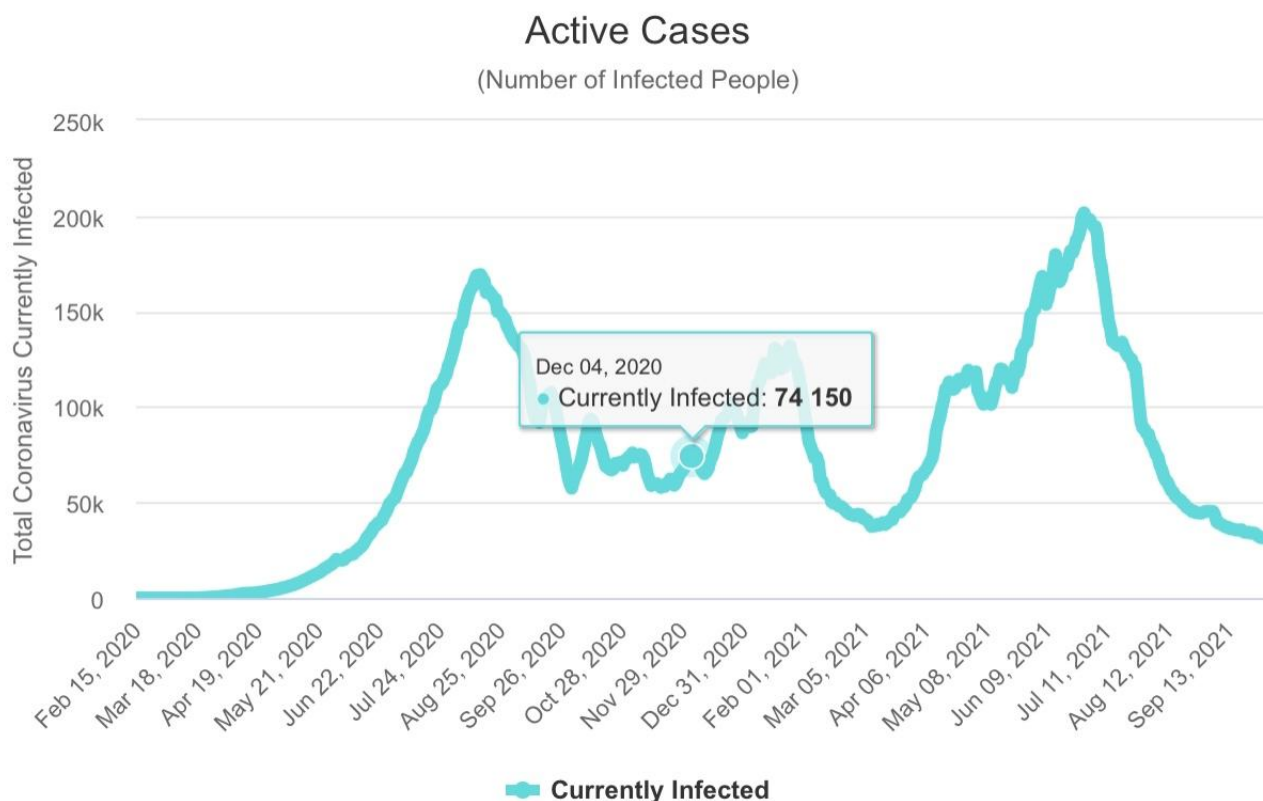


In 2006, there were the University of Colombia protests and, more notably, there were the 2019-2020 protests; both of these had cases of violence and police brutality, especially the former which criticized many of the same points as in the current 2021 protests. This is why some people could view the 2021 protests as the continuation of those protests since the previous protests were widely unsuccessful. They were unable to receive a response for their requests, and terminated with 17 casualties, over 500 injured, and over 500 arrested, similar to the current protests. All of the issues which were addressed in the previous protests further built up after the violence and brutality committed by the police and ESMAD in those cases, especially after the COVID-19 virus reached Colombia, driving the country into chaos and eventually leading to the current dilemma.

## 2. COVID-19 in Colombia

As the coronavirus was spreading throughout the whole world Colombia, as a developing country, was hit hard by the virus. As of August 4, Colombia has the 3rd most cases in Latin America with 4.8 million cases. The virus also took a serious toll on the countries' economies as between 2019 and 2020 unemployment dramatically increased to 15.5% and poverty rose from 35.7% to 42.5%. The fiscal deficit rose from 3.2% of the Gross Domestic Product to 7.8% and the public debt increased from 44% to 55%. The latter two are expected to increase to 8.6% and 65% (Atlantic Council 2021). Apart from the fact that the country had to invest a lot in the health system and the Ingreso Solidario (a universal basic income social program developed during the pandemic with the aims of providing monetary aid to low-income populations within the country), which despite helping many low-income citizens within the country, still weren't able to provide aid for the majority of people. All of this left the country in a grave situation, not only medically but economically.





"Figure 1: Number of Cases of nCov-2019 from February 2020 to September 2021"

### 3. The Tax Reform Bill

Colombia's current president Iván Duque Márquez, who was elected in 2018 and is still in office, proposed the idea of a new tax reform bill on April 28th with the hope of raising between 4.8-6.4 US dollars for the healthcare system of the country, various health organizations and the Ingreso Solidario. Unfortunately, the tax reform bill (which increased value-added tax for many goods and services including food) was unpopular among those around the president, with many of his advisors expressing concern over it and trying to convince the president against it. Apart from that, the bill was forced to go through a rushed filing method by President Márquez, resulting in the bill being seen as incomplete and unpolished. The bill was also found mistimed by many, under the current circumstances with Colombia's economy rapidly failing and people finding it harder to provide for themselves and family. The bill, causing a scarcity of essential products, negatively affected many citizens' lives and left them in a worse position than they already were. The bill's incredible disapproval and unpopularity from the public, with 80% of the population stating disapproval against it, resulted in the 2021 Colombian protests.





#### 4. The 2021 Colombian Protests

The protests regarding the bill first started with people taking their concerns to the streets via a national labor strike and peaceful protests. Though the protests started to involve more and more subjects, some of which were unresolved issues from the previous 2019-2020 protests, such as systematic inequality, political corruption, unkept promises (especially to those in low-income situations), the slow implementation of the peace

process between the Colombian government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, and police brutality from the national police department and ESMAD (which the people wanted to be reformed). They also demanded the trial of the former president Álvaro Uribe Vélez for crimes against humanity for his alleged involvement in the El Aro and La Granja massacres along with bribery and witness



Picture 2: The aggressive actions of the Colombian police department shown by the Human Rights Watch

tampering. Finally, they called for the resignation of the president, the Minister of Finance and Defense along with the commander of the national army and the director of the national police for their handling of the current protests. Unfortunately, despite the protests starting off as peaceful, cases of violence between the public and the police started to increase and involve vandalism, police brutality, and arson. There were even cases where people dressed up as civilians and police officers and fired upon the protesters, one of these people was discovered to be one of Colombia's Attorney General Francisco Barbosa's off-duty employees.

As a result, president Márquez sent the military towards Cali, where the protests are most rageful, in order to support the police against what he claims as "terrorism"(Ivan Duque Márquez,2021). Ever since the protests started the Human Rights Watch claimed that over 68 people died with 34 of them being fully confirmed and 2 of the casualties were police(Human Rights Watch, 2021). Other sources claim that the number is closer to 100. Besides that, there have been dozens of cases of sexual violence, including one in which a teenage girl was caught on video being stripped by 4 ESMAD officers that led her to later take her own life, with over 200 people missing and nearly 1000 people being injured as a result of the protests with these numbers increasing every day (United Nations Human Rights Council, 2021). Despite all of this the Colombian government has been widely ineffective in preventing the protests and their attempts to prevent





them have led to further violence between protesters and the police. Aside from that, there have also been cases of the Colombian government being accused of media censorship and misinformation including the cases in which the internet of Cali had crashed twice during the protests and a false news report attempting to portray the protests as a “celebration”.

## 5. United Nations Security Council

The UNSC’s approach to the situation so far has been supportive of diplomacy and in line with the goals of the UN verification mission in Colombia. They have been greatly disturbed by the protests and the violence they bring, especially against women and indigenous people. They Colombia and aim to propose a solution that can be beneficial for both the protestors and the development of the country. The UNSC is currently considering a series of peace agreements between the government and the protestors to put an end to the violence.

## IV. Key Vocabulary

**Labor Strike:** Also referred to as *strike action* or simply *strike*, a labor strike is an event in which workers refuse to work for a varying period of time with the main purpose of expressing concerns or sending a message to the government. An example would be the strike many Colombians went on after the passing of the tax reform bill.

**Fiscal Deficit:** The term is used to describe when there is an imbalance between the amount of money being spent in a government and the amount of money earned via revenues with the amount spent being higher. Fiscal deficits may not always be completely bad if the money is being spent for good uses. However, if used improperly, fiscal deficits can take a toll on the country’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and create a negative impact on the economy.

**Police Brutality:** The excessive and unnecessary use of extreme violence by a country’s police force. Examples of police brutality can involve actions such as but not limited to excessive use of tear gas, rubber bullets, real bullets, and methods such as beatings. Police brutality often leaves someone injured to either a small or great extent but could very well result in death as well.

## V. Important Events & Chronology

Date (Day/Month/Year)	Event
24 February 1999	ESMAD is formed





May 2006	National University of Colombia riots start with the OHCHR condemning ESMAD
September 2012	Negotiations begin between the Colombian government and the FARC
7 August 2018	Iván Duque Márquez is elected president
21 November 2019	2019-2020 Colombian protests begin
21 February 2020	2019-2020 protests end
6 March 2020	First COVID-19 case reported in Colombia
August 2020	Álvaro Uribe goes under house arrest for an investigation of bribery and witness tampering
10 October 2020	Álvaro Uribe is released from house arrest
28 April 2021	Iván Duque Márquez's tax reform bill passes and 2021 Colombian National Protests begin
2 May 2021	The tax reform bill is removed
3 May 2021	5 people died and 33 were injured amidst the protests
4-5 May 2021	Cali's internet crashed and allegations of censorship begin
14 May 2021	United Nations human rights experts condemn Colombia for their actions

## VI. Past Resolutions and Treaties

Due to this being a very recent issue there have not been many resolutions or treaties regarding the protests, with the UN so far condemning and monitoring the issue from their verification mission in Colombia

- [S/2021/603 Report of the Secretary-General](#): The Report of the United Nations Secretary-General concerning the verification mission in Colombia
- [13 July UNSC Colombia Briefing](#): The Colombia briefing of the UNSC regarding multiple issues in Colombia with the main concern being the ongoing violence taking place in the country

## VII. Failed Solution Attempts

So far, the government of Colombia has tried to calm down the protests with different approaches, none being effective. The tax reform bill was quickly retracted 4 days after it was passed and the protests began, but despite this, the protests only grew more and more violent. This is because of the increasing





demands of the protesters, not all of which the government can provide. The resignation of the Economic and Health Minister along with the Director of the Police Force also had not slowed down the protests.

Additionally, the government's increase in police forces among the protesters along with ESMAD and even the military while implementing blockades and possible cases of censorship has only angered the public towards the president and the forces mentioned. Apart from this, separate nations have expressed their concern for Colombia but have not been involved with the situation including the United States, United Kingdom, Venezuela, Chile, and Peru to name a few. Organizations such as the European Union have also been monitoring the situation and wish for the end of the violence. The UN has also been actively monitoring the situation but has unfortunately not been effective at preventing it. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights has stated that she wishes to prevent the protests as peacefully as possible stating “dialogue is the only way”(Michele Bachelet, 2021). The UN has also condemned Colombia, its police force, and ESMAD regarding their disregard for human rights (The Guardian). Unfortunately, none of the mentioned actions taken have slowed down the protests or decreased the violence taking place.

## VIII. Possible Solutions

Although the situation is complicated, there are a few ways to approach the current situation in Colombia. The best of these examples is the Colombian police force and ESMAD which have been not only criticized by the public but also by the UN. Renewing or improving upon these departments could not only decrease the protests but also police brutality as a whole within the country. Apart from that, encouraging the government against corruption by means of treaties or if necessary repercussions and taking measures to finish unfinished peace agreements can also be an effective solution albeit less likely. Finding various officers accused of police brutality and making them face consequences, such as fines, being removed from the police force, or prison, can also be another solution to decrease police brutality and possibly set an example for others.

Some alternative solutions to help slow down the protests and improve the state of the government are providing citizens with more employment opportunities as many citizens lack sustainable jobs and therefore cannot provide for themselves or their families. Another way to assist the citizens' monetary state is with the introduction of a monetary fund which could either be opened by an existing or new Non-Governmental Organizations(NGO's) or the International Monetary Fund.

It is also recommended to give some attention to the humanitarian aspects of the issue with thousands of civilians being injured. This could be done with the assistance of various NGO's or with UN





Peacekeepers under the guidance and watch of the UNSC. However, it is important to remember that the use of Peacekeepers should be avoided as much as possible.

## IX. Useful Links

CNN's news on Colombia sending the military:

<https://edition.cnn.com/2021/06/01/americas/colombia-protest-military-deployment-intl-latam/index.html>

Why Colombia's protests are unlikely to fizzle out:

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-56986821>

Indigenous people rally against killings:

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-54598875>

UN condemns Colombia after 18 deaths:

<https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2021/may/04/colombia-protests-violence-deaths-missing-un>

The US's stance regarding the protests:

<https://colombiareports.com/how-colombia-turned-us-support-for-protests-into-support-for-violent-repression/>

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