



United States Department of State
*Bureau of International Narcotics
and Law Enforcement Affairs*

International Narcotics Control Strategy Report

Volume I

**Drug and Chemical
Control**

March 2020

Bolivia

A. Introduction

Bolivia is the third largest source country of coca globally and is a major transit zone for Peruvian cocaine. The U.S. government estimated 2018 coca cultivation totaled 32,900 hectares (ha), and the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) estimated cultivation totaled 23,100 ha, both in excess of the limits established by the Bolivian government (22,000 ha). European Union (EU) studies estimate that domestic demand for the traditional and medicinal use of coca is less than 14,705 ha. UN data shows that illicit drug consumption is low in Bolivia.

The Bolivian government has had inadequate controls over coca cultivation. The UNODC calculated an estimated 27-42 percent of the coca that was cultivated in 2018 did not go to the two authorized coca markets for sale. The U.S. government estimated potential pure cocaine production to be 254 metric tons (MT) in 2018. Most Bolivian cocaine is exported to other Latin American countries, especially Brazil and Argentina, for domestic consumption, or for onward transit to West Africa and Europe, rather than to the United States.

In September, the United States again determined that Bolivia under former President Morales' administration "failed demonstrably" to adhere to its obligations under international drug control agreements and the U.S. Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, as amended. This Presidential determination was based, in part, on insufficient justification for the government's 2017 increase in the limit of legal coca production authorized under Bolivian law. On November 12, the transitional government of Bolivia assumed power following the resignation and flight from the country of former President Morales. Since then, the transitional government has made important strides in drug interdiction and extradition of drug traffickers. New elections will be held May 3 with a new government expected to assume office thereafter.

B. Drug Control Accomplishments, Policies, and Trends

1. Institutional Development

In addition to increasing the licit area of coca production from 12,000 ha to 22,000 ha, the 2017 General Law on Coca (Law 906) provides a framework for the regulation of the production, circulation, transportation, marketing, consumption, research, industrialization, and promotion of coca. The 2017 Controlled Substances Law (Law 913, which went into effect once the necessary regulations were implemented via Supreme Decree 3434) includes three enhancements: procedures for the payment of informants and plea-bargaining in drug-related cases; procedures for asset forfeiture; and a framework for wiretapping in drug-related investigations. It also provides a legal basis for studies on coca yield per hectare and on determining coca leaf-to-cocaine yield. Both studies are underway by UNODC with EU funding, and results are expected in 2020.

Bolivia has numerous entities with drug control mandates. The National Drug Control Council is the central drug control policy-making body in Bolivia. The Vice Ministry for Social Defense

and Controlled Substances (VMSD) is mandated to combat drug trafficking, regulate coca production, advance coca eradication and drug prevention, and execute rehabilitation programs.

The Special Counter-Narcotics Police Force (FELCN) reports to the VMSD and comprises approximately 1,600 personnel, and is the agency primarily focused on interdiction and money laundering cases. The Joint Eradication Task Force (FTC) conducts manual coca eradication with approximately 2,300 personnel. The Unit for the Execution of the Fight against Narcotics (UELICN) plans and funds drug enforcement operations. The Regional Center for Counternarcotics Intelligence, a regional fusion center for intelligence analysis and sharing that was started in 2018, includes participation from Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay. Other countries may join once a legal multilateral framework is finalized.

Bolivia's 2016-2020 Strategy to Combat Drug Trafficking and Reduction of Excess Cultivation of Coca Leaf, developed by the former Morales administration, prioritizes actions against criminal organizations rather than farmers who cultivate coca for traditional uses. Its stated strategy includes reduction of supply and demand, control of the excess supply of coca, and shared international responsibilities. Nevertheless, current Bolivian coca cultivation far exceeds the country's demand for coca for traditional purposes. The Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission continues to recommend that Bolivia implement a system to monitor narcotics and psychotropic drugs used in healthcare to ensure medicines are not diverted for illegitimate uses.

Bolivia receives most of its foreign counternarcotic financial support from the European Union (EU). The EU is still implementing a \$50 million three-year assistance program (2016-2018) and is considering support for two additional programs to improve drug enforcement capacity (\$33 million) and promote alternative development (\$22 million) for the period 2020-2024.

The United States and Bolivia are parties to a 1995 extradition treaty that permits the extradition of nationals for the most serious offenses, including drug trafficking. Bolivia and the United States do not have a bilateral mutual legal assistance treaty, but both countries can request assistance through various multilateral conventions to which both are signatories.

2. Supply Reduction

In 2019, FELCN destroyed 97 cocaine hydrochloride processing labs and 841 rustic cocaine labs, a 4 percent increase and 16 percent decrease, respectively, from 2018. FELCN reportedly seized 10.55 MT of cocaine base and 6.4 MT of cocaine hydrochloride in 2019 – approximately the same and 15.7 percent decrease respectively – from what was seized in 2018. FELCN arrested 3,582 individuals on drug-related offenses in 2019. In authorized areas, Bolivia maintains a “social control” policy to curb illicit coca production. Under this approach, the government negotiates with coca growers to obtain their consent for eradication. In unauthorized areas, including national parks, eradication is mandatory. During its first two months in office, the transitional government seized 2.9 metric tons of cocaine, 15 metric tons of marijuana, and destroyed 19 cocaine processing laboratories.

The U.S. government estimated that coca cultivation totaled 32,900 ha in 2018, a 6 percent increase from 2017, and that potential pure cocaine production increased 2 percent from 2017 to

254 MT. UNODC estimated that 23,100 ha of coca were cultivated in 2018, a 6 percent decrease from 2017. UNODC officials noted that 89 percent of the Chapare region's coca cultivation is destined for cocaine production and not traditional consumption. According to the Bolivian government, authorities eradicated 9,205 ha of coca as of October 2019, compared to 11,174 ha in 2018. The Bolivian government estimates it needs to eradicate 11,000 ha of coca yearly to see a net reduction in coca cultivation.

FELCN reportedly confiscated nine aircraft involved in drug trafficking, up from seven seized in 2018.

3. Public Information, Prevention, and Treatment

Illicit drug consumption remains low in Bolivia, according to the UNODC 2019 World Drug Report. There are approximately 80 drug treatment and rehabilitation centers in Bolivia. According to the Bolivian government's 2016-2020 Strategy to Combat Drug Trafficking and Reduction of Excess Cultivation of Coca Leaf, 78 percent of those centers are run by non-governmental organizations. There are only two public treatment centers, one in Tarija and one in Santa Cruz.

4. Corruption

As a matter of official policy, the Bolivian government does not encourage or facilitate illegal activity associated with drug trafficking. Senior government officials acknowledge serious corruption problems in the judiciary and police.

In March 2019, an opposition member of the lower house of the national legislature unearthed corruption involving maintenance contracts for helicopters and fixed wing aircraft used for counternarcotics operations. UELICN officials reportedly awarded 42 of 46 contracts (\$61 million) between 2013-2018 to the same companies in exchange for bribes. Authorities have detained 11 UELICN and former police officials to date.

In April, a FELCN major assigned to the Santa Cruz airport was arrested for drug trafficking and ties with drug trafficker Pedro Montenegro, along with a Santa Cruz Special Crime Fighting Force's colonel and captain. Since November, the transitional government has extradited two drug traffickers, including Montenegro to Brazil, and has expedited proceedings for fourteen more.

C. National Goals, Bilateral Cooperation, and U.S. Policy Initiatives

The U.S. Embassy meets periodically with Bolivian government officials to discuss drug control efforts. Bolivia self-funded participation to eight courses at the U.S.-funded International Law Enforcement Academy in 2019. The participants represented FELCN, the Financial Investigative Unit and the Prosecutor's office. The United States does not currently have a counterdrug presence in Bolivia. With the EU, the United States is funding a UNODC coca eradication monitoring project.

D. Conclusion

Bolivia is the third largest source of coca and cocaine in the world, and a major transit country for Peruvian cocaine. Both UNODC and U.S. 2018 estimates are well above the government-sanctioned limit of 22,000 ha. Potential pure cocaine production in Bolivia remains historically high. There is no available data to support the former Bolivian government's statements that traditional and medicinal coca consumption have increased, which it made in justifying the increase in the legal limit on coca cultivation.

Bolivia's inadequate controls over its legal coca markets are concerning, as is Bolivia's status as a transit country for cocaine trafficking. In 2013, Bolivia re-acceded to the 1961 U.N. Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs with a reservation permitting coca to be used only within Bolivia for traditional and medicinal purposes. Despite this, under former President Morales, Bolivia continued to promote the use of coca internationally and discuss potential export opportunities for coca products. These actions undermine Bolivia's commitments to its international obligations.

Bolivia's transitional government's efforts to focus on interdiction and extradition of drug traffickers skewed Bolivia's 2019 figures. Some of Bolivia's most important drug interdiction and incineration cases occurred under the transitional government. The government elected in the May 2020 elections should build on the transitional government's endeavors to strengthen efforts to stem the diversion of coca to cocaine processing by tightening controls over the coca leaf trade, achieving net reductions in coca cultivation, and improving law enforcement and judicial efforts to investigate and prosecute drug-related criminal activity. The government also needs to close parallel and illegal coca markets that violate Law 906.