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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Where is Territorial Peace? Violence, Drug Trafficking and Territory: The Killings of Former Guerrilla Combatants and Social Leaders in Colombia (2016-2021)

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Abstract: The aim of this study is to analyse the phenomenon of the killings of former FARC-EP guerrilla fighters and social leaders committed in Colombia between November 2016, when the Peace Agreement was signed, and June 2021. It argues for the need to focus the analysis on nine departments, which account for most of this type of violent homicide. This violence is closely linked to armed groups, both in the form of FARC-EP guerrillas and dissidents, as well as post-paramilitary and other criminal groups that fuel the armed conflict. This forms part of the continuation of the geography of violence that existed before the Peace Agreement, albeit with new armed actors following the demobilisation of the guerrillas. One factor explaining the violence is the drug trafficking industry, which attracts armed groups that compete for the control of resources and find in former FARC-EP combatants and social leaders people opposed to their illicit interests. Using different correlational exercises, we also note the need for future research to shed light on a phenomenon that has so far been little studied, and which highlights the limited capacity for transforming the violence that, for the time being, accompanies the Peace Agreement signed in 2016.

Key words: Colombia, FARC-EP guerrilla, social leaders, territorial peace, violence

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1. Introduction

The Peace Agreement signed between the Government of Juan Manuel Santos and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia-People's Party (FARC-EP) in November 2016 put an end to more than five decades of violence between the State of Colombia and one of the guerrilla groups with greater operational capacity in

the history of Latin America (Kruijt *et al.* 2020). After four years of talks in Havana and an unsuccessful referendum, an agreement was signed that highlighted the need for territorial peace (Cairo *et al*. 2018). This notion of peace was accompanied by comprehensive rural reform, an opening up to political participation, the surrendering of weapons, a commitment to reducing the impact of illegal drug trafficking on violence, and restitution to victims. All of this with the full guarantee of the victims' right to truth, justice, reparation and non-repetition based on the Special Jurisdiction for Peace (JEP) and a truth commission. These five points, followed by a sixth, an international mechanism designed to monitor and accompany implementation, made the Agreement one of the most ambitious and robust in the last thirty years (Kroc Institute 2017).

The Agreement acknowledged that the peacebuilding process, unlike previous experiences, had to have a strong local dimension: territorial peace. That is, prioritizing the construction of socio-economic opportunities, institutional strengthening or reconciliation policies *from the grassroots*. This also had to apply to the process of disarmament and the reintegration of former guerrilla combatants into civilian life (Mcfee and Rettberg 2019). There was, therefore, a strong emphasis on ensuring that the new life of former FARC-EP combatants was normalised at the territorial level, and that their security was fully guaranteed by the State.

However, almost five years have passed since the signing of the Agreement and, given the present situation, it is impossible to deny the serious difficulties regarding implementation (Indepaz 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021; Ideas for Peace Foundation 2018a, 2018b, 2019, 2020; Peace and Reconciliation Foundation 2019, 2019b). Added to the structural and institutional weaknesses of a state such as Colombia's, with strong shortcomings in this regard and a geography of violence dependent on huge resources from the coca business and other sources of illicit financing, is the resistance of the current government. This government led by Iván Duque has always maintained a critical stance towards the Agreement and, during Duque's three years in office, it can be said that his main concern has been to prevent demobilised guerrilla combatants from returning to arms (Gutiérrez Sanín 2020). It is perhaps why resources and subsidies to prevent an eventual return of the FARC-EP to violence have been widely deployed while several points set out in the Agreement have been very slow to progress (Kroc Institute 2020).

Nevertheless, it has not been possible to reduce the level of violence associated with the conflict, and much less with regard to the violence directed at former FARC-EP combatants and social activists (Nussio 2020; Ríos *et al*. 2020). The traditional spaces of violence have been co-opted by new actors, such as the National Liberation Army (ELN), the Clan del Golfo (in English: The Gulf Clan) and various criminal organisations operating as FARC-EP dissidents (Indepaz 2019; Ríos 2021a). This is largely because the power vacuum left by the demobilised guerrilla has not been accordingly filled by the State, but rather by these criminal groups. Behind this lies the absence of a clearly defined strategy on the role that the National Police and the army should play in co-opting the territory abandoned by the FARC-EP. It should also be noted that the state has not responded decisively to reducing the size of illicit financing sources. If that were not enough, the porous borders with Venezuela and Ecuador, strongly influenced by the absence of the state, together with the consolidation of transnational crime networks and the scant response to problems of (in)security and violence at municipal level, have ultimately contributed to the continuity of armed violence in a post-FARC-EP scenario. As a result, there has been a proliferation of violence directed against certain sectors of the population, in addition to former guerrilla combatants, who demand that the Agreement be properly implemented at the local level, especially in terms of capacity building, human rights protection, and the eradication and substitution of illicit crop cultivation. Such an approach, which is directly opposed to the interests of violence and the armed groups, has so far resulted in almost 300 former guerrilla combatants and 1,200 social leaders being killed (Indepaz 2020, 2021; United Nations Monitoring Mechanism 2020, 2021a, 2021b)[1].

[1] For now, only estimates exist that consider that more than two thirds of the violent deaths of former guerrillas and social leaders are associated with post-paramilitary structures and FARC-EP dissidents. However, no data are available that allow for a more detailed analysis in this regard, so it is essential that we systematise and disaggregate data on this violence in the future.

The following pages attempt to analyse how the aforementioned territorial peace has been undermined by this type of selective violence against former FARC-EP combatants and civil society activists. The territorial factor of violence must be understood as a variable requiring attention, insofar as its peripheral nature, affected by the deeply centralised state's scant response to the dynamics of crime, is evident both in the scope of the drug trade and the growing presence of illegal armed groups.

The argument to this effect is clear. Firstly, the territorial dynamics of violence directed against former FARC-EP combatants and social leaders is the same. This type of violence (dependent variable DV) is influenced by two closely related aspects. First, the greater the presence of armed groups (independent variable IV1), the greater the likelihood of former guerrilla combatants and social leaders being killed. Moreover, the greater the presence of activities related to the drug trade (independent variable 2 IV2), the greater the number of criminal organisations and the greater the number of violent deaths that occur. When we refer to the coca trade not only are we talking about hectares cultivated, associated with production, but also about other aspects closer to cocaine processing and distribution, such as the existence of clandestine laboratories or the amount of cocaine seized.

Thus, at least three clear contributions resulting from the above analysis should be highlighted. First, the territorial dynamics of violence after the Peace Agreement was signed are exactly identical to those existing before (prior to 2012). Although five years is too soon to expect the structural conditions that support violence in Colombia to have been removed, it is noteworthy that virtually no spatial changes have occurred in the roots of violence. The peripheral areas in the northeast (border with Venezuela), southwest (Pacific coast) and south of the country (border with Ecuador and Peru) continue to be enclaves where armed groups are most present. Groups, which, despite no longer strictly responding to the FARC-EP acronym, operate in the territory either in the form of FARC-EP dissidents or on behalf of other armed groups that have expanded their scope of action.

A second contribution, based on the identical location of deaths of former guerrilla combatants and social leaders and activists, would suggest that the Peace Agreement is an instrument to take into consideration for better understanding the representation of violence. This is because these deaths take place where there is the greatest number of armed groups. Although the reasons behind the killings of former guerrillas have not been systematically analysed, some recently published exploratory studies (Ríos *et al*. 2020) point to issues such as revanchism, the persecution of political proselytism, or the failed attempt to co-opt former combatants into the new rearmed groups. This also applies to social leaders who, when demanding political guarantees, the transformation of illicit economies or greater state presence, go against the interests of the armed groups. Although this is a matter for further investigation to clarify the specific reasons for this type of violent deaths, one can assume that social leaders are common enemies of all illicit activity (perhaps felt more intensely among post-paramilitary structures), while the deaths of ex-combatants may be the result of revenge by these types of groups, as well as failed attempts by new FARC-EP dissidents at (re)mobilising.

Third, this article argues for the need to further understand the violence currently occurring in Colombia as it relates to the illicit drug issue. As will be seen, it is no coincidence that killings of ex-combatants and social leaders take place in those places where coca production and commercialization activities are most relevant. This aspect forces us to question the transformative capacity of the current Peace Agreement, which recognizes the urgent need to address the coca business and its links with criminal structures, something that, for the time being, it has not even been able to attenuate.

To this end, this paper has been organised into five parts. First, a theoretical framework is proposed which reflects on the Peace Agreement commitments, the territorial perspective of violence, and the aspects that are essential in a successful process of armed demobilisation and security control. In addition, we have carried out a review of the literature that highlights the territorial study of violence committed against former FARC-EP guerrilla and social leaders, which, besides reports, is very scant in terms of academic production. The methodological elements of the study are then presented, enabling us to understand the initial hypothesis, the

operationalisation of the variables used, the meaning of the correlations and the analytical approach we have aimed to develop. Fourthly, the territorial dimension related to the armed groups involved in the violence and their relationship with the violent deaths of former FARC-EP guerrillas and social leaders[2] is addressed, first by way of framing the context and then from an analytical point of view. This has also been integrated together with the coca-growing phenomenon, which operates as a particularly attractive factor for the concurrence and proliferation of this type of armed actors. Finally, some conclusions are presented which serve as a corollary to the analysis and provide possible lines of work to continue exploring this object of study, which is as pertinent as it is worthy of attention.

2. Theoretical framework and state of the art

A territorial perspective of the violence in Colombia came into being in the late 1980s and early 1990s when the first studies highlighting the need to understand the spatial representation of this violence from a variable geometry of the territory were published (Reyes and Bejarano 1988; Betancourt 1991; Reyes 1993; Echandía 1996). However, according to Pissoat and Gouësset (2002), it is since the 2000s that most progress has been made in understanding the geography/violence binomial. On the one hand, based on cartographic representations and the analysis of guerrilla or paramilitary activism and the coca trade, as proposed in studies by Echandía (2006), Salas (2015), Ríos (2016) or Echandía and Cabrera (2017). On the other, by analysing the violent act(s) from a local, more qualitative and less geographical-political perspective, as is the case of noteworthy contributions by Aponte and Vargas (2011), González *et al*. (2012) or Piña (2012), among others. All, in one way or another, have attempted to frame the armed violence in the relationship it has with institutional, structural and/or territorial aspects in order to provide an explanation regarding its scope and meaning.

Since the Havana talks began, Colombia has undergone a relative transformation in the way violence is analysed spatially. This is largely due to the territorial focus proposed in the talks with the FARC-EP, and in particular, the first item on the agenda, dedicated entirely to comprehensive rural reform. This has led many studies to focus on a territorial perspective of peace rather than on one of violence (Ríos and Gago 2018; Cairo *et al*. 2018; Lederach, 2020; Rodríguez Iglesias, 2020; Le Billon *et al*., 2020), although studies have also been published focusing on violence in the territory (Ríos *et al*. 2019; Maher and Thompson 2019; Ballvé 2019, or Lemaitre and Restrepo 2019).

In almost all the cited contributions and research, the explanatory variables associated with the prevalence of violence are almost always the same: inequality and lack of economic resources; border advantages; the presence of coca cultivation; illegal mining activities, and institutional weakness. In Colombia, these elements have tended to be juxtaposed so that, as Ríos (2016) argues, and others such as Salas (2015) or Echandía (2006) already pointed out, the Colombian armed conflict has undergone a gradual process of *peripheralisation*. Thus, the different guerrilla groups and criminal structures have consolidated their presence in places with weak state intervention, under hostile geographical conditions for the State, and where coca cultivation is the predominant resource, as is the case in Norte de Santander, Nariño, Putumayo, Cauca, Antioquia or Caquetá (Ríos *et al*. 2019). Nonetheless, and as also recognised by the specialised literature, this situation is not exclusive to Colombia, since it responds to a national model of maintaining a culture of violence in largely rural and peripheral settings, which are highly *inaccessible* to the State. Thus, as will be observed in the proposed analysis, the geographical dimension is key to understanding the violence produced after the Peace Agreement: first, because it continues to bring together the main armed groups; second, because the violence occurs in scenarios where the institutional weakness of the State is greater; and finally, because coca-growing sites still

[2] It is worth remembering that, according to all existing reports, nearly 50% of the killings have been attributed to dissidents of the now defunct FARC-EP

provide enormous resources to the main perpetrators of a violence that finds in former combatants and social leaders a vulnerable and undesirable target for the interests of these armed groups.

In recent years, political geography as a sub-discipline of political science has focused on understanding violence from a strictly territorial perspective (Ríos 2021b). Spatial analyses of violence and (in)security can be found according to different population types (Raleigh and Hegre 2009), structural conditions such as poverty (Hegre *et al*. 2009), border dimensions (Buhaug and Rød 2006), the presence of "lootable" resources such as gas or oil (Basedau and Pierskalla 2013), or the link between violence and ethnic plurality (McDoom, 2014).

A starting premise is that the demographic social or cultural conditions of a given territory influence and feed back into the spatial contexts in which violence takes place. This is only comprehensible when understood as a product of the interaction between a population and a place. In other words, the relationship of the individual – or social group – with the surrounding environment leads to the construction of a spatial context in which multiple interactions take on meaning in the form of everyday life (Agnew 1987), social constructions (Pattie and Johnston 2000) and multiscale interweaving (Taylor and Flint 2011).

This helps understand why more or less violence occurs in certain places in Colombia, but not in others (Zuckerman 2012). In this regard, Linke and O'Loughlin (2015) understood violence based on factors such as national pride, social capital, separatism or greater exposure to the enemy. These are all variables specific to the location and are also found in studies such as that by Schutte and Donnay (2014).

Special attention must be paid to settings commonly referred to as peripheral, and which, like some Colombian enclaves, are very inaccessible and farther away from the country's economic and political hubs, as suggested by Horowitz (1985), Bracanti (2006) or Schutte (2015). This hypothesis was put forward by Forø and Bahaug (2015), who stated that elements such as distance from the city, the existence of jungle or mountainous corridors and refuges, and the sociocultural gap with the country's political and economic centres (*inaccessibility*) favoured the emergence of insurgencies.

Thus, as a result of marked regional fractures, combined with a lack of infrastructure and the existence of a distanced imaginary in terms of national unity, the peripheral enclaves offer the ideal conditions for preserving violence (Buhaug and Rød 2006). This is a reality to which other elements can be added, such as the existence of unstable or permeable borders (O'Loughlin 2012) or settlements of transnational ethnic communities that dispute the (mono)national character of the State (Cederman *et al.* 2013). Nevertheless, it could be assumed that the greater the distance from the decision-making centres of a state and the greater the territorial fracture, the greater the possibility of insurgencies arising when, moreover, ethno-cultural conflicts exist or resources that provide economic income to potential armed groups are available (Snyder 2006).

When a peace agreement is signed with an armed group, several elements are essential to guarantee the always difficult implementation process. According to Collier *et al*. (2003), it is important to normalise the re-emergence of dynamics of armed violence after the armed conflict or civil war has come to an end, although authors such as DeRouen and Bercovich (2008) or Hegre and Nygard (2015) link the possibility of a return to violence to a state's institutional capacity. Others like Hatzell and Hoddie (2003) emphasise the need to enable power-sharing scenarios, while still others link the stability of a peace agreement to the deployment of resources and economic investment (Collier 2008).

From the viewpoint of preventing former guerrilla combatants from not continuing to surrender their arms, and returning to violence, thought-provoking research, such as that of Nussio (2018), point to the importance of creating attractive socio-economic opportunities that provide incentives to help former guerrilla combatants transition back to civilian life. Others, such as Keels (2017), highlight political participation, albeit conditional on leadership and the conviction that disarmament is preferable to violence (Pearlman and Cunningham 2012).

However, a primary element that acts as a necessary condition for preventing a return to violence is the full guarantee of the lives of those former guerrilla combatants who commit to laying down their arms and re-joining civilian life. A lack of security and protection can pave the way for the *security dilemma* (Kalyvas and Kocher 2007; Bøas and Hatloy 2008), while former guerrilla combatants under exceptional circumstances of targeted violence may find greater security in a return to the violent environment of origin.

However, the above should always be understood as the result of a general transformation process of the structures and possibilities of violence, since it is common for there to be moments of transition in which violence and non-violence co-exist in conflict, in line with other experiences such as in the Democratic Republic of Congo (2003), Afghanistan (2004), Liberia (2004) or Sri Lanka (2005) (Höglund 2010). In addition to the need to rigorously analyse this juxtaposition of contexts of violence and its transformation, it is also necessary to address the dynamics of continuity and rupture, as armed groups are subjected to pressures that directly affect their degree of cohesion and performance (Staniland 2014), for example. It is also true, however, that this new case offers unique particularities such as, primarily, the weakness of Colombia as a state in institutional/territorial terms. The government itself acts as the main obstacle to implementing the Peace Agreement, which is, at all events, incomplete, given the continuity of other armed groups with whom there are no signs of negotiation.

In Colombia, political revanchism against armed groups that lay down their arms is far from new. For much of the 1980s and 1990s, the Patriotic Union party, founded in 1985 under the terms of the La Uribe Accords, signed a year earlier between the government of Belisario Betancur and the FARC-EP, was the target of indiscriminate violence. Thus, in less than a decade, two presidential candidates (Jaime Pardo Leal and Bernardo Jaramillo), as well as five congressmen, eleven deputies, 109 councilmen, 16 mayors and thousands of activists were killed by paramilitaries in collusion with certain ultraconservative sectors of the State. (Pécaut 2006; Ríos 2021a). When the Popular Liberation Army (EPL) demobilised in 1991, together with the Workers' Revolutionary Party (PRT), the indigenous Quintín Lame guerrilla group, and before them the M-19, it ended up being the target of reprisals from FARC-EP's 5th Front, which regarded them as traitors to the revolutionary cause (Villamizar 2017). According to official figures, 18 massacres and 763 acts of violence took place, as well as many other attacks on members of the Democratic Alliance M-19, in addition to the death of its presidential candidate, Carlos Pizarro Leongómez, in April 1990, with proven responsibility of State agents belonging to the Administrative Department of Security. Later, with the paramilitary demobilisation of the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC) in 2005, in which more than 31,000 troops were involved, there was also a wave of violence that resulted in more than 1,700 violent deaths (Nussio 2009) in the first few years alone. These figures, according to Collier and Hoeffler (2004), are typical of post-conflict contexts given that it is common for violence to spike in the five years following the signing of a peace treaty, even to the point that violent homicides may increase by as much as 25%.

Likewise, according to the same reference literature, there is an inevitable need to guarantee the security of the civil society closest to, and in most need of, the correct implementation of a peace treaty, especially in those places hardest hit by the violence. In this regard, Colombia has again been one of the places where the civilian population has been most affected not only in terms of the more than 200,000 deaths caused by the armed conflict and the hundreds of massacres committed, but also because of the eight million forced displacements in the first decade of the 21st century alone (National Center for Historical Memory 2013).

However, very few academic papers, besides reports published by the Ideas for Peace Foundation (2018a, 2018b, 2019, 2020), Indepaz (2018, 2019, 2020) or the Peace and Reconciliation Foundation (2019, 2019b), have explored the phenomenon of violence directed against demobilised guerrilla combatants from the defunct FARC-EP and social leaders and activists killed because of their support for the Peace Agreement. González Peña and Dorussen (2021), for example, presented a positive and significant correlation between the increase in homicides in general and the presence of former guerrilla combatants in the reintegration phase in particular. Ríos *et al*. (2020) understood that, going a step further, it was necessary to take another look at the

environments in which criminal activity was taking place in order to interpret correctly the violence deployed against the former guerrilla and the civilian population in the framework of the post-Peace Agreement. To do so, they identified different environmental or individual variables that had an impact on the homicidal violence directed against former FARC-EP combatants. In this way, factors such as revenge, political activism, criminal involvement or the unsuccessful pressures from criminal organisations to detain individuals involved in illegal activities gain special relevance. In contrast, in the case of social leaders, it would appear that their support for aspects of territorial peace, especially in terms of institutional presence and capacity building and the impact on the coca business, have led them to be perceived as a threat to the interests of different criminal groups.

In a qualitative study carried out for the Ideas for Peace Foundation, Garzón *et al.* (2019) identified several aspects to take into consideration in order to understand the violence against former FARC-EP members. These included the lack of political will for implementation, weak institutional organisation and capacity surrounding the Agreement, a security deficit in which there is a greater presence of criminal organisations, and limitations to develop security schemes outside the Territorial Spaces for Training and Reintegration (ECTR). Despite everything, official figures dating from the signing of the Peace Agreement to June 2021 have shown, as previously indicated, that a total of almost 300 former guerrilla combatants and 1,200 social leaders have been killed (Indepaz 2020, 2021; United Nations Monitoring Mechanism 2020, 2021a). This is a very high figure, which beyond what is presented in this article, calls for an urgent need to strengthen the design of security schemes and take into consideration the territorial variable, which has so far been overlooked. This aspect, which, like violence in the post-Peace Agreement period, has so far been ignored as a subject of study and has barely been the focus of academic publications.

3. Methodological aspects

From a methodological point of view, this study attempts to answer the following question: what is the relationship between the violent killings of former FARC-EP combatants and social leaders, and the presence of armed groups and drug trafficking post-FARC-EP? A starting hypothesis supposes that violent homicides of this nature are concentrated in those departments where the criminal structures and factors associated with the drug trade - whether cultivation, processing or distribution - are more prevalent. These are two elements, which in turn, have traditionally been closely related to each other (Ríos 2016) and which, moreover, would show a continuation of the geography of violence that existed prior to the Peace Agreement.

However, this does not mean that such violence can be reduced to merely a drug-related issue, precisely because a vast amount of literature has avoided this simplistic *monocausal* approach (Yaffe 2011). Yet, what we are trying to show is that the proliferation of armed groups in the form of FARC-EP dissidents, post-paramilitary structures and other actors of violence, such as the ELN guerrillas or "Los Pelusos", are particularly entrenched in the departments where the drug trade has a greater impact and the number of violent deaths is higher. These are mostly peripheral and border departments in the north-east, south-west and south of Colombia, which were once under the control of the FARC-EP and are currently the object of dispute among all the armed groups mentioned above.

Nevertheless, as well as a descriptive and analytical approach, we present different correlational exercises that help to make the scope and significance of the proposed hypothesis clear. Thus, different Pearson's linear correlations are proposed to study the relationship between the violence associated with former combatants and social leaders and third-party armed groups. This is also to verify the identical territorial representation of the violence experienced by both types of victims. Naturally, the violence directed against former guerrilla fighters and social leaders is quantified in terms of the number of violent deaths, while the presence of armed groups is based on dichotomous variables (yes/no) and on reports on criminal activism that are later referenced.

However, in order to analyse the role that the drug trade represents in all this, the functional logic has been relativised, first by understanding that there is not necessarily a strictly linear relationship between the coca trade, the presence of armed groups and the perpetration of violent deaths. Thus, other instruments such as Spearman's *rho* better illustrate why many of the deaths of leaders and ex-guerrilla are associated with contexts of high levels of armed violence and coca cultivation. This also obliges us to consider that there are more dimensions associated with the coca trade other than illicit cultivation, such as the processing and distribution links. This involves, for example, tons of cocaine seized, processing laboratories destroyed or the forced eradication of hectares of coca leaf crops, according to figures provided by the Colombian National Police.

Although the 32 Colombian departments are included in all the analytical exercises as a study population, the main focus is on the nine departments where almost all the violent deaths committed in Colombia related to the Peace Agreement have occurred: Antioquia, Cauca, Caquetá, Chocó, Meta, Nariño, Norte de Santander, Putumayo and Valle del Cauca. Deaths which, as previously indicated, operate as a dependent variable for the exercise proposed in this study.

The time period under study is between November 2016 and June 2021, although some of the indicators and variables analysed are limited to December 2020, so some correlational exercises take this date as the limit. All data are from sources of proven academic reference. Data on the deaths of former guerrilla members and social leaders are from the United Nations Monitoring Mechanism records (2020, 2021a, 2021b) and Indepaz (2020, 2021). Similarly, all the data associated with direct violence by armed groups and the coca trade were obtained from the Colombian Observatory on Drugs, attached to the Colombian National Police. Finally, the identification of the territorial presence of different armed groups was obtained from different reports by the Ministry of Defence (2021), Indepaz (2019), the Peace and Reconciliation Foundation (2019) and the Ideas for Peace Foundation (2020) (See Table 1).

Table 1: Summary of variables

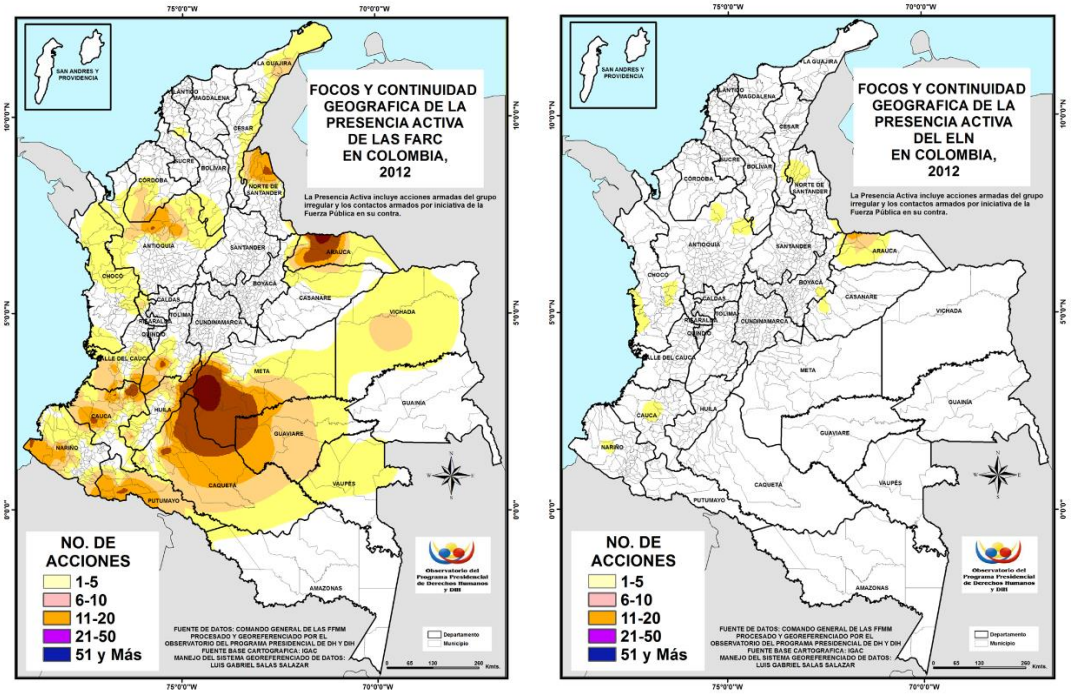
Variable	**Source**	**Indicator**
Violence against former combatants of the FARC-EP (IV)	Indepaz United Nations Monitoring Mechanism	Number of violent deaths
Violence against social leaders (IV)	Indepaz United Nations Monitoring Mechanism	Number of violent deaths
Presence of armed groups engaged in armed actions (DV1)	Indepaz National Police	Effective presence Armed actions
Presence de coca trade (DV2)	National Police	Hectares cultivated Hectares eradicated Tons of cocaine seized Laboratories destroyed

Prepared by the authors

4. Territorial violence and peripheral status before the signing of the Peace Agreement

Some studies focused on the territorial evolution of the armed conflict in Colombia are worth mentioning, such as contributions by Echandía (2006), Echandía and Cabrera (2017), Salas (2010, 2015), Ríos (2016) or Ríos *et al*., (2019), which show how the geography of violence has been transformed, responding to a logic of *peripheralisation*; that is, a process by which the different armed groups and criminal organisations have consolidated their position in hostile geographical enclaves, far from Colombia's economic and decision-making centres. These areas are mostly similar in that the terrain hinders the Public Forces from deploying operations and actions given the remarkable conditions, characterised by rainforests and mountainous terrain, and generally accompanied by border corridors that contribute to the survival tactics of the different armed groups – as was also reported in much of the aforementioned specialised literature.

Map 1. Presence of the FARC-EP and the ELN, 2012



Source: ODHDIH (n.d.)

Based on the above, a turning point occurred with the arrival of Álvaro Uribe Vélez to the Colombian presidency. From 2002 to 2010, during his two terms in office, he promoted the militarisation of security and direct confrontation with armed groups. This was the result of an enormous investment of resources and close military collaboration with the United States, which led to a profound change in the logic of violence on which the armed conflict was based. Thus, from a position of strength and relative advantage, the FARC-EP and ELN were gradually weakened, reducing their presence in the country and their number of troops by more than half (Ríos 2021a). To put it another way, the country's decision-making hubs were given priority, the main access and communication routes were recovered, and the armed groups were forced to undertake a (re)territorialisation process with regard to their traditional rear-guard enclaves (Echandía and Cabrera 2017). This is why the aforementioned peripheral, jungle and mountainous locations, with marked coca growing and border characteristics, act as "oxygen tanks" for the survival of guerrilla groups, as is evident from the figures shown in the following figure.

According to figures from the Observatory for Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law (ODHDIH) (n.d.), of the 824 armed actions carried out by the FARC-EP in 2012, prior to the start of the formal peace talks with the government of Juan Manuel Santos, the departments with the most guerrilla activism were Antioquia (96), Arauca (57), Caquetá (64), Cauca (161), Nariño (73), Norte de Santander (74) and Putumayo (70). This geographical pattern is very similar to that of the ELN, whose 71-armed actions recorded in the same year were mainly focused in Arauca (26), Norte de Santander (11), Nariño (9), Chocó (8) and Cauca (4). In both cases a predisposition to violence can be seen in border departments and peripheral corridors in the north-east (border with Venezuela), as well as in the south, the south-west (border with Ecuador and Peru) and the Pacific region of Colombia (see Map 1).

Taking 2015 as a second point in time, an identical dynamic can be seen, even though the dialogue process with the FARC-EP was about to be closed, and progress was being made towards an eventual opening up of a parallel negotiation with the ELN. The ODHDIH (n.d.) recorded up to 122 guerrilla actions of which 94 corresponded to the FARC-EP and 28 to the ELN. Despite the *de-escalation* of violence, territorial dynamics were very much the same as in 2012. In the case of the FARC-EP, the departments showing the greatest activism were again Antioquia (22), Arauca (8), Cauca (20), Caquetá (2), Nariño (15), Norte de Santander (12) and Putumayo (6). Similarly, the ELN focused their operations in Arauca (10), Norte de Santander (9), Bolívar (5), Cauca (2) and Nariño (2).

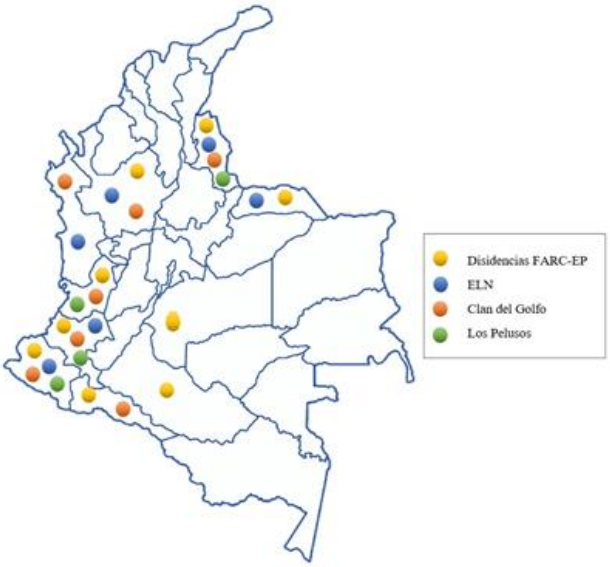
In light of the above, it seems plausible to note how, with the exception of Antioquia – which is a department with its own particular dynamics of violence (García de la Torre and Aramburo 2011) – the geography of violence in Colombia before and during the peace talks in Havana was deeply rooted in the peripheral enclaves in the north-east, south and south-west, and to a lesser extent, in places such as Córdoba, Bolívar or Chocó. Thus, if we look at the current figures for the violence committed by the ELN, "Los Pelusos" or dissidents of the defunct FARC-EP and other new criminal groups, we can see how the peripheral situation of the violence remains unresolved (see Map 2). An unresolved situation, at all events, and as previously mentioned, strongly influenced by the weakness of a state with more territory than sovereignty, which for decades has either been absent from the dynamics of governance building and institutional strengthening or has been co-opted and supplanted by violent instruments of legitimisation in the form of criminal governance (Arjona 2016; Lessing 2020).

5. The new actors of violence after the Peace Agreement with the FARC-EP

That said, and once the FARC-EP were no longer active, as they embarked on the process of laying down their arms and fully reintegrating into civilian life, far from what might be expected, the state did not end up co-opting the territory and this geography of violence was left in the hands of other violent groups (See map 2). As noted, this phenomenon has provided continuity to the unresolved violence in regions that for years have been the most affected by the armed conflict, such as the north-east, the south-west and the south of Colombia. According to data provided by the National Police (2021), from January 2017 to December 2019 a total of 61 subversive activities were carried out in Colombia against the Public Forces, especially by the ELN. Of these, the majority took place in Arauca (33), Norte de Santander (6), Bolívar (8), Cauca (6), Nariño (2) and Cesar (1). Likewise, of the 506 acts of terrorism recorded in the same period, peripheral conditions are similarly represented with the most affected departments being, in addition to Antioquia (122), Arauca (97), Cauca (37), Nariño (54) and Norte de Santander (34). However, to these departments we should also add others where the violence has been gradually increasing, such as Meta (34), as a result of an increase in FARC-EP dissidents, or Cesar (31), due to a greater presence of the ELN and "Los Pelusos". Similar dynamics can also be seen in other types of reports, such as one by the Ideas for Peace Foundation

(2020), which recorded a total of 211 armed actions carried out by the ELN and 163 clashes with the Public Forces from January 2016 and December 2018. More than 80% of these were concentrated in the departments bordering with Venezuela such as Arauca, Norte de Santander and Cesar, on the one hand, and in Antioquia and the Pacific departments of Chocó, Cauca and Nariño, on the other.

Map 2. Presence of the main armed groups, 2020-21



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However, the disappearance of the FARC-EP from the armed conflict chessboard does not mean that traces of the defunct guerrilla group are no longer present. This is due to either their initial reluctance to accept the Peace Agreement and demobilise, or because emerging criminal organisations have been formed, which, taking advantage of the ongoing violence, have succeeded in incorporating new mobilisations to their cause. Thus, if we look at the most important dissident structures today, again the peripheral component described above is visible (Ríos and González 2021) (See Table 2).

In the Pacific region, the main armed groups are dissidents and survivors of former FARC-EP structures which have been proliferating since the end of 2016 and up to the present, under a situation that is as changeable as it is complex. There are organised remnants of the 6th Front, 8th Front, 30th Front and the "Miller Perdomo" and "Jacobo Arenas" Columns in Cauca and Valle del Cauca. In Nariño, a significant fragmentation of criminal organisations linked to the former FARC-EP 29th Front and the "Daniel Aldana" Column exists, as is the case with armed groups such as "Óliver Sinisterra", "Resistencia Campesina" or "Defensores del Pacífico". In the south of the country, some remnants of the former 14th and 15th Fronts have gained relevance in Caquetá, while remnants of the 48th Front are still important in Putumayo. Meanwhile, in the north-east, heirs to the 10th Front are predominant in Arauca and remnants of the 33rd Front can be found in Norte de Santander. Finally, former structures linked to the former FARC-EP 18th Front and 36th Front are still present in Antioquia (Indepaz 2018; Ideas for Peace Foundation 2019; Peace and Reconciliation Foundation 2019).

To these criminal groups should be added other Fronts, which, from the outset, opted not to take part in the talks, such as the 1st Front, active in the south of Colombia (Caquetá, Amazonas, Vaupés), but also in departments such as Meta and Vichada; or the 7th Front, with a presence in Vichada or Guainía. All this without

overlooking the spike in violence in the department of Meta caused by groups that fly the flag for the former FARC-EP 30th and 62nd Fronts (Indepaz 2018; Ideas for Peace Foundation 2019; Peace and Reconciliation Foundation 2019). On the other hand, "Los Pelusos" have a militancy made up of around 200 combatants centred around the Catatumbo region, in Norte de Santander, although evidence exists that in recent years they have managed to move away from their traditional coca-growing roots and carry out residual armed actions in Cesar, Valle del Cauca and Nariño (Ríos 2021a).

It is also worth mentioning the criminal organisation "Clan del Golfo" (in English: the Gulf Clan), self-referred to as Gaitanist Self-Defence Forces of Colombia. The post-paramilitary phenomenon, begun in 2008 with the rearmament of some of the structures of the defunct United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia (AUC), was particularly deep-rooted in the Caribbean region, the Pacific Coast and the department of Antioquia. These criminal structures ended up extending their territorial control in such a way that, although it is true that their municipal presence has declined compared to a few years ago, they continue to have a presence in more than 200 municipalities, mainly in the three regions mentioned above (Ríos 2021a).

Although around twenty criminal structures can be found, the Clan del Golfo, with more than 1,800 members, accounts for almost two-thirds of the forces at the service of these criminal groups. Their gradual fracturing into smaller groups has been accelerated by the window of opportunity that the surrender of arms by the FARC-EP has meant in territorial terms. Thus, the north-eastern departments, the Pacific region and the south of the country have proven particularly attractive for the growth of their illicit financing networks and criminal activity.

The Clan del Golfo has been involved in major clashes with the ELN in Chocó, and with FARC-EP dissidents in Cauca and Nariño, while they have had disputes with "Los Pachenca" over the port enclaves of Barranquilla and Cartagena, and also with the "Caparrapos" in Bajo Cauca and northern Antioquia. In fact, an alliance between this guerrilla group the former FARC-EP 33rd Front and "Los Pelusos" ended up restricting their operational capacity in the coca-growing region of Catatumbo (Echandía and Cabrera 2018). This situation spread to departments like Meta, Casanare or Vichada, where the upsurge in FARC-EP dissidents led to major confrontations with the 1st and 7th Fronts, for example, over control of coca resources (Indepaz 2018; Ideas for Peace Foundation 2019; Peace and Reconciliation Foundation 2019; Ríos 2021b).

Table 2. Number of active armed groups in departments with the highest levels of violence, 2017-2021

Department	FARC-EP dissidents	ELN	Clan del Golfo	Los Pelusos	Other armed groups	Total
Antioquia	18th, 36th Fronts	Darío Ramírez Castro War Front	Yes	No	Caparros, Pachelly, Envigado, Renacer	8
Caquetá	1st, 15th, 62nd Fronts	No	No	No		3
Cauca	Dagoberto Ramos 6th, 30th Fronts Jacobo Arenas Carlos Patiño	South-western War Front	Yes	Yes	La Cordillera	9
Chocó	30th Front	Western War Front	Yes	No		3
Meta	1st, 40th Fronts		Yes		Puntilleros	4
Nariño	Oliver Sinisterra, Guerrillas Unidas del Pacífico,	South-western War Front	Yes	No	Contadores	6

	Stiven González					
Norte de Santander	33rd Front	North-eastern War Front	Yes	Yes	Rastrojos	5
Putumayo	1st, 48th Fronts	No	Yes	No	La Constru	3
Valle del Cauca	6th, 30th Fronts	No	Yes	Yes	La Oficina La Empresa	6

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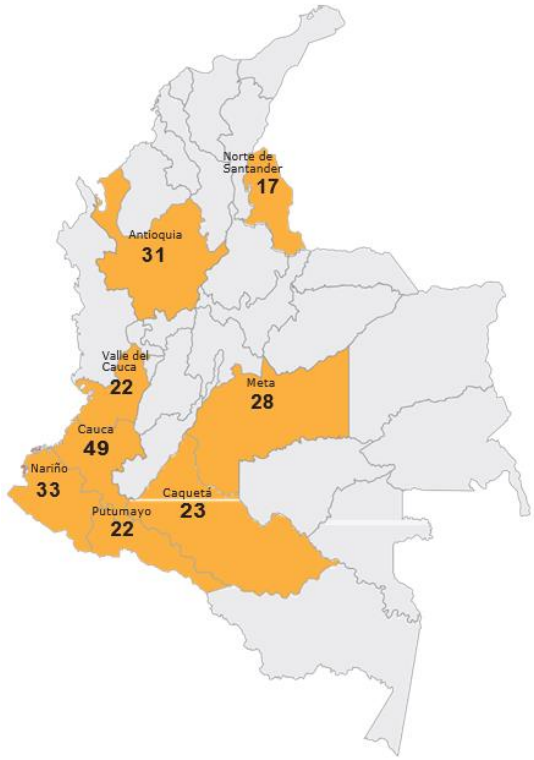
6. Territorial violence and the presence of armed groups

Despite the information referred to above, no reliable data are currently available that allow us to identify those responsible for the violent deaths of social leaders and former FARC-EP combatants. Yet, if violent deaths and their departmental distribution are analysed systematically, we can observe how certain areas are, not by chance, the ones where this type of homicide is most concentrated. Of the 262 former combatant deaths, the following occurred in the departments of Cauca (49), Nariño (33), Antioquia (31), Meta (28), Caquetá (23), Valle del Cauca (22), Putumayo (22), Norte de Santander (17) and Chocó (13) (See Map 3). Put another way, more than 90% of the killings of former FARC-EP combatants in the last five years have taken place in just nine of Colombia's 32 departments.

Something very similar occurs with the number of social leaders killed during that time. According to figures provided by Indepaz (2021), a total of 1,182 killings were recorded in Colombia between the signing of the Peace Agreement and 14 June 2021. Most of them took place in the same departments: Cauca (279), Antioquia (156), Nariño (122), Valle del Cauca (88), Putumayo (70), Norte de Santander (55), Chocó (45), Caquetá (42) and Meta (41). That is, as with the deaths of FARC-EP combatants, again more than three-quarters of violent homicides of this kind occurred in the same locations. However, one exception to consider is the department of Córdoba, where a total of 53 violent deaths were recorded. This department stands out as a complex scenario which, although it lacks a guerrilla tradition or any FARC-EP demobilisation spaces, it is in a very strategic position with access to the Caribbean Sea. This aspect is highly important for the interests of structures such as the Clan del Golfo and is linked to the particularly vulnerable situation of communities demanding that the Peace Agreement be properly implemented in a region where the paramilitary legacy is significant (Trejos and Badillo 2020).

Map 3. Departments with the highest number of killings of former FARC-EP guerrilla, 2017-2020

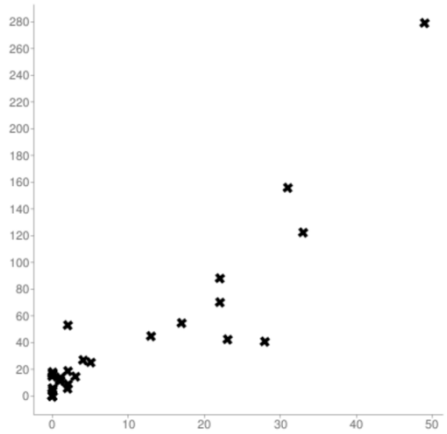


Prepared by the authors

Therefore, a first conclusion to be drawn regarding the territorial representation of violence against ex-guerrillas and social leaders in Colombia is to highlight the marked coincidence in relation to the departments where this type of violent homicide takes place. This suggests that these specific, especially vulnerable populations trigger a particular response on the part of the armed groups, which in turn is facilitated by an absence of institutional capacity, as shown in studies by Echandía (2006), Salas (2015) and Ríos and Gago (2018). In this sense, correlating the two phenomena from a departmental perspective is quite revealing, as shown in Table 4 below.

Table 4. Pearson Correlation. Violent deaths of former guerrilla combatants and social leaders from a departmental perspective

		FARC homicides	Social leaders homicides
FARC homicides	Pearson Correlation	1	.899
	Sig. (two-tailed)		.025
	N	1,444	
Social leaders homicides	Pearson Correlation	.899	1
	Sig. (two-tailed)	.025	
	N		1,444



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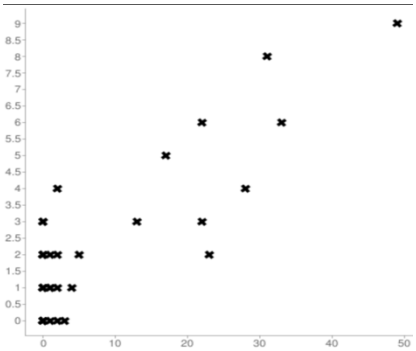
Based on the above, it can be assumed that this type of violence is directly related to the increased presence of criminal structures associated with the armed conflict in its post-Peace-Agreement phase. Thus, this approach could be understood based on an equation like the following, where the number of murders of former FARC-EP guerrilla *(x)* and the number of murders of social leaders *(y)* are closely related to the number of criminal groups operating in a department:

$$Vdepto_{CI} = \sum (x + y)$$

In fact, when exercises are carried out to analyse the correlations between the number of armed structures and the number of violent homicides committed against the two vulnerable groups, a very high level of correspondence can be seen (Tables 5, 6). This is because the departments with the highest number of killings of former guerrillas and social leaders share a common trait: an extremely high proportion of criminal structures. Accordingly, the social activists who insist on the Peace Agreement being implemented are much more exposed and vulnerable since what they are asking for is at odds with the interests of the violent groups. Former FARC-EP combatants are also exposed to elements that threaten their security, whether they be acts of revenge, pressure for new mobilisations in favour of crime, or elements closer to political activism (Kaplan and Nussio 2018; Ríos *et al*. 2020).

Table 5. Pearson Correlation. Violent deaths of former guerrilla combatants and the presence of armed structures from a departmental perspective

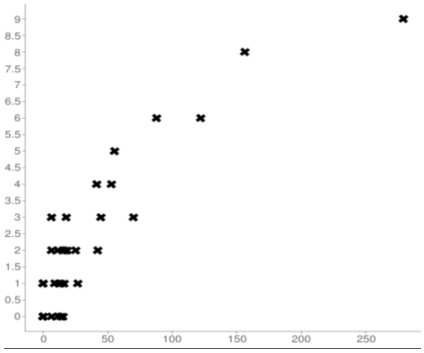
		FARC homicides	Armed Structures
FARC homicides	Pearson Correlation	1	.843
	Sig. (two-tailed)		.025
	N	262	
Armed Structures	Pearson Correlation	.843	1
	Sig. (two-tailed)	.025	
	N		262



Prepared by the authors

Table 6. Pearson Correlation. Violent deaths of social leaders and the presence of armed structures from a departmental perspective

		Social leaders homicides	Armed Structures
Social leaders Homicides	Pearson Correlation	1	.882
	Sig. (two-tailed)		.025
	N	1,182	
Armed Structures	Pearson Correlation	.882	1
	Sig. (two-tailed)	.025	
	N		1,182



7. Territorial violence and the coca trade (I)

In light of the above, it is clear that the murders of social leaders and former FARC-EP guerrilla committed over the last five years are closely related to the new geography of violence established following the signing of the Peace Agreement in November 2016. In other words, as official figures show, although the FARC-EP maintain more than a 93% commitment to the process of reintegration into civilian life (National Agency for Reintegration 2020), it seems likely that the power vacuum created by the surrendering of arms has been co-opted by other armed structures and criminal groups (Ríos 2021a). In this respect, the greater the presence of armed groups, and the greater rivalry among them, the more prevalent this type of violent killings is.

Put another way, if we observe the focus of the violence and the high profile of the armed actors associated with the conflict, coca cultivation and the drug trade linked to the peripheral and border dynamics already mentioned must be understood as a highly explanatory factor, although never the only one, of the violence phenomenon. Based on the above, if more than 75% of social leaders and 90% of former guerrilla combatants killed in Colombia are concentrated in just nine departments, in turn, it does not seem to be by chance that these departments are strongly related to the drug trade – not only as coca-growing areas, but also, like in Valle del Cauca, as processing and distribution centres. According to successive reports published between 2017 and 2020 by the National Police, the departments of Antioquia, Caquetá, Cauca, Chocó, Meta, Nariño, Norte de Santander, Putumayo and Valle del Cauca ended up accumulating a total of 578,504 ha. under coca cultivation, representing 90% of the total 642,735 ha. that were being cultivated in Colombia at that time (Colombian Drug Observatory n.d.). Thus, at first glance, a certain close relationship might be assumed between the contexts of violence against social leaders and former guerrilla members and the areas where the drug problem is most relevant. These departments are also where more armed groups and criminal structures coincide and the highest levels of confrontation occur, as shown in Table 1 above. This is by no means insignificant, and it would allow us to highlight the importance that drug trafficking continues to have in understanding the dynamics of violence in Colombia, the motivations of its main armed actors, and the way in which this violence is exercised on a territorial level.

The association described above would, therefore, be in line with what previous research has suggested, such as studies by González Peña and Dorussen (2021) or Ríos *et al.* (2020). In other words, violence against social leaders and former guerrillas takes place mostly in places where the leading role in the violence is played by different armed groups, either existing armed organisations or new dissidents, heirs of the FARC-EP, in turn, attracted by sources of illicit financing. Whether out of revenge for past political activism, or due to issues linked to the unsuccessful co-optation of criminal structures, or the return to the pursuit of illicit activities, it seems that this three-pronged alliance of factors, closely related to the drug trade, must be taken into consideration when analysing the phenomenon of violence, which is the focus of this article (Garzón *et al* 2019).

From a mathematical standpoint, an analysis of the impact of the drug trade on the violent deaths of social leaders and former guerrilla combatants could be considered as follows:

$$\prod_{i=1}^{2} A_i = B$$

Where A_1 would be the set of departments with the highest density of illicit crop cultivation and A_2 the set of departments with the highest number of killings of former guerrilla combatants and social leaders. Result *B* would be the nine departments with the largest coca-growing areas and the highest levels of direct violence associated with criminal structures. Thus, if we propose a Pearson correlation between, for example, coca growing and the number of former guerrilla combatants and social leaders killed, the result is positive, although not as significant as the relationship between violent deaths and the presence of armed groups (See table Table 7).

Table 7. Pearson Correlation. Violent deaths of former guerrilla combatants and social leaders in relation to coca cultivation and from a departmental perspective

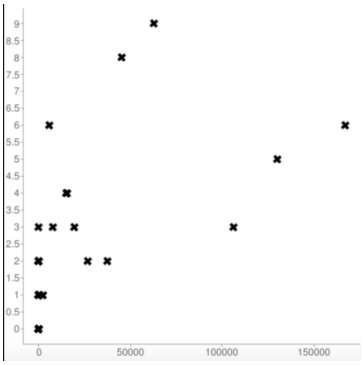
N=32 (Total de departments of Colombia)	Coca cultivation	Murdered FARC-EP	Murdered social leaders
Coca cultivation	1	0.669	0.562
Murdered FARC-EP	0.669	1	0.889
Murdered social leaders	0.562	0.889	1

Prepared by the authors (Two-tailed significance 0.025)

That is, although it can be inferred from a general perspective that the trinomial made up of the coca trade, the killings of social leaders and former guerrilla, and the presence of armed structures is related, it would appear that this relationship cannot be understood in strictly linear terms and requires, at the very least, other explanatory elements to be incorporated. Thus, if the direct violence variable does not show highly significant patterns with regard to the existence of coca growing, it is to be expected that it will not do so with regard to the presence of armed structures either. Therefore, when such a correlation is proposed, again the result is positive, although not significant (See Table 8).

Table 8. Pearson Correlation. Presence of armed structures in relation to coca cultivation and a departmental perspective

		Coca Cultivation	Armed Structures
Coca Cultivation	Pearson Correlation	1	.593
	Sig. (two-tailed)		.025
	N	32	
Armed Structures	Pearson Correlation	.593	1
	Sig. (two-tailed)	.025	
	N		32



Prepared by the authors (Two-tailed significance 0.025)

8. Territorial violence and the coca trade (II)

However, in no way does this detract from the validity of the premise, but rather underlines the need to further refine the explanatory question. In other words, the drug problem should not be reduced to the mere presence of coca growing given that the analysis should include aspects related to the processing and distribution of cocaine hydrochloride. In fact, there is a strong presence of several armed groups in departments with low levels of cocaine production, such as Valle del Cauca or Casanare, or in port cities with high strategic value for cocaine distribution, such as Santa Marta, Cartagena or Barranquilla.

Beyond the fact that the country's nine most violent departments account for 90% of cocaine production, other indicators also exist that show how criminal activity is deeply rooted in their territory. For example, of

the 1,018,049 kilograms of cocaine hydrochloride seized between January 2017 and December 2020, 756,040 (equivalent to 74.20%) were seized in these very same departments (Colombian Observatory on Drugs n.d.). Likewise, up to 1,072 of the total 1,227 coca-processing laboratories destroyed in the course of these four years (87.36%) were located there (Colombian Observatory on Drugs n.d.). Such is the case that, according to figures from the National Institute of Forensic medicine (2020), some of the most violent departments in the country are precisely Valle del Cauca (51.18), Chocó (39.60), Cauca (39.23), Norte de Santander (38.35), Meta (30.83) or Putumayo (30.33), far exceeding the national average of 21.4 violent deaths per 100,000 inhabitants.

In this way, it is possible to observe how other indicators associated with the coca trade, besides illicit crop growing, would appear to link the concurrence in certain departments of armed groups, the drug trade – operationalised through different indicators that denote criminal activity in the territory – and violence against social leaders and former FARC-EP combatants (Table 9). Particularly, if, as Spearman's correlation proposes, we assume the absence of a linear relationship between the coca-growing factor and the dynamics of the violence, and instead the indicators of this illicit activity are associated with dichotomous categories between departments that have higher rates of violent killings (1) and those who do not (0).

Table 9. Spearman's correlation. Presence of armed structures and direct violence in relation to indicators associated with coca-growing activities (from a departmental perspective)

N=32 (Total de departments of Colombia)	Coca cultivation	Cocaine seized	Laboratories destroyed	Hectares sprayed
Armed structures	0.712	0.609	0.760	0.689
Social leaders	0.756	0.562	0.708	0.695
Former FARC-EP combatants	0.722	0.568	0.737	0.668

Prepared by the authors (Two-tailed significance 0.025)

The pivotal role of the drug trade, therefore, must be seen as a highly explanatory variable for the killings that have occurred since the signing of the Peace Agreement. However, we should avoid establishing linear relationships that, albeit clear, do not fully specify or explore the heterogeneity of the contexts of vulnerability in which the violent killings of social activists and former guerrilla take place. Perhaps a first step is to take the municipality as a scale of reference rather than the department. Since it is expected that criminal structures are particularly active in and close to municipalities that have specific characteristics, such as having high coca-growing density, or being prominent border locations or exit ports for cocaine distribution, it can be assumed that the relationship of this type of violence on the local scale will yield more conclusive data[3]. In this respect, if we look at the relationship between the municipalities with the greatest coca-growing tradition and the rate of violent deaths per 100,000 inhabitants, the figures are much more striking. According to 2020 figures, Tarazá (Antioquia), San José del Fragua (Caquetá), El Tambo (Cauca), Tumaco (Nariño), Tibú (Norte de Santander), La Macarena (Meta), Puerto Asís (Putumayo) or Jamundí (Valle del Cauca) had more than 50,000 ha. under coca cultivation as well as a high number of violent killings of former combatants and social leaders, with an average of more than 60 violent deaths per 100,000 inhabitants.

On the other hand, the link between the violence caused by criminal structures in contexts highly related to the coca trade has, as previously indicated, different aspects besides coca growing. In some cases, as in the south or north-east of Colombia, the violence is clearly associated with cocaine production. However, in other departments with a lower density of illicit crop cultivation, such as Meta, Valle del Cauca or Córdoba, a greater

[3] This exercise was not carried out due to limited data and sources available at the municipal level.

connection exists with other links in the chain such as processing or distribution – as is also the case in places where coca cultivation is nor present, like Magdalena, Atlántico or La Guajira, but which are key links in global cocaine distribution.

That said, if we look at the relationship between the violence against former guerrilla members and social leaders by observing the distinctive characteristics of the most violent departments as a whole, we can see that in most cases there are generally two or three links to the coca trade, be it as producers and processors, or also as distributors. Thus, again the use of dichotomous categories that assess the relevance of the department in the coca trade (1, 0) can better illustrate its relationship to the violence, as shown in Table 10. In this way, the major impact of the coca trade, in all its aspects, yields much more relevant and significant results in the correlation with all the phenomena of violence analysed herein. This forces us to rethink many aspects related to the Peace Agreement, especially in relation to the optimisation of protection and security schemes for social leaders and ex-combatants of the FARC-EP, the police fight against armed structures (as recognised in the second point of the Agreement) and the still unattended and unresolved need to provide an effective response to reducing not only coca cultivation, but also production and marketing links, especially relevant in the border areas with Venezuela, Ecuador and Peru.

Table 10. Spearman's correlation. Presence of armed structures and direct violence in relation to the coca trade (from a departmental perspective)

N=32 (Total de departments of Colombia)	Murdered FARC-EP	Murdered social leaders	Armed structures
Coca trade	0.802	0.770	0.766

Prepared by the authors (Two-tailed significance 0.025)

9. Conclusions

At this point, we have been able to analyse the scope and significance of the violence that has been carried out in recent years against two particularly vulnerable groups in the context of the armed conflict in Colombia, namely former FARC-EP guerrilla combatants and social leaders. Accordingly, in these pages we have attempted to answer some questions on this issue, while others have only been partly addressed, leaving new questions open for future research. In particular, there is a need for more information on the commission of these violent killings and, in particular, the perpetrators within the existing universe of armed groups, as well as their motivations. Another factor is that there is currently very little academic literature on the study of this phenomenon.

Firstly, as can be gathered from the dynamics of violence following the signing of the Peace Agreement in November 2016, a key element in this type of violent murder lies in its proximity to environments where third-party criminal groups and armed structures are active. The greater the number of these actors, the greater the likelihood of former guerrilla combatants and social leaders being killed violently. This may be due to vested interests in a geography of violence that maintains a significant degree of stability, or because of factors associated with revenge, political activism, attempts at co-optation, the presence of other criminal networks, or actions to prevent possible claims for the implementation of the Peace Agreement. Be that as it may, this casuistry is one of the elements that requires special attention when further investigating the factors that accompany this type of violence. Similarly, another of the most striking conclusions of this study lies in the territorial proximity that exists between the violence deployed against former guerrillas and civil society activists, which, in turn, is linked to the geography of violence that existed before and after the peace talks with the FARC-EP in Havana. This is because, as we have seen, the territorial locations where armed activism

was most prevalent before the Peace Agreement are now where the most violence and the greatest presence of armed groups are found.

Having pinpointed this issue, however, this study assumes that it is illicit trade and financing that mainly attracts and encourages the presence and proliferation of armed groups, and, by extension, the violence. While practically all the correlational exercises have reported a positive and significant relationship between drug-related illicit activities and direct violence, a linear relationship between the two variables has been considered insufficient. When the linear relationship is avoided and we seek to integrate the different levels of impact of cultivation, processing and distribution on the violence, the correlations yield far more robust results. An assertion which, on the one hand, shows the extent to which the drug trade remains central to understanding the scale of armed violence. Similarly, this draws attention to how, and to what extent, the Peace Agreement with the FARC-EP, and in particular points two and four, have so far failed to reduce the impact of this factor, deeply associated with the long duration and virulence of the internal armed conflict.

Nevertheless, a study of this nature and orientation should be enriched and complemented with other perspectives, which, indiscriminately focused on the territory, analyse different factors involved in this violence based on multivariate approaches that address both individual and environmental factors of a diverse nature. Undoubtedly, the greater the capacity to highlight and define the variables that accompany this type of violence, the greater their explanatory power, and likewise, the better the prevention measures that also have to be implemented through public policies. In addition to the above, it is essential to develop a line of research that focuses on the particular phenomenon of violence following the signing of a specific Agreement and, especially, to determine which are elements of continuity and which represent a new scenario for such violence.

However, any exercise such as we have seen above necessarily requires accessible, transparent, systematised and reliable information sources; four elements which, for the time being, are not a salient feature of the availability of data and statistics on the violence currently taking place in Colombia. In fact, such aspects would enable us to examine other considerations such as, for example, the motivations that trigger violence or the identification of patterns for each armed group in the use of violence, thus contributing to strengthening the potential offered by a strictly territorial analysis.

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