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## Armed Violence in the Llanos Orientales Region Following the Signing of the Peace Agreement with the FARC-EP in Colombia

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# **Armed Violence in the Llanos Orientales Region Following the Signing of the Peace Agreement with the FARC-EP in Colombia**

## **Abstract**

A fundamental aspect in the study of the Colombian armed conflict is related to the violence produced in the country after the signing of the Peace Agreement with the FARC-EP guerrillas in November 2016. To this end, we attempt to analyze the transformation of the relationship between the perpetrators of violence and their territory, taking as a case study a region particularly affected by the conflict, as is Llanos Orientales (known in English as the Eastern Plains). Starting with a preliminary characterization of the most relevant armed groups - post-paramilitary groups, FARC-EP dissidents and ELN guerrillas - we attempt to analyze the changes and continuities of their armed presence and the symbolic, structural and institutional aspects that explain their territorial distribution in this part of the country. In this way, the presence of the former FARC-EP and concurring factors such as the coca trade, oil industry and poverty are aspects that should be considered in order to understand the shifting geometry of violence.

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## Introduction

Colombia's Llanos Orientales region has experienced deep social unrest since it was colonized at the beginning of the 20th century and has witnessed protracted armed conflicts and numerous peace initiatives in its territory.<sup>1</sup> Such a situation was, naturally, linked to the internal armed conflict, so the signing of the Peace Agreement in November 2016 formally marked the end of armed violence with the guerrilla of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia - People's Army (FARC-EP), and specifically, with the armed activism of its most powerful structure: The Eastern Bloc.<sup>2</sup> The Agreement aspired to build stable and lasting peace throughout the country, and specifically in those regions hardest hit by an armed conflict that had lasted more than half a century and was possibly the most virulent of its kind on the continent.<sup>3</sup> However, be it due to the continuity of factors linked to the illicit economy associated with violence; the lack of structural and institutional transformations pursued, in part, by the Agreement; delays in the implementation agenda; or the proliferation of different armed dissident groups, the end of the violence is far from becoming a reality.<sup>4</sup>

In this regard, several works have focused on analyzing the shortcomings of an implementation with a strong territorial component. This, highlighting both structural and institutional factors.<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, equally, a wide literature has tried to explain, from different points of view, the dynamics of reproduction of violence associated with new and old armed groups -in the form of guerrillas, post-paramilitary groups or dissidents of the former FARC-EP.<sup>6</sup> Thus, five years on from the signing of the Peace Agreement, this article aims to characterize and explain the dynamics of territorial violence that have accumulated in recent years in one of the regions with the longest tradition of violence in Colombia: Llanos Orientales. However, this analysis must continue in other studies with which to enrich the academic production on the explanatory factors of violence since the Agreement with the FARC-EP.

The organization of this article is in three sections. First, is a preliminary description of the armed groups in the region. Second is a presentation of the armed groups strategic positioning and, finally, an exercise in causality is proposed to test whether four hypotheses hold true. According to Wood, emerging violence in post-armed conflicts, responds to a political culture of values, norms, practices, and beliefs in

a process of continuous recreation, although it seeks to maintain certain essential elements as its own, to strengthen aspects such as recognition and legitimacy.<sup>7</sup> In accordance with the above, a first hypothesis would be:

*H1: Armed groups will seek to establish themselves in those municipalities where the Eastern Bloc was present*

Moreover, structural aspects in the transformation of violence are fundamental to understanding any process of overcoming the violence. This classic approach outlined by Galtung is used in peace and conflict resolution research, and is addressed in Colombia as an aspect to consider in the presence of armed groups in certain settings.<sup>8</sup> Accordingly, a second hypothesis would be:

*H2: Armed groups will seek to establish themselves in those municipalities where structural violence (poverty/unemployment) is most prevalent.*

This approach, developed around the notion of structural violence, has also allowed us to understand how certain illicit economies take root and become formalized.<sup>9</sup> According to Pécaut or Ríos, the duration and virulence of the armed conflict would not have been so great had there not been huge economic benefits derived from the coca trade, illegal mining, or oil exploitation.<sup>10</sup> These three items, and others such as the control of monocultures, especially in relation to the paramilitary, have been fundamental in the financing of all existing armed groups in Colombia.<sup>11</sup> Hence, a third hypothesis would be:

*H3: Armed groups are in municipalities where coca leaf cultivation, mining or oil exploitation are present*

Finally, according to the theory postulated by Lederach, and as highlighted by the Fundación Ideas para la Paz in one of its many studies, effective peace agreement implementation policies play a fundamental role in displacing and mitigating the presence of armed groups in each territory.<sup>12</sup> These types of elements are addressed in the Peace Agreement signed with the FARC-EP through the so-called Development Programs with a Territorial-based Approach (PDET), which have sought to prioritize certain territories in the implementation of the Agreement. After five years, it is time to examine the real scope of such programs and observe if there is mitigation of

armed activism where they are implemented in the Llanos Orientales region, by assigning a value of 0 (absence) or 1 (presence). Thus, the fourth hypothesis would be as follows:

*H4: Armed groups are not located in municipalities where the Peace Agreement PDETs have been most implemented and developed*

The data used for this work derive from different sources of information. First, the location of armed groups comes from the periodic reports issued by reference foundations that have monitored the armed conflict and Peace Agreement implementation, such as Indepaz, Ideas for Peace Foundation or Peace and Reconciliation Foundation.<sup>13</sup> Data related to the presence of illicit mining, the oil industry or coca cultivation are from the Terridata database, while poverty and unemployment indicators are from the National Planning Department. In addition, the maps have been self-made using QGIS, while the proposed statistical processing was carried out with the STATA 17 program, based on a dataset from November 2016 to November 2020, with a total of 316 observations of acts of violence in all the municipalities of the Llanos Orientales region.<sup>14</sup> For practical purposes, this region is defined on the basis of the political-administrative criterion delimited by the Colombian legal system, for which Llanos Orientales comprises the departments of Meta, Caquetá, Casanare, Guaviare and Vichada. A macro-region that, at all events, has been a place of great relevance for the FARC-EP, since its main center of operations (Casa Verde) was located there, promoting the La Uribe Agreements (1984), with President Belisario Betancur, developing the Caguán negotiation process with President Andrés Pastrana (1999-2002), or hosting the last major FARC-EP conference – the tenth – in which the final signing of the Peace Agreement with the government of Juan Manuel Santos was accepted from the Llanos del Yará.

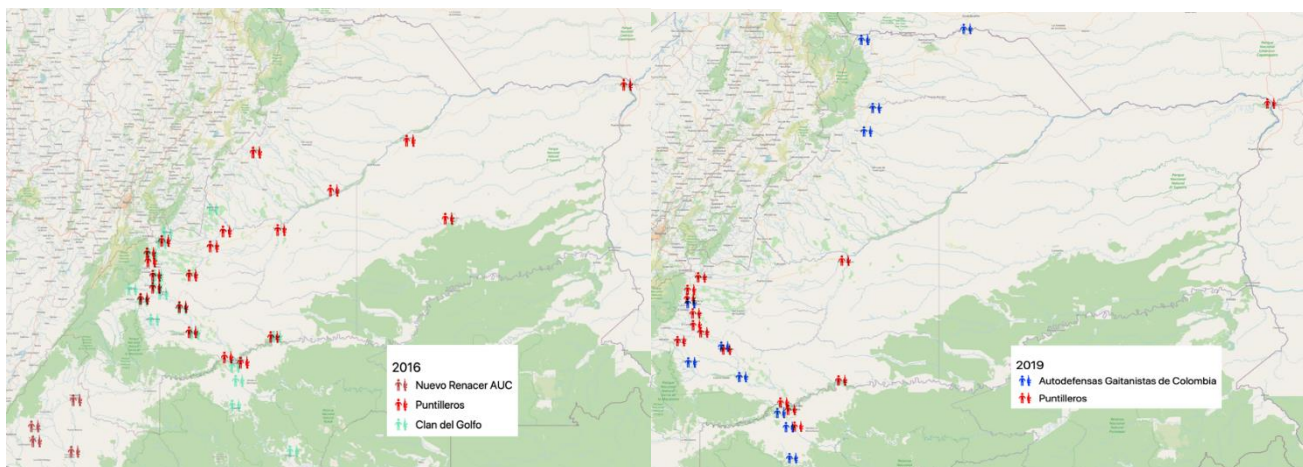
## Territorial Presence and Armed Actions in the Llanos Orientales

When the Eastern Bloc and almost all its 56-armed structures agreed to surrender their arms, a transformation process began on the part of the perpetrators of the violence. First, taking advantage of the power vacuum left by the FARC-EP in the territory, different paramilitary successor groups, such as the Clan del Golfo, Los Puntilleros, Los Caqueteños, Nuevo Renacer AUC and Águilas Negras, consolidated

their position in the department. Likewise, several new groups emerged that tried to function as a continuation of the FARC-EP, either because they continued to engage in violence or because they dissociated themselves from the Peace Agreement. These include the 1st, 7th, 10th, 14th, 15th, 28th, 40th or 62nd Fronts, along with the 'Acacio Medina' Front and the National Liberation Army (ELN).<sup>15</sup>

Since 2016, the Clan del Golfo has been active in the municipalities of Acacías, Barranca de Upía, Fuente de Oro, Granada, Lejanías, Mapiripán, Puerto Lleras, Puerto Rico, San Juan de Amara, San Martín Villavicencio, and Vista Hermosa in Meta, Yopal and Villanueva in Casanare, San José del Guaviare, Miraflores, Calamar and El Retorno in Guaviare (see Figure 1).<sup>16</sup> Their choice of position was based on the control of access routes (both land and river) from Vichada and Guaviare to the Venezuelan border in Arauca, especially in what is known as the *Piedemonte Llanero* (plains foothills). From 2018 to 2020, their presence in the territory decreased significantly from 18 to 11 municipalities, although they continued to maintain control of strategic routes.

Figure 1. Armed groups in the Llanos Orientales region, 2016-2019



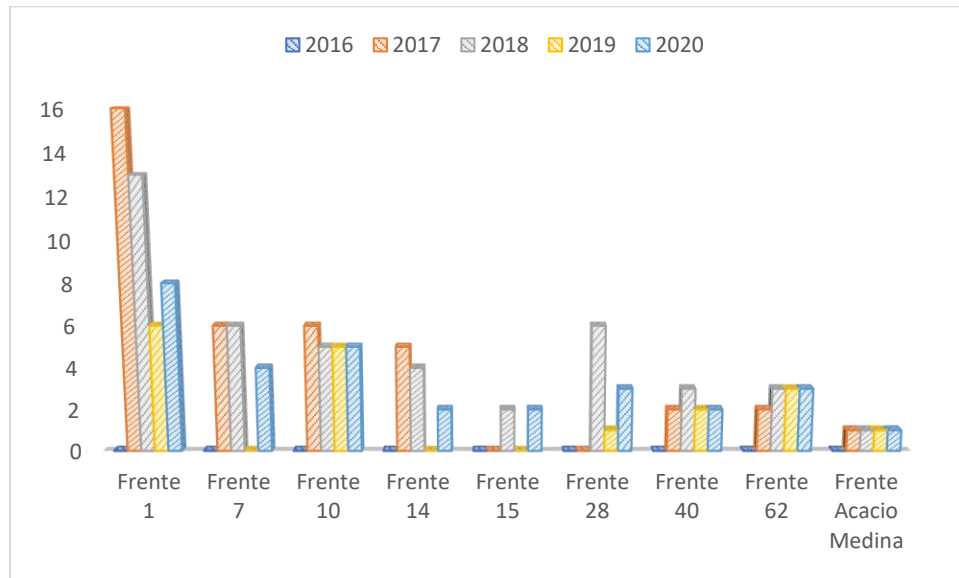
Prepared by the authors

Los Puntilleros have also been operating in the region since 2016. Although initially present in some twenty municipalities, their presence is reduced over the years to almost half, despite strengthening their position in the control of the Meta River, from the plain's foothills to the Venezuelan border, especially in the municipality of Puerto Carreño. The same has occurred regarding the Guaviare River, between the municipalities of Puerto Concordia and Mapiripán.<sup>17</sup> Meanwhile, in 2016, the Nuevo Renacer AUC group gained notoriety, especially in the

department of Caquetá (in the municipalities of Cartagena del Chairá, El Paujil, El Doncello or San Vicente del Cagúan), although not long after this group disappeared. Much the same has happened with Los Caqueteños, who were operating almost exclusively around the departmental capital of Florencia in 2017. However, now they are integrated in other criminal groups.<sup>18</sup> Thus, given these circumstances, since 2016 and up to the present, there has been a special interest in controlling the plains foothills, in their proximity to the natural parks and the border with Venezuela. To this end, control of land and river traffic has become key to the positioning strategy of these groups, with the Clan del Golfo predominantly in control from Guaviare (coca production) to Arauca (distribution). Meanwhile, Los Puntilleros have tried to maintain a certain presence in Guaviare, although their control route goes towards the Venezuelan border, through Vichada and over the plain's foothills.<sup>19</sup>

In terms of guerrilla structures, the former FARC-EP's 1st Front is the one that has been most active in the region, reaching as many as 16 municipalities in 2017, although its presence has been declining over the years. However, this tendency does not extend to other structures, such as the 10th Front, which has shown greater stability in armed activism in the changing scenario of the plains, in which, as can be seen from the following table, an important level of fluctuation takes place (see Figure 2). This is because in 2018 there is an expansion phase of armed groups, but by contrast, since 2019, their strategic positioning and distribution has been consolidated, especially in National Natural Parks, border locations with Venezuela and areas where the FARC-EP has been present for a long time.<sup>20</sup>

Figure 2. Presence of former FARC-EP Fronts in municipalities in the Llanos Orientales region, 2016-2020

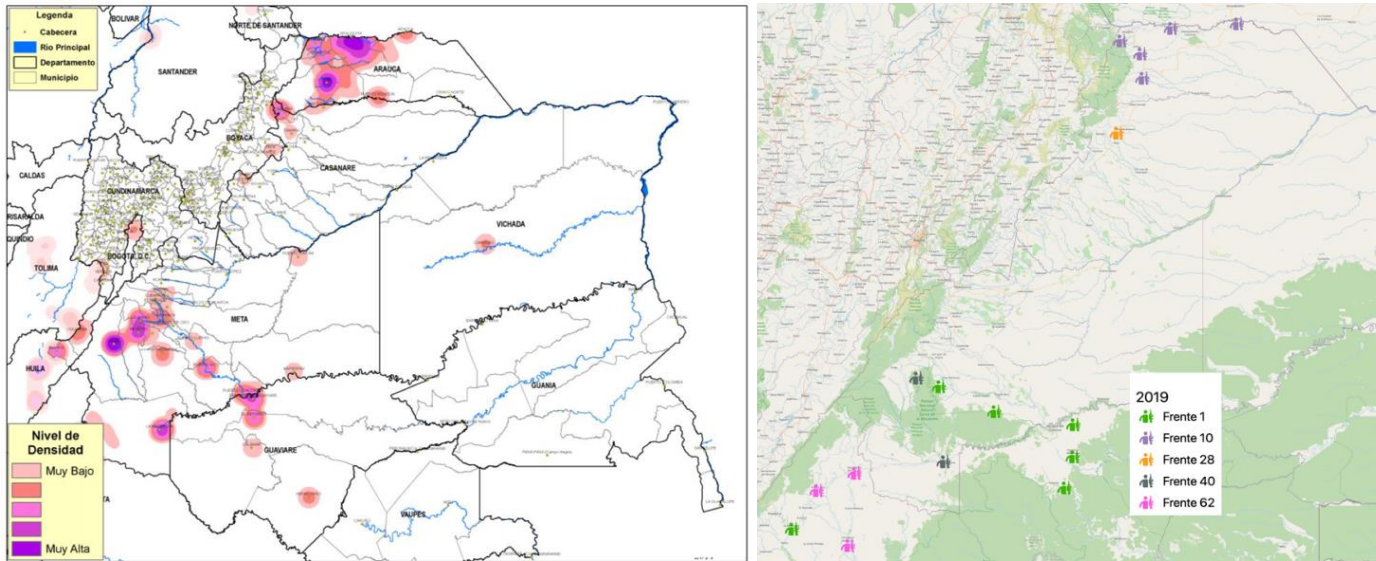


Source: Prepared by the authors

In relation to the above, a fact that is particularly striking is how FARC-EP dissident Fronts have in fact co-opted a large part of the power spaces left by the demobilization of the Eastern Bloc throughout 2017. Data can illustrate this statement by comparing (left) the map drawn up by the Ideas for Peace Foundation in 2012 and (right) the one created for this article, as shown in the following figure. There is a high level of correspondence that allows us to understand the spatial distribution criteria of FARC-EP dissidents on the geography of violence which is currently taking place in the macro-region of Llanos Orientales (see Figure 3).



Figure 3. Presence of armed groups related to the FARC-EP, 2012-2019



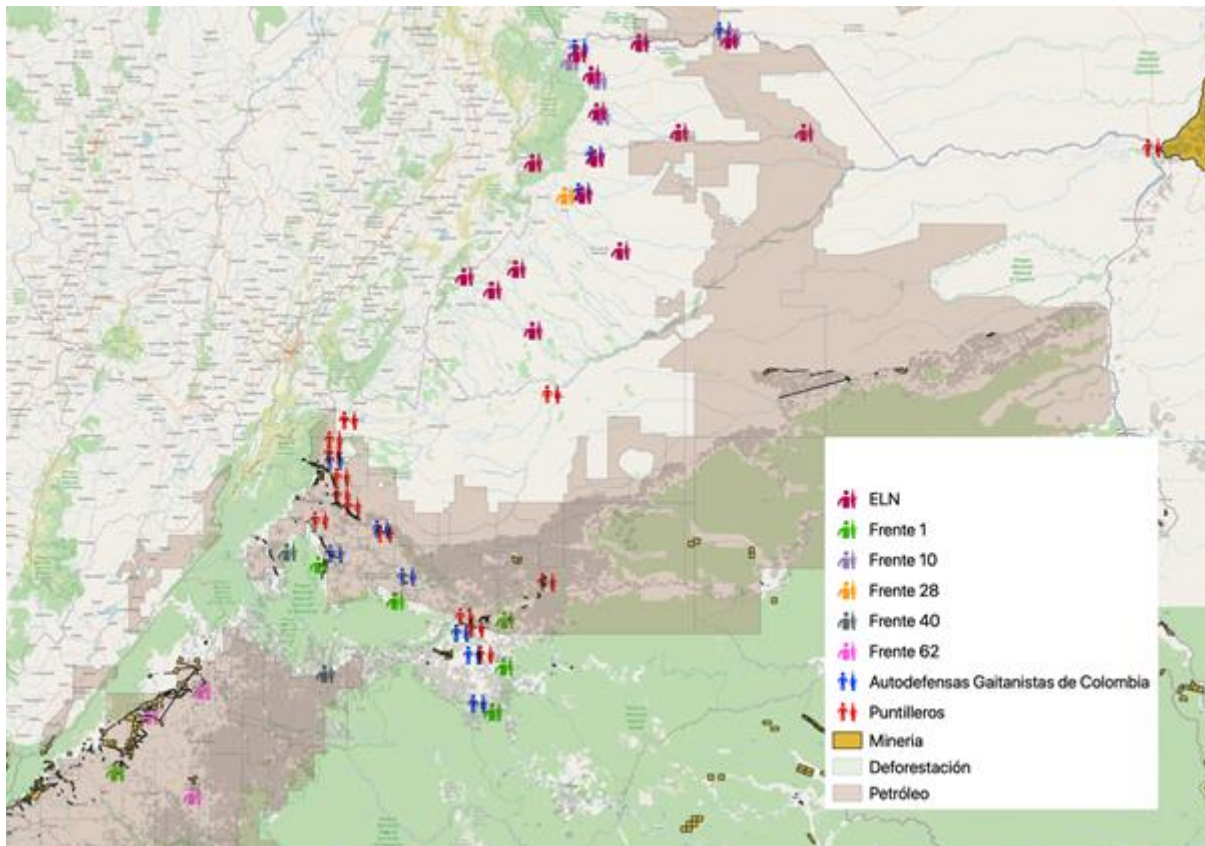
Fuente: DAS, prensa nacional, elaborado por la FIP

Source: Ideas for Peace Foundation (left/free and open access); prepared by the authors (right).

Finally, contrary to what might be expected, the ELN, and specifically its main structure operating in Llanos Orientales, namely the Eastern War Front, has not increased its area of influence because of the power vacuum created by the demobilization of the FARC-EP. While it is true that in 2019 it tried to expand its presence on the Venezuelan border in the department of Vichada – and even in some municipalities of Meta – its position only appears in those locations where it is most deeply rooted and has the greatest guerrilla capacity: In the departments of Arauca and Casanare<sup>21</sup>.

Thus, based on the previous characterization of the enclaves and actors of violence in Llanos Orientales, there is a clear connection between all the armed groups – post-paramilitary groups, FARC-EP dissidents and the ELN – and the different possibilities of illicit financing available in the region, especially oil exploitation and coca cultivation. Added to this is the combination of communication routes to facilitate illegal economy pathways and other associated factors, which will be included in the analysis below, such as deforestation practices linked to the expansion of the agricultural frontier driven by the profit motive and the ongoing process of land dispossession (see Figure 4).

Figure 4. Geography of violence in Llanos Orientales, 2020



Prepared by the authors

### Analysis and results

The econometric model used to test the different hypotheses proposed at the beginning of this article is the Binomial Logit Model, which is an estimation technique for equations whose dependent variable is a dummy variable (whose value can be 0 – there are no armed groups, or 1 – there are armed groups). This avoids the problem of unboundedness of the linear probability model by using a variant of the cumulative logistic function as proposed by Studemund<sup>22</sup>. An additional reason is that this model allows the multilevel structure (municipalities) using time series (2016-2020), so that the equation would be:

$$L : \Pr (D_i = 1) = \beta_0 + \beta_{1t} X_{lit} + \beta_{2t} X_{2it}$$

Where  $D_i$  is the dependent variable corresponding to the presence or absence of armed groups;  $X_{it}$  are the independent variables;  $t$  refers to observations on each municipality at multiple points in time using a time-series approach. That said, Table 1 presents the first model used to explain the presence of armed groups, and the confidence interval used for this model is 0.95.

Surprisingly, if the explanatory model is applied overall, without differentiating between armed groups, the former presence of the FARC-EP, for example, did not appear to be statistically significant ( $Z=0.760$ ). Probably, this is because the violence of other organizations, such as the paramilitary successor groups, was not directly related to the former guerrillas, and their presence in the territory was due to other causes existing in the municipalities. On the other hand, the poverty variable was statistically significant (0.006), with a high coefficient, so that, all other variables being constant, it acted as a powerful predictor of the presence of armed groups in the municipalities of Llanos Orientales. Likewise, the presence of wax palm, as one of the crops associated with the economics of land dispossession, did show a significant value, with a high coefficient, which suggested that a plantation of this type could increase the probability of armed groups being present in the area. Finally, none of the other variables highlighted from in this article turned out to be significant for this model showing the overall pattern.

Table 1. Regression on factors explaining the presence of armed groups

Logistic regression		Number of obs = 316				
Log likelihood = -183.51557		LR chi2(10) = 70.58				
		Prob > chi2 = 0.0000				
		Pseudo R2 = 0.1613				
violenc	Coefficient	Std. err.	z	P> z	[95% conf. interval]	
farc	-.1323122	.4335922	-0.31	0.760	-.9821373	.7175129
coca	.1130385	.4182722	0.27	0.787	-.7067599	.9328369
petroleo	.1275041	.3528482	0.36	0.718	-.5640656	.8190738
mineriacons	.1202895	.325885	0.37	0.712	-.5184335	.7590124
mineriamp	-.5332276	.7949243	-0.67	0.502	-2.091251	1.024796
ocupaformal2	-1.709561	1.076212	-1.59	0.112	-3.818899	.3997766
pobreza2	3.529194	1.290171	2.74	0.006	1.000505	6.057883
poblacion	.0000355	8.16e-06	4.35	0.000	.0000195	.0000515
palmadecera	1.545654	.3467497	4.46	0.000	.8660374	2.225271
pdet	.0019513	.3612439	0.01	0.996	-.7060737	.7099764
_cons	-2.493282	.6468574	-3.85	0.000	-3.7611	-1.225465

Prepared by the authors based on STATA

As documented for the Colombian case, and in particular regarding Llanos Orientales, it would be a methodological error to analyze the presence of armed groups in terms of univocity, as a detailed analysis is essential to differentiate between post-paramilitary groups, groups that are heirs of the FARC-EP, and the ELN. This is because their relationship with the territory responds to a trajectory, rationale and specific idiosyncrasies that are as unique as they are, on many occasions, different from each other. For instance, attending specifically at the process of former FARC-EP dissidents (see Table 2), it is possible to see how explanatory power is greater was increased by the presence of former Eastern Bloc structures (Z: 0.021). However, due to high multicollinearity between enclaves where the FARC-EP were located and where coca cultivation was present (0.7492 - Table 3), had to eliminate the previous existence of the FARC-EP Fronts and the PDETs to establish whether coca cultivation had an impact on the presence of rearmed and dissident groups.

Table 2. Regression on FARC-EP dissidents

Logistic regression					Number of obs = 316	
					LR chi2(11) = 94.51	
					Prob > chi2 = 0.0000	
Log likelihood = -119.85339					Pseudo R2 = 0.2828	
posfarc	Coefficient	Std. err.	z	P> z	[95% conf. interval]	
farc	1.357686	.586519	2.31	0.021	.2081302	2.507243
coca	.1139167	.4592614	0.25	0.804	-.7862191	1.014053
petroleo	.3922844	.5466155	0.72	0.473	-.6790624	1.463631
mineriacons	.4667746	.4226649	1.10	0.269	-.3616335	1.295183
mineriamp	-1.357082	.9651418	-1.41	0.160	-3.248725	.5345617
ocupaformal2	-.4107106	1.376622	-0.30	0.765	-3.10884	2.287419
pobreza2	3.569715	1.685063	2.12	0.034	.267052	6.872377
poblacion	3.67e-06	2.69e-06	1.37	0.171	-1.59e-06	8.94e-06
palmadecera	-1.116019	.5300407	-2.11	0.035	-2.154879	-.077158
para	1.468596	.4299371	3.42	0.001	.6259345	2.311257
pdet	1.428774	.3867904	3.69	0.000	.6706788	2.186869
_cons	-4.973142	.9909105	-5.02	0.000	-6.91529	-3.030993

Prepared by the authors based on STATA

Table 3. Model 2 statistical correlation

	posfarc	farc	coca	petroleo	mineri~s	mineri~p	pobreza2	poblac~n	palmad~a	pdet
posfarc	1.0000									
farc	0.4048	1.0000								
coca	0.3444	0.7492	1.0000							
petroleo	-0.1509	-0.4287	-0.4292	1.0000						
mineriacons	-0.0697	-0.2212	-0.3134	0.4377	1.0000					
mineriamp	-0.0262	0.0968	0.1547	-0.1254	0.0471	1.0000				
pobreza2	0.2858	0.5118	0.5348	-0.4353	-0.4732	0.1965	1.0000			
poblacion	0.0635	-0.0170	-0.0084	0.2140	0.2577	0.0567	-0.2488	1.0000		
palmadecera	-0.1471	-0.2575	-0.1732	0.2489	0.3230	-0.1293	-0.3927	0.1328	1.0000	
pdet	0.4188	0.5364	0.4541	-0.2258	-0.1436	-0.0290	0.2939	0.0177	-0.1884	1.0000

Prepared by the authors based on STATA

Continuing with the explanation, the data in Table 4 below show that the variables of coca cultivation, poverty and population density were statistically highly significant. However, the coefficients for the latter variable were not sufficiently relevant to explain the presence of armed groups that are carrying on from the guerrillas. On the other hand, the co-existence of coca cultivation and high levels of poverty did operate as an important predictor to explain the presence of groups that are heirs of the FARC-EP in different municipalities of Llanos Orientales.

Table 4. Regression on FARC-EP dissidents (Model 2)

Logistic regression

Number of obs = 316  
 LR chi2(6) = 50.50  
 Prob > chi2 = 0.0000  
 Pseudo R2 = 0.1511

Log likelihood = -141.85865

posfarc	Coefficient	Std. err.	z	P> z	[95% conf. interval]	
coca	1.207962	.3710799	3.26	0.001	.4806588	1.935265
petroleo	.0690936	.4668156	0.15	0.882	-.8458481	.9840354
mineriamp	-1.522564	.9542841	-1.60	0.111	-3.392926	.3477989
ocupaformal2	-.5608676	1.169432	-0.48	0.632	-2.852911	1.731176
pobreza2	4.060957	1.393132	2.91	0.004	1.330468	6.791446
poblacion	5.33e-06	2.23e-06	2.40	0.017	9.69e-07	9.70e-06
_cons	-3.776375	.7335773	-5.15	0.000	-5.21416	-2.33859

Prepared by the authors based on STATA

The proposed model of analysis again presented particularities regarding the paramilitary successor organizations (see Table 5). Once again, poverty was statistically significant, while population density was only marginally so. Wax palm cultivation was also an important factor, as it was significant and had a high coefficient. Put another way, the presence of FARC-EP dissident and rearmed groups and paramilitary groups could the same element explain both, so one might think that either disputes or cooperation existed in such settings. Finally, the

presence of PDETs was statistically significant, with a high coefficient, but with a negative value, meaning that there was less likelihood that these groups were present in those municipalities prioritized by the Peace Agreement. Nevertheless, it was not possible to determine whether this was due to the progress of the implementation process and transformation of the violence, or to the better starting position of groups that inherited sites where the FARC-EP had once held control of the territory.

Table 5. Regression on paramilitary successor groups

Logistic regression	Number of obs =	316
	LR chi2(11) =	133.74
	Prob > chi2 =	0.0000
Log likelihood = -133.33229	Pseudo R2 =	0.3340

para	Coefficient	Std. err.	z	P> z	[95% conf. interval]	
coca	.1537878	.5274652	0.29	0.771	-.8800249	1.1876
petroleo	-.5457168	.4189115	-1.30	0.193	-1.366768	.2753346
mineriacons	.5529927	.4141178	1.34	0.182	-.2586632	1.364649
mineriamp	.9179638	.8340888	1.10	0.271	-.7168202	2.552748
pobreza2	4.573975	1.6631	2.75	0.006	1.314359	7.833591
poblacion	.0000186	6.31e-06	2.94	0.003	6.21e-06	.0000309
palmadecera	3.559394	.4686098	7.60	0.000	2.640936	4.477852
ocupaformal2	-1.610224	1.288711	-1.25	0.211	-4.136051	.9156034
farc	.3470955	.5393571	0.64	0.520	-.7100249	1.404216
posfarc	1.20791	.4316513	2.80	0.005	.3618894	2.053931
pdet	-1.329098	.4679091	-2.84	0.005	-2.246183	-.4120134
_cons	-4.689989	.9098763	-5.15	0.000	-6.473314	-2.906665

Prepared by the authors based on STATA

Finally, regarding the ELN, the presence of coca leaf cultivation, oil production, population density, wax palm cultivation, and the presence of FARC-EP dissidents was relevant. Coca leaf or wax palm cultivation yielded a high coefficient with a negative value, so could assume that there was less likelihood of the ELN being in a municipality with coca leaf or palm oil production. However, they were more likely to be in places where there was oil exploitation, tying in with their idiosyncrasy of financing themselves with revenues gained from extorting the extractive industry. The presence of FARC-EP dissidents showed a positive coefficient, which can be as indicator of enclaves where a rationale for cooperation existed between the different armed groups (see Table 6).

Table 6. Regression on the ELN

Logistic regression	Number of obs =	316
	LR chi2(10) =	102.87
	Prob > chi2 =	0.0000
Log likelihood = -107.79498	Pseudo R2 =	0.3230

eln	Coefficient	Std. err.	z	P> z	[95% conf. interval]
coca	-3.017342	.6345053	-4.76	0.000	-4.26095 -1.773735
petroleo	1.257288	.4406866	2.85	0.004	.3935581 2.121018
mineriacons	.5775189	.4219947	1.37	0.171	-.2495756 1.404613
mineriamp	.5764077	.9746044	0.59	0.554	-1.333782 2.486597
pobreza2	.6420164	1.715521	0.37	0.708	-2.720343 4.004376
poblacion	5.90e-06	2.36e-06	2.50	0.012	1.27e-06 .0000105
palmadecera	-2.526313	.5640392	-4.48	0.000	-3.631809 -1.420816
ocupaformal2	.1901685	1.095803	0.17	0.862	-1.957566 2.337904
pdet	.8988037	.598771	1.50	0.133	-.2747659 2.072373
posfarc	1.55665	.5439853	2.86	0.004	.4904589 2.622842
_cons	-1.932001	.8788001	-2.20	0.028	-3.654418 -.2095846

Prepared by the authors based on STATA

## Discussion

There are three lessons from the models presented in this article. The first is that the dynamics of armed groups in the region of Llanos Orientales after the signing of the Peace Agreement are diverse and need to differentiate methodologically when it comes to their study. The second noteworthy feature is that the greater the poverty in the municipalities, the more likely armed groups will be present. However, this variable does not operate in isolation, since it is based on the various resources that the different groups are able to exploit, as in the case of coca leaf cultivation by FARC-EP dissidents, oil exploitation by the ELN, or wax palm cultivation by the paramilitary successor groups. The third lesson is that in this region of the country, mining exploitation or employment rates are irrelevant when explaining the presence of violent groups.

For testing the hypotheses, H1 stated at the beginning of this article is partially true. That is, although the former presence of the Eastern Bloc accounted for the presence of the FARC-EP's rearmed and dissident groups, it failed to do so for the paramilitary successor groups or the ELN. On the other hand, H2 is proved partially. Poverty was a statistically significant variable with a high coefficient for all the armed groups studied. Thus, when the rate of poverty was higher, armed groups were more likely to be present. However, when talking about unemployment, this variable was not relevant, possibly because unemployment is a proxy for poverty, and due to the lack of existing

data, since the only available measurement was the formal employment rate in municipalities for 2016, with a statistical projection made by the DANE for subsequent years. In other words, no robust or reliable data were available to conclude that unemployment was unrelated to armed groups being present in the region.

H3 is validated for the FARC-EP's rearmed and dissident groups, in relation to coca cultivation, and for the ELN in relation to oil production. However, mining in the region was not significant enough to explain the presence of armed groups. H3 had no explanatory power to account for the presence of paramilitary successor groups. Finally, those municipalities where there are PDET programs implemented were only negatively significant in explaining the non-presence of paramilitary successor groups, possibly also due to the presence of dissident or rearmed groups.

Whatever the case, it is important to highlight that the models presented were built from a codebook constructed exclusively for this research based on 316 observations made between November 2016 and November 2020. However, there are some limitations. First, the precarious or non-existent information at the municipal level in Colombia greatly hampered any statistical study. The most complete and reliable source was *Terridata*, but information about some municipalities was simply missing for periods of years (up to 10 years). The only detailed statistical information provided is for the country's most populated cities, while the rest was based on departmental estimates. Moreover, quantitative studies explaining the dynamics of violence in Colombia are quite limited, so determining the relevance of variables, data and econometric models poses a challenge that calls for greater monitoring, accessibility and transparency of sources provided by the National Police or the Ministry of Defense, highly opaque institutions in terms of making information available. Finally, the period analyzed in this article is only five years, so detailed studies on the presence and dynamics of violence in regional settings is a promising field to pursue. This is because they can provide a rigorous understanding of the markedly heterogeneous violence in the territory, especially after the signing of the Peace Agreement.

## Conclusion

This article has studied the presence of armed groups in the Llanos Orientales region following the Peace Agreement in 2016 and up to



2020. During this period, multiple illegal armed groups were operating in the region, such as the Clan del Golfo, Los Puntilleros, Los Caqueteños, Nuevo Renacer AUC, Las Águilas Negras, the ELN and the former FARC-EP's 1st, 7th, 10th, 14th, 15th, 28th, 40th, 62nd and Acacio Medina Fronts. The different structures were grouped into three categories for a more detailed analysis: Successors of the paramilitary, the FARC-EP's successor groups and the ELN. This article has taken a descriptive approach, using maps and specialized literature to describe the armed groups and their dynamics in the region, and a causal approach based on a quantitative study was proposed to explain their presence in the region.

In the first part, it described the groups that arrived in the region after the signing of the Peace Agreement with the FARC-EP, affecting, above all, the dissident and rearmed groups of the demobilized guerrillas. This is because these were newly-created groups as opposed to existing ones, such as the ELN or the post-paramilitary groups, which have undergone an entire reorganization process, and are under permanent transformation. Based on the presence of each armed group, four hypotheses are tested and analyzed using a *binomial logit* model.

Arguments linking the persistence of the conflict to structural elements, according to the proposed model, allow us to highlight that poverty is a determining and significant factor in explaining the widespread presence of armed groups, regardless of their aliases and nomenclatures. However, when one tries to go further and integrate possible sources of illicit financing, not all taxable resources by armed groups have the same impact. Coca cultivation is of great relevance in explaining the position of dissidents who continue in the armed activism of the FARC-EP, while the exploitation of the oil industry helps explain the presence of the ELN. Likewise, palm cultivation is especially significant in relation to the presence of post-paramilitary groups, given that mining, for example, is not a statistically significant factor in explaining the presence or absence of an armed group.

In terms of the symbolic and cultural aspects associated with the continuity of an armed group after its initial demobilization, the model has shown that it is in those municipalities where the FARC-EP has traditionally been present where there are the greatest number of dissidents from this former guerrilla group. This is important to identify explanatory variables other than the existence of conditions of poverty or benefits derived from the illicit economy. Thus, wherever the

FARC-EP's Eastern Bloc was present, the territories under its control have never fallen into the hands of other groups such as post-paramilitary groups or the ELN. This is a highly relevant factor in that the dissident structures derived from the FARC-EP may attempt to confer continuity with respect to the former in terms of their own elements of discourse and strategy.

However, it must be an emphasize on the limited availability of data and the need to complement this type of work with other equally essential studies that analyze in detail the desertion factor among the FARC-EP demobilized population or the relationship between different armed groups. For example, it is not possible to know how many ex-combatants have made the transition to illegality or what the rationale for conflict and/or cooperation has been like between armed structures whose activism were marked by circumstances as changeable as they are strictly local.

Thus, this study calls for further detailed analyses that attempt to characterize separately the aspects that accompany each armed group in their particular use of violence. This will enable us to better explain the relationship of these armed groups with their territory and optimize our understanding of the violence in a post-Peace Agreement scenario in Colombia.

## Endnotes

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