

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Rural Security in Colombia: An Opportunity for State Consolidation

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The citizen security service provided by the Colombian State is unequal. It focuses mainly on large cities and municipal capitals, and is absent in vast expanses of the national geography. In these regions, state incapacity to enforce the law, resolve citizen conflicts, and protect and promote social order based on peaceful coexistence is painfully evident. Also, in a context of armed conflict, the State has placed special emphasis on the fight against illegal armed groups (national security), rather than respond to coexistence and security challenges (citizen security).

Post-conflict, the transition from national security to citizen security in rural areas requires the design of security strategies with a regional focus. It should consider institutional adjustments, construction of legal authorities, and the strengthening of local capacities.

Rural security for the citizenry

The citizen security service provided by the Colombian State is unequal. It focuses mainly on large cities and municipal capitals, and is absent in vast expanses of the national geography. In these regions, state incapacity to enforce the law, resolve citizen conflicts, and protect and promote social order based on peaceful coexistence is painfully evident.

Precisely identifying the causes of this incapacity is an extremely complex task, due in part to the heterogeneity of territorial experiences in Colombia. While there do exist areas where the lack of citizen security is explained by the historic absence of civil and military authorities, there are other

areas where an ongoing dispute has existed between the Colombian State and illegal actors. It is well known that among these actors are illegal armed groups who have used force to exercise control and impose their own social order in certain areas of the country (Vásquez et al 2011). For example, this is the case of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC by its Spanish acronym) and the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC) who demobilized in 2003.¹ It is therefore undeniable that the Colombian State faces serious difficulty in exercising effective territorial control and a legitimate monopoly on the use of force in the totality of the national territory.

With respect to rural contexts and security, the State has placed special emphasis on the fight against illegal armed groups (national security). In these contexts, security is under the purview of the military, and daily security and coexistence problems confronted by the citizenry receive less attention from

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the authorities. In addition, the institutions responsible for guaranteeing coexistence and security conditions have low operational capacity and insufficient coverage.

These institutions must generate processes and mechanisms that allow them to respond to coexistence and security challenges, and to the needs, interests, and expectations of the population. For their part, local communities have been marginalized from services and/or constructed dysfunctional and distrustful relationships with the State. As a result, they need support to adapt to a new social order. This means adhering to duties and obligations that sometimes introduce restrictions, impose discipline, and require the adjustment of entrenched values and practices.

The authors of this text are convinced that the transition from national security to citizen security in rural areas requires the design of security strategies with a regional focus. Proposals for input based on fieldwork conducted by Fundación Ideas para la Paz (FIP) are therefore made below, with the goal of broadening this thesis and its scope. These proposals also invite the reader to consider different options for institutional adjustments, construction of legal authorities, and strengthening of local capacities.

Regions, the population, and security

The regional focus of public policy is based on a notion at once powerful and simple: the success of state interventions depends on the suitability of existing strategies to be implemented, and on characteristics of the context in which they will be applied. In simpler terms, no single formula can be employed with the same results in environments with different traits.

Taking this intuitive approach into account, it is crucial to frame contextual challenges in the design of public security policy in terms of culture, demography, geography, topography, natural resources, and infrastructure, as these features differ greatly between rural Colombian departments. A comprehensive

understanding of contextual characteristics and security challenges will determine the human, financial, technical, logistical, and infrastructural resources needed by the State to exercise control and provide effective services.

The following section examines four essential factors in addressing these issues.

Distant areas and/or those that are difficult to reach

As in many other countries, the Colombian geography includes remote areas that are difficult to access. The country is comprised of five zones – pacific, Andean, Caribbean, valley, and Amazon – and is characterized in physical terms by three mountain ranges that cross the country from south to north. Between these ranges are deep valleys with very different climactic conditions. The country also has mature forests with high levels of rainfall, coastal flatlands with hot climates, and large expanses of humid tropical rainforest (Galeano 1992).

Populations who inhabit areas that are difficult to access are isolated from state services (security, health, education) and have no incentive to move to places where these services are offered, because of high costs, the effort of moving, and the uncertainty of a successful outcome. This situation provides opportunities for armed groups and criminal organizations to coopt communities, impose coercive services, and regulate economic activity to serve their criminal interests.²

These areas demand a state response that facilitates community access to services, and flexible state expansion that adapts to the particularities of each territory. This does not mean to suggest that the State should install permanent offices in all communities, but does imply that it should generate adaptable procedures, mechanisms, and tools to regulate social order and stimulate local adherence to legal norms and standards.

Justice services in the Nariño department demonstrate the difficulties and lack of incentives to access state justice. The state justice at the national level is divided into

33 judicial districts, which in turn are divided into 202 judicial circuits which manage all municipalities in the country. The Tumaco judicial circuit, which belongs to the judicial district of Pasto (Nariño), is in charge of seven municipalities: El Charco, Francisco Pizarro, La Tola, Mosquera, Olaya Herrera, Santa Bárbara, and San Andrés de Tumaco. These municipalities together represent eleven per cent of the department's municipalities (64 in total); they occupy 32 per cent of the departmental territory (10,578 square kilometers of 33,268)³ and house 19 per cent of the Nariño population (319,084 of 1,722,999).⁴

The physical facilities of the judicial circuit are located in the municipal capital of San Andrés de Tumaco; the judicial branch is therefore not permanently or physically present in the other municipalities. While Tumaco is connected to the departmental capital by a paved 300-kilometer highway, the other six municipalities in this judicial circuit do not have land transport infrastructure and are only connected to the rest of the country by river and sea. Travel between Tumaco and the other municipalities in the circuit takes between 30 minutes and 5 hours, with costs of between US\$8 and US\$40 (see **Table 1**).

In a representative case such as this one, the transport difficulties confronted by inhabitants are evident. In order to access judicial services, people must travel to the municipal capital in Tumaco, incurring costs that in many cases they cannot or are not willing to assume.

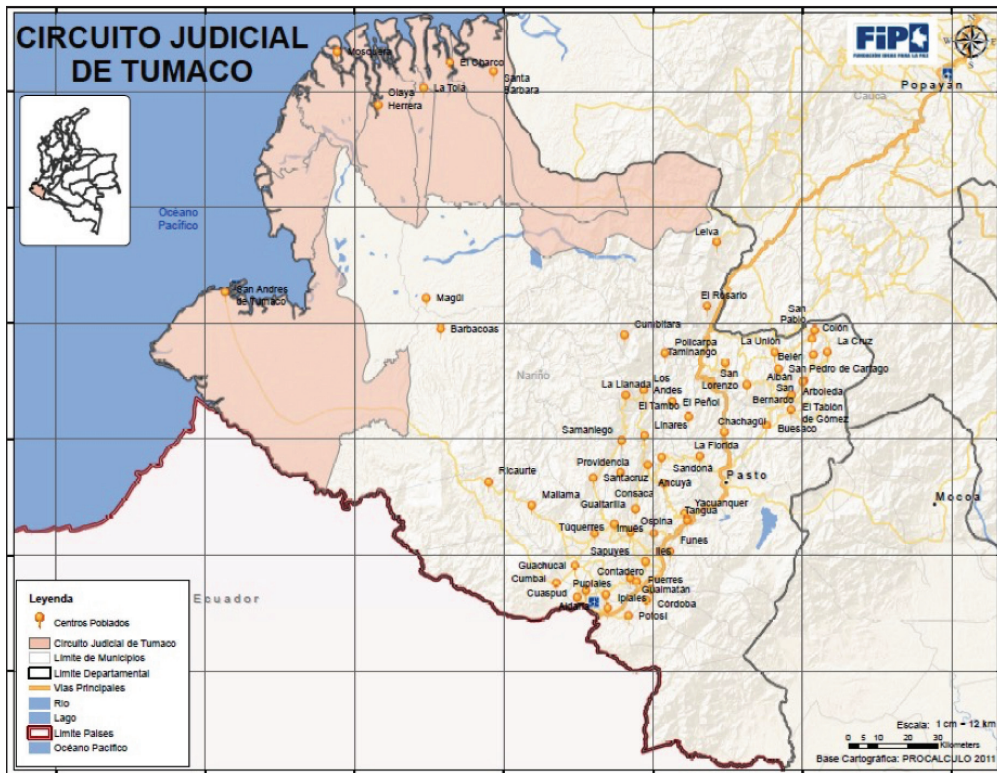
It is difficult to establish a causal relationship between the activity of the illegal armed groups and the institutional instability of the municipalities in the Nariño pacific region. However, it is evident that the combination of insufficient institutional presence, transport and access difficulties, and the dispersed population, serves the activities and interests of criminal groups.

Tumaco, similar to the other municipalities in Nariño and the rest of the country, is heavily affected by violence stemming from the internal armed conflict. In this region, the FARC competes with the Colombian State to impose social order. Public services are restricted to the capitals due to the risks that government representatives face if they travel to rural areas. The armed forces are focused on dismantling and counteracting armed groups and criminal organizations active in the area. Citizens located outside the capitals live under rules imposed by the FARC, including a curfew on river travel in the municipality (see **Map 1** for details of the region).⁵

In conclusion, in municipalities such as Tumaco, the distances between populated areas, topography of the terrain, lack of transport routes, territorial control by the illegal armed groups, limited coverage by state services, and lack of incentives to use these services converge. This combination, which manifests itself in various municipalities of the country, opens the door to the introduction of an alternative institutional presence.

From Tumaco to	Description	Duration of travel	Cost of travel each way (US\$)
El Charco	By sea	3 hours	\$ 40
Francisco Pizarro	By sea	30 minutes	\$ 8
Mosquera	By sea	5 hours	\$ 40
Olaya Herrera	By sea	2,5 hours	\$ 25
Pasto	By land	6 hours	\$ 10

Table 1: Communications between the Tumaco judicial circuit municipalities. *Source:* MSD (2011: 107), adjustments made by the author.



Map 1: Tumaco Judicial Circuit.

Illegal economies

The availability of natural resources in a context characterized by informality and lack of control by authorities increases the risk of extractive activity that does not fulfill legal requirements. Natural resources as a source of wealth also provide the incentive for migratory trends that generate vulnerable population centers with high levels of conflict.

As Giraldo proposes, exploitation and commerce of natural resources can occur in three ways:

- Formal: when the product and production process fulfill regulatory requirements.
- Informal: when the product is legal or illegal and connected to the subsistence of the actor, and its commerce is tolerated but does not fulfill regulatory requirements.

- **Illegal:** when both product and commerce are found outside the regulatory framework.

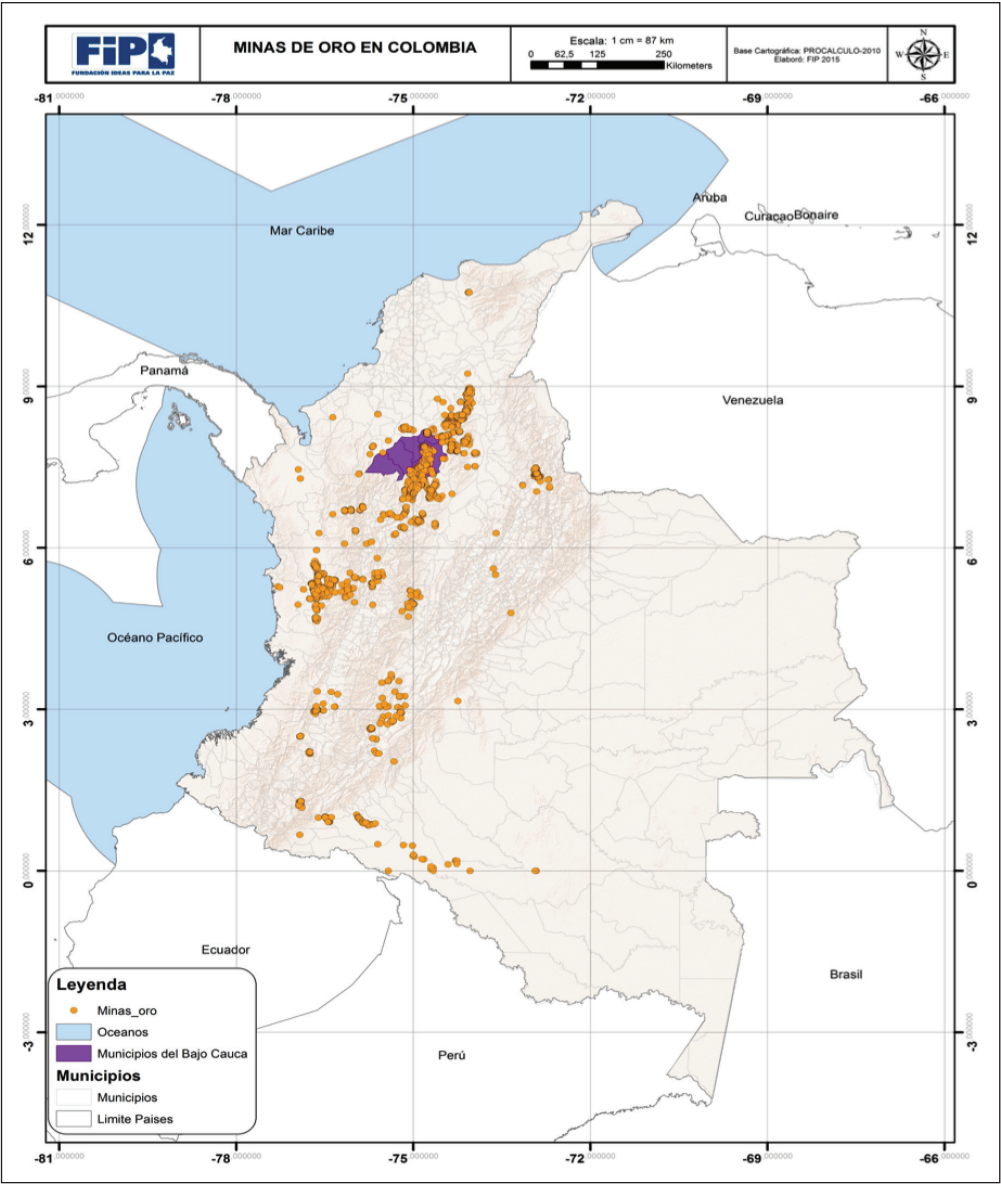
Criminal economies occur when either the product and/or the production process are illegal, and an illegal group regulates activity through threat or use of violence (Giraldo et al 2010).

Such is the case of the insertion of organized crime into mining activity. Research by German Jimenez Morales identifies five ways in which organized crime has become involved in mining in Colombia: legal and direct exploitation of mines through concession contracts; associative contracts with private companies; violent expropriation and direct exploitation of mines; contraband of gold from Panama as political merchandise used by mayors to charge royalties; and extortion of illegal mining (Giraldo et al 2010: 18).

According to information from the Mining and Energy Ministry (Ministerio de Minas y Energía 2014), in the last ten years the Antioquia department has produced at least one third of the gold mined in Colombia. In 2013, it produced 47 per cent of the gold at the national level (24,456.88 kilograms out of a total of 55,745 kilograms). The most abundant gold-producing region of this department

is Bajo Cauca, which comprises the municipalities of Caucasia, Caceres, El Bagre, Nechí, Tarazá, and Zaragoza (see **Map 2**).

The population of Bajo Cauca in Antioquia is concentrated mainly around mining activity. Similar to inhabitants of the region, the armed groups and criminal organizations arrived and/or adapted their activity in the area, attracted by the wealth of its natural



Map 2: Gold Mines in Colombia.

resources as a source of financing and profit. A study by the Universidad EAFIT and Proantioquia estimated that illegal armed groups now receive between US\$268,000 and US\$1,400,000 per month through extortion of mining activity in Antioquia (FIP, USAID, and IOM 2014: 8).

The FARC occupy this region as part of their expansion strategy and, according to Insight Organized Crime, the Ivan Rios bloc is now financed by drug trafficking, extortion, and gold mining. This bloc charges a 'tax' for the use of heavy excavation and extraction machinery which results in an income of more than US\$3 million per month (McDermott 2013). The criminal groups or 'bandas criminales' that arose after the demobilization of the paramilitary groups dispute control of their zones of influence in the area. Los Paisas, Los Rastrojos, and Los Urabeños are present in Bajo Cauca in Antioquia, and finance their territorial dispute through extortion of mining activity.

Beneficial commercial corridors

Geographic areas with strategic value for commercial activity tend to attract criminal activity. This is the case of border areas, as well as transport and natural corridors. Daniel Pecaú asserts that armed groups and criminal organizations have different interests and ways of controlling territories. Strategic control, understood as taking advantage of a territory, provides a platform to wage war due to the benefits of geographic positioning and economic resources it offers (Pecaú 2002: 27).

Montes de Maria, located in the northwest of the country, is in dispute by the State, armed groups, and the 'bandas criminales' due to its excellent geographic position. This region, comprised of 15 municipalities⁶ in the Bolívar and Sucre departments, provides access to three areas used to commercialize drugs: Morrosquillo Gulf, Cartagena Bay, and Dique Canal (UNDP 2010; ILSA 2012). It also features the Western and Caribbean passages, which connect the interior of the country with the Atlantic coast.

Leftist insurgent groups arrived in the area in the 1980s after a failed agrarian reform generated frustration among the population.⁷ In the 1990s, the power vacuums resulting from the demobilization of some insurgent groups opened the doors for FARC's entrance. At the same time, paramilitary groups emerged. Confrontations over territorial control between these two groups submerged the region in violence.

The FARC and the paramilitaries financed their activities in part through easy commercialization of drugs in Montes de Maria (see **Map 3**). As a result, the region became an attractive strategic area for drug trafficking. Since then, despite counter-insurgency strategies implemented in the region, the 'bandas criminales' who played a key role in the continuation of violence after the demobilization of the paramilitaries, have struggled for control of the drug trafficking corridors. According to Indepaz' fourth report on narco-paramilitary groups, between 2007 and 2013 the 'bandas criminales' were a continuous presence in the region and dedicated themselves to drug trafficking (Indepaz 2014: 8).

Strategic endowments and security

The presence of energy or hydrocarbon endowments represents a source of financing and political influence for illegal armed groups. In the case of energy, the presence of large companies allows guerrilla groups to gain resources through extortion. In that of hydrocarbons, violent attacks on infrastructure and/or other public or private assets form part of a political strategy to impact the national economy and security (Pecaú 2002: 30).

In order to counteract these attacks, in particular those that affect the security of exploitative companies' operations, the Colombian State implemented *Agreements for collaboration, cooperation, and/or coordination for the defense and security of the National Ministry of Defense and its operational units*.⁸ These agreements allow companies to make voluntary contributions to the armed forces. These contributions are used to finance the construction of public infrastructure and the protection of personnel,



Map 3: Montes de Maria.

assets, facilities, and activities of the companies themselves. According to unofficial oil sector sources consulted by FIP, the agreements amounted to US\$84 million dollars in 2013.

These contributions are managed through the Armed Forces Agreements Office (Army,

Navy, Air Force, and Police) in charge of the area where the company manages its activity. The resources are administered at the discretion of the armed forces and do not necessarily involve local authorities.

The presence of the armed forces responsible for protecting an extractive operation

generates mistrust in the citizenry and, as a result, affects the force's legitimacy, as citizens perceive that security is only for the company and not for them. This occurs because the armed forces are focused on taking care of the companies' assets, since their presence in the area is due to the agreement. In addition, the armed forces' presence generates risks in terms of their relationship with the community and possible infractions of International Humanitarian Law (IHL). These include military use of civilian facilities, which puts the civilian population at risk, use of civilian facilities as a military shelter, disproportionate use of force, and human rights violations such as sexual abuse and 'false positive' cases, among others.

One example of these risks has occurred in the exploitation of oil in San Vicente del Caguan (Caqueta department). Emerald Energy has had a concession contract to exploit oil resources in the Los Pozos area of the municipality since 2009. According to the media, the oil wells and tankers belonging to the company have been the target of attacks and threats by the FARC since August 2011, in retaliation for their refusal to make extortion payments.⁹

The municipal population perceives that the army took on a greater presence because of the arrival of Emerald Energy. The army concentrated on protecting entry and exit of the multinational company's trucks. In addition, the population believes that the army upheld the interests of Emerald Energy more than those of the citizens of San Vicente.¹⁰

In the first oil forum in Caqueta, the then Governor of the Department (German Medina Triviño) stated his concern over the implications of allocating armed forces personnel to the protection of natural resource companies. In particular, he sustained that the armed forces' provision of special security to oil companies in the municipality meant taking security away from the rest of the jurisdiction:

...we must progress in security for the department. We cannot trade in our

security, as is being done today by assigning more than two thousand men to look after the oil infrastructure and neglecting security, especially when we could be progressing in the development of Caqueta department in other ways (Observatorio de Realidad 2012: 36).

Until now, this text has described some of the contextual elements that must be considered when discussing rural citizen security strategies with a regional focus. In order to strengthen analysis of the complex rural security context in Colombia, the following section will examine another crucial and related topic: inter-institutional coordination. It is well known that citizen security policies are very sensitive to institutions' ability to work together, especially as these policies do not depend on one sole institution or actor.

Inter-institutional coordination

Inter-institutional coordination is a management process that targets the achievement of strategic objectives. This ensures that the execution of policies, strategies, programs, and actions generates stronger economies, greater effectiveness and coherence, better coverage, and increased impact. Coordination allows for the elimination of contradictions or redundancies and the development of integral policies. It also reduces policy inconsistencies, ensuring priorities and promoting a holistic perspective that overcomes the often narrow sectorial approach of policy (Peters 1998, quoted by Licha and Molina 2006: 9).

In Colombia, the Mayor is the primary policy authority in a jurisdiction, and is responsible for 'conserving public order in the municipality, in conformity with the law and the orders he or she receives from the President of the Republic and the respective Governor' (Constitución Política de Colombia, Article 315).

Inter-institutional coordination on security is therefore both top-down with respect

to the national government (ministries and institutions at the national level) and horizontal (municipal institutions, which are decentralized and not clustered together). In addition, there are different degrees of complexity in terms of functional and thematic dependency, financial matters, regional interests, resistance to new practices, and adjustments in organizational culture, among others.

At the local level, various public institutions support security and citizen coexistence. The Attorney General's Office is in charge of investigating and bringing charges against those who break the law. The Municipal Ombudsman is responsible for protecting public interests, promoting human rights, and overseeing state representatives' conduct. The Family Commission oversees cases of domestic violence, resolves family conflicts, addresses crimes against children, and applies sanctions to young people who break coexistence norms. The Police Inspector's Unit is responsible for promoting peaceful coexistence and resolving conflicts between citizens. Judges are in charge of resolving issues relating to civilian life, family, work, commerce, administration, and crimes that were not resolved by other means. Finally, the armed forces include the National Police (armed civil body), the Army, the Navy, and the Air Force.

State institutions should jointly plan and execute national and local strategies that address security and citizen coexistence issues. In terms of security, there are two established tools for inter-institutional coordination: Security Councils and Regional Public Order Committees. There are also two resources to finance security strategies: Regional Security and Citizen Coexistence Funds (FONSET), which conduct fundraising and administration at the local level, and the National Security and Coexistence Fund (FONSECON), administered by the Ministry of the Interior.

Despite the many institutions and mechanisms provided for by the law, their operations are not always permanent in all

municipalities, and even when they are present, they work in challenging conditions regarding technical functions and budgets. The context is characterized by such difficulties as a lack of coordination between design and implementation of policy and projects, and a lack of shared objectives and processes.

As a result, institutional effectiveness is fragile, as is, therefore, the solution to problems that affect the population. The State must guarantee citizen security based on coordination of its institutions. Practices and attitudes, norms, procedures, and organizational arrangements will have to be adjusted so that the institutional context can adapt to rural challenges. Some of the main challenges of rural contexts are examined here.

The political and technical challenge of coordination

Coordination between policies and entities is a political and technical process (Licha and Molina 2006). It requires assurance that the public and private organizations responsible for the design and execution of public policies work together to avoid redundancies or gaps in service provision (Peters 1998 quoted by Licha and Molina 2006: 9). In addition to inter-sectorial action, which requires policy execution, coordination can be seen as an instrument that allows for greater democratic governance by the central government.

State action therefore requires leadership and vision that allows institutions and communities to adjust their values and practices, and target their efforts on the achievement of common objectives. The execution of policy is based on joint values and ideas (Peters 1998 quoted by Licha and Molina 2006: 10). However, leadership must employ effective coordination methods that avoid negative organization (when each organization avoids the others and interaction does not occur) and advance towards positive coordination, in which collaborative work achieves improved results. Peters (1998) recognized an additional type of coordination called 'policy integration' that goes beyond coordination in service provision and moves

towards achieving levels of cooperation that make organizational missions compatible (Licha and Molina 2006: 10).

This type of coordination will be necessary in the design and implementation of rural security policy. The role of central government is crucial in ensuring that the exercise of central authority contributes to institutional coordination and generation of government strategies that facilitate sectorial distribution in coordination with and at the local level.

This assumes the achievement of substantial agreements, not only in terms of the role of different institutions involved, but also with respect to the vision of the State, policy, and government. Coordination is affected by existing power relations between different actors who participate in its design and execution, and by formal and informal rural institutional contexts (Peters 1998 quoted by Licha and Molina 2006: 10).

Coordination also implies technical challenges related to dissociation between those who design a policy, and whether the institutional capacity they assume or do not assume exists. Many of these strategies do not need to be local priorities and they do not need municipal resources to implement them. This situation is exacerbated by organizational cultures that only respond to certain incentives, work practices, ways of interacting with other actors, evaluation mechanisms, and other factors. However, coordination could generate connections or 'synergies' that strengthen the institutions involved.

Cognitive synergies have been identified as promoting the exchange of information and learning between participants. This includes the exchange of processes and activities employed during the execution of joint action by different sectors and actors, of resources that allow for shared competencies and abilities as well as budgets and finances, and of authority, as coordination requires political decision-making and force to create dialogue between different mandates (Licha and Molina 2006).

Mayors, as well as other state actors, have technical tools called Integral Citizen Security and Coexistence Plans (PISCC). Although the majority of municipalities currently have a PISCC, the plans are understood more as a legal requisite than a strategic planning tool. These documents are usually created by external consultants or by the Mayor's offices, and do not view participation by other institutions responsible for citizen security and coexistence as necessary at the national or local levels. The majority of municipalities therefore does not have the political support or financial muscle required for their implementation.

This means that each institution works independently, losing the chance to generate synergies, learning opportunities, and sustainable solutions to municipal problems. There is no local leadership body to regularly convene the Regional Public Order Committees and Security Councils. However, the leadership does appear during events that impact public opinion, in which cases institutions work jointly and produce the expected results.

This lack of coordination is not exclusive to local authorities. It can also be observed in the relationship between the armed forces and civilian institutions, which are characterized by military dominance. For example, in Montes de Maria, 'the roles and mission performed by' the marine infantry in the state consolidation strategy 'clearly exceed the competencies that correspond to its function, to the detriment of political and civilian requests' (Palou and Arias 2011: 6). In other regions, even if civilian control of the territory is clearer, and roles and functions are better defined, the extraordinary material supremacy of the army has a decisive weight when diagnosing security conditions in the area and facilitating the entry and activity of civilian state institutions.

Financing rural security

Financing citizen security depends on municipal fiscal capacity, and there are great differences between urban and rural

municipalities. The former have greater fiscal capacity and therefore resources to finance assets and services that allow them to respond more efficiently to their problems. This translates to a greater number of police, media, goods, and facilities available. In municipalities with low fiscal capacity, which are also the most rural, access to resources to support citizen security is very limited (US\$29,000 per year). There are not enough police, and the few resources they do possess finance police logistics and normally are not enough for the execution of crime prevention strategies.

As mentioned above, municipalities have two main sources of financing for citizen security. FONSET is financed by special contributions of five per cent of the value of public works contracts entered into by the municipality. FONSECON contributions come from five per cent of the public works contracts signed by the government for the construction and maintenance of land or river transport channels, airports, or seaports. While the FONSET resources are administered by the municipality, the FONSECON resources are administered by the Ministry of the Interior, and expenses are allocated to co-financing projects proposed by regional entities whose objective is to guarantee citizen security and coexistence.

Even so, there are discrepancies in access to FONSET resources and allocation of FONSECON resources. These resources are collected for municipalities in which public works contracts are realized. Given that the smallest municipalities have low budgets and enter public works contracts less frequently, their resource levels are also low. Access to FONSECON resources is based on the fund's priorities and decisions. This fund prioritizes investments according to general policies applicable to the majority of the municipalities, which means that investments do not always correspond to the needs of rural municipalities (for example, sports centers and closed circuit television).

This becomes even more worrying because of regional characteristics of the most rural

municipalities, which cover large extensions of territory where the population is very widely dispersed. In these areas, it is possible that security will be more costly, due to transport and communications costs associated with moving public representatives between communities, among other factors. Scarcity of resources for the most rural municipalities makes citizen security management impossible.

Action by the armed forces

Public order in some municipalities of the country has required the presence of armed forces with a focus more on controlling illegal armed groups than on citizen security. This has caused tension between the communities and the armed forces, to the point that it affects local coexistence and security conditions, as well as state legitimacy.

Some communities where illegal armed groups are present perceive that the armed forces and their facilities represent a risk factor for inhabitants, who could be affected by a terrorist attack or caught in the middle of a military confrontation with the illegal armed groups.

In addition, the behavior of the armed forces in areas most affected by the conflict is frequently questioned. Some members of the armed forces are perceived to have links or partnerships with illegal armed groups or 'bandas criminales.' These connections are made evident by retaliations and threats that victimize citizens when their reports filter through to the criminal groups.¹¹ Worse still, in some cases the connections between the armed forces and armed groups or criminal organizations have been overtly demonstrated.¹²

The armed forces and peacebuilding

The institutional architecture of the defense and security sector requires substantial reforms that both allow for the reconstruction of their legitimacy and respond to the new social order of a conflict-free environment. It is necessary to define the type of armed forces the country requires on the

road to peace, and ways to address the transition process to a new institutional organization. This discussion should involve national and local actors who identify particularities and best options according to regional problems.

Despite the fact that the government has announced the creation of a Ministry to lead citizen security, this proposal has not yet materialized and does not seem to be on the horizon. It is therefore necessary to encourage reforms within the current institutional framework to strengthen state capacities in terms of coexistence and citizen security in urban and rural areas. These adjustments should guarantee state territorial control and effective protection of the citizenry from the challenges imposed by the post-conflict phase.

There are various complementary options that could ensure that institutional security adjustments are consolidated in the short and long term.

Strengthening the National Police: An integral police service

This option necessitates transformations of the internal structure of the National Police without modifying the current institutional framework of the defense sector. Security services in rural areas should apply the *community policing in quadrants* methodology, which establishes a 'flexible and inclusive police work model that takes into account the specific characteristics of each territory in urban and rural contexts' (Policia Nacional 2014: 8).

For this model to work, the Citizen Security Office (DISEC) must assume management and coordination of citizen security service provisions in urban and rural areas. This would result in the organizational structural reform of the police, in which citizen security is at the head of all operational guidelines, and guides the coordination of different specialties according to identified regional problems.

These adjustments would allow for the integration of the riflemen in DISEC, not as

a separate office, as it currently operates, but rather as a sub-office mandated and controlled by the DISEC. This sub-office would also coordinate with the department commanderships and with commanders in the stations of jurisdictions under which the police operates.

This integration would allow for the planning of an integral police service with differential strategies to target problem solving. The vigilance committees would also allow for the planning of a flexible deployment of services with the participation of other operational offices and the cooperation of other entities, as well as the community.

A national rural guard connected to the National Police

This option has been considered over the last few years, particularly with the goal of guaranteeing the security of peasant leaders, representatives, and beneficiaries of the land restitution process. The most concrete proposal was formulated by Rafael Pardo, the 2010 Liberal Party presidential candidate. He proposed that the 18,000 peasant soldiers currently in the service of the National Army (Article 13, Law 48 of 1993) be transferred to fulfill police functions in the framework of a national guard (based on the National Police's riflemen model). This guard would be connected to the National Police ('Partido Liberal propone modelo de "seguridad rural"' 2011). At the time, the proposal's immediate purpose was to guarantee security in regions where the land restitution process was just beginning. It was meant to broaden the scope of the guard's mission to provide security in rural areas through prevention efforts and their permanent presence.

At the heart of this proposal is the development of a body with the capacity to realize relevant police functions that respond to citizen security needs in rural contexts. Among these functions are social and situational prevention tactics, control of factors that contribute to violence and other threats to citizen security (among them, criminal organizations), as well as support for justice

and assistance for victims. The guard would be composed partly of peasant soldiers from rural municipalities, which could facilitate relationships with and trust by local communities – a critical factor for the rural police. The fact that a Rural National Guard of this nature would be connected to the National Police would facilitate its operation within the existing constitutional framework and within a civilian organization such as the Colombian police.

It should be noted that the rifleman specialty's training model has already incorporated components of military doctrine and operations necessary to facilitate joint operations with military units when circumstances require. With these capacities, the Rural National Guard does not need to depend on a military entity such as the Army to carry out its operations. This characteristic also allows the operation of military equipment (helicopters, small airplanes, armored vehicles, light infantry weapons, etc.) to guarantee opportune and relevant responses in rural contexts where accessibility and security conditions demand them.

A national rural guard connected to the armed forces

This option is currently under consideration by some sectors of the armed forces. Its objective is to guarantee citizen security and coexistence in a possible post-conflict scenario in which the armed forces have to continue operations against threats such as illegal mining, drug trafficking, extortion, and other forms of violence associated with criminal organizations. The core of the proposal is to divide the current armed forces to create a Rural National Guard exclusively dedicated to municipalities located in peripheral rural areas. These are areas considered the most rural and most vulnerable in the country, and where it is evident that the State has not exercised a legitimate monopoly on force. These municipalities include the Caribbean Coast, the Western Plains, the Pacific Coast, the Catatumbo region, and the forests and mountains of the south (Velásquez 2014).

The plan considers the Rural National Guard to be an appropriate institutional solution for a post-conflict scenario, given the foreseen presence of criminal threats with greater fire power than that of the National Police. In this situation, the dual civil-military nature of a Rural National Guard under the National Ministry of Defense and supervised by the General Commandership of the Armed Forces (from which the Guard would borrow specific versatile doctrine and operational characteristics) would make the Rural National Guard the most appropriate and suitable force for the main type of expected threat.

The Rural National Guard would be a police force that could both investigate complex criminal networks alongside the Attorney General's Office, and forcefully confront criminals with high levels of firepower. This would occur thanks to its configuration as a force with some military characteristics in terms of education, training, organization, and teams. Another great advantage of this proposal is that the Rural National Guard would not have to include personnel in the process of completing their obligatory military service, and could therefore include highly professional members.

A rural national guard connected to the Ministry of Defense

This option represents the creation of a 'third force' within the armed forces, whose formation would necessitate constitutional reform. Similar to the previously-mentioned options, the crux of this proposal would be the creation of a Rural National Guard with the capacity to fulfill relevant police functions that meet citizen security needs in rural contexts. These include crime prevention tactics, control of factors contributing to violence and insecurity, support for the justice system, and assistance to victims. It would also have sufficient fire power to confront threats with military capacity, such as criminal organizations that currently exist in Colombia. One such model was proposed in 2002, at the beginning of Uribe's first government,

for which international technical cooperation was requested of the National French Gendarmerie ('Una tercera fuerza' 2002).

The creation of a Rural National Guard as a third armed force that depends on the National Ministry of Defense would allow the new entity to be civilian but maintain certain military equipment at its disposal, such as helicopters, small airplanes, armored vehicles, and light infantry weapons, similar to the police force. The entity would also have a centralized organizational structure and training in military doctrine and operations to facilitate joint operations with military units when circumstances require.

The main advantage of this method of establishing the Rural National Guard is that its civilian status would facilitate acceptance by the rural population. This is especially true in contexts where the armed conflict made the community a target of illegally armed groups and the armed forces.

The creation of a Rural National Guard in the framework of the Ministry of Defense would also allow it to benefit from connections with the armed forces and the National Police. This is particularly useful for activities such as professional training that are required for proper enactment of police functions in environments involving complex threats, operational intelligence management, acquisition chain management, and logistical management. These functions are required to support a force with permanent reaction and response capacity in remote areas.

Stabilization force

All of the previous options envisage institutional transformations of varying scopes. Even in a politically and institutionally stable situation, these transformations require periods of one to five years for their design, preparation, and implementation. Given this time-intensive phase, post-conflict processes necessitate the inclusion of some kind of transitional mechanism. This guarantees stability and trust for referendum of the agreements, as well as for the process of

ex-combatant demobilization, disarmament, and reintegration to civilian life (DDR). The mechanism should also be responsible for implementing agreements that will eventually be made in the peace talks between the government and the FARC guerrilla group.

This structure must consolidate community trust in public authorities, who in turn should guarantee citizen security conditions and the termination of abuse and rights violations, while the agreements' institutional reforms and adjustments are implemented. This 'transitional stabilization structure' consists of a number of measures designed to temporarily maintain a controlled structure of ex-combatant groups under the umbrella of a joint task force. This force would have functions and a chain-of-command designed to employ the ex-combatants in socially useful activities, such as construction brigades, protection and environmental conservation entities, disaster prevention and assistance bodies, and humanitarian de-mining, among others.

While the institutional preparation and implementation process is conducted in a manner that guarantees the protection of citizen security and access to justice for population groups in different areas of the country, the presence of these institutions is necessary in places where citizen security threats arise, including those that could result from the DDR process (Colletta 2012; FIP 2014).

Among the advantages that this type of mechanism offers, the following characteristics are important: i) it allows the continuation of political dialogue; ii) it facilitates discussion of issues related to the distribution of power in the political and security environments; iii) it helps to build trust between sectors; iv) it helps to construct provisional administrative structures and judicial instruments to promote security; v) it promotes the development of socio-economic capacities in territorial contexts in which processes of reintegration to civilian life are concentrated; vi) it raises community awareness of the DDR process; and

vii) it improves psychosocial abilities of the combatants by supporting their gradual transition to civilian life.

Rural security challenges

The previous pages have provided an in-depth exploration of the difficulties confronted by the State to provide security and promote coexistence in rural areas of Colombia, and have examined some proposals for institutional adjustments. The following section proposes challenges or goals to be met, which the authors believe are fundamental to progress and towards achieving the same objective. This involves inter-related issues closely connected to the need to build trust and legitimacy, and foment local capacities for coexistence. In addition, these challenges constitute a work agenda for the post-conflict phase, given that this period could comprise an opportunity for regional transformation.

The citizen at the center

As has been reiterated on various occasions, rural areas of Colombia have historically suffered from a deficit of institutional presence and activity. In terms of security, the deficit is accentuated by state institutions' focus on war. This implies that the unfurling of state capacity has occurred through its coercive apparatus and has not concentrated on community problem-solving but rather on the neutralization of threats to institutional stability. The active presence of legal armed entities, whether they are police, army, or marine infantry, has not translated to an improvement in security and coexistence conditions for the inhabitants of Colombia's rural areas.

This point requires qualification. It is clear that the neutralization and control of illegal activities exercised by an illegal armed group can generate improvements in the security situation. For example, territorial control could be regained and risk factors such as the presence of armed groups in civilian facilities, or extortion, could be reduced. However, in the logic of war, neutralization of the destabilizing character of the enemy

does not necessarily mean decimation of its infiltration at the community or social level. Nor does this neutralization address daily regional conflicts, which are precisely the spaces that have been occupied by illegal armed actors in Colombia. It is therefore important to note that the war-time security provisions have failed to address the most acute security and coexistence needs of the citizenry, and has allowed illegal armed groups to maintain a highly legitimate presence in many municipalities.

The rural security agenda must therefore put the citizen at the center of institutional concerns and implement all possible efforts required to efficiently meet regional daily needs. This does not necessarily mean more security officials than citizens in areas of high population dispersion. However, it does mean giving greater weight and attention to low-level conflicts and the processing of everyday coexistence issues. State action should incorporate two features in these situations. The first is that action must be exercised by a group of people from the community and its internal structures, as this legitimizes state action by demonstrating understanding of the situation and use of local resources. The second is that assistance services must be mobile and able to reach citizens who otherwise would have to undertake a long journey to access them.

The territory as a unit for public policy

Colombian institutional design comprehends development as the union of sectorial policies. This understanding is useful in gaining deep technical thematic knowledge, but also poses a great challenge in that it exacerbates aggressiveness between sectors because each one prioritizes the satisfaction of its own needs. Military defense of economically valuable and strategic assets clearly demonstrates this disloyalty of scarce institutional resources in rural areas.

In densely populated cities, this difficulty is overcome quite easily for two reasons. The first is that state bureaucracy is more developed and has greater controls, and so it

cannot make decisions without consultation and discussion. The second reason is that the elevated value and scarcity of available land generates enormous interest in any decision that involves land use. Recent discussions of the 'Territorial Legislation Plan' in Bogotá are a clear reflection of this. Conversely, both bureaucracy and land availability in rural areas mean that sectorial planning is exercised without controls, and development projects become motives for dispute and conflict. The enormous conflicts that have arisen over mining activity in Colombia clearly demonstrate the great sectorial conflict generated by the Colombian understanding of development.

In order to confront this issue, as with much of the rural reform agenda, it is necessary to transform development planning mechanisms from their foundation of sectorial thinking to a more regional approach. This means that when selecting the development measures to be applied in a certain region, the interests of the area as a collective – and not the sectorial reform agendas – must be prioritized. Productive development should be considered as being linked to environmental conservation, land ordinance and legislation, natural resource protection, the economic vocation of inhabitants, and the long-term sustainability of interventions. This does not imply delays to project expansion or condemn the municipalities to backwardness, or avoid adjustments to land use. It does mean that decisions about the future of the communities should be subject to broad conversations and democratic processes, and should be the result of collective decisions, not the supremacy of private interests. A process of this nature will undoubtedly have positive effects on coexistence and security conditions.

Capacity generation as a political and structural problem

There is a lot of agreement in our country about institutional instability in rural areas. It is well-known that the scarcity of human,

physical, and budgetary resources constitutes one of the most palpable features in municipalities of category five or six, the majority of which have the highest indexes of rural characteristics. Conflict and criminal analysts such as Leon Valencia, Claudia Lopez, and Gustavo Duncan have portrayed the close relationships between this institutional instability and illegal phenomena in Colombia. As was indicated above, the weakness of state action has both been cultivated by and produced violence. The discussion of attribution and causality will not be examined in depth here, but it is possible to affirm that there exist functional and systemic relationships between institutional instability and violence. Each one feeds on the other, and takes advantage of the other's incentives.

Despite the fact that the complexity of institutional fragility has been widely studied, state (and non-state) response has been superficial and conceived of in limited ways. The great majority of efforts to reinforce the State in peripheral rural areas has been based on the assumption that efforts at local capacity strengthening are a technical challenge. As a result, capacity-generating programs focus on training, technical support, and the creation of guides and manuals. There are two key ideas behind this tendency. The first is that in regions with bureaucratic scarcity, the fundamental weakness is in the understanding of processes and procedures. The second is that the solution to these difficulties lies in the capacity to exercise public functions according to existing norms and standards.

However, these state efforts do not take into account the regional reality. It is true that training and support for regional entities is an important and necessary process, but it is wrong to think that training on project formulation, internal control, and state entity functions will substantially modify the regional reality. This approach overlooks the fact that in many municipalities, though remote, there are people with service vocations, professional ambitions, and the desire

to exercise their talents in the best possible way. These people see training as an opportunity for growth or to reinforce already-acquired knowledge.

The central problem of regional initiatives in rural Colombia is of a different nature, and that must be accepted in order to generate necessary change. First, it is necessary to admit that the current institutional architecture, which distributes resources from the general participation system by population percentage and limits the possibility of fiscal fundraising in peripheral areas, means that mayors are mute in the formulation and execution of public policy. It is impossible to unleash any kind of transformation and generate strengthening processes in the midst of the administration of poverty. That is why international cooperation, private, and national-level resources are more significant than the municipal budget, which can barely sustain the administration itself. Given this situation, to say that mayors in Colombia are the primary police authority in the municipalities and that the responsibility of designing and executing inter-institutional conflict, crime prevention, and assistance programs is in their hands is a bad joke and untrue.

It is also worth acknowledging in this situation, that given the culture of clientelism in Colombia, the lack of regional capacity is fuel for this type of traditional politics. When there is so much fragility in the autonomous execution of policy in the municipalities, the political apparatus of transactions between electoral barons, mayors, and councilors is strengthened. The greatest gains of all are in the national budget, which is accessed through Congress and permanent lobbying. The mediation made possible by the access to these budgetary resources, which is paid for with votes, functions in such a way that the municipality as the unit of execution is trapped between its own incapacity and its great need to negotiate governance.

The substantial transformation of rural security in the country therefore requires the

reconsideration of incentive schemes relating to decentralization and political representation, and the understanding that the challenge to which we are referring is political and structural.

Notes

¹ With respect to FARC territorial control, see, for example, the following article by Leon Valencia: <http://www.semana.com/opinion/articulo/leon-valencia-el-manual-de-convivencia-de-las-farc/377306-3>

² There are also easily accessible areas where the armed groups weakened institutional presence to the point of expelling and substituting it. However, more attention is required in remote areas.

³ According to the Instituto Geográfico Agustín Codazzi.

⁴ According to population projections by the National Administrative Statistics Department (DANE by its Spanish acronym).

⁵ FIP interview with local authorities and representatives of the Tumaco community in October 2014.

⁶ Municipalities in the Bolívar department: Carmen de Bolívar, Marialabaja, San Juan Nepomuceno, San Jacinto, Córdoba, El Guamo, and Zambrano. Municipalities in Sucre department: Ovejas, Chalán, Colosó, Morroa, Los Palmitos, San Onofre, San Antonio de Palmito, and Tolúviejo.

⁷ The National Liberation Army (ELN), the Revolutionary Workers' Party (PRT), the Socialist Revolutionary Current (CRS), and the Popular Liberation Army (EPL).

⁸ *Convenios de colaboración, cooperación y/o coordinación para la defensa y seguridad del Ministerio de Defensa Nacional, y sus unidades ejecutoras*. See the example of Resolution 5342 of June 25th 2014. Available at: http://cmecolombia.co/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/RESOLUCION-5342_l.pdf

⁹ See 'Nuevo atentado contra vehículos de la Emerald Energy en Caquetá' (2012) and Montaña (2012).

¹⁰ Information collected as part of the project 'Strengthening institutional management of regional entities in terms of citizen security and coexistence in the post-conflict phase' with the Ministry of the Interior, Fundación Paz y Reconciliación, and Fundación Ideas para la Paz.

¹¹ See for example FIP, USAID & IOM (2014).

¹² See for example Restrepo (2011).

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