

THE LONDON SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS AND POLITICAL SCIENCE

PARAMILITARY POWER AND “PARAPOLITICS”:  
SUBNATIONAL PATTERNS OF CRIMINALIZATION OF POLITICIANS AND  
POLITICIZATION OF CRIMINALS IN COLOMBIA

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“Tradition means giving votes to the most obscure of all classes, our ancestors. It is the democracy of the dead”.

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*G.K. Chesterton*

## IN MEMORIAM

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To Rogelio Martinez, a peasant leader from Sucre assassinated on the 18<sup>th</sup> of May 2010 in San Onofre, who became my greatest support and friend during my fieldwork in Sucre in 2009.

To my dearest friend Josué Giraldo Cardona, *Unión Patriótica* leader, assassinated by paramilitaries in Meta department on the 13<sup>th</sup> of October 1996.

To *Mía*, my grandmother and greatest woman I have ever met.

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## ABSTRACT

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The phenomenon of corruption in the context of civil wars is of increasing interest in scholarly literature. Colombia exhibits a particular case in which right-wing paramilitaries from the *United Self-Defence of Colombia*, strongly supported in drug trafficking activities, colluded with local politicians and captured the subnational state in many a region, under a phenomenon known as “parapolitics” or the politics of paramilitaries. Unlike the latest generation of armed conflicts in which warlords have sought to deconstruct the state, Colombian paramilitaries levered their strategic interests within the existing institutional framework, backed by local political elites and authorities, and pivoted on patron-client ties. In the context of these alliances, paramilitaries provided politicians with a violent muscle meant to protect electoral processes and maximize votes. In return, politicians protected paramilitary activities and represented the Self-Defence warlords in Congress in order to feed their political, judicial and economic domains.

By elucidating the nature of “parapolitics” and by addressing the question of *why* (conditions), *how* (mechanisms) and *to what purpose* (ultimate goal) did the phenomenon emerge in Colombia, I examine in subnational comparative perspective the cases of Sucre and Norte de Santander departments. By building causal paths in historical perspective I substantiate parapolitics in the selected cases as well as variations in the processes and outcomes thereof. Although the cases do not represent the whole universe of “parapolitics”, causal paths help building explanatory frameworks that may be generalizable to a larger universe of similar cases.

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## LIST OF ACRONYMS

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ACCU	Autodefensas Campesinas de Córdoba y Urabá	Peasant Self-Defence of Córdoba and Urabá
Acdegam	Asociación Campesina de Agricultores y Ganaderos del Magdalena Medio	Peasant Association of Farmers and Stockbreeders of Magdalena Medio
AGO		Attorney General's Office
Anthoc	Asociación Nacional de Trabajadores Hospitalarios de Colombia	National Association of Hospital Workers of Colombia
Asinort	Asociación Sindical de Institutores de Norte de Santander	Association of Teachers of Norte de Santander
Asocipaz	Asociación por la Paz	Association for Peace
ANUC	Asociación Nacional de Usuarios Campesinos	National Association of Peasant Users
AUC	Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia	United Self-Defence of Colombia
BACRIM	Bandas criminales	Criminal gangs
CRS	Corriente de Renovación Socialista	Socialist Renovation Movement
ELN	Ejército de Liberación Nacional	National Liberation Army
EPL	Ejército Popular de Liberación	Popular Liberation Army
ERP	Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo	People's Revolutionary Army
FARC	Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia	Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia
JPL		Justice and Peace Law
M-19	Movimiento 19 de Abril	19th of April Movement
MAQL	Movimiento Armado Quintín Lame	Quintín Lame Armed Movement
MMHB	Bloque Héroes de Montes de María	Montes de María Heroes Bloc
Morena	Movimiento de Reconstrucción Nacional	National Reconstruction Movement
PCC	Partido Comunista Colombiano	Colombian Communist Party
PRT	Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores	Revolutionary Labourers Party
SCJ		Supreme Court of Justice
UP	Unión Patriótica	Patriotic Union
USO	Unión Sindical Obrera	Workers' Trade Union

## INTRODUCTION

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In 2002, at the pinnacle of its military power, the right-wing paramilitary organization United Self-Defence of Colombia (*Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia* – AUC), an irregular warring actor involved since the mid-1990s in fighting the left-wing oriented guerrillas of the Colombian Revolutionary Armed Forces (*Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia* – FARC) and the National Liberation Army (*Ejército de Liberación Nacional* – ELN), engaged with the first Uribe administration (2002–2006) in a rocky process of peace talks and demobilization. In late 2006, over 34,000 AUC’s combatants demobilized. The peace process with paramilitaries was successful in terms of the dismantling of a massive military structure responsible for hundreds of thousands of killings and over a million displaced civilians, and of the relative distension of the internal conflict in many a region. Nevertheless, the process revealed that beneath the violence and humanitarian crisis unleashed by paramilitaries lay a large-scale phenomenon of collusion of AUC warlords with politicians and of AUC’s state capture at the national and subnational levels. Paramilitaries had made alliances with a significant share of elected and appointed politicians between 1998 and 2007, diverted hundreds of millions of dollars from public coffers, and penetrated the judiciary and security agencies. This phenomenon, known as “parapolitics” – a term meant for designating the collusion of paramilitaries and politicians – established an elite of ultra-violent warlords, intimately linked to drug traffic and deeply entrenched in local and national power networks. Likewise it led politics, and many elected politicians and appointed officials to the road of criminality.

By the time the *Autodefensas* demobilized, the organization no longer required the massive military apparatus it had built throughout a decade as the organization had by then robust political connections in various regions and at the highest levels, its members had amassed extraordinary personal wealth and even tried to participate directly in local politics. The political, economic and violent capital built by paramilitaries not only served the *Autodefensas* legitimization process in many a subnational setting but also – and most importantly – provided the muscle for influencing the congressional sphere. Allied Congress members voted the so-called Justice and Peace Law, which provided the AUC’s demobilization framework. This legal framework not only provided a safe-conduct to legality with high levels of impunity and the protection of the *Autodefensas*’ wealth and assets; the demobilization process constituted

a promising avenue for paramilitaries to pursue political power. In this vein, the AUC constituted a threat beyond the sphere of public security and jeopardized to a significant extent the country's institutional stability.

However, at that point the relationship between crime and politics in Colombia was not new anymore – it can be traced back to the early 1980s with the emergence of the Medellín drug cartel. Since then there had been several attempts at capturing the state and influencing politics in a long coevolving thread of criminalized politics and politicized crime. Francisco Gutiérrez analyses the pursuit of power by criminals in his extraordinary work on Colombian political parties (2007) and accounts for three main stages of the phenomenon. The first one took place in the early 1980s when infamous drug baron Pablo Escobar joined the Congress as Representative for a short term with the support of some of the most powerful barons from the Liberal party in order to advance the Medellín cartel's agenda against extradition<sup>1</sup>. Soon after he was expelled from Congress<sup>2</sup>, Escobar continued its enterprise against extradition from the underground, where he engaged in a terrorist and magnicidal war against the state. Escobar's efforts in fighting extradition proved fruitless as extradition was enacted in the 1991 constitutional reform, two years before he was shot dead by Colombian security forces. The second stage took place in the early 1990s, when the Cali cartel chose a different strategy, namely that of infiltrating politics in a top-down fashion by massively financing the presidential campaign of Liberal candidate Ernesto Samper. Despite the magnitude of the scandal and the consequent U.S. pressure against his administration<sup>3</sup>, Samper was elected in 1994 and remained in office until the end of his mandate, in 1998. This time the aim of the infiltration was the protection of the cartel members and their illegal and legal activities from the very top of the state. Nonetheless, Gutiérrez explains that the failure of this top-down infiltration occurred not only because of the over-exposure the most visible area of the Liberal party but also because it was unsuccessful in reaching the subnational circuits which constitute the natural niches for building electoral capital (2007). Under a great deal of pressure from the U.S., the Colombian government extradited the whole Cali cartel's leadership in 1995.

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<sup>1</sup>Although the bilateral extradition treaty with the U.S. was signed in 1979, it only became a constitutional norm in 1991. Before that the treaty was in a legal and political limbo (presidential discretion and alleged unconstitutionality). In this context drug barons put maximum pressure through terrorism and magnicide in order to ban the extradition of Colombian nationals.

<sup>2</sup>In 1982, and before being publicly known as a criminal, Pablo Escobar was alternate Representative for the Liberal party. He sought to use his political position to overturn the extradition treaty with the U.S. By 1984, Escobar was one of the most wanted criminals in the world and therefore his parliamentary immunity was revoked. From that point he went into hiding until his killing in 1993.

<sup>3</sup>The U.S. State Department decertified Colombia's performance in the anti-narcotics efforts in 1996 and 1997, a matter that had pervasive political consequences for the Samper's administration.

It was only in the late 1990s, when the internal armed conflict was entrenched with drug trafficking, that the politics-crime connection reached its most important level of sophistication and therefore of success under parapolitics. But where did these paramilitary groups come from? How did they entrench with organized crime in the context of the Colombian internal conflict? Paramilitary groups emerged in Colombia as private illegal security structures created by drug barons of the likes of Pablo Escobar and Gonzalo Rodríguez in the early 1980s, aimed at protecting illicit drug trade and enforcing contracts. The rural rich, politicians and militaries in turn instrumented these groups at the subnational level in what Gutiérrez and Barón (2006) call the “guild-party-militia trinity” intended to protect the electoral processes of traditional politicians against competitors, enforcing rural private property against landless peasants’ occupation, and providing counterinsurgent dirty-work of eliminating guerrillas’ civilian support. This phase of first generation of paramilitaries lasted until the early 1990s. During that decade these structures were responsible for an unprecedented wave of political violence against politicians who opposed drug traffickers, Left-wing militants, and human rights activists among others.

Between 1990 and 1994 paramilitary groups experienced a temporary decline due to Pablo Escobar’s death and the dismantling of the Medellín cartel. During that time, FARC and ELN guerrillas dramatically expanded throughout the national territory and were systematically threatening society as well as the country’s economic and productive infrastructure. There was a general perception that the state was incapable of defeating guerrillas and that in many regions it had simply surrendered. It was in this context where the escalation of guerrilla warfare produced the stabilization of private security through the creation of the second generation of paramilitary groups. Instead of seeking a public response to violence, the “guild-party-militia trinity” involved in financing private armies and legal security structures. The latter is the case of the so-called *Convivir*, poorly regulated rural private security cooperatives authorized by the government in the mid 1990s<sup>4</sup>, which became the nursery of the AUC.

The *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia* surfaced in northern Colombia, in the Urabá region in Antioquia department in 1996, and were created by Carlos Castaño who, along with his brothers Fidel and Vicente, had commanded a regional paramilitary structure that had served the Medellín Cartel during the 1980s in Antioquia. This structure, which experienced

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<sup>4</sup>According to AUC commander Salvatore Mancuso (Martínez, 2004), *Convivir* were not only the reserve source of paramilitaries; the project was strongly articulated to the creation of the AUC. A total of 414 *Convivir* were created between 1995 and 1996. In 1997 the Constitutional Court declared the unenforceability of the decrees that authorized the creation of these private security cooperatives. After that, many *Convivir* managers and members went clandestine and joined the AUC.

a brief decline in the early 1990s, rearmed in 1994 under the label of Peasant Self-Defence of Córdoba and Urabá (ACCU – *Autodefensas Campesinas de Córdoba y Urabá*) and acted in concomitance with the local *Convivir* structure. Between 1994 and 1996 the ACCU engaged in a bloody war against FARC in the Urabá region and in only two years the organization had fully subdued guerrillas and committed massive human rights abuses. The ACCU model proved so efficient that the Castaño “house” succeeded in gathering eight *Autodefensas* groups from all over the country such as the *Autodefensas Campesinas del Casanare* (ACC), and *Autodefensas Campesinas del Magdalena Medio* (ACMM), and other 34 paramilitary structures from other regions, in order to create the AUC in 1997. The organization had a national scope and was vertically articulated around its counter-insurgent discourse, which made it the third actor in Colombia’s protracted internal conflict. However, the AUC was also horizontally integrated via warlords’ private agendas and interests mostly linked to drug traffic. The AUC had a supreme commander, Carlos Castaño, and a general staff formed by other prominent warlords such as Salvatore Mancuso, “Ernesto Báez”, “Jorge 40”, “Pablo Sevillano” and “Diego Vecino”; however, it was a confederate body and warlords had a great deal of autonomy in their regions. The transformation from scattered private armies to an organized warring actor with political pretensions represented what Cubides (2005) refers as to the finding of the public objective of counterinsurgency to fulfil private goals.

The *Autodefensas* rapidly expanded throughout the Colombian territory in order to confront guerrillas, capture the rents from illegal and legal economies traditionally controlled by FARC and ELN, and secure drug trafficking corridors. The AUC was most successful in central and northern Colombia where many territories were rapidly transformed into “subversion-free” areas, thanks to the open support of local establishments, the public force and drug traffickers. Nonetheless, the expansion towards the southern regions was not as fruitful insofar as historically, FARC was in control of these areas and dismantling its political, economic, military and social infrastructure proved extremely difficult.

In the context of the crossed vertical-horizontal agendas of warlords, the geographic expansion or the process of what Ramírez (2005) calls “private territorialization” of the AUC were not only defined by a counter-insurgent strategy, but followed mainly to subnational political, military and economic interests. These interests and their interactions significantly varied throughout the territory. In some regions, AUC structures were financed and supported by local establishments – politicians in need of protection of electoral enterprises and rural rich seeking personal protection against guerrillas – as it was the case of the Caribbean coast departments. In other regions these structures were directly supported by sectors of the national

armed forces looking for counter-insurgent “dirty work”, and drug traffickers in need of protection of coca crops, as it was the case of northeastern Colombia. Other type of dynamics could be observed in departments such as Valle del Cauca<sup>5</sup>, Arauca and Casanare where local drug barons bought AUC franchises and established local armies that protected coca crops, drug trafficking corridors and export points. Nonetheless it is noteworthy that the *Autodefensas* did not exclusively expand “on demand”: warlords also had their own agendas which comprised increasing their participation in the illegal drugs production and trade as well as taking over the local state by controlling electoral enterprises, appointments to key offices and public budgets.

The *Autodefensas* operated during two main stages. During the first stage (1998–2001) paramilitaries created what Oslender (2008) calls “geographies of terror” by focusing on the support of military and police forces in terror campaigns against civilians considered as the alleged social bases of guerrillas.<sup>6</sup> It is calculated that the death toll of the paramilitary offensive was of over 150,000 civilians killed in massacres and selective assassinations<sup>7</sup> and over one million displaced people. Warlords also amassed great wealth during this stage by increasing their participation in the illicit drugs market via alliances with existing organized crime syndicates or via the dispute of territories with FARC. To a significant extent the alliances with drug cartels were successful<sup>8</sup> and many drug traffickers bought AUC franchises. However, the dispute with FARC was costly and bloody, and not always successful. On the other hand, by forcibly dispossessing peasants from their land and generating a “counter-agrarian reform” (Echandía, 2006; Reyes; 1997), AUC warlords emerged as a new class of rural landowners.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>According to Fernando Cubides (2005) and Restrepo and Llano (2005), the paramilitary expansion in the Norte del Valle region was articulated by the emergence of the region’s drug cartel soon after the Cali cartel was dismantled in the early 1990s. The incursion of the AUC through the *Calima* Bloc mainly responded to the needs of providing security to the expansion of the Norte del Valle cartel’s infrastructure (processing laboratories, clandestine runways and embankment points) towards peripheral areas controlled by FARC. In this manner, the *Calima* Bloc reinforced the structures of drug trafficking in the region and the mafia apparatus was regionally positioned through the military power of the AUC.

<sup>6</sup>There are very few cases of direct guerrillas-paramilitary confrontation; the AUC’s strategy clearly privileged attacking civilians (peasants, union workers, human rights activists, and members of the Left).

<sup>7</sup>Paramilitary terror included a strong ingredient of “ritual” violence, a “legacy” from *La Violencia* times: dismemberment with chain saws, stoning, use of poisonous snakes, sexual aggression on dead bodies, etc.

<sup>8</sup>Salvatore Mancuso, one of the AUC top commanders, confessed allying with and protecting renowned drug-traffickers of the like of Hernando Gómez Bustamante, alias “Rasguño” from the Norte del Valle Cartel; Fabio Ochoa Vasco, alias “Kiko Chiquito” from Medellín, José Antonio Herrera Hernández (“Toño Cacao”), Jorge Luis Hernández Villazón (‘Boliche’) and José Israel Guzmán (“El Arquitecto”) (VerdadAbierta, 2009)

<sup>9</sup>According to the NGO Codhes, since 1990 the AUC snatched through violence, intimidation and money laundering almost 4.7 million hectares from peasant families who owned small farmstead, causing a humanitarian crisis of more than 2.5 million internally displaced people. According to the United Nations Drug Control Programme – UNDCP – the estimated value of warlords’ land has an estimated value of US\$2.4 billion.

AUC's second stage (2001–2006) was that of parapolitics: warlords established innumerable alliances with politicians and paved the road for their reincorporation into civilian life. The legal/illegal interaction of parapolitics, as the ultimate stage of the politics-crime alliance, built what Carroll (1972) refers as to “disintegrative power”, a relatively diffuse yet effective capacity to erode and even bring to collapse the existing social, political and economic institutions via violence and corruption.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS: A CONCEPTUAL APPROACH TO PARAPOLITICS

This thesis aims at shedding a light on parapolitics by contributing to the understanding of the nature of the phenomenon; the factors that explain the clique and coevolution of paramilitarism and politics in contemporary Colombia; the mechanisms used, and the ultimate purpose thereof.

From a sociological perspective, the emergency of drug traffickers in Colombia implied the rise of a “criminal social class”, which, like any other emergent class, has sought social recognition, economic predominance and political power. Literature has largely overlooked the value of political representation in the context of political-criminal connections. The relationships between crime and politics have been mostly depicted at the basic level of exchange, or what DellaPorta and Vanucci (1999) refer as to “transactional corruption”: criminals demand privileges and special treatment from the police and courts whereas politicians ask for votes, money, and, in some cases, the elimination of their competitors. Indeed, immunity and impunity constitute the most valuable assets for criminals. Nonetheless, the incorporation of the “political market” into the “criminal market” is far more complex than its contractual sphere. The fact that parapolitics significantly transformed many subnational settings in terms of politics, economic accumulation and social integration demands an examination that beyond its transactional domain connects to the basic political and economic subnational processes that facilitated parapolitics.

I address three main research questions I consider central for understanding parapolitics beyond its transactional sphere.

The first question relates to the nature of the phenomenon: *what is parapolitics?* Parapolitics is a category created by Colombian journalists, and beyond factual description it does not provide conceptual and analytical keys for explaining the hijacking of the public sphere via the alliances between politicians and paramilitaries. Nevertheless, if filled in with such keys, the

term may constitute a helpful concept to encompass the complex nature of the phenomenon and capture all possible permutations of historical interactions and the building of consensus between AUC warlords and politicians that shaped specific processes in many a region.

The **second** question is about the nature of the AUC: *what and who were paramilitaries in Colombia?* This seemingly simple question is fundamental for determining the complex nature of this actor who beyond its criminal and anti-subversive spheres was capable of transforming political, economic and social landscapes. Answering this question allows determining the degree of autonomy of the AUC from the state apparatus and its connection with distinct forms of power and accumulation among others

The **third** question: *why, how and to what purpose did parapolitics take place?* The *why* is related to the conditions that facilitated parapolitics in Colombia, that is the factors at play beyond the phenomenon's transactional sphere; the *how* relates to the strategies and mechanisms of parapolitics; and the *purpose* refers to the ultimate goals of warlords and politicians in the context of such arrangements.

#### PARAPOLITICS AND AVAILABLE LITERATURE

Parapolitics has been widely discussed in Colombia amidst a strongly politicized debate and an unprecedented judicial offensive against hundreds of elected and appointed politicians of all levels, military, police and secret service officers, legal entrepreneurs and even multinational firms involved with the AUC. Mass media, NGOs, and some think tanks have been active in tackling the topic. Nevertheless, the academic debate has been comparatively poor, which is quite surprising given not only the extraordinarily amount of judicial and journalistic evidence generated over the last decade, but also the prolific production of literature on the internal conflict by the Colombian academy – to the extent to which many scholars have been classified into a species of discipline called “violentology”.

Regarding the first research question, that of establishing *the nature of parapolitics*, the available literature can be organized along **three** strands. The first one is that of parapolitics as a contract, in the works of Mauricio Romero (2004, 2005) and León Valencia (2007). These authors portray parapolitics as an event in which local elites and paramilitaries interacted in the framework of converging interests and consequently – and almost naturally – formed alliances in order to rebel against the influence of the central state, namely against peace efforts undertaken by successive administrations.

The second approach interprets parapolitics at the relational level. Acemoglu, Robinson, and Santos (2009) tackle parapolitics as a symbiotic relationship between politicians and paramilitaries that took place in peripheral Colombia. Using a quantitative approach, the authors establish that elected Congress members in 2002 and 2006 rewarded the violent protection of elections by the *Autodefensas* with a lenient legislative framework that benefited its demobilization. The third line explores an institutional approach. Barrera and Nieto (2010) offer the idea of parapolitics as an institutional arrangement and a type of social relation, as well as a two-way transaction of assets and favours.

The *nature of paramilitaries* in Colombia has been widely discussed. Besides being mostly descriptive and imbued with a predominant rural view, knowledge on Colombian paramilitarism has also been importantly fragmented along ideological and disciplinary boundaries and is, as a result, unsystematic, producing a long-standing gap between empirical evidence and the lag of a rather scarce scholarly production. This gap is centrally related to the multifaceted and complex nature of the actor, the political and subnational dimensions, and the ways in which they articulate diverse and even opposite interests (state and organized crime syndicates).

The wide spectrum of classifications starts with the view of paramilitarism as a counterinsurgent strategy, a species of *Contras* or of state irregulars that unleashed a dirty war regime since the 1980s (Uprimny and Vargas, 1990; Medina Gallego, 1990). Others have classified paramilitaries as organized groups parallel to the state but this parallel nature does not necessarily imply any kind of syndication (Rangel, 2005). In this line Fernando Cubides (1998) rejects the concept of “self-defence groups”, used by authors like Melo (1990) and Ramírez (2005) insofar they were not created as a means of legitimate defence but as a private offensive instrument of drug traffickers, politicians, rural rich and the likes. Ramírez even rejects using the “paramilitary” as a category at doing so suggests organic links to the state and obscures the complex social alliances behind the phenomenon. Some scholars have ventured in alternative approaches that instead of using the above mentioned denominations they account for concepts such as Vilma Franco’s multi-dimensional concept that entails a “counterinsurgent complex” and “corporate mercenarism” (2002), the already mentioned “guild-party-militia” trinity of Gutiérrez and Barón (2006); mafia organizations (Duncan, 2007), violent entrepreneurs (Romero, 2004; 2005), and elitist formations (Bolívar, 2005). There is also the eclectic view of the 2003 Human Development Report for Colombia, according to which the AUC were simultaneously a political project, a military apparatus, an actor in regional

social conflicts, rent-seekers, a way of life, a territorial power, a degraded violent actor, and a trap against human development (INDH, 2003).

Regarding the *why*, that is the conditions that made parapolitics possible, Valencia (2007) and Romero (2004, 2005) concur in that the successive – and fruitless – peace talks undertaken by several administrations with guerrillas since 1984 have triggered a series of “mutinies” of local elites who have used or allied with paramilitary groups in order to close subnational boundaries against guerrillas as potential political competitors in eventual demobilization processes. Following Edward Gibson’s concept of subnational authoritarianisms (2005), the authors valuably base their analyses upon the confrontational nature of territorial politics vis-à-vis the democratizing trends at the national level. In this vein, the confluence of criminal and political interests under the contractual frame of parapolitics constitutes the ultimate expression of the local resistance against the centre, specifically triggered by the peace talks with FARC under the Pastrana administration (1998–2002).

The main contribution of Acemoglu et al. (2009) is that their analysis deviates from normative prescriptions and acknowledges that in the absence of the monopoly of coercion, state formation has been possible in peripheral Colombia, although in a different manner from that of modern Colombia, as a result of the interaction of state and non-state actors (guerrilla and paramilitaries). The analysis also states that the weakness of the state in these territories is not only related to the high costs and barriers to accessing the periphery for state. This weakness can be also explained by the fact that in many cases the incentives delivered by non-state actors to state agents provide greater benefits than accessing the periphery for the pacification, modernization and democratization thereof. In other words, instead of assuming the high costs of bringing the state back into peripheral Colombia, state agents promote the accommodation of armed groups with whom they share relatively similar preferences in order to maximize votes.

The institutional approach of Barrera and Nieto (2010) acknowledges that the alliances of AUC warlords and politicians were conditioned by specific contexts at the subnational level. Despite the promising avenue of this work – it provides a series of elements to be taken into account for building a conceptual framework that takes parapolitics to the institutional realm – it does not actually construct it.

There are other works that do not exactly account for parapolitics but tackle paramilitary formation and evolution in Colombia. These works are based upon structural explanations and historical analyses, and generally establish sophisticated causal paths to under-

stand paramilitary formation, consolidation and evolution overtime. Romero (2004, 2005) and Gutiérrez and Barón (2006) rely on the explanatory power of the AUC's process of territorial expansion. As the organization progressed throughout the geography it entrenched in the subnational life and deeply transformed the political, economic and social landscapes. In alliance with subnational elites, the AUC participated in the closure of boundaries of authoritarian subnational regimes. Instead of referring to the concept of territorial expansion Gonzalez et al., (2002) grant centrality to "geographies of war", a category that goes one step ahead and provides a more nuanced account of the transformation of territories under the influence of the AUC. In a similar vein, Ramírez (2005) refers to "private territories". This category is also attractive in the sense that beyond the alteration of the territory there is an appropriation thereof. All authors acknowledge the importance of alliances with local bureaucracies, political bosses and rural rich in the strategies of territorial expansion or appropriation, or of creation of geographies of war. They also agree with slight variations on the type of political regime paramilitaries supported and reproduced. Alejandro Reyes (1994; 1998) contends that paramilitary territorial expansion is the outcome of a process of "agrarian counter-reform" undertaken through land accumulation.

Another important set of literature provides a sophisticated view on the subject of paramilitary formation related to the politicization of the AUC in the subnational space and its interaction with distinct forms of accumulation. Authors like Pizarro (2004), Richani (1997, 2007), Cubides (2005), and Duncan (2007) provide a useful examination of the ways in which the functional alliances between local elites, state actors, organized crime and paramilitaries worked and reproduced at the subnational level, and are key to understanding parapoltics. These authors spatially approach the alliances in the context of specific geographies of war, which allows for subnational variations according to the particular ways in which the logics of politics and of market interact. These authors argue that the interests of AUC warlords and of politicians at the local level and the interaction between politics and rent seeking were so diverse, that it is very difficult to establish a general single hierarchy of interests. In some regions the subordination to rent seeking seems evident but in others the paramilitary articulations to distinct political projects is a predominant pattern.

A lens used for explaining the *how*, that is the mechanisms of parapoltics, is that of the capture of the state, with the works of Garay et al. (2008, 2010) and López (2010). This set of literature undertakes a conceptual effort to expand the reach of traditional literature on state capture that focuses on forms of large-scale corruption, with individuals, groups or firms as principal agents involved in influencing law, regulations and/or policy making pro-

cesses (Hellman, 1998; Hellman et al., 2000; Omelyanchuk, 2001). Garay et al. go beyond the transactional sphere of state capture and explore the notion of reconfiguring the state, a process in which illegal armed actors play as central agents. The authors propose a model to understand and predict complex scenarios of what they call the “co-opted reconfiguration of the state”, which consists of the quest to systematically modify the political regime and influence the creation, modification, interpretation and application of rules and public policies in order to obtain personal benefits in a sustainable fashion. In this model, violence plays a central role.

The *Nuevo Arco Iris Foundation’s* research, led by Claudia López (2010), based upon the idea of the co-opted reconfiguration of the state, goes beyond Garay et al. by systematically approaching the subnational arena. The research offers detailed accounts – mainly descriptive – of parapolitics in every Colombian department where the phenomenon took place. All cases were thoroughly substantiated relying on field research and media archives and the research offers an impressive wealth of empirical data. Under a different scope, Losada (2006) focuses on the general mechanism of electoral capture and through the analysis of the 2002 elections, he identifies a series of types of politico-electoral strategies adopted by paramilitaries, a mechanism that permits accounting for subnational variations in parapolitics.

Gustavo Duncan (2007) provides an innovative view on the *how* from a perspective of political economy. According to Duncan, the AUC progressively mutated from countryside warlords to urban mafia networks. The urban infiltration of the AUC is significantly explained by the weaknesses of the state and the changes in the state structure as a consequence of democratization and globalization. In this line of argument the author also contributes to an important extent to the realm of the *why*. The infiltration process, strongly substantiated upon empirical evidence, is analysed on four levels: the control of urban criminal activities, urban poor sectors, poorly regulated markets, and the seizure of public institutions. Although for Duncan politics was the predominant goal of warlords, the market rationale complexly intertwined with the former.

Finally, in the area where there seems to be the strongest consensus is regarding the *purpose* of parapolitics, that is using the state – via the alliances made with politicians, officials, security agencies and the judiciary – with the aim of re-entering to civilian life with laundered criminal records and assets, as well as political power and connections. For politicians, the alliances served the purpose of reproducing power and winning elections. There are nonetheless different emphases, from the more radical ones of Claudia López (2010; 2009) for whom parapolitics was about the “re-foundation of the nation”, the “co-opted reconfiguration of the

state” (Garay et al., 2008), to the progression from the countryside to urban centres (Duncan, 2007).

## FILLING THE GAPS

Following the most promising avenues of enquiry suggested by this literature, I conducted empirical research in subnational comparative perspective – explained below in the *Method* section – to try to answer the research questions addressed above. To a significant extent, the existing academic literature has given rise to the same research questions I have addressed yet none has fully solved or answered them. Researchers involved in this line of enquiry have made very important contributions to explaining parapolitics, as seen above. It is important to acknowledge that all reviewed literature, under different perspectives, offer plausible explanations on the phenomenon, account for key conceptual dimensions and provide relevant empirical support. The accounts provide valuable – yet scattered – conceptual keys for a stronger conceptual and analytical approach: the tensions between national and subnational politics; state building as a result of the interaction of state and non-state actors in peripheral regions; state capture as a means to reconfigure the state; and the convergence of geographies of war and local political economies. Likewise, the literature offers an impressive amount of data on the subject. Yet, on the whole, the phenomenon remains under-examined and demands not only further empirical analysis but also a stronger and more comprehensive theoretical approach, and this research has suggested something of a solution for this puzzle.

There are two main shortcomings in the reviewed literature that in my perspective constitute the central analytical pillars for a better understanding of the nature and reach of parapolitics, which require elaboration and that this research aims at solving. The first one is the need of moving beyond transactional or contractual sphere of parapolitics. The idea of parapolitics as institutional arrangements and social relations provided by Barrera and Nieto is extremely appealing insofar as it extends the assessment of parapolitics beyond the transactions of assets and favours.. Unfortunately, the authors did not develop this line of enquiry any further.

Second, and in spite of the vast empirical available evidence that accounts for the strong variations within the universe of parapolitics, the literature fails in tackling the territorial and temporary dissimilarities of parapolitics. López’ account of state capture at the subnational level constitutes an impressive effort of bringing the whole universe of local parapoliti-

tics processes into a single line of research and provides valuable information on the subject. Nonetheless, the mainly descriptive nature of the regional studies precludes the possibility of undertaking at more conceptual and analytical levels any systematic substantiation of the similarities/variations found. The outcome is uncritical in the sense it tends to homogenize the spatial and temporal dimensions of parapolitics, providing only a single explanatory framework, that of parapolitics as a conspiracy for taking over the state. Losada goes a step ahead and accounts for differences by establishing different ideal-type repertoires of alliances between warlords and politicians in the context of electoral processes. Although his account fails in using these types within a wider analytical scope of subnational political economy, it constitutes one of the few valuable efforts to account for parapolitics as a subnational phenomenon and on the heterogeneous nature thereof. My research showed that indeed parapolitics did not occur in the same way and at the same time across the Colombian geography, a fact that supports the idea that the phenomenon was mainly built in a bottom-up fashion, regionally, with some top-down concurrent trends, but was not a homogenous occurrence.

Regarding the first question on the *nature of parapolitics*, I propose understanding the phenomenon as a *subnational process of political economy*, that is the political and economic regimes that emerged at the level of subnational governance, where warlords and politicians (and other key actors such as organized criminal structures and legal entrepreneurs) concurred in the interaction of distinct forms of political power, economic accumulation, war economies and collective violence.

In the following, I outline the three main characteristics of parapolitics. The first one relates to its *directional nature*, a point mostly overlooked in the literature. Parapolitics was mainly built in a bottom-up fashion – with some state capture trends built in the opposite direction – and therefore exhibits significant spatial and temporal variations. Space, understood as a site in which conflicting power relations between different levels of government and actors take place, matters insofar as it accounts for territorial politics (Tarrow, 1978) or political topographies (Boone, 2003) as key concepts for understanding the organization of politics across territories and the political processes that take place along territorial lines of conflict. Parapolitics took place subnationally as warlords and politicians interacted in the basic context of local institution making and therefore the phenomenon was embedded in specific economic, political and social contexts. Parapolitics offers varied repertoires that account for different permutations of political power, economic accumulation and war economies.

In terms of its temporal dimension, although the phenomenon took place in a specific time frame (late 1990s – mid-2000s), it did not occur simultaneously and in the same fashion

throughout the whole Colombian territory, which suggests it was not a phenomenon centrally organized and orchestrated as many accounts claim. The temporal variations are linked with spatial differences.

The second feature is the impossibility of decoupling collective violence from parapolitics. Not only did violence become the main instrument for the building and supporting of these processes of political economy. Violence strongly varied from one case to the other in terms of its forms, intensities and purposes, and according to the lights shed by this research, violence responded to the specific goals of parapolitics in each territory. In other words, the blending of distinct subnational political and economic trajectories with varied patterns of collective violence generated different repertoires of parapolitics

The third feature is that these particular processes of political economy were not built outside the existing institutional framework but within the prevailing arrangements, producing significant distortions outside framework by enabling transactions across boundaries (legal-illegal; national-subnational; public-private; urban-rural) in order to maximize benefits (political, economic and social). The process was not aimed at overthrowing the state. This is not a minor observation insofar as parapolitics did not generate a deconstructive type of power such as those experienced in collapsed or failed states in which warlords build frameworks of rule outside formal state institutions, based on personal ties in which patronage works as a means of political control and convert organizational resources and goals into private, non-collective benefits (Reno, 2000; (Zellman, 2007; Giustozzi (2005)

Regarding the second question, the *nature of the AUC*: Although my research aim was not determining the nature of the AUC, and as such I did not work in this direction, the research – specifically the interviews with AUC warlords – confirmed the accuracy of some interpretations found in the revised literature. I was able establish that the AUC was an autonomous actor from the state, and that despite its counterinsurgent aims – which aligned the *Autodefensas* informally with sectors of the military and police – the AUC acted independently of the objectives of the state and was a much more complex actor, being simultaneously adversary, allied, parasite and predator of the state. Another finding, also supported in the existing literature, is that the AUC was a confederation of warlords, mostly involved in drug trafficking activities, who managed to act according to their private agendas whilst responding to the organizational discourse. The AUC's collective counter-insurgent discourse (master cleavage) developed in a parallel fashion with warlords' individual political and economic agendas and interests (ground cleavages).

Another characteristic found is that AUC warlords were boundary crossers, following Ahram and King's account on Burmese warlordism (2011). The authors' starting point – the identification of warlordism with the realm of political economy – is the same as mine and this regard warlords move beyond the criminal domain and interconnect the spheres of politics, economy and culture and even make them interact. Although warlords – like gangsters – are violent entrepreneurs, racketeers and economic producers, they conceptually differ in the sense that they master the manipulation and crossing of boundaries, that is conducting violent and non-violent transactions of legal and illegal commodities and of political goods, across political, economic, and cultural lines. They are arbitrageurs. The concept of arbitrage can be applied beyond physical resources. AUC warlords not only sought out gradients between different market spheres (licit-illicit) but also of state authority; they constantly manipulated and crossed boundaries in order to deliver political goods (votes) by exploiting an anti-subversive discourse at the subnational level, appealing to politicians, rural rich, and the like. In the same vein, they were granted enough legitimacy to act within and outside the existing institutional framework and conducting all sorts of transactions across the legal-illegal boundaries. Therefore, Duncan's account on AUC as a mafia organization noted above (2007) is problematic and misleading insofar as it miscasts the political dimension and its complex interaction with the economic rationale.

On the question of the *why*, the accounts revised above place great importance on the weight of structural factors as triggers of paramilitary formation and parapolitics: the tension between centre and periphery, the interaction of state and non-state actors that shapes distinct types of state formation of which parapolitics constitutes a phase thereof, and the changes in the opportunity structure introduced by democratizing and liberalizing reforms, among others. These are all of great value but these approaches are partial. Each one of the abovementioned on its own does not seem to have enough explanatory power.

As stated above, although parapolitics pervaded most of the Colombian territory, there were on the one hand substantial differences in the ways in which the phenomenon occurred subnationally, and on the other hand, there were parapolitics-free territories. I therefore claim that there was a series of conditions that a) facilitated/precluded parapolitics, and b) shaped distinct forms thereof. In this vein, and in order to strengthen the explanatory power of the research, I approached the *why* by incorporating a series of key variables to the analysis (state formation processes, democratization, collective violence and crime, forms of accumulation, and transformation of political parties), and for each of the selected cases – two subnational units – I interacted them in historical perspective. These interactions permitted tracing causal

paths that allowed systematizing the explanation of the specific forms and outcomes of parapolitics in the cases as well as substantiating the spatial and temporal differences found. These key variables are discussed in the next chapter.

Regarding the *how*, I deal with three mechanisms used in the context of parapolitics. The first one is that of state capture. The existing literature has incorporated state capture as a way of explaining parapolitics. Such is the case of the “co-opted reconfiguration of the state” by Garay et al. (2008) whose study remains at the conceptual level and does not provide any empirical key for understanding the complexity of the concept. There is also the aforementioned study conducted by López on subnational cases of parapolitics, which under the state capture prism constitutes an invaluable contribution to the empirical wing of parapolitics studies. Nevertheless, I found that state capture on its own does not account for parapolitics, and has not enough explanatory power insofar as it constitutes a form of transactional corruption despite its levels of sophistication and therefore cannot account for more complex interactions such as those I explain in my research. I assumed then state capture as a mechanism of parapolitics, and as such it proved helpful for capturing the transactions and contracting of the alliances between warlords and politicians.

The second mechanism I discuss is that of electoral strategies based upon Losada’s ideal types of warlords’ electoral strategies that go from strong preferences vis-à-vis politics to indifference. I resort to these types as mechanisms that permit locating warlords’ personal agendas and consequently understanding the forms and outcomes of parapolitics in the selected cases. I thoroughly discuss these strategies in Chapter 2.

The third mechanism incorporated in the analysis is that of violence. Violence did not only constitute a counterinsurgent tool for paramilitaries and its military allies. It mainly had a sense of social control for the establishment of authoritarian political regimes, securing markets of illegal commodities, and accumulation of wealth. Regarding the capture of the state, it served the purpose of shielding parapolitics inasmuch as it provided access to information, office, financial resources, impunity and immunity to warlords and politicians. State capture involved two critical spheres: that of protection, which entailed the collusion with military and police members of all rankings, and the infiltration of the judiciary. The *Autodefensas* supported the military in neutralizing FARC and ELN guerrillas and their alleged civilian support, often under tripartite arrangements with politicians, in the context of which paramilitaries committed hundreds of thousands of crimes. AUC members also provided information to local attorneys for the prosecution of alleged guerrilla members. In exchange, authorities guaranteed impunity and immunity from investigation and prosecution. The second sphere

is the capture of key institutions from where warlords could control and/or participate from subnational governance, predate local public finances mainly via the diversion of contracts, and influencing decision-making processes at the national executive and legislative levels.

Although not considered a mechanism, the urban/rural divide introduced by Duncan in his analysis of warlords' progression from the rural to urban areas is very useful for organizing and differentiating the ways in which paramilitaries operated in either setting. This approach is very enlightening in the sense it permits classifying warlords' differentiated mechanisms (labour-intensive and military-like strategies in the countryside and the network mafia-type model in urban centres). These differentiated mechanisms significantly played in shaping parapolitics, as discussed later.

Finally, regarding the *purpose*, for many analysts parapolitics was the outcome of identical goals and interests of both warlords and politicians: taking over the state in order to legalize the *Autodefensas'* criminal status through a lenient demobilization framework and create subnational authoritarian regimes based on illegal economies. However, this argument is accurate, the process was much more complex. The drivers of parapolitics were not homogeneous because the interests and goals of politicians and warlords did not always coincide. On the one hand, there was a confederation of warlords deeply connected to the narcotics production and trade, in control of a massive military muscle, with varied interests that went from the protection of accumulation strategies to political participation and representation. On the other hand, there were local politicians that demanded point alliances with paramilitaries for the violent control of electoral results, but there also were less instrumental engagements that entailed the foundation and reproduction of authoritarian and criminal political regimes at the subnational level. The confluence of all these criminal and political spheres created different types of systems of mutual protection and support.

Consequently, the concurrence of actors involved in parapolitics created repertoires that went from political consociational arrangements of the type of Gibson's subnational authoritarianisms or local power structures that meddled with violence (2005), as it was identified in one of my cases (Sucre department) to engagements closer to the corporate-holding type for taking over economic transactions of all types (Norte de Santander department). It is nevertheless important to point out that there were hardly dichotomies of the kind exposed by Collier (2002) of greed or politics: the logic of markets and of politics were deeply intertwined in the case of the AUC (Gutiérrez & Barón, 2006), with different combinations and emphasis.

## METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

*Method*

I am using a qualitative approach in this research and through **subnational comparative analysis** I examine two geographic units for the purpose of the thesis: the cases of Sucre and Norte de Santander departments, where parapolitics took place but exhibit strong variations in terms of the nature and reach of the processes. These differences are explained by the disparities in the interaction of the five analytical features mentioned above in historical perspective. Consequently, political landscapes, forms of accumulation, geographies of war, and systems of collective violence were distinctively shaped in each case.

Although comparing countries would have been an interesting research road, the heterogeneous nature of the Colombian case would have been completely diluted by the needs of generalization in the comparative exercise. As noted above, no single account on parapolitics has yet explored subnational cleavages and has explained differences and similarities based upon empirical evidence. By tending to generalize as a single and homogeneous phenomenon with single-faced explanations, all approaches suffer the consequences and limitations of Snyder's mean-spirited analysis (2001) and Hurst's "part-to-whole mapping" (2005), distort the phenomenon's actual complexities I found during my research. Ignoring the subnational dimension miscasts the variables at play in parapolitics as well as their differentiated nature and interaction, and the relationship and tensions between centre and periphery, which explains my choice of research along subnational lines and handling the spatially uneven nature of the research object. I found that this type of analysis provides more accurate coding frameworks, avoiding Rokkan's miscoding of the national case – "whole nation bias" (Rokkan, 1970) – as well as for mischaracterizations of contexts. As Gibson states (2005) (Gibson, 2004), disaggregating countries along territorial lines is useful for exploring how constituent parts of a political system interact in large heterogeneous countries as it is the case of Colombia.

Regarding the number of cases, I initially aimed at exploring more subnational units. Nevertheless, as I established the need of understanding the processes of political economy in historical perspective I found such richness in the analytical possibilities and in the collection of evidence that I limited my research efforts to a *small-N* of two subnational comparative units. This research offers a vision that is panoramic and yet has an important sense of detail. Despite the clear trade-off that arises between the ability to gain control over the subnational

units and the ability to generalize, I believe an effort of middle-level of generalization, that is generalizing findings to similar types of regions within the country, is worth the risk and by and large fulfils my research expectations.

*Case selection*

The project explores and compares the cases of two subnational units: Sucre and Norte de Santander departments. The selection mainly responded to the promising strong differences to be found in the analysis. Paraphrasing Charles Tilly when referring to theory building (1995), I found that a good comparison systematically seeks for differences and not for similitudes.

The comparison is framed within two analytical resources. First, the main historic milestones that determined the relevant variations in terms of state formation, configuration of political power, forms of accumulation, integration to markets, and paths of the internal conflict. Second, developing the hypothesis that these factors explain the paramilitary vision of politics and markets, the spatial dimension of the conflict, and the social capital that the AUC was capable to connect with or build. How this model of governance was based upon powerful coalitions of legal and illegal interests, successfully combined a private offer of coercion, the capture of the public sphere, the alignment of interests from diverse sectors of subnational elites, the combination of a vertical and authoritarian model, and the vigorous social mobility of warlords via drug trafficking and irregular warfare.

The historical and empirical evidence reveals strong variations between both subnational units. When I was preparing my research plan I projected the variations in terms of successful and unsuccessful projects of state capture by AUC warlords. When I started research, and mostly during fieldwork, I found a completely different pattern of differences, which made the analysis more complex and enriching. In Sucre I found a large-scale phenomenon of alliances between politicians and warlords and of state capture with clear political projections to the national sphere, which was made possible by subnational closed political boundaries, pre-modern forms of accumulation and weak pre-existing forms of organized crime and criminal activities, narrow political competition and a very strong atomization of political parties, and vertical integration of society to the state.

In contrast, I found in Norte de Santander a case of medium-scale collusion and a more restricted scope of state capture with clear economic rationale and little or no political projections at all (Norte de Santander). This mainly conformed to more opened political bound-

aries; a more horizontally integrated society to the state; modern forms of accumulation and strong pre-existing criminal structures and activities; and a stronger political competition and less atomization of political parties.

*Causal paths*

This type of research faces Lijphart's problem of *too many variables – not enough cases* for causal inference (1971). In comparative case studies, causal complexity demands for variables to be seen as the components of specific configurations, rather than as independent (Ragin, 2000). It allows dismissing the possibilities of examining cases *as wholes* based on thick description – a feature of  $N=1$ .

A feasible way of reaching a balance between parsimony and complexity rests in mapping set-theoretic relationships of variables – or relational analysis Aus (2005) – which permits building causal paths for parapolitics. Although this is not aimed at building ideal-typical cases of parapolitics, causal paths helps building explanatory frameworks that may be generalizable to a larger universe of similar cases.

However, causal paths cannot be understood as mechanisms. The explanatory power of causal paths depends upon in-depth historical and empirical illustrations of how recurrent processes or pathways are linked to outcomes and context-specific conditions (Mayntz, 2004). I resort to the five analytical keys and put them in motion and interaction in historical and spatial perspective: state formation and evolution of the internal conflict; the weakness/strength of the subnational state; the changes in the opportunity structure of the state in the context of democratizing and modernizing reforms; the endogenous connection of drug traffic with the internal conflict; and the fragmentation and de-institutionalization of political parties. Both cases display the same type of outcome – parapolitics – yet they significantly differ in their respective causal configuration. Each case has a different process of state and party formation, democratization and modernization, thus different positions along the weak-strong state spectrum; distinctive embeddedness of the internal conflict and configuration of illegal economies.

*Data and field research*

Besides using qualitative tests against data collected from an extensive set of academic work, I analysed a large mass media database I have been collecting since 2005 of international, national and local press and magazines, and twelve extensive judicial files of parapolitics cases illustrated in this research. In the second semester of 2009 I undertook fieldwork in Bogotá, Sucre and Norte de Santander, where I made sixteen *in situ* semi-structured interviews with AUC warlords, victims, national and local officials, presidential candidates, academics, and members of civil society organizations. It is noteworthy that the collection of reliable and systematic data in the context of this thesis by the time I did my research in Colombia was difficult insofar as any enquiry on parapolitics was and continues to be a risky task. This situation not only entailed a significant threat for me but mainly for interviewed people, which explains why I could not make more interviews and why I protect the identity of some of my sources. Interviews with AUC warlords were particularly challenging insofar as by then the Ministry of Justice had banned interviewing imprisoned criminals. I also had to opportunity to attend five Justice and Peace public hearings, a transitional justice space coordinated subnationally by the Attorney General's Office with the participation of demobilized paramilitaries and victims, in which the former confess committed crimes.

*Structure of the thesis*

Besides the current introduction and the concluding section, this thesis has seven chapters, of which the first addresses a series of analytical keys that in historical perspective account for parapolitics. The second chapter discusses the ways in which parapolitics was built in Colombia, and identifies the trends and outcomes thereof. The third chapter relates to the benefits of parapolitics and the post-AUC era. The following four chapters constitute the body of cases and comparative analysis. Each case is covered in two chapters: one provides the historical background and the other substantiates the process of parapolitics.

## ELUCIDATING THE ROADS TO PARAPOLITICS: THE ANALYTICAL KEYS

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In terms of theory, this research faces the challenge of identifying the elements that explain parapolitics as a series of subnational processes of political economy and set them within their historical and spatial context. For that purpose, I have identified five analytical features that in historical interaction permit identifying the causal paths of parapolitics and explain to a significant extent its heterogeneity throughout the territory: the differentiated process of state formation and evolution of the internal conflict in Colombia; the relative weakness of the Colombian state; the changes in the opportunity structure of the state in the context of democratizing and modernizing reforms; the endogenous connection of drug traffic with the internal armed conflict; and the fragmentation, de-institutionalization and criminalization of the major political parties. These features, their interaction at the subnational level, and their concomitance at the local and national levels have shaped distinct political landscapes, forms of accumulation, geographies of war, and systems of collective violence.

Subnational spaces that have been successfully modernized and democratized, experienced the rise and success of independent political movements, exhibited moderate to intermediate influx of drug traffic and marginal effects of the internal conflict – circumscribed to slums – were parapolitics-free territories. Nevertheless there was the capture of rents from poorly regulated activities by the *Autodefensas*, such as wholesale food markets. This was the case in Bogotá: elections and public coffers were shielded against the AUC. In Medellín – Colombia’s second city – there was no parapolitics. All these variables could be checked in the same line of those in Bogotá with slight variations, excepting for the effects of paramilitary collective violence and organized crime, which in Medellín were devastating. Other settings with a better integration into state and markets but parochial politics and lesser levels of democracy exhibited intermediate levels of parapolitics and heavy organized crime. That was the case of Norte de Santander. Finally, a region like the Colombian Caribbean, with the lowest levels of state formation, modernization and democratization, an ultra violent internal conflict, and

pre-modern political activity did not exhibit levels of organized crime such as the latter and the former, but had the highest number of cases of parapolitics.

SUBNATIONAL CLEAVAGES IN THE STATE FORMATION PROCESS AND THE EVOLUTION OF THE INTERNAL CONFLICT

Explaining the subnational variations of parapolitics implies contextualising the phenomenon in a wider framework of the historical and spatial configuration of the Colombian state and the evolution of the internal conflict. According to Tilly (1992), institutionalization processes are more effective when the state is capable of exerting a direct form of domination throughout the territory, that is, when the state monopolizes coercion, justice and taxation, and a modern bureaucracy predominates. However, the Colombian process of state formation is better explained under Elias's argument of state building as a heterogeneous and gradual process of territorial and social integration in which local powers increasingly link with the central state bureaucracy (1998). Consequently Colombian dynamics of state formation exhibit strong differences from one region to the other in the performance of state institutions and apparatuses, as well as in the forms of social cohesion, economic organization, integration to the domestic and global markets, and relations between state and political regime. So do the dynamics of the internal armed conflict. The country's large territory and extremely complex geography<sup>1</sup> have resulted in a spatially dispersed population as well as in fragmented markets and politics (Melo and Bejarano, 1989; Deas and Gaitán, 1995). Consequently, the nation has had a precarious identity, marked by deep regional and party divisions (Palacios, 1995). In addition, successive and protracted civil wars throughout Colombia's republican life<sup>2</sup> as well as the persistence of illegal armies and organized crime bear witness to the fact that neither central nor subnational authorities have managed to exercise a monopoly over coercion, fulfil basic regulatory functions and mobilize the population.

The influence of the state has reached regions and localities in different ways and to different degrees, as well as at different times. The democratic and modernizing dimensions have evolved at different speeds and sometimes in opposite directions. In words of Bejarano and

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<sup>1</sup> According to the Inter-American Development Bank's Index of Geographical Fragmentation (IGF), Colombia is the third most complex country in terms of geography out of 155 countries assessed.

<sup>2</sup> In the almost two hundred years of Colombian republican life, countless civil wars have taken place. Before the current conflict erupted in the 1960s, the "War of the Thousand Days" (1899–1902) and "*La Violencia*" (1948–1960), triggered both by the ferocious struggle between traditional political parties – liberal and conservative – are remembered as the bloodiest conflicts that ever took place in the country.

Pizarro (2002), the Colombian fragmented territory has been “selectively” modernized and democratized: on the one hand there are central regions where the state dominates in a direct fashion and performs through a relatively modern bureaucracy, an impersonal justice apparatus and military forces that seek to monopolize coercion. The political spectrum is usually wide and therefore political power is dispersed. In these cases, subnational boundaries are permeable to national rule and influence (Rokkan and Urwin, 1983; Gibson, 2005) and local politics reinforce the democratizing trend. On the other hand, there are peripheral areas – which constitute the largest share of the territory – in which the state exerts an indirect form of rule because it has not been able to overcome fragmentation. In such settings, the action of the state has been systematically intermediated by subnational political elites and warring actors, and a strong social vertical integration via clientelistic ties prevail. Local establishments have locked subnational boundaries in order to maintain regressive types of status quo. In these peripheral areas the political spectrum is very narrow thus political power is highly concentrated.

Traditional political parties – Liberal and Conservative – have constituted confederations of large and semi-institutionalized clientelist networks that never managed to promote territorial unity but have instead fostered fragmentation, further deepening the centre-periphery cleavages. The creation of parties in Colombia has hardly corresponded to what Panebianco (1988) refers as to *territorial penetration*, that is, a political centre that controls, stimulates and leads parties’ expansion to peripheral areas, and creates regional and local groups. Given the high levels of territorial fragmentation the model of penetration was permanently challenged in peripheral Colombia by one of *territorial diffusion*, that is, when political parties are generated in a more spontaneous fashion at the subnational level. In this line, local elites created groups that progressively linked with the national level. This tension in the formation of political parties created semi-institutionalized structures that reflected the lack of internal coherence in the dominant coalitions and displayed high levels of factionalism.

The situation of highly fragmented states with weak regulatory powers, as it is the case of Colombia, is reflective of the fact that they have not been able to overcome the competition of strong local actors in mobilizing human and material resources, as well as in allocating dominant values and norms. Joel Migdal’s account explains Colombia’s specific situation well: social control is granted to those who are able to deliver key components for the strategies of survival of individuals in fragmented societies, and generates compliance, participation and legitimation. The organization that succeeds in this task – seldom the case of the state – has a comparative advantage and can apply to society a repertoire of sanctions, rewards and

symbols aimed at imposing parochial and discriminatory rules and norms (Migdal, 2002), different from the state's universalistic and democratizing ones. Power is thus at the heart of social control and accordingly, society is marked by a fundamental conflict over legitimacy and authority which stems from the resistance of local strongmen (chiefs, landlords, bosses, clan leaders, kinships and warlords) to the influence of the state. This is what Gibson (2005) calls "subnational authoritarianism".

Nevertheless, Migdal warns that despite the fact that the state systematically fails to establish itself as the predominant power actor, it constitutes by and large the most prominent organization. It has the options of either exerting violence to weaken its competitors – an extremely costly strategy insofar as it entails not only displacing strong individuals but also whole patterns of fragmented social control – or accommodating with competitors at different levels of society, creating "triangles of accommodators" (Migdal, 2002) in which local strongmen and politicians rely on state resources and patronage in order to maintain and reproduce clienteles and where state leadership involves in implicit accommodation with the former.<sup>3</sup> This accommodation creates a phenomenon "regime juxtaposition" (Gibson, 2005) in which two competing levels of rule with jurisdiction over the same territory operate to a great extent under different types of norms and practices. In this vein, centre and periphery constitute a spatial system of authority (Rokkan and Urwin, 1983) in which both spheres are interdependent as none can do without the other: each is required for maintaining political order, delivering votes and allocating resources.

The correlate of fragmentation and the consequent dissimilarities in state formation is the spatial and temporal differentiation of collective violence. There are "geographies of violence" (Gonzalez et al., 2002) as there are political topographies, and the latter significantly shape the specific patterns and dynamics of the former. The empirical evidence shows that the internal conflict has not affected the Colombian territory homogeneously and with the same intensity. The armed confrontation between the state, guerrillas and paramilitaries has taken place differently throughout the space, following specific subnational economic, social and political dynamics. The territorial unevenness of violence constitutes a partial outcome of a series of geographic and demographic conditions, but these do not necessarily determine the choice of actors for violence. According to Gonzalez et al. the temporal and spatial variations

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<sup>3</sup>Chubb (1982) offers a similar perspective based on the case of politics in Palermo under the Christian Democratic Party rule. "White collar" middle class (bureaucrats), a weak entrepreneurial class, mafia and urban poor interact in a complex web of private appropriation of the public in the context of the boom of the construction industry from the 1950s. All interactions between actors generate systems of reciprocal obligations in a self-perpetuating process.

of the internal conflict are neither related to a unique polarization of clearly defined actors nor to a specific axis of dispute. The internal conflict is diversely embedded in each region and as such, it evolves around distinct dynamics, opportunities and incentives that may not relate to what Kalyvas (2003) calls the “master cleavage” of civil wars. Nonetheless, such dynamics may occasionally intertwine and mutually reinforce (Vásquez, 2001). In other words, a myriad of conflicts are contained under a master umbrella of the internal conflict.<sup>4</sup> Time wise „ although the internal conflict has taken place in a specific time frame (from the early 1960s to the present), some territories have been linked to the conflict’s dynamics over the last fifty years whereas others became entangled in conflict only ten years ago.

## THE RELATIVE WEAKNESS OF THE STATE

It is indisputable that illegal warring actors have enormously contributed to the weakening the state in Colombia by dissolving the monopolies of coercion and justice, undermining civil society spaces and facilitating the business of the drug trafficking. But unlike the latest generation of civil wars or so-called “new wars” that bring states to failure and collapse in a rapid fashion, the protracted Colombian internal conflict reflects Daniel Pécaut’s paradox of “order and violence” (1987), in that despite its entrenchment, the conflict has not represented the dissolution of a rather stable political and economic order.

Although assessments of state weakness across developing countries vary from each other and many still remain inadequate, most of them coincide in that Colombia is a weak state in spite of being a mostly modern nation with a long formal democratic tradition and a well-performing economy (Rotberg, 2004; CGD, 2004; DFID, 2005). Despite being a relatively well-governed polity, crime and conflict have constituted critical dimensions that have overshadowed the political, economic and social welfare indicators, and have therefore negatively affected the country’s overall democratic scores. However, state weakness is not a consistent feature in Colombia in the sense that it displays subnational differences. Following Bejarano and Pizarro’s argument on the selective nature of the country’s modernization and democratization processes (2002), the static nature of the state weakness concept hinders the possibility of explaining the actual dimension of the Colombian situation.

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<sup>4</sup>This is not an exclusive feature of the Colombian internal conflict. Kriger (1992) interestingly illustrates this situation in the case of Zimbabwe, in which many conflicts were waged under the umbrella of the liberation war. Kalyvas (2003) uses impressive amounts of empirical evidence to refer to this phenomenon as to the “ontology of war”: although wars can most of the times be explained by a single cause, wars trigger a myriad of conflicts. In this sense the “purpose” of violence differs from the “production” of violence.

Scott Mainwaring (1999) identified changes in the levels of democracy in Colombia and argues that the country has oscillated between authoritarian, semi-democratic and democratic governments since the 1930s.<sup>5</sup> The last semi-democratic stage started in the 1990s when the unprecedented expansion and intensification of the internal conflict progressively weakened the state, bringing it to the verge of collapse. Unlike the case of other semi-democratic periods, the causes of this decline were not endogenous to the political regime or the party system but were intimately related to the connection of drug trafficking and the conflict with politics, society and the economy in the country.

Despite the fact that on the whole the Colombian state and society have been historically reactive to organized crime and violence, from the late 1970s, the consensus amongst elites vis-à-vis these phenomena has experienced a process of disintegration. Leal and Dávila (1990) and Gutiérrez (2007) agree that whereas some actors privileged the rule of law and democratizing mechanisms, others favoured de-institutionalized ways of confronting the conflict through paramilitary groups and guerrillas, dirty war dynamics, the influx of drugs money in political campaigns and the influence of criminals in subnational and national politics. The latter triumphed in peripheral Colombia. It is noteworthy that this fracture in the consensus has not meant that criminals have incontestably dominated Colombian society. It has been more the case of alliances of criminals and politicians taking place in spheres where the actors were able to elude criminal, political or social sanctions. This is very much the case of parapolitics.

Archer (1995) argues that the wearing down of the state along with the chronic weakness thereof brought Colombia to a situation of “partial collapse” and of besiegement of the democracy. Although the concept of partial collapse seems rather radical and imprecise, Bejarano and Pizarro’s argument that explains the paradox of a country that has made extraordinary advances in some of its democratic dimensions but has experienced dramatic setbacks in others (2002), is useful for precisising the reach of this concept. This partial collapse occurred in peripheral areas where the historically weak state could not overcome the competition of predatory subnational elites, paramilitaries and guerrillas who emerged as rival “proto-states” or as aspiring state-makers, and further contracted. This has not happen in “modern” Colombia.

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<sup>5</sup>Colombia has had semi-democratic governments between 1936–1949; 1958–1964; 1990–1997; an authoritarian rule between 1949–1957, and only a democratic period between 1974–1990. The semi-democratic nature of the 1936–49 and 1958–64 is related to the extremely narrow space for political participation and in this fashion, the limits emerge from within the political system. The authoritarian period mainly relates to the ultra-conservative and repressive Conservative rule of elected president Laureano Gómez (1950–1953) and the only dictatorship that has taken place in the country from General Gustavo Rojas Pinilla followed by a temporary Military *Junta* (1953–1958).

An aspect that demands for precision is the fact that the state in the late 1990s only effectively controlled two-thirds of its territory did not imply that guerrillas and paramilitaries totally controlled the rest of Colombia, as often incorrectly reported. Although warring actors have created zones of influence in a great share of the national territory, these areas are under permanent dispute and therefore it is difficult to draw a clear line that separates the spaces these groups have claimed as their own. Unlike the cases of Afghanistan or the DRC, the Colombian conflict has not stemmed from or caused a case of “institutional multiplicity” (Beall et al., 2004), that is, the existence or creation of rival or competing institutional or rule systems beyond the formal existing framework. Even in the case of guerrillas, who have sought to overthrow the regime since the 1960s, insurgents have not been actually capable of creating competing regimes. Within the same institutional framework, three competing levels of rule with jurisdiction over the same territory coexist and compete for legitimacy: the state’s modern and democratic institutions, and two opposed authoritarian projects of guerrillas and paramilitaries vastly fed by drug traffic. Nevertheless, it is possible to argue that overall the state has remained legitimate and comparatively stronger.

Another dimension of the partial breakdown of the Colombian state relates to the uneven performance of the state apparatus. Some sectors have indeed exhibited a quantum of coherence and efficiency, but crucial sectors such as the military, the police and the judiciary became almost totally ineffective in this context given the inability to enforce a coercive and normative order. Fortunately, these state’s muscles started to build up again since the 2000s.

#### THE CHANGES IN THE OPPORTUNITY STRUCTURE OF THE STATE

Since the 1980s, successive Colombian administrations have engaged in democratizing and liberalizing processes that have involved the quest for a peaceful termination of the internal conflict, the opening of a traditionally narrow political system, the granting of larger autonomy to territorial entities, and the enlarging of the country’s competitiveness in a globalized economy.

The relationship between decentralization and violence in Colombia differs from the experiences of other countries in situations of conflict. In many a conflictive setting decentralization has constituted the means to redress the role that centralist patterns of governance may have played in fuelling violence in the past and expanding governing opportunities at the subnational level for those who previously waged war. In Afghanistan, the 2004 *Loya Jirga*

constitutional reform denied provinces the right to elect governors in an attempt at limiting the influence of regional warlords but introduced an upper chamber to ensure the representation of provincial interests in the central government. The Sudanese People's Liberation Movement was granted significant autonomy in 2005 to put an end to decades of conflict. In the Iraqi case the distribution of authority over natural resources and fiscal revenues along with the question of Kurdish autonomy in the North, dominated politics during the constitutional process. Decentralization was likewise a central post-conflict issue in Angola, Bosnia, Mozambique, Nigeria, South Africa and Sri Lanka. In Colombia, reforms were enacted by a weak state in the midst of the conflict. They did not bring the conflict to an end but instead exacerbated it, making the aim of "pacifying through reforms" unviable (Bächler, 2004).

Reforms have indeed facilitated peace processes and the demobilization of illegal armed groups<sup>6</sup> in Colombia but at the same time they have made other warring actors resilient or made them even stronger. Reforms have widened the political spectrum but have also unleashed a systematic violent campaign against new political forces. Reforms have granted larger autonomy to territorial entities but have equally made them more vulnerable to corruption from machine politics and empowered guerrillas and paramilitary groups. Reforms have indeed made the economy more competitive but have equally hyper-criminalized the economic sphere via the illegal drug trade. The tendency towards greater levels of democratization and a more liberalized economy ended up having a negative impact on other fundamental dimensions such as those of governance and human rights.

Mauricio Romero (2005) provides a series of keys for understanding the unexpected effects of these reforms. By discussing paramilitary formation in Colombia since the 1980s, he identifies three mechanisms that were triggered by the implementation of peace processes, decentralization and political participation policies. The first mechanism is the *polarization* between subnational elites and the central government in the context of the 1980s and 1990s peace talks with guerrillas insofar as they constituted a possibility of redefining local power structures through the potential electoral participation of demobilized insurgent members. The risks of political imbalance in favour of guerrillas in peripheries in which drug barons were becoming an emergent power actor is the key to understand the emergency of a first generation of paramilitary groups (1980–1994) as a relevant political instrument, in Gutiérrez

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<sup>6</sup>During the Barco administration (1986–1990) some of the main Colombian guerrillas were demobilized: the Popular Liberation Army (*EPL-Ejército Popular de Liberación*), 19<sup>th</sup> of April Movement (*M-19*), the indigenous guerrilla *Quintín Lame*, and the Labour Revolutionary Party (*PRT – Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores*). During the Samper administration (1994–1998) the CRS – *Corriente de Renovación Socialista*) was demobilized. It is noteworthy that since 1984 there have been several fruitless peace talks with FARC and ELN.

rez and Barón's abovementioned "guild-militia-party" trinity (2006). Most of the violence committed by paramilitaries during the 1980s and early 1990s against the Left revealed the instrumental nature of these organizations in the counter-insurgent and electoral objectives of regressive subnational coalitions, a trend that deeply opposed that of the national government. The second mechanism is that of *competition* for territorial control of guerrillas and the emergent power of the paramilitary (pre-AUC structures), a matter that dramatically increased the intensity of collective violence in the country. The third mechanism relates to *fragmentation* within the state organization (civilian-military, executive-judiciary-legislative and centre-periphery) that unleashed a ferocious rivalry between those who defended the renovation of the political system and those who sought to preserve the status quo of traditional politics at any cost.

### *Widening the political spectrum*

The popular election of mayors<sup>7</sup> was the central component of an integrated package of fiscal and administrative municipal reforms enacted in 1986. It largely sought to put an end to the traditional rigid two-party system in which Liberals and Conservatives were the only political forces at play. In this perspective, the reform encouraged long-excluded sectors of society – mainly the Left and ethnic groups – to run for mayoralties, municipal councils, departmental assemblies, and Congress (Pinzón, 1989). The 1991 constitutional reform enacted further mechanisms for overcoming political exclusion and increasing participation in public affairs.<sup>8</sup> However, guerrilla ex-combatants' attempts at getting elected, and members of ethnic groups and religious minorities have proved rather unsuccessful. Since reforms were enacted, non-traditional parties have not surpassed 25% of the lists competing for municipal elections.<sup>9</sup> Excepting large urban centres, where independents have experienced an extraordinary rise, machine politics and collective violence have dramatically curtailed political participation.

Political violence has played a central role in weakening the reach of this reform. The case of the Patriotic Union Party (UP – *Unión Patriótica*) is illustrative. The party was created in 1985 in the context of the first – and unfruitful – peace talks that took place in Colombia with FARC guerrillas under the Betancur administration (1982–1986). The UP, a promising

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<sup>7</sup>Before the reforms, departmental Governors, who in turn were appointed by the President, appointed Mayors. The first popular election of Governors took place in 1992.

<sup>8</sup>The 1991 constitutional reform substituted the representative democratic model by a participatory model.

<sup>9</sup>Source: National Registry Office.

political alternative to traditional parties – in 1986, the UP won 5% of the votes to Congress, and in 1988, the first popular election of mayors, the party won 16 mayoralties – suffered from being seen as FARC’s political arm. Between 1986 and 1988 paramilitary groups in alliance with local establishments and members of the Colombian army assassinated 30% of UP candidates, including presidential candidate Jaime Pardo. In 2008, the UP dossier at the Inter-American Court of Human Rights accounted for over 5,000 assassinated and forcibly disappeared militants, leading the organization to the verge of disappearance.<sup>10</sup> Since the UP experience, every single peace talk attempt with guerrillas has triggered similar dynamics.

But the other side of this phenomenon has been the direct or indirect use of this democratizing channel by criminals for participating in local power, either by supporting specific traditional candidates or running directly for office. This will be thoroughly discussed below. The resistance of subnational establishments to the widening of the political spectrum has created a vicious circle in which the contracting of private violence hinders participation, and the systematic political obstruction increases the disengagement of alternative and independent groups from public life.

#### *Increasing local autonomy*

Another key reform was the enactment of the Basic Statute of Municipal Administration, which granted larger autonomy to Mayoralties and Town Councils in the provision of education and health services, and provided mechanisms for the participation of the community in local matters. In terms of fiscal decentralization, the law empowered municipalities not only in terms of redefining the framework for the generation of local revenues but also by defining the transfer of value-added tax revenues from the central government. These reforms significantly contributed to filling the depleted departmental and municipal coffers. Nevertheless, after over a century of a hyper-centralized control over public finances, local entities became autonomous almost overnight, with the overwhelming absence of control mechanisms and technical skills for dealing with public contracting and fiscal norms. This situation generated a complete financial, fiscal and administrative debacle.

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<sup>10</sup>In 2002 the National Electoral Council removed the legal status to the UP, based upon the legal disposition that indicates that those political organizations that cannot obtain through their candidates at least 50,000 votes, reach or maintain their representation in Congress lose automatically their legal status. Nevertheless, in July 2013, a high court granted the party legal status again, arguing that the loss of representation was the outcome of systematic violence against its members.

Although corruption has been a historical characteristic, the poorly designed reforms made subnational finances even more vulnerable to corrupt practices. In the absence of accountability mechanisms and in the context of increased electoral competition via popular elections, politicians systematically appropriated public funds not only for enlarging their personal wealth but also for campaign financing as the costs of campaigns dramatically increased with popular elections.

For many analysts (Cubides, 2005; Duncan, 2007; Pizarro, 2004), the extraordinary territorial expansion of irregular warring actors and the escalation of collective violence in 1980s' Colombia were strongly related to these reforms. Besides the dramatic increase of corruption by local administrations and the reproduction of political machines, decentralization fed armed versions of clientelism or "armed clientelism" (Peñate, 1999) under which local budgets became significant spoils of war, mostly in regions that benefited from royalties from the mining and energy industries. In this framework, guerrillas and paramilitaries systematically manipulated electoral processes, controlled appointments as well as public contracts in many regions. Armed clientelism has taken place to a large extent as a consequence of the tension between political, fiscal and administrative decentralization and the increasing central grip on the management of public security and the administration of justice.

In the context of reforms, guerrillas and paramilitaries had different positions vis-à-vis the state. The latter – both in their early instrumental stage and in the AUC era – were status quo keepers and used their muscle to exert violent clientelist practices in a symbiotic mode with the local establishment in the regions under their control. The case of guerrillas is different. Reforms facilitated a successful transition from the Cold-War era *fight for land reform* to the current and much less ideological *fight for territory*. Decentralization made the takeover of the national state via the revolutionary route a decreasingly important goal for guerrillas insofar as all power was no longer centralized and consequently controlling subnational governments became more strategic. FARC and ELN have developed an ambiguous relationship with local administrations: although they hardly belonged to any subnational ruling coalition – contrary to paramilitary groups – they have had enough violent muscle to control elections and predate public finances in many regions. At times they have impeded elections<sup>11</sup> and at times they have supported them, involving elected and appointed officials in networks in charge of diverting public finances. Despite seeking to subvert the status quo, guerrillas ended up accommodating to and taking advantage of the changes in the opportunity structures of the local state and the

<sup>11</sup>The Colombian Municipalities' Federation reported nine cases in which not a single candidate ran for mayoralties or town councils in 2003 local elections in guerrillas' controlled. Likewise the Federation reported that during the same year 160 mayors had to govern from exile due to FARC and ELN threats.

market and entered an interminable stage of “parasitism” (Pizarro, 2006). The protractedness of the “subnational revolutionary road”, the involvement with drug traffic, and the progressive disengagement from the masses are all factors that have even further enhanced the rebels’ pragmatism over ideology.

### *Economic liberalization*

In the early 1990s Colombia introduced structural adjustments in the economy, facilitating the entrance of foreign capital, dismantling custom duties, privatizing state-owned firms, and opening markets. As a consequence the country experienced monetary revaluation, higher interest rates, and the elimination of some financial controls. However, despite Colombia’s good economic performance<sup>12</sup>, the country lacked the regulatory and control capacity for undertaking the complex agenda of liberal reforms. The new wave of competition generated by the flood of foreign goods in the Colombian market completely transformed the traditional relationship between production and demand. As a result many industries could not cope with competition and entire productive sectors disappeared. The privatization of state-owned assets did not make up for the increasing public deficit. Private investment mainly concentrated in the construction and services sectors, less vulnerable to foreign competition. The increase of imports was not financed with more exports, as it was expected, but with credit and foreign investment, which ended up being unsustainable in the long run.

Neoliberal policies had two main effects that favoured the intensification of the internal conflict: First, the enlargement of the informal sector, one of the largest in Latin America<sup>13</sup>, of which drug traffic related activities had a large share as a source of informal jobs that absorbed the unemployment generated by the partial or full collapse of some sectors, particularly that of agriculture (Martin Masso, 2008; Lee, 1998). Although the largest bulk of this informal labour force was engaged in the agricultural end of illicit drugs, it acquired increasing importance in urban centres via micro-trafficking and money laundering. The informal nature of this market also expanded to other illegal activities such as arms trafficking, vehi-

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<sup>12</sup>During the 1980s almost all Latin American economies experienced recession as well as extreme cash flow and external financing difficulties, which led many countries to devaluation and structural adjustment programmes. Colombia was notwithstanding one of the few exceptions in the regional crisis: the country did not have serious liquidity problems and had an acceptable access to credit. This performance allowed the maintenance of good levels of reserves and of currency stability. Between 1981 and 1990 the GDP’s accumulated growth was of 43.6 per cent whereas the region’s was of 12.4%.

<sup>13</sup>According to the World Bank, the informal sector represented 39% of the GDP in the late 1990s.

cle theft, smuggling, and prostitution, and has connected to poorly regulated cash-intensive sectors such as gambling and food wholesale markets.

The second effect was related to capital flows associated with drug trafficking activities. Imports and the dismantling of custom duties facilitated the flows of illicit money. It is noteworthy that the argument about drug trade being the central driver of the Colombian economy is a myth (Rocha, 2000 and Steiner, 1998)<sup>14</sup>.

Nonetheless, there have been no restrictions for criminal investment in the rural sector. The state's incapacity to enforce rural property rights and the deficient register tools of property transactions not only facilitated the massive investment in rural estates as a way of laundering money; it also generated massive waves of forcible displacements in many a region under what Harvey (2003) calls "accumulation by dispossession". It has been calculated that the AUC is responsible for over 70% of the forcible internal displaced peasants in Colombia (about 5 million) from which they grabbed over 4 million hectares of land (CNRR, 2010). Violent expropriation and fraudulent titling, mainly done to secure corridors for the drug trade and export points, transformed the structure of land in some regions, and in others it reversed the small successes achieved in the state efforts for democratizing the access to rural land.<sup>15</sup> Dispossession also transformed the rural economy at the expense of the agrarian sector's productivity. This violent agrarian counter-reform contributed to the strengthening of a rentier-based political economy in rural areas based on land speculation, extensive cattle ranching, and cash crops geared to international markets such as coca and palm oil.

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<sup>14</sup>Although the drug trafficking income represented in its peak – mid-1980s – over 30% of the GDP when laundered money flooded the market, the phenomenon only lasted a couple of years and its actual size in the economy remained relatively small. The laundering of illegal capital in Colombia has faced a roof provided by the closure and concentration of industrial and financial property in a few entrepreneurial clusters. The construction sector was largely unaffected insofar as it has been regulated by an institutional financial scheme subject to information requirements. Consequently, illegal money has been decreasingly repatriated and has instead remained abroad circulating in consumer countries or the offshore banking sector.

<sup>15</sup>In many regions, rural land property has been a traditionally contentious issue because of the high levels of concentration thereof. Successive agrarian reforms attempts have proved a complete failure not only because of the high political pressure against the reforms but also because of collective violence. UNDP's latest report on Colombia estimated a Gini coefficient for rural land concentration of 0.875, one of the highest in the world. The World Bank has qualified Brazil's coefficient of 0.8 as dramatic. In Colombia, a new landed elite of drug traffickers and paramilitaries, traditional landowners and cattle ranchers, speculators, and more recently multinational mining corporations predominantly control land. Together, these groups have contributed to a precipitous decline in the land used for food production. Currently, from a total of 21.5 million hectares suitable for food production only 4.9 million hectares are cultivated; that is only 22.7% of the total. This constitutes a paradox insofar as Colombia is one of few countries in the world, which along with Brazil, have available land for expanding the agricultural frontier (UNDP, 2011).

## THE ENDOGENOUS CONNECTION OF DRUG TRAFFIC WITH THE INTERNAL ARMED CONFLICT

Colombia's organized crime syndicates transformed from the great drug cartels of Medellín and Cali in the 1980s and early 1990s into multiple small structures. After the dismantling of large cartels, Colombian groups lost the grip over cocaine distribution as Mexican and European organizations progressively entered the market. However as Bolivia and Peru were experiencing a dramatic decline of coca cultivations in the early 1990s and Colombia was experiencing the abovementioned crisis of the agricultural sector that massively drew impoverished peasants into the coca economy, the competitiveness of Colombia in the narcotics trade started to stem from the agro-industrial and processing phases of coca leaf. Since the second half of the 1990s the country became the largest coca and cocaine producer in the world (UNODC, 2005). This phenomenon generated large waves of colonization characterized by chaotic patterns of settlement as well as an unmitigated environmental deterioration. Coca crops first expanded in peripheral areas of open internal frontier, mainly in the Amazonian basin in southern Colombia, but progressively moved towards more central areas of traditional agricultural frontier, like the coffee growing areas, the Caribbean region and the north-eastern zones.

The increasing strength of Colombia in the production stage of coca generated an endogenous connection with the internal armed conflict. Mastering coca leaf production implied an aggressive expansion of coca crops, mostly in areas of extremely complex geography, which demanded a great deal of security, protection and regulation. It was in this context in which FARC and AUC, with their massive armies and the know-how of operating in difficult geographies, joined the world of drug trafficking. In the absence of formal authority, guerrillas and paramilitaries supplanted the state in these peripheral regions and were therefore capable of protecting crops from competitors and eradication activities, securing the plantation's expansion, controlling the massive labour force involved, and regulating the coca paste market. No other actor was capable of guaranteeing the largest coca economy in the world. According to UNODC (2008) coca crops grew in Colombia from 39,800 hectares in 1994 to approximately 160,000 in the mid-2000s, out of which over 520 metric tonnes of cocaine were produced. Along with the expansion of illicit crops, violence dramatically increased: FARC and AUC engaged in a ferocious expansive campaign throughout the territory and the mutual confrontation resulted in an enormous death toll of civilians and an unprecedented humanitarian crisis.

By specializing in the production phase, guerrillas and paramilitaries found an extraordinary financial source in the drugs trade for funding their respective war efforts in moments of military decline. However, the paths to that specialization were different. FARC's relation to illicit drugs has been mainly instrumental insofar as they have constituted a means for funding the "revolutionary road". The case of paramilitarism is different. As seen, its origin and evolution was criminal; not rebel. Many authors consider that the survival and impressive growth of FARC during the 1990s would not have been possible without the cocaine trade (Echandía, 1999, (Cubides, 2005; Gutiérrez, 2008), 2003). Without drug trafficking paramilitaries would have never emerged in the country.

By the 2000s both paramilitaries and guerrillas not only fully controlled the production phase but also were also progressively involved in cocaine trafficking.

#### THE FRAGMENTATION, DE-INSTITUTIONALIZATION AND CRIMINALIZATION OF MAJOR POLITICAL PARTIES

According to DellaPorta and Vanucci (1999) in their analysis on Italian politics, corruption spreads in periods of political parties' transformation, when a political class with strong ideological convictions is substituted by individuals viewing politics as just another "business", and characterized by very low moral costs for illegal activities. This is also the case of Colombia.

The fragmentation of Colombian traditional parties started taking place in the late 1950s in the context of the National Front (*Frente Nacional*), a consociational agreement between the Liberal and Conservative parties aimed at coping with the demands of development, overcoming the mid-twentieth century civil war known as *La Violencia*, and making a democratic transition in the aftermath of General Rojas Pinilla and the *Junta Militar* dictatorships (1953–1957). This pact shifted the weight of competition within parties and empowered regional operators in detriment of the centre (Leal & Dávila, 1990), a matter that significantly explains the decay of traditional *caciques* and the rise of machine politics. The National Front favoured the conformation of narrow regional public spaces and exclusive political cultures; identities built outside the Liberal-Conservative sphere were qualified as extremist or marginal.

Clientelism experienced a significant transformation under the National Front: the classic dyadic patron-client relationship declined and machine politics emerged. This new form of clientelism did not stem from the competition between parties insofar as the National Front ar-

rangement provided pre-established office quotas to parties, but from intra-party competition (internal factions competing for quotas). In this context, parties experienced an atomization process through factions organized around “houses”, that is, personalistic groups led by Liberal and Conservative ex-Presidents. Fragmentation, stronger along the Liberal lines, was the outcome of a strategy of survival of houses: in order to endure amidst competition, houses’ owners increasingly empowered their subnational operators. According to Leal and Dávila (1990) the competition ended up not only weakening the Liberal party’s cohesion at the top but further de-institutionalizing it at the subnational level where politicians in a more or less autonomous fashion were centred in feeding their clientele and collecting votes.

According to Gutiérrez (2007) a second stage of atomization occurred in the late 1990s during the loss of hegemony or “defrosting” of traditional parties, intimately linked to the criminalization of the Liberal party with the aforementioned infiltration of the 1994 presidential campaign by the Cali Cartel’s money in and the systematic failure of attempts at a peace process with FARC and ELN. This phase of atomization occurred under the Pastrana administration (1998–2002) in the context of peace talks with FARC that were brought to an end under political and public opinion turmoil.<sup>16</sup> The central trigger of this fragmentation phase was paramilitarism. The Liberal candidate for the 2010 presidential elections Rafael Pardo interprets the situation:

“during Pastrana’s administration the AUC sought to become a third actor in the peace talks with FARC, just like in Northern Ireland with the “trinity” of Royalists, IRA and the government [...] The eventual participation of paramilitaries in a tripartite peace process would open FARC and the AUC the possibility of political participation. Similar to the case of *Arena* in El Salvador, the AUC leadership saw the Liberal party as its political platform, because since the 1980s paramilitaries had a strong influence in regions of Liberal hegemony [...] This

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<sup>16</sup>President Pastrana agreed on creating the so-called “distension zone” which consisted in clearing from armed forces and the judiciary an area of 42,000 km<sup>2</sup> (the size of Switzerland) comprising 5 municipalities located in the south-western provinces of Meta and Caquetá. The distension zone generated strong negative reactions from diverse sectors in the country (armed forces, liberal politicians, and mass media, among others) with the argument that the extremely generous governmental concessions were undermining the national sovereignty. Opposition to the process increased as the distension zone, created in areas of FARC traditional dominion, was used by guerrillas to hide kidnapped people and intensify coca crops and cocaine processing. This was one of the main issues that made Pastrana bringing the process to an end. It is to note that all prior peace attempts with FARC have systematically failed, not only because of FARC’s strong negotiating position but also because of the strong civilian-military and partisan divisions. Between 1982 and 1984 Conservative President Betancur compromised in a cease-fire, truce and peace process with FARC guerrillas with little success. Between 1991 and 1992 a second attempt by Gaviria’s Liberal administration (1990–1994) of peace talks with FARC, and a third one by President Samper (1994–1998) also failed.

situation created a strong internal fragmentation: a minority from the Liberal national leadership considered that the peace process could not involve the AUC as a third actor insofar as they were “thoroughbred” criminals and could not be granted political status. This position frustrated the paramilitary project of demobilizing and using the Liberal party as a platform; yet there was an ambiguous situation insofar as in many liberal regions paramilitaries were widely accepted and supported. The emergency of *Uribista* parties [president Alvaro Uribe’s coalition] is to a significant extent the consequence of this internal fracture. As these *Uribista* parties emerged the AUC found a platform and a shelter therein” (Pardo, 2009).

The legitimacy crisis broke the internal cohesion of parties and brought a loss of control over labels. This situation had two consequences. The first one was the emergency of what Gutiérrez (2007) refers as to “transitionals”, that is members and factions – mostly Liberal – that emigrated from official lines towards a myriad of new personalized<sup>17</sup> electoral microenterprises (Pizarro, 2004) with unclear programmatic purposes but clearly located towards the right in the political spectrum. It is in this context that Alvaro Uribe, a former Liberal Party militant with a strong anti-subversive profile, was elected President in 2002 and re-elected in 2006, supported by a strong coalition of right-wing oriented transitional movements, the so-called *Uribista* parties. The *Uribista* coalition, as it will be analysed, had the largest number of politicians prosecuted and convicted for parapolitics. The second consequence was the rise of “independents” in large urban centres such as Bogotá and Medellín with impressive electoral strength and proven clean records of governing. It is also noteworthy that in this context the Left managed for the first time to become a significant electoral force after successive historical failures by winning Bogotá’s Mayoralty three times in a row.

A reform in the electoral law in 2003 sought to counteract the atomization process. The reform provided for the establishment of a 2% threshold (in order to win a seat in the legislature a list had to have at least 2% of the vote at the national level); a change in the electoral quota<sup>18</sup>; the prohibition for parties to represent more than one list per electoral circumscription; and the introduction of the “preferential vote”, a mechanism for electors to choose their preferred candidate from a list. Even though the number of lists fell dramatically, political par-

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<sup>17</sup>Under the competing lists system only the candidate heading the list was elected.

<sup>18</sup>The formula used to assign seats was switched from the Hare quotient formula to the d’Hondt “highest average” rule.

ties remained considerably atomized with further defections, and personal politics continued unabated via preferential voting.

The atomization process also implied a significant increase in the costs of campaigns, a matter that made them progressively more vulnerable to criminal seizure. Despite the introduction of control mechanisms over campaign financing, the matter still remains unresolved. The state has significantly increased the funding of parties and campaigns in order to counteract the infiltration of illegal money, but private contributions continue to be a shadow area. Presidential campaigns have an overall limit (80% state resources and 20% private contributions) and individual private contributions have a 2% limit. Unlike presidential campaigns, congressional campaigns only have an overall limit but the law has not yet established a limit for private contributions. In this case the latter's limit is the candidate's overall limit, making the infiltration of illicit money harder to detect insofar as the frontmen system has become increasingly sophisticated in Colombia. This has considerably contributed to the collusion between politicians and criminals.

THE ENGINEERING OF PARAPOLITICS

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In their analysis of Italian politics, DellaPorta and Pizzorno (1996) argue that the party system in Italy transformed from a system of participation to one of protection through the influx of the mafia in politics. As discussed, the Colombian party system seems to have followed the same path of progressive penetration of criminals into the political sphere. However, it is important to make some qualifications regarding the case of Colombia. First, despite the overwhelming number of parties entering the protection system of the AUC, not all parties were part of it. By the same token, not all politicians from protected parties colluded with paramilitaries and not all the alliances with criminals were identical in nature. Second, except for the cases of parties directly created by the AUC, there is no evidence of party capture from the top, as was the case of the infiltration of the Liberal party in the mid-1990s. It is possible to claim that parapolitics was not a national political-criminal conspiracy orchestrated from the top, but a phenomenon built in a bottom-up fashion from the local to the national. Third, although the interest of AUC warlords in allying with politicians was undisputable, as already discussed, paramilitaries were not always interested in politics, that is, seeking representation in decision-making spaces or directly participating in elections.

The Supreme Court of Justice (SCJ) and the Attorney General's Office (AGO) have been actively investigating the system of protection since the mid-2000s. So far, 165 congress members and 470 local officials elected and appointed between 2002 and 2007 have been prosecuted and/or convicted for linkages with paramilitary groups. According to López and Sevilano (2009) these figures indicate that the AUC surpassed the previous infiltration capacity of Pablo Escobar; in 1982, by the time he had become a Congress member his group's vote did not exceed one per cent of the total congressional vote. When the Cali Cartel massively infiltrated the Liberal campaign in 1994, Congress members involved in the scandal did not exceed 12% of the total vote. The incremental success of criminals over time indicates not only the refinement of collusion but also reveals the advantages of allying with politicians in a bottom-up fashion. Unlike previous processes in which infiltration mostly occurred in

the opposite direction, this time 25 departments out of 32 experienced the phenomenon of parapolitics, with varying levels of intention and intensity.

In this chapter I deal in particular with the “engineering” of parapolitics, that is the modalities under which politicians and warlords colluded and the types of variations each of arrangements found throughout the country. By examining the available evidence and data, I explain paramilitaries’ different strategies and preferences vis-à-vis politics and economic accumulation – and the combinations thereof, as well as those of politicians involved. I also analyse the different levels of geographical, partisan and individual involvement in parapolitics. Likewise I analyse the trends in the investigation and prosecution of parapoliticians and paramilitaries, and the response of the Executive and its congressional coalition. Finally I examine the balance of the benefits obtained by paramilitaries, the re-emergence of paramilitary structures, and the survival of parapoliticians.

#### PREFERENCES, OPPORTUNITIES AND POSSIBILITIES OF WARLORDS IN THE FRAMEWORK OF PARAPOLITICS

Although on the whole the AUC had a clear collective political goal in the context of the demobilization process, not all AUC commanders showed the same interest in politics, and as discussed before, this is related to the fact that not all of them had identical incentives and interests. The diverse economic interests and military concerns of warlords determined their proximity or distance vis-à-vis political power. In order to understand the paramilitary meddling in politics a great deal of attention is required to avoid generalizations insofar as the interference in local governance and economic activities varied from one region to the other.

In his analysis of the 2002 electoral process, Rodrigo Losada (2006) identified three types of politico-electoral strategies adopted by paramilitaries: hegemonic, predominance within restricted competition, and apparent electoral indifference. Losada’s categories are ideal-types, and although his account fails in using them within a wider analytical scope of subnational political economy, it constitutes, as mentioned above, one of the few valuable efforts to account for the heterogeneous nature of parapolitics.

The *hegemonic* strategy was undertaken in areas and by warlords with the highest preference for politics. The strategy was aimed at narrowing the scope of political groups or candidates – to the extent of having at times single candidates – through violence, electoral fraud, and buying of votes. Although Losada only analyses the case of the Magdalena depart-

ment in the Caribbean region, the empirical evidence demonstrates that all other departments in that area also fit the *hegemonic* model: Córdoba, Sucre, Bolívar, Atlántico, Cesar and La Guajira (Map 1). The Urabá region in Antioquia, which is the part that integrates that department to the Caribbean region, can also be included as part of this group<sup>1</sup>. The concentration of the *hegemonic* model in the Caribbean geography and the fact that all these departments, excepting for Antioquia, were under the jurisdiction of the AUC's Northern Bloc (*Bloque Norte*), suggest that the AUC, besides seeking to create a drug trafficking corridor along the Caribbean coastal line, also pursued the building of a political cluster.

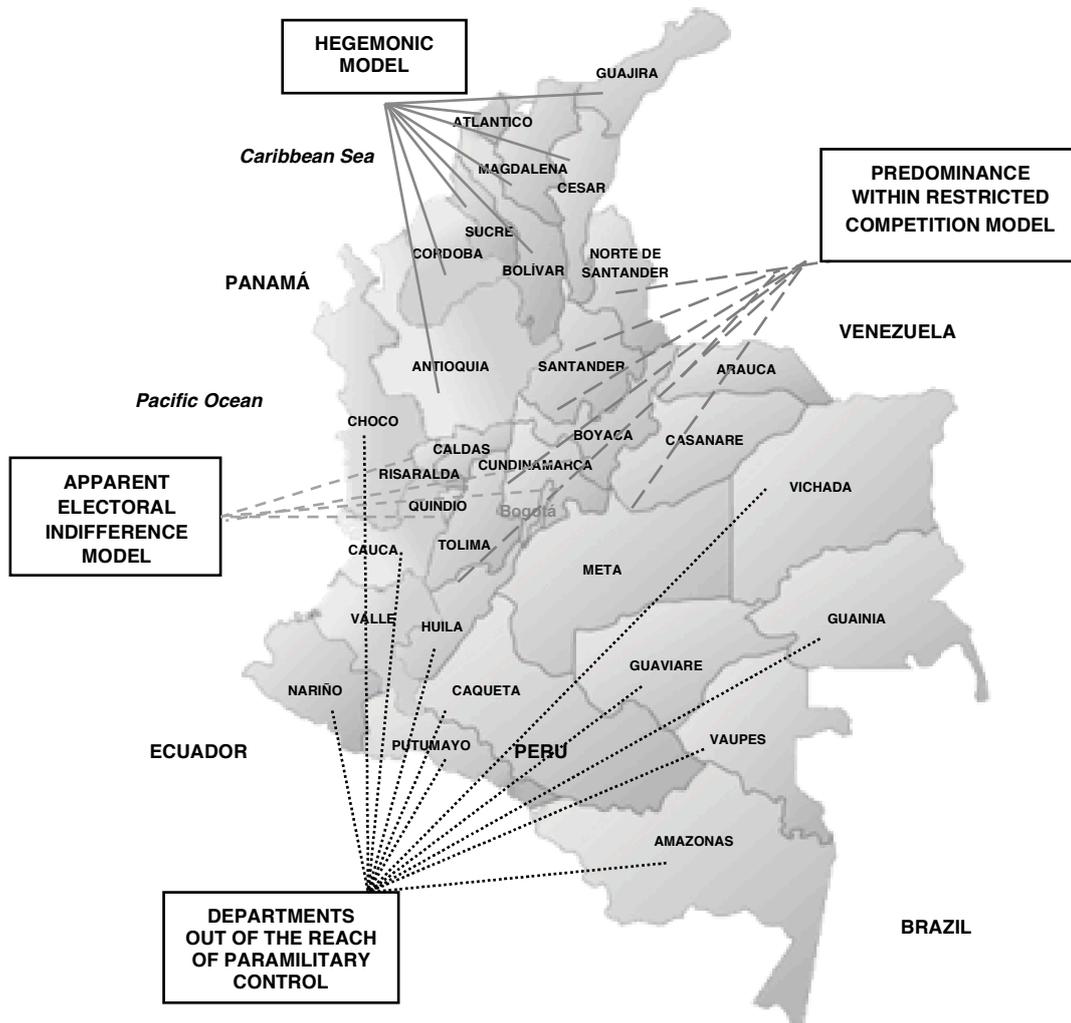
All Caribbean departments have been traditional Liberal strongholds, and have been historically characterized by subnational authoritarian rule, vertical social integration via a strong clientelist exchange, poor integration into markets (excepting for some capital cities such as Cartagena and Barranquilla) and rentier economies based upon latifundia. The paramilitary campaign of territorial expansion was particularly aggressive in the Caribbean region<sup>2</sup>, which had various consequences. On the side of the war balance, guerrillas were dramatically and rapidly weakened, a matter that, unlike in other regions, did not demand a colossal military effort, mainly because of a series of geographic factors that determined its limited embedment in these territories. Regarding the economic sphere, although paramilitaries in the Caribbean area strengthened their control over drug trafficking activities and expanded their accumulation means via local public budgets, extortion rackets, and the violent dispossession of unsecured peasant land, the Caribbean territories were the AUC's main targets for accumulation. The evidence demonstrates that in these departments the main asset for warlords was politics, a matter that significantly explains why the paramilitary influx in local politics generated the most striking cases of power coalitions of politicians and AUC warlords with the support of rural rich and permissive social environments. In this context, the Liberal party experienced a significant loss of electoral weight and representation whilst the *Uribista* coalition parties were strengthened under the direction of former Liberal barons.

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<sup>1</sup>It is to note that the Antioquia department is large enough to exhibit strong sub-departmental variations in every possible sense. This also applies to paramilitary presence. Seven AUC structures operated in the department, under different commandships and with diverse dynamics and agendas: two structures in Urabá region (*Bananero* and *Elmer Cárdenas* blocs), which is the area integrated to the Caribbean region; one structure in the Bajo Cauca region (*Mineros* bloc); two structures in Medellín Metropolitan Area (*Metro* and *Cacique Nutibara* blocs); one structure in the Magdalena river valley (*Autodefensas del Magdalena Medio*); and one structure in the east and north eastern areas (*Héroes de Granada* bloc).

<sup>2</sup>According to the Observatory for Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law, between 1998 and 2001 massacres increased by 140% in Antioquia, Sucre, Magdalena, Cesar and La Guajira departments.

Map 1: Geographic Distribution of AUC Warlords' Preferences



Mapped by the author.

The second model identified by Losada is that of *predominance within restricted competition*, a typology identified in territories where political power did not seem to be on top of AUC's agenda. In this model, warlords supported a wider spectrum of candidates and were relatively tolerant vis-à-vis competitors as long as they all delivered within the framework of their interests. As in the hegemonic model, Leftist candidates were considered ideologically unacceptable and were systematically excluded and obstructed. Although Losada does not substantiate this model, he includes Norte de Santander – NDS, Santander, Arauca, Casanare, Meta, Caldas, Tolima and Valle departments as cases of the predominance model (Map 1).

Unlike the former model, these departments are scattered throughout the Colombian geography. However, the logic of this geographically deconcentrated group might result from the fact that these territories provided the AUC extraordinary accumulation opportunities via both legal and illegal economic activities. All these departments not only have been largely integrated to domestic and international markets via trade (NDS), oil exploitation (Santander, Arauca and Casanare) and agroindustry (Santander, Meta, Caldas, Tolima and Valle), but have also been of importance in the context of the coca/cocaine economies (Meta, Arauca, NDS and Valle). The AUC connections with all these lines of business have been thoroughly substantiated in a study by *Corporación Nuevo Arco Iris* on the matter (CNAI, 2011). It is therefore not surprising that there were fewer politicians compromised with the AUC in these departments as well as fewer cases of threats over elections or fraud, if compared to the departments of the hegemonic model. It is noteworthy that all these departments exhibit wider ranges of political actors in permanent competition, a feature that could have made political alliances more complex and difficult to establish than in the Caribbean region where politics have been more compact and far less competitive. On the war balance side, the AUC could not overcome the competition of guerrillas over control of the territory and resources<sup>3</sup>, a matter that suggest that the magnitude of the AUC's military effort in these cases also made politics secondary on the agenda.

For the third model, that of *apparent electoral indifference*, Losada only uses the Risaralda department in order to illustrate this type. I add Quindío, Cundinamarca and Boyacá insofar as the existing evidence suggests similar trends not only in the arrangements of parapolitics but also vis-à-vis other characteristics. In terms of warfare, this central area has been the least exposed to guerrillas influence. Despite the existence of several municipalities with strong paramilitary presence, and some collusive arrangements with politicians, the AUC proved rather indifferent to politics in Risaralda as well as in the other I point above. The linkages with politicians were far from being systematic, and there is no evidence of electoral violence, voter intimidation or fraud, and competition for votes tended mainly to run under the typical restrictions imposed by machine politics rather than by paramilitary pressure. Although traditional forms of politics prevail in these departments, there are no traces of authoritarian types of local rule as those found in the Caribbean region, which to a large degree can be explained by the integration to markets – mainly via the coffee industry, the deconcentration

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<sup>3</sup>In the case of Arauca, the AUC sought to capture the extraordinary rents derived from the oil industry. However, as Arauca has been a guerrillas' stronghold over the last 30 years, the connections of political elites with ELN and FARC over the "distribution" of oil royalties have proved dominant.

of rural property – small to medium landholdings, and because of the poor connection to the drug trafficking circuit.

There are however many other departments that neither fit any of Losada's types nor are they included in Losada's analysis: excepting for Chocó, Cauca, Caquetá, Nariño, Putumayo, Huila, Guaviare, Amazonas, Vichada, Vaupés and Guainía departments are clustered in the southwestern and southeastern parts of the country (Map 1). In these departments very few cases of collusion between politicians and paramilitaries – or no cases at all – have been registered. The fact that all these peripheral departments have been traditional FARC strongholds, with the largest coca/cocaine economies in the country also fully controlled by FARC, explains why paramilitary consolidation was extremely difficult in these areas. Given the AUC's incapacity of challenging guerrillas for the control of illicit economies, other factors explain the little or sporadic presence of paramilitary groups: low population density, poor legal economies, little electoral activity, meagre political elites, and marginal representation of these departments in Congress. Although these departments exhibit forms of local rule controlled by machine politics from traditional politicians and FARC, and there are a few cases of collusion between politicians and AUC warlords, overall the balance has been more favourable to guerrillas.

As stated before, Bogotá and Medellín, Colombia's largest cities, and to a lesser extent Cali, were areas out of the reach of parapolitics. In Bogotá, the Capital Bloc (*Bloque Capital*) controlled *Corabastos*, the largest wholesale food market in the country, had protection rackets and made social cleansing in slums. In Medellín there were two paramilitary structures: the Metro Bloc (*Bloque Metro*) perhaps the only anti-subversive thoroughbred group in charge of eliminating guerrillas' urban militia members in the *Comunas* (slums), and the Nutibara Bloc (*Bloque Nutibara*) in charge of collecting drug trafficking debts. An internal war eliminated former structure and the latter monopolized the AUC operation. In these cases politics proved extremely difficult to permeate, mainly because mayoralties were in hands of independents and the spectrum of parties in town councils was too wide to capture. To date there are no signs of alliances with politicians. Collusion mostly took place in the realm of security agencies and the judiciary, and meant to protect illicit economic activities.

## THE ARRANGEMENTS OF PARAPOLITICS

As noted before, the complexity of the AUC to a significant extent stems from the fact that the political rationale of warlords meddled with the market rationale. All AUC commanders were drug traffickers but at the same time had political interests too. The important feature here is that each warlord or groups thereof had a leading rationale that overrode the other and to a large extent one became the instrument of the other. The judicial and media substantiation of parapolitics, as well as the field findings of this research reveal two main types of arrangements pursued by the AUC -political predominance and economic predominance. These arrangements also encompass Losada's typologies. As the author exclusively explores the electoral behaviour of warlords and does not analyse their economic rationale, it is possible to locate his hegemonic type closer to arrangements with political predominance and the other three close to those with economic predominance.

Disregarding warlords' rationales, preferences and electoral models, these alliances always entailed on the side of politicians the maximization of votes, office and seats in Congress. The only variation on the side of politicians was that in some cases they aimed at building regressive political projects in coalition with the AUC whereas in others political projects did not involve warlords; only point alliances mediated by violence for electoral purposes.

*Arrangements with political predominance**Foundational pacts and co-governance alliances*

These partnerships were exclusively concentrated in the Caribbean region – Losada's *hegemonic* cluster, with the largest number of collusion cases, as discussed below. They represent the most sophisticated and complex parapolitical alliances, undoubtedly driven by strategic political rationales of both politicians and paramilitaries. In these cases, warlords and politicians sought to build authoritarian political regimes based upon the AUC's ultra-violent muscle.

*Sealing the alliances: the foundational pacts*

The "Burma Plan" (*Plan Birmania*) was the name of a strategy launched in 2001 by the AUC, aimed at consolidating in the short term the paramilitary unity through the drug trade, and in

the mid and long run the control of political power at the subnational and national levels.<sup>4</sup> In the context of the Plan, and as 2002 presidential elections approached, many commanders anticipated the triumph of candidate Alvaro Uribe and along with it the possibility of engaging in a cease-fire and demobilization process (Interview, Ramón\*, 2009). In 2001 AUC commanders called a National Self-Defence Conference during which they chose Uribe as their candidate insofar as “Uribe reflected the *Autodefensas*’ way of thinking” (Ramón\*, 2009).<sup>5</sup> But supporting the presidential candidate of their preference was not sufficient for making the cease-fire and demobilization process become reality. Major reforms had to be made and different sectors had to be consulted. In this vein, securing strong congressional representation became a central goal. Although almost the entire AUC command agreed on the needs of securing a legal safe passage for the reincorporation to civilian life<sup>6</sup>, not all warlords participated in the political process required for that purpose.

Warlords with the strongest political drive promoted explicit regional alliances with politicians and compromised them in supporting the AUC’s political project. Former Senator Miguel de la Espriella confirmed that in 2001 he and various politicians from Sucre, Córdoba, Bolívar and Magdalena, signed the so-called “Ralito Agreement”, a subnational political foundational pact for “re-establishing the country”. Years after, Salvatore Mancuso revealed a copy of the document, which contained the signatures of four Senators, eight Representatives, one departmental deputy, six mayors and ex-mayors, one town councillor, five appointed officials, two cattle-ranchers, and a journalist from the Caribbean departments. The warlord also stated “all those who signed the Ralito Agreement did it voluntarily. They all went there [Santafé de Ralito county] to support the peace process we were promoting [...] but they also knew that for that purpose they needed to survive the next elections” (Mancuso, 2008). Between 2001 and 2002, subsequent agreements with identical purposes took place in the Caribbean region: Chivolo (Magdalena), Pivijay (Cesar), and Urabá (Antioquia). Along with those, commanders “Ramón Isaza” and “Ernesto Baez” created an association of 120 mayors in Antioquia called *Amipaz*.

The fact that these alliances formed in the Caribbean region, and not somewhere else, is not fortuitous. Paramilitaries found fertile conditions in these departments for their criminal and undemocratic project. As it will be discussed in the case of Sucre, the Caribbean territory has

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<sup>4</sup>The *Burma Plan* was named after Myanmar’s political process of a dictatorship based on illegal economies (El Espectador, 2007).

<sup>5</sup>Although Salvatore Mancuso revealed that the AUC contacted people from Uribe’s campaign in order to finance the candidate, nothing has been proved in this respect (VerdadAbierta, 2009a).

<sup>6</sup>It is noteworthy that some paramilitary commanders did not agree with the demobilization process, the same ones whose structures never demobilized.

been historically characterized by the building of subnational authoritarian enclaves opposing the centre's democratizing trends and reforms, with extremely narrow political spectra, widespread corruption, vertical forms of social integration mediated by clientelist ties, and precarious forms of accumulation mainly based upon rents on latifundia. These foundational pacts occurred in the intersection of the trajectory of political economy and the Burma Pact principles. To a significant extent the crossing of these worlds was made possible because the most prominent Caribbean AUC warlords belonged to the regressive rural landed elites, and many of them came from families of that traditionally had been involved in politics.

The mainstream accounts have interpreted Ralito's "re-establishment of the country" as a subnational conspiracy against the centre. Interestingly, Rafael Pardo takes this pact's genesis back to the late 1990s during the failed peace talks of the Pastrana administration with FARC. Pardo argues that the potential entrance of FARC in the political arena in the early 2000s constituted the main trigger of such agreements: "Ralito was not necessarily a conspiracy; it was more of a reaction against the possibility of a constitutional assembly in the framework of an eventual demobilization of FARC. It was a defensive mechanism; a common front inherent to political machines and clientelism in some regions" (Interview, Pardo, 2009). Whether the conspiracy theory was true, and notwithstanding the fact that the peace process with FARC was frustrated, the existing evidence demonstrates that although these Caribbean foundational pacts did not exactly "re-establish the country", they constituted the frameworks under which a series of consociational arrangements of paramilitaries and politicians were created. Through such arrangements the regressive subnational status quo was armoured against any type of threats against the long-standing rule of dominant political "houses" and/or the land-holding structure in rural areas. The AUC protected through violence and fraud the electoral interests of political barons who maximized votes as never before and reproduced their power in Congress. In exchange, the AUC was given room to co-govern, imposing local candidacies and appointments to local office and corporations with the aim of capturing the budgets and state functions.

By the same token, paramilitaries made alliances with public security agencies, the military and the judiciary for counter-insurgent tasks and the protection of drug trafficking activities. In this context, the AUC did the "dirty work" of massacring and displacing hundreds of thousands of civilians in order to weaken the alleged social support of guerrillas and deteriorating the latter's capacity of controlling territories. In many cases the AUC infiltrated judicial offices in order to guarantee immunity from investigation and prosecution.



This type of alliances paved the path through which the AUC amassed extraordinary wealth and obtained strong political representation in Congress for the demobilization process, as discussed below. Politicians whose electoral victories were secured via paramilitary violence and fraud were the ones who voted the disastrous demobilization legal framework that served AUC warlords interest.

*Controlling the vote: supporting traditional politicians and creating AUC's own*

Some of the new parties that emerged as the outcome of fragmentation and atomization discussed in Chapter 1 were created at the subnational level in the Caribbean during the time of parapolitics. This was the case of MORAL Party, created for the 2002 elections, which was transformed into Democratic Colombia for the 2006 elections, and of the Popular United Movement and Civic Popular Convergence (both directly created by the AUC with AUC-made politicians). The core constituencies of the Popular Integration Movement were located in Atlántico, Magdalena, Cesar and Guajira. The electoral success of these parties was the outcome of the violent and fraudulent influence of the AUC.

Electoral fraud was one of the main strategies used by the criminal coalition in many Caribbean departments. The case of the 2002 congressional elections in Magdalena is particularly striking. According to a key witness in a judicial investigation<sup>8</sup>, Representative José Gamarra and AUC commander “Jorge 40” orchestrated the scam. Twenty-one municipalities were distributed into three “electoral districts”: the southern district was awarded to candidates Luis Eduardo Vives (Senate) and Alfonso Campos (House of Representatives); the central district was assigned to candidates Dieb Maloof and José Gamarra; and the western district was given to Salomón Saade and Jorge Caballero. Once districts were drawn up, fraud was triggered: “the electoral fraud was of gigantic proportions. For that purpose we designed this special software which based on the electoral census allowed manipulating each vote: the software included all names of potential voters, their national identification numbers as well as the assigned polling stations in each municipality. Gamarra financed the operation and paid USD 3,000 for each departmental data base” (AGO-PI, 2006). AUC’s Northern Bloc men put pressure on the Local Register Authority’s heads in each of the targeted municipalities, made

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<sup>7</sup>Translated by the author. Besides the signatures of AUC warlords’ Salvatore Mancuso (signing here as “Santander Losada”), Adolfo Paz, Jorge 40 and Diego Vecino, those of Jose Maria Lopez and Salvador Arana, Córdoba and Sucre departments’ governors are also included in the facsimile. The original document contains the signatures of all the assistants.

<sup>8</sup>Rafael García was the former IT director of the National Secret Service. He was convicted for facilitating Magdalena’s electoral fraud and corruption in public contracts.

them assign electoral juries, and instructed them how to guarantee votes for Jorge 40's chosen candidates. Subsequently, vote totals were electronically manipulated. The electoral results confirmed the strategy's success: Luis Eduardo Vives obtained 89% of his total national voting in Magdalena; Salomon Saade, 86% and Dieb Maloof 59%. Their partners for the House of Representatives all had votes of over 75% in the same municipalities. Electoral abstention, void votes and blank ballot papers were extremely low in Magdalena for these elections, far below the national average. Notably, all politicians elected under this fraudulent strategy have been sentenced for colluding with "Jorge 40". The same strategy of districts was used in Cesar in support of the Alvaro Araújo, Miguel Durán, Mauricio Pimiento and Jorge Ramírez; and in Bolívar to favour William Montes.

There was also electoral fraud during the same year's presidential elections. By using the same mechanisms, the AUC sought to guarantee Uribe's victory in Magdalena: "that explains why in the only Caribbean department in which President Uribe won the elections was in Magdalena; the department produced over 300,000 votes for him" (AGO-PI, 2006). Uribe's top campaign staff in Magdalena who later became high ranking officials during his administrations were heavily involved in the fraud: the then departmental campaign manager, Jorge Noguera, who was later appointed as the Director of the National Secret Service and involved the institution in one of the worst cases of paramilitary infiltration; the former director and deputy director of the National Anti-Narcotics Agency, and the former Presidential Councilor for Youth Programmes.

Terrorizing the population was the main ingredient for securing votes and took many forms such as directly threatening political competitors and assassinating them in case they did not withdraw or gathering people and forcing them to vote for specific candidates under threats of massacres, as reported in Sucre. Terror was also used to keep people away from the polls so ballot stuffing and other forms of manipulation of vote totals could occur, as was reported in Cesar. Other strategies involved collecting people's national ID cards – necessary for voting – and using them to collect the ballots and filling them in for voters, as reported in Bolívar; retaining people's IDs and counterfeiting ballots those that could not vote because they had no identification to do so (Magdalena and Córdoba); and replacing ballots that favoured other candidates different from AUC's supported candidates (Sucre, Bolívar and Magdalena).

Under these co-governance alliances the AUC not only delivered in order to secure the electoral success of well-established local politicians. Paramilitaries also created their own politicians, though with less success. The best-known cases are those of Representatives Eleonora Pineda, Rocío Arias and Muriel Benito who with none or little political backgrounds became

electoral phenomena in 2002. Pineda, from Córdoba, who in 2000 was elected as Tierralta's municipality town councillor with 748 votes, won a seat at the House of Representatives with 82,082 votes in 2002. In the same year Benito, from Sucre, won a seat with 44,365 votes and Arias, from Antioquia, won another one with 23,877 votes. The last two congresswomen had no prior political experience. These politicians were the product of electoral fraud and armed pressure. These cases were perhaps the first to attract the attention of the authorities. According to an interviewed warlord, "Eleonora [Pineda] was a monster created by us; just as Rocío Arias and Muriel Benito. We never used this strategy again" (Interview, Ramón\*, 2009).

In all these Caribbean cases, once supported politicians were elected, AUC warlords co-governed departments and municipalities. They interfered greatly in determining candidates for mayoralties and governors' offices, appointments to key subnational offices, mainly those in control of the largest budget share. Likewise they influenced local contracting, diverting millions of dollars from public coffers. Paramilitaries and politicians had the long-term project of building undemocratic and criminal subnational states in the Caribbean region. In some places, as in Sucre, warlords even prepared their own candidates, who would run in the 2007 and 2008 electoral arena, after the AUC's demobilization.

#### *Point alliances for electoral purposes*

The alliances for co-governance and representation in Congress were not the only arrangements that took place between politicians and paramilitaries. There were also point electoral alliances, limited in scope and time, which entailed an instrumental exchange of votes, public budgets and contracts.

Caldas and Tolima are examples of this type of arrangements. Both departments exhibit patterns of traditional politics, clientelism and corruption, but the political spectrum was wider than that of Caribbean departments. These territories have been strongly linked to markets via agricultural exports. According to the judicial investigations, the principal aim of the AUC was the capture of available rents in these territories while maximizing votes was that of politicians. There were no political projects involved. Other departments like Risaralda could fit this typology; nevertheless investigations against politicians were inconclusive.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Former Senator Habib Merheg was linked to AUC warlord "Macaco", one of the biggest drug traffickers the AUC had. According to witnesses Merheg gave "Macaco" USD 200,000 in order to "protect" his campaign. However the linkages between Merheg and Macaco were never proven (La Silla Vacía, 2010).

In Caldas, warlord “Ernesto Báez” used a similar strategy to that of Magdalena and Cesar and in 2003 created two “electoral districts” in northern Caldas, one for Enrique Emilio and the other for Dixon Tapasco, son of traditional Liberal baron Ferney Tapasco and elected in Congress in 2006. The instrumental alliance also included an AUC’s frontman in Tapasco’s lists (VerdadAbierta, 2010). The *Autodefensas* secured the victories of Emilio and Tapasco’s candidates to mayoralties and town councils in the “electoral districts”. It was established “Ernesto Báez” got a strong grip of that region’s public budgets. This political platform secured a seat in Congress for Tapasco, who was convicted to seven years of imprisonment for colluding with the AUC (SCJ-26584, 2011).

In Tolima, former Senate President Luis Gómez was convicted in 2007 to nine years of imprisonment under charges of illegal campaign financing by AUC’s local commander “El Socio” for his 2002 election (SCJ-32792, 2011). El Guamo, Valle de San Juan, San Luis and Purificación elected mayors, all Gómez’s men, were also supported by the AUC which in return obtained 10% of public contracts. Former Representative Javier Devia was convicted to seven years of imprisonment. It was established that Devia’s 2006 campaign was “protected” by AUC’s Tolima Bloc (SCJ-33015, 2011).

#### *Arrangements with economic predominance*

In the cases that fit in this category, AUC warlords’ economic rationale overrode politics, and this is mainly explained by three factors. The first one is that the territories offered extraordinary accumulation possibilities via illegal and legal activities, as it was the case of NDS and Valle departments. Second, some warlords were originally drug traffickers who bought AUC franchises in order to join the demobilization process and legalize wealth and criminal activities. This is the case of Miguel Arroyave (“Arcángel”) who paid 5 million USD for becoming the AUC commander of Meta, Cundinamarca, Boyacá and Casanare departments, as well as of Bogotá’s *Capital Bloc*; the Mejía Múnera brothers (“Los Mellizos”) who for 2 million USD created the *Arauca Victors Bloc*; Francisco Zuluaga (“Gordo Lindo”) who commanded the *Pacific Bloc*, Carlos Jiménez (“Macaco”) of *Central Bolívar Bloc*, and Ramiro Vanoy (“Cuco”) of *Miners Bloc*, for similar amounts. Third, in almost all cases in which the economic rationale led the parapolitical arrangements, warlords were not native of the areas in which they operated. Most of them came from Antioquia and Córdoba departments – cradles of the AUC, a feature that explains to some extent the lack of political drive given

their disconnection with these “occupied” territories. By contrast, all the Caribbean region’s warlords were native of those departments and most of them belonged to the local elites.

Although it is extremely difficult to calculate the wealth of AUC commanders, it must have been of extraordinary proportions given the fact that all warlords had ties with drug trafficking, used sophisticated money laundering mechanisms, had access to public budgets and contracts (it is estimated that the AUC had shares of between 10% and 50% of budgets in the departments where they controlled mayoralties and governors offices), and controlled extensive protection rackets. Many of them expanded the economic webs towards other illegal activities (contraband, prostitution, human traffic, fuel and vehicle theft) and poorly regulated legal ones (lotteries, wholesale food markets, private security firms, construction, bureaus de change). Others also accumulated wealth via the violent dispossession of peasants’ land. The strength of armies that added up to 34,000 armed personnel guaranteed the success of the AUC’s participation in this impressive spectrum of activities. Although maintaining such a large army must have been very costly for the AUC, it is highly probable that the total income exceeded by far the cost of the war effort.

In territories where economic interests came first, paramilitaries required multiple arrangements in order to protect their accumulation activities. Warlords successfully infiltrated public security agencies, colluded with policemen and militaries, and allied with people from the judiciary. In this way they guaranteed impunity and immunity from investigation and prosecution. But politicians were also central to the protection system, mostly elected local officials (mayors and governors). In these contexts, all these key agents constituted nodes in the criminal networks of paramilitaries.

In all cases of parapolitics in the context of economic arrangements, politicians acted as maximizers of votes and were funded with AUC money. In exchange they provided paramilitaries access to public budgets and contracts and protected their economic activities. There have been no signs of the building of political projects. The relationship was merely instrumental.

#### *Drug traffic and money laundering*

Politics became a mechanism for money laundering via campaign financing and those politicians who received funding became partners in crime. But the relationship between drug traffic and politics was not exhausted in this exchange. As discussed, drug traffic constituted the economic backbone of the AUC and therefore it required a great deal of protection not

only from law enforcement and judicial agents but also from politicians. The cases of NDS, Arauca and Valle help understanding this type of exchange: paramilitaries supported elections through campaign funding and elimination of opponents, and in exchange winners protected and even participated in AUC's illegal activities.

In Valle department AUC's *Calima Bloc* financed Dilian Francisca Toro's campaign with USD 170,000, and mid-ranking AUC men were in charge of making people vote for her (El Espectador, 2008). She won a seat in the Senate in 2002 and was re-elected in 2006, when she became Senate's President (El Espectador, 2010). Since 2012, Toro is being investigated for the laundering of USD 2.7 million from a well-known drug baron in Valle, which she and her husband used to buy a rural property in northern Valle (Kienyke, 2012).

In Arauca, drug traffickers "Los Mellizos" who became AUC commanders via franchise funded Julio Acosta's campaign to the Governor's Office with USD 220,000 (Caracol Noticias, 2010). Acosta also used the AUC for eliminating officials from the department's Registrar Office who knew about the electoral fraud committed during his campaign. Los Mellizos' wealth was estimated in USD 800 million (Semana, 2001), a great deal of which was amassed during their short time in the AUC. Governor Acosta's support to "Los Mellizos" between 2003 and 2007 was crucial for the cocaine trafficking to Europe via Venezuela and West Africa.

In NDS, former Cúcuta's Mayor Ramiro Suárez was a crucial ally of commander "El Iguano". The warlord funded his campaign and during his time in office (2003–2007) Suárez protected the complex web of both illegal and legal businesses of paramilitaries in the department that ranged from drug trafficking, fuel smuggling, to control of gambling and betting, and money laundering. This event, which constitutes one of the two cases compared in this thesis, will be thoroughly Chapter 7.

#### *Public budgets and contracts*

The appropriation of public budgets by AUC warlords was common in all cases of parapolitics: irrespective of warlords' political drive, electoral support always implied rewards in public contracts, either within the framework of co-governance arrangements or under more instrumental settings. Although it is extremely difficult to establish to total amount of money embezzled from public coffers, this item in the AUC's balance was likely more than significant.

The cases of the Caribbean departments – the hegemonic model – were particularly dramatic and reveal the entrenchment of the political and economic rationales. In these departments the main targets were the public healthcare system and oil and coal royalties. Northern

Bloc commander “Jorge 40” established a strategy for corruption over public resources. Of the minimum percentage established in each contract, i.e. 10%, 3.3% went to the local AUC structure; 3.3% to elected politicians involved; 1% to local treasurers (VerdadAbierta, 2012).

Misappropriation in the healthcare system was a major business. Warlords controlled appointments of managers of hospitals and healthcare providers. The mayor of Riohacha – La Guajira’s departmental capital – was arrested in 2006 along with ten city officials. They were found guilty of diverting approximately USD 60,000 from healthcare funds for the poorest to the AUC (Semana, 2011). The accountant of “Jorge 40” indicated that the extortion of the public healthcare in the Atlántico department between May and July 2004 generated a profit of USD 550,000. In this case the alliance with then Senator Dieb Maloof, a parapolitician convicted in 2013, created a network of family members and fellow politicians that managed the looting of public healthcare provider *José Prudencio Padilla* through the creation of 13 cooperatives. From a USD 45 million budget, Maloof’s network diverted USD 12.7 million to “Jorge 40” (Semana, 2011). In Córdoba, AUC’s *Elmer Cárdenas Bloc* penetrated the local healthcare system through the creation of provider *Orsalud*. Politicians gave the AUC access to healthcare contracts in six municipalities. It was established that only in the case of Arboletes municipality, the mayor diverted 40% of the health budget to commander “El Alemán”. All mayors and several town councillors were imprisoned (Caracol Noticias, 2011).

Oil royalties constituted another key target in AUC finances. In Sucre, it was proven that former Governor Salvador Arana twice paid fifteen public works’ contracts funded with royalties in the late 1990s in Tolú municipality. In 2002, as the department still owed contractors money from these contracts, Arana fully settled all contracts again, and commander “Diego Vecino” was granted USD 270,000 (VerdadAbierta, 2013).

But this was not only the case in the Caribbean region. Casanare, located in eastern Colombia, is one of the richest departments as it is the second oil producer in the country. Oil has traditionally put Casanare in the crosshairs of armed clientelism, and was for decades an ELN guerrilla stronghold. Drug traffic has also fuelled the internal conflict in the department as it constitutes a point for cocaine processing and a traffic route towards southern Colombia. In this context, parapolitics took place under the form of point alliances with its instrumental exchange of votes and protection of illegal business for access to oil royalties. For the 2003 elections, “Martin Llanos”, the local AUC commander, promoted the “Casanare Pact”, signed by Milton Alvarez, candidate to the Governor’s Office, and candidates to Tauramena, Villanueva, Maní, Sabanalarga and Monterrey mayoralities, who agreed on diverting 50% of local budgets and 10% of each public contract to the AUC in exchange for electoral results.

All candidates were elected. The AGO stated that “the commitment [of politicians] with the *Autodefensas Campesinas de Casanare* was that electoral results were the responsibility of paramilitaries in exchange for controlling local budgets and contracts” (Semana, 2007), and established the diversion of public funds to the AUC. It is calculated that the six mayors managed oil royalties worth USD 185 million during their time in office, of which the AUC received what they established in the pact. All officials were convicted.

Other public fronts were infiltrated by the AUC-politicians alliances. “Jorge 40”, supported by politicians, cooperated with a firm that won a twenty-year concession to collect taxes in Barranquilla district (Atlántico) that reportedly produced USD 17.7 million between 2002 and 2006. Indications are that “Jorge 40” may have taken as much as half of these revenues (Revista Cambio, 2008).

### *Rural land*

In many a department, AUC commanders either reinforced their status of landed elites or became part of a new landed bourgeoisie through violent dispossession or fraudulent acquisition of peasant land. A common purpose of land accumulation was the consolidation of corridors for drug trafficking, and this vein, AUC warlords created “security cordons” of rural property in these strategic areas. This was possible because the Colombian state has been historically incapable of enforcing property rights, a weakness that had a most pervasive impact on the poorest end of rural land ownership. According to judicial investigations, “Macaco” was AUC’s top land grabber in the paramilitary with 50,000 hectares, followed by “Don Berna” (45,000), Salvatore Mancuso (25,000), “Cuco” (24,000) and “Monoleche” (20,000) (El Tiempo, 2012). It has been calculated that almost one million hectares were lost to the complex webs of land seizure created by paramilitaries, politicians, land and registrar authorities, and legal entrepreneurs, of which approximately 400,000 hectares belonged to over 450,000 displaced peasant families and the rest was to public waste land.

In Magdalena, authorities identified 1,500 ghost land sale contracts, with false documents, that accounted for 68,000 hectares of land grabs in Plato, Sabanas de San Ángel, Chivolo, Tenerife and Ariguaní (El Tiempo, 2013). According to the Land Registrar’s Office, in most cases local politicians and officials were AUC accomplices, including former Senator Jorge Castro and the respective mayors. In Carmen del Darién and Riosucio municipalities (Chocó),

the AUC snatched 25,479 hectares of Afro-Colombian collective land.<sup>10</sup> Over 4,000 families were displaced in 1997, and their land was soon after used for large-scale palm oil and cattle ranching activities. By 2001, several legal entrepreneurs had started joining the agro-industrial project. Commander Vicente Castaño, who is said to have managed to legalize 1,000 hectares of this land in only four days, stated that bringing legal entrepreneurs to these projects was very convenient insofar as once the legal rich arrived, then came state institutions, those that helped legalizing the land usurpation (La Silla Vacía, 2011).

## THE GEOGRAPHIC AND PARTISAN DISTRIBUTION OF PARAPOLITICS

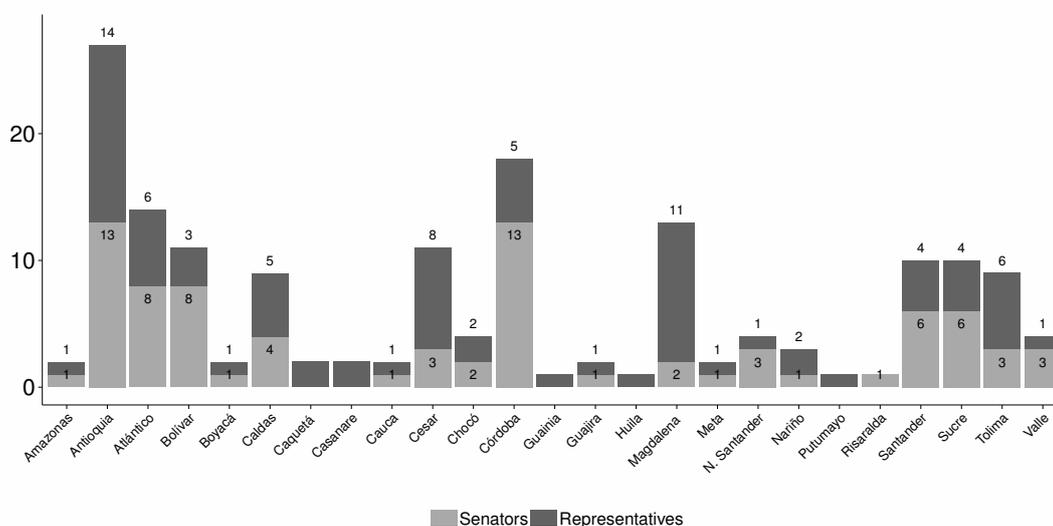
As shown in Figure 2 and Map 2, the largest concentration of congress members investigated by authorities belong to the departments of Antioquia (27), Córdoba (18), Atlántico (14) Magdalena (13), Bolívar (11), Cesar (11), and Sucre (10), all located in Losada's *hegemonic* cluster. In all cases, paramilitaries succeeded not only in fully capturing the subnational public space (local elections, appointments and public contracting) but also colluding with politicians who had important positions in Congress (prominent leaders of *Uribista* parties and key congressional commissions such as the budget assignment commission). As many as 106 of 165 members of congress involved in parapolitics belong to the Caribbean departments, that is 64% of all those implicated. Guajira, the outlier with only 2 cases seems strange in this Caribbean context. A hypothesis could be that given its location along the Venezuelan border, the historical dynamic of this department – deeply connected to smuggling – strongly differs from the rest of Caribbean departments. This case is quite similar to NDS, included by Losada in the *predominance within restricted competition* model, and one of selected cases of this thesis.

In the case of departments under the *predominance within restricted competition* type, 40 politicians (24% of the total) were involved: Santander (10), Caldas (9), Tolima (9), NDS (4), Valle (4), Casanare (2), and Meta (2). Levels of collusion in Santander, Caldas and Tolima are impressive but in spite of the number of cases, there is no evidence of the building of any political project at the subnational level, as occurred in the Caribbean region. These departments are typical cases of point electoral alliances, as discussed below.

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<sup>10</sup>Indigenous and Afro Colombian communities are entitled to own collective territory, which is inalienable and thus cannot be subject to sale contracts.

Figure 2: Number of Congress Members Investigated and/or Convicted for Parapolitics by Department (2002 and 2006 Elections)



(\*) Author’s calculations based on the SCJ and AGO information. Updated: August 2013.

Risaralda, which falls under the *apparent electoral indifference* type, had only one reported case of collusion. If we add the other departments, the number of alliances are very low or zero: Boyacá (2), Cundinamarca (0) and Quindío (0). All together, with 3 cases, they account for only 2%, a number that confirms that in spite of the existence of several municipalities in these departments with paramilitary presence, AUC warlords proved indifferent to politics. The case of the “*out of the reach of paramilitary control*” departments seems to confirm the argument of guerrillas’ hegemony and/or the little relevance of politics or economics to the paramilitaries’ strategy. With 16 cases – Chocó (4), Nariño (3), Cauca (2), Caquetá (2), Amazonas (2), Putumayo (1), Huila (1), Guainía (1), Guaviare (0), Arauca (0), Vichada (0), and Vaupés (0)- the participation with 10% is still proportionally lower insofar as we are than that of the former group.

Map 2: Geographic Distribution of Congress Members Involved in Parapolitics<sup>11</sup>



Mapped by the author.

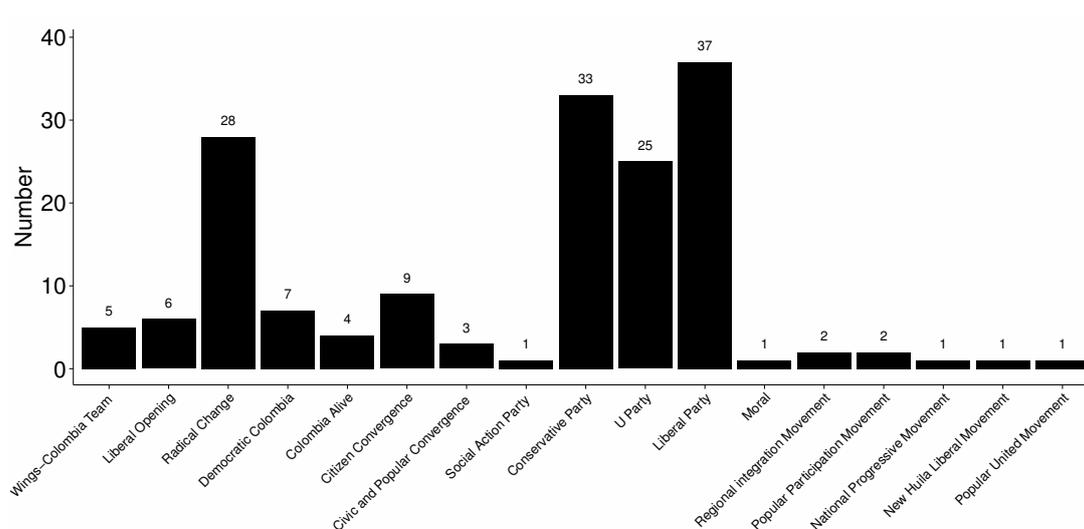
*The Uribista coalition and parapolitics in Congress*

As discussed before, the agglomeration of parties towards to right end of the political spectrum in Colombia was a factor that played a significant role in the politicization of criminals and the criminalization of politicians. In many departments, these right-wing emerging parties made coalitions with liberals and conservatives who, by keeping their labels, established common strategies in line with those of AUC warlords.

<sup>11</sup> Author's calculations based on the National Register Authority (NRA), SCJ and AGO information. Updated: August 2013.

It can be observed in Figure 2 that Liberal, Conservative, Radical Change and U Party parties exhibit the heaviest involvement in parapolitics: 37, 33, 28 and 25 congress members were involved, respectively. It is noteworthy that the Liberal party participation related mainly to congress members elected in 2002. For the 2006 elections, when the party experienced further atomization, the levels of Liberals involved substantially decreased as they had moved to other groups.

Figure 3: Political Parties Involved in Parapolitics (2002 and 2006 Elections)



Author's calculations based on the SCJ and AGO information. Updated: August 2013

The *Uribista* coalition had the largest proportion of parapoliticians elected to Congress in 2002 and 2006. Many of the winners in the 2002 elections merged with other parties or recycled into new movements after the 2003 electoral reform, increasing their participation in the country's political power. This is particularly sensitive in the case of the Liberal party. The National Progressive Movement, MORAL, and a sector of Popular United Movement merged into Democratic Colombia; another part of Popular United Movement became Citizen Convergence; Wings and Colombian Team merged into Wings-Colombian Team. The U Party and Radical Change took in other remnants. Other parties such as Liberal Opening kept the label and structure, and were successful in increasing electoral capital in spite of the investigations against many of their members. Wings-Colombian Team, Democratic Colombia, Citizen Convergence and Liberal Opening grew or maintained their electoral strength for the 2006 and 2007 elections.<sup>12</sup> The only party linked with parapolitics that lost its elec-

<sup>12</sup>Source: NRA.

toral attraction was Colombia Alive. The largest parties of the *Uribista* coalition – Radical Change and U Party – experienced the most spectacular electoral success: the former won 35 congressional seats in the 2006 elections; the latter’s success is even more striking: created only in 2005, it won 50 seats in Congress. In terms of parapolitics, these parties were the most compromised: Radical Change has 28 of its Congress members investigated and U Party 25.

As a product of the media pressure and of the increasing judicial action over parapolitics, the Liberal, Conservative, Radical Change and U Parties excluded from their lists some candidates who were presumably linked to the AUC. However, there was no actual cleansing insofar as other politicians involved with the AUC were later admitted in the parties, and those expelled were soon welcomed in other *Uribista* parties (Semana, 2006). On the whole, many parties experienced a significant loss of congressional seats by the uncovering of parapolitics. According to Table 1 below, of 382 seats won in the 2002 and 2006 elections, 165 have been or are currently under investigation. The *Uribista* coalition had the highest number of investigated seats (121), followed by the Liberal Party (37). Most of the investigated seats were filled with “alternate” congress members<sup>13</sup>, and in this fashion parties managed to keep all their seats. However Wings-Colombian Team and Social Action Party lost all seats and ran out of “alternates” as they were also being investigated (which explains the negative remaining seats in the cases of Democratic Colombia and Colombia Alive below). Some departments were at the edge of losing all congressional representation: such is the case of Sucre, which by 2007 lost all native senators and all but one Representative’s seats.

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<sup>13</sup>In Colombia, elected congress members may be replaced by the non-elected candidate from the same electoral list with the second highest voting in the following cases: death, physical incapacity to exercise the congressional position, resignation, dismissal, investiture loss, criminal convictions that do not include promotion, financing or belonging to criminal organizations, committing crimes against democratic participation or against humanity.

Table 1: Parties Involved in parapolitics: Compromised and Remaining Seats (2002 and 2006 Congressional Elections)<sup>14</sup>

Party	Total Seats (2002)	Total Seats (2006)	Total Seats (2002–2006)	Investigated Seats (2002– 2006)	Remaining non- Investigated Seats (2002– 2006)
URIBISTA COALITION PARTIES	56	165	221	121	100
Wings-Colombia Team (*)	0	5	5	5	0
Liberal Opening	5	5	10	6	4
Radical Change	9	35	44	28	16
Democratic Colombia (*)	0	5	5	7	-2
Colombia Alive (*)	0	2	2	4	-2
Citizen Convergence	8	15	18	9	9
Civic and Popular Convergence (**)	5	0	5	3	2
Social Action Party (*)	0	1	1	1	0
Conservative Party	34	47	81	33	48
U Party (*)	0	50	50	25	25
LIBERAL PARTY	84	53	137	37	100
OTHERS	14	10	24	7	17
Moral	4	1	5	1	4
Regional integration Movement	2	4	6	2	4
National Progressive Movement	2	1	3	2	1
New Huila Liberal Movement (*)	0	2	2	1	1
Popular United Movement	4	2	6	1	5
TOTAL	154	228	382	165	217

(\*) Parties created after the 2002 elections

(\*\*) Parties that ceased existing after 2002 elections or merged with other parties

The 2009 political reform established that political parties with members investigated for colluding with criminal actors can no longer make replacements with “alternates”, and consequently parties will be punished with the so-called “empty seats”, that is by having to leave seats vacant. To date there are five vacant seats in the Colombian Congress (U Party 3, Radical Change 1 and Liberal Party 1).

<sup>14</sup> Author’s calculations based on the NRA, Supreme Court of Justice and Attorney General’s Office information. Updated: June 2013.

*The capture of local office*

Parapolitics was not exclusive to the national legislature. Collusion was also endemic amongst local elected officials. AUC commanders supported candidates to governor's offices, mayoralties, town councils and departmental assemblies of parapoliticians elected in Congress; in other cases they made their front men elected. In many cases, the relationship between paramilitaries and local office was instrumental, solely related to the predation of local budgets and contracts. But in many other cases, the control over local office was part of the strategies of co-governance of paramilitaries that sought to coherently scale from the micro to the national level. As stated by Urabá commander "El Aleman": "the strategy was first reaching mayoralties, town councils which are, say, the base of democracy. Second, reaching Departmental Assemblies, House of Representatives and Senate, and in one way or another, supporting presidential candidates" (VerdadAbierta, 2009b).

In other regions, the strategy worked slightly differently. By winning congressional seats for supported candidates in 2002, the AUC significantly determined the candidates for 2003 local elections of departmental, mayors, town councillors, and departmental deputies from the same political parties, and largely controlled appointments to office. For the 2003 elections, 251 mayors were elected under the labels of Colombia Alive, Yes Colombia, Civic Popular Convergence, Popular Integration Movement, United Popular Movement, Wings, Moral, Democratic Colombia, Liberal Opening, Citizen Convergence, Colombian Team, National Movement and Conservative Progress Movement. On the aggregate, these movements won almost 4,000 town councils' seats. The Liberal party won 231 mayoralties and the Conservative party 160. As for the parties created for 2006 congressional elections, Radical Change won 3 departmental administrations and 112 mayoralties; the U Party won elections for 7 departmental administrations, 123 mayoralties and 59 departmental deputies.<sup>15</sup> It is noteworthy however that not all these elected officials were involved in parapolitics; but the fact of the proven involvement of their parties and of many fellow congress members, suggests that an important share of these local elections had some kind of paramilitary interference, at least in regions in which the AUC exerted full control.

For the 2003 local elections paramilitaries used similar patterns to those of 2002 congressional elections in many regions: they created "electoral districts" (clusters of 3 or more municipalities linked by electoral fraud chains and other electoral offences), supported unopposed

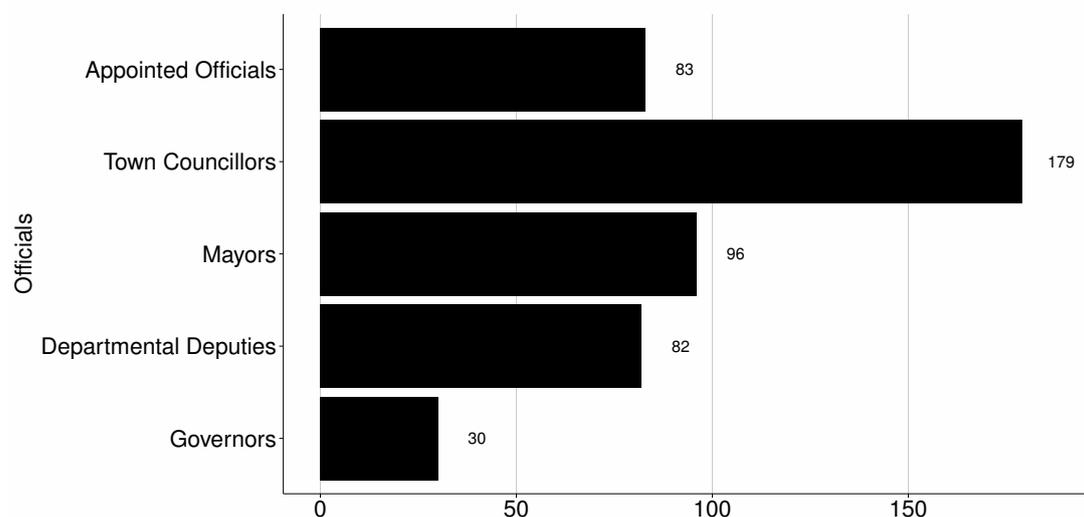
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<sup>15</sup>Source: NRA.

candidates<sup>16</sup>, participated in electoral fraud, and assassinated candidates. The Federation of Colombian Municipalities reported restrictions in campaigns in 200 municipalities, 22 municipalities with single candidates in Antioquia, Córdoba, Sucre, Magdalena, Meta, Guajira, Chocó and NDS, and the resignation of 87 candidates for departmental governors, departmental deputies, mayors and town councillors who had been threatened by the paramilitaries.

To date, 470 elected and appointed local officials have been linked to parapolitics cases, as shown in Figure 3 below. Except for the case of a former governor of Sucre<sup>17</sup>, all cases are strictly related to corruption in public contracting and electoral fraud in alliance with the AUC.

Figure 4: Elected and Appointed Local Officials Involved in Parapolitics (2003–2007)



Source: AGO. Updated: August 2013

<sup>16</sup>Magdalena department’s governor Trino Luna was elected in 2003 as the Colombia Viva candidate after running unopposed. All other candidates quit, citing threats from the AUC. Cesar department also had a single gubernatorial candidate in 2003, Hernando Molina. His two opponents quit also under AUC threats.

<sup>17</sup>Salvador Arana, elected in 2003, was found guilty of the assassination of El Roble municipality’s mayor, in 2003, and convicted to 40 years of imprisonment.

## THE BALANCE OF PARAPOLITICS

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### THE INVESTIGATION OF PARAPOLITICS

The investigation of parapolitics has been a particularly complex process. When the SCJ started investigating the links between politicians and paramilitaries in 2006, AUC's demobilized members were already being prosecuted under the framework of the Justice and Peace Law (JPL). This cross-judicial process has proved extremely difficult. To date, the judicial system has opened over 600 investigations against congress members and elected and appointed officials, which constitutes a very impressive advance given the structural weakness of the Colombian judicial apparatus. Nevertheless, according to the AGO in the framework of the JPL, demobilized paramilitaries and victims have contributed enough information to open 11,179 investigations against 1,124 politicians, 1,023 militaries and policemen, 393 public officials, and 10,329 private persons – including entrepreneurs – and paramilitaries as possible participants in the phenomenon (VerdadAbierta, 2012). But besides the magnitude of information that would make the judicial system collapse, there are also problems of scarcity of valuable information. On the one hand, to date not a single politician has voluntarily confessed or cooperated with the justice administration. A common feature is the systematic denial of the alliances with paramilitaries. On the other hand, several AUC top commanders were extradited to the U.S. in 2008 under charges of drug trafficking and money laundering, a situation that superposed an additional and extra-territorial jurisdiction that has further complicated the investigations. Peace and Justice Attorneys have experienced innumerable difficulties in advancing in the investigations when AUC warlords are imprisoned in American jails: the PJJ is not a U.S. priority, and extradited warlords are being prosecuted for drug trafficking but not for crimes against humanity or for parapolitics.

The political front during the Uribe administration was not helpful either as the investigations jeopardised its coalition in Congress. All congress members claimed that the SCJ launched a strategy for undermining the Uribe administration's legitimacy (Semana, 2006a), a political ruse that would have not had any effect if vastly popular President Uribe would

have not admitted these arguments and used them against the media and the SCJ. Despite continuous verbal attacks, the Court's investigations continued and congress members opted for diverse strategies as fleeing the country<sup>1</sup>, resigning to the seat and waiving jurisdiction in order to be prosecuted by the AGO and not by the SCJ.<sup>2</sup> President Uribe's attitude vis-à-vis the phenomenon was protective. Some of the involved were appointed in the Foreign Service<sup>3</sup> and others were publicly supported.<sup>4</sup> The government, strongly backed by its congressional coalition, was active in promoting – with little success – mechanisms for circumventing the judicial action in the parapolitics cases. Governmental efforts included attempts to change some definitions of types of crimes and turning them into non-bailable offences (El Tiempo, 2007). The government also frustrated a legislative project that sought to establish norms of political responsibility of parties that endorsed politicians involved with organized crime (El Espectador, 2006; Semana, 2008). Likewise, the government proposed removing the competence of investigating Congress members from the SCJ.

In spite of difficulties – reflected in 74 cases that have not progressed from the preliminary stage – the judicial system has proved independent and efficient in punishing parapolitics: to date 55 Congress members have been convicted, 18 are being under formal investigation and trial, and there have been very few acquittals and closures.

Consistent with the analysis of Chapter 2, the length of convictions issued by the judiciary reveals different levels of involvement of politicians. The collusive behaviour varied from occasional assistance to meetings with paramilitaries; protection of electoral enterprises and electoral fraud; and conspiracy to commit crimes. It is however noteworthy that there is not a single investigation that went beyond preliminary stage in which collusion was the outcome of fear or threats. Of a total of 55 convictions 18 politicians were convicted to less than 5 years of prison (34%), 34 have been sentenced between 5 and 10 years of prison (64%) and

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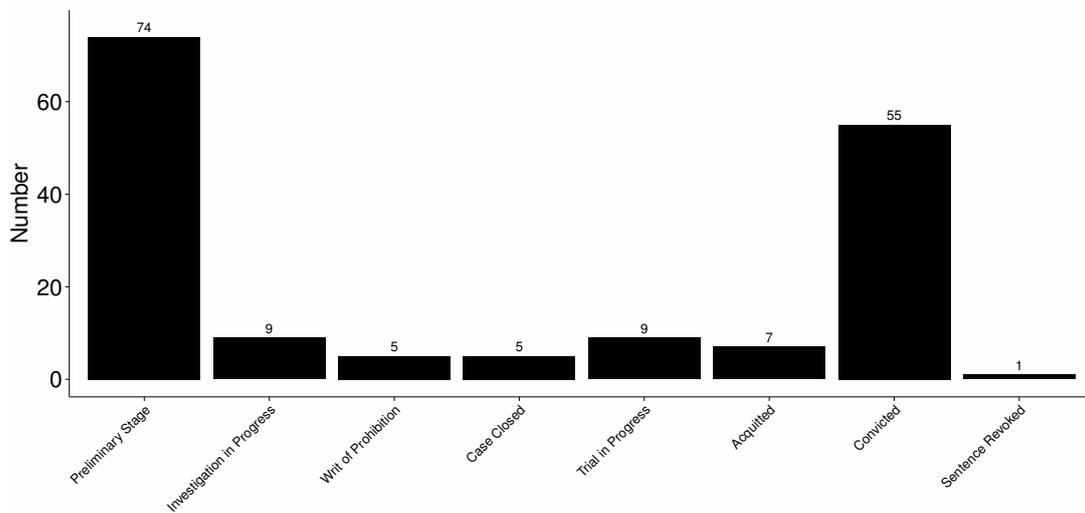
<sup>1</sup>The former governor of Sucre Salvador Arana left the country in 2006 and Senator Mario Uribe, President Uribe's cousin, tried to obtain political asylum at the Costa Rican embassy.

<sup>2</sup>This strategy was massively used by parapolitics: using the GAO allows fragmenting the investigation insofar as the latter accuses and a judge decides, and allows for appeal and a second instance. Under the SCJ's jurisdiction the Courtroom for Criminal Affairs (*Sala Penal*), in plenary, investigates and decides, and there is no appealing or second instance. Fifty-three out of 165 investigated congress members opted for AGO's jurisdiction. Nevertheless, in 2009 the SCJ announced that all congressional cases could no longer be investigated by the AGO.

<sup>3</sup>The former Sucre governor, Salvador Arana was appointed as ambassador to Chile whereas former DAS director Jorge Noguera was appointed as consul in Milan. However given the course of criminal investigations, the politicians resigned and returned to Colombia.

<sup>4</sup>This is the case of the Colombian Army General Rito Alejo del Rio who was investigated and convicted for colluding with paramilitary groups in the Urabá region (Antioquia) and held responsible for several massacres of civilians by the time when president Uribe was Antioquia's department governor (mid 1990s), and that of Jorge Noguera Cotes, former Secret Service director, who is currently under prosecution for the large-scale penetration of the AUC in the institution.

Figure 5: Number of Congress Members Involved by Judicial Stage



Author's calculations based on the SCJ and AGO's information. Updated: August 2010.

only one congress member received a sentence of more than 10 years, which is the case of Senator Alvaro García from Sucre department who was sentenced to 40 years of prison, the highest conviction in the Colombian criminal system, for the massacre of 15 peasants and the assassination of an electoral witness. In this specific case it was proved that the AUC was organic to the García House, which used terror in order to consolidate its position.

Although most of the cases against local elected officials are still in preliminary stage, the case of Sucre's former governor Salvador Arana is noteworthy. Besides charges of formation of a paramilitary group and corruption he was found guilty of the 2003 assassination of an elected Mayor. The cases of Senator García and Governor Arana are a landmark insofar as for the first time in Colombian judicial history, politicians have been sentenced under charges of crimes against humanity according to international standards.

Besides the fact that parapolitics is by far the greatest scandal of political corruption in Colombian history, the phenomenon has also had profound implications for human rights, both in the domestic and international spheres. Human rights organizations entirely dedicated many of their Colombian reports to this issue (AI, 2008; HRW, 2008). The prosecutor of the International Court of Justice has visited the country on two occasions and although he recognized the efforts of the Colombian judicial system, he expressed deep concerns about the restricted scope of the Justice and Peace Law as it only provides for the investigation of

members of the AUC but is not aimed at punishing and putting an end to the paramilitary phenomenon as a whole, that is, including its economic and political support. He also stressed his worries about the potential collapse of the Justice and Peace jurisdiction because of the overwhelming number of cases that are being investigated (El Espectador, 2008).

THE DEMOBILIZATION PROCESS AND THE TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE SYSTEM: THE REWARDS OF PARAPOLITICS

As indicated above, although not all AUC warlords had a strong political drive, the fact is that in all but a few cases warlords sought to demobilize and legalize their judicial situation regarding committed crimes and illicit wealth. The building of innumerable alliances with politicians not only served the purpose of amassing incredible wealth with which, among other things, AUC commanders bought politicians via campaign financing, but also – and most importantly – paved the road that facilitated their reintegration into civilian life.

*Eliminating political status as a condition for signing peace agreements*

In the early 2000s the existing legal framework only authorized the national government to sign peace agreements with illegal armed actors that had previously been granted political status. It was under that framework where many Colombian guerrillas demobilized in the 1990s or agreed to cease fires and peace talks. But it was also the framework under which paramilitaries were systematically excluded from peace talks. Although it was not possible to grant political status to paramilitaries, Law 782 of 2002, one of the first moves by President Uribe's administration with large congressional support, eliminated political status as *sine qua non* condition for negotiating peace agreements. The new legal framework made the AUC eligible for peace negotiations, a matter that completely transformed their legal perspective. Under the new conditions, paramilitaries could demobilize avoiding regular judicial procedures and could be granted pardon, conditional suspension of judicial sentences, as well as the termination of previous judicial procedures, among other benefits.

*Demobilization and disarmament*

Of 40 AUC structures, 35 collectively demobilized between November 2003 and August 2006. Metro Bloc (Medellín), Capital Front (Bogotá), Counterinsurgent Wayúu Front (Guajira), Peasant Self-Defence of Casanare (Casanare) and Guavilá Heroes Bloc (Cundinamarca) did not participate in the peace process. These structures remained active either because commanders increasingly divorced from the AUC commandership (the Castaño family and Salvatore Mancuso), or because they did experience a loss of military power due to internal struggles, during which some commanders were killed. Thus, their structures lost territorial control and did not participate in the process.

Warlords created five groups in order to organize the demobilisation process of combatants: Peasant Self-Defence of Córdoba and Urabá (PSDCU) with 19 structures; Central Bolívar Bloc (CBB) with 8 structures, Peasant Self-Defence of Magdalena Medio (PSDMM) with 3, Eastern Alliance (EA) with 2, Independent Structures (IE) with 2; and Security Rings (SR), one structure created for providing security to commanders during the negotiation and demobilization process.

During its military peak (1998–2002) the AUC became one of the biggest and best-armed non-state actors in the world. Flush with AR-15 assault rifles, M60 machine guns and Galil rifles, the AUC also amassed ammunition, a feature consistent with its poor fire discipline.<sup>5</sup> The dismantling of 35 paramilitary structures signified the demobilization of 31,671 armed personnel, but although many paramilitaries were not AUC rank members and performed as logistics, financial and political support, according to the OAS, the rate of arms handed over to the government during the demobilization process was low: 0.58 for each demobilized member (a total of 18,051 weapon). During the process 30% of the weapons handed were in poor condition or unusable according to the Inter-institutional Group of Anti-Terrorist Analysis, and national authorities found several coves with brand new arms bought on the black market or imported with forged permits of the national military industry.<sup>6</sup> The fears of re-armament were confirmed after 2006: several paramilitary structures re-emerged and started to operate in many a region, a matter that still continues to be a main security concern in the country.

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<sup>5</sup>According to forensic reports, most paramilitaries' victims have been found dead with over 15 gunshot wounds each on average. Source: National Institute of Forensic Sciences.

<sup>6</sup>It has been established that several middle-rank military officers participated in the *Indumil* fraud. According to the National Police almost all guns had manufacture serial numbers that corresponded to year 2003. Most of the arms found were of Bulgarian, Romanian, Hungarian, Chinese, North Korean and German origin.

*Justice and Peace Law (JPL)*

The JPL (Law 975 of 2005) was enacted as a transitional justice instrument for the AUC. The law -widely criticized by the domestic and international opinion for its lenient terms – was by far the greatest benefit obtained by paramilitaries through their alliances with politicians. “All those electorally supported by the AUC without exception voted for the JPL in Congress” (Interview, Pardo, 2009).

The law created a special investigative jurisdiction and established alternative sentences of between five and eight years for all crimes committed before the demobilization, for which demobilized individuals had to confess crimes and hand in personal assets for a victims reparation fund. Among the many controversies the enactment of the law, the most polemic point was that the JPL did not establish any difference between crimes against humanity and other less severe offences, completely disregarding the universal principles of proportionality, necessity and reasonability. In 2006, the Constitutional Court ruled on the JPL and settled to a considerable extent the existing controversies by introducing a better balance between benefits for former combatants and the victims’ rights to truth, justice and reparation.<sup>7</sup>

As indicated above, the magnitude of the information collected by the judicial system since the JPL was enacted exceeds by far its capacity for investigating, prosecuting and convicting paramilitaries. According to the AGO, ex-combatants have confessed 52,000 crimes and the Justice and Peace system has recognized 300,000 people as victims of paramilitary violence. However, the Justice and Peace jurisdiction has only been capable of convicting 14 paramilitaries since 2005. Although the Constitutional Court established that all paramilitaries’ assets had to be handed in for compensating victims, the frontmen chains are so complex that cataloguing assets has proved extremely difficult: there are only 11 in process of handing in assets for the reparation fund.

There is a large portion of ex-combatants who did not join the Justice and Peace system, including some commanders. AUC members not involved in crimes against humanity were automatically freed under the JPL terms, and joined the National Reintegration Agency pro-

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<sup>7</sup>After the Court’s revision of the JPL, ex-combatants risk losing all JPL benefits if they do not confess all crimes, hand in all ill-gotten assets and pay reparations to victims, and they are liable for all crimes committed by their blocs. The ruling holds them liable for victim reparations beyond the first degree of kinship directly affected by their illegal group’s action. It also reiterates the state’s responsibility to ensure reparations if the ex-combatants’ assets are insufficient, requires that victims have full access to information throughout the legal process and gives judicial authorities a longer period to investigate and verify a confession (CC-C/370, 2006).

grammes, which provide education and subsidies for ex-combatants. Others, about 12,000 according to the National Police, joined re-emerging structures.

In the words of a member of the National Reparation and Reconciliation Commission, “the general balance [of JPL] is a good dose of truth, a little reparation and almost no justice at all”.

## THE BREACH OF TRUST AND EXTRADITION: THE REVERSAL OF PARAPOLITICS

Although parapolitics significantly rewarded paramilitaries, warlords also experienced serious lowering of their expectations. After the legislative triumph of the PJJL, the Constitutional Court’s ruling on the JPL constituted a reversal and former AUC commanders publicly complained in 2006 claiming a breach in governmental compromises and lack of legal security (Semana, 2006b).

At the point of the ruling, the alarms of paramilitary reactivation and of former AUC warlords’ relapsing in criminal activities were already triggered, and President Uribe confined the AUC commandship in high-security prisons. Simultaneously, the SCJ had started investigating parapolitics cases, and as indicated above, the common strategy of politicians on trial was the systematic denial of the linkages with the AUC, a strategy that triggered paramilitaries’ confessions against their once allies.

*Extradition*

Before the enactment of Law 782 of 2002, paramilitary commanders expected being granted political status not only to engage in peace negotiations with the national government but also to avoid the U.S. judicial system, since in Colombia extradition does not apply to political crimes, and in this vein drug trafficking would be considered as an offence connected to sedition (Interview, Ramón\*, 2009). However, as mentioned, it was not possible granting political status to the AUC. “The demobilization process was nothing but a government’s sham in order to obtain resources from the international cooperation. There were too many lies. We commanders gave up everything because they [the government] said there would be no extradition. Extradition was always the grey cloud over the peace process; a constant cause of distrust and tensions during the process” (Interview, Ramón\*, 2009).

In May 2008, arguing that ex-AUC commanders continued committing crimes from jail, President Uribe took the sudden decision of extraditing fourteen AUC commanders to the U.S.<sup>8</sup> wanted by Federal Courts under drug trafficking and money laundering charges. The Executive's decision was widely criticized as it severely harmed the process of truth and reparation. The then Attorney General declared that the institution "did not find elements that support the extradition of AUC commanders" (Herald, 2009). A representative of the Victims of Paramilitary Violence Committee wrote after meeting Mancuso in his U.S. prison: "I confirmed that the extradition of the paramilitary leadership was deeply related to the imminence of the most decisive confessions which would involve the President's political, military and economic allies." (Prensa Rural, 2009). Mancuso stated month later that "along with me, President Uribe extradited the truth".<sup>9</sup> AUC commander Carlos Castaño's words before his death were prophetic: "the destruction of the *Autodefensas* lies on its narco-feudalization, and it will be impossible for the government to distinguish drug traffickers from real warriors [...] sooner or later the commandship will end up being accountable in U.S. courts" (Aranguren, 2001).

## WHAT CAME NEXT?

*Re-emerging structures: the recycling of the AUC?*

After 2006 new paramilitary structures – now called BACRIM (for *Bandas Criminales* – Criminal Gangs) emerged, organized under different labels – *Águilas Negras*, *Los Rastrojos* and *Los Urabeños* – and are active in approximately 200 municipalities characterized by coca/cocaine economies. The Uribe administration claimed these groups were disconnected from the AUC whereas some NGOs and analysts argued that re-emerging structures proved the resilience of the AUC (ICG, 2007; MAPP-OEA, 2007; Restrepo, 2008) The National Reparation and Reconciliation Commission made a thorough analysis and found many nuances and variations within the phenomenon; it established a distinction between emergent, re-armed and dissident structures (CNRR, 2007). According to the report, the fact that some mid-ranking ex-AUC members are in charge of these structures does not necessarily imply that these new groups are a simple extension of the AUC. Dissident structures correspond to those AUC

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<sup>8</sup>Salvatore Mancuso, "Don Berna", "HH", "Cuco", "Jorge 40", "Gordo Lindo", "El Tuso", "Pablo Sevillano", "El Patrón", "El Burro", "Diego", "El Cabezón", "El Viejo", and "Macaco".

<sup>9</sup>Letter from Salvatore Mancuso to Liberal Senator Piedad Córdoba (See: La Silla Vacía, 2009)

structures that did not demobilize. Re-armed structures reflect the fragmentation of an organization that lost its structure and the “diaspora” of some demobilized paramilitaries. The emergent structures reflect the underlying crimes exploited and protected by the AUC before the demobilization process and the need of filling the vacuum left by demobilization. The report considered that in all cases drug trafficking is a common – and only – objective. The Commission claims the recycling of specialists in the use of violence can be either understood as a transitional characteristic common in demobilization processes, or alternatively as a new stage of collective violence, but the report clearly dismisses any continuity.

Two basic differences between this new paramilitary generation and the AUC phenomenon confirm the Commission’s approach. The first and most important one is related to the political dimension. Authors like C. López and Sevillano (2009) have contested the political influence of these emerging structures, and to date there is not a single piece of evidence that demonstrates political aspirations. Although demobilized AUC warlords continued to control drug trafficking activities from jail, the political project and muscle exhibited by the organization in its active years were no longer evident in subsequent electoral processes. The second difference relates to the military sphere. The new structures lack the military organization and command lines of the AUC, and do not perform under the basic strategic and tactical military principles. They rather oscillate between common delinquency and organized crime. It is therefore probable that the judicial system’s proactivity in investigating and prosecuting parapolitics prevented this new generation of criminals to connect with politicians and vice-versa. BACRIM are instead expressions of the criminal inertia of almost three decades of paramilitarism in varying combinations with drug trafficking and therefore explain the continuity of violence even after other causal triggers had disappeared (Pizarro, 2004). In many Colombian cities crime rates significantly increased again since 2007, and this rise is deeply related to these new structures. This was the case of Medellín, where the homicide rate increased by 43% between 2008 and 2009, of which 68% corresponds to settling of scores, territorial disputes and contract enforcement.

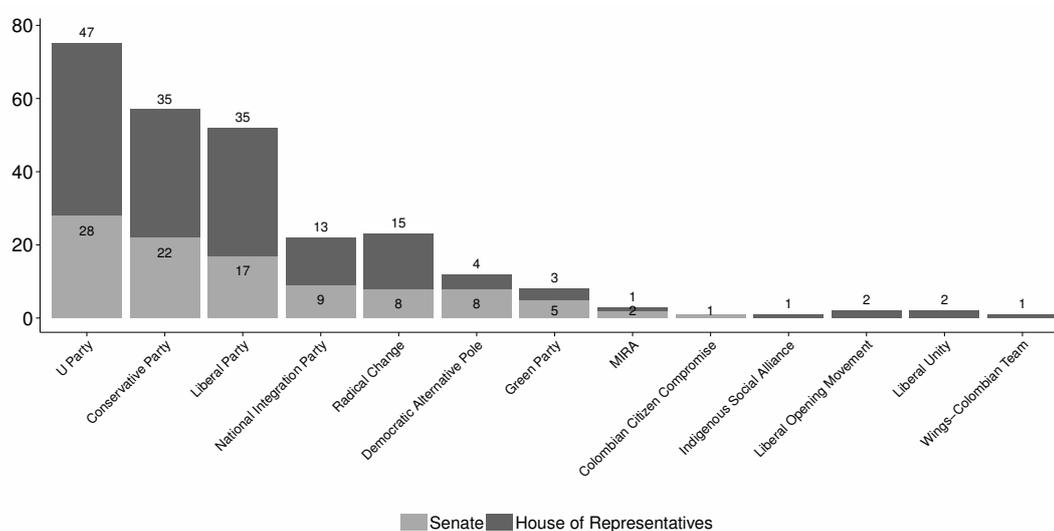
*The survival of parapoliticians by the means of intermediaries*

The 2010 Congressional elections proved that despite the effects of the paramilitary demobilization on the electoral processes, elections might be still vulnerable to infiltration by illegal actors. Compared with the 2002 and 2006 elections, the elections of 2010 showed a decrease

of 27% in electoral violence – the least violent of the last 20 years – but cash votes increased (Semana, 2010), a matter that shows the risks of compromising the integrity of campaign financing. The infiltration of drug money was reported in Valle department.

Although electoral manipulation did not constitute a risk factor in 2010, parapoliticians proved being resilient. “There are two ways in which they [parapoliticians] seek to reproduce their influence. The first one is through the re-launching of campaigns of those who have not yet reached a serious judicial stage. The second one is the resort to family members and allies as political frontmen” (López, interview, 2009). Many parapoliticians used the latter approach through the creation of two new parties. The first one was the National Democratic Alliance that reincarnated Citizen Convergence, which had disappeared because of parapolitics. However, since it could not meet the 2% representation threshold established by the law, its members along with the remains of Democratic Colombia founded the National Integration Party, which ran 100 candidates for congressional elections. The party obtained almost one million votes and won 22 congressional seats, of which 14 belonged to direct heirs of parapoliticians: nieces, brothers, sisters, sons, daughters, wives or simply frontmen. The Liberal and U parties recycled 4 parapoliticians in the same fashion.

Figure 6: 2010 Congressional Elections: Seats Obtained by Party



Source: RNEC

As mentioned, BACRIM do not seem to have the required political drive as the AUC to seize the local state and control electoral processes, and seems more centred in protecting the illicit trade of drugs and enforcing its contracts. Notwithstanding the AUC’s demobilization,

the vast and complex power structure of drug trafficking and its relationship with politics, the economy and society has the enormous potential of mutating and adapting to new circumstances. On the one hand machine politics continue to be the means through which specific subnational authoritarian regimes reproduce and through which the linkages between the regions and the centre are built. On the other hand, drug trafficking is still strong. “Organized crime has a natural tendency to seek representation. Unlike the AUC, the emerging groups lack a national military and political coordination; however they are still the same mafias; they are the heirs of the likes of ‘Don Berna’ and ‘Macaco’ and although they are still very young they can always find the way” (Interview, Pardo, 2009). In a similar vein journalist Claudia Lopez stressed that the 2010 congressional elections made clear that “political structures built upon thousands of assassinated and dispossessed Colombians are still being reproduced. After everything they have achieved in terms of political success it is hard to believe that the interests of a political power obtained illegally and illegitimately will not survive. The renewal of alliances with paramilitaries and drugtraffickers is just a matter of time” (Interview, C. López, 2010).

THE AUTHORITARIAN SUBNATIONAL STATE: A GENERAL  
BACKGROUND FOR THE CASE OF SUCRE

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*“The hens on the top crap on the hens on the bottom”*<sup>1</sup>

Sucre is perhaps one of the most striking cases of parapolitics in the country. The department, located in the Caribbean region, fits Losada’s *hegemonic* type (2006) and represents a case in which despite the relevance of greed, the logic of politics prevailed over the logic of market. With some of the highest levels of proved alliances between politicians and warlords and a large spectrum of state capture, parapolitics followed a distinct process of political economy based on a consociational arrangement of traditional politicians and local warlords that sought to reproduce, through violence, land dispossession and drug trafficking, a regressive political and social status quo built in Sucre for over a century, as well as pre-modern forms of accumulation based on rents generated from rural land. Why and to what purpose did the local establishment and paramilitary groups collude in Sucre? Why and how did all these consequences unfold?

In order to answer these questions, this chapter offers a general background of Sucre that accounts for the subnational historical interaction of the five key dimensions discussed in Chapter 2, which shaped the specific path of parapolitics found in this research. I address Sucre’s late and precarious process of territorial and social integration to the central state bureaucracy and the impossibility of the state to overcome the competition of subnational Liberal “houses” that have not promoted territorial integration but instead fostered fragmentation, building an authoritarian enclave traditionally resistant to democratizing and modernizing reforms, and have used patronage and office in personalized systems of loyalty and rewards. In this context society has been vertically integrated via patron-client ties that evolved from classic dyadic clientelist relationships to the rise of machine politics.

I also discuss the economic dimension, which also reveals Sucre’s weakness, and the role and value of land in the reproduction and maintenance of traditional powers. Sucre’s integra-

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<sup>1</sup>Interview, Ramón\*, 2009

tion to markets has been feeble, a situation significantly explained by pre-modern forms of accumulation mainly based upon rents on latifundia. The connection between these forms of economic accumulation and the abovementioned subnational power system, as explained below, has provided few incentives for Sucre's rural rich to diversify and make the department's rural economy. The consolidation of the landholding status under the latifundia model generated an inequality gap, which was at the root of the highest levels of struggles over land ownership in Colombia between rural rich – in many cases politicians – and landless peasant communities.

Regarding democratizing reforms, I show that the poorly regulated reforms indeed filtered Sucre's subnational regime but were seized by politicians and warring actors alike in order to feed personal and/or organizational agendas. Reforms made public resources particularly vulnerable to corrupt practices of politicians who predated public funds to maintain machines running and cash-voting practices alive, and in this fashion they have been successful in overcoming the competition of other political actors. Regarding the guerrillas and paramilitaries, these groups have also taken advantage of reforms and through armed clientelist practices have been able to influence local governance and taken over public finances via contract diversion. In the case of *Autodefensas*, armed clientelism facilitated paramilitary access to local power structures.

I additionally examine the dynamics of the internal conflict in Sucre. I discuss how the intensification of guerrilla warfare in *Sucreneño* territory from the 1980s made the subnational establishment react against kidnapping and extortion by resorting to the privatization of public security via the formation of paramilitaries, and how the use of the AUC's violent muscle contributed to the maintenance of the latifundium structure and political status quo. The local establishment financed, positioned and even commanded several AUC structures, creating a distinct form of parapolitics in which the *Autodefensas* were incorporated into a ruling coalition. The inflexibility of the political regime in interaction with the intensification of the internal conflict resulted in a frightened and disengaged society, unable to counteract the effects of clientelism, corruption and violence, which have constituted the main "rents of political power" in Sucre (J. Sánchez, 2002). Political competition, the emergency of independent, alternative or Left-wing politics have been pushed out of the political landscape.

Concerning the endogenous connection of the internal conflict with drug trafficking at the subnational level, despite the significant scale of cocaine trafficking from Sucre's coastal areas over the last three decades, I emphasise that the connection was not as strong as in other cases in which, unlike Sucre, local criminal structures existed prior to the AUC's emergence, coca

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crops were developed, and robust legal economies permitted large-scale money laundering activities.

Finally I discuss the dramatic levels of fragmentation, de-institutionalization and criminalization of the major political parties, mainly the Liberal party, and the ways in which the party system at the local level became a “system of protection”, creating room for parapolitics.

In sum, Sucre offers a case of a weak, fragmented territory with boundaries closed to the influence of a modernizing and democratizing central state, a narrow political space with stable clientele and pre-modern forms of accumulation, internal conflict dynamics that favoured the privatization of public security via paramilitarism, and political parties prone to criminalization. The interaction of these variables created a hyper-criminalized political space in which politicians and warlords governed the department and embezzled its finances for almost seven years. *Sucreño* politicians reproduced their power at the subnational and national levels and represented warlords at the congressional sphere and participated in the provision of the legal framework for demobilisation.

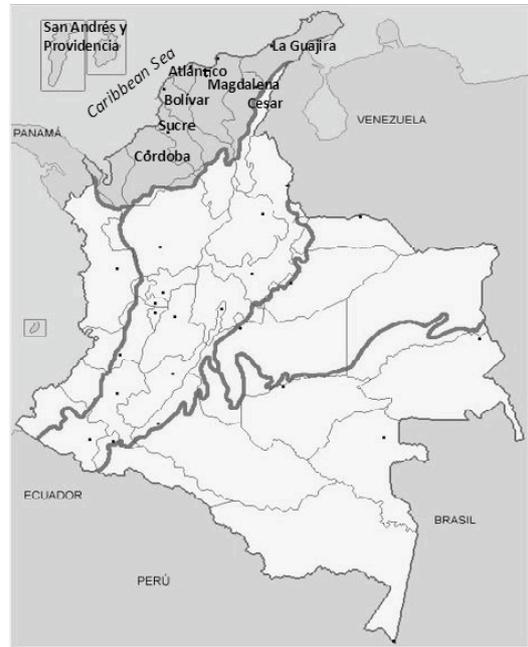
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Along with the Bolívar and Córdoba departments, Sucre is part of the so-called coastal savannah in the northwestern Caribbean region of Colombia. Until the mid-1960s, all three departments belonged to the Bolívar province<sup>2</sup> (map 3). Although the Caribbean region was progressively integrated to the state and markets throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Sucre still remains a relatively peripheral area.

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<sup>2</sup>The other province was that of Magdalena, which comprised the current territories of Atlántico, Magdalena, Cesar and la Guajira departments.

Map 3: The Caribbean Region before and after the mid-1960s

**Colombian Caribbean territory before the mid-1960s****Colombian Caribbean territory after the mid-1960s**

Mapped by the author.

Sucre consists of 26 municipalities and is divided into five natural regions: a) Montes de María, a mountainous area shared with Bolívar department, independent from the Andean mountain range. The subregion comprises the municipalities of Sincelejo, Ovejas, Chalán, Morroa and Colosó; b) a coastal area located along the Morrosquillo gulf that covers the municipalities of Coveñas, Palmitos, Tolú, Tolviejo and San Onofre; c) a central savannah region that includes Sincé, El Roble, San Pedro, Sampués, Los Palmitos, Galeras, Buenavista, Corozal and San Juan de Betulia; d) La Mojana's wetlands in the south that contains Sucre, Majagual and Guaranda; and e) the San Jorge river's wetlands that comprises San Marcos, San Benito Abad, La Unión and Caimito.

The department is a multi-ethnic space with high levels of racial mixing of indigenous, afro-Colombian, and white population, and an important community of Colombians of Syrian and Lebanese descent. Except for two urban centres of intermediate importance (the Sincelejo and Corozal conurbation), the department is semi-urban and rural. For 2011, Sucre had a projected population of 818,663 inhabitants. Sincelejo, Corozal, San Marcos and San Onofre account 51.7% of that number. The department has experienced a dramatic demographic



The Observatory of the Colombian Caribbean (OCC, 2011) revealed that Sucre's average contribution to the national GDP between 2000 and 2011 was of 0.76% and of 4.7% to that of the Caribbean region. In the period between 2006 and 2010, the Caribbean departments experimented a drop of their contribution to the national GDP: the highest is that of Sucre with 10.5 per cent in 2006. The department's per capita GDP in 2011 (USD3,002) was far below the national indicator (USD7,240).

Although the department has increased its participation in the internal markets and to a lesser extent in exports – mostly via primary products.<sup>3</sup> On the whole, its integration to markets is far from significant. Sucre has a small and barely diversified industrial sector but has high potential for agro-industrial production, micro businesses and handicrafts. Yet producers lack resources, have deficient administrative skills, and high levels of intermediation. Besides the services sector, the primary sector is central to the departmental economy. The land has been catalogued as highly productive, 74.4%, (Aguilera, 2007), a feature that provides important comparative advantages to the agricultural sector; however most of the land is dedicated to extensive stockbreeding, which leave land use well below its potential. Only 11.9% of the land is dedicated to agricultural production (NSD, 2002). Tertiary capacity is very low insofar as productive activities have little aggregate value, the generation of employment is poor, and labour mobility is limited. Investment in the department is also precarious and therefore does not generate a demand for more qualified labour. In terms of competitiveness, of 29 departments assessed by ECLAC (2012) for 2010 and 2011, Sucre was ranked 19<sup>th</sup>. In 2012 the Colombian Caribbean Observatory ranked Sincelejo penultimate of 22 cities assessed.

The department's main exports are shellfish, meat and cement<sup>4</sup>; however, apart from the illegal drugs trade, its integration into global markets is far from significant. Although it is difficult to quantify the impact of drug trafficking on the local economy, the shares of the business do not seem to have irrigated it to the extent observed in other regions, such as in the neighbouring Córdoba department. No relevant changes have been observed in variables such as urban construction, property price speculation, black market currency, and conspicuous consumption in Sucre, which constitute important barometers of the penetration of illegal money in the economy across Colombia.

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<sup>3</sup>Sucre has increased its participation in internal markets as the first producer of cassava, and also through rice and tobacco.

<sup>4</sup>The department exports meat to Venezuela, and to some Central American and Caribbean countries it has a small participation in meat exports. It also exports cement to the U.S, the Caribbean and South America. Cement production is the most important industrial process in the department but is not significant if compared to the cement industries in Bogotá and Medellín.

Sucre's structural problems regarding the generation of formal employment, along with the massive forcible displacement of peasants to urban and semi-urban centres, have significantly enlarged the informal economy over the last decades, maintaining unemployment above the national rate (OCC, 2011). Informality and low quality of employment have severely reduced the quality of life in the department. Of 24 assessed departments in 2008, Sucre was 20<sup>th</sup> in the UN Human Development Report with an index of 0.7266, similar to that of Algeria (UNDP, 2009). In 2012 the index rose to 0.775 (UNDP, 2013), yet still in the group of departments with lowest performances (Bogotá D.C. exhibits the best with 0.904). Sucre's low index has been mainly the outcome of its poor performance in income generation and distribution, and education variables.<sup>5</sup>

López H.; Núñez (2007) showed that poverty increased by 24.5% in Sucre between 1996 and 2004, and that by 2005 it became the second poorest department in Colombia, with poverty reaching 69.46% of the population and the segment of population below poverty line estimated at 22.6 per cent. According to the National Statistics Department (NSD), income poverty in Sucre was of 53% in 2011 whilst the national number was of 39.8%. Extreme poverty was of 16.2% for the same year.

While the national incidence of multidimensional poverty in 2011 was of 49% (80.1% rural and 39.1% urban), the department reached a Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) of 73.10% (91.9% rural and 62.5% urban). Compared to the national average, Sucre exhibits a high deprivation of the MPI's variables of habitat and public services, in which deprived households are double the national average. Another variable with high incidence is that of illiteracy. According to NSD, at the national level, 18.5% of households have at least a person over 15 years old in state of illiteracy in 2012. In Sucre this percentage is of 38.9%, very close to that of Chocó department, the highest in the country with 41.7%. The most dramatic MPI's variables are disaggregated as follows and compared to Bogotá D.C (lowest incidence) and Chocó (highest incidence):

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<sup>5</sup> According to the report, an average *Sucreño* has a per capita income (real) of approximately US\$918. UNDP (2008), *Informe sobre Desarrollo Humano, 2002–2007*.

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Table 2: Sucre's Deprivation Incidence by MPI Dimensions (2012)

	Low Educational Achievement		Illiteracy		Non-attendance school rate		School lag		
	Households	%	Households	%	Households	%	Households	%	
Bogotá D.C	1,931,372	42.1%	813,401	7.9%	153,465	4.6%	89,142	21.4%	413,184
Chocó	85,608	78.4%	67,102	41.7%	35,715	24.5%	20,971	44.0%	37,669
Sucre	166,540	74.8%	124,655	38.6%	64,223	8.7%	14,488	35.1%	58,373
National	10,572,280	62.2%	6,572,469	18.5%	1,952,006	8.9%	937,664	27.8%	2,937,927
	Barriers to accessing child-care services		Child labour		High economic dependency rate		Informal employment		
	Households	%	Households	%	Households	%	Households	%	
Bogotá D.C	1,931,372	9.2%	177,519	2.6%	49,456	27.4%	529,573	77.2%	1,490,256
Chocó	85,608	35.2%	30,127	6.8%	5,838	68.0%	58,204	97.4%	83,364
Sucre	166,540	22.7%	37,822	3.3%	5,528	61.5%	102,457	96.9%	161,360
National	10,572,280	15.8%	1,669,230	3.9%	417,426	42.4%	4,482,668	86.8%	9,180,117
	Without health insurance		Barriers to accessing health services		No access to improved water sources		Inadequate exc-reta disposal		
	Households	%	Households	%	Households	%	Households	%	
Bogotá D.C	1,931,372	21.9%	422,885	4.3%	82,928	1.5%	28,110	2.0%	38,468
Chocó	85,608	58.6%	50,137	19.4%	16,630	79.6%	68,121	79.4%	67,946
Sucre	166,540	41.3%	68,862	5.9%	9,841	27.2%	45,363	40.3%	67,125
National	10,572,280	29.6%	3,125,839	6.3%	664,276	17.2%	1,817,629	17.0%	1,794,807
	Inadequate flooring		Inadequate walls		Overcrowding				
	Households	%	Households	%	Households	%			
Bogotá D.C	1,931,372	0.7%	13,014	0.8%	15,610	14.1%	272,703		
Chocó	85,608	6.1%	5,184	27.6%	23,640	22.7%	19,454		
Sucre	166,540	36.8%	61,209	17.2%	28,685	34.9%	58,127		
National	10,572,280	10.0%	1,059,478	4.8%	510,791	19.5%	2,065,159		

Source: NSD (2013).

Regarding its fiscal situation, Sucre is heavily reliant on central government transfers and exhibits a poor capacity in generating local revenues and attracting investment. Although Sucre's tax revenue has increased by 51.86% and non-tax revenues by 34% between 2008 and 2011, according to the Central Bank, the department's fiscal autonomy is at 24%, significantly below the national average (35%), with a dependency on transfers of 71%, which reflects the relative stagnation of productive activities and the low income of the majority of the population.

The somewhat improving yet still discouraging situation of Sucre is the result of more than a century of political and economic fragmentation, and mismanagement. Clientelism, social and political exclusion, corruption and collective violence all contribute to this departmental backwardness, and explain to a considerable extent the vulnerability of the state and society to criminal powers.

#### STATE FORMATION, CREATION OF POLITICAL PARTIES AND THE NATURE OF EARLY POLITICS IN SUCRE

Sucre's trend of political economy can be examined within a larger context, which is that of the Caribbean region. The region exhibits an uneven process of state formation in which urban centres in Atlántico, Magdalena and Bolívar departments were relatively successfully modernized and integrated to the state and markets, mainly through international trade, while the rest of the territory remained peripheral in this process of incorporation. In this context, Sucre – peripheral in its urban and rural dimensions- experienced a two-fold process of exclusion, both from the regional and national integration processes. On the one hand, as shown in Map 3, Sucre belonged to Bolívar department until 1966. Before that, its distant location from Cartagena – Bolívar's capital and regional political centre – and the precarious road system significantly contributed to the marginalization of Sucre, a matter that can be observed in other parts of the Caribbean region before the creation of new departments.

On the other hand, although geographic fragmentation partially explains the isolation of peripheral areas from the central state, the long-term political exclusion of the Caribbean region from the centre constituted the main marginalizing factor. According to Álvarez (2004), between the mid-19<sup>th</sup> and the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century Colombia was governed by the spirit of the conservative 1886 Constitution, which embodied a confessional and centralist political project, closed to regional participation in the decision-making processes. None of the constitutional reforms that took place during that period sought to integrate the regions to national development, creating a divorce between politicians' formal discourse at the centre and concrete political practices at the subnational level. In this context, the latter was left untouched in the forms of traditional society and in the reproduction of unequal opportunities. González (1977) stresses that this divorce or fragmentation allowed semi-institutionalized subnational parties' factions to create strong local political federations and fed clientelist practices in the Caribbean region.

In a framework of isolation, the Caribbean region built a distinct political culture that privileged individualistic and utilitarian ways of consolidating power spaces as platforms for feeding personal interests (Álvarez, 2004). In a similar fashion to that of southern Italian politics, subnational powers took advantage of the primitive character of electoral dynamics, and used universal suffrage at the service of authoritarian principles of rule and the entrenchment of clientelist practices. The main role of political parties was the formation and selection of cadres and not the channelling the interests and needs of electorate, reducing political action to the electoral activity (Leal & Dávila, 1990). Múnera (1996) argues that in this context the weak Colombian Andean centre created an image of the Caribbean as a cultural frontier and as an impenetrable space lacking social order. This hegemonic discourse, based upon the primeval dichotomy between the coast and the highlands, still remains a fundamental divide. For Steiner (1994) and Roldán (1998, 2002) this construction has been nothing but the expression of a national power incapable of penetrating peripheral areas, of imposing institutional order and political discipline, as well as of overcoming political competition during the 19<sup>th</sup> century and part of the 20<sup>th</sup>. In the absence of state capacity to integrate these territories into its networks, the Liberal and Conservative parties, – but mainly the former – played a central role in the incorporation process. Parties linked the relations of interdependence between subnational elites with their respective clientele in the context of freemasonry and guilds (J. Jaramillo, 1976; Loaiza, 2007; Morales, 2004) as well as the *hacienda* structure (Guillén Martínez, 1986).

In 19<sup>th</sup> century Colombia, partisan cohesion at the national level was weak insofar as the Liberal and Conservative corporations were endemically plagued by factionalism and defection of splinter groups (Leal & Dávila, 1990). This situation generated successive Liberal–Conservative civil wars strongly anchored to subnational cleavages. Nevertheless, factionalism prevented total war and the breakdown of the system – a matter that could also be observed during the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century *La Violencia* - and was popular without mass disaffection because of the reliance on patron–client ties as the dominant ruler–ruled nexus. National parties sought to penetrate the local level very early in the aftermath of the independence from the Spanish crown, during the so-called “agrarian period”, when the dyadic relations were stronger than later in the stages of urban growth and industrialization; but as discussed before, the model of penetration was permanently challenged in peripheral Colombia by one of territorial diffusion. The Liberal party – dominant in Caribbean territory – was then built in a bottom-up fashion in which local structures progressively articulated to the national level.

This process created a semi-institutionalized structure with deep internal fractures, as discussed below.

The Liberal origins in the region can be mainly explained by the pioneering support of regional elites to the ban of the slave trade (D. Jaramillo, 2005)<sup>6</sup> and the embracing of the ideals of free trade and markets by Caribbean entrepreneurs who strongly opposed protectionist conservative principles (Álvarez, 2004). The Caribbean urban centres of Barranquilla, Santa Marta and Cartagena were some of the most important Colombian cities during the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries insofar as all international trade activities took place through these cities' ports. Nevertheless, Caribbean Liberalism evolved into a quite atypical ideology, a matter that is significantly explained by the rise of a particular breed of freemasonry. As in other Western contexts, freemasonry was a key instrument for the diffusion of politics in 19<sup>th</sup> century Colombia. The Caribbean was no exception. The Supreme Council of Cartagena, the highest regional freemason organ created in the 1830s played a significant role in the process of parties' diffusion. The Caribbean freemasonry became the main source of social and political status and as such it operated as an associative structure that defined regional elites. The most distinguished members of the Caribbean society, who were in turn freemasons, were appointed to key offices, reached the highest military ranks in the region, and were elected in Congress. Besides integrating elites, the Supreme Council incorporated an emerging intelligentsia of entrepreneurial and white-collar middle class. The Council also actively participated in the creation of the regional *Craftsmen Democratic Societies*, not only the first guild created in Colombia but also the first form of political organization (J. Jaramillo, 1976), which served as organs for the transmission of parties' ideology and values.

But far from supporting the Liberal struggle against the public influence of the Catholic Church, the Supreme Council promoted a peculiar hybrid ideology between moderate Liberalism and Catholic values. According to Morales (2004) the Caribbean freemasonry was nothing but a Catholic association that oddly accepted priests in its lines with the aim of resisting the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century radical Liberal governments and reforms. Supported by the Catholic Church, freemasonry established clientelist networks through the Church's charities and other activities of social control. Loaiza (2007) brings this argument further and claims the existence of a close relation between the trajectory of freemasonic networks in the region

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<sup>6</sup>The Caribbean region, which exhibited the largest concentration of slaves along with that of the southwestern department of Valle and Cauca in the Pacific coast, promoted the first massive manumission act in Colombia in 1851. It is to note that the slave trade was temporarily banned in 1810 during the ephemeral existence of the state of Cartagena in the aftermath of the independence from the Spanish crown. For a more detailed account on the Caribbean Liberal agenda, see Tovar (1986) and J. Jaramillo (1976).

and the definition of an authoritarian regional political tendency. In the same line it is possible to argue that the Caribbean freemasonry contributed to the shaping of the regressive economic ethos that has characterized the largest share of the region's territory. The tensions that emerged between the regressive freemasonry and Bogotá and southern radical and anti-clerical lodges generated an ideological rupture and a territorial division of economic interests with the centre, a matter that according to Fals-Borda (1981) further isolated the Caribbean region. Such tensions progressively overlapped with the political strains unleashed by the lay educational reforms launched by the 1870s Liberal radical administration. Caribbean elites resisted the implementation of these reforms in the region and deepened the Catholic influence in schools. To a great extent the Supreme Council of Cartagena became the political cradle of the Catholic republic of *La Regeneración* (The Regeneration) established from 1886 to 1899 by Conservative Cartagena-born President Rafael Núñez. The Liberal–Conservative tensions were also evident in the economic sphere. Tensions between traders, landowners and democratic societies emerged. *Hacendados* and craftsmen opposed the agro-exports model promoted by radical Liberals insofar as it linked to anti-associationist policies, free trade of property and the creation of free social and labour relations in the countryside. These sectors progressively advocated for protectionism, which constituted another Regeneration's cornerstone. Excepting for modern Caribbean urban centres, the region entered a reversal of development process.

There is no robust historiographical evidence of the role of native freemasons in what corresponds to the current Sucre's territory. In fact freemasonry as well as democratic societies were most of all active in urban centres, and in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Sincelejo was a remote semi-urban area. Nonetheless, the closest democratic society was that of Carmen de Bolívar, located nowadays in Bolívar's share of Montes de María, which had an important role in the foundation of *Sucreño* politics and Corozal's parish church was active in charity work with the poor (Loaiza, 2007; Morales, 2004). In the absence of freemasons and craftsmen in Sucre's rural environment, the *hacienda* structure did the most relevant part of the political work, as discussed below.

It was only during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that Caribbean politics was progressively integrated into national politics through inter-party struggles (Posada Carbó, 1999). This phenomenon implied a process of bargaining and competition not only between national and subnational elites, but also among the latter. This tension entailed a ferocious quest to maintain power, with three main consequences. The first is the further de-institutionalization of parties. The second, the increasing internal fragmentation of parties – mostly the Liberal

Party – in local factions that further complicated the unity and coherence from the top. The third outcome is the spread of corrupted practices in electoral processes. During the first three decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, systematic fraud discredited the institution of suffrage in the Caribbean region, dramatically increasing the levels of abstention<sup>7</sup>, and also creating a degree of tolerance vis-à-vis fraud and the stagnation of political habits. The outcome was a political culture of what Posada Carbó (2000) refers to as no participation and permissiveness of transgression. Parties became voting manipulators and abusers of power in order to benefit private interests. This culture configured ruling elites who fed the vision of suffrage as an occasional institution and as a means for bargaining with electors (Leal & Dávila, 1990). An editorial from Cartagena’s newspaper *La Patria* in 1929 commented: “... This is the real organization of politics: fraud in all possible forms and political delinquency. From the criminal subtraction of votes to the falsification of electoral register forms and supplanting of voters. *Caciques*, local politicians and cunning devils who sell and buy votes are exalted and glorified. And those who call themselves statesmen, respectful of morality and law, are nothing but visible heads of the most repulsive manoeuvres” (*Patria*, 1929).

Since the late 1920s, in a context of discredited politics and in the aftermath of the infamous 1928 banana workers’ strike<sup>8</sup>, alternative liberal and socialist discourses started to take over in the Caribbean territory. Palacios (1995) points out that in spite of the multi-class nature of traditional parties in Colombia, the continued popular attachment to the parties’ structures had prevented the Caribbean “oppressed groups” from recognizing their collective interests, and in this context, working classes consequently failed to create more “class-conscious” political parties. Historically, the impact of the Left in the Caribbean region has been limited. In that time, port and agro-industrial labourers<sup>9</sup> were the only workers who proletarianized under the Socialist Revolutionary Party – SRP<sup>10</sup> (Agudelo, 2011; Solano, 2001). In the absence of organized labour force, Sucre did not experience the emergence of the Left during a long period of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>7</sup>Álvarez (2004) interestingly illustrates abstention in the 1927 elections in Bolívar department, where at some electoral posts votes would not exceed 10 votes.

<sup>8</sup>In the old Magdalena province, the watershed banana workers’ strike was the product of years of tension between the United Fruit Company and its workers in the “banana zone” of Ciénaga, and of a determined organizing drive by anarcho-syndicalists and the Revolutionary Socialist (later the Communist) Party. The Conservative government intervened by deploying troops, calling a state of siege, and carrying out the infamous massacre at Ciénaga in December 6, 1928, with an estimated death toll of 1,000 labourers. The 1928 strike is perhaps the single most investigated event in Colombian labour history. See, e.g., Urrutia (1969), White (1978), and Herrera and Romero (1979). The episode is also masterly portrayed by Gabriel García Márquez in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*.

<sup>9</sup>Port labour force was located in Cartagena and Barranquilla, and agro-industrial unions in Ciénaga.

<sup>10</sup>The SPR was the predecessor of the Colombian Communist Party, which was created in 1930. The *Komintern* had recognized the SPR during the 1920s.

Another case is that of *Gaitanismo*, a political movement named after Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, the most important liberal populist *caudillo* from the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Gaitán, who strongly appealed to the working and middle class, led a national, pivotal movement of popular mobilization and resistance to the existing relations of power from the late 1920s until his assassination in April 1948. After Bogotá, *Gaitanismo* had its greatest stronghold in the Caribbean coast: Gaitán enjoyed outright majorities in the departments of Atlántico (52.8%) and Bolívar (50.4%) and won the majority of the Liberal vote in Magdalena (Weiss, 1966). Yet the *Gaitanista* vote remained mainly urban. The pronounced rural landlessness in the Caribbean region, a matter discussed next, made Gaitán's views on property very appealing: coastal land tended to be held in large *haciendas*, and between the 1880s and the 1930s relatively little public land had been distributed among the landless population. In these terms, *Gaitanismo* offered a dramatic challenge to the hegemony of the established parties insofar as traditional landowners represented political power and the *hacienda* system structured patron-client ties (Guillén Martínez, 1996). However, in spite of the “struggle for socialism” renewing discourse, the Caribbean regions' political isolation played its part: Liberal and Conservative machines managed to hinder the expansion of this discourse in the countryside via the intensification of the clientelist exchange. Many of the largest *haciendas* actually expanded during that period (Green, 1996).

The *Gaitanista* movement was ultimately defeated by Gaitán's assassination and its political victories were lost to violence in many a region, but only at great and enduring cost. For many analysts, Gaitán's killing along with a series of subnational agrarian conflicts in departments such as Tolima, Antioquia and Valle del Cauca were the most notorious triggers of *La Violencia*, the ferocious mid-20<sup>th</sup> century Liberal–Conservative struggle (Palacios, 1995; Roldán, 2002; G. Sánchez & Meertens, 1983). *La Violencia*, however, was much less pronounced in the Caribbean coast. Historical evidence proves that *La Violencia* tended to erupt more likely in: a) Conservative strongholds as it was a more “ideologized” party, b) areas of aggressive competition between the Liberal and Conservative parties' patron-client based politics; and c) contexts of agrarian conflicts. The absence of these features in the Caribbean regions during that time significantly explains the non-interference of interparty violence. The old Bolívar province did not exhibit patterns of “defensive patronalism” (Schmidt, 1974) as in other Colombian regions where clients became patrons' soldiers during *La Violencia*.

## THE OPENING OF THE INTERNAL FRONTIER AND THE FIRST WAVE OF COLONIZATION

In the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century Colombia experienced a significant process of opening of internal frontiers, which did not respond to a strategic and long-term project of the state but instead to forms of private appropriation of territories linked to extractive colonization processes (LeGrand, 1998; Machado, 1986). The Caribbean region and the *Sucreeño* territory were much the case. Extractive colonization processes took place in Sucre's territory during the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The internal frontier was first opened in the 1840s through the agricultural expansion of sugar cane and rice *haciendas* in La Mojana region, as well as tobacco *haciendas* in Montes de María by commercial houses from Barranquilla, Cartagena and Medellín (Ramírez del Valle & Rey Sinning, 1994). The opening of the internal frontiers in the 19<sup>th</sup> century constituted not only an opportunity for private entrepreneurs but also an advantageous circumstance for marginal groups from other Colombian regions (*mestizos*, afro-Colombians, white background poor and landless) who sought to break traditional linkages to land through dependency ties.

Short-cycle booms characterized the economy developed in the context of the Caribbean agricultural *hacienda* until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and that of Sucre was no exception. Ocampo (1984) claims that the then frequent imbalance of the external markets of primary commodities forged a distinct Caribbean agro-exporting mentality that mainly responded to speculation. In this vein, rural entrepreneurs dismissed fundamental aspects such as the need of increasing quality controls and modernizing pre-capitalist production relations; the widening of the productive capacity and developing techniques to improve efficiency of production processes. Given the few industrial and technological changes introduced in the sector, the competitiveness of their commodities in the markets was strongly limited, making exports unfeasible. The fall of the agro-exporting market and the development of one of internal supply were also explained by the region's inhospitable geography that lacked the basic infrastructure required for articulating the agrarian production onto regional markets, the lack of road infrastructure, and the absence of investment capital for intensive agricultural production.<sup>11</sup> Likewise, to the extent to which the region was scarcely populated, the scarcity of labour for cropping made agricultural trade and exports extremely difficult. This was the case of the tobacco industry in Sucre (Sastoque, 2011). In this context, agricultural *haciendas*

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<sup>11</sup>Meisel (1990) interestingly explains how in the period in which regional private banks existed in Colombia (1872–1925) the Cartagena banks – controlled by the city's families of traders and exporters – privileged loans and investments for exports of cattle from areas close to Cartagena and other port areas.

in Sucre were progressively transformed into cattle ranching *haciendas*. In this perspective, extensive cattle ranching became a more suitable option than intensive agricultural production. All these factors account for the rationale behind the economic reconversion of the *Sucreño* economy (Meisel, 1988; Tovar, 1986), contrary to many interpretations, such as that of Kalmanovitz (1982) that insist on the Caribbean *hacienda*'s high levels of irrationality.

Between 1850 and 1900 this type of *hacienda* significantly multiplied throughout the old Bolívar province. Posada Carbó (1988) argues that the intense periods of floods and drought of alluvial Caribbean savannahs generated the need of greater extensions of land to move cattle in search of provisions of water and pastures. Cattle ranching *hacendados* – whose economic and social ascent facilitated their increasing representation in public institutions and other political spheres from the 1860s – started concentrating a significant share of public wealth, mainly in the form of public wasteland (Solano, 2010). Through their presence in the Assembly of Bolívar, these *hacendados*-turned-politicians imposed local legislation that facilitated access to these bald territories – in many cases occupied by peasant colonizers. The inefficiency of the central state in guaranteeing property rights and enforcing a strong agrarian reform systematically undermined the settling attempts of these colonizers, leading frontier settlers to cyclic situations of dispossession and dependency (Fajardo, Mondragón, & Arcila, 1994) as discussed below.

Another target of *hacendados* was land under a corporate property regime, i.e. indigenous territories. Political manoeuvring caused the substantial reduction of *Zenú* and *Embera Katío* reservations in the old Bolívar province during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup>. The expansion of this type of *hacienda* created tensions with indigenous communities and entire neighbourhoods as *hacendados* did not seek to appropriate wasteland but instead land with a higher value given its proximity to urban helmets, water, pastures, roads and port infrastructure (Solano & Flórez, 2007). According to Botero (1994), in the early 1900s only seven indigenous reservations survived out of twenty-six created under the Spanish colonial rule in the Bolívar province. In the 1920s only one reservation survived. Supported in some variations of the liberal discourse of equality and rights of the citizens, subnational politicians suppressed these collective territories. Although the central government sought to legislate in order to protect indigenous communities' territories, subnational politics counteracted the centre's attempts in this direction.

## FROM TRADITIONAL FORMS OF CLIENTELISM TO MACHINE POLITICS

For over a century, the party system in the Caribbean coast substituted politics for loyalty and promoted inter-class paternalist relations, which constituted the basis for clientelist links (Leal, 1989; Oquist, 1980). The clientelist logic promoted a system of loyalties and favours (Figueroa, 2007) that constituted one of the most efficient spaces for reproducing traditional forms of power and domination through the *hacienda* structure.

Rural entrepreneurs who were simultaneously political power brokers led the *hacienda* structure. But economic extraction preceded politics. As rural entrepreneurs opened the Caribbean internal frontier and organized the *hacienda* extractive processes in a stateless and unregulated context, they became central in the process of social articulation and regulation (Guillén Martínez, 1996), as well as in the provision of goods. These “pioneers” were crucial to the process of diffusion of political parties discussed above. The *hacienda* structure fostered a dual role to landowners and peasants. Landowners were also political bosses and the *hacienda* labour force were correspondingly clienteles or “locked-in electorates” under systems of loyalty and dependency based upon the provision of security and protection in exchange for votes or military support. As in many other settings such as southern Italy, the patron-client bond was encapsulated within a set of moral obligations (e.g. via godparenthood), which strengthened a model of social vertical integration. *Hacendados* had the wealth and power required to establish enduring – yet rarely even – relationships of reciprocity.

The self-perpetuating and immobile nature of this type of dyadic clientelism, which made economic, social and political transformations extremely difficult, had historical limits in all hemispheres. As in other countries, the breakdown of Colombian traditional clientelism and the evolution into machine politics happened along similar lines to those depicted by Lange and Tarrow (1980) and Graziano (1977) in southern Italy: the traditional bonds were no longer possible under modernization processes, politics of office, or drastic and fast changes in the social structure. The growth of what Clapham (1982) refers as to “mass clientelism” introduced a high degree of factionalism and fragmentation, displaced local notables by party-directed patronage, as well as individual benefits by collective material rewards. The rise of power brokers made the exchange more corporate and decreasingly interpersonal, and the new loyalties became diffuse and less stable. The authority of the machine, which no longer stemmed from the moral realm, began to derive from its distributive activity (Scott, 1972), i.e. its effectiveness. Unsurprisingly, patronage, spoils, bribery and corruption became inevitably associated with machine politics.

Nevertheless, Schmidt accounts for specific permutations of clientelist networks in Colombia, finding a significant degree of subnational variations, due to the interaction of variables such as economic structures and the ways in which these related to the intensity of *La Violencia* (Schmidt, 1974, 1977). The case of Sucre, generalizable to the Caribbean coast, with little impact of the interparty discord, low modernization of the agrarian production and no changes in the landholding structure is an example of slow loosening of classic patron-client ties. In other regions dyadic relations were thoroughly destroyed during *La Violencia* and even a decade before (G. Sánchez & Meertens, 1983). In Sucre the structural change in the loyalty system took place in the 1960s.

Scott (1972) claims that the progression towards machine politics occurs in periods of rapid socioeconomic change, increase of electoral competition, mass/universal adult suffrage, and significant degree of party competition over time. The case of Sucre slightly varies as it was more centred in the widening of the electoral scope and there were increasing levels of intra and inter-party competition. The urbanization, education, and secularization processes intervened in the process but arguably to a lesser extent as these were not as salient in Sucre as in other regions.

Two processes were at the base of the rise of machine politics in Sucre. The first one, the *Frente Nacional* consociational agreement from the late 1950s empowered regional operators at the expense of the centre as discussed before, a matter that to a large extent explains the decay of traditional *caciques* and the emergency of machine politics in Colombia. Traditional parties started internally atomizing through factions organized around family groups known as “houses”. The Liberal party experienced a stronger internal implosion than that of the Conservative party, mostly since the 1970s. The former subdivided into more “houses” than the latter that competed along personalistic lines rather than along ideological ones, and in order to survive houses “owners” increasingly empowered their subnational operators. According to Leal and Dávila (1990) the competition ended up not only weakening the Liberal party’s cohesion at the top but also further de-institutionalizing it at the regional level, where politicians in a more or less autonomous fashion dedicated to feed their clientele and collecting votes.

The second one, coincident with the former process and generalizable to the whole region, is related to the rise of Sucre as a new territorial entity. The old Bolívar province lost a large part of its territory with the creation of Sucre and Córdoba departments in 1966 and 1967,

respectively.<sup>12</sup> This process was strongly influenced by Caribbean political elites in Congress insofar as it implied bureaucratic growth, local revenues and increase of transfers from the central government. In other words, it meant fresh and more resources for the patronage system. The other two processes at play were the profound demographic changes in the aftermath of *La Violencia* due to new colonizing waves, and the social conflict over landholding structure. The latter will be thoroughly discussed below.

The transformations implied the emergence of new political actors, which although linked to traditional parties, jeopardized the status quo of traditional political bosses. The latter, at risk of being displaced by emerging professional politicians, bargained and adapted to the new machine politics. The emergent new class of politicians included not only professional descendants of rich *hacendados* and merchants but also political newcomers. In turn, a new generation of clients emerged – mostly urbanized and newly settled in shantytowns in the context of the central government attempt to introduce an agrarian reform as it will be discussed below – behaved more like free agents seeking jobs or cash for their votes. An official interviewed in Sincelejo said “what happened in Sucre in the 1960s was that as political competition increased, clientelism had to become more “technical”; modern if you like. In this context, voters started to experience greater freedom of electoral choice, of electing candidates that provided more and better resources. The Tamara family [a Liberal “house”] who controlled this department for over 60 years represented the “old school”. They were real *caciques* and *gamonales* who owned large *haciendas*. Families of the likes of the Nule and Dager Chadid [who represented other Liberal “houses”], which emerged in the 1960s, represented the new “technical clientelism”. Alvaro García and every other politician involved nowadays with paramilitaries are direct descendants of this “new school” of politics” (Interview, Porras, 2009).

Posada Carbó (1988) rejects the depiction of the cattle ranching *hacienda* labour force as one under semi-servile conditions, as often represented. This assessment is based upon an extensive analysis of the cattle business in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which reveals a relatively complex chain of transactions and actors that involved levels of specialization according to the production phases of breeding, raising and fattening. LeGrand (1998) reinforces this argument

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<sup>12</sup>The same process occurred to Magdalena department when La Guajira and Cesar departments were created in 1965 and 1967, respectively, in the Caribbean region.

by accounting for alternative forms to cattle ranching latifundium. Yet, it is undeniable that the expansion of cattle ranching generated a major inequality gap in Sucre's land property system – which persists today – insofar as it did not generate an equal distribution of public wealth among the different actors that integrated the agrarian social tissue. The labour market, tied to the land and diverse forms of social restraints, was deeply affected.<sup>13</sup> As seen before, the main beneficiaries were *hacendados* who managed to appropriate an large share of public resources through the colonization of the agricultural frontier, followed by small and intermediate owners. Although it is important to note that there is evidence of buying and selling processes of small and medium-sized rural property (Solano, 2010), these were minor compared to the access to public and communal land via local legislation.

This situation became worse as a second cycle of peasant colonization took place in the old Bolívar province during *La Violencia* times. As discussed, collective violence was then much less pronounced in the Caribbean coast, and experienced massive migration of forcibly displaced and expropriated families from the Andean regions where the inter-party strife was fierce. The correlate of this phenomenon was the increasing pressure over land in the northern savannahs and coastal areas of Colombia. In the absence of agrarian reform mechanisms and the state's endemic regulatory weakness, cattle ranchers continued resorting to legal and illegal means to enlarge latifundia and exclude peasants from access to rural property.

The extensive monopolization of *Sucreño* savannahs and their transformation into pastures, and the impossibility of consolidating peasant property, reduced frontier settlers to cheap labour force, subject to diverse renting and share cropping arrangements, through which the latter razed forest, grew food and then sowed grass for cattle. In the mid-1960s, this process had exhausted the tropical forests, and the peasant binding to *haciendas* had lost its economic function. The political dyadic ties entered a critical stage (Fals-Borda, 1996; LeGrand, 1998). One of Colombia's most prominent social conflicts in the 20<sup>th</sup> century was about to erupt in Sucre.

By the 1960s Sucre was consolidated as a closed internal frontier: the colonization process had been relatively stabilized to the extent that the forms of production and accumulation – mostly of the agrarian type – had also been solidified and so had the status of land in the form of latifundia. The mechanisms of social integration and regulation had been already consolidated through patron-client ties and machine politics. Although clienteles became

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<sup>13</sup>According to Meertens (2000), the cattle ranching *hacienda* generated a system in which peasant tenants were allowed to exploit some hectares of waste land for a period of four or five years but were obliged to share the harvest with landowners. After that period wastelands were incorporated to the hacienda for the further expanding of pastures for cattle raising.

unstable, the political culture of dependency adapted to the new model of intermediation between the new power brokers and the state. It is in this context, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, where the tensions over land tenure and means of production finally reached a peak.

Successive attempts at agrarian reforms had failed in Colombia since the 1930s. The 1936 reform undertaken under Alfonso López's first administration (1934–1938) was implemented in the context of the strengthening of the industrial sector and therefore ended up favouring big landowners. The legal framework sought to foster the agrarian modernization but based upon large properties. Commercial agriculture deeply transformed land tenancy in the country but failed in democratizing the access to land as it left rural economic and social structures untouched (Reyes, 1978; Zamosc, 1986).

A new reformist wave took place during Carlos Lleras Restrepo administration (1966–1970) that sought to redistribute idle land and empower the peasant organization. In this context the government created the National Association of Peasant Users (*Asociación Nacional de Usuarios Campesinos* - ANUC). As expected, landowners and politicians reacted strongly against the reform and peasant empowerment. Between 1971 and 1972 the elected conservative government of Pastrana Borrero (1970–1974) reversed the democratic gear of the reform under a strong parliamentary pressure, and a counter-reform effort strengthened once again traditional landowners. A Sucre ANUC leader interviewed said that between the late 1960s and early 1970s “over 30,000 families were expelled from rural lands because their presence constituted a risk of state intervention and agrarian reform. They were displaced to Caribbean urban centres and Venezuela” (Interview, Villadiego, 2009).

The policies of the early 1970s promoted rural industrialization and in this context some enclaves of capitalist agriculture were created in Sucre as some technological upgrade was introduced in *haciendas*. Nevertheless, a non-labour-intensive and low-risk cattle-raising model continued to prevail in the region. In this context and under the motto of “the land for those who work it”, ANUC carried out a first wave of land invasions in the early 1970s in Sucre and a second wave in the mid-1980s, with blockades, marches, and sit-ins. Peasants forced the government to install and enforce programs of land distribution. The invasions occurred throughout the Caribbean region, of which the case of Sucre was salient insofar as land invasions took place throughout the whole territory. No other department experienced such an activity in every single municipality. It is noteworthy that ANUC's strength and contentiousness in Sucre were higher from ANUC's levels elsewhere in the country. This was mainly due to the fact that in Sucre the Association strengthened its organizational drive in a bottom-up fashion whereas in the rest of the country ANUC was promoted in a top-down fashion by

the Lleras Restrepo administration, a factor that enabled the co-optation of the Association by traditional parties. This difference provoked Sucre's divorce from the ANUC's official line, through the creation of the so-called "Sincelejo line" that lost all official support: "ANUC was mainly created for serving politicians' interests. That is why on the whole the organization was passive and represented no threats to landowners and politicians. This was not the case in Sucre. The government turned its back on us because we were not willing to accept an intermediated struggle for land" (Interview, Villadiego, 2009).

In the context of a total agrarian reform backlash ANUC's Sincelejo line was violently repressed during the Pastrana Borrero (1970–1974) and López Michelsen (1974–1978) administrations: "we were brutally beaten and incarcerated, and our houses and plantations were burnt. In 1972 the Police assassinated our leadership, and the association's archives were set on fire, destroying our collective memory" (Interview, Villadiego, 2009). During the 1970s, many politicians – mainly those from the Caribbean departments – who were in turn latifundia owners, strongly influenced the Executive's regressive gear vis-à-vis the 1960s agrarian reform. ANUC was dramatically weakened and the issue of rural inequality was left unresolved. Turbay Ayala's administration (1978–1982) was no better. Characterized as one of the most repressive time of Colombia's 20<sup>th</sup> century, military repression was heavily focused on agrarian conflicts.

Despite the tensions regarding agrarian policies, Sucre experienced an important transformation of rural land ownership. A comparison of the 1970–1971 and 1990 data shows that latifundia of 500 hectares or more, which made up 41.6% of the total productive land in 1970, were substantially reduced (by 214,500 hectares) and made up only 15.9% of the productive land in 1990. It should not be assumed, however, that all the latifundia loss of extension was transferred to peasant hands. According to Reyes (1978) only a sixth of expelled families during the 1960s resettled by informally occupying land or via land acquisition by the Colombian state: 5,000 out of 30,000 evicted families were granted land plots in Sucre. The National Agrarian Authority (*Instituto Colombiano de Reforma Agraria* – INCORA) redistributed 102,530 hectares in Sucre between 1968 and 1995, almost half of the total area lost by the largest *haciendas*. This land, along with a little over 10,000 hectares of public land whose ownership had been legally granted to peasants already settled there, accounted for the 6,200 new units of 50 hectares or less (113,895 hectares) registered in the 1990 agrarian census.

Something different occurred with the other 100,000 hectares apparently lost by the largest haciendas. As a mechanism of property protection, landowners subdivided properties of 40,000 hectares into smaller estates of between 100 and 500 hectares and the remaining 60,000

hectares were segmented into properties ranging from 50 to 100 hectares. Partitioned plots under 500 hectares were then trust deeded to sons, daughters and other close relatives of landowners, and rented to peasant families. Another ANUC leader interviewed tells how a well-known landowner from San Onofre managed to avoid the expropriation of his unproductive latifundia by the National Agrarian Authority: “INCORA had already expropriated part of his *hacienda* and land was ready to redistribute but no one wanted to take it as he [the landlord] would constantly threaten any potential beneficiary. What he did later was dividing his estate and renting plots to peasants so he would not lose his land. To date the situation remains the same, and not long ago he had paramilitary support to avoid further peasant occupations” (Interview, Lara, 2009). Formally, the subdivision of estates played an important part in transforming the countryside tenure structure into smaller properties; however the actual distribution of land was not transformed according to democratizing demands.

THE FAILURE OF THE SOCIAL MOVEMENT, THE RENEWAL OF CLIENTELISM AND THE RISE OF THE GARCÍA HOUSE

The analysis of parapolitics in Sucre demands taking into account two events that developed both within and outside institutional channels and had pervasive influence on regional politics since the mid-1980s and were strongly interrelated. The first one is that the enacting of democratizing reforms had pervasive effects in Sucre’s politics insofar as did not transform political customs. On the contrary, it reproduced them as politicians distorted the poorly regulated reforms and used them to their own advantage, as discussed below. The second one is the explosion of collective violence.

*The failure of the social movement and the rise of machine politics*

Peasant struggles in Sucre during the 1970s were not only instrumental to the relations of production in *haciendas*. Land demands were also directed against the state by appealing to more abstract concepts of equality, justice and democracy (Zamosc, 1986). Despite the increasing contention over land and other issues related to democratization, politics was not transformed in Sucre in the context of agrarian conflicts and ANUC never became a significant electoral force. On the contrary, politics continued to tie the *Sucreño* population to clientelism. Agrarian struggles coexisted with clientelist practices and ANUC, the strongest social organization

in Sucre, could not transform politics. Cristina Escobar (2002) in her analysis on the rise of ANUC amidst a strong clientelistic culture, argues that clientelism continued to exist in spite of – not in the absence of – “class consciousness”. The apparent contradiction between peasant empowerment and the resilience of clientelism has to be understood in the context of a precarious economic situation and the shift from traditional forms of clientelism, all encompassing and durable, to modern impersonal machine politics. Following the argument by Caciagli and Belloni (1981), competition between brokers and their dependence on state resources made traditional *Sucreño* patrons progressively fragile figures to clients’ eyes. It is in this breach of traditional dyadic relations that the dispute over land status and peasant mobilization reached its peak in Sucre. Despite the fact that the Sincelajo line was not co-opted by politicians and as such the ANUC did not grease electoral machines, the precarious economic situation of the department kept on forcing important sectors of the population to value the immediate benefits of exchanging their votes over the more long-term and abstract benefits of political and social representation. In this vein most ANUC militants who were landless or smallholders lacking resources remained clients. An ANUC leader from San Onofre commented: “I voted for [a San Onofre town councillor] not long ago as he promised to improve a rural road in exchange for his vote. I voted for him. He actually improved the road” (Interview, Lara, 2009).

The 1980s democratizing reforms encouraged ANUC leaders to run for municipal councils, department assemblies, and even Congress (Pinzón, 1989). However, the results were poor as the majority of rural voters supported political machines. Other emerging political actors – demobilized guerrilla members from the early 1990s<sup>14</sup>, indigenous groups and religious minorities – experienced the same frustration. Between 1988 and 2002, non-traditional parties represented 25% of the lists competing for municipal elections yet only 15.5% of non-traditional candidates were elected to town councils, and 29.2% elected as mayors, i.e. 7 out of 24 elected mayors.

The internal conflict also had pervasive effects over the social movement. Sucre, a traditionally peaceful department, became increasingly violent since the 1970s. According to some analysts, it was in this context in which ANUC moved closer to guerrillas (Reyes, 1987). Others claim ANUC remained independent from subversion and that guerrillas – especially the EPL,

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<sup>14</sup>The Popular Liberation Army – EPL (*Ejército Popular de Liberación*), 19th of April Movement – M-19 (*Movimiento 19 de Abril*), and Revolutionary Workers’ Party PRT (*Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores*) guerrillas demobilized in 1991. The Socialist Renovation Stream – CRS (*Corriente de Renovación Socialista*) reincorporated in 1994.

Table 3: Elected Mayors (Traditional and Non-Traditional Parties in Sucre), 1988–2000

Year	Traditional Parties		Non-Traditional Parties		Total
1988	19	79.2%	5	20.8%	24
1990	23	95.8%	1	4.2%	24
1992	17	70.8%	7	29.2%	24
1994	23	95.8%	1	4.2%	24
1997	19	79.0%	5	21.0%	24
2000	20	87.0%	3	13.0%	23

Source: RNEC

notwithstanding using the agrarian discourse for launching the insurgent project, emerged in Sucre during the decline of ANUC and not during its boom (Interview, Restrepo, 2009).

According to Rudqvist (1983) it is difficult to classify ANUC as a Left-wing union, despite the multiple attempts from the left at co-opting its discourse. An ANUC leader interviewed said: “I think we [ANUC] have been liberals at heart [...] Relations with the Left have always been difficult because it could never cope with the fact that we peasants have an entrepreneurial drive. We want productive land, and generate income and employment. It is a sin to think as “capitalists”. The Left has this strange vision of access to land as an end. It seems the whole thing is pretty much about just dispossessing the rich; it’s like revenge” (Interview, Villadiego, 2009). An interviewed academic complemented this statement: “The agrarian movement has been quite plural in Sucre; both liberal and conservative peasants have converged. To some extent its liberal edge can be described as *Gaitanista*” (Interview, Restrepo, 2009). The source of the irrigation of violence in the rural context seems to have been more linked to the tensions between peasant and the local elite over the rural development model project than in ANUC’s apparent closeness to the Left: “ANUC was never co-opted by guerrillas, thus the fact that peasants have been traditionally victimized is because of the agrarian issue; not because they are actually considered as guerrillas’ supporters” (Interview, Restrepo, 2009).

ANUC leaders have been systematically victimized in Sucre over the last four decades, but the trends dramatically increased in the late 1990s, which coincides with the rise of AUC structures in the department. As analysed below, parapolitics also served what Figueroa refers as to the “authoritarian modernization” of the *Sucreño* countryside (2007), i.e. a domination model based on violence, localism and tradition that deeply undermined the peasant movement and the democratization of access to land. A *Sucreño* warlord interviewed brought

an argument that clearly reflects this model: “Traditional landowners are the only ones who know how to maintain the land; not peasants. Do not ever leave it to peasants!” (Ramón\*, 2009)<sup>15</sup>.

### *Money politics*

As mentioned before, the economic structure of Sucre created the inequality that lies at the foundation of clientelist transactions. However, this socioeconomic situation is a necessary but not always sufficient condition for clientelism to prevail; it is also necessary that political bosses continue to control the resources that clients need. Despite the modest electoral results of non-traditional candidates since 1988, the timid enlargement of the political spectrum still meant a challenge for Sucre’s political machines.

The reforms of the 1980s made political campaigns progressively more expensive: party fractionalization boosted electoral competition and politicians required large campaign teams, intermediaries, advertising, transportation, and most importantly, they needed to mobilize clients. In order to lure politically disenchanted and sceptical voters in a competitive environment, the *Sucreeño* political machines, as elsewhere, resorted to cash vote buying. But where did the money come from? The increasing need for cash made politicians resort to different strategies. The first one is the control over public resources and contracting. It is noteworthy that *Sucreeño* politicians, excepting for renting from latifundia and some surpluses from cattle ranching, have neither been entrepreneurs nor have they based their power upon controlling monopolies or owning economic empires. That is why politicians’ wealth has mainly grown at the state’s expense through corrupt practices (Escobar, 2002).

Central government transfers from oil royalties became the main target of politicians in Sucre and represent the most striking source of corruption. Although Sucre is not an oil producer, Coveñas and Tolú municipalities have four oil piers – Caño Limon-Coveñas, Orensa, O.D.C. and Ecopetrol-Dol pipeline terminal points – from which between 77 and 83% of Colombian oil has been exported over the last 40 years. Until 2012 royalties represented at least 75% of revenues of Coveñas and Tolú and an important share of those went to the department’s coffers. The creation of Coveñas municipality in 2002<sup>16</sup> further multiplied corruption over these resources. A peasant leader interviewed stressed that *Sucreeño* politicians are so corrupted that

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<sup>15</sup>It is noteworthy that Ramón\* belongs to the *Sucreeño* rural and political aristocracy, and FARC guerrilla victimized his family.

<sup>16</sup>Before its creation, Coveñas was a county of Tolú municipality.

they even “created a municipality [Coveñas] in order to fully predate it” (Interview, Villadiego, 2009). According to the Colombian legislation royalties are to be invested by departments and municipalities in health, education, drinkable water, public sanitation programmes and road infrastructure. Given Tolú and Coveñas’ extraordinary income from oil royalties, these municipalities should have the highest social indicators in the department. However, royalties have not had any multiplier effect in Sucre, and have become instead a negative externality. Systematic corruption such as ghost contracting; payment of unfinished public works; multiplication of the value of contracts within short periods of time; and a weak internal control and accounting systems left Tolú and Coveñas as two of the poorest municipalities in Sucre.

The second strategy used by politicians to cope with the escalating cost of political campaigns was the direct appropriation of pork-barrel funds through the creation of fictitious non-profit development agencies to which the funds were diverted. The creation of regional development agencies had a sudden explosion in Sucre in 1986 and increased throughout 1987 and 1988.<sup>17</sup> These private foundations were created not only by the heads of the main political machines of the department but also by middle-rank brokers in order to sustain political groups. A third campaign funding strategy was increasing private sources: traditional donations from cattle *hacendados*, who were interested in keeping local power in their localities, and the compulsory contributions from state employees to their political bosses. As the escalating costs of political campaigns and the commercialization of votes were not easily covered by these sources of financing, drug money started permeating Sucreño politics from the 1994 campaigns<sup>18</sup>, a trend that would dramatically intensify in elections to come, sponsored by the AUC.

### *The rise of the García house*

As mentioned, the fragmentation of traditional parties continued in the context of the enactment of the 1980s reforms, and new houses emerged in Sucre – most importantly those of the García and Merlano families – as the outcome of the atomization of Dager Chadid and

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<sup>17</sup>23. The official creation of 12 development foundations and corporations was registered in the official regional newspaper of Sucre. Source: *Gaceta Departamental de Sucre*, January 31, 1986; April–June 1987; July–August 1987; September 1987; November 1987; April–June 1988.

<sup>18</sup>For the 1994 elections, Cali cartels’ money importantly penetrated the Liberal Party’s campaign, especially ex-president Ernesto Samper (1994–1998). This scandal made Samper’s administration and the Congress deeply illegitimate.

Guerra houses<sup>19</sup>. García and Merlano houses became great electors by co-opting political niches at the municipal level in order to counteract the effects of the popular local elections. The case of the García house is worth analysing as it not only illustrates the survival and adaptation of political machines in the context of decentralization and subnational elections but also, and above all, because the house was central in the criminalization of *Sucreeño* politics and the capture of the subnational state by the AUC.

The García house became the indisputable owner of *Sucreeño* machine politics soon after politician Alvaro García “divorced” from the Guerra house. This house has left a footprint in local politics by disproportionately campaign funding, creating and disarming political coalitions, changing votes in the boards of public corporations, and controlling the Departmental Accounting Office and Ombudsman. The political power of the house was built in three stages. During the first stage the house’s strength was built upon family ties (Figure 7) and increased its political capital in both Sucre and neighbouring Bolívar department. However, the family power structure started to crumble due to successive corruption scandals at the end of the 1980s. The second stage is characterized by the incorporation of García’s close friends and faithful co-partisans into his power network. For the third stage, Alvaro García incorporated paramilitaries and in this fashion the house continued having extraordinary political success.

Originally from Ovejas municipality, the patriarch Juan José García, a prosperous *hacienda* owner and tobacco entrepreneur, was elected deputy for the Bolívar Departmental Assembly in the 1960s.<sup>20</sup> His eldest son Juan José García was the first to become involved in politics, starting at the departmental level and then reaching Congress, but lost his senatorial seat after a series of irregularities in a telecommunications contract were detected in Bolívar department and the use of pork-barrel funds to finance the Foundation for the Improvement of Education, Health, Sports and Public Works of which his mother Mady Romero was chair. Juan José’s wife, Piedad Zuccardi, inherited his political capital, and has been successively elected in Congress for over a decade. The patriarch’s second son Alvaro started his political life in the Guerra house and was appointed mayor of Ovejas in 1974 at the age of 21. Later he was appointed to the Departmental Home Secretary as well as elected as Sincelejo town councillor and Departmental Assembly deputy. In 1978 he won a seat at the House of Representatives and was re-elected for two successive terms. For the 1986 elections, having amassed significant

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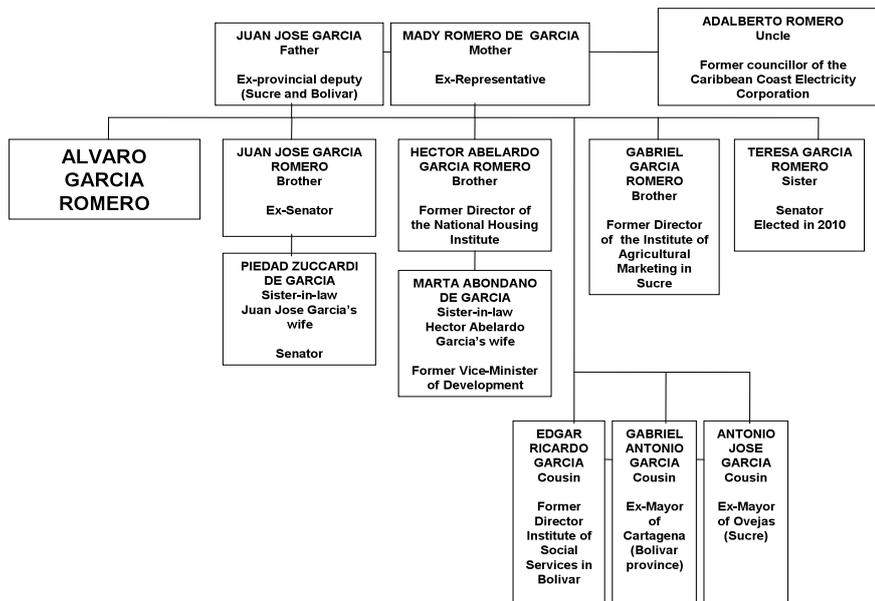
<sup>19</sup>The Guerra house started crumbling in the early 1980s because of strong personal differences between brothers José and Julio Guerra Tulena. The Dájer Chadid house collapsed after a series of mismanagement scandals in the department.

<sup>20</sup>It is important to remember that Sucre’s department was created in the mid 1960s; before that it belonged to the Bolívar department

political capital, García left the Guerra house and created the New Liberal Force party with which he won a seat in Congress and for 1988, the year of the first mayoral elections, his movement won several mayoralties. For the 1990 elections he was not elected as a consequence of the large-scale corruption scandals of brother Juan José. Nevertheless, García succeeded in getting his mother elected as Representative in 1990.

His brother Hector García, former Director of the National Housing Institute, and his wife Martha Abondano, then Vice-Minister of Urban Development were investigated in the early 1990s for a corruption scandal that involved the change of land usage of a plot the couple had previously bought near Cartagena while in office. His cousin Gabriel García was elected mayor of Cartagena and was involved in a scandal-ridden contract with the Cartagena Port Society.

Figure 7: The García Family Power Structure



As the García's family power structure started crumbling, Alvaro García restructured his political strategy by expanding his influence beyond his kin. This situation coincided with García's expulsion from the Liberal Party in the mid 1990s because of his involvement in the scandalous infiltration of Ernesto Samper's presidential campaign by the Cali Cartel. During this second stage, he joined the Progressive National Movement and empowered close political partners. For the successive elections, he kept on migrating from one party to the other, and maintained his power in Congress as well as at the subnational level. This phenomenon is

intimately related to the creation of the AUC in Sucre in 1997, a matter that will be thoroughly analysed in the next chapter.

According to a public official interviewed, “García ‘technified’ clientelism in Sucre because he eliminated traditional nepotism<sup>21</sup> and shared power with his “putative sons”. I am mainly talking about all the popularly elected governors in Sucre [since 1993]: Edgar Martínez, Héctor Pérez, Eric Morris, Salvador Arana and Jorge Anaya. They are all García’s men” (Interview, Porras, 2009). He added: “during those years Alvaro García became stronger than ever by impressively expanding his clientelist network and by increasing his political quotas at the departmental and national levels. All these appointed officials owe everything to him. As for clients, his house was open doors for everyone who came for help, for whom he usually provided solutions. His campaign coffers seemed inexhaustible: he always over-financed his campaigns. Let’s say a congressional campaign cost 50 pesos, he would finance it with 150. It was Joaquin García [prominent Sucreño rural rich] who provided most of the funding. García always repaid Joaquin García by usurping public resources, and in this fashion they kept the machine running”. It is well known that García’s other resource for keeping in power was electoral fraud. He has been called the ‘the Registrar’s Office Magician’.”

García was above all a shrewd politician. Although throughout his long congressional career his parliamentary initiative was almost non-existent<sup>22</sup>, he managed to reach the strategic Budget Commission in Senate in 1998 and remained there as the most powerful voter until 2007. “García is an unbeatable political animal; he always knows what he is doing. He gets whatever he wants whenever he wants. He manages to soften his political adversaries by making them believe they are his partners. He never lost a fight because he never engaged in useless arguments. While in Congress he was THE budget man. Every year he negotiated his vote for the national budget in exchange for contracts and bureaucratic quotas. Besides, he always belonged to the national ruling coalition” (Interview, Porras, 2009).

García built a sultanistic regime of sorts in Sucre, deeply anchored at the local and national levels, which pursued personal goals around family and friends. García mastered the distribution of patronage, creating a white-collar middle class out of Sucreño bureaucracy. These quotas have been carefully and strategically administrated by his house, which managed to fill every single space in the subnational public sector, avoiding the creation of “grey areas” prone to be filled by competing machines or independents. The social tolerance vis-à-vis tra-

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<sup>21</sup>García married late and has no children. In this sense he has shared his political capital with close friends who have been long-standing co-partisans.

<sup>22</sup>The only legislative initiative García had was a project that sought to modify intellectual property rights in 2006. The law project was filed in 2007.

ditional politics has also permitted the maintenance of the García house over time. Besides the socioeconomic vulnerability and the institutional factors that allowed political machines to reconfigure and survive in Sucre, factors inherent to *Sucreño* society are also at play in the reproduction of the subnational forms of political power and dominance. Apart from the undermining of social control as the obvious consequence of the intensification of collective violence in the department, the deficit of public opinion is explained to a considerable extent by the existence of a small and weak middle class, of increasingly disengaged social organizations and of an anaemic media. Social networking is too weak to stand up against traditional practices and promote an alternative political culture in the department. Instead, a political culture of permissiveness prevails: “the state has always been central in Sucre. It is the “it” factor insofar as it constitutes the main source of employment and unique provider. To the extent to which the state is deeply intermediated by politics it entails a serious collective action problem. Although the state as a “privatized” entity has traditionally manipulated misery via clientelism, the *Sucreño* society of free riders is also to blame. It is in the political culture. Even at its most organized levels, society accepts clientelism, corruption, violent illegal actors, state capture, electoral fraud, and so on. Politics is seen as “someone else’s job”. In this context, Sincelejo -the only important urban centre in the department- has still a very weak opinion vote, so there are no counter-weights in this regard” (Interview, Restrepo, 2009).

All these factors have allowed the house to maintain the status quo of its dominant political machine in spite of crises and the competition of the Merlano house. Jairo Merlano was elected mayor of Sincelejo in 1992 supported by Alvaro García. Once in office, he and his brother Jaime created their own political group, the Liberal Independent Movement, separating from the García house. The Merlano house has remained in power ever since and has made Sincelejo mayoralty its stronghold. They have been also successful in controlling Sincelejo’s Town Council, Sucre’s Ombudsman Office and Local Accounting Office. Merlano was elected to Congress in 2002 and was re-elected in 2006. Although this meant the end of the hegemonic power of the García house, the control over Congress as well as most of the subnational public space makes García house extremely difficult to displace.

García has also been a standard-bearer against agrarian reform, a matter that was visible in his congressional career. For example, when a new attempt at agrarian reform took place in the late 1980s, the congressional voting session was broadcast on television and García’s voting was registered. He voted against it four times. There were more votes than congress members voting that day. Although the fraud was made public, the law did not pass.

In the late 1990s, as collective violence took over Sucre's territory and jeopardized the sub-national status quo, García undertook its third strategy which consisted of allying with the AUC under a criminal consociational arrangement. This process constitutes next chapter's main subject.

## POLITICAL ATOMIZATION AND THE DOMINANCE OF THE GARCÍA HOUSE

Sucre was no alien to the process of atomization of parties in the context of the breakdown of the bi-partisan hegemony. The Conservative, but mostly the Liberal party lost internal cohesion and legitimacy due to the mid-1990s corruption scandals. In Sucre, political actors also moved from official lines towards newly created parties, which were nothing but Right-wing electoral microenterprises that belonged to the *Uribista* coalition and that had a salient participation in parapolitics. Neither independents nor the Left succeeded in competing for the dominant houses' vote.

Tables 4 and 5 below show the tendencies of defection of traditional parties towards transitional movements in Sucre. Between 2002 and 2006 elections for House of Representatives, José Luis Feris Chadid and Juan Carlos Rodríguez moved from the Liberal Party to Opening Liberal Movement and Colombia's Communal and Community Movement, respectively. The case of Tulio Alvarez, from MOIR to the Alternative Democratic Pole is different as it reflects the consolidation of the Left in the movement. In 2002, 6 out of 14 candidates belonged to the Liberal Party, one to the Conservative Party, two to the Left (MOIR and AD-M19) and the rest to other movements. In 2006, from 13 candidates, traditional parties and the Left had only one candidate each whereas the rest belonged to other movements, mostly to *Uribista* parties. The strength of *Uribista* parties is even more striking in the case of Senate elections. Excepting for Muriel Benito, who consistently ran for the Conservative party (in 2002 for House of Representatives and in 2006 for Senate), all candidates, Liberals before the 2002 elections, ran as transitionals in 2002 and 2006.

The cases of Alvaro García and Jairo Merlano also demonstrate the mobility amongst transitionals. The former left the Liberal Party and migrated to the National Progressive Movement in 2002. For the 2006 elections he moved again to the Democratic Colombia Party. Merlano made a similar transfer: traditionally Liberal, he moved in 2002 to the Radical Change Movement and in 2006 to the U Party. Although it does not completely explain electoral success, it should be noted that the candidates' moves for 2006 favoured them. Alvaro García and

his partners had the highest voting in the department, followed by Merlano's team. Neither the Left nor independents had representation in *Sucreeño* politics for the Senate.

Table 4: Defection Tendency: Comparative Elections 2002 and 2006 for the House of Representatives

Candidate	2002		2006		
	Party	Elected	Party		Elected
Jorge Luis Feris Chadid	Liberal Party	Yes	Liberal Movement	Opening	No
Juan Carlos Rodriguez Ceballos	Liberal Party	No	Colombian Alternative	Comunal And Communitarian Movement	No
Tulio De Jesus Alvarez Gonzalez	Labour Revolutionary Independent Movement (Moir)	No	Alternative	Democratic Pole	No
Marta Del Carmen Vergara De Perez	Popular Civic Convergence Movement	Yes			
Muriel De Jesus Benito Rebollo (*)	Conservative Party	Yes			
Anibal Jose Monterrosa Ricardo	Liberal Party	No			
Orlando De Jesus Peralta Castro	U Party	No			
Mario Israel Bolaño Hernandez	Liberal Party	No			
Miguel Angel Cabrera Castilla	Serious Colombia Civic Movement	No			
Neila Amira Hernandez Vasquez	Democratic Alliance M-19	No			
Hermes Dario Perez Urzola	National Salvation Movement	No			
Guillermo Alban	Civic Christian Communitarian Movement	No			
Roger Alfonso Fajardo Cardozo	Liberal Party	No			
Manuel Elias Gutierrez Benavidez	Liberal Party	No			
Jairo Alfredo Fernandez Quessep			Social Action Party		Yes
Gabriel Antonio Espinosa Arrieta			Liberal Party		Yes
Erik Julio Morris Taboada (**)			Democratic Colombia Party		Yes
Gustavo Montes			Radical Party	Change	No
Enrique Bernardo Fadul Jattin			U Party		No
Antonio De Jesús Martínez Hernández			Conservative Party		No
Jorge Arturo Ospina Vergara			Wings Team Colombia Movement		No
Enrique Roman Puerta Prieto			Centre Option Party		No
Rafaela Del Socorro Arias Cordoba			Mira		No
Julieta Bonilla Libreros			C4		No

(\*) Muriel de Jesús Benito ran for Senate in 2006, also for the Conservation Party, but was not elected.

(\*\*) Erick Julio Morris Taboada was Sincelejo's Mayor (1990–1992) and Sucre's Governor (1997–2000) for the Liberal Party.

Source: NRO

Table 5: Defection Tendency: Comparative Elections 2002 and 2006 for the Senate

Candidate	2002			2006		
	Party		Elected	Party		Elected
Alvaro Alfonso Garcia	National Movement	Progressive	Yes	Democratic Party	Colombia	Yes
Jairo Enrique Merlano	Radical Change Party		Yes	U Party		Yes
Antonio Guerra De La Espriella (*)				Radical Change Party		Yes
Jorge Visbal Martelo				U Party		Yes
Muriel De Jesus Benito Rebollo (**)				Conservative Party		No

(\*) Antonio Miguel Guerra de la Espriella was Senator (1998–2002) for the Liberal Party.

(\*\*) Muriel de Jesús Benito was House Representative (2002–2006) for the Conservative Party.

Source: NRO

The case of Presidential elections in Sucre also provides evidence of the “defrosting” of traditional parties and of defection tendencies. As shown in tables 6 and 7, and despite Uribe’s national victory via the *Colombia First* transitional party, Sucre voted overwhelmingly Liberal in 2002 elections. The Liberal party obtained 119,038 votes whereas Uribe received 58,631. But in 2006 this trend was fully reversed for Uribe’s re-election as he obtained the highest vote in Sucre, 114,009, whereas the Liberal candidate gained only 56,826 of the votes. The fact that García supported the Liberal party in 2002 and then Uribe in 2006 significantly explains the shift in the presidential vote in Sucre.

Table 6: Presidential Vote in Sucre (2002)

Candidate	Party	Votes
Horacio Serpa Uribe	Liberal Party	119,038
Alvaro Uribe Velez	Colombia First	58,631
Luis Eduardo Garzón	Social And Political Front	9,066
Noemi Sanín	Yes Colombia Movement	4,195
Harold Bedoya Pizarro	Colombia Strength Movement	1,312
Francisco Tovar Garces	Citizen Defence Movement	474
Ingrid Betancourth Pulecio	Green Oxygen Party	439
Augusto Guillermo Lora Ramírez	19th Of April Movement	227
Alvaro Cristancho Tozcano	Communitarian Participatioon Movement	216
Guillermo Antonio Cardona Moreno	Colombian Comunal And Communitarian Movement	172

Source: NRO [data available only for the departmental level]

Table 7: Presidential Vote in Sucre (2006)

Candidate	Party	Votes
Alvaro Uribe Velez	Colombia First	114,009
Horacio Serpa Uribe	Liberal Party	56,826
Carlos Gaviria Diaz	Alternative Democratic Pole	44,219
Enrique Parejo González	National Democratic Reconstruction Movement	2,018
Alvaro Leyva Durán	National Reconciliation Movement	666
Antanas Mockus Sivickas	Social Indigenous Alliance Movement	632
Carlos Arturo Rincon Barreto	Colombian Comunal And Communitarian Movement	227

Source: NRO [data available only for the departmental level]

On the whole, *Sucreño* congressional politics became mainly of the transitional type, and so did the vote for presidential elections, with insignificant results for the Left and independents. Following the national trend, the strength of *Uribista* parties in Sucre demonstrates a clear move towards the Right, a reflection of politicians' anti-subversive spirit discussed below. Stronger atomization and defection could be observed in the case of the Liberal party than in that of the Conservative party, but under no circumstances did Liberal shift towards the conservatives or vice versa. High mobility of transitionals could be also observed: the effects of the 2003 reform made many transitional parties disappear and regroup under new labels without consequences in the ideological and programmatic fields. They kept on representing the dominant *Uribista* coalition. As in the rest of the country, the decline of the hegemony of traditional parties did not imply any kind of renovation in political customs. On the contrary, the change in political labels and defection from traditional lines became a new strategy of survival for the *Sucreño* political powers, which continued exerting the same forms of domination with the increasing support of paramilitary groups as examined in the next chapter.

#### THE INTENSIFICATION OF THE INTERNAL CONFLICT, ARMED CLIENTELISM AND THE CRIMINALIZATION OF POLITICS

Another important element that significantly played in parapolitics is the escalation of violence outside and within institutional channels. Traditional studies have underlined the advantages of clientelism as an alternative to violence and class conflict, but the case of Sucre – generalizable to Colombia – proves counterintuitive: clientelism has not precluded the possibility of violence. On the contrary, the latter has contributed to the former's reproduction

and the other way round. Moreover, since the mid-1990s both phenomena intertwined and mutually fed generating a case of highly criminalized politics.

Guerrillas appeared rather late in Sucre compared to other Colombian regions<sup>23</sup> and they operated in Sucre in two waves. The first one corresponds to the emergence of the Popular Liberation Army (*Ejército Popular de Liberación* – EPL) in the late 1970s, followed in the 1980s by the Revolutionary Workers Party (*Partido Revolucionario del Pueblo* – PRT), the Revolutionary People’s Army (*Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo* – ERP) and Socialist Renovation Trend (*Corriente de Renovación Socialista* – CRS).<sup>24</sup> Despite having little success in building a social infrastructure among the peasant population (Rudqvist, 1983), this first generation of guerrillas emerged intrinsically connected to agrarian conflicts. They were all Caribbean “native” and the CRS was born in Montes de María region. This is noteworthy insofar as most of these guerrillas’ combatants, commanders and ideologues were directly linked to subnational agrarian grievances. These guerrillas entered in a stage of critical military weakening in the late 1980s, which explain their demobilization in the early 1990s.

The second wave of guerrillas corresponded to the late appearance of FARC and ELN in Sucre in the early 1990s, in the aftermath of the demobilization of the first wave groups, as a consequence of spectacular military defeats by paramilitary groups in neighbouring departments. The ELN progressively filled the spaces left by demobilized guerrillas through the *Alfredo Gómez Quiñónez* and *Jaime Bateman Cayón* fronts in La Mojana and Montes de María regions, followed by FARC through the creation of the 35<sup>th</sup> and 37<sup>th</sup> Fronts. The entrance and territorial expansion of these guerrillas was intimately connected to the enacting of decentralization and local elections. This connection, as in other Colombian regions, significantly reshaped the dynamics of the internal conflict in Sucre. The insurgent newcomers were not local but instead belonged to branches of groups that emerged in other regions. FARC and ELN made no alliances with key social actors – politicians, peasant movements or criminal syndicates – but instead concentrated on extorting and kidnapping rural rich and shopkeepers. Edward Cobo – who later became AUC political commander in Sucre under the alias “Diego Vecino” – was the first cattle rancher kidnapped by FARC in 1995.

These guerrilla groups also engaged in systematic armed clientelist practices, mainly in Montes de María region where they extorted and threatened local governments. One NGO

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<sup>23</sup>The main Colombian guerrillas (FARC, ELN and EPL) emerged in the mid 1960s.

<sup>24</sup>FARC, ELN, and EPL guerrillas emerged in the early 1960s. The *Corriente de Renovación Socialista* (CRS) was created in 1991 as an ELN splinter group. It operated in the northern areas of the country and demobilized in 1994. The *Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo* (ERP) was created in 1985 also as an ELN splinter group and operated in Tolima, Sucre and Bolívar departments. It demobilized in 2007.

director stressed: “Montes de María was completely controlled by FARC by the mid-1990s. They fully determined public contracting from which they kept a high percentage. As if it was not enough, FARC would also extort or kidnap contractors and ended up diverting almost all contract resources. In Sucre there is no such thing as an accountability culture and therefore politics has been very difficult here. In that time many mayors from Montes de María had to govern from “exile” in Sincelejo, Cartagena or Bogotá because of guerrillas’ threats and pressure. By then Sincelejo [the capital] was also besieged by FARC; no one dared to travel outside the city between 6 p.m. and 5 a.m. That brought a complete economic debacle. Moreover, Sincelejo was staring to become an important recipient of massive waves of forcible displaced population [...] The department became unviable and at some point we thought we were at the verge of collapse” (Interview, Hernández, 2009).

This security crisis is central to the explanation of parapolitics in Sucre: the escalation of guerrilla warfare produced the stabilization of private security, a “necessary evil” according to a source interviewed (Interview, Ramón\*, 2009). Instead of seeking a public response to guerrilla violence, *Sucreño* rural rich and politicians increasingly involved in financing private armies, the already mentioned *Convivir* and AUC structures which were also largely profited by the military and police in counter-insurgent tasks and strategies, as well as by drugtraffickers who controlled cocaine exports through the Morrosquillo gulf.

The AUC changed the war balance in the department by weakening guerrillas and exerting terror among its alleged social base. The fact that FARC and ELN never engaged in drug trafficking in Sucre determined the small size of their structures and made them vulnerable in terms of financial support and territorial control. By the time the AUC was established in Sucre, FARC guerrilla, under the infamous alias “Martin Caballero” command, had no more than 300 men-at-arms organized under the 35<sup>th</sup> and 37<sup>th</sup> Fronts. These fronts were rapidly weakened and expelled from Sucre. The paramilitary “pacification” process brought a significant improvement in the security situation – mainly a substantial drop in kidnapping and extortion cases – but at the same time an overwhelming humanitarian crisis and deterioration of human rights for a large portion of *Sucreño* society. The correlate of more security for the rich was violence and terror for the poorest: massacres, selective assassinations, forcible disappearances and forcible displacement dramatically increased since the mid-1990s.

In his analysis on warlordism and local politics in the Philippines, Sidel (1989) argues that violence and mobilization of private armies in armed patron-client sets play an important role in political competition and survival. The predatory incomes derived from it mark the accumulation of wealth of actors involved. This is very much the case in Sucre. The paramil-

itarization of *Sucreño* life did not only affect security issues or fostered the counterinsurgent field. Most importantly it favoured the subnational agrarian and political status quo. The landholding model was at stake, notwithstanding the systematic failure of agrarian reforms. So were electoral enterprises in the context of institutional reforms and the fragmentation and atomization of parties. As Gutiérrez (2007) claims, politicians and rural rich incorporated paramilitary violence to the asset basket in order to maintain the land tenancy structure, control political competitors, and keep a dynamic flow of clients. Although the AUC was a much more complex phenomenon than a violent instrument formed by local elites, the fact is that by including warlords in governing coalitions, the *Sucreño* establishment successfully mobilized paramilitaries in order to maintain and reproduce the latifundium structure and the García's house political machine, as thoroughly examined in the next chapter.

But parapolitics did not only benefit local powers; paramilitaries also had their share. The effective protection of cocaine exports allowed the AUC to displace pre-existing small cartels and rapidly monopolize drug traffic in Sucre. Likewise the massive forcible displacement of peasant population served the warlord strategy of what Harvey (2003) calls "accumulation by dispossession", making AUC commanders an important emerging landed bourgeoisie. But most importantly, they participated in politics and were represented by the Garcia house in Congress, securing votes for the enactment of the Peace and Justice Law.

Parapolitics was to a significant extent possible in Sucre because worldviews of the rural bourgeoisie were compatible with those of AUC warlords on primitive forms of accumulation, rural land status and traditional politics. But apart from this affinity, the ease at which parapolitics seized the subnational state and criminalized politics can be also explained by other factors. First, the absence of organizational complexity within the state, with fully controlled bureaucracies by the García and Merlano houses that made most institutions vulnerable to seizure. Second, the absence of a strong civil society, citizen culture, political opposition, and media generated a wide social permissiveness and tolerance vis-à-vis the phenomenon, hindering the possibilities of bringing "the public" back in.

## THE CAPTURE OF THE STATE IN SUCRE: ALL ABOUT POLITICS

*“I have earned my seat by the way of effort; by the way of sweat”<sup>1</sup>*

The last chapter’s analysis on the historical background of Sucre discusses a series of keys that facilitated the distinct process of parapolitics that took place in this territory. The department constitutes a peripheral space characterized by a weak state ruled by corrupted politicians who, via the creation of a narrow political space with stable clientele, have closed subnational boundaries to the influence of the centre’s modernizing and democratizing reforms. Sucre has not overcome pre-modern forms of accumulation that mainly derive from rents on rural land and uncompetitive extensive cattle ranching, and therefore its integration to markets has been extremely weak. Politicians along with rural rich, and more recently supported by the paramilitary muscle, have violently hindered the democratization of the access to rural land – highly concentrated in few latifundia owners, generating one of the deepest rural inequality gaps in Colombia. The interaction of these variables created a hyper-criminalized political space in which politicians and warlords co-governed the department and looted its finances for almost seven years. Although paramilitary groups participated in overcoming the security crisis generated by guerrillas, paramilitary formation primarily responded on the one hand to the needs of maintaining the status quo of rural land and politics in the department, and on the other hand serving the AUC’s urge for demobilizing in order to legalize and legitimate wealth and political power accumulated by warlords during their active time in Sucre.

As discussed in this chapter, there are four distinctive features that characterize parapolitics in Sucre. The first one is that the logic of politics prevailed over the logic of market. The main accumulation means – public resources, patronage, and rural land – were in the hands of the local establishment, and despite the fact that the *Autodefensas* enjoyed a significant share, the connections to the sources of such means were a monopoly hard to grab from local politicians and rural rich. Although AUC warlords controlled drug trafficking, its relevance was not as

<sup>1</sup>Alvaro García Romero’s speech at the Colombian Senate during the debate in which he was pointed by Senator Gustavo Petro as allied of the AUC in Sucre, October 2006

prominent as in other Colombian regions insofar as it was restricted to cocaine exports – the weaker end of the business for Colombian criminals, and consequently did not constitute the main focus of paramilitaries. The greater strategic value of Sucre was indeed politics. They not only actively participated in the governance of the department but also had the García and Merlano houses representing the *Autodefensas*' interests in Congress.

The **second** trait is that the *Sucreneño* establishment locally induced paramilitary formation. According to the SCJ, “political elites organized and financed paramilitary structures; they first made personal financial contributions and later created their own private army and used public resources in order to maintain them” (SCJ-32672, 2009). Although Sucre fits Losada’s *hegemonic* type, the hegemony did not stem from warlords but from the García house, the AUC’s actual commander in Sucre. The internal induction -interpreted by many as a saviour and patriotic gesture against guerrillas, along with the fact that politicians, more precisely the García house, were in command of AUC structures, generated a great deal of social acceptance vis-à-vis paramilitarism. The arrangement between politicians and warlords proved extremely difficult to counter-balance: neither competing political actors nor guerrillas were strong enough in this regard.

The **third** characteristic is that paramilitary groups had little competition. In other regions, paramilitary warfare was conducted in territories where guerrillas and/or existing organized crime structures were extremely difficult to overcome due to their deep rootedness in the geography, society and economy. In those cases, despite the use of huge military manpower, the AUC could not fully overcome armed competition. Sucre was different. Paramilitary warfare was not labour intensive as guerrillas were not as strong as in other areas, has meagre political support and a weak financial infrastructure given the fact it never participated in drug trafficking.

**Fourth**, parapolitics in Sucre entailed the participation of warlords in governing the department. Politicians and paramilitaries created a complex legal/illegal power structure, fuelled by violence. The legal wing, mainly composed by the García house, increasingly allowed the illegal wing – the AUC – to control subnational appointments, bureaucracies and budgets in exchange for electoral protection and vote maximization. This process generated a win-win situation for both actors: politicians reproduced their power whilst paramilitaries obtained political representation at the congressional level. Alvaro García, along with his power structure of elected governors, departmental deputies, mayors and town councillors was central for the AUC expansion and consolidation and was active in crystallizing a political project through which the AUC captured the state. That explains why the SCJ in most of its sen-

tences refers to the existence of a “power structure” rather than to individuals in collusion with paramilitaries (VerdadAbierta, 2010a).

Despite the robustness of parapolitics in Sucre, there is no such thing as an invulnerable criminal enterprise. As discussed below, the alliance was not immune to fractures caused by internal divisions along the AUC commandership, defection, and betrayals. Moreover, notwithstanding the compactness of the alliance, the criminal project faced a few yet important “grey” institutional areas, that is, public officials who were neither controlled by the García house nor the AUC. The conjunction of these and other factors brought the enterprise to disintegration yet the conditions under which the criminal power structure was built remain untouched.

In this chapter I substantiate the process through which subnational political elites and AUC warlords allied. I analyse the creation of the AUC in Sucre by the local establishment; the conditions under which paramilitaries expanded throughout the territory and became the hegemonic warring actor; the inclusion of the AUC in the subnational ruling coalition and the establishment of a legal-illegal consociational arrangement; and finally its fall.

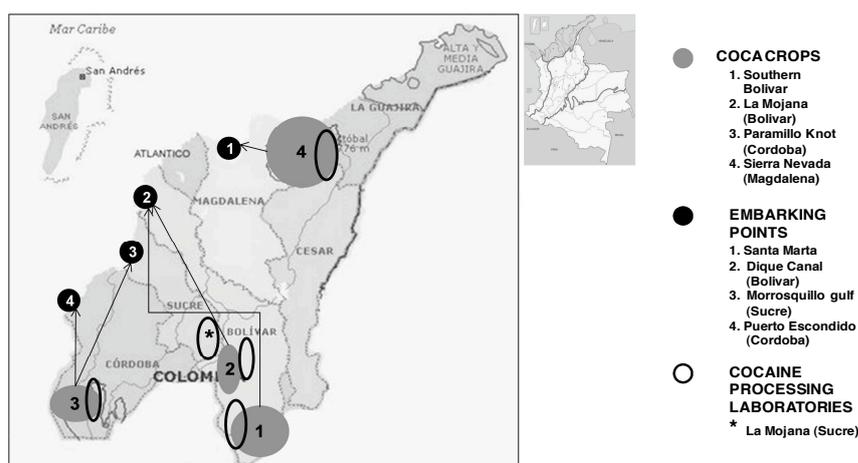
#### THE STRATEGIC VALUE OF SUCRE'S TERRITORY: GEOGRAPHY, RESOURCES AND UNDERLYING CRIMINALITY

The *Sucreño* geography lacks strategic value for warring actors given the scarcity of mountain chains and rain forest. This situation explains in large measure why FARC and ELN never reached a strong military control in northwestern Colombia if compared to the levels attained in other regions, owing to an important extent by the Amazonian rain forest in the south and the Andean mountains in the centre. According to an academic interviewed, “the fact that Sucre’s territory is of little strategic value in terms of guerrilla warfare made the intensity of collective violence rather low for a while if compared to other geographic areas in the country. Sucre is mainly a zone for guerrillas’ dispersion. Guerrillas have never been strong here and will never be [...] in terms of financial resources, extortion of rural rich has been an important predatory mechanism but if you compare Sucre with [neighbouring] Córdoba department, cattle ranching activities are not that important [...] Sucre has a mediocre economy. In my view, Sucre’s real strategic value for any warring actor is the public budget” (Restrepo, 2009).

Sucre has also been marginal in terms of underlying criminality – that is, structures of organized crime and illegal activities that existed prior to the emergency of guerrillas and paramil-

itaries. Although drug trafficking significantly increased under the control of the AUC, the narcotics trade in the department has never been relevant.<sup>2</sup> First, unlike the case of the Bolívar, Córdoba and Magdalena departments, there are no coca crops in Sucre (Map 5). Second, cocaine-processing activities were of intermediate importance, compared to those located in neighbouring departments. Third, in terms of cocaine exports, the Morrosquillo gulf was far from being the most salient shipment point in the Caribbean region: the largest share of cocaine produced in the Caribbean is trafficked from the Dique Canal in Bolívar, Puerto Escondido in Córdoba, and Santa Marta harbour in Magdalena. Fourth, there was neither a local cartel nor any major *Sucreño* drug trafficker. Moreover, FARC never became involved in the business. The Medellín Cartel largely controlled cocaine export activities during the 1980s and after its collapse small syndicates led by Pablo Escobar's former lieutenants controlled them. The Medellín Cartel's heirs controlled the business through local intermediaries in other cities. These aspects largely explain why drug traffic never irrigated the departmental economy as it did in other cases.

Map 5: Location of Drug Traffic Activities in Sucre and Neighbouring Departments



Source: Colombian Anti-Narcotics Police (mapped by the author)

The absence of strong illegal activities in Sucre had two important consequences for the AUC's military strategy. As coca has never been cultivated in the department, the paramili-

<sup>2</sup>It is to note that in the context of the Caribbean coast, the departments of Bolívar and Magdalena are the most salient coca leaf producers and cocaine export points. Magdalena department has a long-standing tradition in the field since the 1970s with massive production and trafficking of marihuana, the so-called "marihuana boom". The latter was followed since the 1980s by coca leaf and cocaine processing. Bolívar department became important since the late 1980s when the southern and mid-western areas started to experience an impressive increase of coca crops.

tary warfare neither entailed a dispute with guerrillas over crops control and protection, nor the needs of protecting and regulating coca labour force – mainly harvesters, as was the case in the neighbouring department of Bolívar. This significantly explains why the AUC neither generated a huge military manpower nor an organic workforce. The second consequence is related to the cocaine trade. Given Sucre's feeble underlying criminality, AUC warlords monopolized cocaine processing and shipment activities very soon, and with almost insignificant levels of violence.

## THE BUILDING OF THE CRIMINAL ENTERPRISE

Despite the long-term political success of García and Merlano houses in Sucre, their alliance with the AUC made their electoral performance reach extraordinary results between 2002 and 2006. The convergence of machine politics, landed interests and paramilitary violence became the perfect recipe for the electoral success of politicians and for the paramilitary urge for representation. Nonetheless, it is important to note that these political houses had different processes vis-à-vis paramilitarism. The evidence shows that the García house created and commanded paramilitary groups whereas the Merlano group was co-opted by the AUC in the context of internal AUC fractures, as thoroughly substantiated in this chapter.

The criminal enterprise of politicians and the AUC was built between 1997 and 2006, and comprised three stages: a) the creation and financing of AUC structures; b) the military consolidation of the AUC and its inclusion in the subnational ruling coalition; and c) the crisis and shift in the paramilitary strategy.

*The creation and financing of AUC structures (1997–2001)*

The first stage took place between 1997 and 2001, and the relationship between politicians and paramilitaries was mainly grounded at the level of violence provision. The *Sucreño* establishment financed AUC structures in order to provide private security to the rural rich<sup>3</sup> as well as protecting the local economies from guerrillas' predatory activities. The García house was

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<sup>3</sup>Between 1996 and 2004, 633 kidnappings were registered in Sucre according to the Ministry of Defence, although it is worth noting that these strongly decreased over time, from 114 in 1999 to 39 in 2004. 1999, 2001 and 2002 were the years with the highest number of kidnappings of which the FARC is alleged to have participated in 185 (29%), followed by the ERP with 140 (22%), the ELN with 79 (12%), common delinquency with 69 (11%) and the AUC with 29 (5%).

central in the creation, financing and expansion of the AUC's Montes de María Heroes Bloc – MMHB (*Héroes de Montes de María*). However, by that time García enjoyed a long-term electoral strength, and during that first stage the AUC was not used for electoral protection but for clearing the department from subversive actors and alleged bases in order to stabilize the region. Parapolitics came later.

In the pre-AUC era, paramilitary presence in Sucre was sporadic and intermittent between 1985 and 1996. During that period, private armed groups were created by drug traffickers mainly linked to the Medellín Cartel, and involved with the rise of coca crops in the Bolívar and Córdoba departments and the creation of cocaine routes through the Morrosquillo gulf. These paramilitary units were fragmented and rather autonomous. They lacked any offensive strategy or tactics; they neither settled in the region nor did they effectively control the territory. They operated in small commandos with specific missions in the coastal areas linked to the security of cocaine shipping. At that time, FARC and ELN dominated the Montes de María and La Mojana subregions and exerted control over local economies, especially through the diversion of public budgets, cattle theft as well as extortion and kidnapping of rich landowners and cattle ranchers. From 1994 these paramilitary structures were progressively embraced by rural security cooperatives – *Convivir*.

Although it is alleged that a first approach between the *Sucreneño* elite and the AUC took place in 1996 when rural rich Joaquín García travelled to Medellín in order to create a paramilitary structure in the department, the actual “foundational” moment took place in 1997 during a meeting of sixty members of the local establishment – including Alvaro García, and prominent warlords of the likes of Salvatore Mancuso. All participants agreed on bringing together the existing scattered paramilitary structures that operated in Sucre and creating an AUC bloc, the MMHB. Rodrigo Mercado – a former *Convivir* member – was chosen as the local AUC military commander under the alias of “Cadena”. The bloc was created to operate in Sucre and Bolívar (Appendixes 2 and 3), under the Northern Bloc's (*Bloque Norte*) line of command.<sup>4</sup> Although the MMHB depended from the Northern Bloc commandship, the

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<sup>4</sup>Paramilitary leaders Salvatore Mancuso and Rodrigo Tovar (alias “Jorge 40”) led the AUC expansion throughout the Caribbean Coast region in Colombia. Its largest structure, the Northern Bloc, brought together a wide network of local paramilitary groups that operated in an independent fashion until they were co-opted, subordinated or subdued between 1997 and 2002. Before the Northern Bloc demobilization process started, Jorge 40 and Mancuso controlled the north of Colombia from the Sinú and San Jorge rivers' basin in Córdoba and Sucre departments to the Venezuelan borders in the east. Between 1998 and 1999, Mancuso and Jorge 40 defeated the ELN guerrilla in order to control coca crops in Bolívar. They further advanced towards the lower regions of the Magdalena department, the city of Barranquilla and reached the rural areas of Uribe in La Guajira department, controlling the entire drug trafficking and smuggling strategic corridors. In late 2004, approximately 8,700 soldiers from the Northern Bloc started demobilizing in a process that ended in 2006.

latter – as other AUC blocs – was not exactly a vertically articulated structure but a confederation of warlords strongly linked to drug trafficking, with dissimilar and at times opposite histories, backgrounds, and interests.

Besides a special task command, the MMHB comprised three principal structures: the *Dique Canal Front* (area 1 in Map 6) under “Juancho Dique’s” command that operated in the bordering municipalities to the Dique canal in Bolívar department. The *Central Bolívar Front* (area 2) under the command of “Román Zabala” that operated in the coca crops mid-areas of Bolívar. The *Morrosquillo Gulf Front* (area 3) commanded by “Cadena” that controlled the *Sucreño* central and coastal areas. The MMHB had 594 combatants before its demobilization in July 2005.

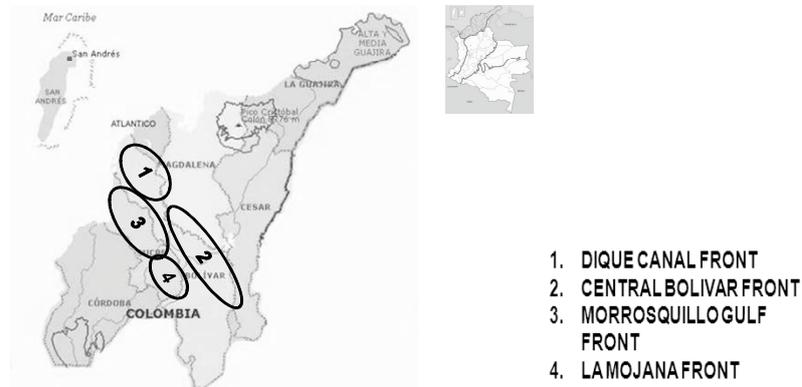
Another AUC structure, La Mojana Front (LMF), was created in 1998 in order to operate in southern Sucre for the protection of a cocaine-processing laboratory<sup>5</sup>, under the “Ramón Mojana” command. Its operational radius comprised the municipalities of San Benito, Caimito, Guaranda, Majagual and Sucre (area 4 in Map 6). This front was created as an independent structure from MMHB and depended directly from the Northern Bloc. Cattle ranchers also used this AUC structure for protecting their extensive landholdings from peasant occupations.<sup>6</sup> This front demobilized 109 soldiers in 2005. Alvaro García and Joaquín García were also involved in the creation of LMF. The then Sucre’s governor Salvador Arana –one of García’s top men – diverted public funds for providing guns, ammunition, and other logistic support. A key witness in Arana’s trial stated: “[when] Joaquín García asked Arana how was he planning to get the money, Arana replied that as Sucre’s municipality mayor was close to him, he would collaborate with the funding” (SCJ-32672, 2009). The SCJ established that the funds came from a ghost contract for the building of an embankment. The contractor received a 50% contract’s advance of US\$20 million in November 1998. The day after he handed a US\$14 million cheque to a paramilitary, and the rest of the money was in AUC’s hands before the end of the year. The embankment was never built. Along with other charges, Alvaro García and Arana were later prosecuted and convicted under charges of embezzlement.

According to Ramón\* (2009), the AUC had three military strategic goals in Sucre. The first one was concentrating efforts in San Onofre, Tolú, Toluviejo, and Ovejas municipalities in order to control cocaine exports through the Morrosquillo gulf. The second goal was weakening guerrillas and cutting their mobility and supply lines in the Montes de María region

<sup>5</sup>Salvatore Mancuso confirmed that he sent coca base from the Catatumbo region in Norte de Santander and from the south of Bolívar to La Mojana region for processing and export purposes (VerdadAbierta, 2009b).

<sup>6</sup>According to La Mojana Environmental Corporation (CORMOJANA), 95% of the subregion’s land is accumulated by 5% of registered landowners and is used for extensive stockbreeding.

Map 6: Geographic Location of the MMHB and La Mojana Structure



Source: Presidential High Commissioner for Peace (mapped by the author)

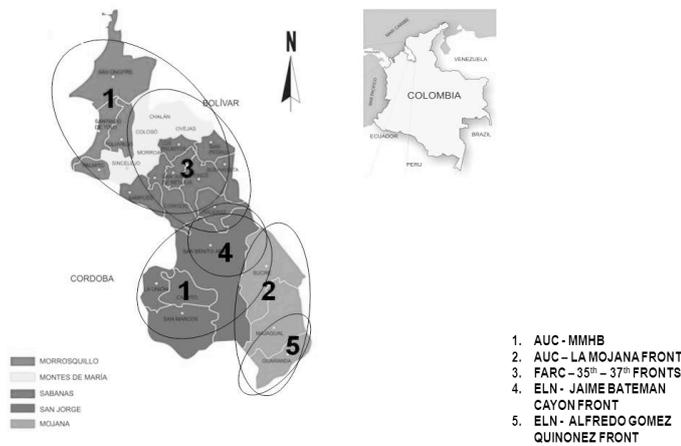
through an offensive campaign, and increasing the recruitment base by promoting desertion of guerrillas as well as incorporating deserter guerrilla members to its ranks. The third aim was expanding the AUC's control to the areas with more dynamic economic activities such as La Mojana (agriculture and cattle breeding) and urban areas (Sincelejo and Corozal) in order to obtain economic support by extorting cattle ranchers, retailers, wholesalers, transporters, shopkeepers and households in exchange for paramilitary protection.

The logic of territorial control of the MMHB and LMF corresponds to what González, Bolívar, and Vásquez (2003) refer as to a “meso-regional dynamic”, that is, a dispute over the military and political control of regions of fast economic expansion and integration to markets mainly via drug traffic activities. The Sucre and Bolívar departments are a case in point: the latter constitutes one of the most important areas of coca crops in northern Colombia and a relevant cocaine export point through the Dique Canal. Sucre, although not as significant as Bolívar, is still an important shipping point. The AUC structures in Bolívar and Sucre had a clear division of labour vis-à-vis the illegal business: Central Bolívar Front controlled coca crops, La Mojana Front controlled cocaine processing, and Dique Canal and Morrosquillo Gulf Fronts controlled cocaine shipping. Even more interesting is the fact that none of these structures had a cross-departmental jurisdiction, as shown in Map 6. The fact that these were clearly contained within departmental limits suggests unambiguous political and electoral goals, a pattern analysed below.

*Counter-insurgent campaigns: the weakening of guerrillas and the creation of geographies of terror*

The intensity of collective violence in Sucre was rather low until 1996 compared to other departments in Colombia. This situation changed in the context of FARC's and ELN's aggressive territorial expansion, and the emergence of AUC structures. Paramilitaries first settled in the Morrosquillo gulf area, of which the municipality of San Onofre became the main operational node. FARC was concentrated in Montes de María (Map 7), and despite occasional hit-and-run operations in other areas (extortion and kidnappings), the insurgents' supplies, logistics and conscription centres were located in those mountains. ELN operated in La Mojana with poor mobility and scarce manpower. From 1998 MMHB and LMF contested the control of territory with guerrillas by expanding towards the San Jorge and La Mojana sub-regions. Montes de María – the poorest region in the department, of small to intermediate peasant landholdings – did not provide any strategic value to the AUC in terms of financial resources and social networks support, but constituted an area of contention of guerrillas' progression towards the coastal areas. This explains why paramilitary operations in Montes de María were particularly bloody. However these did not entail direct confrontation with guerrillas but were instead targeted against civilians through massacres and forced displacement, as a means to weaken any social support available for guerrillas. Following Kalyvas (2006), terror against civilians had a clear function of social control. Montes de María experienced the most dramatic human rights abuses and humanitarian crisis in the department during the AUC's times. Systematic violence against civilians was a shared AUC-establishment goal, which more than being a strategy against guerrillas, was the dominant strategy for protecting rural rich land. On the one hand it entailed the ultimate weakening stage of the agrarian movement and on the other hand, the possibility of grabbing legally unprotected peasant small and intermediate landholdings.

Map 7: Areas of Military Control by Guerrillas and Paramilitaries



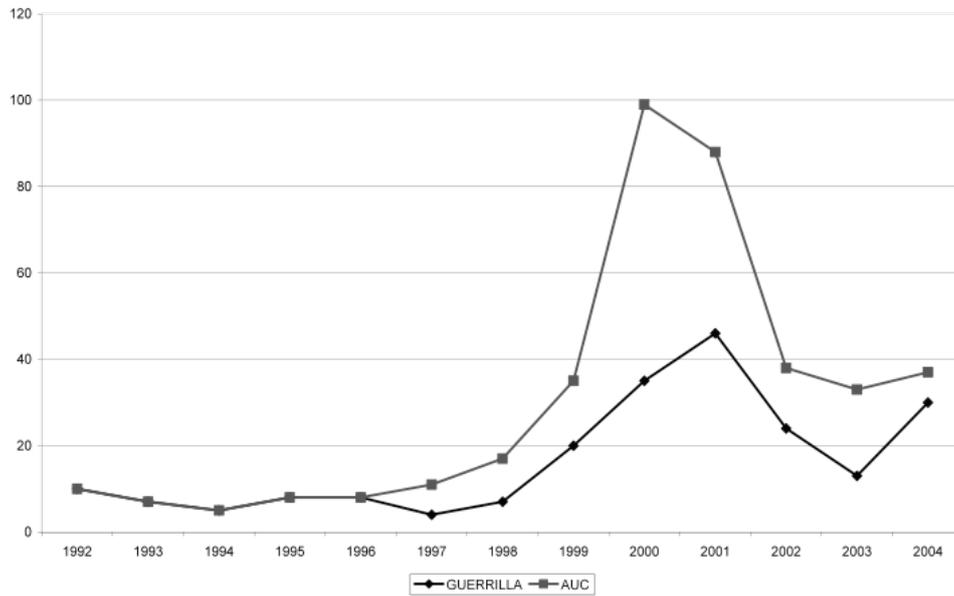
Source: Ministry of Defence (mapped by the author)

The paramilitary offensive in Sucre was very effective in the weakening of guerrillas. In the early 2000s, FARC had no more than 300 combatants organized under the 35<sup>th</sup> and 37<sup>th</sup> Fronts and ELN structures were at the verge of disappearing. On the civilian side it had devastating effects. In terms of homicides, the low intensity registered between 1990 and 1995 experienced a shift in 1998 with the dramatic increase in homicides against civilians (Figure 8). Similar patterns can be observed in the case of massacres (Figure 9) and forcible displacement (Figure 10). It is noteworthy that the highest peaks in all cases have a temporal coincidence between 2000 and 2002. The curbing of massacres from 2002 and of forcible displacements from 2003 suggests a success in the strategy of social control, the stabilization of land structure and the reach of the AUC's hegemonic military position in Sucre.

Under the monthly quota of thirty deaths imposed by “Cadena”<sup>8</sup>, at least 3,000 people were killed and disappeared (most human remains buried in mass graves). A further 150 people were killed in 29 massacres. Over 70,000 civilians were displaced between 1997 and 2005. The most infamous massacres were perpetrated in Montes de María with a death toll of over 100 victims. The best-known are those of El Salado (18<sup>th</sup> of February 2000) with 36 victims, Chengue (17<sup>th</sup> of January 2001) with 27 victims, and Macayepo (October 2000) with 15 victims. The latter was clearly orchestrated by Alvaro García and Joaquín García.

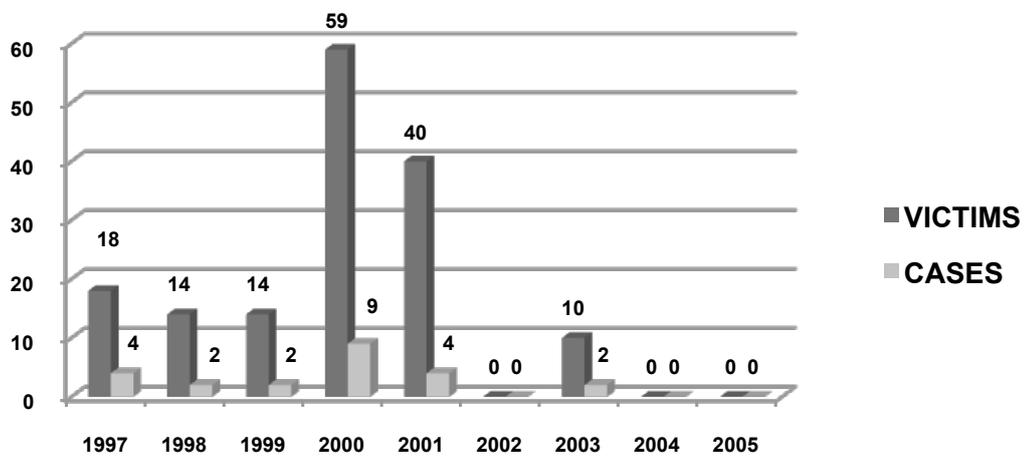
<sup>8</sup>A demobilized paramilitary told how alias “Cadena” imposed this quota and that his lieutenants had to hand in a report every month. Besides the report, Cadena’s men had to bring the victims’ national ID as further evidence, which were burnt. (Justice and Peace Public Hearing of Emiro Correa Viveros, alias “Convivir”, demobilized from the Montes de María Heroes Bloc, January 12<sup>th</sup>, 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> 2010).

Figure 8: Selective Homicides Perpetrated by Guerrillas and AUC in Sucre (1992–2005)



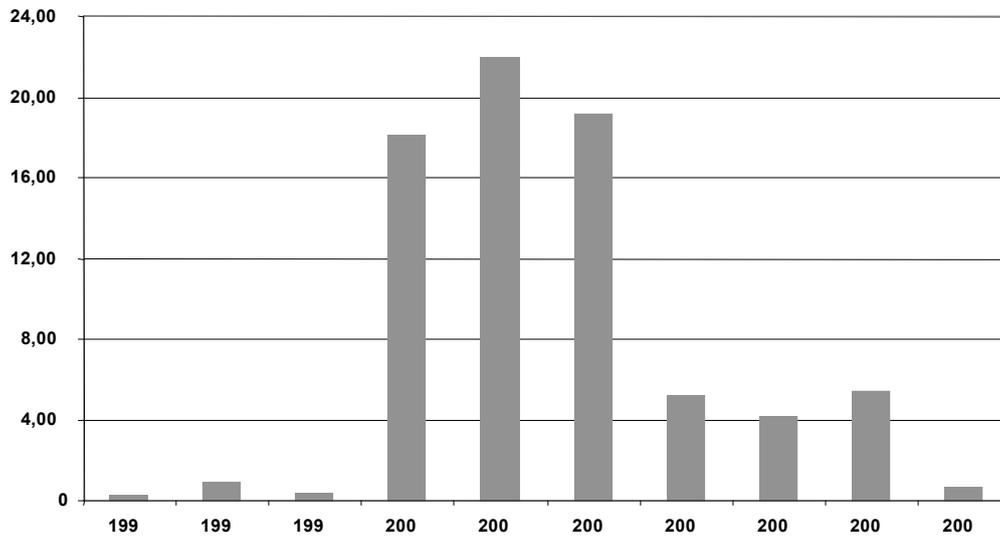
Source: Presidential Observatory for Human Rights

Figure 9: Massacres Perpetrated by the AUC in Sucre (1997–2005) (Number of Cases and Victims)



Source: Presidential Observatory for Human Rights

A week before the collective killing took place the National Police intercepted a telephone conversation in which Joaquín García asked Alvaro García to negotiate with the departmental Marine Corps commander the withdrawal of military troops from Macayepo in order to allow

Figure 10: Forcible Displacement Perpetrated by the AUC (1997–2006)<sup>7</sup>

Source: Presidential Observatory for Human Rights

the AUC incursion. Both the AGO and the SCJ established that two days before the massacre the area was cleared of military troops facilitating the paramilitary manoeuvre.

The AUC created what Oslender (2008) calls “geographies of terror”, that is, the production of landscapes of fear in which social relations collapse as inhabitants are massacred and displaced. “We decided to stay right after the [Chengue] massacre. Almost everybody left on that same day [...] we stayed because we had nowhere to go and because my daughter is crippled [...] it’s a miracle we were not killed that day. I happened to be in Ovejas selling cows; otherwise I would not be telling the story [...] we stayed in fear. We never slept again thinking they would come back and kill us all [...] the town felt ghostly, one could feel the ghosts of those who died in the massacre wandering around at night [...] we were a very close community before but after that we just stopped communicating [...] we were like the living dead [...] fear was too much to handle with so we finally left” (Ambrosio\*, 2009).

The de-territorialisation process via forced displacement mainly sought to undermine the peasant movement, and in this fashion terror deepened the existing social tensions over land property. Most victims of massacres were active ANUC militants. “In the early 1990s we had over 10,000 ANUC affiliates, but by 2002 only about 2,000 were still active”, said an ANUC leader interviewed (Villadiego, 2009). He added: “massacres and displacements weakened

our bases. There were also selective homicides: only in 2000, 24 ANUC affiliates were killed by paramilitaries. Everybody left. We were left alone and stigmatized. They said we supported guerrillas but they were too blind to see the truth. We were not supporting the FARC. I confronted FARC in many occasions because I always thought that it was not correct to use the peasant struggle for their warring purposes”.

*The infiltration of security agencies*

It was during this first phase that the AUC started capturing the local state by infiltrating security agencies. This constituted a fundamental strategic step given the AUC's need of immunity and impunity to operate. During the expansion process in Sucre, paramilitaries enjoyed full support from Colonel Rodrigo Quiñónez, then commander of the Marine Corps Brigade at Corozal with a long-standing history of human rights abuses<sup>9</sup>, and Colonel Norman Arango, departmental police commander. Salvatore Mancuso acknowledged this situation during a public hearing in which he accepted ordering the Colosó massacre. The warlord pointed out that former AUC leader Carlos Castaño “...gave us a mobile number of a general or colonel Quiñónez; he told us that if something ever happened he was the person we should contact at all times”. He added that two days before the crime he arranged with police and military officers the clearing of the area in order to perpetrate the massacre. During his interview, Ramón\* (2009) said he was in charge of liaising with the armed forces in the region, coordinated with the police and the military a series of selective assassinations in San Onofre, Ovejas, Sincé and Sincelejo and used his influence to provide his closest men with military intelligence ID cards. The Chengue massacre case, substantiated by the AGO and the Solicitor General's Office, also reveals the ways in which a high level of cooperation was reached between the Marines and the AUC in the region, involving Colonel Quiñónez.

The support of the military and police forces was not restricted to the counter-insurgency; they also collaborated in the illicit drugs trade. According to “Diego Vecino”, the AUC was supported by the Colombian Air Force and Navy: “our infiltrated people in the Navy facilitated us updated reports on the location of corvettes and other domestic and international ships in order to avoid the maritime interdiction of our fast boats” (Semana, 2010b).

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<sup>9</sup>In 1994, Quiñónez was investigated for the assassination of over 50 trade-union workers, politicians, and human rights activists in Barrancabermeja (Magdalena Medio region). A military court later acquitted him.

*The accumulation logic of the AUC*

The AUC warlords' participation in legal business was marginal in Sucre.<sup>10</sup> To a large degree, this limitation can be explained explained by the department's poor economic performance. Hence, they were heavily reliant on other available resources: drug trafficking, rural property, and public funds. However, during this first stage the AUC concentrated in accumulating wealth via the cocaine market, extortion and the grabbing of rural property.

It is calculated that the MMHB's war effort cost approximately US\$250,000 per month.<sup>11</sup> Although it is difficult to estimate the AUC's total income in Sucre, the scattered information suggests that the income exceeded by far the maintenance of the military structure costs; it seems clear that the surplus obtained via drug traffic, extortion, land dispossession and during other stages public contracting diversion fed warlords' personal finances as well as their political strategy.

*Accumulation by violent dispossession*

The economic effects of collective violence varied among subregions and social sectors in Sucre. One of the clearest direct effects of paramilitary violence was the deepening of the social tensions over land property and use. The consequences were two-fold: negative for small and intermediate producers in Montes de María, and positive for traditional landowners, paramilitaries – as the new landed elite – and for new agro-industrial investors in other subregions.

The logic of violent dispossession not only served the objectives of military control and of social and political stabilization of the territory. It also supported the aggressive capitalist penetration and control over areas close to cocaine shipping points. The “pacification” of the territory forced small and intermediate agricultural producers to abandon their land or sell it far below market prices in view of the threats and terror, and in the absence of regulatory mechanisms for enforcing private property rights.<sup>12</sup> The vast majority of dispossessed peasants were members of the ANUC who had been struggling for the land for decades. In this regard, the humanitarian crisis generated by the forcible displacement dynamics not only reversed the process of a more democratized access to land, but also the productive model

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<sup>10</sup>“Cadena” owned some shopping centres and gasoline stations as well as he controlled the wholesale foods market and the *moto-taxi* business (private motorbikes used as taxis, which constitute the most used means of transport in urban centres in Sucre).

<sup>11</sup>According to “Diego Vecino's” version, the MMHB's monthly payroll was of US\$150,000 (Semana, 2010a)

<sup>12</sup>In many a Colombian region, peasants have no formal land titles, and when they do, there is no existing strong authority to watch for dubious sale contracts.

of intensive agriculture of small and intermediate landholders. The latter was upturned by extensive stockbreeding.

Tolú, Toluviejo and San Onofre are the municipalities with the largest number of cases of dispossession in the Morrosquillo gulf area, as well as San Benito Abad in La Mojana region. It has been calculated that almost 60,000 hectares were forcibly abandoned and/or sold between 1998 and 2006 in Sucre (CNR, 2010). This situation is not only the result of the creation of an important drug trafficking corridor connecting both areas, but also of the creation of distinct electoral districts, as discussed below.

The case of *La Alemania* farm in Montes de María is illustrative. After years of struggle, fifty-two peasant families created the *Alemania Communitarian Company* on 556 hectares allocated by the National Agrarian Authority in 1997. In 1998, paramilitaries displaced the families and in 2001 “Cadena” took possession of the land, looted and dismantled the farm’s existing infrastructure and created an operational base there. While displaced in Sincelejo, the impoverished families saw how the debt contracted with the Agrarian Bank for agricultural production hopelessly increased. The AUC assassinated sixteen members of the *Alemania* community between 1998 and 2005. In May 2010, the company’s legal representative since 2006, Rogelio Martínez, was killed in Sincelejo. To date, families have not been able to recover the land, which has been tangled up in a complex chain of front men with legal property deeds almost impossible to challenge. Another example is that of *La Setenta* farm, located in the outskirts of San Onofre. “Cadena” grabbed the land from its owners, and through forcible sales and displacement, he expanded *La Setenta* from 70 to 300 hectares in less than two years (Lara, 2009). According to an ANUC leader interviewed, “San Onofre went from being an agricultural territory to a cattle breeding one in very short time. The coincidence of this phenomenon with the inrush of the AUC is clear. Nowadays only 10% of rural land has an extension of up to 10 hectares. The rest is latifundia” (Alvarez, 2009).

The Morrosquillo gulf was easily consolidated as a cocaine shipping area since the 1980s as the surrounding rural property was in the hands of members from the Medellín Cartel. “Diego Vecino” and “Cadena”, who rapidly monopolized the business, appropriated or bought most drug traffickers’ properties in San Onofre, Palmitos, Tolú, Toluviejo and Coveñas coastal municipalities, *El Palmar* and *Las Melenas* being the most renowned. These properties became barracks, operational nodes and even the site of common graveyards (El Tiempo, 2008).

*Drug trafficking*

During this first stage, the provision of private security to elites and territorial ‘cleaning’ was complemented by the consolidation of corridors for cocaine traffic. By 2000, the Northern Bloc had established itself as the cartel that controlled the entire illicit drugs chain in northern Colombia. The MMHB and La Mojana Front constituted central links in coca production as well as in cocaine processing and exports. All the embarked alkaloid belonged to “Diego Vecino” and “Cadena”, who controlled all the maritime routes in Sucre, and “Juancho Dique” who controlled those in Bolívar<sup>13</sup>. The cocaine processed in the Paramillo knot (Córdoba) and in La Mojana region was transported to *El Palmar* rural estate, where it was packed; it was then sent to a camp called Matarratón and embarked to Jamaica (Justice and Peace Public Hearing, 2010). Although it is very difficult to calculate the AUC’s drug trafficking income in the region, or exactly how much cocaine was shipped, it is estimated that warlords exported almost 35,000 kilos between 1997 and 2005 from the Morrosquillo gulf and Dique canal (VerdadAbierta, 2009a). According to Garzón (2005), the MMHB was financially self-sufficient when the structure demobilized in 2005 and it was almost fully financed by drug trafficking activities. Drug trafficking provided the AUC a substantial financial advantage for supporting its war effort, and most importantly the muscle for seeking political representation. Although *Sucreño* politicians never became directly involved in drug traffic, they were deeply tolerant vis-à-vis the business.

*Politics*

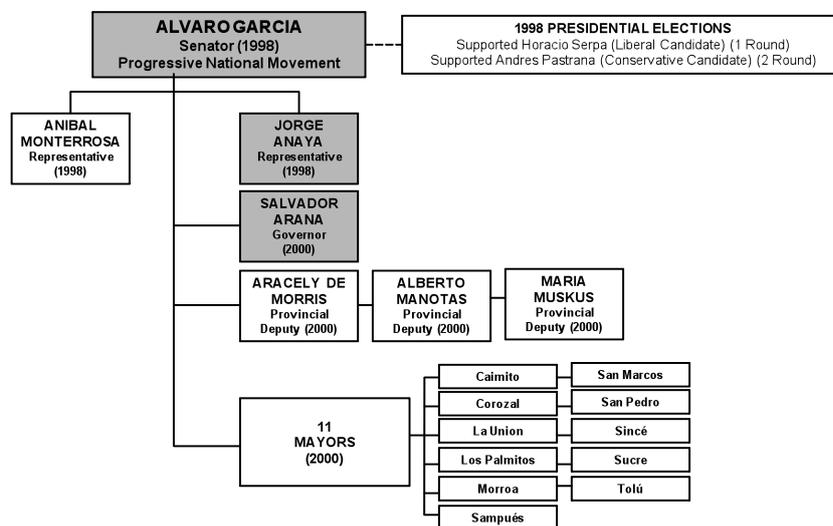
As stated above, during this first stage, the collusion between warlords and politicians was mainly limited to the contracting of violence.<sup>14</sup> Only until 2002 the AUC was included in the subnational ruling coalition.

<sup>13</sup>“Jorge 40” controlled the cocaine aerial traffic routes in the Caribbean coast. Jorge 40 dispatched cocaine to Venezuela in small airplanes that operated from illegal runways located in the Cesar department (Semana, 2007a).

<sup>14</sup>For the 2007 local elections, Eric Morris, one of García’s closest political partners, won the Governor’s Office under rigged conditions. The fraud provided Morris 3,000 extra votes, which made him beat his opponent. San Onofre’s Secretary of Planning and electoral witness, Georgina Narváz, publicly denounced the fraud. The public denunciation resulted in her assassination in November 1997. The Supreme Court of Justice established that Alvaro Garcia masterminded the crime and the AUC executed it. According to a key witness in García’s process, “the solution was killing her because she had the evidence of vote counting [...] García and Arana said that they had to give \$10 million [US\$8,300] to San Onofre’s paramilitaries to kill her [...] right after that Joaquín García let the AUC know that there were \$10 million available [...] after a few days the woman was assassinated” (SCJ-32805, 2010).

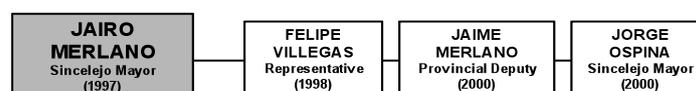
For the 1998 congressional elections, Alvaro García joined the National Progressive Movement and won his first senatorial seat with 38,111 votes. His partners for the House of Representatives, Jorge Anaya, obtained 51,736 votes, and Aníbal Monterrosa gained 37,675. For that same year’s presidential elections, García, as it was his tradition, supported the winner. For the first round he supported Liberal candidate Horacio Serpa but for the second round he backed Conservative candidate Andres Pastrana, who was elected president. Regarding the 2000 local elections, García won the Governor’s Office with Salvador Arana, three Departmental Assembly seats, and eleven mayoralties (See Figure below. The shaded areas correspond to politicians who were later prosecuted and/or convicted for colluding with the AUC).

Figure 11: Alvaro García’s Power Structure (1998–2000)



The Merlano House got Jairo Merlano elected as Sincelejo mayor, his brother Jaime won a seat at the Departmental Assembly, and entered Congress for the first time with Felipe Villegas at the House of Representatives. Although the power of the Merlano house could never be compared to that of the García group, it controlled Sincelejo politics until the mid 2000s. As in the case of the García house, the Merlano group did not collude with the AUC for electoral purposes during this period.

Figure 12: Jairo Merlano Power Structure (1997–2000)



*The consolidation of the AUC and its inclusion in the subnational ruling coalition (2002–2006)*

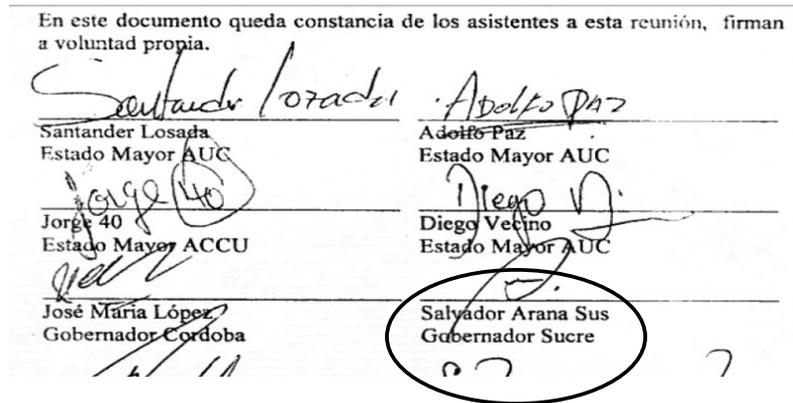
Since the early 2000s, the Colombian army and the *Autodefensas* had weakened guerrillas as well as their alleged social networks in the countryside. The AUC had penetrated the urban areas by creating its own support networks. This situation made it increasingly difficult for insurgents to obtain economic resources; the lack of any sort of social support critically undermined their networks and recruitment sources. From this point paramilitary groups stopped using indiscriminate violence and shifted to more selective forms by targeting specific victims<sup>15</sup>, a strategy they followed until the demobilization process took place in 2005.

The aforementioned Ralito Agreement was forged in 2001 and constituted the platform for the AUC's infiltration of the Legislature. Besides other Caribbean politicians, key *Sucreño* politicians signed it: three mayors, two staffers from Ovejas and Sincelejo mayoralties, and most importantly governor Salvador Arana (Figure 13). Arana was central in this context. According to the SCJ, he “promoted the paramilitaries’ qualitative leap to the political realm [...] he used his influence as departmental authority in order to benefit the reproduction and stability of the paramilitary organization [...] he signed the Ralito Agreement without any kind of pressure” (SCJ-32672, 2009).

<sup>15</sup>One of the most dramatic cases is the assassination of Eudaldo Díaz, mayor of El Roble (one of the few mayoralties won by the Left in Sucre). Díaz's publicly denounced governor Arana and Alvaro García's links with the AUC and departmental mismanagement in a public televised meeting with President Alvaro Uribe in March 2003. “Mister President, I know I'm going to be killed for bringing all this information into the public light” said Díaz. He was killed one month later. A key witness in former Governor Arana's process declared that the elected official paid “Cadena” US\$100,000 for assassinating Díaz. “I was there when [a ‘Cadena’ lieutenant] said: Arana gave the order [to kill Díaz] and everything has been already paid; what are we waiting for?” President Uribe later appointed Arana as Ambassador to Chile. In 2009, he was sentenced to 40 years of prison under charges of first-degree murder. The former director of Sincelejo prison was convicted to 28 years of prison for her participation in Díaz's murder. She granted two AUC members permission to leave the premises in order to commit the crime.

The Ralito Agreement was at the heart of the extraordinary expansion of political machines. Every single politician that signed it was elected or appointed in the 2002 elections with a large number of votes, as proven by the SCJ.

Figure 13: Fragment of Ralito Agreement Signatures (facsimile)<sup>16</sup>



*The electoral performance of García and Merlano houses*

The political partnership of the AUC and the García and Merlano houses emerged during the second stage. During this period, both political barons experienced spectacular electoral success and warlords co-governed the department, influenced appointments and systematically preyed upon local public resources. Moreover, they managed to obtain an unequivocal representation in Congress for achieving political status and the passage of the Justice and Peace Law.

Notwithstanding the inclusion of warlords in the subnational ruling coalition, García and his fellow party members were the actual commanders of the criminal enterprise. The SCJ argued: “political elites sealed a criminal alliance and the man in charge was Alvaro García” (SCJ-32805, 2010). Many people interviewed agreed on that “Cadena” was never recognized as commander in Sucre given his modest social background and disconnection with the local establishment; something similar happened with “Diego Vecino”.<sup>17</sup> AUC commanders were

<sup>16</sup>The first signature corresponds to Salvatore Mancuso who used “Santander Losada” as one of many of *noms de guerre*.

<sup>17</sup>“Diego Vecino” was born as Edward Cobos Téllez in Santander department of urban middle-class background. His family owned cattle breeding farms and where victimized by guerrillas. When he was 12 years old M-19 guerrilla’s men shot him. In the 1990s he moved to Sucre where he became cattle-ranching manager. He was kidnapped by FARC in 1995. In 1998 he joined the AUC and demobilized in July 2005.

therefore in charge of the dirty work, in exchange for an large share of public finances and some degree of co-governance, whilst politicians drew the strategic lines. A public official stated: “García would never follow instructions from someone like “Cadena”, who was illiterate and ignorant and as such he could have never entered the Sucreño political circle. García would refer to him as a “chimpanzee”. He did not have the stature of the likes of [AUC commanders] Mancuso or “Jorge 40” who belonged to Córdoba and Cesar departments’ landed elites” (Porras, 2009). According to a warlord, “Cadena was just a butcher from Macayepo<sup>18</sup>. He was chosen as commander because he was the biggest *hijueputa* [son of a bitch] in Sucre. García was his top boss. So were [ex-Governors] Salvador Arana and Eric Morris” (Ramón\*, 2009). A witness in Arana’s trial stressed: “we [paramilitaries] feared Arana. He was very powerful. We did not dare to become involved with the organization’s civilians because they could kill us” (SCJ-32672, 2009).

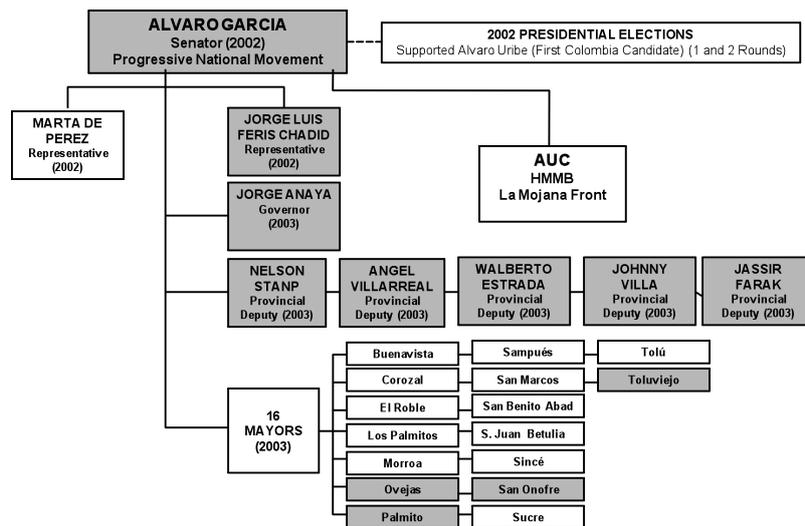
As pointed out before, warlords required political muscle in order to face a peace negotiation process; however, there were divergent approaches to this matter within the AUC. For most warlords, allying with traditional politicians constituted the fastest and most secure way. For others, the goal was creating the AUC’s own politicians and reach Congress directly. This divergence became the first factor at the heart of AUC’s internal fractures in the department. “Diego Vecino”, believed in creating AUC’s own politicians in order to combat *caciquismo* and political machines and also to have a more reliable political muscle. In this line, “Vecino” made a strange move: he co-opted the traditional Merlano house and used its power to launch the AUC’s first direct candidate Muriel Benito, a conservative from San Onofre with no prior electoral success, as discussed in a previous chapter.<sup>19</sup> This move sought to counter-balance the power of Alvaro García. Muriel Benito stated: “I knew ‘Diego Vecino’ was a paramilitary in January 2002. He told me the AUC wanted to venture into politics. They wanted to have their own candidates and they were contacting people in Sucre and Bolívar in order to know the kind of compromise they had with their regions. He also emphasized the AUC’s interest in a demobilization process” (Semana, 2007b). It is important to underline that, unlike the case of the García house, which was at the base of the creation of the AUC in Sucre and was in command of the *Autodefensas*, the Merlano house neither participated in the process of paramilitary formation nor in the command line. This house was more instrumental.

<sup>18</sup>This is not in a figurative sense. “Cadena” was a butcher until 1994 when he moved to San Onofre where he was in charge of a *Convivir* until 1997. In 1997 he joined the AUC.

<sup>19</sup>This odd alliance of ex-Liberals and Conservatives was not a surprise insofar as parties’ indiscipline reached its highest peak for the 2002 elections. In Sucre, two conservative streams emerged: one of them led by García and the other one by Merlano. In this fashion, marginal Conservatives increased their political weight by joining the great *Uribista* coalition.

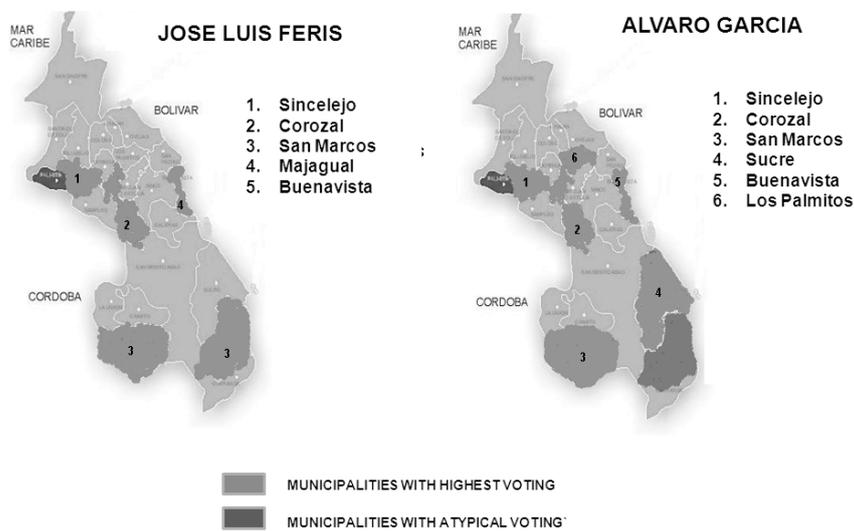
The other line, that of relying on political barons, constituted the prevalent approach within the AUC, and was backed by top commander Salvatore Mancuso: “we considered Caribbean coast politicians as our ‘natural’ partners for the demobilization process. We already had military power but we needed more political power in order to engage in a peace process with the government. That is why we needed the support of regional elites in order to consolidate a political project that expressed the AUC’s interests” (Semana, 2010d). He added: “creating an AUC list for Congress would have generated a massive conflict with the owners of local politics” (Semana, 2010d). In Sucre, “Cadena” was in favour of this strategy. García, with his electoral success at stake because of “Diego Vecino’s” support to Merlano and Benito, made two moves. First, he left the Progressive National Movement and joined the Democratic Colombia party – key in the *Uribista* coalition – for the 2002 elections, a move that responded to the usual strategy of supporting the presidential winner. The second move was allying with “Cadena”. García won a Senate seat again with 58,506 votes, almost doubling his 1998 vote. His partners for the House of Representatives, Jorge Luis Feris – brother of AUC commander Salomon Feris alias “o8” – obtained 53,396 votes, and Marta de Pérez 51,989. For the 2003 local elections the house won the Governor’s Office with Jorge Anaya, García’s 1998 congressional partner; 4 Departmental Assembly seats, and 16 mayoralties. The house won mayoralties where it was not traditionally strong. This is the case of La Mojana subregion: Majagual (1,741 votes in 1998 and 3,924 in 2002); Sucre (2,929 and 4,895, respectively); San Benito Abad (337 and 2,101); and San Marcos (3,123 and 5,524).

Figure 14: Alvaro García’s Power Structure (2002–2003)



Although Sucre’s case of atypical voting (above 50% of votes for a specific candidate) and conformation of “paramilitary electoral districts” was never as striking as those of Magdalena and Cesar departments (Losada, 2006), it can be observed in Map 8 below that Congressional voting for García and Feris was strong in almost the same municipalities where the tandem won. Nevertheless, atypical voting patterns do not coincide. Where García obtained the largest number of votes, Feris’s voting was atypical and vice-versa. García obtained atypical voting in Buenavista (71% of the total voting), and in Sucre (59%). Feris had atypical results in Buenavista and Majagual, with 52 and 57% of total votes respectively.

Map 8: Alvaro García and Jose Luis Feris’ voting for 2002 congressional elections



Source: National Registry Office (mapped by the author)

On the side of the Merlano house, the co-optation by the AUC represented its electoral consolidation not only in its traditional stronghold, Sincelejo with Jaime Merlano as mayor, but in municipalities where it did not have any prior political strength: San Pedro, Ovejas, and most importantly, in San Onofre where the house concentrated 57.35% of votes. Jairo Merlano, who joined the Radical Change party, was elected Senator with 41,071 and his partner and AUC candidate, conservative Muriel Benito won a Representative seat with 44,365 votes.

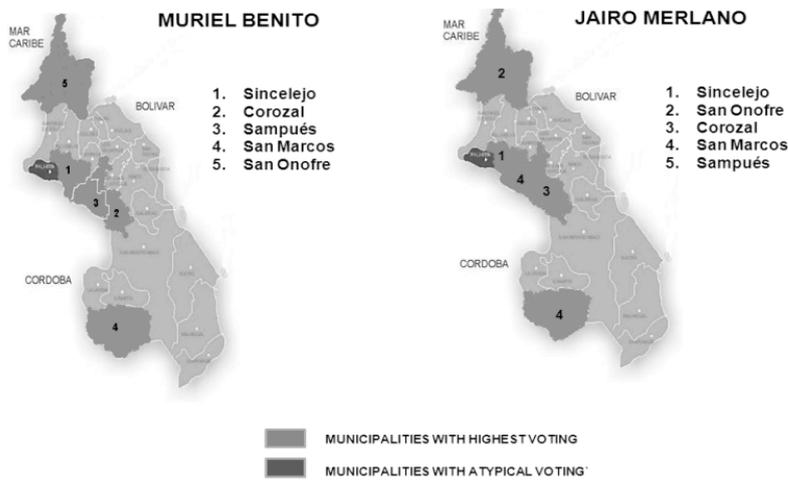
Map 9 below shows that Merlano and Benito had the majority of votes in the same municipalities, which confirms the pressure exerted by the AUC in these places for people to vote Merlano and Benito in tandem. Although in Merlano’s case no atypical voting was regis-

Figure 15: Jairo Merlano Power Structure (2002–2003)



tered, Benito won her seat with 67.72% in San Onofre, a striking result for a newcomer with no electoral background at all.

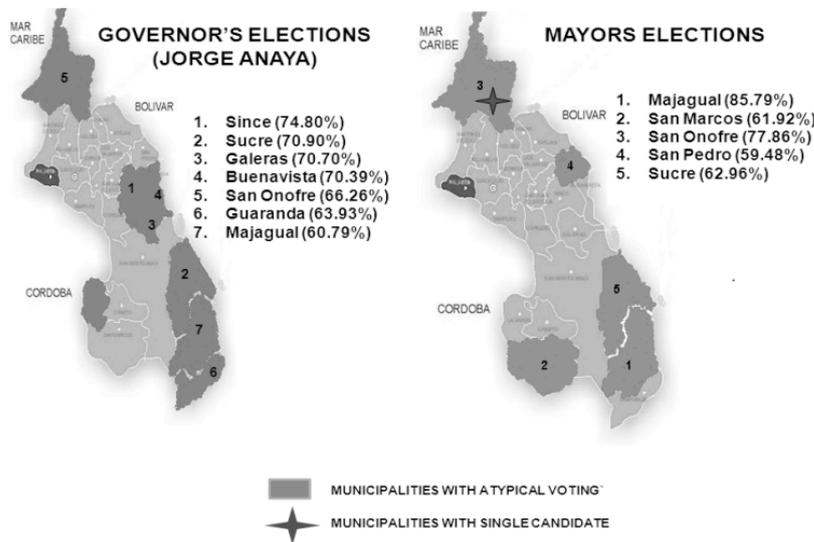
Map 9: Jairo Merlano and Muriel Benito voting for 2002 congressional elections



Source: National Registry Office (mapped by the author)

The paramilitary-led electoral process of 2002 generated a strong feedback in the 2003 local elections. As shown in Map 10 below, the latter exhibited strong atypical voting patterns, which tend to coincide with those municipalities where atypicality was identified in 2002. For the gubernatorial election, Jorge Anaya had an overwhelming triumph over the other candidates. His voting was atypical (over 60%) in seven municipalities. For mayoralties, Majagual elected mayor won with 85.79% of voting; San Marcos' with 61.92%; San Pedro's with 59.48%; and Sucre with 62.96%. The case of San Onofre deserves a special mention insofar as besides the striking atypicality of 77.86%, it was a single candidate case: Jorge Blanco Fuentes, the second AUC-made candidate. The atypical patterns in the mayoral elections tend to coincide with those of gubernatorial elections.

Map 10: Atypical Patterns – 2003 Mayoral and Gubernatorial Elections



Source: National Registry Office (mapped by the author)

All municipalities that experienced atypical electoral results had hegemonic AUC influence and there is sufficient judicial and journalistic evidence that demonstrates that most winner candidates colluded with warlords in order to maximize votes. Moreover, the patterns of “illegal” electoral districts where Senate and House of Representative candidates were elected in tandem are clear, as shown in Maps 8, 9 and 10. For the 2002 and 2003 elections the levels of electoral participation were significantly above the national average and void and null votes were well below thereof. According to the main electoral watchdog in Colombia<sup>20</sup>, in all municipalities with atypical voting two mechanisms were used: the paper ballots handed to electors were already marked, or the results were altered during the count. Paramilitaries worked thorough electoral rolls and retained national ID cards in each influenced municipality in order to control the voting.

*San Onofre: the recipe for success*

The main strategy for the spectacular electoral results of political houses was a blending of terror and fraud. The case of San Onofre illustrates the strategy at its best. Peasant orga-

<sup>20</sup>Electoral Observation Mission (Misión de Observación Electoral – MOE).

nizations were closed down, and ANUC leaders had to meet in Sincelejo with great secrecy. Every single household and business was extorted. Public officials had to give a monthly share from their salaries. “Cadena” imposed a curfew during two years, under which after 6 pm no one could transit or fish because at that time the maritime routes for the narcotics trade were activated.

Rural estates seized by warlords were used as concentration and torture camps. The most renowned case is that of *El Palmar*. There was a huge rubber tree to which “Cadena” tied detainees for days; a torture room called “the last tear”, and a crematorium.<sup>21</sup> To date, over a hundred skeletons have been put together from mortal remains found in mass graves. “Cadena” was also known for his binges: he treated politicians and cattle ranchers with smuggled champagne and whiskey, prostitutes, live music and banquets. He also organized beauty pageants in *El Palmar* – Muriel Benito was member of the jury on several occasions – and participants were sexually abused. A young girl interviewed said “my friend ‘X’ was one of ‘Cadena’s’ girlfriends. She won one of his beauty pageants once. He would give him presents every day: gold chains, cuddly toys, and perfumes. She even got a motorbike. No one dared to look at her. “Cadena” was crazy jealous. ‘X’ convinced me to participate in one of the pageants with the promise of finding myself a nice and rich boyfriend [...] they gave us lots of alcohol and everything turned really bad [...] three men raped me for almost a week and tied me up to a huge tree there [...] I was almost dead when they put me in the back of a truck and threw me somewhere along the road. I remained in hospital for weeks [...] I was told that my father and my brother were disappeared. I heard they went to *El Palmar* to look for me and never came back home. My mother goes there every day there to see if their remains have been found in the mass graves” (Paola\*, 2009).

The terror regime – with 330 homicides and 17,660 forcibly displaced peasants between 2000 and 2006 – made San Onofre a fertile ground for electoral manipulation and coercion. According to a communal leader interviewed, “for the 2002 elections, San Onofre’s communities were completely terrorized so it was easy to force their voting. They had to vote for Alvaro Uribe, Muriel [Benito] and Merlano. In 2003 it was the same. People were forced to vote for Anaya and Jorge Blanco [elected mayor]. All of them were imposed by the AUC [...] people were picked up in trucks in neighbourhoods and rural areas and were massively taken to Plan Parejo County, where they were told that they had to vote for Merlano and Muriel

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<sup>21</sup>I had the opportunity of visiting *El Palmar* rural estate during my fieldwork in November 2009. It is under property recovery process and has a permanent forensic team assigned for the recovery of remains found in several common graves waiting to be identified.

Benito [...] ‘Cadena’ put papers with the names of all town councillors in a bag. He took two and said he was going to kill them if Muriel did not win” (Lara, 2009).

*The co-government of warlords*

For the 2003 local elections, Jorge Anaya paid “Cadena” US\$670,000, diverted from public contracting, in order to support his campaign for the Governor’s Office (SCJ-31943, 2009); as stated above, he won an overwhelming victory. In exchange, “Cadena” had his brother-in-law appointed as departmental Secretary of Education, and one of his front men as Secretary of Finance. Once in office, both secretaries systematically extorted employees and contractors. The funds were shared with “Cadena” and Anaya (SCJ-31943, 2009). “Cadena” also supported Departmental Assembly deputies Angel Villarreal, Johnny Villa, Nelson Stanp and Walberto Estrada. “Vecino” stated: “Cadena and I brought these guys to the Departmental Assembly and we had the largest voting in 2003. We made Stanp the Assembly’s President” (Semana, 2010b). Something similar happened in San Onofre. As soon as he took office, Mayor Jorge Blanco removed all appointed officials from office in order to appoint paramilitary quotas. By the time I did my fieldwork in 2009, dismissed officials had neither been able to claim their work benefits nor their severance pay. A similar story happened to the local hospital workers.

During this second stage the AUC heavily influenced and diverted the flow of public expenditure. Elected and appointed politicians supported by paramilitaries supplied the AUC with strategic information about contracting and contractors as well as they dealt with all the legal matters involved. Twelve *Sucreño* municipalities were identified as part of the Northern Bloc’s public contract “taxation” network system.<sup>22</sup> In all municipalities almost 80% of public contracting was done via direct contracting and not by bidding. Most direct contractors were paramilitary frontmen who diverted over 30% of the total cost from each public contract to the AUC (Foro Nacional por Colombia, 2008).

Oil royalties became the main AUC target. As mentioned before, these resources have constituted the major source of political and fiscal instability in the Morrosquillo gulf subregion. Despite the fact that Sucre received substantial royalties of over US\$1 billion between 2001 and 2005<sup>23</sup>, their systematic predation via ghost contracting; payment of unfinished public works; duplication of the value of contracts within two years; and no internal control or clear

<sup>22</sup>The Northern Bloc’s “taxation” strategy in the Caribbean coast departments involved over 100 municipalities (Semana, 2008a).

<sup>23</sup>Source: National Royalties Office.

accounting systems left Tolú and Coveñas fiscally broke and with unsatisfied basic needs of almost 57%. In Tolú, the local public debt in 2005 amounted to USD50 million, of which almost USD11.5 million were subject of irregular contracts. Two mayors, three town councillors and several contractors who opposed corrupt practices were assassinated during that period. In turn, Coveñas has had 13 mayors between 1996 and 2009, all involved in corruption. None of them remained in office for more than a year. Luis Alberto Guevara, a prominent social leader was assassinated in 2006 after publicly denouncing corruption and irregularities in public contracting and the linkages between local politicians and “Jorge 40”. It is known that local contractors obtained a percentage of the total cost of the projects by lending the AUC their companies’ names. Contractors also obtained a share by signing the contract after which they either transferred it to MMHB frontmen or handed all the money to paramilitaries. A large share of these municipalities’ budgets fed the coffers of MMHB and the Northern Bloc, whilst most of the public works contracted during that period were never concluded and some did not even started. According to the General Accounting Office, just for 2003 the MMHB embezzled over USD1 million from Coveñas’ budget only in ghost contracting and the local authorities justified those transfers in the categories of services and acquisitions.<sup>24</sup>

“Vecino” revealed that they created a firm called *Coopsabana* for auditing public works’ contracts in Coveñas, Tolú, Toluviejo, San Antonio de Palmitos and San Onofre, and that the firm’s creation was also orchestrated by the respective mayors. According to the warlord, *Coopsabana* ended up being “the worst public budget bleeding factor [...] we contracted the Coveñas aqueduct but you cannot have a single glass of drinkable water there”, and that very soon the firm became the main public works contractor in the subregion (Semana, 2010a). A local NGO director interviewed stressed that the mayors of Coveñas, Tolú, Toluviejo, San Antonio de Palmitos and San Onofre created an association of municipalities<sup>25</sup> in 2004, which was used to magnify the scale of contract diversion in the Morrosquillo gulf subregion: “think about an average contract of US\$800,000. In the best of cases, they would only adequately spent US\$500,000 and divert the remaining percentage. As for the rest, ghost contracting was the rule” (Hernández, 2009). It is noteworthy that *Coopsabana* audited contracts in the same municipalities of the association.

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<sup>24</sup>Among the categories of services and acquisition used to divert public resources, the General Accounting Office found: solid residues and management, acquisition of uniforms, printing of IDs for meddlers, transformers’ supplies, civil works’ contract auditing, latrine construction, administrative consultancy, creation of public services companies, environmental management plans, local hospital infrastructure adjustment, among others (Semana, 2010a).

<sup>25</sup>The association of municipalities is a legal figure meant for generating economies of scale in public investment.

Another strategy was the diversion of the central government transfers to the indigenous reservation of San Andrés de Sotavento (Palmito, Sampués and Sincelejo municipalities).<sup>26</sup> “Vecino” and “Cadena” in alliance with mayors and indigenous captains diverted these resources for buying cattle. The operation consisted in stealing cattle in Montes de María sub-region, transporting the animals to the Morrosquillo gulf area and hiding them in Cadena’s rural properties in San Onofre. AUC’s frontmen negotiated the sale of the stolen cattle in public bids where the Palmito, Sampués and Sincelejo administrations bought the livestock from the indigenous communities. The business was extraordinarily profitable: municipalities bought each stolen animal at twice its market value<sup>27</sup>; indigenous captains and mayors were given a share. According to a demobilized AUC member, “Cadena” financed these mayors’ campaigns as well as he hosted parties for the indigenous captains: “he treated them as kings [...] he used to say ‘I am going to civilize these people by giving them clothes, watches, and even little mirrors, as in the Colonial times” (Justice and Peace Public Hearing, 2010).

Another case is that of the University of Sucre, the institution with the second largest budget in the department, a factor that made it a political stronghold with a long history of corruption. According to a student leader, “in Sucre even students’ elections are corrupted. For the last elections each vote cost US\$20. Yahir Acuña<sup>28</sup> was the one buying the votes” (Dairo\*, 2009). A former Vice-chancellor candidate remembers: “I went to the house of one of the University’s Board of Directors members in order to discuss my appointment [...] to my surprise [Yahir] Acuña was there along with physician Willer Cobo and Humberto Frazer [AUC’s frontmen in charge of extorting local administrations]. There was a rifle next to Cobo and I thought, what am I doing here? I simply cannot do this. The university was completely infiltrated by the AUC. I did not accept the appointment” (Daniel\*, 2009). The person who was later appointed as Vice-Chancellor, Rafael Peralta, was found guilty of diverting US\$6.6 million to the AUC, for appointing seven members of his family to positions at the university, and for irregular student admission processes (El Heraldo, 2009).

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<sup>26</sup>The San Andrés de Sotavento reservation also comprises the municipalities of Purísima, Momil, Chimá, Sahagún y Chinú in Córdoba department. It is estimated that 85,420 Zenú indigenous people live in the reservation.

<sup>27</sup>Between 2000 and 2005 over 30 members of this community were assassinated: some were killed for opposing the business and the others -participants – for settling of scores (VerdadAbierta, 2010b).

<sup>28</sup>Yahir Acuña is currently Sucre’s Representative, former departmental assembly member and former student leader. He will be mentioned later in this chapter.

*The social front for peace: crisis and shift in the AUC strategy*

The 2002 and 2003 elections allowed the political consolidation of the AUC in the department. Warlords' interests were successfully represented in Congress. Muriel Benito told the press: "after I got elected I met him ["Vecino"] again in Bogotá at the end of 2002. By that time the first drafts of the Justice and Peace law project were circulating and he was really interested in discussing this matter" (Semana, 2007b). In 2005, the law was enacted and without exception, all elected Congress members from Sucre voted for the law.

Before the 2006 elections the AUC's internal fractures increased in Sucre. It is worth remembering that "Vecino" and "Cadena" had divergent views on the ways of seeking political representation. "Vecino" stated post-demobilization that after 2003 "Cadena" led a *coup d'état* against him in order to feed his personal financial greed: he depleted public coffers in alliance with the García house but gave very little of it to the organization. According to "Vecino", this explains why politics in Sucre became "too degraded, too dirty" (Semana, 2010b). "Cadena" got along with his own personal project, mostly because he was strongly backed by the García house. As long as "Cadena" delivered votes and money, politicians did not care about the AUC's internal struggles. Politicians were in charge of everything; they were the real commanders. However, the *coup d'état* put "Cadena" in an internal difficult situation, mostly with Northern Bloc commander "Jorge 40".

In July 2005, 700 men-at-arms from the MMHB were demobilized. "Cadena" mysteriously disappeared during the demobilization process. It is said that "Jorge 40" – one of the last AUC warlords to demobilize – ordered his assassination and sought to rapidly fill the vacuum left by the MMHB demobilization and "Cadena's" disappearance. For this purpose, he delegated the control of Bolívar and Sucre to two of his closest lieutenants, "Don Antonio" and "Gonzalo". In 2006, the AUC launched the so-called "Social Front for Peace". The Front represented the AUC's qualitative political leap in the Caribbean region. The aim was to legitimize the political project of demobilized warlords: although they still sought to use the leverage of García and Merlano houses, they wanted to promote their own politicians by reaching a broad consensus in Sucre and Bolívar and not by resorting to sheer violence and intimidation. This explains to a great extent why "Jorge 40's" demobilization took longer. Warlords had to secure their political future in the Caribbean region.

In 2006, the Colombian authorities confiscated a laptop belonging to "Jorge 40" with information that was central for the judicial substantiation of the *Sucreeño* parapolitics trials.

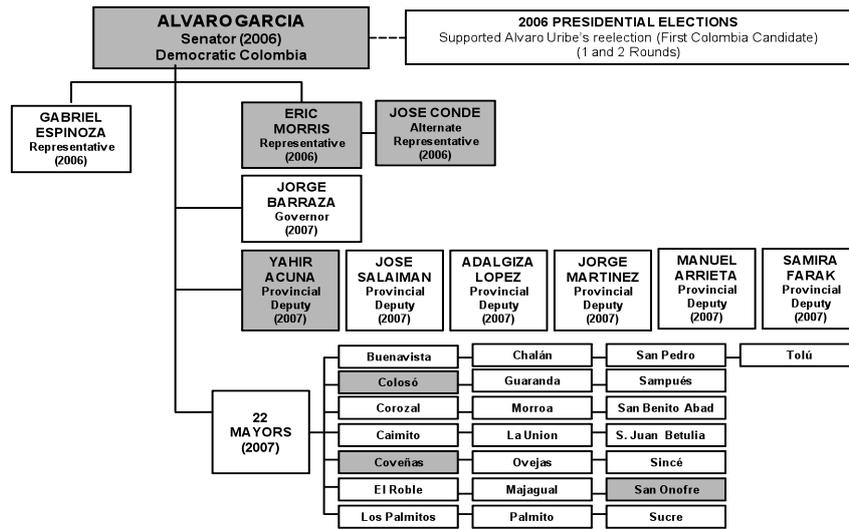
The most important pieces of evidence were a series of recorded meetings that took place in January 2006, prior to that year's electoral process. The recordings revealed that "Jorge 40", under the *divide et impera* logic, sought to take advantage of the existing political strife between Alvaro García (whose partner for the House of Representatives was Eric Morris) and Jairo Merlano (with Muriel Benito) in order to start giving room to the AUC's own political project. The objective was continuing to use García's influence, but concentrating on supporting Jairo Merlano. This time they did not support Vecino's *protégée* Muriel Benito, but instead they backed their own politician, Conservative Antonio Martínez as Merlano's partner (Semana, 2006a).

One of the recordings clarifies the nature and reach of the Social Front for Peace. "Don Antonio" said: "from the seven departments we control in the Caribbean coast, I can say that our political work is particularly solid in Sucre. That is not the case of Bolívar where we are militarily stronger but we still have a long way to go in politics. I reckon Sucre is ours; hundred per cent sure [...] Sucre was in chaos but once we started working there we sent the message that things were going to change [...] We are demobilized now but that does not mean we have lost the political power because this power is what's going to project us into the future [...] "Vecino" coerced people to vote for Muriel [Benito] but we are no longer letting him do this. He's demobilized now. It is fine for me if people vote for Muriel because she's an excellent politician, but not because people are forced to do so [...] politics cannot be done with guns [...] we have to promote ideas and projects. That's the politics I am interested on now. I used to be on the military side and did not know shit about politics. Now I am learning. This is the line we have to follow now" (Semana, 2006c). In another recorded meetings paramilitaries and politicians discuss the distribution of electoral support, the taxation of public contracting, and again, the nature of the political project (Appendix 4).

For the 2006 elections, Alvaro García left the Progressive National Movement and joined the Democratic Colombia party, supporting again Alvaro Uribe's candidacy for presidential re-election. García won a seat in Congress again – his last one – with 52,014 votes. His partners Eric Morris – ex-Governor – and Gabriel Espinoza entered the House of Representatives with 33,365 and 33,794 votes, respectively. Although this time García's votes did not surpass his 2002 result, he and his partners recorded the largest number of votes in Sucre. García dominated in Sampués, Los Palmitos, Colosó, La Unión, Sincé, El Roble, Morroa and Galeras with voting of over 30%; the highest concentration was in Sampués, Galeras and Colosó. However, unlike 2002 elections, this time no atypical voting patterns were registered.

The 2007 local elections proved the biggest success for the García house. This time, besides winning again the Governor’s Office with Jorge Barraza, García won six Departmental Assembly seats and 22 mayoralties. Although there is no evidence of paramilitary coercion or fraud, the triumph of the García house was linked with alleged electoral fraud, a technique traditionally mastered by Alvaro García.<sup>29</sup>

Figure 16: Alvaro García’s Power Structure (2006–2007)



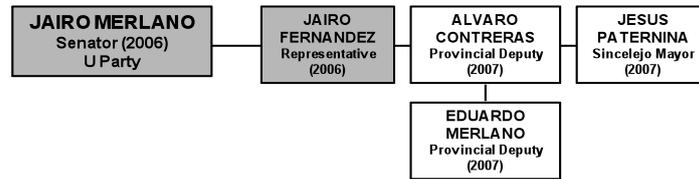
The Merlano house won a senatorial seat with Jairo Merlano (41,257 votes), who moved from Radical Change to the U Party. However, his 2002 partner Muriel Benito was not successful, a foreseeable outcome given “Diego Vecino’s” demobilization and “Jorge 40’s” lack of support. By then she was already being investigated for her links with the AUC. Merlano had three partners for the House of Representatives, of whom only one was elected: Jairo Fernández. Antonio Martínez (“Gonzalo’s” candidate) and Nasly Ucrós did not succeed.

The Guerra house returned to the political arena after being fully displaced by the AUC.<sup>30</sup> Antonio Guerra entered the *Uribista* coalition (Radical Change) and won a senatorial seat

<sup>29</sup>For the Governor’s Office elections, García’s candidate was competing with Julio César Guerra. The polls pointed Guerra as the winner; however, an alleged fraud made Barraza become the last minute winner. Electoral witnesses also confirmed fraud in Sucre, Los Palmitos, Ovejas and San Onofre; “in Sucre, even the dead voted”, one of them said.

<sup>30</sup>It is to note however that the Guerra family displacement from the electoral arena happened only in Sucre. In the neighbouring Córdoba department they kept being strong as well as at the national level. Uribe’s former Minister of Telecommunications was María del Rosario Guerra, daughter of the patriarch José Guerra Tulena and sister of Antonio Guerra.

Figure 17: Jairo Merlano Power Structure (2006–2007)



with 16,763 votes. His uncle Julio César Guerra ran for the Governor’s office but lost due to Alvaro García’s support to his candidate Jorge Barraza through alleged electoral fraud.

The paramilitary muscle provided great success to political houses again. Nonetheless, the ambitious Social Front for Peace project did not materialize. There are two reasons that explain this situation. First, the organization was almost fully demobilized by then and was significantly exposed to the public light, mostly because of the concerns about the reach of the Justice and Peace Law. Second, there was already an on going public debate on the phenomenon of parapolitics, many politicians names were involved, and the judicial system was starting the investigations, including the Social Front for Peace connections. However, there are other explanations at play, related to the subnational political mechanics and to the situation of politicians vis-à-vis paramilitarism. Even if “Jorge 40” sought to make his frontmen elected and appointed, bypassing traditional politicians and machines was out of the question at this stage. They were the ones with the connections and the clientele. Paramilitaries were indeed central in the García and Merlano houses extraordinary electoral success over the last decade. In return, politicians allowed warlords co-governing the department and feeding their personal greed; moreover, politicians represented paramilitaries’ interests at the highest level and gave them what they wanted. However, as stated before, politics came first. The García and Merlano houses existed before the AUC era and were robust enough to control the region-centre linkages without resorting to violence. Moreover, in the case of Sucre, politicians were never subordinate to paramilitary power. On the contrary, they were the ones who orchestrated paramilitary formation, as well as created and commanded the advantageous criminal political network. “Jorge 40” sought to have his first elected Governor, but failed. Alvaro García imposed Jorge Barraza. The warlord candidate for the House of Representatives, Conservative Antonio Martínez, attracted few votes and was not elected to Congress.

Even if both sides of the alliance were subject to the action of justice, it is possible to stress that at the end politicians won, mostly the García house. Although García was convicted to

40 years of prison, he managed to keep his machinery working from jail. Something similar has happened to the Merlano house. Paramilitaries met a more bitter end.

## UNVEILING THE CRIMINAL ENTERPRISE

*The shift in key agencies at the subnational level*

From 2003, an open offensive against guerrillas and paramilitaries was launched by the national government in the Montes de María region, a situation that completely changed the military-paramilitary balance in the department. The new military and police commandship, Colonels Rafael Colón and Rodolfo Palomino, respectively, proved unsympathetic to the AUC. A military officer interviewed stressed: “before 2003, it was clear that both the Marines and the police supported the paramilitary expansion in Sucre. Their support was crucial for AUC consolidation [...] their commitment with the AUC proved harmful for the armed institutions. Operationally they were implacable with guerrillas but protective of the paramilitaries [...] police Colonel Arango was a bandit” [...] the victims of the massacres committed during those years were not insurgents. They were unarmed peasants [...] when this all began *Sucreño* society was a slave to paramilitaries. When Colón arrived, people started talking and collaborating with the authorities. This change was central for investigating paramilitary crimes and the finding of mass graves in *El Palmar*” (Daniel\*, 2009).

Regarding the judicial system at the subnational level, the evidence also demonstrates the resilience of the departmental Attorney’s Office to infiltration and capture. On the 29<sup>th</sup> of August 2002, departmental attorney Yolanda Paternina and two subordinates were assassinated in Sincelejo. She had been thoroughly substantiating the Chengue massacre investigation against 80 AUC members involved.

*The Attorney General’s Office and the Supreme Court of Justice*

Sucre was the first case of parapolitics exposed in the public light. In May 2005, Left wing Representative Gustavo Petro led a public debate in Congress in which he denounced the “Sucre connection” and constituted the starting point of what became the AGO and the SCJ central task for the years to come, and unveiled an avalanche of collusion cases in many departments.

The once solid alliance between politicians and warlords started experiencing a serious breach of trust, insofar as two converging – yet independent – judicial roads were being followed. On the one hand, investigations and trials against politicians and on the other hand the processing of AUC ex-combatants under the Justice and Peace jurisdiction. The attitude of exposed politicians vis-à-vis the accusations was denial and hence a complete lack of collaboration in revealing the truth. In turn, AUC warlords, feeling betrayed by their former allies, and given the complications that emerged in the framework of the Justice and Peace Law as well as under the extradition treaty with the U.S., started to provide valuable information regarding the alliances through various documents and explosive interviews. The situation was further aggravated by the attitude of President Uribe’s administration, which was publicly interpreted as one of complicity with its Congressional coalition.

Sucre is to date the department with the highest number of elected and appointed officials involved in parapolitics: 4 Senators, 6 Representatives and 36 locally elected and appointed officials (Appendix 5). The second-worst case is that of the Magdalena department in the Caribbean coast with a total of 19 parapoliticians.

### *The García House*

The sentences against García and Arana are unique in the universe of the parapolitics processes. They were convicted to 40 years of prison under charges of plot to commit crime, first-degree murder and embezzlement. The García house brought the collusion to its highest level: for the first time in Colombian judicial history politicians have been sentenced for being responsible of crimes against humanity. García was held responsible for the Macayepo massacre and the assassination of an electoral witness in San Onofre. Salvador Arana was convicted for the murder of El Roble’s mayor in 2003. In January 2011, a new trial against him was initiated, accused of diverting public funds.

Eric Morris was the first politician to be convicted for collusion with paramilitary groups in Colombia. He was sentenced to six years of prison in 2007 for promoting, arming and financing illegal armed groups, and plotting to commit crime by using official position and public resources. In his case, the SCJ stated “he is one of the main men responsible of promoting the paramilitary organization in Sucre in a progressive scale” (SCJ-26118, 2007). Morris’

alternate at the House of Representatives, José María Conde<sup>31</sup> was also accused of first-degree homicide plot and sentenced to 5 years of prison.<sup>32</sup>

Jorge Anaya was sentenced to seven years and six months of prison under charges of first-degree plot to commit crime. According to the SCJ, “the behaviour of Anaya demonstrates his clear belonging to the AUC [...] his relationship with the AUC did not stop once Anaya was elected but on the contrary it lasted throughout the time he remained at office” (SCJ-31943, 2009).

Departmental Assembly deputies Angel Villarreal, Johnny Villa, Walberto Estrada and Nelson Stanp got sentences of six years each under charges of promoting the paramilitary organization in Sucre. According to the Sincelejo Criminal Court, “they undertook the task of directing the AUC militancy with the strongest conviction of paramilitary principles [...] they were responsible for the AUC support to governor Anaya” (SCC-2007-00016-00, 2007). All mayors and town councillors involved were sentenced between six and eight years of prison for supporting the AUC and under charges of embezzlement.

Piedad Zuccardi, Alvaro García’s sister-in-law and political baroness from the Bolívar department, is being investigated for parapolitics in Bolívar department and is being trialled since March 2013 by the SCJ.

### *The Merlano House*

Muriel Benito was sentenced to six years of prison in 2008 for being electorally supported by the AUC. She was the only *Sucreño* politician to acknowledge links with “Vecino”; hence she obtained a significant reduction of almost half of the sentence.

A Bogotá Court first acquitted Jairo Merlano in 2008. Nonetheless, the GAO appealed the sentence, arguing strong evidence of the electoral support provided by the AUC. Merlano was finally convicted by the SCJ to eight years of prison. His son Carlos Eduardo, who was elected at the House of Representatives after his father was being trialled, is currently trialled for parapolitics by the SCJ.

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<sup>31</sup> Conde replaced Morris when he resigned to his seat because of his legal situation.

<sup>32</sup> Conde is being held responsible for planning the assassination of Victor Ramírez from the Left party Democratic Pole, in 2004. Ramírez escaped unharmed from the assassination attempt.

*AUC warlords*

All warlords went behind bars – excepting for “Cadena” who was allegedly murdered during the demobilization process. Salvatore Mancuso, AUC General Staff commander, and “Jorge 40”, Northern Bloc commander were extradited to the U.S. in May 2008 under charges of drug trafficking. “Ramon Mojana” was extradited under identical charges in December 2009.

A U.S. court has thoroughly requested the extradition of “Diego Vecino” but the SCJ has systematically opposed it on the grounds of his collaboration with the Justice and Peace system. According to the Court, “the seriousness of crimes committed abroad cannot be compared with that of massacres, forcible disappearance, torture, and forcible displacement committed by paramilitaries” (VerdadAbierta, 2010c). Last June, he and “Juancho Dique” were the first AUC warlords sentenced under the Justice and Peace jurisdiction. Each was convicted to eight years of prison – the maximum sentence allowed by the transitional law – after they accepted their responsibility in many crimes.

*State security agents*

Based upon the available evidence on the Chengue massacre, the Solicitor General’s Office sanctioned Colonel Quiñónez, and other two officers and five sub-officers. However, the AGO precluded the penal investigation by arguing that no convincing proof of collusion with paramilitaries was found in the trial. It was also found that the information contained in the police register books about the time where the paramilitary trucks were seen was altered. In 2007 the Attorney General’s Office found strong evidence to accuse Colonel Norman Arango from the National Police, another officer and two sub-officers.

## THE POST-PARAPOLITICS ERA

It is clear that Sucre has to a great extent overcome collective violence and for many *Sucreños* the department is going through a “post-conflict” stage. Despite the re-emergency of paramilitary structures, paramilitary violence has been considerably curbed with the demobilization of the AUC, and guerrillas have been significantly weakened.

Nonetheless, the department is facing a dead calm period rather than a post-conflict situation. According to Father Rafael Castillo, “Sucre is experiencing a disturbing transition. The conflict is not yet over and warring actors are re-accommodating. All the conditions for reac-

tivating collective violence are given: the ways of making politics, the tensions over land, and an extremely weak society” (Castillo, 2009). The “pacification” of Sucre is to a considerable extent attributable to the delegation of security to private agents. Although paramilitaries were not able to militarily defeat guerrillas, they were successful in removing their alleged social bases, which ended up in the dismantling of the peasant movement. On the whole, FARC and ELN were considerably weakened not only by paramilitary action but also by the state’s offensive from 2003, and withdrew to Montes de María areas. Although insurgents have tried to fill the vacuum left by the AUC, they no longer have the military strength and lack the social support to succeed in this objective.<sup>33</sup> This explains the dramatic increase in the use of landmines by guerrillas. The fact that the department also became one of the most important operational theatres for the national government since 2003, made the Morrosquillo gulf lose its relevance as a drug trafficking point. It is no longer the free harbour it used to be at the end of the 1990s. The activities are now concentrated in Córdoba and Urabá region in Antioquia.

A new paramilitary structure called “Banda de los 40” emerged in the Caribbean coast departments during the post-demobilization time, allegedly under alias “Salomón”, lieutenant of Jorge 40.<sup>34</sup> “There is an evident breakup between the AUC and these new structures. The judicial prosecution of regional elites frustrated the AUC continuity. What we have now are typical organized crime structures; not paramilitaries”, a *Sucreneño* academic pointed out.<sup>35</sup> Unlike the AUC, this structure lacked political drive, hence its emphasis on drug trafficking. In fact, there is no evidence of paramilitary interference in electoral processes after 2007. The “Banda” mainly taxed cocaine shipments and collected related debts through the so-called debt-collecting offices. The gang reached almost 200 members in 2007. It is calculated that in Sucre the group operated with 27 people of whom at least six were former members of public security forces. The fact that the underlying crime in Sucre prior to the AUC emergence was feeble made the “Banda de los 40” subject to contestation by external stronger organized crime structures. The much-feared Envigado debt-collecting office from Medellín and the Múnera clan from Arauca department sought to control the Morrosquillo gulf drug trafficking activities. The outcome was a ferocious war – it is calculated that almost 50% of homicides perpetrated in Sucre between 2006 and 2009 are related to this dynamic – leading

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<sup>33</sup>Public schools in Sincelejo have become targets for illegal armed groups’ recruitment. Students are invited to go the southern departments in the country, where FARC is still a strong actor. In other cases, the youngsters are offered to go to Córdoba department in order to protect coca crops by re-emerging paramilitary structures.

<sup>34</sup>Since Jorge 40’s extradition, “La Banda de los 40” suffered an accelerated process of decomposition. The Múnera brothers, known as *Los Mellizos*, who commanded an AUC structure in Arauca department, as well as “Don Berna” the AUC leader in Medellín took over the group, seeking to control the drug trafficking businesses in the Morrosquillo gulf. This competition unleashed a war (Semana, 2008b).

<sup>35</sup>(Restrepo, 2009).

to the “Banda’s” disappearance. Nowadays, The Envigado office controls the cocaine trade from the gulf.

Politics was no longer influenced by paramilitaries after the 2007 elections. Cash votes replaced bullets in Sucre. A person from San Onofre said: “now they give us things, not bullets, and treat us right. At least there is more flexibility for elections. In the past, candidates were imposed with violence” (Semana, 2006b). Also, candidates started to proliferate in Sucre: according to the National Register Officer, the number of candidates to mayoralties went to 77 in 2003 to 142 in 2007. A similar situation was experienced during the 2010 electoral process, which was the least violent of the last twenty years.

However, traditional politics has prevailed. The García house remained in command despite having Alvaro García and his partners behind bars. Its political muscle has proved invincible, even in the absence of paramilitary violence: for the 2010 elections the house had the highest voting in the department once again.<sup>36</sup> García’s party – the Colombian Democratic party – was one of the most affected by the parapolitics phenomenon as most of its seats in Congress were investigated. That is why ex-Colombian Democratic Party members “refurbished” the party by giving it a new name, the National Integration Party (PIN). As stated before, investigated and sentenced politicians used the PIN and other Uribista coalition parties to launch relatives or close friends as political frontmen. Teresa García, Alvaro García’s sister, won a seat in Senate with 48,210 votes in 2010. Salvador Arana used Yahir Acuña – allegedly close to paramilitary groups as well – who got elected at the House of Representatives with 45,775 votes. The Merlano house managed to get Eduardo Merlano, Jairo’s son, elected as Senator for the U Party with 37,195 votes; he is now being trialled by the SCJ for colluding with the AUC.

Parapoliticians’ heirs considered that they acted independently from what happened with their predecessors. Someone from Teresa García’s campaign argued: “what explains the fact that we are being supported by people in Sucre is a spontaneous feeling of gratitude for almost 40 years of working really hard for the communities’ well-being” (Semana, 2010c).

As for victims, the truth and reparation processes have been difficult. Although the convictions of “Vecino” and “Juancho Dique” and those of politicians involved with the AUC constitute a positive advance in the truth process, the crimes committed by “Cadena”, which

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<sup>36</sup> According the National Prisons Authority and the Home Ministry, Alvaro Garcia was the most visited inmate between January and March 2010, whereas ex-Governor Salvador Arana managed to leave prison almost 40 times during the same period. Besides the clear case of corruption, for many this is related to a very intense proselytizing activity.

constitute the vast majority, will remain unpunished as the warlord was killed immediately after the demobilization of MMHB. The reparation issue is even more complicated. Warlords' assets have been immunized from the victims' claims given the lenient terms of the Justice and Peace Law, let alone the fact that most of these assets are entangled in complex webs of frontmen. A recent scandal in the National Anti-Narcotics Office, which is the institution in charge of managing illegal assets, revealed that a large number of drug traffickers' assets disappeared from the databases and that many frontmen ended up receiving confiscated properties. A similar situation was identified in the Rural Development Institute: many rural properties destined for the return of several displaced groups were allocated to warlords' frontmen (Semana, 2010e).

The state's effort to facilitate the return of displaced people has been slow and full of bureaucratic obstacles. According to the Ministry of Agriculture and the Unit for Land Restitution, dispossessed peasants are formally claiming the restitution of over 51,000 hectares but only 3.3% of land has been returned to dispossessed peasants. The humanitarian demining operations, which have proved extremely difficult, also constitute a major obstacle in the return process. Also, as pointed out before, threats against land claimants still continue. As a consequence, people are returning under the so-called "silent return" modality, that is, the sporadic return to the parcels for the purpose sowing and harvesting. Peasants commute to the countryside and work during the day. At night, they return to the slums in urban centres where they found refuge since they were displaced.

The incipient peace has brought another disturbing phenomenon: under the shelter of promising mega-investment projects (gas and oil extraction) the acquisition of large extensions of rural land in Montes de María region started to take place in 2008, further impacting the unstable small and intermediate landholding structure. "Peasants who were lucky enough not be displaced during the war, or some of those who had their land returned started selling it for peanuts [...] entrepreneurs from Medellín came out of the blue, cash in hand, unleashing an unprecedented speculative fever. They bought hectares for \$300,000 pesos [US\$250] each and now they cost \$2 million [US\$1,670] [...] these entrepreneurs, who by the way are very close to the Uribe administration mostly through campaign financing, created companies exclusively for buying land in Montes de María [...] the land is being used for producing dairy on a large scale, on land with great soil for agricultural production. More of the same: fields full of cows. It's the cheapest option. No impact on work generation whatsoever. It's a shame" (Hernández, 2009). In November 2008 the Governor's Offices of Sucre and Bolívar froze land sales in Montes de María. "This was not a bad move, but the problem is that you

cannot do that unless you offer alternatives. I mean, the people who were selling the land are mainly displaced peasants. When they started to return they found their land reduced to nothing. All the improvements made for years were lost. Moreover, most of them were being choked by debts from which the government did not protect them. I guess they felt they didn't have a choice but selling and now they cannot do it" (Villadiego, 2009).

OF PROSPEROUS ENTREPRENEURS AND CRIMINALS: A  
GENERAL BACKGROUND FOR NORTE DE SANTANDER

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Norte de Santander (NDS) illustrates a different process of parapolitics. Although it is not as striking as that of Sucre in terms of the number of politicians involved, it has salient dimensions. Located in northeastern Colombia, NDS fits Losada's *predominance within restricted competition* type (2006) and represents a case in which the logic of the market significantly prevailed over the logic of politics. The emergence of the AUC in NDS and therefore parapolitics were not connected to the political process as it was in Sucre. Instead, it was mainly driven by the AUC's needs of controlling illegal and informal economies. In this fashion, violence was mainly aimed at disputing the control over the narcotics production and trade with FARC, as well as other businesses with other criminal actors. Contention over land was never as strong as in Sucre.

Although politicians and warlords colluded in NDS, the department did not experience the criminalization of politicians and the politicization of criminals in the magnitude of Sucre. Involved politicians sought to maximize votes, as in Sucre, but AUC warlords neither participated in governing the department, nor were they represented in Congress by politicians. The evidence shows that parapolitics in NDS had broader and deeper linkages with the AUC's economic activity, and weaker, shallower political bases and bonds, opposite to Sucre's experience. Unlike Sucre, where politics was first and crime came later, in NDS crime and politics have historically co-evolved. Contraband has played a central role in the department's economic configuration since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and prior to the arrival of the *Autodefensas* in NDS, strong organized crime networks connected to smuggling and the narcotics trade were consolidated. Although politicians have neither controlled these networks nor have they served as front men thereof, many politicians have traditionally protected criminal enterprises in exchange for campaign financing. This relationship continued during the AUC era, when warlords violently monopolized criminal activities in NDS. Parapolitics was then about protecting the paramilitary economy. However, the connection remained small in scale – it did not involve the whole establishment or all active politicians – and short-lived in dura-

tion, with continuing instability, contestation and flux. The fact that prior to the arrival of the *Autodefensas* NDS had a more pluralistic and competitive political field, in which diverse legal and illegal economic interests were represented by some politicians but not in a successfully consolidated or stabilized fashion, presumably explain the attenuated and unstable linkages between warlords and politicians, making NDS Sucre's counter-example. In Sucre politicians had traditionally owned the main subnational means of production - rural land - and therefore experienced more enduring, stable and larger scale forms of proprietary wealth, creating a different - and late - relationship with crime and paramilitarism. Despite the fact that the AUC's support to political campaigns generated extraordinary electoral successes to the García and Merlano houses, it is worth recalling that the paramilitary boom was possible because of politicians and that the García house commanded the MMHB. This was not the case of NDS as paramilitary formation was triggered in an exogenous fashion, as analysed in Chapter 7.

This chapter offers a general background of NDS that accounts for the subnational historical interaction of the five key dimensions discussed previously, which shaped this specific local path of parapolitics. It is noteworthy that NDS exhibits subregional variations in terms of state building and economic integration, which has created a modern urban NDS and a peripheral rural NDS, a matter thoroughly discussed in this chapter and the next, and subject to systematic comparison. Modern NDS is characterized by a stronger state and a modern and relatively strong economy, well-integrated into the domestic and international markets: Cúcuta, the departmental capital and one of the largest Colombian cities, has been the centre of the trade with Venezuela, one of the country's main trade partners since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Instead of the flourishing of landed rural elites intimately linked to the political realm as seen in Sucre, NDS created urban elites connected to trade and industry, largely divorced from politics. This phenomenon is mainly explained by the fast decline of the *hacienda* structure in and the early industrialization and connection to trade activities.

In contrast with modern NDS, peripheral NDS - the Catatumbo region - became a no man's land with the decline of the *hacienda*, and was subject to aggressive forms of accumulation via oil exploitation and coca production as well of as chaotic colonization waves. These processes occurred in the absence of the state, a vacuum historically filled by private firms, guerrillas and paramilitaries, which make this region a different kind of periphery from that of Sucre.

Regarding politics, NDS politicians never owned the means of production and consequently the labour force never served electoral purposes, unlike in Sucre where the *hacienda* solidified

patron-client ties. The existence of a more diverse economy has perhaps generated a more diverse, factionalized and contentious political space. These characteristics along with the fact that NDS has been primarily urban (75% of the population lives in Cúcuta's metropolitan area) have had important consequences in the political configuration of the department. Regardless of the predominance of traditional parties and of clientelist practices, political power has been diluted. Although the Conservative party has been the strongest in NDS, it has never been hegemonic as the Liberal party was for a long time in Sucre. Not a single political house has owned the department's politics like the García house has in Sucre. These features had two implications that contrast with case of Sucre. On the one hand, it precluded the building of an authoritarian subnational enclave, and on the other hand, it generated less severe levels of fragmentation, de-institutionalization and criminalization of political parties. These two factors contributed to narrowing the space of parapolitics.

On the whole, despite the existence of a modern NDS, the rule of law and the state's regulatory capacities have been weak in the department, a matter that largely explains the intensity of collective violence, the rise of massive illegal and informal economies, and the hijacking of democratizing and modernizing reforms by politicians, guerrillas, and paramilitaries. These phenomena have not only taken place in peripheral NDS but has also affected modern NDS to the extent to which Cúcuta has become one of the most prominent centres of criminal transactions in Colombia as well as one of the most violent. Unlike Sucre, where the "rents of political power" were at the base of the intensification of the internal conflict and the rise of parapolitics, in NDS it was about capturing the rents of legal and illegal businesses. The mixture of private prosperity and state weakness opened the doors to criminals and irregular warring actors to pervade departmental life, particularly since the 1980s, and through their increasing involvement with drugtrafficking activities NDS became the largest producer of coca and cocaine exporter in northern Colombia.

In sum, NDS offers a case of a fragmented territory with a strong division between modernity and periphery. On the whole, although subnational boundaries have been relatively open to the influence of a modernizing and democratizing central state, and despite exhibiting a wider political space, unstable clienteles and modern forms of accumulation, the weakness of the state has made NDS a highly criminalized space that revolves around all sorts of illicit activities. This feature has determined the dynamics of the internal conflict, paramilitary formation and parapolitics.

## BASIC CHARACTERIZATION

NDS is located in northeastern Colombia, along the border with Venezuela. Many territorial divisions occurred before the department was definitively created in 1910. Although considerably linked to the state and international markets since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the department's development has been uneven, a matter that has generated a dramatic development gap between the urban Cúcuta area and the rest of the department. The gap is particularly notable in the case of the Catatumbo region, the most peripheral area of the department. But in the overall, it is possible to stress that in many respects NDS exhibits higher levels of integration than Sucre.

*Geography and demography*

NDS is characterized by two different landscapes, a mountainous area corresponding to the eastern Andean branch, and a flat one located in the east central and north (Appendix 8). The department is divided in six subregions of which the eastern, northern and western subregions are the focus of this research (Appendix 9). The eastern subregion comprises the metropolitan area of Cúcuta, which is the fifth largest urban centre in Colombia with almost 1.3 million inhabitants. Cúcuta, Los Patios, Villa del Rosario, San Cayetano, El Zulia and Puerto Santander form the metropolitan area.

Map 11: Cúcuta Metropolitan Area



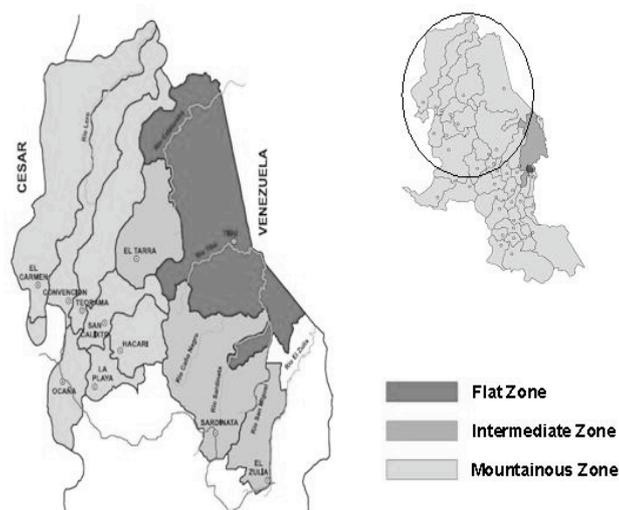
Mapped by the author.

In spite of its exceptional geo-strategic location along the border with Venezuela, Cúcuta's enormous trade potential has been reduced due to the poor road infrastructure. Organized crime, illegal armed groups, and smuggling informal agents have exploited this weakness, as it will be seen later. Besides Cúcuta's area, the department has two other urban centres of intermediate importance: Ocaña in the Catatumbo region and Pamplona in the south. The rest of the department is semi-urban and rural.

The northern and western subregions form the Catatumbo region, which constitutes almost 50 per cent of the departmental territory, and has been characterized by extractive economies that range from coffee and oil to coca. This region has a complex geography – a mixture of mountains and tropical valleys – and can be divided into three zones (map 12). The *flat zone* comprises the municipality of Tibú centre of the oil industry and the coca economy. El Tarra, Sardinata and El Zulia municipalities constitute the intermediate zone. One portion of this territory is located in plains and the other in the mountains. An important 16,619 hectares irrigation district was created in El Zulia and as a consequence some capital-intensive agriculture has been developed in its territory El Tarra and Sardinata are areas of agricultural and

stockbreeding activities, increasingly displaced by coca crops since the early 1990s. El Carmen, Convención, Teorama, San Calixto, Hacarí, La Playa and Ocaña municipalities constitute the *mountainous area*, characterized by peasant economies and the most important activities are related to coca crops.

Map 12: Catatumbo region by zones



Mapped by the author.

The urban and rural population is mainly of white and *mestizo* background. The *Bari-Motilón* and *U'wa* ethnic groups inhabit in the northern areas of the Catatumbo region and the southeast of the department, respectively. The demography is very dynamic in the department due to different factors. The first one is that Venezuelans and Colombians are allowed free transit across the border and have the right to remain indefinitely in either territory. Besides the existence of an important established Venezuelan community in Cúcuta and a Colombian one right on the other side of the border, many people from both nationalities temporarily migrate, according to the economic trends of either side of the border. The second factor is related to the internal conflict, which has significantly changed the urban-rural composition via forcible displacement. The third factor is the mobility generated by the coca industry in the Catatumbo region: in times of harvest the region's population increases as people from other Colombian regions and even from Venezuela temporarily move to work on the crops.

*Basic socio-economic characteristics*

NDS has a relatively large economy and overall its socioeconomic indicators are better than those of Sucre. The strategic location along the border with Venezuela has generated a dynamic economy mainly based on trade, banking and transport services which are concentrated in the metropolitan area of Cúcuta. The industrial sector, of intermediate importance, is composed of food and drinks, chemical products, cement and footwear. In turn, Catatumbo region is rich in natural renewable and non-renewable resources, mainly coal and oil.<sup>1</sup> Likewise, stockbreeding and agriculture are important activities with coffee, sugar cane, potato, rice, and tobacco. Although rural land in the department is not as productive as that of Sucre, the agricultural sector in NDS has proved more productive than that of Sucre. This is mainly explained by a different land structure in which small, intermediate and large landholdings coexist; hence there is less property concentration. This mixture also indicates that land has different uses, more intensive in seasonal and permanent crops, unlike Sucre where most of the land is dedicated to pastures for stockbreeding.

NDS's average contribution to the national GDP between 2000 and 2011 was at 1.66%, almost double that of Sucre with an average growth of 2.29% between 1990 and 2005.<sup>2</sup> The department's per capita GDP in 2011 (US\$4,214) was above Sucre's, yet far below the national indicator (US\$7,240).

In terms of competitiveness, of 29 departments assessed by ECLAC (2009) NDS was 12<sup>th</sup>, better ranked than Sucre. In 2012 the Colombian Caribbean Observatory ranked Cúcuta in place 13<sup>th</sup> whilst Sucre was penultimate of 22 cities assessed. Despite NDS's economic potential, informality, illegality and the absence of state regulation in many sectors have severely worked against the possibilities of a strong economy. Unlike Sucre, NDS has been dynamically integrated to domestic and international markets<sup>3</sup> since the 19<sup>th</sup> century given its strategic location along the Venezuelan border, mainly through clothing and footwear, mining and agriculture. However, the trade integration process with Venezuela has been traditionally poorly regulated and therefore has generated a large informal economy, which has been pro-

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<sup>1</sup>Oilfields are located in the Catatumbo region and are an extension of the highly prolific Maracaibo lake basin of Venezuela. Oil has a cumulative production of over 450 million barrels and 500 billion cubic feet of gas. Tibú produces 657,000 barrels of high quality petroleum per year. However, the oilfields on the Colombian side are almost insignificant if compared to those of the neighbouring country. As for coal, its reserves have been estimated in 300 million tonnes, the largest in Colombia.

<sup>2</sup>"Agenda para la competitividad: documento regional – Norte de Santander", Departamento Nacional de Planeación, 2008.

<sup>3</sup>Venezuela is NDS main trade partner with over 95 per cent of exports, followed by the U.S., Ecuador, Chile some Caribbean countries, China, Japan and Brazil. Source: Central Bank.

gressively criminalized by contraband, drug trafficking and money laundering. Unlike Sucre, drug trafficking has dramatically pervaded the NDS's economy: significant changes have been observed in variables such as urban construction and real estate speculation since the 1990s. But perhaps the most pervasive effect thereof, besides coca bush cultivation, is the flooding of the market with drug money via massive laundering efforts and the dramatic growth of the foreign exchange black market. These factors have significantly contributed the department's economy shrinkage over the last two decades, not only growing below the national average but also disconnected from the national tendencies. In 1990 the department had the eleventh largest economy in the country with a contribution of 1.93% to the national GDP; however in 2007 it dropped to the eighteenth place with a share of 1.53%.

The agricultural sector, which used to be at the core of the economic activity of NDS, has considerably declined over the last two decades. The end of the protection for agricultural products as part of economic liberalization strategy of the early 1990s, the fall of international coffee prices, smuggling, collective violence, and the introduction of coca crops are the main factors that explain the rural crisis in the department. Besides trade and agriculture, NDS has been characterized by enclave economies from oil since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century to coca over the last 20 years. Informalized trade and extractive activities have given rise to high levels of cash circulation and consumption but have not created productive chains. Consequently, productive activities have little aggregate value, the generation of employment is poor, and labour mobility is precarious. Informality and low quality of employment have hijacked the economic space and severely worsened the quality of life in the department. NDS has one of the largest informal economies in Colombia: it is calculated that over the last decade on average over 60% of Cúcuta's population participated in the informal economy. According to the Statistics National Agency, the informality ratio between 2000 and 2006 was of almost three informally occupied people for each person with a formal job on average (DANE, 2007). Almost 80% of the population displaced by guerrillas and paramilitaries has settled in Cúcuta, a situation that has notably enlarged the informal market over the last decade.

In terms of basic indicators the department has performed better than Sucre but given the nature of its economy NDS's overall situation is still precarious. NDS has a Human Development Index of 0.796 in the 2011 UN Human Development Report, better than that of Sucre but still in the group of departments with lowest performances. NDS's index is quite complex. According to the Ministry of Planning, from a list of 1,115 assessed municipalities Cúcuta was located in the sixty-second place whereas the rest of NDS municipalities were located between the 600<sup>th</sup> and 996<sup>th</sup> places. This difference accounts for the historical socioeconomic gap be-

## BASIC CHARACTERIZATION

tween Cúcuta's area and the rest of the department and this gap generates a particularly low indicator.

According to the National Statistics Department (DANE, 2012), income poverty was of 40.6% in NDS in 2011 whilst Sucre's was of 53%. Extreme poverty was of 9.9%, almost half that of Sucre (16.2%) for the same year. Compared with the national average, NDS has a higher multidimensional poverty index (MPI) incidence, but lower if compared with that of Sucre. While the latter's MPI was of 73.10% in 2011, NDS's was of 58.2% (86.22% rural and 50.26% urban). Educational achievement and formal employment are the variables with the highest incidence in the department (70.8% and 93.8% deprivation respectively). Other critical variables are child labour, childcare, health, and employment. Unlike Sucre, habitat and public services variables exhibit lower incidence levels. The MPI's variables are disaggregated as follows and compared to Sucre, Bogotá D.C and Chocó:

BASIC CHARACTERIZATION

Table 8: NDS' Deprivation Incidence by MPI Dimensions (2011)

	Low Educational Achievement		Illiteracy		Non-attendance school rate		School lag		
	Households	%	Households	%	Households	%	Households	%	
Bogotá D.C	1931372	42.1%	813401	7.9%	153465	4.6%	89142	21.4%	413184
Chocó	85608	78.4%	67102	41.7%	35715	24.5%	20971	44.0%	37669
Sucre	166540	74.8%	124655	38.6%	64223	8.7%	14488	35.1%	58373
Norte de Santander	295285	70.8%	208994	23.1%	68256	11.5%	33949	30.0%	88454
National	10572280	62.2%	6572469	18.5%	1952006	8.9%	937664	27.8%	2937927
	Barriers to accessing child-care services		Child labour		High economic dependency rate		Informal employment		
	Households	%	Households	%	Households	%	Households	%	
Bogotá D.C	1931372	9.2%	177519	2.6%	49456	27.4%	529573	77.2%	1490256
Chocó	85608	35.2%	30127	6.8%	5838	68.0%	58204	97.4%	83364
Sucre	166540	22.7%	37822	3.3%	5528	61.5%	102457	96.9%	161360
Norte de Santander	295285	21.4%	63330	6.0%	17695	42.2%	124552	93.8%	276841
National	10572280	15.8%	1669230	3.9%	417426	42.4%	4482668	86.8%	9180117
	Without health insurance		Barriers to accessing health services		No access to improved water sources		Inadequate excetra disposal		
	Households	%	Households	%	Households	%	Households	%	
Bogotá D.C	1931372	21.9%	422885	4.3%	82928	1.5%	28110	2.0%	38468
Chocó	85608	58.6%	50137	19.4%	16630	79.6%	68121	79.4%	67946
Sucre	166540	41.3%	68862	5.9%	9841	27.2%	45363	40.3%	67125
Norte de Santander	295285	35.7%	105448	8.0%	23633	17.2%	50835	13.6%	40029
National	10572280	29.6%	3125839	6.3%	664276	17.2%	1817629	17.0%	1794807
	Inadequate flooring		Inadequate walls		Overcrowding				
	Households	%	Households	%	Households	%			
Bogotá D.C	1931372	0.7%	13014	0.8%	15610	14.1%	272703		
Chocó	85608	6.1%	5184	27.6%	23640	22.7%	19454		
Sucre	166540	36.8%	61209	17.2%	28685	34.9%	58127		
Norte de Santander	295285	9.8%	29083	3.5%	10481	27.3%	80522		
National	10572280	10.0%	1059478	4.8%	510791	19.5%	2065159		

Source: DANE (2012)

The fiscal performance of NDS is superior to that of Sucre: over the last ten years, after a series of fiscal adjustment policies, the department has exhibited a positive current balance

and a good management of the debt. NDS is less dependent than Sucre on central government transfers. Over the last decade the reliance on the central government has decreased and currently stands approximately 58%. Departmental revenues have increased in spite of the struggle to raise tax revenue: most cigarettes, alcohol and fuel are smuggled, a situation that significantly weakens the departmental tax base.<sup>4</sup>

STATE FORMATION: THE ROLE OF INTERNATIONAL TRADE AND RESOURCE EXTRACTION

Although political parties played a central role in moving Sucre within the orbit of the central state, NDS followed a rather different process. The economic dynamics in NDS have been historically at the centre of institution building and of social integration to the state.

State formation was an uneven process in NDS. On the one hand there are the rapid modernization, urbanization and industrialization processes in Cúcuta, with some impact in Pamplona and Ocaña, and on the other hand the backwards situation of the rest of the department. Cúcuta's area was progressively integrated to the central state since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Its strategic commercial proximity to Venezuela rapidly provided this part of the department with a relatively large bureaucracy – mainly linked to customs and tax collection activities – and road infrastructure. Trade also generated a significant industrial capacity and both activities triggered an important urbanization process. These factors along with the premature dissolution of the *hacienda* system in the Catatumbo region, discussed below, made urban centres increasingly attractive. By 1880 the British-built Cúcuta-Zulia railroad was fully operating and the introduction of aviation in the 1920s further expanded the “industrial revolution” in Cúcuta. Through the 1930s the department industrialized mainly through oil and cement. Between 1938 and 1951 NDS had an urban growth index of 1.12, the seventh in the country during that period (Weiss, 1966). Besides Cúcuta, the municipalities of Ocaña and Pamplona also became important intermediate urban centres in the department. This process significantly contrasts with the marginality of Sucre's urban formation, state building, and industrialization.

As stated before, there are important sub-departmental variations in terms of the peripheral situation vis-à-vis the centre in NDS. The central, southwestern and southeastern regions are characterized by stable intermediate and small-scale agriculture with some concentration

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<sup>4</sup>In Colombia taxes on cigarettes and alcohol, as well as fuel surcharge constitute important sources of departmental and municipal revenues.

around Cúcuta, Ocaña and Pamplona. The Catatumbo region is the most peripheral subregion, a situation that worsens towards the North and West (intermediate and mountainous areas). Given its difficult geography, the region is poorly connected to any development pole. It is also an area of open frontier that has been historically subject to aggressive extractive economies with little impact in welfare, unstable and disorganized population processes, and a scenario of illicit economies and collective violence during the last decades.

*The hacienda structure: the first colonization wave in Catatumbo region*

The opening of the agricultural frontier in NDS came before that of Sucre. According to Ramos (2005) the settlement process in the Catatumbo river basin started during the 18<sup>th</sup> century, still under colonial rule in the context of the free-trade process promoted by the Bourbon crown. Royal policies stimulated the expansion of the agrarian frontier through slave-based cacao bean and sugar cane *haciendas* in wastelands and territories inhabited by the *Barí* indigenous community located in the flat areas of the Catatumbo region. The frontier was then expanded from the Maracaibo region (now located in Venezuela), Salazar de las Palmas, Cúcuta and Pamplona. The expansion of the agricultural frontier was conflictive, as opposed to that experienced in Sucre. *Barí* people resisted the expansive process to which local elites reacted by creating military enterprises. Violence was complemented with missionary companies that actively participated in the subjection of indigenous communities and facilitated the formation of *haciendas* and villages in the natives' ancestral land (Ramos, 2005).

Emulating the Venezuelan success in growing and exporting coffee, Cúcuta traders promoted the rapid displacement of cacao bean and sugar cane *haciendas* by the coffee *hacienda* in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. The latter generated the further opening of the agrarian frontier from the flat to the mid-mountainous areas in Catatumbo. The coffee activity grew very quickly and NDS became one of the principal coffee-growing regions in Colombia: it is calculated that in the 1870s the regional coffee production grew by almost 90% (Kalmanovitz, 2003) significantly competing with Brazilian, Venezuelan and Costa Rican exports. By the 1980s coffee had displaced the cacao bean economy. According to A. Machado (1988), the coffee economy in NDS displaced the slave-based *hacienda* system and brought along the *aparcería* (sharecropping system) as the predominant labour relation, mostly based on white and mestizo labour force. The burden of compulsory labour was very little or inexistent and therefore moved in the opposite direction of the almost servile labour relations common to other Colombian

regions until the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>5</sup> Coffee introduced a dualistic agrarian structure (Arango, 1977) in which the peasant economy expanded in parallel to the *hacienda* structure, introducing a relative modernization in the production relations. This process also sharply differs from Sucre's colonization in which, as explained before, the *hacienda* system did not allow for a peasant economy to develop and was based for a long time upon compulsory labour; the share cropping system developed later in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The coffee industry soon declined in NDS and the coffee *hacienda* rapidly dissolved. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century a large wave of peasant colonization moved from southern and northeastern Colombian regions to wastelands located in central-western areas where colonizers established models of small and intermediate coffee production (Ocampo, 1989; Palacios, 1979). This type of production rapidly expanded insofar as coffee could be easily propagated and its smaller scale production entailed less costs than those of the *hacienda*. This situation, along with the availability of suitable land and a better exports infrastructure in this newly colonized region generated the erosion of the coffee *hacienda* model throughout the country. By the 1940s, NDS's share of Colombia's coffee production had dropped to 34%.

This phenomenon importantly determined land relations not only in the Catatumbo region but also elsewhere in the department. Latifundia never became a predominant form of land property. In contrast with Sucre, this fact not only generated different productive relations but most importantly, different forms of political integration and social tensions. Even during the times of *La Violencia*, which was very intense in NDS, rural land was never at the centre of the conflict as it happened in other Colombian regions like Tolima, where partisan strife mainly revolved around the late *hacienda* structure. More importantly, the fact that the *hacienda* structure disappeared before political parties reached maturity in NDS did not create a political culture of dependency as observed in Sucre, or at least never to that extreme.

#### *The oil industry: the second wave of colonization*

The Catatumbo region was one of the first settings for oil exploitation in Colombia. Although minor exploitation took place in the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the industry became important in the 1930s when the so-called *Barco Concession* was granted to the American-based Colombian Petroleum Company (COLPET). The concession comprised al-

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<sup>5</sup>Most of the *hacienda* system in Colombian regions (Caribbean coast and central and southern Colombia) was of the regressive type based on compulsory labour for tenants. In the southwestern departments such as Valle and Cauca, the sugar cane *hacienda* was relied on slave labour force of indigenous and African descent.

most 200,000 hectares in the flat area of Catatumbo region with its centre in Tibú, in *Bari* territory. This situation made the phenomenon highly contentious insofar as *Bari* people, as in the case of the *hacienda* expansion, violently reacted against the concession and COLPET used the Colombian Army to repel the attacks.<sup>6</sup>

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the settlement processes were activated by the *hacienda* structure in Sucre and NDS alike. However, during the 20<sup>th</sup> century these processes diverged. Unlike Sucre, where settlement processes continued to be generated by the quest for land, in NDS the trigger was the establishment of the oil industry, which generated a second wave of colonization, not only at the inter-departmental level but also from other Colombian regions, and later by the coca boom. Between 1930 and 1950, oil exploitation generated the typical rapid settlement by large groups of people attracted to an industry with almost unlimited resources that, contrary to their expectations, hardly offered permanent employment. As a consequence, many immigrants established themselves as colonizers in a disorderly process that exerted further pressure over *Bari* land. The situation was worsened as World War II and *La Violencia* temporarily paralyzed the industry in the mid-1940s. Most newly unemployed joined the colonization process whereas others moved to the other side of the border where Venezuelan farmers illegally imported Colombian labour force to El Zulia region.

In 1950 the oil exploitation was reactivated and until the mid-1960s another wave of oil colonization took place, this time by peasants displaced by *La Violencia* from all over the country. As demand for work was larger than supply, the new immigrants brought further chaos into the colonization process at the expense of *Bari* territory, with violence, dispossession and massive displacement of native people. According to Pineda (1995) the *Bari* community went from 1,800 people in 1950 to 800 in 1960.<sup>7</sup> Unlike the case of Sucre where *Zenú* people – which was also significantly expelled from its territory – were absorbed by the *hacienda* structure, in NDS the *Bari* community remained as outsiders, systematically de-territorialized and decimated.

Despite the chaotic nature of this colonization wave, an important social process developed in the context of the oil industry in Catatumbo: the unionization of oil workers through the Workers' Trade Union (*Union Sindical Obrera* - USO) in the late 1950s<sup>8</sup>, and along with it,

<sup>6</sup>It is calculated that *Bari* people killed almost 250 oil workers in 1939. Although the number of *Bari* deaths is uncertain, nine communities were violently displaced towards the mountainous areas.

<sup>7</sup>A study from Beckerman (1979) presents a decreasing sequence of *Bari* people along the first half 20<sup>th</sup> century, from 2,500 in 1910 to 800 in 1960, a decimation of almost 70%. In 1964 *Bari* communities stopped resisting the oil penetration and white colonization and came to a series of agreements with the national and local governments.

<sup>8</sup>USO was created in 1923 and constitutes perhaps the largest trade union in Colombia, which covers all the *Ecopetrol* (Colombian Petroleum Company) workers. The organization has led an important process in favour

other sectors such as peasants and teachers also organized. The rise of the social movement was deeply connected to the region's progressive peripheral confinement and the exclusion of workers, indigenous communities and colonizers from oil boom benefits.<sup>9</sup> Vega and Aguilera (1995) calculated that between 1939 and 1975 Catatumbo's oil exploitation generated revenues of no more than USD53 million for the Colombian state, a derisory sum if compared to the oil companies' benefit of about USD8 per each invested dollar in the field during the same period. The accumulation of grievances over time generated a strong civic movement in Catatumbo whose claims helped to generate a massive social mobilization that took place in 1987 known as the Northeastern Civic Strike. Claims mainly revolved around public services, housing, education, health, road infrastructure, natural resources, and importantly, the recognition of the *Bari* territory. Almost 150,000 organized agrarian and urban workers from NDS, Cesar, Santander and Arauca departments mobilized against political violence and governmental neglect, making the strike one of the most salient in Colombian history. In this line, NDS's social movement formation was not connected to the landholding structure but to a wider range of claims from different marginalized sectors.

The oil boom in Catatumbo lasted about 30 years. Although the oil industry still remains central, and is showing important recovery signs, the reserves were apparently exhausted during the concession's first three decades. In the absence of state intervention and regulation in the region's settlement and socioeconomic development, the oil path brought forth chaotic and violent colonization patterns, which, as discussed below, also allowed the entrance of guerrillas, paramilitaries and coca.

#### *Coca: the 'armed' colonization process*

The ultimate wave of colonization took place in the early 1990s as coca crops were introduced on a massive scale in Catatumbo "no-man's land", a feature that makes the NDS case significantly different from that of Sucre. Coca crops not only dramatically increased in the Amazonian basin in southern Colombia, but also expanded in areas of the traditional agricultural frontier, like the Catatumbo region.<sup>10</sup> Besides the lack of an effective state response

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of the nationalization of hydrocarbons in Colombia with a significant impact in the continuous re-negotiation of the oil exploitation contract with multinational companies.

<sup>9</sup>In 1993, 55% of Catatumbo municipalities still lacked electricity, 59 per cent did not have running water, and sewage systems were absent in 75% of them.

<sup>10</sup>According to UNODC, Colombia reached by 2000 the largest expansion of coca cultivation in the world, of over 160,000 hectares, and increased cocaine production from 230 metric tonnes of alkaloid in 1995 to 520 in 1999.

to the northeastern strike claims, the rise of the coca economy was explained by three main factors. The first one was the increasing unviability of traditional small agriculture. The agricultural decline in the Catatumbo region was a consequence of the end of protection for agricultural products in Colombia as part of the economic liberalization strategy introduced by the national government at the beginning of the 1990s. The second factor was related to the shifts experienced by the illegal drugs industry: after the decline of the big cartels (Medellín and Cali) and of coca cultivation in Peru and Bolivia, Colombia's competitiveness shifted from cocaine trafficking – which became increasingly monopolized by Mexican cartels – to the agro-industrial and processing phases of coca leaf. The third factor is that guerrillas and paramilitaries, in the absolute absence of state presence and action, found an extraordinary financial source in the drugs trade that substantially funded their war effort. The new war economy allowed warring actors to engage in expansive campaigns throughout the territory, making violence and coca crops expand hand in hand.

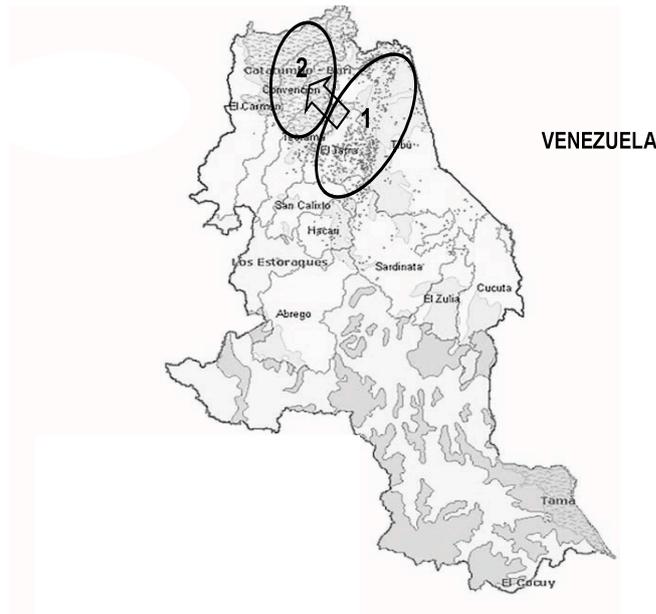
Although coca crops existed in the region since the mid-1980s, it was with FARC that these reached an industrial scale. Before the end of the 1990s the region had the largest expansion of coca crops in northern Colombia. Besides drawing impoverished Catatumbo peasants and former oil workers into illegal crops, the coca economy also attracted people from other Colombian regions, generating a new wave of colonization prominently driven by FARC under the logic of extraction (A. Machado, 2004). The coca economy process was further intensified by the emergence of the AUC in the late 1990s.

It is estimated that before the coca economy came into existence, La Gabarra county (the centre of coca activity in Tibú) had approximately 7,000 inhabitants. The population increased up to 25,000 in the mid-1990s, when FARC fully controlled coca production. Although some of the new inhabitants were part of an itinerant labour force that moved throughout the country seeking to work during the different coca leaf harvest seasons, most of them settled in the region and expanded the colonization from the Catatumbo's tropical valleys to the mountainous areas. The coca economy deeply affected the already existing fragile social fabric by the floating nature of the majority of labourers, and in the hands of the new settlers it generated new and pervasive agricultural production patterns. In the first instance peasants added coca bushes to basic foods crops. However, due to FARC's pressure, peasants not only ended up substituting legal crops by coca but also further expanding the internal frontier.

According to A. Machado (2004) coca colonization has an extensive impact on territories as it increases cultivated areas at a fast pace. The widening of the agricultural frontier responds to the needs of moving the crops away from the reach of aerial eradication. In the case of the

Catatumbo region, the largest concentration of coca crops was located in Tibú and El Tarra (area 1 in map 13 below) until 1999. From that year, the dynamics of the dispute between FARC and AUC for the control over coca crops as well as the state anti-narcotics strategy displaced coca in an east-west direction towards the mountainous areas, more specifically towards the Catatumbo national park (area 2).

Map 13: Expansion of coca crops within the Catatumbo region



Mapped by the author.

The displacement of the conflict and of coca as its economic backbone plunged colonizers into increasingly marginal conditions. The mountainous areas are poorer than the flat lands due to the extremely difficult geographic conditions, such that no significant investments have been made for integrating that part of the territory to the departmental and national lives. Agricultural activity in El Tarra, San Calixto, Hacarí, Teorama, Convención and El Carmen is below productive and technological standards. Likewise, it has been limited by the lack of definition of property rights, the absence of state support, and the precarious road infrastructure. In 1995, 1998 and 2001 there were new waves of social unrest in Tibú, which manifested themselves through the so-called *marchas cocaleras* (cocalero strikes). Coca growers and *raspachines* (coca leaf harvesters) protested against the U.S.-Colombian aerial fumigation strategy. Although FARC's prominent role in the promotion of the strikes in order to protect its

financial backbone is undeniable<sup>11</sup> it was clear that grievances from the Northeastern strikes were still largely unaddressed. Hence collective action was mainly the outcome of the fact that licit agricultural activity was pointless in the absence of state support, infrastructure and means for commercializing products and access to markets.

Again, *Bari* people were particularly victimized in the context of the coca economy. What was left of their ancestral territory after the oil boom was devastated and exhausted by coca crops and the new colonization waves; some indigenous people were forcibly incorporated as labourers in coca fields, and most of them were progressively displaced by guerrillas and paramilitaries towards to mountainous areas, where many of them suffered from disease and starvation under forcible confinement. Before the independence from the Spanish crown, the *Bari* people were granted a territory of 21,000 square kilometres, which by the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century was reduced to 16,000. Only up to 10,000 kilometres of *Bari* area was left in 2003.

Another dimension of Catatumbo's extractive economies is the pervasive environmental impact generated since the entrance of the oil industry and worsened by coca production: oil exploitation, systematic use of chemicals, monoculture of coca, and aerial fumigations. Moreover, the coca industry has generated a loss of almost 200,000 hectares of forests with the consequent loss of biodiversity due to the dramatic change in land usage and the contamination and exhaustion of water resources.

### *Land*

As seen, conflicts over land in NDS have mainly stemmed from the occupation of *Bari* territory; not from landholding structure, as it was the case of Sucre. Native lands were first usurped by *hacendados* followed by the Colombian state when granting the oil exploitation concession, and further seized throughout successive colonization waves. In Sucre, despite the dramatic integration of native Zenú people and territory to the *hacienda* structure, the process was never as violent as the territorial loss of the *Bari* community.

The landholding structure has not been a historically contentious issue in NDS. This is mainly explained by the early decline of the *hacienda* structure and the types of colonization

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<sup>11</sup>Unlike the case of Bolivia, there is no *cocalero* movement that articulates the sector's subnational grievances in Colombia; *cocaleros* lack a national leadership and political representation. This is mainly explained by the fact that the coca economy is marginally connected to traditional use and its labour force is highly unstable. FARC's mobilizing capacity was particularly clear in the June 1995 strike, as the mobilization of over 1,500 coca growers and harvesters from Catatumbo took place simultaneously with other massive mobilizations in Putumayo and Guaviare departments in southern Colombia.

that have taken place in NDS. Under these circumstances, small, intermediate and large property developed in a more or less simultaneous way and, contrary to Sucre's experience, this situation largely explains why there is no such thing as a traditional "landed class" in the department. Until the late 1990s the coexistence of these structures was rather peaceful. Between 1971 and 1980 ANUC promoted 97 land occupations in Sucre whereas only eight cases occurred in NDS (CNRR, 2010; Zamosc, 1983). It is also worth noting that ANUC in NDS belonged to the official governmental strand, hence far less belligerent than Sucre's where the organization had divorced from the institutional line.

In her study on internal displacement, Ibáñez (2010) found that in spite of the intensity of collective violence and forcible displacement in NDS since the late 1990s the structure of rural land remained relatively stable, in contrast with Sucre. However, over the last decade an emerging agro-industrial model started displacing the traditional peasant structure. In the context of the construction of the irrigation district in El Zulia, there has been an important expansion of permanent crops – mainly oil palm – in recently created large landholdings located in eastern Catatumbo and Cúcuta's rural area, in which the AUC and even politicians have been involved, as will be discussed in the next chapter. Notwithstanding this situation, the logic of "accumulation through dispossession" was not a main drive in the political economy of warring actors, as was the case in Sucre.

#### THE ILLEGAL TRADITION AND UNDERLYING CRIMINALITY

The most important part of the border with Venezuela is concentrated in Cúcuta's metropolitan area on the Colombian side, and in San Antonio, Ureña and San Cristobal on the Venezuelan side. The poor levels of regulation in the commercial, border and foreign exchange has made the majority of transactions to take place in the black market. The comparative advantages of the Venezuelan exchange rate and price control have also played a significant role in this black market dynamic, generating further conditions for the flourishing of informality and criminality in NDS.

Smuggling has been the main illegal activity in NDS, making Cúcuta perhaps the most critical contraband node in Colombia. Besides the authorities' tolerance vis-à-vis illegality and the wide social acceptance thereof, contraband generated a whole infrastructure for other illegal activities to flourish, in this case, drug trafficking: routes, transport, bribing techniques, contacts and the like. Moreover, it has constituted the perfect platform for massive money

laundering operations. Likewise, smuggling has generated optimal conditions for the reproduction of informality.

### *Smuggling*

Although there is a significant volume of legal exports and imports registered in Cúcuta, legality has been historically overridden by the magnitude of the unregistered trade -goods from the basic food basket smuggled in small scale- and large-scale contraband -consisting of fuel, chemical supplies, stolen cars, guns, ammunition and drugs. The intensity and direction of smuggling activities have altered according to changes in the exchange rate (Colombian Peso-Bolivar) and in levels of economic growth on both sides of the border.

Contraband is neither new in the department nor exclusive to it. The activity can be traced back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century and constitutes a tradition in all Colombian frontier areas (Ecuador, Peru, Brazil and Panama) and seaports along the Caribbean and Pacific coasts alike. During the 1860s and 1870s salt, spirits, fabric and other manufactures were massively smuggled through Cúcuta from San Antonio in Venezuela, and by then the magnitude of contraband was already significant in the context of the regional economy. According to Laurent (2008) the phenomenon developed around the poorness of local customs infrastructure, corruption, and mainly the lack of agreement between the Colombian and Venezuelan tariff systems.

After decades of steady economic growth, Cúcuta started to experience a process of impoverishment from the early 1980s. This phenomenon was unleashed by the dramatic fall of international oil prices and the increase of the Venezuelan fiscal deficit. Consequently, the Bolivar devalued and the traditional trade flux in which Colombian exports were dominant was inverted. Simultaneously, drug trafficking money was already irrigating Cúcuta's economy and smuggling activities grew like never before.

This situation was maintained throughout the 1990s and worsened over the 2000s. Several factors were at play. The first one is that the border is very porous, customs controls are loose and officials are easily corrupted.<sup>12</sup> Smuggled goods are mainly transported in trucks and cars that transit at ease through the principal roads, but there are also the so-called *trocheros* (path-crossers), young men who cross the Táchira River – which divides the two countries –

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<sup>12</sup>It is said that the Venezuelan *Guardia Nacional* (National Guard) charges between 2,500 and 5,000 Bolivars for vehicles loaded with smuggled goods on the border bridge in San Antonio, depending on their size.

in adapted bikes that support up to 200 kilos of merchandise. Path-crossers use myriads of semi-urban paths in Cúcuta's area that allow an easy passage through the river.

The second factor was the implantation of three different exchange rates by the Chávez administration in 2003. The first one (US\$1 = 2.60 Strong Bolivars) applies to the sectors of foods, health, machinery imports, science and technology, and everything related to the public sector. The second one (US\$1 = 4.30 Strong Bolivars) applies to the oil sector and imports of other machinery. The third one corresponds to the free market exchange rate; although it is illegal to publish the price of this so-called "parallel dollar", it may oscillate between 6.25 and 9.20 Strong Bolivars. The latter is the one that has further stimulated contraband; transactions are made in US dollars and can be easily converted in the black market. As a consequence, according to the Central Bank, Colombian exports to Venezuela fell by 45.35% in the mid-2000s and it is calculated that for each tonne of Venezuelan goods that entered legally the Colombian market, there were four tonnes of smuggled goods being distributed in a parallel fashion.

The third factor is related to price control. The prices of Venezuelan regulated goods – foodstuffs and fuel – have fallen in real terms, seriously distorting the relative prices of the same products in Colombia. Subsidies have significantly reduced these goods' prices, and are sold through the so-called *Mercal* network.<sup>13</sup> This situation has further stimulated contraband. According to the Venezuelan Ministry of Food, in 2004 the monthly consumption of goods from the basic food basket was of 121.5 kilos per person in the frontier small municipalities of San Antonio, Ureña and Rubio – critical points in the contraband route, whereas in Caracas, with almost 5 million inhabitants, it was of only 33.5 kilos. Venezuelan goods are sold in Colombia at thrice their price, yet they continue to be cheaper than Colombian products or those legally imported. For example, the so-called "Chavez's milk" (evaporated milk produced exclusively for the *Mercal* network distribution) is at times extremely difficult to find in Venezuelan markets but is usually available everywhere in Cúcuta at thrice its regulated price in Venezuela, a situation that explains the dramatic decline of NDS industrial and agricultural activity.

Another target in the smuggling business is Venezuelan livestock, which is very cheap compared to Colombian animals. A Venezuelan meat trader has the option of locally selling livestock for 5.5 Strong Bolivars (US\$2) per kilo (the maximum price fixed by the government) or

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<sup>13</sup> *Mercal* is the abbreviation of *Mercado de Alimentos* (foods market) and is one of the most important Chavez's social programmes. The government is in charge of building supermarkets and shops and providing food and other basic goods at low prices for the poorest parts of the population.

selling it in Colombia for US\$ 1.27. Nevertheless the trader can resort to the free market and increase the benefit to 7.93 Bolívares per kilo by using the corresponding exchange rate (minimum 6.25 Bolívares per dollar) (El Espectador, 2008). Livestock trade has been mainly used for money laundering in the so-called “livestock carousel”: part of the livestock introduced in Colombia is taken to illegal slaughter houses and the meat is sold on the black market, but another part of the livestock is sold on the free market in Cúcuta, then returned to Venezuela and then back to Colombia to be sold again, and so on until the animals weaken and die of exhaustion. In the carousel dynamic a single animal is sold three times average and, in the absence of sanitary controls, outbreaks of foot-and-mouth disease have been registered in NDS. In 2009 Cúcuta’s meat processing plant activity fell from 300 slaughtered animals per day to 30. It is calculated that approximately 10,000 head of cattle illegally enter Colombia through that part of the border.<sup>14</sup>

However, the most dynamic and profitable smuggled commodity is fuel, which has been traditionally subsidized by the Venezuelan state but reached an unprecedented peak under Chávez administration. Nowadays Venezuela provides the cheapest oil in the world at the domestic level.<sup>15</sup> In Cúcuta, two types of illegal fuel trade have developed: retail and wholesale (large volumes of fuel are stored in warehouses called *escurrideros* and the distribution channels operate beyond the departmental borders). Smuggled fuel is not only meant for cheaply supplying the high vehicle demand, but also for drug trafficking insofar as it constitutes one of the main ingredients for cocaine processing. Twenty-six litres of gasoline cost only 1.80 Bolívares in Venezuela and Colombian retailers sell the whole lot for 42 Bolívares in Cúcuta with a profit margin of over 1,600 per cent.<sup>16</sup> However, the business is even more lucrative: retailers usually resell the fuel to a second intermediary who in turn resells it in neighbouring departments for 71.45 Bolívares. There are approximately 6,000 affiliates to a co-operative street sellers of fuel; the co-operative has significantly grown over the last decade because Cúcuta stopped offering job opportunities. As in the case of food, the flight of fuel is originated close to the border. According to a report of the Venezuelan Ministry of Energy and Oil, the department of Táchira, with only 185,000 vehicles registered, has a larger consumption of fuel than that of the Caracas Metropolitan area with over 2 million cars.

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<sup>14</sup>All the information related to smuggled livestock was collected in downtown Cúcuta in conversation with slaughterhouse workers and butchers.

<sup>15</sup>It is calculated that in 2007 Venezuelan vehicles consumed 400,000 barrels of liquid fuel (70% gasoline) per day, and that the annual subsidy ascended to US\$ 12,500. In this fashion, the state is giving each vehicle an average subsidy of US\$3,000 (IPS, 2008).

<sup>16</sup>All the information related to fuel smuggled was collected in downtown Cúcuta in conversation with street retailers.

It is possible to observe an impressive number of large vintage American cars coming back and forth from Venezuela. They are used for smuggling fuel since they have large tanks, some on them modified for transporting more than 100 litres. A litre of fuel costs US\$ 0.4 (cheaper than a can of soda) whereas in Cúcuta, where legal fuel is cheaper as a means of preventing contraband, it costs 60 cents and in Bogotá one dollar. It is hard to find a gas station in Cúcuta; most of them have shut down. On the other side, in San Antonio, one sees the big cars on the left side of the road and drivers making signs to the *moscos* (flies) who are the people in charge of taking bribes from smuggling cars. *Moscós* pass and as they collect the money they make a chalk mark on the bonnets, indicating that the bribe was already collected. Once the marked cars reach the border, guards from the *Guardia Nacional Bolivariana* let them pass without inspection. The same mechanism is applied for food and other smuggled goods. Of course, further bribes are demanded on the Colombian side.

#### *Currency exchange black market*

The foreign exchange market in Cúcuta is one of the largest in the country. Professionals of the sector buy and sell considerable amounts of Bolívars and then bureaux de change cash the Bolívars in registered Venezuelan bank accounts where they are converted into US dollars. The dollars are later converted into pesos in Cúcuta, returning to their natural market. The peso/bolivar, bolivar/dollar and dollar/peso conversion has been a favourite in the field of money laundering, generating massive profits for the foreign exchange market guild.

However, the ultimate way of playing with the exchange rate is through the Venezuelan *Cadivi* card, a subsidized credit card provided by the government. Each Venezuelan has a spending limit of US\$4,000 per year when travelling abroad, and under the *Cadivi* scheme dollars are almost three times cheaper than on the black market. Users pay the debt by instalments in devaluated Bolívars. Venezuelans go to well-known shops in Cúcuta's downtown, which have specialized in ghost purchasing operations. Users swipe their cards for any given value and get that value in cash; shops charge a commission of between 10 and 30 per cent of the transaction and provide customers ghost receipts (dental and plastic surgeries, air tickets, hotels). Venezuelans later sell the cash with a better exchange rate. Although in 2009 the Chávez administration reduced the *Cadivi* spending limit to US\$2,500 and imposed restrictions to operations made in Colombia, the business has become increasingly sophisticated: Cúcuta's shopkeepers have card readers that connect the transactions to ghost businesses in

Ecuador and Panama and provide clients with false air tickets and passport stamps as proof of travel to either of these countries.

### *Drug trafficking*

Although NDS was used as an occasional platform for cocaine exports in the 1980s, the department's strategic criminal potential only started being fully exploited since the early 1990s. NDS is one of the few departments where all the stages of the drugtrafficking chain take place within the territory. First, there is the peripheral Catatumbo region with the largest coca expansion in northern Colombia (which reached over 12,000 hectares in 2004) and an important processing infrastructure.

Second, the poorly controlled border with Venezuela has become one of the main cocaine exports points as a consequence of the relative exhaustion of the traditional Caribbean routes mostly due to the U.S. interdiction programmes. Over the last years Venezuela has become a strategic point in the route for cocaine traffic to Europe<sup>17</sup> where the use of cocaine is on the rise and has tripled in a number of countries during the last decade. Third, as discussed before, contraband has not only transferred the criminal know-how and infrastructure to drug trafficking, but has also served as an important means for laundering money and obtaining cheap chemical ingredients for cocaine processing. And fourth, there is the dynamic currency exchange black market in Cúcuta that has served money-laundering needs. At some point during the early 2000s drug trafficking money flooded the market in Cúcuta through shops, restaurants, bars, and gambling places. In 2003, the National Revenues' Office reported almost 70,000 suspicious operations that had taken place in businesses located in Cúcuta's metropolitan area.

Besides being an illicit activity, drug trafficking can be also classified as informal, understood as a source of informal jobs (Martin-Masso, 2008). It absorbs labour from declining economic sectors (Lee, 1998): the coca/cocaine economies are important employers who directly hire coca bush growers, seasonal coca leaf harvesters, leaf merchants, truck drivers, chemists, couriers, small aircrafts and pilots, and so forth. The bulk of this labour force is engaged in the agricultural end of the business, and it is estimated that in 2005 there were

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<sup>17</sup>The route to Europe is very complex. According to UNODC (2007), once the cocaine reaches Venezuelan territory it is shipped to western Africa where it is stored and repackaged in countries like Nigeria, Ghana, Ivory Coast, and Guinea Bissau. Nigeria is the main hub for drug distribution towards Europe and the drug enters mainly through the Iberian Peninsula and the Netherlands.

almost 3,000 labourers in coca cultivation. Nonetheless, the labour force is increasingly important in urban centres, through trafficking (exports and domestic micro-trafficking) and money laundering. The informal nature of this market has also greatly expanded as drug trafficking connects with other activities such as arms trafficking, vehicle theft, smuggling, and prostitution among others.

In sum, NDS and Sucre exhibit radical differences as far as underlying criminality is concerned. As seen, Sucre did not experience a strong organized crime phenomenon before the emergence of the AUC. It has been a cocaine traffic point of intermediate importance, controlled by small non-local mafias. Moreover, coca crops have never developed in Sucre. Informality has not stemmed from illicit economies but from a rigid agrarian structure and a little diversified economy.

On the contrary, illegality has importantly hijacked NDS's economy, blurring not only the lines between other criminal activities and the informal market, but also those between illegality and legality. The peripheral situation of the Catatumbo region and the tradition of contraband made NDS one of the main Colombian organized crime centres with a large informal economy. This situation had major consequences for the intensification of collective violence from the 1990s, and decisively shaped paramilitary formation, forms of accumulation and politicization in the department, a matter thoroughly analysed in the next chapter.

## POLITICAL CONFIGURATION AND TRANSFORMATION

The political configuration of NDS is radically different from that of Sucre. Three factors are at the base of the distinction: the early decline of the *hacienda* structure, the fact that historically most of NDS population is urban, and the lack of hegemonic status of any traditional party or political house.

As discussed, Sucre was characterized as a traditional Liberal stronghold and the party was practically hegemonic. Although NDS is considered the cradle of the Conservative party in Colombia<sup>18</sup> the party has never managed to achieve political hegemony. Of 40 municipalities, only 16 have been historically Conservative and 13 traditionally Liberal, Cúcuta included, where most of the Liberal vote is concentrated. The rest have had no distinct partisan affili-

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<sup>18</sup>One of the party's founders was José Eusebio Caro, a politician born in Ocaña. Caro fervently promoted the defence of constitutional order and legality against dictatorship and monarchy, the protection of property rights against communism, that of Roman Catholic morality against atheism, the equality of citizens before the law, and the victory of "civilization against barbarism".

ation. Nonetheless, it is possible to assert that the department has a Conservative majority since the party's foundation in 1849.

Between 1939 and 1945 NDS was the department with the third largest Liberal vote in the country – 76.5% of the departmental vote – (Pinzón, 1989); this electoral behaviour coincides with the so-called national Liberal hegemony (1930–1946), when all elected Presidents were Liberal. In this context the *Gaitanista* vote in 1946 was 38% of the departmental Liberal vote and only 20.4% of the departmental total vote. But between 1946 and 1949 hegemony shifted to the Conservative party with 58.7% (Pinzón, 1989), coinciding this time with the last two consecutive Conservative governments (1946–1953) before the short General Rojas Pinilla and the *Junta Militar* dictatorships (1953–1957). This situation reveals that the predominant political orientation in NDS shifted according to that of the party in presidential office (Weiss, 1966). From 1958 to 1966 – during the *Frente Nacional*'s era – the liberal vote dropped to 39.4% (Pinzón, 1989).

Unlike Sucre, *La Violencia* greatly affected NDS, a matter that is mainly explained by the Liberal pressure over Conservative municipalities since 1930, when the Liberal party won the presidency after the so-called *Pax Conservadora* when the Conservative party took presidential office in the aftermath of the Thousand Days War<sup>19</sup> in 1902 and remained in power until 1930. According to Guerrero (1991), once the Liberal party took office in 1930, Liberal mayors were appointed in Conservative municipalities, generating strong inter-party tensions that later ended up in collective violence. In 1948 NDS had a homicide rate of 48 for 1,000 inhabitants and 79 in 1949 while the average national rate for those years was of 10.<sup>20</sup> However, violence decreased after 1949; that is why NDS is characterized as a department of “early *Violencia*” (mostly located in the eastern areas of Colombia), in contrast with central and western areas of “late *Violencia*” such as Antioquia, Tolima and Cundinamarca, where changes in violent patterns took place in the early 1950s.

Much like other Colombian departments, NDS has not been alien to partisan clientelism and machine politics. However, due to the fact that the *hacienda* system soon disintegrated and other forms of land structure from latifundia developed, the scope and reach of traditional clientelism was limited. Moreover, the fact that in a region such as Catatumbo colonization

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<sup>19</sup>The Thousand Days War was the eighth and last Colombian civil war in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. As the previous wars, this was also a partisan strife between the Conservative and Liberal parties' radical factions. In 1899 the ruling conservatives were accused of maintaining power through fraudulent elections. The situation was worsened by an economic crisis caused by falling coffee prices in the international market, which mainly affected the Liberal opposition.

<sup>20</sup>Source: Ministry of Justice.

processes were disorderly made the building of stable clienteles more difficult. Another important limitation to traditional forms of clientelism is that Cúcuta's process of urbanization and industrialization generated the conditions for the ascent of a new elite linked to trade and industry and not to land. It also consolidated a significant middle class, an industrial proletariat and a wide popular sector.

The explanation for the emergence of machine politics is no different from that in Sucre: the pyramidal structure that once linked the great Liberal and Conservative national factions to their respective subnational operators started crumbling at the end of the *Frente Nacional* regime. A progressive disaggregation of parties took place at the local level with politicians becoming increasingly autonomous from their national chiefs. In this context, NDS also experienced the emergence of professional politicians, a trend that increased electoral competition. From the mid-1980s, in the context of decentralization and elections of mayors and governors, national political chiefs were almost completely displaced from subnational politics.

Electoral competition in NDS stemmed mostly from the internal fragmentation of traditional parties and to a lesser extent from competition from the Left and other alternative movements. Notwithstanding the fact that the Communist party and later the Patriotic Union party (UP) had more relevance in NDS than in Sucre – mostly because of the strong social platform they built upon oil trade unions and the 1980s northeastern strikes – the Left has never constituted a significant force. “The trajectory of the Left in NDS has never been too strong and its electoral strength has been quite marginal. Perhaps the UP enjoyed some success in the late 1980s and early 1990s in some Catatumbo municipalities, or more recently the Alternative Democratic Pole”, noted an interviewed analyst. He added “the greatest sin of the Left in the department is that it never generated a strong base; it never did a thorough work at the neighbourhood level or anything of that sort. The Left got stuck in the world of trade unions” (Oviedo, 2009). Another important factor is that NDS did not experience the political impact of local or regional guerrillas' demobilization processes like the cases of EPL or CRS in Sucre. However, the relative weakness of the Left did not immunize the department from the wave of political violence against social movements since the mid-1980s.

As in Sucre, politicians in NDS have not exhibited entrepreneurial energy; instead the control over public resources and contracts has been the main source of personal wealth and campaign financing. The enlargement of central government transfers, in particular royalties from the oil and mining industry, also became a source of diversion: oil and coal exploitation as well as the usufruct of the Caño-Limon pipeline have generated royalties of over US\$10 million per year. However, political campaigns have not only been financed via the diversion of

public resources in NDS. It is said that political campaigns have traditionally received funds from smugglers and bureaux de change owners, and more recently, from drug traffickers via well-known intermediaries, a matter discussed in the next chapter.

Although the Liberal party was never the strongest force in the department, it managed for decades to prevent the consolidation of a conservative hegemony. NDS's politics remained bi-partisan until the end of the 1990s when traditional parties "defrosted" and atomized in a myriad of micro-electoral enterprises. The fact that in NDS the atomization's impact was not as strong as it was in Sucre as less new political parties and movements derived from the Conservative lines, which clearly held the majorities. Nevertheless, the Liberal party experienced an important electoral loss since the mid-1990s, as observed in Table 9 below. From five active Liberal houses in 1997, only one house survived in the party's official line; the rest migrated to the *Uribista* coalition.<sup>21</sup> The Conservative party, although never a hegemonic force, clearly held the majorities, and its politicians proved to be more disciplined than their counterparts in Sucre. Although in the 2002 elections the Conservative party experienced a slight curbing in its subnational representation because of the competition of emerging parties, by joining the *Uribista* coalition it remained a majority force.

As in Sucre, departmental politics followed the national trend of moving towards the right, and neither independents nor the new Left became as strong as in other parts of the country, which is somewhat puzzling insofar as Cúcuta is one of Colombia's largest cities, with a great potential for independent vote.

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<sup>21</sup>The Cristo family house is the only house that remained within the Liberal party official line. The Salcedo, Colmenares, Silva and Flórez houses migrated to other parties and movements.

Table 9: Evolution of Traditional Parties in NDS (1997–2007)

	1997–2000			2002–2003			2002–2003			
	Liberal (5 Houses)	New Parties (Liberal Origin)	Conservative (3 Houses)	New Parties (Conser- vative Origin)	Liberal (5 Houses)	New Parties (Liberal Origin)	Conservative (3 Houses)	New Parties (Liberal Origin)	Conservative (3 Houses)	New Parties (Conser- vative Origin)
Senate (Seats)	2		2		1	1	3	1	1	1
House of Representatives (Seats)	2		3		1	2	2	2	3	3
Departmental Assembly (Seats)	11		6		2	2	5	2	6	6
Governor's Office			1				1		1	1
Mayoralties	8		24		5	3	18	3	13	13
Town Councils	13		26		5	15	16	2	19	19
Majorities (Number of Municipalities)										

Source: National Registrar's Office (NRO)

The impact of new parties was stronger in Congress than in local elections (Table 10). Ignoring Conservatives, the coalition had two Senators and four Representatives elected in 2002, and two and one respectively in 2006. They neither had great impact in the Departmental Assembly nor did they constitute a major threat in mayoral elections. This outcome suggests that to an important extent traditional parties kept most of the local machines greased and running.

Two cases are particularly striking in this transitional process. That of the Colombia Alive Party which right after its launching in the department for the 2003 local elections, won two mayoralties, including Cúcuta's with 127,800 votes, the largest vote in Cúcuta's history; majorities in town councils in four municipalities, and three seats in the Departmental Assembly. The other case is that of the Citizen Convergence Movement, which went from obtaining 2,806 votes in 2002 congressional elections to over 38,000 in 2006, growing by 1,633%. This extraordinary electoral growth seems to be connected to the paramilitary interference in politics, discussed in the next chapter.

As for the Left, UP party won only one mayoralty in 1998. The new Left (Alternative Democratic Pole) obtained one seat at the Departmental Assembly in 2007 and won one mayoralty in the same year.

As shown in Table 11 below, there was less proliferation of parties in NDS than in Sucre for congressional elections: seven in 2002 and five in 2006, in contrast with twelve in Sucre for each period. The levels of defection were also lower than in the case of Sucre, and unlike in the latter, NDS's politicians proved to be more disciplined with two of them running for the Conservative party in both elections and one for the Liberal party. Likewise, three politicians who for the 2002 elections joined new movements returned to the Liberal and Conservative parties in 2006.

In 2002, the Coalition movement – a departmental *Uribista* movement – had the largest voting (103,122), followed by the Liberal party with 81,628. Conservatives had poor results in a department of conservative majority with 41,288 votes. However, the latter considerably recovered in 2006 with the largest vote with 112,941 as a result of the joining to the *Uribista* coalition. The U Party, following the national trends, had the second largest vote with 101,070 whereas Liberals experienced an notable decline (26,864), below Citizen Convergence (38,344). In the overall, *Uribista* parties and movements proved popular in the department.

Table 10: Impact of Uribista coalition parties in NDS (2002–2007)

	Senate (Seat)		House Of Representatives (Seats)		Provincial Assembly (Seats)		Mayoralties	
	2002	2006	2002	2006	2003	2007	2003	2007
Liberal Opening Movement			I	I	I			I
Coalition	2		I					
Team Colombia								
Democratic Colombia		I (*)			2			
Colombia Alive					3			
Moral								
Radical Change								
Popular Integration Movement			I					
Citizen Convergence		I				I		
Colombia United Movement			I					
U Party		I				3		5
Wings – Team Colombia								4

(\*) Not elected Alternate Senator

Source: NRO

Table 11: Defection tendencies in congressional elections (Comparative 2002–2006)

	Party	2002		Party	2006	
			Chamber Votes			Chamber Votes
Jorge Alberto Garcia - Herreros	Coalition	HR	34,470	Conservative Party	HR	31,643
Armando Amaya Alvarez	Coalition	S	31,505	Liberal Party	No Elected	
Guillermo Chavez Cristancho	Coalition	S	37,147			
Albino Garcia Fernandez	Colombia Unite Movement	HR	28,632			
Isabel Celis	Conservative Party	S	41,288			
Jairo Diaz Contreras	Conservative Party	HR (*)	ND	Conservative Party	HR	29,429
Ciro Ramirez Pinzón	Conservative Party	S (*)	ND	Conservative Party	HR	7,443
Juan Fernando Cristo	Liberal Party	S	29,016	Liberal Party	S	26,884
Eduardo Augusto Benitez	Liberal Party	S	52,612	U Party	HR	24,099
Jose Luis Florez Rivera	Liberal Opening Movement	HR	47,630			
Juan Manuel Corzo Roman	National Movement	S	48,952	Conservative Party	S	44,356
Carlos Augusto Celis	Popular Integration Movement	HR	38,712	U Party	HR	27,263
Manuel Guillermo Mora				U Party	S	49,708
Carlos Emiro Barriga				Citizen Convergence	S	38,344
Ricardo Elcure Chacón				Democratic Colombia	S (*)	2,394

(\*) Alternate Representatives or Senators

Source: NRO

As in Sucre, presidential elections in NDS (2002 and 2006) also provided evidence of the right-wing direction of politics. As shown in Tables 12 and 13, Alvaro Uribe was the winner in 2002 and 2006 elections, unlike Sucre's case in which the Liberal candidate had the largest vote in 2002 but in 2006 Uribe was the winner.

Table 12: Presidential Vote in NDS (2002)

Candidate	Party	Votes
Alvaro Uribe Velez	Colombian First	207,710
Horacio Serpa Uribe	Liberal Party	83,619
Noemi Sanín	Conservative Party	26,104
Luis Eduardo Garzón	Political And Social Front	15,866
Harold Bedoya Pizarro	Go Colombia Movmt.	1,867
Ingrid Betancourth Pulecio	Green Oxigen Party	1,818
Francisco Tovar Garces	Citizen Defence Movement	803
Augusto Guillermo Lora	19th Of April Movement	648
Guillermo Antonio Cardona Moreno	Comunal And Comunitarian Colombia Movmt.	512
Alvaro Cristancho	Comunitarian Participation Movement	424
Rodolfo Rincón Sosa	Comunal And Comunitarian Colombia Movmt.	271

Source: NRO

Table 13: Presidential Vote in NDS (2006)

Candidate	Party	Votes
Alvaro Uribe Velez	Colombia First	239,334
Carlos Gaviria Diaz	Alternative Democratic Pole	67,193
Horacio Serpa Uribe	Liberal Party	36,221
Antanas Mockus Sivickas	Indigenous Social Alliance	2,679
Enrique Parejo González	Democratic National Reconstruction Movmt.	1,372
Alvaro Leyva Durán	National Reconciliation Mvmt.	590
Carlos Arturo Rincon Barreto	Comunal And Comunitarian Colombian Movmt.	440

Source: NRO

## THE INTENSIFICATION OF COLLECTIVE VIOLENCE AND THE FURTHER CRIMINALIZATION OF THE DEPARTMENTAL ECONOMY

Unlike in Sucre, where the escalation of collective violence was strongly related to the survival of traditional politics and the extermination of the agrarian movement, in NDS it was to a significant extent explained by the extraordinary advantages provided by extractive, illegal and informal economies. The internal conflict's dynamic was not only superposed on the uneven development map of NDS, but also contributed to the further enlargement of the urban/rural gap.

NDS has been a privileged scenario for warring actors. Besides the strategic unregulated border with Venezuela, the western subregion offers access to the Caribbean coast through Cesar department; the southwestern subregion to the centre of the country and the southeastern areas to the Orinoquía region, the centre of the Colombian oil industry. Catatumbo region has been particularly strategic: given its location along the Venezuelan border and complex geography, this subregion has constituted one of the most valuable rearguards for irregular armed groups since the 1970s.

*The oil rush*

The chaotic processes of internal colonization and extractive economies have facilitated the entrenchment of irregular warring actors in Catatumbo. Guerrillas first appeared in NDS in the 1970s, with the ELN linked to the oil industry against which the group had developed a radical discourse calling for nationalization of natural resources. Its emergence in NDS took place in the context of a profound internal restructuring process.<sup>22</sup> The group abandoned its foundational Cuban rural *foco* conception of guerrilla struggle and political action and initiated a process of territorial expansion in order to obtain financial resources and link to urban centres (Rudqvist, 2006). As a result, the *Camilo Torres* and *Carlos Armando Cueva* fronts started to systematically sabotage the oil infrastructure, extort the industry, and prey upon local public finances.<sup>23</sup> In this fashion, Catatumbo's flat lands became ELN's financial

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<sup>22</sup>The ELN's restructuring process was the outcome of a massive military defeat by the Colombian Army in July 1973 that led the organization to the verge of extinction; however from 1975 ELN managed to survive and recoup its strength in the course of the following years.

<sup>23</sup>The 780 kilometers Caño Limón-Coveñas pipeline (which pumps around 105,000 oil barrels per day) has been the central ELN guerrillas' sabotage target since 1986. The pipeline blasting campaign has been aimed at pressuring transnational oil companies to abandon their operations in Colombia. However, the sabotage activities

base whereas the intermediate and mountainous areas remained as rearguard. The insurgents also understood the potential of accessing the Venezuelan border and creating a corridor with neighbouring Arauca department – the centre of oil industry in Colombia – in order to seize and prey upon the local oil economy<sup>24</sup>, much larger and important than that of NDS. The ELN not only strengthened its military front but also its political reach by connecting to the USO trade union in Tibú, and expanding to Cúcuta where the organization was successful in creating strong urban militias in slums. The ELN's politico-military activity reached its peak during the already mentioned Northeastern Civic Strike<sup>25</sup>.

The Popular Liberation Army guerrilla (*Ejército Popular de Liberación* – EPL) appeared in NDS in the early 1980s with the *Libardo Mora Toro* and *Ramón Gilberto Barbosa* Fronts, following a similar politico-military trend to that of ELN. Although EPL demobilized in 1991, it continued operating in NDS through a small dissident group, and although weak, the group concentrated on kidnapping, extortion and sabotage operations.

The guerrillas' connection to the oil industry, particularly the ELN, was at the base of the intensification of collective violence in the department in the 1980s – which coincided with the local popular elections and decentralization reforms – long before the AUC emerged, contrary to what happened in Sucre where the internal conflict intensified in the 1990s. As in Sucre, central government transfers of oil royalties became the guerrillas' main financial target, particularly in Catatumbo municipalities. The conflict in NDS was further exacerbated in the late 1980s by two factors. On the one hand, there was the emergence of FARC with the 33<sup>rd</sup> and 44<sup>th</sup> Fronts, and *Resistencia Barí* and *Arturo Ruiz* Mobile Columns in the mid-1980s, when the organization was experiencing an unprecedented military growth. This group expanded in NDS as part of the strategy of creating a massive corridor along the Andean mountains, from the border with Ecuador to that with Venezuela through a long chain of guerrilla fronts. On the other hand, and as a response to the insurgency escalation and generalized social unrest – the latter interpreted as part of the former – there was a noticeable growth of human rights abuses by state's officers and intermittent operations of paramilitary commandos in the Ocaña area. It is worth noting that the first paramilitary activity in NDS, which

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have been strongly connected to the pipeline repairing business. Both ELN and FARC have systematically taxed repairing companies' contracts, obtaining a sizeable income out of this process. The pipeline repairing business became for over a decade a most profitable business for companies and guerrillas whereas it has generated massive environmental and economic losses for the country.

<sup>24</sup>The ELN controlled the monopoly of the oil industry extortion for over a decade, from which the organization derived an important share of its income. Nevertheless the high profitability of the extortive business became a source of conflict between the ELN and FARC, unleashing a ferocious war between the two insurgent groups.

<sup>25</sup>For a detailed account on the ELN's influence on the strike see Restrepo and Contreras (2000).

took place in the late 1980s, coincides with the occurrence of the Northeastern Civic Strike. As in the case of Sucre, these pre-AUC paramilitary structures were not settled in NDS's territory and despite their "local" nomenclature – *Ocaña's Friends Society* and the *Convención's Moral Committee* – these groups had their centre in neighbouring Cesar department (Arciniégas, 2009). They operated in an inter-departmental space that also included Santander and Arauca departments and one of the aims was that of curtailing the northeastern social movement.

It was in this conjuncture that political violence dramatically increased in NDS. The government's response to the strike was the militarization of the region against the protest, and unionized workers were stigmatized as the ELN's political agents (Loingsigh, 2007). Over fifty strike leaders and participants were assassinated between July and December 1987 and over a hundred had to leave the department under threats. The offensive against the social movement continued and has been a constant ever since, aggravated by the emergence of the AUC in the late 1990s, as discussed in Chapter 7.

#### *Drug trafficking and internal conflict*

The endogenous connection of the internal conflict with drug trafficking is much more salient in NDS than in Sucre. By the end of the 1990s, FARC was bigger and stronger than ELN in the department. Although FARC's strengthening in NDS was to some extent connected to the oil industry, it was actually the coca economy that made the organization financially and militarily powerful, a phenomenon also observed in the Amazonian basin. FARC's 33<sup>rd</sup> Front promoted coca crops in Catatumbo's flat area (Tibú and La Gabarra). When the AUC arrived in NDS and the war against FARC over the control of coca started, crops started expanding towards the intermediate area (El Tarra and Sardinata) and the mountainous area (Teorama, Convención, El Carmen, Hacarí, and San Calixto). During the 1990s FARC controlled the entire border with Venezuela in the rural areas and the ELN was predominant in Cúcuta.

Besides the obvious extraordinary economic benefit, the coca economy has provided warring actors with important social bases, mainly composed of the labour force linked to illicit cultivation. It is worth underlining that FARC's territorial approach in NDS significantly differed from those of ELN and EPL guerrillas, just as it was the case in Sucre. The latter sought to build strong politically driven social bases in the Catatumbo region, whereas FARC sought a more instrumental support in coca communities. In this respect, Sucre and NDS

share similar patterns of guerrilla formation, with early generations seeking to promote “revolutionary” communities in contrast with a latecomer FARC that was largely disengaged from social processes and focused on accumulation.

The rise of the AUC in NDS is largely explained by the subnational security crisis, as in Sucre and elsewhere in Colombia. The escalation of guerrillas’ actions, particularly FARC, contributed to the stabilization of private forms of security. However, paramilitary formation in NDS, as in Sucre and elsewhere in Colombia, involved other factors. In Sucre, it was the land structure and the survival of political power structures that triggered the creation of AUC structures. In NDS it was about controlling the largest illegal and informal economies in northern Colombia and the entire available infrastructure required for it.

From 1999 the AUC burst in the department mainly in order to dispute FARC’s fierce grip on coca production. Until 2004, when AUC’s *Catatumbo Bloc* demobilized, the war was ferocious and coca crops expanded throughout the region. Besides the control of coca crops in Catatumbo, the AUC also disputed the control over Cúcuta’s metropolitan area to ELN guerrilla. The informal and illegal economic infrastructure built over decades in the capital’s area also constituted crucial spoils of war for paramilitaries. As analysed in next chapter, paramilitaries did not only politically cleanse Cúcuta but also controlled every illegal, informal and poorly regulated transaction in the area, subdued the existent criminal workforce and allied with powerful drug traffickers. In sum, the AUC created in NDS perhaps its strongest economic base by connecting for the first time the periphery to the departmental centre: the coca/cocaine production in Catatumbo region with its distribution and other complementary activities such as money laundering and contraband fuel in Cúcuta. Besides controlling the underworld, the AUC proved instrumental to some legal interests in the department like the oil exploitation and agro-industrial activities. As stated by a union worker who participated in the Northeastern Strike, “Catatumbo leaders have been massively assassinated because this is a rich zone”.<sup>26</sup>

Although this is the subject of analysis of the next chapter, it is worth anticipating that in NDS the “guild-party-militia” trinity found in Sucre where a distinct power structure created, financed and even commanded the AUC in order to maintain the rural status quo and electoral power did not materialise in NDS. As noted above, NDS’s political configuration very much differs from that of Sucre and this is largely explained by a series of factors related to distinct processes of state and politics formation, human settlement, integration into markets and

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<sup>26</sup>Taken from Arciniégas, F. (2009), “Santander, Atlántico y Magdalena: Territorios signados por la violencia antisindical”, *Documentos de la Escuela* No. 77, Bogotá D.C.: CUT/Ediciones Escuela Nacional Sindical, p. 17.

connections between drug trafficking and the internal conflict. As thoroughly discussed next, the case of NDS is not one of a subnational establishment privatizing security but instead a case of organized crime providing itself with a big and strong military structure. Because of this fundamental difference there are significant variations in the patterns and magnitude of parapolitics in NDS.

NORTE DE SANTANDER INC.: THE HYPER-CRIMINALIZATION  
OF THE ECONOMY

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*“When paramilitaries arrived and guerrillas fled – Nicolás remembers – [paramilitaries] gathered the whole town and informed us that from that very moment they were in command [...] at 5 a.m. they knocked on my door and put a gun in my head. “You’ll die today, son of a bitch, so pray and cry”. They tied me up and I waited 24 hours to die. They didn’t kill me but I had to serve them for as long as they stayed.”<sup>1</sup>*

As discussed, there are substantial differences between Sucre and NDS regarding the trajectory of the political economies in historical perspective, a matter that entails different paths and rationales of parapolitics. Notwithstanding the subregional variations between Cúcuta area and the peripheral Catatumbo region and the state weakness in its regulatory powers, NDS constitutes a more integrated space to the centre and markets, in contrast with Sucre’s peripheral and significant disconnected situation. In terms of its political configuration, despite the historical influence of the Conservative and Liberal parties, NDS has had a more pluralistic and competitive political field than that of Sucre, which was characterized by the predominance of single houses of Liberal origin that tightened the department’s authoritarian boundaries. NDS’s parties proved more discipline than those of Sucre in terms of fragmentation and atomization. Although politics showed the same trend of moving towards the Right, not all houses succumbed to this tendency, making many parties and groups free of parapolitics.

Unlike Sucre, where the long-lasting *hacienda* structure linked politics to the economic accumulation process, and shaped society’s dependence on politics and clientelist ties, the rapid collapse of the *hacienda* structure in NDS and the rise of trade activities drew a clear line separating the political and economic accumulation processes. The ascent of an influential entrepreneurial class detached from the political realm isolated political powers from local forms of accumulation. Consequently, NDS society has been chiefly shaped by markets – legal and illegal – rather than by its dependence on politics, making clienteles diffuse and unstable.

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<sup>1</sup>Testimony of a coca leaf harvester from the AUC’s arrival to La Gabarra in 1999, *El Espectador*, 2012.

Another differentiating feature is NDS's "border town" phenomenon, which facilitated its early integration to markets, different from Sucre's traditional marginalization, stemmed from pre-modern forms of accumulation. Nevertheless, the flourishing of trade has historically occurred in the absence of basic regulations regarding border control and exchange rate markets, which consequently has created a complex display and overlapping of legal and illegal economic activities both in modern and peripheral NDS. The former constitutes a typical enclave model (oil, coal and coca), where the concentration of capital has not come from within and legal and illegal activities apparently do not interconnect. The latter had instead a complex and intertwined circuit where legal and illegal activities cross with local and outside capital in the context of a highly unregulated trade activity with Venezuela. In this context, political powers were instrumental to economic powers by adopting a *laissez faire* stance and being protective of this economic complexity, but have never actively participated therein.

The interaction of these variables created a hyper-criminalized economic space in which parapolitics was limited to the protection of warlords' accumulation interests by politicians in exchange for votes and office. The collusion never reached the realm of co-governance experienced in Sucre. The research in NDS strongly suggests that unlike the political strategy followed by the AUC in Sucre, and the Caribbean region as a whole, the strategy of the *Autodefensas* in NDS – generalizable to Arauca department also located in northeastern Colombia – was mainly aimed at controlling the coca economy, cocaine exports through the Venezuelan border, and other illicit and informal transactions. The patterns of state capture in NDS do not seem to have been aimed at capturing politics as such and seeking representation from politicians but more targeted at obtaining immunity and impunity from judicial and security agencies. The fact that parapolitics in NDS occurred in a different time frame than that of Sucre and did not coincide with the voting on the Peace and Justice Law, reinforces the argument that the AUC's logic of market overrode the logic of politics. This variation largely explains the magnitude of the penetration of these institutions in NDS compared to Sucre. Although some politicians benefited in different ways from the AUC's violent and financial muscle and were important in the warlords' strategy, collusion seems to have been more restricted in the sense that it did not pervade the whole political space. There was never a consociational arrangement based upon violence in NDS and the AUC did not co-govern as in Sucre. In this context, and juxtaposed with Losada's *hegemonic* model identified for Sucre, NDS rather fits the *predominance within restricted competition* typology (Losada, 2006) in which paramilitaries were relatively indifferent to politics – not to politicians – and supported candidates amongst a limited pool, kindred to warlords' interests.

There are five features that make the case of NDS dissimilar from that of Sucre and largely explain the prevalence of the economic rationale. The first difference is that drug traffickers and sectors of the Colombian army and police participated in the AUC formation process; not NDS's establishment. To a significant extent the AUC was externally induced, a matter that sharply contrasts with Sucre's internally driven process.

The second variation relates to the nature of paramilitary warfare and strategies for controlling resources. In NDS guerrillas were stronger in both the military and political dimensions than those in Sucre. Insurgents embedded in the department not only because of the strategic value of its geography but also because of the impressive amount of available resources: oil, coca, and public budgets. This situation made the paramilitary strategy difficult and complex. Despite the fact that the AUC also used a terror-intensive model against civilians in NDS as a means of weakening guerrillas and succeeded in controlling a large share of the coca/cocaine economies, the *Autodefensas* could not fully overcome FARC and to a lesser extent ELN competition, unlike in Sucre where the war balance was soon tipped in favour of the AUC.

A third distinction is the role of the AUC vis-à-vis extractive economies, a feature completely absent in Sucre: the dispute with FARC over the coca economy with over 15,000 hectares of illicit crops, and the protection of the re-activating oil industry and coal exploitation concessions in the Catatumbo basin. Regarding the question of rural land, unlike the case of Sucre, the logic of accumulation through dispossession was marginal in NDS. Forcible displacement was mainly instrumental to the coca economy and to the balance of war but not a means for warlords to accumulate land or to protect the rural establishment's status quo. Because latifundia has not been the predominant land structure in NDS and consequently there has never been a strong agrarian movement, the AUC was not instrumental to the rural rich interests of weakening agrarian collective action. Nevertheless, the AUC apparently used violence for the late partial alteration of the rural land structure in the Catatumbo region where approximately 6,000 hectares were violently or fraudulently expropriated from small farmers for the cultivation of palm oil.

The fourth difference is that NDS, and more specifically Cúcuta's area, had traditionally hosted criminal organizations connected to contraband and drug traffic. This pre-existing criminal structure became one of the main spoils of war for AUC warlords and the fact that the *Autodefensas* had a military force of over 1,400 men facilitated the progressive monopolization of criminal activities in urban areas. Consequently, the fifth peculiarity of NDS is that the relation between criminals and politicians existed long before the AUC emerged, and although it is possible to stress that on the whole politics and crime have been separated spheres

in the department, they have traditionally co-habited and at times of elections they have interacted, mostly through a complex chain of intermediaries, a matter explained later. In the AUC era the traditional functional relation between criminals and politicians was maintained and political actors accommodated to the characteristics of this new illegal actor.

In this chapter, parapolitics in NDS will be not only compared with Sucre but also the contrast between the rural and urban dynamics will be substantiated, following the comparative line established in Chapter 6. This chapter will be divided into two sections, the first one addressing the dynamics of the internal conflict and the AUC accumulation logic in NDS, and the second one related to parapolitics and the capture of the local state. It is noteworthy that the available evidence for the NDS case is not as rich as that of Sucre and therefore there are several missing pieces from the parapolitics puzzle. Despite the gaps, the bits and pieces found allowed establishing robust tracing of the paramilitary process in the department and making series of inferences of the relationship between the AUC and politics.

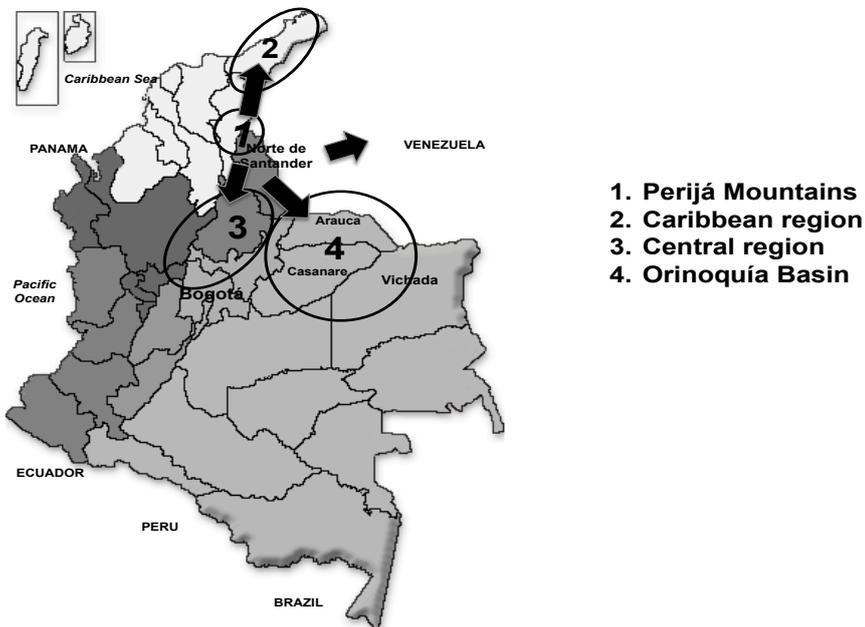
#### PART I — THE CAPTURE OF THE STATE

##### THE STRATEGIC VALUE OF NDS

NDS has had a bigger strategic value for irregular warring actors and illegal war economies than those of Sucre in many respects. First, NDS's territory comprises the last leg of the Andes Mountains and the Catatumbo rain forest, which represent the most valuable guard areas in northern Colombia. Second, Catatumbo region is the centre of the coca economy in northern Colombia. Third, NDS location provides key mobility corridors that connect the department with the rest of the country. The Perijá Mountains, one of the Andes Mountains' foothills, constitute a traditional drug trafficking corridor towards the Caribbean coast (Map 14). Fourth, the long unregulated border with Venezuela facilitates a wide array of illegal transactions as well as the integration of NDS with the Arauca-Casanare geographic cluster within the Orinoquía basin, the richest oil region in Colombia and also an important drug trafficking zone. Finally, the access to central Colombia facilitates massive trade of smuggled Venezuelan fuel through NDS.

As already discussed there was a noteworthy pre-existing criminality in NDS by the time the AUC emerged in the department, as a consequence of the poorly regulated border with Venezuela and of a series of comparative advantages derived from the neighbouring country's

Map 14: Strategic Value of NDS Location



Mapped by the author.

exchange rate policies. NDS has traditionally hosted criminal organizations dedicated to large-scale smuggling activities in Cúcuta area and, since the 1980s involved in drug trafficking and money laundering, among others. Likewise, at the time of the AUC's arrival, NDS had the largest coca economy in northern Colombia and some of the most important trafficking routes via Venezuela.

The strategic value of NDS defined the *Autodefensas*' military strategy along the urban-rural divide – deepening the existing gap even further yet connecting modern and peripheral areas in a complementary fashion – and had major consequences on the subnational war equation. In the Catatumbo region the AUC implanted a violence-intensive model that demanded a large military capacity in terms of manpower and arms. This is explained by the magnitude of the coca-cultivated area – over 15,000 hectares in 1999 – that involved a bloody territorial dispute with FARC, and the needs of controlling the large labour force involved in planting and harvesting coca as well as processing cocaine. In terms of the war equation, although FARC lost the absolute control over the coca economy in the confrontation with the AUC, paramilitaries never managed to monopolize it. As discussed below, the coca economy delivered under permanent confrontation.

In urban areas, the AUC resorted to a different strategy that better adapted to the needs of controlling dispersed illegal and poorly regulated legal businesses as well as cocaine trafficking. The consolidation of organized criminal syndicates prior to the AUC's emergence provided an extraordinary platform for paramilitary control of Cúcuta's area. Although paramilitaries exerted large amounts of violence in the metropolitan area, the model demanded a smaller military capacity. The organization operated in network mode, supported in pre-existing criminal nodes. Unlike the Catatumbo case, the AUC was successful in inverting the urban confrontation balance with guerrillas – particularly the ELN -, which was defeated in Cúcuta's shantytowns.

## THE DYNAMICS OF THE INTERNAL CONFLICT

As previously discussed, between the early eighties and the late nineties NDS society lived under guerrillas' threats and violence. Both FARC and ELN assassinated and displaced civilians, kidnapped farmers and merchants, and systematically preyed on the economy. By the time the AUC emerged in NDS, FARC was the dominant guerrilla. The ELN – who had strengthened its military position in NDS given its ability to extort the oil industry and sabotage the oil infrastructure in the 1980s, had experienced a progressive loss of military and political predominance during the 1990s. This is mainly explained by the decline of the oil industry and the ELN's disconnection with the drugs trade.<sup>2</sup> FARC's arrival and expansion in NDS was mainly encouraged by the coca economy, and in Catatumbo it found an extraordinary financial resource for enlarging and strengthening its army.

The internal conflict radically intensified in NDS upon the entrance of the AUC in 1999. On the rural front there was the dispute with FARC over the coca economy, and in the Cúcuta area the ELN was displaced and the entire criminal market the area appropriated. A matter that cannot be found in Sucre is that a major consequence of the intensification of the conflict in NDS was the displacement and contagion effects on the other side of the border. As examined later, the Venezuelan territory became a safe haven for FARC under the alleged official protection of the Chávez administration, where the organization also became involved in extortion and kidnapping activities. In response, many Venezuelan rural rich who opposed

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<sup>2</sup>Given its “theology of revolution” Catholic background, the ELN has been traditionally separated from drug trafficking activities. This is perhaps one of the main variables at play in the ELN decline. Although the organization has tried to win a small share of the business in recent years, FARC and paramilitaries have been dominant actors for a long time.

the Chávez regime allegedly started to finance paramilitary structures with the support of the *Autodefensas*.

### *Paramilitary formation*

One of the main differences between Sucre and NDS is the process of paramilitary formation. While paramilitarism was an internally induced process in Sucre, NDS was externally stimulated: security forces, drug traffickers and other criminals – with distinct interests in NDS territory, implanted AUC structures formed in other Colombian regions. “Paramilitarism as we know it was an external phenomenon in NDS; it is not something that sprang from within”, said an academic interviewed. “It came from Montería [Córdoba’s capital in the Caribbean region, considered the AUC’s cradle] with a clear goal of anti-subversive control and also with the objective of controlling drugs and arms trafficking corridors” (Bautista, 2009). The director of local NGO PARCOMUN argued that the AUC did not arrive in NDS on its own: “the ‘marriage’ to the public force and drug traffickers had clear strategic interests in the narcotics production” (Oviedo, 2009). According to an investigation by the Solicitor General’s Office, the overall departmental strategy was indeed externally planned (Verdad Abierta, 2008): the paramilitary campaign originated in Córdoba as the outcome of an agreement between AUC’s top commanders Carlos Castaño and Salvatore Mancuso, two top-ranking officers from the Colombian Army, as well as *Los Pepes*<sup>3</sup> and *Los Azules*, criminal structures with an significant participation in the drugs trade in NDS prior to the paramilitary entrance.

Before the creation of NDS’s paramilitary structures, the AUC organization from the neighbouring Cesar department (*Autodefensas del Sur del Cesar* – AUSC) engaged in counter-insurgency tasks in the western Catatumbo territory from 1997, aimed at blocking a traditional ELN corridor along the NDS- Cesar border. Nonetheless the AUSC did not actually control NDS’s territory; it only developed “hit-and-run” operations in Ocaña, Ábrego, La Playa and La Esperanza.

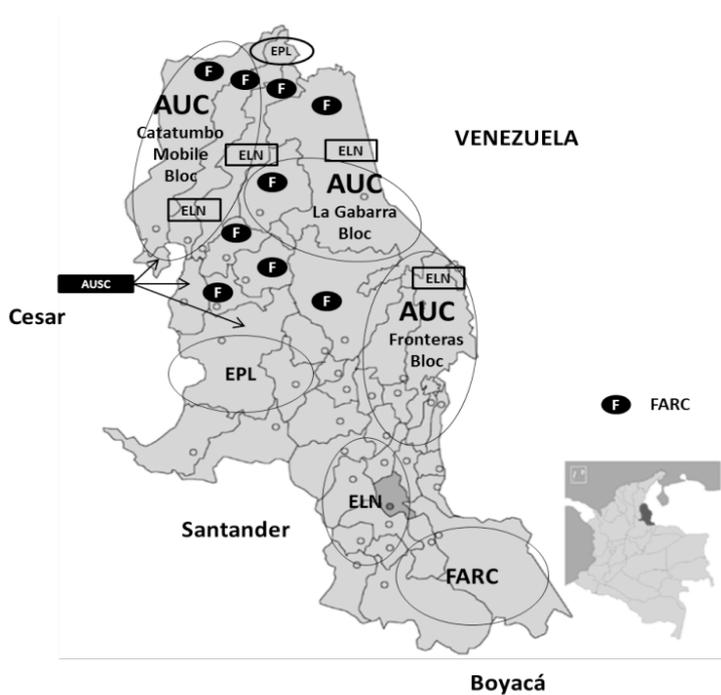
It was only in 1999 that the Catatumbo Bloc (CB) was created as an exclusive AUC structure for NDS. Although the CB belonged to the same Sucre’s MMHB jurisdiction, the Northern Bloc, the CB was not put under “Jorge 40’s” command but under Salvatore Mancuso’s. The fact that a commander of the stature of Mancuso took direct control of the CB reveals the

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<sup>3</sup>One of the *Los Pepes* family members was Gerson Gonzalez, alias “Kiko”, one of Mancuso’s right hand men who would later manage the AUC’s only cocaine processing laboratory in the Catatumbo region (Verdad Abierta, 2009a).

strategic importance of this structure for the organization. The CB, with 1,434 men, was composed of two structures: La Gabarra Front (LGF) which operated in Tibú, El Tarra, Sardinata and San Calixto commanded by Armando Perez, alias “Camilo”. La Gabarra Front had a special group, the *Fronteras* Front (FF), commanded by Jorge Iván Laverde, alias “El Iguano”, in charge of Cúcuta’s metropolitan area, Puerto Santander, Chinácota and Pamplona (Map 15). The second structure was the Mobile Catatumbo Bloc (MCB) under alias “Felipe” command, concentrated in Hacarí, Ocaña, Teorama, Convención and El Carmen. The CB was active between mid-1999 and December 2004 when the whole bloc was formally demobilized.

Map 15: Influence areas of AUC and guerrillas in NDS



Source: Presidential Office of the High Commissioner for Peace. Mapped by the author.

The CB had two distinct strategies in NDS. A rural strategy aimed at controlling the coca economy in the Catatumbo region where the organization challenged FARC for the control of approximately 15,000 hectares of coca crops during almost five years and hindered the ELN from operating in the oil exploitation areas. It is important to note that except for the Catatumbo region, rural areas in NDS seemed to lack strategic importance for the AUC. These are characterized as middle and small traditional agricultural areas of closed frontier not as peripheral as Catatumbo and therefore not suitable for developing illicit crops on a large scale. Although the CB operated in other rural regions it did not actually exert or fight

with guerrillas over the control of these territories. As shown in Map 15, guerrillas controlled other departmental areas, namely southern and mid-western zones.

The urban strategy was directed at controlling the pre-existing criminal infrastructure and opportunities as well as eliminating the ELN's influence in shantytowns. Notwithstanding the distinctiveness of each strategy, there was a strong complementarity between the rural and the urban approaches. "Catatumbo and Cúcuta's dynamics were not isolated from each other; they were connected through a well-structured strategy, and made part of a project against insurgents, subjection of the population and the capture of the state" (Oviedo, 2009). But above all, the existing evidence demonstrates that a stronger complementarity existed in the field of illegal markets. Controlling Cúcuta's metropolitan area had three main critical consequences for the AUC. First, it provided control over the black market of Venezuelan fuel and consequently it generated a dramatic reduction in the costs of coca paste production in the Catatumbo region. Second, it facilitated the control of strategic corridors for cocaine trafficking through the neighbouring country.<sup>4</sup> Third, the extraordinary cash flows generated in the Catatumbo region could find innumerable channels and mechanisms for money laundering in Cúcuta.

#### *The rural dynamic of the conflict*

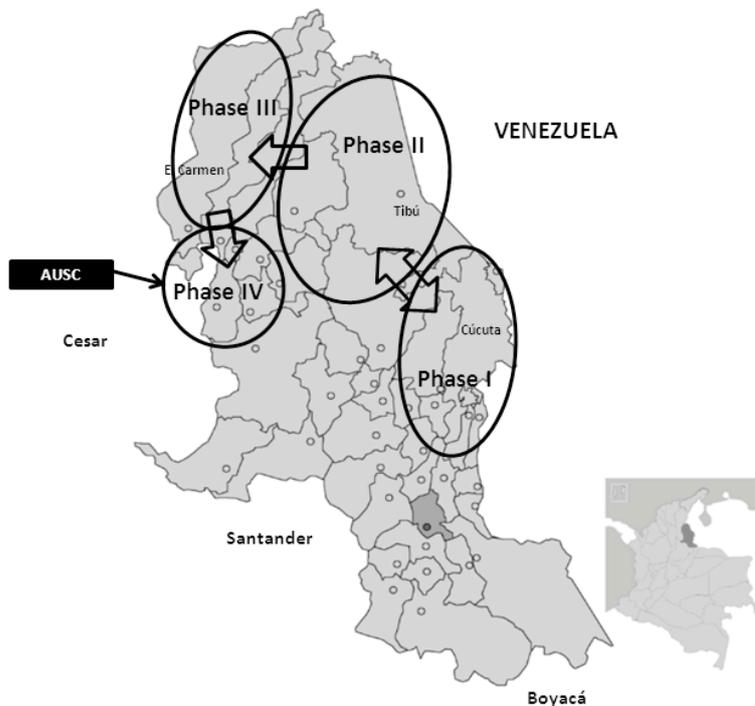
According to the consulted judicial and police files, the CB first emerged in Cúcuta's metropolitan area (phase I-Map 16) and within days it emerged in the Catatumbo region, specifically in Tibú and El Tarra (phase II). By 2001 the AUC had progressed to the intermediate zone in El Carmen and Convención (phase III), and by early 2002, the organization had reached the mountainous area of Teorama, San Calixto, and Hacarí (phase 4).

The CB arrived in the Catatumbo region in 1999 when FARC was at its peak in terms of controlling territory and the coca economy. The ELN, although not as strong as FARC, has managed to control in the oil exploitation areas. The CB first operated in Tibú (low lands), particularly in La Gabarra County. Once the flat area was under paramilitary control, the AUC progressed towards the region's intermediate and mountainous areas following FARC's ascending coca colonization in order to control the guerrillas' labour force and coca harvest.

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<sup>4</sup>The main corridor is Tibú – Puerto Santander – Cúcuta, with a turnoff in Sardinata, where there are many passages into Venezuela. The second one is a set of corridors structured around the road that communicates Cúcuta with Tibú and Ocaña: the corridors connect the Catatumbo region with the Cesar department and the highway to the Caribbean coast.

Map 16: Catatumbo Bloc expansion in NDS (1997–2004)



Mapped by the author.

While the CB exerted influence over the flat and the intermediate areas, the AUSC from Cesar department sought to control the mountainous regions. However, although FARC lost the monopoly over the coca economy, the organization remained strong in Catatumbo's mountainous area.

This process generated a spiral of confrontation fed by large amounts of violence. As a result FARC and AUC temporarily delimited their areas of influence: the former would control the Catatumbo River's left bank and the latter the right bank. However the agreement was unstable and fragile and the non-aggression pact was soon broken by FARC with the massacre of 34 coca harvesters in La Gabarra in June 2004. The progression of the armed confrontation from the flat areas to the mountains is consistent with the expansion of AUC throughout the territory.

Unlike Sucre's case, the fact that the AUC in NDS had to struggle with guerrillas over both the production of coca and the trafficking of cocaine entailed using large amounts of human and financial resources. It is no surprising then that the CB was one of the AUC's largest

structures. The rural strategy entailed not only employing large amounts of violence against civilians but also using an sizeable part of the available manpower for the protection of coca crops, cocaine processing laboratories and trafficking routes to Venezuela.<sup>5</sup> Drug trafficking activities also implied exercising strong social control over coca growers and harvesters, coca base and cocaine producers, and small drugs retailers. It required taxing buyers and sellers and enforcing transactions; guaranteeing the flux of chemical precursors (mainly fuel and cement) for transforming coca base. It also demanded constructing infrastructure for accessing isolated areas and to export cocaine, like roads, river docks and clandestine runways.

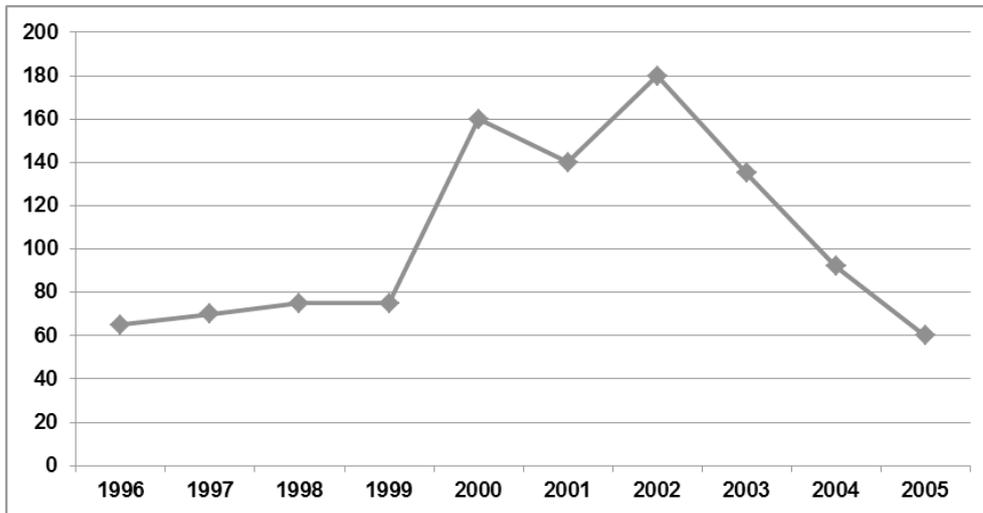
Violence followed exactly the same geographical path described above. As the confrontation progressed from lowlands to the mountainous area, guerrillas and paramilitaries engaged in a spiral of violence that left a death toll of over 11,200 civilians, the disappearance of almost 200, and the forcible displacement of at least 19,000 families.<sup>6</sup> Homicide rates more than doubled between 1999 and 2001, and reached the peak of 180 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants in 2002. Between 1999 and 2000 murderous violence was very intense in the flat area; violence increased substantially during the year 2000 in the intermediate area, and in the mountainous area between 2001 and 2003. This dynamic not only involved the elimination of the “enemy-competitor” labour force, but also that of leaders of social organizations, human rights activists and *Barrí* people.

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<sup>5</sup>NDS is the main drug-trafficking route to Europe, via western Africa, through Venezuela, and to a lesser extent to the U.S. Due to the increasing anti-narcotics enforcement in Colombia, the AUC established operation bases in Venezuela with the alleged support of Venezuelan authorities, in particular, the *Guardia Nacional*.

<sup>6</sup>Source: (CALCP, 2009).

Figure 18: Catatumbo region homicide rates (1999–2005)

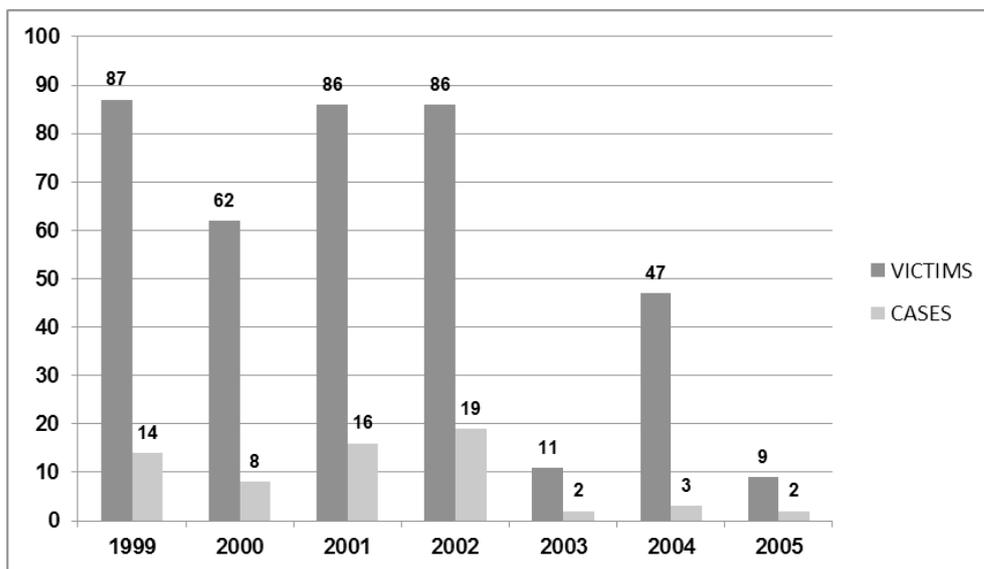


Source: National Police

As shown in Figures 19 and 20, massacres<sup>7</sup> and forcible displacement followed similar patterns. Assassination and forcible displacement became a strategy to guarantee the reliability of the Catatumbo region as a strategic area for illicit crops and drug trafficking. The depopulation and repopulation processes in the Catatumbo mainly conformed to the logic of securing a reliable workforce for the coca/cocaine industries from other regions. But forcible displacement also served emerging agro-industrial interests, specifically in the palm oil sector, a matter discussed below.

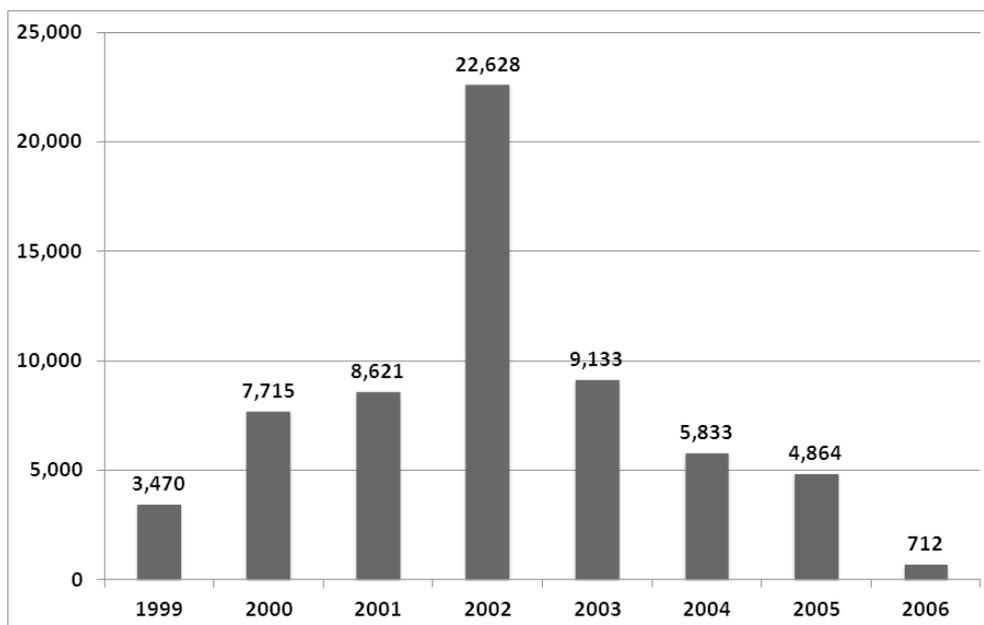
<sup>7</sup>Among many massacres, the ones perpetrated in Tibú in 1999 (one with 11 victims and another with 32) and in El Tarra in 2000 with 20 victims constituted an important milestone in the AUC territorial control process.

Figure 19: Massacres in the Catatumbo Region (1999–2005)



Source: Presidential Office of the High Commissioner for Peace

Figure 20: Forcible Displacement in the Catatumbo Region (1999–2006)

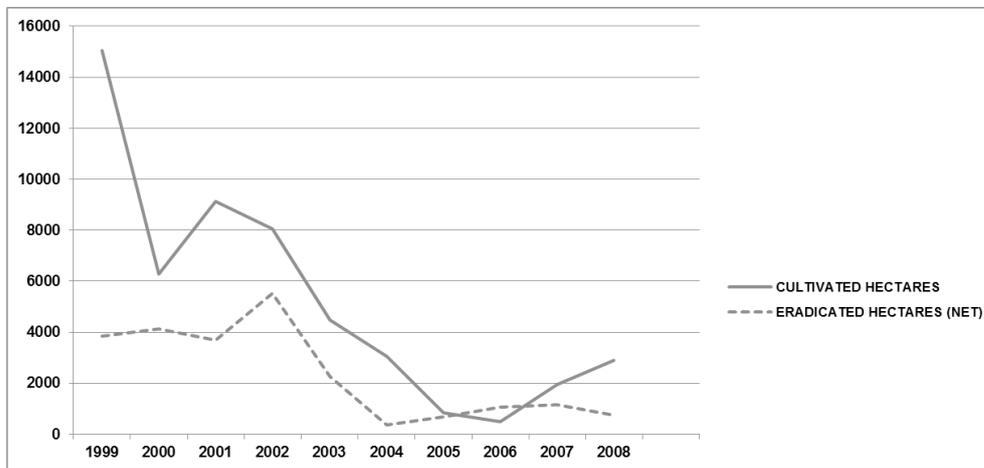


Source: Presidential Office of the High Commissioner for Peace

Coca crops moved in the same direction of the confrontation noted above – from the flat areas to the mountains. Nevertheless, contrary to what happened in other Colombian regions,

the total area of coca crops did not grow: they experienced a dramatic decline from 15,000 hectares in 1999 to 3,055 in 2004 (Figure 21). Besides the relative effectiveness of the Colombian police and U.S. government joint aerial eradication in the region, the displacement of crops from the flat areas to the mountains in a short period of time reduced the stability levels of the crops<sup>8</sup>: in 1999 the geographic core of illicit crops was located in Tibú and El Tarra, where most crops were located. As crops moved towards the mountains, the nucleus moved to the intermediate areas. In 2005 there were hardly any crops left in the flat area. For many, this phenomenon reveals the alleged pacts between the AUC and multinational oil companies for making the flat area more competitive and safe.

Figure 21: Evolution of cultivated and eradicated (\*) hectares of coca crops in the Catatumbo region (1999–2008)



(\*) Each hectare is fumigated in average 2.5 times in order to successfully eradicate coca bushes  
 Source: DNE (Anti-Narcotics National Office)

Contrary to the case of Sucre, the AUC never became a dominant warring actor in NDS not only because it did not seek to control the whole departmental territory – the CB specifically concentrated in the Catatumbo region and Cúcuta’s metropolitan area – but also because it could not overcome the competition of one of FARC strongest structures in the country. The AUC succeeded in effectively controlling the flat areas and also gaining a large zone of influence in the intermediate areas where guerrillas were still active. FARC became predominant in the mountainous area.

<sup>8</sup>The stability level is a measure used to account for the capacity of expanding coca crops overtime without abandoning the initial nucleus of crops. Stability levels depend mainly upon the efficacy of eradication policies: if they are successful the crops will move towards areas out of the reach of eradication policies leaving behind the initial nucleus; if not, coca crops expand by maintaining the initial nucleus as a reference. According to UNODC (2008a), NDS’s average stability level for 2000–2005 was the lowest, 0.5, whereas the national average was 6.9.

As for the ELN, the organization was progressively weakened by the AUC in the flat area where the organization had strengthened thanks to the oil industry. The categorical rejection of drug trafficking activities, a stance mainly based on the argument that the drugs economy had contributed to increasing corruption, impunity and the criminalization of political power (Gutiérrez, 2008), is a factor that played a significant role in the ELN's weakening and shrinking. However, the organization shifted towards coca and cocaine markets since 2005, but has not been able to compete with FARC and re-emerging paramilitary structures.

*Cúcuta: the urban strategy*

Cúcuta, the sixth largest city in Colombia, has one of the strongest economies in the country. Nonetheless, a weak rule of law, unregulated basic transactions, informality and exclusion are factors that explain to an important extent the flourishing of organized crime and collective violence. Before the AUC emerged in the urban areas, guerrillas, particularly the ELN, controlled shantytowns. "Cúcuta's metropolitan area was fully controlled by guerrillas; the police would not leave the stations and the army would not operate. They were confined to barracks" (El Espectador, 2009c). Nonetheless, neither ELN nor FARC had any sort of control over organized crime in Cúcuta; the guerrilla-criminals connection was restricted to coca paste deals.

The AUC emerged in the area of Cúcuta a couple of weeks before it arrived in the Caturbo region. As in the case of the latter, the creation of the *Fronteras* Front – FF – was externally arranged. According to the Solicitor General's Office, the Castaño brothers and Salvatore Mancuso sent "El Iguano", one of their most trusted men, to Cúcuta in order to create an urban structure. The designation of "El Iguano" as commander of the FF was not fortuitous. He had played a key role in the pacification process in Urabá region (Antioquia) under the Castaño brothers' command, which explains his rapid ascent in the organization and his transferral to strategic areas for the AUC. "El Iguano" had specialized in penetrating urban centres: infiltrating security agencies, combating insurgent groups, absorbing existing criminal structures, monopolizing illegal activities, implementing complex extortion structures, creating intelligence networks, and controlling the slums. These qualities made him well suited to the challenging task of taking over Cúcuta; hence he was transferred to NDS to operate under Mancuso's orders where he remained until the CB demobilized in 2004.

According to “El Iguano”, “Carlos Castaño called a meeting in Urabá [northwestern Colombia] [where] he told me that he had already made arrangements to break in Catatumbo [...] a trader from Cúcuta and friend of Castaño known as *Papo* had said that they were in need of urban and rural *Autodefensas* in the area of Cúcuta. We arrived there on the 9<sup>th</sup> of May 1999 [...] five commanders [...] *Papo* organized us” (La Opinión, 2007). The FF commander also indicated that he and his men had the task of merging with a gang known as *Los Polleros* with fifteen men specialized in social cleansing in the metropolitan area slums. “El Iguano” absorbed this gang – as he subsequently did with all urban gangs – and in this fashion the FF was formed.

The FF operated in two complementary directions. On the one hand, it functioned as an agent of political contention through an aggressive counter-insurgency cleansing campaign in the *comunas* (shantytowns) through a war waged under a “bloc by bloc” dynamic from the very beginning. “El Iguano” stated: “we got there [Cúcuta] [...] and the other group reached Catatumbo twenty days later. When the latter arrived, we [FF] had already assassinated 60 ELN urban militia members in Cúcuta” (La Opinión, 2007). The ELN’s weakening was particularly notorious in Cúcuta between 1999 and 2001 with the AUC’s arrival *en masse*.

On the other hand, paramilitaries operated like a highly sophisticated organized crime structure. Unlike the AUC’s rural structures, which were organized in a military fashion, the FF mainly operated as a network in which AUC cells and all pre-existing criminal structures constituted individual nodes. This architecture strongly differed from the urban paramilitary organization in Sucre, which aside from some protection rackets was hardly different from that of the countryside. “El Iguano” soon monopolized dispersed criminal structures of all sorts, co-opting some and eliminating others, and created a complex network of extortionists, hit men, money launderers, large-scale smugglers, and contract enforcers.

The urban process had two phases. The first one consisted of cleaning the *comunas* from guerrillas’ bases and “undesirables” as well as absorbing the available scattered criminal work force and infrastructure. Besides murderous violence, the FF created a complex protection racket that comprised households, small shops, unlicensed security firms, and wholesale food markets among others. The structure succeeded in covering almost every neighbourhood through vigilante groups supported by intelligence networks formed by guerrilla defectors, taxi drivers, small shopowners and private guards.<sup>9</sup> In this fashion, the FF built significant

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<sup>9</sup>Paramilitaries were also deeply involved in the private security business. Besides the security firms’ profits the FF used guards as information sources, as *El Tiempo* reports. In Colombia, the private security sector is poorly regulated and as a consequence an important share of companies operate without a license. Investigators affirm that the AUC forced the unlicensed companies’ managers to resign in order to designate trusted people

networks in Cúcuta's downtown and shantytowns and extended the AUC's influence to criminal sectors in those areas, maximizing its operational capacities and financial resources. In Cúcuta's rural zones the AUC established camps in El Zulia, Puerto Santander and Villa del Rosario used for cocaine processing and traffic. At the end of 2002, the AUC exerted full coercive control over Cúcuta and its metropolitan area.

It is estimated that between 2002 and 2005 the FF perpetrated 42 massacres (154 people assassinated), 5,200 selective homicides and over 600 forcible disappearances in the area (CALCP, 2009). Regarding the latter, "El Iguano" revealed that the FF built two crematoria, one in Villa del Rosario and the other in Puerto Santander, in order to disappear the front's victims without a trace. In 2001, 98 victims were cremated. During two years the crematoria replaced the traditional paramilitary practice of corpse dismemberment and burial in common graveyards.<sup>10</sup>

The National Forensic Institute reported 2002 as the most violent year in Cúcuta's history and consequently the Institute was declared in state of emergency given the massive activity of removal of bodies. For that year the homicide rate was of 115 per 100,000 inhabitants. This wave largely involved the social cleansing campaign against prostitutes, drug addicts, petty thieves, LGBTI, homeless, and peddlers, as well as violence against resilient gangs. In turn, the political cleansing strategy with over 150 victims was not as territorially defined as the social cleansing one, and was aimed at public officials, human rights activists, community leaders, union workers, left wing activists, and university students.<sup>11</sup> The most notorious cases were those of Pauselino Camargo, independent politician and former Cúcuta mayor, assassinated in February 2000; Iván Villamizar, head of the Libre University in Cúcuta, former NDS Ombudsman and Secretary of Finance, killed in February 2001; Enrique Flórez, an external legal advisor to the Mayor of Cúcuta, murdered in 2003; and Tirso Vélez, a left wing candidate for the Governor's Office in 2003, was shot dead in June 2003, a few months before

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in these positions. The AUC's penetration of the private security business was so great that the FF paramilitary commanders were able to call all managers to meetings in Juan Frío, 30 minutes from Cúcuta, in order to establish the monthly "contribution" that these firms should pay the AUC in order to operate as well as to define the mechanisms used by guards in order to collect valuable information. Before contacting the police, private guards warned the AUC about guerrillas, robbers, lowlifes or car thieves in the different neighbourhoods (El Tiempo, 2004).

<sup>10</sup>According to "Hernán", Villa del Rosario's AUC commander, the crematoria were banned by the AUC commandship in 2003 because "it was against the International Court of Justice", and therefore, in an "act of extreme consideration", AUC stopped cremating victims and instead their corpses were thrown into the Táchira River in Venezuela. See *El Espectador* (2009a) and *Verdad Abierta* (2009b).

<sup>11</sup>The Francisco de Paula Santander University Campus became a main AUC target: students and professors were systematically threatened. One of the most notorious cases is the assassination of students Edwin López and Gerson Gallardo in 2002. Weeks after they went missing they were found shot dead, with evidence of torture.

the elections. By then he was leading the polls. Vélez had been mayor of Tibú in 1992 for the Patriotic Union Party, and while in office he and his family were subjected to innumerable threats. He was also departmental deputy, member of the National Commission for Peace and founder of the local NGO *Redepaz*.

During this first phase “El Iguano” was also successful in infiltrating state security agencies –the national police and the secret service – and the departmental Solicitor’s Office. The second phase of the urban strategy consisted in colluding with politicians, a process thoroughly discussed in the next section.

Overall, the urban process was much more complex to the extent that Cúcuta is far more institutionalized than the Catatumbo region and the spectrum of criminal, political, social and economic activities are wider. However, the strategy was very successful as FF monopolized organized crime, controlled the *comunas*, infiltrated state agencies, and kept guerrillas at bay. During this process ELN militias were brought to the edge of disappearance and FARC’s urban structures had to withdraw to rural areas.

#### *Conflict displacement and contagion*

When the Uribe administration launched its offensive against guerrillas in 2002, both FARC and ELN sought refuge in the areas bordering Ecuador and Venezuela in order to avoid Colombian military sweeps. One of the main consequences of the intensification of the internal conflict in NDS was – and continues to be – its increasing movement towards Venezuela. The paramilitary-guerrilla confrontation has not only generated thousands of Colombian refugees in Venezuelan territory but has also pushed FARC to use Venezuelan territory as a strategic rear guard. This situation has contributed to the deepening of the historical tensions between the two countries.<sup>12</sup>

Over the last decade the Colombian internal conflict has become a threat to the regional security and stability as it has not only displaced towards neighbouring countries but has also had a contagion effect. The phenomenon has been particularly sensitive in the case of

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<sup>12</sup>For over a century Colombia and Venezuela have had a territorial dispute over a share of the border that has not been solved in spite of the diplomatic efforts and has therefore constituted a source of tension. Nevertheless, it is the armed conflict situation in the border the matter that has reached the highest contentious point more specifically the alleged protection of FARC by Hugo Chávez administration has been a highly contentious matter over the last decade.

Venezuela. However Ecuador, and to a lesser extent Panama, have also experienced it.<sup>13</sup> For many regional governments, this situation has been significantly caused by U.S. military involvement in Colombia. They argue that the military offensive against FARC and the aerial eradication of illicit crops have pushed rebels and coca across the borders. This situation has not only redefined the regional alignment vis-à-vis the U.S (Tokatlian, 2006) in which an increasing number of countries oppose U.S. policies but has also had a pervasive impact on the diplomatic relations.

The Colombian conflict experienced an important change since Colonel Hugo Chávez took office. It has been repeatedly purported that the progressive displacement of the conflict to Venezuelan territory, specifically to Táchira, Zulia and Apure states, is the outcome of the protection received by FARC under Chávez's administration. This situation has generated severe diplomatic tensions, mostly during the Uribe administrations (2002–2006 and 2006–2010). For almost a decade both governments became involved in a deeply polarized debate about the U.S. military and anti-narcotics involvement in Colombia. President Uribe systematically accused Chávez's administration of being ineffective in combating drug trafficking activities and of supporting guerrillas through arms supply and the provision of refuge. In turn, Chávez accused the Uribe administration of unconditional alignment to the U.S. and even of plotting to assassinate him.<sup>14</sup> By putting forward threats to the national defence, Chávez used the border as a potential war scenario between the two countries.<sup>15</sup> The continuous crisis generated temporary suspensions of trade activity, a matter that further contributed to the promotion of informality and illegality on both sides of the border.

The polarization of the debate had consequences beyond bilateral relations. On the one hand, the region experienced a contagion effect. Chávez managed to align Ecuador, Nicaragua

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<sup>13</sup>Another diplomatic crisis was unleashed with Ecuador in March 2008, the Colombian Air Force launched an air raid in Ecuadorian territory and bombed a FARC's camp in Sucumbíos department, during the so-called Phoenix Operation (*Operación Fénix*), in which alias "Raul Reyes" – FARC's second commander – and other 22 rebels were killed. A diplomatic crisis resulted as President Correa argued that Colombian had violated Ecuador's sovereignty during the military operation and Uribe's administration claimed the complicity of the Ecuadorian government with guerrillas.

<sup>14</sup>According to Venezuelan official sources 130 Colombian paramilitaries were detained on the 9<sup>th</sup> of May 2004 in a rural estate near Caracas. The men were ordered to assassinate President Chávez. Venezuelan Vice President José Vicente Rangel revealed photographs of a supposed paramilitary training camp in Homestead (Florida) and his claimed commander, a former officer from the *Guardia Nacional*. According to Rangel, the group was trained by the opposition to operate in Venezuela against *Chavista* targets (Voltaire Net, 2004). More recently, elected president Maduro stated that ex-president Uribe had plotted to assassinate him.

<sup>15</sup>Venezuela's military expenditure dramatically increased over the last decade. It is estimated that Chávez's administration spent US\$4,400 million only in weapons purchase between 2003 and 2008. Russia has been the main supplier of combat airplanes, submarines, helicopters, and assault rifles.

and Bolivia against Colombia; but was not successful with Brazil<sup>16</sup> and Argentina who worked mainly as mediators. Colombia received support from Chile, Peru, Mexico and Panama. The rest remained at the margin. On the other hand, the armed conflict displacement also generated internal tensions in Venezuela. Táchira's state governor of that time, who belongs to the Social Christian Party (COPEI), the opposition party to Chávez's Fifth Republic Movement (*Movimiento V República*), was accused of promoting the entrance of Colombian paramilitaries into Venezuelan territory, and in turn the governor insisted that Chávez protected Colombian guerrillas, which had introduced and dramatically increased practices such as extortion and kidnappings in some Venezuelan provinces.

Notwithstanding the rhetoric and the increasing polarization of the bilateral – and at times regional – debate, the fact is that the Colombian conflict has indeed affected the neighbouring country. It is calculated that between 2004 and 2006 there were 5,779 deaths reported in Táchira, Zulia, Barinas and Apure states as consequence of the expansion of the conflict.<sup>17</sup> In September 2003 alone forty-six Venezuelans were kidnapped (El Tiempo, 2003). There has been no doubt that FARC has been using the Venezuelan territory over the last decade not only as a refuge area but also as a rear guard. It is alleged they have access to clandestine runways from which they launch operations for recovering wounded combatants from the Colombian territory as well as trafficking cocaine. According to Mancuso, members of the Venezuelan army supported FARC's 33<sup>rd</sup> Front in several confrontations with the AUC in the early 2000s (Verdad Abierta, 2009c).

But there is also evidence of AUC involvement in this situation. It is known that the AUC extended its military and economic rationale in the neighbouring country. Commander Carlos Castaño accepted in 2002 that the AUC entered Venezuelan territory: "we have gone as far as 14 kilometres into Venezuelan territory in hot pursuit of FARC members". The BC's responsibility in the assassination of over 50 members of the peasant movement created under Chávez's Land Law has been established. The evidence points towards Venezuelan cattle ranchers and agricultural entrepreneurs as responsible for many of these crimes with the complicity of sectors of the army in the city of Barinas, out of fear of expropriation under the Bolivarian revolution (Prensa Rural, 2004). Paramilitaries have been also held responsible for the kidnapping of Richard Boulton, president of the multinational *Servivensa*. Likewise, it

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<sup>16</sup>In spite of the border problems with Brazil, the situation has never led to an inter-governmental confrontation. Lula's administration implemented a mega-programme for the defence of the Amazonian basin significantly aimed, although not solely, to prevent the Colombian conflict's displacement, sending a "correct signal" in this direction.

<sup>17</sup>Source: Fundación Progresar.

was established that every shopkeeper and trader in San Antonio del Táchira paid the AUC a monthly “contribution” of between US\$60 and US\$600. As in the case of FARC, the paramilitary phenomenon not only moved beyond the border but also generated a contagion effect. When asked about the provision of assistance to the then emerging “United Self-Defence of Venezuela” (AUV), Carlos Castaño said that “they [AUV] are joining us in solidarity [...] we have some people giving instruction in Venezuelan territory. We maintain communication. It is a process that is still in its early stages” (World Press, 2002).

## THE ACCUMULATION LOGIC OF THE AUC

As stated before, drug trafficking generated a pervasive integration of peripheral Catatumbo into Cúcuta’s metropolitan area. It established a clear division of labour in which the coca activity was located in the former and the traffic and benefits thereof in the latter. The director of the Regional Observatory for Peace and Development in NDS (ORDICOP) stated: “at the same time the AUC was securing the Catatumbo territory they were controlling Cúcuta. Catatumbo and Cúcuta’s dynamics are complementary. The coca boom in the former boosted the traffic routes through the latter, money laundering via the foreign exchange sector, fuel smuggling, car theft and other activities. The strong alliances made in the underworld greased the AUC’s infiltration of the state” (Bautista, 2009).

The AUC took over the narcotics trade either by confronting guerrillas, making alliances with well-established criminals or by eliminating “un-cooperative” competitors. As mentioned before, some drug traffickers were at the base of the creation of the CB. Upon AUC’s arrival in NDS there were at least five criminal structures in charge of the business, relying on FARC for the protection of crops. Almost all these structures were absorbed by the AUC, except for the Mejía Múnera brothers known as *Los Mellizos* (the twins) from neighbouring Arauca department, who had a significant grip on NDS coca and cocaine economies. *Los Mellizos* were difficult competitors for the AUC as they had established themselves as dominant drug traffickers in northeastern Colombia. The Castaño brothers and Mancuso settled the dispute by selling *Los Mellizos* an AUC franchise with which they created the Arauca’s Victors Bloc.<sup>18</sup> “El Iguano” recruited 53 men in Cúcuta – of whom 15 were children between 11 and 13 years old – to feed the Múnera brothers’ army (Vanguardia Liberal, 2004). In ex-

<sup>18</sup>In spite of their counter-insurgent effort, the Colombian government did not accept this structure’s demobilization attempt and the twins remained in the underworld. They created a criminal structure called *Los Nevados* in 2006 after paying US\$5 million for the ex-AUC *Tayrona Bloc* in Magdalena department in the Caribbean region.

change for some counterinsurgent operations in that department they could control the local coca crops and traffic routes to Venezuela from Arauca as well as have an important share of the NDS business.

An important point is that the narcotics trade became a vehicle for the AUC not only to extend its control over other criminal activities but also to transform the criminal landscape in NDS. Petty crime decreased during the expansive process of the AUC in the urban areas, giving way to a criminal model of “protection-regulation-ownership”. Under this new logic the FF penetrated criminal forms of larger aggregate value; monopolized the contract killing market; created a vast extortion network that systematically levied forcible contributions from marginal households and many economic transactions; and infiltrated a share of the legal economy. In this context, extortion constituted a central mechanism for social and market regulation. Forcible contributions were required to keep the illicit economies running as they guaranteed property rights, business protection and the stability of prices.

As seen in the case of Sucre, the accumulation logic of MMHB was completely different. The absence of illicit crops put paramilitary involvement in drug trafficking in a completely different perspective. Cocaine exports were not contested by FARC and were not labour or violence-intensive activities, at least to the extent observed in NDS. Besides drug trafficking, the MMHB accumulation logic was mainly centred around the violent expropriation of rural land and the diversion of public resources. In Sincelejo the situation was also completely different. The latter is a far smaller city, far less relevant in terms of key economic transactions and with a very limited criminal underworld. In terms of territorial control, the urban/semi-urban divide is not as notable as that identified in NDS. Although extortion was part of the AUC’s financial infrastructure, the magnitude of it was derisory if compared to the scale of Cúcuta’s forcible contribution system, as explained below. The infiltration of drug trafficking in the legal economy was also marginal, and as discussed in the correspondent chapters, drugs hardly flowed into the Sucreño economy. The infiltration of the economy in Sincelejo was focused on public contracting, which involved the AUC’s access to related information, officials in charge, budget, and payments. As analysed further in this chapter, the public budget in Cúcuta was also an important spoil of war for the AUC. However, the access to the level of “white collar” crimes in the latter was obtained through investments in political campaigns and threats against those who opposed such practices. In Sucre, it was about the creation of a criminal power structure led by local politicians, from which the AUC co-governed the department until 2005.

*The coca/cocaine economy*

Although the dynamic of the internal conflict in the Catatumbo region generated a dramatic curbing of the stability of coca cultivation, the coca economy continued to support the AUC's war effort. The region's coca economy was the second most productive in the country with 6.2 harvests per year.<sup>19</sup> Each harvest provided 700 kilos of coca leaf per hectare, that is a yearly production 4,200 kilos per hectare (UNODC, 2008b). It is estimated that the Catatumbo's coca economy provided the AUC with approximately US\$70 million of direct income per year (Vote Bien, 2007).

According to Jaramillo and Duncan (2006), behind the paramilitary greed there was a whole new way of organizing the local economy in order to maximize the income flow for the communities they dominated. Although this argument is correct in the direction of the paramilitary process of building social support, the organization of the local economy mainly benefited warlords. The case of coca/cocaine in NDS is illustrative. The coca economy created a brand new type of colonizer, the illegal rural micro-entrepreneur (García, 2007) who along with the massive seasonal labour force of harvesters altered the use of the land, market exchange, forms of accumulation, price levels, and social stratification. Nevertheless, coca growers have received the smallest share of the business; coca generates a slightly better income for families than that derived from legal crops, but it does not constitute a viable source of capital accumulation. According to SIMCI (2008), producer units – mainly families – earned in average USD 1,320 per year in NDS when their activity only involved producing coca leaves and not transforming them into coca paste. If units also processed coca base earnings increased to USD 4,073. An important share of the income was used for buying agricultural supplies and for paying the *gramaje*, a coca-trade tax levied by both guerrilla and paramilitary groups.

However, contrary to the trends in other coca zones in Colombia, most Catatumbo growers sold the raw leaves directly to people in charge of processing. It is estimated that throughout the 2000s only 19% of growers processed coca leaves in NDS (UNODC, 2008b). This reveals an important division of labour, which is mainly related to the type of arrangements that crystallized between the emerging AUC and pre-existent criminal structures in the department, in this case with *Los Mellizos* who controlled the transformation process.

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<sup>19</sup>Guaviare department in southeast Colombia registered the highest productivity with 6.6 harvests per year.

As for trafficking, the CB controlled an important share of trafficking corridors to Venezuela. According to intelligence reports, over 50% of Colombian cocaine was then trafficked through a couple of Cúcuta's routes: one went to Europe via West African states, and the other one went to the U.S via Central America. As the paramilitary's merger with pre-established drug traffickers took place, the AUC became the most prominent wholesaler in the department. The *Autodefensas* guaranteed placing orders in Venezuela and Brazil but did not manage any destination markets (Semana, 2008). By using routes through Venezuelan territory, the AUC became the main coca paste and cocaine supplier of *Los Pepes*, and in partnership with them Salvatore Mancuso became the Calabrian '*Ndrangheta*'s main supplier.<sup>20</sup> Mancuso revealed that they produced and sold over 120,000 kilos of cocaine between 1999 and 2004 (each kilo worth about US\$2,000), almost 15% of the drug business in the Catatumbo region, whereas FARC managed the other 85% of the market (approximately 800,000 kilos).<sup>21</sup>

*Cúcuta: the urban goldmine*

"Cúcuta has traditionally experienced a significant criminal linkage. Smuggling mafias have always existed here and then came drug traffickers. After that there were guerrillas benefiting from oil and coca and after them came the AUC. This situation has created a huge criminal universe in NDS, which in conjunction with a corrupted political class – in the best of cases tolerant vis-à-vis the phenomenon – an increasing state of marginality and a corrupted border with Venezuela, created the most explosive mixture" (Oviedo, 2009). It is in this context that the FF took over a great share of NDS's urban economy.

The paramilitary infiltration of the urban economy took place along two dimensions. The first one is that of pre-existing criminal activities. As in any other Colombian city, there was a proliferation of individuals and organizations competing for the different segments of criminal activity in Cúcuta. These activities went from pickpocketing and mugging to other more sophisticated like money laundering, contraband, piracy and prostitution. The second dimension was that of poorly regulated legal businesses linked to some extent to illicit transactions, all of them cash-intensive, in which the state was discarded as a regulatory agent. Such was the

<sup>20</sup>An investigation led by the Reggio Calabria Court in Italy established how the controversial Italian businessman Giorgio Sale, connected to the Calabrian mob, generated a massive money laundering operation that used the AUC's sophisticated frontmen chain in Colombia. The investigation also established that Mancuso was strongly connected with Santo Scipione, a ranking member of the '*Ndrangheta*', through whom the AUC supplied cocaine to a drug trafficking web that operated in Greece, The Netherlands, Bulgaria, Spain and Australia (El Espectador, 2009b).

<sup>21</sup>See *Verdad Abierta* (2009a) and *Semana* (2007).

case of *sanandresitos* that are smuggled goods shopping centres; wholesale food markets characterized in Colombia by price speculation, and gambling, a business prone to tax evasion. It is worth noting that both dimensions increasingly intertwined, blurring to a significant extent the divide between licit and illicit activities.

The FF succeeded in controlling Cúcuta's underworld by coordinating different criminal actors and activities in a networked fashion. On the one hand, the structure created the muscle for collecting debts and taxes from households, shops, poorly regulated legal transactions, and all sorts of illegal businesses, as well as of managing money laundering channels and activities. On the other hand, it had the armed power to enforce contracts via gangs and hit men. In this sense the FF had a complex structure, illustrative of the ways in which the urban conflict connected to the criminal world, not only in Cúcuta but also in other Colombian major cities, including Bogotá. The success was indisputable: although it is very difficult to calculate the FF's income, the High Court of Bogotá, based on El Iguano's disclosure, estimated in US\$122.5 million the cost of the Front's total war effort, and calculated a profit of at least four times the Front's expenses (HCB-110016000253200680281, 2010).

### *Smuggling*

Until the end of the 1990s, rich smugglers were extorted and kidnapped by ELN and FARC. During the early stage of paramilitary infiltration in NDS, the AUC's actions substantially reduced guerrillas' activities in urban centres, curbing extortion activities. However, during a second stage, the AUC recreated protection rackets and systematically extorted contrabandists. In a third stage, the *Autodefensas* fully controlled large-scale contraband, in particular that of fuel, chemical supplies for cocaine laboratories, arms, ammunition, and stolen vehicles. By controlling these activities, the AUC not only pursued lucrative goals, but also the military aim of denying guerrillas access to these strategic goods as well as the use of well-established contraband routes for drug trafficking.

The FF seized the black market for fuel not only with the aim of controlling the illegal distribution networks in NDS and other neighbouring departments but also in order to supply cocaine processing laboratories in Catatumbo. Regarding small-scale contraband of fuel, the FF taxed small traders on a monthly basis. As for large-scale smuggling, the AUC monopolized the aforementioned fleet of American vintage cars used for transporting fuel as well as warehouses for wholesale distribution. Official numbers indicate that between 2003 and 2004 approximately 30,000 barrels of smuggled fuel, worth US\$2.6 million, entered Colombia

through Cúcuta every month, of which almost 12,000 were resold in other Colombian departments and cities at higher prices. However, the FF's ultimate strategy was venturing through chains of front men in the licensed fuel collection points authorized by the national government where legally imported Venezuelan fuel could be sold at a cheaper price per gallon (El Tiempo, 2005).

### *Extortion*

As mentioned, the AUC created a complex protection racket that covered a wide spectrum of people, activities and sectors in Cúcuta's metropolitan area. Paramilitary levies were created for "protecting" urban poor and other sectors from the proliferation of competing extortionist agents like guerrillas and other criminal groups. Although it is difficult to estimate the total income via extortion, some data from the International Crisis Group – ICG – provides a rough idea of the magnitude of the protection market. In shanty towns, every shopkeeper and household was forced to pay a monthly "cleansing and control tax", which varied depending on the size of the household or the business. The household tax oscillated between US\$0.50 and US\$1.50 per week whereas shops were charged according to weekly sales, between US\$5 and US\$25; in the case of beer sales the Front charged US\$1.5 for every 24 bottles sold (ICG, 2007).

Another case is that of small-scale smugglers who had to pay a monthly US\$15 "security tax". According to NDS's Secretary of Finance, by the time the AUC was in full operational capacity in NDS there were approximately 12,000 families who participated in fuel smuggling. At least as many other families must have been involved in the smuggling of other goods. Controlling wholesale food markets was always a central AUC goal in urban centres as it not only secured valuable "countryside to urban" informant networks but also an important source of income via the extortion of food traders.<sup>22</sup> The AUC's tax base was also composed of Cúcuta's downtown shops and bars, taxi companies, and private security firms.

### *Money laundering*

Cúcuta is one of Colombia's money laundering paradises. Contraband, black market currency exchange and corruption in border controls facilitated the laundering of repatriated

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<sup>22</sup>There is the case of five fruit traders from *Cenabastos*, Cúcuta's wholesale food market, assassinated in December 2002 after refusing to pay AUC's "Christmas" extortion (SCJ-33301, 2010).

flown capital and domestic illegal circulating cash. Between 2002 and 2005, Cúcuta was one of the three cities with the largest number of suspicious financial operations in the country.<sup>23</sup> In 2005 alone, the Ministry of Finance's Information and Financial Analysis Unit reported approximately 1,500 transactions worth millions as suspicious.

Paramilitaries created sophisticated networks for laundering money in NDS. Colombian authorities identified several mechanisms used by the FF for this purpose, among which fuel and livestock contraband, under-invoicing of imports and the currency exchange market were used to launder the extraordinary profits of the drugs business in Cúcuta. The FF also laundered money through taxies, motels, private security firms and cable television. The construction sector experienced impressive growth between 2000 and 2004: some properties reached unprecedented prices of US\$2.5 million, only found in Bogotá's high end markets. On top of that, the FF not only used the public sector as a source of accumulation, as examined below, but also as a laundering front. This is the case of the public works firm *Retromáquinas*, owned by the family of NDS Senator Carlos Barriga. According to "El Iguano", the firm was used in two ways: during the AUC era the firm practically monopolized Cúcuta's contracting and was also used for laundering AUC' money (Vote Bien, 2007).

Although these activities are very difficult to trace, it was established by the General Solicitor's Office that the already mentioned criminal group *Los Pepes* became a FF key node, and that among other tasks, the gang laundered approximately US\$220 million for Salvatore Mancuso (El Colombiano, 2008).

### *Gambling*

The gambling and lotteries system, created to subsidize the healthcare system in Colombia, has been traditionally a main target for corrupt practices.<sup>24</sup> It is well known that the AUC took over these businesses, especially the *chance* game<sup>25</sup>, in conjunction with local politicians.

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<sup>23</sup>None of the Caribbean cities under paramilitary influence, including Sincelejo, was included in the Unit's list of suspicious operations. These kinds of operations were only detected in cities with large drug trafficking activities' influence and frontier dynamics (Semana, 2006).

<sup>24</sup>Besides the national lottery games and those run by the local Red Cross, each Colombian department is also permitted to operate its own games, leaving over twenty different lotteries competing for prominence in the Colombian market. However, a number of departmental lotteries have been highly problematic because of corruption. In many cases the national government has had to intervene departmental lotteries and even shut down some operations.

<sup>25</sup>*Chance* is a locally operated lottery that grows at a rate that outstrips even the national lottery, accounting for nearly 50% of total gambling expenditure in the country. In accordance with Colombian law, local governments are only allowed to operate *Chance* games via an operator selected in a public tender process, usually characterized by irregularities and corruption. It is estimated that in the mid-2000s that the *Chance's* 71 concessions operated

Although the most striking case of appropriation of rents derived from slot machines<sup>26</sup> and lotteries took place in some Caribbean departments (Sucre was not included in this activity), NDS did not escape this logic, according to the General Solicitor's Office. The case of the firm *J.J. Pita*, the largest chance game operator in the department is noteworthy. In August 2004, the owner Juan Jose Pita was assassinated in Táchira (Venezuela) by the AUC. It is said that Pita had great political influence and was an important financier of political campaigns; for many Pita was probably an important intermediary between the AUC and some local politicians. He had quite a shady reputation and he was once implicated in a murder trial. Although his death has not been solved yet, it is believed that it was related to a settling of scores with the FF, which was heavily involved in the business (Alianza de Medios, 2005).

### *The support of legal interests*

Paramilitary support to private legal interests in NDS has yet to be exposed. For many the AUC played a central role in protecting the agro-industrial expansion of palm oil and the reactivation of the oil industry (Bautista, 2009; Oviedo, 2009). The fact that the AUC cleared Tibú's jurisdiction from guerrilla influence and participated in the shifting of illegal crops towards the Catatumbo intermediate and mountainous areas may constitute a strong signal of paramilitary protection of private legal interests.

Although there is no evidence of protection of oil companies by the AUC as had been the case in other Colombian regions, the fact is that the clearing of FARC and of coca crops from Tibú facilitated the recent reactivation of the oil industry as well as of other large-scale mining and agro-industrial projects. It has been said that the AUC's force was used for the recent alteration of the rural land structure in Catatumbo region where approximately 6,000 hectares were violently or fraudulently expropriated to small farmers for the cultivation of palm oil.

The rural/urban cleavage in NDS has had different implications for irregular warring actors in NDS. On the side of guerrillas, this divide generated fragmentation. The Catatumbo region constituted the economic backbone of both FARC (coca economy) and ELN (oil industry). Nevertheless, in the urban areas guerrillas never actively participated in the criminal

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by almost 500 entrepreneurs generates around \$1.3 billion every year, of which 12% subsidizes local healthcare systems.

<sup>26</sup>According to the Ministry of Social Protection's Gambling Supervisory Department (ETESA), it is estimated that almost 50,000 out of 71,643 slot machines registered in Colombia were controlled by the AUC by 2003. In other words, US\$640 million out of US\$1,300 million annual revenue ended up in AUC hands (Semana, 2009).

underground. Except for some protection rackets, guerrillas concentrated on building robust political underground networks and controlling shanty towns through urban militia structures. In contrast, the rural/urban divide had a strong complementarity for the AUC: the rural strategy was mainly focused on the coca/cocaine economies, but was also linked to the agro-industrial expansion of palm oil and the reactivation of the oil industry. The urban strategy strongly complemented the rural one: the AUC managed to build extraordinary money laundering mechanisms through its control over criminal networks, the informal markets and poorly regulated legal activities.

This panorama significantly contrasts with that of Sucre. Besides the fact that the conflict did not follow the urban/rural divide and its consequences remained within the department's territorial boundaries, the absence of legal and illegal extractive economies significantly limited the ELN and FARC financial opportunities. Insurgents therefore secured financial means via armed clientelist practices, mainly through the extortion of local governments. This situation in Sucre also had consequences for the AUC. Regardless of the fact that warlords rapidly monopolized cocaine exports through the Morrosquillo gulf, the absence of a coca economy and of a pre-existing criminal infrastructure made the HMMB financially reliant on public budgets and rural land. It was perhaps in this financial handicap that politics acquired its great significance in Sucre.

## THE SOCIAL CONTROL STRATEGY: TERROR, PROTECTION AND REGULATION

In Sucre, paramilitary violence brought elites together, in the sense that the needs of maintaining the status quo of rural land and of leading political houses became a shared goal of rural rich and politicians (Romero, 2004, 2005), and excluded the lower strata. The case of NDS exhibited a different trend. On the one hand, there did not seem to be a unique shared goal that gathered subnational elites, as thoroughly examined in the next section, and on the other hand, the integration of the poorest sectors to the AUC project was very clear. While in Sucre social control was mainly achieved through mass violence against the agrarian unions, NDS exhibited a somewhat different model based upon the combination of terror – paramilitaries also exerted violence against the social movement in NDS – and protection of a far more diffuse and heterogeneous society. This variation compared to Sucre is largely explained by the predominance of the economic rationale of the AUC in NDS's massive illegal economic

platform and therefore the need of integrating the lower strata to the paramilitary economic networks.

Indeed violence via social and political cleansing was the “natural” instrument of social control and regulation in NDS, and constituted an essential means for securing territorial control. However, violence was a necessary yet not sufficient condition for integrating and shaping lower strata of society according to warlords’ needs. According to Jaramillo and Duncan (2006), behind the paramilitary drive for accumulation there was a whole new way of organizing the local economy in many a region in order to maximize the income flow for the communities they dominated and in this way securing labour force and clientele. In the Catatumbo region *coca* communities constituted the social base for paramilitaries and FARC. Loyalty was a central asset for securing control over cultivations and guaranteeing the smooth running of the coca market. In exchange, these communities were protected against the competitor. The urban poor – criminal labour force and informal workers linked to the criminal and legal activities mentioned before – also constituted part of the AUC’s clientele under a similar rationale.

The *Autodefensas* intensive military activity not only fed the strategy for generating reliable labour and recruitment sources and expanding intelligence networks but also for stabilizing communities. The AUC social stabilization implied the construction of a distinct type of “citizenship” in which rights and duties became exchange objects. All clients – urban and rural – were expected to be loyal to the AUC in exchange for protection, contract enforcement, conflict solving, and deterrence of competitors, among other things. Indeed, this type of exchange was not governed by democratic values but mediated by regressive norms based upon the principle of vertical integration, which characterizes the patron-client relations, regulated through violence and without the political exchange.

In this context, protection rackets were not only a means for extracting money but also a most effective mechanism for social control and regulation. The AUC blocked and confined entire communities through curfews and a tight control of people leaving and entering counties or urban neighbourhoods. The FF had lists of inhabitants with their correspondent national ID numbers. In Cúcuta, the pressure over urban poor communities reached the extent of even controlling youth gatherings, fashion and the use of spare time: “I was forced to cut my hair, go back home before 10 p.m. every day, stop wearing my favourite bands’ T-shirts. We could not go out in groups of more than three people at a time. Tight clothes for young girls were banned as well as rock concerts. The rock culture became a military objective. We could not understand what had we done wrong. Just that within this new rule we became a

problem. Threats were direct; no letters; no messages. Or you disperse and change or you die” (SCAD-Group Action La Gabarra, 2004).

The effects of this mixture of violence, extortion and protection on the social fabric were pervasive: the paramilitary action allowed the establishment of a regime of terror, progressively undermining local social and political organizations as well as increasing the paramilitary recruitment base and youth involvement in criminal activities.

## PART II — THE CAPTURE OF THE STATE

### IMPUNITY AND IMMUNITY AS CENTRAL ASSETS FOR THE PROTECTION OF THE ILLEGAL CONGLOMERATE

Besides the prevalence of the economic rationale over the political one in NDS, the patterns of parapolitics vary in other ways from those of Sucre. In the latter, the collusion of politicians and paramilitaries occurred on the top of the subnational political scale and then descended along it. Alvaro García created, financed and was the actual HMMB commander, along with his political partners, and sought, by creating a consociational arrangement with the AUC, to build a distinct political project. In NDS, the predominance of a war economy based upon hard-core organized crime put collusive arrangements with security and judicial agencies on top of the AUC’s agenda. The involvement with politicians was dispersed, did not cover the subnational political spectrum, and seemed to be strictly functional to the economic strategy. There are only two proven involvements – those of the then Mayor of Cúcuta and a candidate to the Governor’s Office, a couple of political newcomers – cases that seem to endorse this argument that such alliances constituted a means for obtaining immunity and impunity required for securing the paramilitary accumulation strategy, as analyzed below.

The other side of the equation, is that it is very likely that FARC’s strength in NDS prompted the military and national-level AUC figures to take an initiative that was considered “necessary” in NDS but “unnecessary” in Sucre, where guerrillas were weaker and the territory was not as strategic as NDS’s, where the weakening of guerrillas attracted new investors linked to the oil industry as well as to large-scale palm oil and cocoa bean cultivation to the Catatumbo region. Although it is very difficult to connect this with the highest levels of government, the fact is that while the AUC operated with full immunity in Catatumbo, the national gov-

ernment acknowledged the merit of the Colombian Army's counterinsurgent effort (Semana, 2009).

## SECURITY AND LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES

Carlos Castaño acknowledged that the Catatumbo region was central to the organization as it produced almost 70% of the organization's revenues (Aranguren, 2001), a matter that largely explains why the seizure of security and law enforcement agencies made more sense than the capture of a complex political structure in NDS. Mancuso confessed that the AUC had a "payroll" through which paramilitaries rewarded state officials and politicians throughout the country. The payroll's total cost was on average USD500,000 per year; in NDS it cost USD250,000, half the total, of which over 80% paid for their agents at the District Attorney's Office, the National Army and Police, and the Secret Service, while Mancuso's units in Córdoba department in the Caribbean region paid a monthly outlay of no more than US\$80,000 (La Opinión, 2007a). These numbers are consistent with the hypothesis that the economic rationale took priority over the political one, and that in this regard, security and law enforcement agencies constituted central assets for the AUC.

*Colombian Army*

Two main features characterized the collusion between the AUC and the Colombian army in NDS. The first one was the top-down nature of the penetration. According to the Solicitor General's Office "it was not about middle-rank officials collaborating with the AUC. The symbiosis took place at the highest levels" (CNRR, 2010). The second feature was that the collusion framework was established outside NDS, prior to the creation of the CB. According to the same report, the overall departmental strategy was agreed between Castaño and Mancuso and four Generals from the National Army in Córdoba department before the AUC reached NDS's territory (CNRR, 2010).

According to different judicial versions<sup>27</sup>, over 200 AUC combatants were transported in six trucks from Córdoba to NDS in May 1999. As noted by a witness<sup>28</sup>, the contingent made

<sup>27</sup>The main witness in this case is Mauricio Llorente, a former National Army officer who by then was *Héroes de Saraguro* Battalion commander in Tibú, and his confessions fully coincide with those of Salvatore Mancuso.

<sup>28</sup>Officer Llorente mentioned in previous footnote.

a journey that lasted over fifteen hours and entailed fully crossing northern Colombia in a west-east direction (five departments) before it reached the final destination without any obstacle. It is noteworthy that given the critical public order situation in Colombia at that time it was impossible to drive through five departments without finding military or police checkpoints along the way, which suggests that the paramilitary deployment required a great deal of planning and coordination not only from and between the army and the police, but also clear lines of command involved.

On the 29th of May 1999 the contingent arrived in Tibú where the quest for territorial control over the Catatumbo region began and was fully supported by the Army. The first massacre took place on the day of arrival in the Socuavo County where five civilians were murdered along the road. The second massacre took place in Tibú on the 17th of July. According to a key military witness<sup>29</sup>, Colonel Víctor Hugo Matamoros, then commander of the 5th Cavalry Group in Cúcuta, and the then Departmental Police Commander had several telephone conversations with Mancuso and other AUC commanders. The witness confessed: “I planned the whole operation with David [the alias of Mancuso’s nephew]. I told him that I needed to simulate a guerrilla attack on the military garrison in order to justify the fact that I couldn’t abandon my post. This alibi allowed them [AUC] to get to the centre of Tibú with an informer who was wearing a balaclava, one block away from the Police station. She [the informer] pointed at nine alleged guerrilla supporters. All of the identified people were shot dead in the head; paramilitaries stole all the money from the shops and took four more civilians with them. Their dead bodies were later found along the road” (Semana, 2009). The third massacre took place on the 21st of August in La Gabarra County where the AUC assassinated 35 civilians. The military commander of the zone was found guilty for colluding with paramilitary groups in this event. All three events generated the displacement of 2,229 civilians to Venezuela (Semana, 2009).

The Supreme Chamber for Administrative Disputes issued a resolution in which it concludes that “La Gabarra [paramilitary] operation was not only foreseeable but was also known by the police and military authorities in the region whose abuse of their functions contributed to the paramilitary action [...] the operation was also avoidable [...] evident lack of interest in confronting the illegal actor made all the massacres possible in El Catatumbo [...] in spite of the military controls introduced ex-post, the paramilitary units continued to control the population, food and medications [...] the 18<sup>th</sup> of July 1999 the paramilitary group entered Tibú without any resistance from the Police or military personnel [...] the criminal and dis-

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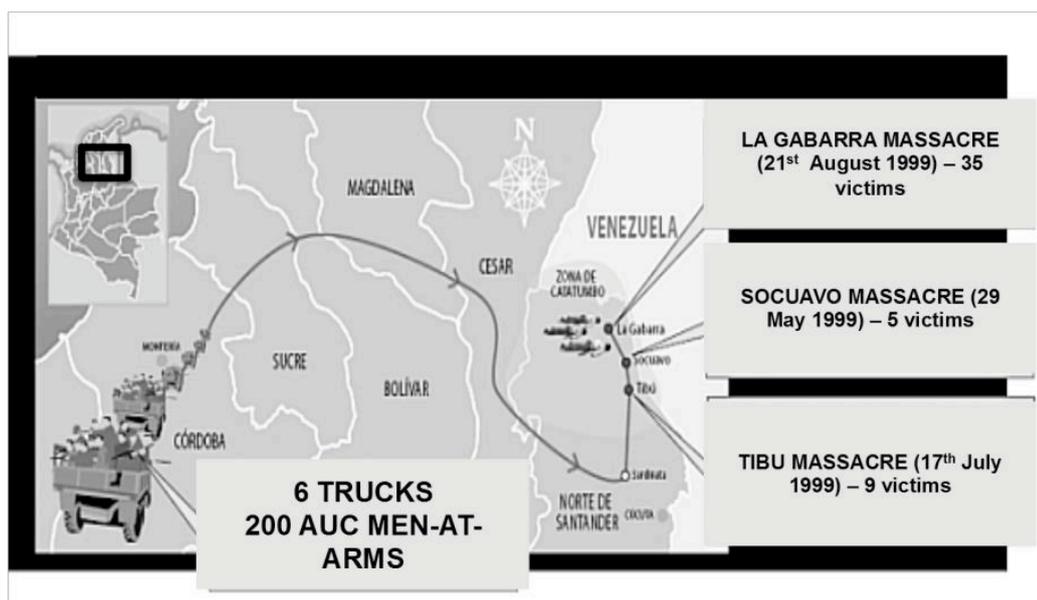
<sup>29</sup>Officer Llorente.

ciplinary investigations established that the paramilitary activity was permitted by the Police and the National Army” (SCAD-Group Action La Gabarra, 2004).

“The local army unit refuses to combat area paramilitaries,” wrote a U.S official who interviewed Matamoros a few months after the initial massacres. “He is convinced that doing so [combatting paramilitaries] before the guerrillas are defeated would not make military sense” (Lindsay-Poland, 2009). “El Iguano” stated: “thanks to Matamoros we could operate in 1999; he coordinated everything. Wherever we went there was no presence of the public force. A combat with guerrillas could last two, three hours and no one would show up” (Verdad Abierta, 2009a).

“El Iguano” also claimed that he paid USD 10,000 to a sergeant who had been assigned to a special programme at the President’s Office in which airborne operations against illegal armed groups were planned. The junior officer informed him about specific operations in Tibú and La Gabarra beforehand.

Mancuso said that “the relations between the AUC and the Public Force were quite fluid” and that during the taking of the Catatumbo “[paramilitaries] were patrolling on one side of the road while militaries were doing the same on the other side” [...] after a while the AUC troops started to make serious joint operations” (Verdad Abierta, 2008b). It is presumed that at least four other Army Generals and a Colonel were actively involved in the collusion (Semana, 2009).



*National Police*

In general terms, there was a division of labour in which the Army supported the AUC in the countryside and the Police in the metropolitan area. “El Iguano” said “everybody is talking about the Army’s collaboration but what about the Police’s? How do you explain the occurrence of so many assassinations in Cúcuta and so few AUC members arrested?” (El Espectador, 2009b).

Unlike the case of the Army and according to the available evidence the collusion with the Police seems to have taken place at the subnational level, and not in a top-down fashion<sup>30</sup> – and with intermediate and low rank officers. Nevertheless, the police’s support was central for the FF infiltration in Cúcuta. According to judicial investigations, Major William Montezuma, director of the departmental judiciary police, was the officer in charge of providing paramilitaries with valuable information about the state of on-going investigations and warned them about police operations (El Espectador, 2009b).

Agent Martín Soto, member of the security staff of Cúcuta’s mayor, was an important link for paramilitaries. According to “El Iguano”, the fact that Soto was the link between Mayor Suárez and the FF protected the latter from any direct interaction with the AUC. It was through Soto that the aforementioned assassinations of Tirso Vélez and Enrique Flórez were planned and executed (Semana, 2004). The agent was also responsible of releasing smuggled merchandise confiscated by the Police. A corporal named Ardila participated in the assassination of two members of the District Attorney’s Office in 2001. It was established that Ardila undertook surveillance of the victims’ movements and routines and provided hit men with guns to shoot the victims.

*Departmental National Secret Service Office*

As discussed, the National Secret Service constituted perhaps the most striking case of paramilitary institutional seizure in Colombia. The institution was penetrated in a top-down fashion and in many departments there were strong levels of collusion. NDS was no exception.

Jorge Díaz, former departmental director of the National Secret Service, and deputy director Viterbo Galvis actively collaborated with the AUC. According to the General Attorney’s

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<sup>30</sup>In Colombia the Police is a national institution, not departmental or municipal, vertically organized in a similar fashion to that of the military forces.

Office, Díaz provided the AUC with information about potential “military targets”, as was the case of lawyer Ernesto Obregón, ex-candidate to Cúcuta’s mayoralty Carlos Caicedo, and human rights activist Carlos Bernal, assassinated in Cúcuta between 2003 and 2004. “El Iguano” said that Díaz was “more an AUC member than a DAS official” (Verdad Abierta, 2010b), and identified several DAS detectives as close collaborators. “El Iguano” also said he had a meeting with Díaz and a former general of the Colombian Army in which they informed him that one of FARC’s top commanders was in Venezuela’s Táchira department and that they required an AUC operation to kill him there (Verdad Abierta, 2010b).

Mancuso revealed during one of his public hearings that Díaz was one of his closest collaborators in NDS and that paramilitaries operated in the institution’s vehicles. In a recent interview “El Iguano” stated that the Secret Service in NDS provided the AUC with intelligence information on alleged guerrilla members, information that made paramilitary actions more efficient (El Espectador, 2009b). In 2003, Cúcuta’s *La Opinión* newspaper reproduced a telephone conversation between “El Iguano” and one of his lieutenants in which the latter informed him that he had to sleep in the Secret Service’s installations because a judicial commission from Bogotá was looking for him.

According to information provided by the Secret Service in Cúcuta<sup>31</sup>, a rural property belonging to the family of aforementioned Senator Barriga was used by the FF for illegal activities in 2004. The internal information revealed that this situation was reported to the central headquarters but that the then Director General warned the Barriga family and the AUC that this situation was about to be investigated. FF’s men assassinated Flórez and Galvis a few months later, allegedly in revenge.

### *District Attorney’s Office*

NDS’s Prosecutor Office is perhaps one of the most notable cases of judicial infiltration by the AUC.<sup>32</sup> The subnational judiciary was so penetrated that all the investigations had to be commissioned from Bogotá. Captured criminals also had to be transferred to prisons in Bogotá. This was the only way for authorities to partially break up the seizure of the office.

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<sup>31</sup>In 2006, Departmental Secret Service officials anonymously sent this information to Left-wing Senator Gustavo Petro, responsible for unveiling the parapolitics phenomenon in Colombia, and other politicians. Senator Petro disclosed the information a week after.

<sup>32</sup>The then Deputy Attorney General acknowledged the high level of paramilitary infiltration in NDS. He said it was the only department where such a collusion had taken place (El Espectador, 2004).

This was a typical case of infiltration through pressure, unlike the case of other institutions in NDS in which infiltration took place through mutual agreement. In 2001, paramilitaries killed local prosecutor María del Rosario Silva – renowned for the efficacy and soundness with which she conducted her investigations – in Cúcuta. She was investigating the linkages between the AUC, businessmen and politicians in NDS, as well as over 80 cases of crimes perpetrated by paramilitaries. There was also the assassination of David Corzo, a local criminal investigator in September 2001. Prosecutor Carlos Pinto, who replaced Silva, was also assassinated four months later. “El Iguano” involved the departmental Secret Service director and two national police officers in this assassination. The paramilitary acknowledged that the AUC required eliminating all the existing “uncomfortable” investigations against the organization and to this end penetrating the institution was indispensable (Verdad Abierta, 2010c).

These crimes along with permanent threats to other investigators finally broke the internal resistance. The SCJ established that the work was done by a lawyer named Alexi Sandoval who influenced the institution at the national level in order to declare null and void a local key in the investigation of the Tibú and La Gabarra massacres without much substance (SCJ-23973, 2007; SCJ-33301, 2010). It was under Ana María Díaz’s direction that the District Office was finally infiltrated by the FF. “El Iguano” said the “the departmental Attorney worked with us [...] Ana María Flórez provided us with valuable information about investigations and operations against us. She kept ‘El Gato’ [second FF urban commander] updated about the location of guerrilla militias and we operated according to that information” (Verdad Abierta, 2010c). Salvatore Mancuso said he influenced the appointments of Flórez and her assistant Magaly Moreno (known as alias “Perla”) at the District Office. He stated that “she [Moreno] was El Gato’s girlfriend; she was part of the organization” and testified that Flórez gave his group the names of colleagues who, in her judgment, supported the guerrillas. “Everyone she mentioned was assassinated”, he added (Verdad Abierta, 2008a).

After tracing NDS officials’ mobile calls, the Solicitor General’s Office established that 52 officials from the District Attorney’s Office regularly communicated with paramilitaries (El Tiempo, 2004).

“El Iguano” revealed that in 2002 Flórez asked the FF to find a couple of young men to arrest in order to help the District Office to register better operational results. “Ana María Flórez was under a lot of pressure from Bogotá because under her administration the District Office had not produced any single result against us. So [one of ‘El Iguano’s’ lieutenants] asked me if I would authorize providing her these two guys, and I said yes, I authorize it”. A couple of

days later, the District Office broke into a house where the two paramilitaries were left drunk and asleep with guns and ammunition, and made the arrest (Caracol Radio, 2010).

Flórez left the country by the time an arrest warrant against her was issued. The SCJ convicted her to twelve years of prison for colluding with the AUC (SCJ-23973, 2007), however she still remains a fugitive. Another twelve District Office members are currently in prison, among them Magaly Moreno.

### *National Prison's Authority*

The director and deputy director of the departmental Prison's Authority Office, the director of the *Modelo* prison in Cúcuta, and Secret Service deputy director in NDS were involved in El Iguano's spectacular jailbreak in November 2002 from a hospital in Cúcuta where he was sent for an emergency surgery while under detention. He was rescued by FF men and it is calculated that the operation cost the AUC US\$50,000 (Verdad Abierta, 2010a).

### POLITICS

Unlike in Sucre where it has been proven that over thirty politicians and public officials colluded with paramilitaries, the linkages between the AUC and politicians in NDS were not as numerous. However, the difference with Sucre not only lies in the intensity of the phenomenon but also in the nature of the strategy and of the arrangements between the AUC and politicians. Despite the perplexing absence of evidence on the politics-crime linkages in this case, the indications permit arguing that the economic rationale led the AUC's strategy in NDS. In NDS paramilitary groups did not politically embed in the framework of agreements such as that of *Ralito* in the Caribbean departments. In this vein, colluding with some politicians – not seizing political power – seemed to be more in line with the AUC's strategy in NDS.

It is difficult to imagine a highly criminalized space such as NDS in which the criminal and political spheres did not experience any kind of friction. Indeed, politicians and criminals have traditionally coexisted in NDS in a context of mutual accommodation and shared benefits. As stated during an interview, “it is compulsory to go through the departmental mafias in order to win elections” (Bautista, 2009). Unlike the case of Sucre, the criminal-political exchange existed in the department long before the emergence of the AUC, and the exchange

has been highly instrumental: campaign financing on the side of criminals in exchange for the reinforcement of immunity and impunity from politicians. The exchange has never supported a clear political project. Moreover, the collusion has tended to be highly intermediated, and therefore has been more diffuse, as discussed in detail below. During the AUC era, the paramilitary influence on departmental politics seemed to have followed the same traditional path with similar characteristics.

*Catatumbo: the logic of armed clientelist practices*

The AUC did not exhibit a distinct strategy for capturing the state and politics in Catatumbo, a matter that could be either explained by the fact that the organization could not overcome guerrillas in the region – particularly FARC, and/or justified by the heavy weight of the coca economy in the paramilitary strategy.

Although corruption has been a structural feature in the region and some atypical patterns of electoral competition and public expenditure have been identified in the Ocaña and Tibú municipalities (Foro Nacional por Colombia, 2008), the capture of public rents by armed actors is still a difficult process to trace in this case. The same goes for interference in Catatumbo's politics. It is worth noting that the Catatumbo municipalities – except for Tibú that has traditionally received royalties' transfers – are amongst the poorest in the country and therefore are insignificant regarding public finances. The available information suggests that AUC meddling in the region was a typical case of armed clientelism, and in this respect, it was not too different from ELN or FARC interventions: extorting contractors and putting pressure on local administrations in order to divert public expenditures. According to FFNC, GTZ and Rinde report (2008), besides having a bearing on infrastructure contracts and appointment of teachers in many Catatumbo municipalities – competing with FARC and ELN – paramilitaries also influenced the contracting of workers for the oil industry as well as the allocation of local subsidies for palm oil cultivations. “Paramilitaries controlled almost everything [in Catatumbo]. They took over the public administration [...] the health, education and infrastructure budgets. It is said they obtained a share of every single contract subscribed by Tibú's administration. On top of that they controlled bars, local gambling, and even the funeral parlour. Whatever generated money” (Oviedo, 2009). Under these circumstances, many local governments in the Catatumbo region had no choice but to share the administration with FARC, ELN and AUC, as in many places in Colombia, a matter which along with

the curbing of royalties transfers further worsened the already fragile fiscal and administrative conditions of the region (FFNC et al., 2008).

Regarding electoral processes, there is no proof of paramilitary electoral protection and/or manipulation in the region, and much less of arrangements for the creation of “electoral districts”, selection of candidates, or influence of appointments, as found in Sucre. On the contrary, electoral processes were severely threatened between 2000 and 2004, again a typical outcome of armed clientelist practices. Both guerrillas and paramilitaries were responsible for this kind of violence in the Catatumbo region. According to the National Electoral Authority, El Tarra, Tibú and Convención were the most dangerous places for campaigning purposes; five Catatumbo mayors were assassinated during that period and over nine had to abandon their municipalities and govern from “exile” in Cúcuta or Ocaña (Vote Bien, 2007). In the context of the armed clientelist model, the main difference between guerrillas and the AUC vis-à-vis electoral processes was that the former have been more prone to the sabotage of elections by forbidding people to go to the polls whereas the latter tended to force communities to vote (González, Bolívar, & Vásquez, 2003; Losada, 2006). In this context, the 2003 local elections in the Catatumbo region seem to have been more sabotaged by guerrillas than influenced by the AUC. Not a single case exhibited signs of electoral fraud of the likes of very low levels of abstention, as observed in Sucre. Elections in El Tarra, El Carmen, Hacarí, San Calixto and Teorama had to be postponed because of the absence of candidates; the elections took place months later and the National Electoral Authority registered patterns of high abstention in each case, a situation very likely attributable to FARC.

Concerning the election of AUC’s frontmen or paramilitary influence on appointments, the only case identified is that of Carlos Barbarán, a Town Councillor from Tibú elected in 2003 who participated in the CB’s demobilization in 2004 under the alias of “Alonso”. Unfortunately, it was impossible to substantiate this case as there is no further official, judicial or journalistic information on the matter.

#### *The urban machine: the protection of the criminalized economy*

According to Duncan (2007) the levels of success of criminals in urban centres can be classified according to the levels of infiltration of three main activities: criminal transactions, legal activities and state institutions. The AUC was highly successful in infiltrating all these spheres

in NDS, but the infiltration of state institutions was linked to the protection of businesses rather than driven by political goals.

If the CB proved incapable of establishing a political strategy in Catatumbo or that such strategy was not a fundamental part of the organizational goals, the outcome in the area of Cúcuta was different. Unlike in the Catatumbo region, elections took place in every single municipality in Cúcuta's metropolitan area and the National Electoral Authority found that abstention levels were far below the national average, reflecting a typical "electoral paramilitary" pattern. The Authority also established that the total number of registered voters was larger than the number of inhabitants in Villa del Rosario and Los Patios, a typical case of the so-called "moving of votes" which consists of bringing people who are registered for voting in a given municipality to vote in another one.

Although this trend is consistent with the AUC's success in exerting full control over the urban territory, and despite the fact that all relevant cases of collusion took place in the urban areas, neither did paramilitaries capture the state nor did they penetrate politics in the way in which they did in Sucre.

#### *The role of intermediaries*

Della Porta and Vanucci (1999) argue that brokers are necessary when relations between corrupters and corrupted are sporadic or fragmentary; or when these are complicated because of the involvement of larger networks of different actors. In NDS this is the case. As stated before, politics has had an instrumental relationship with crime in the department: the financing of campaigns by criminals in exchange for immunity from prosecution and eventually a share of the public budget. It is in this environment that the complex web of the criminal underworld flourished long before the emergence of the AUC, and sophisticated ways of connecting the political and criminal spheres have been implemented, particularly the use of intermediaries (best known as "apostles") who played a central role in facilitating the exchange and have been vital in erasing possible traces of this exchange. Intermediaries have been usually well-connected entrepreneurs with influence – and in some cases with participation – in the criminal underworld, which have been usually the main campaign funders but do not belong to the political elite. This situation sharply contrasts with that of Sucre where brokers were of no use as power networks were narrower and involved fewer actors: the AUC emerged because the local establishment decided so and the relationship with politicians was not sporadic or fragmented but organic.

The most prominent name is that of Luis Enrique Pérez, best known as *El Pulpo*, a self-made businessman of modest background. Pérez became a highly influential person in the local scenario during the 1990s and a prominent political campaigns funder. “He is the real regional ruler, and everybody fears him” (Revista Cambio, 2009). An alleged partner of several drug traffickers with strong links to the AUC, Pérez was a car dealer who diversified his business in restaurants and show business, in which it is said he laundered millions of dollars. He was thoroughly investigated for money laundering since 1986, and in the mid-2000s he was arrested on charges of illicit enrichment but he was soon released in the absence of evidence against him. Nonetheless, his name appeared in intelligence reports as an important partner of one of the most important cocaine routes that goes through Cúcuta and Central America to the U.S. (Semana, 2006). Different sources interviewed agree in that Pérez put pressure on Cúcuta’s Mayor Ramiro Suárez in 2003 to have his nephew appointed in *Metroseguridad*, a state enterprise in charge of preventing criminal activities in main Colombian cities through information systems and fast connections to the National Police, a situation that provided the FF a great deal of immunity from investigation. Pérez was assassinated in April 2012 in Cúcuta, apparently motivated by settling of scores. Other killings took place in the city right after *El Pulpo*’s death. According to local authorities, these were related to internal struggles between Pérez’s frontmen.

Another important intermediary was Jensey Miranda, a renowned real estate entrepreneur and one of NDS most prominent contractors with contracts worth over USD7.5 between 2003 and 2006. Miranda was also known as “Ernesto” in Cúcuta’s underworld and is held responsible for trafficking cocaine to Europe through Guinea Bissau and Cape Verde. While tracked by international authorities for his illicit activities for almost six years, Miranda enjoyed a great deal of protection by local authorities in Cúcuta and in Caracas’ legal business world and politics. According to an Interpol official “someone protected him for a long time. There are key recordings of phone conversations with politicians” (El Tiempo, 2009). *El Tiempo* newspaper disclosed a meeting with politicians during AUC times that took place in one of Miranda’s country estates before the 2003 elections in which he offered his support to at least a dozen local politicians among which there was Luis Miguel Morelli, then candidate to the Governor’s office, and Cúcuta’s Mayor candidate Ramiro Suárez. The latter’s party *Colombia Alive* got a US\$30 million contribution from Miranda’s firm (El Tiempo, 2009). Miranda was arrested in an operation coordinated from Bogotá, on charges of running cocaine processing laboratories and some trafficking routes through Venezuela and was extradited to Spain in 2009. Miranda admitted financing Suárez’s campaign and said that the ex-mayor had im-

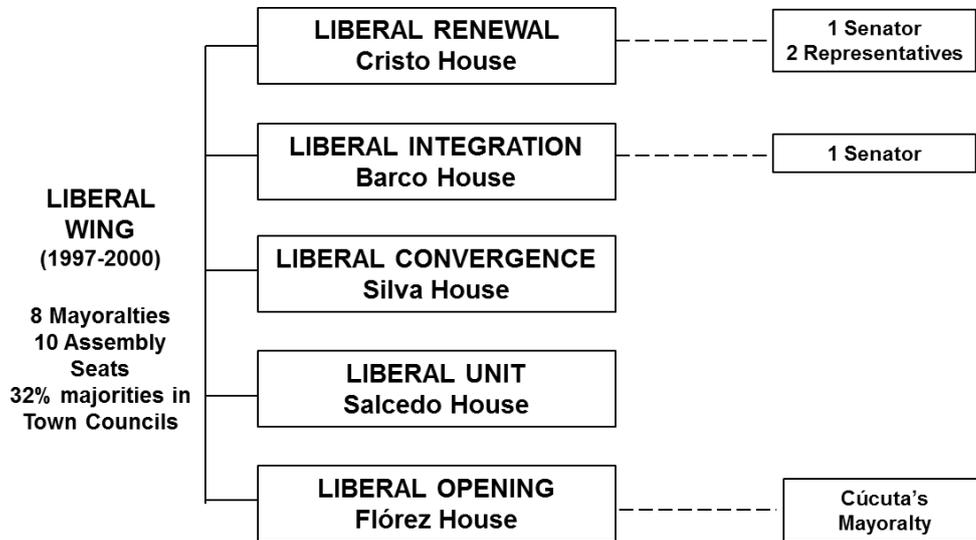
portant links with the AUC. By the time he was captured, Miranda had won contracts worth about USD1.5 million with Cúcuta’s mayoralty (La Opinión, 2011). Miranda has also been linked to Senator Juan Manuel Corzo, a matter discussed below.

The aforementioned gambling operator Juan Jose Pita, killed in 2004 by the FF, was also an important campaign funder and he might have also been an important intermediary between politicians and criminals (Oviedo, 2009).

*The early paramilitary-less politics (1997–2002)*

Unlike the case of Sucre where two political houses controlled subnational politics, when the AUC arrived in NDS political power was significantly dispersed, as has been the tradition in the department.

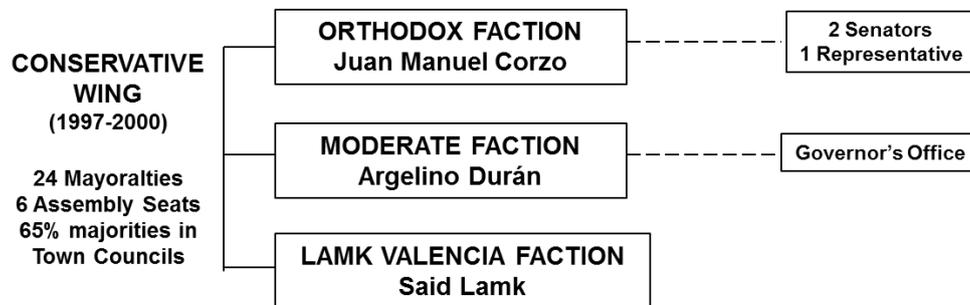
On the Liberal side there were five houses and all of them had already split from the party’s official line for that electoral period. As shown in the figure below, Liberal power in NDS was significantly distributed among houses and none exclusively dominated the electoral realm. These houses obtained 20% of mayoralties (8 municipalities); 11 out of 17 seats at the Assembly; and majorities in 32% of town councils (13 municipalities). In Congress, they won two senatorial seats and one in the House of Representatives.



Source: RNEC

The Conservative side, organized in three houses, won 60% of mayoralties and 6 seats at the Departmental Assembly. It also obtained majorities in 65% of town councils and won the

Governor's Office. At the congressional level Conservatives won one senatorial seat and two at the House of Representatives. As in the Liberal side, no Conservative house held political power exclusively. During this period the balance of power was in equilibrium: Liberals and Conservatives got almost the same representation in Congress. The former won the Governor's Office and the latter Cúcuta's Mayoralty.



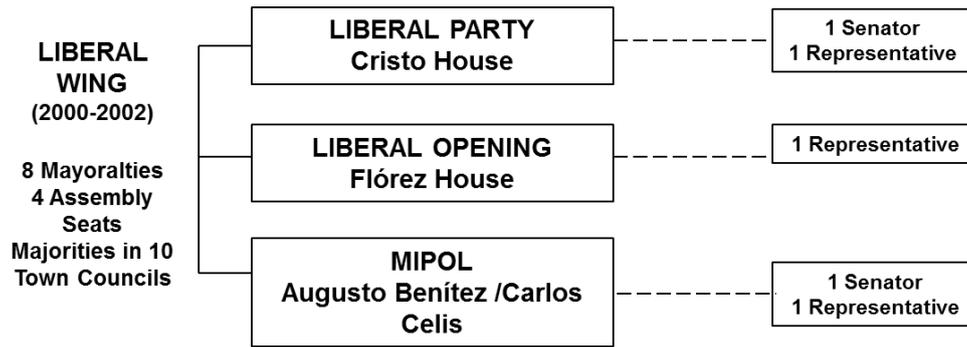
Source: RNEC

As in Sucre, NDS's politics experienced a progressive shift towards the right and most groups joined the Uribista Coalition later, except for *Liberal Renewal*, which opposed Uribe's administration under the national leadership of NDS's Cristo house. During this period there was no AUC interference in politics.

In the 2002–2003 elections the Liberal wing shrank and was reduced to three factions: *Liberal Renewal*, which joined the Liberal official line for the 2002 elections and won two congressional seats; *Liberal Opening* which obtained a congressional seat; the other three factions disappeared and the new Uribista party *Popular Integration Movement* (MIPOL), took over<sup>33</sup> and gained two congressional seats. On the whole, the Liberal wing won eight mayoralties, four Assembly seats and majorities in ten Town Councils. None of the factions had overwhelming results over the others; again, there was no dominant group.

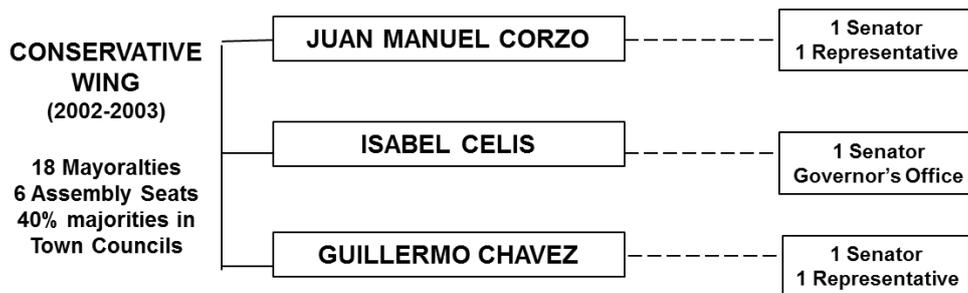
<sup>33</sup>MIPOL was created in the Caribbean region and was particularly strong in Magdalena department where it grew along with the AUC expansion.

POLITICS



Source: RNEC

Conservatives maintained three groups, which were divorced from the previous labels and mainly became linked to each group’s strongmen, a trend that could be observed throughout the country. The Conservative wing won five congressional seats in 2002; won the Governor’s Office, 18 mayoralties, 6 Assembly seats and obtained majorities in 40% of Town Councils in the 2003 local elections.



Source: RNEC

As noted previously, although Liberal and Conservative power structures did not change substantially from one election to the next, there were no signs of power accumulation, as there were in Sucre during the same period. Neither were there signs of collusion with the AUC. As a matter of fact both the Liberal and Conservative wings experienced overall electoral losses: despite the fact that each wing managed to increase its congressional representation in 2002 they both lost mayoralties – including Cúcuta’s – and town councils in 2003. As analysed below, this situation is largely explained by the emergence of another *Uribista* party, *Colombia Alive*, allegedly supported by the AUC.

*The infiltration of local politics in 2003: Cúcuta's Mayoralty and NDS's Governor's Office*

The fact that for the 2002 elections no “parapolitical” arrangements had taken place in NDS shows a completely different trajectory from that of Sucre. In the latter great electors created, financed, and commanded AUC structures and gave paramilitaries access to local administrations. Politicians strengthened the existing power structures supported by paramilitary violence and in exchange the AUC obtained congressional support for the demobilization process.

The paramilitary infiltration of Cúcuta's mayoralty and attempts to infiltrate the NDS Governor's Office, both in the 2003 elections, constituted the first events in which politicians col-  
luded with the AUC in the department. These cases, unlike in Sucre, are illustrative of the disconnection with the political realm and the prevalence of the economic rationale.

The SCJ substantiated how the AUC created a commission led by *Pacho*, the CB's political spokesman, in charge of coordinating the 2003 electoral strategy of vetoes, threats, assassinations and displacements for Cúcuta's metropolitan area (SCJ-33301, 2010). The AUC sought to secure candidates for the Governor's Office and for the mayoralties of Villa del Rosario, Puerto Santander, Los Patios, Chinácota and Cúcuta. There is evidence of a meeting that took place, which candidates attended under pressure. According to Villarraga and Cañizales (2005) the campaigns in Villa del Rosario, Los Patios and Cúcuta were “extravagant” in terms of invested resources, advertising, logistics, transport, and securing of social leaders. However, the only proven cases of alliances are those of the Mayoralty of Cúcuta and NDS Governor's Office.

*Cúcuta's Mayoralty*

Cúcuta is a typical case of politicians being subjugated to paramilitaries' interests and not the other way round. Gustavo Duncan argues that in a criminal context such as Cúcuta's, mayors do not constitute an “exchange” cell in the illegal network but instead an “operative” one (Duncan, 2007). This seems to have been the case of Ramiro Suárez, elected in 2003.

Suárez, an absolute political newcomer of modest background, represented the emerging *Uribista* party Colombia Alive in NDS. Suárez had worked as personal driver of Conservative leader Said Lamk in the 1990s, who later connected Suárez to the political world. He soon established a long-lasting friendship and collaboration with Guillermo Mora, another traditional Liberal politician. He worked for Mora's campaign for Cúcuta's mayoralty in 2000

and became his closest assistant while Mora was in office. For the 2003 elections Suárez used the recently created *Colombia Alive* as his platform for Cúcuta's mayoralty, which he won with 127,800 votes, the largest vote recorded in the city's history (El Tiempo, 2007b). The party also obtained majorities in four Town Councils and three Assembly seats. Guillermo Mora abandoned *Liberal Opening* in order to join Suárez's campaign. Another politician, Carlos Barriga, who was NDS's treasurer for the Alvaro Uribe Presidential campaign, became Suárez's assistant. Mora and Barriga were later involved in the parapolitics phenomenon in NDS; however, they were never trialled.

For many, Suárez split NDS's political life in two, because he became one of the greatest electoral barons in the department almost overnight. One source pointed out that "he did not have a penny, yet he managed to get his campaigns financed; organized meetings with the people that have traditionally financed campaigns here in NDS [...] politically speaking Suárez is a monster. When Guillermo Mora was Cúcuta's mayor, Suárez was the 'shadow' mayor" (Oviedo, interview, 2009).

The AUC funded Suárez's campaign in a complex scheme of intermediation (allegedly through Jensey Miranda) that provided Suárez with an extraordinary amount of votes. The AUC also used its violent muscle to eliminate opponents. In exchange, Suárez's administration protected FF from prosecution in conjunction with the Police and Secret Service and gave the Front access to public contracting.

Salvatore Mancuso stated that when Suárez was still a candidate, the AUC reached an agreement to support his political aspirations. As the FF controlled shanty towns in the city, it was relatively easy for "El Iguano" to secure the urban poor vote for Suárez. In exchange, once elected, he would give the AUC access to key local offices, public budget and contracts. According to Mancuso, Suárez actually did so. "Andrés", one of the FF's commanders revealed that "[Suárez] promised [the AUC] Cúcuta's Secretary of Transit, *Metroseguridad*, and several contracts in exchange for votes in Cúcuta's shantytowns where I was in control" (La Opinión, 2007b). The AUC had its frontmen appointed as Secretaries of Transit, Transportation and Public Works (La Opinión, 2007b). There is the much-discussed case of the firm *Retromáquinas* of the aforementioned Barriga family. The public works firm that became the main contractor in NDS during the time, was allegedly a means for laundering AUC's money (Eje 21, 2011). *El Tiempo* newspaper (2005) pointed out that "many young engineers have warned that they cannot get business from the mayor or governor's offices because the contracting process is controlled by paramilitaries".

Other types of favours by Suárez included the repeal of a regulation that prohibited the construction of tall buildings in Cúcuta, at the very moment in which the building of tall luxury “love hotels”<sup>34</sup>, one of the top money laundering mechanisms in Colombia, started to take over the city. There was also the granting of licences for the aforementioned legal fuel collection points to several AUC frontmen, a situation that further permitted the FF to monopolize the fuel market in the metropolitan area.

Besides access to public contracting, the infiltration of Cúcuta's administration reinforced the immunity from investigation and prosecution enjoyed by criminals. Clear examples of this were the FF's strong grip on the state enterprise *Metroseguridad* where *El Pulpo*'s nephew was appointed, and the case support by Police agent Martín Soto. In June 2004 *Semana* weekly magazine described the relation between Cúcuta's mayoralty and impunity with the policeman case:

“Soto was one of former mayor Guillermo Mora's bodyguards and he had been recently transferred as part of then candidate Suárez's security scheme. Ever since Soto was transferred to the Mayor's office he had become a strategic link for paramilitaries. For instance, in July 2003 the police had immobilized a truck loaded with smuggled food and clothes in *Cenabastos* [wholesale food market] which was heading to Puerto Santander, a renowned operational paramilitary hub [...] men from FF contacted Soto and let him know that the confiscated load belonged to ‘El Gato’ [...] the police agent contacted the uniformed men in charge of the operation and managed to free the truck. These types of favours made Soto not only a main man for the *Autodefensas* but also for some politicians who found in Soto an effective bridge with the AUC” (*Semana*, 2004).

Despite the abundant signs of Suárez's linkages with the FF, the judicial investigations only shed results until very recently. Suárez was first arrested in June 2004 while still in office under charges of receiving paramilitary funds for his campaign and holding several meetings and telephone conversations with local AUC commanders. In January 2005 Suárez was accused and put on trial; he spent six months in prison in Bogotá until the investigation was thrown out by the prosecutor in charge, on the grounds that the evidence was not strong enough (*La Opinión*, 2007b). Nonetheless, mass media remained very active in denouncing the Suárez administration's corruption and linkages with paramilitaries. As a consequence, journalists were severely victimized during the mayor's time in office. In 2005, a journalist was killed by the FF and another eighteen were threatened and forced to leave the city (*Indymedia*, 2005). Suárez allegedly used paramilitary force against the press and also against those within the

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<sup>34</sup>Known as *motels* in Colombia, where couples pay per hour.

office who opposed his corrupted ways (El Tiempo, 2007d). In September 2007 Suárez was accused of the aforementioned homicides of Pedro Durán and Enrique Flórez. Regarding the latter, who opposed most of Suárez' contracting, Mancuso and key witnesses indicated that Suárez negotiated Flórez's death with *El Gato* when he was still in campaign (La Opinión, 2007b). Likewise, "El Iguano" declared that "the current mayor of Cúcuta, Ramiro Suárez, asked in 2003 the FF under my command to neutralize electoral observer Pedro Durán and Enrique Flórez. He insisted they belonged to FARC's 33<sup>rd</sup> Front" (El Tiempo, 2007a). The paramilitary added that Flórez's homicide was actually a personal favour to Suárez because the victim was about to disclose Suárez's links with the AUC (El Tiempo, 2007a; Verdad Abierta, 2009c).

The ex-mayor was in jail for two years but was freed again in 2009. However, in August 2011 the High Tribunal of Bogotá reversed the acquittal and convicted the ex-mayor to 27 years of prison for the assassination of Flórez (Verdad Abierta, 2011). According to the Tribunal's decision "Suárez let AUC commanders know that he wanted Cúcuta's mayoralty. The delinquents supported him in exchange for his help in the 'legalization' of several urban AUC soldiers by incorporating them to a private security firm in the city. 'El Gato' was the man in charge of helping Suárez with the murder [...] The AUC had not planned to kill Flórez. The commanders decided to do so when Suárez asked for it" (El Espectador, 2011)

### *Governor's Office*

Besides the capture of Cúcuta's mayoralty, the AUC attempted a similar move on the NDS's Governor's Office in the same year. Ricardo Elcure, a "mediocre politician" (López, 2010) with little political background, became the CB's candidate. Elcure launched his gubernatorial campaign for the 2003 elections with the Uribista *Democratic Colombia* party. Although he received an extraordinary high voting for a newcomer, 109,181 votes, his Conservative competitor Miguel Morelli won the Office with 191,552 votes. The AUC's muscle in Elcure's campaign did not guarantee electoral victory. According to "El Iguano" the office was lost because communities did not respond to paramilitary "indoctrination" of votes in favour of its candidate and the insufficient financial injection into the campaign (SCJ-29640, 2009).

It was established that the AUC financed Elcure's campaign in exchange for 5% of all departmental contracting (SCJ-29640, 2009). According to "El Iguano", Elcure was the key AUC politician in NDS for the 2003 elections and the organization and the politician connected through the already mentioned former Secret Service director Jorge Díaz (Verdad Abierta,

2009b). The paramilitary assured that “[he] met el ‘*Chico*’ [Elcure’s nickname] thrice in Puerto Santander. [Alias] Camilo mentioned that he had requested money for his campaign. We agreed to give him 80 million [USD40,000] out of the 200 [USD100,000] he had requested. Alias ‘Mauro’ delivered it through Jorge Díaz. I cannot remember very well how he did influence Díaz’s appointment, but it was Díaz who introduced ‘*Chico*’ Elcure to the AUC” (SCJ-29640, 2009). This AUC funding was collected through the so-called “stamp” (*estampilla*), a public works contract “tax” levied by paramilitaries in Cúcuta, and the resort to the stamp was Elcure’s idea (SCJ-29640, 2009).

The intermediation of Díaz was confirmed later by former National Secret Service General Director – convicted to 25 years of prison for colluding with the AUC – who accepted that Elcure influenced the appointment of Díaz in NDS (SCJ-29640, 2009). The SCJ established that Díaz, “a sinister character who was appointed thanks to Elcure’s influence”, was a fundamental source of support for Elcure (SCJ-29640, 2009).

The Supreme Court’s investigation concluded that “there is absolute certainty that Elcure formed an alliance with the AUC, clearly linked to the 2003 electoral process [...] the handing over of the money is not the only element that accounts for the illegal collusion between Elcure and the illegal armed group; nevertheless it constitutes the emblematic evidence of the financing of his political work by paramilitaries (SCJ-29640, 2009). Although there are some signs of paramilitary pressure on some local candidates to mayoralties and town councils to support Elcure’s campaign<sup>35</sup>, there is no evidence of anomalous voting patterns in any NDS municipality for Elcure. Abstention levels varied depending on whether zones were controlled by guerrillas or paramilitaries, as discussed above.

Elcure’s case took time to investigate. He ran for Congress in 2006 again with *Democratic Colombia*, the same party through which Sucreño parapoliticians Alvaro García and Eric Morris were elected in the same year, but did not win a seat. However, replaced a congressman convicted for linkages with the AUC in October 2007<sup>36</sup> where he remained until 2009, when the SCJ sentenced him to six years of prison for colluding with the AUC. The abovementioned assassination of Left-wing candidate for the Office Tirso Vélez seemed to have been part of the strategy to win the Governor’s Office. According to El Iguano, “Mancuso ordered his [Vélez] death. We had information that linked him with FARC’s 33<sup>rd</sup> Front”. He added that “it was a

<sup>35</sup>The SCJ accounts for the case of Tibú’s Town Council candidate Ovidio Navarro, whose campaign was partly funded by the AUC in exchange for support to Elcure and the threats against one candidate for Pamplona’s mayoralty (SCJ-29640, 2009).

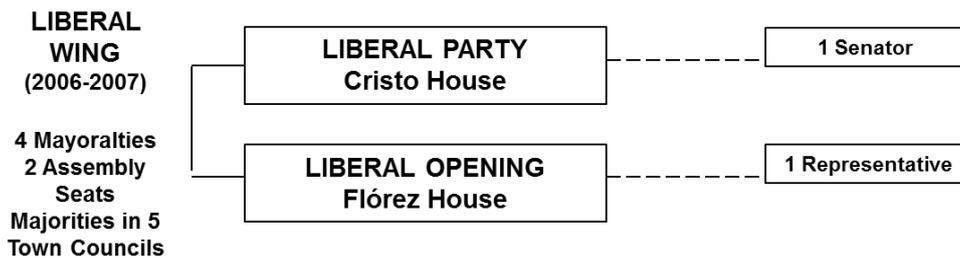
<sup>36</sup>Elcure replaced Mario Uribe, president’s Uribe cousin who had to resign to his seat for being prosecuted by links with paramilitaries in Antioquia department.

political favour” (Verdad Abierta, 2010d). However the paramilitary commander said later to Vélez’s widow during a Justice and Peace public hearing that they really did not know whether they assassinated the politician because of his ideology or because it was necessary to remove him from the electoral scene. He said it was Mancuso who ordered the crime and that he simply followed his orders (Verdad Abierta, 2010d).

There are unproven accounts of FF also supporting Miguel Morelli’s candidacy, not with money as in the case of Elcure, but with votes (La Opinión, 2011). “El Iguano’s” support for Morelli was supposedly requested by Jensey Miranda (La Opinión, 2011), who funded both Morelli and Suárez campaigns. True or not, it seems that intermediaries and criminals in NDS had no preferences when it came to supporting campaigns. They were indifferent to labels or political projects as long as candidates delivered. In this case, both the AUC and Miranda supported the best options, a matter that reaffirms Losada’s typology of *predominance within restricted competition* typology (Losada, 2006) in NDS, in which paramilitaries supported candidates within a restricted competition field kindred to the organization’s interests.

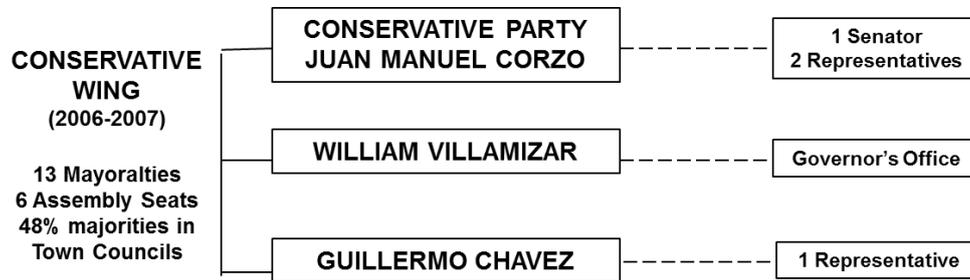
*The late congressional penetration attempt: the unreadable ‘para-congressional’ map in NDS*

The first signs of paramilitary collusion with NDS congressmen emerged during the 2006 elections, unlike in Sucre where alliances were forged as early as the 2002 elections. The migration of politicians to *Uribista* coalition parties increased electoral competition, and in this context, elections were more vulnerable to paramilitary influence. For the 2006 election the Liberal wing experienced further shrinking to two houses and a significant electoral loss: only one senatorial seat, four mayoralties, majorities in only two town councils and two Assembly seats.



Source: RNEC

As for the Conservative wing, the three factions remained but that of Juan Manuel Corso realigned with the official Conservative party; William Villamizar was in charge of Celis' faction (who had died in an accident) and Chávez kept control over his group.



Source: RNEC

Although the Conservative wing won the highest number of votes in 2006 elections and its loss in 2007 local elections was not as dramatic as that of the Liberal wing, Conservatives were unable to benefit from the losses of Liberals. Other *Uribista* coalition parties such as Citizen Convergence, Democratic Colombia, and the recently created Radical Change and U Party mainly filled the Liberal gap. Many Liberal politicians migrated to the newest parties. Besides the case of Suárez and Elcure, all other NDS's politicians but one with alleged linkages with the AUC belonged to these new parties.

Between the 2002 and 2006 congressional elections the votes of *Citizen Convergence* in NDS increased by 1,633%.<sup>37</sup> Carlos Barriga, a politician of Conservative background without electoral history, won a seat in Senate with 38,344 votes, Villa del Rosario's mayoralty and an Assembly seat. Voting for Barriga was very high, considering the fact that he was somewhat of a newcomer and that it was the first time he ran for election, and at that time rumours of paramilitary infiltration in his campaign were strong but no evidence has ever been found (El Tiempo, 2007c).

Senator Barriga was investigated, along with NDS's political bosses Jorge García-Herreros, Eduardo Benítez, Augusto Celis, and Guillermo Mora, in the aforementioned case of violent land expropriation of about 6,000 hectares (25% of peasant property in the region) in the Catatumbo region with paramilitary support, aimed at growing palm oil.

But what actually first connected Barriga to the parapolitics scandal was the alleged links between his brothers – owners of the aforementioned public works firm *Retromáquinas* – and the AUC and other criminals of the likes of the Mejía Múnica twins and *Los Mexicanos*. It has

<sup>37</sup>Similar trends could be observed in other departments. Except for two cases, all *Citizen Convergence* seats have been or are being currently investigated for parapolitics.

been claimed that the Barriga brothers laundered money through their firm and coordinated cocaine traffic activities with “El Pulpo” (Semana, 2006). It has also been said that the AUC established a command and training centre in *La Isla* rural estate, a Barriga brothers property in the Catatumbo region, which was also used as an interrogation, torture and execution centre (Revista Cambio, 2007b). Nevertheless, the investigations against senator Barriga and his brothers did not succeed. A writ of prohibition was issued in the case of the Senator and the judicial investigation ceased as the evidence was considered weak. Barriga was re-elected to Senate in 2010.

The *U Party* was electorally strong in NDS with 82,413 votes in 2006 with which it gained two senatorial seats, two on the House of Representatives, five mayoralties and three Assembly seats. Manuel Guillermo Mora, former Cúcuta mayor, who had left *Liberal Opening* in 2003 in order to join *Colombia Alive* (Suárez’s party), joined the *U Party* for the 2006 elections and won a senate seat with 49,708 votes. Mora allegedly met several times with FF’s men while in mayoral office in order to negotiate appointments at *Comfaoriente*, a departmental family benefit fund (Revista Cambio, 2007b). However, there is no evidence that formally involves the politician. The investigation at the SCJ has remained in preliminary stage. Mora was re-elected to Congress in 2010.

Senator Juan Manuel Corzo from the Conservative Party is the only alleged parapolitician with long-term experience in politics. He has been in Congress since 1998. The first investigation against Corzo for alleged collusion with the AUC was closed in September 2008 because the evidence was weak. However, “El Iguano” implicated the politician during one of his Peace and Justice public hearings (Verdad Abierta, 2009b), a situation that led to the re-opening of the investigation, which is still in preliminary stage. Despite the fact that Corzo was subject to another three criminal investigations for alleged corruption, he was re-elected for Congress in 2010. Ramiro Suárez stated that Jensey Miranda also financed Corzo’s campaigns.

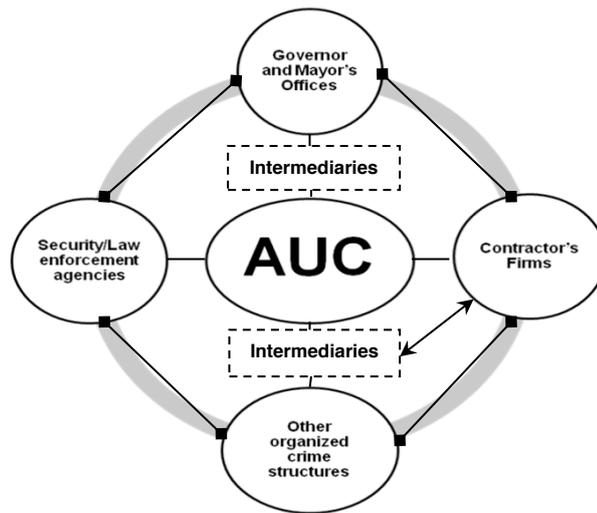
Different sources, including former AUC combatants, have provided a long list of at least another eighteen politicians apparently involved with paramilitaries. Nevertheless, there is no evidence to support the linkages.

Besides all the variations pointed above, there are additional differences between the AUC intervention in NDS politics and that in Sucre. First, there was a significant discontinuity between politics in Catatumbo region and Cúcuta area, contrary to Sucre, where the linkages from town councils to Congress and everything in between, and from rural to urban could be easily drawn along the line of parapolitics. In Catatumbo, in the absence of evidence of collu-

sion of politics, it is possible to argue that the action of the AUC was a typical case of armed clientelism, not distant from the relationships established by guerrillas with local administrations in that region. All the proven and alleged cases of collusion in NDS are specifically urban and involve the FF under “El Iguano’s” direction. However, it is not possible to establish a clear arrangement between the AUC and a specific power structure in NDS. None of the traditional electoral barons of the likes of the Cristo or García-Herrereros have been involved in the parapolitics to date. All of the implicated were newcomers to politics.

Second, there are no signs that allow linking the influence of the 2002 congressional elections with the 2003 local elections as in Sucre. Not only there is no evidence of the creation of paramilitary “electoral districts” for the 2002 and 2003 local elections but also there are no signs of any political house accumulating power and office from 2002 to 2003 via paramilitary influence as clearly observed in Sucre. Elcure’s case is illustrative, as the connection neither took place via the political establishment nor via traditional intermediaries. Instead it was the local director of the Secret Service who connected Elcure with the AUC. As for the case of Ramiro Suárez, despite his connection with Manuel Guillermo Mora, it is not possible to observe a clear incremental political capital. Third, not a single NDS elected congress member in 2002 has been involved in parapolitics which means that the AUC did not seek NDS congressional vote for the Justice and Peace Law approval and enactment. Although the purported support to 2006 congressional candidates might have been connected to the AUC’s needs to enlarge its already robust congressional voting block, the purpose of colluding with Senators and Representatives in NDS it is not clear at all: the Justice and Peace Law was already passed before the 2006 elections, and there are no signs of a paramilitary political project of the likes of what “Jorge 40” sought to implant in the Caribbean region through the *Social Front for Peace*, discussed in Chapter 5.

Fourth, capturing the state in NDS implied transforming institutions into operative cells of the criminal network rather than a means to enter the realm of politics. In this context, politicians involved were practically subordinated to AUC commanders, and were considered as nodes of the network, just as security and law enforcement agencies, intermediaries, and contractors’ firms. Moreover, there was a significant level of interconnection between cells. In Sucre, the AUC integration to local politics was vertical as paramilitaries were subordinated to the García house, and not all actors had the same weight within the structure.



THE JUDICIAL BLACK SPOT OF NDS

Unlike the case of Sucre, the incidence or paramilitarism within the subnational state in NDS has not been subjected to serious investigation or prosecution. As seen above, the deep infiltration of key security and law enforcement agencies as well as of local executive offices provided the AUC an invaluable veil of impunity that has hindered judicial action to a significant extent.

Notwithstanding gaps in the available evidence, it does not seem possible to assert that collusion was a marginal phenomenon under the AUC's time in NDS. Moreover, such an assertion would be questionable given the traditional weight of organized crime in the subnational economy and the already discussed role of politicians in this field. The complicity between politicians and criminals seems instead to have been characterized as a long-term process of accommodation and of mutual benefit from one another. It is very likely that intermediaries have contributed to make these linkages very sophisticated and difficult to trace. Therefore, the judicial investigation seems to have become increasingly difficult.

What did exactly happened in NDS? Why is it that there are no successful judicial results? As discussed above, the Colombian judicial system has shown on the whole extraordinary results vis-à-vis parapolitics – as the case of Sucre illustrates – in a country where impunity is a structural and endemic issue. In this respect, impunity in NDS is puzzling. To date, there are only two convictions, those of Suárez and Elcure; one writ of prohibition and investigation being closed (Barriga); and two preliminary investigations (Mora and Corzo). “It is not clear

at all why in NDS the investigation and prosecution of parapolitics has not prospered. It is probable that there are too many interests at stake; too many businesses; too much money involved. There must be extremely powerful intermediaries [...] there is so much at stake here and many of the compromised actors are active and that is why nothing has been clarified as it has happened in other parts of the country” (Bautista, 2009). There are, however, more assertive opinions: “parapolitics has not been properly dealt with in NDS because our politicians were very careful in protecting themselves against the judicial action. We have an extremely clever political establishment, and politicians knew they had to deal with the AUC as they had dealt with other criminals in the past. Arrangements were always done through others of the likes of *El Pulpo*. That is why there were no meetings of the *Ralito* type here in NDS. Our politicians have a rather low profile in Congress; they are not too visible. It seems as if they delegated the exchange to [Ramiro] Suárez [...] economically speaking, and except for Elcure, politicians were very careful not to be involved with AUC’s dirty money. But mark my words: all their hands are dirty!” (Oviedo, 2009).

The case of security and law enforcement agencies is uneven, and although in this situation it is very likely that many of the “ingredients” mentioned above by Oviedo in his interview are at play, it has also to do with the performance of military justice in Colombia, which as stated, has structural issues of judicial independence. In the case of the National Army and Police, the officers with the higher ranks went unpunished: military courts acquitted Colonel Matamoros; and the investigations against Major Montezuma did not yield results and he ascended to the rank of Colonel. The only exceptions are the cases of Major Llorente who was convicted in 2007 for La Gabarra massacre and of lower ranked agent Martín Soto and Corporal Ardila. The case of the Secret Service was left unpunished because former director and deputy director were assassinated. The only case in which there has been exemplary twelve-year sentence to District Prosecutor Ana María Díaz, still in absentia, as well as seven years sentences to a further twelve officials from the Office, including Magaly Moreno who was captured in Venezuela in 2010.

Regarding Justice and Peace, the High Court of Bogotá found “El Iguano” guilty of the commission of 170 homicides, two kidnappings, and 16 forcible displacements of civilians. The paramilitary was sentenced to forty years of prison, however once JPL conditions were applied, the sentence was reduced to eight years in prison, the maximum punishment determined by the law (HCB-110016000253200680281, 2010). “El Iguano” is the third paramilitary commander to be sentenced in the framework of the JPL, after “Diego Vecino” and “Juancho Dique” from Sucre HMMB. In the judicial review, the SCJ requested the High Court in 2009

to exclude “El Iguano” from the Justice and Peace system, in which case “El Iguano” would have lost all benefits from the JPL (SCJ-33301, 2010). However, the High Court refused, arguing that the paramilitary had contributed to the system by confessing all the abovementioned crimes (HCB-110016000253200680281, 2010).<sup>38</sup> No other convictions have taken place in the framework of the law. “Visaje”, another AUC urban commander was convicted to 26 years of prison for the murder of Ernesto Obregón, but this sentence took place outside the Justice and Peace system.

The situation of the victims is critical. As discussed, the investigation of crimes committed by the AUC has had very poor results. In this context, the case of forcible disappearances is particularly dramatic: skeletal remains of only 69 missing people have been found and identified out of the over 600 cases reported between 2000 and 2004 (El Espectador, 2009a). The process of land restitution for displaced people has been very arduous as claimants have been systematically threatened by re-emerging paramilitary groups; Sara Rodríguez and Rigoberto Ramírez – leaders of the land restitution process in NDS -were murdered in Cúcuta in 2010. And finally, the reparation process has been very slow and hardly any paramilitaries’ assets have been used for compensating victims. It is calculated that only the compensation to victims for “El Iguano’s” confessed crimes (which do not constitute the whole universe of FF’s victims) would amount to USD 3.2 million (HCB-110016000253200680281, 2010), of which not even one per cent was declared by the paramilitary in the context of the JPL.

#### THE POST-AUC ERA

##### *Re-emerging paramilitary structures*

Soon after the demobilization of the CB in 2004 FARC and ELN guerrillas have been trying to take control over the cleared areas, which used to be their areas of influence. However, as in Sucre, new paramilitary structures also emerged. In this context, coca crops and drug trafficking routes constitute the targets of a new cycle of contestation over territorial control. According to the OAS, 1,425 combatants of the Catatumbo Bloc were demobilized in 2004 but only 1,115 guns were handed to the government during the process (MAPP-OEA, 2006). Taking into account that the CB was one of the most important AUC structures, this 0.78

<sup>38</sup>In the sentence the High Court acknowledges nonetheless that these crimes do not constitute the whole universe of offences which El Iguano can be held accountable for. According to the Prosecutor General’s Office, paramilitary crimes reported to the Justice and Peace system in FF’s jurisdiction amount to 2,978.

man/gun ratio does not coincide with the estimated firepower of the CB, and suggests that the demobilization process was only partial. One of Mancuso's partners in the drug trafficking business said that "[Mancuso] has only handed obsolete arms and demobilized useless people. By doing so he was weighing the Government's compromise to the demobilization process while keeping the best he had" (Semana, 2008).

The neo-paramilitary structure *Águilas Negras* (Black Eagles) emerged in Ocaña, El Tarra, Tibú and Cúcuta at the end of 2004 and several of AUC's former mid-ranking members were identified as the main commanders. In 2008 it was estimated that *Águilas Negras* was active in 11 municipalities with over 400 combatants, an army composed by BC's demobilized members, non-demobilized paramilitaries and ex-guerrilla combatants (MAPP-OEA, 2007).

In 2009 *Águilas Negras* were violently absorbed by another re-emerging structures called *Los Urabeños* arrived in NDS from the Urabá region in Antioquia department – the same route followed by the AUC in 1999. Then came *Los Rastrojos*, another re-emerging structure from Valle department in southwestern Colombia. These groups have been at war for the control of the illegal markets in NDS ever since.<sup>39</sup>

As in the case of Sucre, there are different interpretations of these new structures. A prominent regional journalist argued: "the AUC did not actually demobilize. They handed the government old rifles and demobilized some men but not all of them. The only thing that changed was the commandership. AUC's former mid-ranking men are now in charge of these structures" (Romero, 2009). However, others differ in their assessment: "I do not think it is exactly the same phenomenon. There is a great dispersion mostly due to the proliferation of debt-collecting offices. The new paramilitary generation is disorganized, highly violent and irrelevant in political terms [...] these emerging bands not only control debt-collecting offices but also cocaine processing laboratories in [Cúcuta's jurisdiction] and the roads' network where they extort transporters. All these activities demand territorial control, so in this regard these groups can still be considered as paramilitaries but they are no longer the AUC" (Bautista, 2009).

If compared to the post-AUC era in Sucre, the situation regarding the re-emerging structures in NDS has been even more complicated as not only all possible forms of organized crime converge in NDS but also the size of the illicit economy is far larger than that of Sucre.

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<sup>39</sup>"Los Rastrojos" operates in nine Colombian departments and "Los Urabeños" in four. They are ferociously disputing[fighting over] coca crops areas and trafficking routes through the Pacific, Caribbean, and Venezuela. The groups' enmity can be traced back in the 1990s and their leaders are well-known drug barons who have been at war over two decades.

Consequently, violence associated with the criminal markets, which is somehow structural in the department, particularly in Cúcuta, has been further intensified with these new groups. It is therefore possible to claim that in NDS there is an enormous potential for a continuous flow of criminalized economic activities in the hands of these bands or any other criminal structures.

Since 2010 mass media have been reporting the paradoxical alliance between guerrillas and re-emerging bands for drug trafficking purposes. According to reports, FARC and ELN are in charge of coca production; EPL transforms coca paste into cocaine and new paramilitary structures transport and collect money (El Tiempo, 2011). The alliance has been nonetheless very unstable and violent because of regular breaches of contract and losses of money and drugs, a situation that has further destabilized the region, particularly in Hacarí and El Tarra. In urban areas, re-emerging gangs operate in the same fashion as the FF, under the model of debt-collecting offices; that is as criminal networks that provide the financial and violent enforcement of illegal markets. Given the control over extortion, money laundering and contract killers, re-emerging gangs have kept a dominant position in Cúcuta's metropolitan area.

### *International Effects*

President Santos re-established the diplomatic relations with Venezuela in 2010 under a new cooperative approach. These relations have become increasingly important in the context of the peace talk with FARC that started in October 2012, in which the Venezuelan government plays a key role. However, because the border continued to be a hot spot, criminal actions have continued on both the Colombian and Venezuelan sides.

According to a report from the Colombian government, in 2010 FARC had expanded towards the states of Apure and Zulia in Venezuela with 1,500 combatants, as well as some ELN groups, allegedly connected to the Governor's Office and some mayoralties through which insurgents have access to public contracting (El Espectador, 2010). Likewise the report claims that members of ETA and Iranian citizens established in Venezuela are providing training to Colombian guerrillas as well as creating and training local commandos. The report discloses the linkages between some FARC commanders and Venezuelan power structures, entrepreneurs, social and educational organizations.

Colombian think-tank *Nuevo Arco Iris* and a New York Times report claim that *Los Rastrojos* control Zulia state and its capital Maracaibo. The criminal gang, jointly with Mexican criminal group *Los Zetas* have been using Maracaibo's port and clandestine airstrips for cocaine trafficking with the alleged protection of Zulia's Police (Nuevo Arco Iris, 2012; NYT, 2012). The report also notes that the war between *Los Rastrojos* and *Los Urabeños* has also crossed the border, and the killing of four people in January 2012 is apparently connected to this war.

Further propagation and contagion of the conflict has taken place. There are two groups clearly identified in Venezuela. On the one hand, there is a paramilitary command of former AUC combatants, under the command of renowned drug trafficker and former "Jorge 40" lieutenant Miguel Villarreal *El Salmón*. It is said that Villarreal controls almost all 25 trafficking existing routes in Venezuela. On the other hand, there is a left-wing armed group known as *Los Boliches* that sympathizes with the Bolivarian revolution and is presumably trained by ELN guerrillas. This group is allegedly responsible for the infamous massacre of eleven Colombian street vendors in Fernández Feo, Táchira department, in October 2009.

### *Economy*

Despite the governmental anti-narcotics' efforts, coca cultivation has not declined in NDS, unlike in other Colombian regions. Although between 1999 and 2004 illicit crops were reduced by over 30% (UNODC, 2011) the coca economy experienced a substantial increase after the AUC demobilized. In 2005 coca crops were reduced to 844 hectares but in 2009 they had augmented to 3,307. In 2010 the total area decreased to 1,889 hectares and in 2011 it reached 3,490 (UNODC, 2011). In 2012 – last available estimate – shows a new increase of 29% with 4,516 hectares. Thus, cocaine exports have grown and the routes via Venezuela are still amongst the most strategic.

Catatumbo is entering a new cycle of extraction, this time in the framework of legal markets, but under poorly regulated conditions and in the absence of the state. In 2010 started the implementation of four great projects in the energy, mining and agro-industrial sectors in the region. Multinationals of the likes of Harkem Energy, Solana Resources and Petrobras were undertaking seismic studies in an area of about 260,000 hectares. These firms are also seeking to participate in the operation of a huge coal complex, which would become the second largest open-pit mining complex in the country (Revista Cambio, 2007a). There has

been a rapid expansion of palm oil plantations since the mid-2000; at the end of 2011 there were 14,000 hectares in the region and according to the Governor's Office the mid-term goal is to reach 22,000 hectares and build an oil processing plant. This new extractive cycle has an enormous potential for further conflict: the fact that over 20% of the Catatumbo territory is still open for colonization entails a risk of large-scale plantation expansion, pushing small informal landowners towards the mountains to a situation of greater marginalization. This situation would not only generate new chaotic colonization waves – associated with the further expansion of licit and illicit crops into the Motilón-Barí territory – but also guerrillas seeking to extort the new multinational companies and re-emerging paramilitary structures ready to protect the emerging businesses.

As for the metropolitan area, Venezuelan flows of consumers have stopped shopping in Colombia. Since the 2010 rainy season provoked an unprecedented road blockage that further aggravated the bilateral trade to the extent to which the departmental government had to declare the state of economic and social emergency in NDS. In 2012 and 2013 the devaluation of Bolívar has deepened the critical situation along the border. The local trade guild indicated a drop of 80% in sales (Dinero, 2013). Unemployment has kept on rising in Cúcuta to the extent of becoming the city with the highest unemployment rate in Colombia: 19.1% was reported between July and September 2013, 7.1% above the national average (DANE, 2013). Consequently, informality has also risen; at 71.2% it is the highest in the country. But drug trafficking activities go on; so do contraband and other illicit activities. Re-emerging structures have maintained a strong grip over all illicit businesses, including fuel contraband. In 2006 the national government “formalized” the black market in Cúcuta, a policy that consisted legalizing the fuel that entered irregularly into Colombia. For that purpose the government created authorized retail points. Despite the formalization policy, the amount of illegal fuel that enters Colombian territory exceeds the fuel sold at the legal collection points. According to NDS's Mining and Energy Planning Unit, 672,000 gallons of Venezuelan fuel have reached the Cúcuta's market in average over the last eight years, and the supply exceeds the local demand. The excess-supply fuel goes to the so-called *escurrideros* (illegal wholesale points from where the fuel is distributed to other Colombian departments) and to cocaine processing laboratories. It is calculated that this situation causes a national revenue loss of approximately USD 200 million (Semana, 2010). Besides fuel, these groups control protection rackets and gambling from which they collect approximately USD 15 million per month.

Local authorities rhetorically condemn these practices but there are no effective actions against them, a reality that suggests that nothing has changed in this regard, and that illicit

markets continue to enjoy a great deal of protection. The thriving of illegal activities along with informality keeps the city afloat.

### *State capture and politics*

Although there have been no further developments registered regarding the infiltration of the state, the fact that illegal economies continue to flourish permits arguing that criminals continue to receive protection on the part of state agents at the local level.

Unlike the AUC, re-emerging paramilitaries do not seem to have any political strength. The last two elections have been the least violent of the last two decades, as in Sucre. Except for Suárez and Elcure, those allegedly involved in parapolitics were all re-elected to Congress in 2010. In the overall, there is little political renewal. Nevertheless, unlike Sucre, the Liberal Cristo house is still strong and in spite of being part of traditional politics, has been immune to the paramilitary capture and has promoted progressive policies from Congress, such as the Victims and Land Restitution Law, which was enacted in June 2011.<sup>40</sup> As for the Left, the systematic paramilitary offensive largely explains its meagre participation in the 2007 and 2010 elections.

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<sup>40</sup>The law constitutes a fundamental advance vis-à-vis the internal armed conflict victims' right to reparation and restitution of land, a matter that was almost completely ignored under the Uribe administration. Senator Juan Fernando Cristo, one of the strongest opponents of the Uribe administration, was one of the most active promoters of the law and was the law's sponsor in Congress. After successive failures during the Uribe administration, the project finally found its way under president Santos's government.

## CONCLUSIONS

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### AN OVERVIEW OF THE MAIN ORIGINAL CONTRIBUTIONS

Despite the magnitude of parapolitics and its impact on the Colombian institutional life, the academic debate has been insufficient. Notwithstanding the significant contribution of the existing literature to shedding light on the phenomenon, the topic demanded further empirical analysis and a more comprehensive theoretical approach in order to move beyond the transactional sphere of parapolitics and to tackle its territorial and temporary dissimilarities.

I therefore addressed a series of research questions, which along with the conduction of empirical research that compares the cases of Sucre and NDS in subnational perspective, contributed to providing more accurate answers to these questions. Regarding the first question, *what is parapolitics*, I found that the phenomenon was built in a bottom-up fashion, namely at the subnational level; it occurred in the interaction of distinct forms of political power, economic accumulation, war economies and collective violence; and in turn it either contributed to the maintenance of existing spheres and interactions or significantly transformed them. These findings made me approach the phenomenon as a series of subnational processes of political economy, with significant spatial and temporal variations, and built within the existing institutional framework and not outside the prevailing arrangements.

Regarding the second research question, *what and who were the AUC*, I indeed confirmed it was confederation of warlords with varying private agendas, but there was a complex blending of these personal agendas with the organizational master counter-insurgent discourse. In all cases AUC structures delivered according to the counterinsurgent “mandate” but the blending of agendas was significantly shaped to match the characteristics and seize the opportunities of the territory the *Autodefensas* embedded in. In this vein, AUC warlords specialized in crossing the strategic boundaries that each territory offered. In Sucre, “Diego Vecino” and “Cadena” were mainly at the service of the García house political strategy, but were at the same time drug traffickers, and obeyed the counterinsurgent dictate, all under Northern Bloc’s Jorge

40's command. In this context, warlords became crossers of political boundaries, both at the local and national level, co-governing the department and being represented in Congress.

Inversely, in NDS Mancuso and "El Iguano" mainly served economic agendas but did not serve any political interest beyond colluding in order to guarantee protection to the paramilitary war economy. CB and FF commanders were experts in crossing complex economic boundaries as well as the rural/urban divide. They went from controlling a significant share of the coca and cocaine economies – and connecting them, controlling informal and scarcely regulated formal transactions, to dominating the underworld. Warlords did not deliver across political boundaries as in Sucre but connected with key state areas such as the judiciary, and allied with Mayor Ramiro Suárez, a great protector, and with candidate "Chico" Elcure.

I addressed a third question: *why, how and to what purpose did parapolitics take place?* Concerning the *why*, I incorporated a series of key variables to the analysis (state formation processes, democratization, collective violence and crime, forms of accumulation, and transformation of political parties), and made them interact in historical perspective in each case. This allowed explaining not only why parapolitics occurred but also the particular forms of parapolitics that took place in each case.

In Sucre I found that the large-scale phenomenon of parapolitics and state capture was mainly politically driven and was projected to influence the national political sphere. The fact that in Sucre politics was first and crime came second explains why the legal/illegal intersection was a long-term empty space that only started being filled in the context of parapolitics, but not before.

Sucre is perhaps the most extraordinary case of criminalization of politics in Colombia. Before the emergence of the AUC in Sucre, the local state and society were systematically threatened and victimized by guerrillas; the latifundium structure was progressively jeopardized by agrarian unions; and the political establishment was at risk of losing influence because of the proliferation of new power brokers, the rise of independent forces, and the fragmentation of political parties. All these factors constituted important triggers of paramilitary formation in Sucre: local elites privileged the privatization of security and protection – via the creation of local AUC structures – over its public provision. Politicians, rural rich, security agents and paramilitaries allied in order to preserve the subnational status quo, generating an anti-subversive and anti-agrarian consociational reform arrangement.

This specific configuration, to a significant extent generalizable to the Caribbean region, was made possible by the historical interaction of subnational closed political boundaries;

the vertical integration of society into the state via clientelist ties; the predominance of the Liberal party with its narrow spectrum and competition margins, as well as a strong fragmentation, atomization and shift towards the Right end of the political continuum; pre-modern forms of accumulation based upon rentier latifundia – intimately related to politics – and weak integration to markets; the social contentiousness over the rural landholding structure; a frail endogenous connection of the internal conflict to drug trafficking due to the feeble pre-existing forms of organized crime and limitation of criminal activities to cocaine exports. This interaction generated a process of paramilitary formation connected to the establishment's needs of preserving the status quo of land and of the García house, rather to the incentives of warlords and drug traffickers for taking over the pre-existing criminal underworld. This explains why AUC structures were created within *Sucreeño* territory and was led – and even commanded – by the subnational establishment. It also clarifies that despite the accumulation of wealth via drug trafficking and the diversion of public finances, the principal asset for the AUC in Sucre was politics. The AUC supported the García house for reproducing its power in Congress and for unprecedentedly expanding its influence in departmental and municipal politics. Warlords also protected the rural landholding status quo by undermining the agrarian movement through massacres, homicides and displacements. In exchange, the MMHB joined a consociational political arrangement based upon violence, crime and corruption from which it not only influenced local appointments but most importantly the enactment of the Justice and Peace Law.

The case of NDS exhibits a different configuration. I found a mainly economically driven phenomenon of parapolitics, which exhibited a magnitude of intermediate scale and a more restricted scope of state capture. Unlike Sucre, in NDS illegality and politics historically co-evolved and therefore the intersection was filled before the AUC emerged. I found no evidence that supports the importance of politics either via participation or representation in the department, or of scaling up the influence to the national level, contrary to Sucre's case. NDS's distinct configuration of parapolitics was significantly shaped by the historical interaction of political boundaries that have been more permeable to the central state's influence; a society that was more horizontally integrated to the state despite the existence of clientelist practices; the absence of a political party in a hegemonic position, wider political competition, less fragmentation and atomization of parties despite the shift towards the Right, and a stronger political competition and less atomization of political parties; modern forms of accumulation – detached from politics – based on international trade but weakly regulated in many areas; the social contentiousness over a wider spectrum of claims; and a strong endogenous

connection of the internal conflict with drug traffic and other forms of organized crime explained by the traditionally robust urban underworld and coca economy in rural peripheries. The interaction of these variables created a causal path in which paramilitary structures were introduced in NDS as outcome of the demands of already established drug traffickers and sectors of the National Army. There is no evidence that demonstrates that the emergence of the CB and FF were connected to the subnational establishment's needs and that politics represented the most valuable asset for warlords. Although there are two proven cases of collusion of politicians with AUC warlords, the connection was mainly instrumental to the logic of the market in the sense that paramilitaries sought protection for their venture in illegal, informal and legal businesses. Paramilitaries did not form alliances for co-governing NDS or seeking Congressional representation as in Sucre.

Regarding the *how*, I analysed three mechanisms for parapolitics: electoral strategies, state capture and violence. As far as electoral strategies are concerned, I discussed that warlords' attitudes vis-à-vis political enterprises varied not only according to their personal preferences and objectives but also to the available territorial possibilities, shaped by the dynamics of the internal armed conflict, the existing types of rule, and levels of integration to markets at the subnational level. Following Losada's types (2006) the *hegemonic* strategy was prevalent in Sucre. In the framework of the "foundational" *Ralito* agreement, the strategy was aimed at narrowing the scope of political groups or candidates – to the extent of having only the García and Merlano houses and at times single candidates as the case of San Onofre's Mayor candidate – through violence, electoral fraud, and buying of votes. In the process warlords imposed congressional and presidential candidates in 2002, governor, mayors, departmental deputies and town councillors in 2003. They also backed the creation and strengthening of new political parties, a move that significantly increased the success of the houses in the 2006 elections. In terms of state capture, this scheme permitted MMHB's warlords to determine appointments and divert public finances. As for violence, paramilitary terror articulated the establishment, in the sense that the needs of maintaining the status quo of rural land and of political houses became a shared goal (Romero, 2004, 2005), and was also the instrument for exclusion of the lower strata. Social and political control in Sucre was mainly achieved through mass violence against the agrarian unions, political competitors of and opponents to the dominant houses.

In NDS the electoral strategy corresponded to Losada's *predominance within restricted competition* type, in which warlords supported a wider spectrum of candidates and were relatively tolerant vis-à-vis competitors as long as they all delivered within the framework of their

interests, namely the protection of the paramilitary economy. There were fewer politicians that allied with the AUC in these departments as well as fewer cases of threats over elections or fraud, if compared to the departments of the hegemonic model. It is noteworthy that all these departments exhibit wider ranges of political actors in permanent competition, a feature that could have made political alliances more complex and difficult to establish than in the Caribbean region where politics have been more compact and far less competitive. There is no evidence of paramilitaries supporting politicians that reached Congress or a strong influence in appointments at the departmental and municipal levels. In terms of state capture, although warlords managed to influence a few appointments and get a great share of public contracting, the most penetrated areas of the state were the judiciary, public security agencies and secret service, which is coherent with the needs of impunity and immunity from investigation and prosecution. As discussed, Cúcuta Mayor and a candidate to NDS's Governor's Office were also central to the protection system and constituted nodes in the criminal networks of paramilitaries. They did not seem to have any political value. NDS exhibited a somewhat different model concerning violence, which was intimately linked to the coca/cocaine economic processes and the needs of controlling poorly regulated activities and other pre-existing illegal operations. In this context, and although the AUC significantly hit the social movement and Left wing politicians, the terror campaigns were more aimed at combining the control and regulation of the war economy, and the protection of a far more diffuse and heterogeneous society. Paramilitary violence neither articulated the establishment nor did it necessarily exclude the poorest sectors. This variation vis-à-vis Sucre is largely explained by the predominance of the economic rationale of the AUC in NDS's massive illegal economic platform and therefore the need of articulating the lower strata to the paramilitary economic networks.

The fourth question relates to the *purpose* of parapolitics. There were two levels of purposes; those of politicians and those of warlords, who counter intuitively, did not share identical goals and interests. On the side of politicians the purposes went from point alliances with paramilitaries for the violent control of electoral results, to less instrumental engagements that entailed the foundation and reproduction of authoritarian political regimes at the subnational level. In the case of paramilitaries I found that the logic of the market complexly interacted with the logic of politics in the case of parapolitics. But insofar as parapolitics was subnationally specific, I not only found distinct blending of economic and political rationales in each studied case but also the prevalence of one over the other, depending on the subnational historical configuration. In Sucre the findings respond to the purposes of a lenient demobilization framework especially made for AUC warlords in Congress and the strengthening of

## LIMITATIONS

a subnational authoritarian regime in defence of the status quo of the landholding structure and of political houses. In NDS I found that the dominant purpose was the safeguard of a hyper-criminalized economy and in this vein parapolitics took place in a more instrumental sphere, namely protecting elections and maximizing votes.

## LIMITATIONS

I consider the value of this PhD thesis, beyond its extraordinary learning exercise, is its contribution to the expansion of the current body of knowledge on parapolitics. However, this line of enquiry has two main limitations that should by all means be tackled and overcome by future examinations on the subject. The first one is methodological and relates to the scope for generalization. Although I believe that in my case assuming a small-N research in order to gain richness of in-depth comparative analysis was absolutely worth the risk, it still consider the questions addressed and main analytical keys for building causal paths require further analytical and empirical testing, not only in similar cases to those of Sucre and NDS, but in cases of Losada's type of *apparent electoral indifference*, and of parapolitics-free territories.

If my research questions and causal paths stand up to further testing, this thesis will have contributed to the possibility of expanding its scope by “building blocks”, namely progressively incorporating cases in order to have a larger-N study, with a wider and more comprehensive map of parapolitics, thus having enough external validity.

The second limitation is related to the restricted access to fine grained data and primary sources. As observed, mass media and criminal investigation have provided an impressive amount of evidence that permitted tracing the process of criminalization of politics and the politicization of criminals substantiated in many a case, including that of Sucre. That is not the case of NDS. The best primary source for this kind of research is semi-structured interviews. I was very lucky to find so many enthusiastic people willing to talk about parapolitics in Sucre, in a quasi-cathartic exercise. In NDS it was close to impossible. Not only there were far less judicial and mass media information. I found the department was still a landscape of fear by the time of my visit, and exploring for further information entailed a security issue for both interviewees and the researcher. Filling the gaps on NDS was very difficult, and as seen in the comparative analysis there is far less certainty in my NDS conclusions – what evidence permitted – than in those on Sucre.

I also found institutional barriers for collecting further information insofar as by the time I undertook my fieldwork, the national government had banned interviewing AUC commanders in jail. Insofar as talking to warlords was central I overcame many restrictions and managed to make in an almost clandestine fashion a couple of enlightening and rich interviews – the one with Ramón\* lasted 8 hours!

## CHALLENGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In the case of this research, the challenges and recommendations go beyond the academic sphere and are centred in the policy and decision-making realms. I could not recommend enough to the National Government to take into account the risks pointed below. It is noteworthy underlining the current peace talks that are taking place between the Santos administration and FARC in Cuba, which have unprecedentedly advanced in the context of the government's strategic agenda related to a new model of rural development, the participation of ex-combatants in politics, the rights of victims, and strategies for overcoming the coca and cocaine economies. According to experts, the odds of reaching a peace agreement with FARC, with ELN following suit, are very high. For the very first time after almost fifty years Colombia would reach a final post conflict situation. In this context, Colombia demands not only investing huge amounts of economic resources but also establishing strong guarantees for reincorporating combatants into civilian and productive life, and political participation. Democratizing and modernizing reforms are more urgent than ever before: the success of an eventual FARC and ELN demobilization significantly depends upon these.

The historically contentious issues of land; political competition; justice and victims' right to reparation; and drug traffic are on the table, and the structural factors that facilitated the processes of parapolitics are very much alive. As mentioned in the case of Sucre, the matter of landholding has not been overcome. On the one hand, an emerging wave of unknown entrepreneurs are buying peasant land plots far below market price in Montes de María. On the other hand, a situation also observed in NDS, there are difficulties for land restitution processes. According to the Land Restitution Unit, displaced peasants have claimed six million hectares of dispossessed land, In August 2013, the GAO indicated it was investigating 56 homicide cases of land restitution leaders and claimants committed by the so-called "anti-restitution armies" over the last decade, a trend that goes against the serious and committed efforts of the Santos administration in this regard.

The widening of the political participation spectrum is also at stake. Colombia is deeply polarized vis-à-vis this issue. An important share of the public opinion is reactive to have ex-guerrilla members running for Congress, mayoralties and governor's offices after having committed endless crimes against humanity and incurred in drug traffic activities. It is noteworthy that this opinion was not shared when the AUC demobilized under the JPL mainly because the *Autodefensas* were not granted the right of political participation.

The aforementioned UP extermination experience is recent. The party has just recovered its legal representation and it is very likely to become the political platform of demobilized FARC members. However, all conditions for a new wave of violence against this type of politics are met: resilient corrupted political elites obsessed with maintaining the status quo and privileges and available violent muscle willing to contribute to the annihilation of these political newcomers.

In a wider social perspective, the criminal political project severely undermined collective action. Society was further impoverished and deconstructed by paramilitary terror. Father Rafael Castillo discussed the social impact in Sucre, but his words can perfectly fit NDS or any other case: "on the one hand, the society has been trapped by fear and with feelings of betrayal and abandonment from the state. People were unable to collectively react against terror. On the other hand, criminal values deeply permeated society and it is possible to stress that to a significant extent the Sucreño society shares a collective "paramilitary ethos"; there is a generalized obsession with violence. How to transform the imaginaries? Is it possible for *Sucreño* society to conceive the world otherwise?" (Castillo, 2009)

I pointed out that the judicial system, backed by a national and international mobilized public opinion, has been fiercely engaged in uncovering the linkages between politicians and paramilitaries, demonstrating that a quantum of institutional counter-weight and a modern *de jure* performance can unveil an extremely sophisticated and harmful criminal apparatus. However the overall balance of the benefits obtained by paramilitaries constitutes the triumph of criminals over justice. The JPL ended up legitimating the paramilitary strategy and political power, rehabilitating a great share of warlords' wealth and land holdings, and legalizing to a significant extent committed crimes at the expense of truth, reparation and conciliation.

Moreover, the elimination of political status as a *sine qua non* condition for negotiating peace agreements not only benefited the *Autodefensas* but also left the door open for any criminal organization seeking to gain advantages in the future. Paramilitarism is not over yet.

## CONCLUSIONS

On the side of politicians, the situation has been less favourable insofar as they face longer convictions than those of paramilitaries that accepted the JPL jurisdiction. In this sense the spirit of the law failed to embrace the magnitude of the phenomenon by leaving politicians at the margin; the fact that none of them has collaborated by admitting the existence of alliances and providing information makes this possibility even more elusive. Nevertheless, as discussed, parapoliticians have managed to maintain power by launching relatives or close friends as political frontmen, and the strategies have been successful in the sense they have kept congressional seats and office.

In the aftermath of the AUC demobilization process, the inertia of drug trafficking proved so strong that it rapidly facilitated the emergence of a new generation of paramilitary gangs. Although rearmament tends to be a common feature in post-disarmament situations, the rise of a new generation of paramilitarism under the shelter of a powerful illegal economy seems very unlikely to be a temporary phenomenon. The AUC ended its demobilization in 2006 and in 2013 these gangs are still around. The paramilitary recycling through re-emerging structures have further armoured the illegal economies. The coca and cocaine economies are still strong in many regions – backed indeed by FARC guerrilla – and other criminal opportunities are still available. The more recent is that of illegal mining, which is rapidly spreading throughout the Colombian territory.

Although these re-emerging paramilitary structures have not been involved in politics, as long as organized crime exists and subnational authoritarian regimes prove resilient to democratizing trends, the politicians' needs of political survival will keep on meeting the criminals' needs of political representation. Although it is too soon to jump into definite predictions, it would not be misconceived to foresee the history repeating itself. All the conditions are met. It might be just a matter of time and, of course, a learning process.

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CHAPTER 1 — THE ENGINEERING OF PARAPOLITICS

LIST OF PARAPOLITICIANS INVESTIGATED, PROSECUTED AND CONVICTED BY THE COLOMBIAN JUDICIAL SYSTEM (2005-2013)

Department	Name	Political Party	Jurisdiction	Judicial Status
Amazonas	Manuel Antonio Carebilla	National Progressive Movement	SCJ	Preliminary Stage
Amazonas	Victor Hugo Moreno	Liberal Party	SCJ	Preliminary Stage
Antioquia	Jorge Ignacio Morales	Liberal Party	SCJ	Preliminary Stage
Antioquia	Mauricio Parody	Liberal Party	AGO	Preliminary Stage
Antioquia	Pompilio Avendaño	Liberal Party	SCJ	Acquitted
Antioquia	Cesar Pérez	Radical Change	AGO	Trial in process
Antioquia	Estanislao Ortiz	Radical Change	AGO	Trial in process
Antioquia	César Augusto Andrade	Radical Change	AGO	Convicted
Antioquia	Jesús Doval	Radical Change	AGO	Convicted
Antioquia	Manuel Darío Avila	Radical Change	AGO	Convicted
Antioquia	Rocío Arias	Civic and Popular Convergence	AGO	Convicted
Antioquia	William Velez Mesa	U Party	SCJ	Preliminary Stage
Antioquia	Antonio Valencia	Wings – Colombia Team	SCJ	Convicted
Antioquia	Carlos Arturo Clavijo	Civic and Popular Convergence	AGO	Convicted
Antioquia	Ernesto Garcés Soto	Conservative Party	AGO	Case closed
Antioquia	Guillermo Gaviria Zapata	Liberal Party	SCJ	Preliminary Stage
Antioquia	Humberto de Jesús Builes	Radical Change	AGO	Convicted
Antioquia	Jorge Enrique Velez	Radical Change	SCJ	Preliminary Stage
Antioquia	Manuel Ramiro Velásquez	Conservative Party	SCJ	Preliminary Stage
Antioquia	Mario Uribe Escobar	Democratic Colombia	AGO	Convicted
Antioquia	Oscar Suarez Mira	Wings – Colombia Team	SCJ	Trial in process
Antioquia	Rubén Darío Quintero	Radical Change	AGO	Convicted

(Continued)

Department	Name	Political Party	Jurisdiction	Judicial Status
Antioquia	Gabriel Zapata	Conservative Party	SCJ	Writ of prohibition
Antioquia	Jhon Jairo Roldán Aven- daño	Liberal Party	SCJ	Preliminary Stage
Antioquia	José Ignacio Mesa	Radical Change	SCJ	Preliminary Stage
Antioquia	Luis Alfredo Ramos	Wings – Colombia Team	SCJ	Preliminary Stage
Antioquia	William Ortega	Radical Change	SCJ	Preliminary Stage
Antioquia	Olga suárez	Conservative Party	SCJ	Preliminary Stage
Antioquia	César Pérez García	Conservative Party	SCJ	Trial in process
Atlántico	Álvaro Antonio Ashton	Liberal Party	SCJ	Preliminary Stage
Atlántico	Armando Benedetti	U Party	SCJ	Preliminary Stage
Atlántico	David Char	Radical Change	SCJ	Preliminary Stage
Atlántico	Dieb Maloof	Colombia Alive	AGO	Preliminary Stage
Atlántico	Vicente Blel	Colombia Alive	AGO	Convicted
Atlántico	Jorge Castro	Colombia Alive	SCJ	Convicted
Atlántico	Jorge Gerlein	National Progressive Movement	SCJ	Preliminary Stage
Atlántico	Alonso Acosta	Conservative Party	SCJ	Preliminary Stage
Atlántico	Tarquino Pacheco	Radical Change	SCJ	Preliminary Stage
Atlántico	Mario Enrique Varón	Radical Change	SCJ	Preliminary Stage
Atlántico	Eduardo Crissien	U Party	SCJ	Preliminary Stage
Atlántico	Jaime Cervantes	Radical Change	SCJ	Preliminary Stage
Atlántico	José Name	Radical Change	SCJ	Preliminary Stage
Atlántico	Luis Eduardo Díaz-Granados	Radical Change	SCJ	Preliminary Stage
Bolívar	Fernando Tafur	Liberal Opening	SCJ	Preliminary Stage
Bolívar	Héctor Julio Alfonso López	Liberal Opening	AGO	Investigation in Process
Bolívar	Miguel Angel Rangel	U Party	AGO	Convicted
Bolívar	Daira Galvis	Radical Change	SCJ	Preliminary Stage
Bolívar	Jesús Puello	Liberal Opening	SCJ	Preliminary Stage

*(Continued)*

Department	Name	Political Party	Jurisdiction	Judicial Status
Bolívar	José María Imbett	Conservative Party	SCJ	Convicted
Bolívar	Pepe Gnecco	Liberal Party	AGO	Case closed
Bolívar	William Montes	Conservative Party	AGO	Convicted
Bolívar	Javier Cáceres	Radical Change	SCJ	Convicted
Bolívar	Lidio García Turbay	Liberal Party	SCJ	Preliminary Stage
Bolívar	Piedad Zuccardi	U Party	AGO	Preliminary Stage
Boyacá	Ciro Ramírez	Conservative Party	AGO	Convicted
Boyacá	Humphrey Roa	Conservative Party	SCJ	Preliminary Stage
Caldas	Mauricio Lizcano	U Party	SCJ	Preliminary Stage
Caldas	Emilio Enrique Angel	Liberal Party	AGO	Convicted
Caldas	Dixon Tapasco	Liberal Party	AGO	Convicted
Caldas	Jairo Alberto Llanos	Liberal Party	SCJ	Convicted
Caldas	Juan Pablo Sánchez	Liberal Party	SCJ	Convicted
Caldas	Adriana Gutiérrez	U Party	AGO	Case closed
Caldas	Carlos Clavijo	Civic and Popular Convergence	AGO	Convicted
Caldas	Víctor Renán Barco	Liberal Party	SCJ	Preliminary Stage
Caldas	Jaime Zuloaga	U Party	SCJ	Preliminary Stage
Caquetá	Luis Fernando Almario	Regional Integration Movement	AGO	Preliminary Stage
Caquetá	Alvaro Pacheco	Liberal Party	SCJ	Preliminary Stage
Casanare	Javier Enrique Vargas	Radical Change	SCJ	Preliminary Stage
Casanare	Oscar Wilches	Radical Change	AGO	Investigation in process
Cauca	Gloria Montilla	Liberal Party	SCJ	Preliminary Stage
Cauca	Luis Fernando Velasco	Liberal Party	SCJ	Acquitted
Cesar	Alvaro Morón	Wings – Colombia Team	AGO	Convicted
Cesar	Jorge Enrique Ramírez	Liberal Party	AGO	Convicted
Cesar	Miguel Ángel Duran	Regional Integration Movement	SCJ	Convicted
Cesar	Alvaro Araujo	Wings – Colombia Team	AGO	Convicted
Cesar	Mauricio Pimiento	U Party	SCJ	Convicted
Cesar	Juan Manuel Campo	Conservative Party	SCJ	Preliminary Stage
Cesar	Jaime Ezpeleta	Liberal Party	SCJ	Preliminary Stage

*(Continued)*

Department	Name	Political Party	Jurisdiction	Judicial Status
Cesar	Carmen Gutiérrez	U Party	SCJ	Preliminary Stage
Cesar	Alfonso Mattos	Conservative Party	SCJ	Preliminary Stage
Cesar	Pedro Muvdi	Liberal Party	SCJ	Preliminary Stage
Cesar	Alfredo Ape	Conservative Party	SCJ	Preliminary Stage
Chocó	Odín Sánchez	U Party	SCJ	Convicted
Chocó	Edgar Ulises Torres	Radical Change	SCJ	Convicted
Chocó	Carlos Escobar	Liberal Party	SCJ	Preliminary Stage
Chocó	Cristóbal Rufino Córdoba	Democratic Colombia	SCJ	Preliminary Stage
Córdoba	José de los Santos Negrete	Conservative Party	AGO	Acquitted
Córdoba	Remberto Montes	Liberal Party	AGO	Investigation in Process
Córdoba	Luis José Alvarez	Liberal Party	AGO	Case Closed
Córdoba	Eleonora Pineda	Popular United Movement	AGO	Convicted
Córdoba	Freddy Sánchez	Liberal Party	SCJ	Convicted
Córdoba	Mussa Besaile	Liberal Party	SCJ	Preliminary Stage
Córdoba	Arleth Casado	Liberal Party	SCJ	Preliminary Stage
Córdoba	Bernardo Elías	U Party	SCJ	Preliminary Stage
Córdoba	Juan Manuel López	Liberal Party	SCJ	Convicted
Córdoba	Julio Manzur	Conservative Party	SCJ	Preliminary Stage
Córdoba	Luis Carlos Ordosgoitia	Conservative Party	AGO	Acquitted
Córdoba	Salomón Nader	Liberal Party	SCJ	Trial in process
Córdoba	Reginaldo Montes	Radical Change	SCJ	Convicted
Córdoba	Rodrigo Burgos	Conservative Party	AGO	Convicted
Córdoba	Zulema Jattin	U Party	AGO	Investigation in Process
Córdoba	Miguel de la Espriella	Democratic Colombia	AGO	Trial in process
Córdoba	Matín Emilio Morales	U Party	SCJ	Preliminary Stage
Córdoba	Nora García	Conservative Party	SCJ	Preliminary Stage
Guainia	Sandra Aravella	Radical Change	SCJ	Revoked sentence
Guajira	Miguel Pinedo	Radical Change	AGO	Convicted
Guajira	Bladimiro Cuello	Conservative Party	SCJ	Preliminary Stage

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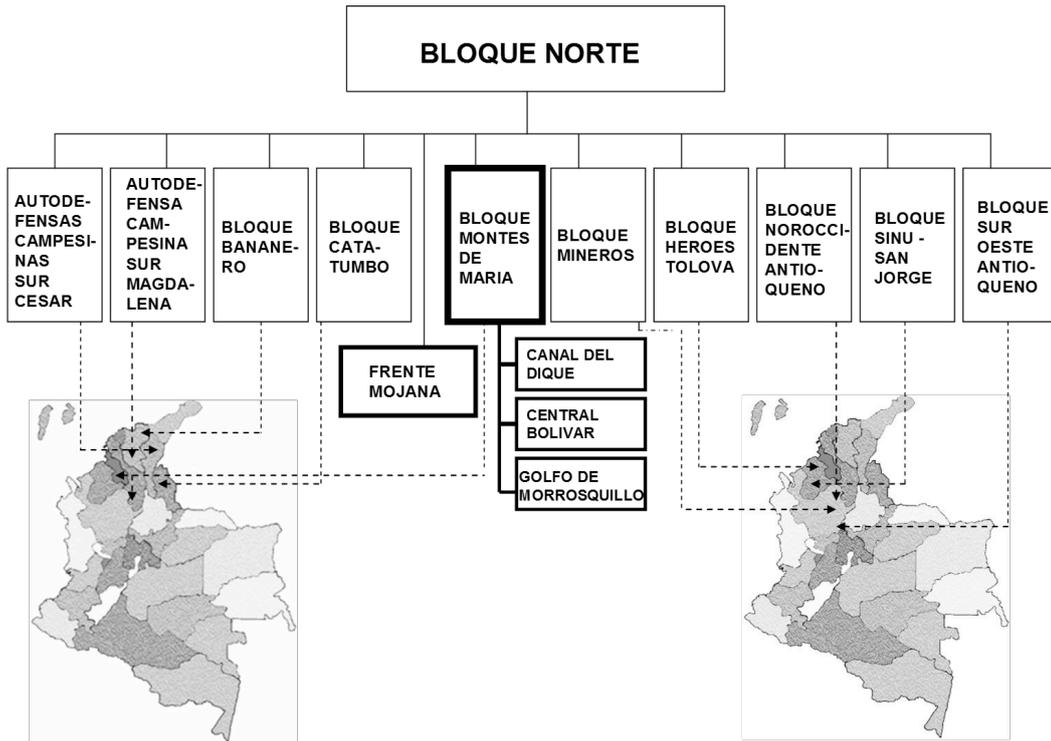
Department	Name	Political Party	Jurisdiction	Judicial Status
Huila	Héctor Javier Osorio Botello	New Huila – Liberalism Movement	SCJ	Preliminary Stage
Magdalena	Rodrigo Roncallo	Liberal Opening	AGO	Preliminary Stage
Magdalena	Jorge Luis Caballero	Liberal Opening	SCJ	Convicted
Magdalena	Karely Lara	Radical Change	SCJ	Convicted
Magdalena	Alonso de Jesús Ramírez	Moral	AGO	Trial in process
Magdalena	Afonso Campo Escobar	Conservative Party	SCJ	Convicted
Magdalena	Luis Fernando Vanegas	Liberal Opening	AGO	Preliminary Stage
Magdalena	José Gamarra	Radical Change	SCJ	Investigation in Process
Magdalena	Eduardo Diazgranados	U Party	SCJ	Preliminary Stage
Magdalena	Fuad Rapag	U Party	SCJ	Trial in process
Magdalena	Enrique Caballero	Liberal Party	SCJ	Convicted
Magdalena	Luis Eduardo Vives	Citizen Convergence	SCJ	Convicted
Magdalena	Joaquin José Pérez	Liberal Party	SCJ	Preliminary Stage
Magdalena	Roberto Herrera	Conservative Party	SCJ	Preliminary Stage
Meta	Fabiola Olaya	Conservative Party	SCJ	Preliminary Stage
Meta	Luis Carlos Torres	Radical Change	AGO	Preliminary Stage
Nariño	Myriam Paredes	Conservative Party	SCJ	Writ of prohibition
Nariño	Eduardo Maya	Conservative Party	SCJ	Preliminary Stage
Nariño	Orlando Guerra	Conservative Party	SCJ	Preliminary Stage
N de Santander	Carlos Barriga	Conservative Party	SCJ	Preliminary Stage
N de Santander	Ricardo Elcure	Democratic Colombia	SCJ	Convicted
N de Santander	Juan Manuel Corzo	Conservative Party	SCJ	Preliminary Stage
N de Santander	Manuel Guillermo Mora	U Party	SCJ	Preliminary Stage
Putumayo	Guillermo Rivera	Liberal Party	AGO	Writ of prohibition
Risaralda	Habib Merheg	Colombia Alive	AGO	Preliminary Stage
Santander	José Manuel Herrera	Citizen Convergence	SCJ	Investigation in Process
Santander	Alfonso Riaño	Citizen Convergence	SCJ	Convicted
Santander	Carlos Higuera	Citizen Convergence	SCJ	Investigation in Process

*(Continued)*

Department	Name	Political Party	Jurisdiction	Judicial Status
Santander	Iván Díaz	Conservative Party	SCJ	Convicted
Santander	Luis Alberto Gil	Citizen Convergence	AGO	Convicted
Santander	Marco Alirio Cortes	U Party	SCJ	Investigation in Process
Santander	Oscar Reyes	Citizen Convergence	SCJ	Convicted
Santander	Rafael Castillo Sanchez	Citizen Convergence	AGO	Investigation in Process
Santander	José Eristides Andrade	Liberal Party	SCJ	Trial in process
Santander	Nelson Naranjo	Citizen Convergence	SCJ	Convicted
Sucre	José María Conde	Democratic Colombia	SCJ	Convicted
Sucre	Erick Morris	Democratic Colombia	SCJ	Convicted
Sucre	Jairo Fernando Quessep	Social Action Party	SCJ	Acquitted
Sucre	Antonio Guerra de la Espriella	Radical Change	AGO	Case Closed
Sucre	Muriel Benito Rebollo	Conservative Party	AGO	Convicted
Sucre	Jorge Luis Feris	Liberal Party	AGO	Convicted
Sucre	Alvaro García	Democratic Colombia	SCJ	Convicted
Sucre	Jairo Merlano	U Party	AGO	Convicted
Sucre	Eduardo Merlano	U Party	SCJ	Preliminary Stage
Sucre	Jorge Visbal	U Party	AGO	Preliminary Stage
Tolima	Emilio Martínez	Liberal Party	SCJ	Investigation in Process
Tolima	Pedro Pablo Trujillo	Conservative Party	SCJ	Writ of prohibition
Tolima	Javier Ramiro Devia	Conservative Party	AGO	Writ of prohibition
Tolima	Gonzálo García	Conservative Party	SCJ	Convicted
Tolima	Jaime Yepes	U Party	SCJ	Preliminary Stage
Tolima	Pompilio Avendaño	Liberal Party	SCJ	Acquitted
Tolima	Carlos García	U Party	SCJ	Acquitted
Tolima	Luis Humberto Gomez Gallo	Conservative Party	AGO	Convicted
Tolima	Mauricio Jaramillo	Liberal Party	SCJ	Preliminary Stage
Valle	Carlos Herney Abadía	Liberal Party	SCJ	Convicted
Valle	Luis Carlos Restrepo	U Party	SCJ	Preliminary Stage
Valle	Dilian Francisca Toro	U Party	SCJ	Preliminary Stage
Valle	Juan Carlos Martinez	Citizen Convergence	SCJ	Convicted

## CHAPTER 4 — SUCRE CAPTURE

### NORTHERN BLOC STRUCTURE



Mapped by the author.

### SUCRE'S AUC COMMANDERSHIP LINE

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### TRANSCRIPTS FROM THE CONVERSATIONS RECORDED IN 'JORGE 40' LAPTOP

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<sup>1</sup>“Las pruebas de la parapólitica en Sucre”, in *Semana*, November 11<sup>th</sup> 2006

‘Gonzalo’, ‘Don Antonio’; departmental deputies Angel Villarreal, Johnny Villa, Nelson Stamp and Walberto Estrada, and Zenú indigenous leaders Pedro Pestaña and Antonio Martínez<sup>2</sup>; Willer Cobo and Conservative candidate to the House of Representatives Antonio Martínez discuss the distribution of electoral support, the taxing of public contracting, and again, the nature of the political project.

On the political project:

*Willer Cobo*: “we need to unite in order to guarantee governance in Sucre and promote social work [...] we have to promote a single candidate who runs for departmental governor and create a political structure in every single municipality depending on the governor’s political movement”

*Gonzalo*: “we need to consolidate a political team and have a paramilitary leader in charge; one that hasn’t demobilized yet [...] working in a different line to that of ‘Cadena’ [...] we cannot afford to lose the political work we’ve done here. We are creating a political and social front in Sucre for peace time [...] no guns but bearing in mind that the Northern Bloc still has a threatening muscle in case we need it [...] the aim is to crystallize all the electoral work we’ve done and the success in influencing the Legislative [...] a centre-right position; we’re no enemies of the Left but of all those subversives that hide behind the Left flags [...] basing their discourse in this Marxist-Communist thing [...] we’ll keep on fighting those who use that discourse to gain people’s hearts and then deceive them”

*Antonio Martínez*: “We need to have the best possible relations with the Legislative as well as targeting the Executive in the middle run [...] if we do that we’ll have the ground floor of our building; that will be our base, so let’s put our first own governor.”

On the distribution of electoral support:

‘*Gonzalo*’ [referring to the need of negotiating with Alvaro García]: “I will speak to ‘El Gordo’ [‘the Fat’, García’s nickname] and convince him. He is still looking for a party to launch his campaign”

‘*Willer Cobo*’: “Alvaro García will give some money here. With that money we can finance House of Representatives”.

‘*Gonzalo*’: “So when I start the [campaign] process you all go with Alvaro [García], but you can’t negotiate on your own, you have to wait until we say something because maybe we could change our minds. We can decide supporting someone else. We still don’t know. If you go with García it’s with our organization’s support. If 70% of the Senate voting goes to Alvaro García then we’ll negotiate with García”.

‘*Fredy*’: “Don Gonzalo, when you talk to Alvaro García let him know that we’ll give him 20,000, 15,000, 30,000 votes, whatever; just a reference point to start a negotiation [...] how much are these 20,000, 30,000 votes worth? Let’s say \$1.000 million [US\$830,000], 500, 800... that’s something you’ll have to work on...”

‘*Gonzalo*’: “the thing with Muriel [Benito] is very complicated right now and I don’t think people will follow her; I’m really worried about it because my people [Merlano] are with her...[...] We had no choice but thinking about the future: it was [Jorge] Merlano or Muriel or [Alvaro] García. García gave us the subsidized health system; he gave us \$3.200 million [US\$2.6 million] from the department [...] Merlano has contributed with say \$10,000 or \$15.000 million [US\$8.3 or US\$12.5 million], and this is a problem because Muriel spoke with him and is aspiring to the House of Representatives again [...] Antonio Martínez, who’s here with us today, is our candidate for the House of Representatives. Not Muriel. We know him and when he was Los Palmitos mayor he helped us a lot”.

[...]

‘*Fredy*’: “Excellent! Coveñas and Tolviejo go with [Eric] Morris [candidate to House of Representatives]”

‘*Gonzalo*’: “Well, let’s continue...San Antonio de Palmito goes with Morris as well...”

‘*Fredy*’: “Tolviejo and Sucre are hundred per cent with Morris [...] A quick calculation gives us something like 10,000 votes for Morris [...] this is important because he’ll get to know better his organization’s brothers”

‘*Gonzalo*’: “with at least 4,000 votes in Tolviejo”

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<sup>2</sup>Pedro Pestaña was the manager of *Manexca*, an indigenous co-operative that provided subsidized health system services in the department. Pestaña and Martínez were later prosecuted and convicted under the Zenú special judicial jurisdiction for deviating *Manexca*’s resources to the AUC.

On public contracting:

*Gonzalo*: “I had a meeting with commander ‘Jorge 40’ last week and we agreed on the need to collect 10 percent of all the departmental contracting for maintaining our military and political structure [...] I mean, ‘Cadena’ was collecting almost 50 percent, so I guess we are making a huge difference here [...] This is the way we are working now in other departments and to tell the truth we are all working in a quite pleasant way”

The recording also accounts for the politicians’ loyalty to the AUC:

*Antonio Martínez*: “I’ve had the organization’s support and I can never forget that and that’s why I owe loyalty and gratitude to the organization. So today I say I’m grateful as a person, as a politician”.

*Gonzalo*: Nelson Stanp, a very good friend of missing commander ‘Cadena’, is here with us today. He has done a very important work for the organization. I think that ‘doctor’ Stanp is one of the closest departmental deputies to the organization”

*Nelson Stanp*: “Because of commander Cadena’s loyalty I’m one of your closest men. I was one of the first people to have met him in San Onofre. I want to say I’m a loyal person and that during the time I was with ‘Cadena’ I considered myself one of his closest men [...] Now you can expect from me all the loyalty in the world and I’ll do whatever it takes for you”

*Angel Villarreal*: “I think this is a great opportunity for Sucre and I’d like to say we fully agree on what you want to do for our department...”

CHAPTER 4 — SUCRE CAPTURE

SUCREÑO POLITICIANS PROSECUTED/CONVICTED FOR PARAPOLITICS

NAME	POLITICAL CV	JUDICIAL STATUS	EVIDENCE
ALVARO GARCIA	Town Councillor, Mayor, Provincial Deputy, Representative, Senator	Sentenced to 40 years of prison	Paramilitary formation Master mind of Macayepo Massacre Master mind of electoral witness Georgina Narvaez's assassination Embezzlement (Sucre municipality embankment contract) Electoral fraud
SALVADOR ARANA	Governor	Sentenced to 40 years of prison	Paramilitary formation Master mind of El Roble Mayor Eudaldo Diaz's assassination Master mind of Provincial Attorney Yolanda Paternina's assassination
JORGE ANAYA	Representative, Governor	Sentenced to 90 months of prison	Paramilitary formation
ERIC MORRIS	Governor, Representative	Sentenced to 6 years of prison	Paramilitary formation Embezzlement (Sucre municipality embankment contract)
JAIRO MERLANO	Mayor, Senator	Acquitted. Sentence appealed	Collusion Electoral fraud
MURIEL BENITO	Representative	Sentenced to 6 years of prison	Collusion Electoral fraud
JAIRO FERNÁNDEZ	Representative	Acquitted	Collusion
JOSE CONDE	Representative (alternate)	Preliminary stage	Homicide
ANTONIO GUERRA	Senator	Preliminary stage	Collusion
JORGE VISBAL	Senator	Preliminary stage	Collusion
JASSIK FARAK	Provincial Assembly Deputy	Convicted 6-8 years of prison	Paramilitary formation
ANGEL VILLARREAL	Provincial Assembly Deputy	Convicted 6-8 years of prison	Paramilitary formation
NELSON STANP	Provincial Assembly Deputy	Convicted 6-8 years of prison	Paramilitary formation
JOHNNY VILLA	Provincial Assembly Deputy	Convicted 6-8 years of prison	Paramilitary formation
WALBERTO ESTRADA	Provincial Assembly Deputy	Convicted 6-8 years of prison	Paramilitary formation
MIGUEL CARRASCAL	Tolúvejo Mayor	Convicted 6-8 years of prison	Collusion - Embezzlement
GREYSI DIAZ	San Antonio del Palmito Mayor	Convicted 6-8 years of prison	Collusion - Embezzlement
MANUEL DAVID RUIZ	Coloso Mayor	Convicted 6-8 years of prison	Collusion - Embezzlement
JORGE BLANCO	San Onofre Mayor	Convicted 6-8 years of prison	Collusion - Embezzlement
SABAS BAL SEIRO	San Onofre Mayor	Convicted 6-8 years of prison	Collusion - Embezzlement
LUIS SALAIMAN	San Onofre Mayor	Convicted 6-8 years of prison	Collusion - Embezzlement
OLIVERIO MORENO	Sincé Mayor	Convicted 6-8 years of prison	Collusion - Embezzlement
EDWIN MUSSY	Ovejas Mayor	Convicted 6-8 years of prison	Collusion - Embezzlement
FREDDY VILLA	Galerías Mayor	Convicted 6-8 years of prison	Collusion - Embezzlement
JORGE OSPINA	Sincelejo Mayor	Convicted 6-8 years of prison	Collusion - Embezzlement
LICELOTH LOPEZ	Tolú Mayor	Convicted 6-8 years of prison	Collusion - Embezzlement
ALFREDO NAVAS	Tolú Mayor	Convicted 6-8 years of prison	Collusion - Embezzlement
MARIO CONTRERAS	Tolú Mayor	Convicted 6-8 years of prison	Collusion - Embezzlement
PEDRO PATRON	Coveñas Mayor	Convicted 6-8 years of prison	Collusion - Embezzlement
RAFAEL GARCIA	Coveñas Mayor	Convicted 6-8 years of prison	Collusion - Embezzlement
ABEL TOSCANO	Coveñas Town Councillor	Convicted 6-8 years of prison	Collusion - Embezzlement
BERTILIO OROZCO	Coveñas Town Councillor	Convicted 6-8 years of prison	Collusion - Embezzlement
ELADIO MIENTES	Coveñas Town Councillor	Convicted 6-8 years of prison	Collusion - Embezzlement
CARLOS OLIVERA	Coveñas Town Councillor	Convicted 6-8 years of prison	Collusion - Embezzlement
JOSÉ GONZÁLEZ	Sincelejo Town Councillor	Convicted 6-8 years of prison	Collusion - Embezzlement
MANUEL RIOS	Sincelejo Town Councillor	Convicted 6-8 years of prison	Collusion - Embezzlement
ANDRES ALVAREZ	Sincelejo Town Councillor	Convicted 6-8 years of prison	Collusion - Embezzlement

SUCREÑO PARAPOLITICIANS

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THE VICTIMS

*Detail of a “memory quilt” sewn by massacre victims (San Onofre)*

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*Mortal remains found in El Palmar rural estate (San Onofre)*

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*Sucreño Ghost Towns*

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## CHAPTER 5 — NDS GENERAL BACKGROUND

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### NORTE DE SANTANDER ORTHOGRAPHIC MAP

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NORTE DE SANTANDER SUBREGIONS

**Central Subregion**



Arboledas • Cucutilla •  
Gramalote • Lourdes •  
Salazar de Las Palmas •  
Santiago • Villa Caro

**Southwestern Subregion**



Cácota • Chitagá •  
Mutiscua • Pamplona •  
Pamplonita • Silos

**Southeastern Subregion**



Bochalema • Chinácota •  
Duranía • Herrán •  
Labateca • Ragonvalia •  
Toledo

**Western Subregion**



Abrego • Cáchira •  
Convención • El Carmen •  
La Esperanza • Hacari •  
La Playa • Ocaña •  
San Calixto • Teorama

**Northern Subregion**



Bucarasica •  
El Tarra •  
Sardinata •  
Tibú

**Eastern Subregion**



Cúcuta • El Zulia •  
Los Patios •  
Puerto Santander •  
San Cayetano •  
Villa del Rosario

Mapped by the author.

## LIST OF INTERVIEWS

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### NATIONAL

RAFAEL PARDO RUEDA, Liberal presidential candidate, Bogotá, November 3<sup>rd</sup> 2009

CLAUDIA LÓPEZ – Journalist and member of the electoral watchdog *Misión de Observación Electoral* -MOE (Electoral Observation Mission), Bogotá, March 26<sup>th</sup> 2010

### SUCRE

JORGE RESTREPO – Sucre University Lecturer and Director of the *Centro de Convivencia y Familia* -CECAR, Sincelejo, November 9<sup>th</sup> 2009

DABOBERTO VILLADIEGO – ANUC Leader – Sincelejo, November 9<sup>th</sup> 2009

UDALDO LARA – ANUC Leader – San Onofre, November 10<sup>th</sup> 2009

JUAN ALVAREZ, ANUC leader, San Onofre, November 10<sup>th</sup> 2009

EDUARDO PORRAS, Director of the Provincial Commission for Reparation and Reconciliation (*Comisión Nacional de Reparación y Reconciliación* -CNRR), Sincelejo, November 11<sup>th</sup> 2009

FREDY GARCIA – Montes de María Peace and Development Foundation, Sincelejo, November 11<sup>th</sup> 2009

LUIS ALBERTO HERNANDEZ – Director of transparency watchdog Nueva Sabana Foundation, Sincelejo, November 11<sup>th</sup> 2009

PABLO VASQUEZ- FUNDEPAZ – San Onofre, November 10<sup>th</sup> 2009

FATHER RAFAEL CASTILLO – Priest and Executive Director of the Montes de María Peace and Development Foundation, Macayepo, November 13<sup>th</sup> 2009

DAIRO (\*) – University Of Sucre's Student Leader, Sincelejo, November 11<sup>th</sup> 2009

MAGNOLIA (\*), Chengue massacre survivor, Ovejas, November 12<sup>th</sup> 2009

AMBROSIO (\*), Chengue massacre survivor, Ovejas, November 12<sup>th</sup> 2009

PAOLA (\*), San Onofre, November 10<sup>th</sup> 2009

DANIEL (\*), public official, Sincelejo, November 9<sup>th</sup> 2009

Alias RAMON (\*), AUC Commander, Bogotá: November 6<sup>th</sup> 2009

### NDS

Jairo Oviedo, PARCOMUN Executive Director, Cúcuta, December 3<sup>rd</sup> 2009

Víctor Bautista, ORDICOP Executive Director, Cúcuta, December 2<sup>nd</sup> 2009

Angel Romero, La Opinión newspaper journalist, Cúcuta, December 2<sup>nd</sup> 2009