

CHALLENGES TO STABILIZING PEACE

The final set of peace accords in Colombia, signed on November 24, 2016, present a comprehensive solution to addressing both the root causes and outcomes of more than a half-century of internal armed conflict. Arguably, they contain all of the technical, social, political, and economic mechanisms (or provisions for such mechanisms) required to build a durable, sustainable peace with a tailored approach to gender and ethnicity. Nonetheless, early implementation challenges – e.g., slow-to-launch transitional zones in which the FARC-EP guerrillas have gathered and begun to disarm and bitter opposition fighting within the halls of the Colombian Congress - have shown early on that the stabilization of peace will be an arduous and fraught process over the mid- to long-term.

This Spotlight analyzes four critical factors that threaten peace stabilization efforts within Colombia: coca production, land formalization, political participation, organized armed groups (OAGs), and the politicization of elements of the peace accord (or its entirety) ahead of the 2018 presidential elections. While neither the list of factors nor the attending analysis is exhaustive, the following document offers insight into 1) the interrelatedness of all of these domains both to one another and to the implementation of the accords, 2) the paradoxes that stymie advances in each of the domains, and 3) possible solutions to addressing some of the more persistent challenges.

FIVE FACTORS COMPLICATING PEACE STABILIZATION IN COLOMBIA

1. COCA



What the Peace Accords Say:

Point 4 (Illicit Drugs) of the accords creates the Comprehensive National Program for Substitution of Crops for Illicit Use (PNIS), responsible for participative planning designed to eliminate illegal crops, and to contribute to the structural transformations related to the Comprehensive Rural Reform (RRI). The accords position “voluntary and coordinated” participation of the coca growing communities as a fundamental tenet of the work of the PNIS, advocating for pre-arranged accords between the GoC and the communities before launching any coca eradication initiative in their territories.

Current Challenges:¹

Implementation of the ambitious GoC plan to eradicate 50,000 hectares of coca crops this year through forced eradication, in addition to the additional 50,000 hectares it is looking to remove through voluntary substitution projects, has been received as an affront by many rural coca farmers. They argue that forced eradication runs counter to what was promised in the accords, and have, in some locations, reacted violently to government attempts to implement these initiatives.

The Paradox:

Coca farmers tend to want rural development projects in place before they are willing to substitute their crops. However, the presence of coca crops often correlates with the presence of other dynamics that impede rural development projects.

2. LAND



What the Peace Accords Say:

Point 1 (Rural Reform) of the accords creates the Land Trust, which will be responsible for making available 3 million hectares of land to benefit rural inhabitants with no or insufficient lands. It is designed to target those regions most affected by the armed conflict, and to promote more democratic access to land. Additionally, through Development Programs with a Territorial Focus (PDET), the GoC also looks to formalize 7 million hectares of small- and mid-sized rural land holdings within the first ten years of peace accord implementation.

Current Challenges:²

The premise of initiatives such as formalizing land holdings is the following: by activating a legal land market and reducing uncertainty about tenure, illegal economies and land conflicts will also reduce proportionately. However, both coordination challenges among state land and agriculture agencies as well as large gaps between the legal premise and what rural farmers desire complicate the goals of the Rural Reform component of the peace accords.

The Paradox:

Newly formed land and agriculture agencies require the rural census data of the agencies that they replaced in order to advance in land inventory and titling processes – data that were neither digitalized nor systematized. The lack of collaboration that hampered the prior agencies now paralyzes the new agencies that were created specifically to resolve these issues.

3. POLITICAL PARTICIPATION



What the Peace Accords Say:

Point 2 (Political Participation) of the accords calls for the creation of a Comprehensive Security System for the Exercise of Politics, which contains the following elements: a normative institutional framework that protects the expression of political opposition, an early alerts system for violations of these norms, specialized protection for those who qualify, and evaluation and tracking of the efficacy of this System. Point 2 includes a specific section dedicated to delineating the security guarantees for social organization and movement leaders, as well as human rights defenders.

Current Challenges:³

A dramatic and internationally decried upswing in threats and assassinations of social leaders throughout Colombia seriously threatens the legitimacy of Point 2 of the peace accords. In the first three months of 2017, 20 social leaders or human rights defenders have been assassinated and threats have increased 68% over the same period last year. Two-thirds of these aggressions have been attributed to paramilitary groups, and the incidents have concentrated in the Andean corridor and in Bogotá.

The Paradox:

Those at the political margins who are most likely to address the needs and protections of their constituents are increasingly less likely to be able to effectively engage in the political activity that would help them achieve the positions of power that would be required to do so.

4. CRIMINAL ORGANIZATIONS



What the Peace Accords Say:

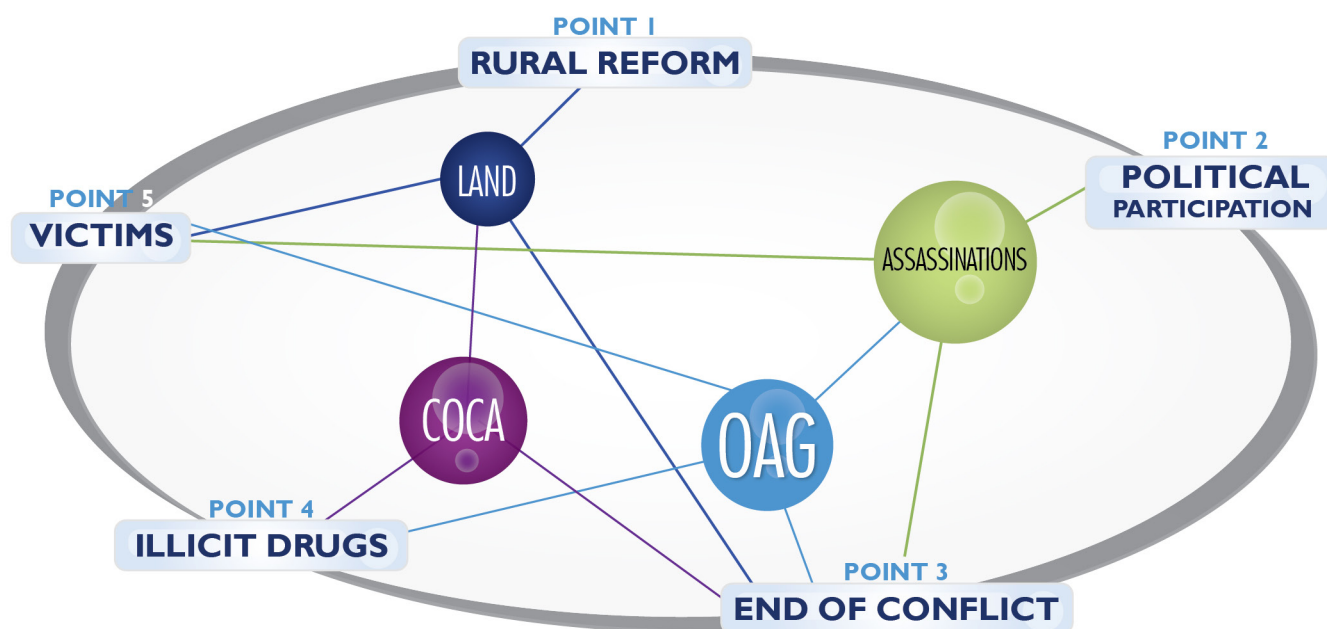
Point 5 (Victims) of the accords includes in the justice component the responsibilities of the Special Jurisdiction for Peace (JEP) the creation of a Unit for Investigation and Dismantling of Criminal Organizations. The purview of this unit encompasses all criminal organizations, including what are known as paramilitary successor organizations – or those still organized remnants of past demobilizations that have evolved into independent OAGs - along with their support networks. Dismantling criminal organizations is a fundamental tenet of the principle of Non-Repetition – itself a core element in the justice component of the peace accords.

Current Challenges:⁴

Certain regions of the country have had an increase in organized armed group (OAG) presence once the FARC-EP moved to the transitional zones. Some areas, such as parts of the Catatumbo Region, are seeing OAGs re-emerge after more than a decade of peace in the area. Massive displacements continue due to fighting between OAGs and the Colombian military, or between competing OAGs jostling for control over swathes of territory – generally for control over illicit supply chains.

The Paradox:

The convergence of a broad range of social, economic, and security factors has, in some areas of the country, resulted in an increase in armed violence affecting civilians that can be pegged to the implementation of specific elements of the peace accord.



Conclusion & Recommendations

The above diagram depicts the constellation of challenges to stabilizing peace and the range of domains of the peace accord upon which they have an effect. The challenges are located either closer or farther away from an element of the peace accord based on the strength of their relation to it. Social leader assassinations are a direct threat to stabilizing political participation. However, this phenomenon also counteracts the work of Point 5 (Victims) in that it violates the principle of Non-Repetition. These assassinations also work against Point 3 (End of Conflict). Land titling issues are directly tied to rural reform, but are also a core component of land restitution initiatives for repairing victims, and a source of ongoing conflict for OAGs battling over control of contested territories. Coca production ties obviously to the issue of illicit drugs, but also relates to land reform and ending the conflict – in the latter case, because it finances OAG operations. Finally, OAGs undermine ending the conflict and both perpetuate and are perpetuated by coca production, among other illicit activities. They also continue to produce new victims and fail to allow past victims assurances of non-repetition.

The paradoxes identified within the dynamics of each element suggest three areas in which policy makers and technical professionals need to focus in order to ensure a stable peace over the long term: first, inter-institutional, and inter-sectorial collaboration is of primordial importance. Where individual initiatives (e.g., forced eradication) fail, more collaborative undertakings (e.g., simultaneous eradication, substitution, titling, and infrastructure development) may find purchase. Additionally, agencies need to resolve their internal dynamics so that they are not their own worst enemy along the way. Second, those at the margins (geographically, politically) require immediate and heavy-handed protection measures both from emerging violence entrepreneurs and long-standing OAGs. Third, key agreements and compromises among opposition leaders need to be reached before the Presidential campaigns kick into high gear in ways that demonstrate a path of compromise that prioritizes the core principles of the peace accord: guaranteeing victims truth, justice, reparations, and non-repetition, and ending the armed conflict.