



PERCEPTIONS

THE ENTANGLEMENTS OF PEACE

Reflections on the long road to transformation in Colombia

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Colombia has a long history of war and peacebuilding. The 2016 Peace Agreement and its implementation have initiated some profound transformation processes but also created new conflicts and exacerbated existing ones.



Interestingly, our representative national survey on what peace is, shows high levels of consensus on respect, tranquility, and justice as the main elements of peace.



Success of peacebuilding strategies depends on the political will of the government in charge to pursue a peace agenda and built coalitions most of all with civil society international actors.

THE ENTANGLEMENTS OF PEACE

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The study of the »Entanglements of Peace« provides evidence for the relevance of the three pillars of peace – violence reduction, participation based on individual and collective human rights, and the constructive transformation of historical conflicts. It also shows that variation in peacebuilding at the local level is contingent upon the presence and combination of structural factors such as illegal economies, armed actors and the Indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities. The central argument is that peacebuilding should not and cannot be reduced to the Peace Agreement between the government and the FARC and its implementation. The Agreement provides a significant window of opportunity for making meaningful changes that may prevent a relapse into war.

From an integral peacebuilding perspective, the Colombian case study shows that the problem is not the existence of actors who oppose profound change, but rather that some of them seek to legitimise, generate or use violence for their political, economic and social ends. Identifying and finding ways of unpicking these entanglements in a constructive (not necessarily consensual) and non-violent way must be a fundamental step in the search for peace.

However, four trends can still be observed that are hazardous for the Peace Agreement and the broader peacebuilding process such as a) the active presence of violent non-state actors, b) the numerous ongoing murders and intimidation of and threats against human rights defenders, social leaders, local politicians and FARC ex-combatants, c) the persistence of structural inequality that was increased by the Covid-19 pandemic, d) a lack of political and social consensus in Colombian society and politics on how to forward peace beyond the process with the FARC. Overall, clear strategic priorities are lacking. As the relevant reforms are all long-term and profound, a minimum of consensus, prioritisation and a focus on marginalised communities will be necessary.

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1

THE LONG ROAD TO TRANSFORMATION IN COLOMBIA¹

Willy Brandt's inspiring statement »*Peace is not everything, but without peace everything is nothing*« postulated »peace« as a goal. Many other Sunday speeches and declarations in international and national politics have followed suit, in a thread running through time and space. What distinguishes them are the concepts of peace underlying them, as well as how they answer the question of peace may be achieved and maintained. The joint project *PEACEptions* conducted by the German Institute for Global and Area Studies (GIGA) and the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) uses a conceptual framework that makes it possible to capture and compare different conceptions of peace, ranging from the simple absence of war to fundamental socio-political transformations. On this basis, we present concrete peacebuilding proposals for a range of national and international actors (such as Germany, the European Union and the United Nations).

Our analysis starts with conflicts that have produced violence in a given context or may do so. Our underlying concept of peace is that of a »process of constructive conflict transformation«. It is based on three elements that are significant across historical and cultural contexts: (i) physical integrity, (ii) individual and collective human rights, and (iii) formal or informal institutions for conflict transformation. Methodologically, we first analysed the central conflicts (and their actors) at various levels in different contexts within a country. Secondly, we collected qualitative and quantitative data on the three pillars of peace, enabling us to identify challenges and opportunities for peacebuilding. Thirdly, we carried out a representative survey to collect the prevailing ideas on what peace means for the population. This three-fold analysis enables the development of a comprehensive approach to peacebuilding. It goes beyond the prevailing binary, linear and sequential conceptions (such as ending war, stabilisation, reform) and is also suitable for contexts in which conflicts are not yet or are no longer visible, which can be a problem for peacebuilding, as in authoritarian regimes with high levels of repression or in countries with violent conflicts in sub-regions.

Based on this analysis, we aim to identify the entanglements and interactions between various levels, cross-cutting topics and possibilities for building bridges between different conceptualisations and notions of peace. Politically speaking, peacebuilding depends on building interpersonal trust, as well as trust between people and formal and informal institutions that are responsible for the constructive and non-violent transformation of conflicts. Beyond the absence of war, peace cannot be achieved overnight. It is a long and non-linear process punctuated by instances of progress and setbacks. It is essential to try to maintain common sense and not forget the ultimate goal.

Consequently, peacebuilding needs to include the management of expectations.

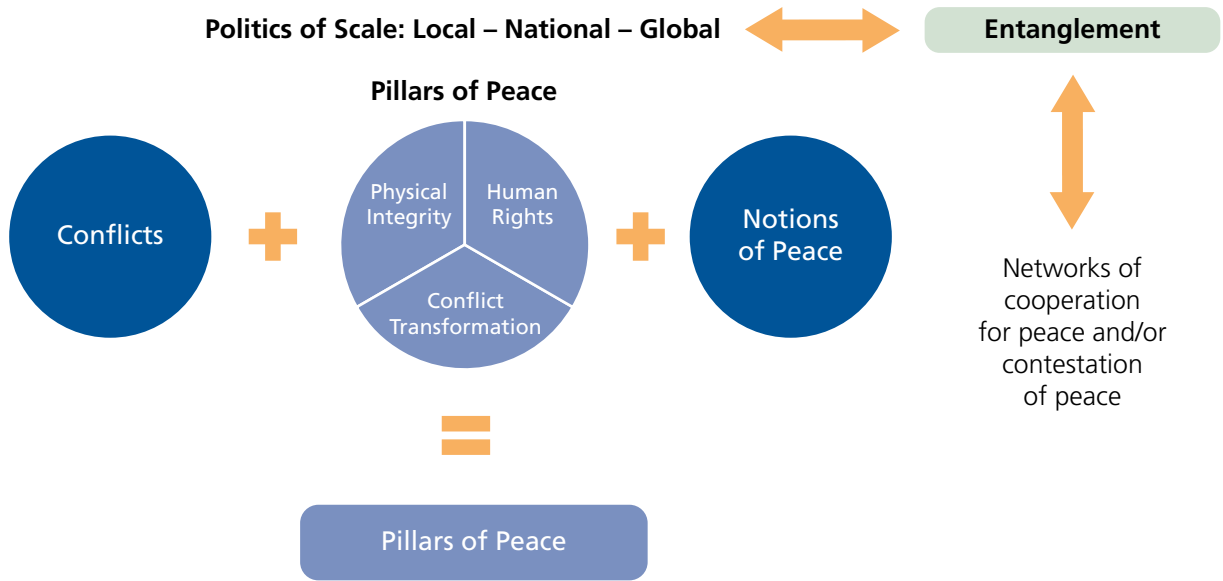
The project's overarching aims are as follows:

1. attempt to understand peace by analysing underlying conflicts and conceptions of peace held by different actors and levels inside and between societies on the basis of a consistent framework;
2. appraise peace by comparing the status of the three main pillars of peace at national, subnational and cross-national level and their entanglements;
3. promote peace by developing policy recommendations able to encompass different meanings and conceptions of peace in the analysed cases and more generally for the FES and other actors.

Besides the policy level the results of the project can also be of use for the strategic planning of the FES offices involved. They may help in the analysis of interrelationships and conflicting goals between different areas of FES work at the country level and the development of peace as an overarching goal.

¹ This report is based on the publication: Kristina Birke Daniels/Sabine Kurtenbach (eds) (2021): *The entanglements of peace. Reflections on the long road of transformation in Colombia*. Bogotá: FESCOL; available at: <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/kolumbien/18213-20210901.pdf>

Figure 1:
The PEACEptions methodology



Source: Kurtenbach (2021: 345).

2

COLOMBIA – MORE THAN HALF A CENTURY OF WAR AND PEACEBUILDING

At the end of 2016, after 52 years of war, the then government of Colombia, led by President Juan Manuel Santos (2010–2018), and the guerrillas of the FARC-EP (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia–People’s Army) signed a comprehensive peace agreement (Final Agreement for the Termination of the Conflict and the Construction of a Stable and Lasting Peace). This was yet another effort in a long series of partial successes and failed attempts to leave the war behind through a peace process (Helfrich and Kurtenbach 2006; Bouvier 2009; Kurtenbach 2013, 2016). The best-known attempts hitherto were the peace process with M19 and other guerrilla organisations at the end of the 1980s and the Caguán dialogues at the beginning of the new millennium. While the former is considered a success, the latter highlighted the consequences of a failed process: an increase in many forms of violence and the delegitimisation of dialogue as a method of conflict resolution. A decade passed before then-President Santos launched a new process in 2012. The negotiations in Havana were complex and it was not expected that the process would culminate in one of the most comprehensive peace agreements worldwide.

The level of armed confrontation and physical violence decreased during the dialogues and negotiations. As 2017 saw the lowest homicide rate since the late 1970s, the Colombian experience raised high hopes that dialogue could resolve even protracted and structurally complex armed conflicts. Although led by the Colombian parties, the process benefited from political and academic input from other parts of the world. The most obvious influence is attributed to the guarantor countries (Cuba and Norway) during the negotiations and to the United Nations in verifying implementation of the Agreement. Germany is mentioned in the Agreement as supporting the transitional justice system. Although less visible, experts and non-state organisations were important in facilitating the reconciliation of divergent positions between the parties and the inclusion of Colombian civil society in the process. Research on and testimonies of these negotiations, and on the ebbs and flows of the implementation process already fill libraries. These political and academic debates reveal a gap between the peace concepts, expectations and experiences of different actors in different contexts and settings.

In the case of Colombia, experiences of peacebuilding are as diverse as experiences of war and armed conflict. War and violence have seldom been a national experience, taking

place mainly in peripheral and border regions (PNUD 2003; González González 2014). Therefore, different notions of peace prevail in Bogotá, Cauca or Catatumbo. Its meaning varies also between marginalised sectors and wealthy neighbourhoods. But there is no linear or direct causality between one and the other. The concept of »territorial peace« of the Santos government, which negotiated the peace, tried to incorporate these significant differences (Jaramillo 2014).

These diverse notions of peace exist even though Article 22 of the Colombian Constitution stipulates that »Peace is a right and a duty compliance with which is mandatory.«² There is no shared vision of what peace is or should be, however, much less how to achieve it. The 2016 Peace Agreement, linked to the Constitution for three legislative periods, can be interpreted as an attempt to generate a shared conception of peace »as a process of deepening democracy [that] allows the emergence and representation of new actors in the Colombian political system and society« (Valenzuela 2019: 302). At the same time, with the goal of non-repetition in mind, the Agreement emphasised the need to transform structural and historically unresolved conflicts, such as the land problem, and to recognise full citizenship for historically marginalised groups, such as women, indigenous peoples, Afro-Colombians and the LGBTBI community.

The plebiscite, an attempt by the Santos government to put the Peace Agreement on a democratic foundation, demonstrated the complexity of perceptions and hopes surrounding the peace process (González 2017; Vanegas and Vergara 2016). While the most affected regions and large cities voted overwhelmingly in favour, intermediate cities and regions, such as the Eje Cafetero, voted against it. The plebiscite on the Agreement and the debates to date highlight the absence of a shared vision of peace. More than seven years³ after the signing of the Agreement with FARC-EP, an analysis of peace in Colombia yields mixed results. On the positive side, a large part of the guerrilla FARC-EP demobilised, and there has been no relapse into war (so far), despite dissent and numerous implementation problems. In this perspective, the 2016 Peace Agreement is in line with the partial successes of

² See: https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Colombia_2015

³ The fieldwork for the project in Colombia was carried out in 2019 and 2020, and the results published in 2021 (Birke Daniels and Kurtenbach 2022).

demobilisation processes since 1990. In a broader perspective of peace and peacebuilding, however, current developments reflect the persistence and reproduction of structural problems and historical obstacles to transformation.

Implementation of the peace accord was slow, if not halted, during the presidency of Iván Duque (2018–2022), who had campaigned on an anti-Agreement ticket. Under his government, there was a resurgence of violence by the remaining non-state armed actors. Peacebuilding received new impetus with the election of Gustavo Petro in August 2022. He proposed a policy of »Total Peace«, whose main elements included the demobilisation of all armed actors through either negotiations, dialogue or the subordination under the rule of law. This was very controversial and contested across the board. While some argued that the government should first fully implement the peace accord with FARC-EP, others had reservations about talks with armed groups generally classified as »criminal«, such as the Gulf Clan, with its roots in the paramilitary forces of the early 2000s. At the end of 2023, talks and negotiations commenced, for example, with the ELN (National Liberation Army), but no agreements have been signed. The bilateral ceasefires with these groups remain fragile.

3

MAIN CONFLICT STRUCTURES – LAND, INEQUALITY, DRUGS

Like other societies, Colombia has never been free of political, social and economic conflicts. Several historical conflicts, such as the inclusion of women, the Afro-descendant population and the rights of indigenous communities, are still unresolved. Colombia is a rich country, but one of the most unequal in the world, with a traditionally inequitable distribution of its land and abundant resources. Despite high levels of urbanisation, the country's main inequalities are between urban and rural areas and between the wealthy upper class and particularly marginalised ethnic minorities. The non-redistributive tax system (although the Petro government introduced some changes) perpetuates inequality. Inequitable access to and ownership of land, as well as the lack of prospects for a dignified life in rural areas, are the main structural causes of inequality (LeGrand 1992; González González 2014). In this context, various armed actors – including groups of dissidents of the former FARC-EP (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia-People's Army), the still active guerrilla organisation ELN (National Liberation Army), and so-called criminal groups (Bacrim), partly dissidents from previous peace processes – continue to operate alongside organised crime and fight for control.

Several chapters in the Peace Agreement address historical conflicts; most importantly, the agrarian conflict and, closely related, the conflict over illicit crops. It includes an »Ethnic Chapter«, which states that the Agreement must be interpreted in ethnic terms. It is also the first agreement in the world with an explicitly intersectional gender dimension. Political reform, which had made great strides with political decentralisation in the mid-1980s and the 1991 Political Constitution, is continuing, covering issues such as the inclusion of special constituencies for victims and greater transparency in party financing.

The 2016 Peace Agreement and its implementation have partially led to some profound transformation processes, creating new conflicts and exacerbating existing ones. The promotion of small-scale agriculture and the former FARC's (now represented through the »Communes« political party) political participation are examples of changes that have polarised the country. Opponents of the process and these changes successfully mobilised in the 2016 plebiscite and the 2018 presidential elections. On the other hand, the success of reform-oriented coalitions in the regional and local elec-

tions of October 2019 and the election of the first left-wing president, Gustavo Petro, in 2022, provide a counterpoint.

In general terms, three patterns of conflict stand out:

1. Ongoing conflicts for territorial control between different non-state armed groups: after the signing of the Agreement, the areas most affected were those abandoned by the FARC. Almost invariably, these are territories with illicit economies (including the cultivation of coca or marijuana, cocaine production and illegal mining, among other things) or border areas.
2. Conflicts emerge and grow in the context of extractive projects and the globalised economy, affecting environmental and societal concerns. With the Peace Agreement, these conflicts have reached previously inaccessible regions and have met with high levels of mobilisation and resistance from the local population, especially from Indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities. This in turn increased the exposure of and violence against leaders and members of the communities.
3. The end of the war has brought to light conflicts related to social and political change, namely recognition of the full citizenship of hitherto marginalised groups, such as peasants, women, indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities, the LGBTI population, and FARC-EP ex-combatants. These groups are struggling for recognition, representation and the prospect of a dignified life and against violence and structural discrimination.

These conflicts are interrelated, as evidenced by the high levels of threats to and murder of human rights defenders and social leaders, which have been on the rise since the signing of the Peace Agreement (INDEPAZ 2020b). This multitude of conflicts generates a variety of experiences and notions of peace in Colombia. The transformative character of the Peace Agreement generated a lot of hope among the historically marginalised, but also staunch resistance from those preferring the status quo, such as regional elites.

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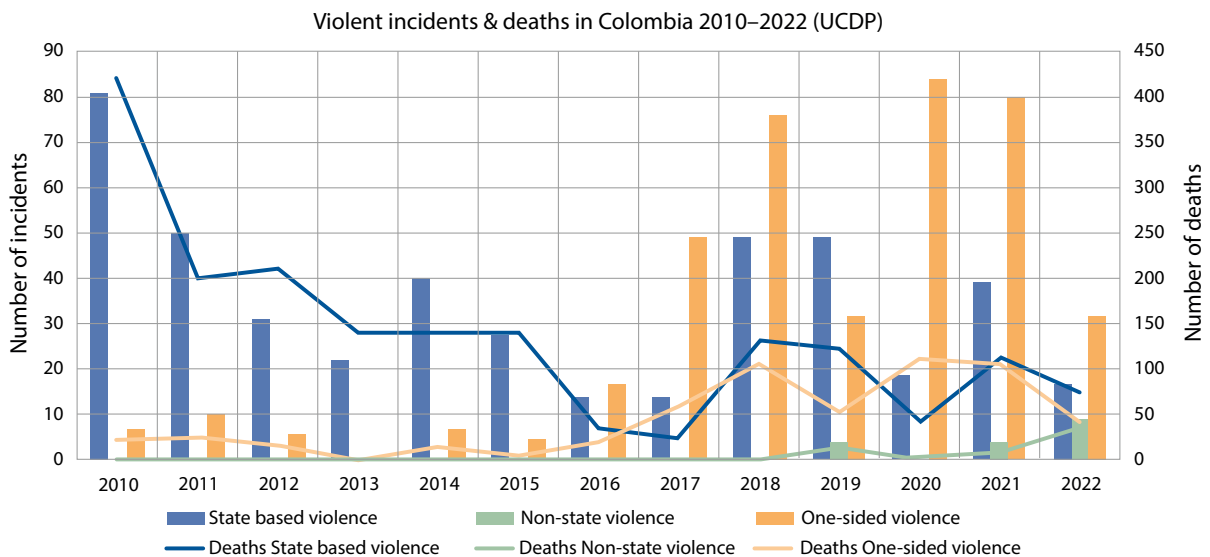
THE THREE PILLARS OF PEACE AT THE NATIONAL AND LOCAL LEVELS

Colombia is a paradox, where formal guarantees of fundamental rights, an independent judiciary and high levels of violence coincide.

4.1 PHYSICAL SECURITY

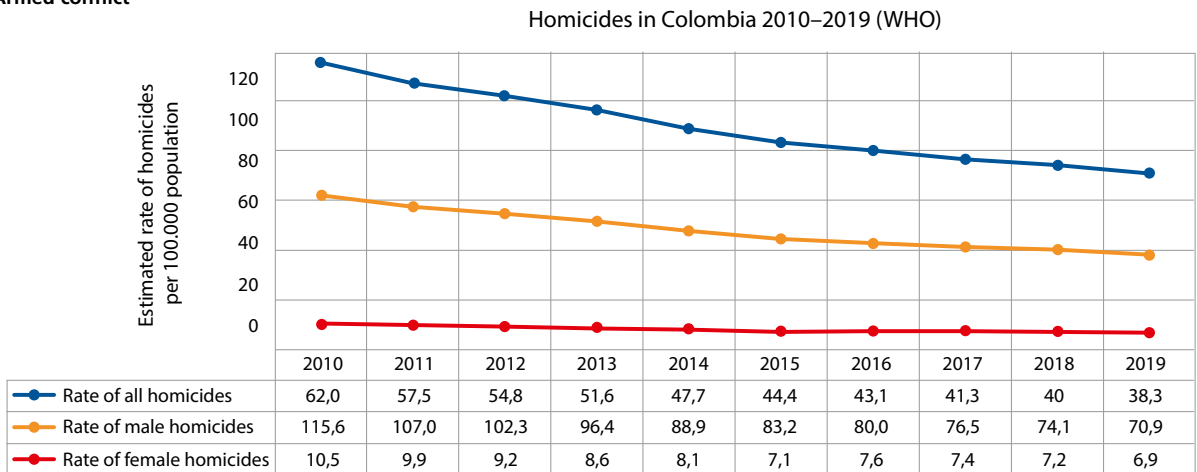
The diversity of peace experiences is closely linked to the reality on the ground in terms of the three pillars of the

Figure 2:
Armed conflict



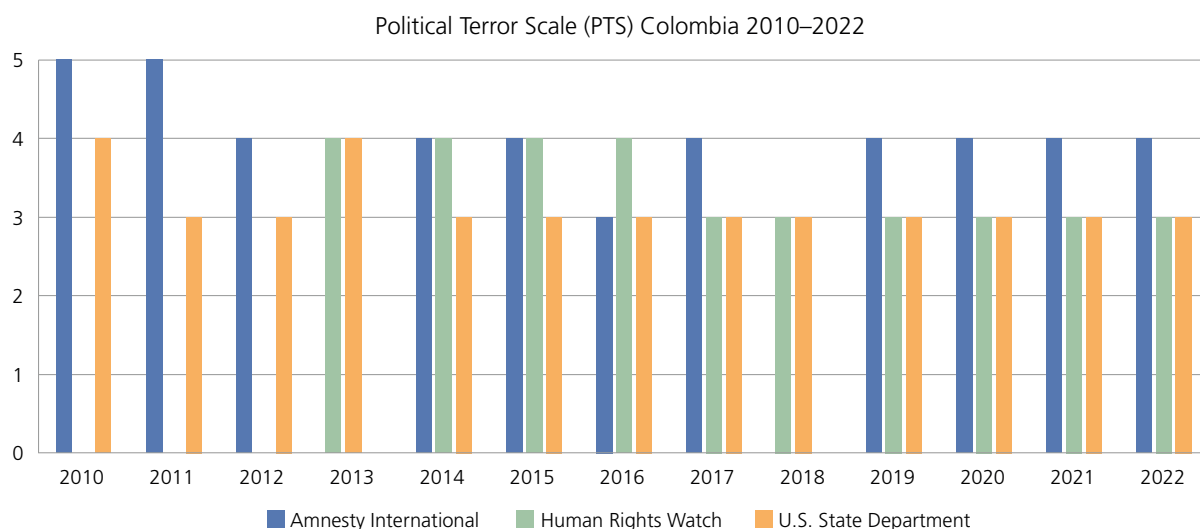
Source: Carla Kienel based on data from UCDP: <https://ucdp.uu.se/country/100> (date of retrieval: 23/09/05).

Figure 3:
Armed conflict



Source: Carla Kienel based on WHO, <https://www.who.int/data/gho/data/indicators/indicator-details/GHO/estimates-of-rates-of-homicides-per-100-000-population>. (accessed on 1/8/2023).

Figure 4:
Political terror scale



Source: Carla Kienel based on Gibney et al. <http://www.politicalerrorscale.org>. (accessed on 25/7/2023), distinguishing between five levels of state violence.

underlying peace concept: physical integrity, individual and collective human rights, and the existence of formal and informal institutions for conflict transformation. During the past decade, the scale of physical violence in Colombia was decreasing up until 2022, irrespective of the data source.

Level 3: There is extensive political imprisonment, or a recent history of such imprisonment. Execution or other political murders and brutality may be common. Unlimited detention, with or without a trial, for political views is accepted.

Level 4: Civil and political rights violations have expanded to large numbers of the population. Murders, disappearances, and torture are a common part of life. In spite of its generality, on this level terror affects primarily those who interest themselves in politics or ideas.

Level 5: Terror has expanded to the whole population. The leaders of these societies place no limits on the means or thoroughness with which they pursue personal or ideological goals.

Source: Political Terror Scale Data • The Political Terror Scale

However, violence has not been uniformly reduced across national territory; levels of physical integrity vary between departments and regions, as well as between sectors of society. In the most violent areas, conflict factors multiply and diversify, while in others, existing conflicts can be managed and transformed without the use of violence.

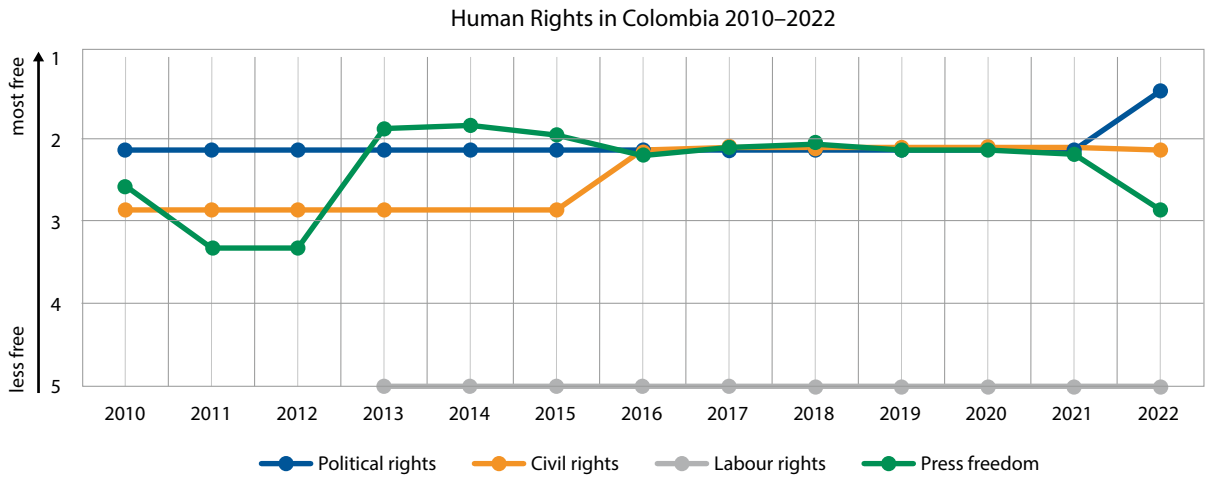
4.2 HUMAN RIGHTS

Concerning individual human rights, Colombian governments proudly proclaim that the country is one of the oldest democracies in Latin America. Colombia has signed and ratified most international human rights treaties, including the Rome Statute that created the International Criminal Court. However, there are significant gaps in human rights guarantees between urban and rural areas and social classes. In the context of elections, for example, political and civil rights are restricted. Problems arise mainly in the most remote rural areas, where candidates (especially those with progressive change agendas) are threatened or even killed. This jeopardises free and fair elections and highlights the existence of clientele networks and corruption. However, one of the interviewees in Northern Cauca put this into historical context:

»Now, when we talk about the assassination of social leaders, that does not mean that in Colombia this happened after the signing of the Peace Agreement. [The fact is] that before it was less visible because the conflict made it invisible.«
(cited in: Rodas Veléz and Valencia 2021, 147)

The situation is even more complicated in terms of collective rights. Colombia is one of the most dangerous countries for trade unionists, social leaders, journalists, and human rights defenders. Those devoted to defending the rights of Indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities are targeted most frequently. Threats and killings increased during the pandemic. Recently, violent war-time practices, such as massacres, displacements and youth recruitment, have returned (INDEPAZ 2020a).

Figure 5:
Individual and collective human rights



Source: Carla Kienel based on Freedom House (International Trade Union Confederation (2023), Reporters Without Borders (2023), World Press Freedom Index (accessed on 1/8/2023).

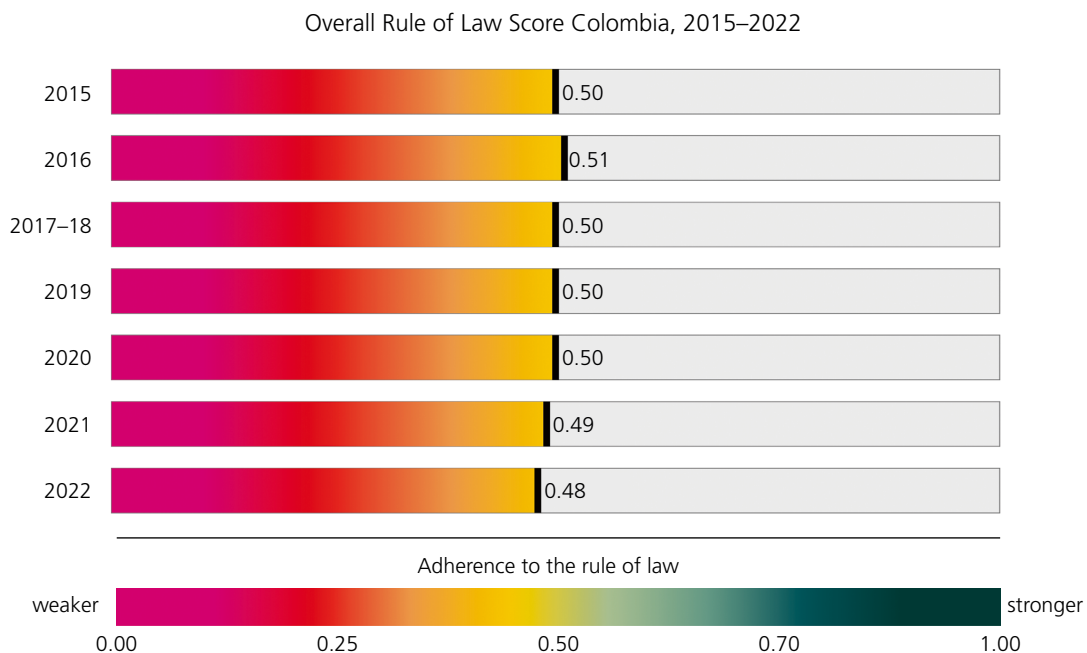
4.3 CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION

Formal and informal institutions for conflict resolution exist in Colombia. The functioning of the rule of law and national institutions, such as the judicial system, is pivotal in guaranteeing human rights.

According to Latinobarómetro surveys (2019), Colombians generally distrust institutions such as the government and the judiciary (only between 20 and 25 per cent say they have a high or moderate level of trust). The Colombian state has a

limited institutional presence across its territory or is affected by contentious relationships at the local level. There are significant differences in terms of the presence or absence of national institutions for conflict resolution, such as houses of justice (*casas de justicia*), the Attorney General’s Office, or community centres. There are also non-state institutions, for example, in indigenous communities (*resguardos*). This lack or limited presence of institutions has a twofold impact on violence and human rights: violence goes unpunished and impunity is widespread, more so in rural areas than in urban centres (Valencia et al. 2019), and human rights defenders

Figure 6:
Colombia: overall rule of law score (2015–2022)



Source: World Justice Project (2021). Rule of Law Index 2021. Accessed on 1 August 2023, available at: <https://worldjusticeproject.org/rule-of-law-index/country/2022/Colombia/>.

are left unprotected. This destroys what little trust citizens have in the state and creates opportunities for armed actors to replace the formal institutions in peripheral regions under their control. The focus groups provided interesting information in this regard. Tibú is an interesting case:

»Tibú is characterized for having 99% of unsatisfied needs in all sectors; this generates a certain degree of rejection by the communities towards institutions and, in turn, affinity with illegal groups within the community, because they bring productive projects, providing tools for self-sustenance.« (cited in Niño Guarnizo 2021: 203)

Colombia is a country of regions, as well as of great variations and local diversity in terms of conflict, levels of violence, human rights guarantees and the presence of formal and informal institutions for the constructive transformation of conflicts. Different dynamics of armed conflict throughout the national territory testify to its complexity. This complexity and variety were the focus when selecting the case studies. To ensure that such diversity is represented, the following criteria guided the selection of cases for the qualitative analysis of peace:

- level of violence during the war, structure and presence of armed actors;
- causes and dynamics of conflicts: political, social, economic and ethnic;
- local conflict transformation institutions: presence of the central state, presence of peace initiatives.

The local contexts studied were: Buenaventura (Valle del Cauca), Cúcuta (Norte de Santander), Maicao and Manaure (La Guajira), Mesetas (Meta), Ramiriquí (Boyacá), Santander de Quilichao (Cauca), and Tibú (Norte de Santander).

Following the signing of the Peace Agreement, conflict has been related mainly to the reconfiguration of political, economic and social forces and non-demobilised armed actors in different parts of the territory. At national level, actions by identified armed actors increased by 65 per cent during 2020 and the dynamics of the conflict changed from a nationwide war to multiple local conflicts and a decentralisation of actors (Llorente 2020).

5

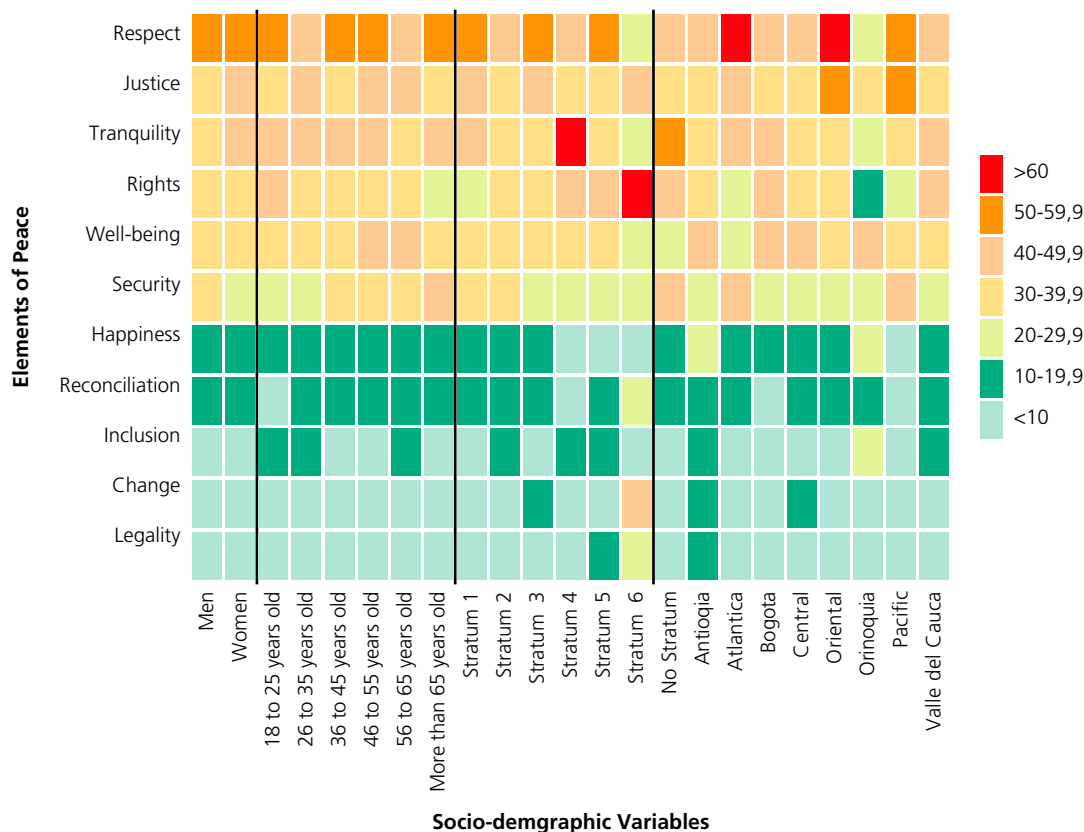
PERCEPTIONS OF PEACE

Given this variety of conflicts and the varying realities in relation to the pillars of peace, we expected ideas about peace to present similar variation. Interestingly, the results of our representative national survey and focus group discussions indicate that, despite high levels of polarisation within Colombian society, there appears to be a consensus on the main elements of peace. Most of the people surveyed associated peace with respect, tranquillity and justice (see Figure 7). Although these are also complex concepts, at least at first glance, there is no evidence of a correlation between perceptions of peace and the underlying conflicts. Theoretically, we expected that the conception of peace of poor and

marginalised people (strata 1 and 2) would prioritise justice, well-being, inclusion and change. Although a detailed analysis of the survey is still pending, we see little correlation in a cross tabulation.

The data show that most Colombians want violence to end and to lead lives free of turmoil. Determining the relationship between peace and justice is more complex, as it would require asking about a respondent's conception of justice and whether it is related to the debate on war atrocities and transitional justice – a highly polarised issue – or to notions

Figure 7: Heatmap of perceptions of peace



Source: Encuesta de percepción de paz en Colombia (Survey of perception of peace in Colombia by Cifras & Conceptos). Based on the question: »In your opinion, what are the three MOST important components of peace?« Options: personal security, tranquillity, respect, participation, justice, well-being, rights, inclusion, happiness, legality, reconciliation, change, education, and health. For the analysis presented in this chapter, the options well-being, education, and health were subsumed under well-being; and the options rights and participation were subsumed under rights. Data weighted to the socio-demographic structure of the municipality. Number of valid observations: 1,733.

of justice concerning everyday life and the socio-economic and political context.

Despite the variety of specific contexts and levels of violence and conflict, and the existence of institutions for the constructive transformation of conflicts, experiences in the communities analysed reflect the results of the national representative survey in three crucial respects. Notions of peace are closely related to yearning and hope:

1. To live in tranquillity, that is, without threats to physical integrity and undue interference in everyday life.
2. To be able to exercise basic human rights, individually and collectively. The latter is particularly emphasised in discussions with hitherto marginalised groups, such as women, young people, indigenous communities and Afro-Colombian groups. Access to justice, political representation, ample equal opportunities and capabilities play a fundamental role in this regard.
3. Recognition that institutions for the constructive transformation of conflicts (whether state, municipal, formal or informal) are fulfilling their functions.

Although in some contexts there are indicators of hopelessness, most interviewees seem to be very aware that *peace is a process*, that the signing of an agreement is a necessary but not sufficient condition, and that peace is built collectively. For this, it is necessary not only to ensure a fundamental level of physical security but also to generate adequate spaces of opportunity so that each individual and each community can pursue their activities and live a full and dignified life. Again, Tibú – a municipality with high levels of violence and the presence of various armed actors – is an interesting case:

»In the case of Tibú, two factors affect these conceptions: the continuation of the armed conflict and the mafias that have developed around it, together with various forms of illegal economies protected by armed actors, and the central government's non-compliance with the implementation of the Agreement for the termination of the conflict. Within the framework of these restrictions, the conceptions of peace found in Tibú have an individual, a social, a market, and a public dimension. A continuum from the most private to the most public, with intermediate dimensions between these two extremes, can be suggested. The more public dimension assumes the existence of rights and a political and institutional order to enforce them.« (Tibú report) (cited in: Kurtenbach and Rodas Vélez 2021: 74–75)

The importance of specific contexts also becomes obvious in the focus groups among young people in Buenaventura, a city with a substantial Afro-Colombian and indigenous population:

»In a context inhabited by Afro/black and Indigenous ethnic groups, peace is closely linked to their world-views and their territoriality. Therefore, the achievement of peace involves institutions by guaranteeing rights, armed groups through the cessation of armed violence, and citizens who must act in accordance with their own social morality (solidarity and trust between relatives and neighbors). In short, peace is understood from a perspective that transcends the protection of physical integrity to include the achievement of social well-being.« (Buenaventura Report) (cit. in Kurtenbach and Rodas Vélez 2021, 76).

6

MAIN ACTORS IN PEACEBUILDING

A variety of national, local and international actors are part of the peacebuilding process in Colombia. These actors differ in their perceptions of peace and their ambitions regarding societal change.

As signatories to the Agreement, Juan Manuel Santos' government and FARC-EP should share a common understanding of the Agreement and its transformative aims. However, differences emerged early on. The FARC wanted far more and far-reaching changes (especially regarding the reform of small agriculture) than the government. The government confirmed its commitment to the process by institutionalising the most important provisions of the Agreement, a process supported by the Colombian Parliament and the Supreme Court. Civil society actors and local communities were also part of the pro-Agreement coalition. However, resistance began to organise from the very start, as shown by the failed referendum and much more so after those in opposition to the treaty won the presidential elections in 2018, after which implementation of the Agreement slowed down significantly.

On the ground, indigenous, Afro-Colombian and Campesino communities hoped for change, but some also voiced concerns that the end of war would »take away the little the war had left«, as one interviewee put it. Regions that had not been accessible to extractive industries and economic exploitation because of the war attracted interest from local, national and international capital, as well as remaining armed actors. This led to high levels of mobilisation, as well as renewed conflict and violence against social leaders, human rights defenders and demobilised FARC members. Women and young people are also among those with a broad perspective on and hoping for change. The high levels of mobilisation and the protests in 2019 and 2021 were a clear expression of such demands for change and resistance to the Duque government's agenda.

At the international level, perceptions of peace vary substantially. The United Nations, the European Union and most of its member states share a broader and transformative perception of peace and thus supported the negotiations until 2016 and – nowadays – the implementation of the Agreement with financial and technical cooperation. In the United States, despite a broad bipartisan approach towards the Colombian peace process, specific policies depend on the current administration and pressure from civil society

actors. While Latin American governments hailed the peace agreement as a sign that armed conflict in the region had come to an end, most favour a minimalist approach to peace defined as the absence of war.

Neighbouring Venezuela has special importance for the Colombian peace process. It shares a border of more than 2,000 kilometres, and bilateral relations have been shaped by deep ideological and political differences between the governments. Accusations of interference in internal affairs and support for armed groups against the respective governments are made on both sides of the border. At the same time, support from the Venezuelan and Cuban governments was fundamental to the initiation and accompaniment of peace negotiations in Havana between the Colombian government and the FARC-EP, and dialogue with the ELN. According to experts in both countries, several armed groups are operating in binationally. In 2020, several border conflicts in the final months caused by these actors threatened to escalate. Under the Duque administration relations between the two governments deteriorated to a level almost unprecedented in international politics. With the election of Gustavo Petro, however, diplomatic relations have been restored and the border reopened. Relations nevertheless remain complicated and many argue that peace will not be possible in Colombia without resolving the internal conflict in Venezuela and vice versa (Birke Daniels, Stollreiter and Wegner 2021). Ultimately, conflicts in Colombia and Venezuela are also entangled because of the operations of armed groups across the border and the presence of out-of-region actors such as Russia, Iran, Turkey and the People's Republic of China.

The support or neglect of external actors regarding the negotiations and process implementation reflects the variety of conceptions of peace and related priorities resembling limited or broader perceptions. Within this variety, alliances have developed between actors with similar conceptions of peace, such as the Duque government and the Trump administration, or an alliance between European states in favour of implementation and international and Colombian human rights NGOs. The unstable and changing nature of these alliances is sometimes problematic.

7

SPECIFICS OF PEACEBUILDING AND LESSONS LEARNED

Looking at Colombia through a comprehensive analysis of peace as a process reveals high levels of contentiousness due to peacebuilding. These interweaving layers should be analysed in spatial terms (local, national, global) and in terms of actors who favour a broader conception of peace and those who wish to maintain the status quo or achieve only a minimalist peace. In Colombia, the latter are known as »the big or complete peace« and »the small peace«.

The analysis of underlying conflicts at different scales, the variety of local, national and international actors, and their specific perceptions of peace led to the identification of a series of entanglements or complications shaping the process of peacebuilding in Colombia. Such entanglements have two dimensions: (i) they originate in interactions between different territorial scales, local, national and global; and (ii) the existence of networks of actors with differing notions of peace. This corresponds to very different views on the scope of the Peace Agreement and the need for societal change.

These entanglements are related to three central issues, among others: access and use of land, political and social participation, and dealing with past atrocities. While these issues are fundamental to the Peace Agreement, they are also much broader in scope. These conflicts are rooted in Colombia's historical experience, which adds a temporal dimension to their management and transformation. Within this perspective, the Peace Agreement may be – or could have been – a critical juncture (Capoccia 2016) for the transformation of these conflicts. At the same time, it must be borne in mind that peacebuilding and the reforms and changes it requires do not occur in a vacuum but are shaped by previous historical experiences and depend on specific trajectories and contexts that define power relations locally, internationally and regionally (Almohamad, Kirchschlager and Kurtenbach 2020). This path dependence (Mahoney 2000; Ansong and Kurtenbach 2016) tends to limit the possibilities for change despite the existence of windows of opportunity.

The entanglements of peace involve many issues and actors. From an integral peacebuilding perspective, the problem is not the existence of actors who oppose profound change, but rather that some of them seek to legitimise, generate or use violence for their political, economic and social ends. Identifying and finding ways of unpicking these entanglements in a constructive (not necessarily consensual) and

non-violent way must be a fundamental step in the search for peace.

The study provides evidence of the existence of relevant elements for peacebuilding in Colombia. It shows that variation in peacebuilding at the local level is contingent upon the presence and combination of structural factors such as illegal economies, armed actors and the Indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities. The central argument – shared by Colombian colleagues such as Fernán González González (2020) and Francisco Gutiérrez Sanín (2020) – is that peacebuilding should not and cannot be reduced to the Peace Agreement between the government and the FARC and its implementation. The Agreement provides a significant window of opportunity for making meaningful changes that may prevent a relapse into war. However, the lack of implementation of the transformative parts of the Agreement (rural affairs, justice, political reform) during the Duque and Santos administrations started to close that window. The Petro government's »Total Peace« policy recognises this.

However, four trends can still be observed that are hazardous for the Peace Agreement and the broader peacebuilding process:

- a) The active presence of violent actors – such as the ELN, FARC dissidents, paramilitaries, national and international organised crime actors – who occupied regions abandoned by the former FARC guerrillas. Whatever the reason, the Colombian state has not been willing or able to prevent this. The Duque government's only answer to the problem was repression. Talks and negotiations under way since the introduction of the »Total Peace« approach have lowered the number of direct confrontations between non-state armed actors and the state, but not between those groups. Other forms of human rights violations, such as kidnapping and massacres, have also been increasing. The overall situation remains very fragile.
- b) The numerous ongoing murders and intimidation of and threats against human rights defenders, social leaders, local politicians and FARC ex-combatants have serious consequences at different levels: (i) this type of violence shatters the already low level of trust in the possibility of change; (ii) murders endanger and reduce the space

for social and political action by civil society and political actors to perform their role of advocating for reform and non-violent change; and (iii) renewed massacres and recruitment of young people reactivate the traumas of war in the most vulnerable sectors of the country.

- c) The economic and social consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic increased structural inequality. At the same time, the pandemic served as a pretext for the Duque government to slow down even further the implementation of the peace agreement, restrict human rights, and criminalise and repress the constant wave of protests taking place since 2019. Indeed, there has been an increase in police violence in urban areas in recent years. In 2021, over one and a half million people from all walks of life took to the streets in different parts of the country in an unprecedented wave of protests. Here young people from the cities – many of them from marginalised groups and in a highly precarious situation because of the lack of education and employment in the wake of the pandemic – played a major role advocating for an agenda of environment protection, antiracism and feminism. The election in 2022 of the country's first left-leaning president is a result of these citizen demands for profound change. But resistance to the related reforms still exists, and it remains to be seen whether the government will deliver on its promises, at least partially.
- d) The Duque government's policy of neglecting or delaying implementation of the Agreement, especially its most structural aspects, as well as its tax policy and its repressive reaction to the related protests, delegitimised democracy as a political system, although this process was already under way. Early on, the government made it clear that while they could not undo the peace accord, its implementation was not a priority. It also stressed that it would choose »legality« and familiar recipes for economic growth based on the extractivist model. While the Petro government has changed course, some critics claim that he should have prioritised full implementation of the Agreement with the FARC before embarking on a broader initiative to demobilise other groups. However, such a sequential approach is scarcely viable due to the territorial expansion dynamics of non-state armed actors, such as the Gulf Clan.

In this context, Colombia runs the risk of remaining in a situation that, while not a return to war, is far from achieving peace beyond the absence of war. As in other parts of the world, peacebuilding in Colombia implies much more than a peace agreement and its implementation, although these play a key role, especially when, as in the Colombian case, they outline a pathway for a profound process of transformation. Three tasks are central to an integral approach to peacebuilding:

1. Reducing violence through the rule of law instead of militarisation. The independence of the judicial system must be maintained and strengthened so that no one is above the law. The Special Jurisdiction for Peace (JEP), a mechanism for transitional justice established by the peace agreement, also plays an important role because it takes action against the atrocities of the war, as evidenced by the first ruling against the FARC. Obtaining acceptance of such judgments is hard, and we are yet to see the reactions of different actors. The JEP has identified 11 'macro cases' and the one about »false positives« will evidence the military's position.
2. Guaranteeing individual and collective human rights. It must be recognised that all human rights are essential and that freedom of expression and an independent, pluralistic media are as important as transparent, free and general elections. The same is true of collective rights, which are often underestimated from the perspective of developed countries and an individualistic neoliberal approach. Guaranteeing human rights is the foundation of modern democracy.
3. Transforming underlying conflicts. As explained at the beginning of this study, conflicts are ubiquitous in all societies and at all levels. Therefore the term »post-conflict« is misleading because it implies a societal harmony that does not exist and never has. What is important is the constructive and non-violent transformation of interpersonal and intergroup conflicts. Formal and informal institutions exist for this purpose at different levels. At the same time, such conflicts should be acknowledged and trust developed in the respective institutions.

To this end, it is important systematically to interconnect peace policies and the policies of socio-economic development in the territories. For example, prioritising land distribution and implementing comprehensive reform for rural women could reinforce the progress made concerning decent work for this population group. The same links exist between the policy of illicit crop substitution, combatting drug trafficking and compensating victims. Combining these policies could benefit women – especially mothers who are heads of households – improving their opportunities to develop their economic lives and enhance their families' well-being. This would, for example, provide educational options for children, who could then avoid recruitment into armed groups, which in some regions is often their only option, apart from marriage.

The development model must align with an environmental policy focused on nature preservation and climate change mitigation. From this perspective, environmental problems require comprehensive and complex solutions, rather than just security strategies designed from a national-interest perspective. Prioritising stabilisation over development impairs a development policy based on plans elaborated with community participation in the PDETs. At the same time, prioritising stability of the status quo reproduces or extends the militarisation of the territories most affected by the war. The Petro government's National Development Plan opts for a much broader approach and seeks to transform Colombia into a global leader, or in his words a »world power of life«.

These profound reforms require the efforts and support of several internal and external actors. First, in order to promote peacebuilding, it is necessary to establish a political coalition or a pact in Congress and at the local level. Equally important is the support and protection of civil society actors to

strengthen the existing national consensus between sectors of Colombian civil society and political actors, even those in opposition. But this dynamic needs to be translated into a new »political pact for peace«. There is a risk that presumably the most urgent needs in the wake of the pandemic will dominate the electoral agenda, bypassing the crucial connection between transforming the structural causes of violence, such as inequality, and the path of economic and social reconstruction to overcome the devastating socio-economic effects of the pandemic.

The change agenda also needs to include young people. Despite UN Resolution 2250 (Youth, Peace, and Security), unanimously adopted in 2015, there has been no formal effort in Colombia to include young people in the Havana dialogues or implementation of the Agreement. The consequences of the pandemic make such inclusion even more urgent because the gap in their education will make it even more difficult for young people to find decent work. Renewed forced recruitment of marginalised youth is a red flag. Peacebuilding is also based on the political, economic and social empowerment of women and the LGBTIQ+ community beyond the catalogue of »gender measures« within the Agreement, incorporating feminist and LGBTIQ+ perspectives on peace. This empowerment is achieved with the support of gender transformative measures within society that question the traditional roles of men and women and try to develop notions of masculinity disconnected from militarisation and war.

In a virtual talk organised by the Catalan Institute of Peace,⁴ John Paul Lederach developed the image of the spider's web for peacebuilding. A cobweb in this context is a fragile, multidimensional structure with broad participation and the ability to reconstruct broken parts. Colombia's historical experiences of peacebuilding have always been fragile and conflictual, with both progress, such as the 1991 Constitution, and setbacks, such as violence against ex-combatants (from the Patriotic Union to the M-19 and the FARC, today the Communes Party), social leaders, and human rights defenders. The central challenge is to protect, expand and connect progress, while overcoming setbacks and marginalising actors and dynamics that resist peacebuilding. The entanglements of peace analysed in this Colombian case study must be transformed into consensus-building processes around peace, empowering civil actors.

⁴ See: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7cpMZTV80XU>;
4 March 2021

8

POSTSCRIPT: TOTAL PEACE UNDER A PEACEPTIONS PERSPECTIVE

In August 2022 Colombia elected its first left-wing president, Gustavo Petro. Petro announced a profound agenda of change, emphasising the reduction of structural inequalities and the demobilisation of non-state armed actors. This policy of »Total Peace« has been seen as complementary to the peace accord with the FARC-EP. However, the new approach has been highly contested for different reasons by different actors. First of all, the supporters of the accord with the FARC have prioritised implementation of the Agreement, which had slowed down under the Duque administration. Others have criticised the idea of having conversations and dialogue with groups they labelled »criminal« and with FARC dissidents because they believe that these groups »had their chance and missed it«. Interestingly, in a communique published on 5 September 2022, the ELN criticised the new approach, claiming that a »rebel organisation« should not be equated »with the actions of paramilitaries or drug traffickers, who are common criminals«. This distinction between political and criminal violence goes back to Carl von Clausewitz's classic definition of war as »nothing but a continuation of policy with other means«. Thus, classifying an armed group as political gives it a certain level of legitimacy, while groups classified as criminal are seen as motivated principally by greed. The differentiation is important for the choice of mechanisms for combating these groups, but the empirical reality is rather complex. There is abundant evidence that the classification of groups in both state and society is more important than their self-definition. A binary classification presents at least two issues: first, actors can and often do alter their discourse and political agenda over time to adapt to changing contexts. A recent example is the letter written by members of different non-state armed groups to president-elect Gustavo Petro on 19 July 2022 with a highly political discourse, emphasising both the lack of job opportunities and possibilities for a dignified life and the absence of the state as a reason for their activities. Second, all armed groups need funding in order to supply their fighters, buy weapons, and so on. The means to do this are necessarily illegal as they are in confrontation with the state and often include resort to illegal resources, such as drugs.

Under a PEACEptions perspective peacebuilding needs to address improvements in the three pillars of peace, namely, reduction of violence, guarantees of individual and collective human rights, and, last but not least, the constructive transformation of underlying conflicts.

The evaluation of the government's peace strategy in terms of the *reduction of violence* depends to a certain degree on what forms of violence are analysed. The various ceasefires with the ELN (started on 3 August 2023) and with other non-state armed actors (Gulf Clan between 31 December 2022 and 19 March 2023) did reduce fighting between the state's security forces (police and military) and the non-state armed groups. However, fighting between the non-state armed groups or their violence against civilians has increased. The Gulf Clan has expanded its territorial control significantly over recent years based on cooperation with local non-state armed actors. At the same time, other forms of violence, such as massacres, forced displacement and the assassination of social leaders or demobilised FARC members, is still ongoing.

The Petro government has seen a significant increase in *civil and political human rights*. In 2023, Freedom House for the first time classified Colombia as free. The participation of formerly marginalised groups, such as women and ethnic minorities is exemplified by the current vice president, Francia Márquez, an Afro-Colombian woman with a background in social and environmental activism. The participation of local communities is a key element of the »Total Peace« policy, but faces various challenges, such as the abovementioned violence against activists and human rights defenders. In addition to »Total Peace«, the government has developed its National Development Plan with the participation of local communities.

When it comes to *conflict transformation*, the government has initiated a highly transformative agenda to mitigate the deeply ingrained structural drivers of violence, such as high levels of inequality between social groups and between its territories (urban/rural). A core element of this agenda is agrarian reform, aiming to redistribute land bought by the government from large landowners to small-scale *campesinos*. Following the peace accord, the first beneficiaries of this reform will be demobilised FARC combatants. The overall goal is to boost agrarian production, above all, food production. The government also seeks to enhance access to health care and education across the country. Another aim is to protect Colombia's biodiversity and a transition towards carbon-free energy resources.

Nobody doubts that these are ambitious aims, which would change the country profoundly. However, the government

lacks a majority in congress after some parties who had pledged support after the election left the coalition. Additionally, resistance to certain policies is being organised by groups interested in maintaining the status quo, such as agrarian elites. Overall, clear strategic priorities are lacking. As the relevant reforms are all long-term and profound, a minimum of prioritisation and a focus on marginalised communities will be necessary.

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