

War-Affected Communities in Colombia: Project Documentation

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1 Project Overview

This survey is part of the Drugs and (Dis)Order project, which focuses on war-to-peace transitions in conflicts with illicit economies. One of our goals was to investigate the trajectories of communities with coca crops, drug trafficking, or both, after the demobilization of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). To this end, we interviewed individuals in communities where there had been sustained presence of armed groups—what we call “conflict communities”—as well as individuals in communities that did not have any presence of armed groups during the armed conflict. In total, we surveyed 2,645 individuals: 1,517 living in communities with sustained presence of guerrillas, paramilitaries, or both at any point throughout the war, and 1,218 individuals in communities that did not experience presence of any armed group through the duration of the armed conflict. The survey aims to provide detailed evidence that can help researchers and policy makers to better understand the unique challenges and opportunities that different types of communities face after the demobilization of armed actors. Considering this variation is essential as Colombia continues to navigate the difficult path toward peace and reconciliation.

2 Sampling Methodology

2.1 Sampling Conflict Communities

Our survey was implemented in a random sample of communities that Arjona 2016; Arjona 2017 studied in the past. The goal of that study was to collect data on conflict zones—that is, territories that **have endured the ongoing presence of non-state armed groups**—both during and after conflict. In 2012, the author selected a representative sample of communities where at least one non-state armed group had been present for at least six months at any given point from the 1970s to 2012. She conducted a follow-up survey in 2016, right before the FARC demobilized. For this study, we returned to the same communities to gather information on various domains of local life as well as individuals’ experiences.

The sample for this study required identifying municipalities where people had lived under the ongoing presence of non-state armed groups. Given that there are no data of guerrilla or paramilitary presence—only of armed group violence—the universe of cases included, initially, all the municipalities of the country. Municipalities were only excluded when, based on both the absence of primary records and conversations with contacts in the field, there was no indication of presence of armed groups at any point since the 1970s. The

sampling then proceeded in three stages. First, the Colombian territory was stratified in three regions, excluding 6 of 33 Colombian departments or provinces.¹ Each region had the same number of municipalities. In order to ensure variation along important dimensions, a random sample of 22 municipalities was then selected, stratified by state presence, ethnic composition (as measured by the population share of Afro-Colombians or Indigenous people in the municipality), and population distribution in urban and rural settlements. Data on these stratification variables come from official Colombian sources.

In the second stage, the presence of armed groups was corroborated in each selected municipality on the basis of primary and secondary sources as well as interviews with experts and field contacts. Only the municipalities where at least one armed group had been present in the past for at least 6 continuous months were included in the sample. If all field contacts failed to confirm the sustained presence of armed groups in the municipality, the municipality was replaced with another randomly selected from the eligible municipality list.

In the third stage and once the list of municipalities was finalized, localities (i.e. villages, hamlets, or neighborhoods) were chosen on the basis of their wartime experiences. A short survey with individuals knowledgeable about the municipality gathered evidence on the forms of social order that operated in each community over time based on vignettes.² Participants were asked to give their responses related to as many communities that they had reasonable expertise about. A sample of between 2 and 4 localities per municipality was thus selected, attempting to preserve the distribution of social order scores among all surveyed localities. The *cabecera* of each municipality (the equivalent of a county, municipal, or district seat in other contexts) was included in the selection of communities in each municipality for this wave of fieldwork.

The final sample of 63 sub-municipal conflict communities are located in 20 municipalities covering 13 different departments.³

¹The departments of the Amazonian region (Vichada, Guainía, Guaviare, Vaupés, and Amazonas) as well as the island groups (San Andres, Providencia, and Catalina) were excluded on the basis that the populations in these territories are sparse and conflict had only recently arrived there, thus sustained armed group presence has historically been limited.

²See Arjona 2016, Appendix I and II for more information on this survey and subsequent coding processes.

³There are fewer communities than in original fieldwork waves as we excluded all municipalities from the first round of Arjona's fieldwork as well as communities where current security conditions made it impossible or dangerous to complete the survey.

2.2 Sampling Non-Conflict Communities

The selection process for the control group was also an iterative process. First, we took a list of all Colombian municipalities, excluding those that were in the treatment group or those located in departments in the Amazon region, and aggregated data on municipal-level violence over the course of the conflict using data from various sources (Osorio et al. 2019; Centro de Estudios sobre Desarrollo Económico 2014; Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica 2013). We determined the total magnitude of violence in each Colombian municipality by simply adding up the number of violent events recorded in each municipality over 1976-2019 across each of the cited violence databases.⁴ We considered lists of municipalities at different specifications of violence cutoffs. We specifically considered municipalities that experienced no violence or were in the 10th or 15th percentile of violent events. We ultimately limited the list from which to sample municipalities to those that experienced violence in the 15th percentile or less, as the list of municipalities was long and diverse enough that we could have a more representative sample and there would be municipalities to draw from should we have to discard any of the initial selection.

From the initial list of municipalities at the 15th percentile of violence and below, we selected a stratified random sample using the same stratification variables as in the conflict communities. Upon selecting these initial municipalities, we then searched Colombian newspapers, human rights reports, and other reports from Colombian institutions to determine if any of these municipalities were false negatives on the basis of a lack of violence. We also contacted regional or local authorities in some cases, such as the local ombudsman’s office (*Personería*) or a mayor, to verify any information. We replaced municipalities as necessary with a random draw of another municipality from the eligible list.⁵

Upon gathering a final list of 15 municipalities, we worked with a research assistant who informally interviewed mid-level guerrilla and paramilitary ex-combatants about whether the armed group they were affiliated with was ever present in the municipalities in question. We repeated the discard-replace procedure for all municipalities where our research

⁴We were not worried about double counting violent events between databases, as we wanted to limit our selection process as much as possible to conflict-free municipalities, thus uniformly over-counting would simply allow us to be necessarily restrictive.

⁵We first attempted to replace discarded municipalities with others that were similar on the stratification variables of the discarded municipalities. However, there were too few municipalities in some stratum to allow for this to be a random process. Therefore, we chose to merely replace each discarded municipality with a random choice from the total eligible list. Due to this, there is higher geographical clustering in the control group than in the treatment group. However, because we allowed for this to be based on the random process, we are confident that this clustering is representative of some of the patterns, determinants, and realities of local armed group presence in Colombia rather than sampling error.

assistant confirmed that there had been armed group presence. Once finalized, we randomly selected 2 localities in each municipality in addition to the municipal seat (*cabecera*) from which to survey individuals— thus sampling a total of 44 non-conflict afflicted localities in 15 municipalities.⁶

3 Survey Enumeration

The survey was enumerated in the same way across both conflict and non-conflict settings. The survey was carried out in a sample of households in urban and rural areas of the selected municipalities. The sampling strategy was different in urban and rural zones based on available territorial information. In urban zones, survey enumerators received grid level map information in the selected municipal section. Each municipal section was divided into different blocks. Within each block, enumerators were required to complete a maximum of 8 surveys, 2 on each side of each block. Upon arrival to each selected housing development, the household that answered the door was selected as the interviewed household.

In rural zones, enumerators conducted a sweep of the residences in each cardinal direction from a point of reference. The point of reference might be a police station, a school, or an intersection of roadways. During this sweep, enumerators visited households to complete the requisite number of surveys for each population settlement.

In both urban and rural areas, the person selected to complete the survey in each household was the person 25 or older⁷ with the closest birthday among those present in the home at the time. Enumerators were instructed to alternate between men and women respondents from household to household to achieve parity between the percentage of women and men respondents. Respondents completed the survey at their household on a tablet provided by the enumerator.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, survey enumeration was delayed multiple times from 2019 to 2021. However, due to limited levels of community transmission of the novel Coronavirus in Colombia, existing presence of local survey enumerators employed by the survey firm, and the development of safe survey fielding methods, the survey firm conducted the survey between November and December of 2021.

⁶A total of 45 communities were sampled but, due to logistical problems, the survey was only carried out in 44 communities.

⁷Since we are interested in historical trends regarding the conflict as well as in people’s views on the peace agreement, we required that all survey respondents were at least 16 years old in 2016, when the peace agreement was signed.

Figure 1: Geographic Distribution of Sampled Municipalities



The total sample resulted in the geographic distribution of municipalities shown in Figure 1— in red are the conflict municipalities, in blue are the non-conflict municipalities.

4 Anonymization and Data Ethics

To ensure the anonymity of our survey respondents, we have removed any variables in the dataset that might lead to the identification of our individual respondents.

Additionally, because some of the communities in which the survey was carried out are very small, we have removed any variables that may lead to the identification of these specific communities.

This project and its associated human subjects research was approved by the Northwestern University’s Institutional Review Board (Protocol Number STU00216029) as well as by Los Andes University’s Ethics Committee (Act Number 1449 of 2021).

The survey was enumerated in the field by Cifras y Conceptos, a reputable survey firm

based in Bogotá.

5 How to cite this dataset

Arjona, Ana and Sarah Moore, 2022. "War-Affected Communities in Colombia." A survey in conflict and non-conflict communities in Colombia.

6 File Roster

The data and documentation archived with the drugs and (dis)order repository are the following:

1. Project Overview and Methodological Documentation
2. Conflict Communities Dataset (Stata .dta file)
3. Non-Conflict Communities Dataset (Stata .dta file)
4. Questionnaire (English)
5. Questionnaire (Spanish)
6. Consent Procedure (English)
7. Consent Procedure (Spanish)

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