

Documentation

Dataset C3. Interviews, 2018-2021

Collection of interviews carried out in four borderland regions in Colombia affected by the armed conflict and illicit drug economies. Interviews focus on coca cultivation and production, rural livelihoods, counter-narcotics measures, armed conflict and the latest peace process.

Dataset owner: Universidad Nacional de Colombia

Context

Colombia has endured numerous periods of armed conflict. The most recent is often dated as beginning in the 1960s, when various armed insurgent groups were formed, including the FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia). In the 1970s and 1980s an illicit drug economy, centred on cocaine exports, emerged. Around the same time, a number of anti-subversive paramilitary groups were proliferating across the country. Coca cultivations expanded across Colombia, especially in southern 'colonisation zones' where people had settled, pushed out of other areas of the country by violence and/or land concentration.

In many of these zones, coca cultivation offered settlers a source of income where conventional commercial crops didn't grow well, there was little state support for farmers and transport costs to regional markets were prohibitively high.

Illicit drug production has helped sustain the armed conflict. Civilians, and especially those in coca-growing regions, have been the primary victims. Beside financing illegal armed groups, the coca economy has led to militarised counter-narcotics operations, including aerial fumigations, with devastating consequences for coca-farmers and local inhabitants.

The 2016 peace agreement between the Colombian Government and the FARC has opened the door to a new chapter in the country's history. It remains to be seen what this will entail. The picture is complex. Hundreds of social leaders and community activists have been killed since the signing of the agreement. Coca cultivation has expanded and the illicit crop substitution programme seems to be faltering. ELN guerrillas, paramilitary successor groups and criminal gangs involved in the illicit drugs trade have imposed themselves in many territories vacated by the FARC.

Methodology

Semi-structured interviews using question / topics lists. Interviews have been carried out in Spanish. During the COVID pandemic interviews have been carried out via teleconference or videoconference. Otherwise interviews have been face-to-face.

Location

Interviews have been carried out in four borderland sites:

- Puerto Asís, Putumayo (Ecuador border)

- Catatumbo, Norte de Santander (Venezuela border)
- Tumaco, Nariño (Pacific coast and Ecuador border)
- Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta (Caribbean coast)

Time period

2018-2021

Sample selection

Interviews have been carried out with various groups of actors and stakeholders:

- coca growers
- coca pickers (raspachines)
- social leaders from rural communities, community organisers and indigenous leaders
- ex-combatants and former members of the FARC
- human rights defenders
- local authorities
- government functionaries and members of Congress
- officials from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)
- public officers
- PNIS officials implementing the drug substitution program

	Tumaco	Puerto Asís	Catacumbo	Santa Marta	Total
2018	11 interviews with officials and others <i>(currently 10)</i>	18 interviews <i>(missing)</i>			94
2019	43 Interviews with coca growers, day labourers harvesting coca leaves (raspachines), local politicians, PNIS leaders, public servants and community action boards <i>(currently 40)</i>	Interviews with community action leaders, coca farmers, cocalero women, coca collectors and local bureaucrats implementing PNIS <i>(missing)</i>	Interviews with peasant organisations, community boards and Bari indigenous people <i>(missing)</i>	Interviews with former coca and marijuana producers and muleteers, PNIS officials, local leaders and politicians and social actors. <i>(missing)</i>	230
2020	14 interviews and one focus group with peasant leaders and church. 10 virtual interviews with social leaders and politicians <i>(currently 10)</i>	Interviews with community leaders, coca farmers, cocalero women, coca harvesters and local bureaucrats. 8 virtual interviews with local officials and 5 with coca pickers and peasant leaders	Online group interviews <i>(missing)</i>	4 interviews with politicians and academics	?

		<i>(missing)</i>			
2021	7 interviews	46 interviews with coca growers, social leaders, politicians, public officials, health staff and local businessmen <i>(currently 41)</i>	84 interviews with Bari indigenous people about coca growing and harvesting (raspachines) and officials <i>(currently 70)</i>		?
				49	

Anonymisation steps

The dataset has been anonymised by leaving out names and direct identifiers for all respondents, aggregating certain variables, coding textual responses. Also some sensitive questions have been removed from this version of the dataset.