

A Two-Colombia Model: How the “Hidden Colombia” Emerges with Qualitative Analysis

At first glance, state stability seems to be on the rise in Colombia; however, closer examination gives rise to a two-Colombia model. The “Visible Colombia” is represented by the currently available statistical data, while the “Hidden Colombia,” lost in the statistical aggregation, emerges through qualitative analysis. In this paper, I analyzed rural poverty and cocaine profitability across three Colombian departments to better understand the “Hidden Colombia.” Evidence suggests a correlation between high levels of rural poverty and decreased stability due to the intervention and activity of illegal armed groups. Although cocaine is the primary product trafficked by illegal armed groups, substitution of another product for cocaine would leave the model unchanged. Therefore, it is not the presence of cocaine trafficking that decreases stability, but the activities of illegal armed groups associated with trafficking that decrease government stability.

Introduction:

In the United States, Colombia became a household name associated with cocaine trafficking as public concern about drug abuse became more prominent. Considering that most of the cocaine in the United States originates in Colombia, this association is warranted (CR 2019b; UNODC 2019). However, the situation is far more complex and reliance on an incomplete description of Colombia has led to US policy that fails to address the underlying problems and does not lead to lasting solutions. For example, the US spent \$10 billion on cocaine eradication efforts via Plan Colombia between 2000 and 2015 (Alpert 2016). However, since the rate of production outstrips the rate of eradication, trade continues (White House 2018). Therefore, it is essential to understand the context in which cocaine trafficking occurs in order to develop effective policy promoting stability. By studying the dynamics between rural poverty, cocaine profitability, and illegal armed groups (IAGs) effective policy proposals can be developed. But its illicit nature and the deliberate concealment of information by illegal armed groups (IAGs) engaged in trafficking, makes it a particularly challenging topic to research accurately.

Moreover, the available data leads to inaccurate conclusions because it does not adequately capture the disparity within the country that leads to two vastly different profiles.

This is a case of two Colombias, the “Visible Colombia” and the “Hidden Colombia.” The Visible Colombia is the part of Colombia represented by the data. When Colombia is referenced generally, it is usually about the Visible Colombia. Meanwhile, the Hidden Colombia is characterized by conditions of rural poverty and exploitation by IAGs. The de facto power of these groups is exercised in a variety of ways including forcible displacement, strict regulation, and local relationship building through the provision of resources. Between the deliberate concealment of illegal activity and the minimal impact on aggregate data due to population size, this part of Colombia has been pushed into the shadows. Until this Hidden Colombia is revealed, the country as a whole cannot be fully understood.

Background:

Colombia’s central role in cocaine trade destined for the United States

Cocaine is derived from the coca leaf which is indigenous to several Latin American countries, including Colombia. For centuries, the coca leaf has formed part of local culture and agricultural tradition. As drugs became a profitable commodity, cocaine came into prominence. This shifted coca production from its traditional role and local consumption to the production of coca as the primary component of increasingly popular cocaine. After harvesting, the coca is dried and then transformed into coca paste by undergoing chemical treatments, finalizing it into cocaine (OIG 1997, Flaviano 2014; Mejía 2016). This last step is the most complex and as has historically been carried out by one country (Gootenberg 2007).

The early cocaine routes were dominated by Chile which sourced coca paste from other countries and completed the chemical processing into cocaine prior to trafficking (Gootenberg

2007). However, after a shift in the 1970s, Colombia replaced Chile as the primary cocaine producer, sourcing much of the coca paste from Bolivia and Peru (Gootenberg 2007; Alpert 2016; Mejía 2016). In addition to its historical importance, Colombia gained additional attention from the United States because the cocaine trafficked into the United States primarily originates from Colombia (CR 2019b; UNODC 2019). Although other countries continue with their production, Colombia has the advantage of cultivating its own coca crop and producing its own cocaine.

Illegal Armed Groups (IAGs)

Aside from their infamous reputation, the actions, involvement, and impact of IAGs was relegated to the Hidden Colombia. Within Colombia there are two dominant types of IAGs, guerilla groups and paramilitary groups. Generally, guerilla groups emerged in connection with Marxist or socialist movements that claimed to fight on the side of the people with the express goal of procuring more equitable land distribution. In order to achieve their objective, many of these groups employed violent tactics and eventually came to rely on the drug trade as a source of revenue for their movement (CR 2018; CR 2019c; CR 2019e; FARC-EP n.d.; ICG 2017). Paramilitaries emerged within this context, purportedly to defend the people from the violence of the guerilla groups (CR 2019d). However, the paramilitaries also relied on non-sanctioned violence in their effort to stop the guerilla groups. Although many groups, especially the paramilitaries, denounced involvement in drug trafficking, the need for funding and interest in protecting their assets led many to become involved in trafficking as well (CR 2019d; Holmes, Guitérrez de Piñeres, and Curtin 2006; ICG 2017; Otis 2014). Their shared participation in the cocaine trade and use of violence to defend their interests has blurred the lines distinguishing these groups. Thus, in order to observe the larger dynamics of poverty and cocaine profitability

that are impacted by behaviors common to both groups, they will be collectively referred to as illegal armed groups. Further research into the ideological motives behind various groups would be an insightful contribution to future research but would distract from the focus of this analysis.

Theory/ Statement of Research Purpose:

Exposing the Hidden Colombia is essential to developing a clear picture of Colombia, by establishing this accurate foundation, precise and directed policy is possible. IAGs exploit the conditions of rural poverty and rely on non-governmental sanctioned force to procure profits which undermines state stability. Thus, state stability decreases as conditions of rural poverty and the profitability of cocaine trafficking increase.

Due to the qualitative differences between rural and urban poverty, the implementation of governmental programs can have divergent results. Since land is a vital component of cocaine production and trafficking, IAGs fight to control it. But they are more likely to openly exert their authority in regions with high levels of rural poverty away from dense metropolitan centers. Because public goods are not distributed in the same centralized way, unmet needs are different in areas with rural poverty. Therefore, access to clean water, basic sanitation, and maintenance of public structures like schools are often lacking. IAGs can exploit these gaps to win over loyalty from the locals by providing resources. Or, IAGs can use the physical distance to their advantage because isolated, local organization and mobilization against IAGs is far more difficult and unlikely to succeed, especially with insufficient resources.

H1: If rural poverty decreases then state stability will increase.

Thus, populations living in rural poverty are more susceptible to IAG authority and manipulation. As the levels of poverty decrease, the leverage that IAGs use to control the area is also reduced, allowing for greater stability. If a correlation between high levels of rural poverty

and IAG authority in the region is shown then IAGs are motivated by more than geographic location.

Since coca is the essential element of cocaine, its exclusivity to the region makes it an easier subject to study than other drugs which are more widely sourced or have synthetic variations. Additionally, Colombia's central role in the production and trafficking of cocaine makes it a key way that IAGs support themselves financially. Increased profits allow for greater expenditures to protect their interests through financial arrangements, providing provisions to people in exchange for support, or by violent means. This expansion of force and designation as the de facto local power, puts IAGs in direct opposition to the de jure authority of the state.

H2: If profit from cocaine is reduced, state stability will increase.

Literature Review:

Poverty

National-level poverty statistics distort the distinction between urban and rural poverty. Fortunately, as poverty studies become more common, there is increasing effort to represent the delineation, but the data deficiency remains. For example, the World Bank provides data for 2014 and 2015 which is insufficient for a time-series analysis because there is not enough information to indicate trends (WB 2020). Furthermore, no comparison between distinct periods of time can be substantiated due to the proximity of the years (WB 2020). Moreover, the rural designation is based on the unilateral headcount ratio set by the national poverty line which neglects a nuanced consideration of qualitative differences between urban and rural conditions (WB 2020). While some models moved beyond the unilateral poverty approach, they are still confronted with the task of determining what criteria should designate poverty. Union models automatically classify a household as poor if at least one indicator is insufficient, independent of

other indicators, and even if the recorded insufficiency is by choice (Angulo, Díaz, and Pardo 2016). This interpretation is too broad and leads to imprecise policy generation. As an alternative, intersection approach indexes, try to compensate for imprecision by requiring demonstrated insufficiency in each indicator to be classified as poor (Angulo, Díaz, and Pardo 2016). This standard is too strict since unlivable conditions and a substandard quality of life persist despite meeting the standard on one or a few indicators. In an effort to reconcile these differences, Alkine and Foster developed a model that allows for greater flexibility on the part of the user in hopes of combining qualitative and cardinal data (2011). Their model led to the development of the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) which marks substantial progress for poverty studies as it better reflects the complexity of poverty. One of the valuable tenants of this model is the ability to disaggregate key features; however, the ability to do so with regard to rural poverty and urban poverty, independent of the total, is an underdeveloped but essential feature. Additionally, the newness of this model limits its use for research as there is currently only one data point available in the harmonized case data set for Colombia (MPI 2019). While this is valuable information, more data is necessary for comparison. Hopefully, as this data is collected and interpreted it can be used for future research. Building upon the Alkine and Foster framework, the Colombian Multidimensional Poverty Index (CMPI) shows a general decrease in multidimensional poverty across Colombia and notes the imbalance between rural and urban poverty (Angulo, Díaz, and Pardo 2016). But this determination comes from analysis after the collection of data and results in convoluted findings such as a simultaneous decrease in the rural/urban gap and an increase in the rural/urban multidimensional poverty headcount ratio (Angulo, Díaz, and Pardo 2016).

Violence as it relates to cocaine

Given the persistence of conflict in Colombia, much of the literature has come to focus on violence in the state. Changes in drug prices, crop cultivation, eradication, and interdiction strategies are predictors of both domestic and international terrorism according to Piazza (2011). Therefore, decreasing the price of cocaine and increasing enforcement will lead to a reduction in terror (Piazza 2011). Contextualized to IAGs specifically, Millán-Quijano demonstrates that the number of homicides increases as cocaine prices increase due to the oligopolistic competition between IAGs (2020). While these authors demonstrate the connection between profit and violence, they insufficiently explain which groups are responsible and how they are able to use force. Focusing on the effects of crack cocaine in particular, De Mello confirms the relationship between cocaine and homicides, clarifying that the increase in homicides is associated with cocaine trafficking not possession (2015). Similarly, Holmes, Gutiérrez de Piñeres, and Curtin reach the conclusion that violence is not dependent on cultivation, but they note a correlation between cultivation and displacement (2006).

Stability

Both violence and displacement suggests weak government authority and low levels of state stability as the government is unable to respond to the needs and demands of the people. This is stated more clearly by Shelley who finds that transnational organized crime decreases stability by increasing corruption (1995). The acknowledgement of decreasing state stability is a valuable contribution, but the complexity of IAGs, which Shelley mentions as a unique and defining feature of Colombia, extends beyond corruption (1995). Thus, it is a helpful but incomplete description. Another conceptually valuable claim is that increasing prices in Colombia caused by reinvestment of drug revenue does not necessarily result in improved quality of life for the people (Shelley 1995). This claim is made, but not substantiated with

evidence regarding quality of life. Thus, there is an informational gap concerning living conditions amid complex and dynamic circumstances best met with qualitative evaluation. Finally, the idea of crimilegality, or authority in which the line between legal and illegal blurs, provides another model of stability (Schultze-Kraft, Chinchilla and Moriconi 2018; Schultze-Kraft 2018). These crimilegal systems are often maintained by violence and coercion, especially in societies with a history of violence (Schultze-Kraft, Chinchilla and Moriconi 2018; Schultze-Kraft 2018). The blurred lines indicate a loss of de facto power by the de jure government, especially as criminal groups take uncontested violent action despite local petitions for help.

By combining the insight on poverty, the relationships between IAGs, cocaine, and violence, and the concept of state stability with qualitative case studies, the Hidden Colombia can emerge to provide a more comprehensive view of the country and its inner workings.

Methods:

To test these hypotheses, an in-depth case study on one Colombian department, Chocó, supplemented by two additional department-level case studies in Vichada and Vaupés are used. The relationships that are brought to light from the Hidden Colombia by studying Chocó in depth can be confirmed by the subsequent cases of Vichada and Vaupés (see figure 1). The exclusivity between the US cocaine market demand and the Colombian production and supply allows for the



Figure 1: Map of the location of the three case studies, Chocó, Vichada, and Vaupés.
Source: Mapsopensource

complexity of the world-wide cocaine trade to be simplified to a single chain which makes Colombia an ideal state for observation. This simplification allows for the study to better isolate the relationships between poverty and the profitability of cocaine trafficking on state stability.

There is currently no international standard of classification for rural and urban poverty. So, using all of the public services statistics available for each department, I calculated the total and average amount of services provided for each department (DANE 2018b). Given this data I ranked the countries according to their lack of services and compared it to the unsatisfied basic needs data (DANE 2018a). Chocó, Vichada, and Vaupés consistently ranked in the lowest five departments. After using department-level population density to help verify that they are rural regions. All three departments, Chocó (10.4 inhabitants/ km²), Vichada (0.8 inhabitants/km²), and Vaupés (0.8 inhabitants/ km²), have population densities far lower than the national average of 42.4 inhabitants per square kilometer (AdminStat Colombia 2020). Thus, these three departments were selected out of the thirty-two Colombian departments. To ensure that they are rural areas, Conditions of rural and urban poverty differ qualitatively. For example, distance from government centers and unaddressed problems associated with rural poverty allow large-scale, decentralized networks of IAGs to thrive as they engage in interdepartmental and international trade (Shelley 1995).

State stability is the ability for the government to execute governmental functions and it is characterized by the public's perception of their ability to participate within the political system. The government effectiveness and voice and accountability data collected by the World Governance Index operationalize these concepts using multiple indicators resulting in a helpful conceptualization (Kaufmann and Kraay n.d.). Their data demonstrates increasing government stability in Colombia (see figure 2); however, the data represents an aggregation that only allows

the Visible Colombia to be seen. Therefore, qualitative department-level findings are necessary to see past the Visible Colombia into the Hidden Colombia.

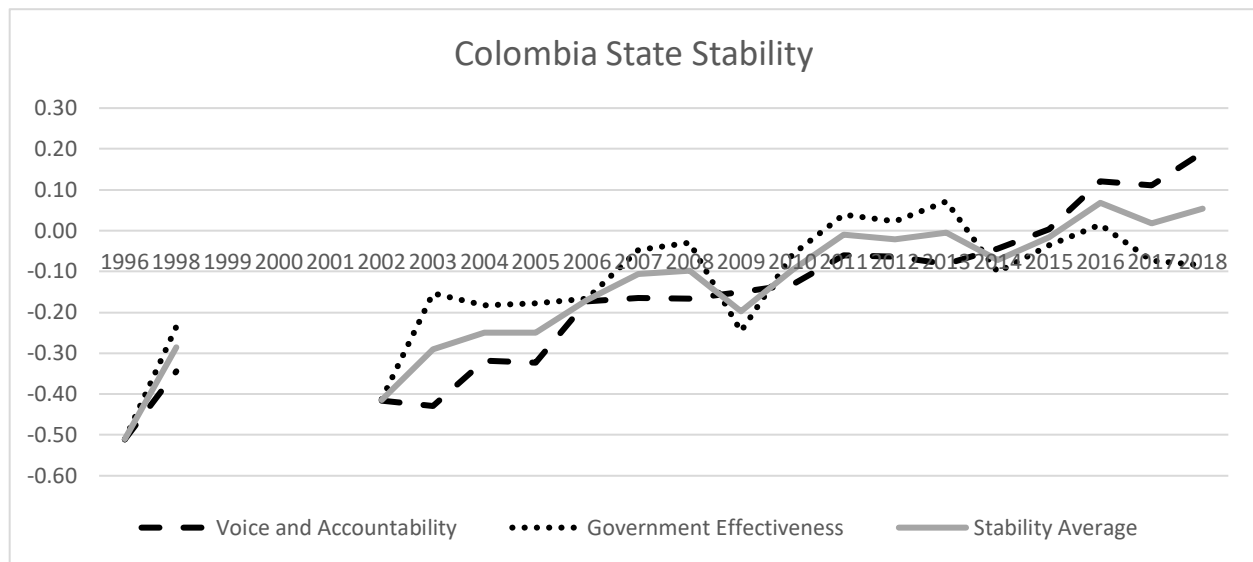


Figure 2: Voice and accountability represents citizen perception of their ability to be represented in government while government effectiveness is the ability of the government to carry out policies and services.

Source: World Governance Indicators

Another element of the Hidden Colombia is illegal cocaine trafficking. Because of the illegal nature of the cocaine trade, profitability must be approximated based on circumstantial evidence. One common way of estimating cocaine production is by considering the number of hectares of coca crop in cultivation (Holmes, Gutiérrez de Piñeres, and Curtin 2006). This allows for a reasonable projection of cocaine production, but it only represents the supply side of the equation. Since this research is particularly concerned with the profitability of cocaine trafficking, both the supply and demand must be taken into account to satisfy the quantitative formula for profit. Furthermore, even with rough estimations of demand in destination markets, there is no data to represent the variable costs incurred in the trafficking process. This lack of information makes the projections of profitability inaccurate and results in misleading numerical

conclusions. Another strategy is reliant on interdiction data (De Mello 2015; Piazza 2011). But, rates of interdiction rely upon state stability to enforce state policies regarding drug trafficking and conflates the independent and dependent variables. In other words, data obtained by interdiction cannot be used to study the impacts of cocaine trafficking on state stability when state stability is inherent to the data. Thus, qualitative data which describes how the drug trade occurs and highlights the role of profit, allows for an analysis of trends and provides explanation.

Findings:

Chocó

As part of the Hidden Colombia, there is limited journalistic coverage of Chocó. This resulted in sparse historical coverage of the region, but contemporary accounts provide valuable insight. Chronic poverty in Chocó made it susceptible to exploitation by IAGs that in turn have undermined state authority. Chocó consistently ranks as one of the more impoverished departments and demonstrates less stable rates of economic development than the national average according (CR 2019a; DANE 2018; Eustance 2016; Friedmann 2018; Sudarsky Restrepo). According to data from 2011, 80% of the population living in Chocó experienced unmet basic needs and approximately 30% lived in extreme poverty (HRW 2017). In 2013, according to a World Bank document, Chocó was recorded as the department with the highest poverty rates. Citizens of Chocó have limited access to basic infrastructure, about 29% percent of the department has access to an aqueduct while approximately 20% of the department has access to sewage systems (DANE 2018). The lack of infrastructure and services is also apparent in the education system. Because schools are limited, students are forced to rise in the early morning and commute long distances to reach the nearest school (HRW 2017). The lack of access to essential resources and services demonstrates the high levels of poverty the department endures.

The extreme scarcity is illustrated by the return of displaced Colombian to their homes after seeking refuge in other municipalities where they expected to receive resources as stipulated by the constitution (HRW 2017). In one example, displaced people were collectively placed in a room and forced to sleep on a concrete floor for eight months with inadequate food and sanitation resulting in the spread of preventable diseases (HRW 2017). The unmet needs were so severe that many Colombians risked returning to the violence they fled, indicating widespread poverty throughout the department.

Conditions of poverty made Chocó particularly susceptible to exploitation by IAGs by two primary forms. The first utilizes the poverty of the people to provide services and build relationships while the second implements strict regulations and relies on threats for control (CHOA 2010). For several decades, the dominate IAG in the department was Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC) (Ávila and Clavel 2017; Sudarsky Restrepo 2019). Their hegemony in the region allowed for a certain level of predictability and local leaders were able to work with FARC which preserved some aspects of civil society (Sudarsky Restrepo 2019). Beyond some relationship formation between local leaders and FARC members, FARC also assumed the role of the de facto government in a few cases (COHA 2010). Such as when FARC provided access to education and medical services (Stanford n.d.a). There are also reported cases of FARC charging a tax in order to create school programs and infrastructure and thus filling a central role of government (Leech 2013). The relationship between local communities and FARC were not consistent across the entire department, nor were they consistently peaceful. However, providing necessary resources fostered greater reliance and trust in the authority of the IAG than in the government (Sudarsky Restrepo 2019). The 2016 Peace Accord signed between FARC and the Colombian government transitioned FARC into a political party and created a

power vacuum that other IAGs rose to fill (ABColumbia 2020; Clavel 2017; ICRC 2019; IGC 2017). While exploitive, FARC's quasi-governmental role limited state stability by undermining government effectiveness.

The voice and accountability component of state stability were also undermined in Chocó. For example, the 2016 Peace Accord called for governmental reforms to address the unviable conditions, but the slow and limited implementation did not restore authority to the government (Palau 2019). In fact, the Ombudsman for the region, Carlos Negret, claimed that the emergence of 17 IAGs was due in part to the unanswered requests for government assistance (Alsema 2019). The emergence of these new groups often led to violent clashes between them that spilt over into the population. Some residents of Chocó commented that under FARC's authority they were still able to engage in civil society, but as other IAGs fight to control the department their ability to do so has declined (Sudarsky Restrepo 2019). In many cases the IAGs that emerged to contend for power subverted local traditional leaders, either by assassination or through threats, as a way to assert control over the area (OECD 2017). This is especially true among indigenous leadership. At least three indigenous leaders were assassinated in Chocó in 2017 and 2018 with a fourth assassination taking place in 2019 (OECD 2017; Veitch 2019). In Juradó, Chocó, more than 1,600 members of indigenous communities were displaced within two weeks (Veitch 2019).

The variation of IAGs strategies creates confusion for citizens as they determine how to act. There are two primary strategies, the first relies on winning over local support while the other involves the use of threats and fear. The 2002 pipe bombing highlights both simultaneously. The bombing occurred in the Bojayá municipality, which was contested by several IAGs (Navarrete 2020). When the locals heard rumors of an attack, they took precaution

by gathering together in a church, assuming that it would be a safe location (Navarrete 2020; Marín Cárdenas 2019). However, FARC initiated an attack on the church resulting in 80 casualties and wounding hundreds of others, as a display of power to take control of the region (Navarrete 2020; Marín Cárdenas 2019). This example of fear and violence to assert control was juxtaposed with the strategy of another IAG that showed up on the scene a few hours later providing care for the wounded and assisting in transporting the injured to receive medical care (Navarrete 2020; Marín Cárdenas 2019).

Another display of authority comes from the establishment of rules by IAGs (Southwick 2013). These rules infringe upon the daily activities of the people and limit their ability to work in the fields, hunt, or fish, often times limiting their access to basic necessities like food and water (HRW 2017). One example is the implementation of curfew by an IAG called Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN) from 6:00 PM to 6:00 AM across several municipalities within Chocó under the pretext of protecting the community (HRW 2017). These limitations disrupt the traditional work and social interactions of the community, but the fear of punishment, which is made clear in mandatory meetings detailing the IAG's response, act as deterrents to non-compliance (HRW 2017; Southwick 2013). In addition to the meetings, instances of killings and torture add credibility to the threat of enforcement. But, enforced punishment is used for a wide array of actions. For example, in some municipalities, IAGs implement restrictions on social behavior (Southwick 2013). Brawling for instance is punishable by community service (HRW 2017). The nuanced protocols like establishing a permissible length for boys' hair and banning ear piercing help to socialize the community into the de facto legal system led by the dominate IAG in the area (HRW 2017). Furthermore, the fear of retribution stops many Chocó citizens from requesting governmental assistance or even speaking out about violations that have

occurred (HRW 2017). Therefore, the reported cases of violence represent only a small pool of all the incidents.

This is made more apparent with recruitment of child soldiers into IAGs which the OCHA reported a recruitment of more than 3,900 minors in 2019 (Alsema 2019b). If a family reports the loss of a child, the family risks becoming the target of more recruitment, facing retaliatory violence from the IAG or having their child labeled an enemy sympathizer by other IAGs, making the child a target (Sudarsky Restrepo 2019). The susceptibility to child recruitment has led many families to stop sending their children to school, fearing that the long journey exposes them to too much risk. The concern is well warranted given the conversion of many schools into IAG base camps (HRW 2017). The forcible re-designation of schools into IAG encampments symbolizes the power of these groups as the local authority and indicates weak state stability.

The decision to keep children home is one manifestation of the desire to avoid the violent circumstances. This is also witnessed in the form of displacement when locals decide that it is better to leave than stay in the situation. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) estimated that 6,900 people were displaced from Chocó in 2016 (Ávila and Clavel 2017). Within the first ten months of 2019, from January to October, it is estimated that over 36% of the population were victims of armed conflict in which OCHA registered more than 15,000 humanitarian emergencies, 1,800 displaced people, and 13,000 people confined to violence (Alsema 2019b). Often this displacement comes in waves like the displacement of 52 residents after and ELN attack that killed 5 farmers or the event in February 2019 where an estimated 2,800 people were held hostage in Bojayá (Villalba 2019). The

violence and displacement show the ineffectiveness of the state to carry out its functions to protect its citizens.

Furthermore, the reluctance of many Choc citizens to request government support indicates either a low public perception of voice and accountability in the government or a belief that the government is ineffective. In the first case, the people lack a sense of efficacy and believe that their needs and desires cannot be effectively communicated to the government which is either unwilling or unable to listen. The second case describes a perception of state weakness where the people are unwilling to risk retaliation by the IAGs for appealing to a government that is unable to intervene and protect them. In Chocó, both aspects of state stability are called into question.

First, in the case of government effectiveness, unfinished projects and inadequate provisions reflect an inability to carry out the tasks charged to the government. One recurrent example in Chocó is flooding. Chocó is geographically predisposed to flooding, but is often met with insufficient aid from the government. The citizens are often reliant on foreign aid for recovery purposes. The most recent flood occurred in February of 2019. While the government announced nationally that it had provided aid to 1,500 people over 15,000 people were impacted by the flooding, and much of the support was provided by the red cross (LAP 2019; Floodlist 2019). Thus, the government claimed success while providing aid to less than 10 percent of the victims, demonstrating a relatively low level of government effectiveness. Compared to emergency response, infrastructure offers a clearer understanding of government effectiveness because the completion of the project as set out by the state can be used as the criteria for its success. Consider an infrastructure project in Chocó which planned to create the first fully paved road connecting Quibdo, the capital of Chocó, to Medellin, the next largest city (Eustance 2016).

After more than three decades of construction the project is still underway (Eustance 2016). Similarly, in Quibdo, which has a population of approximately 400,000 people there is only one hospital which is purportedly on the brink of bankruptcy (Eustance 2016). The inability to complete the project or maintain facilities points to low levels of state stability.

Aside from poverty, the geography of Chocó makes it a uniquely profitable region. It is the ninth largest producer of coca and has two rivers, the Bojayá River and the Atrato River, run across the region forming the foundation of two major drug trafficking routes (Friedmann 2018). These are particularly valuable for efficiently moving large quantities of cocaine to the coast (Ávila and Clavel 2017; Villalba 2019). Chocó's access to the Pacific Ocean and the Caribbean Sea make it especially lucrative because transportation via sea routes remains a prominent mode of trafficking. Go-fast boats which were popular for trafficking in the 1980s began to be replaced by low-profile vessels, which encompasses a variety of models (Woody 2018). One variation of these low-profile vessels includes "narco-submarines" which are becoming more common since the first one was reported in 2006 (Sutton 2020; Woody 2018). It is approximated that the vessels cost about one to two million dollars to build and equip but they allow for massive quantities of product to be transported valuing hundreds of millions of dollars with little detection according to the former chief of international operations for the US Drug Enforcement Administration, Mike Vigil (Woody 2018). The uptick in usage was noticed in 2018 when 35 narco-submarine incidents were reported, and slightly increased in 2019 with 36 recorded incidents (Sutton 2020). It is estimated by the DEA that at least 30-40% of drugs that enter into the United States arrived by narco-submarine, but this estimate is uncertain (Woody 2018). This reliance on submarines suggests that even as strategies of drug trafficking continue to develop, Chocó will remain strategically significant.

The growth, production, and trafficking of cocaine is significant in order to understand what is happening in Chocó; however, it is likely only significant because of its current profitability. Should another illegal product become more profitable, it is likely that IAGs will continue to operate and dominate the region. IAGs action contributes to the decrease in state stability more than the presence of cocaine. The simultaneous involvement in illegal mineral production makes this point more evident (Otis 2014; InSight Crime 2019). Chocó is the largest producer of platinum and silver and the second largest producer of gold (OECD 2017a). Much of this production involves IAGS, for example, FARC established a tax on illegal gold mines (Otis 2014; InSight Crime 2019). Currently, cocaine and mineral production are interrelated, as many believe that over reporting of mineral production is used as a way to launder cocaine profits (OECD 2017a). Therefore, the IAGs have been able to diversify the products that they traffic. If cocaine suddenly lost its value, it seems likely that the IAGs would concentrate their efforts on other illegal products.

Frustration for the government is evidenced by a department-wide strike held in Chocó in 2016 where the people demanded a government response to address poverty, the lack of adequate healthcare, and the limited access to clean water (Eustance 2016). In 2017, another strike was held and participation was estimated to include 70,000 people (Vaughan Johnson 2017). Symbolic displays to of disaggregation also demonstrate the marginalized sentiment of individuals living in Chocó. On Colombian Independence Day in 2016 the inhabitants of Chocó refused to raise the Colombian flag and flew their department flag instead (Eustance 2016).

Vichada

Vichada is another Colombian department characterized by high levels of rural poverty. The lack of infrastructure illustrates the extent that poverty pervades the department. The

department does not have roads connecting cities, and what roads are available cannot be used during rain, there are no health posts, and where electricity is available, it can only be used from 7:00 to 10:00 at night (bogotapost 2017). In the context of this poverty, FARC came to dominate the region in the 1980s (bogotapost 2017). FARC and other local IAGs like Liberators of Vichada inserted themselves in land disputes and worked against new agricultural companies (Oxfam 2013). The IAGs purchased land below market value or took it by force which often resulted in forced displacement, a number that grew from 321 people in 2003 to over 8,600 in 2008 (Oxfam 2013). Given its location on the border of Venezuela and jungle cover, Vichada was prime land for growing coca, concealing cocaine production, and trafficking drugs across the border by plane (Oxfam 2013). Despite some areal eradication efforts, the protection provided by the jungle and the importation of arms, food, and supplies from across the border made the cocaine relatively profitable (Oxfam 2013).

There was minimal evidence of de facto governmental power until 2012 when the government responded by launching a campaign aimed at reducing cocaine trafficking (bogotapost 2017). Concurrently, Vichada was selected as one of fourteen departments to take part in an agricultural substitution program run by the government that committed the Colombian Air Force to help transport the cocoa harvest if farmers would switch from coca to cocoa (bogotapost 2017; Loaiza and Dalby 2019). After the 2016 Peace Agreement, a new plan called the Integral Development for Alto Vichada was set to offer a monthly wage to farmers transiting their crops to help cover costs and to provide expert advice on new crop cultivation (bogotapost 2017). After these measures, there was a purported decrease of coca production from estimates of over 4,900 hectares to less than an estimated 700 hectares in 2017 (bogotapost 2017). So, the areal anti-trafficking campaign in combination with the promise of policies to help reduce rural

poverty decreased the relative profitability of cocaine trafficking. This suggests that by decreasing the profitability of cocaine trafficking, the prominence of IAGs is reduced, resulting in increased state stability. However, these outcomes occurred in conjunction with policies that aimed to reduce rural poverty which strengthened state stability by reducing the public's deference to IAGs.

Unfortunately, by 2019 replacement rates of coca production were estimated to be around 50 percent as many of the programs were not adequately implemented (Jaramillo 2019). Across the participating districts, including Vichada, it is estimated that less than 10% of eligible citizens received the promised benefits like technical assistance (Palau 2019). In addition to the failure to receive promised payments, people who signed up for crop substitution are facing retribution by IAGs for their willingness to participate in the programs (Loaiza and Dalby 2019; Palau 2019). Despite the agreement to these programs, laws were never passed to implement them, thus action was left to the will of the government at the time (Palau 2019). Out of the 578 stipulations about 61% have some level of implementation activity, but they concentrate almost exclusively on the ceasefire and transition of FARC into a political party, leaving the conditions of poverty unaddressed (kroc.nd.edu 2018).

Thus, while intervention to make cocaine trafficking costlier and the promise of poverty relief demonstrated temporary improvements in state stability, the failure to carry out the policies aimed at poverty reduction led to the resurgence of IAGs. Once the areal anti-trafficking campaign and the promise of subsidies to the farmers were removed, coca replanting rates increased (Jaramillo 2019). Even without significant material changes, the perception of changing circumstances resulted in changed behavior. However, when the promises were unsubstantiated, the behavioral changes could not endure. In other words, the recognition of the

Hidden Colombia's existence prompted a positive change to policy approach, but its incompleteness let it slide back into the shadows.

Vaupés

Vaupés is a department in the southeastern part of Colombia that is primarily jungle and only accessible by plane (LAP 2017). It is an ideal location for IAGs because the Vaupés River that runs through the region to Brazil is used to transport coca base (Ávila 2017). Excluding the head municipality, unsatisfied basic needs for the department is 88.18% (LAP 2017). Inadequate resources are especially apparent in the schools. For example, the boarding school in Bocas de Yi have no water, electricity, or toilets and children must sleep in hammocks or on the floor (UNHCR 2009). These conditions of poverty led IAGs to control and transform the region into a profitable cocaine production and trafficking center.

Amid desperate circumstances, and with no legal alternative, much of the population is forced to support themselves by coca cultivation and coca paste production (Ávila 2017). Despite their compliance and involvement, people and municipalities are still subject to both extortion and protection fees imposed by IAGs (Ávila 2017). The normalization of this type of exchange has spread throughout the region and coca base is commonly used as currency to purchase items like food and clothing (Ávila 2017). Poverty has radically linked Vaupés to coca, and the connection will continue as long as IAGs maintain de facto power and coca remains valuable to them.

As in the other departments, the threat of minor recruitment by IAGs is common. Many children sleep at inadequate schools rather than risk abduction by IAGs by commuting (UNHCR 2009). The number of children recruited is unknown, and teachers, often the first to notice a child's absence, fear retaliation for reporting (Ávila 2017). The inability to report for fear of

retribution demonstrates the lack of government effectiveness, an indicator of state stability, as the government cannot enforce its own policies requiring school attendance. Elections reveal a similar lack in state stability. Since, as a constitutional democracy, the government of Colombia has a responsibility to carry out free and fair elections, but in 2002 the threats and violence by FARC were sufficiently severe that two municipalities in the department were unable to participate in elections (USDS 2004).

Within the department one of the most dramatic stories is that of the municipal head, Mitú. In 1998, it was a highly-impooverished municipality with access points to the Vaupés River (Ávila 2017). The locals anticipated an IAG attack, but they were unable to leave or prepare so, the threat went unaddressed until around 2,000 FARC members attacked on November 1, 1998 resulting in over 70 police and civilian casualties (CNN Español 2018; El Tiempo 2018; Pachico 2011). In response to the attack, the government used the military to drive back FARC forces (Pachico 2011). But, after the initial response it appears that socioeconomic changes deterred additional attacks. Due to its historically isolated and impoverished state, little data is available regarding poverty statistics or accounts of infrastructure in Mitú; but, reflections by locals on the twentieth anniversary of the attack indicate stark change. In their comments to the Colombian newspaper, El Tiempo, citizens of the municipality noted that now 80% of the streets are paved, 25 indigenous zones have access to education and health services, and the number of inhabitants has increased more than doubled (CNN Español 2018; El Tiempo 2018). It appears that poverty has improved, or at least that locals perceive they are less poor now than they were previously. Mitú still reports an unmet need of 40.26% which is better than the departmental average of 54.7% but still worse than the national average of 29% (LAP 2017). While there is room for improvement, substantial shifts toward poverty reduction were made in the municipality. Mitú

has become a relatively peaceful and quite municipality with no current formal reports of IAGs (El Tiempo 2018). The decrease in relative rural poverty led to a decrease in the IAGs' authority and exploitation resulted in an increase in state stability.

Discussion:

Across Chocó, Vichada, and Vaupés, it is evident that high levels of poverty leave the population susceptible to rule by IAGs. This de facto rule is in direct contest to state stability as the sense of voice and accountability is cut off and the government is made ineffective. Once this process has started, it often escalates to high levels of violence and displacement. Chocó exemplifies this and has experienced more violence since the 2016 Peace Agreement because unaddressed poverty reduced government effectiveness. So, when the de facto power left, it resulted in a power vacuum. But, the cycle can be broken. Reductions in poverty, like the case of Mitú in the department of Vaupés can restore state stability and keep out IAGs. Vichada showed similar progress toward the restoration of state stability when promises to alleviate poverty were made, but the prioritization of disarmament and neglect of poverty policies opened the department up to renewed conflict between IAGs fighting to assert control and thereby compromising state stability.

IAGs translate poverty into a decrease in state stability while pursuing profit. Thus, as long as cocaine remains a profitable product it will play a contributing role in IAG trafficking. If it loses value, it will likely be replaced by something else. The emergence of illegal metal mining in Chocó supports these predictions. Thus, the system of IAG trafficking will continue undisturbed, regardless of what is trafficked unless sustained efforts targeting the process of trafficking are implemented.

Moreover, the Visible Colombia conceals downward stability trends in the Hidden Colombia because of the improvements in high-density urban areas. The sheer number of people in urban locations overwhelms the aggregate data and therefore cannot represent the nuance within the numbers or account for the challenges unique to rural populations. Closer examination shows that the Hidden Colombia has contributed to decreases in state stability that have gone unnoticed.

Study Limitations

Bringing to light the Hidden Colombia is an important first step, but there is more to be done. Other factors such as ethnic, racial, and religious affiliation are warrant greater study. Understanding the intersection of these other variables with factors like rural poverty will help bring to focus the image of the Hidden Colombia in its complexity. Access to personal interviews to provide primary source accounts of these departments and insight into how they have changed would allow patterns to be analyzed across time, confirming what happens in the Hidden Colombia.

Policy Considerations

Because of the adaptability of trafficking by IAGs, policies targeting cocaine cultivation and production is unlikely to improve durable state stability. At best, it will create a temporary improvement while the groups transition to other trafficking forms. Therefore, policy directed toward decreasing rural poverty should be prioritized. The provision of necessities like access to water and sanitation are critical to breaking local dependence on IAGs. Similarly, making public services, like education and the infrastructure to support it, accessible will help decrease the vulnerability of the local populations. The proposed government policies supporting the reduction of rural poverty and assistance with crop substitution after the 2016 Peace Agreement

generated a positive response. Thus, the full and sustained implementation of these policies have a high chance of success toward creating a more stable Colombian state. To be effective, however, the policies need to be substantiated by laws that secure their implementation.

In addition to these legislative tasks, the government must inform the rural populations of the legal changes uphold the policies. In an effort to minimize retaliation from IAGs to the local populations, government information campaigns about the changes should coincide with the distribution of benefits. If the people are required to commit before receiving benefits, it is likely to spark localized violent conflict. By acknowledging and communicating with populations that have lived most of their lives in the Hidden Colombia the government can help coordinate local expectations and garner support. This is especially important to help restore credibility after the terms of the 2016 Peace Agreement were not carried to completion. A sense of broken trust and the need to recover from IAG backlash makes the challenge of implementation more difficult now, but with deliberate government action to meet the terms of the agreement and to inform the citizens, the policies can still take hold.

Conclusion:

Stability in the Hidden Colombia decreases due to high levels of rural poverty and profitable trafficking by IAGs. IAGs are concerned only with the profitability of the product they traffic. Since cocaine remains profitable, they continue to rely on it as a source of revenue. However, they simultaneously continue to diversify the products they traffic, notably expanding into precious metals. Ultimately, it appears that rural poverty is the precondition that enables IAGs to become the de facto power and is a significant factor for determining the level of stability.

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