DISAPPEARANCE OR SILENT PRESENCE?

A case-study on the emergence, survival and growth of Colombian paramilitaries

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Abstract

This is a single-case study that employs a complex-time series approach, based on rich empirical data. This study examines the underlying mechanisms behind the emergence, growth, and survival of Colombian paramilitaries throughout a 50-year time period. The research is divided into three streams: the paramilitaries birth (1960—1990), the decentralisation reforms (1990—2003), and the post-paramilitarism Phase (2003—2010). Using Tilly and Tarrow's (2015) framework on violent contention, the study explores the political opportunity structures and mobilisation processes that shaped paramilitaries' persistence. Challenging the notion that paramilitaries flourish due to state weakness, this study argues that their survival is rooted in hybrid authority and differentiated state presence. It examines the reciprocal influence between the state and paramilitaries, highlighting how the latter adapted to various conditions to grow and survive. The study explores the organisational adaptability, strategic alliances, and organisational transformations of the paramilitaries, emphasising their ability to merge legal and illegal operations within state structures. By adapting Tilly and Tarrow's (2015) framework and Hristov's (2010) anti-ideological approach, this study provides a comprehensive understanding of the paramilitaries' behaviour and their complex relationship with the state. This research contributes to the understanding of the paramilitary phenomenon and the adaptability of Tilly and Tarrow's framework, suggesting avenues for future comparative studies to explore similar mechanisms across countries.

Keywords: Colombian Paramilitaries, Violent Contention, Decentralization, Demobilization, Nonstate armed actors, Hybrid Authority

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Content

Acronyms

POS: political opportunity structures

Actors

AUC: Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia

ACCU: Asociación Colombiana de Cirugía de Urgencias y Trauma

FARC: Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia

ELN: Ejercito de Liberación Nacional

US: United States

SU: Soviet Union

CEA: Special Forces Unites to demobilise paramilitaries

BACRIM: Bandas Criminales (Criminal gangs)

Policies, laws and institutions

DSP: Democratic Security Policy

AFP: Alliance for Progress

OACP: Office of High Commissioner of peace

CTA: Formation Associated Worker Cooperatives

Organisations

BEC: Bloque Elmer Cárdenas

JAC: Juntas de Acción Comunal (Commission Board)

PDS: Promotores de Desarrollo Social

INCODER: Instituto Colombiano de Desarrollo Rural (Colombian Institute for Rural Development)

Chapter 1: Introduction

An Introduction on the Colombian conflict

Colombia, the cycle of violence

'With today's guilty plea, the bloody reign of the most violent and significant Colombian narcotics trafficker since Pablo Escobar is over*', Brooklyn US Attorney Breon Peace said in a statement. (*Al Jazeera, 2023)

Otoniel, the former leader of the Gulf Clan Cartel, pleaded guilty in a US courtroom for his involvement in narcotics practices (Al Jazeera, 2023). For decades, Otoniel and other illegal groups have been terrorising Colombia, creating a major narco-trafficking network marked by brutal violence (Ballvé, 2012; Hristov, 2010). These cartels, which are guilty of many human rights violations, international crimes, and the displacement of five million people, often originated from self-defence groups. These groups were introduced in 1960 as a security-sector reform to strengthen the state's security apparatus and authority. The self-defence formation aimed to reduce the violence that stemmed from structural economic, political, and agrarian issues and, two decades later, to protect civilians against guerrilla attacks (Grajales, 2017a; Hristov, 2010). The paramilitaries are composed of these self-defence groups, producing to the study's main definition of paramilitaries as *armed groups created and funded by the wealthy, supported unofficially by military and logistical means by the state, and aimed at eliminating or neutralising movements or individuals perceived as threats or obstacles to political actors with economic and political power (*Hristov, 2010. P.15*).* Hristov's (2010) definition illustrates the potential obstacles that can arise when certain authorities are empowered, potentially leading to fragmentation of authority, conflicts between authorities, and monopolisation of violence by non-state authorities (Grajales, 2017a). Otoniel's cartel exemplifies such authority.

The right-wing paramilitaries and left-wing guerillas clashed over land rights, cocaine taxes, and ideologies, resulting in a long-standing conflict that the state attempted to end through democratisation, counterinsurgency, and demobilisation (Eaton, 2006). In an attempt to eliminate the paramilitary presence, the state illegalise self-defence groups in 1980, and to pacify the state, it proposed decentralisation reforms in 1990 (Ballvé, 2012; Hristov, 2010). However, paramilitary groups persisted under a new organisation, the AUC, which was essentially a continuation of the former self-defence groups. Despite state efforts, the paramilitaries re-emerged, expanded, and survived through AUC's formation, encouraging their dominance in society and the escalation of conflicts (Ballvé, 2012; Hristov, 2010). Thus, the state's policies have proved counterproductive, enabling the rise of paramilitary power and authority in society.

In 2003, the escalation led to peace negotiations between the state and the AUC, resulting in the AUC's five-year demobilisation process and marking a new post-paramilitary era (Hristov, 2010). During this era, the state prosecuted several guerilla members and paramilitaries, including a joint effort with the US to prosecute Otoniel (Al Jazeera, 2023; Hristov, 2010). For this reason, US officials argued this was the end of the Narcos' extensive power, while the Colombian state presented itself as a peace supporter because of its success in demobilising and prosecuting right-wing militias (Al Jazeera, 2023; Hristov, 2010). Hence, despite these efforts, the paramilitary presence remains evident in the post-paramilitary era regarding their involvement in politics and violent practices. Throughout decades, the state has potentially created an image of itself as a supporter of peace and democracy, and the state has virtually erased the paramilitary presence from the conflict using language, media, and so-called joint cooperation with the US (Hristov, 2010).

The Colombian Puzzle

Despite domestic efforts to eliminate the paramilitaries, these groups have found ways to survive. Several scholars offer different explanations. Hristov (2010) attributes the paramilitaries' continued presence to state complicity in their activities. Eaton (2006) notes that paramilitaries have succeeded in destabilising and eroding the Colombian state from within, granting them a beneficial position. Ballvé (2012) argues that paramilitaries initiated state formation by producing territory, effectively becoming the state. This study argues that the Colombian puzzle lies in the inconsistency between the state's efforts to eliminate the paramilitary presence and their continued influence. Consequently, numerous policies, laws, and regulations have been introduced by state officials and bodies to eliminate the paramilitaries; however, these forces are constrained by other internal domestic forces, facilitating the 'survival of these groups.

On the one hand, the High Commissioner's Office prosecute paramilitary leaders, but its efforts are constrained or obfuscated by competing forces. For example, Otoniel's arrest illustrates the constraining forces at play; prosecution efforts are limited by domestic forces who leveraged Otoniel's arrest as a strategy to secure the state's and politicians' image while allowing many paramilitary leaders to remain in total impunity (Hristov, 2010). Therefore, on the other ,hand, there are many officials, such as Uribe, and (political) organisations with ties to former paramilitary groups (Hristov, 2010). This entanglement suggests the state's complicity in paramilitary survival and that their presence runs deep within state structures due to their formal integration into imitating institutional state structures by domestic supporting forces (Grajales, 2017b; Terpstra & Dirkx, 2016). Thus, despite domestic initiatives to eliminate paramilitaries, other internal forces encourage them, resulting in their survival and growth. Within the regime, certain forces impede genuine efforts to eliminate the paramilitaries, occurring within in contentious politics. However, the question is, what exactly occurs

within this realm that facilitates the paramilitaries' emergence, survival, and growth? To, This study proposes the following main question to understand this elusive phenomenon:

Which underlying mechanisms explain the emergence, growth, and survival of the paramilitaries in the state of Colombia during 1966–2010?

Paramilitaries have not only emerged and grown but also survived through transitions, evolving into a complex reproduction in many forms and their ongoing presence (Hristov, 2010). To understand this, this study explores the paramilitaries' lifecycle: their emergence, growth, and survival, divided into three episodes: 1960—1990, 1990—2003 and 2003—2010. By examining these episodes, the crucial mechanisms behind the paramilitaries' persistence and their impact on Colombian society will be revealed. This single-case study adopts a mechanism-based approach in a longitudinal setting to understand the paramilitaries' reach and influence, using Tilly and Tarrow's (2015) contention framework to illuminate the factors underpinning their emergence, growth, and survival. Hence, having outlined the complex history and current status of Colombian paramilitaries, the focus now shifts to the specific methodologies and theoretical frameworks that guide the investigation into these paramilitaries' persistent influence.

Research Approach and Framework

This study applies Tilly and Tarrow's (2015) contentious political framework, including political opportunity structures and mobilisation processes.

1. Political opportunity structures (POS) are systematic and structural factors that influence a contention's success or failure. For survival, the paramilitaries strategise and navigate through challenges and opportunities (Tilly & Tarrow, 2015).
2. The mobilisation process concerns contention's organisation and engagement in collective action (Tilly & Tarrow, 2015).

The figure below provides an overview of the meaning of contentious politics (see Figure 1.1)

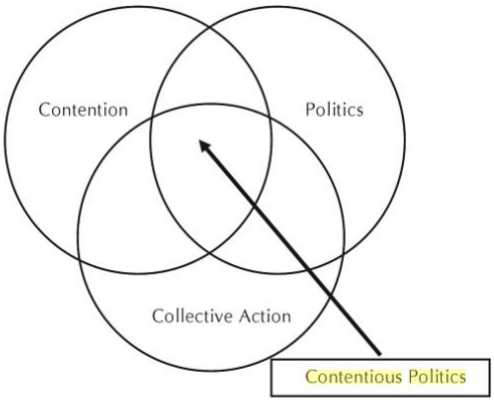


Figure 1.1: Tilly & Tarrow (2015, P.10) Components of Contentious Politics

Tilly and Tarrow (2015) emphasise two messages when exploring contention. First, similar mechanisms and processes operate across various forms of contentious politics. In lethal conflicts, violence always alters the nature of contention and its outcomes. For example, governments and other political actors use organised armed forces, such as national military forces, death squads, or paramilitaries, in their claim-making processes. Collective contentions by non-state armed groups are not blind explosions of mass discontent but are methodical processes led by rebellious minorities. Using Tilly and Tarrow's framework, the study explores the behaviour of non-state actors in violent conflicts and their dynamic state relationships (Kreutz, 2023).

Second, the existing opportunity structures and established repertoires shape the forms and degrees of contention. Contentious repertoires are prescribed sets of actions based on perceived rights or the lack thereof; therefore, non-state actors do not act randomly (Kreutz, 2023). Tilly and Tarrow (2015) elaborate that POS interacts with established repertoires, shaping contentions that can occur within a given regime. In semi-authoritarian regimes such as Colombia, repertoires lean towards lethal conflicts and produce more violence due to the reliance on coercive and violent means to address

contention (Tilly & Tarrow, 2015). Therefore, paramilitaries therefore choose violent tactics based on their popularity, the regime's response, and organisational capacity, resulting in an explosion of violence when a regime lacks institutional capacity (Tilly & Tarrow, 2015). The regime's character, especially the state's capacity and degree of democracy impact, impacts the intensity and location of likely contentions (Tilly & Tarrow, 2015).

Situating Tilly and Tarrow's (2015) analysis within the broader academic debate of non-state actors provides a better understanding of the drivers of paramilitary engagement in violent conflicts and how POS influence their actions. Their analysis offers insights into the conditions and dynamics under which non-state actors emerge, survive, and operate. Their lens allows an exploration of the emergence, growth, and survival of Colombian paramilitaries, including their motivations, strategies, and outcomes within a broader context of social and political struggles. This study explores why the Colombian state claims to be free from paramilitaries while violence continues. Accordingly, Tilly and Tarrow's framework is applied throughout three episodes to answer the study's main question. This main question will be explored with the assistance of three sub-questions that are written below.

1. *Which opportunity structures and mobilisation processes explain the emergence and growth of the paramilitaries from 1960—1990?*
2. *Which opportunity structures and mobilisation processes explain the re-emergence, growth, and survival of the paramilitaries from 1990—2003?*
3. *Which opportunity structures and mobilisation processes explain the survival of the paramilitaries from 2003—2010?*

The first episode examines the paramilitaries' emergence and growth until their illegal declaration. The second episode covers their survival and re-emergence through the AUC's demobilisation. The third episode starts with the AUC's demobilisation process and ends with the post-paramilitary era, focusing on their institutionalisation despite mobilisation efforts. These episodes all conclude with the greatest threats to the survival of non-state armed actors, the illegal declaration of their organisation, the demobilisation of their organisation, and the announcement of the post-paramilitary era, implying the disappearance of paramilitaries. Further arguments concerning the chosen episodes are elaborated in Chapter 3, Section Timeframe. Thus, the theoretical insights provided by this analysis not only deepen the understanding of paramilitary dynamics but also underscore the significant societal and scientific implications of this study.

Study Relevance

Scientific Relevance

This study aims to illuminate contentious Colombian politics, focusing on the ongoing reach of the paramilitaries. The paramilitaries have been a neglected actor in the academic literature, leading to fuzziness in their definition (Hristov, 2010). Hristov (2010) has proposed an anti-ideological approach to address these uncertainties, though his explanations of the processes involved remain incomplete. Therefore, this study explores the ongoing processes of paramilitaries using Hristov's (2010) definition and approach as propositions. This study contributes to constructing a more comprehensive definition and understanding of the paramilitaries in Colombia by researching their activities.

Furthermore, Tilly and Tarrow's (2015) concept primarily focuses on peaceful contention rather than violent contention. Regarding the similarity of the level of analysis, differences may arise due to the nature of violent contention. For the Colombian paramilitaries, it remains to be seen what differences will occur because of violent contention. Moreover, violent contention and non-state actors are often separated areas; however, as Kreutz (2023) elaborates, there is a potential link between the two that remains unconnected. Therefore, this study combine – seeks to bridge this gap by integrating violent contention with the study of non-state actors to explore the paramilitaries in Colombia, building upon the knowledge of Tilly and Tarrow's general laws of violent contention.

Moreover, the study contributes to the wider debate on state-building, moving beyond the neo-liberal principles that typically position the state as the central actor and portray non-state actors merely as the state's challengers. In academic work such as Eaton's (2006), the state is central to state-building, and the paramilitaries are blamed for state failure, while Ballvé (2012) simplistically categorises them by defining paramilitaries as solely illegal groups funded by the coca industry, albeit he highlight the paramilitaries producing territory. Nevertheless, both explanations are too simplistic. Accordingly, this study provides a deeper understanding through a complex time series approach to explore the co-responsibility of paramilitaries in state-building, paramilitary–state collusion, and their essence beyond mere illegality.

Social Relevance

There has been much misinterpretation regarding paramilitaries in the mainstream media and academic ,discourse, which have often portrayed them inaccurately as criminal gangs or narco-traffickers. The Colombian state has even created the label BACRIM to suggest that paramilitaries no longer exist (Hristov, 2010). This portrayal has enabled the state to be successful in virtually erasing the paramilitary presence from the conflict and in presenting a distorted representation of itself as a state that saves its citizens from irrational Narcos. However, Hristov (2010) argues that paramilitaries are more than just criminal organisation; they are deeply intertwined with the state. This study illustrates the entanglements of former paramilitaries in current politics, wherein many connections to

presidents and officials and their roles in perpetuating violence. Therefore, politicians have no incentive to decrease violence or acknowledge the presence of paramilitaries, as such admissions may jeopardise their positions. Denying the ongoing existence of paramilitaries has real-life implications for human rights, ongoing violence, and the role of the international community.

One consequence of not recognising the ongoing existence of paramilitaries is the violation of human rights, especially in the palm oil industry. The increased international demand for palm oil has provided opportunities for paramilitaries to engage in violent entrepreneurship, displacing many citizens due to land-grabbing .practices. Despite official denials from the state, this violent practice continues, and this violation of human rights goes unnoticed by the international community. This study also examines how paramilitary civil society movements engage in whitewashing practices, political influence, and extracting international funds. By shedding corruption levels, the research aims to encourage the international community to respond differently and sensitively. Notably, denying the paramilitary presence has consequences for human rights violations and implications for the international community's role in these issues. To navigate through this comprehensive examination, the following reading guide outlines the study's structure, ensuring a coherent flow from theoretical exploration to empirical analysis.

Reading Guide

This study consists of seven chapters. Chapter 1, provides *the introduction*. Chapter 2’sTwo's *theoretical framework* includes four sections: 1) non-state actor definition and peaceful contention; 2) POS; 3) 4) mobilization process. Chapter 3’sThree's *Methodology* includes three sections: 1) methodological perspective and single-case arguments; 2) mechanisms-based approach and timeframe; and 3) sources. Chapter 4, provides *Episode 1;: Juntas Autodefensas, the Paramilitaries’ Birth 1960—1990*. Chapter 5 addresses *Episode 2 – Unidas Autodefensas and Decentralisation Reforms 1990—2003*. Chapter 6Six presents *Episode 3 – Desaparecer Autodefensas and Paramilitaries’ Demobilisation 2003—2010.* Finally, Chapter 7 ends with *The Conclusion*: 1) reflection, the results, and conclusion; and 2) theoretical implications, strengths and limitations, and future research.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

Non-state Actors: Paramilitaries

Having established the foundational context of Colombia's enduring conflict, this chapter considers the theoretical perspectives that explain the roles and behaviours of non-state actors, with a particular focus on paramilitaries Several scholars have elaborated on the nature of non-state actors, defined as entities not formally integrated into the central state institutions yet willing to use violence to achieve their objectives (Schneckener, 2006). Schneckener's (2006) ideal typologies of non-state actors include militias and paramilitaries; paramilitaries are non-state actors who act on behalf of the state or receive state support to fight insurgents or conduct the state's 'dirty business'. Regularly, paramilitaries and militias evade governmental control during long-standing violent conflicts, subsequently developing their own agendas to sustain the status quo of former elites (Schneckener, 2006). Hence, this typology, while ideal, should be practised fluidly, acknowledging that the typologies of non-state actors can overlap and alter due to organisational evolution or conflict dynamics (Schneckener, 2006).

The existing literature distinguishes between pro-state and anti-state paramilitaries. Schneckener's (2006) typology favours pro-state paramilitaries, while Böhmelt and Clayton (2018) expand upon his typology by exploring pro-state paramilitaries and pro-government militias (PGM) and their integration into state structures. While both groups receive state support, pro-state paramilitaries serve as extensions or replacements of regular military forces and are partially formally integrated into state structures, whereby PGM exist outside state structures. Therefore, paramilitaries dodo not always exist outside formal structures; Böhmelt and Clayton (2018) argue that a state's capacity is crucial for sustaining paramilitaries but not for PGMS. They also explore how states select these auxiliary forces through a principle-agent framework, arguing that the state investment in particular forces is shaped by available resources and capacity, accountability and deniability, and domestic threats. Hence, Böhmelt and Clayton (2018) provide a nuanced understanding concerning the formal integration of paramilitaries in state structures, illustrating that while pro-paramilitaries are often formally integrated and linked with the state's capacity, wherein PMG's remain more clandestine and prevalent in civil conflict. Thus, they distinguish between formal and informal state integration, deviating from Schnecker's earlier typology (2006).).

Other pro-state scholars include Espino (2004) and Üngor (2010), who highlight the dangers of pro-state paramilitaries when state loyalty decreases. As Üngor (2010) explains, while states have found paramilitaries useful in conflict and provided them with cover, these groups have exploited this protection to pursue their political goals with violent means. Espino (2004) identifies this danger in the Philippines, where the state has invested in paramilitary forces as a counterinsurgency against communist threats. These paramilitaries are initially trained to protect communities and encounter communists. However, when state loyalty decreases, the paramilitaries can use their skills against the

state, especially when paramilitaries have built strong ties with locals and developed strong command and control. Thus, both authors demonstrate the dangers of decreasing state loyalty, resulting in paramilitaries evading government control and creating new agendas.

In the middle of the continuum, some authors have explored state-parallel paramilitaries and entanglement. Aliyev argues that Ukrainian paramilitaries have shifted from being state-manipulated to becoming state-parallel entities, evolving into powerful organisations parallel to the state due to their extensive command and control. This evolution from death squads to state parallel forces indicates collusion and entanglement between state officials and paramilitary actors, as Suryana (2019) argued. For the paramilitaries to evolve into significant organisations where violence is often central, the state must be complicit. Suryana (2019) argues that in Indonesia, there is a blurred boundary between police officers and vigilante groups with overlapping material and political interests. This dynamic hampers judiciary officers' abilities to prevent violence and paramilitary growth and bring charges against perpetrators. The state's complicity highlights its role in violence and paramilitary growth. Overall Aliyev (2016) argues that state-parallel paramilitaries are qualitatively different from state-manipulated paramilitaries. Although this phenomenon was typical during the Cold War, it is not new and was merely understudied, as was the entanglement of state officials and paramilitaries.

Besides pro-state paramilitaries, scholars such as Guelke (1995), Neumann (2008) and Mulvenna (2016) have applied the term 'paramilitary' to describe security forces operating outside the law, often referred to as terrorists, particularly those involved with the Irish conflict. Mulvenna (2016) reinforces this argument by exploring the evolution of Irish paramilitaries from gangs to sophisticated organisations. Due to their criminal and religious origins, these groups are termed terrorists. These paramilitaries differ religiously, politically, and socially from the state; therefore, the state does not support these groups, leading them to work clandestinely and outside of the law (Guelke, 1995). Additionally, Neumann (2008) notes that Irish paramilitaries are often described as terrorists or anti-state. However, he contrasts this by noting that in Colombia, these paramilitaries are labelled as pro-state. Thus, this change in terminology illustrates how context influences the perception of paramilitaries and the application of the term to describe the character of these security forces.

Context influences paramilitary perception. Hristov (2010), a scholar focused on Colombian paramilitaries, demonstrated the importance of in the perception of paramilitaries and their character. He proposes an alternative to Schneckener's (2006) typology, critiquing it for its lack of application; the revolutionary extent of his anti-ideological approach is questionable. His approach is based on three principles (Hristov, 2010). 1) Structure Multidimensionality, 2) Multi-faceted nature and 3) dynamic interactions. The structure multidimensionality Firstly, paramilitarism is a persistent structural multidimensional phenomenon that can evolve its expressions and dimensions over time (Hristov, 2010). This principle allows these groups to overcome their limiting ideological construct, wherein they are initially ideological organisations but shift their focus to enrichment. For example, scholars such as Peel (2009) have demonstrated that African militaries often emerge around giant oil

companies offering enrichment possibilities.

Multifaced nature: paramilitaries are recognised as multi-faceted entities that are simultaneously economic, political, and military (Hristov, 2010). This classification transcends economics and politics because the paramilitaries do are not solely motivated by political gain or material assets; rather, there is a strategy for enrichment (Hristov, 2010). However, as Aliyev (2018) argues, this is not a new phenomenon, though it has been understudied. Suryana (2019) illustrates this by detailing the entanglement between police forces and paramilitaries based on shared material and political objectives

Final principle of dynamics is *'the dynamic two-way relationship where each side shapes and affects the other evolutions, state and paramilitary'* (Hristov, 2010). This dimension concerns not only the benefits derived from coordination between paramilitaries and the state but also the high degree of financial, military, and territorial power established outside the state's official boundaries (Hristov, 2010). This aspect is also highlighted by Espino (2004) and Üngor (2010), noting that the relationship influences other evolutions of the state and paramilitaries, whereby state loyalties can decrease when paramilitaries become more powerful. Further, this dynamic can lead to paramilitaries pursuing their own interests and, therefore, challenging the state and its development. As Hristov (2010) elaborates, the state's complicity is an essential condition in the paramilitary's birth and maintenance. Moreover, Suryana (2019) underscores this argument, as does Böhmelt and Clayton's (2018) argument of state investment in sustaining paramilitary forces; indeed, paramilitaries are a more complex, accelerated reproduction of ongoing processes that shape societies and states; however, Hristov's (2010) portrayal, while not revolutionary, consolidates all paramilitary literature into three comprehensive principles. Therefore, this study adopts Hristov's (2010) definition to explore the study's main question and the inconsistency of state's efforts to eliminate the paramilitaries.

Peaceful and Violent Contention

Violent contention, unlike peaceful contention, occurs in lethal conflicts involving two armed organisations (Tilly & Tarrow, 2015). Violence is a complex interactive process; accordingly, Hristov (2010) argues that *paramilitaries are more complex, accelerated reproductions of ongoing processes that shape societies and states*. Therefore, violent contention differs from peaceful contention in three ways. First, the stakes in claim-making; are higher, and violent practices have a long-lasting impact on the survival of participants in conflicts that depend on the organisational structure and support system for those committing violent acts (Tilly & Tarrow, 2015). Second, sustaining armed groups requires extensive resources for maintenance, recruitment, and creation. Third, fighters continue to fight post-conflict, as there are limited opportunities for institutionalisation (Tilly & Tarrow, 2015). Thus, violent and peaceful contention are shaped by POS and respond to changes in political alignments, the availability of allies, and the state's approach to challengers. However, violent contention differs

because it is more directly influenced by access to coercive resources, the state's repressive capacity, grievances, and the legitimisation of violence.

Political Opportunity Structures

This study defines POS into three components, extracted from Tilly and Tarrow's (2015) concept.

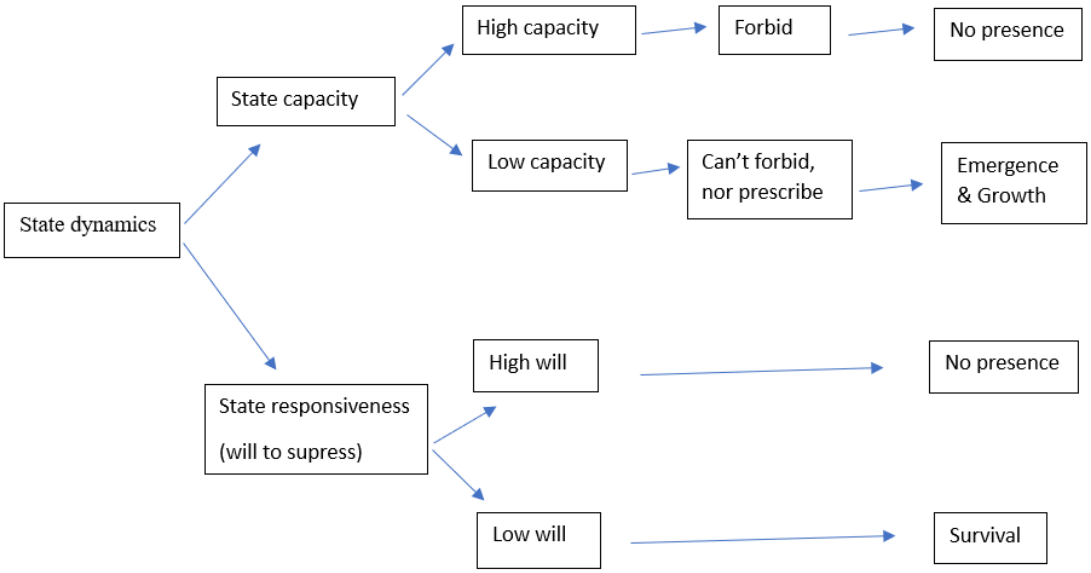
1. *State capacity and state responsiveness*
2. *Political fragmentation and alliance networks*
3. *Institutional structures*

State Capacity and State Responsiveness

Firstly, Tilly and Tarrow (2015) define regimes as relations among governments, political actors, challengers, non-state actors (outside actors), and their external governments. Political actors who are part of the day-to-day government are the standing members, and challengers are those challenging the government with insecure standing. The external political actors have a secure standing over territory outside the government's control. The state and these political actors are in a political struggle, and the state's capacity and responsiveness – or its ability to suppress contention – can function as a POS for violent contention. Moreover, the state's capacity to suppress relates to a low or high capacity of state structures (Bellin, 2012; Tilly & Tarrow, 2015). Notably, states with a low capacity can neither forbid nor prescribe and states with a high capacity dodo not tolerate disruptions (Tilly & Tarrow, 2015). Additionally, high-capacity states often have a strong military force enabling them to discourage peaceful protest, which pushes contention to use violence to achieve its goals. Conversely, states with a low capacity can neither forbid nor prescribe, creating opportunities for contention to emerge and thrive.

Besides the capacity, the state must possess the will to suppress, which decreases when state representatives are linked with non-state actors (Bellin, 2012). Emergence and survival are more likely when there is a low will to suppress contention. As Bellin (2002) elaborates, the state's responsiveness to violent contention always depends on the capacity measurement of government toleration and support (Bellin, 2012; Tilly & Tarrow, 2015). Hence, the state requires the will and capable, well-equipped, and strong institutions to suppress violent contention. Further it requires a functioning security sector that can oppose non-state actors; however, states that exert excessive force will push violent contentious groups to adopt violent practices to achieve their goals. Conversely, low-capacity states with a low will to suppress create opportunities for contention to emerge, survive, and grow. Thus, the figure below provides a conceptual model of state dynamics (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Conceptual Model: State Dynamics



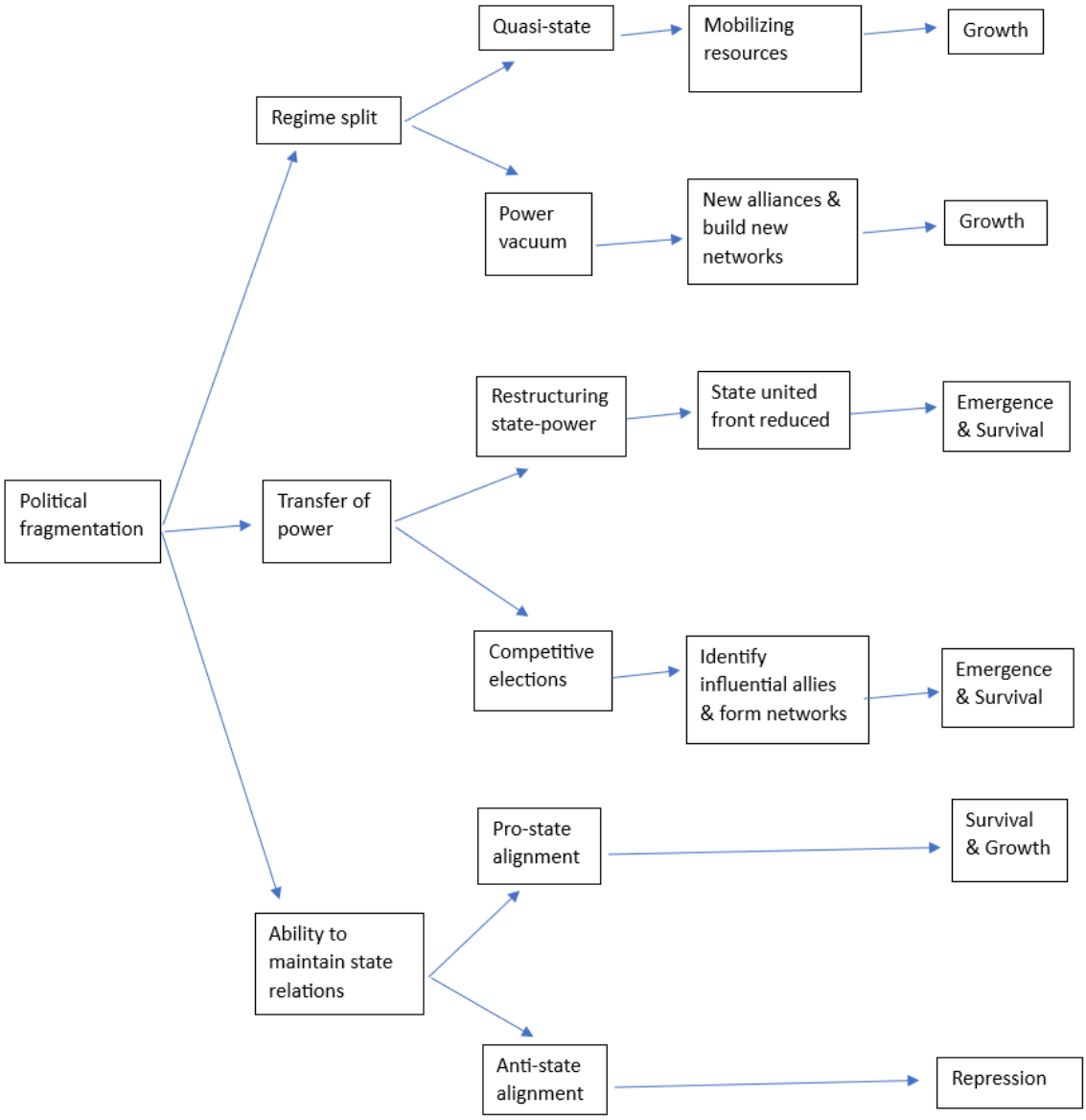
As this figure illustrates, the relationship between state dynamics operationalised into two components, state dynamics and state responsiveness and the presence, emergence, growth and survival of paramilitaries. Or in other words, the state dynamics provide POS for the nonstate actors to seize for their emergence, growth or survival, or the state dynamics result in no presence.

Political Fragmentation

Political fragmentation produces two dramatic outcomes: regime spillover and the transfer of power (Tilly & Tarrow, 2015). These outcomes vary in degree, ranging from minor, incremental changes to major, rapid overturns of existing state structures (Tilly & Tarrow, 2015). Alternatively, a less dramatic outcome could be that non-state actors rally with the state's interests, which can encourage their survival and growth (Üngor, 2010). Furthermore, regime splitting occurs when alliances and routine interactions between parties deteriorate, leading to fragmentation (Tilly & Tarrow, 2015). In extreme cases, this can result in non-state actors gaining control over territory as if it were their own state, encouraging their growth. A regime split also means that the state lost control over territory, power, or alliances, thereby creating growth and survival opportunities for non-state armed actors to fill the power vacuum through building networks and alliances (Tilly & Tarrow, 2015).

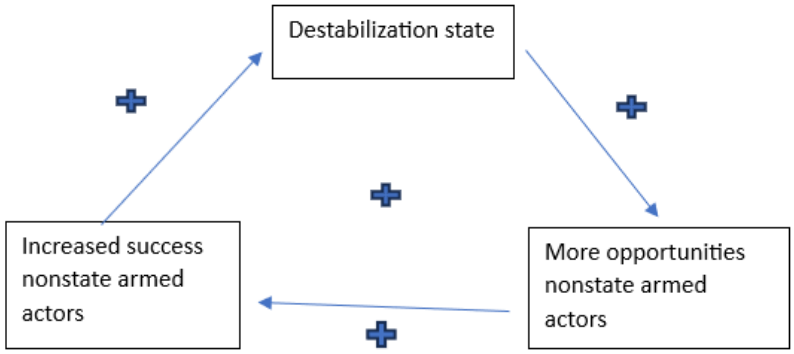
Furthermore, transferpower transfers involve one rising actor gaining more access to control the government while another loses power and a third forms new alliances with the rising actor (Tilly & Tarrow, 2015). Rapid changes can lead to the instability of current political alignments, which can further lead to rivalry among power-holders and forming new alliances. The divisions among elites reduce the state's united front against challengers. This can spark uncertainties in the relationships between politicians and supporters while simultaneously providing survival and growth opportunities for contention (Laition & Fearon, 2003). Moreover, the transfer of power often occurs during competitive elections, which is a fundamental time to gain access, control, and power. Non-state actors can use elections to search for influential individuals to create networks for resource mobilisation and support (Terpstra, 2022). Thus, feedback loops can emerge where the increased success of non-state armed actors produces destabilises the state, leading to more opportunities for these actors, produces thereby perpetuating a cycle of destabilisation and opportunity. To conclude, the figure below provides a conceptual model of political fragmentation (See Figure 3).

Figure 3: Conceptual Model: Political Fragmentation



This figure illustrates the results and opportunities of political fragmentation. Outcomes such s regime split and transfer of power provide nonstate actors to emerge, grow and survival. The ability of nonstate actors to maintain state relations during conflict influences their chance of survival, the more anti-state, the more chance of repression. Moreover, the figure below illustrates potential feedback loops that can emerge when nonstate armed actors are successful in seizing POS (See Figure 3).

Figure 4: Feedback Loop: Success Nonstate Armed Actors



This figure illustrates that feedback loops can emerge where the increased success of non-state armed actors destabilises the state, leading to more opportunities for these actors, thereby perpetuating a cycle of destabilisation and opportunity.

Institutional Structures

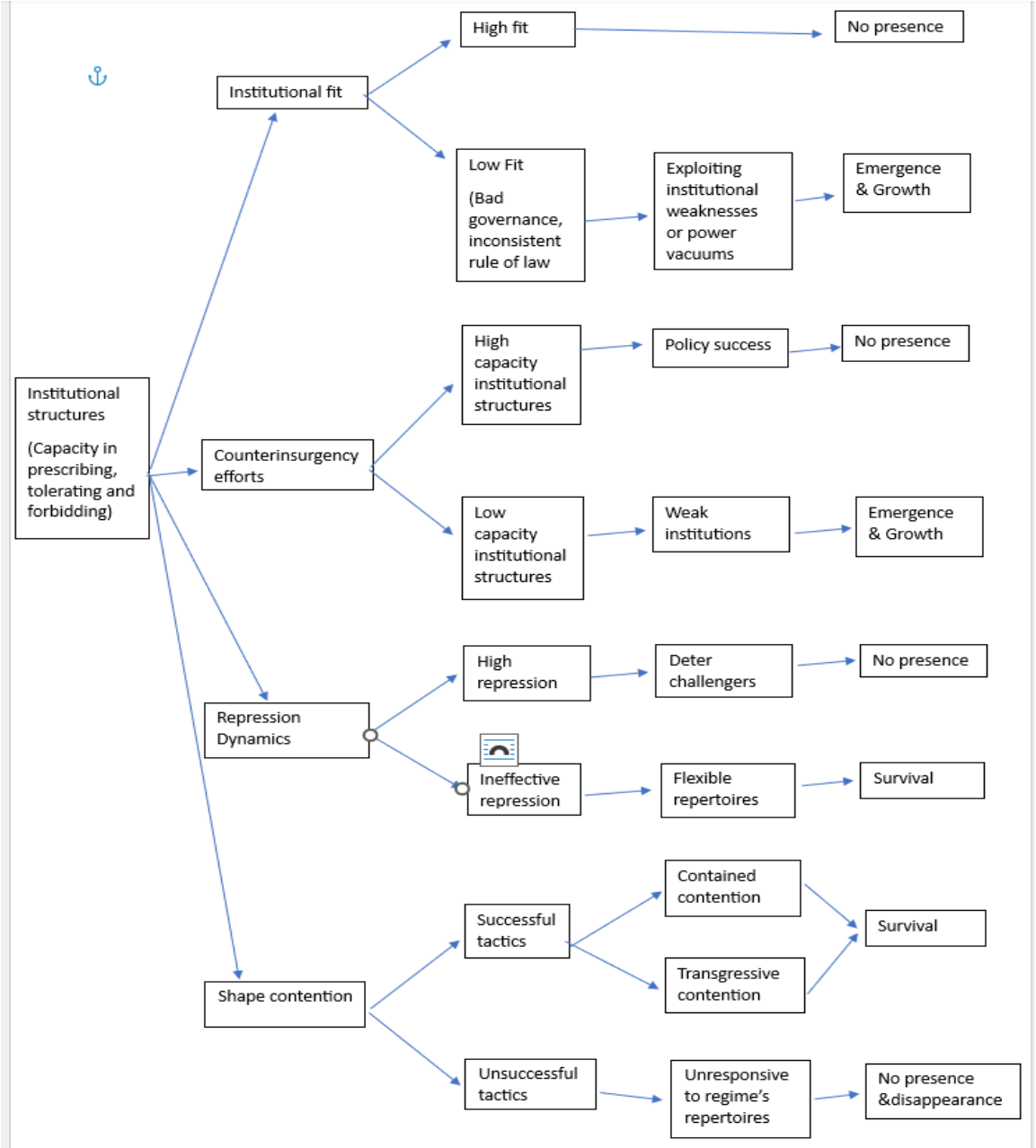
POS are shaped by the state's capacity through institutional dimensions that prescribe, forbid, or tolerate actions due to the dynamic relationships among the state, institutions, and society (Tilly & Tarrow, 2015). Institutions represent the outcome of everyday lived experiences closely linked with the state or as pathways that shape the fit between the state and local conditions (Ballvé, 2012; Tilly & Tarrow, 2015). In weak or failed states, this fit is often incongruent, and due to weak institutions, bad governance, and inconsistent rules of law, violent contention becomes more viable. The absence of effective state control can create power vacuums that violent groups can exploit, leading to their emergence and growth. Moreover, when violence aligns with cultural, political, or historical norms – whenorit 'fits' with everyday experiences, – violent contention is more likely to escalate (Atran, 2010; Crenshaw, 1981). Furthermore, states often introduce counterinsurgency policies; however, their success and efficiency depend on institutional execution (Ballvé, 2020; Bellin, 2012). Weak counterinsurgency policies provide a POS for non-state actors, potentially encouraging them to resort to violence or exploit institutional weakness for emergence or growth. Hence, an incongruent fit and often ineffective counterinsurgency policies encourage the emergence and growth of contention.

Institutional structures determine the capacity to prescribe, tolerate, and forbid, thereby influencing repression dynamics. High levels of repression may deter potential challengers from engaging in violent action but can also push them to use violence. States often deploy rigid repertoires to forbid and restrict challengers, especially in altered settings wherein threats and opportunities co-occur (Tilly & Tarrow, 2015). These repertoires, both repressive and performative, are implemented through the state's structures to and illustrate the state´s ability to suppress challengers (Tilly & Tarrow, 2015; Bellin, 2012). When challengers ascend to power, they potentially adapt similar

suppressive characteristics and change their previously flexible repertoires into rigid ones (Tilly & Tarrow, 2015). However, ineffective repression can lead to non-state actors adopting flexible repertoires for survival purposes to outwit the state's authorities or other competitive actors through new alliances or destabilising the state's forces (Tilly & Tarrow, 2015). Therefore, while high repression through rigid repertoires can deter challengers, it can also compel non-state actors to adopt flexible repertoires to survive when faced with ineffective repression.

Contention is shaped by a regime's institutional capacity to forbid, prescribe and tolerate, dictating the strategies non-armed actors can adopt within the regime's control (Tilly & Tarrow, 2015). Non-state actors can choose between tactics of contained contention (that occur within the entity and through state structures) or opt for transgressive contention tactics that transpire within forbidden territory that crosses a state's institutional boundaries (Tilly & Tarrow, 2015). Alternatively, these actors may opt for both options, simultaneously shaping the entity's organisational structure. Thus, contention is influenced top-down: The state prescribes the types of authorities and violence to be tolerated. The regime needs to adopt the chosen tactics, which then lead to survival. Overall, institutional structures influence POS's ability to seize opportunities, shape political interactions, and affect contention's available repertoires and actions. The figure below provides a conceptual model of institutional structures (See Figure 5).

Figure 5: Conceptual Model: Institutional Structures



This figure illustrates how institutional structures in their prescribing, tolerating and forbidding capabilities influence the institutional fit, counterinsurgency efforts, repression dynamics and the shape of contention. These in turn influences high or low capable structures or tactics to adopt to institutional structures. This influences POS in emergence, growth and survival, but as well nonstate armed actors presence.

Mobilisation Process

Tilly and Tarrow define mobilisation (2015, p. 120) as '*an increase of the resources available to a political actor for collective making of claims; demobilisation as a reduction of this aggregation of resources'*. Mobilisation's component mechanisms are mostly interactive, engaging with challengers, third parties, the state, and the public. Each episode of mobilisation commences and concludes with demobilisation, involving many differences in scale, impact, and outcome of contention (Tilly & Tarrow, 2015).) Mobilisation is divided into three categories:

1. *Political actors*
2. *Successful organisations and networks*
3. *Upwards scale shift*

Political Actors

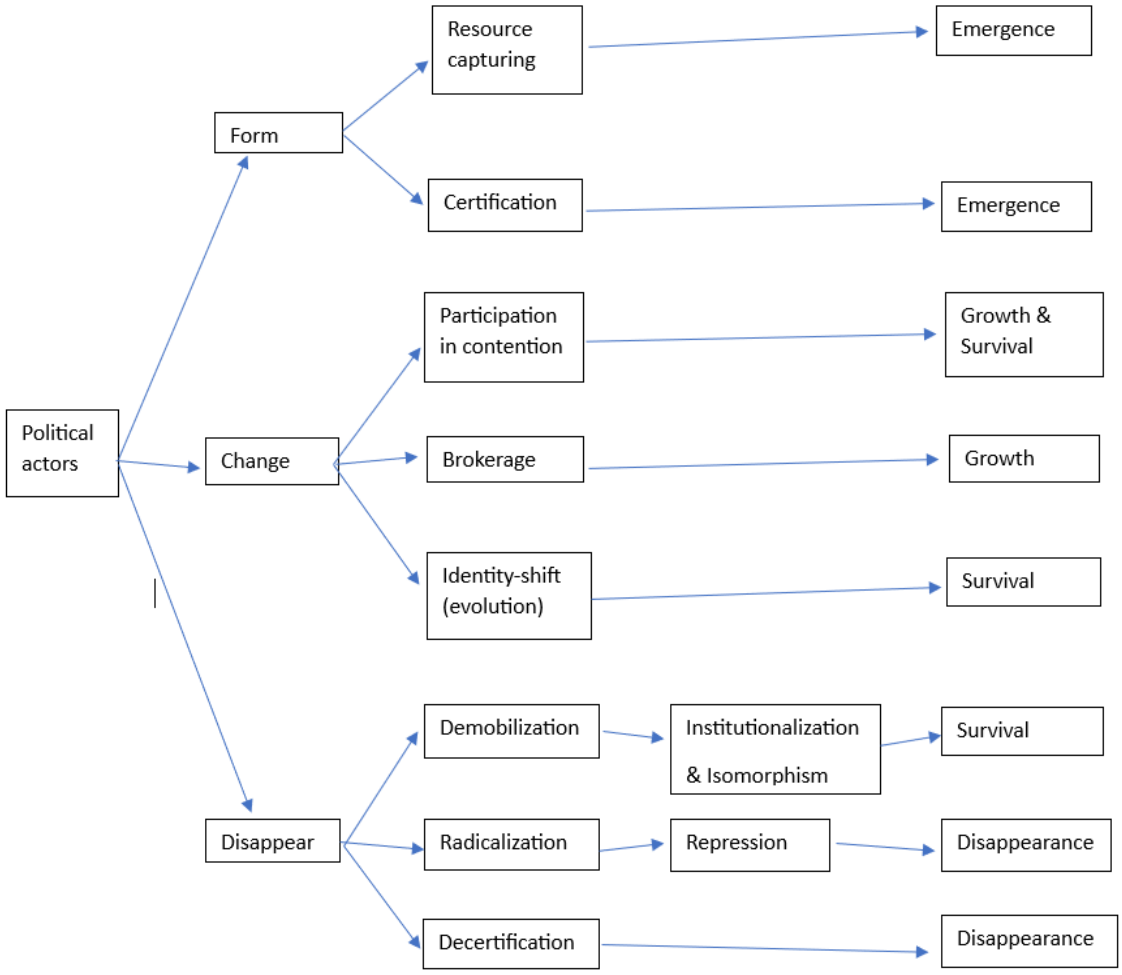
Political actors refer to recognisable groups involved in movements of collective action, directly or indirectly interacting with government mechanisms of claim-making or claim-receiving (Tilly & Tarrow, 2015). Around these mechanisms, political actors are formed through mobilisation, increasingly capturing available resources for collective claim-making, are changed through participation in contention, and disappear through demobilisation (Tilly & Tarrow, 2015). Moreover, political actors are formed around capturing resources and certification, meaning that their existence is recognised and supported by an external authority (Tilly & Tarrow, 2015). This process alters the new actor's strategic position related to others who can become the actor's oppressors, rivals, or allies (Tilly & Tarrow, 2015). Thus, actors can emerge through resource- capture and certification.

Actors change through participation in contention, such as struggles over resources or power, producing to their growth and survival. Furthermore, political actors change through new coordination processes, which are jointly produced and activated through mechanisms of brokerage activities that activate diffusion and lead to coordinated action and growth. Further, actors can change through identity evolution to include more actors within their political boundaries or develop alongside the state interests to survive. However, with decertification, the opposite occurs through the withdrawal of recognition and commitment, potentially leading to repression and disappearance (Tilly & Tarrow, 2015). Thus, actors change through participation, facilitating growth and survival, and through brokerage mechanisms and identity evolution for survival.

Furthermore, mobilisation process ends with demobilisation, which happens through three mechanisms: repression, institutionalisation, and escalation (Tilly & Tarrow, 2015). In lethal conflicts, repression often produces escalation into civil war due to brutal violence against challengers. Often, when states retract reforms – because elites are afraid that certain groups may gain excessive power – indiscriminate brutal repression follows. This repression can trigger radicalisation, often

ending in the disappearance of these groups. This brutal cycle can also foster the professionalisation of opposition, which often manifests as institutionalisation that solidifies the survival of non-state armed actors. Nevertheless, while institutionalisation constrains organisational rationality, adopting institutional rules provides legitimacy and results in homogenisation or isomorphism (Thoenig, 2003). Coercive isomorphism refers to organisations adapting or changing based on regulations, state standards, or government mandates, thereby responding to coerciveness (Thoenig, 2003). Normative isomorphism is influenced by factors such as professionalisation, norms, and political-military uncertainty. Organisations driven by these factors desire to become like others in the same field or industry. Although isomorphisms are crucial to survival, paradoxically, they do not lead to organisatisational efficiency (Thoenig, 2003). Thus, actors disappear through radicalisation and decertification. However, while actors can 'disappear' through demobilisation, ending in institutionalisation, they can also adapt to threats and survive through isomorphism. An overview is generated in figure 6, the conceptual model of political actors.

Figure 6: Conceptual Model:. Political Actors



This illustrates the pathway of political actors in formation, change and disappearance, and the outcomes of nonstate armed actors behaviour in emergence, growth, survival and disappearance.

Successful Organisations

The survival and growth of non-state armed actors depend on organisational success. Often, pre-existing or new organisations are developed for mobilisation and action coordination. These new organisations and networks assist in spreading the organisations and their support, as well as in overcoming collective-action problems. This issue, which did not trigger new coordination through diffusion or brokerage, is fatal for non-state actors. Accordingly, non-state actors need a well-structured organisation, often with strong leadership, to overcome this issue and ignite effective mobilisation. Often, organisational evolution is required to adapt to environmental changes and POS for survival purposes. Thus, the mobilisation of pre-existing and new organisations refers to the mobilisation and coordination of actions and organisational structure and its evolution (evolution) for organisational growth and survival.

Furthermore, organisational success depends on repairing, maintaining, and building resources. Organisations are involved in seizing resources and gathering new ones, maintaining solidarity, managing disputes, recruiting, and providing services (Ajona, 2019; Terpstra, 2022; Tilly & Tarrow, 2015). As Pfeffer and Salancik (1978) elaborate, when maintaining and managing resources, organisations must be proactive when addressing environmental constraints and acquiring scarce critical resources to survive and prosper (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). Furthermore, attracting long-term resources and accessing short-term resources can help organisations becoming more independent of other organisations and urge dependency from others (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1977, 1978). Organisations can choose from various strategies, such as horizontal expansion, vertical expansion, and diversification. Therefore, organisations must constantly must manage political, social, economic, and legal constraints to legitimise their organisation, achieve favourable political regulations, and acquire scarce resources for their growth and survival (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1977, 1978). Hence, organisational growth and survival depend on successful resource management and critical resource acceptance.

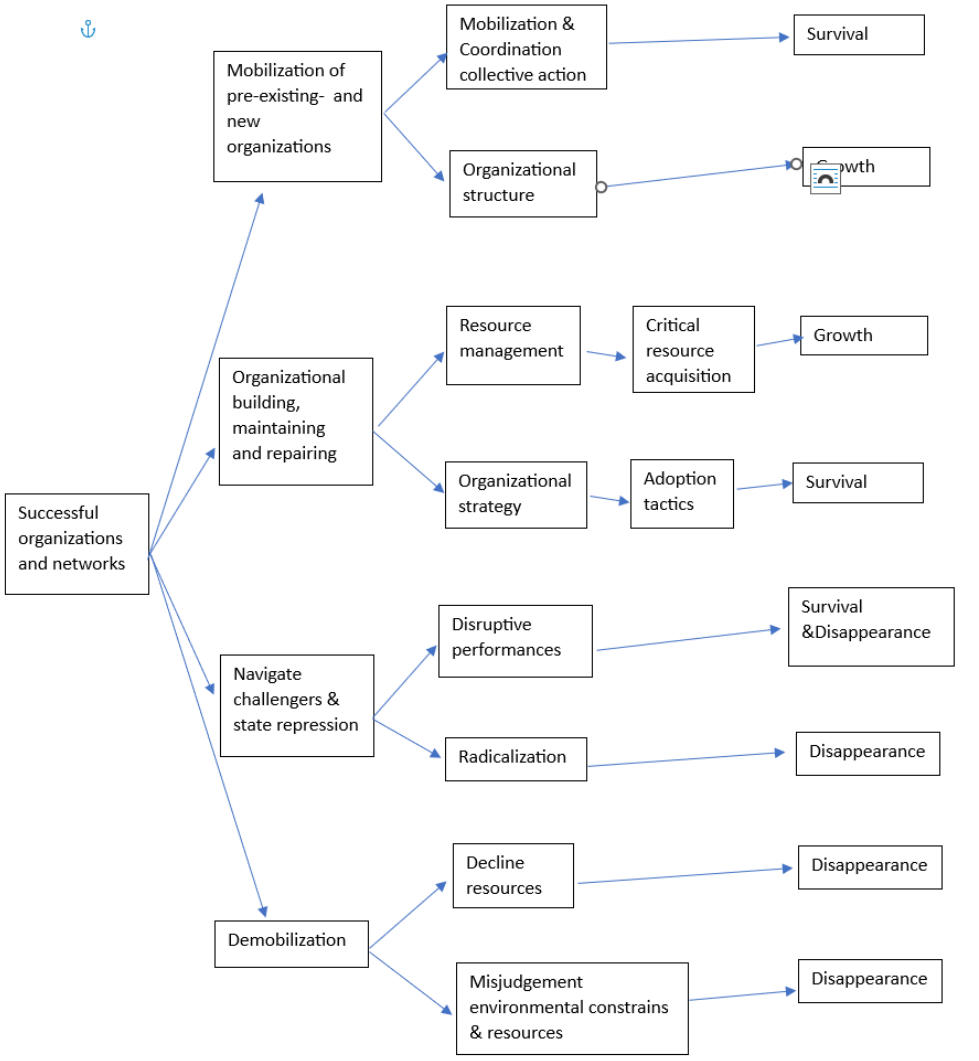
Organisations devote significant time to repairing, maintaining, and building their organisational strategies. An organisation's programme – for survival purposes – is based on contentious interactions to demonstrate its identity and recruitment, leading to support from allies and populations. Actors can employ various tactics, such as displaying tactics, guerilla warfare, new governance models, or political/social integration, to overcome state repression. They can choose between conventional routine performances or disruptive actions(Tilly & Tarrow, 2015). Disruptive actions are directed at unsettling populations or challenging authority structures, with the goal of navigating challengers, evading state repression, and installing fear. Disruptive performances can become conventional. Non-state actors need to balance these strategies and performances between

quick and sustainable action. Hence, for organisational survival, actors must balance strategies and performances with quick and sustainable action because unsuccessful tactics and strategies can end in disappearance.

Non-state armed actors can navigate challengers through disruptive performance, resulting in survival or disappearance. However, polarisation can arise when navigating challengers and state repression, resulting in clashes within the organisation and causing radicals to form into smaller groups. Such divisions between groups can be intensified by the state's repression, which is often disproportionately harsh against radicals, increasing the likelihood of radicalisation, more violence, and the disappearance of radicals (Tilly & Tarrow, 2015).

Moreover, another threat for organisations lies in the misjudgement concerning the acquisition of critical resources. Organisational survival can be threatened when judged incorrectly, and this can lead to a decline in resources, power, and demobilisation (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1977, 1978). For survival, organisations with a decline in resources must focus on managing relationships or other strategies to reduce their dependence on others and increase their power relationships. Hence, clashes can arise within organisations when navigating challengers and state repression, resulting in radicalisation, thereby leading to the disappearance of radical groups. Moreover, mismanagement of resource allocation and a decline in resources can lead to the demobilisation and disappearance of organisations. The figure below provides a conceptual model of successful organisations and networks (See Figure 7).

Figure 7: Conceptual Model 5: Successful organizations and networks



This illustrates how nonstate armed actors organizations and networks influences their chances to survive, grow, emerge or disappear.

Upward scale shift in mobilization

The most significant process of mobilisation is upwards an upward-scale shift, resulting in growth. This process results from the combination of all key mechanisms. It entails a an upward-scale shift that extends beyond locality and touches on the interests and values of new actors, involving a venue shift to other potentially successful spheres wherein political actors can threaten other political parties, such as the state or other independent power-holders (Tilly & Tarrow, 2015). Hence, this is a complex process – concerning the locality of mobilisation – which implies organisational expansion to other arenas (Tilly & Tarrow, 2015).

An upwards -scale shift is triggered by forming alliances across societal divisions and forging new collective identities. Contentious organisations can strengthen their position by building coalitions across society, which can contribute to more support and resources. Such actors can adopt

collaborative strategies because alliances can lead to coordinated actions, shared knowledge, and pooled resources. This enhances an organisation's societal position and the ability to confront common adversaries, as well as its societal reach and entanglement with more actors. Additionally, new collective identities trigger an upwards scale shift by redefining boundaries due to identity shifts. This boundary can exclude or include actors, and organisations can create an enhanced collective identity that resonates with more actors, resulting in the unification of diverse groups under one umbrella or common cause. This consideration is important to maintain solidarity and motivation among participants. Hence, mobilising coalitions and alliances can strengthen non-state actors' positions, support, and resources; forging identities can lead to unification; and both can ignite an upwards scale shift.

Figure 7. *The upwards scale-shift process* illustrates upwards scale-shift through two main routes: the diffusion route and the mediated route. These routes commence with local actions that both culminate at higher new coordination (Tilly & Tarrow, 2015). The diffusion route operates through individuals and groups whose previous contacts or similarities assist in spreading mobilisations (Tilly & Tarrow, 2015). The mechanism in play here is relational diffusion (Tilly & Tarrow, 2015). The mediated route passes via brokers who connect unknown actors with the regime's agenda through brokerage, following an attribution of similarity (Tilly & Tarrow, 2015). Both routes end in emulation, which implies that newcomers imitate the performances of early risers and activate joint coordination, potentially leading to new identities (Tilly & Tarrow, 2015). Thus, mobilisation is a process of coordination, implying brokerage mechanisms that activate the mechanism of diffusion and jointly produce collective action, resulting in growth (Tilly & Tarrow, 2015).

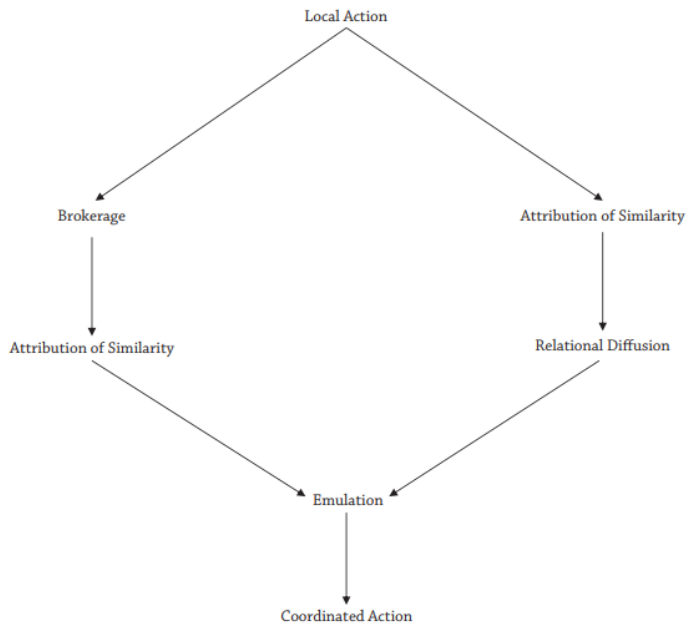
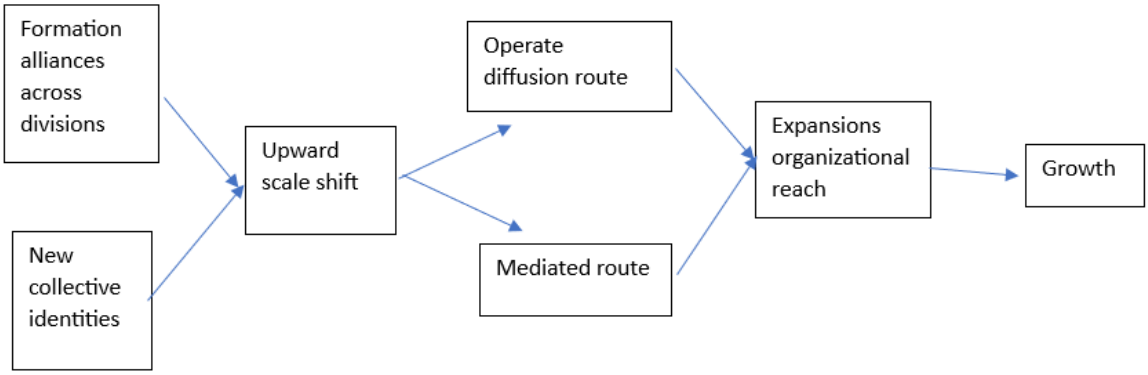


Figure 1.1: Upwards scale-shift process

Source: (Tarrow & McAdam, 2005, p. 128, as cited in Tilly & Tarrow, 2015, p. 126).

To conclude this chapter, a conceptual model is illustrated below (See Figure 8).

Figure 8: Conceptual Model: Upward Scale Shift



This figure illustrates the route of expansions organizational reach. Formation of alliances actors divisions and new collective identities trigger an upward scale shift. This upward scale shift occurs through two routes, operate diffusion route and mediated route, and through both routes organisations expand, therefore it implicates nonstate armed actor's growth.

Tilly and Tarrow's (2015) Framework on Paramilitaries

Tilly and Tarrow's (2015) framework is instrumental in dissecting the factors that drive paramilitaries to engage in violent conflicts and how POS influence their actions, ultimately offering insights into the dynamics and conditions of paramilitary emergence, survival, and growth. Their framework clarifies paramilitary behaviour and the conditions and mechanisms of its emergence, survival, and growth. Through this framework, the paramilitary term can be fluidly adopted into the Colombian context, which relates to the arguments of both Hristov (2010) and Schneckener (2006). As Guelke and Nuemann (2008) elaborate, context influences paramilitaries. Thus, Tilly and Tarrow (2015) consider the density of the context, evolutions, and fluidity of violent contention and go even further by the ability to re-construct the process to understand it.

Furthermore, Tilly and Tarrow's (2015) framework considers state dynamics, institutional structures, and political actors. These mechanisms can assist in operationalising the state's investment in auxiliary forces and how these are influenced. Böhmelt and Clayton (2018) operationalise the state's investment based on available resources, capacity, accountability/deniability, and domestic threats. These mechanisms are also embedded in Tilly and Tarrow's (2015) framework, which provides the possibility of discovering exactly what they are to explain paramilitary survival and

growth. Thus, this study can explore the state's investments in paramilitaries further by examining political opportunity structures through the Tilly and Tarrow (2015) framework.

Espino's (2004) work in the Philippines relates closely to the Colombian case, particularly regarding the use of paramilitaries as counterinsurgency forces to protect communities and communists. Nevertheless combat communist threats. However, he underscores the dangers of such forces when state loyalties decrease; this decline in loyalty can be due to the process mentioned in Tilly and Tarrow's framework of transfers of power within a regime. Moreover, this framework provides an opportunity to explore paramilitary behaviour, their behaviour toward the state, and how their increased power shapes their perception of state loyalty. Further, their framework provides the possibility to explore the reaction of the state to the decrease in loyalties and whether this can lead to the repression of anti-state paramilitaries, possibly labelling them as terrorists (Neumann, 2018). Thus, Tilly and Tarrow's (2015) framework sheds light on the dynamic relationship between states and paramilitaries and how loyalties between these actors influence each other's behaviour.

The parallel-state phenomena that Aliyev (2008) mentioned can result from regime splits, as mentioned by Tilly and Tarrow (2015). Tilly and Tarrow (2015) clarify the battle in contentious politics between domestic officials and paramilitaries, which can lead to rivalry among powerholders and new powerholders. This could result in a regime split granting the paramilitaries access to a new territory, enabling them to declare their own state and become a parallel state. Further, the entanglement of state officials with paramilitaries, which Suryana (2019) explored, can be researched through this lens as well as through mechanisms concerning forging new collective identities and social alliances and networks. Therefore, Tilly and Tarrow's (2015) framework allows this study to explore the underlying mechanisms of paramilitaries' emergence, survival, and growth in a broader context of social and political struggles, enriching the understanding of the fluid paramilitary concept and its relations to the state, itself, and population's. With a solid theoretical grounding established, the discussion turns in Chapter Three to the methodological approaches that guide the exploration of the underlying mechanisms of paramilitary dynamics in Colombia.

Chapter 3: Method

Methodological Perspective

This study explores a social phenomenon in a real-world context focusing onparamilitaries' dimensions of (re)--emergence, survival, and growth, as well as the possible underlying relationships between these various dimensions. This study can be classified as qualitative research,as it aims to examine complex meanings that shape everyday life experiences and, in turn, determine the complex behaviours of actors in the political sphere, which quantitative data cannot adequately capture (Yin, 2003). The study's main question has an explanatory grounding, toing explain the underlying mechanisms of the paramilitaries' emergence, growth, and survival. This technique helps reveal connections, hidden patterns, and processes that are not immediately apparent, thereby solving the study's puzzle. Employing a single-case study facilitates the investigation of meaningful and holistic characteristics of real-life events, such as the life cycle of paramilitaries (Yin, 2003). Moreover, it is too difficult to identify and search for regularities in the various dimensions when the scope is too broad and when multiple variables of interest are present (Ylikoski, 2019). The only viable pathway to explore these relations is through a single-case study that considers the density of the context to accumulate meaningful findings (Al-Ababneh, 2010; Ylikoski, 2019). This approach is supported by existing literature on paramilitaries, which indicates that paramilitary characteristics are influenced by location their location.

Single-study; Case Study: Complex Time-approach Series Approach

As Yin (2003) explains, the strength of the single-case study is evident within longitudinal research. This study's complex time-series approach can stipulate a trend over time – a period of 50 years – , providing the *ability to have rich explanations of a complex pattern of outcomes and compare explanations with the outcomes* (Yin, 2003, p. 124). A complex time-series approach is suitable when a study consists of different predictions of mechanisms over time and possible changes within them. Therefore, this study uses the explanatory framework of Tilly and Tarrow (2015) as a guiding proposition for data collection and analysis through the mechanisms of POS and mobilisation to research thoroughly. This framework of relational perspective ensures a dynamic and context-sensitive understanding (Tilly & Tarrow, 2015). Tilly and Tarrow's (2015) concept can be used as a presumed temporal relationship to analyse the complex evolution of paramilitaries that have shaped their trajectory.

Furthermore, utilising this framework will enhance this single-case study's measurability and validity through the operationalisations of the mechanisms and variables concerning the POS and mobilisations process, which are operationalised defined in the study's theoretical chapter. The clear identification of these mechanisms enhances the study's measurability by applying the framework

consistently in the analysis. these mechanisms must be traced thoroughly through a standardised framework to enhance the study's validity and diminish the chances of errors, as well as to avoid misinterpreting spurious relationships as causal interferences (Yin, 2013). This framework minimises the single-case study's danger of being merely descriptive by explaining how certain outcomes are produced through certain mechanisms (Yin, 2013). Thus, the framework enhances the study's measurability and validity.

However, the study's limitations relate to its generalizability is, which is relatively limited because it focuses solely on Colombian paramilitaries. Therefore, it is only possible to conclude some analytical generalisations about Colombian paramilitaries based on particular sets of results. Additionally, the framework's mechanisms are complex and interactive, posing a challenge in tracing them perfectly, and the study's short timeframe pressures the study to remain somewhat superficial. Therefore, there is a risk of failing to recognise spurious relationships as causal interferences. Finally, the two fallacies pose a constant danger in explaining certain phenomena. Thus, while a single-case complex series approach allows for rich explanations it limits the of depth of understanding the essence of the phenomenon.

Mechanism Based Approach

Tilly and Tarrow (2015) outline a seven-step mechanism-based approach for consistent analysis. First, describe the sites of contention: in this case, the paramilitaries in Colombia. Second, describe the relevant site conditions at the start of contention, which in this study include widespread inequality, weak institutions, US intervention, democratisation, demobilisation efforts, security-sector crises, state behaviour, and violence. Third, delineate the streams of contention (Tilly & Tarrow, 2015). For the paramilitaries, these streams are their ongoing presence and influence in the country despite demobilisations efforts. This is explained through the paramilitary's emergence, growth, and survival. Additionally, it is critical to elaborate on the initial condition – such as the paramilitary organisation or the state's capacity – this illustrates as these set the stage for the beginning of contention and shape how contention actually occurs. Fourth, specify the outcomes to determine contention. In this step, Tilly and Tarrow (2015) explain that it is important to ask outcome questions that can be divided into components, such as state stability or political power. The outcomes to be determined could include changes in state control or organisational dynamics.

The fifth and sixth steps are the study's analytical phase, while the seventh and eighth steps are dedicated to the conclusion. Fifth, fragment the streams into episodes of contention. This fragmentation allows for the exploration of explanations of specified outcomes by combining the conditions, mechanisms, and processes. Sixth, Tilly and Tarrow (2015) suggest searching for mechanisms that produce changes or differences in the episode and eventually between the episodes. This forms the study's analysis that searches for opportunity structure mechanisms and mobilisation

mechanisms. The seventh step is to reconstruct the process with the embedded mechanisms, and eighthly, to explain the specified outcomes by combining the above steps and, if possible, to make comparisons between the episodes and other cases (Tilly & Tarrow, 2015). Thus, the mechanisms-based approach provides a pathway to analyse contention by identifying the sites of contention, relevant conditions, streams of contention, and necessary explanatory outcomes. Moreover, these episodes will help explain casual interferences between mechanisms that have led to the paramilitaries' emergence, survival, and growth and can illustrate the differences in the decline and increase of those mechanisms by reconstructing the process.

Timeframe

The study covers the period from 1960—2010, tracing the paramilitary from its birth until its demobilisation process. This focus allows to explore the paramilitary's an exploration of the paramilitary's presence through their emergence, growth, and survival. As the fifth step elaborates, the streams must be fragmented into three episodes. The explanations for these episodes form the expectations of the study. The first episode, spanning 1966—1990, commences with the security-sector reform that led to forming self-defence groups and ends with the paramilitaries' illegal declaration. Initial conditions triggering paramilitary emergence include ongoing violence between the state and guerillas, land-disputing conflicts, political instability, and economic disparities (Ballvé, 2012; Eaton, 2009; Hristov, 2010; Ballvé). The conditions shaping sites of contention include the state's responses, the emergence of narcos, and the absence of state presence. These initial conditions affect the mechanisms of POS and mobilisation, impacting the outcomes of the paramilitaries' emergence and growth. Thus, this study aims to uncover the mechanisms of paramilitary emergence and growth, as understanding these will also help explain how the paramilitaries could survive in the next episode.

The second episode, from 1990–2003, starts with the illegal declaration of paramilitaries and ends with the AUC's demobilisation. The stream begins and ends with the demobilisation efforts of the paramilitaries (Ballvé, 2012; Eaton, 2006). The initial conditions that started the re-emergence, survival, and growth of the paramilitaries include the illegal declaration, paramilitary involvement in drug trafficking, the absence of the state's presence, decentralisation reforms, and ongoing violence. These conditions, coupled with the AUC's formation, political identity, and organisational transformation, collectively influence the mechanisms that produce the outcomes. The outcomes requiring explanation in this phase are the paramilitary re-emergence, growth, and survival.

The third episode from 2003–2010 concerns the AUC's demobilisation process and ends with the post-paramilitarism era (Hristov, 2010). Initial conditions that influence the paramilitaries' survival are the AUC' dominance, continued violence, and peace negotiations. Conditions that shape the paramilitaries include the demobilisation process, the parapolitics scandal, and institutionalisation.

These initial conditions interact with the mechanisms of POS and mobilisation to influence the outcomes. The outcome that needs explaining is survival of the paramilitaries. Considering the other timeframes and the potential of power attained by the paramilitaries, this timeframe can illustrate their disappearance or continued presence during their demobilisation process. This timeframe will elaborate on this trajectory. Hence, the insights from these combined episodes will enhance the understanding concerning the underlying mechanisms of the emergence, growth, and survival of the Colombian paramilitaries between 1960—2010.

Sources

The – study analyses the paramilitaries – – in the Colombian context using 54 secondary sources from the 1960—2010 timeframe. The data is divided according to the identified episodes. Selecting data in complex-time series research involves the risk of collecting poor-quality data (Yin, 2015). Therefore, the data was selected with the assistance of Tilly and Tarrow's (2015) framework, including indicators for data tracing to minimise the danger. The secondary sources range from qualitative to quantitative research, reports, documents, and sources in English and Spanish. Critics have highlighted the unreliability of secondary sources; however, as Yin (2003) explains, adopting a systematic framework can lead to new discoveries within these secondary sources. Additionally, by examining different sources from different perspectives, a deeper understanding can be gained regarding the study's object (Yin, 2013). Thus, this study can compare different time-consuming studies to balance various perspectives, offering a more nuanced perspective (Yin, 2013).

This study has prioritised the selection of credible and relevant sources to support the study's analysis and conclusions. The following criteria were used to ensure transparency and accountability: For source credibility, this study used peer-reviewed journals such as International Security and the Journal of Conflict Resolution. Additionally, the research included academic books such as Contentious Politics and journalistic books such as Het cartel van de Narcos. This study investigated newspaper articles from El Espactator, The Guardian, and El Tiempo and used phone audios published by El Tiempo and Raya. Further, official reports or secret reports published by recognised institutions were utilised, such as international courts, the CIA, and international human rights organisations. These sources were selected on the basis of their scholarly reputation, relevance to the research topic, and expertise of the authors.

The next criterion is the diversity of perspectives. The study included sources that offer a range of perspectives on the topic. For instance, many sources reported different numbers concerning the demobilisation process; both Spanish and English sources were used to integrate Western and Latin perspectives on the conflict. This approach also helps to ground the analysis in current, real-world data. Moreover, this includes contrasting viewpoints, where applicable, to provide a comprehensive understanding of the subject, such as pro-government viewpoints on Uribe's

administration and Uribe's credibility, as well as critical viewpoints of civil society organisations and international courts. Furthermore, given the relevance and timeliness of this research topic, the study ensured that most sources were published during the study's episodes and included recent publications. However, foundational texts and seminal works that remain relevant were also included, regardless of their publication date.

The last criterion refers to source evaluation. Each source was critically evaluated for its methodological consistency, the reliability of its data, and its contribution to the existing literature. This evaluation process was documented, and any potential biases or limitations of sources were considered in the research. Thus, each source was critically evaluated for its contribution to the study's research questions, and any limitations were transparently discussed to maintain the study's integrity. These criteria ensure a transparent research process and accountability for the study's selection of sources to meet academic standards. It also enhances the credibility of the study by systemically selecting sources.

Furthermore, regarding the limited time constraints, this study relies on secondary sources rather than primary sources. By utilising secondary sources, sufficient information can be retrieved concerning conditions, context, and critical actors related to sites of contention. However, there is a potential risk of generalisation when collecting data because paramilitaries are not homogenous groups. As Holmes et al. (2018) elaborate, paramilitaries are regional phenomena whereby location and era influence their motivations, interests, and agendas. Therefore, to minimise this danger, this study collected data from all Colombian regions to aggregate them into one homogeneous group. Thus, this study's limitations involve collecting potentially poor data, the unreliability of secondary sources, and generalisation the danger of generalisation. To Accordingly, this study uses Tilly and Tarrow's (2015) framework to combat these limitations and guide data collection, using many secondary sources and data from all Colombian regions. With the methodological framework established, Chapter Four explores the initial phase of the paramilitaries' development, examining the origins and early actions of the Juntas Autodefensas during a turbulent period in Colombian history

Chapter 4: Episode 1 – Juntas Autodefensas, the Paramilitaries' Birth, 1965—1990

Context

La Violencia (1925—1958) was the initial condition for the consolidation of the *Juntas Autodefensas* in 1966. Due to the state'ss inability to protect its citizens, these groups were armed to function as a first-response unit and provide intelligence (Holmes et al., 2018). These self-defence groups were governed by traditional clientelism. Initially, this structure was efficient in providing security but excluded other participants from the political process (Hristov, 2010; Eaton, 2006). In rural areas, this situation ignited FARC's formation in 1966 based upon Marxist-Lennist ideology to overthrow and replace the Colombian state (Eaton, 2006; Ortiz, 2002). Other groups, such as the ELN and M-19, also emerged, championing varying ideologies. The leftist guerillas targeted the agrarian sector, which was dominated by the banana and coffee industries (Ballvé, 2012; Hristov, 2010). These guerillas legitimised their actions by voicing peasant grievances concerning land rights and garnering significant support (Taylor & Saab, 2009; Ortiz, 2002). On the other end of the spectrum, right-wing paramilitaries emerged to combat the FARC, driven by capitalist and nationalistic motives (Browitt, 2001). Consequently, a bloody conflict ensued between left- and right-wing militias (Grajales, 2017a; Taylor & Saab 2009).

The drug cartels' involvement further shaped the security landscape, often collaborating with or against guerillas and paramilitaries as well as targeting the state (Verbeek, 2016). Cocaine became an important driver for armed actors to sustain their operations, influencing their motives for violence. The conflict intensified, killing dozens of civilians due to the fragmentation of armed groups within society and the state's inability to stop the violence (Taylor & Saab, 2009). In 1980, President Betancur initiated peace negotiations involving the state, the FARC, ELN, and M19 (Ballvé, 2012). This led to the illegal declaration of self-defence groups in 1989. Thus, this period marks the origins of the paramilitaries and their pathway of expansion.

Political Opportunity Structures

State Capacity and State Responsiveness

The Colombian regime is characterised by a complex interplay of political power sharing, economic challenges, social inequality, and ongoing violence. Important actors include the state, local elites, landed elites, guerillas, drug cartels, and paramilitaries. The government of Colombia is not a homogenous entity; its institutions, congress, security sectors, and social sectors may constrain and limit each other for their own interests (Nussio, 2011). The effectiveness of state intervention depends on both state capacity and the cooperation or resistance of social sectors (Nussio, 2011). The regime's

prolonged conflict involved liberals and conservatives, which later extended to include left- and right-wing armed militias. Scholars often argue that prolonged violent conflicts are due to state weakness; however, as Nieto-Matiz (2020), Elhaway (2010), Grajales (2017a) and Nussio (2011) elaborate, the situation is more complex. The state never aspired to monopolise violence and welcomed indirect alliances – the paramilitaries – to provide security (Nussio, 2011; Elhaway, 2010). Hence, by acknowledging the state's incapability and aversion to monopolies over violence, the state's character as a hybrid authority is established, whereby authority is exercised through delegation and facilitated by allies (Grajales, 2017a).

Furthermore, Colombia is known for a differentiated state presence where urban centres develop the state's quality and modernisation especially Bogota) and where peripheral areas selectively develop and authorise state institutions through historical traditional clientelism (Nieto-Matiz, 2020; Verbeek, 2016). Therefore, the Colombian state dynamics exhibit a differentiated state presence and hybrid authority, whereby the state capacity relates to the state's inversion of its monopoly of force, which is delegated to the paramilitaries. The state, with its hybrid capacity, prescribes and tolerates the paramilitaries, facilitating their emergence and, eventually, their growth. Thus, the state supports the paramilitaries' emergence and growth as hybrid authorities that monopolise force.

Moreover, the rise of leftist guerilla movements and drug cartels in peripheral areas incentivised the state to strengthen its presence using paramilitaries (Nieto-Matiz, 2020, Verbeek, 2016). The state's high will to repress guerillas by using paramilitaries reflects its responsiveness in forcibly repressing the guerillas while simultaneously fuelling the emergence and growth of the paramilitaries. The state's low will to maintain its monopoly over force welcomes its delegation to paramilitaries. The paramilitaries, acting as a parallel state body, preserved the status quo and gained autonomy. This situation is why Nieto-Matiz (2020) argues that the impact of conflict on state capacity depends on the type of armed group. Hence, the state has the will to suppress guerillas and, therefore, intensifies its state capacity using. This process granted freedom to the paramilitaries, which enabled their survival.

Political Fragmentation

The increasing power of the guerillas destabilises the state's alignments with the population, army, and landed elite, resulting in political fragmentation during the 1980s and 1990s. Grajales (2017a) describes this as a polarisation phenomenon. The M-19 attack on the Palace of Justice in 1985 brought Colombia to a breaking point, leaving 100 civilians dead, including 24 Supreme Court judges. The subsequent memorial, organised by governmental officials, was boycotted by 12 judges who survived the 28-hour siege of the Justice Palace: '*they stayed away to protest the Government's handling of the crisis'* (Treaster, 1985). The state's failure could not prevent guerilla victories caused the political and

land elites, as well as judges and civilians, to feel increasingly threatened by the left. Thus, this regime split created a power vacuum for the paramilitaries to seize, creating opportunities to build alliances with the landed elite, army, and population. The elite formed coalitions with the paramilitaries to protect their societal positions, and this opportunity encouraged paramilitary growth (Grajales, 2017a).

The polarisation also sparked a transfer of power. The state's united front was compromised due to the FARC's increasing power and territorial control, positioning it as a successful state challenger. The FARC's attacks provoked the emergence of more sophisticated groups (Romero, 2000). In the north of Colombia, the Castano brothers formed their Los Tangereous organisation, later known as ACCU (Independent, 2006).

In 1981, Farc snatched Castaño senior and demanded a $7,500 ransom, which was raised by the eldest brother, Fidel, by mortgaging the farm. Yet the father's corpse was found chained to a tree even after the cash was paid. (Independent, 2006)

Their father's murder by the FARC, despite a ransom payment, led to the formation of Los Tangereous. The Castano brothers formed alliances with the landed elite '*to avenge Colombian landowners menaced by rebel Marxists in a 40-year civil war*' (Independent, 2006). Thus, this rivalry between left and right powerholders deepened the divisions between the state and the landed elite, resulting in a new alignment between the landed elite and the Castano brothers, granting the paramilitaries more power. This reduced unity within the state encouraged paramilitary emergence and, later, its survival.

The paramilitaries then formed alliances with the state and military (Grajales, 2017a). These relationships had a stable alignment, with the paramilitaries engaging in the 'dirty business' on behalf of the state. This alignment also involved the state acknowledging its lack of capability and using the paramilitaries as a tool to overcome strategic mismatches (Uribe, 2010; Holmes et al., 2008). Further the military and paramilitaries formed alliances for counterinsurgency, wherein the paramilitaries were perceived as useful tool (Grajales, 2017a). By aligning with state interests to the guerillas combat guerillas by executing the state's 'dirty business,' the paramilitaries illustrated their utility for counterinsurgency, enabling the paramilitaries to survive and grow.

This dynamic led to the rise of potential feedback loops, potentially explaining the ongoing presence of the paramilitaries in Colombia. The increasing success of paramilitaries in fighting guerillas further destabilised the state, providing more opportunities for the paramilitaries. The ongoing polarisation weakened the state even more and enhanced the paramilitaries' survival and growth because the landed elite and the state became increasingly dependent on the paramilitaries to

provide security and engage the FARC. Thus, if this feedback loop continues to be intensified throughout the decades, it could perpetuate the re-emergence, growth, and survival of paramilitaries.

Institutional Structures

The security sector reform was a result of a low institutional fit, whereby the Colombian state was cannot deliver security, especially in rural areas (Pearce, 2010). When the Castano brothers wanted to avenge their father's murder, they initially turned to the military. However, the military could not provide security but did support the formation of a self-defence group (Porch & Rasmussen, 2008). As Castano said:

We invoked justice; we trusted justice, but when it did not respond, we felt we could take justice into our own hands. And I'm not ashamed to say it was for vengeance. (Independent, 2006).

This quote illustrates the low institutional capacity to deliver justice and security, prompting the state to delegate the monopoly on force to the paramilitaries. This delegation allowed paramilitaries could exploit these institutional weaknesses, turning violence into a market strategy to manipulate dynamics in their favour (Pearce, 2010). Thus, the Castano brothers and others exploited these institutional weaknesses to emerge and grow as paramilitary organisations.

Regarding counterinsurgency efforts, the institutions prescribed self-defence groups as hybrid authorities, leading to the emergence of self-defence groups. In 1968, the institutions officially prescribed self-defence groups with the support of the police and military under Decree 3398, Article 33 Paragraph 3:

TheThe Ministry of National Defense, through the authorised commands, may provide, when it considers it advisable, as private property, arms that are considered exclusively for the use of the Armed Forces, with which groups of civilians are armed legally. (Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, 200*4*–2007)

This demonstrates the regime's hybrid authority, which facilitated the expansion of criminal law and security policy, implementing new intervention models and governance techniques (Grajales, 2017a). The state plays a central role in maintaining this dynamic, tolerating various authorities, such as paramilitaries, using violent means (Grajales, 2017a). Thus, the state does not prioritise maintaining its monopoly on violence; instead, it tolerates and prescribes that civilians form self-defence groups with support from the army (Grajales, 2017a). Consequently, paramilitaries emerged as a

counterinsurgency effort, and their central role assisted their growth.

The state's strategy of high repression against the left was managed through institutional cooperation with the paramilitaries, which led to brutal violence against the guerillas (Grajales, 2017a; Pearce, 2010). Essentially, while the state forbids guerilla movements, it prescribes and condones the use of paramilitaries as a counterinsurgency force due to its inadequate control over rural areas (Grajales, 2017a). Nevertheless, despite these measures, they were unable not repress the paramilitaries (Romero, 2000). Thus, paramilitaries were promoted through the state's institutions within the overarching counterinsurgency umbrella; however, when drug allegations against the paramilitaries were made, they faced the potential threat of criminalisation and repression. Nevertheless, this threat of state repression was minimised due to the state's dependency on paramilitaries, granting their survival.

The containment and transgressive tactics of the paramilitaries. The state influences contained contention elements and the transgressive tactics of the paramilitaries. Often, they used containment tactics that are part of the institutional framework for managing violence and shaping political action (Grajales, 2017a). Simultaneously, Uribé (2010) notes that self-defence groups adopt transgressive tactics to eliminate political opponents, which the state often turns a blind eye to.

The paramilitaries slaughtered union leaders, peasants, and the indigenous, as well as targeting militants or sympathisers of political parties with origins in the insurgency. (Castro, 2014).

Nevertheless, paramilitaries' actions are not random; the state prescribes the kind of tactics they can exercise, as evident in the next citation.

Many of these massacres were concentrated in the northern region of Uraba. In the 1970s and 1980s, Uraba was an important territorial enclave for the guerrillas of the FARC and the EPL. By the late 1980s, a steady stream of massacres announced the arrival of the paramilitaries, and the slaughter continued throughout the 1990s as they waged their counter-insurgency campaign. (Castro, 2014)

These citations illustrate the state's rigid repertoires to repress the FARC and other leftist movements, whereby civilians were paying the highest price. These rigid repertoires resulted not from actions aimed at paramilitaries but from institutionalised cooperation between paramilitaries and political leaders (Grajales, 2017a). Thus, paramilitaries use both transgressive and contained tactics, with the state prescribing institutionalised violence and tolerating transgressive tactics to kill opponents. The balance of tactics, based on institutional structures, shaped paramilitary survival.

Mobilisation Process

Political Actors

First, the state formed paramilitaries, leading to their emergence around the capture of resources and their certification, which the state recognised through legal and political alliances. The paramilitaries changed due to their participation in contention, seizing territorial control over key geographical areas and participating in creating opposition to peace processes. By supporting the elite's interests, brokerage processes were activated, resulting in alliances with the landed elite. Furthermore, this paramilitary identity development enabled self-defence groups such as the Castano-paramilitary network in Uraba to develop from small gangs into sophisticated networks that promote paramilitary survival. Often referred to as 'Los Tangueros' before becoming the ACCU:

*Castafio has recruited not a band of professional hitmen but a private army, which he describes without irony as a new kind of guerrilla. The men guarding him have blue uniforms with baseball caps printed with the letters 'ACCU'. They have wartime regulations, a joint chiefs-of-staff, and even 'hearts-and-minds' civic-outreach campaigns. Further, they have a goal. 'We are going to end this war once and for all', Castaho says. (*Kirk, 2007)

Nevertheless, as the episode draws to a close, the paramilitaries face decertification by the state due to rising drug allegations. Since decertification results in disappearance, this poses a great threat to the paramilitaries, especially when the state grants many resources. Therefore, the paramilitaries must respond to this threat by adopting tactics that respond to environmental constraints. Otherwise, an illegal declaration would mean the end of the paramilitaries. Initially, the state formed the paramilitaries as part of the security sector reform. However, they evolved by seizing territorial power and building change, changing their identity to transition into a sophisticated organisation. Nevertheless, toward the episode's end, they face threats to their survival (Pearce, 2010).

Successful Organisation and Networks

Through the mobilisation of violence, the paramilitaries managed to coordinate collaboration, negotiation, competition, and conflict, establishing themselves as central actors (Grajales, 2017a). By producing collective action in violent entrepreneurship, the paramilitaries overcame the collective-action problem, which enabled them to control territory and resources thereby facilitating their expansion throughout the country (Grajales, 2017a; Pearce, 2010). This coordination led to the maintenance and repair of their organisational structure, evolving into a decentralised operational network of semi-autonomous cells with hierarchical structures that maintained clear chains of

command, control, and centralised leadership. Additionally, this granted local commanders certain autonomy for regional adaptability and responsiveness (Romero, 2000). With the paramilitary organisations and networks overcoming collective-action problems and maintaining and repairing their organisational structures, they grew during this episode. Accordingly, at the end of this episode, the self-defence groups developed into seven larger groups, forming the foundation for the AUC.

TheThe Peasant Self-Defense Group of Córdoba and Urabá (Autodefensas Campesinas de Córdoba and Urabá, ACCU), the largest and most public group; the Eastern Plains Self-Defense Group (Autodefensas de los Llanos Orientales, also known as Los Carranceros, after their leader, Víctor Carranza); the Cesar Self-Defense Group (Autodefensas del Cesar); the Middle Magdalena Self-Defense Group (Autodefensas del Magdalena Medio), the group with the longest history; the Santander and Southern Cesar Self-Defense Group (Autodefensas de Santander y el sur del Cesar); the Casanare Self-Defense Group (Autodefensas del Casanare); and the Cundinamarca Self-Defense Group (Autodefensas de Cundinamarca). (Human Rights Watch, 1997)

A successful organisation must focus on resource management. For their critical resource acquisition, the paramilitaries began decreasing their dependency on state resources. Paramilitaries became self-sufficient by allocating more resources, such as land, funds, territory, and authority (Duncan, 2006). Through high-level coordination, the paramilitaries could attract resources from their extensive networks, including politicians, the military, and elites (Duncan, 2006). As organisations face potential declines in resources, they enhance their power relations to attract critical resources and create dependency. This step was crucial at the episode's end because the paramilitaries faced the threat of decertification and managed resource decline by the state. Hence, the paramilitaries increased their dependency and pushed others into dependency through their extensive networks to attract critical resources.

In their organisational strategy, the paramilitaries adopted tactics of coercion and service provision. They employed display tactics and used the media to instil fear, establish their identity, and justify their organisation (Reyes, 2009). Moreover, Kirk's (2007) interview with Castano reveals other tactics. They used symbols, had regulations, and employed staff to demonstrate their identity and act on their objects in certain ways. Their behaviour relates to violent entrepreneurship with the overarching goal of ending the war against the guerillas.. Their approach reflects Machiavellian behaviour: the end justifies their means; the war against FARC justified the innocent killings and Narcos trafficking practices.

Castafo admits what he calls 'errors' – the killing of innocents. (Kirk, 2007)

Furthermore, the paramilitaries adapted to local ;needs; for example, the Northern paramilitaries aligned with Chiquita's interests and goals. Their strategies revolved around violent and start influencing local politics through violence, threats and support for friendly paramilitary-candidates. This encouraged their survival and growth; the Chiquita paramilitaries have been active until as recently as 2018 (Whitney, 2024).

The paramilitaries adapted to the environment to navigate challenges and state repression. By employing regional commanders, paramilitaries could respond to local necessities. Duncan (2006) explains that this structure allowed the paramilitaries to adopt flexible repertoires based on local conditions, evade state repression, and ensure organisational coherence via high-level coordination. The paramilitaries used disruptive performances to challenge the FARC. For instance, in Middle Magdalena, the paramilitaries slaughtered all prostitutes in the communal square in front of the whole community to send a message against fraternising with guerillas (Grajales, 2017a).

It was horrific, they cut them up with a chainsaw in front of everyone and then threw their remains into the holes of the electric poles, they ripped the poles out of the ground and put them back afterwards. (Cienage, 2009 *[*Retrieved from Grajales, 2017a, *p*. V111*])*

The state ignored these acts because the paramilitaries were doing the state's dirty business. Thus, the paramilitaries could navigate state repression by executing the state's dirty business, adapting to environmental constraints, and using brutal violence to challenge the guerillas.

Upwards Scale Shift

When the paramilitaries became FARC's targets, it enabled them to forge alliances with the old elite (Ballvé, 2012). This newly achieved status legitimised their violence against guerillas. Additionally, the dissatisfaction of the elites, military, and locals towards Betancur's peace process allowed the paramilitaries to build alliances as powerful oppositions (Ballvé, 2012). Subsequently, others became progressively accepting of the paramilitaries and their power. This situation resulted in strategic relationships among the old elite, military, and paramilitaries to justify the new order through joint action (Ballvé, 2012). This alliance produced various paramilitary networks, such as the ACCU in the Cordoba region by the Castano brothers (Romero, 2000). Through relation diffusion, the Castano brothers unified smaller paramilitary organisations and alliances – from cattle ranchers to Narcos – into one overarching alliance, the ACCU, based upon strong cross-sectional support from different segments of society (Romero, 2000). This development triggered the brokerage mechanisms of newcomers connecting with the ACCU's anti-communist agenda.

The ACCU began its campaign to eliminate guerrillas in northern Urabá, then expanded south into the departments of Antioquia, Chocó, Bolívar, and Sucre. By the time we spoke with Castaño in 1996, he claimed to have over 2,000 trained, armed, and equipped fighters distributed among five fronts in addition to his headquarters in San Pedro de Urabá. (Human Rights Watch, 1997)

Besides the ACCU's evolution, other paramilitary groups, such as Masetos (middle Colombia) and Autodefensas de Puerto Boyaca (south and middle Colombia), expanded through similar mechanisms. This facilitated their evolution into a sophisticated military force in 1980, which also formed the basis for future AUC (Romero, 2000) to become guerilla fighters. Thus, Castano's alliances were based on strong cross-support, which triggered relation diffusion and produced an upwards scale shift through the route of operate diffusion, leading to ACCU formation. This enhanced coordination triggered brokerage mechanisms and produced an upwards scale shift through a mediated route whereby the ACCU could touch different regional sites (Romero, 2000), thereby facilitating their growth (Romero, 2000).

The paramilitary upwards scale shift was also triggered by their ability to create identities that resonated with actors across society. First,, they identified as victims of guerilla attacks (Romero, 2000). Second, they promoted economic prosperity to resonate with the poor (Ballvé, 2012). Third, their identification as capitalist elites resonated with many wealthy landowners, local politicians, and businesses (Grajales, 207a; Ballvé, 2012).

With Chiquita's support, 'the paramilitaries successively extended their power in the region…by means of assassinations, disappearing people, and displacing thousands of them', according to a report. (Whitney, 2024)

Their paramilitary identity enabled them to expand into different agrarian sites, gaining territorial and political influence (Romero, 2000). They triggered relational and brokerage mechanisms that facilitated an upwards scale shift through mediated and operational diffusion routes. Thus, the paramilitary identity resonated with the poor and elite, facilitating their growth across diverse locales. Their expansion and spread is demonstrated below (See Image, 1,2,3).

Image 1: Expansion paramilitaries in Colombia 1977

Image 2: Expansion paramilitaries in Colombia 1986

Image 3: Expansion paramilitaries in Colombia 1990

These images illustrate the following. The growth of paramilitaries in Columbia is evident in the following images, illustrating the bigger paramilitary movements. Image 1 illustrates, that initially, in 1977, only one small faction was active in the North. However, this scenario began to change dramatically in 1986, illustrating their emergence and their expansion to different sites, demonstrate in image 2. During this time, groups such as the Masetos group were able to extend their influence across various regions through successful coordination, mirroring the expansion strategies of other factions. In 1990, while the increase in the number of active paramilitary groups was less pronounced, seen in image 3, during Betancur's presidency from 1986–1990, the violence increased. During this period, there was much fighting among guerillas, state forces, and paramilitaries. Therefore, the paramilitaries focused on gaining a stronger foothold in these fighting regions through order. Thus, the following images illustrate the expansion of paramilitaries to different sites and the emergence of various groups. As this study further explores the Juntas Autodefensas' formative years, Chapter Five continues this narrative by examining the transformations and re-emergence of these groups under new guises and during a period of significant political and social reform.

Chapter 5: *Episode 2 – Unidas Autodefensas and decentralization reforms 1990–2003*

Context

This episode begins with the illegal declaration of the paramilitaries due to their drug-trafficking activities and bloody violence (Eaton, 2006). President Virgilio Barco (1986–1990) initiated the alternations of the law, and on *May 25, 1989*, '*the Colombian Supreme Court overturned the provisions in Law 48 that allowed the army to distribute restricted weapons to civilians*' (Human Rights Watch 1996)). Barco was a strong opponent of the paramilitaries, Narcos, and guerillas. As Neumann (2008) elaborated, when paramilitaries are perceived as anti-state, they are often referred to as terrorists, like Barco's perception.

*In April 1989, President Virgilio Barco (1986–1990) spoke out against paramilitaries, calling them 'terrorist organisations'. … organisations.... In reality, the majority of their victims are not guerrillas. They are men, women, and even children who have not taken up arms against institutions. They are peaceful Colombians.[55] (*Human Rights Watch, 1996)

Around 5,000 combatants demobilised and reintegrated into society, but the number of their reach is still unknown (Prior, 2021). Their increased power and growth in the last decades (1966–1990) granted them powerful positions in Colombian society, creating difficulties in demobilising the paramilitaries successfully. Due to their powerful positions, they could set up organisations, such as Conviver, to consolidate a new paramilitary organisation, the AUC (Grajales, 2017b). Moreover, this study argues that the entanglement with state officials, elites, cartels, wealthy landowners, etc. assisted AUC's formation that made Barco's initiative ineffective.

*Today, many of the former combatants are high-ranking politicians, members of think tanks or NGOs, or work in the public sector.[45] (*Prior, 2021*)*

In 1991, under president Cesar Gaviria (1990–1994), a new constitution was written to implement decentralisation reforms on a political, fiscal, and administrative level to pacify the country and to achieve peace between the guerillas, paramilitaries, and the state (Rodriguez-Acosta, 2016).

The political decentralisation aimed to end traditional clientelism and respond to insurgent's demands for political participation at local, subnational, and national levels (Eaton, 2006). More parties were allowed to run for office, ending the exclusionary two-party system (Eaton, 2006). Consequently, a new legislative assembly was formed, largely composed of demobilised guerillas. As in the M19 group, around 2,000 members demobilised and secured seats in the national assembly,

influencing the new Colombian constitution and decentralisation technicalities (Prior, 2021; Porch & Rasmussen, 2008).

Initially, the reform positively impacted guerillas by turning them into local parties, decreasing their size, and introducing new party members into political bodies. Similarly, FARC members formed the UP to run for various offices, even considering disarmament, which led to internal disputes with FARC (Eaton, 2006). The UP Party and M19 gained much popularity among the population. The elite, landowners, Narcos, and the paramilitaries felt threatened by their popularity, sparking UP's political cleansing by the paramilitaries (Eaton, 2006). Hence, the immediate effects of the reforms were positive, even creating peaceful political participation; however, this was quickly replaced by violent political participation, resulting in bloody conflict between the FARC and the AUC.

The fiscal reforms aimed to distribute royalties and transfers to the subnational level, reducing the national government's fiscal control (Eaton, 2006). Changes included an equal share of royalties and direct transfers of central-government revenues to the municipalities based on their size rather than relying on centrally collected tax revenues (Eaton, 2006). Administrative decentralisation gave new subnational governments responsibility to provide vital goods such as health and education (Eaton, 2006). These governments gained significant discretion in their daily decisions, whereby the national comptroller's office lost its controlling power over subnational spending. Local governments were given direct access to state resources and autonomy in policy execution (Eaton, 2006). This lack of control, however, made it difficult to monitor spending practices, especially when seized by illicit actors (Eaton, 2006). Thus, insurgent groups start seeking subnational control through violence to access decentralised resources, changing the sites of conflict from the jungle to urban cities.

Opportune political structures

State capacity and state responsiveness

During the decentralisation reforms, the Colombian state aimed to maintain and centralise its monopoly over force. The centralisation of force is crucial to securing non-state armed actor's obligations to peace processes and to monitor decentralised state resources (Eaton, 2006; Hristov, 2010).

Nevertheless, the state's dynamics of hybrid authority and a differentiated state presence limited the state's capacity to enforce law and order in rural conflict areas and later in urban areas. This resulted in the state's dependency on paramilitaries to maintain state's presence in rural areas to provide security (Arjona et al., 2015). The state's capacity was further undermined by AUC's formation, highlighting the state's weakness in enforcing laws and maintaining authority. Thus, the state cannot forbid the paramilitaries but can prescribe the AUC's formation to forbid the guerillas. The state has a hybrid capacity, causing the state's dependency on the paramilitaries to provide security. This assisted paramilitary re-emergence and growth.

Furthermore, President Barco and Gaviria had the will to suppress the paramilitaries but not the capacity, which was further undermined by officials such as President Pastrana, Minister of Defence Botero, and Uribe, who cooperated closely with paramilitaries and others. President Barco and Gavivira faced institutional resistance to suppressing the paramilitaries. For example, the state consolidated a special force, CEA, to forbid and combat paramilitaries, which was ineffective due to military–paramilitary collusion (Grajales, 2017a). The military continues to openly cooperate with the MAS (paramilitary group):

> *Even after these decrees were implemented, however, military leaders continued to work with paramilitaries, defending themselves by arguing that paramilitaries had been effective against guerrillas until drug traffickers induced them to work on behalf of what former Defense Minister Oscar Botero Restrepo termed 'perverse interests'.[60] In the Middle Magdalena, where the government had collected the most information about the military–paramilitary partnership, the army continued to openly support MAS, even patrolling with them and helping distribute pro-paramilitary propaganda.[61] According to former paramilitary commander Meneses, army intelligence even held a meeting with paramilitary leaders in the department of Caquetá after the Barco decrees, where they discussed ideology and operations planning. (*Human Rights Watch, 1996*)*

Therefore, the state's inability and limited will to suppress resulted in a focus on combating guerillas and Narcos, granting paramilitary impunity and survival. The high will to suppress Escobar in 1993 opened the state to cooperation with paramilitaries (Verbeek, 2016). The state did not recognise nor condemn the paramilitaries' involvement, but it did tolerate the execution since the state is not obliged to combat illegal groups without its recognition. Despite recognition, the state's limited will to suppress led to paramilitary survival and AUC's emergence through prescribing and tolerating capabilities. Thus, the will to suppress paramilitaries is limited due to institutional resistance and paramilitary entanglement, which led to AUC's emergence and paramilitary survival.

Political fragmentation

The decentralisation reforms aimed to assemble all parties, but the opposite occurred. The reforms led to hyper-fragmentation, resulting in a regime split. The decentralisation of state revenues to local and municipal levels provided paramilitaries access to coercive means through control over urban areas, manipulation of elections, and infiltration of local governments (Hristov, 2009; Duncan, 2006; Eaton, 2006; Garcia, 2002). Furthermore, in these paramilitary-established zones, the paramilitaries could control local economies, impose taxes, and establish a parallel system of justice (Duncan, 2006). Their governance, often perceived as more brutal yet more stable than the state's, allowed them to create a parallel state (Arjona, 2016; Duncan, 2006). Hence, the paramilitaries could expand because they

could mobilise decentralisation resources, which enabled their quasi-state.

Other opportunities arise due to the regime split. The absence of the state's ability to monopolise force creates power vacuums. This allowed the paramilitaries to access decentralisation resources in urban areas (Hristov, 2010; Eaton, 2006). The paramilitaries could seize local and subnational political positions through their entanglement with military, elite, and business actors. The paramilitaries maintained an extensive network of political and paramilitary collaborations (Romero, 2007b; Garcia, 2002). This caused their representation on a political, administrative, and fiscal level. Thus, power vacuums emerged on a decentralised level, whereby the paramilitaries could seize decentralisation resources and power through maintaining a network of political and paramilitary collusions, thus encouraging their growth.

Furthermore, the political fragmentation ignited transfers of power and reduced the state's united front. Initially, the state alignment with ELP for demobilisation succeeded, as did an alignment with the UP, but similar efforts with FARC created further party rivalry (Saab & Taylor, 2009). Moreover, on the political right, the state alignment with the elite weakened due to agrarian reforms, pushing the elite to collaborate with the AUC. Further, the military and old elite formed alliances with the AUC due to the weakened state's ties. Their paramilitary ability to form alliances with powerful actors allowed them to escape repression. Thus, the state desired to enhance its united front through establishing alignments and implementing reforms, but nevertheless, it resulted in more elite divisions, pushing the elite to align with paramilitaries to combat the FARC, which encouraged the paramilitary's survival.

The newly initiated elections transferred power to the paramilitaries. Initially, some FARC members created the UP party for political participation, integration, and demobilisation, subsequently sparking the FARC's radicalisation due to organisational disputes (Dudley, 2004). Besides FARC's unwillingness, the elite, business-owners, military, and paramilitaries resisted allowing leftist parties in politics, feeling threatened in their power (Eaton, 2006). This impacted their view of the state's legitimacy and provided fertile ground for paramilitary re-emergence. Through distinguishing rivals and allies, the paramilitaries were once again perceived as useful tools for counterinsurgency by the elite, business owners, etc. (Grajales, 2017a). This initiated paramilitary re-emergence through the AUC and increased paramilitary violence against communist associations. The FARC rearmed and violated the peace agreement, which led to Gaviria's following statement (Romero, 2000):

On November 8, President César Gaviria declared a 'state of internal commotion' after guerrillas from the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), Colombia's largest guerrilla organisation, killed 26 policemen guarding an oil pumping station near Orito, Putumayo, and staged a wave of bombing attacks in several cities, including Bogotá. (Human Rights Watch, 1993)

Inevitably, the state's declaration of war on the guerillas increased the use of paramilitaries to protect the state's capacity (Romero, 2000). Thus, right-wing elites distinguished influential allies during the competitive elections to combat the guerillas. The paramilitaries could re-emerge and survive by using violence against the guerillas.

Further, the paramilitaries were concerned about maintaining state relations. The drug allegations influenced paramilitaries to cease drug-trafficking activities. Fidel (Castano-network) illustrates this example as follows:

Although it is rumoured that he had cashed out of trafficking by 1990, Fidel remained a powerful figure in the market, and a vengeful one. When Pablo Escobar tortured and killed two associates, Fidel retaliated by blasting Escobar from his luxurious hiding places and, ultimately, into the gun sights of the US Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) and the Colombian police. (NACLA, 2007)

The paramilitaries tried to escape repression by 'cashing out' trafficking and by siding with the DEA and Colombian police. Despite being officially banned, in 1995, the paramilitaries attempted to conserve the state by establishing Conviver as a counterinsurgency scheme (Grajales, 2017a). Convivers and paramilitaries are not distinct groups, but rather for paramilitary professionalisation and bureaucratisation. Therefore, Conviver was a legal façade for the paramilitaries to be subjected to public regulation to access resources, arrange collaboration, and share intelligence between the state, paramilitaries, elite, and military (Grajales, 2017b). Thus, the paramilitaries cooperated with the state to maintain authority by establishing legal facades for their survival. This legal façade was only possible due to the paramilitary entanglement with the state.

Far from being punished, the junior and mid-level officers who tolerated, planned, directed, and even took part in paramilitary violence in Colombia in the 1980s have been promoted and rewarded and now occupy the highest positions in the Colombian army. To be sure, a few, linked to well-publicised cases, have been forced into retirement or dismissed.(Human Rights Watch, 1996)

Institutional structures

Decentralisation reforms attempt to enhance the fit between institutions and societal needs. Nevertheless, private companies were under attack by guerillas and demanded private security, which was granted under Law 356 for the SVSP watchdog and was a means to pursue paramilitary survival (Grajales, 207b). This scheme – prescribed by the state – was more or less equivalent to the security reform of 1966 and is a strategic imperative to overcome challengers (Grajales, 2017b). Therefore, the institutions monopolise force as a joint product of institutional energies through framing, which allows the paramilitaries to operate under legal façades (Grajales, 2017a). Institutions are not beneficial for

civilians rather for only the state, as the state is a separate body from society (Grajales, 2017a). This phenomenon is explained by Villamizar (Daniels, 2020):

*'What this shows is that the army has never known how to fight a clean war', said Villamizar. 'They don't know how to stand on the side of civilians, or even what their role is in Colombia'. (*Daniels, 2020)

Hence, there is a low fit between society and institutions whereby institutions monopolise framing and therefore the accountability of these legal schemes, which encouraged paramilitary re-emergence through the AUC. The paramilitaries holding the execution monopoly over force could grow through Conviver.

Many counterinsurgency efforts to fight the paramilitaries have been ineffective. Strong opponents to the paramilitaries, such as judges, politicians, and civil society movements, were limited due to paramilitary entanglement and were killed. Further, the clear-hold-build rationale to enhance state representation power and strengthen security was unsuccessful. This included road-construction and security for territorial control and economic development to boost the banana industry (Ballvé, 2012; Ballvé, 2012). Really, the paramilitaries were often the prime supplier of road security and construction (Ballvé, 2012). Thus, counterinsurgency efforts were ineffective due to paramilitary–state collusion and corruption, providing the paramilitaries with opportunities for expansion.

The high repression against the guerillas ignited a new civil war. This assisted Conviver and AUC's formation as counterinsurgency tool to suppress the guerillas and Narcos. The paramilitaries adopted flexible repertoires to consolidate Conviver through brokerage as a legal façade to institutionalise paramilitaries within state structures. This collaboration resulted in AUC's formation within state structures in 1997 (Grajales, 2017a; Richani, 2007). Therefore, violence is part of a public-private approach to governing violence and institutionalising collaboration between armed actors and leaders. Violence is not prevented but only regulated by the state or illegal groups. Thus, the state categorises violence within the legal framework and only addresses the guerillas but facilitates AUC's emergence and survival (Grajales, 2017b).

The institutions influence contained contention and the transgressive tactics of the paramilitaries. The state's tolerance enabled the paramilitaries to adopt contained contention tactics to pressure for Conviver's and AUC's legal integration. Eventually, the state prescribes paramilitary institutionalisation through Conviver and AUC (Grajales, 2017b). The paramilitaries adopt transgressive tactics to eliminate the FARC and Escobar through killing and executing massacres. These massacres raised much attention, and civilians demanded justice and the documentation of these massacres, on which institutions started documenting paramilitary crimes (Human Rights Watch). These institutional limits pushed the paramilitaries to balance their tactics.

Massacres, traditionally used by paramilitaries to spread terror, were less numerous than in 2001, but the decrease appears to have reflected a change in paramilitary tactics rather than a decrease in overall violence. Witnesses, church officials, and municipal observers, among others, described to Human Rights Watch how paramilitaries seized large groups of people, then killed individuals separately, to avoid the publicity that results when incidents are recorded as massacres. As the Bogotá office of the UNHCHR noted in March, 'Although these [tactics] had less drastic effects than the massacres, [paramilitaries] committed numerous individual executions. The Office was informed of cases in which the paramilitaries, after choosing their victims from a large group of people they had abducted, killed them individually or in small groups, leaving the bodies scattered in different locations'. (Human Rights Watch, 2003)

They 'balanced' their tactics upon documentation by killing individuals separately instead of killing the whole group in public. Thus, the paramilitaries react upon institutions and balance transgressive and contained contention tactics, and this balance produces their survival.

Mobilisation

Political actors

The paramilitary formation went through an incremental route by first establishing Conviver, and through Conviver, the paramilitaries could mobilise consensus for AUC's formation, which transformed them into a legal organisation. The AUC could mobilise and frame their socioeconomic power into direct authority, leading to certification, external authorisation, and legal recognition by the state and allies (Eaton, 2006). The paramilitaries participated in the political struggle to maintain their societal position by siding with the state, elite, and army and framing themselves as tools for counterinsurgency (Ballvé, 2012; Hristov, 2010). They distanced themselves from the Narcos and adopted a pro-state identity that concerned solely capital enrichment. They adopted a political identity to evade drug allegations and gain the state's support. Hence, the paramilitaries formed around AUC's emergence, and their identity evolution as pro-state was critical for their survival.

The paramilitaries disappear into the shadows by establishing organisations within state structures, such as Conviver and AUC. As coercive isomorphism, the paramilitaries adapt to the illegal declaration through Conviver, and as normative isomorphism, they become like military organisations and professionalise their organisation through AUC. Paramilitaries without a political approach, such as narcotraffickers, faced the threat of repression. Escobar's cartel emerged from self-defence groups, radicalised, and disappeared in 1993 (Verbeek, 2016). Other paramilitaries associated with the Narcos faced decertification and eventually their disappearance. Thus, those with a political approach sought institutionalisation to 'disappear' into the shadows – were they remained active – and they consolidated legal organisations to continue paramilitary survival. The once-without-a-political approach disappeared and was radicalised.

Successful organisations and networks

The paramilitaries had to overcome the collective-action problem to expand and survive. The fragmentation within the self-defence groups was a challenge for collective action. The partnership with drug traffickers came with costs; as Dudley (2004) explains, it divided the AUC into two groups: the ones colliding with Narcos and the ones hunting down guerillas. For the first group, the narco-trafficking had its perks: money. Money became the ultimate driver, group loyalties shrank, and *the word autodefensas meant less every day* (Dudley, 2004. p. 64). The second group faced battlefield issues because the FARC had decades of battlefield experience and a strong organisation with a strategy, ideology, and leadership (Saab & Taylor, 2009; Dudley, 2004). Thus, the paramilitaries faced conflicting interests between fragmented groups that discouraged joint action, but for their survival, the paramilitaries must cooperate.

The paramilitaries could overcome the collective-action problem through AUC's formation based on their entanglement with state officials, industries, and institutions (Grajales, 2017b). The AUC is an umbrella organisation that constitutes various paramilitary factions (Richani, 2001). AUC

had a hierarchal structure with effective command and control, strong, centralised leadership, and one national strategy to overcome the collective-action problem when various factors are combined (Duncan, 2006). Additionally, the AUC used symbols, uniforms, and prestige for the demonstration of one identity. This kind of mobilisation enables higher coordination in the coordination of military operations and strategic planning (Duncan, 2006). Thus, the paramilitaries transformed from a loosely tied, fragmented organisation to a hierarchal, centralised leadership under one banner: the AUC. The most important paramilitary-groups and structures is demonstrated below in figure 10.Hence, through overcoming collective-action problems and through organisational development, the paramilitaries could grow.

Figure 10. AUC's structures of important groups. *(CIA, 2000*

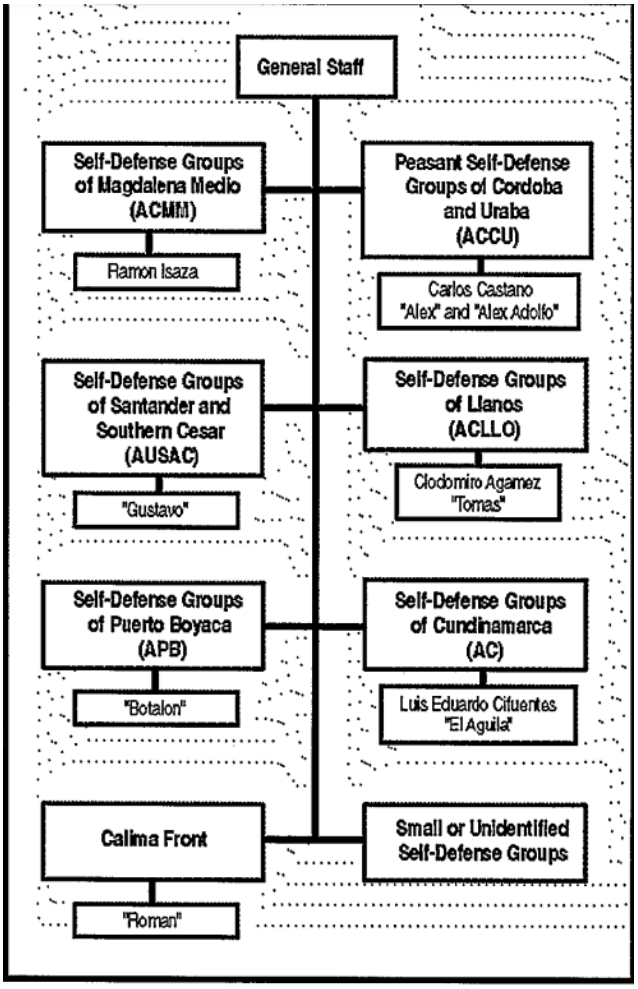


Figure 1. [redacted] *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia.*

The paramilitaries maintained, built, and repaired their resources. The paramilitaries expanded their network by absorbing local politicians, elites, and drug lords, leveraging resources, and recruiting for organisational success. Their vertical expansion by absorbing all kinds of local actors in their organisation and their horizontal expansion by seizing and managing decentralisation resources enable

their growing independence and social integration by obtaining the most critical resources (Saab & Taylor, 2009). They infiltrated state structures and administrative reforms to diversify their organisation by creating all kinds of organisations and mobilising resources (Krakowski, 2010; Eaton, 2006). The paramilitaries combined transgressive and contained tactics to seize political, administrative, and legal decentralisation resources, making them indispensable in society. Thus, by capturing decentralisation resources, diversification, and horizontally and vertically expanding the paramilitaries, they could grow. The illegal declaration did not lead to a decline in resources, but rather an increase; therefore, the paramilitaries were not demobilised.

One study estimated that the AUC earned as much as $75 million in 1999. Expenses include a $30-million estimated annual payroll in addition to the cost of operations, weapons, and other supplies. (CIA, 2000)

The AUC adopted new tactics; one of these tactics was the district-based method for engaging more in political elections (Grajales, 2017a; Romero, 2003). They transformed traditional clientelism into armed clientelism to maintain relationships with politicians. This facilitates a system of resource distribution and armed clientelism, exchanging decentralised goods and services for political support under the threat of violence (Eaton, 2006). They used softer tactics, such as development projects and political involvement. However, these 'softer' tactics were concerned with money laundering, capital accumulation, and political influence. Thus, the paramilitaries could adapt their organisational strategy to environmental necessities through 'softer' tactics.

Besides these softer tactics, the paramilitaries used disruptive performances of guerilla warfare that became conventional as it became more organised and modern to respond quickly and to coordinate attacks effectively to eliminate the FARC (Duncan, 2006). They also use disruptive techniques to kill opponents who accuse them of narco-trafficking activities. They used targeted assassinations and massacres to demonstrate their power and to install fear as part of their psychological operations (Gutiérrez Sanín & Barón, 2005). This was accompanied by sophisticated propaganda to spread fear and demonstrate their identity. They disrupt civilian lives by controlling roadblocks.

In several regions, paramilitaries were in control of towns while guerrillas controlled the countryside, making travel across these areas highly risky. At roadblocks, armed fighters demanded to see identification cards from all travellers, and the possession of identification from an area deemed to be under the influence of the enemy could be a death sentence. (Human Rights Watch, 2003)

Thus, their disruptive performances to navigate challengers through installing fear, targeting opponents, and spreading fear facilitated their survival.

Upwards scale shift

Yet paramilitaries appeared more numerous and militarily stronger than ever. They claimed to have over ten thousand armed and trained members, a number that was not disputed by the government or other sources. (Human Rights Watch, 2003)

The paramilitaries formed alliances with local elites, landowners, local drug traffickers, and politicians, securing financial support in exchange for security (Gutiérrez & Barón, 2005). Moreover, the district-based method enabled them to fix elections by securing candidates' positions in exchange for paramilitary support (Grajales, 2017a). These candidates were sent to unknown territories to deprive them of their territorial foothold and make them dependent on paramilitaries (Grajales, 2017a). This gave the candidates a disguise to pursue paramilitary interests in unknown territory. The emulation process of the early rise of less professional self-defence groups led to AUC's professionalisation and militarisation, which allowed them to seize more areas, activating joint action and producing new alliances. This ignited an upwards scale shift in the mediated route through brokerage mechanisms, creating dependencies without reciprocating reliance due to their capacity for violence (Saab & Taylor,2008). Thus, this episode marked a significant upwards scale shift, producing diffusion, collective action, and their expansion to different departments. A secret intelligence report concludes this as well:

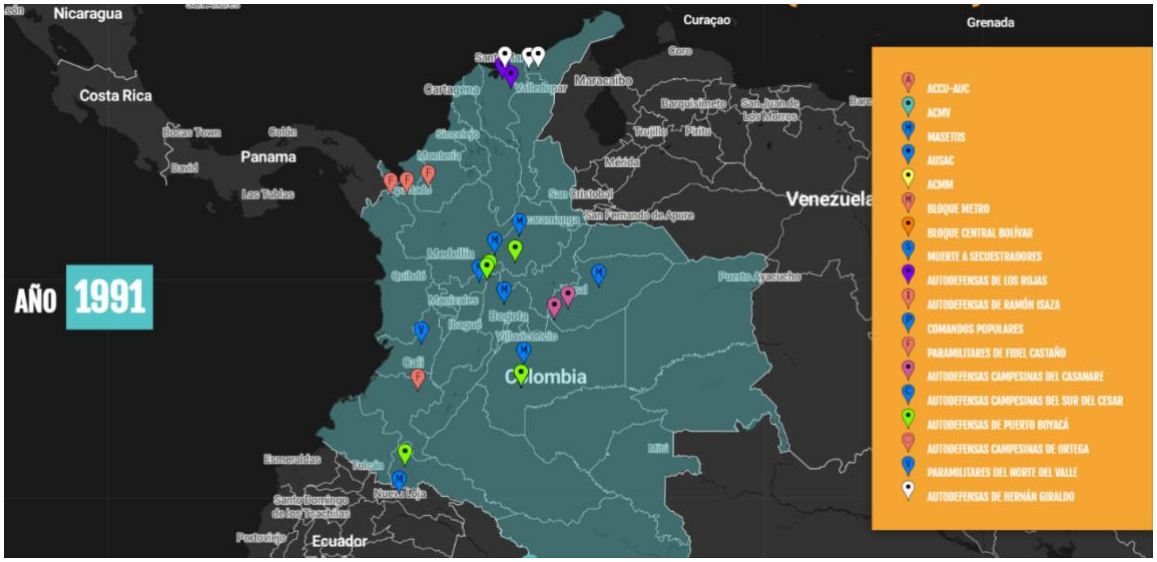
The AUC now accounts for 80% of the estimated 5,000 to 8,000 autodefensas in Colombia, which currently conduct significant activities in 26 of Colombia's 32 departments. (CIA, 1997)

Their new sophisticated identity allured former self-defence members to cooperate under one umbrella. Besides unifying members of former Autodefensas, the political approach stretched the boundary to include more actors. The paramilitaries aligned their identity with broader sentiments of nationalism, anti-communism, and capitalism (González, 2004). Actors such as Coca-Cola resonated with the paramilitary identity, which led to strategic cooperation for enrichment.

The unions claim Coca-Cola bottlers hired far-right militias of the United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia (AUC) to murder nine union members at Colombian bottling plants in the past 13 years. (Brodzinsky, 2003)

To win the local population and politicians, they implemented social and economic policies to forge a social identity as they integrated into political processes (Ajona, Kasfir & Mampilly, 2015; Romero, 2003). It created new identities for paramilitary leaders as political actors (Maher, 2014). This upward scale shift occurred through the operation diffusion route, whereby similarities assisted in the spread of the paramilitaries to different sites, such as Coca-Cola. Hence, their upward scale shift through the diffusion route due to paramilitary identities facilitated their growth to different sites. The following images illustrate the paramilitary expansions.

Image 4. Expansions paramilitaries in Colombia 1991 (Rutas del conflict, n.d.)



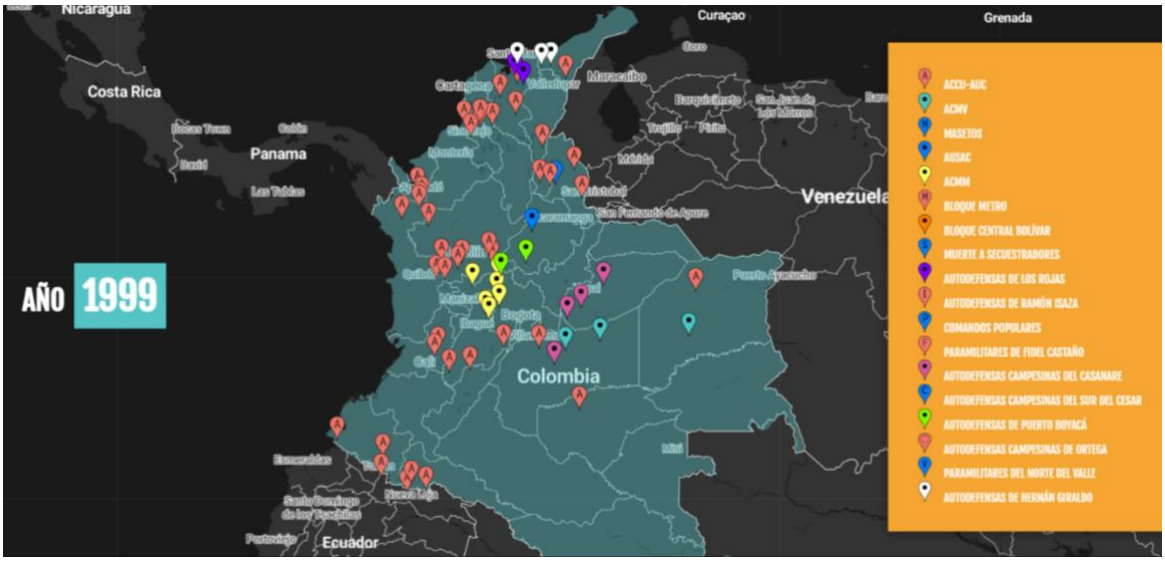
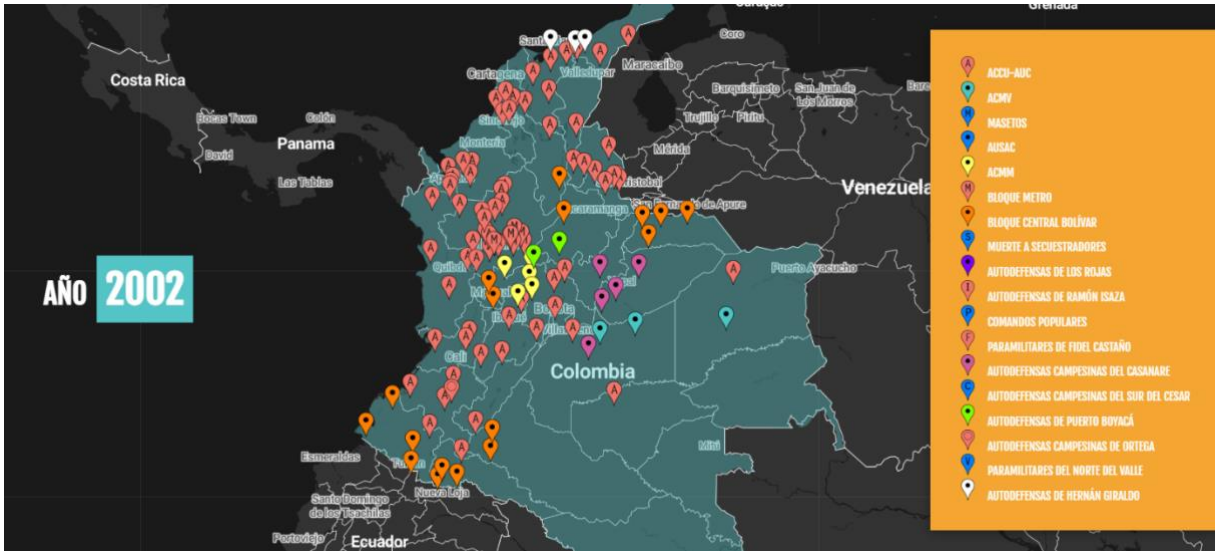


Image 5: Expansions paramilitaries in Colombia 1999 (Rutas del conflict, n.d.)

These images illustrate the grand expansion of the paramilitaries, which was predominant in this episode. Their growth will facilitate their survival in the coming episode 2003-2010.

Image 6: Expansions paramilitaries in Colombia (Rutas del conflicto, n.d.)



Chapter 6: Episode 3 – *Desaparecer Autodefensas and paramilitaries demobilisation 2003–2010.*

Context

'Las Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (AUC) se comprometen a desmovilizar a la totalidad de sus miembros, en un proceso gradual que comenzará con las primeras desmovilizaciones antes de terminar el presente año y que deberá culminar a más tardar en diciembre del 2005', indicó el llamado 'Acuerdo de Santa Fe de Ralito para Contribuir a la Paz de Colombia'. (Pablo Toro, 2003)

This statement marks the beginning of AUC's demobilisation process under President Alvaro Uribe (tijd; Pablo Toro, 2003). The AUC has agreed to demobilise its forces before December 31 2005 with a gradual process of disarming the Cacique-Nutibara Bloc in Medeline in 2003, following the disarmament of the Catatumbo Block of Salvatore Mancuso – one of the biggest paramilitary groups – in December 2004 (Indepaz, 2013). Through these demobilisationsdemobilisations, Uribe has claimed that 31.671 combatants have been mobilised, 18051 arms have been collected, and 38 important actors have been integrated, especially in the departments of Le Ceja, Antioquia, and Itagui (Indepaz, 2013). Thus, the Uribe administration claims a post-paramilitary era whereby paramilitary presence is successfully eliminated.

They go on television saying that everything in Colombia is fine and that the war is over. The truth is that public order is only fine for those who have money, but for campesinos like us, it's worse than it was before. (Volckhausen, 2018)

The Ralito 1 agreement is one of the pillars of the Democratic Security Policy (DSP; Porch & Rasmussen, 2008). The DSP goals are to restore the state's monopoly over force by reducing armed actors' presence, like the FARC and paramilitaries (Pardo, 2007). This new rigid state approach resulted in the large-scale DDR programme to demobilise the AUC. The demobilisation process, governed by the Justice and Peace Law of 2005, offered reduced sentences in exchange for disarmament, demobilisation, reintegration, and reparations for the victims (Nussio, 2011). The law is intended to provide justice and reparations for victims. Thus, the first large-scale demobilisation process of the AUC was initiated, which would lead to their disappearance.

However, violence persisted during AUC's demobilisation process (Rangel, 2000). The members with political incentives demobilised or institutionalised into state structures, but criminals were not included in the DDR programme (Saab & Taylor, 2009). These criminals consolidated new

groups, also known as the BACRIM, and continued to engage in violent activities like extortion and murder (Rangel, 2000). The power vacuums left by AUC's demobilisation in some areas sparked violent competition among non-state armed groups (Avila, 2013). Nevertheless, there were no hard linkages between the BACRIM and the AUC (Saab & Taylor, 2009). Thus, AUC members with a political approach demobilised and left in peace, while others faced brutal repression (Porch & Rasmussen, 2008).

There were deep connections between paramilitaries and politicians, known as the para-politics scandal (Saab & Taylor, 2019). 30 politicians elected to Congress in 2006 have been arrested on charges related to conspiracy with the paramilitaries, including Mario Uribe, President Uribe's cousin (Garcia, 2022; Bordzinsky, 2008). Mario Uribe faces charges *of allegedly seeking the political backing of paramilitary leader Salvatore Mancuso in 2002 just before national elections, and of negotiating with another warlord the purchase of land in areas under paramilitary control* (Brodzinsky, 2008). Even though it was his cousin, President Uribe reacted gratefully that his policies had steered collective catharsis (Brodzinsky, 2008). There have been allegations concerning Uribe's credibility, but repeated journalistic and judicial investigations into alleged links between Uribe and AUC have never brought any evidence during his presidency (Brodzinsky, 2008). Thus, many find it unlikely that the president himself will be implicated in the scandal.

Political opportunities

State capacity and state responsiveness

Pécaut (2008) elaborates that the DSP aim is to enhance state capacity by strengthening the police and military apparatus, to reclaim territories from previous non-state actors, and to strengthen the judiciary system for the prosecution and prevention of paramilitary crime (Chernick, 2007; Pardo, 2007; Safford & Palacios, 2002). Nevertheless, the state was incapable of monitoring and overseeing the DDR programme. Many demobilised members were friends, associates, or family of the AUC and joined the programme for its benefits. Furthermore, many paramilitaries have already been institutionalised, maintained powerful positions, and were supported by paramilitary-friendly parties in national politics (Nieto-Matiz, 2020). This illustrates the paramilitary–state collusion. Generally, this would limit the state's capacity, but not when there is beneficial cooperation between the AUC and politicians. Thus, the state'sstate's capacity is not limited due to the entanglement between paramilitaries and state officials. This influences the emergence and growth opportunities for the paramilitaries as influential actors.

The state responded with a strong will to suppress the AUC, which will minimise their survival chances. The AUC members with state interests were willing to demobilise, but the ones with a less political approach were not willing to lay down their arms. This fragmented the AUC into smaller groups, called BACRIM (Theidon, 2007). BACRIMC – solely criminal, not political – continues to operate in a decentralised manner and uses disruptive performance in their territories (International Crisis Group, 2010). In these areas, violence increased, especially along the Pacific coast (Saab & Taylor, 2009). The state's brutal repression towards BACRIM-members led to the extradition of fourteen ‘paramilitary’ bosses, who were actually more associated with the cartels than with the AUC (US Department of Justice, 2008). Therefore, the state responded softly to paramilitary factions that act upon the state’s interests, illustrating the state’s complicity in paramilitary activities (Nieto-Matiz, 2020). Potentially, DSP policies aligned with paramilitary interests due to the paramilitary–state collusion, facilitating their survival and leaving many paramilitaries in total impunity (Ballvé, 2012).

Furthermore, the state has a high will to suppress the guerillas. To demonstrate the state's performance, the army boosts its numbers by killing innocent young people. Also known as Falsos positivos 2002–2009 (Yepes, 2023). The young people were dismembered and put on guerilla boots as ‘proof’. Moreover, there were rumours that paramilitary squads were involved. Uribe denied allegations of having knowledge of these 6400 cases and responded with the will to prosecute perpetrators. However, after 16 years, there has been no credible action taken to prosecute the generals guilty of the Falsos Positivos (Yepes, 2023). The Uribe administration pretends to have the will to suppress state challenges, but only those who are not ‘protecting’ the state. The more representatives linked to the paramilitaries, the less the will to suppress them. Therefore, the paramilitaries and others

are left in impunity, while civilians are being terrorised (Yepes, 2023). Thus, the state responsiveness can be explained through the para-political scandal. This entanglement illustrates the cooperation with armed forces who act on behalf of the state, influencing a low will to suppress these 'companions' and eventually supporting their survival.

Political fragmentation

The paramilitary parallel state (emerged in Episode 2) strengthened their position in society and contributed to their opportunities to form alliances with political actors, members of Congress, or local officials (Eaton, 2006). The paramilitaries were successful in the first and second episodes to fill power vacuums. This allowed their infiltration, formation, and co-option of state institutions, including the military and police, granting them impunity and political influence (Romero, 2007b). The paramilitary–state collusion is peculiar, as the military and state pressured for the AUC's mobilisation, which normally would spark divisions and rivalry among powerholders. It did not spark rivalry among the AUC, state, and military, but rather beneficial cooperation to restore Colombia's image, pursue capitalism, and institutionalise paramilitary groups. The paramilitary quasi-state destabilised the state and granted more opportunities for paramilitary growth and survival. Nevertheless, the feedback loop is complete because the paramilitaries are not destabilising the state further but contribute to beneficial cooperation between the state, military, and paramilitaries, which grants paramilitary growth.

Therefore, the state is more united than ever. The para-political scandal demonstrates the unity of many corrupt state members with the paramilitaries. This unity can suppress resistance and opponents who are not in favour of paramilitary–state interests. State-opponents are successfully suppressed, and paramilitaries can maintain authority:

These groups are rooted in several departments and form part of the local power structures, with profound links with local authorities and political elites. This makes the fight against the paramilitaries and nacro-traffickers all the more complex, and it is a major reason that a different approach is needed to minimise the power of these groups.(Richaim 2009).

Moreover, secret documents illuminate the nature of paramilitary–state entanglement, whereby top AUC commanders, the self-defence minister, and Uribe have made a pact (El Tiempo, 2009). The Uribe administration uses AUC's demobilisation as electoral campaign to gain support, whereby the AUC has a chance to integrate and 'disappear' to the shadows to evade prosecution (Raya, 2022) They will consolidate a new movement in favour of the AUC persistence, embodying AUC's members, but the AUC must cooperate and assist in Uribe's re-election (Raya, 2022; El Tiempo, 2009).

De la Espriella había dicho que el pacto se estableció tras una reunión en Ralito y que este buscaba crear un movimiento político para defender la tesis de las Auc. Pese al contenido ideológico y a las alusiones a la búsqueda de la paz, lo preocupante es que reconocidos políticos y funcionarios hayan

decidido clandestinamente estampar sus nombres debajo de los de Salvatore Mancuso, don Berna, Jorge 40, y Diego Vecino. (El Tiempo, 2007*)*

Therefore, Uribe could block genuine judicial proceedings to eliminate the paramilitaries under the DSP scheme. Thus, there is a united front through paramilitary–state collusion, facilitating AUC's survival – ultimately, to create a new political movement to defend AUC existence and survival.

The AUC's willingness to align with state interests enabled their survival. AUC's involvement in narcotics was overlooked during the DDR programme because they never desired to overthrow the state, rather to have political and economic power (Saab & Taylor, 2009). Therefore, genuine efforts to eliminate the AUC were resisted by the Uribe administration. During the para-politics scandal, Uribe could steer the attention toward these politicians. Nevertheless, the leaked phone conversations between Luiz Carlos Restrepo and paramilitary commanders Salvatore Mancuso and Rodrigo Tovar Pupo (14) reveal the deep entanglement between high-ranking politicians – the president himself – and the pro-paramilitaries.

Despite Uribe's allegations, many officials still support him.

Duque came forwards and stated that: 'I have always considered him (Uribe) and will consider him a genuine patriot, dedicated to serving Colombia, as evidenced in a long career of public service as director of the Aerocivil, mayor of Medellin, senator, governor, and as president of Colombia on two occasions', he said. (Doque & Rojas, 2020)

Uribe played a critical role in Duque's presidential election; potentially, Duque himself depends on paramilitary support. Thus, AUC's ability to align with state interests has created paramilitary–state cooperation, which has facilitated the survival of the paramilitaries. Many are in favour of protecting the state rather than civilian lives, and therefore support the AUC's involvement.

Institutional structures

The DSP aimed to address weak institutions in monitoring and penalising insurgents misusing decentralisation resources, aiming to strengthen security and legal frameworks as well as ensure a fit between society and institutions (Nussio, 2020; Eaton, 2006). This fit was not ensured, as this policy was inconsistently applied, particularly in the Pacific coast, where the state disproportionately targeted paramilitaries seen as state challengers (Saab & Taylor, 2009). The high level of violence on the Pacific coast was not addressed, because the state never desired to improve this area or its institutional fit (Saab & Taylor, 2009). In other regions, the inconsistency allowed pro-state paramilitaries to

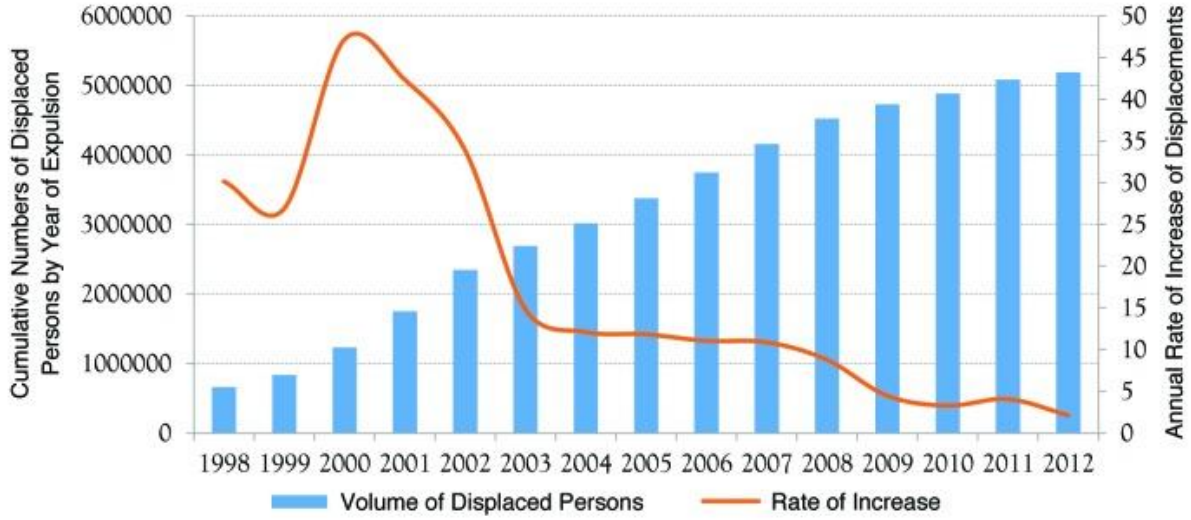
operate with impunity, maintaining influence and control (Gutiérrez Sanín, 2008; Duncan, 2006). Thus, the paramilitaries exploit institutional weakness due to the low institutional fit, encouraged by the state, which facilitated the duration of their operations during their formal demobilisation.

Today in Valledupar [the capital of the department of Cesar] four people were murdered. It is a lie to say that the paramilitaries here have been demobilised. All kinds of people are being murdered here. The murderers are paramilitaries. Pupo [alias Jorge 40] is still the leader of the paramilitaries in Valledupar. (Moor & Sandt, 2014)

Counterinsurgency efforts were limited due to high paramilitary–state collusion, resulting in a soft-demobilisation process (Ballvé, 2012; Duncan, 2006). Uribe never desired to target paramilitaries; he blocked several judicial and civil society efforts in Congress to prosecute and investigate the AUC (Doque & Rojas, 2020; El Tiempo, 2007). Civil society efforts to maximise worker's union power and limit paramilitary aggression resulted in the killings of palm-oil union leaders, with the state turning a blind eye (Maher, 2014). The institutional infiltration of paramilitaries and state–paramilitary cooperation limits counterinsurgency efforts due to the political economy of the war system (Richani, 2009). Thus, the state–paramilitary entanglement limited honest counterinsurgency efforts, which facilitated their survival.

As long as there is an armed conflict the possibility for the rule of law and good governance are overshadowed by the dynamics and political economy of the war system, which these groups form part of alongside the state and the insurgency. (Richani, 2009*)*

Concerning repression effectiveness, Uribe rebranded the conflict as a legitimate fight against terrorism, denying paramilitary presence in the armed conflict picture (Elhaway, 2010). As Elhaway (2010) explains, the government rejects a post-conflict phase, but rather an anti-terrorism phase. Uribe expanded the security apparatus to protect civilians but labelled opponents as terrorists, legitimising the use of force against state challengers (Elhaway, 2010). His strategy was successful in 2003 with a reduction of displaced people; however, it increased by 38 percent in 2004 (Leech, 2005). Moreover, 3594 people were forcibly disappeared in 2002–2003, this number is far higher than the previous seven years (Leech, 2015). Nevertheless, Uribe's administration fails to address this issue, as paramilitaries and state forces are responsible for the most disappearances and displacements (Elhaway, 2010).

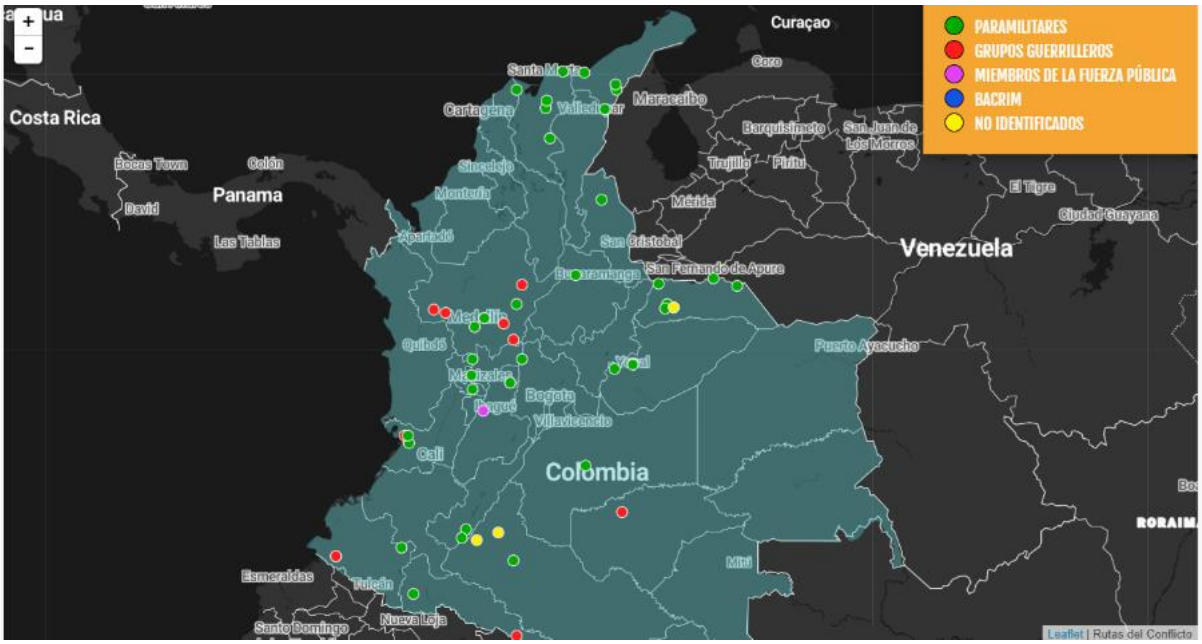


Shultz et al. (2014).

Hence, DSP focused solely on the state's protection, and not civilian protection, thereby overlooking paramilitary attacks that aligned with the state's interests. Therefore, state repression against pro-state paramilitaries was ineffective.

The Uribe administration shaped paramilitary tactics to survive. In the beginning, Uribe's security strategy was perceived as successful, reducing kidnappings, internal displacement, and violence (Leech, 2015). However, in 2003 and afterward, many pro-state paramilitaries were found guilty of massacres across the country:

Massacres by non-state armed actors in Colombia 2003



(Routes de Conflictas, n.d.)

These reductions in violence and crimes have been due to the change in paramilitary tactics. Instead of kidnappings, the paramilitaries arrange an extortion-payment date, or the targeted individual would be killed (Leech, 2015). The reduction in violence is related to the decline in BACRIM homicides, on which Uribe implemented rigid repertoires to eliminate BACRIM presence, though using paramilitaries: '*The number of killings related to the civil conflicts remains unchanged'* (Leech, 2015). Furthermore, through judicial institutions such as INCODER, the paramilitaries could legalise their illegally required titles that are violently stolen from peasants through land grabbing (Hristov, 2010). INCODER demonstrates how the transgressive tactics of the paramilitaries are transformed into legalised, contained contention. The state provided the paramilitaries with impunity and the possibility to legalise their illegal actions because the state benefits economically from paramilitary activities. Thus, the paramilitaries adopted contained and transgressive tactics are shaped by the state within a framework of state–paramilitary cooperation. This obscures the vision of legal/illegal, state/non-state, civil society/non-civil society even further.

Mobilisation process

Political actors

The paramilitaries are formed by violent political participation. Violence and intimidation remain a central part of their repertoires (Gutierrez Sanin, 2008). They are formed around marketing violence as a strategy for capital accumulation and political power, facilitated by armed clientelism (Eaton, 2006). These capitalist motives and the state's interests made it possible for the AUC to emerge as new 'shadow' actor during the demobilisation process. Even though the state does not publicly recognise the AUC presence, from secret documents it becomes clear that they still recognise the AUC but re-place them into the shadows or into state structures to deny their existence.

Even with the ruling, it wasn't until 2005–06 that a group of displaced campesinos returned to their territory alongside the non-profit Justicia y Paz without state accompaniment. When they returned, they found it had been destroyed by paramilitary-connected businesses to make way for palm oil and cattle ranching. (Volckhausen, 2018)

The paramilitaries participated in contention through political manipulation and alliances to influence elections, ensure impunity, and place paramilitary-friendly parties (Insight Crime, 2010; Dudley, 2004). These parties only grew during AUC's demobilisation, which gave them access to resources. Official recognition of their existence was avoided to prevent a negative image of the state (Hristov, 2010). Hence, the demobilisation process was more of a façade; the paramilitaries survived and were left in impunity under the state's protection.

Rural resident leaders in the community of Carmen del Darien say that now their lives are under imminent threat because of their work to defend local land from palm oil and cattle ranching. (Volckhausen, 2018)

The AUC's demobilisation process would imply their disappearance through a decline in resources. Instead, the paramilitaries maintained and even sophisticated their resources through their participation in social and economic networks, becoming powerful political actors. The pro-state paramilitaries are more than an armed actor, El Espactaror (2022) argues; therefore, they could disappear into the shadows by acquiring legal positions. This limits the possibility of demobilising the paramilitaries because they will always have access to resources through political, social, and economic alliances.

'El paramilitarismo no es solo un actor armado – entendido como ejércitos privados con estrategias de terror contra la población civil – sino más ***un entramado de intereses y alianzas*** *también asociado a proyectos económicos, sociales y políticos que logró la imposición de controles territoriales armados por medio del uso del terror y la violencia, y también a través de mecanismos de legitimación, establecimiento de normas y reglas'.* (El Espactator, 2022)

This institutionalisation, which was ignited by the demobilisation process, forced the paramilitaries to behave in a similar manner as the state. Hence, this process of coercive isomorphism blurred the lines between legal and illegal and between state and non-state even further, ensuring the paramilitaries' survival.

Now, more than six years later, Colombia has about 6,000 well-armed paramilitaries that, according to the Colombian Institute for Development and Peace Studies (INDEPAZ), operate in 314 municipalities and are located in 29 out of 32 of the country's departments. The most alarming thing is that their numbers are increasing. (Volckhausen, 2018)

Successful organisations and networks

Generally, demobilisation processes limit coordination and mobilisation, but the paramilitaries could overcome the collective-action problem due to their organisational structures. Richani (2007) elaborates that the AUC's influence persisted even after demobilisation due to their strong command structure and control in paramilitary-controlled areas (Richani, 2007). Their integrated defence strategy to safeguard their socioeconomic power allowed them to balance flexible and responsive tactics according to the demobilisation context (Nussio, 2011; Romero, 2007a). This contributed to their growth, even during their demobilisation.

The paramilitaries managed resources through various strategies. They expanded vertically in the cocaine production and mining industries by controlling the whole chain of production (Maher, 2014; Felbab-Brown, 2010). They controlled the palm-oil industry to diversify their sources of income (Maher, 2014; Felbab-Brown, 2010; Richani, 2007). Furthermore, they expanded horizontally by implementing sophisticated extortion schemes (through legal organisations) to target businesses and individuals and to attract resources (Felbab-Brown, 2010). Therefore, the paramilitaries could enhance their organisational dependency through maintaining and accessing critical resources Thus, the paramilitaries diversified their incomes, expanded vertically in illegal sectors, and expanded horizontally in legal sectors throughout economic/social/political sectors. This facilitated their growth.

As for their organisational strategy, the paramilitaries adopted new tactics according to the new demobilisation context. The paramilitaries consolidated new civil-society organisations that simultaneously pursued the interests of capital accumulation and paramilitary agendas (Ballvé, 2012; Richani, 2007). The BEC was a legal façade in the palm-oil industry to manipulate fiscal and

administrative structures, involving techniques of complicity, coercion, and attracting international funds to legitimise their actions (Ballvé, 2012; Hristov, 2010). Other schemes, such as PDS, were used as tools for the paramilitary agenda. Through the PDS, the legal process of JAC's formalisation was funded and aided as an initiative to promote local movements, create a voice for peasants and enhance local political participation (Ballvé, 2012; Hristov, 2010). This allowed the paramilitaries to manipulate and co-opt the JAC's, using them as a tool to maintain their power and authority in the region; it 'legitimised' paramilitary illegal activities without facing resistance or opposition (Ballvé, 2012). Thus, the paramilitaries adopted tactics to form new legal/civil organisations for the institutionalisation of their illegal practices, allowing them to survive through legal structures.

Furthermore, the paramilitary organisational strategy aligned with the state's counterterrorism approach to escape repression by imitating state structures. To achieve this, the paramilitaries influenced local, regional and national political sector through armed clientelism (Eaton, 2006) They continue to bribe and coerce police officers, judges, and the military to ensure favourable treatment and impunity during the demobilisation process (Semana, 2006; Dudley, 2004). For instance, in the palm-oil industry, the paramilitaries adopted labour-repressive tactics to navigate union movements. They executed union-leaders and opponents to eliminate their bargaining power for improving labour conditions (Maher, 2014). The state's complicity in CTA law formation contributed to further undermining workers conditions by illegalising union formation in the palm-oil industry (Maher, 2014).

Thus, through adopting the state's counterterrorism approach, the paramilitaries were not only navigating their own challengers; they were also navigating state challenges. These disruptive performances did not result in their disappearance, but rather in state–paramilitary cooperation and their survival. To conclude, demobilisation relates to declines in resources and misconceptions concerning resources and environmental constraints; therefore, the demobilisation process is a scheme because the paramilitaries had no decline in resources and could maintain and access critical resources or their growth and power. Their success lies in their organisational pro-state strategy to adapt the same state's counterterrorism approach for the state's protection.

Upwards scale shift

This episode's upwards scale shift does not concern the shift in locality but the shift to different structures, such as different economic sectors and legal structures. The paramilitaries entered a new economic sector, the palm-oil industry, in the Meta department due to their economic alliances. The paramilitaries strengthened these alliances by increasing their own organisational capacities (Saab & Taylor, 2009). The state alliances allowed pro-state paramilitaries to shift their illegal practices to legal structures through their civil society movements, such as PDS and INCODER (Ballvé, 2012; Hristov, 2010). The paramilitary–state cooperation facilitated their expansion into legal structures. Thus,

through an operating diffusion route, similarities assist in the spread and expansion of paramilitary organisations; these similarities were often among high-ranking officials, such as Uribe.

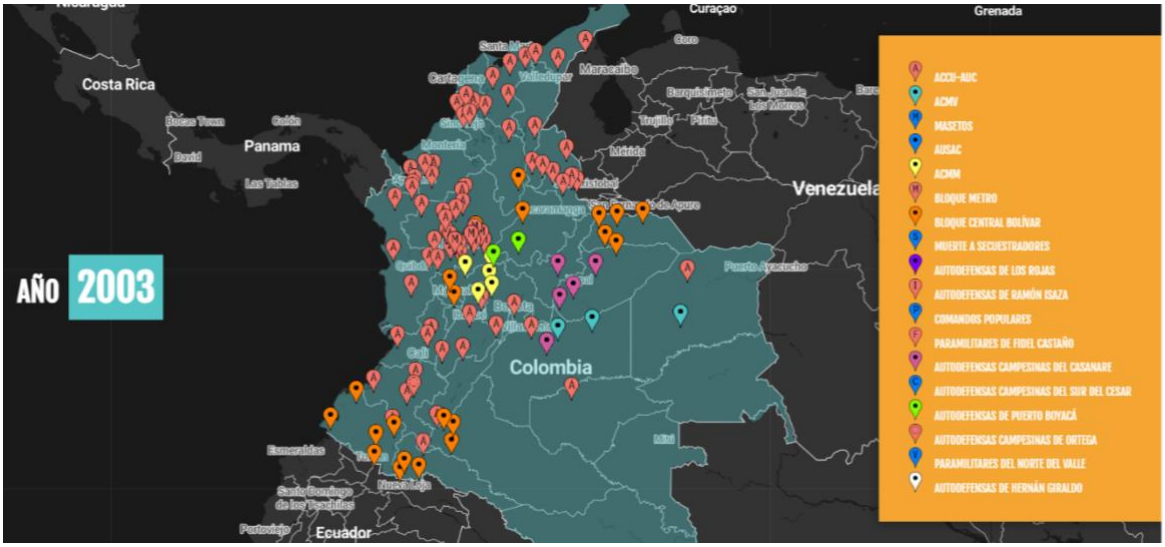
Only for the pro-state paramilitaries was an upwards scale shift into legal structures possible. The criminal BACRIM faced a downwards scale shift, but the politically motivated paramilitaries moved into legal structures and were 'protected' by the state (Gutierrez Sanin, 2008). Their identity, extracted from the state's capitalist motives and state protection, facilitated an upwards scale shift through operating diffusion mechanisms. Brokerage was not required because of the deep connections between the state and paramilitaries. Their economic standing granted their expansion, and their pro-state standing granted their position in the new urban order. After the finalisation of demobilisation process and dismantling of many cartels, the pro-state paramilitaries are left in charge of the state in many urban areas.

It is estimated that the Urabeños operate in 95 municipalities in the six aforementioned departments, with an army of about 1,600 armed men and an estimated annual income of $15 million. The Colombian police estimate that throughout the country, six paramilitary groups (including the Urabeños), have a total of roughly 6,000 armed personnel, which operate in 150 municipalities in half of the country's 32 departments. (NACLA, 2007)

Thus, their pro-state and economic identity facilitated their integration into society on an economic, social, and political level (Dudley, 2002). Therefore, the pro-state paramilitaries could escape repression and grow once again, but now in urban areas.

The images below illustrate paramilitary activities and their spread during the demobilisation process. In the middle of the process, the images show that paramilitaries expanded over Colombian territory; the last image illustrates their decrease. Nevertheless, honest documentation is limited as paramilitary members, activities, and crimes are increasingly adopted into legal structures. Thus, they have disappeared into the shadows of the state, where they could persist.

Image 7. Expansions paramilitaries in Colombia 2003 (Rutas del conflicto, n.d.)



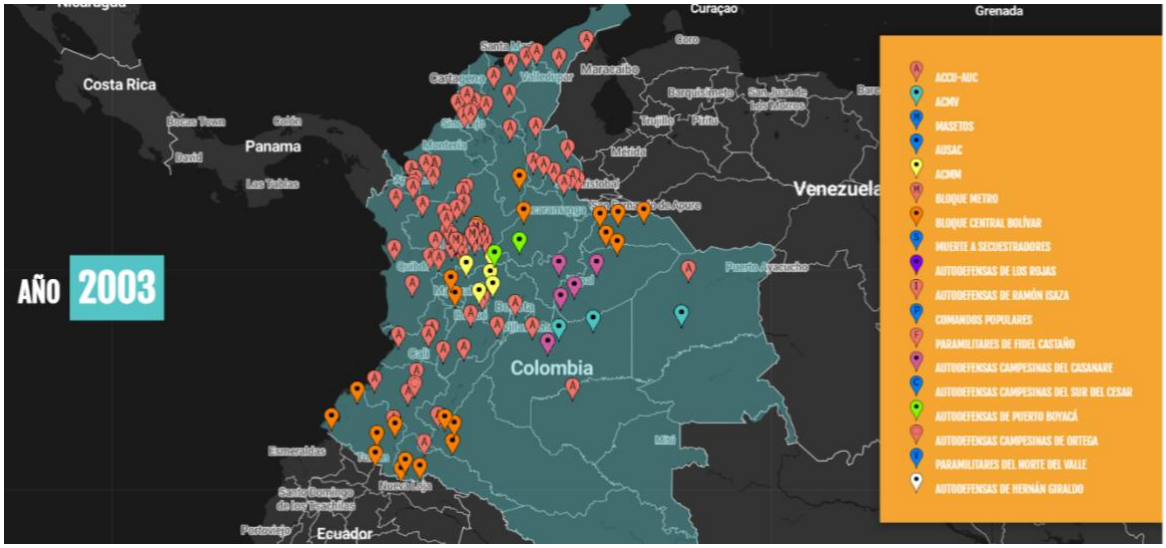


Image 8. Expansions paramilitaries in Colombia 2005 (Rutas del conflicto, n.d.)

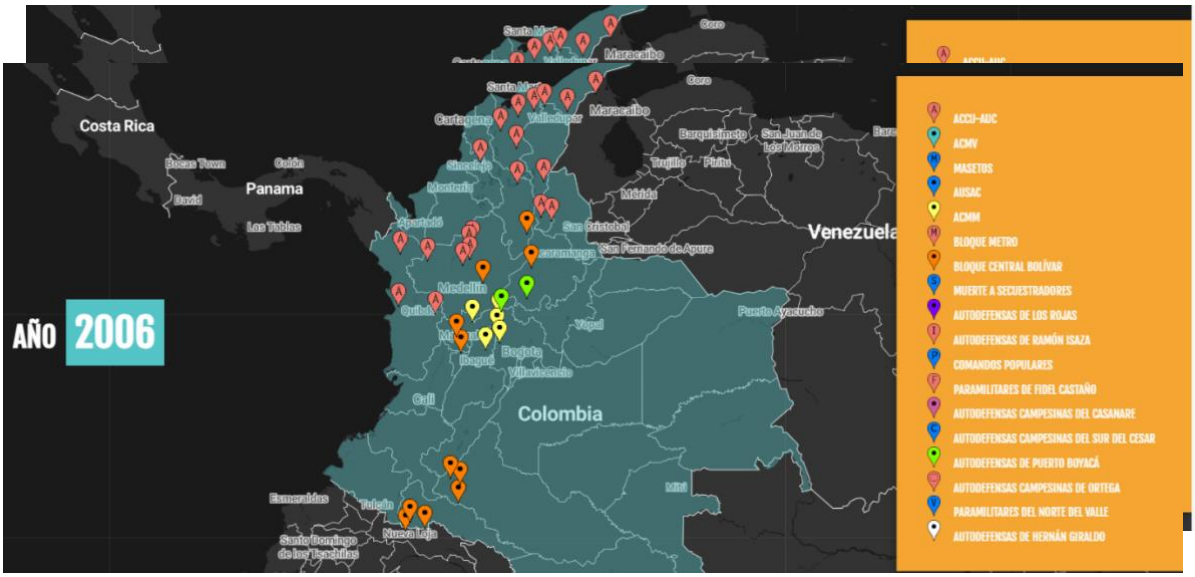
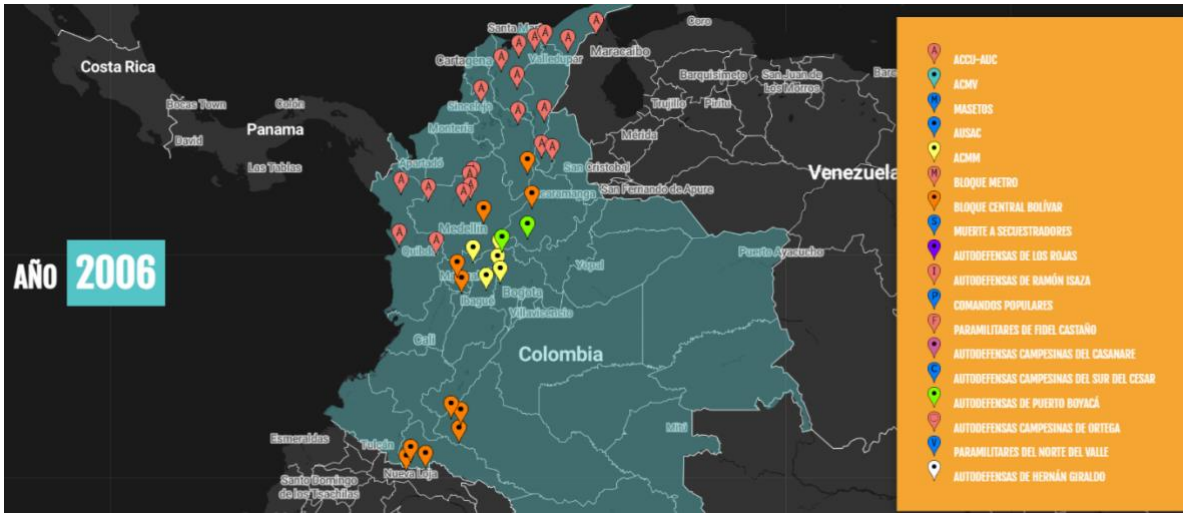


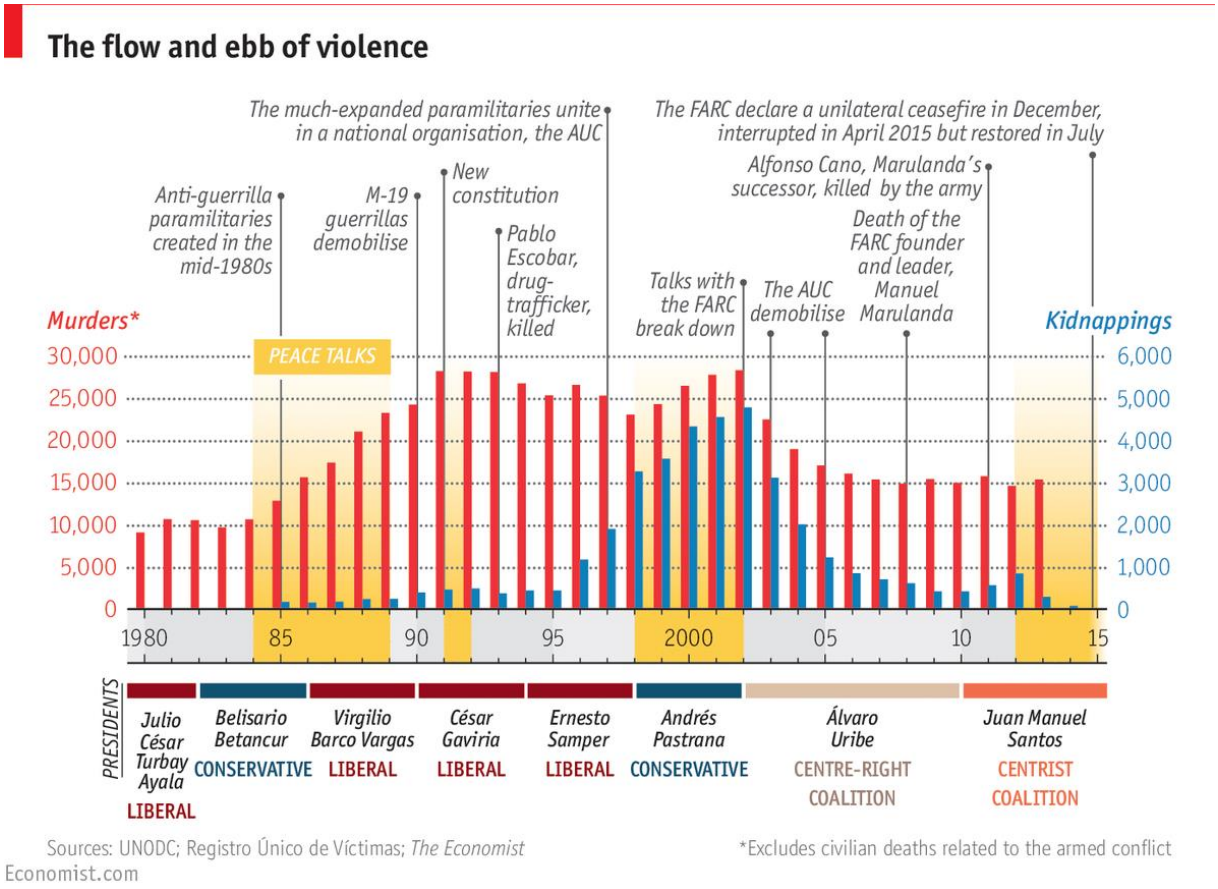
Image 9. Expansions paramilitaries in Colombia 2006 (Rutas del conflicto, n.d.)



Chapter 7: Conclusion

Reflection

This study's main question is: *Which underlying mechanisms explain the emergence, growth, and survival of the paramilitaries in the state of Colombia?* The question's exploratory grounding allows to explore the inconsistency between the state's efforts to eliminate paramilitary presence and their continued influence, implicating supporting domestic forces for the paramilitary organisation. Considering the context's significance, this study is a qualitative, single-case study, using a complex time-series approach to analyse a 50 year trend divided into three episodes and guided by Tilly an Tarrow's (2015) framework to comprehend the mechanisms and processes that shape their emergence, survival, and growth.



Results

Political opportunities structures

State capacity 1966–2010

The results will be demonstrated with the assistance of the POS and mobilisation processes. The results are presented per mechanism with the collected data from each episode. Political opportunity structures are divided into three components: state capacity and responsiveness, political fragmentation, and institutional structures. State capacity and state responsiveness encompass first the state dynamics, and these can be divided into the state's capacity (high–low) and the state's will to suppress (high–low).

In the first episode, the state dynamics of hybrid authority and differentiated state presence set the foundation of the state's character throughout all episodes. The state has a hybrid capacity, neither low nor high, and prescribes and tolerates the emergence and growth of the paramilitaries. The state has no desire to monopolise force, solely its framing, and delegates it to the paramilitaries. Therefore, Colombia, with a hybrid capacity, welcomes indirect alliances to execute the monopoly over force: the paramilitaries, and contributes to their growth. In the second episode, the state illegalises the paramilitaries and implement decentralisation reforms for pacification, but the state is limited due to its character. The state's hybrid capacity cannot forbid the paramilitaries due to their dependency on the paramilitaries to provide security, and therefore prescribes AUC's formation to fight against the guerillas and Narcos. This facilitated their growth and re-emergence. In the third episode, the state dynamics relate to deep paramilitary–state collusion, but this entanglement does not limit the state; rather, it creates beneficial cooperation, which illustrates the paramilitary expansion into legal and political structures for their survival.

The state's will to suppress the guerillas led to self-defence formation, and the state encouraged their growth through the increased use of paramilitaries as counterinsurgency. Simultaneously, the state becomes dependent on the paramilitaries to exercise force. In this episode, the state has no will to suppress the paramilitaries because the state itself created and welcomes the paramilitaries to suppress the guerillas. This provides the base for paramilitary survival. In the second episode, the state's will to suppress paramilitaries, especially under the Vargas Barco administration, was limited by institutional resistance and actors linked to the paramilitaries. Eventually, the AUC was seen as a solution to the high will to suppress the guerillas and Narcos. Thereby, the deep entanglement with the paramilitaries and the state contributed to their re-emergence and survival. In the third episode, the high will to suppress 'terrorist' produces further paramilitary–state collusion to eliminate state challenges. This entanglement provides impunity to the pro-state paramilitaries. The state has a high will to suppress the guerillas and high will to demonstrate state performances to protect the state, not civilians, using paramilitaries, encouraging their survival

Thus, the hybrid capacity of the state welcomes authorities who monopolise force on behalf of the state. The paramilitaries could emerge as self-defence groups and were state-supported in their growth. The paramilitaries and state cooperation do not limit the state's capacity to suppress state challenges. The will to suppress the guerillas and other state challengers who do not share similar state interests is successfully suppressed using paramilitaries. The will to suppress the paramilitaries is limited by institutional resistance and paramilitary entanglement with various actors; therefore, the will to suppress paramilitaries is low. This assisted their survival Nevertheless, the state solely desires to protect the state itself from anti-state groups, but it does not act on behalf of the state and therefore does not aim to protect civilian lives.

Political fragmentation 1966–2010

Political fragmentation is divided into regime split (quasi-state – power vacuums), transfer of power (restructuring power – competitive elections) and ability to maintain state relations (pro-state alignment – anti-state alignment).

The regime split due to the guerillas' increased power in the first episode, and decentralisation reforms in the second episode provided the paramilitaries with power vacuums to seize through mobilising extensive networks with various economic and political actors. In Episode 2, the decentralisation reforms provided paramilitaries with opportunities to grow into a parallel state by seizing decentralised resources and filling positions on an administrative, fiscal, and political level. In the last episode, the paramilitary state maintains beneficial cooperation with the state, facilitating their growth into legal structures. This contributed to their emergence, growth, and survival.

The transfer of power was triggered by elite divisions concerned with combating guerillas and protecting capitalist interests. It reduced the united front in the first two episodes, whereby the paramilitaries could unite with the elite's by combatting the guerillas and sharing capitalist ideas. They have access to more power and more critical positions to facilitate their emergence and survival. This led to an increase in paramilitary–state collusion, which is particularly evident in the last episode. In this episode, the state and paramilitaries are more united than ever; both have similar interests, and through secret pacts, the paramilitaries could re-emerge and survive.

The paramilitaries ability to align with the state is based upon doing dirty business for the state. They fight the guerillas in the first episode, but extend it to fighting Narcos, such as Escobar. Furthermore, they distance themselves from narcotics activities to align with the state and promote their organisation as a counterinsurgency tool. In the last episode, the paramilitaries adopted the state's economic and political interests, and the state's counterterrorism approach. It becomes clear that the state solely focuses on state protection, and therefore the paramilitaries act on behalf of the state to protect the state. This granted the paramilitary survival. Thus, the success of the paramilitaries throughout all episodes pushed the state into paramilitary dependency for providing security. The

paramilitaries gained more opportunities to build alliances and extensive networks, leading to more entanglement. This increasingly destabilises the state, whereby the state becomes increasingly dependent on the paramilitaries, which increases the paramilitaries' power. The state and paramilitaries became increasingly one due to their entanglement, blurring the lines between the two. Ultimately, the creation of a paramilitary–state.

Institutional structures 1966–2010

The institutional structures are based on their capacity for prescribing, tolerating, and forbidding. The institutional structures are divided into four components: institutional fit (high–low), counterinsurgency efforts (high–low), repression dynamics (effective–ineffective) and shape of contention (successful tactics – unsuccessful tactics).

In all episodes, there is a low institutional fit; the state and institutions are separate bodies from society. The low fit to provide security provides the paramilitaries with opportunities to monopolise forces throughout decades and to re-emerge through different movements. First, as self-defence groups, the AUC and the embodiment in the last episode remain unclear, but negotiations are happening. In other words, violence becomes a market strategy for the paramilitaries to re-emerge and grow.

In the first episode, the paramilitaries are central to the counterinsurgency policy; they are the policy; therefore, they could emerge and expand as a central actor providing security. Their expansion and state collusions limit counterinsurgency efforts to illegalise the paramilitaries in the second episode. Once again, the AUC and Conviver become a central part of counterinsurgency, facilitating their power to re-emerge, grow, and survive. Not surprisingly, AUC's demobilisation as a counterinsurgency was a scheme between the Uribe administration and the paramilitaries. Thus, the political economy of war limits efforts to demobilise the paramilitaries, and the state's complicity nevertheless creates favourable conditions for the paramilitaries to grow and emerge.

In Colombia, there are high repression dynamics against the guerilla, whereby the paramilitaries play a central role in repressing guerilla factions. So when drug allegations rose against the paramilitaries in the first episode, repression was ineffective due to the paramilitaries' expansion. In the second episode, it becomes clear that violence is not prevented but regulated by institutions. The institutions have framing power over the monopoly over force and frame the guerillas and Narcos as state challengers and pro-state paramilitaries as state protections. This idea is intensified in the third episode, when Uribe rebrands the conflict as a fight against terrorism but not a fight against pro-state paramilitaries. Thus, the ineffective repression dynamics against the paramilitaries accompanied their survival.

The institutions shaped paramilitary tactics that were transgressive and contained contention. As for contained contention, paramilitary violence was institutionalised by security-sector reform and the

AUC. In the last episode, the paramilitaries could institutionalise their violence through legal and civil society movements with the state's assistance. Their transgressive tactics are based on the state's response and environment. They use brutal violence against opponents, such as massacres, killing, forcibly displacing, and disappearing. Nevertheless, the state often turned a blind eye because the paramilitaries were doing the state's dirty business. Moreover, the documentation of the state led to paramilitaries adopting other transgressive tactics instead of massacres, killing individuals instead of displacement and disappearance. This assisted their survival, but it also assisted the state to obscure their involvement in those crimes.

Mobilisation

Political actors

Mobilisation is divided into three components: political actors; successful organisations; and upwards scale shifts. Political actors refer to formation (resource capturing – certification), change (participation – brokerage – identity evolution) and disappearance (demobilisation – radicalisation – decertification).

In the first episode, the paramilitaries are formed by the state and by elite, military, and state certification as useful counterinsurgency tools. This episode ended in their decertification, which would pose a threat to the paramilitaries of a decline in resources. Nevertheless, there was no decline in resources in the second episode, but rather an increase. The paramilitaries were successful in limiting the state's dependency on resources through participation in contention and were changed by territorial control, power, and brokerage into a powerful actor.

In the second episode, the paramilitaries mobilised resources around Conviver for AUC's formation and the state's certification. They change their identity to a more political approach to align with the state's interests. This change in identity is critical because, once with a political approach, they sought institutionalisation to 'disappear' into the shadows – were they remained active – and they consolidated legal organisations to continue paramilitary survival. The once-without-a-political approach disappeared and was radicalised. This is also the case in the third episode: the ones becoming pro-state paramilitaries are left in impunity during the demobilisation process, but the ones with an unpolitical criminal approach faced repression and demobilisation. Thus, in all episodes, the paramilitaries are formed around the practice of violence. Their success in these practises resulted in an identity evolution whereby pro-state paramilitaries are more than armed actors. Therefore, they could disappear into the shadows by acquiring legal positions. This limits the possibility of demobilising the paramilitaries because they will always have access to resources through political, social, and economic alliances.

Successful Organisations 1966–2010

Successful organisations can be divided into three categories: mobilisation of pre-existing and new organisations (collective-action coordination – organisational structure); organisational building, maintaining, and repairing (resource management – organisational strategy); navigating challengers and state repression (disruptive performances – radicalisation); and demobilisation (decline resources – misconception).

In the first episode, the paramilitaries collective action around the practice of violence resulted in their growth. In the second episode, they mobilise collective action around their political approach and the allure of a prestige military organisation for their expansion. The first episode provides AUC's organisational foundation. Throughout the decades, the paramilitaries had a hierarchical organisation with effective command and control, national strategy, and context-sensible attributes that evolved throughout time and change.

Their ability to overcome collective-action problems through the practice of violence and political approaches, and their organisational structure, facilitated their growth.Their organisational building, maintenance, and repair in resource management facilitated their growth and survival. In the first episode, they decrease state dependence; in the second episode, they expand horizontally and vertically through seizing decentralisation resources; and in the last episode, the paramilitaries maintain their control over territory and diversify their sources through establishing legal organisations. Their organisational strategy assisted in their survival; they adopted strategies of coercion, provisions of services, regulations, and symbols to demonstrate their identity and install fear. In the second episode, the paramilitaries transform traditional clientelism into armed clientelism, and they use district-based methods during competitive elections to adapt to the new context. In the last episode, they focused more on tactics to legalise their illegal activities. Thus, their resource management and organisational strategy assisted their growth and survival.

The paramilitaries navigate challengers through disruptive performances, which have not led to their disappearance but rather their survival. The paramilitaries executed the state's dirty business, and therefore the state responded through repression. Moreover, the paramilitaries exhibited the state's interests; therefore, the crimes against opponents were beneficial for the state. To conclude, demobilisation relates to a decline in resources and misconceptions concerning resources and environmental constraints; nevertheless, the paramilitaries had no decline in resources and could access and maintain critical resources. The demobilisation process is a scheme because, because the paramilitaries continue to hold on to resources and powerful positions, their growth and power are not limited. Their success lies in their organisational pro-state strategy to adapt the same state's counterterrorism approach for the state's protection.

Upwards scale shift

Upwards scale shift is divided into formation alliances across divisions and new collective identities; these trigger the expansion of organisational reach through two routes: operating diffusion and mediated route.

In the first episode, local defence groups can create alliances with strong cross-support (economic, political, illegal). The strategic alliance triggered relational diffusion for the Los Tangerous, Masetos, ACCU, etc. formations. The self-defence identities resonated with various actors. ACCU members used brokerage to expand their organisations to different sites in Colombia, and through a mediated route, a large expansion of paramilitary organisations spread over the country in 1980–1990. In the second episode, alliances around the district-based method triggered a brokerage mechanism and an upwards scale shift through a mediated route. The AUC identity allured more members, and their political approach, with broader sentiments of nationalism, anticommunism, and capitalism, enabled them to become new political leaders via the relational operating diffusion route. This episode encompasses the greatest expansion of the AUC of 6,000–8,000 self-defence groups in 26 of the 32 Colombian departments. The third episode illustrates an upwards scale shift – not of land but of structure. Through relational diffusion triggered by their state alliances, the pro-state paramilitaries could shift their illegal activities to legal structures.

Conclusion

Which underlying mechanisms explain the emergence, growth, and survival of the paramilitaries in the state of Colombia?

The state's complicity and its role in maintaining, regulating, and delegating violence to the paramilitaries enabled them to emerge, grow, and survive throughout all facets of Colombian society through the means of violent entrepreneurship. Their reach in all facets of society transformed the pro-state paramilitary into an all-encompassing actor – political, economic, social, judicial, etc. Their organisational capabilities contributed to transforming into an organisation that was stable yet flexible and context-sensitive. This transformation applies to only the pro-state, political paramilitaries, and not to the unpolitical, criminal paramilitaries. This distinction is critical because the pro-state paramilitaries are acting on behalf of the state – they navigate state challenges, protect the state, and pursue the same economic state interests. This provides the foundation for state–paramilitary cooperation, entanglement, and collusion. Thus, the pro-state paramilitaries emerge, grow, and survive due to the to the state's entanglement and the paramilitaries' ability to transform themselves into all-encompassing actors.

The results shed light on the study's puzzle. Genuine efforts to eliminate the paramilitaries were constrained by institutional resistance and paramilitary cooperation. During the Vargos Barco

administration, the institutional resistance of the military and police limited the illegal declaration and its credibility. The military cooperation with the paramilitaries was not even hidden; they organised public meetings and openly supported each other. Throughout the decades, the military and police did not stop paramilitary violence, and the state never tried to hold them accountable. Further, large businesses such as Chiquita and Coca-Cola used the paramilitaries for their own capitalist interests, resulting in beneficial cooperation based on violent entrepreneurship. These companies influence the political landscape of Colombia and support paramilitary persistence.

Most importantly, genuine efforts were constrained due to brutal violence. Violence is a central part of the paramilitary presence. Judges who tried holding paramilitaries accountable and promoted victims rights were often killed, kidnapped, or disappeared. Peasants who worked on their own land to support their families were forcefully displaced or publicly executed. Further, women have been raped, killed, and slaughtered in communal squares. Union leaders who fought for better working conditions were killed, disappeared, and threatened. Politicians were bribed, coerced, or replaced by paramilitary-friendly candidates. Therefore, at the end, only paramilitary-friendly actors exist because the paramilitaries have eliminated all their opponents or silenced them. Therefore, the high commissioner's rigid stance against the paramilitaries is bravery. Even the paramilitaries were surprised by the prosecution of 14 high-ranking politicians involved in paramilitary activities. Only after several years was the truth finally revealed concerning Uribe's involvement in and credibility of the DDR programme. The president himself is involved in paramilitary activities and supports their organisation and survival. Thus, the para-political scandal and Uribe's prosecution shed light on the widespread paramilitary–state entanglement and collusion, but they also demonstrated the bravery of the High Commissioner to continue its mission to eliminate paramilitaries while his life was in danger.

Theoretical implications

This study has several theoretical implications. As Schnecker (2006) argued, paramilitaries act on behalf of the state, often doing the state's dirty business; indeed, the paramilitaries execute the state's dirty business, but they are also involved with state-building through establishing alliances and ordering and forming several of the state's structures. Schnecker (2006) also argues that in ongoing conflicts, the paramilitaries evade governmental control and establish their own agenda. However, this agenda is not at random; to survive, the paramilitaries adopted their agenda in accordance with the state's interests. The paramilitaries who evade governmental control face repression because the state's role in sustaining these armed forces is still predominant.

This study builds on Bohmelt and Clayton's (2018), Espino's (2004), and Suryana's (2019) work concerning state's role. The state's investment in the paramilitaries was influenced by the state's hybrid capacity, the unavailability of security sector resources, the deniability of accountability for the state's role in paramilitary crimes, and the domestic threats of increasing guerilla power. Nevertheless,

they argue that PSG paramilitaries are often not formally integrated into state structures, but the Colombian pro-state paramilitaries are formally integrated, first through self-defence law, then through AUC, and then through legal schemes. Moreover, for their survival, their state loyalty did not decrease but only increased, contrary to Espino's (2004) argument, even when they were becoming more powerful. Their power resulted in the paramilitary parallel state, and as Suryana (2019) argues, the state's complicity is crucial for their survival and growth. The ones with decreased state loyalty were targeted and labelled as terrorists, likewise the Irish paramilitaries, and faced threats of demobilisation. Thus, this study broadens the understanding concerning the state's complicity and paramilitaries' pro-state approach to survive, grow, and emerge.

This study elaborates on Hristov's (2010) concept of paramilitaries as a persistent structural multidimensional phenomenon that can alter and evolve its expressions and dimensions over time. The paramilitaries are indeed economic, military, and political entities, as evident in their activities across all social facets. The two-way relationship between the state and paramilitaries has shaped each other's evolutions, as they are co-dependent for their success. This study provides clarity on the definition by illustrating the paramilitaries' evolution throughout three episodes, establishing the comprehensiveness of Hristov's (2010) definition. This study demonstrates the adaptability of Tilly and Tarrow's (2015) framework on violent contention to comprehend paramilitary influence and state formation, reflecting on a wider debate on state-building by non-state armed actors. It highlights the fluidity of state sovereignty and the emergence of hybrid authorities. It underscores Ballvé (2012) theories of territorial production, encouraged by differentiated state presence, creating state-formation opportunities for paramilitaries, and the significance of identity shifts for non-state armed actors' legitimacy and survival.

Strengths and limitations

The study provides a comprehensive analytical framework that integrates POS and mobilisation processes to offer a holistic understanding of paramilitary evolution. It is based on rich empirical data that encompasses meso, micro, and macro levels, providing a nuanced perspective on how different dynamics shape and interact with each other. The interdisciplinary approach from political science, sociology, and conflict studies highlights the study's value in comprehending complex phenomena. However, limitations include its single-case character, which may limit the generalizability of findings to other contexts. Additionally, potential bias in reliance on certain resources and challenges in establishing clear causal relationships between multiple factors are noted. The study's treatment of paramilitaries and institutions as homogeneous groups is acknowledged as oversimplified.

Future research

Regarding limitations in generalizability, future research could explore if similar mechanisms arise in different historical settings or contexts and could conduct a comparative study with other countries with paramilitaries. In how far are pro-state paramilitaries the same as PSG, and in how far are the criminal paramilitaries the same as Irish terrorist paramilitaries? Moreover, future research could incorporate more actors, such as guerillas, for a more comprehensive analysis, and it could incorporate mixed methods, combining qualitative and quantitative techniques, to gain a deeper and broader understanding of the paramilitary phenomenon. This study focuses solely on pro-state paramilitaries, but the development of anti-state paramilitaries is still new.

Other recommendations for future research apply to this study's puzzle. This study concluded paramilitary entanglement and its development; nevertheless, this is still limited. Future research can build further on understanding the state–paramilitary entanglement through a principal agent framework. Moreover, this study focuses on all regions of Colombia; however, it is interesting to explore the differences between these states in paramilitary entanglement and its development. Furthermore, to gain insights into conflict resolution and demobilisation, researchers could focus on the effectiveness of demobilisation policies and the strategies, addressing causes of paramilitary persistence to achieve peace

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