

The Colombian side of the Colombian-Brazilian border: An approach using the category of lawless areas¹

El lado colombiano de la frontera Colombo-brasilera. Una aproximación desde la categoría de área sin ley

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Abstract

This study uses the category of lawless areas as an approach to the complex security situation resulting from increasing ties between localized criminality and transnational organized crime networks on the Colombian side of the Colombian-Brazilian border. The permanent presence of illegal armed actors in this border area is largely caused by the absence and weak presence of the Colombian State at its margins. The methodology used is both bibliographic and descriptive.

Keywords: Failed State, border, lawless area, guerrilla, drug trade.

Resumen

En este trabajo se realiza una aproximación desde la categoría de *área sin ley*, a la compleja situación de seguridad generada por los crecientes vínculos de la criminalidad local con redes del crimen organizado transnacional en el lado colombiano de la frontera colombo-brasilera. El establecimiento permanente de actores armados ilegales en este espacio fronterizo se debe en gran medida a la ausencia y débil presencia del Estado colombiano en sus periferias. El abordaje metodológico es de tipo bibliográfico y descriptivo.

Palabras clave: Estado fallido, frontera, área sin ley, guerrilla, narcotráfico.

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Lawless areas

Lawless areas or brown zones are defined by O'Donnel (2004), Bartolomé (2003), Cirino and Elizondo (2003) and Cirino (2002) as those spaces where non-state actors

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linked to illegal local and international practices and networks accumulate so many resources and so much influence that they surpass State institutions, whether due to the total absence or the weak presence of the State. In this sense, Wanderley (2000) claims that these areas present a "Hobbesian state of ungovernability," understood as a continued rupture of the social fabric within a framework of continued violence and criminality over time. In these states, authorities do not have the necessary resources to effectively rule, and thus, the protection of public order and collective security are uncertain. Cirino and Elizondo (2003), propose 3 possible causes for the appearance of lawless areas:

1. Political. Weak state institutions translate into an inability to maintain a legitimate monopoly on violence and high levels of state official corruption.
2. Political-Geographical. Border areas, due to their distance from productive centers, have not been connected with those centers. Moreover, they are difficult to access due to the presence of certain geographical conditions with thick jungle vegetation and the absence of roadway or communications infrastructure, making these spaces suitable for establishing illegal organizations connected to international crime.
3. Socioeconomic. The creation of free trade zones in these areas increases the operational capacities of non-state (illegal) actors because the economic gains produced through illicit activities, such as contraband, drug trafficking and money laundering, produce the necessary resources for sustaining illegal activities. Maicao City in the Colombian Guajira, Colon in Panama, and Iquique in Northern Chile are examples.

In the relatively recent literature, some have begun to speak of "gray areas," framed within postmodernism and surpassing state-centric theories of international relations by proposing a new cartography on the international stage with international insecurity as the backdrop. This concept is not a very clear one: authors such as Lupsha (1993), Gu henno (1999) and Maisonneuve (1998) use it to describe spaces with conditions very similar to those of lawless areas where half-criminal, half-political organizations appear, areas that serve as refuge and sanctuary to criminal organizations and areas in which the State is incapable of imposing its authority.

Put simply, in these areas, "The bureaucratic state may be present in the form of buildings and public officials financed through the national budget, but state legality is still absent: whatever the existing system of rules, it is applied intermittently in the best of cases" (O'Donnell, 2004, p. 32).

Geography and the territorial presence of the Colombian State

Following are some social and political situations that have occurred at different intensities and with different tones throughout Colombian history:

The State has never controlled classical monopolies that one might suppose are the State's responsibility in any society: violence, territorial control, justice and taxation. Peter Waldmann (1997) describes this situation as follows:

Although in almost no Latin American country has the State been able to impose a monopoly on the means of coercion in all its ramifications, the crises of state authority and legitimacy in Colombia have periodically worsened to the point of causing the true dissolution of the State (p. 37).

During Colombia's existence as a republic, there has been a persistent recurrence of political violence by different social actors. The historical persistence of violence has been considered the primary threat against Colombia's stability (Vargas, 2003). During the past century, considerable political violence has erupted in three different periods: the first was the Thousand Day War (1889-1902); in the 1940s, the murder of Liberal Party presidential candidate Jorge Eliécer Gaitán led to liberal-conservative violence (1948-1958); and following that was revolutionary and counterrevolutionary violence on the part of insurgent and paramilitary organizations, along with regular military forces (1964-2014).

In spite of the systematic use of violence by political and civil actors, the institutional terms of different rulers have been respected. There was only one military coup in the 20th century, in 1953, which was relatively acceptable to the political elites (Tirado, 1989).

However, an essential characteristic for defining or attempting to describe the Colombian State is that historically, it has maintained a differential presence throughout its national territory; that is, the continuity of the Colombian State has been fragmented. Even as it manages to integrate urban centers, vast peripheral zones of the nation are excluded and marginalized from its basic services. The reason for this fragmentation is, in part, the country's complex geography. According to the Geographical Fragmentation index created by the International Development Center at Harvard University, Colombia is the third-most geographically fragmented country among 155 countries analyzed (Pizarro, 2004).

Colombia is located in the heart of a tropical zone and is crisscrossed by three large mountain ranges (eastern, central and western) that impact its climatology and form a varied range of climates: high altitude in upper areas, warm climates in the valleys of its large rivers (Magdalena and Cauca), cool climates in the middle ranges or flanks of the mountain ranges, and cold climates appropriate for agriculture and the settling of large populations in the high plateau—such as the Bogota Savanna, which is the center of historical development and Colombia's administrative capital. This complexity does not decrease in geopolitical terms: Colombia is an Andean, Caribbean, Pacific and Amazonian country all at once. It is precisely this complex geography that has caused difficulties in inter-regional communication and interaction, with serious impacts on the possibility of symmetrical or even development within the country.

One explanation of this situation can be found by reviewing Colombia's demographic development process throughout the colonial period and at the outset of the 19th century. During this entire time, the population grew from the center (Andean region) toward the periphery because the latter area housed the largest number of Colombia's indigenous population, which could provide abundant labor for exploiting new territories and agricultural areas. *Encomiendas* and forts were built in these new areas,

which led to a bimodal land ownership structure of large estates and smallholdings. In the latter, an entire farming family would work, with relatively more hand labor than other factors of production. The opposite took place in the large estates, which used very little hand labor because of their extensive land use. These types of land ownership led to rural overpopulation, which usually resulted in rural residents migrating to urban centers as large forces of unemployed workers who had been used to colonize new "agricultural frontier areas" (PNUD, 2004).

Along these same lines, Gouesset (1998) claims that migration to these new areas was generally complex and, depending on the context, was completed either immediately or in phases. These phases were mediated by variables that permeated the push/pull processes. The lack of agrarian reform and the proliferation of abandoned tracts meant that colonization became a way to release demographic pressures and to delay social reforms in Colombia's center. In general, these processes of farming colonization in Colombia were spontaneous: there was no state mediation or participation.

A characteristic trait of these internal border zones is the State's absence. Along these lines, authors such as González (2014), Schelenker and Iturralde (2006), Serje (2005), Salazar and Castillo (2001), Soto (2001), Rangel (1999) and Medina (1994) agree that the Colombian State has historically maintained a differentiated presence across its national territory. In this study, we understand state presence as the permanent meeting of the State's primary responsibilities: delivering justice, providing security and guaranteeing citizens the provision of and access to basic public services. Although this definition may not appear to be well developed, what it seeks to highlight is that State presence is not limited to the physical presence of its institutions and that these institutions should provide the services for which they were conceived.

In other words, the continuity of the Colombian State has been fragmented, given that while it has attempted to integrate the political, judicial, economic and social dynamics of its urban centers, vast peripheral areas remain excluded and marginalized from basic services. This situation enables the appearance and consolidation of parallel powers that use force and violence to impose the basic social and economic order that allow people to live together in the same place.

In these State-free zones, paramilitary and guerrilla organizations become the seeds of order and, in practice, act as parallel states under the cover of illegality as the State renounces its role as guarantor of the interactions among inhabitants. This leaves property rights, contracts and exchanges in an abstract type of limbo. Without these legal relations, there can be no social life. It is only natural for a new type of social order or primitive state to arise in such contexts.

These areas end up being defined as armed territories or states of war, defined by María Teresa Uribe (2001) as territorial spaces in which institutional power is not sovereign and where across broad swaths of the social sector there is an open unwillingness to submit to State order, i.e., a resistance against its control, which leaves a latent possibility of armed confrontation with the State. In states of war, violence becomes the means of resolving social tensions and conflicts; that is, violence and those who administer or exercise it become the dynamic element in the development of a shared life.

It is worth pointing out that authors such as Uribe (1997), Garay (1999) and Gómez (2000) maintain that State absence is not only limited to the periphery or internal border zones, and they agree that Colombia lives under permanent uncertainty. This uncertainty means that specific solutions must be negotiated for each situation of disorder. In growing areas of the center, such as poor neighborhoods in large cities, the law of the strongest prevails.

The Colombian side of the Colombian-Brazilian border. A geographic and economic overview

The aforementioned panorama is made up of a shared border area² that includes 11 departments extending 6,342 kilometers (km). State absence in these areas is largely due not only to their distance from “political and productive centers” located in the interior of the country but also to these areas’ geographical characteristics (jungle areas with difficult access and little or no roads or service infrastructure).³ These claims are supported by the fact that only 5.45% of the Colombian population lives in these areas, and it was only in 1991 that they were classified as departments⁴ (Fundación Seguridad and Democracia, 2008).

The border between Colombia and Brazil extends over 1,645 km through the Amazonas, Guainia and Vaupes Departments on the Colombian side and the Amazonas province of Brazil. The most significant cities in the region are Leticia, which is the capital of the Amazonas Department (Colombia), and its neighbor Tabatinga (Brazil). The Colombian side of this border is composed of four municipalities and seven departmental districts. In the Amazonas Department, the border goes from the Leticia municipality in the far south of the country to the district centers of La Pedrera and Tarapaca in the north. In the Vaupes Department, the border touches the Taraira municipality and the Pacoa district, Mitu (the departmental capital) and the Yavarate district from south to north. In the Guainia Department, the border crosses the Pana Pana, Puerto Colombia, San Felipe and La Guadalupe districts in the eastern part of the country, and it is a meeting point for the borders of Colombia, Brazil and Venezuela (Sierra, 2003).

According to the Fundación Seguridad and Democracia (2008), the border area holds approximately 91,764 inhabitants, or one person for each 1.79 km². Seventy-five percent of this population is concentrated in the departmental capitals of Amazonas and Vaupes. The local population is majority indigenous, whereas in the municipal centers and some border settlements, there is an active presence of settlers from the center of the country, mostly dedicated to informal (gold) mining activities and the production of coca leaves and cocaine.

² For a better understanding of the issue of international borders, see Medina (2006).

³ An interesting historical description and characterization of Colombian borders has been conducted by Margarita Serje (2005).

⁴ Law 191, approved in 1995, was the first constitutional judicial framework for Colombia’s borders. The primary goals of this law were to articulate the peripheral areas with the center of the country, to promote binational border integration and to strengthen the State’s presence.

The regional economy is linked to the dynamics of the Port of Leticia on the Amazon River. The legal economy of the border zone is nearly inexistent; illicit crops have had a significant impact on Guaiavare's economy, whereas in Guainia, the economy revolves around gold-mining projects (PNUD, 2004).

In this regard, Ramírez (2006) maintains that this frontier has had four economic booms that have substantially altered environmental and population dynamics, leading to different processes of colonization and violence. The first was the rubber boom, which occurred between 1890 and 1920 and again in the mid- 1940s because of global postwar demand. The second boom involved furs and occurred between 1960 and 1970, wiping out native species and dramatically altering the ecological equilibrium. The third boom involved gold and occurred in the mid-1980s, especially in Taraira. The fourth boom involved coca and began at the end of the 1980s. These booms have been an ongoing source of conflicts among indigenous populations, settlers, Colombian and Brazilian miners and illegal armed groups.

With respect to roadways, the border area does not have the road infrastructure to enable terrestrial transport. The few existing roads are limited to the area surrounding the city of Leticia. State marginalization of this large and strategic peripheral area is described in the following text:

Beyond the Amazon River port, the border area has docks belonging to the different populations living on rivers flowing into Brazilian territory. This does not translate into a system of communicable rivers connecting national territory together (...) Given its geographical characteristics and distance from the center of national power, this area of the country boasts significant physical territory without State presence (Fundación Seguridad and Democracia, 2008, p. 3).

Legal and illegal military groups

This description is confirmed by reviewing the limited military and political presence deployed by the Colombian State in the frontier area.⁵ In part, this limitation is caused by the fact that Leticia holds the greatest number of troops, and this city is connected to other border posts only by air. The Amazonas Department is under the jurisdiction of the 26th Army Brigade based in Leticia, under the Sixth Division, which is based in Florencia, Caqueta. This brigade has a counter-guerrilla battalion, a jungle battalion and a services battalion, all located in Leticia. The northern border is part of the operational area of the 28th Jungle Brigade, under the Fourth Division of the National Army located in Puerto Carreño (capital of the Colombian Vichada Department) on the Venezuelan border. In this latter city, Colombia's Navy has a river post that covers the Orinoco River to the Brazilian border in La Guadalupe, Guainia Department, next to the Cucui population. In the Vaupes and Amazonas Departments, Navy presence is virtually nonexistent. The Tarapaca District (Amazonas Department) is covered by a river command located 1,400 km away, and the La Pedrera and Taraira Districts do not have an ongoing Navy presence. The most important operational unit of the Navy in

⁵ For Brazilian military deployment on its Colombian border, see: García (2010) y Moreano (2006).

the area is found in Leticia, which is responsible for the Colombian side of the Amazon River. The Air Force does not have any aerial unit on this border. Finally, the National Police has a presence in the municipal centers in the border area and have guard posts in some border districts. Migration enforcement under the Administrative Migration Unit operates only in the city of Leticia (Fundación Seguridad and Democracia, 2008).

The Colombian side has an active presence of the Armed Revolutionary Forces of Colombia—People's Army (FARC-EP, in Spanish) Fronts 1, 16, 29 and 44, which are positioned between Vaupes and Guainia. In the Amazonas Department, the influence of Fronts 1 and 63 has been reported, along with paramilitary and drug-trafficking structures.

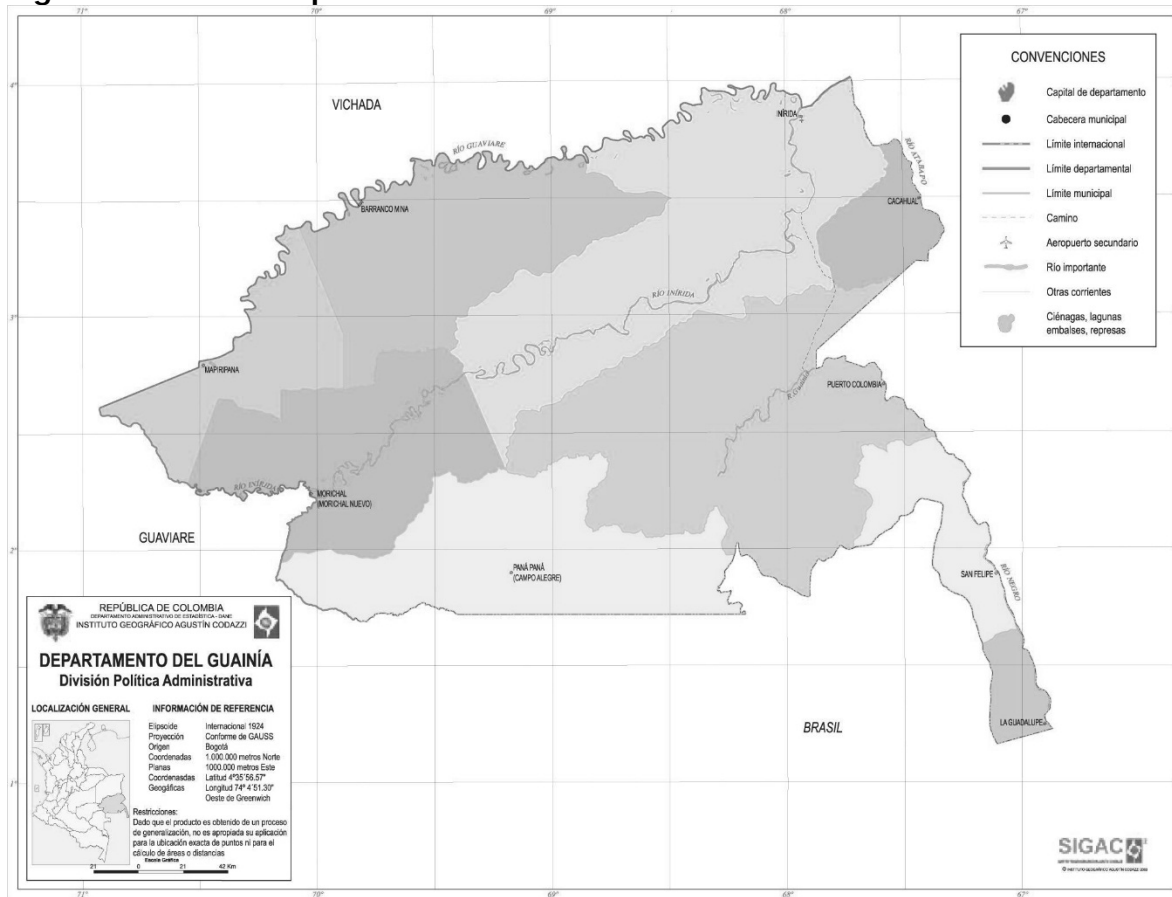
Guainia Department

The 2005 census performed by the National Statistics Department (DANE, in Spanish) discovered that the indigenous population is the majority in the department (at 64.9%), primarily in the rural areas of Puerto Colombia, La Guadalupe and Cacahual (with between 98 and 99%), Barrancominas (83.9%) and San Felipe (84.4%). It follows that an elevated percentage of housing units in the department (37%) are indigenous homes.

According to the Presidential Human Rights Observatory (2010), agriculture is Guainia's primary legal economic activity; there is also fishing, livestock and the production of chiquichiqui palm and "Yare" vine, which are used for making handcrafts. In this sense, indigenous communities have achieved a degree of organization that has allowed them to market their products nationally and internationally through Artesanías de Colombia, making it possible for this population to maintain its cultural heritage. Although trade has traditionally been concentrated in the departmental capital, beginning in the second half of the past decade, gold and diamond deposits have been found in the El Dorado area near the Brazilian and Venezuelan borders. Titanium and uranium veins are being explored in the Puerto Colombia District.

In general, the majority of the territory in the department is composed of indigenous settlements, with the largest belonging to the medium and upper basins of the Inirida River, the Lower Guainia River, the Negro River, the Cuiari and Isana Rivers, and the Atabajo, Inirida, and Chorro Bocon Rivers at the middle of the Inirida River. The most represented ethnicities in the department are the Piapoco, Sikuani, Curripaco and Puinave (Presidential Human Rights Observatory and International Humanitarian Law [DIH], 2010, p. 4).

Figure 1. Guainia Department



Source: Augustin Codazzi Geographic Institute (IGAC, by its initials in Spanish).

Illegality and armed conflict in Guainia

The arrival of the FARC in the Guainia Department has been narrated by Alfred Molano as follows:

One January afternoon in 1986, some odd people appeared in Maimache; the population took no time at all to see them as strange. They were the survivors of a guerrilla group made up of six members who came from Vichada but who, when they went through Guarmiza, were ambushed by the Venezuelan guard. Only three of them escaped the ensuing shootout (...) The newly arrived individuals brought rifles, an eloquent-enough notification, and the inhabitants of Maimache—including the police inspector—very quickly recognized their authority. It didn't take long for other young men to arrive (...) They gave a political speech and announced the rules of the game: they prohibited drinking in the mines, the improper use of hand guns (which were confiscated), prostitution and, above all, robbery. The approval of the measure was unanimous (Molano, 2005, pp. 76-77).

With these antecedents, the FARC-EP's presence was consolidated by Front 16 under the command of the Eastern Block. Under the command of Tomas Medina Caracas (Negro Acacio), Front 16 became one of the primary contributors of financial resources within the Block and the organization's Secretariat. The group achieved this by strengthening drug trafficking sales, increasing illicit crops, increasing the number of coca processing laboratories and using border areas for cocaine sales. Front 16 was also in charge of bringing in arms.⁶

Front 16 has been weakened by the actions of the Public Security Force. The attacks included the capture and detention of the Brazilian drug trafficker Luis Fernando da Costa, "Fernandinho," in the rural area of Barrancominas (Guainia) on April 19, 2001, who had been protected by Front 16 inside Colombia. On September 2, 2007, in the early morning hours, an undetermined number of Army soldiers, Air Force pilots, Navy marines, Administrative Security Department and police agents deployed operation "Sol Naciente," which, after the bombardment of a camp on the edge of the Guaviare River 130 km from San Jose, led to the death of the main commander of Front 16, Tomas Medina Caracas (Negro Acacio). After Medina's death, the command of Front 16 went to Efrain Mendez (Guillermo or Cochornea), and responsibility for drug-trafficking finances was assumed by General Garcia Molina (Jhon 40), the commander of Front 43. In this context, the Army, Navy and Police have been increasing their presence in the department (Arias, 2008a).

Currently, Guainia is the epicenter of illegal coltan mining. This new boom, according to García (2012), began in 2008, when mineral mixtures with high value for the production of electronic devices were discovered in the black soil of the department—e.g., columbite, tantalite and tungsten—which are the components of coltan. This mining takes place in Zancudo, in the northern area of the Puinawai national nature park. "La Selva Herida" (2013) determined from official sources, that Front 16 regulates production in the Zancudo mine. This journalistic enterprise also proved that it is nearly impossible to get to the site not only because of the lack of roadways and navigable sections of river but also because guerrillas attack anything that flies overhead without their permission.

The State's absence and organized crime's territorial control in Guainia have been magisterially rendered in "Ruta del Coltan":

Crossing the Coltan Route requires paying a price set by various FARC fronts. Each ton bought in Puinawai costs 9 million pesos (after the mining boom, the price stabilized at 9 thousand pesos per kilo), and to get it out, they must pay five million pesos to the Acacio Medina Front of the FARC. From Zancudo, buyers take the Inirida River until they arrive at two hamlets in the Guaviare Department: Puerto Flores or Charras. There, they encounter two guerrilla

⁶ During March and August 2000, FARC-EP Front 16 used airplane delivery to receive 10,000 AK-47 guns in the southern Colombian jungles from a total lot of 50,000 for which they had negotiated in 1999; the value of the guns was between 15 and 22 million dollars. The operation involved complicated logistics that began by loading the weapons into a cargo plane in Jordan, with stopovers in Algeria, Cape Verde, Granada and Trinidad and Tobago (Trejos, 2012).

fronts. The first is Front 44 of the FARC, which charges a bribe of three million pesos for each ton. The second is Front 16, which charges 2 million. Once in Guaviare, the buyers use old guerrilla paths to travel to San Jose del Guaviare. There, they must pay a million pesos to Front 7 of the FARC, the final column of the armed group that dominates the Coltan Route. In the capital of Guaviare, control moves to the hands of paramilitaries, who charge a 200,000-peso toll for each ton transported until reaching Villavicencio by land. By the time they have reached their destination, buyers have paid more than 20 million pesos per ton of coltan, without counting what they have spent on transportation. Even so, the business is still good: the official market price for a ton of coltan may be more than 50 million pesos, a figure that is increased on the black market (García, 2012).

Vaupes Department

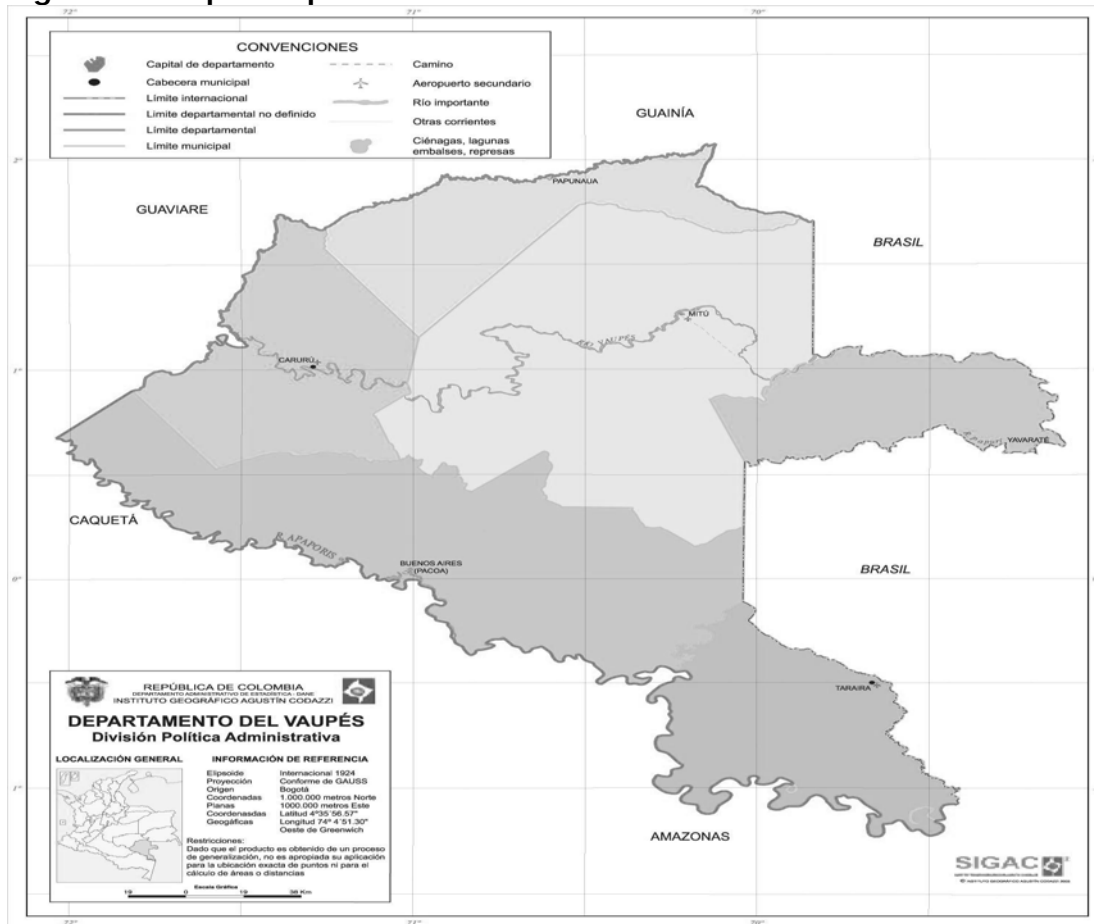
The socioeconomic situation in Vaupes is so worrisome that the Human Rights program of the President's Office has written the following:

The department has also been characterized by state abandonment over many years, which, according to the 2005 census, translated into a percentage of Basic Unmet Needs of 40% in urban areas and 88.1% in rural areas, the highest in the nation (Presidential Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law Program, 2009a, p. 5).

The institutional panorama in this department is so complex that the supplies of gasoline (whose price is not regulated by any legal authority) and food for the department's inhabitants depend almost entirely on the arrival of cargo planes from Villavicencio every 10 days. The Vaupes River is navigable between Caruru and Miraflores (the capital of the Guaviare Department), but the boat journey takes approximately three days. DANE has estimated that in 2005, the Caruru population was 2,000 inhabitants, 641 of whom live within the urban perimeter (Presidential Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law Program, 2009a).

In the Vaupes Department, the FARC-EP is present through the Libardo Garcia Company, which belongs to Front 1 (Armando Rios) under Reynaldo's command. This guerrilla unit shows low levels of military confrontation because it is more connected with activities tied to the processing and sale of cocaine, especially in the rural area of the Caruru municipality. There are also records of the extortion of contract construction workers in those communities.

Figure 2. Vaupes Department



Source: Augustin Codazzi Geographical Institute.

Amazonas Department

According to the DANE census in 2005, the indigenous population accounts for a significant percentage of the population of the Amazonas Department at 43.4%, especially in the rural areas of Miriti-Parana (100%), La Chorrera (93.6%) and Tarapaca (89.6%). The most developed legal economic activities are ecotourism and the sale of handcrafts, along with active commerce with Brazil and Panama. Moreover, fishing is good in the Districts of Puerto Arica, El Encanto and Puerto Alegria, which are located on the Putumayo River (DANE, 2005).

The difficult socioeconomic situation in the department is outlined by the Presidential Human Rights Program as follows:

The Amazonas Department, due to its distance from the economic and political center of the country, shows some rather high indices of Basic Unmet Needs (44%). However, it presents the best panorama among the old national territories. According to the census, its total population is 56,036 people, 25,004 in the urban area and 31,032 in rural areas. Forty percent of the

population has completed a basic primary education, and 20.7% have completed secondary education. With respect to access to public services, 72.9% of the population has electricity, 41% has sewage and 54% has access to potable water (Presidential Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law Program, 2009b, p. 2).

The situation in the Amazonas Department is not very different from those already mentioned. Its unique jungle orography and its ability to connect three States—Brazil, Peru and Ecuador—through the Putumayo Department have made different types of illegal activities possible. This situation is made easier because the department is crossed by four significant rivers—the Apaporis, the Caqueta, the Putumayo and the Amazon—and because it has a relatively weak institutional presence. Corruption and drug trafficking have been common in this department since the 1980s, when it became the entry point for coca paste from Bolivia and Peru. Many of the department's political leaders have faced criminal investigations or have been removed from power by the National Attorney General's Office (Arias, 2008b).

Drug trafficking and armed conflict in the Colombian Amazon

Reyes (2009) has described international illegal networks bound together by drug trafficking in this large lawless or empty area represented by the Colombian side of the Colombian-Brazilian border, proposing that Amazonas's importance to drug trafficking is its rivers, many of which flow either directly or indirectly into the Amazon River in Brazil and then to the rest of the world (especially Europe). Cocaine crosses the Atlantic Ocean to some island nations of Western Africa that were once Portuguese colonies, such as the Islands of Cape Verde and Guinea Bissau and its Bissagos archipelago (Presidential Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law Program, 2009b).

It is important to note that the goods needed for coca processing arrive from Brazil, where crystallization laboratories and sales locations are also located.

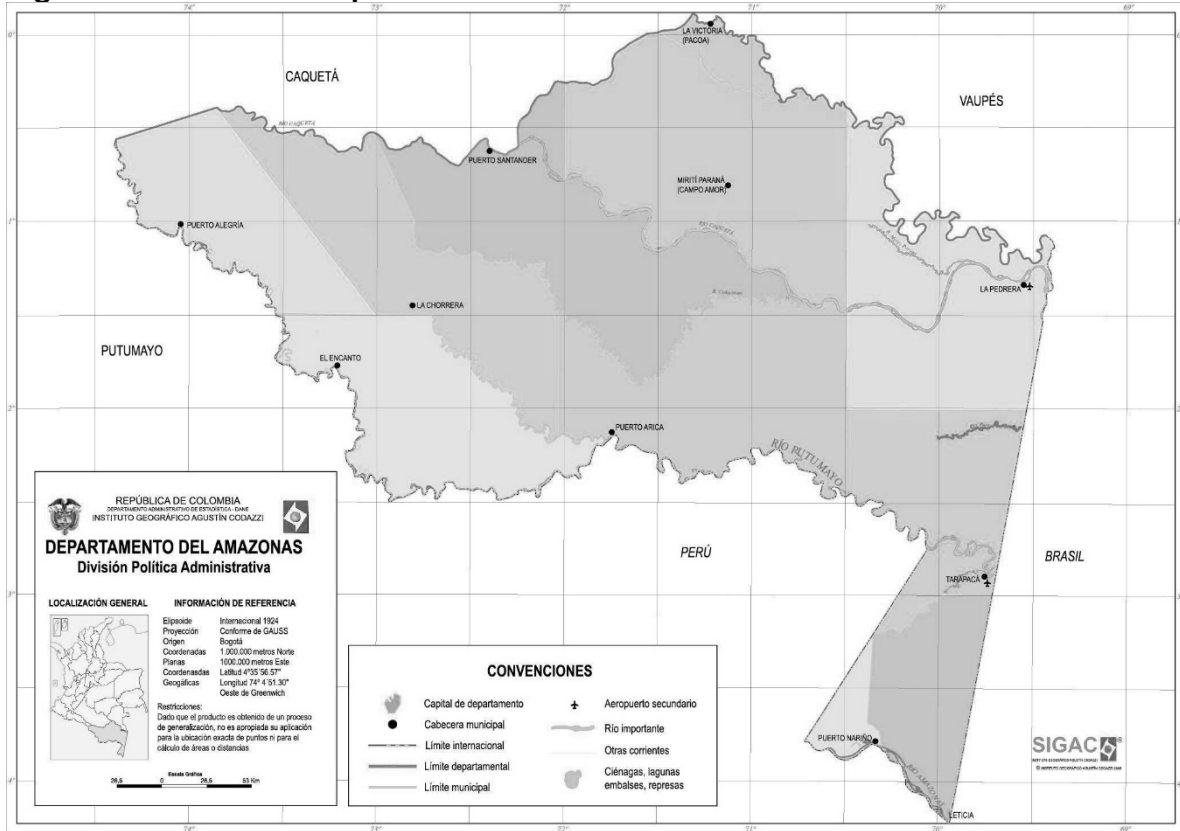
With respect to the presence of illegal armed actors, Front 63 (Rodolfo Tanas) was created in the 1990s. It is worth noting that this Front, along with other guerrilla structures operating on its border, does not engage in regular military activities because it is primarily dedicated to controlling the different phases of cocaine production and sale, shipping corridors and military equipment imports. Between 2000 and 2002, there was a sporadic presence of the Putumayo Southern Block Self Defense forces on the Putumayo River, and cases of extortion of salespeople in Leticia have been reported.

Regarding the presence of drug trafficking in Amazonas, the October 4, 2013, digital edition of the *El Colombiano* newspaper writes the following:

The United Nations Office against Drugs and Crime (UNODC) noted that from 2006 to December of 2012, coca crops went from 692 to 698 planted hectares, especially on the borders with Caqueta, Vaupes, and Putumayo. In fact, today, the majority of coca circulating in the Amazon area comes from the Putumayo municipalities of Puerto Asis and Puerto Leguizamo (...)

Controlling the drug trade along this stretch of the border is a titanic labor. It is worth noting that all of Colombia fits within the Brazilian state of Amazonas, which is 1,570.745 km² in size. The standing army does not have the capacity for control, an unfortunate situation that it shares with its Peruvian colleagues (Matta, 2013).

Figure 3. Amazonas Department



Source: Augustin Codazzi Geographical Institute.

It is necessary at this point to analyze the changing relationship of the FARC-EP, coca growers and drug trafficking. From the FARC-EP's initial opposition to coca cultivation in 1977, it moved to accepting and regulating it in 1979, and in 1982, it began to tax coca paste sellers, cocaine production labs and cargo flights. At the beginning of the 1990s, the FARC-EP began to regulate the behavior of drug traffickers and kitchen workers. During peace talks in Caguan, Commander Julio Rincon claimed the following:

Those who bought and lived in the area followed our rules: do not carry weapons larger than a revolver, never a nine millimeter, do not bring anyone without knowing who it is, and if they bring him or her, they had to explain why he or she was in the area (Ferro and Uribe, 2002, p. 99).

The first coca growers' marches against aerial fumigation began in 1996, and the entry of coca paste buyers was restricted in 1999 because of fears of paramilitary infiltration.

This marked the beginning of competition among the paramilitaries over purchasing, and in 2000, the direct sale of coca paste by the FARC-EP began.

The control and regulation of coca in FARC-EP territories also has an organic function:

While it appears to be paradoxical, the control of the coca economy offered advantages to guerrilla forces in terms of its growth, especially when there is a sharp decrease in prices. Periodic crises in coca also favor the guerrilla forces because joining its ranks becomes nearly the only alternative in the face of the general lack in employment opportunities (Ferro and Uribe, 2002, p. 100).

For Alfredo Rangel (1999), half of the FARC-EP's economic gains originated with the drug trade; he even claims that the organization commits 1 of every 3 of its combatants to activities directly or indirectly related to drug trafficking. In reality, the organization would be seriously challenged in waging war against the State without the significant economic resources it obtains from a complex system of coercive taxation (grammage) imposed in the areas where coca leaf is grown and processed.

What should be clear is that although the FARC-EP is actively related to the drug trade, as noted by Ávila (2008), the FARC-EP does not control the entire chain of cocaine production and distribution; in many cases, its control goes as far as its contact with those who mediate and transport cocaine to the consumer market. The group's connection to and economic dependence on this illegal activity requires it to retain commercial ties to drug traffickers. This was demonstrated in April 2001, when "Operation Gato Negro"—under the auspices of the Colombian Army in the Guaviare Department and against Front 16 of the FARC-EP—captured the Brazilian drug trafficker Luis Da Costa, also known as "Fernandinho." Table 1, graph of previous information.

In border areas, the FARC-EP controls some routes used to take cocaine to neighboring countries, but the corridors leading to the large consumer markets remain in the hands of large drug traffickers and cartels.

From this perspective, the FARC-EP fits within the concept of clandestine transnational actors (CTAs), created by Peter Andreas (2003) and defined by him as:

Nonstate actors who operate across national borders in violation of state laws and who attempt to evade law enforcement efforts. CTAs are as dramatically varied as their motives. They may be driven by high profits and market demand (e.g., drug traffickers and migrant smugglers), the desire to carry out politically or religiously inspired acts of violence (terrorists), or the search for employment or refuge (the vast majority of unauthorized migrants). (p. 78).

Table 1. Productive chain of the drug trade and the relationship between the FARC-EP and the drug-trafficking mafia

Coca leaf crops	Basic coca leaf processing	Sale of coca leaf base to intermediary or without intermediaries	Processing and transformation into cocaine	Outside transport	Distribution in cities
Eastern Block	Eastern Block		Eastern Block	Drug Trafficker	Drug Trafficker
Southern Block	Southern Block	Southern Block	Drug Trafficker	Drug Trafficker	Drug Trafficker
Joint Western Command	Joint Western Command		Joint Western Command	Drug Trafficker	Drug Trafficker
Mid-Magdalena Block	Mid-Magdalena Block	Mid-Magdalena Block	Drug Trafficker	Drug Trafficker	Drug Trafficker
Caribbean Block	Caribbean Block	Caribbean Block	Drug Trafficker	Drug Trafficker	Drug Trafficker
José María Córdoba Block	José María Córdoba Block	José María Córdoba Block	Drug Trafficker	Drug Trafficker	Drug Trafficker

Source: Ávila Ariel 2009, FARC, Coca and Drug Trafficking.

This concept has been developed in security and defense studies conducted with the new international scenario in mind, wherein sovereignty and national security are affected not only by military variables but also by the increasing porosity of borders under globalization.

Conclusions

The critical security and governability situation present on the Colombian side of the Colombian-Brazilian border is the product of, among other things, a state that is centralized, absent or weakly present at its periphery. State presence can be understood as a continued meeting of the State's primary responsibilities, such as delivering justice, providing safety, and guaranteeing its citizens the provision of and access to basic public services. Thus, the physical presence of the State's institutions is insufficient. Rather, State institutions should perform the functions for which they were conceived. State presence that is either absent or weak favors the appearance and consolidation of illegal armed groups, which create social orders and incentivize illegal economic practices connected to transnational criminal networks that use border areas as starting points.

In the Colombian case, internal armed conflict and the State's counterinsurgent strategy transformed external border zones into active areas of the production of

goods that escape State control and the demand for which is related to international economic exchanges. The backdrop to this situation is liberal globalization and increasing border porosity of peripheral states that have secured the relationship between crime, the market and the State (Briscoe, 2008).

The active presence of illegal armed actors, coca crops and cocaine production laboratories, along with the absence of the State across large extensions and its limited presence in municipal seats, have transformed the Colombian side of the Colombian-Brazilian border into a huge lawless area full of empty spaces, as non-state actors tied to illegal practices and networks on the local and international levels accumulate such a quantity of resources and influence that they surpass the few State institutions. This is the result of the State's complete absence or weak presence, which often is limited to police forces. That is, in many of these areas, military forces have exercised *de facto* political and judicial power. Thus, the State and its institutions present themselves as an indivisible civic-military framework.

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