Law in Peace Negotiations
Morten Bergsmo and Pablo Kalmanovitz (editors)
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One national war, multiple local orders: an inquiry into the unit of analysis of war and post-war interventions*

Ana M. Arjona **

1. Introduction³⁶³

Countries that are either in the midst of a civil war or in its aftermath are the focus of different types of interventions aiming at promoting peace, justice, reconciliation and reconstruction. Most discussions of the virtues and shortcomings of these interventions tend to assume – albeit not explicitly – that the country is the appropriate unit of analysis for this debate. However, war may take a different form across local territories, unleashing strikingly different dynamics. Local communities are thus prone to live very different wars – and very different lives – throughout the territory where the war goes on. Since legal instruments, international peace keeping operations, and policies and programs do not operate in a vacuum, this variation is consequential for both their normative validity and eventual success. Disaggregating the analysis beyond the country is thus essential for identifying the conditions under which a given intervention is both justified and likely to be effective.

In this chapter I aim to plea for such disaggregation. My argument is twofold. First, I argue that civil war is seldom as chaotic as we tend to think. While violence exists and a myriad of conducts become risky, anarchy seldom reigns in war zones. On the contrary, in most areas some form of order emerges. When an armed group has control over a territory, it usually engages in some form of rule over its population. Unless civilians are willing to resist – and have the capacity to do so – a new organization of local affairs emerges. While the previous order is in a sense overthrown, it is not replaced by anarchy but, rather, by a new form of order. When studying alternative attempts to bring about peace and reconstruct a war-torn country, it is important to take into account not only the destructive facet of war, but also its capacity to create a new organization of social, political, and economic matters.

The second part of my argument points to the variation of that new order. Armed groups can approach their role as rulers in different ways, from limiting their intervention to the maintenance of public order, to becoming a local government that deals with every aspect of

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³⁶³ I would like to thank Laia Balcells, Pablo Kalmannovitz, Jonah Schulhofer-Wohl, and the participants at the Workshop on Peace Keeping Operations organized by the Folke Bernadotte Academy at Georgetown in October 2007 for their comments. Many thanks go to Ana M. Zuluaga for outstanding research assistance in my fieldwork in Colombia, and Andres Clavijo, Carlos Hernández, and Laura Otalora for their help with the survey data.
civilians’ lives. Likewise, local inhabitants can resist the new ruler, obey its commands, or endorse it. Due to this variation in the behaviour of both actors, the new social orders that emerge – to which I refer as local orders – can vary greatly along several dimensions. In consequence, the context in which interventions operate both during and after the war may differ substantially across the national territory.

Taking for granted that the country is the adequate unit of analysis for assessing the validity and effects of interventions can lead to three types of problems. First, we can make unrealistic assumptions by thinking that the war is homogenous, when in fact great variation exists across the national territory. Second, we can make an erroneous assessment of the situation of civilians, the ways in which the war affected them, and their needs. And third, we can rely on a poor analysis of the likely effects of alternative interventions by ignoring the variation in the contexts where they are applied. In so far as an intervention aims at outcomes that depend on civilian behaviour – such as reconciliation between community members, prevention of violence, obedience to law, or political participation – the particular situation of the community where the intervention takes place can be a major determinant of its success.

My aim in this paper is to present micro-level evidence of this variation by showing how the new orders that emerge during the war differ across local communities in Colombia. I intend to show that treating the country as the unquestioned unit of analysis leads us to overlook key differences in the way in which the war unfolds at the local level, and the ways in which it transforms civilian life.

I proceed as follows. I start with a brief theoretical discussion of the existence of order in war zones, and the emergence of different local orders across territories (Section 2). I then explore the variation across local orders in the Colombian case along four dimensions: the ruler; the domain of rule; the enforcement mechanisms; and the relation of the population to the ruling groups (Section 3). I conclude by arguing that the existence of different local orders is likely to affect both the validity and success of interventions. This implies that disaggregating the unit of analysis can improve our assessment of the different normative implications that specific interventions may have across the national territory, as well as our understanding of the diverse effects that a given intervention may have depending on where it is implemented (Section 4).

2. The existence of local orders in civil war

Civil war is usually equated with chaos and destruction. Yet, in the areas where the war is fought life often goes on in an ordered way. To be sure, violence may be present as well as fear and oppression. But some standards of behaviour emerge, which people learn to identify and follow. The pre-war modus vivendi is no longer valid, but it is not replaced by anarchy. Rather, a new order emerges, in which civilian affairs are regulated in a stable fashion – even if it includes violence, and uncertainty is larger than in peacetime.

In spite of its apparent counterintuitive character, the existence of order in war zones makes sense theoretically. In most contemporary civil wars, frontlines are absent and the fight is more about gaining territorial control than defeating a rival army in successive battles. This condition – often described as irregular warfare – has direct implications on the ways in which armed groups relate to civilian populations.364 When the survival and success of armed groups

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depend on territorial control, civilian collaboration becomes crucial. Civilians can provide the armed groups with a wide range of valuable resources and endowments, including information, food, shelter, and labour force. Without these resources, armed groups can hardly survive, let alone maintain territorial control. Mao’s metaphor of civilian populations as the water in which the rebels can swim depicts the situation perfectly – as does the counterinsurgency strategy of “draining the water”, which means taking civilian collaboration away from the rebels in order to weaken them.365

Because civilian collaboration is so essential for armed groups, they have a clear incentive to behave in ways that render it. But collaboration is a complex matter. It may involve only a few occasional actions, or a long list of daily activities; and these behaviours can entail either mere obedience or endorsement – each of which is the outcome of a different set of motivations and beliefs. Given this heterogeneity, while violence may be an effective deterrent for the transgression of certain rules, it cannot bring about the different forms of collaboration that an armed group needs. In particular, it cannot secure behaviours that are difficult to monitor (such as the provision of information),366 and only under certain circumstances it leads to acts of endorsement.

If violence cannot bring about the different instances of collaboration that armed groups need from civilians, what is the alternative? Creating a new social order offers great advantages. To begin with, order, as opposed to anarchy, increases the group’s capacity to monitor both locals and outsiders. More importantly, by creating a new social order the group is able to influence civilians’ lives in ways that may, through different mechanisms, translate into obedience and endorsement. In addition, this influence may be exploited to shape local affairs in ways that favour the group in economic or political terms. By establishing a new social order, the group may also put into practice its ideological beliefs at the local level. Undertaking land redistribution or forbidding the practice of a certain religion would be instances of such change.

Given its advantages, armed groups strive to establish a new social order in the localities that they aim to control. How they do this, and the extent to which they succeed is, however, a function of their endowments (both material and ideological), and the context in which they attempt to gain control and collaboration. As local communities differ in both their willingness to welcome a new ruler and their capacity to resist it, an armed group may attempt to create order by opting for any of four different strategies.

The first, to which I refer as coercion, consists of the exclusive use of violence and the absence of rule – i.e., coercion without establishing norms or institutions that regulate civilian behaviours. The second entails limiting its intervention to the sphere of public order. Under this rule, which I call minimal, the group only regulates the use of violence and the provision of information to the enemy side, while abstaining from intervention in other civilian affairs. This strategy aims to secure the basic requisites for territorial control – i.e., a monopoly over the use of violence, and the prevention of defection to the enemy side,367 while avoiding governing civilian matters. The third strategy consists of ruling civilian affairs beyond violence and defection, although not in an overt way. Under this form of rule, that I call indirect, the group infiltrates existing organizations by allying with, or mobilizing, a sector of the commu-

367 Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence*. 
nity. By gaining access to organizations and networks, the group is able to rule over certain domains of local life, without openly taking over power. Finally, an armed group may opt for becoming a de facto ruler who governs civilian matters in a broad and explicit sense. Under this strategy, several aspects of public and even private life can be subjected to regulation, such as public goods; the system of justice; the practice of religion; personal appearance; and freedom of speech. I refer to this type of rule as comprehensive.

Civilians, on the other hand, can react to the presence of the group in any of three ways: fleeing, resisting or collaborating – which in turn may entail a wide array of behaviours. Obviously, these decisions do not take place at the same point in time, and individuals may change their mind throughout the conflict. For example, early supporters may turn into displaced persons, and joiners of one group may later on support the rival side. The fact that civilians are forced by the new circumstances to flee, join, resist or collaborate, has led many to label those who stay as supporters of the ruling armed group. Yet, a better understanding of the dynamics that are unleashed by the presence of these organizations shows that collaborating with combatants may entail not only staying alive, but also being able to interact with others in different dimensions that allow life to go on. To be sure, both rebel and paramilitary groups are sometimes able to render sympathies, loyalty, and support. Yet, not every act of collaboration entails favourable emotions and beliefs towards the group.

Even though variation in individual behaviour exists within almost all communities, they translate into observable outcomes at the aggregate level: communities may flee together (either in response to an order by one of the warring sides, or by choice); accept the group’s rule (either with or without actually endorsing it); or oppose it.368

The different combinations of armed groups’ and civilians’ behaviours lead to distinct local social orders (hereafter local orders) where life is organized on the basis of a particular set of standards. The existence of multiple local orders implies that even within the same region, civilian populations may deal with very different forms of war. Whereas in some cases the group is nothing but a violent invader that victimizes and harasses the population, in others civilians interact with it as their ruler. Yet, combatants can also become a powerful actor that shapes local affairs from the shadows, or behave as a policing apparatus within strict limits. The changes that these new orders bring about not only involve modifications of rules and rulership, but also complex transformations of locals’ beliefs, emotions, habits, and actual behaviour. These transformations are a key aspect of how civilians experience both the conflict and its aftermath and, as such, should be taken into account in our study of war and post-war intervention.

3. Local orders in the Colombian conflict: evidence of variation

In this section I present empirical evidence to illustrate the kind of variation that can exist across local orders within a civil war. I focus on three dimensions of local governance in war zones: first, the allocation of the capacity to rule (or the sources of rule); second, the scope of the system – i.e., the types of civilian affairs that are regulated; third, the system of rule enforcement; and fourth, the way in which local populations relate to the ruling armed groups.

368 Both armed groups’ and civilians’ choices in the midst of civil war are the outcome of a complex process where several factors and mechanisms intervene. I address this variation elsewhere (Ana Arjona, “The Creation of Local Order in Civil War: Armed Groups’ and Civilians’ Behaviors in Civil War”, paper presented at the Comparative Politics Workshop at Yale University, 4 November 2007; and “Grupos Armados, Comunidades y Órdenes Locales: Un Enfoque Interrelacional”, in Fernan Gonzalez (editor), Hacia la Reconstrucción del País, Antropos, forthcoming.)
I rely on a preliminary analysis of both quantitative and qualitative evidence on the ongoing armed conflict in Colombia. This evidence comes from different stages of my fieldwork. First, a survey with ex-combatants and civilians that I conducted with Stathis Kalyvas in 2005 and 2006, where we interviewed 830 ex-guerrilla and ex-paramilitary fighters and 565 civilians. I focus on ex-members of the guerrilla groups FARC and ELN, and the paramilitary factions Catatumbo Bloc and Cordoba Bloc because 74% of the respondents belonged to these groups. Second, a collection of qualitative and quantitative evidence on local orders in fifteen municipalities. Third, interviews with mid-level commanders and rank soldiers of the guerrilla groups FARC, EPL, ELN, M-19 and several paramilitary factions that I conducted between 2004 and 2007. And finally, six case-studies, three in the department of Cundinamarca (in the central part of the country), and three in the department of Córdoba (in the north-western part of the country). Following a standard practice in anthropology, I do not use the real names of these localities, nor of the municipalities where they are located.

3.1. The allocation of the capacity to rule

In a context of war, variation in the distribution of power is to be expected across the national territory. This is especially the case in an irregular war where the territory tends to be fragmented, allowing the warring sides to have full control over certain territories. The survey responses of ex-combatants and civilians to the question “who ruled in your locality” support this view (Table 1). The results suggest that the state does not own the monopoly over the capacity to rule civilian populations – something that should be expected from a country facing an armed conflict. A commander of either a paramilitary or a guerrilla group is perceived to be the local ruler by about half of the ex-combatants and about a third of the civilians interviewed in war zones. State authorities are more likely to be perceived as rulers by former members of paramilitary organizations than by either ex-guerrillas or civilians. The data also suggest that persons who join guerrilla groups are more likely to come from areas where a guerrilla group acts as the de facto ruler, while the opposite is true for those who join the paramilitaries. Unpacking the rule of armed groups is thus essential for understanding the context in which civilians make choices during the war – such as enlisting as full time combatant – and presumably also in its aftermath.

369 Ex-combatants were interviewed in three cities, although they came from 30 of the 33 departments of Colombia. The sample of ex-paramilitaries includes both deserters and collectively demobilized combatants. The sample of ex-guerrillas includes only deserters; hence, generalizations from these results require careful examination. For details of this survey see Arjona and Kalyvas, “Report of a Survey with Demobilized Combatants in Colombia”, unpublished document (2007). The survey with civilians was conducted in fifteen municipalities where we interviewed randomly-selected persons between ages 18 and 30, both in urban centres and rural areas.

370 The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the National Liberation Army (ELN) are the two major left-wing guerrilla groups that are still fighting in Colombia. The Catatumbo Bloc and Cordoba Bloc are two of the factions that were united under the right-wing umbrella organization United Self-defense Forces of Colombia (AUC). These factions are usually referred to as paramilitaries.

371 This work was complementary to the survey with civilians conducted in 2006. Through semi-structured interviews, we gathered evidence on several dimensions of local life in municipalities where guerrillas, paramilitary groups, or both were present. The quantitative data I include in this piece come from responses to close-ended questions asked to the interviewees.

372 The purpose of presenting this information is not to test any argument or theoretical claim. Rather, I aim to provide evidence that simply helps us assess the great variation that exists across localities within war zones on different dimensions of life. My goal is also to show, through several types of data gathered with different methods, that even though the ways in which life goes on within a context of war is quite complex, it displays patterns that can be systematically theorized and researched. More importantly, with this descriptive information I aim to plea for more attention to local dynamics in studies of war and post-war intervention.

373 Kalyvas, The Logic of Violence.
Table 1: Sources of rule at the local level.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondent</th>
<th>A guerrilla commander</th>
<th>A paramilitary commander</th>
<th>State or local authorities</th>
<th>Non-state persons</th>
<th>Delinquent organizations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ex-FARC</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ex-ELN</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ex-Catatumbo</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ex-Cordoba</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civilians</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There is also variation in the extent to which other actors are influential within areas controlled by guerrilla or paramilitary groups. Table 2 below summarizes survey responses of ex-combatants and civilians to the question “How important were each of the following persons in your locality?” This table suggests some remarkable patterns. First, the distribution of power within localities in war zones is complex in all cases: no matter who is perceived by the population to be the *de facto* ruler, other actors influence somehow local affairs. Second, the priest is perceived to be a very influential person among ex-combatants of both sides as well as civilians, even when they thought a commander of one of these organizations ruled the locality. Even in areas under state control, the priest is perceived to be as influential as the mayor. The importance of religious authorities in spite of the dispute over population control among the warring sides may be of particular importance for the implementation of certain local interventions, both during and after the war. Third, the saliency of community leaders is also worth noting. In some cases these may be leaders who are able to keep their authority in spite of (and even against) the presence of armed actors, while in others they may only be able to do so by collaborating – in the behavioural, not attitudinal sense discussed before – with the group. Each scenario may have different implications on the social fabric and capacity for self-governance in the post-conflict period. Fourth, the mayor is a very important actor for half the persons who say that a guerrilla commander ruled the locality, and for about 60% of those who think of a paramilitary commander as the local ruler. This result points to a type of armed group rule that somehow incorporates – rather than eliminates or neutralizes – local authorities.

374 Responses from ex-combatants are presented by first armed group membership in some tables and by last group membership in others. The reason is that some questions were asked about the first group they joined, while others were asked about the group from which they demobilized. Given that about 30% of all respondents fought in more than one group, this difference matters (this includes persons who moved both across and within paramilitary or guerrilla organizations). This table presents respondents by their first-group-membership.

375 This category includes respondents who said that a priest, “the rich”, or other non-state and non-illegal actor ruled the locality.

376 This category includes respondents who said that a member of gangs (*pandillas*), drug cartels, or other delinquent organizations ruled their localities.

377 Data come from the survey with ex-combatants and the survey with civilians. Ex-combatants were asked “Who ruled in your locality where you lived one year prior to joining”? Civilians were asked “Who ruled your locality when you were [15, 20, and 25] years old?”
Several facts seem to underlie this multiplicity of powers. First, because the different actors that constitute local communities can react in a variety of ways to the group’s rule, different configurations of power can emerge in areas under control of the same group – hence, some variation should be expected. Second, as I argued before, armed groups may opt for different strategies towards civilians in areas under their control. When the group opts for either minimal or indirect rule, it leaves space for other sources of authority to govern. In some cases, the group may perceive that local structures of governance are so embedded in the community that ruling without them would be unfeasible. In others, such structures may be instrumental to the group: why not use an already established institution if it can be put to work for the organization? Finally, even when armed groups lack full military control over a territory, they can penetrate a community and regulate some conducts of its members. Shantytowns and poor neighbourhoods in big cities often display this mix of rebel governance and state presence. In these circumstances, governance can be expected to be fragmented, and different actors may rule over distinct spheres of society.

Due to these different possibilities, local authorities that existed before the group arrived – be they public functionaries, religious or traditional authorities, or local leaders – may be: eliminated; overthrown by the armed group by capturing the democratic process; co-opted; oppressed; or respected. Different structures of local authority imply different ways in which the armed actor exerts power, shaping the relation between the ruler and the ruled. The implications on local life are far-reaching.

Under elimination, the group kills, expulses, or simply neutralizes existing authorities and establishes an all-together new system of rule by capturing the spaces where such authorities used to govern the population. The village of Librea, one of my case-studies in Cundinamarca, illustrates this case. Local leaders (mostly supporters of the Liberal party) who op-

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Table 2: Sources of rule and influential actors at the local level.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very important persons in your locality</th>
<th>Who ruled your locality?</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A guerrilla commander</td>
<td>A paramilitary</td>
<td>State or local authorities</td>
<td>Non-state persons</td>
<td>Delinquent organizations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>commander</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A priest</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The mayor</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The rich</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A community leader</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A paramilitary commander</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A guerrilla commander</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

378 Data on ex-combatants come from the survey with demobilized fighters conducted in 2005. Data on civilians come from the survey with civilians conducted in 2006.
posed the FARC were killed or expelled. Once the former leadership was out of the way, the group established its own system of governance by placing its cadres to serve as presidents of the Communal Action Association (CAA). A woman recounts that, “everyone looked for the commander to solve private disputes and to find the way out to a problem – be it a debt, a son that did not want to obey his parents or a conflict with a neighbour. The commander became the one everyone turned to”.

Leaders can also be deprived of their role by an armed group that captures the democratic process. In this case, the armed group manipulates the elections and the designation of public officers in order to place its cadres in important positions of local government. The town of Argel, one of my case-studies in Córdoba, illustrates well this situation: from the Procurador (local official of the Internal Affairs Office) to the council members, to the local police station, the local government was in the hands of the Brown Bloc of the paramilitaries.\[379\] It was clear to most inhabitants that in order to be part of the local government, being with the paramilitaries was a must, as the testimony of a local worker suggests: “Every position in the public administration had to be approved by [the paramilitaries]. And everyone who disagreed with them was expelled from the region”. In addition, several interviewees reported that candidates that were not associated with the armed group were usually approached by combatants and informed about the conditions under which they were allowed to run, as well as the terms they would need to agree with in order to rule if elected. In interviews conducted outside of my case areas, descriptions of similar instances were recurrent under different warring sides. A local of a town in the department of Meta described the situation as follows: “The mayor and council members were members of the community chosen directly by the FARC. In a meeting, the group decided who should run as candidate, and who would win”.

According to the media, the capture of the democratic process has taken place in several localities across the Colombian territory. An article of the Colombian Magazine Semana states that public servants of the Electoral Office in different municipalities were coerced in order to manipulate the count of votes. In some localities where the majority of the inhabitants did not vote in the past, turnout was very high, close to 100%.\[380\]

Ex-combatants’ responses to the question “Did you know of cases when the mayor was an ally of the group before becoming mayor?” suggest that elections are a common means for the group to rule local communities, as about a third of them report that this did happen (Table 3). One possibility is that civilians’ capacity to elect their representatives is suppressed by the armed group in either subtle or direct ways; it can also be that the results of the elections are manipulated as mentioned above. In this case, while democracy – in a minimalist sense – still seems to exist, its essence has vanished. Politicians in the locality can still play with the jargon, symbolism, and discourse of legitimacy that characterize democratic processes, but its foundation is lacking. Another possibility is that the community truly supports the armed group and, hence, freely elects its ally. While the outcome could be labelled as democratic, it raises questions about the ways in which different types of institutions operate in a context where an illegal actor is massively supported by the citizenry as its ruler. Another phenomenon that can underlie this result is that the elites use their capacity to mobilize electoral support towards a candidate that is allied with an armed group. In this case, “politics as usual”

\[379\] I do not include the names of the fronts or blocs of the guerrilla and paramilitary organizations in order to avoid the identification of the villages where the interviewees agreed to talk with me under anonymity.

\[380\] “Cómo se hizo el fraude” ["How the fraud was done"],Semana, 8 April 2006.
would be the mechanism through which armed groups transform the distribution of power at the local level, as well as the ends for which it is used.

A case of co-opted authorities is such where leaders decide to support the group or at least work for it. The motivations for this kind of alliance may vary. In some cases ideological support drives leaders to work side by side with combatants. In others, leaders seek individual benefits such as keeping their posts, or defending the advantages that these entail. Even though openly admitting to have willingly supported armed groups is risky for visible leaders, the fact was clear in conversations with locals in different areas. In the village of Lluvias, another case-study in Cundinamarca, one of the leaders who served as president of the CAA for decades said he supported the FARC for ideological reasons, and ruled side by side with them. His decisions as president of the CAA were always in accordance with the rules established by the FARC. He would also take the concerns and problems of the community to the commander of the 100th Front, who would act as the maximum authority to solve them. A young local leader of the village of Permia, a case-area in Córdoba, sadly described how one by one his friends, who had worked with him in favour of their community for years, ended up supporting the paramilitaries: “They have kids now, and I don’t blame them. It is very difficult to say ‘no’ when they offer you a motorcycle or a large payment when you know you are not likely to be able to do anything against them anyways. Plus, we will hardly ever have [those things] in our lives. They [the paramilitaries] knew that, so they harassed all the youths with leadership skills, offering them power and money. Fear is also carefully manipulated”. A local leader interviewed in the Department of Meta described the situation in his town as follows: “[T]he local government has always been very influenced by the armed groups. This is because it is in their benefit to be friends with the groups. It is either voluntary (receiving money and security) or forced upon them (the killings, the kidnappings). The majority of the council members that have not been willing to collaborate have been killed”.

Authorities are repressed when the armed group simply commands them to obey their orders without them having agreed to share their rule with them. Mayors, local council members, and even representatives of national-level institutions like the police or the Attorney General’s Office can be forced to work under the direction of the armed group. To a greater or lesser extent, this case seems to be a common situation across war zones in Colombia. The mayor of Hadria, the third case-study in Cundinamarca, was always forced to “go up” the mountains in order to discuss different issues of the municipality with the commander of the 100th Front of the FARC. Even though some mayors were perceived by the local population to be outspoken supporters of the group, others who did not support it were still accountable to the commander, and had to follow his orders at least to some extent. According to a former public official of this town, sometimes the authorities would explicitly and openly refer civilians to the commander to solve their private disputes instead of turning to a local court or the police: “sometimes you would go to see [the procurador] and he would tell you to talk directly to the commander, up in their camp”. The percentage of ex-combatants who say that certain rules were imposed on mayors to perform their duties suggest that this situation is quite common (Table 3). According to about half the ex-guerrillas and a fourth of the ex-paramilitaries, mayors of localities where an armed group is permanently present have to serve their duty under a particular arrangement with it.
The group imposed rules that the mayor needed to follow in his/her service

The group agreed with the mayor on what to spend the municipal budget on

The mayor was an ally of the group before becoming mayor

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>57%</th>
<th>42%</th>
<th>37%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ex-Farc</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ex-Eln</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ex-Catatumbo</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ex-Córdoba</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Relation between armed groups and local mayors.

It is worth noting that this evidence does not imply that mayors, local leaders, or any other local authority who inhabits an area where one of the warring sides has ruled actually supports that group. They may have had to adjust to shifts in control and coercion, and obey the rules imposed by the strongest actor; some may not have collaborated in any way with the group’s struggle and still preserve their authority; and some may have resisted or rejected their rule either through a successful collective organization of resistance, or in more subtle ways, when the “weapons of the weak”, to use Scott’s term, make their way. It is also possible that, as illustrated by the parapolitics scandal in Colombia, local politicians not only support the armed group but also rely on their services for personal security, clientelism (in the sense of vote buying), and coercion of both voters and electoral officials to ensure favourable electoral results. As with other aspects of the evolution of politics in a context of armed group rule, there is great variation in the ways in which different types of local authorities behave. A closer examination to that variation would be needed in order to understand the implications of these outcomes for the communities.

3.2. The domain of armed groups’ rule

Local orders also vary regarding the spheres of life that the armed group aims to regulate. A first evident difference exists between localities ruled in a minimal way, those ruled in a comprehensive way, and those ruled by indirect rule. Yet, both comprehensive and indirect rulers may choose to extend their regulation over different dimensions of locals’ lives. It follows that the domain of rule may differ even if the same type of ruler governs both. The testimonies of civilians living in different areas illustrate this variation:

“At first, the Elenos [combatants of the ELN] came in to replace the state. They set up norms; regulated the salaries and jobs at ECOPETROL; they were the owners of the gasoline cartel; they influenced the decisions of the local government; they were invited to all social events; organized the strikes in ECOPETROL, and with that they paralyzed half of the country.” (Local inhabitant of the city of Barrancabermeja)

“The [FARC] did not try to establish many norms. They asked that people solved their problems by turning to the chief [Corregidor], and only take serious matters to the [FARC] commander. They did not establish many norms… although they

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381 Data come from the survey with demobilized fighters conducted in 2005.
did have an influence but not on small matters of daily life.” (Local inhabitant of a village in Cordoba)

I identify five dimensions of local life over which rebel and paramilitary groups may extend their rule in the areas where they are present in Colombia: the use of violence; the provision or regulation of public goods; private behaviour; civilian labour; and the resolution of private conflicts.

a. The use of violence and the provision of information to the enemy

In a context of civil war, eradicating the use of force by non-combatants within a local territory can serve different ends. Above all, it is a means for defending sovereignty, as it makes the work of different types of challengers more difficult. It also increases social control, which makes ruling easier. In addition, regulating the use of violence can awaken sympathies: it all depends on who is getting killed or harmed. For example, by becoming the prosecutor of violent actors like thieves and rapists, the armed group can win the applause of some locals.383

In numerous interviews that I conducted in my case-areas, civilians praised the capacity of both paramilitaries and guerrillas for keeping “those people, the criminals” away. Even several of my interviewees who resented the years under paramilitary rule in the town of Tellus, a case area in Cordoba, were quite assertive in their acknowledgement of the group’s capacity to completely stop all delinquency: “You could leave anything on the street, during the entire night, and no one would take it. They knew they would be dead the next morning. Girls could walk knowing they would not be abused. Now, since the demobilization, thieves are making their business again. And several girls have been raped. And nothing happens”.

Responses of both civilians and combatants to the survey suggest that, in fact, armed groups tend to rule over the use of violence almost everywhere they are present. As Graph 1 shows, according to about 85% of the ex-combatants and civilians who responded the surveys, all groups established norms to regulate the use of violence within their territory.

383 The “positive” effect of this type of violence on an armed group’s capacity to gain recognition among a local population has been recognized by several authors. See for example Fernando Cubides, Ana Cecilia Olaya and Carlos Miguel Ortiz, Violencia y el Municipio Colombiano, 1980-1997, Universidad Nacional de Colombia, 1998, and Michael Taussig, Law in a Lawless Land: Diary of a Limpienza in Colombia, New Press, 2003.
b. The provision or regulation of public goods

Armed groups seeking to govern local populations have an interest in promoting the adequate provision of public goods. Both the organizations that seek territorial control as an instrument to power, and those that aim to work for the people during their struggle have an interest in making things work in the local areas where they are present. For, as mentioned earlier, efficient local governance may lead to collaboration and support through different mechanisms, and populations that enjoy better provisions of public goods are arguably in a better situation ceteris paribus. There seems to be great variation both in the extent to which armed groups in Colombia are interested in public goods in a given locality, and in the strategies chosen to promote them. Sometimes public goods are regulated in formal ways – i.e., through clear and enforced rules – while others they are taken care of via informal procedures.

The FARC, ELN, Catatumbo Bloc, and Cordoba Bloc seem to sporadically engage in both formal and informal regulation depending on the type of public good. While there is no evidence that they engage directly in the construction of schools or hospitals, pressuring local authorities to build them seems to be common in the areas they control. Both sides in the conflict also occasionally help a civilian in need to receive health services. Several interviewees

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384 Data come from the survey with ex-combatants and civilians' responses to close-ended questions in semi-structured interviews. Ex-combatants responded to the question “Were rules about illegal conducts [by civilians] like stealing or rape established by your group in the locality where you fought?” Civilians responded to the question “Which norms do you remember the group [that was present in your locality] established regarding illegal conducts such as stealing or rape?” This question was asked to civilians about all the groups they reported being present in their localities since the 1970s.
in my case areas in Cordoba reported instances where the FARC helped wounded peasants by bringing in the nurse that worked with the organization; interviewees elsewhere said it was common for FARC commanders to find a vehicle and cash to take ill persons and pregnant women to nearby health centres – even when these facilities were located in areas considered to be controlled by the enemy. The accounts, however, always referred to a few cases, and seldom described these practices as systematic.

Other public goods like the construction and maintenance of roads are directly taken on by armed groups in some areas under their rule. They do this either by bringing in machinery or by “pulling strings” in the local administration. Several interviewees remembered instances when the FARC stole the municipality’s machinery in order to build a road or repair it. Sometimes combatants would “retain” (the FARC’s term for kidnapping) the operator of the machine during the days it took for the road to be built or improved. In some areas where the FARC had direct authority over the members of the council or the local administration, this was not necessary, as they would just order them to do the work. The paramilitaries, on the other hand, relied on their ties with the local administration, and usually managed to get local authorities to devote resources to this type of public expenditure. The importance of this type of public good is related to the direct use combatants make of it: roads are essential for any of the warring sides, especially if they engage in economic activities in the area (including producing and selling illicit drugs). In addition, good roads make life much easier for locals; hence, keeping them in good shape may render sympathies. The level of variation seems to be high, as in some localities people do not remember any single instance of such involvement of an armed group in public infrastructure; yet, in others, everyone portrays combatants as effective guardians of roads and bridges.

A variety of public goods are also protected, or provided, by organizing the community and making collective action compulsory. The maintenance of rural tracks, for example, is mostly organized on the basis of collective work. In the village of Permia, in Córdoba, both the FARC in the 1990s and the paramilitaries in the early 2000s set the rule of “Saturday community work”: every Saturday all members of the community were expected to work on a local public good such as doing maintenance to the aqueduct or cleaning a track.

Another way in which armed groups engage in the provision or regulation of public goods is by protecting natural resources. This practice is particularly widespread among the FARC. According to one of my interviewees in the town of Hadria (Cundinamarca), “at least, what we have all gained with this is the re-emergence of the beautiful woods we used to have here. Both flora and fauna bloomed after years of strong regulations [by the FARC]… No one dared to cut or move a piece of wood without the approval of the commander”.

c. Private behaviour

Some armed groups limit their rule to public affairs while others attempt to influence locals’ personal behaviour, including public speech, sexual conduct and clothing. Rebel and paramilitary groups in Colombia seem to attempt to influence the moral code of conduct in many areas, although there is variation in its severity, as will be shown later when addressing differences in enforcement. The following graph shows ex-combatants and civilians’ responses to survey questions about whether the different groups regulated each of a set of dimensions of local life.
Areas of life regulated by armed groups

Graph 2: Respondents who report armed groups regulated each dimension of life.385

These results suggest that there are both similarities and differences across the localities in which respondents lived, in the case of civilians, and where they operated, in the case of ex-combatants. First, armed groups seem to converge as they all tend to establish at least some norms about private conducts in most, but not all, the areas where they are present. Second, some aspects of private life are more likely to be regulated than others. Domestic violence, for example, seems to be the matter that all armed groups are most interested in. According to several interviews I conducted in my case areas, both the FARC and the paramilitaries were quite vigilant of infidelities, and particularly strict about physical abuse of family members. These rules, however, were not established everywhere.

Personal appearance was regulated by both sides of the conflict, according to about half of the respondents. In these cases, long hair and earrings in men were usually forbidden, and transgressors of this rule often faced physical punishments. In some areas it was prohibited that women wore short skirts. The percentage of respondents who say that this aspect of private behaviour was regulated is very similar across ex-combatants and civilians, with the exception of civilians living in areas where the guerrillas were present, who are less likely to report this type of regulation. Sexual conduct is also regulated in several ways. According to

385 Data come from the survey with ex-combatants and responses to close-ended questions with civilians in the semi-structured interviews. Ex-combatants were asked whether the group in which they fought regulated each dimension of local life. Civilians were asked the same about the groups that were present in their localities.
my interviews, homosexuality was forbidden and adultery would be punished most of the
time, by both sides. Most interviewees also mention regulations for prostitution, although the
ways in which it is pursued seem to vary across regions. It is worth noting that civilians and
combatants seem to have different perceptions of the extent to which the different groups en-
gaged in ruling these conducts.

Freedom of speech is also guarded by both sides in about half of the areas where they
are present. According to different interviewees who lived under the rule of the FARC and,
later on, the paramilitaries, sometimes there were no formal or explicit rules over what could
be said and discussed and what could not. Yet, people knew there were some topics they
should not comment on, and everyone was aware of the danger of sharing political views and
opinions that somehow were against the ruling group. While ex-combatants of the FARC por-
tray the organization to which they belonged as being more concerned about freedom of
speech than the other groups, civilians describe the paramilitaries as being more repressive in
this sense than the guerrilla groups.

These findings have important implications. While for some individuals interacting with
an armed group entails paying taxes and obeying some norms on their involvement with other
warring sides, others interact with combatants on a daily basis, and have an important part of
their private life regulated by the group’s norms. This variation is not only illustrative of the
great differences in armed groups’ behaviours across territories, but also of the diverse modus
vivendi and quality of life that characterize war zones.

d. Civilian labour

Both rebels and paramilitaries display attempts to regulate labour in some of the areas they
control. It is common for fishermen not to be allowed by the FARC to fish with nets in high
parts of the river so that fishermen down the river are not left without fish. But the regulation
is not limited to natural resources. Taxi drivers affiliated with different companies in one of
my case areas were only allowed to operate in certain days of the week by the paramilitaries
in order to, they said, allow everyone to have their share of the market.

As is well known, armed groups intervene the job market also by taxing certain activi-
ties. The FARC in the town of Hadria (Cundinamarca) taxed for years the owners of large
extensions of land, merchants, and big companies that sold their products in the area. At some
point they started to tax also peasants who owned small farms. According to several inter-
viewees in Tellus (Córdoba), the paramilitaries taxed every worker in town; from those sell-
ing coffee in carts on the street to taxi drivers to shop owners, they all had to pay.

e. An informal system of conflict resolution

A key characteristic of rulers is that they not only monopolize the use of violence but also the
right to take revenge. Without achieving this end, an aspiring ruler can hardly bring about
order. References to rebel and paramilitary commanders engaged in solving private disputes
were recurrent in my fieldwork. Responses from ex-combatants and civilians about the behav-
iour of the groups that were present in their localities in different areas of the country support
this fact, as Graph 3 shows.
At least some ex-combatants and some civilians recognize the role that each armed group played in solving private conflicts in their localities. Even among those who eventually joined the guerrillas, about a third say that the paramilitaries did engage in this type of practices; likewise, about the same percentage of ex-paramilitaries report that both FARC and ELN intervened in locals’ disputes. Civilians are less likely to report this practice, but about a fourth say that the FARC did engage in this type of behaviour. The percentage is much lower among civilians living in areas where paramilitary groups were present. There seems to be wide variation within groups and across localities.

The types of private conflicts for which these organizations act as a third-party in order to resolve them can be very different in nature. In the interviews I conducted with civilians, local leaders, and former mayors and council members, a wide range of conflicts and arrangements were mentioned as part of the “issues” that the armed group used to handle. According to several interviewees in rural areas, neighbours who had disputes over land borders usually solved these issues by talking to the commander of the ruling group (either the guerrilla or the paramilitary organization). In some cases civilians would talk with the representa-

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386 Data come from the survey with ex-combatants and the survey with civilians. Ex-combatants were asked whether the groups present in the locality where they lived one year prior to joining solved private conflicts among locals. Civilians were asked the same about the groups that were present in their localities.
tive of the group in the area (e.g. a militiaman), while sometimes they would directly seek the commander. Most of the time both parts in the dispute would follow the decision of the group as a sentence given by a recognized court.

Conflicts over the distribution of inheritances were also settled by talking to the commander of the ruling group. Once again, the commander’s decision would be taken as the final sentence. The popular name of FARC’s 100th Front in one of my case areas is illustrative: it was called by many the 100th Court. In the case of the guerrillas, the commander could also serve as the figure that conducted wedding ceremonies.

3.3. Rule enforcement

If armed groups care not only about formally stating their regulatory system but also about its effectiveness (i.e., its actual observance), they need to engage in some form of rule enforcement. Yet, variation in rule enforcement exists along several dimensions across localities where an armed group rules. I identify three key dimensions on which such variation exists: its domain, its severity, and its reliance on some form of “due process”.

a. Domain of enforcement mechanisms

Regarding the domain of enforcement mechanisms, some armed groups intervene to enforce the obedience to all the rules they establish in the locality. For example, a minimal ruler may intervene to punish all unauthorized uses of violence, or the provision of resources to the enemy. Others, however, may only enforce part of their regulation. Graph 4 summarizes civilians’ and ex-combatants’ perception of whether punishment followed from disobedience to different norms that were established by armed groups present in their localities.

The Graph suggests that about the same portion of ex-combatants in all groups think that punishment was likely to be used for each type of transgression. Overall, civilians’ responses coincide with those of the ex-combatants regarding the enforcement of violence; however, civilians perceive enforcement of norms on domestic violence and sexual conduct to be less common than ex-combatants believe. The data also show variation within armed groups and across local territories, especially regarding the punishment of transgressions of norms on personal appearance and freedom of speech. At the same time, however, the results point to a striking convergence of armed organizations in this respect.

The importance that armed groups give to the enforcement of rules that are not directly linked to the military security is illustrative of the weight they give to preserving social order. Clearly, armed groups sometimes care not only about dominating – in military terms – a territory, but also about creating a particular type of order within it. The fact that these attempts can trigger different reactions among civilians adds to the depth of the variation in the way in which local societies live during the war.

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387 The existence of regulation need not imply that mechanisms for enforcement are put at work. There may be cases in which an armed group officially establishes a rule only to appear as an organization that cares about a particular issue, or in order to use it in its discourse. In this case, enforcement may not be something the group is interested in investing any resources on.
b. Severity of rule enforcement

Even though armed groups are violent organizations by definition, they do not resort to violence to the same extent, nor under the same circumstances. The forms of violence they use also vary (e.g., assassinations, massacres, torture and displacement). Yet, in terms of rule enforcement, the severity of punishment for the same misconduct seems to converge across guerrilla and paramilitary organizations in Colombia, according to both ex-combatants and civilians. Graph 5 shows an index of severity of punishment where 0 means no punishment was used; 1 means there was no punishment but the person would receive a warning; 2 means the person would be punished lightly, for example by being fined or forced to do community work (such as sweeping the town square); 3 means the person would be physically punished (in less severe ways than torture or death, such as with lashes); 4 means the person would be expelled from the area or receive a more intense form of physical punishment (like mutilation); 5 means the person would be killed. The data are based only on responses of those who did say that there was some form of punishment for those who disobeyed each rule.

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Graph 4: Respondents who report that armed groups punished disobedience of rules.388

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388 Data come from the survey with ex-combatants and the responses to close-ended questions in the semi-structured interviews with civilians. Respondents were asked about the punishment that would follow from disobedience to each type of rule by the armed groups in which they fought (in the case of ex-combatants), or those present in their locality (in the case of civilians). Percentages are calculated on the basis of only those who report such rules being established by the group, not the entire sample of respondents.
Interestingly, responses of both ex-combatants and civilians converge for each type of transgression, pointing to similar behaviours across armed organizations. It is worth noting that this result is not an artefact of civilians’ and ex-combatants’ definition of “severity”, since this index is built based on the specific punishments that respondents reported were used, rather than on a subjective assessment of the severity of such punishments. Violent behaviours are, as expected, the conducts that receive the highest sanction; but personal appearance appears to be as serious. This puzzling result may be partially explained by the easiness with which certain physical appearances are taken to be accurate signs of ideological beliefs or behaviour.

While this graph suggests that on average the different armed groups rely on similarly severe punishments for the same type of disobedience, the variation within the groups is large. Table 4 shows the mean and standard deviation of the severity of punishment for each conduct by armed group, according to ex-combatants and civilians that lived in different localities where these groups were present. The data suggest that the same group sets up very different systems of rule enforcement depending on the place.

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389 Data come from the survey with ex-combatants and semi-structured interviews with civilians. Respondents were asked about the kind of punishment that would follow from disobedience to each type of rule by the armed groups in which they fought (in the case of ex-combatants), or those present in their locality (in the case of civilians).
Table 4. Severity of punishment for disobedience: means and standard deviations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Violence</th>
<th>Domestic violence</th>
<th>Sexual conduct</th>
<th>Personal appearance</th>
<th>Freedom of speech</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Farc</strong></td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>(1.31)</td>
<td>2.29</td>
<td>(0.99)</td>
<td>2.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ex –Eln</strong></td>
<td>3.01</td>
<td>(1.31)</td>
<td>2.33</td>
<td>(0.94)</td>
<td>2.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ex-Catatumbo</strong></td>
<td>3.19</td>
<td>(1.28)</td>
<td>2.45</td>
<td>(0.93)</td>
<td>2.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ex-Còrdoba</strong></td>
<td>3.18</td>
<td>(1.33)</td>
<td>2.02</td>
<td>(0.82)</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Civilians</strong></td>
<td>3.08</td>
<td>(1.69)</td>
<td>1.93</td>
<td>(1.38)</td>
<td>1.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(guerrilla present)</td>
<td>3.62</td>
<td>(1.57)</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>(1.56)</td>
<td>1.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Civilians</strong></td>
<td>3.62</td>
<td>(1.57)</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>(1.56)</td>
<td>1.68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**c. Reliance on “due process”**

Another aspect of the efficacy of the enforcement mechanisms in a local order is the extent to which it relies on a careful examination of proofs. As Kalyvas has shown, in civil war civilians denounce others to the warring sides quite often. From the perspective of the group, in a context where neighbours, relatives, enemies, and rivals can denounce each other to a ruler who has the capacity to expulse or kill, having procedures for assessing the reliability of denunciations is important. Variation in this regard was particularly stark in my case-areas. Not only were different communities under the rule of one same armed group exposed to different procedures leading to the punishment of a civilian that was accused of some misconduct; there were also cases where the same group would follow different procedures in the same locality at different times. As with other aspects of the behaviour of the groups, both the stage of the group’s conquest of that particular locality, and who the commander in charge was seem to have had an important effect on this variation. Both ex-FARC and ex-paramilitary medium-level commanders that I interviewed said that whether the commander in charge had political training made a key difference. According to them, commanders who understand the importance of the political and social work with the communities would put a big effort in avoiding punishing the wrong person. In the words of a former political commander of the FARC, “[t]hose who are military cadres, who did not receive strong political training, tend to be less aware of the negative implications that such a system of punishment may have”.

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390 Data come from the survey with ex-combatants and semi-structured interviews with civilians (see Graph 5). Means are given first, and standard deviations in parenthesis.

391 Kalyvas, The Logic of Violence.
Graph 6 shows ex-combatants’ responses to the question “Would you say that in general an investigation takes place before the group attacks or threatens a civilian who is suspect of a transgression?” According to survey respondents, all groups seem to care about verifying accusations in most of the areas where they are present, although not everywhere. Civilians are thus ruled by clear and strict forms that are usually enforced. According to my interviewees in different areas of the country, once a group believes a person could have collaborated with the enemy, it is very difficult for her to be allowed to stay in the area and not be somehow harassed, or killed, by combatants. Less serious transgressions may be forgiven.

Graph 6. An investigation was conducted before attacking or threatening a civilian suspect.392

3.4. Local populations’ perception of the rule established by armed groups

In the first section of this paper I mentioned that civilians may react in different ways to the behaviours of armed groups in their territories. Because the use of coercion makes obedience likely, it triggers the belief that every interaction between civilians and combatants is determined by the coercive power of the latter. While it is definitely true that armed groups’ use of violence allow them to dominate and coerce civilians, the interaction between them is more complex. Resistance is an option, although only certain local populations are capable of overcoming the organizational challenges and the fear that such response creates. The opposite, endorsement, is also possible when a population finds itself to be better off after the group arrives to its territory, and such perception of improvement leads to positive beliefs about the

392 Data come from the survey with ex-combatants and civilians’ responses to close-ended questions in semi-structured interviews.
group, or benign emotions towards it. Endorsement may also follow from genuine synchrony between the group’s discourse and the ideology or interests of civilians. Obedience is also possible; it may be an outcome of a mix of motivations, including endorsement, fear, respect, and private interest.

The ways in which local communities responded to the presence of the different warring sides in my case areas differ greatly, even though they were geographically close to each other. In some cases my interviewees described the early arrival of the FARC as a time of peace and social cohesion. A woman of the village of Permia remembered that stage positively: “they were very good to us. They helped us improve the tracks and organize our labour to help each other. They did not abuse us. That started later”. Yet, in other neighbouring areas civilians described the rule of this group as a form of dictatorship. A leader of the village of Placo put it in these terms: “At the beginning they tried to rule over everything. They came to our meetings. They told us what we could do, where we could go, and when. We could not let this happen. We had been our own rulers for years”. To others, as in the town of Agilis, the FARC were for a long time a military organization that only attacked them sporadically, but never ruled in their territory. To most locals, this group was only a threat of violence.

Similarly, those who interacted with the paramilitaries describe their experiences in very different ways. In the villages of Zama and Librea in Cundinamarca, residents say that the paramilitaries only were present in the area to kill. “They never established rules around here […] They didn’t engage in any form of interaction with us. They only went after those who they thought collaborated with the guerrillas. They killed a lot of people. And when the FARC combatants and their militiamen had either left or been killed, the paramilitaries left too. They stayed in the town, but they didn’t come back here [to the fields]”. In the town of Tellus in Córdoba, the paramilitaries also started their presence with massacres and killings, which most people resented. However, they soon became the de facto rulers and through time many welcomed them. In particular, several interviewees mention that almost everyone celebrated the end of delinquency: “[With the paramilitaries], there was zero delinquency. Most locals thanked them for ordering things in this place”.

This variation is both a response to the specific strategy that armed groups opt for in a given locality, and the characteristics of the population – in particular its structure of authority. Given the ruling aspirations of armed groups, the quality of existing ruling institutions play a key role in shaping civilians’ perceptions of, and response to, the attempts of these organizations to bring about a new social order. The community’s actual capacity to resist also determines the way in which their interaction with combatants unfolds.393

Turning to how civilians respond to specific norms, the links between agreement with the norms, punishment for disobedience, and actual obedience are not straightforward. Graph 7, below, show the results of questions asked to civilians about how often would a group punish disobedience of each of a set of rules; whether they believed most people in the community agreed with those rules; and whether people obeyed those rules most of the time.

The results point to several issues. First, there is variation in the three dimensions across cases, as responses are far from 0% and 100%. Second, the expected correlation between enforcement and obedience, on the one hand, and agreement with the norm and obedience, on the other, is not clear-cut. The most obeyed rules are those regarding violent acts and freedom

393 I propose a theoretical account of this variation elsewhere (Arjona, “Grupos Armados, Comunidades y Órdenes Locales”).
of speech – the behaviours that are under strict surveillance of armed groups. However, locals seem less likely to follow other norms if they disagree with them, as agreement with the rule co-varies nicely with obedience to rules on personal appearance, sexual conduct and domestic violence, while enforcement is almost constant. The particular configuration of a group’s rule in each local order seems to shape both the extent to, and the reasons why, civilians follow the norms that these organizations set up.

Because following a norm may be the outcome of different motivations, similar levels of obedience may underlie very different perceptions of the rules (and the ruler) among the local population. Since an armed group may become the ruler of a particular population through different paths, obedience to its rules may follow from very different motivations. In areas where the group imposed some form of rule without the population agreeing, the relation that civilians may have with the rules they are supposed to follow are qualitatively different from that of locals who endorse the organization and recognize it as a source of authority. Even when the rules are the same, people’s relation with those rules can vary greatly. Exploring this variation is important not only to have a better understanding of how civilians relate

Data come from the semi-structured interviews with civilians. The graph shows the percentage of respondents who said that each norm was obeyed always or almost always.

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with armed groups in these areas, but also in order to explore the transformation of both the institutional apparatus that works during the war, and the implications on civilians’ habits, beliefs, and motivations for abiding, changing, or opposing existing norms.

4. Conclusion: implications for studying war and post-war intervention

The different debates surrounding war settlement and post-conflict intervention involve two lines of research. One, of a normative character, requires us to look at the moral criteria on which an intervention should be designed. The tension between deontological and consequentialist arguments is crucial in this debate since the requirements of principles like peace and justice often go in opposite directions, as several authors in this book stress. The second line of research, of a positive character, entails assessing the actual consequences of alternative interventions and instruments. Both approaches require some diagnosis of the situation of civilians and combatants when a specific model of intervention is to be selected and implemented. On the one hand, in order to identify the requisites for justice we need to have some diagnosis of the phenomena that occurred during the war. On the other, to assess the possible consequences of different interventions, we need to be able to understand the context in which such measures would take place; only then can we attempt to analyze the odds of success and failure of alternative options. Furthermore, in order to identify and respond to the challenges that war-torn societies face, we need to take into account the actual circumstances in which the population finds itself at the end of the war. Without such assessment prioritizing needs and identifying areas for improvement requires high doses of guessing, or imputing to the history of the entire country what we know about some parts of it. Hence, disaggregating the unit of analysis of interventions may be an important step towards a better assessment of, and response to, conflict and post-conflict situations.

In this paper, I relied on micro-level data on the Colombian case in order to illustrate differences in the manner in which local societies experience the war across the national territory. This evidence suggests that the ways in which life goes on in areas where armed groups are present often involve clear and well grounded standards of behaviour. Even though the pre-war organization of local societies is disrupted, it is not replaced by anarchy; rather, a new order emerges. By focusing on local governance in Colombian war zones, I showed that this order varies across localities in the allocation of the capacity to rule (i.e., the set of actors or institutions that rule civilian affairs in some way); their domain (i.e., the spheres of civilians’ lives that are regulated); and their system of enforcement. According to both ex-combatants and civilians, the FARC, the ELN, and two paramilitary groups, Catatumbo Bloc and Cordoba Bloc, set up a system of governance in most of the areas where they have a sustained presence. Yet, this system varies across local societies as armed groups can approach their role of rulers in a variety of ways. In spite of this intra-group variation, the patterns are strikingly similar across the four armed organizations. This similarity points to the parallel needs that irregular war brings about the parties involved, and the different contexts in which they strive to meet them. Civilians, on their part, also have different reactions to the rule of armed groups. In particular, they may endorse it, obey it, or oppose it. Furthermore, they display different levels of obedience, as well as different levels of agreement with the norms that these organizations establish. The factors that underlie this variation involve complex mechanisms that entail the transformation of motivations, preferences, and beliefs.

As with any regime, the specific characteristics of these local orders have far-reaching consequences on their inhabitants. They determine the set of forbidden behaviours and indi-
individual rights; the actor or agency that they seek for solving their conflicts; the persons and organizations they have to obey; the existence of channels to communicate with those who command them; and the availability of procedures to defend them selves when accused of some misconduct. Even their private life – how they dress, what their sexual choices are – can be subjected to strict regulation. The existence of variation in local order implies that the way in which civilian populations experience the war across the national territory can be immensely different.

I contend that taking this variation into account is not only relevant for our assessment of the situation of civilian populations during the war; it is also essential for understanding the consequences of war on civilians’ behaviour as well as on the organization of local societies in the post-conflict period. Regarding individual behaviour, we tend to focus on victimization – for obvious reasons. While I agree that this is the most important aspect of civilian involvement in the war from a policy perspective, other phenomena that take place during the war can also affect civilians in profound ways that demand attention. I showed that the inhabitants of war zones often live under a regulatory system that establishes rights and obligations, sets punishments for disobedience, and defines the channels of communication between the ruler and the ruled. This experience is important in and of itself as it is a major determinant of people’s lives. But it is also important for its consequences. First, civilians make choices during the war that impact phenomena that demand attention, such as enlisting in armed organizations, fleeing or allying with one of the warring sides; if we aim to understand these behaviours, we need to explore the context in which civilians’ decisions are made. Second, the particular local order of a given community can have long-lasting consequences on its members. Different kinds of institutions, including state agencies and traditional practices, can be deeply transformed by the regulatory system that operates during the war. If fostering trust on the state, recovering the authority of traditional institutions, or promoting community cohesion are among the challenges that post-war societies face, understanding the ways in which the war transformed social and political organization is a necessary step. Ignoring that war takes a different form across local territories, and that civilians can live under completely different regimes, can lead us to overlook important ways in which the war shapes individuals’ beliefs, the norms of their communities, and their relation with different state and non-state institutions.

Given these differences in how local societies are regulated during the war, it is likely that the greatest challenges and opportunities for peace, reconciliation and reconstruction vary from place to place. Identifying priorities requires us to acknowledge that while some areas were physically devastated, in others the infrastructure may be untouched but local institutions were completely eroded. While the principal challenge for reconciliation in one community is the acceptance of ex-combatants among civilians, in another ex-combatants can be respected and admired, but the displaced persons who want to return are likely to be ostracized. Likewise, even though state agencies can preserve their aura of legitimacy among some populations, in others they may be seen with distrust and lacking authority.

The actual consequences of alternative interventions can also be expected to vary depending on the case. Legal instruments, international interventions, and local policies do not operate in a vacuum. If the context in which such measures operate vary, what works well in some areas of a country may not succeed in others. To be sure, some interventions may operate at the level of the central state, high-level politicians, and the leaders of armed groups. However, there may be reactions at the local level that have the capacity to affect the overall
outcome. Amnesty – which is a national-level instrument aimed at achieving peace and reconciliation – can be successful in achieving just that in the areas where the armed groups were seen as saviours, legitimate representatives of the people, or at least benevolent rulers. However, for those who experienced the war in an area where an armed group imposed a new local order based on coercion alone, amnestying ex-combatants can fuel hate, indignation, and a negative attitude towards the peace process. Even if amnesty is chosen based on principles and expectations about its aggregate effects, acknowledging that it may have pervasive effects on some local populations can be fruitful. On the one hand, it can allow us to better understand local-level reactions like riots, public demonstrations against the return of ex-combatants to a given location, or sabotages to local policies oriented towards the reintegration of former fighters. On the other hand, it may allow governments to identify key areas of the country where it may be important to rely on additional interventions for fostering peace and reconciliation. The same applies to the prosecution of the leaders of these organizations. While in some areas victims may see in trials and punishments the national recognition of their suffering and the arrival of justice, inhabitants of localities that endorsed the group and welcomed its rule may oppose them. It is not uncommon to find civilians with deep feelings of gratitude and reciprocity towards both guerrillas and paramilitaries, even if for each of them one could count hundreds of victims that cry for justice. While prosecution, punishment, and the demand of truth should not be stopped or mitigated due to the existence of areas of the country that do not approve of them, acknowledging the reactions these instruments may unravel is important within a post-conflict reconstruction agenda.

In the case of legal and policy instruments that do imply a direct intervention in local communities as opposed to at the level of the country, the importance of the existence of diverse local orders is more direct: the outcome is likely to depend on the local circumstances under which they are implemented. For example, promoting the return of ex-combatants to their hometowns requires a solid understanding of the different contexts in which such policy would operate even within the same region. The outcome can vary depending not only on the level of victimization by that group, but also on the type of relations that emerged between civilians and combatants during the war. Rebuilding the rule of law can also require different measures depending on the case. For example, areas where an armed group co-opted public institutions and put them to work for them may require a complex process for legitimizing the state again, and building trust on its institutions. In these areas people may feel incapable of even denouncing to state authorities different kinds of victimization and irregularities, let alone participate in the democratic processes. This case would be very different from one where public servants preserved their authority, and whose legitimacy was not put into question by locals. For this reason, local policies and programs that somehow depend on local governments for their instrumentalization can produce outstanding dissimilar results depending on the status of the local government in the locality. The effect may be more pronounced in decentralized systems than in centralized ones, as in the former case most policies would require the direct involvement of local authorities.

To conclude, disaggregating the unit of analysis seems to be a necessary step towards a deeper understanding of the contexts in which alternative interventions operate both during and after the war. By focusing on the “country” we ignore the multiplicity of local orders that emerge within any civil war. This variation in the way in which the war unfolds across the national territory is relevant for some of the key questions on promoting conflict termination and post-conflict reconstruction. This line of research certainly demands a sound theoretical analysis of the implications of different local orders on individual behaviour and institutional
development, as well as a systematic treatment of empirical evidence. The avenues for future research are vast. And the implications of finding answers promise to be far-reaching.