

A POST-NEOLIBERAL ERA IN LATIN AMERICA?

Revisiting cultural paradigms

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From Uribe's "Democratic Security" to Santo's Peace Accords with the FARC: Hate, Fear, Hope and other Emotions in Contemporary Colombian Politics

Fabio López de la Roche

Introduction

This chapter first presents explanatory factors concerning Colombian divergence from the recent tendency in several Latin American countries toward 21st century models of political socialism or in conjunction with post-neoliberal development. It then explores the complex legacy of political culture bequeathed by the governments of Álvaro Uribe Vélez (2002–06 and 2006–10), which involved an important military effort to combat the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC by its Spanish acronym) but was not able to defeat them, although their debilitation undoubtedly constituted one of the factors that led to the negotiations in Havana. Hatred and fear of the FARC, promoted by President Uribe's discourse supported by the mainstream media and important journalistic sectors, are then explored as factors in conjunction with societal ideological homogenization around the policy of "Democratic Security." The chapter moves onto the redefinitions in the political culture and hegemonic communicative regime promoted by

President Juan Manuel Santos (2010–14 and 2014–17), which favored promoting successful conclusion of the peace process with the FARC and initiation of a new, complex and still uncertain phase of national reconciliation among Colombians, notwithstanding obstinate Uribe's loathing of both the FARC, and President Santos and President Uribe's systematic and ideological delegitimization of the peace process. This section also deals with issues concerning the October 2, 2016 plebiscite regarding the ratification of the Havana Accords, the triumph of the rejectionists, the renegotiation of the Accords with representatives of the rejectionists by the government's negotiating team, the mobilization of the citizenry in defense of the Accords, and the ratification of the revised Accords by the Congress at the Teatro Colón. The chapter concludes by outlining some of the challenges and possible alternatives for the country's political development during the post-Accord era.

Colombian divergence and its causes

Colombia has not had a "pink tide" experience since the beginning of the 21st century unlike several other Latin American countries¹ because it has not experienced anything like 21st century socialism or an eventual post-neoliberal alignment. Such divergence has a few explanations.

Colombian conservatism

During the 20th century Colombia was characterized by conservative politico-cultural hegemony. The Constitution of 1886, a normative model based on the fear of God and conservative, authoritarian and religious Catholic culture, led alternatives in partisan politics and ideas to coalesce around political and philosophical liberalism and the Liberal Party. Amid that conservative order, the political left, communist as well as socialist, seemed an extremist and marginal phenomenon. Such conservative hegemony and the religious tenor it imposed on culture and politics generated a conservative form of modernization that hampered societal dialogue with respect to modern values such as freethinking, scientific thought, secularism, separation of church and state, philosophical liberalism and socialism (Jaramillo Vélez, 1994; Melo, 1990; López de la Roche, 1990). The system, in place for more than a century (until the Constitution of 1991), promoted and maintained an exclusionary, anti-leftist, anti-communist politico-cultural tradition that stigmatized and obstructed the consolidation of the political and social left.

A proposal for violent revolutionary societal transformation

A country that, for more than 50 years, maintained an internal conflict² without resolution facilitated stigmatization by the establishment of not only violent leftists but also of unarmed leftists and social movements, predicated on the false premise that protests were always insurgency sponsored. The presence of armed insurgents coupled with the seductive quality of revolutionary violence hampered development of a legal, civil, and democratic leftist political project (López de la Roche, 1994).

Sectarianism and concealed truths within the world of the left

Starting in the 1920s, leftist organizations and political parties played an important role in social justice and in the organization of laborers, *campesinos* (rural crofters) and other urban and rural worker sectors. Influenced by the Cuban revolution during the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, such organizations and political parties in Colombia and Latin America became critics of the peripheral capitalist order and of its related exclusions and inequities. Despite contributions to the development of an emancipatory spirit, the study of national realities, and criticism and denunciation of repression, leftist political culture was not exempt from problems involving authoritarianism, dogmatism, and the absence of a democratic inclination for resolving differences or relational recognition of political, social, and cultural diversity.

The sectarianism of most of the legal left's gradations—the Colombian Communist Party (with a pro-Soviet orientation), the Marxist-Leninist Colombian Communist Party (with a pro-China orientation), the Independent and Revolutionary Workers' Movement (MOIR by its Spanish acronym, a pro-China oriented critic of armed struggle), and many Maoist, Stalinist and Trotskyist parties and groups—constituted an additional factor in the left's struggle to unite and consolidate into a unitary and truly alternative project. Ideological intolerance was often the predominant tone among such leftist gradations during the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s: self-assumed political churches, each with their respective closed and incontrovertible truths. Such truth regimes expressed in a sectarian manner are still present among leftist organizations.

The degradation of war and deterioration of the armed left's ethics

Outside the purview of the legal left, responding to the leftist insurgent presence (and its use of extortion, kidnapping and association with drug trafficking to finance its growth) right-wing paramilitary groups entered the Colombian conflict during the 1990s and beginnings of the 21st century, degrading it with massacre and terror-based strategies of their own. The armed left's reaction had unfortunate consequences involving deterioration of its ethics and revolutionary ideals. Too often it resulted in relationships with the illicit drug industry, human rights abuses, and a lack of respect for the lives and physical integrity of the civilian population. Resulting excesses, although characteristic of prolonged and crude military confrontations such as that experienced in Colombia, earned the insurgents strong animosity from broad sectors of Colombian society. Those sectors also, albeit indirectly, discredited the legal left because the mass media and anti-subversive government propaganda did not always make the necessary distinctions between armed leftists and the legal and civilian left.

Military containment of the FARC and societal drift toward the right (2002-2010)³

Evaluations of democracies deal with how presidents think and how they manage governmental communications and the communicative rights of opposition parties and groups; and, by virtue of their presidential investiture, how they deal with their relationships as governments (and consequently as rulers) imbued with great rhetorical power with respect to the media and journalism. The communicative modalities used by leaders permit evaluation of their perspectives with regard to power, democracy, and political and cultural pluralism, and of their view of the opposition. It is posited that such elements are as important for evaluation of the democratic quality of political systems and governments as judicial and congressional independence from the executive and even the existence of truly free and competitive elections.

President Uribe, an extraordinary and skillful political communicator, made "propaganda" the dominant genre of his governmental communication, favoring mass media and audiences such as television and radio, to the detriment of the press and more reflexive and thought-provoking discourse and audiences. Propaganda, which generally functions as a type of unilateral communication and rhetorical device, geared to persuasion, was created during his rule by the repeated

production of an insistent message to the effect that "the country is getting better every day," "the war against the insurgency is being won," and, as for the FARC, the idea that "the end of the end" of that organization was here and now.

So-called "community councils", community meetings, and meetings with regional and local institutions—to discuss their needs and exigencies and to make decisions with regard to investments in works and projects—played a central role in Uribe Vélez's governmental communications. Such "community" or "communal" councils became personalized and populist areas of communication. The president would take his ministers to account to the populace for their ministries' performance, publicly interview them with respect to details of their administration and related supporting data, and might also reprimand them in such a hierarchical display of authority that it was popularly said "Uribe had vice-ministers rather than ministers." President Uribe was the star of such weekly council performances, televised publicly for eight to twelve hours on Saturdays and which made it appear that he was responsible for all investment indulgences and regional progress. Through such publicly staged discourses, Uribe Vélez was portrayed as a moral leader and an exemplary fighter against political chicanery and corruption. One could thus allude to the communicative regimen (Brunner, 1988) characteristic of the Uribe government as "monologic" or "monoglossic" (single voiced) contrasted with "heteroglossic", one inclusive of differing voices (Bajtín, 1993); or perhaps as an "oracular" regime where oracles would equate to paternalistic, vertical, and unilateral forms of communication where others do not count, their voices being faint or simply conceived of as servants or subjects (Evans, 2008).

Government discourse and television news played a central role in Uribe's monologist communication regimen. During his eight-year administration, Uribe's discourse (supported by private television channels' reports) homogenized and effectively reoriented public opinion through generation of a singularly "anti-FARC (*antifariano*)" nationalism through discursive definition of the FARC as Colombian's public enemy number one (López de la Roche, 2014). Such anti-FARC nationalism catalyzed, multiplied and politically exploited the feelings of hate and rejection shared by millions of Colombians because of the FARC's systemic kidnapping and extortion practices and because of such insurgency's militaristic arrogance during the Pastrana government's frustrated peace initiative in the Caguan region from 1998 through 2002.

From a communicative perspective, such “anti-FARC nationalism,” which transformed the FARC into the “Colombian society’s primary culprit,” developed an inequitable victim visibility structure that prioritized FARC victims over others and reflected the FARC as more responsible than other victimizers. Right-wing paramilitary groups were never persistently criticized by Uribe Vélez despite the probability that they were much crueler and more heartless, with massacres and terror being central to their politico-military strategy. This strategy was designed to provoke the flight of affected campesinos and the abandonment of their lands, permitting paramilitaries to appropriate the lands while presenting themselves as guarantors of security. Paramilitaries were not subjected to systemic media and journalistic campaigns denouncing and confronting them in a manner that might have stemmed the bloodshed they occasioned, as was done with respect to the FARC.

Official propaganda, as well as the hegemonic media system’s anti-FARC propaganda, was perverted by a systemic “pedagogy of hate” directed against the organization, directly promoted through presidential discourse.⁵ In order to understand this phenomenon in all of its complexity it must be added that President Uribe not only managed to unify part of the country against the FARC but he also automatically categorized opposition politicians, intellectuals, journalists and other government opponents as FARC sympathizers or as “complicit in terror.” Such a nationalist construct produced a Manichean (but politically profitable) polarization of public opinion.

From another analytical angle, Uribe Vélez’s military policy in combating the FARC was, unequivocally, very successful. It resulted in the FARC’s expulsion from the Department of Cundinamarca, as well as from areas near the national capital, severely impairing their offensive capabilities. It also allowed government penetration into the jungles of the Colombian Orinoquia and Amazonia, where insurgent encampments and positions had been considered unassailable. With foreign aid,⁶ incorporation of advanced technology permitted improved coordination between intelligence and telecommunication functions as well as making location of insurgent encampments and areas of concentration much easier to find.

Given this, President Uribe’s anti-FARC military policy must be credited with helping to rebuild foreign investor confidence in Colombia as well as the confidence of Colombians themselves who, after many years of insecurity and fear of possible kidnapping by insurgents, were once again able to travel on principle highways. The “Democratic Security” policy also helped overcome the designation

of Colombia as a “failed state”—a state that lacked viability due to the inability to control its own territory. Nonetheless, while “Democratic Security” solved the problem of security on major highways and seriously degraded the FARC, it was unable to defeat them and, beginning in 2008, the FARC were able to restructure their military strategy.

As to right-wing paramilitaries, between 2004 and 2008, Uribe Vélez sponsored political negotiations with leaders and members of paramilitary groups who chose to avail themselves of a “Law of Justice and Peace” promulgated at his urging and thereby temporarily deactivating an important aspect of the armed conflict. However, many mid-level paramilitary commanders and lower ranking troops were subsequently recycled into new paramilitary groups or criminal gangs denominated “Bacrim” (an abbreviation for criminal gang). Senior paramilitary leaders (Salvatore Mancuso, “Jorge 40,” “Don Berna,” Hernan Giraldo, and ten others), rather than facing Colombian justice, were extradited to the US during May 2008 by President Uribe, making unfavorable information relating to their crimes, human rights violations, and complicity with politicians, businessmen, military personnel, and senior state officials unavailable to Colombian authorities.

Returning to the theme of government rhetoric with respect to “anti-FARC nationalism”, during the eight years of the Uribe government confrontational daily polarizing discourse directed at those who thought differently or had a different perception with respect to the country, the conflict, security or peace, produced a profound deterioration of confidence among diverse sectors of the population. Whole families, friends and coworkers became estranged; political conversation became shunned either tacitly or explicitly both at home and at work, all because of the official discourse of “good versus bad” and of “friends versus enemies” that permeated all of Colombian society.

Using a linguistic policy aimed at establishing an official ideological version of reality, Uribe Vélez prohibited reference in government documents to the existence of an armed conflict in Colombia; in its place they had to refer to a “terrorist threat,” consequently rendering victims of the conflict invisible.⁷ In order to complete such linguistic standardization, President Uribe sent the communications media a “Style Manual,” through which he sought to intrude into media and journalistic ideological orientations (Secretaría de Prensa, Presidencia de la República, 2009). President Uribe, having reaped widespread popularity among Colombians by virtue of his decisive and effective

struggle against the FARC, made perverse use of the authority he had acquired by subverting public discourse in a manner bordering not only on the unwarranted but also on the criminal. He did so in order to repeatedly stigmatize his critics and opponents, to illegally intercept the telephone conversations of the journalists, judges, intellectuals, and politicians he considered enemies or unreliable, and to organize smear campaigns against justices of the Supreme Court investigating collaborative relations and complicity between ultra-right-wing paramilitary leaders and Congressional leaders.

Such actions eventually miscarried, resulting in legal proceedings that led to imprisonment of more than 50 legislators. One of the most serious cases involved the Administrative Department for Security (DAS by its Spanish acronym) which, under the direction of Jorge Noguera (appointed directly by the President), provided paramilitary leaders in the departments of the Atlantic Coast with lists of trade unionists and leftist leaders to be intimidated or killed. An egregious example involved Professor Alfredo Correa de Andreis, a renowned sociologist and social researcher, and an exonerated victim of a judicial process fabricated to make him appear a member of the FARC, was shot and killed in Barranquilla in 2004 by hired assassins linked to paramilitaries. María del Pilar Hurtado, DAS director after Noguera, was also tried and sentenced by the Supreme Court, in her case for illegal telephone interceptions involving judges, journalists, and opposition politicians. Another of the Uribe government's notorious cases of corruption involved the *Agro Ingreso Seguro A.I.S.* program, supervised by Agriculture Minister Andrés Felipe Arias. Arias illegally granted millionaire subsidies to affluent families on the Atlantic Coast in exchange for electoral support. Arias, under investigation by the Colombian attorney general's office, is currently a fugitive seeking asylum in the US. It bears noting that, in conjunction with similar but less serious crimes by members of his administration involving the Watergate affair, US President Richard Nixon felt compelled to resign.

A further instance of impropriety involved Uribe's efforts to secure constitutionally prohibited re-election in 2004 where, in order to obtain Congressional approval for a required Constitutional amendment, his government bought the votes of congressmen Yidis Medina and Teodolindo Avendaño. A case relating to such acts was adjudicated by the Supreme Court, resulting in the imprisonment of then ministers Sabas Pretelt and Diego Palacios for offering bribes and notarial posts⁸ to the Congressmen in exchange for their votes.

In summary, not only can the corrupt nature of the Uribe government be affirmed but also the right-wing, authoritarian and

antiliberal nature of Uribe's politico-communicative regimen and the consistency during its eight-year administration of a markedly anti-leftist discourse directed against defenders of human rights and non-governmental organizations (NGOs)—in a country where, in the midst of symbolic exclusion and violent physical annihilation, the consolidation of a legal left has proven a tortuous process.

The delegitimization of liberal opposition and the legal left was compounded by the stigmatization of other voices critical of the government, especially those of intellectuals in favor of political solutions to the armed conflict through negotiation. President Uribe publicly referred to the latter (such as members of "Colombians for Peace") as "the FARC's intellectual bloc" (*El Tiempo*, 2009). Such stigmatization of intellectuals, journalists, and opposition politicians constituted a potential death sentence in a country where in many regions and marginal urban areas the state was unable to preserve its legitimate monopoly over the use of violence (effective authority being held by rightwing military groups). A number of those publicly accused via the then president's obdurate discourse of being "accomplices of terrorism," such as opposition journalist Hollman Morris, were forced to experience a veritable "calvary" of intimidations and threats (Morris, 2010). Between 2002 and 2010 the Uribe Vélez phenomenon reflected an experience similar to that of Fujimori in Peru—the abuse of authority attained as a result of a successful military containment policy against an insurgency in support of a complex of antidemocratic and criminal objectives.

Another rhetorically discursive track unfurled by President Uribe during his administration in public speeches, event inaugurations, and declarations to the mass media involved historical revisionism keyed to antiterrorism. In his version of history, he was portrayed as fighting "against 50 years of terrorism," incorporating not only the paramilitaries and drug related car bombings of the 1980s and 1990s but also all historical insurgencies, notwithstanding the absence of any careful assessment regarding timing or concrete historical circumstances. Within that same mixed terrorist bag he included: human rights NGOs; the indigenous movement in El Cauca (which had dared to confront him directly, questioning his authoritarian communication model and propaganda); the Marxist left; M-19 nationalists; critical journalists like Hollman Morris and Jorge Enrique Botero (whom he called "accomplices of terrorism"); and opposition politicians and intellectuals like Gustavo Petro and León Valencia, former insurgents who had resumed civilian life as part of the legal left to whom the president systematically referred as "guerrillas in civilian clothing."

Finally, Uribism's legacy in terms of political culture generated a strong coterie comprised of millions of Colombians, a legion of unconditional believers in the former president, many voting for whatever candidates Uribe Vélez selects.⁹ Because they consider their leader not only a great political leader but also a great moral leader, many of them fail to acknowledge the crimes and abuses here analyzed and take as their own, without the tiniest criticism, the arguments posited by Uribe Vélez and his legislators in his Centro Democrático (the political party founded by Uribe after he left the presidency) to the effect that his ex-ministers and senior officials found guilty and imprisoned are victims of political persecution by a "politicized" justice system, biased against the former president and his party.

The governments of Juan Manuel Santos (2010–14 and 2014–17) and its reconsideration of "Democratic Security"

Juan Manuel Santos won the 2010 election with the support of President Uribe and his political base on the expectation that he would continue the "Democratic Security" policy of his predecessor. However, to the surprise of those who expected continuity with the Uribe administration in which Santos had served as Defense Minister and as a promoter of the "Democratic Security" policy, the election resulted in important reconsideration of Uribist policies and discourse.

To begin with, Santos transformed the conflictive relationship and permanent tensions with Venezuela and Ecuador, neighboring countries ascribed to 21st century socialism—an anathema to Uribe. He advocated for Colombia's integration into organizations of Latin American states such as the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR, by its Spanish acronym), de-ideologized relations with Venezuela, and promoted a pragmatic coexistent relationship with regimes of differing political orientations. With a touch of irony, the media and journalists began to refer to President Santos's relationship with Hugo Chavez as that among "new best friends."

As for internal politics, promoting consensus, Santos surprised critics of doctrinaire Uribism by affirming in his speech in celebration of his electoral triumph on June 20, 2010 that "I am and I will be the president of national unity ... Let us turn the page from hatred ... No more pointless confrontation, no more divisions." Toward that end, President Santos symbolically crossed clear and progressive boundaries with respect to the worst facets of Uribe Vélez's politics. On August 7, 2010, in one of his first post inauguration acts, he met with the justices

of the Supreme Court in an effort to normalize the conflictive relations that had characterized the Uribe era, clearly expressing his desire for a harmonious and respectful relationship with the courts. Another of his decisions involved support for the "Law of Victims,"¹⁰ a very important symbolic differentiation with respect to Uribism, which had consistently torpedoed such an initiative in Congress. A symbolically strategic demarcation was the recognition of the existence of internal armed conflict that his predecessor had systematically denied, arguing that it was a "terrorist threat."

Santos promoted a "Land Law" to accelerate restitution of rural properties appropriated through paramilitary expansion during the 1990s and the beginning of the 21st century. That decision generated resistance among regional economic, political, and military elements who had thrived due to paramilitary plundering of poor campesinos, and small and medium rural landowners. In some regions, the new government's policies were challenged by purported "anti-restitution armies," criminal bands comprised of recycled demobilized former paramilitaries known as BACRIM. While some restitution process leaders were able to remain on their land with government protection, others were displaced as a result of threats or assassinated.

With respect to communications, Juan Manuel Santos, the scion of an elite, cosmopolitan, capitalist family with an important background in the newspaper industry, replaced former President Uribe's personalist, monologic, rural-plantation driven and confrontational communicative regime.¹¹ Importantly buoyed by the presidential decisions described above, a liberal, democratic, pluralistic, less ideological and less dogmatic tone less linked to a traditional, rural and religious view of authority was adopted in the president's public discourse and in the political life of the country.

Such repositioning of "Democratic Security" policies and discourse by President Santos earned him the animosity of former President Uribe, who was accustomed to the unconditional obedience of his officials and partisans. It also earned him the animosity of thousands of Uribist militants who began to brand the new president a "traitor" and to delegitimize his political decisions.

The Havana peace process between 2012 and 2016

The peace process with the FARC was made public at the end of 2012 after a year of secret conversations between insurgent commanders and Santos government emissaries, which had concluded in the signing of a minimalist agenda permitting the initiation of a public phase to such

conversations. The peace process has been well conducted to date by President Juan Manuel Santos, who has proven a skilled strategist in the quest for peace. The support of the international community has been key to its success: Cuba as host of the talks and, together with Norway, guarantor of the agreements, with Venezuela and Chile as support countries. Experiences involving the quest for peace in South Africa, Guatemala, Salvador, Ireland, and other countries were studied in order to advance the dialogue and highly competent national and international advisers, expert in conflict negotiation, international humanitarian law, transitional justice, and rural land reform, were consulted.

The UN's involvement was key for participation by social leaders from different regions of the country¹² in the discussion of each of the Havana negotiation agenda items. This enabled placing of the agenda items before such different social groups in different regions and gathering related societal input and proposals. This work was carried out by the UN and the Centro de Pensamiento y Seguimiento al Diálogo de Paz (Center for Thought and Follow-up on Peace) of the Universidad Nacional de Colombia, which also organized working meetings with a view to preparing proposals for the dialogue table in Havana among representatives of a wide variety of victims of the armed conflict from different regions.¹³

One of the most important aspects of the Havana peace negotiations was the attention paid to victims' reparations demands. Given the complexity of the Colombian conflict and the tensions arising from political polarization between Uribism and Santism not all groups of victims felt represented at the negotiating table; however, the UN, the Catholic Church, and the Universidad Nacional de Colombia made significant efforts to assure pluralistic and equitable representation of the different categories of victims. The inclusion through a liaison committee of active duty armed forces personnel and national police generals and senior officers in the Havana dialogues was also key to the negotiations' progress on issues involving terms for ending the conflict (disarmament, security and reincorporation of the insurgents into civilian life). Such officers also having participated in the redesign of their respective institutions in order to adjust to the new, post-agreement context.

Because for the main part negotiations took place in the midst of armed confrontation between the parties, they experienced several precarious moments, including: the FARC capturing (deemed a kidnapping by the government) General Alzate during November 2014 (*Semana*, 2014); the death of 14 soldiers in Buenos Aires, Cauca, in

an attack by the FARC during April 2015 (*Semana*, 2015a); and the systematic attacks by the FARC during June 2015 against electrical and oil infrastructure in Buenaventura, Tumaco, and Putumayo (*Semana*, 2015b). These episodes seriously threatened continuation of the peace talks.

The 2014 presidential election (May and June¹⁴) posed an additional challenge to the peace process because the Uribist radical opposition had, during the seven years of the Santos administration, generated not only visceral hatred against the FARC and Manuel Santos, but also, in parallel fashion, spawned significant fear with respect to the peace process and the transition of the FARC from a military insurgency into a political party. While Uribe's designated candidate, Oscar Ivan Zuluaga, won the most votes in the first round, Santos managed to win the second round thanks to supporters of the democratic left, Clara López' Alternative Democratic Pole Party and Gustavo Petro's Progressives Party, key allies in supporting political negotiation to end the war.

The Havana Peace Accords as agreements for democratization and social modernization

The agenda for discussions on termination of the armed conflict included six agreed upon items: comprehensive rural reform; political participation; end of the conflict; solution to the problem of illicit drugs; victims' rights (including the transitional justice component); and ratification and implementation of the items agreed upon.

With respect to political participation, the objective involved conversion of the FARC into a political party so that, upon abandonment of its weapons, verbal arguments rather than bullets and bombs would be used to defend and promote their ideals. The topic of rural reform involved recovering a countryside totally neglected by ruling groups during the past half century. Modernization includes recording ownership to the 50% of rural property that neither has titles of record nor pays taxes, the granting of land to those displaced by the armed conflict, the construction of tertiary roads, and the implementation of improvements in rural healthcare and education. A key component of the accords deals with creation of the institutions required for implementation of transitional justice: the Special Jurisdiction of Peace (JEP in its Spanish acronym), the Commission for Clarification of the Truth (CV in its Spanish acronym), and the Unit for Search of Disappeared Persons (60,000 estimated). Those eminently democratic and modernizing tasks that have nothing to

do with socialism are currently major sources of tension among the Uribist right.

Reasons why the NO triumphed in the October 2, 2016 plebiscite

Although unnecessary from a legal perspective, President Santos decided to submit the peace accords with the FARC to a public plebiscite as a means of strengthening the political legitimacy of the peace negotiations with the insurgency. Colombians would vote yes or no to express either their support for or opposition to the peace accords.

Despite being well designed and despite its success, the peace process was very poorly executed from the perspective of public opinion. Not only were there no public-to-state-to-government communication policies in place with respect to the Havana Accords but President Santos himself was communicatively ineffective, failing to express positive emotions such as “hope,” “enthusiasm for peace,” or “a collective sense for the future.” In addition, the excessively confident tone of the official promotional campaign during the final weeks preceding the plebiscite generated a false sense of security (and of governmental arrogance) when public opinion surveys indicated that the YES vote was likely to win with 70% of the vote. An additional factor involved the systematic failure of the Santos government to comply with agreements with social movements such as Dignidades Campesinas de Boyacá, truckers and educators, which led thousands of Colombians to vote NO, not so much because of their opinion with respect to the peace process but as a de facto plebiscite on the overall performance of the government.

The FARC’s poor communication, its delayed apology to victims (on September 26, 2016, only a few days after signing of the Peace Accord), as well as the contrast between its last-minute agreement to return land to victims compared with its initial assertion that “[w]e have neither the money nor the property to make reparations” obviously also failed to favorably impact the YES vote.

The mass media played a somewhat negative part in the process as the two major news providers on private television channels (essential sources of information for Colombians) made very limited supplemental information publicly available. Since the beginning of 2015, one network, RCN,¹⁵ has been actively opposed to the peace process and through four daily programs on RCN News, its news channel and an important forum for peace process opponents, echoes

and expounds on the positions of former President Uribe and the Centro Democrático party’s Congressional delegation (López de la Roche, 2018b).

Moreover, former President Uribe and the Uribist right’s policy of “lying and myth building – falsehood and fear” (and slogans like “takeover of the country by Castro–Chavism”, “Santos will deliver the country to Cuba”; we are headed toward a model like Maduro’s Venezuela) played their part in the NO vote’s success. A dirty propaganda campaign in traditional media and social networks by the Centro Democrático against the YES vote (unveiled with a mixture of cynicism, arrogance and ingenuity by its director, Juan Carlos Vélez, in a *La República* interview (2016)) implemented a deception-based strategy designed to generate indignation against the Havana Accords. Less well-off citizens were provoked with allegations that the Santos government would pay insurgents two million pesos monthly while better off citizens were incited by criticism of alleged insurgent impunity, eligibility for public office and resulting increased taxation (*La Republica*, 2016).

“Salvation” of the Peace Accords

The NO vote triumphed by a little over 50,000 votes, a precarious triumph stained by illegitimacy given the surprising revelations of Juan Carlos Vélez on October 5 with respect to NO vote promoters’ strategies for emotional manipulations of the voters. Reflecting the fact that the difference in voting between proponents and opponents of the Peace Accords had been negligible (in spite of having lost, almost half the country had voted YES) and that many of the NO voters had been manipulated through the Centro Democrático’s admittedly dirty campaign, a broad student and citizen mobilization in defense of the Havana Accords was organized between Monday October 3 (the day after the plebiscite) and Wednesday October 5. On October 5, a huge concentration of university students filled the Plaza de Bolívar in Bogotá clamoring for peace under the slogans “No more war!” and “Agreements now!” and for a swift new agreement between the Santos government and spokespersons for NO voters in order to break the impasse generated by the victory by opponents of the YES vote. Concurrently, similar mobilizations took place in numerous cities in support of the Peace Accords and of their renegotiation with partisans of the NO vote (López de la Roche, 2018a).

Despite the need to seek consensus among YES and NO voters, the award of the Nobel Peace Prize to President Juan Manuel Santos

on Friday, October 7, 2016, constituted a formidable political and symbolic endorsement by the international community of the manner in which the quest for peace had been managed and of the manner in which victims' interests were to be dealt with. Additionally, on October 12, indigenous movements and numerous regional and local associations throughout the country joined the students in backing the peace process with another massive march to the Plaza de Bolívar. The resulting mobilization by the citizenry, animated by genuine feelings of hope and the conviction that war had to be overcome generated a complex new scenario (*Semana*, 2016).

Discussions between government negotiators with representatives of the different sectors who had led the campaign for the NO vote¹⁶ permitted the presentation of their objections, many of which were deemed acceptable. However, notwithstanding the concessions made by government negotiators and FARC spokesmen, the obtuse opposition of former President Uribe was unrelenting. The opposition was partly predicated on Uribe's intransigence with respect to transitional justice, the absence of prison as punishment for insurgent leaders, opposition to comprehensive rural reform and to political participation by former FARC commanders). It also involved his personal rivalry with Santos for his "betrayal" of "Democratic Security" and calculations concerning the electoral benefits of radical opposition to the accords in the looming 2018 presidential election, the latter probably carrying more weight than judicious assessment of the points renegotiated¹⁷.

Given such circumstances, the Santos government played its only remaining card by signing a new accord with the FARC incorporating the points agreed to with opponents other than former President Uribe. The new accords between Santos and the FARC were signed on Thursday, November 24, 2016, at the Teatro Colón in a much more modest and lackluster ceremony than the one prior to the October 2, 2016 plebiscite. Rather than a second plebiscite, the new version of the accords were ratified by the Congress subject to approval by the Constitutional Court, making it possible to salvage the peace process and the agreements with the FARC but at the cost of a partial loss of legitimacy due to the electoral victory of the NO vote and because of the inability to secure the support of Uribe and his partisans: quantitatively significant deficiencies with an important impact on public opinion.

Conclusions

At stake today in Colombia is not a transition to 21st century socialism or to a post-neoliberal economic-political model. What is deeply revolutionary in the contemporary Colombian experience is the severance of the exercise of politics from its relationship to violence, a development which now applies not only to the left but also to the right and the extreme right. They too must now exercise politics, especially in remote regions, dissociating themselves from paramilitary groups engaged in the murder of social and leftist leaders. Overcoming the internal armed conflict and displacing it from its privileged place on the political, electoral, and media agenda is likely to allow social agenda issues (health, education, improvement of rural life, employment and equity) to come to the fore in its place.

Contrary to Uribe's negative discourse and to that of his political and media spokesmen, as FARC insurgents were incorporated into rural settlement transition zones during the first half of 2017, the former fighters validated their strong desire for peace and for reincorporation into civil life to the population and the media. The delivery of 7,132 of their weapons to UN representatives at the different transition zones on Tuesday, June 27, 2017 reaffirmed such determination to national and international public opinion. The reauthorization of a second UN mission to verify implementation of the Teatro Colón agreements on July 10, 2017 signified renewed backing for the peace process on the part of international society. The peace process is highlighting profound changes in the former FARC insurgents' political culture. They now accept democratic institutions (the decisions of the Constitutional Court and Special Peace Jurisdiction, for example) and have reconsidered not only ideological ties to orthodox Marxism but also militaristic and authoritarian gambits typical of any politico-military insurgent organization.

Transformation and mental broadening in the political culture of important sectors of the military, the national police and liberal and conservative political classes are also being witnessed, notwithstanding the strong still existent national polarization concerning peace with the FARC and the implementation of the accords. However, and as part of the current situation's complexity foreshadowing a strong politico-ideological conflict during the post-accord period, significant opposition still exists among the sector of the right embodied in Uribism, several sectors of conservatism, a strong Protestant and Catholic moralistic right-wing, and social sectors victimized by the FARC, all of which maintain ideological, exclusionary, and revanchist

postures, still resisting or not yet prepared for reconciliation and forgiveness.

Sectors of the right, encouraged by Uribe Vélez's intransigent discourse and his rejection of everything in the Peace Accords that provides former insurgents with the right to participate in politics or that creates an equitable transitional justice system, seek a return to power in 2018 using the same discourse of fear and hate that has characterized them politically during the past 15 years of the nation's history.

Opposition to such sectors will need to be based on democratic strategies emphasizing peace-building and compliance with the accords, reconstruction of trust and hope among Colombians, progress in attaining social justice, and in the construction of modern institutions in rural and marginal urban areas, and minimization of widespread corruption among almost all political forces. As John Paul Lederach (2016) has emphasized, periods of armed conflict tend to dehumanize mutual perceptions among enemies while peace processes favor the re-humanization of social relations.

It is probable that this process of re-humanization of relations between Colombians which seeks the generation of hope and confidence in reconciliation and the attainment of collective purposes is only just beginning, and that between 30 to 50 years will be required to consolidate it. But the truth is that with the current peace process, the first steps in that direction have already been taken.

Notes

- ¹ Venezuela, Ecuador, Bolivia, Brazil, Argentina and briefly Paraguay during the Lugo government.
- ² The FARC were born during 1964 and only started reincorporation into civil society in July 2017.
- ³ For more detailed information concerning the analytical elements with respect to Uribe's political culture heritage, see López de la Roche (2014).
- ⁴ A term coined by the author, López de la Roche (2014).
- ⁵ The FARC facilitated their transformation by Uribe into Colombian society's "worst monster" through their absurd justification for kidnapping as a purported "social tax."
- ⁶ Primarily involving US sponsored Plan Colombia. Assistance under Plan Colombia reallocated from the War on Drugs to counterinsurgency operations during the administration of President Pastrana (1998–2002) had permitted retooling of the Colombian armed forces which had suffered crippling blows during the 1990s at the hands of the FARC, including the loss of government garrisons and dozens of soldiers taken prisoner, especially during the administration of Ernesto Samper (1994–98).

- ⁷ At the conclusion of the Uribe administration, its government shelved a Congressional proposal for a "Law of Victims," with one of its ideologues, José Obdulio Gaviria, daring to affirm that "no displaced persons existed in Colombia but rather, only internal migrants" (*Revista Cambio*, 2008).
- ⁸ Notaries are much more important, prestigious and lucrative than in the US, more akin to quasi-judiciary county clerkships.
- ⁹ They do so for various reasons, including: because they were victims of extortion or kidnapping by the FARC; for their ideological affinity with President Uribe's "hard hand" discourse and actions against the insurgents; or because of fanatical and uncritical assimilation of the "democratic security" discourse.
- ¹⁰ The proposal sponsored by progressive sectors of the Liberal Party involved providing reparations for the consequences of past and recent political violence to a broad group of victims.
- ¹¹ For more complete information concerning the communicative regimes of the Uribe Vélez and Santos administrations and with respect to hegemonic characteristics of other "communicative regimes" in Colombia, see López de la Roche (2013).
- ¹² Indigenous peoples, campesinos, Afro-Colombians, settlers, small and medium range entrepreneurs, and so on.
- ¹³ The author participated with social leaders and victims as a member of the Centro de Pensamiento y Seguimiento al Diálogo de Paz of the Universidad Nacional de Colombia during each of its combined working sessions, serving as the moderator of a 30-person dialogue working group.
- ¹⁴ Colombia requires an absolute majority of the popular vote for a first round electoral victory and a second round was required in the 2014 election.
- ¹⁵ Radio Cadena Nacional, S.A. (the National Radio Network) a provider of mass radio and television programming with a presence in 50 countries.
- ¹⁶ For example, Protestant pastors, ultraconservative former attorney general Alejandro Ordóñez, the Conservative Party sector led by Martha Lucía Ramírez, Francisco Santos and former President Uribe of the Centro Democrático.
- ¹⁷ The first round of presidential elections was held in Colombia on 27 May 2018. As no candidate received a majority of the vote, a second round was held on 17 June. In this round Ivan Duque, candidate of right-wing party Centro Democrático, was elected.

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