



From Armed Conflict to Criminality:
**Understanding the War to
'Peace' Trajectories of
Armed Actors**

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Introduction

War and its impact do not end with the final bullet or with the signing of a peace agreement: rather, both war continuity and its legacy remain evident across a wide spectrum of social, political, economic, and socio-cultural spheres. A significantly important aspect of the legacy / continuity of armed conflict, which is closely linked both to recidivism and the quality of post-accord peace, is *the nexus between violent political conflict and criminality*.

The transition from violent political conflict to criminality is not the preserve of any particular type of armed group or individual actor – i.e. state (security forces) or non-state (paramilitary/insurgent) actors – nor is it a pathway adopted exclusively by groups linked to the armed/political right or the left. As empirical cases from across the globe have evidenced, in some cases, armed groups transform into criminal organizations in the wake of a peace agreement, deploying their existing structures, capacity for territorial control, and illicit networks to traffic drugs, weapons, or people. Often, criminal structures – or the architecture for them – had already been established when a peace agreement was signed. In fact, in some cases, criminal activities were already being carried out by armed actors *during* the conflict. In this regard, rather than armed groups being dismantled, they frequently mutate (or consolidate) to adapt to the new ‘democratic’ context. Post-accord criminal organisations may, in some cases, have had their origin in the web of relationships developed between the security forces (legal and illegal) and other sectors within society (politicians, private sector and other civilians) during the conflict. In the case of state security forces where individuals or entire networks become embedded in post-accord criminal activity, these had historically deployed counter-insurgency strategies and structures against insurgent groups and in the new post-conflict conditions, increasingly orient themselves toward illicit and personal profit.

In other cases, individual former-combatants struggle with reintegration and turn to crime for economic survival. Often, the lack of meaningful provisions within the peace agreement itself – related, for example, to weak stipulations concerning DDR, socio-economic rights, ownership of land, employment opportunities and the like – and ongoing structural violence (poverty and political/socio-economic exclusion) may play a role in driving individuals towards criminality. Similarly, in cases where former combatants have been systematically executed in the wake of a peace agreement, and where societal norms and attitudes tend towards rejecting the shift from insurgent to citizen, individuals may return to the armed struggle or use their networks to gain access to the opportunities afforded by criminality. Finally, in those cases where armed paramilitary structures have been excluded from peace negotiations, individual members (and the structures themselves) may mutate towards criminality.

Workshop Aims

This workshop aims to explore the above themes from the perspective of scholars, practitioners and policymakers who have experience across diverse case studies and fields of study/practice. It represents the first stage in the development of a research project bringing together the Ohio State University, the University of Bristol and the Pontificia Universidad Javeriana. The workshop brings together experts from diverse countries and backgrounds to explore this topic by examining three case studies from Latin America (Colombia, Guatemala, El Salvador) and several crosscutting themes. Each case study will be explored by a team constituted by one academic researcher and one practitioner. The case studies have been selected given that all countries have experienced protracted violent conflict (linked to the Cold War), which was brought to an end through a negotiated peace settlement with differing degrees of international involvement. Each country, moreover, has subsequently been affected by diverse forms of violent criminality involving diverse actors linked to the previous violent political conflict and organized criminal groups.

The workshop will build foundational insights for the subsequent wider project, specifically allowing us to consolidate the research questions and contemplate a pathway for our research methodology.

Ultimately, the project itself aims to generate new knowledge that advances academic understanding of this topic. In this regard, the project will seek to build theory through engagement with the empirical case studies. At the same time, and significantly, the project will inform practical strategies for policymakers at the international and national levels with the aim of rupturing definitively cycles of violence and building sustainable peace.

Workshop Methodology

We aim to develop core insights for the wider research project during the workshop. In this respect, we have crafted our initial research questions and would hope to discuss them with workshop participants in order to develop our final research questions. Moreover, we aim to build our research methodology as a result of the conversations held during the workshop.

On the first day, we will hold a prolonged initial introductory session. We would propose that, during this session, workshop participants introduce themselves, explaining their own experience with the workshop themes, whether academic, practical or both. We would also ask workshop participants to think about the following questions (our initial research questions) and refer to them during their introduction.

- *How and why do armed political groups/structures (and individual perpetrators) overlap with criminal networks before, during, and after conflict?*
- *Which factors shape how armed groups/structures, and their individual (former) members mutate from political violence to criminality and organized crime?*

Workshop Program

Day One. Monday 21 July:

- 9.00-10.00: Welcome and introductions
- 10.00-10.45: Panel One: Colombia Case Study
- 10.45-11.10: Coffee break
- 11.15-12.30: Q&A and discussion on Colombia Case Study
- 12.30-1.30: Lunch at El Mirador Restaurant
- 1.30-2.15: Panel Two: Guatemala Case Study
- 2.15-2.30: Coffee break
- 2.30-3.30: Q&A and discussion on Guatemala Case Study
- 3.30-3.45: Coffee break
- 3.45-5.00: Representatives: Coperacion Neuvo Arco Iris, Fundación Paz y Reconciliación, and/or Fundación Ideas para la Paz

Day Two. Tuesday 22 July:

- 9.30-10.15: Panel Three: El Salvador Case Study
- 10.15-10.30: Coffee break
- 10.30-11.30: Q&A and discussion on El Salvador Case Study
- 11.30-12.30: Regional Trends in Criminality (ACLED)
- 12.30-1.30: Lunch at El Mirador Restaurant
- 1.30-2.15: Methodology
How might we study the political violence – criminality nexus? Here we will address how and why armed political groups/structures overlap with criminal networks before, during, and after conflict. We will discuss which factors shape how armed groups/structures, and their individual (former) members mutate from political violence to criminality and organized crime.
- 2.15-2.30: Coffee break
- 2.30-3.30: Discussion and mapping comparative cases: What role do factors such as DDR provisions and wider stipulations within peace agreements, weak state institutions, economic opportunity, geo-political and strategic location and transnational criminal networks play in shaping these trajectories?
- 3.30-3.45: Coffee break
- 3.45-5.00: Round Table: for faculty and students from the Pontificia Universidad Javeriana

Day Three. Wednesday 23 July:

- 9.30-10.30: Next steps: Analysis, comparative cases and emerging insights
What lessons can be drawn from different case studies to inform more effective policies for post-conflict security and social cohesion?
- 10.30-10.45: Coffee break
- 10.30-11.45: Project design: research gaps, evolving research questions and comparative approach
- 11.45-12.15: Close

Workshop Participants

Hosts

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