

The Securitization of Citizenship under Colombia's Democratic Security Policy

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Contemporary Colombian citizenship presents two main and contradictory tendencies.

The first of these is an increase in authoritarianism. In this context, it is a form of social control that includes the use of force and that is becoming concentrated in the hands of private actors. These authoritarian tendencies exist both *within and beyond* the state, mainly, but not limited to, guerrilla and paramilitary groups.

Currently, social authoritarian tendencies are articulated in prevailing programs of economic liberalism and the U.S.-backed war on terror. The novelty of the present situation is that authoritarianism, exerted through society, is colonizing the structures of democracy in Colombia as the language of citizenship is invoked in support of these tendencies.

President Alvaro Uribe's (2002-2010) "democratic security" policy is a paradigmatic example of this tendency.

The second and countervailing tendency in Colombian citizenship

advocates progressive forms of citizenship. It is inspired by the social democratic tradition of expanding rights through the state, in the republican tradition of broadening the public sphere, and in proposals for new forms of sociability.

These forces are present within the state as well as within leftist democratic parties, indigenous, Afro-Colombian, and women's movements, and in local projects such as peace communities advocating citizenship practices conducive to the right to live in peace.

It is also worth noting the role that the Constitutional Court plays in defending citizens' rights, denouncing the links between paramilitaries and the government, and initiating judicial procedures against members of Congress accused of providing support to paramilitary groups. Equally important in advocating progressive forms of citizenship is the democratic left, led by candidate Carlos Gaviria from the *Polo Democrático Alternativo PDA*, which obtained 22 percent of the vote in recent elections, a record level of support for leftist parties in Colombia.

In this brief bulletin, however, there is space only to address the rationale and outcomes of the former tendency- that of authoritarianism. Embodied in Uribe's "democratic security" policy, it is centered on the

'vigilante citizen,' the over-protection of big capital, and concurrent increases in the insecurity of trade unionists, social activists and the poor.

The Vigilante Citizen

Who is the ideal citizen under Colombia's democratic security policy? Uribe promotes a citizen-policing society, where individuals are endowed with the responsibility of his/her own security and the security of those living in their locality. Security is a "collective effort of all members of society" (Presidencia de la República 2003, 14), where the citizen is hardly distinguished from the armed forces, and is asked to work in solidarity with them in the "struggle of all against terrorism" (6).

The 'good citizen' collaborates by actively providing information on other citizens' activities to the Colombia state- the 'vigilante citizen.'

Uribe's vision of the 'vigilante citizen' was implemented through the 'networks of collaborators and informers' program. Under this program, informants are financially rewarded for providing information deemed helpful in the prevention or prosecution of crimes, and for undertaking surveillance of their neighbourhood.

These rewards are disbursed in public ceremonies- "Reward Mondays"- and broadcast live on television while high ranking

military personnel hand out payments to informants wearing ski masks in order to hide their identity.

For peasants, the demands of cooperation with the country's security forces went further, by including them actively in conflict. The strategy consisted of the training of 100,000 "peasant soldiers" or "soldiers of my Town," where peasants received 4 months of military training to enable them to participate in combat operations.

Not even girls and boys were excluded from 'vigilant citizen' initiatives. In some cases children were asked to police and report on their own parents. Furthermore, as described by the Comisión Colombiana de Juristas (2004, 58-59), military personnel were involved in health brigades and advertisements in schools, even implementing a "soldier for a day" program in the conflict-ridden region of Arauca.

NGOs and the Office of the Commissioner of Human Rights have criticized these practices, not only for increasing distrust and weakening solidarity in a society already fragmented by long years of conflict, but also for blurring the distinction between civilians and combatants. More importantly, peasants have become increasingly insecure as a result of these measures as they are easily identified and become more vulnerable to attacks by guerrilla groups. Their actions also contribute to the displacement of rural populations.

The Oversecuritization of Capital

Uribe's discourse of security is articulated with the need to "secure a business environment." For example, the two zones of rehabilitation and consolidation (ZRC) designated by the

government coincide with the trajectory of the Caño Limón-Coveñas pipeline, owned in part by U.S.-based Occidental Petroleum. In these zones, citizenship rights were restricted, including curfews, restrictions on meetings and demonstrations, mandatory identification and the carrying-out of preventive measures without judicial orders. The Constitutional Court has ruled that some of the powers conceded to the military in RCZ were unconstitutional.

Reforms in the judicial system are also biased towards the protection of big capital, framed to fit economic liberalism's emphasis on personal security, private property and juridical security—understood as a right of dominant actors (Uprimny et al 2006, 110).

In the area of civil law, for example, two thirds of cases processed deal with financial concerns in which the plaintiffs are financial entities collecting debts on private individuals—obtaining favorable decisions most of the time. In the area of criminal justice, the inequity is reflected in disproportionate punishment for the poor. As Uprimny et al point out, an individual without a private lawyer is 80 percent more likely to be convicted than those who have one (33-34).

The Insecurity of Labour and Social Activists

If capital is overprotected, labour is extremely vulnerable. According to Amnesty International (2006), over 750 trade unionists have been killed in Colombia since 2000, and at least a hundred more have been "disappeared." In 2005 alone 73 trade unionists were either killed or "disappeared," while over 200 received death threats. Although impunity is generalized in Colombia, for trade unionists, the

situation is worse— in 2003, only 26 (2.14%) of 1210 cases came to trial, and of these there were convictions in only 14 cases (1.15%) (Uprimny et al 2006, 30).

In 2005, there was a decrease in the number of human rights violations and homicides of trade unionists, however the dangers facing other vulnerable groups increased. The number of female homicides remained constant while death threats and harassment towards women increased. This violence was exacerbated by the persistent invisibility of gender-based violence and the symbolic character of these forms of aggression, which use the female body to send a message to the collectivity (ENS 2005, 10).

The increasing risks facing social movement activists in Colombia has been widely documented (Fairbairn 2005; USIP 2004). In the first year of Uribe's administration, the United States Institute of Peace (USIP) (2004) documented the killing of 49 activists and 792 other people, 160 forced disappearances, 144 cases of torture, 573 death threats, and the arbitrary detention of 2,546 individuals.

During the first two years of Uribe's presidency, more than 6,300 Colombians were arbitrarily arrested compared to a total of 2,869 such arrests conducted during the six previous years (Fairbairn 2005, 43). Peace Brigades International also denounced the growing trend of the government launching legal proceedings against human rights defenders, a tactic the Colombian government uses to create an atmosphere of suspicion towards human rights work (PBI 2006).

Insecurity for the Poor

22.2 million poor people constitute half of the Colombian population, people. In rural areas, 7 out of 10

people are poor. The slight reduction in the proportion of poverty during Uribe's term (1.2%) was not enough to reduce the number of poor, as 5 million more people live in poverty now than in 1991 (CID 2006). Their living conditions of the population have also deteriorated, especially in terms of health. In the past three years rates of maternity-related-mortality deteriorated while child-mortality is at a standstill (El Tiempo 2006).

After Brazil, Colombia is the country with the highest index of income concentration in the region (0.591 to 0.576). And after Uribe's first term, inequality in income distribution remains high and unaltered.

Since 1992, the richest 10 percent of the population have received 46 percent of national income (CID 2006, 63). The distribution of property is even more concentrated, as 2,428 property owners (0.06 percent) hold 53.5 percent of the country's land (38), while drug dealers and paramilitaries control at least 50 percent of land suitable for cultivation (Archila Neira 2006, 15).

Property rights are not equally protected across social strata, sex or race, as is reflected by the massive levels of internal displacement of Colombian citizens. 3 million people have been uprooted in the past 20 years. Indigenous peoples, Afrocolombians, peasants, women and children are over-represented in the number of internally displaced people (IDP).

According to the Women's Commission for Refugees and Children, "forced displacement in Colombia is clearly a 'women's issue'. . . 58 percent of the people forced to leave their homes are female and 39 percent of displaced household are headed by women"

(COHRE 2005, 25). Afrocolombians and indigenous people represent a quarter of all IDP while they constitute only 11 percent of the total population (20).

Displaced people in Colombia face insecurity regarding property, experiencing a 'reverse land reform' with land being taken from them (Haugaard 2006, 2). The exact amount of property lost is not known, although it is believed that from 1995 to 2001, between 2 and nearly 7 million hectares changed ownership as a result of displacement (2).

Nationwide, indigenous communities are victims of a "pre-emptive war" that has killed 240 indigenous people in the past 12 years (Molano Bravo 2005). Historically, paramilitaries, guerrillas, and the army have not recognized cultural differences or claims for autonomy. As a result, indigenous people have been threatened by all three groups, endangering their very survival.

In the 1990s indigenous people were targeted as 'guerrilla collaborators' by paramilitary groups. Massacres, like the one perpetrated in 2001 in the Naya territory (where 30 people were killed and another 40 were disappeared) where human rights organizations have documented official military (or government) collusion with the killers (Fairbairn 2005, 3), are all too common.

The FARC has also accused indigenous leaders of collaborating with paramilitary and has also killed indigenous leaders, including Cristóbal Secué, leader of the *Concejo Regional Indígena del Cauca* in 2001, and destroyed communities such as the Municipality of Toribío in 2005 (Peñaranda 2006, 543-567 558).

Internally displaced women and girls face growing insecurity with increases in domestic violence, sexual abuse and sexual exploitation. According to a study by the Colombian Pro-Family Institute, 20 percent of displaced women had been raped, and 30 percent of displaced teenage girls had children or were pregnant (COHRE 2005).

Although the Colombian government has made some progress in this area, persistent obstacles include the under-reporting of crimes, a lack of gender-disaggregated information on the specific challenges facing women, and an ineffective judicial system in dealing with cases of gender-based violence (30).

Overall, IDPs are the "poorest of the poor." 83% of them have unmet basic needs as compared to 73% of the poorest 10 percent of the population. They receive only 65% of the minimum wage to meet the basic needs of households of 5 or 6 people (on average), while 93 percent have an income that is below the benchmark for extreme poverty.

88 percent stated that they have not had sufficient money to buy food in the last month, while 60 percent of pregnant women had high levels of anaemia (UNDP 2006). The lack of recognition of the fundamental rights of internally displaced populations was acknowledged in a ruling by the Court of Justice that declared displacement "unconstitutional," due to the lack of attention and protection provided to IDPs. Because of this, the Court ordered the state to prevent displacement and to guarantee the protection of IDPs.

Conclusion

An important lesson to be drawn from the Colombian case is the contested meaning of citizenship. The concept can be mobilized not only for progressive and democratic ends, but also in support of authoritarian projects used to preserve social and economic privileges. The latter tendency characterizes President Uribe's democratic security policy. The vigilante citizen and peasant soldier projects not only create distrust in an already divided society, but also blur the distinction between combatants and civil society. This increases the vulnerability of groups already lacking state protection, as is the case for small peasants living in areas of conflict.

These programs overprotect already privileged citizens and under-protect others. Business, in particular the oil industry, wealthy landlords, and paramilitary groups benefit from exceptional measures such as the creation of Rehabilitation Zones, favourable judicial reforms, and lately, extraordinary measures like the Peace and Security Law. This contrasts with the under-protection of the nearly 3 million internally displaced Colombians. Most of these are women and children, members of Indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities, and/or trade unionists and social activists.

On the other side of the ledger, the open-ended character of citizenship is also manifested in the emergence of progressive forms of citizenship briefly mentioned earlier in this bulletin.

The future of democracy in Colombia depends on which of these projects of citizenship ultimately prevails.



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