



Conflict Risk Assessment Report 2017



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Executive Summary

This report provides conflict diagnostics of Colombia based on risk assessment indicators and trends in structural factors, events, and key stakeholders from the last 10 years. The report assesses the different indicators as stabilizing, destabilizing, or mixed factors contributing to escalation or de-escalation of conflict. The report concludes that despite recent progress on achieving peace between the FARC and the Colombian government, the peace process is far from completed. Our cautiousness is based on the assumption that the creation and implementation of a peace deal, with there being little likelihood of violence re-emerging, is not the same as building peace, a process that takes 10 to 15 years based on the “three R’s”: reconstruction, resolution and reconciliation.¹


Background




Colombia’s armed conflict has left as many as 260,000 dead and 5.7 million displaced over the last half century.² It started in May 1964, when a group of communist guerrillas and peasants at odds with the Colombian government resettled in the Colombian countryside after *La Violencia*.³ In May 1966, after having escaped from the Colombian army, guerilla leaders met and formally created the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (“the FARC”) calling for land reforms and militant resistance.^{4,5} 1982 marks the first time peace talks and a ceasefire were attempted with the goal to have the FARC reintegrated into society.⁶ In August 2016, following four years of negotiations facilitated by Cuba, Norway and Venezuela, a peace accord was signed, and put to a referendum in October 2016.⁷ The referendum, which asked the Colombian population if they approved the peace deal, failed to pass with the “No” campaign winning at 50.2%.⁸ After the loss, the Colombian government and the FARC committed to the ceasefire and to the revision of the peace deal. On November 30, 2016, the revised peace deal was passed by Colombia’s Senate and the Lower House signaling an end to Colombia’s 52-year armed conflict.⁹

Internal Stakeholders





Country/Actor	Impact	Effects
The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) 	Destabilizing	(-) A rural based guerilla movement with 16,000 members (in 2001) that started in 1966, and concentrated primarily in Southern Colombia and on the Venezuelan border. By the time the FARC agreed to negotiations, in 2012, its ranks had fallen to some 7,000 members. ¹⁰
The Military Forces of Colombia 	Mixed	(+/-) While they have contributed to eradicating the FARC they also committed crimes. The military engaged in a tactic called false positives, which entailed dressing civilians in guerilla apparel in order to present them as combat kills and gain bonuses. ¹¹
Alvaro Uribe (Current Senator, Leader of the “NO” campaign) 	Mixed	(-) Civilians who wanted the peace agreement see Uribe’s action and negative involvement as a destabilizing factor. (+) Supporters of Uribe see him as an advocate of justice, by refusing to let the deal offer amnesty and impunity for crimes committed by the FARC.
Juan Manuel Santos (Current president, leader of the “YES” campaign) 	Mixed	(+) Civilians who wanted the peace agreement see Santos’ action and positive involvement as a stabilizing factor. He was awarded the 2016 Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts towards peace and security. (-) Civilians who voted “No” think Santos traded peace for justice and that he offered impunity for crimes committed by the FARC and the military.
The National Liberation Army (ELN) 	Destabilizing	(-) A rural based left- wing guerilla movement with 5,000 members, concentrated primarily in Magdalena Medio and oil producing regions. Although some say the ELN is more ideological than the FARC, the two have similar programs. ¹²
The United Self-Defence forces of Colombia (AUC) 	Destabilizing	(-) Right-wing paramilitary group; emerged in the 1980s as landowners organized to protect themselves from the guerrillas. AUC was on the U.S. State Department’s list of foreign terrorist organizations until July 2014. It formally disbanded in 2006. ¹³

External Stakeholders

Country/Actor	Impact	Effects
International and Regional Organizations 	Stabilizing	(+) International and regional organizations, such as the UN, OAS, UNASUR and the G24, have supported peace initiatives at a lower level, with varying degrees of success. ¹⁴

Mexico, Cuba, Venezuela	Stabilizing 	(+) Mexico, Cuba and Venezuela have facilitated and mediated various peace talks throughout the years. The two countries ideologically the closest to the leftist guerrillas, Cuba and Venezuela, have been recurrent facilitators in Colombian peace processes. The ELN was created in Cuba in 1962, three years after the Cuban revolution. ¹⁵
Norway, Switzerland, Spain and France	Stabilizing 	(+) Important contributions to peace negotiations in Colombia have come from Norway, Switzerland, Spain, and France. These various actors have not had any close relation with the guerrillas or the government. Their interventions failed to bring about a final peace agreement, but they acted as facilitators and mediators.
United States	Stabilizing 	(+) The U.S. has been a historically dominant actor in the region. In 2000, President Bill Clinton announced \$862 millions of aid for "Plan Colombia" aimed at helping Colombia combat guerrilla violence, strengthen its institutions, and stem drug production and trafficking. ¹⁶

Risk Assessment Indicators		
High Risk	Medium Risk	Low Risk
↑ Improving	→ Stable	↓ Deteriorating
History of Armed Conflict	Medium Risk	Stable →
Stabilizing Factors	The Colombian government and the FARC reached a peace agreement on November 30, 2016, putting a closer end to the 52 year war. ¹⁷ The UN has actively sent forces to help the demobilization and disarmament of the FARC in the next upcoming months. In the wake of this accord, the Colombian government and the ELN have began negotiating further peace settlement.	
Destabilizing Factors	According to the definitions provided in the Conflict Data Project and the Polity IV Colombia's conflict can be considered a war, as it killed at least 1000 people per year, ¹⁸ leading to 260,000 deaths. ¹⁹ In the 2006 CIFP report, Colombia scored a 7.2, meaning there was a high presence of conflict. ²⁰ At the end of 2015, Colombia had 6.94 million persons of concern, where 37,494,172 are internally displaced persons (IDPs), even more than Syria. ²¹ During the conflict, 46, 383 people have 'disappeared' and 29,682 people have been kidnapped. ²²	
Assessment	Colombia's 52 year war has been described as one of the deadliest conflicts of the past century. Although the aftermath from the conflict is still very much present through the number of IDPs, the thousands of killed civilians and families still affected by the conflict, the peace deal is a step closer to making the armed conflict history.	
Governance and Political Stability	Medium Risk	Stable →
Stabilizing Factors	On the 2001 Polity IV database, Colombia scored a 7 ²³ on level of democracy, which demonstrates that Colombia's democratic level is strong and has remained stable over the past 15 years. ²⁴ In 1991, Colombia developed a new constitution aimed towards a better democracy. ²⁵ The 2006 CIFP report ranked Colombia's regime durability a Global Rank Score of 2.0, indicating a high level of durability. ²⁶ In a 2017 Freedom House report, Colombia scored a 3.5/7 ²⁷ on freedom, 3 in civil liberties, and 3 in political rights. ²⁸ From 2012-2016 Colombia continuously scored 4/7 on civil liberties, showing improvement on the efforts of the government to respect civil liberties.	
Destabilizing Factors	In the 2006 CIFP report, Colombia received a Global Rank Score of 6.0 meaning that although press is not highly restricted, it is not completely free. According to Freedom House, from 2012-2016 Colombia has constantly ranked in the 50s, thus having a partly-free press. ²⁹ In 2016, Colombia's score deteriorated scoring at 56/100 from 53 in 2013. ³⁰ According to Transparency International, Colombia has regularly scored in the 36-37 range. ³¹ As of 2016, Colombia was ranked 90/176 countries in the corruption index. ³² The question of amnesty for war crimes committed by the FARC and the military remains highly controversial.	
Assessment	With stable governance, improvements in most areas of political stability, and a peace agreement in place, there are few reasons to expect significant change. Corruption is a persistent issue, as the amnesty law that was proposed by the deal and passed by Colombian Congress ³³ is the key issue in the full implementation of the peace deal.	

Militarization	Medium Risk	Stable 
<i>Stabilizing Factors</i>	Colombia's military and the FARC have officially signed the peace accord; however this does not mean that there has been demilitarization. Colombia's military has undergone continuous growth in the last 15 years ³⁴ and military personnel has continuously increased, with a total of 455,750 personnel in 2014. ³⁵ In 2015, Colombia's military expenditure accounted for 3.37%, which was the highest in the last five years. ³⁶ As of 2015, Colombia was ranked 55 out of 152 countries. ³⁷	
<i>Destabilizing Factors</i>	One of Colombia's destabilizing factors is the false positives tactic executed by Colombia's military that resulted in the killing of thousands of civilians. In 2015, it was reported by the Prosecutor General's Office that the armed forces had killed 4,475 civilians since 1986, where 5,137 officials have been implicated and only 923 have been convicted. ³⁸ Additionally, the FARC recruited and used a high number of child soldiers, whom were supposed to be released; however as of February 2017, the FARC has only released 13 children. ³⁹	
<i>Assessment</i>	Colombia's military provides mixed effects on the conflict's outcome. For one, Colombia's military fate will be determined by the direction of Colombia's next president upon elections in 2018, and thus cannot be examined. ⁴⁰ Lastly, the fate of child soldiers remains unknown as the FARC's promise to release all children is dependent upon arrival to their demobilization zones. ⁴¹	
Economic Performance	Medium Risk	Improving 
<i>Stabilizing Factors</i>	Unemployment hit a record low of 8.9% in 2015. ⁴² The 2014 tax reform bill by the Santos government has helped raise revenues for implementing the peace deal with the FARC. ⁴³ Public debt has remained constant at an average of 34.4% of GDP. ⁴⁴ Colombia has solid macroeconomic fundamentals and stability with strong openness to global trade and finance. ⁴⁵	
<i>Destabilizing Factors</i>	GDP growth rate has been declining, from 6.6% in 2011 to 2.2% in 2016. ⁴⁶ The drop in international commodity prices has weakened the export dependant oil industries. ⁴⁷ The decline in FDI from 19% in 2011 to 2.8% in 2015 ⁴⁸ reflects the erosion in investor confidence due largely to the effects of narco-trafficking and corruption on domestic infrastructure. ⁴⁹	
<i>Assessment</i>	Colombia ranks 33 rd globally ⁵⁰ in economic freedom with a score of 70.8 and rising. ⁵¹ The recovering oil prices and increased government spending creates an attractive environment for foreign investment. ⁵² Real GDP is forecasted to grow by 3.8% between 2016-2021 ⁵³ as inflation stabilizes. ⁵⁴	
Population Heterogeneity	Low Risk	Stable 
<i>Stabilizing Factors</i>	Low score of religious and linguistic fractionalization ⁵⁵ at 0.1478 and 0.0193 ⁵⁶ respectively. 90% of the population is Roman Catholic and speaks Spanish. ⁵⁷	
<i>Destabilizing Factors</i>	Medium level of ethnic fractionalization at 0.6014 ⁵⁸ where 58% of the population is Mestizo, 20% White, 10% Afro-Colombian and the remaining a mix of Indigenous and unspecified. ⁵⁹ Afro-Colombian and Indigenous groups were disproportionately affected by forced relocation and internal displacement. ⁶⁰	
<i>Assessment</i>	The decreased intensity of the conflict has given the Afro-Colombian and Indigenous populations new opportunities to reclaim lost land through legal tools. ⁶¹ They have also begun to gain more representation in the political system. ⁶² Religious homogeneity provides social cohesion, so the risk of fractionalization leading to rebellion remains low.	
Demographic Stress	Low Risk	Stable 
<i>Stabilizing Factors</i>	Population growth has remained steady for the past 5 years, fluctuating between 1% and 1.3%. ⁶³ Fertility rates have dropped to just above replacement level due to increased literacy, education, and family planning. ⁶⁴	
<i>Destabilizing Factors</i>	Urban population increased by an average of 1.66% between 2010-2015 and now accounts for over 76% of the total population. ⁶⁵ The rural nature of the conflict, coupled with the amount of IDPs has driven rural populations towards cities, creating massive urban slums. Displaced rural populations have been unable to return to their homeland due to the violence.	
<i>Assessment</i>	With a median age of 29.6 years, the working aged population accounts for 41.8% of the total population. ⁶⁶ The population is densely situated in the north and west, with over 60% of the land in the south and east sparsely populated. ⁶⁷ The increasing urbanization of the population serves to further exacerbate income inequality.	

Human Development	Medium Risk	Stable →
<i>Stabilizing Factors</i>	Colombia's HDI has remained steady for the past 10 years, at around 0.70-0.72, placing it amongst high HDI countries. ⁶⁸ Infant mortality rate dropped from 17 deaths per 1000 live births in 2007 to 13 in 2015. Maternal mortality rate (per 100,000 live births) has also improved from 75 in 2007 to 64 in 2015. ⁶⁹ The net primary school enrollment for both genders has remain stable with an average above 90% in the last 10 years. ⁷⁰ In 2015, the education budget increased by 5.75% in efforts for Colombia to become Latin America's most educated country by 2025. ⁷¹	
<i>Destabilizing Factors</i>	Income inequality in Colombia remains amongst the worst in the world as more than a third of the population lives below the poverty line. ⁷² Colombia experiences significant legal and illegal economic emigration and refugee flows. ⁷³ Children are engaged in the worst forms of child labor, including street work, illicit activities, and sexual exploitation. ⁷⁴ A 2011 report found that between 2005 and 2010 the rates of HIV/AIDS in Colombia have been steadily rising. ⁷⁵	
<i>Assessment</i>	Human development is at medium risk; inequality remains a challenge, but steps in the right direction have been made through increased spending in education.	
Environmental Stress	Medium Risk	Improving ↑
<i>Stabilizing Factors</i>	Colombia is the second most biodiverse country in the world and has a tradition of developing policies and laws to protect its nature. Colombia's Victims and Land Restitution Law of 2011 has been integral to proactively preventing forced displacement. The Law provides a judicial framework for stabilising land ownership and preventing further displacement. International donors have been involved in supporting the implementation of the land restitution policy. ⁷⁶	
<i>Destabilizing Factors</i>	In 1954, 3% of landowners held 55% of all farmland; by 2005, 0.4% of landowners held 62.6% of the land. ⁷⁷ As of 2014, the hectares of arable land per person dropped to 0.035%. ⁷⁸ The 2011 Restitution Law proposed a new land registry based on testimony by the displaced people. ⁷⁹ Additionally, deforestation and water pollution are persistent environmental issues.	
<i>Assessment</i>	In 2014, Amnesty International revealed significant deficiencies in restoring property rights. ⁸⁰ Many people have been unable to return home due to ongoing threats of violence and the slowness of the restitution process. ⁸¹	
International Linkages	Medium Risk	Stable →
<i>Stabilizing Factors</i>	Colombia is a member of numerous international and regional organizations such as the UN, WTO, WHO, OAS, and Mercosur amongst others. ⁸² Additionally, the U.S. and China are Colombia's largest trading partners.	
<i>Destabilizing Factors</i>	A \$450 million aid package originally negotiated by the Obama administration is now under review by the Trump administration. ⁸³	
<i>Assessment</i>	Any reduction in the aid package on the part of the US could negatively affect the implementation of the peace agreement in Colombia. ⁸⁴	

Possible Scenarios

Best Case Scenario	Worst Case Scenario
The peace process continues to unfold, with the passing of the Amnesty Law. This will free 2,000 rebels in jail ⁸⁵ and protect the FARC legally from future punishment, except for international crimes. FARC starts full demobilization, hands over all child soldiers; and by 31 May 2017 will have handed all their weapons to the UN. ⁸⁶ Furthermore, they will start their reintegration into society, and in the political sphere by forming their legal political party. Land reform continues to play a central role in the peace implementation.	The government continues the construction of zones occupied by the FARC, but the FARC remains armed and unwilling to fully cooperate due to the government's lack of organization in the implementation of the deal. Even if the FARC disarms, other armed groups fill the vacuum and create further conflict and insecurity. Land reform is unsuccessful as the government does not engage the local warlords. Oil prices do not recover causing the government to rely more on foreign aid and tax accumulation.

Most Likely Scenario

Although behind the deadlines imposed by the peace deal, guerrilla members continue their march towards the demobilization zones created by the peace settlement. Land reform is limited, and those who do receive land will continue to farm the existing coca plants, furthering the narco trafficking. The military and the FARC receive partial amnesty from international crimes which triggers an investigation by the ICC. The FARC disarmament and reintegration into society is contingent upon the political pressures from competing parties in the upcoming 2018 elections and their results.

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- ³ La Violencia is known to be a smaller civil war that was started by the assassination of left wing Mayor of Bogota
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- ¹⁹ Centro Nacional de Memoria Historica, “Colombia’s National Museum of Memory,” accessed February 1, 2017, <http://www.centrodememoriahistorica.gov.co/en/about-the-national-center-about-the-national-center/content/60-english-version>.
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- ²³ Where a score of 6-9 indicates “democracy” and 10 indicates “full democracy”.
- ²⁴ Marshall, M. 2014. “Polity IV Project: Political Regime Characteristics and Transitions, 1800-2013” accessed February 4, 2017, <http://www.systemicpeace.org/polity/polity4x.htm>.
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- ⁵⁰ Ibid.
- ⁵¹ (Where 0 is not free and 100 is completely free).
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