

Document #2060100

IRB – Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

Colombia: Criminal groups, particularly the Gulf Clan (Clan del Golfo) [also known as the Gaitanista Self-Defence Forces of Colombia (Autodefensas Gaitanistas de Colombia, AGC), Los Urabeños, Clan Úsuga], the National Liberation Army (Ejército de Liberación Nacional, ELN), Los Pachenca, and Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia, FARC) [or Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia—People's Army (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia—Ejército del Pueblo, FARC-EP)] dissidents, including their areas of operation and relations between them (2019–June 2021) [COL200696.E]

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

1. Criminal Groups in Colombia

According to the US embassy in Colombia, the "main criminal threat" in Colombia is the "emergence of criminal organizations" from "remnants" of "paramilitary organizations, drug trafficking groups and guerrilla units" (US n.d.). The same source states that organized crime groups have "stepped into the void" left by paramilitary organizations and are behind "much of the increased violence and drug trafficking throughout the country" (US n.d.). InSight Crime, a non-profit think tank and media organization that studies organized crime in Latin America and the Caribbean (InSight Crime n.d.), reports that despite the demobilization of various groups, dissident groups persist; these are involved in illegal activities, making them "hard to eradicate," due to the "criminal incomes [that] sustain them" (InSight Crime 11 Nov. 2019). For information on the targets of criminal groups, particularly the Gulf Clan, the ELN, Los Pachenca, and FARC dissidents, as well as the methods and abilities of these groups to track their targets, and state protection, see Responses to Information Request COL200703 from August 2021.

2. Gulf Clan

Sources state that the Gulf Clan is a drug trafficking group (InSight Crime 10 Dec. 2020; TRAC n.d.a; AQ [26 Jan. 2021]). Sources indicate that the Gulf Clan is Colombia's "most powerful paramilitary group" (Colombia Reports 22 Oct. 2019) or "most formidable criminal organization" (InSight Crime 16 Mar. 2021) or [translation] "main criminal group" (EFE 1 June 2021), and that it "allegedly controls most of the country's drug trade" (Colombia Reports 22 Oct. 2019). A September 2020 article by Colombia Reports, a non-profit news website based in Colombia (Colombia Reports n.d.), describes the Gulf Clan as the country's "largest illegal armed group," numbering 3,000 to 7,000 "combatants" (Colombia Reports 3 Sept. 2020). According to sources, the Gulf Clan is [translation] "heir" to the United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia (Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia, AUC) (EFE 1 June 2021) or led by AUC dissidents who abandoned the demobilization process between 2003 and 2006 (Colombia Reports 3 Sept. 2020).

2.1 Areas of Operation

According to the Terrorism Research & Analysis Consortium (TRAC), a website that provides "comprehensive data and analysis" for researchers studying topics such as terrorism, political science, and international relations (TRAC n.d.b), the Gulf Clan "moved into FARC territory in central Colombia" after the FARC's 2016 peace deal with the Colombian government and "assumed almost absolute control of the organized criminal activity" along the Pacific and Caribbean coasts (TRAC n.d.a). A September 2020 article by InSight Crime indicates that the Gulf Clan's presence in the Pacific region has been "affected" by the "rising strength" of the ELN and its "control of shipment points" along that coast (InSight Crime 8 Sept. 2020). A December 2020 article by the same source states that Bahía Solano, a "strategic location" for drug routes to Panama and Central America, has been "disputed" by the ELN and the Gulf Clan since 2016 (InSight Crime 10 Dec. 2020). The same source further states that the municipalities of "greatest importance" are Juradó, Riosucio, Bojayá, El Carmen del Darién, and Belén de Bajirá, which are "gateways to Chocó" from the department of

Antioquia (InSight Crime 10 Dec. 2020). A February 2021 article on Colombia Peace, a website by the Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA) that tracks progress in peace talks, notes that the Gulf Clan is "making new incursions" in the Catatumbo region of the Norte de Santander department (WOLA 6 Feb. 2021). According to a January 2021 report by a coalition of Colombian human rights organizations [1] on rights violations in Cauca, the Gulf Clan has a [translation] "sporadic" presence in the department, including in the towns of Balboa, Mercaderes, Corinto, Caloto, Miranda, Santander de Quilichao, Guachené, and Totoro (Organizaciones de la mesa territorial Jan. 2021, 21).

2.2 Relationships with Other Groups

According to sources from 2018 and 2019, authorities "claim" that the Gulf Clan is the "main ally of the powerful Sinaloa Cartel from Mexico" (Colombia Reports 22 Oct. 2019) or that it has "good business relations" with the Sinaloa Cartel (GlobalSecurity.org 4 Mar. 2018). According to sources, the group is a "long-time rival" (TRAC n.d.a) or "[c]ompetito[r]" (AQ [26 Jan. 2021]) of the ELN (TRAC n.d.a; AQ [26 Jan. 2021]) and the FARC (TRAC n.d.a). In a March 2021 article, InSight Crime reports that the conflict between the Gulf Clan and the ELN is "primarily over the department of Chocó" and the "key" drug routes that pass through it to the Pacific coast (InSight Crime 10 Mar. 2021). According to the December 2020 article by InSight Crime, conflict between the ELN and the Gulf Clan "usually takes place in rural areas" (InSight Crime 10 Dec. 2020). The same source further states that the criminal group known as Los Chacales was "subcontracted" by the ELN in 2020 to make the group a "military objective" and "hit" the Gulf Clan in urban neighbourhoods of Bahía Solano (InSight Crime 10 Dec. 2020). The article adds that the struggle for control over the northern part of Chocó began when the FARC left in 2016 (InSight Crime 10 Dec. 2020). The March 2021 article by InSight Crime indicates that the Gulf Clan's "spread across southeastern Antioquia" has brought the group into conflict with the ELN on another front, adding that "venturing to control new routes towards Chocó seems to have weakened the group's territorial consolidation efforts, preventing it from building the necessary alliances" (InSight Crime 10 Mar. 2021). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

Colombia Reports states that the Gulf Clan has "allegedly teamed up" with the Medellín "crime syndicate" Oficina de Envigado and the Clan del Oriente from the Magdalena Medio region to "form a 'consortium' dedicated to exporting drugs and importing arms" (Colombia Reports 5 June 2019). InSight Crime similarly reports that the Oficina de Envigado has become an "important drug trafficking all[y]" for the Gulf Clan (InSight Crime 28 Oct. 2020).

According to sources, the Gulf Clan is in conflict with the Caparrapos [a Gulf Clan dissident group (La Silla Vacía 4 Mar. 2019; InSight Crime 2 June 2021; EFE 1 June 2021), also known as the Caparros and the Frente Virgilio Peralta Arenas (InSight Crime 2 June 2021; EFE 1 June 2021; Colombia Reports 3 Sept. 2020)], in Bajo Cauca and southern Córdoba (InSight Crime 8 Sept. 2020; La Silla Vacía 4 Mar. 2019). According to a June 2021 article by InSight Crime, the Gulf Clan is a "primary enem[y]" of the Caparrapos and the "armed conflict" between the two groups "shows no sign of abating" (InSight Crime 2 June 2021). La Silla Vacía, a Colombia-based news website (La Silla Vacía n.d.), reports that the Caparrapos allied with the ELN and remnants of the FARC's 18th and 36th Fronts against the Gulf Clan and that the coalition is looking to remove the Gulf Clan from Tarazá, Nechí, and Zaragoza in Antioquia (La Silla Vacía 4 Mar. 2019). The same source further states that the Office of the Ombudsman (Defensoría del Pueblo) has warned of [translation] "another possible Gulf Clan dissident group along the Nechí River, in El Bagre, Zaragoza, and Cauca" known as the Frente Francisco Morelos Peñate, which has published "threatening pamphlets" against Gulf Clan members and is "reportedly joining the Caparrapos" (La Silla Vacía 4 Mar. 2019).

A June 2020 article by InSight Crime indicates that the Gulf Clan was formerly allied with Los Pachencia but that the two groups have now become rivals; they are fighting for control of drug routes from the city of Santa Marta (InSight Crime 29 June 2020). *Semana*, a Colombia-based magazine (LJR 3 Dec. 2020), similarly reports that the two groups have been in a territorial dispute over the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta region (*Semana* 17 June 2019).

For further information on the Gulf Clan, including on its structure, see Response to Information Request COL200218 of May 2020.

3. Los Pachencia

According to sources, Los Pachencia [also known as the Conquering Self-Defence Forces of the Sierra Nevada (Autodefensas Conquistadoras de la Sierra Nevada, ACSN) (InSight Crime 29 June 2020; BLU Radio 2 Mar. 2020)], is a gang involved in drug trafficking in the Sierra Nevada region (InSight Crime 29 June 2020; *Semana* 17 June 2019; BLU Radio 2 Mar. 2020) and also has a presence in "key drug trafficking routes throughout the Caribbean" (InSight Crime 29 June 2020). According to BLU Radio, a Colombian radio station (iVoox n.d.) owned by Caracol Next (Caracol Next n.d.), the Defence Minister of Colombia states that, along with the Gulf Clan and La Silla, Los Pachencia members are among the [translation] "most wanted criminals in Magdalena department, as well as the main murderers and drug traffickers in the Caribbean region" (BLU Radio 4 Jan. 2021).

3.1 Areas of Operation

Sources indicate that Los Pachenca operate out of the city of Santa Marta (InSight Crime 30 Oct. 2020; Colombia Reports 5 June 2019). A June 2019 article by Colombia Reports states that the gang controls "much" of the criminal activity in Santa Marta (Colombia Reports 5 June 2019). However, *Semana* stated in June 2019 that authorities have [translation] "pushed" Los Pachenca into the mountains of Magdalena, although it continues to have a presence in the rural areas of Santa Marta (*Semana* 17 June 2019). An article from October 2020 by InSight Crime reports that Los Pachenca "lost its hold" on drug smuggling out of Santa Marta after "allied trafficker" Elkin Javier López Torres, known as La Silla, "turned himself over to authorities" in December 2019 (InSight Crime 30 Oct. 2020).

Colombia Reports states that, as of 2019, Los Pachenca controlled "much of the dru[g] trafficking routes" between the departments of Córdoba and La Guajira (Colombia Reports 3 Sept. 2020). *Vanguardia*, a Colombian newspaper based in Bucaramanga, states that Los Pachenca [translation] "reportedly have control" from Minca to Mingueo in La Guajira department (*Vanguardia* 29 Feb. 2020). *El Herald*o, a Colombian newspaper based in Barranquilla (*El Herald*o n.d.), reports that, according to the police chief in La Guajira, Los Pachenca engage in drug trafficking in the departments of Atlántico, Magdalena, and La Guajira (*El Herald*o 28 Sept. 2020). According to the October 2020 article by InSight Crime, Los Pachenca "coordinate the transport of cocaine" between Catatumbo and Magdalena Medio (InSight Crime 30 Oct. 2020). An alert released by the Office of the Ombudsman with information [translation] "current" as of September 2018 states that Los Pachenca continue to expand into the towns of Aracataca, Fundación, and Zona Bananera (Colombia 30 Oct. 2019, 29).

3.2 Relationships with Other Groups

The June 2020 article by InSight Crime states that Los Pachenca have lost "many" of their "top leader[s]" to "repeated military and police assaults" (InSight Crime 29 June 2020). Similarly, BLU Radio reports that 51 of Los Pachenca's 81 members have [translation] "already been captured," adding that the group is "seeking alliances with other armed organizations" to "strengthen" itself (BLU Radio 17 July 2020).

According to the June 2019 *Semana* article, the Gulf Clan has [translation] "apparently" reached out to Los Pachenca to negotiate its entry into the Santa Marta-Sierra Nevada region to access ports for trafficking (*Semana* 17 June 2019). An InSight Crime article, also published in June 2019, reports that the Gulf Clan "outsourced the guarding of drug shipments" to Los Pachenca; however, this relationship was "ultimately severed" (InSight Crime 11 June 2019). An article from October 2020 by *El Espectador* reports that the Gulf Clan is [translation] "proceeding with a plan" to "put [Los Pachenca] out of business" (*El Espectador* 29 Oct. 2020).

4. ELN

Sources state that the ELN is Colombia's last ["Marxist" (Colombia Reports 3 Sept. 2020)] guerrilla group (International Crisis Group 22 Jan. 2019; Colombia Reports 3 Sept. 2020). According to an October 2020 article by InSight Crime, the ELN is "the most powerful criminal group in Colombia" and "one of the principal organized crime players in the Americas" (InSight Crime 27 Oct. 2020).

Sources report that the ELN has "around 2,500 fighters" (InSight Crime 27 Oct. 2020) or 4,000–5,000 members (FIP 28 Jan. 2020) or an "estimated" 3,000 armed members, "mainly in the countryside" (Colombia Reports 3 Sept. 2020). International Crisis Group adds that the ELN has a "much larger militia structure" beyond its "full-time guerilla fighters," made up of members that live "as civilians," gathering intelligence, carrying out "small-scale attacks" and "coerc[ing]" and coordinating with "certain local social movements" (International Crisis Group 22 Jan. 2019). According to sources, the ELN's "extensive clandestine networks" (AQ [26 Jan. 2021]) or [translation] "low-visibility" organizational structure (FIP 28 Jan. 2020) make the group "resilient to military pressure" (AQ [26 Jan. 2021]) or "allow them to respond to State offensives" (FIP 28 Jan. 2020).

Sources report that the ELN gives its units (International Crisis Group 22 Jan. 2019) or front commanders (InSight Crime 27 Oct. 2020) significant autonomy (International Crisis Group 22 Jan. 2019; InSight Crime 27 Oct. 2020). International Crisis Group states that units follow "general guidelines set by the national-level leadership" (International Crisis Group 22 Jan. 2019). However, according to WOLA, the group's "loos[e] confederat[ion]" means it can "take a long time to reach consensus on policies and strategies" (WOLA 12 Apr. 2020).

4.1 Areas of Operation

Sources indicate that the ELN operates in "at least" half of the departments in Colombia, as well as along the Venezuelan border (AQ [26 Jan. 2020]; InSight Crime 27 Oct. 2020), especially in the Arauca and Vichada departments (InSight Crime 27 Oct. 2020). Sources state that the ELN also operates [in the "major cities" (AQ [26 Jan. 2020]; InSight Crime 27 Oct. 2020)] and along the Pacific Coast (AQ [26 Jan. 2020]; InSight Crime 27 Oct. 2020; HRW 10 Feb. 2021, 30), where it has "strongholds" in Chocó, Cauca, Valle del Cauca, and Nariño (InSight Crime 27 Oct. 2020). Sources report that the group has expanded into Venezuela (AQ [26 Jan. 2020]; InSight Crime 27 Oct. 2020) and operates in parts of Ecuador and Guyana as well (AQ [26 Jan. 2020]). According to an April 2021 article by *El Espectador*,

the ELN has a [translation] "strong influence" in Cauca as well as along the coast in departments such as Bolívar and Sucre (*El Espectador* 19 Apr. 2021). The same source further states that in Cauca, the José María Becerra and Manuel Vásquez Castaño fronts [translation] "mainly" have a presence in the towns of Argelia, Santander de Quilichao, Caldono, Caloto, La Sierra, and Timbiquí (*El Espectador* 19 Apr. 2021). According to a February 2021 report by Human Rights Watch (HRW), the ELN operates in Catatumbo, North Cauca, Bajo Cauca (Antioquia), and Arauca (HRW 10 Feb. 2021, 30, 40, 54, 65).

WOLA states that the ELN "appears to be more oriented toward entrenching itself and 'resisting' in a few regions, rather than expanding territory or taking over the state" (WOLA 12 Apr. 2020). The Institute for Peace and Development Studies (Instituto de Estudios para el Desarrollo y la Paz, Indepaz), an NGO that promotes peacebuilding in Colombia (Indepaz n.d.), states that the ELN had a [translation] "rapid expansion" within the two years after the "withdrawal" and demobilization of the FARC, but it "does not have sufficient mid-level commanders for sustainable expansion" (Indepaz Jan. 2021, 12). According to Colombia Reports,

the ELN has been able to grow its territorial reach in the center and east of the country, but without the ability to impose guerrilla rule.

This has allowed the guerrillas to maintain a permanent presence in 136 of Colombia's approximately 1,100 municipalities and increase in temporary or transitory presence from 14 in 2018 to 71 in the first half of 2020. ...

The ELN's so-called Urban War Front has maintained presence in Colombia's largest cities, but has failed to gain support among non-violent sympathizers of the "Liberation Theology" propagated by the guerrillas. (Colombia Reports 4 Mar. 2021)

According to WOLA, the ELN has six "war fronts" in Arauca, Catatumbo, Magdalena Medio, Chocó, Cauca, and Nariño as follows:

- Eastern War Front (Frente de Guerra Oriental, FGO): in and around Arauca, including a "large presence" on the Venezuelan side of the border; the largest ELN front, "by some accounts making up more than half of all of the group's fighters"
- Northeastern War Front (Frente de Guerra Nororiental): in the Catatumbo region of Norte de Santander department as well as in "parts of" Cesar department and on the Venezuelan side of the border
- Western War Front (Frente de Guerra Occidental): "in and around" Chocó
- Southwestern War Front (Frente de Guerra Suroccidental): in "parts of" Cauca and Nariño
- Darío Ramírez Castro War Front (Frente de Guerra Darío Ramírez Castro): "in and around" the Magdalena Medio region; "believed to be the weakest of the ELN's regional fronts"
- Urban War Front (Frente de Guerra Urbano): in cities; "appears to be only semi-active" (WOLA 12 Apr. 2020).

The October 2020 article by InSight Crime reports that the ELN has the following seven "active" fronts in Colombia:

- Manuel Pérez Martínez Northeastern War Front (Frente de Guerra Nororiental Manuel Pérez Martínez, FGNO): Norte de Santander
- Northern War Front (Frente de Guerra Norte, FGN): La Guajira, Cesar, Magdalena and Atlántico
- Manuel Vásquez Castaño Eastern War Front (Frente de Guerra Oriental Manuel Vásquez Castaño, FGO) in Arauca, Boyacá and Casanare
- Jesús Darío Ramírez Castro War Front (Frente de Guerra Jesús Darío Ramírez Castro, FGJDR): Antioquia and Sur de Bolívar
- Omar Gomez Western War Front (Frente de Guerra Occidental Omar Gómez, FGO): Chocó and Risaralda
- Carlos Alberto Troches Zuleta Southwestern War Front (Frente de Guerra Suroccidental Carlos Alberto Troches Zuleta, FGSO): Nariño and Cauca
- Camilo Torres Restrepo National Urban War Front (Frente de Guerra Urbano Nacional Camilo Torres Restrepo, FGUN): main cities, including Medellín, Barranquilla, Bogotá, Popayán, Neiva, Cúcuta, Villa del Rosario, Bucaramanga, Barrancabermeja, Ibagué and Cali (InSight Crime 27 Oct. 2020).

4.2 Relationships with Other Groups

According to *Americas Quarterly* (AQ) [2], the "competitors" of the ELN are the Gulf Clan, the Popular Liberation Army (Ejército Popular de Liberación, EPL), the Los Rastrojos Cartel, Los Pelusos and "sometime[s]" FARC dissidents (AQ [26 Jan. 2021]). HRW reports that "in recent times" the ELN has

"often" fought with Los Rastrojos in the municipalities of Puerto Santander and Cúcuta (HRW 10 Feb. 2021, 40). InSight Crime indicates the ELN has also "engaged in a series of gun battles" in Venezuela, across the border from Puerto Santander (InSight Crime 30 Mar. 2020).

According to sources, the ELN and EPL have been fighting in Catatumbo since 2018 (Colombia Reports 3 Sept. 2020; HRW 10 Feb. 2021). According to the October 2020 InSight Crime article, the ELN has been "winning a long campaign" against the EPL in Catatumbo to "control major drug trafficking corridors" left after the FARC demobilized (InSight Crime 27 Oct. 2020). In a February 2021 report, HRW states that "[i]n the second half of 2020, fighting among them appeared to reach a halt as the ELN recovered its territory and EPL fighters moved closer to the border" (HRW 10 Feb. 2021, 40).

According to *El Tiempo*, a Colombian newspaper based in Bogotá, the ELN has allied with the Caparrapos to [translation] "attack" the Gulf Clan in Bajo Cauca in order to gain territory (*El Tiempo* 21 Apr. 2019). A March 2021 article by Colombia Reports similarly states in Antioquia the ELN has "reportedly teamed up" with Los Caparrapos, who have been "at war" with the Gulf Clan, thus allowing the ELN to "expand" its territory (Colombia Reports 4 Mar. 2021). The June 2021 article by InSight Crime indicates that the ELN has a "strategic, though fragile, localized allianc[e]" with the Caparrapos, although it "seem[s] to be temporary in nature [and] based on accomplishing specific mutually beneficial goals" (InSight Crime 2 June 2021).

Sources indicate that the ELN's territorial control is ["fiercely" (Colombia Reports 4 Mar. 2021)] disputed by groups such as the Gulf Clan along the Pacific Coast (Colombia Reports 4 Mar. 2021) or in Chocó, eastern Antioquia, Cauca, and "occasionally" Nariño (WOLA 12 Apr. 2020). Sources state that in Chocó, the ELN is fighting the Gulf Clan (HRW 13 Jan. 2021; InSight Crime 27 Oct. 2020) for "control of territories ... especially the border with Panama and the Darién Gap" (InSight Crime 27 Oct. 2020).

AQ reports that the ELN "sometime[s] allies" with and sometimes competes with FARC dissident groups (AQ [26 Jan. 2020]). Similarly, the October 2020 article by InSight Crime indicates that the ELN has "complex relations with various factions of the ex-FARC Mafia," and has "fought against and allied itself with various dissident FARC factions" in Colombia and Venezuela (InSight Crime 27 Oct. 2020). The March 2021 article by Colombia Reports indicates that the ELN "recruited some militia members or external collaborators from the FARC, especially in Chocó and ... towards Norte de Santander" (Colombia Reports 4 Mar. 2021). The same source further states that the ELN has "apparently" been able to expand in northeast Norte de Santander and Arauca "thanks to reported alliances with rearmed guerrillas" of the FARC's 33rd and 10th fronts (Colombia Reports 4 Mar. 2021). According to Colombia Reports, in southwest Colombia, which has "more than two dozen FARC dissident groups," "stable alliances" have become "complicated" (Colombia Reports 4 Mar. 2021).

5. FARC Dissident Groups

In June 2019, Reuters reported that, according to a "confidential military intelligence report," there are 31 FARC dissident groups, which operate in areas where coca is grown or gold is mined illegally (Reuters 5 June 2019). A January 2020 article by *Semana* indicates that there are 23 FARC dissident groups in 85 municipalities (*Semana* 8 Jan. 2020). Anadolu Agency (AA), a state-run news agency in Turkey (BBC 8 Oct. 2018), cites the Deputy Director of the Peace and Reconciliation Foundation (Fundación Paz y Reconciliación, Pares) [3] as stating that the FARC dissidents are "deployed" in 101 towns (AA 19 Aug. 2020). A report from October 2020 by HRW, citing a survey by the Colombian think tank Conflict Responses, indicates that there are 25 FARC dissident groups in operation "throughout the country" (HRW 22 Oct. 2020).

Sources report the following regarding the number of FARC dissidents:

- "around" 3,000 combatants (InSight Crime 11 Nov. 2019) or
- "at least" 1,800 former FARC members with 600 "new recruits" (*Semana* 8 Jan. 2020) or
- "approximately" 1,600 with "perhaps" 600–800 "new recruits with no guerilla background," according to Pares (WOLA 24 Apr. 2020) or
- 2,500–2,600 "fighters in arms" with 1,800–2,000 "'part-time'" members living in cities and providing support, according to government estimates (HRW 22 Oct. 2020) or
- "around" 2,500 (Freedom House 3 Mar. 2021).

According to WOLA, citing Pares and *Semana*, a "majority" of dissidents are "loosely confederated into two national structures," with 11 groups clustered around the 1st Front (also known as the Eastern Bloc) and 4 groups clustered around the Segunda Marquetalia (WOLA 24 Apr. 2020). Sources report that the 1st Front is "arguably the strongest" and "most important" (InSight Crime 13 July 2019) or the "biggest" (Colombia Reports 3 Sept. 2020) of the ex-FARC groups (Colombia Reports 3 Sept. 2020; InSight Crime 13 July 2019). However, an article from April 2020 by WOLA indicates that, although the 1st Front is larger, the Segunda Marquetalia is the "best-known" ex-FARC dissident group and has the "highest profile" (WOLA 24 Apr. 2020).

According to InSight Crime, ex-FARC groups "do not necessarily have a relationship, nor do they make up a structured organization" (InSight Crime 27 Oct. 2019). HRW similarly reports that it "appears inaccurate to treat all FARC dissident groups as a single group" given that "many ... operate independently" (HRW 22 Oct. 2020). The same source found, based on interviews with local experts and journalists regarding three dissident groups within the same umbrella organization, that the groups "appea[r] to have different internal rules" (HRW 22 Oct. 2020). WOLA also states that dissidents "vary widely in the solidity of their command and control, their actual control of territory, and the extent to which they resemble armies more than gangs" (WOLA 24 Apr. 2020).

5.1 Areas of Operation

According to InSight Crime, ex-FARC groups "have a presence in at least 19 departments," including Nariño, Putumayo, Cauca, Valle del Cauca, Chocó, Antioquia, Arauca, Meta, Caquetá, Guaviare, Tolima, Huila, Amazonas, Vichada, and Guainía, as well as along the borders with Venezuela, Brazil, and Ecuador (InSight Crime 27 Oct. 2019). According to the April 2020 WOLA report, the two national dissident networks groups are "establishing presences" or "linking up with existing dissident groups" in "several" regions, including Nariño, Cauca, Putumayo, Antioquia, Arauca, and Catatumbo (WOLA 24 Apr. 2020). The September 2020 article by Colombia Reports states that groups have "rearmed" in Antioquia, Arauca, and Santander (Colombia Reports 3 Sept. 2020).

According to WOLA, ex-FARC groups operating in Nariño include the Oliver Sinisterra Front, the United Guerrillas of the Pacific (Guerrillas Unidas del Pacífico, GUP), and 30th Front (WOLA 24 Apr. 2020). Sources state that the following fronts operate in Putumayo: the 32nd (WOLA 24 Apr. 2020); 48th, 36th and 18th (InSight Crime 27 Oct. 2019). InSight Crime reports that the 36th, 18th, and 48th fronts operate in Antioquia (InSight Crime 27 Oct. 2019). According to sources, the 10th Front operates in Arauca (WOLA 24 Apr. 2020; Colombia Reports 26 Mar. 2021). Sources indicate that the following operate in Cauca:

- Jaime Martínez and Dabogerto Ramos mobile columns (*El Espectador* 19 Apr. 2021; HRW 10 Feb. 2021, 31);
- the Frente Carlos Patiño [also known as the 30th Front (WOLA 24 Apr. 2020)] (*El Espectador* 19 Apr. 2021); and
- the "'Nueva o Segunda Marquetalia'" (*El Espectador* 19 Apr. 2021).

5.1.1 1st Front Dissident Group

A July 2019 article by InSight Crime reports that the 1st Front "rarely confront[s] the armed forces and the civilian population," and uses "[S]tate weakness and corruption" to "hide [its] actions" (InSight Crime 13 July 2019). The January 2020 article by *Semana* indicates that 1st Front dissident groups are [translation] "mainly" located in Meta, Guaviare, Arauca, Caquetá, and part of Putumayo (*Semana* 8 Jan. 2020). The July 2019 InSight Crime article states that the 1st Front has "focused on consolidating its control" in Meta, Guaviare, and Vaupés and on "controlling drug trafficking routes" to Vichada, Guainía, and has gotten more involved in transporting cocaine from Caquetá "through the north of Amazonas and into Brazil" (InSight Crime 13 July 2019). Small Wars Journal, a website whose founders "come from the Marine Corps" and is run by the non-profit Small Wars Foundation that aims to "facilitat[e] the exchange of information" among "practitioners, thought leaders, and students of [s]mall [w]ars" (Small Wars Journal n.d.), states that the 1st Front operates in Meta, Guaviare, Vaupés, and Guainía (Small Wars Journal 17 Jan. 2020).

5.1.2 Segunda Marquetalia Dissident Group

According to sources, the Segunda Marquetalia is composed of the 19th, 41st and 59th fronts (InSight Crime 16 Mar. 2021; Diaspora Tribune 22 Mar. 2021), as well as the Danilo García command and the Bertulfo Álvarez commission (Diaspora Tribune 22 Mar. 2021). InSight Crime states that the 18th Front, [which separated from the 36th (InSight Crime 7 Oct. 2019)], has also joined the Segunda Marquetalia (InSight Crime 18 May 2021). Sources report that the Segunda Marquetalia operates "on the Caribbean coast" and in Magdalena Medio (Diaspora Tribune 22 Mar. 2021) or in Magdalena, Cesar, Atlántico, Córdoba, Sucre, and Bolívar, with a "special focus" on the Montes de María region (InSight Crime 16 Mar. 2021). According to InSight Crime, it operates in Antioquia, in Arauca and in southern Córdoba (InSight Crime 18 May 2021). According to sources, the Segunda Marquetalia also has a presence in Cauca (Colombia 25 May 2021; HRW 10 Feb. 2021, 31), as well as "parts of" San Vicente del Cagúan along the border with Meta (HRW 10 Feb. 2021, 61).

5.2 Relationships with Other Groups

WOLA states that dissident groups "often" fight with paramilitary groups and "other dissidents" (WOLA 24 Apr. 2020). According to an article from October 2019 by InSight Crime,

[a]s a result of the multiple groups that make up the ex-FARC mafia, it is not possible to talk about just alliances and enemies given that this depends on the characteristics of each one of the groups and the areas in which they operate.

... [T]hese structures create alliances with other criminal groups that allow them to maintain strategic control of [e]ach zone, as well as their respective illegal econom[ies].

...

However, these alliances can be of a diverse nature and with more than one armed group[,] ... for example the [ELN], los Urabeños, los Caparrapos, [or] other dissident ex-FARC mafia elements.

In the same vein, the disputes that have occurred since the emergence of these groups also revolve around the struggle to preserve or expand their control of the country's strategic locations. This is the case of the confrontations that different ex-FARC mafia structures have had with members of the [ELP], in the departments of Valle del Cauca and Norte de Santander, particularly in the region of Catatumbo. (InSight Crime 27 Oct. 2019)

A July 2019 article by InSight Crime states that the 1st Front has "allied" with the 14th, 15th, 17th, 27th, 33rd, 40th, 42nd, 43rd and 44th fronts (InSight Crime 13 July 2019). However, a May 2020 article by the same source indicates that "[d]espite efforts to unify them, the ex-FARC Mafia are not a single criminal force" (InSight Crime 19 May 2020). A March 2021 article by the Diaspora Tribune, an English-language socialist news organization that covers Colombia (Diaspora Tribune n.d.), states that "commanders have not succeeded in uniting" the "rival" FARC factions (Diaspora Tribune 22 Mar. 2021).

According to the April 2020 article by WOLA, the 36th Front dissidents, the Gulf Clan, the Caparrapos, and the ELN are "contest[ing]" the Bajo Cauca region and southern part of Córdoba (WOLA 24 Apr. 2020). The June 2021 article by InSight Crime states that "elements of the ex-FARC Mafia have formed "strategic, though fragile, localized alliances" and that the 18th and 36th fronts in particular have allied with Los Caparrapos, though these alliances "seem to be temporary" and "based on accomplishing specific mutually beneficial goals" (InSight Crime 2 June 2021). The July 2019 article by InSight Crime reports that the 1st Front has allied itself with the Gulf Clan in Guaviare (InSight Crime 13 July 2019). However, TRAC states that the FARC and the Gulf Clan have been "long-time rival[s]" (TRAC n.d.a).

WOLA states, based on interviews with "local analysts," that it is "uncommon for dissident groups to fight the ELN" (WOLA 24 Apr. 2020). Sources state that FARC dissidents and the ELN "appear to be honoring" (WOLA 24 Apr. 2020) or have "maintained" (Colombia Reports 26 Mar. 2021) a "non-aggression pact" along the border with Venezuela (WOLA 24 Apr. 2020; Colombia Reports 26 Mar. 2021). According to a May 2021 article by InSight Crime, leaders from the ELN and 18th Front met on "two occasions" in Venezuela to coordinate shipments of cocaine between the two countries (InSight Crime 18 May 2021). According to the Fundación Ideas para la Paz (FIP), an "independent think tank" founded by "a group of Colombian businessmen" that seeks to contribute to peace in Colombia (FIP n.d.), Iván Márquez [leader of Segunda Marquetalia] and other FARC dissident leaders met with ELN commanders [translation] "to explore a possible alliance," although there are "no signals that this accord is advancing" (FIP 28 Jan. 2020, 29).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

Notes

[1] The coalition of Colombian human rights organizations included the Francisco Isaías Cifuentes Human Rights Network of South-Western Colombia (Red de Derechos Humanos del Sur Occidente de Colombia "Francisco Isaías Cifuentes"), the Cauca Network for Life and Human Rights (Red por la Vida y los Derechos Humanos del Cauca), the Committee for Solidarity with Political Prisoners (Comité de Solidaridad con los Presos Políticos), and the Organizations of the Cauca Department Regional Roundtable on Guarantees (Organizaciones de la Mesa Territorial de Garantías en el Departamento del Cauca) (Organizaciones de la mesa territorial Jan. 2021, 4).

[2] *Americas Quarterly* (AQ) is a not-for-profit publication covering business, politics and culture with a focus on Latin America, published by the Americas Society (AS) / Council of the Americas (COA) (AQ n.d.). The AS is a forum that aims to "foster an understanding of the contemporary political, social, and economic issues confronting Latin America, the Caribbean and Canada," while the COA is an international membership organization for businesses committed to "economic and social development, open markets, the rule of law, and democracy" (AS/COA n.d.).

[3] Fundación Paz y Reconciliación (Pares) is a non-profit NGO with offices in Bogotá and Buenaventura that [translation] "generates knowledge and social interventions through research and analysis" in areas including security, internal armed conflict, post-conflict, and criminality, to influence public opinion and public and private decision-makers (Pares n.d.). The organization also aims to support "peacebuilding, national reconciliation and the strengthening of democracy" (Pares n.d.).

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Criminal groups (2019 - June
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