

Urban drug markets and zones of impunity in Colombia

The assumptions and the facts behind the retail drug trade and the responses to it

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On 1 April 2013, after visiting the *Bronx*, one of Bogotá's main enclaves of crime and drug dealing, President Juan Manuel Santos announced that the authorities would be dismantling 24 drug outlets in 20 cities around the country in the space of 60 days. "War unleashed against Colombia's 'ollas' (drug dens)" was the headline in one of the country's leading newspapers.³ One year later, the national news channels broadcast images of bulldozers literally demolishing the buildings where the drug dens functioned, in joint operations by the police and the public prosecutor's office. The measure looked like a publicity coup in the midst of the election contest, but several organisations and analysts warned that it would do nothing to solve a problem that has multiple causes.

Those narratives and explanations that place the local drug market alongside violence and crime – especially in urban settings – have gained strength in the last decade. This is despite the fact that drug trafficking in cities and the influence of criminal organisations in the local urban economy is nothing new. On the contrary, although the major trafficking networks have given priority to exporting the drugs produced in the country, they have also shown interest in the local market, which has allowed them to gain control of urban territory.

The retail drug trade has been identified by the authorities as a strategic priority, under the hypothesis that it is one of the main triggers of violence and crime, as well as a



Conclusions and Recommendations

- The demolition of the zones of impunity has an immediate impact on the retail drug trade, but this is not sustainable unless the presence of the state is re-established and communities are reintegrated into the legal sphere.
- Interventions by the police are not sustainable in the long term because of the large number of officers that need to be sent into a zone of impunity. The state's interventions will only displace the activities temporarily, allowing the illegal order to continue to perform its function of organising society, to the detriment of citizens' security and quality of life.
- In order to build and restore the culture of legality in these areas, the conditions needed to incorporate these territories into the city must be put in place. This includes developing alternatives for the weakest links in the chain and bringing legal action against the criminal organisations that have the capacity to create zones of impunity.
- The impact of police action will only be temporary unless it is accompanied by the political will in central and local government to replace the illegal order with inclusive urban development.

response by the criminal organisations to their loss of influence in global markets. How valid is this argument? The interaction of local drug markets with violence and crime is complex and goes in more than one direction. Furthermore, at least in the case of Colombia's cities, it is very difficult to separate it off from other types of criminal economies.

The aim of this briefing is to put to the test the starting points and assumptions underlying the definition of this 'new' threat, and provide an overview of local drug markets and their relationship with violence and crime in Colombia's cities. It will therefore analyse recent developments in criminal activity, how the criminal organisations have adapted in response to interventions by the state, and the forces involved in shaping the local drug market. In particular, it will analyse the retail drug trade in two of Colombia's cities, Cali and Barranquilla, in order to connect this illegal market to the presence of criminal organisations and high-impact crimes.⁴ These two cases will provide important evidence regarding the spatial dynamics of the retail drug trade and its implications for urban security. Finally, the main findings will be contrasted with government proposals to tackle the problem, offering some lessons learned and recommendations.

The retail drug trade as a threat to security: the assumptions and the evidence

One recent study⁵ identifies two factors that have influenced the linking of micro-trafficking with what it calls the "explosion of urban violence". The first is the increase in drug use (demand) and the second is the retail drug trade as a response to the loss of international drug markets. In addition to these aspects, it is relevant to mention the ways in which criminal organisations have adapted to changing conditions – what

we will refer to here as the *rationality* of organised crime – as this is what largely determines the use of violence.⁶ Regarding this, one key aspect is the assumption that larger structures are involved in local drug markets.

As far as drug use is concerned, the National Study on the Use of Psychoactive Substances in Colombia⁷ (which refers to urban areas) shows an increase in the prevalence of use during people's lifetime for illegal drugs in general (including marijuana, cocaine, *basuco*,⁸ ecstasy and heroin), rising from 8.8 per cent in 2008 to 12.2 per cent in 2013. Reported drug use in 2013 also increased, from 2.6 per cent to 3.6 per cent.

To estimate the size of the demand, it is necessary to distinguish between different types of users: those who experiment with drugs, those who use them occasionally, and those whose use is habitual and who come to develop an addiction. Various analyses show that this third type of user is not just the one that accounts for most of the demand, but is also unaffected by price changes.⁹ According to the study mentioned before, in 2013 about 484,000 people in Colombia (57 per cent of all users) practise this type of drug use, constituting the large share of the domestic market. The estimate for 2008 was 298,000 people in this category, so there has been a notable increase.¹⁰

The evidence shows that the demand for drugs in Colombia has increased, as has the number of users with higher levels of dependency, who also use larger quantities of drugs. One relevant debate here is how much of the increase is due to drugs being more available and easier to access in the local market. According to the 2013 survey, 50 per cent of the population believe that it is easy to get hold of marijuana. The equivalent numbers are 31 per cent in the case of cocaine, 30 per cent in the case of *basuco* (a kind of crack) and 23 per cent in the case of ecstasy.¹¹ These percentages have increased

Table I - Key processes associated with the retail drug trade¹²

Process	Description of the purpose of the process
Buying the substance (several kilos). The buying and transport of these small quantities is what is known as 'micro-trafficking'.	The purpose of this stage is to acquire the substance demanded by users. It may be done in the places where the drug is produced, which may be rural areas. The substance may also be bought from a single supplier who buys it wholesale from the production site.
Manufacturing the product. Soaking, adulterating, packaging with the organisation's logo, organising dispatches to the warehousing sites.	The purpose of this stage is to reduce the concentration of the substance and thus increase the number of doses. Branding is used to signal the organisation's monopoly control of certain urban areas.
Stocking the warehouse. The warehouse – where large quantities are stored – is relatively near to the sales outlet.	The purpose of this stage is to have enough stock for the sales outlet to meet the demand from users, which may fluctuate by the day, by the week or by the month.
Planning the vendors' shifts and handing out the 'bomba' – a certain number of measured doses counted out to be sold during the shift.	The purpose of this stage is to organise the vendors' work on the street and keep a tally of sales.
Going to the places where psychoactive substances are sold. These places may be a public space or somewhere open to the public.	The purpose of this stage is to facilitate the encounter between sellers and buyers.
Transaction between seller and buyer.	These two processes are what is known as the 'retail drug sale'.
Use. The vendor may provide a space near the sales point for the drug to be used. This happens in areas with high levels of urban and social decay.	
Handing over the money from each shift's sales.	The purpose of this stage is to manage the cash income and make the relevant payments to those involved in producing it. The capitalist entrepreneur pays the workers and invests in the next operational cycle to keep the business going.

Source: Adapted from the book by Yofre Cortes and Rodolfo Parra, *Narcomenudeo*, Bogotá, 2013

slightly since 2008 (48 per cent for marijuana, 28 per cent for cocaine and 20 per cent for ecstasy),¹³ but by much less than the increase in the number of users. In other words, there is no indication that the growth in the demand is correlated with drugs being easier to access. This casts doubt on the assumption that the retail drug trade is responsible for increasing use. Further analysis is needed of other social and cultural dynamics that may be influencing this trend.

The next assumption is that the domestic market is a substitute for the export market as participation by Colombian criminal organisations in the latter has fallen. Most analyses of this compare the revenue earned abroad with the profits obtained in the retail drug trade, which has a series of methodological implications. Such an analysis would require differentiating between types of drugs – including differing degrees of purity – and looking at profit margins at each stage of the chain (depending on the market they are destined for). For the time being, there is sufficient evidence to state that the local drug market generates significant income for the criminal organisations.

According to the Ministry of Justice and Law, the estimated amount of gross income from the marijuana and cocaine consumed in Colombia (in 2012) is in the order of US\$139 million in the case of marijuana and US\$136 million in the case of cocaine.¹⁴ For *basuco*, the estimates made in a recent study by the Ideas for Peace Foundation (Fundación Ideas para la Paz – FIP) that applies a simulation model¹⁵ indicate that the income in Bogotá would be in the order of US\$250 million, in Cali US\$60 million and in Barranquilla US\$44 million.

So, there would be sufficient financial incentives to participate in the local market. Nevertheless, it is important to mention that the structures involved in the international traffic are different from those involved in

micro-trafficking or the retail drug trade. The organisational capacities required to export tons of cocaine to the United States or Europe are different from the capacities needed to sell small doses in a Colombian town or city. This is the reason why the organisations involved in one business or the other are different, although there may be connections between them. This casts doubt on the substitution assumption, not just due to the size of the market but because of the ability to shift from being a transnational trafficker to a local distributor.

The Table I below shows the main activities in the retail drug trade's value chain. The key processes are different from drug trafficking, most of the activities are out of sight of citizens and the authorities, and the retail drug trade requires coordination between many different players who have access to 'easy money'.

Leading on from this differentiation of the processes is the debate about the rationality of the criminal organisations and their capacity to adapt. Criminal rationality is understood as the improvement of the key processes of an organisation dedicated to the systematic infringement of criminal law for the purpose of earning income and profits. From this perspective, the organisations are the ones who learn; individuals do so as well, but their learning is appropriated by the network of collaborators. This ensures that knowledge and working routines do not disappear when one of the organisation's members dies or is arrested.

One study on this issue¹⁶ calls attention to the criminals' need to develop skills in order to be successful, i.e., to commit a crime and not be caught by the authorities. To get involved in a criminal activity it is necessary to have a minimum level of training and be aware of the divisions and specialisations involved in the work. This is the only way a criminal organisation can survive in competition with other criminal organisations and

withstand the pressure from the state. This takes into account that the criminal group is a multi-product enterprise, meaning that the capabilities needed to manage one value chain, such as the retail drug trade, can be used to control other sorts of legal goods and services.

Bearing this in mind, is it possible for organisations previously dedicated to international trafficking to transfer their skills so that they can handle the local market? This question is important in order to test the assumption that the crackdown on the larger criminal factions has led them to focus on the domestic market. The larger structures are understood to be those with the capacity to operate throughout the country – or much of it – as well as the capacity to export drugs.

The retail drug trade needs to be seen in its true dimensions, understanding that it is a criminal economy with a significant territorial component. This requires the creation of ‘zones of impunity’ to facilitate the illegal transactions associated with drug dealing and other criminal activities. The analysis of a number of Colombian cities carried out by FIP did not find evidence of any strong connections between the large drug trafficking organisations and the groups engaged in the retail drug trade.

There are indications from testimonies that some retail organisations have links with the groups known as Emerging Criminal Gangs (*Bandas Criminales Emergentes* - BACRIM). However, these tend to be relationships of affiliation and subordination, with the aim of ensuring continuity between the rural and the urban world so that the supply of drugs and the control of territory in certain critical areas of Colombia’s major cities can be guaranteed. These connections do not mean that there is a permanent contractual employment or commercial relationship that would secure the retail organisations’ loyalty to the large drug export networks in perpetuity. All these contracts seem to be open to review,

depending on changes in the composition of the drug trafficking power structure.

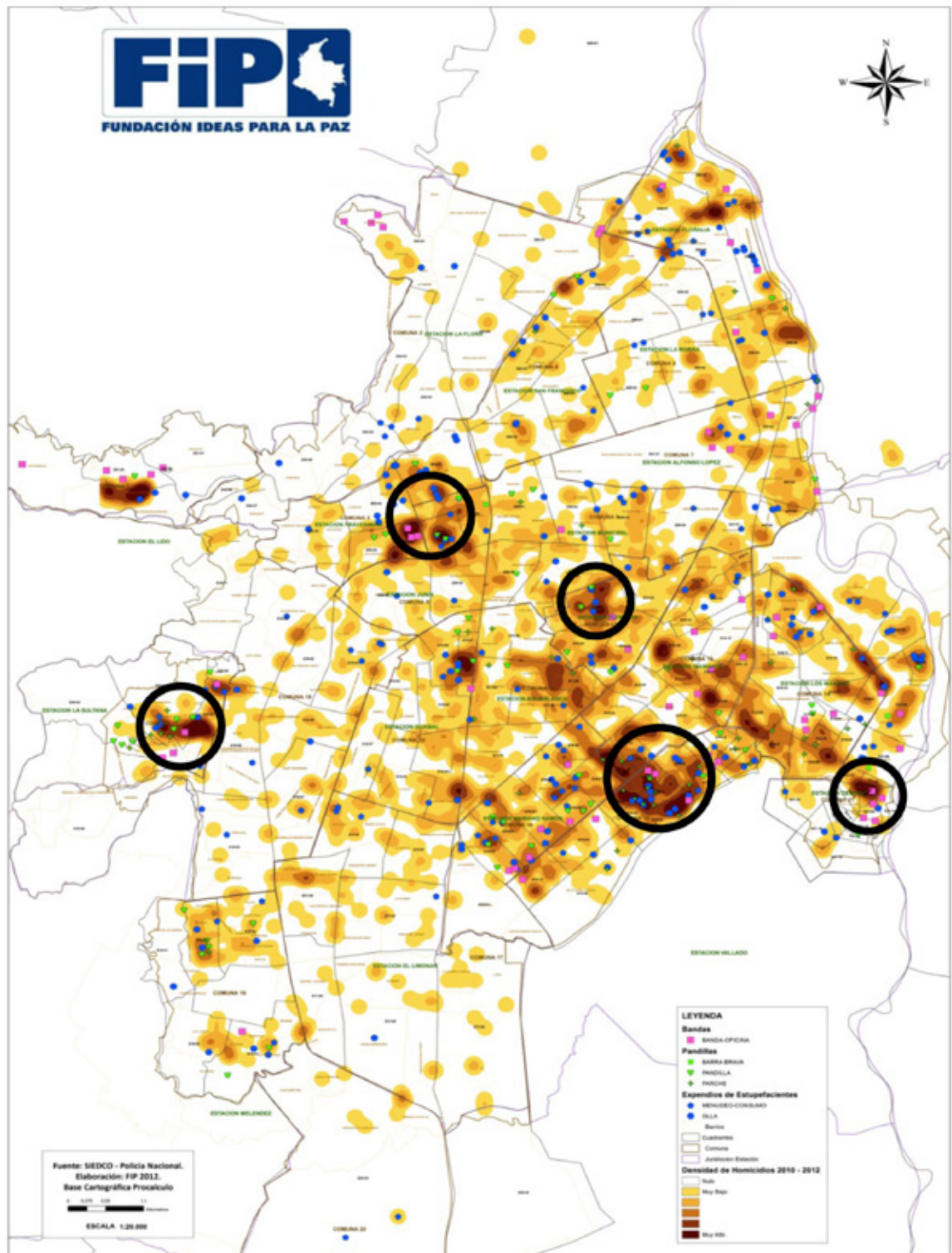
Therefore, in order to define the retail drug trade as a threat to security it would be necessary to analyse the different urban dynamics and understand local processes and the interaction between the different criminal factions. Although what goes on in Medellín, Bogotá, Cali or Barranquilla has some patterns in common, it can hardly be interpreted in the same terms as the export market being replaced by the local market, or as the trafficking groups influencing the sale of drugs in urban settings.

One key idea put forward by FIP in the study of the retail drug trade and violence in Colombia is the existence of ‘zones of impunity’. This concept allows the emergence and consolidation of local drug markets to be seen in terms of their interaction with the urban space and multiple forms of violence and crime. These zones are characterised by the existence of an illegal social order – where illegality is socially accepted – which allows crimes to be committed, including the sale of narcotics. These areas are part of a process of consolidation of urban and social decay that has required time and effort on the part of the criminal organisations based there, in full view of local authorities and governments that often refuse to intervene in these areas, and in some cases even participate in the illegal economies.

‘Zones of impunity’ in Cali and Barranquilla: the spatial link between high-impact crimes and the retail drug trade

Rather than seeking to offer an in-depth analysis of the retail drug trade in Cali and Barranquilla, this section takes two specific cases and uses them to observe the spatial link between the local drug market and high-impact crimes. The selection of these cases was not based on any specific criteria, but it

Map I - Narcotics sales outlets, criminal networks and gangs (2010), together with the density of murders in 2010-2012 in the city of Cali



does have the objective of calling attention to the implications of the retail drug trade in these two cities that have been marked in different ways by drug trafficking, in order to complement the discussion of more studied cases such as Medellín.

Cali is the capital of the department of Valle del Cauca on the Pacific side of Colombia. With a population of over 2,300,000, this city's links to drug trafficking go back a long way. The Cali Cartel predominated in the 1990s; after its structures were dismantled, it was replaced by the Norte del Valle Cartel, and more recently by the so-called Criminal Gangs. The city has suffered from endemic violence caused by various players and processes, with a murder rate of more than 70 per 100,000 inhabitants.

Since the time when the Rodríguez Orejuela brothers controlled the city at the head of the Cali Cartel, no one group has managed to impose its control over criminal activities.¹⁷ In contrast to the situation in Medellín, drug traffickers in Cali have not systematically used gangs as an armed force. There are currently about 134 gangs, most of them unconnected with the larger-scale criminal conflicts.

As far as the retail drug trade is concerned, police intelligence work has identified two critical neighbourhoods, El Calvario and Sucre, which are home to about 5,000 people. The two areas are controlled by the traffickers known as Papi John and Martha, who manage the trade in marijuana, *basuco* and, in smaller quantities, pills and heroin. According to the authorities, at least 150 people are engaged in selling marijuana and *basuco*.¹⁸ In addition, this organisation supplies drugs to different criminal groups operating in the district and to the so-called '*oficinas de cobro*'¹⁹ or coordination offices that have traditionally managed the sales outlets in Santa Helena, San Judas, La Isla and El Rodeo.

The Map I shows the spatial links between

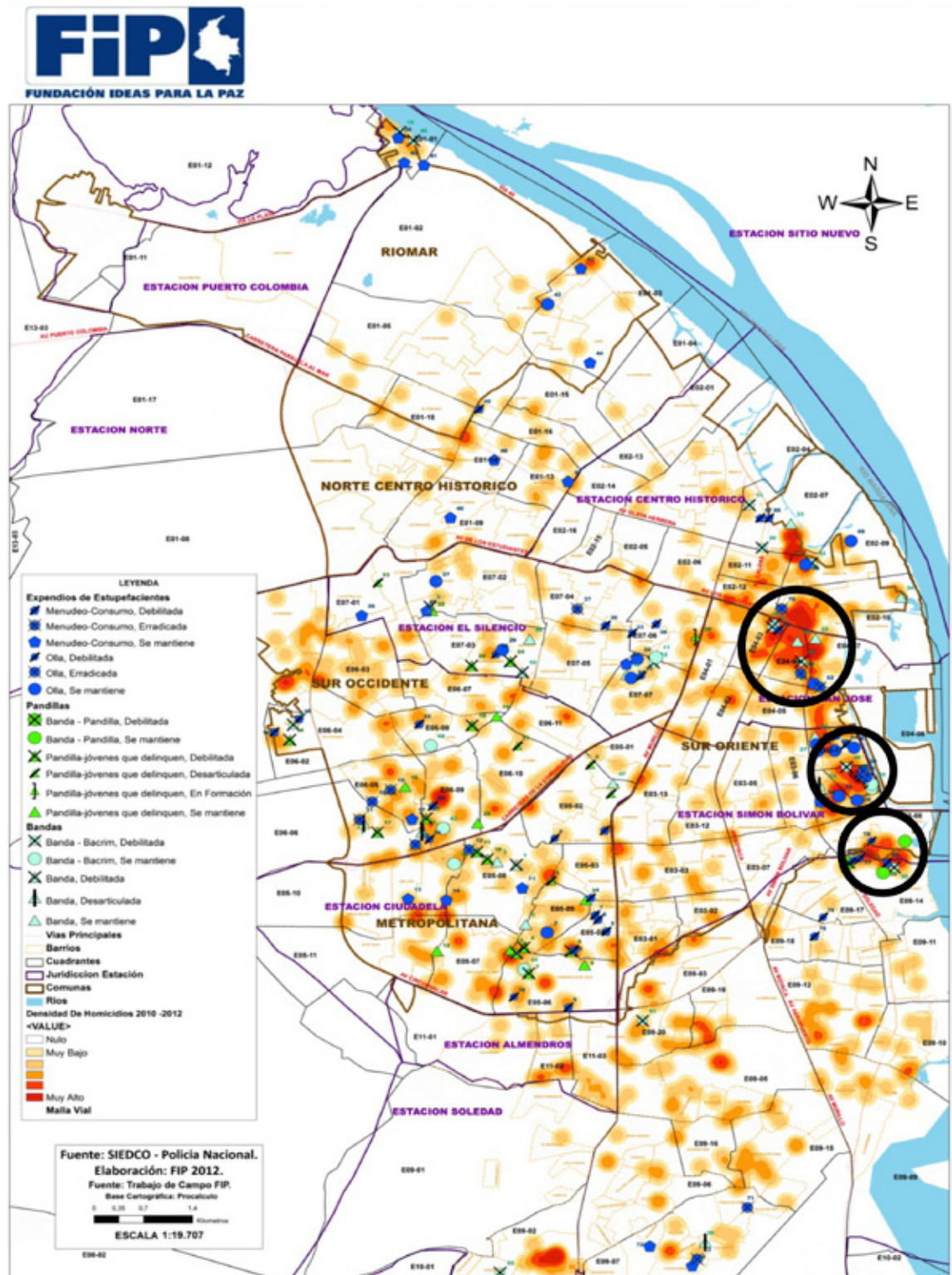
narcotics sales outlets (blue spots) and the presence of criminal networks (pink spots) and gangs (green triangles), together with the density of murders in the 2010-2012 period. The information on the so-called '*ollas*' and the location of the criminal structures was obtained from interviews with police assigned to each of the neighbourhoods.²⁰

As the map shows, the areas with a high density of murders are related to the areas with a large number of drug seizures and/or the presence of criminal networks or gangs. One thing worth highlighting is that when the year-on-year analysis was done for the 2010-2012 period, this spatial link remains over time. This shows this persistence of hotspots of violent death coinciding with areas where the local drug market is most intense. Another striking fact is that although there are some critical neighbourhoods with a high concentration of drug sales, these sites are spread all over the city. In addition, when the data on narcotics sales outlets was cross referenced with other high-impact crimes (such as different types of robbery), with very few exceptions no spatial coincidence was found.

In the areas of El Calvario and Sucre specifically, the situation of insecurity and low quality of life for the people who live there is critical. On the streets of these districts there are children prostituting themselves, pregnant women using drugs and addicts in a critical state of health. In addition, there are abandoned houses that have been taken over for the sale and use of narcotics. It is precisely in these neighbourhoods where the local drug market has focused above all on *basuco*. The authorities calculate that the sales outlets are taking in about US\$50,000 a month.

Barranquilla is a city on the Caribbean coast with a population of just over 1,200,000. Compared to Cali or Medellín, expressions of violence have been much more moderate in this city. Because it is a sea port, it has attracted the interest of illegal armed groups

Map II - Narcotics sales outlets, criminal networks and gangs (2012), together with the density of murders in 2010-2012 in the city of Barranquilla



and drug traffickers, and has become a strategic location for the export of drugs, the entry of supplies and arms, and asset laundering.²¹ With regard to the gangs, it is difficult to place them in time, but there is evidence that they were already strong in the mid-1980s. These gangs served as a source of recruits for larger groups. Bands of criminals mainly engaged in robbery and theft also operate there.

In 2012, more than 160 drug sales outlets could be found in the city. According to the authorities, most of the retail trade was controlled to begin with by the *Los Rastrojos* criminal gang. After the surrender of its top boss, alias Comba, its members put together a complex distribution system of their own.²² It is important to mention that the retail drug trade in the city is nothing new and is quite intense in some of its neighbourhoods.

The Map II shows the spatial link between the activities associated with the retail drug trade and the high density of murders – a link that has remained over time despite the weakening of the criminal networks and gangs. In this city, too, a spatial coincidence was found between drug seizures – the proxy variable for sales outlets – and personal injury as well as robbery with the use of force.

Analysis of the cases of Cali and Barranquilla, with the spatial concentration of drug sales outlets and their association with murder and other criminal activities in certain areas of the city, leads to the question: Why is the local drug market more intense in some areas than in others? The answer is directly linked to the concept of criminal rationality and learning applied to the construction of a social order that favours illegal activities.

As entities that seek to ensure their own survival, criminal organisations set out to create environments of impunity, with the aim of facilitating the buying and selling of psychoactive substances as well as the development of other sorts of transactions

related to illegal markets. This allows criminal economies to develop in a setting where illegality is socially accepted and, as a result, transactions no longer require extreme secrecy and discretion. When this is the case, transactions can happen in a public space, even under the noses of the authorities when certain basic conditions are met for cooperation between the legal and the illegal sphere.

It is worth noting that the creation of an environment of impunity for the sale of drugs requires a long-term process of planning and investment. A large-scale illegal project needs several criminal organisations that have an interest in fostering urban and social decay to work together. A criminal environment can only be created if the criminal organisations are able to replace the legal order of the state with an illegal order that favours the commission of crimes, the sale of narcotics among them. This replacement process takes years and in most cases requires a change in the resident population, something that may occur willingly or unwillingly.

Once the criminal organisations have managed to bring about the replacement of earlier residents by a like-minded population – meaning people who can participate in or tolerate the presence of an environment of illegality – they can proceed to concentrate the sale and use of drugs in the area. Thus, residents end up accepting the criminal social order and even start to participate in it. In this new context, the police are less able to enforce the law because illegal transactions are socially accepted. In a place where crime is socially functional, an arrest or a raid becomes a high-risk operation when the police do not enjoy superiority in numbers.

Once the area of impunity for illegal transactions is established, it becomes easier to maintain it over time. Some of the funds generated by various legal or illegal activities may be used to reduce the pressure from the authorities. One example of this may be the

Table II - Steps conventionally involved in consolidating a zone of impunity in an urban setting

Steps	The actions of criminal organisations	The actions of state institutions and society
1	Location of the area where narcotics transactions will be promoted.	System-wide ignorance of the sites where the sale and use of drugs is tending to concentrate in the city. Ignorance of the crime hot spots in the city.
2	Initial influx of organisations engaged in selling narcotics into the selected area.	
3	Distribution of streets and city blocks into areas of influence. This distribution may be a result of agreement between the criminal organisations or the use of force.	
4	Increase in the income received by the criminal organisations. This revenue is used to reduce coercion from the authorities by means of bribes or threats.	
5	Consolidation of patrolling by the criminal organisations in order to monitor changes in the social order and sound warnings about the presence of law enforcement agencies.	The authorities become aware that a 'tolerance zone' is being created. Both society and the authorities accept the patrolling by non-state actors and may even justify it as a measure that benefits local residents and pedestrians.
6	Expulsion of traditional residents from the selected area.	The local community and authorities learn to live with the zone of impunity. They may even enact legislation to protect the area controlled by the illegal players.
7	Replacement of the traditional residents by people who have an affinity with the activities of the criminal organisations.	
8	Influx of economic activities (both legal and illegal) that complement the sale and use of narcotics: recycling, car mechanics' workshops, sale of car parts, prostitution, installation of <i>oficinas de cobro</i> , sales of criminal services, etc.	The urban and social decay in the area is so marked that the local authorities plan to intervene.
9	Consolidation of a criminal authority (an individual or a group) with the capacity to collect taxes from the legal and illegal businesses in the area.	The authorities draw up plans for intervention in the tolerance zone but only the police have the operational capacity to carry it out.
10	Consolidation of impunity and the new social order in the occupied area.	The national police intervene but the rest of the local authorities lack a schedule of activities and responsibilities. Arrests are made. The illegal social order prevails.



bribes paid to different officials with policing roles, such as local politicians or government authorities responsible for enforcing land use laws. Some of these funds may also be used to reduce police pressure. Once the environment of impunity has been consolidated for many years, it is very costly for the state to intervene. The cost of intervention is so high that the state and society learn to live with this parallel social order that favours illegal activity.

The coexistence of the two social orders may even suggest that it is better not to disturb that world. When that happens, it can be affirmed that the criminal organisations have managed to instil in society's beliefs the idea that what is happening there is entirely unrelated to the rest of society. In the zones of impunity, the conditions are systematically created for this criminal order to be self-sustaining, starting with the systematic violation of the rights of children, thus guaranteeing a supply of new workers. Similarly, the most elemental norms of coexistence, such as those that prohibit violence within the home, are overturned. This is compounded by the transmission of rules that define what is a 'fair' bribe to

be paid to the authorities and, finally, the rules used to decide when someone must be murdered as a punishment for infringing the illegal order.

The Table II presents a model of how sites for the sale and use of psychoactive substances are conventionally created and consolidated. This model places emphasis on the rationality of criminal organisations, which set out to create an environment of impunity that will reduce the risk of arrest and prosecution. It also presents a set of actions and attitudes taken by the state and society at the local level in relation to the formation of these zones of impunity.

The emergence and consolidation of zones of impunity is directly related to what are known as hot spots. Crimes tend to concentrate in certain areas as a result of some specific conditions that make it easier to break the law. The hot spots tend to persist over time.²³

According to recent analyses, there is little evidence that police intervention in hot spots results in crime being displaced to other areas. On the contrary, there is strong



evidence that nearby areas also benefit from the results of police action in the hot spots. However, this happened when the state in addition to solve problems and reduce the opportunities for crime to be committed, also develop social interventions that aim to strengthen the communities living in these areas.²⁴

The Colombian government has made tackling the sites of the retail drug trade a priority, targeting police intervention at certain streets and neighbourhoods. As mentioned at the beginning of this briefing, President Santos has declared ‘war on the drug dens’, ordering the physical demolition of these sites. Accordingly, several of the areas of Cali and Barranquilla mentioned in this briefing²⁵ have been the target of such intervention, which has been accompanied by the arrest of hundreds of people. What has the result been?

Intervention in the *ollas*: the expected results of police action

What has been the result of this strategy? Although a full answer to this would require a systematic evaluation of the places targeted, the information available makes it possible to identify some impacts of the state’s intervention in these sites. In most

of these areas, what has happened is that people have been displaced to neighbouring districts which were not the target of the intervention.²⁶

One aspect worth highlighting is that alongside the larger *ollas* there are ‘satellite *ollas*’ which operate as zones of impunity on a smaller scale but have the potential to consolidate themselves as epicentres of the local drug market.²⁷ The reaction on the part of both the criminal organisations involved in drug dealing and the residents of these areas has been to move into the ‘satellite *ollas*’. In the city of Bogotá in the past, the intervention in El Cartucho, the country’s main ‘*olla*’, led not only to the springing up of new *cartuchitos* but also to the emergence of the *Bronx*, one of the epicentres of the local drug market in the city.²⁸

The available information indicates that the displacement effect is being repeated. In Cali, for example, when El Calvario was demolished, drug users moved to the Sucre neighbourhood, where there was a smaller *olla* that has now grown with the arrival of more than 300 homeless drug users. The same process is taking place in other areas of the city, where there are currently new attempts to reproduce the zones of impunity. Libardo Naranjo, president of the El Calvario Community Action Committee, does not see

the actions of the law enforcement agencies as having any more of a lasting impact than before: “When they (the police) were here it was good because there was peace in the neighbourhood. But then they went away and it just went back to the way it was before. They came here in May and they only stayed for about two months. The criminals went away while the police were here, but they’ve come back now, so nothing has changed.”²⁹

Conclusions

Police intervention in the hot spots is important, but insufficient if it is not accompanied by social interventions as well.³⁰ The demolition of these sites has an immediate impact on the retail drug trade, but this is not sustainable unless the presence of the state is re-established and communities are reintegrated into the legal sphere. It is also worth bearing in mind that while the intervention is taking place in these areas it is necessary to have a strategy for those neighbourhoods that have the capacity to absorb the illegal market.

Otherwise, the only result will be to displace the entire operation and even promote the strengthening of other zones of impunity, producing what is known as the ‘balloon effect’ at the local and city-wide level. It is also important to bear in mind the market’s capacity to adapt, which may involve shifting from distribution at fixed sites to itinerant retailing and home deliveries. The sale by home delivery arrangement has the potential to reduce open drug dealing and shrink the market in the street, with positive effects in terms of reducing the violent competition for sales outlets.³¹ However, it should be borne in mind that this change would only have an impact on some drugs, especially the higher-cost ones that are used by the middle and upper classes. In the case of *basuco*, for example, the impact of such a change would be minimal.

The intervention ordered by central government and led by the national police can be seen as a targeted action in a social environment that is densely interconnected and designed to maintain a criminal social order. This type of intervention only affects one dimension of the problem: the criminal offences that are committed in the areas controlled by organised crime. What is needed, however, is the participation of many different actors responsible for restoring the legal social order that had been supplanted.

Interventions by the police are also not sustainable in the long term because of the large number of officers that need to be sent into a zone of impunity. In short, the challenge for state institutions is to coordinate to counteract the coordination and long-term planning engaged in by criminal organisations. Otherwise, the state’s interventions will only displace the activities temporarily, allowing the illegal order to continue to perform its function of organising society, to the detriment of citizens’ security and quality of life.

In order to build and restore the culture of legality in these areas, the conditions needed to incorporate these territories into the city must be put in place. This includes developing alternatives for the weakest links in the chain and bringing legal action against the criminal organisations that have the capacity to create zones of impunity. Thus, it is a matter of reducing the harm done by the drug market to certain sectors of the community, not just from the point of view of health but also in terms of reducing the violence and crime associated with the illegal drug market. The impact of police action will only be temporary unless it is accompanied by the political will in central and local government to replace the illegal order with inclusive urban development.

Endotes

1. Researcher with Fundación Ideas para la Paz and the Universidad Externado de Colombia.
2. Global Fellow at the Woodrow Wilson Center (Washington DC) and Research Associate with Fundación Ideas para la Paz (Colombia). @ JCGarzonVergara. For more information about the author: <http://www.wilsoncenter.org/staff/juan-carlos-garz%C3%B3n>
3. El Espectador. (2013). Arrancó guerra contra las 'ollas' en Colombia. 2 April. Available at: <http://www.elespectador.com/noticias/nacional/arranco-guerra-contra-ollas-colombia-video-413656>
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6. Garzón, Juan Carlos. (2008). *Mafia&Co: La Red Criminal en México, Brasil y Colombia*. Bogotá: Fundación Seguridad y Democracia, Editorial Planeta.
7. Observatorio de Drogas, Ministerio de Justicia y del Derecho de Colombia. (2013). *Estudio Nacional de Consumo de Sustancias Psicoactivas en Colombia*. Bogotá.
8. *Basuco* is a low-cost drug similar to crack, made of cocaine residue processed using sulphuric acid and kerosene, among other substances.
9. RAND Corporation, (2014). *What America's Users Spend on Illegal Drugs: 2000-2010*, Washington D.C., Office of National Drug Control Policy.
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11. Observatorio de Drogas, Ministerio de Justicia y del Derecho de Colombia. (2013). *Estudio Nacional de Consumo de Sustancias Psicoactivas en Colombia*. Bogotá.
12. These are key activities within a particular type of criminal organisation. For these activities to take place also requires the availability of organisations or workers willing to use violence in order to enforce illegal contracts. Criminal coercion thus becomes a support activity.
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Briefing Series on Drug Markets and Violence

This briefing series on Drug Markets and Violence will address the complex interaction between the dynamics of an illicit market and the policies that are designed to repress it. The series will focus on local examples where violence is linked to the drugs trade, but not only. It will critically analyze the policy responses and law enforcement practices applied and recommend alternatives prioritising the reduction of violence.



Transnational Institute

Since 1996, the TNI Drugs & Democracy programme has been analysing the trends in the illegal drugs market and in drug policies globally. The programme has gained a reputation worldwide as one of the leading international drug policy research institutes and as a serious critical watchdog of UN drug control institutions, in particular the United Nations Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND), UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB).

TNI promotes evidence-based policies guided by the principles of harm reduction, human rights for users and producers, as well as the cultural and traditional uses of substances. The project seeks the reform of the current out-dated UN conventions on drugs, which were inconsistent from the start and have been surpassed by new scientific insights and new pragmatic policies that have proven to be successful.

For the past decade, the programme has maintained its main focus on developments in drug policy and its implication for countries in the South. The strategic objective is to contribute to a more integrated and coherent policy where drug control is regarded as a cross-cutting issue within the broader development goals of poverty reduction, public health promotion, human rights protection, peace building and good governance.

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