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**Police Trust in Conflict Zones:**

**Exploring Critical Factors Affecting Police-Community Relationship**

By

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## **Police Trust in Conflict Zones:**

### **Exploring Critical Factors Affecting Police-Community Relationship**

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*Recent evidence emphasizes the significance of procedural justice in fostering trust in the police. However, the empirical research primarily derives from aggregated national data, focusing on major cities, and predominantly in the global north. In regions affected by armed conflicts in the global south, I argue that trust between citizens and the police is driven by endogenous factors, such as effectiveness and fear of crime; exogenous factors, like rurality; and social mechanisms, like leadership. To examine this, I collected novel data from nine municipalities in Colombia, employing three methods: i) 5,929 snowball sampling surveys targeted at key informants, ii) a probabilistic survey representing 145,000 citizens, and iii) a two-year fieldwork period. The findings yield four unconventional results. Firstly, in remote areas grappling with armed conflict in the global south, effectiveness emerges as the primary influencing factor for trust in the police. Secondly, citizens residing in rural regions exhibit lower trust in the police, while leaders and critical informants in these areas express higher levels of trust, emphasizing the importance of effectiveness. Third, leaders and critical informants generally display higher levels of trust in the police and acknowledge the inherent clash of interests between the police and the local state, challenging prevailing literature that assumes their alignment. Finally, there are differences in the distribution of trust, depending on the type of illegal armed group in dominance. This thesis underscores the relevance of utilizing disaggregated local data to comprehend institutional trust.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Empirical evidence from the global north underscores the significance of procedural justice in establishing trust in the police. Renowned scholars such as Tankebe (2008), Taylor (2004), and Bottoms & Tankebe (2012), who have contributed significantly to the literature on trust in the police, emphasize the importance of respectful service, transparency, and a perception of fairness in fostering trustful relations between citizens and law enforcement agencies.

Similarly, recent studies in the global south highlight procedural justice as the primary mechanism for building trust and legitimacy. For instance, research conducted by Abril et al. (2022; 2023) in major Colombian cities such as Bogotá, Medellín, and Cali demonstrates a strong association between procedural justice and trust in the police, with a lesser impact on variables such as effectiveness and integrity.

Furthermore, scholarly work summarized by Blair et al. (2022), including studies by Lalinde (2020), Grant and Pryce (2020), Jackson et al. (2014), and a meta-analysis of 56 studies in the global south by Colin & Walters (2019), consistently reveals a positive correlation between procedural justice and trust and legitimacy.

While I concur with this perspective, trust-building requires more than procedural justice in areas affected by armed conflict in the global south. In such contexts, deep-rooted legacies of distrust necessitate additional efforts. Additionally, the relationship between citizens and state security institutions has been virtually nonexistent or built upon unresolved grievances in these areas. Moreover, illegal actors often provide goods and services that the state fails to deliver, undermining trust in state actors.

For the above-mentioned reasons, relying solely on procedural justice to build trust is more challenging in rural municipalities characterized by limited state presence, historical grievances, and mutual negative stereotypes between citizens and the police.

Most data on attitudes and behaviors towards conflict has been gathered in non-representative areas where conflict rarely occurs, leaving a significant gap in our understanding of the determinants of trust in conflict zones (PRIO, 2020).

My research addresses this gap by examining attitudes and behaviors that affect trust in state security institutions, particularly the police, in municipalities heavily impacted by state-based armed conflicts in Colombia. I seek to answer questions such as why certain zones in Colombia exhibit varying levels of trust in the police and what critical factors influence trust in conflict zones.

To address these questions, I propose a theoretical framework for trust-building that incorporates endogenous factors such as effectiveness and fear of crime, exogenous factors like rurality, and social mechanisms like leadership. My research demonstrates that effectiveness plays a crucial role in shaping the trust relationship between the police and citizens. At the same time, fear of crime primarily impacts individuals identifying as social leaders and key informants. Furthermore, I find that citizens living in rural areas express lower trust in the police and place greater emphasis on procedural justice compared to urban citizens who prioritize effectiveness and security. Interestingly, rural leaders and key informants exhibit higher levels of trust in the police, which challenges common assumptions.

One possible explanation for the difference between trust levels in rural and urban citizens is that rural areas in Colombia are remote and often disconnected from development zones. These areas may have hazardous tertiary roads that become impassable during rainy seasons and need stronger municipal administrations. Many rural areas are also co-opted by illegal groups seeking territorial control for legal and illegal activities, which adds to citizens' skepticism towards state-provided services. Consequently, rural citizens place greater importance on effectiveness, a factor that needs to be improved in state services.

A secondary explanation could be that in rural conflict areas, the police and other state security institutions engage in activities such as combating drug trafficking, targeting high-value individuals, and implementing coca eradication measures. As a result, people in these zones may trust the police less due to their perception of them as actors who exacerbate existing problems rather than providing protection.

However, these explanations do not fully account for the higher levels of trust exhibited by leaders and critical informants in rural areas. Additionally, rural leaders often prioritize security because they bear the brunt of the armed conflict and are crucial in peacebuilding efforts. Therefore, greater effectiveness in resolving the conflict becomes essential in building trust in the police among rural leaders.

Finally, my research reveals two secondary findings. Firstly, while existing literature on police trust suggests a positive correlation between police and state trust (Salazar-Tobar & Rengifo, 2023), I present a case where trust in local key informants towards the police is not correlated with trust in local mayors<sup>1</sup>. Secondly, I find that different armed groups lead to varying levels of trust, a hypothesis that requires further exploration.

To conduct my research, I employ a unique and novel dataset<sup>2</sup> that includes indicators related to attitudes and behaviors towards security and justice-related institutions in rarely surveyed areas of Colombia. Specifically, I utilize a random, stratified, multistage probabilistic survey conducted in 2022 with 933 citizens, representing a population of 145,000 inhabitants

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<sup>1</sup> The local state includes the *Comisarías de Familia* (Commissioners Office for Women and Families) and *Inspecciones de Policía* (police inspection).

<sup>2</sup> The data come from the Citizen Security Dialogue Activity (CSD) of the United States Institute of Peace (USIP), the US Agency for International Development (USAID), Fundación Ideas para la Paz (FIP), and Fundación Paz y Reconciliación (PARES) in which I participated.

across nine rural-dispersed municipalities in Colombia<sup>3</sup>. Additionally, I include 5,929 snowball surveys targeted at local social leaders and key informants in the same municipalities.<sup>4</sup>

There are three important caveats to consider. First, the scope of the results is limited to the nine municipalities in Colombia. Second, the surveys and interviews rely on self-reported perceptions of security, which may introduce desirability bias and incentives for misrepresentation. Third, while the probabilistic survey employed a rigorous sample design, more surveys were conducted in urban rather than rural areas. Nevertheless, I mitigate this bias by triangulating the data, using multiple samples, secondary sources, interviews, and fieldwork to ensure consistency. I also tested the data's reliability over time and compared the results across municipalities. Additionally, the stratification process in the sample design guarantees statistical representativeness in both rural and urban areas, despite the difference in the percentage of surveys conducted in each area.<sup>5</sup>

Finally, it is essential to note that the surveyed municipalities exhibit various homicide rates and conflict events. In some areas, reporting perceptions of trust, security, and justice can be dangerous. The project that the data originated from underwent two IRB processes to protect participants and ensure data storage security. The data is anonymized and poses no additional risk to participants.

My research contributes to the discussion on police trust in two significant ways. Firstly, it highlights the importance of rural citizens and leaders, calling for their increased relevance in policymaking. Any potential police reforms should prioritize restoring citizen security in rural areas through carabineros<sup>6</sup>. Secondly, this research underscores the need for strengthening rural policing and granting greater autonomy to local commanders. The centralized nature of

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<sup>3</sup> The probabilistic survey has a structured questionnaire of 61 questions on attitudes and behaviors toward justice and security, with in-face surveys, with a length of 25-30 minutes (See Data section).

<sup>4</sup> The snowball sampling has 16 questions with similar concepts to the probabilistic survey. This survey targets key community informants and social leaders (See Data section).

<sup>5</sup> In addition, the snowball sampling strongly represents rural inhabitants (71%).

<sup>6</sup> Carabineros is the Rural Police service in Colombia (Carabineros de Colombia - Policía Nacional, 2023)

police operations limits the possibilities for building better relations with locals, who can distinguish the interests of local mayors at the community level from those of the police at the national level. In this sense, my research underscores the value of utilizing disaggregated local data.

The remainder of the paper is organized into seven sections. The subsequent section presents a literature review and the theoretical framework underlying the findings. Section 3 provides an overview of the research context, focusing on a specific state-armed conflict scenario. The fourth section outlines the data and empirical strategy employed. Sections 5 and 6 discuss the findings and the mechanisms influencing trust. Finally, Section 7 concludes the paper.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW ON POLICE TRUST**

Trust is the foundation for legitimacy upon which democratic institutions rest (OECD, 2023). In latest years, several governments have been interested in their performance and how it impacts trust. For instance, in a recent study on trust in countries of The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), O'Leary, Welle & Agarwal (2022) found that the trust in the federal government was only 24% in OECD countries by 2022.

In this survey, Colombia has the lowest trust rate. The armed groups in this country partially explain the low levels. Nilsson & González (2020) found that in areas of armed conflicts, "mistrust between civilians and state security actors is widespread and mutual" (p. 256). Cruz & Vorobyeva (2022) found a similar finding in Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador, where citizens distrust the police's effectiveness in diminishing violence. Moreover, the distrust worsens if the state actors actively participate in the conflict and commit crimes, as in Colombia (De Juan, 2016).

Illegal actors also challenge the legitimacy of state security organizations because they compete with the state to provide security and justice. Armed groups perform as mini-states

(Skaperdas & Syropoulos, 1997), providing security, justice, and infrastructure (Lessing, 2020; León J., 2009). Often, the provision of public goods is discretionary and in some groups, such as paramilitaries, it depends on the rural origins of its commanders (Bautista et al., 2023).

However, the relationship between crime and trust in state institutions is more complex. As an example, Uribe et al. (2023) discover that in Latin America, where criminals impose restrictions or rules of behavior on civilians -what Lessing (2020) and others (Lessing, 2020; Magaloni, 2020) call criminal governance- people trust the state more. Similarly, Blattman et al. (2021; 2022a; 2022b) find that citizens trust the state more under criminal governance in Medellín (Colombia). Nevertheless, although these authors sketch out some possibilities of this pattern -complementarity between criminals and state actors, citizens' growing demand for governance, and incentives for criminals to deter state entry by keeping order –they do not explain the mechanisms behind these attitudes and perceptions towards trust.

Furthermore, the literature on police trust focuses on procedural justice at the global north, especially in US, UK, and Australia (Blair R., 2022). In those countries, Tankebe (2008), Tyler (2004), Bottoms & Tankebe (2012), Sunshine and Tyler (2003), and Tyler and Huo (2002) find that legitimacy in the police is strongly associated with the perception of fair procedures and respectful relations. Furthermore, these theories highlight that communication and soft skills are relevant to trigger legitimacy (Blair R., 2022).

There are examples of procedural justice in the global south. For instance, Abril et al. (2022), based on a conceptual framework for the global north, show that procedural justice is the most relevant mechanism to build trust, with a more significant effect than effectiveness. In this line, Lalinde (2020), using information from the three biggest cities of Colombia, asserts that procedural justice is positively correlated with trust. Similar studies on other countries (Jamaica, Nigeria, Ghana, Bosnia) of the global south find the same results, as remarkably summarized by Robert Blair (2022).



However, most of these studies based their conclusion on big cities, neglecting the role of the police in rural areas, where procedural justice is far from the whole story. Moreover, they do not show the dynamics of trust in civil war zones. Unfortunately, there are few examples to cover this gap. For example, Blair (2019, 2020, 2021) presents evidence of legitimacy in the police after a civil war. Nevertheless, systematic data on police trust in conflicts with civil war are still needed.

Another body of relevant literature for the global south concentrates on the impact of the effectiveness of fighting crime on trust. For instance, Jackson et al. (2012b), Jackson & Bradford (2014), and Jackson et al. (2012a) find that in fragile countries, people blame the police for crime problems, turn to alternative providers of security, and call for more effectiveness of the police. However, other conditions question the author's findings in conflict-affected rural areas of Colombia.

Finally, a substantial body of theory on police trust and legitimacy concentrates on internal or endogenous capacities or policing practices that require less time than structural changes. For instance, these practices include community policing, with tactics such as increased foot patrolling and town hall meetings (Blair R, Grossman, & Wilke, 2021); hot spots policing, soft skill training, body-worn cameras, integration and militarization (Blair R., 2022).

In line with this, Blair et al. (Forthcoming) evaluated the effects of community policy in building trust in six global south countries, finding no impact on trust nor reducing crime. In those contexts, structural reforms to the police need to be done for community policing to succeed. Nevertheless, their study is based on big cities and urban areas, except in the

Philippines and Uganda<sup>7</sup>. Therefore, I propose a theory of trust-building in places with conflict in the global south.

## 2.2 THEORY OF TRUST BUILDING

The literature on police trust focuses only on internal or external factors separately, and the analysis is almost inexistent for rural areas in the global south. Therefore, I propose a hybrid model of police trust emphasizing endogenous (effectiveness and fear of crime), exogenous (rurality), and social (leadership) mechanisms that explain the relationship between citizens and the police in areas with conflict (see Figure 1).

*Figure 1. Model of trust in police*

MECHANISM	EFFECT	OUTCOME
<b>EFFECTIVENESS</b> (endogenous)	+ DIRECT EFFECT	<b>+POLICE TRUST</b>
<b>FEAR OF CRIME</b> (endogenous)	- Leadership - Urban citizens	<b>-POLICE TRUST</b>
<b>RURAL</b> (exogenous)	- DIRECT EFFECT	<b>- POLICE TRUST</b>
<b>LEADERSHIP</b> (social)	+ Effectiveness + Procedural justice - Fear of crime	<b>+ POLICE TRUST</b>

Source: own elaboration

<sup>7</sup> This result aligns with what Gonzalez (2017) found for Latin America, where social inequality makes it harder to reinforce police and citizens' relationships.

## **ENDOGENOUS FACTOR - EFFECTIVENESS**

Effectiveness is the ability to deliver a good service and respond to the needs of the citizens (Bradford et al., 2014). Banerjee et al. (2021) measure performance by testing management practices in the police, such as increased community involvement and on-duty training. They find mixed results on the effectiveness impact on trust. Effectiveness is also the ability to attain objectives, such as the provision of security (Abril, Vélez-Vincent, Tobón, & Vanegas Arias, 2022; Bradford, Huq, & Jackson, 2014), the reduction of risks (Ho & McKean, 2004), the satisfaction with a service (Hawdon & Ryan, 2003) and the capacities (Alalehto & Larsson, 2016).

Bradford et al. (2014) show that effectiveness is a stronger predictor of legitimacy in South Africa than procedural justice. However, the literature on effectiveness of policing and its impact on trust in Colombia is highly scarce. For instance, there are only two pieces (Ramírez A., 2016; Ruíz-Vásquez & Páez, 2016) that use empirical evidence to assess the role of the effectiveness of hot spot policing. Both pieces are for Bogota and Medellín, leaving small rural municipalities out of the equation. In addition, both studies relied only on objective measures of crime or crime reports provided by local governments rather than on victimization rates or independent data (Lalinde, 2020).

In contrast, my research is the first study evaluating effectiveness in rural areas of Colombia and using self-reporting measures from key informants that do not have incentives to hide or falsify information (Jiang & Yang, 2016).

## **ENDOGENOUS - FEAR OF CRIME**

Fear of crime is associated with social order and the feeling of safety. In this regard, Tyler, Jackson & Mentovich (2015) find that in the United States, citizens living in neighborhoods with disorder were more likely to distrust the police. However, the legitimacy of the police remains the same. In the same vein, Abril et al. (2023) show that the effect of

procedural justice is negative under increasing perceptions of insecurity in conflict areas of big cities. Another recent study (Reid et al. (2020)) shows that feelings of insecurity are negatively correlated with trust in law enforcement, also affecting behavior.

Finally, García-Sánchez et al. (2015) find that in American countries, there is an association between feelings of unsafety and trust, probably through police ineffectiveness. However, this literature is still scarce in Colombia (Lalinde, 2020), and there are no systematic data on the fear of crime in places with ongoing armed conflict (PRIO, 2020). In addition, although fear of crime is an influential variable in Colombia, relevant nuances are worth mentioning. Is it the same for all individuals? Are there any other identities that outclass fears of crime? I find that rurality and leadership lead to the effect of fears of crime on trust.

### **EXOGENOUS FACTORS - RURALITY**

Few studies measure police trust in rural areas. Shun-Yung & Sun (2018) reveals that rural residents in Taiwan have higher levels of trust in police based on performance, while procedural justice remains similar in rural and urban areas. In addition, (Ekins, 2016; Holmes, Painter II, & Smith, 2017) find that rural areas in the United States<sup>8</sup> trust slightly more the police than in urban areas.

However, the rural areas in conflict zones in Colombia show different patterns. Rurality entails a particular definition. There are different measures of rurality. For instance, the Rural Mission and the National Department of Planning - DNP (2014), designated by the president to boost rural development in the country, proposed a novel indicator of rurality that uses the density, the size of the capitals, and the distribution between the capital and the dispersed area. In that definition, 30.4% of the Colombian population lives in rural areas.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> In the US, urban-rural classification corresponds to geographically excluded areas instead of a continuum that shares more commonalities than we thought (World Bank, 2020; Gallant, 2015; Ramírez & Aguas de, 2017).

<sup>9</sup> The National Department of Statistics defines rural as land unsuitable for urban use and with a destination for livestock, agriculture, forestry, or exploitation of natural resources. In that definition, 23% of the Colombian population lives there.

However, despite the usefulness of these measures, they neglect one significant cleavage: the double periphery or the rural consciousness that inhabitants outside the urban cabeceras of small municipalities develop and the possibility of being identified with a rural consciousness (Cramer, 2012).

In this research, I follow the Rural Mission (2014) to analyze the dynamics of all municipalities as a representation of dispersed-rural areas, small cabeceras with low densities (less than 10000 inhabitants per square kilometer). However, I also consider a secondary division between rural and urban areas of these dispersed small municipalities, with even more considerable distances to the system of cities, rural consciousness, and a very weak state monopoly regarding security. I call this the double periphery.

The lack of permanent state institutions -local authorities, police officers, public ministry, and prosecution officers- is the double periphery's everyday reality. As a result, rural areas in conflict have less infrastructure and usually rely on other forms of governance (Blair & Weintraub, 2023), affecting trust in state institutions.

## **SOCIAL MECHANISMS - LEADERSHIP**

Social leaders and key informants have been crucial agents in dealing with the armed conflict in Colombia. Rural leaders and communities have suffered the armed conflict in this country disproportionately. According to Crisis Group (2023), since 2016 -the year of the signature of the Peace Accord- the predatory control of armed groups has deteriorated the humanitarian conditions of rural inhabitants. Since 2016, three crimes have increased: Forced displacement, threats, and killings of social leaders.

Social leaders in these areas have been killed and threat by many actors, some of them linked to the state at a certain point in the history of the Colombian conflict (Duncan, 2006; CH et al., 2018). Between 1958 and 2021, more than 5000 social leaders were killed (Truth

Commission, 2022). However, only between 2021 and 2022 335 social leaders were killed in the country (Ombudsman Office, 2022).

Social leaders are essential in their societies: “As prominent figures in their communities, they can be singled out by groups aiming to establish or demonstrate their authority or to silence potential critics” (Crisis Group, 2023). One of the grievances of the conflict in Colombia is around the recognition of the suffering of social leaders amid the armed conflict, many of them associated with indigenous people, peasant organizations, unions, afro communities, and rural identities.

Therefore, security is a concern for rural leaders. Luhmann argues that trust requires a calculation of risks (Luhmann, 2000), and Hardin (1991) argues that fears of crime are relevant to cooperation, which is associated with trust. Notably, “what is mainly needed for most people is merely enough security to be able to enter into exchange relations with others without fear of being killed” (Hardin, 2016, p. 523). However, the relationship between the fear of crime and trust is complex. I maintain that the socialization process of social leaders allows them to trust more in others, including the police.

### **3. SETTING THE CONTEXT: ELEMENTS TO UNDERSTAND THE CONFLICT ZONES**

#### **LOCATION AND DYNAMICS**

In Colombia, 170 municipalities were prioritized for implementing the peace accord. These municipalities are diverse in terms of the conflict (some above and some below the national average homicide rate). Of the 170, I concentrate on nine municipalities in Colombia's five most conflict-affected departments (Antioquia, Chocó, Nariño, Norte de Santander, Cauca, and Caquetá). The homicide and threats self-reports of these municipalities varied from the objective statistics of crime retrieved by the National Police (SIEDCO, for its acronym in

Spanish). As shown in Table 1, the municipalities have diverse rates of homicide and threat, although all have very high rates of displacement.

**TABLE 1**

<b>Municipality, department</b>	<b>Inhabitants</b>	<b>Homicides</b>	<b>Threats</b>	<b>Displacement</b>	<b>Armed group<sup>10</sup></b>
Mutatá, Antioquia	8735	68.8	89	2018	AGC
Convención, N. Santander	12557	79.6	145.6	9560	ELN
Bojayá, Chocó	6644	15	16.1	2333	AGC
Riosucio, Chocó	37991	26.3	53.9	2027	AGC
El Doncello, Caquetá	13050	7.66	66.7	821	FARC
Puerto Rico, Caquetá	16900	76.9	161.8	1179	FARC
Morales, Cauca	27095	59	27.2	576	FARC
Timbiquí, Cauca	15539	45.6	48.5	3694	FARC
Leiva, Nariño	6851	46.2	83.6	1379	FARC

Source: Official reports retrieved from SIEDCO (2022).  
Crime rates per 100000 people, in 2022. (National Department of Statistics, 2023)

## **ARMED CONFLICT: THREE MAIN GROUPS**

Colombian has been in conflict for more than seventy years (Truth Commission, 2022). However, there are new conflict scenarios after demobilizing two main actors, the paramilitaries (2006) and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia in 2016 (FARC, for its acronym in Spanish).

According to the ICRC (2022), there are currently six areas with armed conflicts between the government and organized armed groups (GAO)<sup>11</sup>, but also among the groups<sup>12</sup>. There are

<sup>10</sup> An important caveat is that many illegal armed actors could be in the same municipality. In that sense, I classify only the more salient actor in each of the municipalities (Table 1). For example, Convención has a presence of ELN, FARC, and Los Pelusos, but the ELN is stronger there. I use a classification corresponding to the attribution of public crimes, such as armed strikes, massacres, and displacement. In addition, the key informants told me which group was in charge, at least near the cabecera municipal (urban casco).

<sup>11</sup> See (Ministerio de Defensa, 2019) for the operationalization of the concept.

<sup>12</sup> "In Colombia, there is no singular armed conflict that encompasses the entire country. On the contrary, the nation faces multiple active conflicts, each with its own dynamics at the subregional level, even in

plenty of illegal structures in Colombia. However, three armed groups dominate the municipalities under study: Autodefensas Gaitanistas de Colombia (AGC), the FARC dissidents (FARC-EP), and the National Liberation Army (ELN).

The AGC (or Clan del Golfo, as the government refers to them) is in the *Urabá Antioqueño* and *Chocoano*, south of Córdoba and Bajo Cauca (Indepaz, 2017). They have a presence or activities in at least 326 municipalities (Indepaz, 2023). The AGC's primary business are drug trafficking, illegal mining, and extortion, but they do not operate as a cartel. Instead, their model involves local cells that are financially self-sufficient through illegal activities (Crisis Group, 2022) and is composed of a mix of commanders with roots in other groups, such as the FARC and the Popular Liberation Army (Carroll, 2011; Barrera, 2020). It has social and political control over the everyday lives of the inhabitants of many municipalities, especially in rural areas. For instance, in May 2022, the AGC called for an armed strike in retaliation for the extradition to the United States of its leader Dairo Antonio Usuga, a.k.a. Otoniel. This control affects the everyday lives of many communities.

The FARC's dissidents, a Marxist-Leninist guerrilla founded in 1964 with peasant roots linked to rural struggles (Aguileña-Peña, 2013), are in 60 municipalities (Indepaz, 2023) and share similarities with the old FARC. They also have social and political control over the citizens, especially in rural areas. They are located mainly in the country's south, in the Orinoco region. There are two big structures, the Estado Mayor Central, and the Segunda Marquetalia (Alvarez, 2023).

Finally, the ELN, a guerrilla with roots in the Cuban and Chinese revolutions and the Theology of Liberation (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica, 2013; Medina, 2019), is in

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geographically proximate areas, where these conflicts operate independently from one another" (Trejos, Bravo, & Badillo, 2021). In this sense, I acknowledge that the armed conflict in Colombia has evolved to include actors beyond the state. However, for the purpose of my main hypothesis, I adopt the ICRC approach to emphasize the role of the state in the conflict and its impact on public confidence in the police.



191 municipalities (Indepaz, 2023). Since 2002, this group has reconfigured its organization, adding to the national project local structures that deepened the collective actions of the organization.

## **POLICE CENTRALIZATION AND LOCAL AUTHORITIES**

The police are a national institution, centralized, with a territorial deployment to departments, metropolitan areas, districts, and municipal police stations at the local level. Therefore, they must coordinate with the civil local and department authorities to provide service (Aparicio et al., 2019).

Colombia's decentralization process gave the local authorities more power through fiscal decentralization and mayors' and governors' elections. However, this autonomy did not translate into more autonomy for the police. For instance, local police officers must follow direct orders from their superiors and the district commanders and simultaneously need to coordinate with the head of the provision of security at the local level, the mayor. More than often, the federal incentives of the police collide with the local interests of the mayors (Cortés & Gómez, 2017, pp. cited by Aparicio, Bello & Marín (2019)).

In addition to this tension, the police officers at the local level deal with a deficit of personnel, few resources oriented to rural security, superposition of functions, control, and command, and an organizational structure that does not correspond to the political-administrative division of the country (Aparicio et al., 2019; Aparicio J., 2019).

In municipalities heavily affected by armed conflict, there are additional challenges. Several police officers and local authorities were interviewed for this research, and they expressed their concerns about the impossibility of attending cases at the rural level due to the conflict. As stated by one authority,

*We have intermittent services. Sometimes, we are exposed to armed actors. Once, I went with other local institutions to remove a body, and the AGC intercepted us. We*

*were retained for several hours and could not finish lifting the body. Sometimes, only some leaders can attend to those cases, but they are not authorities* (Police Inspector, 2022)

An additional constraint is that there needs to be more knowledge of the competencies of each institution and more cooperation between agencies to attend to requirements. The head of security at the local level is the mayor. However, sometimes, armed groups seize local politics and fiscal revenues for their interests (Ch et al., 2018; Eaton, 2006; Trejos, 2018; Gutiérrez-Sanín, 2010;2019).

Finally, the operative plans of the police focus on high-level targets, and the local commanders are hidden from the citizens in these rural disperses zones, affecting the trust-building process. The police perceive these zones as punishment zones, and the police stations only manage to protect themselves without providing tangible support and protection to the communities. Therefore, communities need more confidence in the benefits of establishing relationships with the police.

#### **4. RESEARCH DESIGN AND EMPIRICAL STRATEGY**

This research uses a random, stratified, multistage probabilistic survey applied in August 2022 to 933 citizens representing 145000 inhabitants of nine municipalities of Colombia. Within the municipality (statistical stratum), a random sample of cartographic blocks (and veredas) was selected in the urban (and rural) areas. In each block (or *vereda*), a simple random sample of households and an adult were selected.

I also use 5929 snowball sampling surveys targeted to local community leaders and key informants. The surveys contain questions on perceptions of security and justice, with 76 questions (61 questions in the probabilistic survey and 16 in the snowball sampling).

I measure trust on a Likert scale from 1 to 4, where 1 is nothing, and four is complete. For the citizen's probabilistic survey, effectiveness is a question that asks about the performance of the police on a Likert scale from 1 to 4, where 1 is nothing, and four is entirely (well

performed). While for the snowball survey, effectiveness is measured by asking directly for the solution to the security and justice needs of the respondents. The following table summarizes the main questions I used to build my model.

**TABLE 2. QUESTIONS ON PERCEPTIONS**

<b>Mechanism</b>	<b>Question</b>	<b>Source</b>
<b>Effectiveness (endogenous)</b>	From 1 to 4, where 1 is nothing and four complete, how much do you rate the performance/labor of the following authorities?	Probabilistic survey
	From 1 to 4, where 1 is nothing and four complete, how much do you rate the solutions to the needs for security and justice from the following authorities?	Snowball survey
<b>Fear of crime (endogenous)</b>	From 1 to 4, where one is entirely safe, and four is completely unsafe, how safe do you feel in the municipality?	Probabilistic survey
	From 1 to 4, where one is never, two is rarely, three is frequent, and four is very frequent, during the last month, how often have the following security events occurred in your municipality? List nine crimes.	Snowball survey
<b>Rurality (exogenous)</b>	Register the zone of the household, rural or urban.	Probabilistic survey
	Select the zone you inhabit, rural or urban.	Snowball survey
<b>Procedural justice<sup>13</sup> (endogenous)</b>	From 1 to 4, where one totally disagrees and four totally agree, tell me how much you agree that the	Probabilistic survey

<sup>13</sup> In this thesis, I use a proxy of procedural justice through treatment and attention. It is important to note that using a single question as a proxy for procedural justice may not capture the full complexity of

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	security and justice authorities in this municipality serve (give attention to) the communities to improve security, coexistence, and justice.	
	On a scale of 1 to 4, where one is very bad and four is very good, please rate each of the following according to how you think you were treated during the provision of the service?	Probabilistic survey
	On a scale from 1 to 4, how would you rate the following actors' attention during the last month?	Snowball survey
<b>Trust (outcome)</b>	From 1 to 4, where 1 is nothing and four completely, how much do you trust the following authorities: List seven authorities.	Probabilistic survey
	From 1 to 4, where 1 is nothing and four completely, how much do you trust the following authorities: List eight authorities.	Snowball survey

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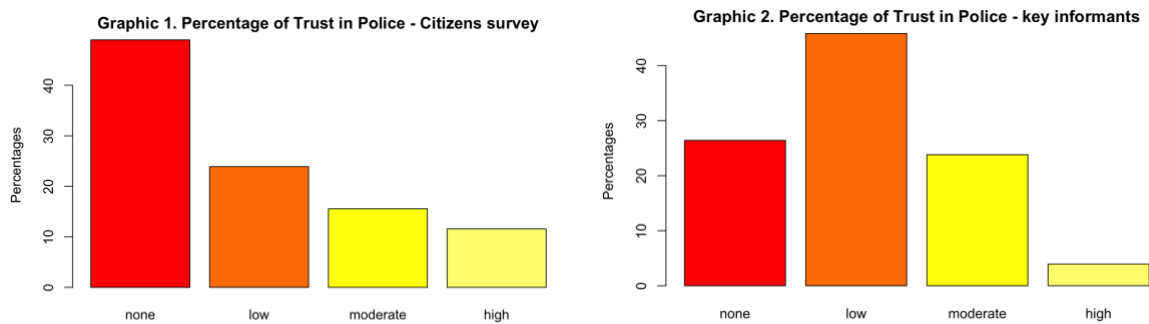
The probabilistic survey has a structured questionnaire of 61 questions on attitudes and behaviors toward justice and security, with in-face surveys, with a length of 25-30 minutes. The survey was applied to 933 people in 933 households, with 67% living in the urban casco o cabecera and 33% living in rural zones. The target population is above 18 years old. The error in urban areas is 4.4% and 4.8% for the rural zones, with 95% of confidence.

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the concept. Procedural justice involves neutrality, voice, respect, and transparency, which may require a more comprehensive assessment. Nonetheless, these questions provide some insight into individuals' perceptions of how they were treated and attended, which can indicate procedural justice to some extent.

The snowball sampling has 16 questions with similar concepts to the probabilistic survey. In this survey, 71% are rural, and 29% are urban. This survey is targeted at key community informants and social leaders of the nine municipalities.

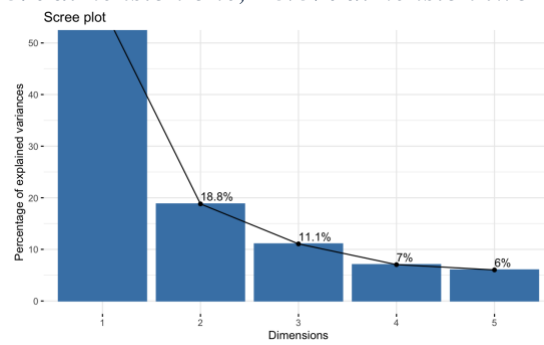
One caveat is that the two surveys' questions differ, which could lead to different results. However, the questions maintain their theoretical construct. The survey was carried out in the urban and rural areas of the nine municipalities listed in Table 1. The CSD project -where the data come from- selected the municipalities using two criteria: municipalities prioritized for the peace accord implementation and absence of previous US international cooperation programs (v. gr. USAID). The descriptive statistics show that most citizens surveyed have low or no trust in the police. However, the leaders and key informants have better rates.



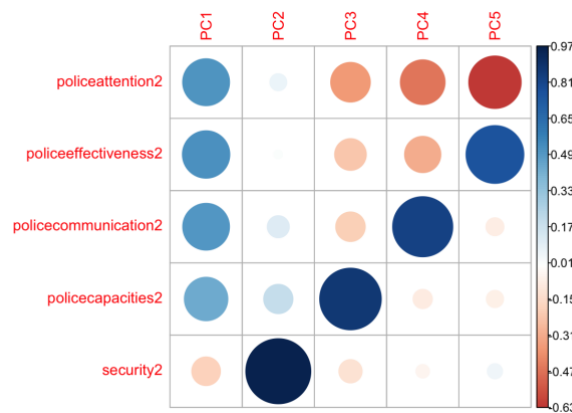
Trust is a complex construct with multiple variables affecting it simultaneously (I find multicollinearity between trust, capacities, communication, effectiveness, procedural justice, and solution, with correlations of more than 0.7. See the correlation matrix in the appendix). Therefore, I first conducted a Principal Component Analysis (PCA). A PCA model is used on datasets with many predictors to remove collinearities and narrow the model's dimensions. The PCA shows that 58% of the empirical model of police trust is composed of endogenous variables, such as procedural justice, effectiveness, communication, and capacities, and 18.8% is mainly by fear of crime (see graphics 3 and 4)<sup>14</sup>.

<sup>14</sup> Similarly, the first two dimensions explain 86% of the model for the leader's and critical informants' surveys.

Graphic 3. PCA model for the citizen's survey:  
58% dimension one, 18.8% dimension two



Graphic 4. Weight of variables in dimensions: Dimension one (attention, effectiveness, and communication); dimension two (security or fear of crime)



Before moving to the regressions, I want to mention three caveats. First, the scope of the statistical results only holds for nine municipalities in Colombia. However, these municipalities have similar conflict patterns to those with armed groups, so it will be reasonable to expand some of the results to other conflict zones in Colombia.

Second, the surveys and interviews are based on self-reporting perceptions of security and justice. Therefore, there could be desirability bias, and people could report information in a favorable way.

Furthermore, the snowball sampling was connected to a more extensive project in which participants could be part of a dialogue process with state security institutions. Although the information is anonymous, people could rate it differently, thinking about the possibility of attending the dialogue. To minimize the bias, I tested the consistency of the data over time and triangulated the data using two samples, secondary sources, interviews, and fieldwork.

Third, although the probabilistic survey has a rigorous sample design, more citizens were surveyed in urban areas. Still, the stratification process guarantees significance in the rural area. In addition, the snowball sampling has a strong representation of rural inhabitants.

Finally, the surveyed municipalities have a strong presence of armed groups, so it could be dangerous to report perceptions on trust, security, and justice. This research fulfills two IRB processes to protect the participants and the data. The data is anonymous and represent no additional risk for those who participated.

## 5.1 ESTIMATION

$$\text{Trust in police}_i = \alpha + B1 \text{ Effectiveness}_i + B2 \text{ Fear of Crime}_i + \text{rural}_i + \text{gender}_i + \text{age}_i + \varepsilon$$

Where trust in the police is a factor from 1 to 4 (or continuous in the OLS models, or one/zero in the logit models), effectiveness is a factor from 1 to 4, and fear of crime is a continuous variable to show self-reporting frequency of crimes. Rural is a dummy variable that represents the zone where the inhabitants live; gender is a dummy that represents male or female; and age is a continuous numerical variable that corresponds to the respondent's age in years. I run the same models using two different sources (a probabilistic survey and a snowball survey). There are three hypotheses in this research.

H1: Effectiveness is the salient mechanism to build trust in the police.

H2: Rural inhabitants trust the police less.

H3: Social leaders and critical informants trust the police more.

## 5.2 RESULTS

I present the following tables that summarize the results according to the three hypotheses. Table 3 shows the results for a linear regression using the Trust in Police score (1

to 4) as a continuous dependent variable,<sup>15</sup> separating the sample between rural and urban dwellers. While the effectiveness of the police is highly statistically significant in both areas (rural and urban) and has a positive effect on trust (one extra level of effectiveness -1 to 4-means, on average, a trust score between 0.50 and 0.54 higher), there are some dissimilarities between the two areas.

**TABLE 3. Ordinary least squares (OLS) regression models** with trust in the police as the dependent variable. Model 1a, rural areas with procedural justice measured by attention; Model 1b, rural areas with procedural justice measured by treat (respect); Model 2a, urban areas with procedural justice as attention; Model 2b, urban areas procedural justice as treat (respect).

	(Model 1a)	(Model 1b)	(Model 2a)	(Model 2b)
Male	-0.028 (0.074)	0.022 (0.275)	0.025 (0.07073)	0.239 (0.186)
Age	-0.005* (0.003)	-0.003 (0.009)	0.0024 (0.00215)	0.012 (0.006)
Effectiveness	0.503*** (0.042)	0.425** (0.150)	0.549*** (0.040)	0.420*** (0.120)
Procedural justice (attention)	0.136*** (0.050)	0.153 (0.174)	0.071 (0.044)	0.125 (0.123)
Procedural justice (treat)		0.051 (0.144)		0.028 (0.105)
Fear of crime	-0.007 (0.0469)	-0.007 (0.184)	-0.107* (0.044)	-0.248 (0.149)
Capacities	0.066. (0.038)	-0.180 (0.154)	0.021 (0.041)	-0.064 (0.135)
Communication	-0.005 (0.050)	0.156 (0.189)	0.099* (0.454)	-0.009 (0.126)
Constant	2.083*** (0.116)	1.542* (0.715)	1.826*** (0.111)	1.349** (0.449)
Observations/N	933		933	
Multiple R-squared:	0.436		0.465	

Standard errors in parentheses

. p<0.1, \* p<0.05, \*\* p<0.01, \*\*\* p<0.001

<sup>15</sup> The main results hold when I use the dependent variable as ranked/ordered and estimate the model as an ordered logit (1 to 4) or logit (zero if trust is very low or low, and one if trust is high or very high). Therefore, I present the OLS model for simplification of the interpretations. The rest of the models are in the appendix section.



Fears of crime seem more meaningful in urban areas and affect (or are more correlated with) trust than in rural areas, whose coefficient is not statistically significant. The sign of the coefficient means that the more insecurity perceived by the respondents, the less trust in the police. In urban areas, communication also plays a role in increasing the trust in the police - the coefficient is positive and significant to a 95% confidence level - while in rural areas, it is not statistically significant. On the contrary, procedural justice is positively correlated with trust in the police in rural rather than urban areas.

**TABLE 4. Ordinary least squares (OLS) regression models** with trust in the police as the dependent variable. Model 3a for citizens (Procedural justice as attention); Model 3b for citizens (procedural justice as treat); and Model 4, leaders, and key informants.

	(Model 3a)	(Model 3b)	(Model 4)
Rural	-0.094 . (0.054)	-0.332* (0.147)	0.052*** (0.015)
Male	-0.010 (0.051)	0.126 (0.148)	0.010 (0.013)
Age	-0.000 (0.001)	0.005 (0.004)	0.001** (0.000)
Effectiveness	0.526*** (0.029)	0.460*** (.087)	0.348*** (0.009)
Procedural justice (attention)	0.096** (0.033)	0.144 (0.097)	0.338*** (0.010)
Procedural justice (treat)		0.053 (0.082)	
Fear of crime	-0.063. (0.032)	-0.116 (0.111)	-0.069*** (0.007)
Capacities	0.057* (0.029)	-0.116 (0.096)	
Guerrilla presence	-0.013 (0.054)	-0.219 (0.162)	0.298*** (0.015)
Constant	1.971*** (0.083)	1.530*** (0.375)	1.915*** (0.033)
Observations/N	933	933	5929
Multiple R-squared:	0.456	0.456	0.571

Standard errors in parentheses  
. p<0.1, \* p<0.05, \*\* p<0.01, \*\*\* p<0.001

Table 4 shows a broad comparison when I run the model using the citizens probabilistic survey vs. the leaders/key-informant snowball survey. It is interesting to find that even when the surveys have different questions and samples (Table 2), the results for leaders and citizens regarding the correlation of trust in the police with procedural justice and the effectiveness of its service are very similar. Both coefficients, in both cases, are positive and highly significant. The coefficients' size suggests that effectiveness is more significant in all models, while procedural justice also seems critical for leaders.

While the coefficient of rural is barely significant (10% significance level) and it has a negative sign for citizens (rural dwellers seem to trust less in the police less than urban dwellers *ceteris paribus*), it is highly significant (>99% confidence level) and has a positive sign when we consider the survey of the social leaders (when compared to urban leaders, rural leaders seem to trust the police more).

**TABLE 5 t-test for police trust and local state trust.** Leaders and key informants

<b>Group</b>	<b>Observations</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard errors</b>	<b>[95% conf. interval]</b>
Local states trust	5929	2.409	0.328	0.328-0.383
Trust in police	5929	2.053	0.384	0.328-0.384
Diff. = mean (1) - mean (2)				t = 24.847

Table 5 displays the difference in means between the trust the local leaders have in the police and their trust in local state security institutions. Again, the mean difference is statistically significant in favor of the trust in other local-official institutions. More specifically, the average score for trust in local state institutions is 2.41, while the trust in the police is 2.05.

**TABLE 6. Ordinary least squares (OLS) regression models** with trust in the police (model 5) and trust in local states (model 6) for Leaders and key informants

	(Model 5)	(Model 6)
Rural	0.052*** (0.015)	-0.076 (0.059)
Male	0.010 (0.013)	-0.005 (0.059)
Age	0.001** (0.000)	-0.000 (0.001)
Effectiveness	0.348*** (0.009)	0.345*** (0.032)
Procedural justice	0.338*** (0.010)	0.085* (0.033)
Fear of crime	-0.069*** (0.007)	-0.141*** (0.037)
Capacities		0.074* (0.012)
Guerrilla presence	0.298*** (0.015)	-0.086 (0.033)
Constant	1.915*** (0.033)	2.084*** (0.096)
Observations/N	5929	5929
Multiple R-squared:	0.571	0.262

Standard errors in parentheses  
. p<0.1, \* p<0.05, \*\* p<0.01, \*\*\* p<0.001

Table 6 shows results for the model using trust in police and trust in local state institutions as different dependent variables. The coefficient of effectiveness is very statistically significant and robust for both cases. It is also surprising to find that, while it is statistically significant for both, the coefficient for fear of crime is larger when trust in local state institutions is the dependent variable. Both regressions have similar results for the effect of procedural justice in the dependent variable. There is nonetheless a difference in the coefficient of rural: while it is slightly significant in the case of trust in the police, it is not relevant in the trust in local state institutions.

**TABLE 7. Distribution of trust in the police in the presence of armed groups (in percentage)**

	Nothing	Some	Much	Completely
Guerrilla/citizens' survey	0.466	0.251	0.168	0.113
AGC/ citizens' survey	0.531	0.216	0.132	0.120
Guerrilla/ leaders' survey	0.161	0.485	0.298	0.053
AGC/ leaders' survey	0.487	0.397	0.106	0.008

Finally, Table 7 presents the distribution of trust in the police in the presence of different armed groups. According to the citizens' survey, over half of the citizens residing in municipalities dominated by the AGC express no trust in the police. At the same time, only 12% of the respondents in the same areas report complete trust. In contrast, 46% of the population living in municipalities under guerrilla dominance (FARC and ELN) express no trust in the police. Overall, citizens tend to have lower levels of trust in the police in areas with AGC dominance compared to areas dominated by guerrilla groups. Additionally, the surveys aimed at social leaders also reveal pronounced differences. Leaders living in areas with AGC groups exhibit a significantly lower level of trust in the police, with 48.7% expressing no trust, in contrast to those residing in areas with guerrilla dominance, where only 16.1% report no trust in the police.

## **6 DISCUSSION: WHAT DOES AFFECT TRUST?**

### **Effectiveness**

As shown in the results section (Tables 3 to 6), effectiveness is the most critical factor affecting the relationship of trust. In municipalities with a strong presence of armed groups, other mechanisms rather than procedural justice matter significantly. In rural-disperse small

municipalities, citizens could draw heavily on the ability of the police to resolve crimes to form their judgments effectively.

The municipalities I analyze have the presence of illegal groups that govern political and social aspects of the population, solve problems between neighbors, maintain order, and make economic decisions that affect the finances of the communities (Schmidt & Durán, 2022). Armed groups perform some functions traditionally exercised by States, as stated by a leader in Mutatá:

*The AGC stipulated a law where it said that if a person fights against other, then both have to pay a fee, each one about 500000 pesos [120 USD], and if a person looks for the problem, then he/she has to pay it, but If the fight was mutual, both have to pay a certain amount of money; otherwise they can lose their lives or get punished (Social Leader, 2021)*

In this sense, one possible explanation for less trust in the police by rural citizens is that there are alternative groups providing security, and citizens turn to these substitutes. Therefore, trust would be determined by demanding effectiveness in the presence of alternative providers.<sup>16</sup>

Effectiveness is robust in all the regressions (see appendix)<sup>17</sup>, with more importance on average than other variables. However, there are essential differences between rural peripheries in rural-disperse municipalities (double periphery) and urban cabeceras, which have been neglected in the literature so far. For instance, the latter's attitudes are driven mainly by effectiveness and fear of crime, while the attitudes of the former are determined by effectiveness and procedural justice, not security.

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<sup>16</sup> This hypothesis is coherent with the theory of the *menu dependence* of social behavior, in which the inclusion of alternatives (in this case, armed groups) changes the decision-maker preferences (León, 2014), leading to less trust in the police.

<sup>17</sup> In addition, effectiveness has a pure direct effect that is not mediated by any other mechanism (see Table 9 in the appendix section).

People in the cabeceras or urban cascos of these small rural disperse-municipalities are more concerned with insecurity and demand that the police perform better. In contrast, in the double periphery, citizens have less access to police commanders, and while also demanding effectiveness, they want procedural justice for the police.

In line with the above, when I run the model without effectiveness (the strongest predictor of trust), feeling valued by the police is relevant only for rural citizens and not for those living in the urban casco, meaning that procedural justice could be a symptom of demanding more recognition and value to build trust. Similarly, in the urban cabeceras, communication is relevant to improve the trust in the police because there are some levels (although low) of communication. At the same time, in rural areas, it is insignificant.

### **Fear of crime**

Fear of crime is a powerful mechanism to consider. However, it is not significant in all the models. Fear of crime mainly affects leaders' perception and, in some models, citizens living in the urban cascos. One possible explanation is that illegal groups control security (criminal governance) in rural peripheries, making security less critical for citizens in rural areas.

In contrast, I show that the fear of crime is robust in all the models of the leaders and key informants. In this sense, citizens want their needs to be addressed (effectiveness) but not necessarily have more fears of crime, while leaders systematically have more fears because they know the implications of having criminal governance, receive more threats, and understand their context as key informants.

This finding has a consequence for the public security policy. The police have been focusing on the fight against high-value targets associated with the armed groups in those municipalities while neglecting citizen security affecting the leaders more than any other identity. Crimes such as homicide, threats, and forced displacement concern the leaders as key

informants and those suffering the most, especially in rural areas (USIP/USAID/FIP, 2022; Pulso FIP, 2023).

### **Rurality**

In rural areas, the presence of the state is temporary, and the institutions visit rural places sporadically. Because of the armed conflict, the police officers are entrenched in their stations, and there are few interactions with people in the urban cascos and almost zero interactions with people in the double periphery.

Therefore, social leaders in rural areas must perform some activities when the state is not present or under an uneven presence of the state (González, 2014, Gutiérrez-Sanín, 2019). For instance, some leaders who participated in this research expressed how they must remove bodies from crime scenes or solve disputes between neighbors because there are no police in the zones.

The lower trust in the police by rural citizens could be explained by the police in charge of coca eradication in those places not to protect the citizens but to fight against narcotraffic and follow the national government's interest. In the double periphery, there are no state institutions, and illegal groups have stronger governance, so they demand more effectiveness and more procedural justice than urban citizens, as stated by the Ombudsmen of Leiva (2021):

*In the urban cascos, the fights are less controlled by the armed group, but in the rural areas, if someone fights, the armed group punishes him. If he is a repeat offender, they can threaten him to leave; if he is a repeat offender, he could suddenly end up murdered.*

However, there are differences in the attitudes of trust toward the police among rural citizens and rural leaders. For instance, for rural citizens, fear of crime is not relevant because of criminal governance. In contrast, for rural leaders, it is significant because they receive more threats from illegal groups and want the effectiveness of the police.

In addition, rural leaders have more trust in the police than rural citizens. This result has implications for the public policy of security. In policy terms, any revamp of the police needs to have a rural-specific chapter to protect social leaders. In addition, units such as carabineros need to retrieve the citizen's security, with more effective policies against homicide and threats and less on organized crime.

In addition, there is a window of hope in the trust-building process. In this sense, rural leaders, who value the police more, could perform as "transmission belts" between rural communities and the police. An important caveat is that social leaders in Colombia conduct a key role in bridging communities and institutions (The Dialogue, 2023) but receive a heavy burden when institutions perform poorly. They have also been systematically killed after the signature of the peace accord. Therefore, understanding that rural leaders trust the police more opens a window of opportunity to strengthen the relationship between the state and the citizens and contributes to building strategies for protecting these key actors in areas with conflict.

### **Leadership**

Leaders and critical informants systematically trust the police more. One explanation is that leaders and key informants had prior positive experiences that molded their psychology of trust (Hardin, 2016; León, 2014). Another reason is that leaders form their attitudes toward the police based on their Bayesian generalization from their experience with others (Hardin, 2016), usually more favorable than other citizens. I argue that the latter case is more plausible since social leaders have been critical to maintaining social tissue in communities and have maintained good relations overall.

In addition, leaders and key informants have sophisticated reasoning from socialization. Therefore, they can understand the difference between the interest of the local authorities and the national police, contrary to some previous findings in the literature (Salazar-Tobar &



Rengifo, 2023).<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, leaders value security more than citizens on average, so fears of crime are driven mainly by leadership identity and knowledge of the context.

### **Armed groups**

Colombia has different armed groups with different relations with the citizens and the state. They all perform duties as a state, deploy levels of criminal governance, and conduct political activities.

Regarding criminal governance, groups such as AGC, FARC dissidents, or ELN have similar strategies to control the population, socially and politically. For instance, as stated by one interviewed in Convención, armed groups regulate the behavior of the citizens, especially in rural areas, impose sanctions, regulate social events, and solve disputes. (Social Leader, 2021). Similarly, groups such as AGC, apparently a less organized and political group, control social and political activities.

In 2023, the AGC announced its political orientation and strategy (Schmidt, 2023), possibly because of the Colombian government's proposal of a peace process with several illegal armed groups (Badillo & Mijares, 2021). However, the AGC has a mixed model that involves local self-sufficient cells (Crisis Group, 2022), outsourcing illegal activities, commanders with leftist origins (FARC or ELN), and shadowing the classification of the group as merely organized crime (Barrera, 2020).

As revealed in Table 7, individuals residing in areas dominated by the AGC display lower levels of trust in the police than those living in areas under guerrilla dominance. This pattern may be attributed to the AGC's growing antagonism towards the state, resulting in actions by the police and other security forces that clash with the interests of the citizens.

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<sup>18</sup> Possibly, the relation is mainly driven by institutions such as the Comisaría de Familia and the Inspección de Policía, which many project participants have recognized as critical actors in addressing citizen security in rural-disperse areas with conflict.

Additionally, in the region where the AGC is dominant, there is a story of a collision with the state. The AGC is dominant in places where the paramilitaries used to be powerful, deepening the distrust in the state<sup>19</sup>.

The year 2016, marked by the signing of the Peace Accord with the FARC, holds pivotal significance in understanding these outcomes. Following 2016, the police and armed forces adopted a different strategy in areas previously dominated by FARC, resulting in improved trust and enhanced protection for the citizens, albeit for a certain period. Conversely, after 2016, due to the reorganization of organized crime in Colombia, the state intensified military actions against the AGC, which had an adverse impact on the public's trust in the police.

Furthermore, how the AGC interacts with the citizens differs from other groups. The AGC intervened more than the FARC dissidents in social control and local justice, at least during the accommodation process of the FARC (2017-present), gaining more legitimacy. Therefore, the legitimacy of the police could decrease under the described phenomena.

Finally, the security strategy adopted by the state in the last years could explain the difference in the distribution of trust in the police. For instance, after the demobilization of the FARC, the government implemented security strategies and development plans to address the roots and causes of the conflict. Although there are several critiques of the results of implementing the peace process between the FARC and the Colombian government, some actions could have contributed positively to increasing the trust in the police. In comparison, the actions against the AGC have been majoritarian military, chasing high-value targets, such as Dairo Antonio Úsuga, aka Otoniel (Insight Crime, 2023).

Although the history and context; the actions and presence of the police forces; and the security strategy adopted by the state are plausible explanations of the difference in the

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<sup>19</sup> At least for the Uraba region I study in this thesis.

confidence in the police in places with AGC as a dominant group, more research must be done to understand this pattern.

## **7. CONCLUSIONS AND FURTHER RECOMMENDATIONS**

Overall, this research fills a gap in the literature and empirical models on attitudes and behaviors of trust in police. I show four novel findings—first, effectiveness (robust in all models) is the most critical factor in building trust. A second significant finding is that people living in rural areas have less trust in the police, but this does not hold for rural leaders. Third, leaders trust the local state more than the police, contradicting recent literature. Lastly, municipalities under the dominance of AGC exhibit lower levels of trust compared to areas where guerrillas hold sway.

Fears of crime have been left behind in many analyses. For instance, (Lalinde, 2020) finds no evidence between social order and police legitimacy. However, I show that the fear of crime is a relevant and nuanced mechanism. Of paramount importance, my findings reveal that threats and homicides have a more significant impact on trust compared to other crimes. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that leaders and key informants experience higher levels of fear when compared to the general population.

The current literature on police trust equates police to state trust. For instance, Salazar-Tobar & Rengifo (2023) use a multilevel analysis to assert that respondents in Latin America with higher confidence in the government have higher rates of trust in the police. Contrariwise, I show that in rural-disperse municipalities with conflict, citizens have sophisticated reasoning to understand the tension between the interests and incentives of the police and local authorities. I present a solid case in which leaders rating consistently different trust in the police and other institutions of the ecosystem of security, such as local mayors, *comisarías de familia*

(Commissioners Office for Women and Families), and inspecciones de policía (police inspection).

There are two implications of these findings. First, in policy terms, the revamp of the police needs to have a rural-specific chapter. Units such as carabineros need to retrieve the citizen's security, with more effective policies against homicide and threats and less on organized crime. Also, the police in rural areas should concentrate on effectiveness to gain trust.

Second, the fear of crime in conflict zones deserves more discussion to find new ways to establish trust between stakeholders. The level of violence and the type of crime are relevant to guarantee trust, with threats and homicides being more salient for key informants than extortion and robbery. In addition, fear of crime varies, depending on the source (citizens vs. critical informants) and between cabeceras and double peripheries.

Future research still needs to be done to understand how armed groups mediate trust. In this line, I find that it is not true the idea that criminal governance is consubstantial to the organization where there is hegemony. All groups use similar criminal governance tactics but with different levels of transparency, affecting different the trust in the police. For instance, in municipalities with the presence of the AGC, the trust is lower than in municipalities with a guerrilla presence.

Although I cannot fully explain this difference, the level of transparency in the operation of the groups may be driving the result (in the case of AGC, there is no clarity on who is the commander in chief, in contrast to the case of FARC or the ELN). Other possible hypothesis are the history and context; the presence of the police forces; and the security strategy adopted by the state. My research paves the way to understanding these findings and shows the importance of having data in places where the conflict is occurring.

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## APPENDIX

**TABLE 8 Ordered Logit regression models** with trust in the police for citizens (Model 7) with procedural justice as attention; Model 7b for citizens, with procedural justice as treatment; and leaders and key informants (Model 8)

	(Model 7)	(Model 7b)	(Model 8)
Rural	-0.290*** (0.139)	-0.784*** (0.389)	0.140*** (0.063)
Male	0.006 (0.137)	0.337 (0.383)	0.025 (0.057)
Age	-0.002 (0.004)	0.012 (0.012)	0.006*** (0.002)
Effectiveness	1.336*** (0.089)	1.290*** (0.256)	1.332*** (0.044)
Procedural justice (attention)	0.288*** (0.085)	0.514*** (0.256)	1.432*** (0.047)
Procedural justice (treat)		0.176 (0.204)	
Capacities	0.113 (0.077)	-0.279 (0.254)	

Fear of crime	-0.159 . (0.088)	-0.381 (0.287)	-0.286*** (0.032)
Guerrilla presence	0.027 (0.146)	-0.432 (0.405)	1.337*** (0.068)
None/low	-0.485*** (0.230)	0.626 (0.971)	-1.327*** (0.139)
Low/moderate	1.173*** (0.232)	3.034*** (1.002)	2.373*** (0.141)
Moderate/high	2.837*** (0.254)	5.049*** (1.098)	6.000*** (0.169)
Observations/N	933	933	5929
Residual Deviance:	1752.589	1752.589	8851.62

Standard errors in parentheses  
. p<0.1, \* p<0.05, \*\* p<0.01, \*\*\* p<0.001

**Table 9. Mediation Effect**

	Estimate 95%	CI Lower 95%	CI Upper	p-value
ACME	0.0000	0.0000	0.00	1
ADE	-0.158	-0.243	-0.07	<2e-16
Total Effect	-0.158	-0.243	-0.07	<2e-16

**TABLE 10 Logit regression** (1 or 0) models with trust in the police for citizens (model 9) and leaders and key informants (model 10)

	(Model 9)	(Model 10)
Rural	-0.338 . (0.193)	0.035 (0.084)
Male	-0.138 (0.188)	0.110 (0.078)
Age	-0.004 (0.005)	0.006* (0.078)
Effectiveness	1.225*** (0.106)	1.130*** (0.052)
Procedural justice	0.095 (0.114)	1.568*** (0.072)
Capacities	0.215* (0.102)	
Fear of crime	-0.207 . (0.119)	-0.236*** (0.444)
Guerrilla presence	-0.029 (0.202)	1.352*** (0.100)



Constant	-1.045*** (0.306)	-2.474*** (0.195)
Observations/N	933	5929
Residual Deviance:	730.98	41826

Standard errors in parentheses

. p<0.1, \* p<0.05, \*\* p<0.01, \*\*\* p<0.001

**Heatmap of correlation between 0 (no correlation) and 1 (perfect correlation)**

