

Colombia elections 2022: An uncertain political future for the former FARC guerrilla

Five years after signing a peace deal with the Colombian Government, the former Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – People's Army (FARC-EP) are divided and weakened as a political actor. Even though the Comunes party has political representation, not all the 13,000 former FARC members endorse it, writes [Lucas Yordi](#) (LSE).

Lee este post [en español](#)

Colombia voted for a new Congress on March 13. The Comunes party, formed by ex-guerrilla members, [gained around 52,000 votes, a significantly lower number than the 85,000 obtained in the 2018 election](#). With these results, the representation of the former combatants is hanging by a thread after 2026, when they will no longer have guaranteed five seats in the Senate and five seats in the House of Representatives. In addition, the divisions inside the group show uncertainty about its political future.

Most long-term observers of the Colombian conflict and the FARC often emphasize that the internal divisions of the former guerrilla group came before the peace deal signed in 2016. The death of key figures such as its historical founder, Manuel Marulanda Velez, known as *Tirofijo* in 2008, his predecessor Alfonso Cano (2011), and his second-in-command Víctor Julio Suárez Rojas, known as *el Mono Jojoy* (2010), are said to thoroughly have damaged the guerrillas' social cohesion. Many combatants' allegiances became more personal than ideological. Today, the ex-FARC's political divisions, not unrelated, centre on disputes in the leadership's management style and differences of how to accept compromises as a political party.

Andrés París, one of four former high-ranking FARC leaders expelled from the Comunes in June of 2020, sees three main factions in opposition to the core leadership: those who returned to the armed struggle, the division which remains within the party led by Senator Israel Zúñiga (known as Benkos Biohó) and Senator Victoria Sandino, and the alleged majority which París belongs to, "those who are neither with the guerrillas, nor with Benkos Biohó, but we are not with Rodrigo Londoño either (President of Comunes and FARC-EP former military commander also known as *Timochenko*)."

A majority of the factions of Comunes claim that the party leadership is vertical and autocratic and that its leadership's management style has not transitioned from the guerrilla commandment to civilian politics. Senator Biohó, central leader of "Agrupar para Avanzar", the second faction highlighted by París, says that "there was never the will to build a party" by the "defunct leadership of the FARC." "What was intended was to make a transfer of a vertical structure of leadership, which is logical to see in the armies and the armed forces, because it is the only way to function effectively, but that does not work for a party," says Biohó. Similarly, París claims that the party does not recognise opinions outside of the core leadership.

The political factions to which Senator Biohó and París respectively belong, are in turn being labelled as orthodox and delusional, in the sense that they are allegedly not willing to accept the political reality facing the former FARC and the compromises it takes to make politics work.

"There are other colleagues who thought that by signing the agreement, they were going to receive us with open arms, they were going to roll out a red carpet, we didn't have to do anything, wait for the government to solve everything for us. It turns out that we arrived here and found ourselves in a rather precarious situation", said Senator Sandra Ramírez, key political leader of Comunes and former Second Vice-president of the Senate, when asked about París' expulsion.

The consequences of these divisions

These internal differences could be interpreted as a symbol of political participation and democratic debate. After all, they are being voiced publicly and peacefully rather than fought over violently. Furthermore, it is expected that political parties in democratic systems have public internal divisions, but the FARC's go deeper as well as its consequences.

The party is experiencing a serious fracture of its already small political base. There is no official data on how many members Comunes has, the core leadership claims 6,800 whilst the factions claim less than 3,000. Rhetoric amongst current and former leaders has also adopted a problematic tone. Former FARC leaders have publicly and privately claimed that they are being wrongfully associated by the main leaders with the armed dissidence. And there have been accusations of racism and misogyny against some of these same party heads.

This all contributes to weakening the former FARC's position as the legitimate counterpart to the Colombian government in the implementation of the peace accords. The nature of their internal divisions makes it easier to disregard them as former "narco-terrorists" with no justifiable political agenda. And if their already small political base was to be divided in three, the issues of legitimate representation and ensuring the interests of the former combatants and compliance with their obligations will become more critical.

Some of the former FARC leaders somewhat recognise this reality. "It is true, those decisions which we have made internally are killing us" says Rodrigo Granda, another central leader of Comunes and widely known as the "Chancellor of the FARC". Pastor Alape, another major figure of Comunes leadership emphasises along with other party heads, how necessary it is to respect the factions' decisions to go their own way. Alape says how the biggest concern is that they end up "helping the adversaries of the process" dismantle the political project. Even Senator Biohó acknowledges how "it is not the same to face the current government in a unified way to press for implementation than to do it in a fragmented way."

Where do things go from here?

One could worry that the former FARC's internal struggle will continue. The factions could escalate their contestation of the central leadership's control of Comunes, Senator Sandino and Senator Biohó, who were not part of the lists for the 2022 congress election, [published a letter](#) on how they had unsuccessfully requested the Comunes National Council to split the Party. Both politicians also filed a lawsuit against the internal structuring of the party that was also unsuccessful as the court [found no evidence](#) that "the rights to political participation" of the plaintiffs have been violated as alleged.

There are coordinating bodies like the Commission for Monitoring, Promoting, and Verifying the Implementation of the Final Agreement (CSIVI) where the government and Comunes meet and discuss implementation and resources allocation. According to the factions, these are being distributed discriminatorily. "The criteria for reincorporation must be changed. All instruments cannot be for the party. It must be for those of us who signed the agreement" says París.

This political fragmentation happens while the peace deal is under constant pressure, and where an effort must be made so that politicians and civil society support its implementation. The success of the Peace Process, and the former FARC's role in it, however, should not be neglected. When the UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres visited Colombia in November 2021, to mark the 5th anniversary of the agreement, he mentioned how there are "undeniable achievements" that must be recognised. Especially the fact that a former guerrilla group involved in a 50-year war is currently functioning as a political party with the vast majority of its former combatants [living "admirably" in peace](#).

Be that as it may, Comunes must improve their internal cohesion so they can become a stronger and more attractive political actor with the new government taking office in August 2022. However, it remains unclear how a new administration will interact with the political FARC, and what will happen with the political representation of the former combatants.

Notes:

- All the interviews with the former FARC members presented in this article are the authors' own.
- The views expressed here are of the author rather than the Centre or the LSE
- Please read our [Comments Policy](#) before commenting
- Banner image: U.S. Department of State ([Public Domain](#))