Seize the State, Seize the Way: State Capture as a Form of Warlord Politics in Colombia

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The phenomenon of corruption in the context of civil wars is of increasing interest in scholarly literature, but large-scale forms such as state capture have been hardly addressed. Colombia exhibits a particular case in which in many regions the recently demobilized United Self-Defence of Colombia (right-wing paramilitary organization) succeeded since 1998 in capturing the local state and creating specific frameworks of rule within formal state institutions, backed by local political elites and authorities.

**THE PROBLEM**

Strong correlation between criminalization of Colombian politics and drug trafficking

**SOME FACTS**

- Between 2002 and 2006 over 34,000 men-at-arms from the United Self-Defence of Colombia were demobilized under an impunity and immunity regime. It is calculated that over 20% of ex-combatants have been recycled into re-emerging paramilitary structures.

**THE RESEARCH**

- **RESEARCH QUESTION**

  Why (condition), how (mechanisms) and to what extent (ultimate goal) did state capture as a form of warlord politics emerge in Colombia?

- **RESEARCH METHOD**

  Subnational comparative analysis

  **CASE SELECTION**

  Northwest, Centre and Southeast

  (Koenders, Mariana Escobar Arango, 2015)

- **PRELIMINARY FINDINGS**

  Success in state capture is more likely to be achieved in regions where:

  - Status of local has been stabilized in the wake of demobilization
  - There are intermediate to high levels of state capture in the regions
  - The political climate is favorable (state capture efforts are stable)
  - There are indicators to believe that local authorities and citizens have been put to scale

  Success in state capture is less likely to be achieved in regions where:

  - Status of local has not been stabilized
  - There are intermediate to low levels of state capture
  - The political climate is unfavorable (state capture efforts are unstable)
  - There are indicators to believe that local authorities and citizens have not been put to scale

- **WARLORD POLITICS**

  - Politically clienteled networks have been institutionalized
  - Control over territory has been achieved
  - Drug traffickers have established themselves as local political figures

- **SOCIETY**

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  - There are intermediate to high levels of state capture
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- **THE RESEARCH**

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- **CAPTURE OF THE LOCAL STATE BY PARAMILITARY WARLORDS**

  - Successfully obtained impunity and immunity regimes for the demobilization process
  - Successfully built up their influence along the national decision-making centers
  - Successfully obtained legal and immunity regimes for the demobilization process

- **INFLUENCE OF BIG DRUG CARTELS IN POLITICS**

  - Collusion of big drug cartels and increasing control of key decision-making organs and entities

- **COLLAPSE OF BIG DRUG CARTELS AND INCREASING CONTROL OF LEFT-WING GUERRILLAS AND RIGHT-WING PARAMILITARIES IN DRUGS PRODUCTION AND TRADE**

  - It is calculated that between 1997 and 2006 Colombian paramilitaries exported over 350,000 kg of cocaine, worth approximately US$150 million

  - During their aggressive campaign of territorial expansion and control, paramilitaries committed over 150,000 assassinations, 2,500 forcible disappearances, 2,326 cases of forcible displacement, and 1,033 kidnapings of civilians

- **LOW LEVELS OF SUCCESS**

  - Obtained impunity and immunity regimes for the demobilization process
  - Successfully built up their influence along the national decision-making centers
  - Successfully obtained legal and immunity regimes for the demobilization process

- **HIGH LEVELS OF SUCCESS**

  - Successfully obtained impunity and immunity regimes for the demobilization process
  - Successfully built up their influence along the national decision-making centers
  - Successfully obtained legal and immunity regimes for the demobilization process

- **INTERMEDIATE TO LOW LEVELS OF UNDERLYING CRIMINALITY**

  - Gained enormous profits from corruption in public spending
  - Obtained impunity and immunity regimes for the demobilization process
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- **SUBATIONAL COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS**

  - There are intermediate to high levels of state capture
  - The political climate is favorable (state capture efforts are stable)
  - There are indicators to believe that local authorities and citizens have been put to scale

- **SUBNATIONAL POLITICAL ECONOMIES**

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- **FORMS OF ACCUMULATION**

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- **GOVERNMENT DEPENDENCY**

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- **ATTORNEY GENERAL’S OFFICE AND SUPREME COURT OF JUSTICE**

  - Decentralized security agencies and the judiciary at the highest levels
  - Gained enormous profits from corruption in public spending
  - Obtained impunity and immunity regimes for the demobilization process
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- **KEY INDUSTRIES**

  - Drug trafficking activities revolve exclusively around coca leaf production

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- **SELECTED CASES**

  - United Self-Defence of Colombia (paramilitary organization)