

The underlying causes of deforestation during “peacetime”: evidence from the implementation of the peace agreement in Colombia

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Introduction

- ▶ Deforestation has accelerated since the sign of the Colombian Peace Agreement (CPA). The power vacuum left by the FARC-EP after its demobilization in 2016 and the difficulties in the implementation of the Agreement have opened the space for different actors to transform the forests that were inaccessible during wartime.
- ▶ On the one hand, illegal armed groups have taken advantage of the State's absence to dispute territorial control and exploit their natural resources. On the other hand, new and old settlers with expectations of land redistribution are transforming forests into pastures for extensive cattle ranching and other agricultural activities.
- ▶ There is a positive relationship between the presence of illegal armed actors, coca cultivation, and deforestation in the prioritized municipalities for implementation stage of the CPA.

Results

The results show that deforestation has worsened during the first phase of the CPA implementation (2016-2019), especially in the PDET municipalities. The cultivation of illicit crops has also grown considerably, concentrated in prioritized areas and grow at a faster rate than in the rest of the country (Figure 1).

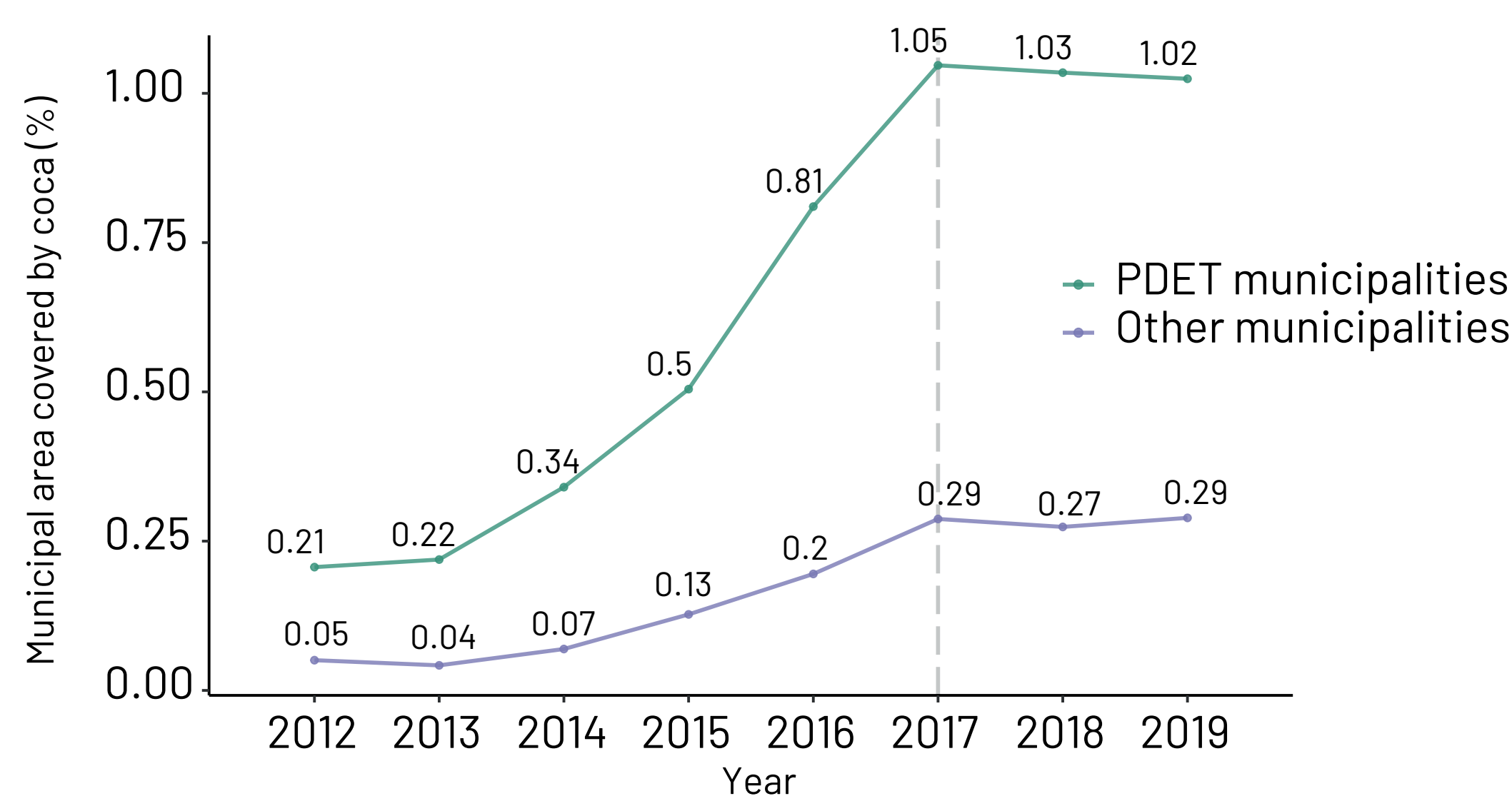


Figure 1. Municipal area covered by coca, 2012-2019 (%)

The expansion of deforestation and illicit crops may be indicators of the presence of illegal armed groups with economic interests. When analyzing the rate of violent acts per 100,000 people perpetrated by illegal armed actors, it is found that violence too has increased (Figure 2).

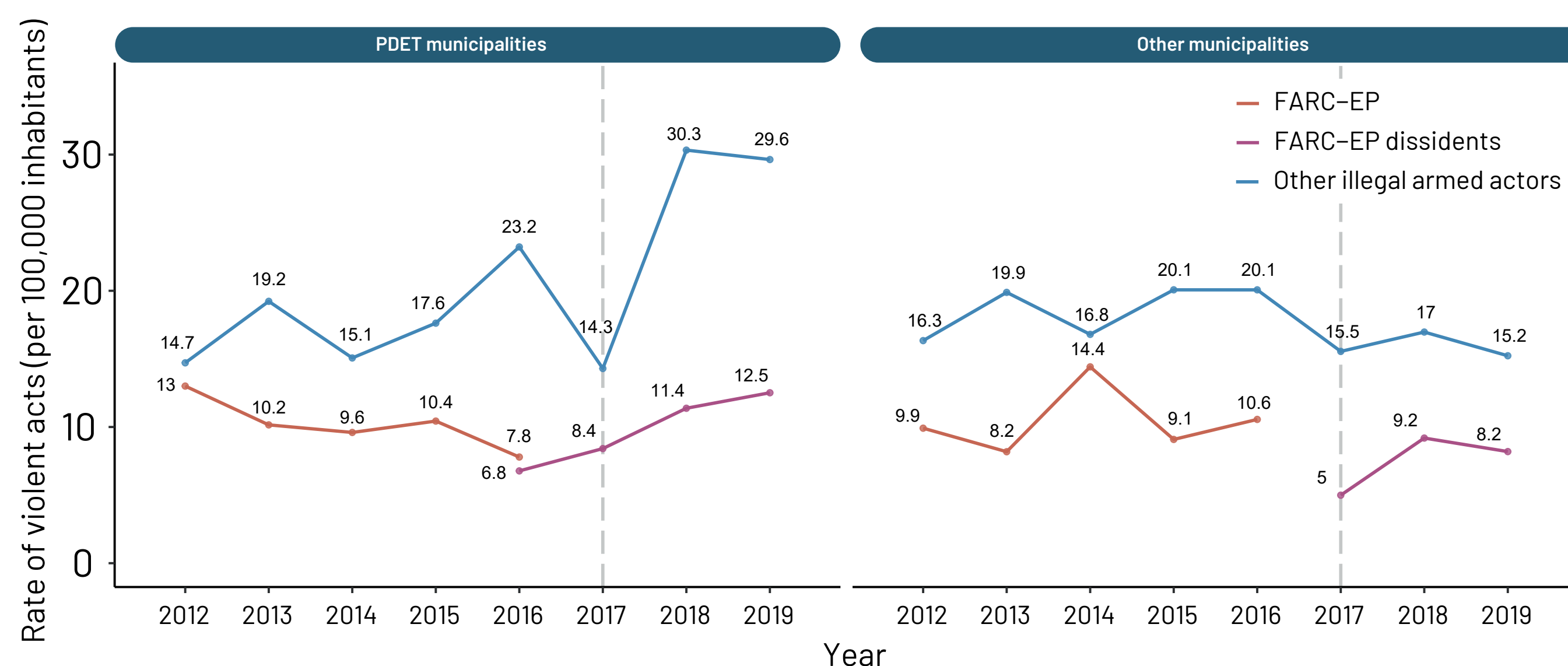


Figure 2. Rate of violent acts perpetrated by illegal actors, before and after the implementation stage of the CPA.

Although compliance with the agreement has progressed continuously, obstacles have arisen, decelerating its implementation in the territories. On the one hand, legislative advances have been delayed both in the processing of the *Differentiated Penal Treatment Law* for small farmers who have planted coca and in the execution of illicit crop substitution

Objective

This research analyzes how delays in the implementation of the CPA with the FARC-EP and the Colombian government are related to deforestation, violence by illegal armed groups, and the rise of illicit economies.

Methodology

- ▶ This study used satellite information on deforestation and coca crops, reports on the violent presence of illegal actors, economic and demographic data of chosen municipalities, combined, to understand the causes of deforestation in the areas most affected by the armed conflict before and after the signing of the CPA.
- ▶ Special emphasis is put on those prioritized by the PDET Municipalities. This sort of data displays not only the dramatic increase in deforestation in Colombia, but also the difficulties in the implementation of the CPA.
- ▶ It is therefore premature to theorize on the harmful environmental effects of peace, as its achievement is far from being consolidated.

programs. On the other hand, mobility restrictions during the Pandemic contributed to the formulation of public policies and programs associated with the *Comprehensive Rural Reform* (CRR) taking longer than planned, in addition to preventing the coordination of community consultation spaces for the victims.

The results show there is a positive correlation between prioritized municipalities, coca cultivation, and the presence of armed groups. This renders visible that disputed territories continue to be unstable (yet under different circumstances), that violence is still quotidian, and that “peace” is not an actual agent of deforestation, but it is instead the lack of pacification which increases environmental catastrophes.

Conclusions

- ▶ Despite the undeniable progress achieved, figures show that violence continues to be a problem in the prioritized territories, and that the success or failure of the implementation processes cannot be evaluated in the short term. Therefore, peace efforts cannot be attributed a negative connotation, since, for PDET municipalities, reconciliation and stability continue to be elusive.
- ▶ One of the hypotheses around the changes in deforestation after the signing of the CPA is the existence of a direct relationship between the transformation of forests and peace. However, a context of peace implies more than the cessation of confrontations between the State and the illegal armed groups.
- ▶ In PDET municipalities, there have been obstacles and delays in the implementation of several of the points of the CPA. Different types of illegal armed actors have taken advantage of this situation and the difficulties of the State to exercise territorial control to dispute control over populations and exploit their natural resources have played a tremendous role in deforestation dynamics.
- ▶ The findings highlight the importance of analyzing the behavior of deforestation after the end of the armed conflict considering the mechanisms that lead to the transformation of forests, rather than establishing a direct, causal relationship between deforestation and peace, largely blind to the inherent complexities of peacebuilding.

Acknowledgments

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Acknowledgments

This work was carried out as part of the CGIAR Initiative on Livestock and Climate. We would like to thank all the donors who globally support our work through their contributions to the CGIAR System. The opinions expressed in this document cannot be taken as official opinions of these organizations.



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Poster prepared for: Tropentag 2023 September 20-22, 2023 Berlin (Germany)