

Academia has a vital role to play in Colombia's peace process

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Achieving an enduring peace in Colombia will require compromise and engagement from every sector of society, but by remaining authoritative, plural, and independent, academia can play a crucial role, write [Francisco Panizza](#) and [Gonzalo Vargas](#).



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The Colombian peace process has the potential to bring significant benefits to the people of the country and beyond. But its implementation faces massive challenges that cannot and should not be underestimated. Academia can play a unique and important role in addressing these challenges, not least through the [Observatory on the Colombia Peace Process](#) currently being established by the LSE Latin American and Caribbean Centre and the Universidad de Los Andes in Bogotá.



The first and most pressing challenge facing the peace process is to bring the nation together and explain how the benefits of peace can outweigh the legitimate concerns of those who opted not to vote or voted against the peace deal in the referendum of October 2016. These concerns vary according to political views, social class, and the particular impacts of past violence on particular citizens, families, and communities, with the conflict being experienced very differently in major cities than in those rural areas which bore the brunt of the violence.

Yet the 2018 presidential election campaign is likely to polarise even further Colombia's already deeply divided society. In this context it may prove extremely difficult to find trusted sources of information and analysis on the implementation of the peace process.

The second, deeper challenge is to ensure that the peace process goes beyond simply silencing the guns. Instead, it must begin to address the underlying conditions that have made violence so prevalent in Colombia over the past half century. For the peace process to take proper root, the social, political, and economic order of the communities worst affected by the violence must be transformed in accordance with principles of democracy, economic inclusion, and social justice.

In facing these key challenges, academics naturally cannot claim a monopoly on the truth, but they can make an important contribution to an informed debate on the peace process both within and outside Colombia.



Part of this contribution will come from the [LSE Latin American and Caribbean Centre](#) and the [Universidad de los Andes](#), as we are working together to [set up](#) an international Observatory that will be able to provide precisely the kinds of research, analysis and information that this complex process will require. In order to do this successfully, three characteristics will be key: [authoritativeness](#), [plurality](#), and [independence](#).

The Observatory will be authoritative because its analyses will be research-led and undertaken by experts from a wide range of disciplines and departments within both institutions. It will be plural because it will be open to contributors within and outside Colombia, including all sectors of Colombia's civil society (not least [Redprodepaz](#), a nationwide coalition of peacebuilding organisations). And it will be independent because even while acknowledging the desirability of peace, it will critically assess the progress of the process, highlighting achievements and shortcomings alike.

Through joint workshops held at Universidad de los Andes in Bogotá (pictured left), researchers from the two institutions have already identified a number of topics that are key to achieving a sustainable peace:

What is the role of international actors as potential facilitators of or obstacles to the peace process? What are the main challenges facing the mechanisms of transitional justice and how can transitional-justice actors best rise to these challenges? How will the peace process impact on urban security? How can we build state capacities to reduce inequalities and promote more inclusive development? What is the likely impact of the peace process on gender violence and how can we bring a gender perspective to the construction of peace? What is the role of business in the political economy of transition to peace? How can electoral reform contribute to the achievement of a more transparent and inclusive democracy? And how can we begin to overcome the key territorial dimension of peace?



As we begin to unpick these complex issues, colleagues and partners from both institutions, both countries, and both continents will report back on our findings in a [special series of articles](#) for this blog, beginning with LSE's [Austin Zeiderman](#) on the politics of threat in Colombia's post-conflict society.

Achieving a lasting peace in Colombia will require compromise and engagement from every sector and segment of society. Academia is ideally placed to support this process, and we must seize the opportunity with both hands.

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