Violent Contexts, Electoral Participation and Vote Choices in Colombia: A Hierarchical Approach

Miguel García-Sánchez
Assistant Professor
Department of Political Science
Universidad de Los Andes
Bogotá – Colombia
m.garcia268@uniandes.edu.co

Prepared for delivery at the 2010 meeting of the MPSA, Chicago, April 22-25 2010.

Data used in this study were provided by the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) of Vanderbilt University.
This study received financial support provided by USAID though a “small grant” from the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) of Vanderbilt University.
ABSTRACT

Drawing on insights from the literatures on contextual effects and civil wars, this paper develops a theoretical framework for understanding the impact of violent contexts on individuals’ electoral participation and vote choices. Specifically, it tests the hypothesis that individuals living under a violent context tend to adjust their political behaviors in line with the strategic objectives and ideological orientations proclaimed by the armed actor dominating the area. Based on a national survey conducted in Colombia in 2005 by the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP), and contextual level data, this paper employs hierarchical regression models to test the theoretical framework. Results suggest a strong impact of violent contexts on political behavior, and that the nature of this impact is closely related to the balance of military power between the competing armed actors and their strategic objectives towards the political system. Disputed areas exhibited the lowest probabilities of voting. Similarly, violent contexts demonstrated to have an important role explaining vote choice. As we move from areas dominated by left-wing insurgents to regions controlled by right-wing paramilitaries, individuals were more likely to support a presidential candidate placed on the right of the ideological spectrum.
1.1 INTRODUCTION

An important number of empirical analyses support the general argument that social and political environments affect individual political behavior and attitudes (Huckfeldt 1979; MacKuen and Brown 1987; Mondak et al. 1996; Corder and Wolbrecht 2006; Baker et al. 2006; Huckfeldt 1986; Huckfeldt and Sprague 1995; Huckfeldt et al. 2004; Berelson et al. 1954). Contexts have an influence on political behavior as they contribute to define the opportunities and limitations individuals face when making political decisions. As a result political behavior and political attitudes cannot be explained relying exclusively on individual characteristics, rather they must be understood in terms of people’s relationship with their environment (Huckfeldt 1986). Contextual effects literature has focused its attention primarily on how socioeconomic environments and social networks influence political behavior in developed countries. However, as electoral democracy has extended to developing nations one can expect that outside Western Europe and the United States additional contextual factors may affect individuals’ political behavior and opinions. This paper focuses on one of these factors asking how individuals behave in a context characterized by high degrees of political violence. More precisely, what is the impact of violent contexts on individuals’ decision to vote, and their electoral preferences?

In this paper I argue that in a situation of civil conflict, armed actors use violence in an attempt to force individuals to behave in a way consistent with their political objectives; therefore, one can expect individuals to adjust their political behavior and opinions to the strategic objectives of the dominant armed actor. I also argue that the nature of the impact of a violent context on individuals’ political behavior is a function of the military balance between armed actors and their strategic objectives towards the political system. Using a hierarchical data
analysis, I show that even though individual factors play a relevant role explaining political behavior, violent contexts have an important effect on individuals’ electoral participation and vote intention.

This paper consists of seven sections. After the introduction, the second section discusses why it is relevant to analyze the relationship between violent contexts and political behavior, and why Colombia is an appropriate case to study this relationship. It also presents a brief description of the illegal actors involved in the Colombian conflict. The third section summarizes the literature on contextual effects. The fourth one introduces some hypothesis about the effects of violent contexts on individuals’ political behavior. The fifth section presents the data and the analytical strategy. The sixth section discusses the results; and the last one concludes.

1.2 COLOMBIA: A DIFFERENT KIND OF CONTEXT

Although most Latin American countries experienced processes of democratization during the past few decades, some of these new democracies continue facing important environmental challenges such as corruption, violence, and institutional instability. This challenges may lead new democracies towards what some authors have called hybrid regimes (Diamond 2002; Levitsky and Way 2002; Schedler 2006). That is, political systems which cannot be considered full democracies or full authoritarianisms because, although elections serve as the main mechanism for obtaining political authority, some of the key principles of a functioning democracy are frequently violated, creating an uneven playing field between political
competitors. In most cases hybrid regimes emerge as incumbents attempt to manipulate the democratic rules for their own benefit. That may be the case of Fujimori’s self coup. However, democracies can also move toward a hybrid regime as external competitors challenge the authority of the democratic state, or when the state surrenders some of its power to a private agent. Here, external competitors and private agents may use violence to seize power or to influence electoral results. This is the case in Colombia during the last three decades. On the one hand, guerrillas increased their actions against democratic institutions in an attempt to undermine them, and in some cases to “influence” them. On the other hand, as paramilitary groups started to play a central role in the Colombian state’s counterinsurgent strategy (Mauceri 2001: 55), these organizations gained important political influence. Thus, studying the repercussions of contextual factors such as political violence on elections and individuals’ political behavior represents an important endeavor of any research agenda focusing upon political behavior in new democracies.

Within Latin America, Colombia represents a “unique” opportunity to study the impact of violent contexts on political behavior. Despite the persistent political violence that has characterized this country during the second half of the twentieth century through the present, the electoral process has unfolded in a context of relative open competition between parties and candidates, a relative absence of fraud, and the perceived legitimacy of winning candidates (Kline 1995; Pecaut 2003). However, during the last decades as the internal conflict has intensified, it is increasingly apparent that the state has been unable to maintain its presence and

---

1 According to Levitsky and Way (2002) functioning democracies have to fulfill the following four principles: 1) executives and legislatives are chosen through free and competitive elections, 2) all adults possess the right to vote, 3) political and civil rights are protected and, 4) elected authorities possess real authority.

2 Some Colombian scholars have even suggested that, during the last decade, Colombian conflict transformed itself into a civil war. See: Ramírez Tobón (2000).
to preserve the democratic rule of law in many parts of the country. Thus, during the last two decades, guerrillas and paramilitaries organizations have consolidated some control over wide areas of the country in ways that have gone beyond mere military domination. In this context, it is valuable to analyze how electorates behave in a country suffering the effects of an internal conflict.

1.3 VIOLENT CONTEXTS AND POLITICAL BEHAVIOR

The literature on political behavior, with a few exceptions, has emerged from studies of democracies characterized by a high degree of political stability. Electoral analyses in countries under stress or crisis usually subscribe to the same theoretical and methodological tendencies developed in stable countries without examining the impact of political crises upon electoral outcomes and political behavior. Political systems confronting crises, that is “a situation where the political or economic system is confronted with challenges with which existing institutions and organizations are potentially unable to cope” (DESTIN 2001), represent a distinct framework for the analysis of political behavior. As mentioned before, several new democracies are facing environmental challenges that may have effects not only on the nature of the political regime, but also on citizens’ political behavior.

Individual characteristics alone cannot fully explain individuals’ political actions and opinions. Along with these factors, political behavior must be understood in terms of individuals’ relationship with the environment and the environmental factors that affect their individual choices (Huckfeldt 1986). In other words, individual’s choice is located at the intersection
between individual preferences on the one hand and environmentally imposed opportunities and constraints on the other.³

There are least two different mechanisms through which social and political environments can have an effect on political behavior. First, the reference group or the structurally imposed context (Huckfeldt 1986; Huckfeldt and Sprague 1987). These are certain social and political conditions external to the individual, which may have a direct effect on political behavior because they limit individuals’ experiences and choices. That is the case of factors such as the ethnic and socioeconomic composition of a neighborhood, or the distribution of political preferences at the work place. Second, social and political contexts can be defined in terms of social networks. That is, individually constructed interpersonal interactions that, although are a product of individuals’ choice, are defined by environmental opportunities and constraints (Huckfeldt and Sprague 1987). Here the context has an influence on the individual’s behavior as people interchange points of view or are exposed to new information.

The effects of structurally imposed contexts on political behavior were studied for the first time in the 1950s. In their analysis of electoral processes and opinion formation in small communities, Berelson, Lazarsfeld and McPhee (1954) showed that political preferences were more likely to be socially constructed than individually determined. At the same time, social psychologists such as Kurt Lewin and Herbert Simon highlighted the effects of social circumstances on individuals’ perceptions, choices, and actions (Zuckerman 2005). After a period in which political scientist focused its attention, almost exclusively, on the individual determinants of political behavior, during the last decades the study of the social logic of

³ This broad understanding of a political or social context implies that structural factors, interpersonal networks, as well as institutions, among other factors, constitute the environment in which individuals act and make their political decisions.
political behavior has gained interest (Zuckerman 2005). Research has focused its attention on turnout, vote choice, partisanship and political preferences; and socioeconomic conditions appear as one of the main contextual determinants of political behavior (Giles and Dantico 1982; Huckfeldt 1979; Kenny 1992; Leighley 1990; Mondak et al. 1996). Additional structurally imposed contexts have been found to have an influence on political attitudes and political behavior; the list includes: the ethnic composition of neighborhoods (Giles and Buckner 1993), regional levels of women’s enrollment in higher education (Banaszak and Plutzer 1993), the theological climate of religious communities (Wald et al. 1988), and urban conglomerates’ size (Oliver 2000).

Recently, some contextual analyses have changed their focus from structurally imposed contexts to social and political networks. This line of research has made important contributions about the influence of other persons on individuals’ political decisions and attitudes. First, this line of research has showed that people who discuss politics are more susceptible to experience changes in their opinions that are consistent with the opinions prevalent in a given area (Mutz 1997; Huckfeldt 1986). Or as MacKuen and Brown (1987) argued, individuals will tend to align their views with those dominant in their political milieu (474). However, heterogeneous social networks tend to make voters more ambivalent, as they are exposed to diverse political views (Huckfeldt et al. 2004; Baker et al. 2006). Research on the effects of social networks also demonstrated that individuals have an important role on the articulation of the social and political networks in which they became involved. In other words, individuals can shape their interaction networks. However, although individuals decide with whom they interact, the pool of individuals from which they can select their discussion partners is conditioned by their social context.
As mentioned above, most of the literature on contextual effects has focused on the impact of socioeconomic contexts and social networks on political decisions and attitudes. However, there is a lack of research about the effects on political behavior of environmental factors characteristic of developing democracies. That is the case of political violence. This paper attempts to bridge that gap; but, why would political violence or an internal conflict should affect individuals’ political behavior? The following section proposes an answer to this question.

1.4 POLITICAL VIOLENCE AND ELECTORAL BEHAVIOR

Unlike common violence, political violence usually grows out of an interaction of opponents, and serves specific instrumental purposes; in other words, it is used to achieve diverse strategic goals (Tilly 1978). According to Powell, political violence has three general objectives: “to change the bargaining rules of the democratic game, to undermine the support enjoyed by the regime or its major parties, or to intimidate the opposition while mobilizing support” (Powell 1982: 158). In the same way, other scholars have suggested that one of the central functions of violence in civil wars is to generate citizens’ obedience (Kalyvas 2006; Wickman-Crowley 1990; Kalyvas 1999); thus, in contexts of internal conflict or civil war, the actual use of violence or the threat of its use is “intended to shape the behavior of a targeted audience by altering the expected value of particular actions” (Kalyvas 2006: 26).

---

4 The literature on political violence conceives violence as either contingent or inherent. The second perspective argues that since violence is one of many alternative channels of group activity, it is chosen as a tactical calculation (Eckstein 1980). This paper follows the idea that violence is an inherent human behavior.

5 Violence increases the cost of certain actions; therefore individuals have no chance but to accept the authority of the dominant armed actor.
When an armed actor decides to use violence against the political system or certain individuals, it attempts to shape the social context in which individuals take political decisions. By doing so, this actor seeks to force individuals to behave in a way consistent with its political objectives. As a result, *individuals living in violent contexts will tend to adjust their political behaviors and opinions in line with the strategic objectives and ideological orientations proclaimed by the dominant armed actor.*

This general expectation warrants a more detailed explanation. First, I assume a conflict in which there are two competing armed actors. These actors may be the government (the incumbent) and an insurgent force (the challenger); or an illegal armed actor close to the government—a counterinsurgent force or a paramilitary group—and an insurgent group. Second, I also assume that these groups have political counterparts or “allied” political parties which compete in the electoral arena. Some armed actors have close links to political parties as they share a common political project. That was the case of many insurgent groups and the Communist party, or the National Fascist Party and paramilitary groups in Italy (Elazar 2000). Other armed actors develop alliances with political parties; however, these pacts may be temporal and they do not imply a close ideological connection. They may be product of strategic decisions to reach a common political goal.

The political dimension of armed actors suggests that they may also differ in terms of their strategies toward the political system. Some armed actors may want to *influence* the politics by trying to affect, for example, electoral results; while others may want to *undermine* the existing political system, by blocking elections or by overthrowing elected authorities. In Colombia paramilitaries represent the first strategy. These counter insurgent forces attempt to have an influence on local and national politics, using violence to undermine the electoral
support enjoyed by leftwing parties, while they mobilize support for candidates close to them. Left-wing guerrillas, on the other hand, use violence attempting to undermine the current political regime (Pizarro 1996). Guerrillas are less interested in promoting candidates than in blocking elections and killing politicians.

In some cases armed actors may practice a “mixed” strategy. This type of strategy implies that while a given armed actor is trying to influence politics, at the same time it attempts to undermine the political system. In Colombia, the FARC initially practiced a “mixed” strategy as this organization combined attacks against the state with electoral politics (Harnecker 1987). However, recently this guerrilla has concentrated all its efforts to undermine the current political regime (Ferro and Uribe 2002). “Mixed” strategies tend to take place at the national level, as an armed actor changes its strategy from one region to another within the same country. At the local level, armed actors have less room for a “mixed” strategy, because they need to focus their activities and resources towards a single set of political institutions (mayor and city council), making inefficient to set in motion contradictory efforts. If an armed actor were to develop a “mixed” strategy towards a single set of political institutions, it would be acting as its own competitor. An armed actor cannot try to have influence on electoral outcomes while at the same time it is blocking elections, because it will fail to fulfill one of these two strategies. Thus, at the local level armed actors have to either try to influence or to undermine the political system. Since my analysis focuses on the local level I will not analyze the impact of “mixed” strategies.

Finally, armed actors may also differ in terms of their level of control over a given region. On the one hand, there is a situation of fragmented control; this is typically the situation of disputed or contested areas in which there are two relatively equal military powers. In situations of fragmented control, violence can be exercised by both sides (Kalyvas 1999: 252).
On the other hand, there are areas of full or close to full control. Here one of the competing armed actors exercises full sovereignty or at least it enjoys a dominant position. In this scenario the dominant actor controls the violent initiative and the means of violence, as other armed actor was expel from the region or was force to hide in the periphery. In Colombia, during the late 1990’s paramilitary forces took over several municipalities previously dominated by left-wing insurgents who were forced to move to the rural highlands.

In sum, the nature of a violent context is defined by armed actors’ level of control or dispute over a region and their political strategies. However, what are the specific impacts of different violent context on electoral participation, electoral preferences, and political opinions?

In a violent context one can expect individuals’ electoral participation to decrease. However, not all violent contexts are the same, so I expect the reduction of electoral participation to vary as we move from one violent context to another. When an armed actor increases its control over a region, political competition is expected to decrease, as political parties representing political ideas opposing the dominant armed actor’s ideology may reduce their presence. These parties withdraw from politics as a way to protect their members from violence, or they simply disappear due to violent actions committed against their militants. No matter the armed actor’s strategic orientation, dominated areas become politically homogeneous; in this type of macro-environment political information flow and mobilization efforts decrease stimulating a reduction in electoral participation (Gimpel and Lay 2005: 210).

In disputed areas, on the other hand, the individual probability of voting is expected to be even lower than in controlled municipalities. Contested regions are characterized by high levels of indiscriminate violence against civilians and politicians (Kalyvas 2006, 1999). In these areas the expression of any political position may expose individuals to violent attacks from any
competing armed actor. Citizens living in these areas face a situation in which there is no safe action but inaction; therefore they will abstain from voting as a mechanism to protect themselves from political violence (Garcia 2006). Similarly, in this type of social environment political parties will temporarily withdrew from the political arena as a mechanism to protect their members; as a result political competition will be very low and there will be almost no mobilization efforts. In other words, in disputed areas individuals will adopt a fence-sitting strategy as “contestation makes it difficult for most people to align with a single political actor” (Kalyvas 2006: 226).

Individual electoral preferences, like electoral participation, may also be affected by armed actors’ levels of control over a region. High levels of dominance give armed actors the chance of forcing individuals to support their political counterparts. Individuals living in these areas will have a higher probability of voting for these candidates or political parties than individuals living in other non dominated areas. However, this effect may be moderated by armed actors’ strategies towards the political system. Armed actors attempting to influence the politics are more likely to use their dominant status to promote the electoral success of certain candidates or political parties. Generally, these parties represent the existing political status quo. Conversely, armed actors attempting to undermine a political order, will use their dominant position to promote electoral support for disloyal opposition parties (Linz 1978: 27), while they try to undermine political support for those parties around which the existing political status quo it is articulated.

---

6 By the mid 1990s the dispute between guerrillas and paramilitaries reached its peak in the Colombian municipality of Apartadó. This caused that in 1994 there were no politicians willing to compete for the local executive.
In Colombia paramilitaries embody the first case. This organization developed pacts with politicians from various political parties.⁷ Like the paramilitaries, these politicians are located at the right-wing of the ideological spectrum, and they represent the political status quo historically sustained by the bipartisan hegemony. Guerrilla controlled areas represent the second scenario. By the end of the 1990s, the FARC expressed its intention of undermining electoral support for Liberal and Conservative candidates. An insurgent commander declared: “…in the areas which we control, we are not going to allow the traditional parties to make hay” (Ferro and Uribe, 2002: 140). Thus, in these regions the individual probability of voting for parties and candidates representing the current status quo will decrease compared to areas controlled by the state or by paramilitary groups.

In disputed regions, the violent context will not have an effect on individuals’ electoral preferences. Armed actors need to have a minimal advantage over their competitors to have an influence on individuals’ electoral choice. As an armed actor is able to consolidate its military control in a certain region, it will be able to generate some sort of political order, and therefore it will be capable of having an influence on individuals’ political behavior. This is not the situation in contested areas; therefore armed actors will not be able to use violence to have a particular effect on political outcomes.

---
⁷ Recently, paramilitaries supported several politicians belonging to President Uribe’s congressional coalition.
Table 1. Expected Effects of Violent Contexts on Voting and Electoral Preferences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LEVEL OF TERRITORIAL CONTROL</th>
<th>POLITICAL STRATEGY</th>
<th>Influence</th>
<th>Undermine</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Contested</td>
<td>The probability of voting reaches its lowest level.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>There is no effect on electoral preferences</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full control</td>
<td>The probability of voting decreases.</td>
<td>The probability of voting decreases.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The probability of supporting pro “status-quo” candidates and parties increases.</td>
<td>The probability of supporting pro “status-quo” candidates and parties decreases.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Predominant Armed Actor</td>
<td>Paramilitaries</td>
<td>Guerrillas</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1.5 DATA AND METHODS

Individual level data used in this paper comes from a national survey conducted in Colombia in 2005 by the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) of Vanderbilt University. This survey is divided into two samples. The first one is a nationally representative sample of 1,487 adults from 48 municipalities covering all of Colombia’s geographical regions (Bogotá, Atlantic, Pacific, Central, Western and the former National Territories). The second one is a sample of 1,596 adults, representative of conflict regions. The latter sample interviewed individuals from 28 municipalities. Both samples applied the same questionnaire. In short, the LAPOP study conducted in 2005, interviewed 3,083 adults from 76 Colombian municipalities. In this paper I also use contextual level data on political violence and socioeconomic factors for the 76 municipalities included in the survey. Data on political violence includes measures, at the municipal level, of armed actors’ levels of control and dispute. Using the municipal level data on armed actors’ military balance and other contextual factors, this paper will be based on a
hierarchical data structure, as I have information on individual level variables (level-1) and municipal level factors (level-2).

1.5.1 Variables

This paper deals with two types of dependent variables: vote, and vote intention. *Vote* is a dichotomous variable measuring whether or not an individual participated in the 2003 local elections. Vote is coded so that one is equal to vote and zero to non vote. *Vote intention* measures whether or not an individual was planning to vote for the incumbent in the 2006 presidential elections. Vote intention is coded so that one is equal to vote intention for President Álvaro Uribe, and zero is equal to vote intention for any other candidate. This variable allows me to test the effect of a violent context on a vote choice representing a somehow extreme ideological position. President Uribe embodies the current “status-quo”, and he represents the right-wing segments of the Liberal party and the Conservative party.\(^8\) Additionally, several members of Uribe’s congressional coalition have been involved in political pacts or negotiations with paramilitary groups.\(^9\)

The different violent contexts described in the previous section are measured using a group of variables capturing the local balance of power between guerrillas and paramilitaries at the municipal level. Two variables measure the level of control exercised in a given municipality

---

\(^8\) Alvaro Uribe himself has been recognized as one of the most conservative members of the Liberal party. His cabinet and congressional coalition is made up the majority of the Conservative party and the growing right-wing segments of the Liberal party.

\(^9\) 57 members of Uribe’s government congressional coalition have been investigated or judged for their political links to paramilitary groups.
by guerrillas and paramilitaries, respectively. Another variable captures the extent of the dispute between guerrillas and paramilitaries.

These variables were constructed in the following way. I started by creating a municipal level database on violent actions, covering the seven electoral years between 1988 and 2003.\(^\text{10}\) This database records, on a daily basis, violent events committed by guerrillas and paramilitaries in all Colombian municipalities. Violent actions included in the database are: terrorist acts, attacks on public property, attacks on private property, blocking of roads, ambushes, combats, piracy, massacres, homicides, assaults against individuals, political kidnappings, and assaults against public officials. Based on these data, I produced two annual counts of violent actions committed by guerrillas and paramilitaries in every Colombian municipality.\(^\text{11}\) These variables capture the intensity of armed actors’ political violence. Using these variables, the following step was to create a classification procedure capable of discriminating to what extent a given municipality is controlled by guerrillas or paramilitaries, or it is disputed by these armed actors.

First, I decided to take advantage of the geographical and longitudinal character of my dataset on political violence. Although this paper works only with 76 municipalities and cross-sectional survey data, using the information on political violence in the surrounding areas of a given municipality, and considering each municipality’s history of violence are key elements to come up with a reliable measure of armed actors dispute, and guerrilla and paramilitary levels of control. Considering time and space helped me to avoid misclassifying municipalities that differ in terms of armed actors’ levels of control, but that appear as very similar at a given point in time. For instance, two municipalities may register a very low count of violent actions in a given

\(^\text{10}\) I only recorded information for electoral years due to constraints in time and resources.
\(^\text{11}\) The source of this database was a report on violent actions published by Centro de Investigación y Educación Popular, CINEP.
year. The first one is located in a relatively peaceful region, and over the years it consistently registers low levels of political violence. In this case, there is no doubt that this municipality is not controlled or disputed by any armed actor. The second municipality also experienced low levels of political violence in that particular year, but previously it experienced high levels of violence. Here low levels of violence at one particular year may be the consequence that guerrillas or paramilitaries finally conquered the region, therefore they don’t need to use violence anymore. Similarly, an apparently peaceful town may be surrounded by municipalities affected by high levels of violence; thus, although this municipality appears as not affected by political violence it belongs to a disputed region.

I considered the geographical dimension of political violence creating a spatially weighted count of both guerrilla and paramilitary violent actions. These variables were created, using GeoDa 0.9.3, multiplying the yearly counts of armed actors’ violent activities by a contiguity weight containing information on the neighborhood structure of each municipality (Anselin 2003: 2). This structure is defined using one of two types of contiguity criteria. I used a neighboring structure called “Queen”, that creates the contiguity weight considering information from the municipalities sharing a border with a particular location, and the municipalities placed in the vertices of that location.

Using the spatially weighted count of violent actions, the next step was to use a procedure to distinguish municipalities controlled or disputed by the different armed actors. In longitudinal analysis there is the possibility that individuals or observations don’t follow a common development pattern, instead there may be clusters or subgroups within a population describing distinctive trajectories (Nagin 2005). Following this logic, Nagin developed a semiparametric group-based modeling approach that identifies trajectories or paths emerging from longitudinal
data. This technique allows the identification of groups within a population on the basis of a formal statistical model rather than on subjective classification rules (Nagin 2005: 15). Via Nagin’s approach, I identified distinctive trajectories described by the violent actions committed both by guerrillas and paramilitaries. In other words, I was able to distinguish clusters of municipalities in which violent actions perpetrated by guerrillas and paramilitaries follow different patterns. Two semi-parametric group-based models were estimated for guerrillas and paramilitaries violent actions, respectively using SAS PROC TRAJ (Jones et al. 2001).

My analyses started by identifying the optimal number of trajectories and their shape. Models with two, three, and four groups, as well as models including different time points were estimated. The best model fit was obtained using information on political violence from the last three time points (1997, 2000 and 2003), and including four trajectories. In the case of guerrilla actions, all four groups were modeled as quadratic curves; for paramilitaries’ violence, one group was modeled as a flat trajectory, and the remaining groups as quadratic lines. The trajectories for the final models are depicted in Figure 1; parameter estimates and model fit measures are provided in Appendix A. Solid lines represent the trajectories of paramilitary violence, dotted lines represent guerrillas’ actions paths.

In the case of paramilitary violence, the largest group called “Very low stable” is estimated to include approximately 76% of Colombian municipalities, and it is comprised by towns registering almost no paramilitary activity. The “Moderate decreasing” group includes about 20% of all municipalities and captures towns in which paramilitaries moved from about 4 actions in 1997 to approximately 2 in 2003. The “Increasing” trajectory describes municipalities experiencing an important augment in paramilitary violence; it includes only 1.6% of all Colombian towns. Conversely, the “Decreasing” group describes those municipalities that at the
beginning of the period experienced a severe amount of paramilitary violence, and then it decreased to moderate levels. This trajectory includes around 2.4% of Colombian municipalities.

All four guerrilla’s trajectories describe similar shapes as violence increases in 2000 and then it suffers a reduction by 2003. The largest group, also called “Very low stable”, includes a 56% of Colombian municipalities in which there are almost no guerrilla actions. A second “Low stable” group is comprised of approximately 30% of all towns; here guerrillas committed about 2 violent actions across the years. A third group called “Moderate decreasing” includes about 12% of all municipalities, and captures towns in which guerrillas moved from being
responsible for about 4 actions in 1997, to perpetrate approximately 2 violent events in 2003. Finally, the “High increasing-decreasing” group represents only 2% of Colombian towns; here guerrilla violence starts relatively high, reaches its highest level in 2000 and then it suffers and important decrease in 2003.

By crossing paramilitary and guerrilla trajectories I classified all municipalities according to different levels of guerrilla or paramilitary control, as well as various levels of dispute between these armed actors. Table 2 displays the scenarios of dispute and control resulting from the intersection between guerrilla and paramilitary trajectories. Municipalities in which both guerrilla and paramilitary actions describe the “very low stable” paths are consider areas controlled by the Colombia state or regions not affected by the armed conflict. Towns controlled by the guerrillas result from the intersection between guerrillas’ “Low stable”, “Moderate decreasing” and “High increasing-decreasing” trajectories and paramilitaries’ “Very low stable” trajectory; and from the crossing between guerrillas’ “High increasing-decreasing” path and paramilitaries’ “Moderate decreasing” trajectory. Paramilitary controlled areas result from the intersection between paramilitaries’ “Moderate decreasing”, “Increasing” and “Decreasing” trajectories and guerrillas’ “Very low stable” and “Low stable” paths. The intersection between paramilitaries’ “Decreasing” trajectory and guerrillas “Moderate decreasing” trajectory also define municipalities controlled by the right-wing paramilitaries. Finally, disputed municipalities are defined by the intersection between paramilitaries’ “Moderate decreasing” and “Increasing” paths and guerrillas’ “Moderate decreasing” path. The crossing between paramilitaries’ Increasing” and “Decreasing” trajectories and guerrillas “High increasing-decreasing” trajectory define disputed municipalities as well.
Finally, I created four continuous variables capturing the local balance of power between guerrillas and paramilitaries at the municipal level. I assigned to each cell resulting from the intersection between the different trajectories numerical values measuring the level of armed actors’ control or dispute (Table 2). I created an integrated measure of control and dispute (Guerrillas v. Paramilitaries). This variable goes from -4 to 4, where values from -4 to -2 represent different levels of guerrilla control, scores from 2 to 4 describe the various degrees of paramilitary control. Disputed municipalities where coded -1 when guerrillas show a slight advantage over paramilitaries, and 1 when paramilitaries are the armed actor having a minor advantage. Zero indicates absence of armed actors. Then I broke up this measure into three variables, one capturing paramilitary control, another measuring guerrilla control, and the last one capturing dispute. These variables are coded in a 0 to 3 scale in which 0 represents no control or dispute, and 3 represents the highest level of control or dispute.

In addition to the contextual variables capturing the different scenarios of military balance and strategic objectives, my analysis controls for the impact of other contextual and

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paramilitaries’ Trajectories</th>
<th>Very Low Stable</th>
<th>Low Stable</th>
<th>Moderate Decreasing</th>
<th>High Increasing - Decreasing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very Low Stable</td>
<td>No Conflict</td>
<td>Guerrilla</td>
<td>Guerrilla</td>
<td>Guerrilla</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate Decreasing</td>
<td>Paramilitaries</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increasing</td>
<td>Paramilitaries</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decreasing</td>
<td>Paramilitaries</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
individual level variables on political behavior. One of the factors found to have an influence on
individuals’ political participation are contextual economic conditions (Giles and Dantico 1982;
Huckfeldt 1979; Kenny 1992; Leighley 1990; Mondak et al. 1996). To account for the effect of
this environmental factor, I include in my analysis of voting a poverty measure known as
Unsatisfied Basic Needs (UBN) index. This variable identifies the proportion of households
having one or more unsatisfied basic needs (Feres and Mancero 2001). This variable was
measured in a 0 to 100 scale, in which higher values represent an elevated level of poverty.\footnote{The basic needs considered by the index are: adequate living space, adequate provision of utilities, number of
persons per room, household income, and household members’ level of education (controlled by age).}

In the case of the effect of violent contexts on vote intention, one could make the
argument that armed actors move to places where the population already shares their political
preferences, therefore the relationship between armed actors’ presence and individuals’ vote
choice may be endogenous. To control for this option I created a variable capturing contextual
ideological preferences. Using local electoral results from 1988 to 2003, I coded every winning
party using a 1 to 5 scale. Left-wing parties were coded 1, while right-wing parties were assigned
a 5. Then, I created a score capturing each municipality’s average ideological preferences
between 1988 and 2003, so low scores indicate consistent support for left-wing parties in local
elections, while high scores show regular support for the right.

Since the hierarchical structure of the data allows me to control for the effects of
individual level variables, I include in my analyses several individual level factors that the
literature on political behavior has found to have an impact on participation, and vote choice.
These variables are: age, gender, education, socioeconomic status, system support, external
political efficacy, political sophistication, political engagement, party identification, and
sociotropic evaluations of the economy. A detailed description of these variables is presented in Appendix B. Table 4 displays the descriptive statistics.

### Table 3. Descriptive Statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard deviation</th>
<th>Min.</th>
<th>Max.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dependent variables</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vote</td>
<td>3055</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vote intention for the Incumbent</td>
<td>2972</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Level-2 Independent Variables</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guerrilla Control</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>0.40</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paramilitary Control</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>0.36</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dispute</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guerrilla V. Paramilitary</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>-0.43</td>
<td>1.55</td>
<td>-4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty (UBN)</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>40.40</td>
<td>23.84</td>
<td>9.96</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideology</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>3.21</td>
<td>0.43</td>
<td>1.83</td>
<td>4.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Level-1 Independent Variables</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>3063</td>
<td>8.05</td>
<td>4.37</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>2859</td>
<td>36.57</td>
<td>14.10</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age (2003)</td>
<td>3065</td>
<td>35.80</td>
<td>13.73</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>System support</td>
<td>2983</td>
<td>59.65</td>
<td>20.76</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender (male)</td>
<td>3065</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socioeconomic status</td>
<td>3065</td>
<td>47.25</td>
<td>21.58</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External efficacy</td>
<td>2936</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophistication</td>
<td>3065</td>
<td>46.13</td>
<td>27.25</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party ID (traditional)</td>
<td>2984</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current sociotropic eval.</td>
<td>3049</td>
<td>39.81</td>
<td>20.30</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prospective sociotropic eval.</td>
<td>2891</td>
<td>42.44</td>
<td>37.65</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political engagement</td>
<td>3038</td>
<td>10.46</td>
<td>22.60</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideology</td>
<td>2489</td>
<td>64.71</td>
<td>27.32</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 1.5.2 Analytical Strategy

To analyze the impact of violent contexts on political behavior in Colombia, I estimated a series of hierarchical models, with vote, and vote intention modeled at level-1 nested within municipalities at level-2. These estimations were conducted in HLM 6.06. Vote and vote
intention were modeled using a two-level model for binary outcomes. For each of the dependent variables I estimated two types of HLM models: the fully unconditional model and the conditional model.

The fully unconditional model predicts the dependent variable within each level-1 unit with just one level-2 parameter, the intercept $\beta_{0j}$, where the intercept is the mean outcome for the $j$th unit. In addition, it provides information about the outcome variability at each of the two levels (within-municipalities and between-municipalities). The variance components represent the within-group variability ($\sigma^2$) and the between-group variability ($\tau_{00}$). By comparing the variance components this model allows me to gauge how much variability in the dependent variable is attributable to municipalities versus individuals, and provides information on whether or not contextual level factors must be considered to model the outcome (Raudenbush and Bryk 2002:23).

For binary outcomes, the level-1 equation for the unconditional model is:

$$\eta_{ij} = \log\left(\frac{\varphi_{ij}}{1 - \varphi_{ij}}\right)$$

$$\eta_{ij} = \beta_{0j}$$

and the level-2 equation is: $\beta_{0j} = \gamma_{00} + u_{0j}$; $u_{0j} \sim N(0, \tau_{00})$. Where $\gamma_{00}$ is the average log-odds of occurrence of, for instance, voting in local elections across municipalities, $\tau_{00}$ is the variance between municipalities in municipality-average log-odds of the outcome variable, and $u_{0j}$ represents the random effect associated with unit $j$ (Raudenbush and Bryk 2002:297).

---

13 The HLM model for binary outcomes uses a binomial sampling model and a logit link function (Raudenbush and Bryk 2002; 294).
Having estimated the outcome variability at each of the two levels, the next step will be to build an explanatory model to account for this variability. The *conditional model* will take into account level-1 and level-2 predictors, and it attempts to understand why some municipalities have higher outcome means than others, and why in some municipalities the relationship between the level-1 predictors and the outcome variable is stronger than in others. In this model, the units at level-1 are individuals and each person’s outcome is a function of individual characteristics. At level-2 the units are municipalities, and the regression intercept (the mean outcome) or the level-1 slopes are conceived as the dependent variables that are hypothesized to depend on certain contextual factors (Raudenbush and Bryk 2002).  

In this paper I will estimate two types of *conditional models*. First, I start by modeling only the intercepts (*intercepts-as-outcomes model*). This will allow me to know whether different violent contexts predict significant differences in mean vote and mean vote intention, which is my main theoretical interest. Then, I will model both intercepts and level-1 slopes (*intercepts-and slopes-as-outcomes model*). By predicting the level-1 slopes using contextual variables, I will be able to discover whether the strength of the associations between contextual level factors and the outcome variables changes at different levels of the individual variables. In other words, I will try to capture which individuals are more affected by violent contexts and which are more resistant to environmental influences. Because my theory doesn’t focus on how municipal-level factors affect individual predictors of vote and vote intention, I will model the level-1 slopes following a more inductive approach. One alternative is to model every slope using all contextual variables; however cross-level interaction can introduce into the model problems such as lost of efficiency in parameter estimation (Raudenbush and Bryk 2002). Therefore a more

---

14 These types of models are also known as Intercepts-as-Outcomes models.
parsimonious approach was preferred in which I will model the slopes including only those contextual variables with \( t \)-statistics greater than 1.50.\(^{15}\)

In all HLM conditional models the continuous independent variables will be centered on the grand mean, and the dummy variables will be included uncentered. By centering the variables in this way, the models’ intercepts represent the average log-odds of certain event or the average value of the dependent variable, when the continuous variables take their mean values and the dummy variables are equal to zero.

1.6 RESULTS

This section presents results from two sets of hierarchical models dealing with the effects of violent contexts on political behavior. The first subsection focuses on electoral participation, and the second one deals with vote intention.

1.6.1 Electoral Participation Models.

The first column in Table 4 displays the results for the fully unconditional model of voting. The intercept coefficient \( \gamma_{00} \) shows the average log-odds of voting across municipalities, which corresponds to a probability of voting of approximately .62.\(^{16}\) In addition, a significant intercept indicates that individuals were found to vary significantly around their municipal means. Taking into account the intercept coefficient (the mean) and the municipal level variance \( \tau_{00} \), I found that

\(^{15}\) Lee and Bryk (1989) and Weld (2006) follow a similar estimation strategy when working with cross-level interactions.

\(^{16}\) Using the odds ratio (OR) I estimated the probability \( (p) \) using the following formula: \( p = \text{OR}/(1+\text{OR}) \).
95% of the municipalities lie between .42 and .79 with respect to the average probability of voting in local elections.\textsuperscript{17} In sum, the fully unconditional model suggests that there is a statistically significant variation in the probability of voting that may be associated with municipal or contextual level factors.

The first conditional model for voting in the 2003 local elections includes individual level variables, and models the level-1 intercept using four contextual variables: guerrilla control, paramilitary control, dispute and poverty (UBN). Its functional form is the following.

For the dependent variable vote the level-1 equation is:

\[ \eta_{ij} = \beta_{0j} + \beta_{1j} (\text{Education})_{ij} + \beta_{2j} (\text{Age})_{ij} + \beta_{3j} (\text{System support})_{ij} + \beta_{4j} (\text{Gender})_{ij} + \beta_{5j} (\text{SES})_{ij} + \beta_{6j} (\text{External efficacy})_{ij} + \beta_{7j} (\text{Sophistication})_{ij} + \beta_{8j} (\text{Traditional Party ID})_{ij} + \beta_{9j} (\text{Political Engagement})_{ij} , \]

and the level-2 model is:

\[ \beta_{0j} = \gamma_{00} + \gamma_{01} (\text{Guerrilla Control})_{j} + \gamma_{02} (\text{Paramilitary Control})_{j} + \gamma_{03} (\text{Dispute})_{j} + \gamma_{04} (\text{UBN})_{j} + u_{0j} \]

\textsuperscript{17} To obtain this interval, first I estimated the log-odds interval using the following formula: \( \gamma_{00} \pm (1.96 * \sqrt{\tau_{00}}) \). Then I transformed the log-odds interval into an odds ratio interval (\( \text{OR} = \exp^{[\text{log-odds}]} \)), and finally into a probabilities interval using the formula presented in foot note 25.
Table 4. HLM Models of Vote in Local elections

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fixed Effects</th>
<th>Model 1 Fully Unconditional</th>
<th>Model 2 Conditional</th>
<th>Model 3 Conditional Cross-level Interactions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Level-2 predictors</strong></td>
<td>Coefficient (Robust SE)</td>
<td>Coefficient (Robust SE)</td>
<td>Coefficient (Robust SE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercept $\gamma_{00}$</td>
<td>0.488 *** (0.064)</td>
<td>0.402 *** (0.102)</td>
<td>0.388 *** (0.091)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guerrilla Control $\gamma_{01}$</td>
<td>-0.04 (0.111)</td>
<td>-0.061 (0.109)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paramilitary Control $\gamma_{02}$</td>
<td>-0.181 * (0.071)</td>
<td>-0.189 ** (0.071)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dispute $\gamma_{03}$</td>
<td>-0.232 * (0.094)</td>
<td>-0.436 *** (0.091)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty (UBN) $\gamma_{04}$</td>
<td>0.009 ** (0.003)</td>
<td>0.009 ** (0.003)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Level-1 predictors</strong></td>
<td>Coefficient (Robust SE)</td>
<td>Coefficient (Robust SE)</td>
<td>Coefficient (Robust SE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education $\gamma_{10}$</td>
<td>0.062 *** (0.014)</td>
<td>0.063 *** (0.013)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age $\gamma_{20}$</td>
<td>0.024 *** (0.003)</td>
<td>0.024 *** (0.003)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>System Support $\gamma_{30}$</td>
<td>-0.001 (0.002)</td>
<td>-0.001 (0.002)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dispute $\gamma_{31}$</td>
<td>0.010 * (0.005)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender $\gamma_{40}$</td>
<td>0.026 (0.105)</td>
<td>0.022 (0.105)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socioeconomic Status $\gamma_{50}$</td>
<td>0.001 (0.003)</td>
<td>0.000 (0.003)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ext. Efficacy $\gamma_{60}$</td>
<td>0.228 ** (0.079)</td>
<td>0.242 ** (0.080)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophistication $\gamma_{70}$</td>
<td>0.001 (0.002)</td>
<td>0.001 (0.002)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party ID (Traditional) $\gamma_{80}$</td>
<td>0.436 *** (0.097)</td>
<td>0.457 *** (0.092)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dispute $\gamma_{31}$</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Engagement $\gamma_{90}$</td>
<td>0.02 *** (0.003)</td>
<td>0.021 *** (0.003)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty (UBN) $\gamma_{91}$</td>
<td>0.000 * (0.000)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Random Effects</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Variance Components</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Municipal level effect $\tau_{00}$</td>
<td>0.177 ***</td>
<td>0.135 ***</td>
<td>0.106 ***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual level effect $\sigma^2$</td>
<td>0.421</td>
<td>0.367</td>
<td>0.326</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reliability of intercept</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td>0.43</td>
<td>0.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage explained$^+$</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>40</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001

$^+$ Between municipalities variance in voting accounted for by level-2 variables
Following the literature on political participation, I expect that individuals with higher socioeconomic and intellectual resources will have a higher probability of voting than their poorer, less educated, and less sophisticated counterparts (Brady et al. 1995; Plutzer 2002; Rosenstone 1982; Verba and Nie 1972; Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980). Similarly, the chance to vote is expected to be high among citizens with a sense of external efficacy, engaged in politics, and for those who believe in the legitimacy of the state (Finkel 1985; Ragsdale and Rusk 1993; Seligson 2002). I also expect a positive effect of being a Liberal or Conservative party identifier on voting, as these parties are very efficient organization mobilizing their electorate to vote.

According to the contextual theory presented in the previous section, I expect voting rates to decrease as guerrillas and paramilitaries increase their control levels. However, municipalities disputed by the competing armed actors are expected to have the lowest voting rates. Finally, I expect poorer municipalities to have higher voting rates than richer ones. Unlike the American literature on contextual effects, in a previous analysis I found that poverty was positively related to electoral turnout (García 2006), probably as a consequence of the prevalence of clientelistic networks in poorer municipalities, and the ability of these networks to mobilize the electorate to vote (Leal and Dávila 1990).

The conditional model for voting (Model 2, Table 4) indicates that, among the municipal level variables, the log-odds of voting are negatively related to paramilitary control and dispute, and positive related to poverty (UBN). They are not significantly related to guerrilla control. Results indicate that as paramilitaries increase their level of control over a region, there is a
significant decline in voting rates. Still, in contexts in which both armed actors are competing, as dispute increases voting rates suffered the biggest reduction. Figure 2 shows a comparison between predicted probabilities of voting, for these two scenarios. In municipalities where there is no paramilitary control, the average probability of voting is expected to be .59; as paramilitaries reach a high level of control it drops to .49. This probability goes from .59 to .43 as we move from no dispute to its highest level.

As I expected, electoral participation reached its lowest level in contested municipalities. There is no doubt that contestation makes it difficult for most individuals to align with a single political actor, because there is a high risk of suffering violent retaliations. In these areas, people abstain from voting as mechanism to protect them from political violence. Similarly, politicians are less willing to participate in elections, political competition may be very low and there will be almost no mobilization efforts, stimulating a reduction in electoral participation. I was also expecting areas controlled by a single armed actor to have a significant reduction in the log-odds of voting; however my model only supports this expectation for paramilitary controlled municipalities. This indicates that paramilitaries are having a stronger impact on electoral politics than guerrillas. In fact during the last decade paramilitaries were very efficient increasing their influence in local and national politics, by developing alliances with politicians and attacking left-wing militants. Thus, as paramilitaries increase their control over a region, they promote certain candidates and stimulate the reduction of political competition, creating a politically homogeneous context that fosters electoral abstention. On the contrary, results suggest that, at least in 2003, guerrillas failed or didn’t set in motion a strategy of blocking elections.

18 Predicted probabilities were estimated in HLM holding other predictors equal to zero.
Results also support the hypothesis that poorer municipalities have higher voting rates than their richer counterparts. Municipalities with poverty levels one standard deviation below the mean are expected to have an average probability of voting equal to .64; this probability increases to .72 for municipalities having poverty levels one standard deviation above the mean.

Comparing level-2 variance components ($\tau_{00}$) from the unconditional and the conditional models, there is a reduction of $\tau_{00}$ from 0.177 to 0.135. In other words, about 24% of the total between-municipalities variance in log-odds of voting in local elections is accounted for by the level-2 variables included in the conditional model. This suggest that other contextual level factors not considered here should have an influence on voting; however some of the level-2 variables included in this model do have a significant effect on the outcome variable.

Regarding the individual level controls, results are consistent with some general findings of the literature on electoral participation. My model indicated a significant and positive effect of

---

19 The percentage of variance between municipalities is expressed formally as:
Variance explained = $\tau_{00}$(fully unconditional) - $\tau_{00}$(conditional model) / $\tau_{00}$(fully unconditional).
education, age, external efficacy, party identification and political engagement on the probability of voting in local elections. However, results suggested that there was no relationship between the average probability of voting and system support, gender, socioeconomic status, and political sophistication. These results show that “intellectual” and “psychological” variables have a key role explaining electoral participation, as education, external efficacy, partisanship, and a direct involvement in local political activities are factors that seem to drive local vote in Colombia. In addition, the significant effect on voting of identification with the traditional parties, not only suggests that having a traditional partisan identification eases the political decision making process stimulating electoral participation, but it also indicates that the Liberal and Conservative parties may be very efficient mobilizing their electorate to vote.

After analyzing the direct effect of violent contexts on electoral participation, I also attempt to explore to what extent the strength of the associations between individual level factors and vote are affected by differences in violent contexts. As mentioned before, “interactions” between level-1 and level-2 variables can be captured modeling the level-1 slopes using contextual factors. Most of the contextual level variables resulted in \( t \)-statistic values less than 1.50, so the final model included cross-level interactions for only three individual level variables. The equations for the cross-level interactions are:

\[
\beta_{3j} = \gamma_{30} + \gamma_{31} (\text{Dispute})_j \\
\beta_{8j} = \gamma_{80} + \gamma_{81} (\text{Dispute})_j \\
\beta_{9j} = \gamma_{90} + \gamma_{94} (\text{UBN})_j \\
\beta_{kj} = \gamma_k
\]

Where \( \gamma_{30} \) is the intercept for the system support slope, and \( \gamma_{31} \) is the effect of dispute. \( \gamma_{80} \) is the intercept for the traditional party ID slope, and \( \gamma_{81} \) is the effect of dispute. \( \gamma_{90} \) is the intercept for
the political engagement and $\gamma_{91}$ is the effect of poverty. Finally, $\gamma_k$ are the remaining intercepts, for the individual level variables which did not have significantly different effects across violent contexts.

Results from the conditional model with cross-level interactions (Column 3, Table 4), confirm the direct effects of the contextual variables on voting. Thus, the log-odds of voting are negative related to paramilitary control and dispute, positive related to poverty, and unrelated to guerrilla control. In the same way, the effects of the individual level variables on the probability of voting were found to be similar to those presented in the previous model. However, the last HLM model of voting indicates that the effects of dispute and poverty on the log-odds of voting are conditioned by system support, partisanship and political engagement.

Figure 3 displaying the cross-level interaction between system support and dispute indicates that, when there is no dispute between guerrillas and paramilitaries, there are no significant differences in the probability of voting for the different levels of system support. However, in contexts in which armed actors compete, the chance of voting significantly varies for different levels of system support. Among individuals with a low level of system support, an increase in the intensity of the dispute between guerrilla and paramilitaries generates a small decrease on the average probability of voting. Yet, for individuals with average and high levels of system support, this probability increases as the level of dispute between the armed actors augments. As we move from no dispute to the highest level of conflict between armed actors, the expected probability of voting for individuals with an average level of system support increases from .56 to .71. For individuals with a high level of system support, this probability goes from .56 to .81 (Figure 3). It seems that, those individuals who believe in the legitimacy of the political system are willing to take the risks associated with participating in elections in a context
in which armed actors are disputing the control of a given area; perhaps voting is a mechanism to express their support to the political system.

As mentioned above, individuals who identified themselves with the Liberal and Conservative (traditional) parties are expected to have a higher probability of voting than identifiers of other parties. The cross-level interaction between party ID and dispute supports this finding; however, it also evidences that the effect of the dispute between guerrillas and paramilitaries on the average probability of voting, significantly differs for traditional parties identifiers versus identifiers of other political parties. Figure 4 shows that, individuals who belong to the former group are practically not affected by changes in the level of dispute between guerrillas and paramilitaries. On the contrary, the average probability of voting for identifiers of
non-traditional parties is expected to decrease by almost 30 points (from .59 to .30) as we move from contexts in which there is no clash between guerrillas and paramilitaries, to areas in which armed actors reach the highest level of dispute.

What makes traditional parties’ identifiers resistant to the effect of a context characterized by a dispute between both armed actors? A possible answer to this question is that violence against militants of the Liberal and Conservative parties is not as common as violence against militants of other parties, particularly members of leftist parties. Although both paramilitaries and guerrillas have used violence against civilians, politicians and state agents, there are important differences in terms of their main targets. Paramilitary violence has primary affected civilians, and militants of leftist parties. Between the late 1980s and the mid 2000s more
than 3,500 members of the leftist *Unión Patriótica* (UP) were either murdered or disappeared by state agents and paramilitaries (Dudley 2008: 32). On the other hand, guerrillas have targeted mainly state agents and politicians from the Liberal and Conservative parties. Civilians also have been victims of guerrilla actions, especially of kidnappings; and recently, the leftist insurgency have attacked groups of civilians accused by this organization of being sympathizers of paramilitary groups. However, this organization never set in motion a systematic strategy of physical elimination of a particular political group comparable to the one developed by paramilitaries with the consent of some state agents. Thus, in contexts characterized by a high level of conflict between armed actors, independents and mainly leftist militants may be more likely to be victims of violence than traditional parties’ identifiers. Thus, they may abstain from participate in any political activity as a mechanism to protect themselves from paramilitary violence.

The cross-level interaction between *political engagement* and *poverty* shows that as individuals increase their level of political engagement, the effect of the contextual level of poverty on the average probability of voting tends to decrease its magnitude. As displayed in Figure 5, among individuals with a high level of political engagement, an increase in the contextual level of poverty from zero to its highest level only augments the average probability of participating in elections by about 4 percentage points. On the other hand, the odds of participating in elections for individuals with average and low levels of political engagement tend to be more affected by changes in contextual levels of poverty. For citizens with a typical level of political engagement, as we moved from no poverty to the highest level of contextual poverty, the average probability of voting goes from .66 to .78. Among the low political engaged, this probability increases 25 points, as it goes from .54 to .79.
Figure 5. Effect of Poverty on the Predicted Probability of Voting for Different Levels of Political Engagement

As mentioned above, the positive effect of contextual poverty on the log-odds of voting may be consequence of the prevalence of clientelistic networks in poorer municipalities, and the ability of these networks to mobilize the electorate to vote. Individuals with a high level of political engagement may be less affected by the mobilization efforts of political networks because they are already involved in politics; they may be part of those political networks so their chances of participating in elections are already high. Conversely, the less engaged in politics may be more affected by the political networks’ mobilization efforts. Thus, the average probability of voting of the less engaged in politics suffers a substantial increase as we move from richer to poorer municipalities, because in the latter areas political networks are expected to be strong and very effective mobilizing the electorate to vote.
Finally, a comparison between the variance components ($\tau_{00}$) of the fully unconditional model and the conditional model with cross-level interactions, indicates that about 40% the total between-municipalities variance in log-odds of voting in local elections is accounted for by the level-2 variables included in the conditional model. Thus, modeling some of the level-1 slopes represented a significant increase in model fit with respect to the conditional model without cross-level interactions.

### 1.6.2 Vote Intention Models

The second set of models has vote intention for the incumbent as the dependent variable. Like in the previous sub-section I start discussing results from the fully unconditional model; then I analyze the direct effects of violent contexts on the probability of supporting a right-wing incumbent such as Alvaro Uribe. Finally, I discuss how contextual effects are moderated by individual level variables.

A significant intercept in the fully unconditional model indicates important variation among municipalities in their mean vote intention (Model 1, Table 5). The intercept also shows that the average probability of expressing an intention to vote for President Uribe was equal to .73\(^{20}\); in other words the probability of supporting the incumbent in the 2006 elections was high. This result is not surprising as Uribe’s government maintained a popular support above 50% during his first term in office (Rodriguez-Raga and Seligson 2007). However, the model’s variance component $\tau_{00}$ shows a significant variation between municipalities in the average probability of vote intention for Uribe. In fact, 95% of the municipalities lie between .45 and .90

\(^{20} p = \text{OR}/(1+\text{OR}); \text{OR} = 2.7, \text{therefore } 2.7/(1+2.7) = .73.\)
with respect to this probability. It appears that while in some municipalities about 90% of citizens intended to vote for Uribe, in others only about half the adults were planning to support the incumbent in the 2006 elections. In short, the fully unconditional model suggests that the between municipalities changes in support for Uribe should be associated with contextual level factors.

The Conditional HLM model for vote intention includes as individual level variables education, age, ideology, gender, socioeconomic status, party identification, and current and past sociotropic evaluations of the economy. I model the level-1 intercept using two contextual level variables: guerrillas versus paramilitaries, a continuous measure capturing the local balance of power between these two armed actors at the municipal level21, and a municipal level measure of ideology. Its functional form is the following.

For the dependent variable vote intention for the incumbent, the level-1 equation is:

\[ \eta_{ij} = \beta_{0j} + \beta_{1j} (\text{Education})_{ij} + \beta_{2j} (\text{Age})_{ij} + \beta_{3j} (\text{Ideology})_{ij} + \beta_{4j} (\text{Gender})_{ij} + \beta_{5j} (\text{SES})_{ij} + \beta_{6j} (\text{party ID})_{ij} + \beta_{7j} (\text{Current sociotropic})_{ij} + \beta_{8j} (\text{Prospective sociotropic})_{ij} . \]

The level-2 equation for vote intention is:

\[ \beta_{0j} = \gamma_{00} + \gamma_{01} (\text{Guerrillas v. Paramilitaries})_{j} + \gamma_{02} (\text{Ideology})_{j} + u_{0j} . \]

As discussed above, I expect guerrilla controlled municipalities to have lower average probabilities of supporting the incumbent than paramilitary controlled regions. Thus, I anticipate guerrillas versus paramilitaries to have a positive sign. I also anticipate municipal level ideology to have a positive effect on vote intention for a right-wing incumbent, as higher scores of contextual ideology indicate a municipal history of support for parties closer to the right.

---

21 This variable goes from -4 to 4, where values from -4 to -2 represent different levels of guerrilla control, scores from 2 to 4 describe the various degrees of paramilitary control. Disputed municipalities where coded -1 when guerrillas show a slight advantage over paramilitaries, and 1 when paramilitaries are the armed actor having a minor advantage. Zero indicates absence of armed actors.
Following the literature on vote choice (Nadeau and Lewis-Beck 2001; Lockerbie 1991; Lewis-Beck and Rice 1984; Kinder and Kiewiet 1981; Fiorina 1978; Bartels 2000) and recent findings on the determinants of vote choices in Colombian presidential elections (Hoskin et al. 2003), I expect that being older and male, having high socioeconomic status, being liberal or conservative, having a positive evaluation of the current economic situation, and having a positive evaluation of the future economic situation will increase vote intention for President Uribe. On the other hand, I expect education to decrease the chances of supporting Uribe, as educated individuals are anticipated to be more liberal (Glaser 2001; Shaffer 1982) and therefore less supportive of a right-wing incumbent like Uribe.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Model 1 Fully Unconditional</th>
<th>Model 2 Conditional</th>
<th>Model 3 Conditional Cross-level Interactions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fixed Effects</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Level-2 predictors</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercept $\gamma_{00}$</td>
<td>0.993 *** (0.085)</td>
<td>0.939 *** (0.115)</td>
<td>0.978 *** (0.117)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guerrilla v. Paramilitaries $\gamma_{01}$</td>
<td>0.117 * (0.050)</td>
<td>0.197 ** (0.059)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideology $\gamma_{02}$</td>
<td>0.413 * (0.169)</td>
<td>0.825 ** (0.219)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Level-1 predictors</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education $\gamma_{10}$</td>
<td>-0.041 ** (0.015)</td>
<td>-0.046 ** (0.015)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideology $\gamma_{11}$</td>
<td>-0.008 * (0.003)</td>
<td>-0.008 * (0.003)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age $\gamma_{20}$</td>
<td>-0.008 * (0.003)</td>
<td>-0.008 * (0.003)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideology $\gamma_{30}$</td>
<td>0.012 *** (0.002)</td>
<td>0.012 *** (0.002)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender $\gamma_{40}$</td>
<td>-0.156 (0.093)</td>
<td>-0.156 (0.094)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socioeconomic Status $\gamma_{50}$</td>
<td>0.001 (0.003)</td>
<td>0.001 (0.003)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party ID (Traditional) $\gamma_{60}$</td>
<td>0.437 ** (0.134)</td>
<td>0.370 ** (0.120)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guerrilla V. Paramilitaries $\gamma_{61}$</td>
<td>-0.165 * (0.079)</td>
<td>-0.165 * (0.079)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideology $\gamma_{62}$</td>
<td>-0.827 * (0.328)</td>
<td>-0.827 * (0.328)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sociotropic (Current) $\gamma_{70}$</td>
<td>0.014 *** (0.002)</td>
<td>0.014 *** (0.002)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sociotropic (Past) $\gamma_{80}$</td>
<td>0.009 *** (0.001)</td>
<td>0.009 *** (0.001)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Random Effects</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variance Components</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Municipal level effect $\tau_{00}$</td>
<td>0.368 ***</td>
<td>0.297 ***</td>
<td>0.297 ***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual level effect $\sigma^2$</td>
<td>0.607</td>
<td>0.545</td>
<td>0.545</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reliability of intercept</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>0.54</td>
<td>0.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage explained†</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001
† Between municipalities variance in voting accounted for by level-2 variables
Results from the conditional model displayed in Column 2 of Table 5 confirm my expectations. The log-odds of expressing intention to vote for President Uribe were positively related to *guerrillas versus paramilitaries*, and *contextual ideology*. In areas controlled by guerrillas, the average probability of expressing support for President Álvaro Uribe appears to be significantly lower than in municipalities controlled by the right-wing paramilitaries. Holding all other variables constant, at the highest level of guerrilla control the average probability of vote intention for Uribe is expected to be about .62, this probability reaches approximately .79 in municipalities where right-wing paramilitaries experience a high level of control (Figure 6). Results also support the argument that armed actors need to consolidate a minimum level of military control to have a significant influence on individuals’ political behavior. The unconditional model showed that the national average probability of vote intention for Uribe is about .73. Following the conditional model, it is clear that disputed municipalities have average probabilities of vote intention for the incumbent somehow close to the national average probability. For municipalities in which guerrillas only have a slight military advantage over paramilitaries this probability is .70 , and in areas in which paramilitaries have a minor military advantage over their enemy, the average probability of vote intention for the incumbent reaches .74 (Figure 6).
Individuals living in armed actors’ controlled municipalities are more likely to align their electoral preferences with the political orientation of the violent organization controlling the area. However, this “influence” on individuals’ political behavior augments as armed actors increase their level of control of a given municipality. Areas in which an armed actor exercises close to full sovereignty are politically homogeneous and less competitive, offering citizens a limited array of electoral options (Rodríguez-Raga and Gómez-Albarello 2007). Additionally, under these contexts, political dissent represents a risk to individuals’ security, so the threat of violence compels voters to behave consistently with the political preferences proclaimed by the dominant armed actor.

The vote model showed that Colombian guerrillas didn’t have a significant effect on electoral participation; on the other hand, the vote intention model indicates that municipalities controlled by this armed actor have a low average probability of supporting president Uribe.
These results may indicate that guerrillas are more interested or more capable of having an effect on electoral results than on electoral participation. As a FARC commander declared, his organization is less interested in blocking elections, and more concerned with trying to undermine traditional parties’ access to political power (Ferro and Uribe 2002). In the case of the reelection of Alvaro Uribe, guerrillas might have been particularly interested in undermining electoral support for the incumbent, due to his right-wing ideological orientation, and because Uribe has been one of the most fierce enemies of Colombian guerrillas. Conversely, in paramilitaries controlled municipalities Uribe’s candidacy reached the highest popular support.22 This outcome may be explained considering different factors. An ideological proximity between paramilitaries and the incumbent may have motivated this criminal group to “promote” a candidate representing a political project favorable to their interests. However, even if paramilitaries didn’t promote Uribe’s candidacy, right-wing politicians tend to perform well in regions controlled by this organization as the most conservative segments of the traditional parties emerge as sole competitors in elections, and leftist parties have been dismantled consequence of paramilitary violence (Dudley 2008; López 2007). Finally, in several regions politicians belonging to Uribe’s congressional coalition used paramilitaries to increase their electoral returns intimidating the electorate and their political competitors (López 2007; Valencia 2007). If politicians from outside Uribe’s coalition couldn’t promote their own candidacies, they were also unable to promote their presidential candidates; consequently, there is a chance that Uribe emerged almost as a single candidate in regions in which politicians from his coalition were backed by the right-wing paramilitaries.

22 Uribe has been one of the most popular presidents of Colombia, enjoying strong nationwide support. As I showed in the unconditional model the average probability of vote intention for Uribe was .73. This probability reached .78 in municipalities controlled by the paramilitaries.
Regarding contextual ideology, results indicate that municipalities with a history of electoral support for rightist parties have a significantly higher average probability of supporting a right-wing incumbent, than municipalities in which parties closer to the left have won the local executive. In the first type of municipalities the predicted probability of supporting Uribe is .95; this probability is .79 for municipalities traditionally governed by the left. This result suggests that citizens have a higher chance of backing candidates and political parties representing an ideological orientation that has achieved a dominant status. As a party consistently gains access to power, it will be in a privileged position to promote its political views among the citizenry, and to consolidate a political network that will help this organization to maintain or increase its electoral base.

A comparison between the unconditional and conditional models level-2 variance components ($\tau_{00}$), indicates that there was a reduction in $\tau_{00}$ from 0.368 in the unconditional model to 0.297 in the conditional one. This reduction suggests that about 19% of the total between-municipalities variance in log-odds of vote intention for Uribe is accounted for by the level-2 variables.

Finally, level-1 results are consistent with the literature on the effects of partisanship and economic evaluations on vote decisions. Being Liberal or Conservative (traditional party identification) significantly increases the probability of supporting Uribe, a president backed by a bipartisan coalition in Congress. Similarly, ideology has a significant impact on vote intention for the incumbent; so the closer the self-identification with the right, the higher the individual probability of supporting a right-wing incumbent like Uribe. Beyond partisan and ideological identifications, the economy has a significant impact on vote intention for the incumbent. Individuals with positive assessments of the current and future state of the Colombian economy,
have a high probability of rewarding the incumbent with their electoral support. On the other hand, education and age were found to have a negative and significant impact on vote intention for Uribe. More educated individuals are probably less supportive of the incumbent as they are able to have access to more and better sources of political information; or because a rightist incumbent like Uribe finds less support among educated citizens as they tend to be more liberal (Glaser 2001; Shaffer 1982). Finally, gender and socioeconomic status don’t have an impact on support for the incumbent. This result is not surprising because Colombian political parties are not articulated around class lines; and although Uribe abandoned the Liberal party, he attracted an important contingent of conservative and liberal politicians that have helped him to build a bipartisan and multi-class electoral coalition.

The last HLM model for vote intention explores the extent to which the strength of the associations between individual level factors and vote intention for the incumbent is affected by differences in violent contexts. As, most of the contextual level variables resulted in $t$-statistic values less than 1.50, the final model included cross-level interactions for only two individual level variables, education and partisanship. The equations for the cross-level interactions are:

$$\beta_{ij} = \gamma_{10} + \gamma_{11} \text{(Ideology)}_j$$

$$\beta_{6j} = \gamma_{60} + \gamma_{61} \text{(Guerrilla v. Paramilitaries)}_j + \gamma_{62} \text{(Ideology)}_j$$

$$\beta_{kj} = \gamma_k$$

Where $\gamma_{10}$ is the intercept for the education slope, and $\gamma_{11}$ is the effect of contextual ideology. $\gamma_{60}$ is the intercept for the traditional party ID slope, and $\gamma_{61}$ and $\gamma_{62}$ are the respective effects of guerrilla v. paramilitaries and contextual ideology. $\gamma_k$ are the remaining intercepts, for the individual level variables which did not have significantly different effects across violent contexts.
Results displayed in the last column of Table 5, confirm the findings of the conditional HLM model without cross-level interactions. This model also shows that the effects of contextual ideology and the variable capturing the balance of power between guerrillas and paramilitaries are moderated by education and partisanship. Thus, there is a negative and significant effect of contextual ideology on the education slope. This result corroborates that, on average, individuals living in municipalities with a history of electoral support for rightist parties in local elections, have a significantly higher average probabilities of supporting a right-wing incumbent, than dwellers of municipalities in which leftist parties traditionally win the local executive. However, as show in Figure 7, these probabilities are significantly higher for individuals with a low level of education compared to individuals with a higher level of schooling.

Figure 7. Effect of Contextual Ideology on the Predicted Probability of Vote Intention for the Incumbent for Different Levels of Education
In municipalities with a history of electoral support for the left, individuals with zero years of education are expected to support a right-wing incumbent with an average probability of .85; this probability is about .72 for citizens with 10 years of schooling. On the other hand, in a political context where the right has reached a hegemonic status in local elections, the probability of supporting a right-wing incumbent increases to .99 for individuals with no education, and to .93 for those citizens with 10 years of education. There is no doubt that the municipal political atmosphere has a strong effect on individuals’ political decisions, so once a political party gains a hegemonic status, it will easily promote its political views, and it will find a fertile ground to sustain and increase its electoral base. However, educated individuals are less susceptible to this contextual influence. Education may give individuals the necessary tools to obtain more and diverse sources of political information; thus educated citizens will be able to contrast political information generated in a homogeneous political context.

A significant effect of the variable capturing the balance of power between guerrillas and paramilitaries on the party identification slope indicates that there are significant differences in the impact of a violent context on the average probability of supporting the incumbent for Liberal and Conservative parties’ sympathizers versus supporters of other parties. This conditional effect captured in Figure 8 indicates that, among traditional parties’ followers, a change in the armed actor dominating a municipality has a very small effect on their average probability of supporting the incumbent. In other words, identifiers of these parties have a high chance of supporting a right-wing incumbent, regardless of the armed actor dominating the area. For non-traditional parties’ identifiers the situation is completely different because this group of voters is far more affected by changes in the dominant armed actor. Thus, in areas in which the
left-wing insurgency exercise any level of control, the average probability of supporting a right-wing incumbent such Uribe, ranges from .59 to .69. In the same way, in areas in which paramilitaries enjoy a small advantage over the insurgency this probability increases to .76 and it reaches a maximum of .83 for those municipalities totally controlled by these illegal armed actor.

Figure 8. Effect of Guerrilla v. Paramilitaries on the Predicted Probability of Vote Intention for the Incumbent, Traditional Parties Identifiers v. Identifiers of Other Parties

Similarly, the cross-level interaction between partisanship and contextual ideology shows, on the one hand, that for members of traditional parties a change in contextual ideology has no effect on the average likelihood of supporting a right-wing incumbent. Regardless of the context, they are expected to support the incumbent with a probability of about .79 (Figure 9). On the other hand, for members of other parties this probability suffers a significant increase as contextual ideology moves to the right. In municipalities with a history of support for the left the
average probability of supporting a right-wing incumbent is about .86; this probability reaches .99 in municipalities traditionally governed by the right.

Why Liberal and Conservative identifiers are almost not affected by changes in the political environment? Despite of a reduction, during the last decades, in the percentage of Colombian citizens identified with the Liberal and Conservative parties, these organizations still enjoy of a very loyal base of supporters that tends to vote for the candidates of their respective parties (Hoskin et al. 2003). In 2002 and 2006 Uribe’s electoral coalition benefited from this group of voters. Although Uribe abandoned the Liberal party in 2002, his dissidence was supported by the most conservative leaders of the Liberal party, who attracted to Uribe’s

---

23 In 1993 61% of Colombians identified themselves as liberal or conservative. In 2007 traditional parties’ identifiers dropped to 39% (Hoskin et al. 2003; Rodriguez-Raga and Seligson 2008).
camp an important number of partisan voters. On the other hand, the Conservative party gave its full support to Uribe’s candidacies both in 2002 and 2006 as this party didn’t nominate its own presidential candidates. Thus, the high level of support enjoyed for Uribe among Liberal and Conservative identifiers may be a consequence of the bipartisan nature of his electoral coalition. The consistency of this support, as the political context changes (i.e. as we move from guerrilla controlled regions to municipalities under paramilitary dominance), may be explain by a strong commitment of Liberal and Conservative militants with Uribe and their party leaders. This loyalty may lead them to resist the influence of a dominant armed actor or a hegemonic political party, when these organizations don’t share their political views.

The bigger influence of the political environment on the probability of supporting the incumbent among non-traditional parties’ identifiers may be caused by a lack of partisan identities among this group of voters. Most individuals included in this group identified themselves as independents; meaning that they don’t follow a specific political party. Thus, their political preferences are expected to be unstable and highly influenced by changes in the political context. For instance, as an armed actor consolidates its control in a region, non-traditional parties’ identifiers may be the first to align their preferences with the political orientation proclaimed by the dominant armed actor.

To finish, the comparison between the variance components ($\tau_{00}$) of the fully unconditional model and the conditional model with cross-level interactions, indicates that about 19% the total between-municipalities variance in log-odds of voting in local elections is accounted for by the level-2 variables included in the latter model. This indicates that, both conditional models, with and without cross-level interactions, had similar model fit scores.
This study supports previous findings on the effects of social and political contexts on political behavior, according to which individuals tend to line up their political views with those prevailing in their political milieu (Huckfeldt et al. 2004; MacKuen and Brown 1987; Mondak et al. 1996). However, this study represents an important contribution to the literature on political behavior as it deals with a type of context previously not analyzed by the research on contextual effects, namely: a violent environment. Results from this analysis indicated that the political violence characteristic of many Colombian municipalities has an important impact on individuals’ electoral participation and vote choices. More important, the nature of this impact is closely related to the balance of military power between the competing armed actors (guerrillas and paramilitaries), and their strategic objectives towards the political system.

Dispute between guerrillas and paramilitaries demonstrated to have the strongest effect on electoral participation. Contested areas exhibited the lowest average probabilities of voting in local elections. Individuals living in this type of political environments are less likely to vote, presumably because the high levels of indiscriminate political violence, generated by the competing armed actors, discourage their electoral participation. Any type of political involvement may trigger violent reprisals, so citizens abstain from voting as a mechanism to protect themselves from political violence. Indiscriminate violence also discourages politicians from participating in politics, consequently political competition will be very low and there will be
almost no mobilization efforts which stimulate a reduction in electoral participation. Paramilitaries, unlike guerrillas, revealed to have a significant negative effect on electoral participation. This organization has been very efficient reducing political competition and helping right-wing politicians to create political hegemonies (Valencia 2007). Thus, as paramilitaries increase their control of a given region, the political macro-environment becomes more homogeneous, which has been proved to increase electoral abstention (Gimpel and Lay 2005).

Violent contexts also demonstrated to have an important role explaining political preferences. As we move from areas dominated by left-wing insurgents to regions controlled by right-wing paramilitary groups, individuals were more likely to support a presidential candidate placed on the right of the ideological spectrum. Individuals living in municipalities controlled by guerrillas or paramilitaries are more likely to align their electoral preferences with the political orientation of the dominating organization. Under these contexts, political dissent represents a risk to individuals’ security, so the threat of violence compels voters to support the candidates and political parties preferred by the dominant armed actor. Additionally, dominated regions tend to be politically homogeneous, offering citizens a limited array of electoral options.

Results on the relationship between violent contexts and political behavior showed that political violence is a very effective tool modeling political behavior. Armed actors employ violence or the threat of its use to shape individuals’ political behavior by altering the expected value of certain political actions. However, armed actors also have an influence on citizens’ political actions and preferences when they use violence to redefine political equilibriums. Results from this study suggested that once an armed actor consolidates its control over a region, it is in a privileged position to create a political hegemony by eliminating political competitors.
As the contextual literature has demonstrated, politically homogeneous environments tend to generate a correspondence between individual preferences and surrounding preferences (Huckfeldt et al. 2004). In this case the “surrounding preferences” are defined by the strongest violent organization.

This paper studied the effects of additional contextual factors on electoral participation and vote intention; these were municipal level poverty and contextual ideology. The former contextual factor appeared to have a positive impact on the probability of voting in local elections. Although, this finding contradicts the American literature on the effects of socioeconomic contexts on participation, it makes sense for the Colombian case. The prevalence of strong clientelistic networks in poorer municipalities, and the capacity of these structures to mobilize the electorate to vote (Leal and Dávila 1990), may explains why in Colombia contextual poverty fosters voting. On the other hand, contextual ideology was found to have a significant impact on vote intention. Municipalities with a history of electoral support for rightist parties revealed a higher average probability of supporting a right-wing incumbent than municipalities in which the left has traditionally won the local executive. This result highlighted, once again, that when certain ideological orientation achieves a hegemonic status, individuals will support political parties and candidates representing the dominant ideas.

The hierarchical nature of my analyses allowed me to test the effect of several individual level factors on electoral participation and vote intention. In general, results from these variables supported previous finding of the literature on political behavior. More important, the hierarchical approach permitted me to explore the extent to which the strength of the associations between contextual level factors and the outcome variables were moderated by individuals’ characteristics. Partisanship showed to have a very important role moderating the effect of
several contextual factors on participation and vote intention. Liberals and Conservatives appeared to be less affected than followers of other parties by violent environments and other political contexts. Among sympathizers of non-traditional parties, higher levels of dispute significantly reduced their probability of voting; similarly, they aligned their political preferences with the dominant armed actor ideological orientation. This was not the case of sympathizers of the Liberal and Conservative parties. What explains that Liberals and Conservatives are almost not affected by changes in the political environment? There is no doubt that political violence has not affected Liberals and Conservatives with the same strength as it has hit leftist militants. As mentioned above, more than 3,500 left-wing politicians and sympathizers were massacred by paramilitaries and state agents. Thus, even under a violent context, sympathizers of the traditional parties may be in a relatively safer position to express their political preferences. On the other hand, Liberals and Conservatives have deeper partisan loyalties than militants of other parties; consequently a strong commitment to their parties may explain why these individuals are somehow resistant to the influence of a political context that is at odds with their political views.

The findings of this paper are only applicable to the Colombian case. However, they highlight the relevance of taking into account contextual factors in the analysis of political behavior in developing democracies. In Latin America only Colombia suffers from an internal conflict; however, outside the region several countries are trying to consolidate or built democracies in the midst of a violent conflict. These are the cases of Iraq, Philippines and Sri Lanka just to mention a few countries. Thus, further comparative analyses are appropriate in order to extend the results of this paper to other cases, and to strengthen our knowledge on the impact of conflict, violence and political unrest on political behavior.
## APPENDIX A

### Parameter Estimates for Trajectories of Paramilitary Actions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Coeff.</th>
<th>SE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Low Stable</td>
<td>-0.503</td>
<td>***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>17.854</td>
<td>***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Linear Slope</td>
<td>-2.082</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Quadratic Slope</td>
<td>0.069</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increasing</td>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>58.214</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Linear Slope</td>
<td>-10.310</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Quadratic Slope</td>
<td>0.472</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decreasing</td>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>149.606</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Linear Slope</td>
<td>-19.855</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Quadratic Slope</td>
<td>0.672</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

***p < .001
BIC = -5416.75 (N= 3123) BIC = -5409.06 (N= 1041) AIC = -5374.42

### Parameter Estimates for Trajectories of Guerrilla Actions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Coeff.</th>
<th>SE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Low Stable</td>
<td>-7.851</td>
<td>***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Linear Slope</td>
<td>1.281</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Quadratic Slope</td>
<td>-0.050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Stable</td>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>-10.360</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Linear Slope</td>
<td>1.933</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Quadratic Slope</td>
<td>-0.075</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate Decreasing</td>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>-24.889</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Linear Slope</td>
<td>4.867</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Quadratic Slope</td>
<td>-0.199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Increasing - Decreasing</td>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>-86.580</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Linear Slope</td>
<td>15.120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Quadratic Slope</td>
<td>-0.591</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

***p < .001
BIC = -4912.10 (N= 3123) BIC = -4903.31 (N= 1041) AIC = -4863.73

56
APPENDIX B

LEVEL-1 VARIABLES

Age. This variable was measured as the respondent’s number of years.

Gender. This is a dummy variable coded 1 if male, and 0 if female.

Education. This variable measures each respondent’s years of formal education.

Socioeconomic status. This is an index of individuals’ ownership of nine consumption goods. These goods are: television, refrigerator, conventional telephone, cellular telephone, automobile, washing machine, microwave, indoor running water, indoor bathroom, and personal computer. This index is measure in a 0 to 100 scale.

System support. It is a measure of legitimacy of the political system developed by Muller (Seligson 2002). This variable is an index based on five items, each scored on a 1 to 7 scale. These items “attempt to tap Easton’s generalized notion of ‘diffuse support’ and Lipset’s notion of ‘legitimacy’ rather than specific support for any given administration” (Seligson 2002: 165). The five items ask: 1) “To what extent do you believe the courts of justice in your country guarantee a fair trial?” 2) “To what extent do you respect the political institutions in your country?” 3) “To what extent do you believe that basic citizen rights are well protected by your country’s political system?” 4) “To what extent are you proud to live under the political system? 

57
of your country?”, and 5) “to what extent do you think one should support political system of your country?” Answers to these questions were averaged and transformed into a 0 to 100 scale.

External political efficacy. This variable measures to what extent an individual has a sense that his or her electoral participation can influence governmental action. This concept was measured using the question “do you think that voting can lead to improvement in the future or do you believe that no matter how one vote, things never change?” The question was coded 1 if the respondent answered “the vote can change things”, and 0 if she chose “it doesn’t matter how you vote”.

Political sophistication. This variable measures the quantity and organization of a person’s political cognitions (Luskin 1987). The variable is an index based on four questions on general politics. These questions are: 1) “Do you remember the name of the President of the United States?”. 2) Do you remember how many departments are there in Colombia?” 3) “What is the term of the Colombian President?” And 4) “do you remember the name of the President of Brazil?” Positive answers were added and transformed into a 0 to 100 scale.

Political engagement. This measure captures an individual’s level of involvement in local politics. Political engagement is an index based on three questions on participation in public activities. These questions are: 1) During the last 12 months, have you attended to meetings called by the major? 2) During the last 12 months, have you attended to municipal council sessions? 3) During the last 12 months, have you attended to debates on the local budget? Positive answers were added and transformed into a 0 to 100 scale.

Traditional Party identification. This is a dummy variable coded 1 if an individual self identified herself with the Liberal or the Conservative parties, and 0 otherwise.
Current sociotropic evaluation of the economy. This variable captures respondents’ opinion on the current situation of the national economy. It is based on the following question: What is your evaluation of the state of the national economy? Individuals had 5 response options in which 1 was “very good” and 5 was “very poor”. The scale was inverted and transformed into a 0 to 100 scale.

Prospective sociotropic evaluation of the economy. This variable captures respondents’ opinion on the future situation of the national economy. It is based on the following question: Do you think that in the following year the state of the national economy will be better, the same, or worst than today? Individuals had 3 response options in which 1 was “better”, 2 was “the same” and 3 was “worst”. This scale was inverted and transformed into a 0 to 100 scale.
1.8 REFERENCES


Feres, Juan Carlos, and Xavier Mancero. 2001. *El método de las necesidades básicas insatisfechas (NBI) y sus aplicaciones en América Latina*. Santiago: CEPAL.


Rodríguez-Raga, Juan Carlos, and Juan Gabriel Gómez-Albarello. 2007. "Competencia electoral en grandes circunscripciones: El caso del Senado colombiano." In *Entre la presistencia y..."
Rodríguez-Raga, Juan Carlos, and Mitchell A. Seligson. 2007. *La cultura política de la democracia en Colombia: 2006* Bogotá
Universidad de Los Andes, Vanderbilt University, USAID.