



Presidential Candidates and the Colombian Conflict

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INTRODUCTION

Within Latin America, Colombia is one of the countries with the greatest electoral tradition. Similarly, it hosts the *oldest guerrilla movement in the world*. Over the last four decades a *difficult combination* has configured itself with the continued presence of illegal actors and the maintenance of legal procedures for the legitimation of political power, converting Colombia into a unique case: *a country at war, that holds regular elections*.

The presence of illegal armed actors gives the Colombian elections a special flavor and the conflict is a central issue in all campaigns. In the current electoral process, the subject is once again a key element and around it the different candidates have aligned themselves in two opposing positions.

On the one hand, there is a *hard line* represented by President Alvaro Uribe Velez, candidate of a coalition that includes the traditional Conservative party and a myriad of different political forces, some of which have recently regrouped under *new parties*: Cambio Radical, Apertura Liberal, Huella Ciudadana, Colombia Democrática, Colombia Viva, Partido Social de Unidad Nacional, Movimiento de Avanzada Social Alas-Equipo Colombia, Conservatismo Independiente, as well as some religious minority groups. In accordance with his actions in government during his four-year mandate, from 2002 to 2006, the candidate's position towards the insurgency is one of confrontation, encapsulated within the concept of negotiation, after military weakening.

On the other hand, the *soft line* is represented by the other four candidates that have made their way into the opinion polls: Horacio Serpa Uribe, of the Partido Liberal; Carlos Gaviria, of a new party, the Polo Democrático Alternativo, that has integrated various left-wing forces that had previously operated under the Alternativa Democrática and Polo Democrático Independiente parties; Alvaro Leyva Duran of the Movimiento Nacional de Reconciliación and Antanas Mockus of the Partido Visionario, with the support of the Alianza Social Indígena. These candidates' position is based on the search for a negotiated political solution to the conflict.

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POSITIONS WITH RESPECT TO THE SOLUTION OF THE ARMED CONFLICT



The candidates also distinguish themselves from the others in the emphasis that they place on the armed conflict within their campaign programs.

Although the armed conflict is one of the main issues of this campaign, it seems to be less central than in previous elections, in which the conflict was the core issue of campaign rhetoric. In these current elections the only candidate that deals with the solution of the conflict as the main element of his campaign is Alvaro Leyva Duran, the others obviously include it in their programs, but with varying degrees of prominence and emphasis. President Alvaro Uribe Velez, who has been subject to much criticism from the opposition because of his policy of promoting *Democratic Security* while in power, leaving aside as secondary concerns matters such as investment in society, bases this campaign on a broader spectrum of issues and some emphasis, although more subdued, on what he terms *social action*, a concept that appears prominently among the program's usual items. Two other candidates, Horacio Serpa Uribe and Carlos Gaviria Diaz, coincide in having as core issues the fight against poverty and inequalities, and the need to review the country's development model. As for Antanas Mockus, whose program places the least emphasis (as compared to the others) on solving the armed conflict, focuses more on a proposal to strengthen the State and move forward towards a culture of citizen regulation, deliberation, and active citizenship (see Table 1).

A certain convergence on themes can be found among some of the candidates (especially between Horacio Serpa Uribe and Carlos Gaviria Diaz), having said this, there are also differences in the emphasis placed on some of the issues. In terms of presentation, the least focalized program is that of President Uribe Velez, built upon the achievements of his four year term in power (2002 to 2006), and his projections for the following four years (2006 to 2010), in any case the weight of the *Citizen Security Policy* emerges as the backdrop of his government and as one of the main expectations for a possible second presidential mandate. In the official campaign Web page, *Citizen Security Policy* occupies a special, and separate section from that of other campaign documents.

Table 1
EMPHASIS AND CORE ISSUES IN THE PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGNS

PRIMERO COLOMBIA Alvaro Uribe Velez	ARTIDO LIBERAL Horacio Serpa Uribe	POLO DEMOCRATICO ALTERNATIVO: Carlos Gaviria	ALIANZA SOCIAL INDIGENA Antanas Mockus	MOVIMIENTO NACIONAL DE RECONCILIACIÓN Alvaro Leyva Duran
<p>“Colombia First”</p> <p>Emphasis: There is no clear emphasis or focus in the program. As to the</p>	<p>“Another Colombia is possible”</p> <p>Emphasis: Policies geared towards a new development model to</p>	<p>“Lets build democracy, no more inequalities”</p> <p>Emphasis: A social policy that will overcome inequalities and poverty, requiring a</p>	<p>“Legal Colombia: in favor of rights and against shortcuts”</p> <p>Emphasis: To build a State capable of obeying and ensuring compliance</p>	<p>“Let us all build the Ark or Reconciliation”</p> <p>Emphasis: The problem of the armed conflict. War is the country's main problem. To put an end</p>

<p>order of issues, social action is placed first and as a core aspect for the continuity of the democratic security policy.</p> <p><u>Core Issues:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social action to overcome poverty. • The problem of agriculture. • International relations and trade agreements. • The fight against corruption. • Citizen security policy, with emphasis on the urban context. • Human rights policy. • State reform in search of greater efficiency. 	<p>overcome poverty and the concentration of wealth, and for a fair distribution of wealth.</p> <p><u>Core Issues:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthening the Rule of Law. • Fighting corruption. • Promoting institutional changes (presidential reelection, redesigning ministries). • Achieve peace through dialogue with armed actors, and without impunity. • Promote the access to education, health, accommodation, and employment. 	<p>new development model and the consolidation of the Rule of Law.</p> <p><u>Core Issues:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The need to consolidate the Social State subject to the Rule of Law. • Consolidate democracy on the basis of pluralism and tolerance. • Seek a negotiated political solution to the conflict. • An international policy based on the respect for national sovereignty and autonomy with regard to the United States. 	<p>with the law, the respect for rights and obligations, and to ensure the provision of goods and services.</p> <p><u>Core Issues:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To consolidate a strong, institutionally efficient and judicially secure State. • Greater economic productivity, and better distribution of wealth. • To facilitate the compliance with rules for coexistence. • As regards the conflict, to combine State presence with the mobilization of civil society for a democratic solution. 	<p>to war and find a negotiated end to the conflict.</p> <p><u>Core Issues:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employment and defeating poverty. • Greater competitiveness and a new model for the political and economic management of the nation. • The fight against corruption. • The creation of productive units, especially for those persons reintegrated from the conflict.
<p>Source: Political programs of: Alvaro Uribe Velez, www.primerocolombia.com.co/H; Horacio Serpa Uribe, www.colombia.com/especiales/elecciones_2006/presidencia/08_serpa_programa.asp; Polo Democrático Alternativo, Carlos Gaviria Diaz; Partido Visionario, "Colombia legal, justa y productiva", 2nd of February 2006 http://partidovisionario.com/articulo; Alvaro Leyva.</p>				

This article presents a summarized description of the positions of each of the five presidential candidates as regards the armed conflict. These are dealt with under four different dimensions: the characterization of the conflict, its causes, positions as regards its solution, and strategies to achieve such solutions. The criteria used to organize the presentation are those of the preferences expressed in the most recent national opinion polls.

THE CANDIDATES AND THEIR POSITIONS REGARDING THE CONFLICT

Movimiento Primero Colombia, Alvaro Uribe Velez: *from the conflict to the terrorist menace*

At a graduation ceremony for officers in September 2005, the President and candidate to reelection Alvaro Uribe Velez made the following statement concerning guerrilla movements: "*there is no space for terrorism within Colombia*" (El Tiempo, 7th of September 2005). This phrase summarizes the candidate's position towards the insurgent groups, which he defines as terrorists. This assimilation of guerrillas and terrorists is followed by three other considerations that comprise the corpus of his thinking as regards the Colombian conflict: i) as terrorist groups, the guerrillas have economic motivations linked to drug trafficking, ii) they are opposed to democracy and fight against society, iii) the only option in the face of terrorist groups is to defeat them, or weaken them in order to push them towards the negotiating table.

This stance was initially presented during the 2002 presidential campaign although it drifted during his term in government, on the one hand towards ignoring the existence of conflict, replacing it by rhetoric concerning the *terrorist menace*, which also altered the form in which illegal armed groups were named: from *armed*

irregular groups or violent groups to terrorist groups; and, on the other hand, by initiating controversial negotiations with paramilitary groups.

The thesis according to which there is no armed conflict in Colombia, as defended by the president-candidate, is based on a premise according to which in their origins in the sixties the guerrillas were fighting against political exclusion generated by the National Front, the institutional reforms that followed, with democratic overtures and guarantees for the opposition, as established in the last decade, deprived the guerrilla's struggle of their original motives, therefore the "struggle that once began in the name of democracy is currently perceived as a struggle against democracy". The armed conflict, that would have expressed the confrontation between the State and an illegal armed actor that demanded from the former an alternative project for society, transformed itself from being an internal conflict into a *terrorist menace* against society.

Viewing the internal situation and the illegal armed actors in this manner, the consequent perspective for State action is to face and confront them, and only secondarily to persuade and negotiate. As incorporated into his 2002 program for government, and currently reaffirmed, the only possible position against armed actors is to weaken them, in order to force them to sit at a negotiating table. According to this perspective, it is not only impossible to accept the humanitarian agreement that various segments of society are calling for in the name of the hundreds of captives in the hands of the guerrillas, but it is also inconceivable to establish a demilitarized zone as requested by the FARC as a precondition to initiate negotiations. In the past such zones have been used to commit crimes and served as *breathing spaces* to strengthen the guerrillas. Finally, it is clear that under this perspective, dialogue is only possible if the armed groups implement an effective demilitarization and if they hand over their weapons. Under the previous premises, the *Democratic Security Policy* is justified as a means to "guarantee that terrorism be defeated and for the State to be able to extend its presence throughout the entire national territory"¹.

Although this radical position is occasionally mitigated², it is always emphasized in the strategy of *weakening to negotiate*, vindicated by the example of the progress made with paramilitary groups, under the assumption that this was only possible thanks to their prior military weakening³.

¹ His presidential program raised the following concern, "to protect Colombian society and democracy from the terrorist attacks of an insurgency that has preferred to strengthen itself with the capital generated from drug trafficking, rather than with popular support. Security policy aims to extend the authority of the State to all the corners of the country and to avoid the attacks by armed groups against civilians, and to put an end to the rule of drug trafficking gangs that operate hand in hand with these armed groups. A democratic security policy with the aim of guaranteeing the exercise of the freedoms of: thought, movement, and trade for all Colombians. A security policy directed towards the simultaneous struggle against terrorism, paramilitaries, and drug trafficking" (Democratic Manifest. Uribe's 100 points).

² In early 2005, the president, talking about the FARC, mentioned that, "we presented them with a sense of urgency regarding the end of hostilities, as a precondition to initiate the negotiating process, without a specific urgency for disarmament or demobilization. I believe that it is a practical and generous proposal, that conciliates or explains how a policy whose principal axis is Democratic Security, is a policy that does not discard the possibility of negotiation" (Statement by President Alvaro Uribe in the forum, ¿amenaza terrorista o conflicto interno?, at the University of La Sabana, Bogota, May 2005).

³ In this sense he stated that, "the illegal Colombian self-defense forces have not reached this negotiating process of their own free will. This government's military action has been relentless and has had a decisive effect in changing the will of sectors of the self-defense movements towards negotiation (...) This is why I have said that, in Colombia there is a very serious social problem that we must tackle, but the action of violent parties cannot be incorporated into the framework nor defined as an action taking place within an

In practice, the government has acted in three different directions: it has announced a military victory against the FARC on the basis of the implementation of the *Plan Patriotas* and a prolific campaign to invite and give incentives for desertion, for which it has had the open support of the United States; the negotiation with paramilitary groups that, according to official figures, has led to the demobilization of more than 30,000 fighters; and more recently, attempts to negotiate with the National Liberation Army (*Ejército de Liberación Nacional* -ELN), the guerrilla group that has been most significantly weakened over the last few years.

The president-candidate's approach has led to a stalemate in relations with the FARC, who openly express their belief that under Uribe Velez peace is impossible, although they claim to be ready to consider it with a different government⁴. As for the National Liberation Army, although it has initiated a process of contacts with the government, it also considers the government's position as a huge obstacle for peace⁵.

Partido Liberal, Horacio Serpa Uribe: *dialogue and integral peace*

In opposition to Alvaro Uribe's (the president-candidate) policies, Horacio Serpa raises four core issues as regards the conflict: i) he recognizes that Colombia is facing a social and armed conflict, ii) he attributes the causes of this in the country's social conditions and poverty, iii) he considers that there has been no transparency in the dealings with paramilitaries and that these have increased their economic power and

internal armed conflict. It is a terrorist menace against a State that is consolidating democratic pluralism" (*Ibid.*).

⁴ On the 14th of February, the FARC expressed that "dialogue with this government is impossible while it continues to qualify the insurgency as narco-terrorist in its media strategy, and while it continues to criminalize protest and popular non-conformity. Colombia needs and deserves peace, but Uribe represents the contrary: irrational war, enflaming the country, and neglecting social programs, handing over our sovereignty to the "gringos", taxes and more taxes, profits for corporations and poverty for Colombians. What is at stake in these elections is the future of Colombia, the reconciliation and reconstruction of the country in peace, and the possibility for structural changes that have been repressed for so many years, social justice, sovereignty and real democracy. These are the things that all Colombians should have in mind when going to the polls". (www.farcep.org/novedades/comunicados/sec2006). Later on, Raul Reyes, member of the FARC Secretariat, reiterated this position, "we reiterate that under Uribe there will be no Exchange, nor dialogue. Uribe's government is illegitimate, and provides no credibility to the FARC or to the Colombian people. We are ready to accept the Humanitarian Agreement and to dialogue in search of peace with a government other than that of Alvaro Uribe. We have heard many, interesting, proposals such as those of the candidate from Reconciliación Nacional, Alvaro Leyva, who promises to put an end to the war in six months. We want this to happen, it would be a huge breath of fresh air for the Colombian people, of whom the FARC are an important part. That the Humanitarian Agreement be implemented is great news for us. The candidate, Carlos Gaviria, in other terms, has stated something similar. We hope that, at some point, these two candidates be able to unify their proposals in favor of peace, in harmony with one of the main interests of our people, and in defense of our national sovereignty to put an end to the extradition of Colombians to other parts of the world, and to start to reconstruct a new Colombia, beyond the corruption, the patronage system, the lies and deceit of Alvaro Uribe Velez". (www.anncol.org/es/site/doc).

⁵ The Central Command of the ELN indicated in a statement made in August 2005 that there were five main obstacles within a potential peace process with Uribe Velez's government: i) the insistence in denying the social, economic and political causes that originated the conflict, ii) the pretence that peace is a matter between the insurgency and the government, denying the fact that peace is a right and an obligation for all Colombians, and that therefore any peace process should include the active participation of various sectors of society, iii) denying that the conflict has generated a significant humanitarian crisis among the poorest sectors of society, which must be tackled as a priority, and in parallel to the search for a political solution, iv) the current government's denial of the existence of an internal conflict, and v) the fraudulent negotiation between the government and the paramilitaries, as there never was a war between them, but rather cooperation and coordination. (*El Tiempo*, 7th of September 2005). In any case, during the first few months of 2006 various conversations have taken place between the Government and this guerrilla group, under the auspices of the Cuban government.

their presence in various levels of Colombian society and, iv) he raises the need to find a negotiated end to the conflict, preceded by the humanitarian agreement.

Recognizing the existence of the conflict includes assuming that it is based on social and economic situations. As in the 2002 presidential campaign⁶, Serpa the candidate, considers that, “hunger, poverty and social exclusion are among the root causes of violence”⁷. Although he admits that the drug traffic economy is currently an important resource for the sustenance of the guerrillas (as well as for the paramilitary groups⁸) he attributes a certain social base to these groups, in so doing he distances himself both from Uribe’s definition of the conflict and of his characterization of the guerrillas.

He proposes a policy of dialogue to tackle the conflict, which implies the strengthening of the State’s presence throughout the national territory; the implementation of social reforms and a revaluation of the economic model, on which he blames social inequalities, as well as the creation of spaces for dialogue with the insurgents that could lead to a politically negotiated end to the conflict. In this sense, by conferring social causes to the armed conflict, his program includes what he calls an *integral peace proposal* in which he combines citizen security, State authority, negotiation and social reforms⁹. The humanitarian agreement geared towards the freeing of hostages would be the first step towards dialogue with the armed insurgents, a step that would not be preconditioned by requests for disarmament or demobilization.

As regards the paramilitary groups, while strongly criticizing the process initiated by President Uribe, which he considers opaque and liable to lead to impunity, he considers that parallel processes are required, both with the guerrillas and the paramilitary forces.

The Polo Democrático Alternativo, Carlos Gaviria: *political negotiation and the applicability of the Rule of Law*

“We are neither extremists, nor cantankerous, nor enemies of democracy and the Social State subject to the Rule of Law. On the contrary, we are democrats, defenders

⁶ At that point he stated, “for Compromiso Social there will be no path to peace without a political, social and economic reform that will tackle inequality and poverty, together with actions aimed at recovering the confidence of citizens in their institutions and to strengthen the judicial system as an instrument of coexistence. There can be no peace without social justice. The political solution is always considered to be the best and least costly way to end the armed conflict, but while the conditions for fruitful negotiations are not in place, we will honor our duty to protect the life and security of all Colombians, within the framework of the capacities that the National Constitution establishes, and with the legitimate use of force against the guerrillas and paramilitaries, as well as all other armed threats that assault the stability of the State“ (www.elcolombiano.com/proyectos/serie).

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ In the inaugural speech of his campaign, he stated, “Colombia is overwhelmed by the action of criminal organizations. The internal conflict is financed, at a large scale, by illegal business. The guerrilla and the paramilitaries are significant administrators of the criminal economy, be it to promote their military goals, or for the enrichment of their members” (www.partidoliberal.org.co/).

⁹ In this sense he was recently quoted as saying in an interview, “On the side of authority, on the side of the public forces, with social policies, developing the fight against inequality, promoting a new development model, we shall create conditions to initiate negotiations. I continue to vindicate the possibility of negotiation. That which we did once in Tlaxcala, has to be repeated, but obviously in better conditions, we have to ensure that the guerrilla give up the idea that they can gain power by force. I believe this to be enormously important, but conditions for social development must be on offer” (El Tiempo, 8th of March 2006).

of the Social State subject to the Rule of Law and with this proposal we aim to establish and promote, without any sectarianism but without any ambiguities either, a left-wing democratic alternative for the country, embodying the real opposition to the current model and government". This approach, included in Carlos Gaviria's campaign program for the Polo Democrático Alternativo, is a declaration of principles of a party that has emerged from the fusion of a myriad smaller left, and center-left parties, from the Communist Party and the Movimiento Obrero Independiente Revolucionario-Moir-, the two oldest left-wing parties, to movements that emerged from the peace processes between the guerrillas and the State in the nineties, as well as Alianza Nacional Popular and independent movements. As a declaration of principles, its goal is to foil any attempt to pigeonhole the party and the candidate at an extreme of the political spectrum, which could lead to their identification as sympathizers of armed groups or enemies of democracy and the Rule of Law¹⁰.

Polo Democrático Alternativo's, and to a certain extent the Liberal party's candidate Horacio Serpa Uribe's, program regarding the conflict points in a totally contrary direction to that which the government and candidate Uribe Velez propose.

It stems from the recognition that there is a social and armed conflict in the country among insurgent groups, who are beyond the Law and the State. Furthermore, that this conflict has degenerated and has led to actions that are contrary to international law. The conflict is explained on the basis of social, political and economic motives¹¹, and they contend that the only possible solution is political negotiation. With the construction of what is termed a *National Peace Agreement* looming in the horizon, his proposal incorporates five components: i) to demand that the armed groups respect the civilian population, the environment, and the public heritage, ii) the preparation of a humanitarian agreement, which shall be the predecessor for more broad reaching agreements, iii) to call upon the various social actors and the political parties to collectively build a policy of dialogue with the illegal groups, iv) to tackle the problem by means of a negotiating table, which could imply the demilitarization of certain areas of the country as preliminary steps to assist the process.

In terms that are reminiscent of those raised by Horacio Serpa Uribe, he focuses on the need for an integral policy that includes solutions to the root causes of the conflict, as well as political negotiation with armed organizations and the full applicability of the Social State subject to the Rule of Law"¹².

In the foreseeable future, the candidate proposes to continue with the dialogue initiated with the ELN, to reach concrete commitments and humanitarian agreements,

¹⁰ In various occasions, candidate Carlos Gaviria has emphasized his disagreement with any form of political action contrary to deliberation, democracy and the Rule of Law. In a recent interview, he was quoted as saying, "one of the greatest obstacles that the Left has encountered is the guerrilla because when someone says that he supports the Left he is immediately assumed to support the armed struggle. It is crucial that people stop thinking that all left-wing proposals are related to the use of force. I have said it in every forum. Neither the ethics that I believe in, nor the philosophical convictions that I have are compatible with armed struggle (...) If there are people in the Polo who believe that armed struggle is the way, they chose the wrong candidate"(Revista Semana No 1249, April 2006).

¹¹ In the program it is stated that, "as compared to the current government, we firstly recognize the existence of an armed conflict in the country, originated in inequalities, exclusion, the negation of freedoms, the repression of social protest, and the violation of human rights. Although in some occasions, and on behalf of some of its actors, this conflict has taken up terrorist methods, its existence cannot be denied, neither can the entire problem be simplified in the fight against terrorism". (Carlos Gaviria's Electoral Program, 2006:8).

¹² www.eltiempo.terra.com/co/blogs/home/.

as well as conditions for the celebration of a National Convention, and the signing of a definitive peace pact. As to the FARC a humanitarian exchange would be considered, as would the possibility of reaching an irreversible pact before the 7th of August 2010, to put an end to the armed conflict, the support of the United Nations would also be contemplated¹³.

Movimiento Nacional de Reconciliación, Alvaro Leyva: *in six months he can put an end to the war*

When presidential candidate Alvaro Leyva Duran launched his campaign, he used the very effective phrase, “in six months I can put an end to the war”. The candidate proclaims, as his main claim to reach the presidency his knowledge of the actors in conflict, thanks to his participation in various peace processes, in intermediation actions for the handing over of hostages, and from his direct contact with guerrilla groups.

“Armed” with his experience, which he considers essential to solve the Colombian conflict, this candidate raises as his starting point the recognition of the existence of an armed conflict, and the need to reach a negotiated peace. He considers that the FARC can be defined as a group in arms, beyond the Constitution and the Law, which have territorial control over part of the nation’s territory, an organization that cannot be qualified as a terrorist group (El Espectador, 26th of March 2006).

This candidate places the causes of the conflict in the State’s weakness: “the conflict is the product of an irresponsible, permissive State that has allowed the gestation and multiplication of self-defense groups, but which has also facilitated the concentration of property, and all the problems and consequences that this entails”¹⁴. From this angle, and recognizing the weakness of the State, the only solution is that of negotiation, regarding this he points out that, “in so doing, the participation of the State is accepted, its collusion and responsibilities in the circumstances of the war that we are suffering. This is to say, to start acting as a responsible State, showing a disposition to know, confront, and transform the root causes of conflict, which will allow us to tackle the problem that we are suffering, without any foreign intervention”¹⁵.

He stresses that armed struggle is in no way a viable option for the guerrilla groups, before which a position of recognition and approach must be assumed, to facilitate dialogue. Similarly, and in opposition to President Uribe, this candidate expresses the need to reach a humanitarian agreement, as a starting point for conversations with guerrilla groups, followed by a cease-fire, in order to ensure that the parties can initiate a negotiation process, based on working groups, a personal direction of the process, and the holding of a national convention to unify the different processes with all armed actors.

As regards the paramilitary groups he proposes to avoid impunity, to establish actions geared towards reparation for victims, and instruments to reintegrate the demobilized fighters into society.

Alianza Social Indígena, Antanas Mockus: *social self-regulation and solving the conflict*

¹³ www.colombia.com/especiales/elecciones/.

¹⁴ Interview with Alvaro Leyva Duran, www.voltairenet.org.com.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

The position that candidate Antanas Mockus holds regarding the conflict has a lot in common with that of the previous candidates as regards the decision to seek a negotiated end to the conflict, which opposes him to President Alvaro Uribe Velez. Notwithstanding, and contrary to all other candidates, he introduces as a central element of his program the need for civil society involvement, which will allow for the establishment of instruments for moral sanction, and for mobilization against violent actions.

This proposal is based around what the candidate calls, *social self-regulation*, which presupposes that the State will assume the responsibility to develop its constitutional obligations on security matters in four fundamental areas: citizen security, judicial security, national security and social security; but also incorporating a commitment from the population regarding the recognition of the other, and in censoring those who act against society¹⁶.

As to the first aspect, he proposes to strengthen the State, to ensure that it is "capable of defeating the threats to democracy stemming from drug trafficking, illegal armed groups, corruption, the patronage system, and undue pressure from private interests" which in turn, will provide incentives and support citizen civil resistance actions, promoted by the population itself. In this regard he raises a combination of elements that are not contemplated by other candidates, that imply combining State action with social action: "to understand the armed conflict as a threat against national security requires maintaining the action of the public forces and facilitate peaceful actions such as civil resistance, social pressure, and the participation of armed illegal groups in public debate on the consequences of violent actions and the belief that 'anything goes'".

In this sense he plans to send out an invitation to make use of the public arena to deliberate, debate, and in so doing to open up the doors to negotiating policies. Furthermore, and in a fairly unique proposal that aims to ensure dialogue at all levels he wishes to, "motivate society and the family members of persons involved in drug trafficking, paramilitary activities, and the guerrilla to dissuade them through reason and emotions, and to educate the citizenry as to the harmful consequences that illegal protection services have for society and the State"¹⁷.

His program includes various points: i) We promote the abandonment of illegal activities through the revaluation of life", ii) It is necessary to promote "civil resistance actions to violent confrontation, hand in hand with human rights groups and groups that promote peace", iii) Develop the constitutional obligations on security in its four main aspects: judicial, social, national, and citizen security, iv) Contain the use of terror to avoid further displacements and tend to the displaced population in an integrated manner. Protect and return abandoned lands to farmer communities, as well as indigenous and black communities that have been displaced".

As regards the paramilitaries he highlights the need to overcome the laxness of the process, and avoid the level of impunity that the process promoted by President Uribe Velez has led to¹⁸.

¹⁶ Partido Visionario, Electoral Program, "Colombia legal, Justa y Productiva", 2nd of February 2006, <http://partidovisionario.com/articulo>.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ "The ultimate interpretation of this Law will be judged by the behavior of the paramilitary leaders: what charges they accept, what they confess to, and what this leads to, how effective are the restitutions and reparations, and how much truth emerges. An obvious risk is that if we compound the initial laxness (or generosity) of the Law with a lax interpretation, and a certain degree of self-indulgence on behalf of the paramilitary leaders in their use of the legal instruments, it is very likely that the case will have to be

IN CONCLUSION

The positions regarding the conflict and electoral results

The *difficult combination* of illegal armed actors and legal instruments for the legitimation of political power, to which we alluded to at the beginning of this article are still the backdrop of Colombian electoral processes. As an expression of this coexistence that transforms the country into a turbulent scenario, in which, notwithstanding, the periodicity of competitive polls is maintained; the issue of the conflict always acquires great relevance during the campaigns. With greater or lesser emphasis, proposals for the resolution of the armed conflict are present in all the programs and in all the campaigns.

The positions towards the conflict were relevant factors in the final results of the Colombian presidential elections in 1998 and 2002. In 1998, the rapprochement of candidate Andres Pastrana to the FARC and the promise of possible negotiations and a consequent peace process played in the candidate's favor, who won the elections in the second round. In 2002, the *hard line* stance that candidate Alvaro Uribe Velez maintained as a core element of his campaign, helped his triumph in the first round. In both cases, the main loser was Horacio Serpa Uribe, who came in second.

After two governments, in which neither peace was reached, nor the guerrilla groups were defeated, the current electoral process, once again presents a great polarization of positions as regards the armed conflict. The confrontation between candidates Horacio Serpa and Alvaro Uribe Velez is repeated, with a third candidate, Carlos Gaviria approaching the former, both in his approach as in the opinion polls.

This polarization regarding the conflict occurs in an electoral scenario that incorporates a *new element*, at least institutionally, given the possibility of immediate presidential reelection, which has led to a novel situation in Colombia, with a president who is simultaneously a candidate and who counts with an absolute majority in the Congress. This scenario also brings back an *old element*, the refusal of the FARC to initiate any peace process with the candidate that is leading the opinion polls, Alvaro Uribe Velez.

During the 2002-2006 four-year mandate, the nation advanced, controversially in the process of demobilizing a great part of the paramilitary groups. Similarly, over the last few months, conversations have been held for a rapprochement between the government and the ELN. Both *peace events* signify progress towards a possible resolution of the Colombian conflict. As regards the FARC, the other component of the *difficult combination*, peace only seems to be possible, assuming that the campaign opinion polls turn out to be true, through a policy of *negotiation after weakening*. Up to now this path has yet to deliver the expected results.

reopened, at least for the more notorious leaders, before the International Criminal Court, within two to three years" (*Ibid*).