CIVIL WARS
https://doi.org/10.1080/13698249.2023.2222947

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

From Insurgency to Local Politics the Case of the Former FARC-EP Insurgent Guillermo Torres in Turbaco, Colombia

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ABSTRACT

Political participation by the former FARC-EP in Colombia remains challenging. Yet, despite limited acceptance of ex-rebels by Colombian society, ex-insurgent Guillermo Torres successfully ran for office in the municipality of Turbaco. We observe how he negotiated his identity as former rebel, revolutionary musician, and son-of-the-soil, to make himself a credible candidate, and to implement a progressive agenda. We challenge mainstream perspectives on 'political reintegration' and localise the 'rebel-to-party' debate. We suggest four elements to understand ex-insurgents political participation in local realms: identity and sense of belonging, insurgent and post-insurgent relations with local society, interaction with regional elites, and partisan competitiveness.

ARTICLE HISTORY Received 16 December 2021; Accepted 1 June 2023

Introduction

> *That word [reintegration] is not entirely accurate because I was never outside of society, because if insurgents left society, then where were they? On Mars? On Jupiter?*
> Guillermo Torres, Turbaco's Mayor

'Why did we so staunchly defend his campaign? Because we were tired of Turbaco not having water, of having a road toll in the middle of the town. This is abuse for any population of the world', stated Everth Sierra, Turbaco's Secretary of Culture, upon expressing his sympathy for Guillermo Torres' political

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This article has been corrected with minor changes. These changes do not impact the academic content of the article.

campaign. With Sierra, 50.11 per cent of the population of the municipality of Turbaco elected Torres as town mayor in 2019. The election of Torres contrasted with Colombians' general disaffection and mistrust of ex-insurgents of the FARC-EP, who received less than 1 per cent of all votes in Colombia's 2018 congressional elections[1]. The FARC party[2] is a controversial political actor at the national level as part of Colombian society, and mainly far-right political actors still consider the FARC a terrorist group and reject the peace treaty and its transformative spirit.

This paper describes the involvement of Guillermo Torres[3] — the only FARC-EP ex-insurgent in Colombia, who has thus far won a mayoral election – in electoral politics and local governance. We look at how local office was, for him, an opportunity to work from his political ideology and experience and to develop his progressive agenda, supported by his fame as a musical performer. His election as mayor is striking in the light of the overall difficulties of FARC-EP[4] ex-insurgents to gain broader societal acceptance, at the national as well as the local level. Given the general failure of the FARC-EP in electoral politics in post-agreement Colombia, as well as widespread societal divisions, we explore how Torres sought to establish himself as a credible candidate and negotiate his capacity to govern as mayor. We draw insights from this case for the broader process of post-insurgent political participation, proposing to understand how it plays out in local settings. This case represents a unique illustration of a former guerrilla fighter's involvement in local government. While the specific conditions of this case may not allow for generalising, it provides several insights, which may help to further research and policy making on peacebuilding.

Literature on 'rebel-to-party' transformation suggests that participation by ex-insurgents in mainstream politics is both one of the major goals and one of the hardest challenges of peacebuilding strategies throughout the world (De Zeeuw 2008). However, the difficulties in achieving effective political reconversion[5] of ex-insurgents are still not well understood. Most studies assume that the political engagement of ex-insurgents is mainly shaped by the political will of local and national elites (Dudouet 2009, Söderström 2013), at the expense of the role that internal dynamics in post-insurgency movements and the interaction of ex-insurgents with local actors and constituencies. It is on these aspects that we focus our analysis.

In the case of Colombia, political participation of FARC-EP ex-insurgents takes place in a variety of domains, including not only electoral politics but also local and national social movements. As a consequence of the peace agreement, former FARC-EP leaders created the FARC political party (currently known as *Comunes*) with the purpose of participating in electoral politics. The internal dynamics of the new party and the varying political interests entailed the (re-)emergence of former and new factions and led ex-militants to seek different paths of political involvement. While some ex-

insurgents continue to belong to the Comunes party, others have developed mechanisms of political engagement outside the party, using a variety of political platforms and creating their own 'style', without being subordinated to the former FARC-EP hierarchical structure. This is the case of Torres, who successfully ran for mayor of Turbaco.

The present study explores how Torres, as a popular figure and musician, entered the local political scene in Turbaco. Torres, while maintaining his identity as an ex-FARC-EP guerrilla fighter, appealed to pressing demands of Turbaco citizens. He brought in his artistic fame as well as his identity as a citizen of Turbaco. His campaign and exercise of governance are interwoven with the forms of interaction and construction of meaning that exist in the Turbaco community, and therefore, with residents' identitary affiliation with that locality. In the case of Torres, his political/anti-establishment music and the meaning it has in the locality are integral to his political profile. Zooming in on this local setting, we unravel how his musical role is connected with his belonging to Turbaco, and how this affects both his reconversion process and his creation of social ties with the Turbaco community.

This paper is based on 5 weeks of fieldwork in the municipality of Turbaco in the department of Bolivar involving participant observation, video ethnography[6] and 22 face-to-face semi-structured interviews with the mayor, his close advisors, local leaders, and 10 informal interviews with people from the street. We approached members of the opposition for interviews but unfortunately only one person accepted our invitation. This implies that the views of opponents are less represented in our analysis. Informed consents were obtained for all the participants. The use of video as methodology for data collection and dissemination of findings served us to account Torres' life from different memories from actors associated with Torres. All interviews were recorded. Data was coded using Atlas.Ti identifying specific categories such as administration challenges and achievements, political campaign discourses, historical accounts, personal features, and relations within local actors. Other secondary sources were used such as newspapers and videos online. The authors of this article are committed to an emancipatory peace, which criticises neoliberal views of peace. The research is part of a PhD project in which the main author uses militant ethnography as methodology and is also an ex-insurgent. The authors have first-hand knowledge and research experience related to the Colombian conflict and peacebuilding issues.

This paper consists of four sections. We first explain our theoretical framing by situating the case of Turbaco in the literature on political reintegration and rebel-to-party transition, where we propose to shift the perspective, from the collective to the individual level of analysis, and from national to local perspectives. We then turn to the case, describing, first, Guillermo Torres' life and how he came to campaign for office and constructed his credibility

and victory. We then analyse his administration on four inter-related dimensions: identity and belonging; relations with local civil society; interaction with regional elites; and partisan competitiveness.

Three Moves in the Political Reintegration Debate

We propose in this paper that re-integration has to be understood politically, that is, as a process of negotiating the political belonging of ex-insurgents in ways that allow for substantive citizenship. We do, however, find that the rebel-to-party literature, while offering valuable insights on the political transformation of armed groups, remains somewhat limited in terms of the way 'the political' is understood, with its focus on national-level, party and electoral politics. In line with authors such as Söderström (2013) and Sprenkels (2014a, 2014b), we suggest to broaden the idea of insurgent movements' political participation, first, beyond party politics and collective strategies; and second, beyond the national into local arenas, where political performance involves multiple registers, including those related to culture and belonging. We frame our case in relation to existing theories of political reintegration and rebel-to-party transformation, proposing the following conceptual-analytical moves:

Re-Politicising Reintegration: From Political Reintegration to Post-Insurgent Political Reconversion

'Political reintegration' refers to the political engagement of armed groups in the peacebuilding process.[7] However, this term has been criticised by some scholars and stakeholders (Söderström 2013, Sprenkels 2014a, Quishpe 2016) due to its lack of comprehensiveness. The prefix 're' begs the question as to what extent insurgents were actually separated from the rest of society before and during the armed confrontation. 'Integration', for their part, suggests a degree of social cohesiveness that might not resonate with those who experienced the transition (Kriger 2003, Sprenkels 2014a) and assumes the society as 'legitimate', 'fully democratic', and 'non-exclusionary' (Söderström 2013). The term reintegration also considers insurgencies to be 'war-focused military organisations' which must be converted into 'dialogue-based political entities' (De Zeeuw 2008, p.1). Then, reintegration seems to assume a de-humanisation of those who had formerly taken up arms. As a consequence of that assumption, a lack of citizenship must be re-integrated (or issued by the first time) to ex-combatants. That is why one of the first actions taken in DDR processes is to provide citizen ID cards as happened in Colombia (Exmilitantes de las FARC iniciaron 2017). However, this citizenship as a means of integrating people into the nation-state could be otherwise

understood – as stated by Holston (2008, p. 5) – as 'a means of distancing people from one another'. Reintegration then could entail some kind of 'differentiated citizenship' (Holston 2008) where rights (and privileges) are available for some (common citizens) while they are denied for others (ex-combatants), as a 'mechanism to distribute inequality' (Holston 2008, p. 7) – even among ex-insurgent population.

In sum, 'reintegration' makes sense from an elitist state-centred perspective, but less so from a critical perspective that acknowledges the political engagement of subversive, counter-hegemonic and rebel groups with society in different ways. For example, the FARC-EP insurgency contributed to organising peasant movements and student organisations (Beltrán 2015, Cortés-Urquijo 2017). Consequently, following Sprenkels (2014a) and De Zeeuw (2008), the reintegration of ex-insurgents into civilian life differs from that of ex-combatants without revolutionary inspiration (such as paramilitaries or irregular armies) given that members of rebel movements usually have transformative or radical agendas which, in a post-agreement stage, may be introduced into electoral political arenas.

As a response to the notion of 'political reintegration', 'Post-insurgent Political Reconversion' (PPR) – a term coined by Sprenkels (2014b) — considers rebels' wartime experience, political savvy, and engagement with the local population. To understand such reconversion, one must begin by asking what is being reconverted. The analytical starting point of the transformative process is not the desired outcome of reconversion, but rather the existing state of the armed political movement before the transition – in particular the movement's internal relations as well as those with its broader social context. Thus, reconversion implies thinking about a relational process in which not only the variety and complexity of the personal histories of ex-insurgents must be considered but also the interactions they establish with social sectors in a given context. These rebels' interaction with local societies have previously been studied by scholars who propose concepts such as 'rebel governance arrangements' (Mampilly 2011, Arjona *et al*. 2015), 'hybrid political orders' (Boege *et al*. 2008), 'institutional multiplicity', 'parallel governance' (Van der Haar and Heijke 2013), 'proto-state building' (Sprenkels 2014b), or 'social revolutionary paths' (Selbin 2018). Such theoretical possibilities could contribute to better comprehending rebel movements' political reconversion.

'Rebel-To-party' Transformations: From Collective to Individual Trajectories

Literature regarding rebel-to-party transformation emphasises the former armed movement's collective challenges in establishing an electorally viable political party (Söderberg-Kovacs 2007), drawing attention to how diverse insurgent legacies may help shape the political development of such a party (Ishiyama

and Batta 2011, Söderberg-Kovacs and Hatz 2016, Curtis and Sindre 2019, Sindre 2019). Additional literature has highlighted issues such as considering former insurgents as war veterans (Duclos 2012, Wiegink *et al*. 2019, Wiegink and Sprenkels 2022), electoral performance of rebel parties (Ishiyama and Widmeier 2013, Manning and Smith 2019, Esparza and Ishiyama 2021) and ideological transformations in the transition from war to peace (Berti 2019, Curtis and Sindre 2019, Sindre 2019, Sprenkels 2019). De Zeeuw (2008, p.16) proposes a model of rebel-to-party transformation consisting of four core structural and attitudinal changes, which are necessary for rebel movements to achieve such transformation: 'demilitarisation of organisational structures, development of a party organisation, democratisation of decision-making, and adaptation of goals/strategies'.

In the rebel-to-party transformation ex-rebel political participation is considered in a limited way, as related to electoral politics, and the fielding of candidates (Porto and Alden 2016) within generally accepted political structures such as parties. Furthermore, there is a general assumption that rebel movements collectively transform into political parties. In fact, De Zeeuw (2008) stresses the 'party' as the main outcome of ex-insurgents' political engagement and suggests that successful political participation by former armed groups is only possible when a party participates 'in elections, parliament, national government, and other governance tasks' (De Zeeuw 2008, p.17). The literature disregards the individual political performance of former rebels as politicians. Söderström (2013, p. 24) classifies political participation by ex-rebels in three levels: 'the military elite, armed groups, and individual combatants', the latter of which may be understood through micro-level analysis to understand individual trajectories of former insurgents.

In recent years, the individual political participation of ex-combatants has gained attention, particularly through the development of research on 'warlord democrats' (Hensell and Gerdes 2017, Themnér 2017, Angerbrandt and Themnér 2021) and 'mid-level commanders' (Themnér 2015, Martin 2021, Martin *et al*. 2022). These studies focus on the process of construction of images and the speech of military and political leaders, often seen in ambivalent way: as a spoilers or potential contributors for peace. Based on theories of securitisation, the main findings highlight the relevance of rebels' accumulation of social capital, their networks with elites and communities to understand their trajectories in post-conflict scenarios, and the inclusion of rebels in national and regional democracies.

'Rebel-To-Party' Transformations: From National to Local Level of Inquiry

With the collective dimension of rebel-to-party transformations, scholars frequently emphasise the national dimension of reintegration (Manning

and Smith 2016, 2019, Marshall and Ishiyama 2016, Söderberg-Kovacs and Hatz 2016) while failing to adequately consider the local dynamics. However, in what has been called the 'local turn' in peacebuilding (Mac Ginty and Richmond 2013), the particularities of local settings, actors, and dynamics have received more attention as part of a critique on State-centred as well as top-down approaches. This coincides with a rise in subnational analysis by comparative political science, which is increasingly focusing on the need to disaggregate the State into smaller entities for analysis using more fine-grained data systems (Snyder 2001, zuo 2015). This has facilitated micro-level research in areas such as peace-making and international intervention (Mac Ginty 2015, Ruggeri *et al*. 2017), grassroots movements and infrastructure (Hilhorst and Van Leeuwen 2005, Richmond 2013), and reconciliation (Prieto 2012).

Scaling down the inquiry to the subnational levels can help to comprehend the transition of an armed movement into a political party/movement or other forms of ex-insurgent organisation on a local level, including individual participation in any sort of local political activity. This opens room to understand within-country variation of political involvement, tied to local histories of insurgencies' engagement with local communities.

To understand the way ex-insurgents participate in the local political sphere, we propose that it is necessary to look at some dimensions that interact at the local level: identity and sense of belonging, relations with local society, regional elites, and partisan competitiveness.

Construction of Identity and a Sense of Belonging

We suggest that the current debate over the political transformation of insurgent movements should be enriched by perspectives that understand the local in terms of identity and belonging. This allows for looking beyond the political agendas at play to understand the role of symbolic constructions. Locality is relational and contextual, constructed on the basis of social meanings and forms of interaction, as well as through rites or ceremonies – for example, related to political appointments – that inscribe the locality in the bodies of local subjects, and therefore influence the social life of that context (Appadurai 1996). On the other hand, habits and identity are connected in individuals' recognition of behaviours and symbols with which collectivities coexist (Appiah 2018).

Identities are not static but rather the consequence of dynamic processes of social exchange (Cañedo 1999). Music and the arts play a particular role in the way in which the identities of a collectivity are represented (Arellano 2019). The communicative capacity of music in the local society offers a language that has an impact on the affective and ideological levels and that allows people to connect with each other.

Relationship of the Armed Group with Local Civil Society

The effect of prior rebel influence on electoral politics appears to vary with the type of influence or governance developed by the armed group during wartime, either gaining sympathisers or opponents. Studies have demonstrated the importance of rebel groups' wartime presence on the ground for subsequent electoral support for political parties emerging from those groups (Ishiyama and Widmeier 2013). In the case of El Salvador, regions where the FMLN had been present during the armed conflict showed higher numbers of votes compared to regions in which this armed movement had not maintained territorial control. However, in Indonesia, electoral behaviour in territories where the local insurgency was present was quite the opposite.

Interaction with Regional Elites

Regional political and economic elites are a central factor in local electoral politics. Therefore, they must be included in any analysis of democratisation on local and/or regional levels (Grimm and Weiffen 2018). These elites may co-opt the political process by purchasing votes, as well as through other clientelistic tactics. Similarly, they guide political parties' decision-making and influence local administrations' financial decisions by providing campaign funding in exchange for receiving contracts of any kind.

Recent studies show that the early years of transition to peace tend to be characterised by intense strategization by elites to retain their power, which may directly influence low levels of public good provision and accountability (Martinez-Bravo *et al*. 2017). Rebel parties and ex-insurgents participating in local governance must therefore interact with these elites, whether through confrontation, negotiation, or avoidance.

Partisan Competitiveness

Inclusion of new actors in post-agreement democracy leads to the emergence of a multipolar political space (Usma 2020) unknown during wartime. However, this space varies according to the degree of electoral competitiveness (i.e., the number of parties running for election) as well as the predominance of party factions in local administrations. Local parties can help to solidify or weaken the party system (Budiatri 2022). For that reason, ex-insurgents also need to develop specific capacities 'to be competitive' and electable in electoral debates, being part of a rebel party or running as an independent candidate. Moreover, ex-insurgents face different challenges depending on the municipal political system, and must establish alliances with similar parties or confront hostility where parties of opposing ideologies predominate in public administration and other local institutions.

The Case of Guillermo Torres: Turbaquero, Musician, Rebel and Mayor

We 'localise' the perspective on political reintegration by analysing the electoral victory of Guillermo Torres, a former FARC-EP combatant in his native town, Turbaco. Turbaco, in Bolivar, has a population of 174,000. The town's history is characterised by the influence of the music of the Atlantic coast, which has shaped its inhabitants' particular identity. While most of the Colombian Caribbean suffered severe effects of massacres and other expressions of violence by paramilitaries and the guerrilla, Turbaco was not directly affected by the armed conflict; however, it did receive people displaced from the southern region of the department (La Liga Contra el Silencio n.d.).

Turbaco's economy and politics were shaped by the economic power consolidated by Alfonso Hilsaca (known as the 'lord of public lighting') over more than 30 years by funding political campaigns in Cartagena, Turbaco, and Arjona. Furthermore, his highly profitable business has allegedly allowed him to economically support paramilitary groups, and some claim he has been involved in killings of social leaders (Hilsaca, el 'todopoderoso' de Bolívar Hilsaca, el 'todopoderoso' de Bolívar, n.d.).

Guillermo Torres Cueter (commonly known as Julián Conrado) was born in Turbaco in 1954. Since childhood, he was interested in music as well as politics. With his teenage friends, as Rafael Miranda, secretary of sports reminds, he formed the band '*Los Sensacionales*', which played *sabana* music,[8] at local family celebrations and other festivities. Torres later began to question the corruption and poverty in his town, which is dominated by traditional political parties. As a result, he composed songs such as *'La Volqueta'*, in which he denounced corrupt politicians' theft of a truck purchased by the municipality evokes Oscar Jimenez, a close friend of Torres.

Following the recording in 1978 of the LP 'El Nuevo Rey Sabanero' with Mariano Perez and the promotion of his music by his friend and well-known musician Alfredo Gutierrez, he achieved regional recognition for his collaboration with renowned *vallenato* musicians. In the 1980s, as a result of his songs and his social commitment through music, as well as his collaboration with various leftist organisations of the region, Torres began to be recognised in his town as a cultural and political reference. However, following the murder of his friend Julián Conrado David in 1983 by paramilitary groups, he decided to join the FARC-EP, taking on his deceased friend's name as his war-name (Conrado 2012). Mariano Perez reminds us how this decision negatively affected his future career as a musician.

Within the FARC, he became recognised as a singer, composing over a hundred revolutionary songs, which were taught to the insurgents in their assembly meetings in order to maintain their '*moral de combate*'

(combat spirit). His songs, as well as other FARC-EP singers' music, were frequently heard in rural areas, bars, restaurants, parties, and clandestine meetings (Quishpe 2020). Thanks to his charisma he was granted a middle-rank cadre position in the guerrilla, allowing him to dedicate more of his time to culture rather than war-related activities.

In 1985, he was commissioned as representative of the *Union Patriótica*, a movement created by the FARC-EP and other social movements in an attempt to attain peace. Following the killing of thousands of militants of that party, he returned to the guerrilla. In 1998, he played an important role in the Caguán talks as a cultural promotor and member of the cultural commission of the FARC-EP. In 2011, he was imprisoned by the Venezuelan government, accused of rebellion due to his inclusion on the INTERPOL red list. Upon his release 3 years later, 'he went to Havana to collaborate in peace negotiations' remembers Miranda. Following the peace talks, he returned to Colombia to organise the 'pedagogy of peace' to publicise the content and importance of the peace agreement. After laying down arms, Torres began his reincorporation in the Territorial Space for Training and Reincorporation (ETCR) of Tierragrata in the department of Cesar.

As Mauricio Campos, one of the leaders of the political platform 'amor por Turbaco' evokes, Torres did not seek to run for mayor of Turbaco until a group of citizens interested in transforming the municipality's electoral politics proposed this as they saw in him a charismatic figure capable of harnessing the municipality's popular discontent. The leaders of this citizens' group included friends of Torres, who were activists of the centre and left. As Torres says, analysing the municipality's situation, three priority issues were placed on the campaign agenda: health, safe drinking water, and poverty reduction.

Torres sought to run independently without the support of the FARC party, due to discrepancies with its leadership. He and his support team collected signatures to register him as an independent candidate. Although the signatures were delivered on time, the process of validating them in Bogotá took longer than expected, so Torres ended up registering with endorsement by the Colombia Humana – Unión Patriótica (CH-UP) coalition of leftist movements, which had no direct connection to the Comunes party.

Torres ran against candidates supported by local economic and political elites, mostly from traditional right-wing political parties. Torres' campaign was characterised by his charismatic speeches, low expenditure, revolutionary music, and progressive agenda. Torres' popularity and ability to congregate people was reflected in two episodes narrated by Rosa Morales, the current secretary of the municipal department of Social Integration: Torres' participation in 'Pedagogy of Peace' to spread the peace agreement, and the presentation of his recent album '*Alzado en Canto*' in a nightclub in Turbaco. His role in the Peace Pedagogy involved songs he composed as a guerrilla

member, such as '*Mensaje Fariano*' (FARC Music Database 2019) and '*Con el mismo amor*' (Nirvana Elles 2015a). Other songs that contributed to Torres' reaching the public were '*Una gota de amor*' and '*Alzado en Canto*' (La Kanduruma 2019a, 2019b), composed while he was imprisoned in Venezuela. As Morales explains, Torres accompanied his music with personal stories. For instance, in '*La Volqueta*' (Las2orillas 2019) Torres denounced theft of public funds, conveying the message that the Torres government would be different. As told by Rosa, someone in the crowd screamed '*Tu eres el gallo*' (You are the rooster), a popular expression clearly inviting him to be his leader in the coming elections.

In 2019, Torres was elected mayor of Turbaco with a clear victory of almost 50 per cent of the votes among five candidates and began his administration in January 2020.

Negotiating Identity and Belonging: The Musician Returns Home

'I am a wild singer … Music is consubstantial for Guillermo Torres' says Guiillermo Torres. For Torres, music has served as a tool to express his story, his political orientation and his criticism of political decisions, actions, and actors at the local level. Before taking up arms, during his membership in the FARC, and since the signing of the peace agreement, his music has characterised him and shaped his social interactions. Songs he wrote when he was a member of the FARC-EP were clandestinely listened to in Turbaco and other cities and villages. Although Torres left his town to join the guerrilla – as he narrates in '*De mi pueblo para la guerrilla*' (Concausa 2008), even today his music continues to be a part of the daily lives of Turbaco residents, and plays a role in the construction of the Turbaco identity.

As addressed by Quishpe (2020) and Bolívar (2017) music fulfilled a central role in motivating the guerrillas for combat, fomenting social and ideological cohesion, and in connecting with the local civilian population as propaganda. Boulanger (2020) has also explored the role of music as a social practice that contributes to the internal legitimisation of insurgent groups by maintaining hierarchies, as well as externally, representing the people. Julián Conrado's music is part of the landscape of the *fariana*[9] culture, which involves not only *vallenato* but also *llanera* music, salsa, merengue, and hip-hop. Conrado's songs have also crossed national borders, inspiring international solidarity, as evident when he was imprisoned in Venezuela. Furthermore, his music has strengthened international networks through its appeal to Venezuela's Bolivarian discourse, as evident in several of his songs: '*Regresó Simón*', '*Bolivariando venceremos*', '*Versos bolivarianos*', '*A bolivariar*', and '*Sueño bolivariano*' (Malagón 2015).

Episodes narrated in this work and others demonstrate the role of Torres' music in political scenarios and how the singer, accompanied by

his guitar and voice, inspires his town as a musician and as a politician. Music thus, is an integral part of Torres' subjectivity. Torres possesses the ability to approach people through his music says Oscar Jimenez. In fact, messages critiquing corrupt former administrations, expressing the need for reconciliation within Colombian society, and proposing love as a holistic approach to life invited people to imagine the future and electorally support the emergence of a new political scenario for Turbaco. Oscar reminds the role of the song *'Gotica de amor'* (little drop of love) in the political campaign, which was played in different meetings.

As the interviews show, Torres' individual agency and his personal 'charisma' have also been crucial for being accepted by Turbaco' inhabitants. Torres' music, which is embedded in Turbaco's everyday life, as well as in its commemorative rites, influences local residents' perceptions of Torres as a politician. His music and his artistic performance are part of such rites that took place during his campaign and his administration. This may be seen as a 'rite of passage' from FARC-EP insurgent to mayor of Turbaco that indicates continual – albeit not unidirectional – connection among the components that build his individual identity as a musician, ex-insurgent, candidate, and finally mayor of Turbaco.

The contribution of Torres' music and his legend to his construction as a figure of Turbaco present in the daily life of the town's inhabitants greatly contributed to his election as mayor. As Rosa reminds the collection of signatures was made in different neighbourhoods by playing music by Torres. Listening to his music can then provoke a range of emotions, from admiration to contempt. The narratives of those who knew him before he joined the FARC-EP circulated alongside his music, permeating the imaginary of younger generations who (re)met Torres after he laid down his weapons.

By supporting culture and the arts, Torres, the mayor, strengthens the Turbaco identity and sense of belonging. The musicians supported by the new major suggest this is the first administration that supports culture in Turbaco. Therefore, for the analysis, we consider not only the political dimension of music but also the role played by artists within social configurations (Street 2002) to comprehend how Torres' role as ex-insurgent musician of the FARC-EP is articulated around his role as a representative of his town's popular culture.

Therefore, Torres' PPR process allows us to elucidate that belonging to a locality should not only be analysed based on belonging to a place but also as 'a discursive resource that constructs, claims, justifies or resists forms of socio-spatial inclusion/exclusion (politics of belonging)' (Antonsich 2010, p. 645). The song *Volqueta* is an example of a cultural product that awakens a sense of belonging to a place, on the one hand, because it was inspired by that place and therefore evokes it; and on the other, because it reflects the

thoughts and experiences of some *Turbaqueros*. Torres' musical presence in Turbaco and the fact that this presence is inspired by this locality could partially explain his popularity among its inhabitants and his election as mayor. Guillermo Torres' music generates a narrative that constructs him as a celebrity and as a '*Turbaquero*'.[10]

Although Torres' identity as a former FARC-EP guerrilla did play a role in his opponents' campaign to discredit him, his identity as a member of Turbaco and as a musician allowed him to overcome possible mistrust due to his political identity. Within the political dispute over the administration of Turbaco, and currently governing Turbaco, there is a notable desire among residents for differentiation between those who, through their vote, supported an ex-insurgent who is, at the same time, a musician from Turbaco and those who do not consider their political identity to be represented by Torres' candidacy.

Relating to a Local Society: Music and Progressive Agenda

'My dream is to turn Turbaco into a territory of reconciliation and peace with justice and love' says Torres proposing the philosophy of his agenda. This phrase makes us reflect upon the importance of individual analysis, where the Torres' image in his own environment contrasts with the general negative perception of the FARC-EP as a guerrilla group and after the peace agreement, as a political party.

Added to the evident outcome of Torres identity as musician, as ex-insurgent and as Turbaco citizen on his relation with local society, this case also shows the dialectical relationship between music and politics and makes visible the socio-political function of arts, and the link between the local culture and political action (Street 2002, Arellano 2019). The ability of audiences to decode music messages depends on biographies and experiences in certain historical contexts (Ares 2013, Bernabé 2013). Torres' music connects and communicates, by evoking the Turbaco and 'costeño' (from the Caribbean coast) identity not only aesthetically – through vallenato – but also from a discursive plane that highlights the daily narratives and imaginaries of local people. It is not a coincidence, therefore, that this communicative capacity of music has been used as a counter-discursive resource by Torres before joining the guerrilla, during his membership in the guerrilla, and in the recent context of the political campaign in his reconversion process. Torres' case shows, in Foucault's terms, how resistance and mobilisation through counter-hegemonic discourses contained in his music are creative processes that coexist with the exercise of power that he seeks to challenge (Foucault 1991).

Affirming local culture has been crucial for the Torres administration since Turbaco's rich culture had been undervalued. Several interviews stressed that

previous administrations favoured artists from elsewhere over those from Turbaco, in contrast to the current administration that has provided local artists with rehearsal space and has hired them to represent Turbaco in a variety of regional music festivals. One musical group created during the Torres administration is the Corraleros – former street musicians who play *sabana* music. According to Evert Sierra, the Corraleros 'reflect their Caribbean identity more than does *vallenato*' which was created in the department of Valledupar. Torres also promoted the creation of the Big Band Orchestra, principally consisting of musicians who have received musical education and therefore read music. This band not only plays tropical rhythms of the Caribbean but also classical music. Creation of these groups was not without tensions. Some of the musicians who were invited to join refused to participate because they did not agree with the mayor's political ideology, and others joined despite opposition by friends and relatives.

According to local musicians, their participation in local music festivals has contributed to their artistic formation, in contrast to much of their previous musical and life experience, associated with memories of mismanagement of cultural funds, lack of administrative support for local musicians participating in regional festivals, and the exodus of musicians in search of recognition for their music.

Sierra, as well as current members of 'Corraleros' interviewed name several factors that contributed to their support for Torres' administration. First, some of them found music to be a means of expressing nonconformity to social injustice or have been able to protest against human rights violations through *vallenato* and other types of Caribbean music. They support Torres due to his role as a revolutionary musician from Turbaco and their sympathy with Torres' militancy in the guerrilla. Finally, the cultural expressions promoted by Torres' administration exalt the Turbaco identity and a sense of belonging to this locality.

Torres says that his governance proposal is based on seven principles: depuration of administrative process; planned management of municipal development; massive social participation; programmatic concertation; controlled inversion of public resources; a functional bureaucracy; and continuous evaluation of public management. He affirms he wants to transform Turbaco into an ethical inspiring municipality of peace and an example of reconciliation.

As mayor, Torres has faced several challenges, which affected his performance as political leader of Turbaco's community. The COVID 19 pandemic presented an opportunity to develop his social programs, allowing him to demonstrate his problem-solving capacity. The administration improved the hospital by building an emergency room and other infrastructure and providing the necessary medical staff to carry out tests and other medical procedures. He also rectified hospital workers' unpaid salaries and resolved an

economic sanction that a national agency had previously imposed on the hospital.

Torres' administration confronted an aggressive media campaign by his political adversaries who suggested that his administration was corrupt. His administration was blamed, for example, for not building a road that, at the end, he could demonstrate was the consequence of the former administration not leaving the funding necessary to complete that project (Colpas 2021). Given the impact on his political image, Torres engaged in continuous communication in social networks, to explain his actions regarding the implementation of social programs.

His administration managed to invest in sports infrastructure such as a baseball stadium and a public gym, supported peasant entrepreneurs by creating a peasant market in Turbaco's central square and implemented a small business training program. Torres also supported a strike organised by Turbaco residents against the central government demanding the removal of a tollbooth on the road from Turbaco to Cartagena due to its economic effects on local workers (Mejía 2021) who travel daily to Cartagena.

Turbaco had not been heavily impacted by the armed conflict and had little first-hand experience of FARC-EP presence. The Turbaco population mostly knew about the FARC-EP through, Julian Conrado, the guerrilla singer. However, his counter-hegemonic discourse by expressing it with the concepts of 'peace and social justice', akin to that of the guerrilla, convinced the half of the population who elected him.

Wheeling and Dealing with Regional Elites: The War by Other Means

'No one can buy me; no one can sell me. A person's dignity impedes them from becoming a commodity'. As Torres explained with this phrase, negotiation with traditional powers does not necessarily involve receiving money or corrupting his administration; on the contrary, he stressed his commitment to total honesty, which includes refusing bribes.

Torres, as mayor of Turbaco, has had to dialogue with local power structures, which were challenged by the new leftist power. Hilsaca, captured in 2014 for crimes related to funding paramilitaries (El prontuario del 'Turco' 2014) and recently released by corrupt judges (Las graves denuncias 2021), appears to be the principal representative of this local power that secretly dominates part of the department of Bolivar. As one interviewee expressed,[11] 'He has a lot of businesses which have been contracted by former administrations, and surely Torres had to meet with him to make a deal'. Another interviewee clarified that Torres could not break open agreements, which had been made between this local power and former administrations.

For Torres, setting ethical limits has been met with obstruction of his social initiatives and programs by the municipal council. Conflicting visions between local traditional powers (which in the case of Turbaco are right-wing) and the new leftist administration could involve abandonment or adaptation of some political elements of the ex-insurgent legacy. In fact, Torres has been unable to increase his room to manoeuvre – especially with respect to seeking funding for social programs – and has been forced to turn to the private sector for support.

Another obstacle, according to Torres, is the municipality's low budget. The past administration committed the current and half of the following administration's budget (for a total of 10 years) to investments, which cannot be withdrawn. This was the case of the fuel surcharge tax, which could not be used during the current administration, as well as investments in cement-related infrastructure. Additionally, royalties from crude oil sales – which are divided among all municipalities of Colombia – have not been available to the Torres administration, supposedly because the former municipal administration was sanctioned for inappropriate use of these funds by the central government in August of 2019, argue Torres. These situations have greatly limited the budget available for implementing Torres' campaign promises, most of which were related to social programs. Nonetheless, by carefully investing local tax money and making relations with local entrepreneurs, he has been able to improve the municipal economy.

Given the budget situation, Torres found a solution to the lack of running water and aqueducts in rural areas by turning to private companies that shared his administration's philosophy and agreed to donate materials. As a result, Torres tells us, a local businessman donated a 30,000-litre tank for the aqueduct in the rural area of Cañaveral. Torres speaking about local entrepreneurs says: 'I have the best relation with businessmen in Turbaco, … but I contact them only for donations' clarifying that there are no agreements with those actors that could constrain his administration.

In general, it seems that in such modest scenarios of progressive governments, 'challenging the system' is limited. Nelson (2018) suggests that socialist experiences in Latin America failed in deeply challenging neoliberal systems, as these governments hardly recuperated the control over economy and rely their social investments on extractive economies without changing social relations and on negotiation with elites who, hardly, support progressive governments and their egalitarian dreams. In fact, Torres recognises that and says: 'there are so many problems that cannot be solved since there are structural problems that must be solved by a deep transformation at national level'.

Dancing with the Opposition: At the Margins of the Political Party System

Torres tells of his first meeting with the council, in which council advisors asked: 'How much [money] is in it for us?', and that he replied, 'For you there's the same as for me: the satisfaction of serving the people'. Such situations clearly arose in reaction to Torres being a leftist politician in opposition to traditional right-wing parties. Despite attempts to resolve tensions with Turbaco elites, Torres complains of continual obstruction by traditional political sectors, which control the majority of the Municipal Council. Regarding the Council role, one interviewed woman in the street suggests that despite the major's good intentions it is very difficult that his administration successfully ends up. She also highlights the effect of the central government and its 'bad administration' on Torres administration.

The first strategy of the opposition has been the approval of motions of censure to different officials of the mayor's office. This constitutional mechanism had never been used in the political history of the municipality. In September 2020, 15 councillors voted in favour of suspending the secretary of social integration, Rosa Margarita Morales, arguing that she did not attend an official summons to speak in the council. However, a municipal judge subsequently ordered her reinstatement, as her right to due process had been violated (Mejia 2020). Recently, in April 2022, the Municipal Council again approved a motion of censure against the Secretary General of the municipality, Dirleys Villadiego, accusing her of irregularities in her appointment (Alvarez 2021). Again, a judge found that the council had acted contrary to the constitution and the very internal procedures that regulate the council's actions (Reincorporada Secretaria General 2022).

The second strategy has been to block the bills that the mayor's office has presented to the council for approval. While most of the projects he has presented to the council have effectively been blocked, there is some room for manoeuvring through programs and public policies that do not require council approval. Torres mentioned that his relationship with some council members has improved but is still not strong enough to obtain approval for his programs. He has publicly explained this situation to his voters, emphasising the consequences of council members blocking his programs. Torres, however, has developed good relations with other political actors of the region, such as with the department of Bolivar's governor Vicente Blel, who belongs to a faction of the conservative party and Cartagena's major William Dau, who was elected as an independent candidate.

While ex-insurgents' political participation partially depends on the political will of local and national elites and the political parties representing their interests, the internal dynamics of post-insurgency political parties also plays

an important role in promoting (or hindering) their individual and collective political participation.

Conclusions

This study was aimed at understanding how a Colombian ex-insurgent, became involved in electoral politics and assumed governance of a municipality within a national context of limited acceptance of the FARC-EP as a post-agreement political force. We discuss how Guillermo Torres negotiated electoral support and proposed his progressive agenda to govern the municipality of Turbaco. Below, we attempt to identify some insights from this case, which may be useful for Post-Insurgent Political Reconversion in other contexts.

The key insights with implications for PPR process are related to the role of identity and sense of belonging in the creation of a credible political figure, the way ex-insurgents relate to local society in time of war and in time of peace, the ex-insurgents interaction with regional elites within the 'realpolitik' sphere, and the role of the political party system in facilitating or obstructing progressive political agendas.

Through his political performance, Torres shows himself to be an alternative to historic corrupt politicians, capturing the increasing public discontent, as reflected in the ballot boxes. His progressive administration places a social agenda over the conventional focus on infrastructure, which tends to further big business and corruption. His discourse of 'justice and love' favoured his campaign and subsequent administration. Furthermore, the use of music as a political practice, as developed during the insurgency, facilitated his participation in electoral politics. Clearly, Torres' figure as a popular singer in Turbaco enabled him to win the majority of votes. His artistic dimension seems to play a relevant role in feeding the sense of belonging of Turbaco population to their village, perhaps in the same way in which it was also feeding the sense of belonging to the guerrilla of his former comrades. The connection between the mayor and musicians benefited from his administration's cultural programs makes Torres an agent of change capable of recognising the value of musicians and improving their working conditions. In sum, he negotiated his credibility along three dimensions: as Musician, as Turbaco's son, and as an ex-guerrilla fighter.

The administration and figure of Torres has also served to anchor Turbaco residents to their locality by reaffirming their identity and sense of belonging to their town. Torres assumed the challenge of attempting to improve Turbaco residents' lives by building on his idea of social justice as well as his affinity with music, which has inspired residents' renewed sense of belonging.

In recent decades, local and regional powers with strong ties to illegal businesses have gained control of Colombian State institutions, representing a great challenge for future ex-insurgent participation in electoral politics and for the PPR process in general. Political action, programs, and public policies developed by ex-insurgents participating in local governments are clearly influenced by local political actors who practically leave little room for manoeuvre, especially when those ex-insurgents pursue interests other than those of other local political actors. The tension resulting from these competing interests among political actors may threaten the independence – and even the life – of the emerging ex-insurgent political actors and their closest supporters. This tension may force candidates to moderate their political discourses and practices or, in worst-case scenarios, to strategically align themselves with such powers abandoning their revolutionary ideals. This raises questions regarding how some of the ideals of ex-insurgents are being expressed in new formats within the existing political realm, perhaps without totally endangering the neoliberal system.

Thus, ex-insurgents' participation in local governance in post-agreement scenarios would be facilitated by being able to ethically negotiate with local powers with the purpose to implement a progressive social agenda. Perhaps, Torres' greatest challenge has not been being elected despite being an ex-FARC-EP guerrilla fighter, but rather implementing that agenda within the neoliberal economy and social relations under capitalism, which cannot be soon modified. In sum, PPR should be understood as a terrain in which the correlation of forces between the new power and the former customary power plays a significant role in either promoting or reducing ex-insurgents' influence in society, but also a fertile terrain for making new deals with other sectors, which may be prone to supporting a progressive agenda.

The case of Torres, whose individual rebel identity did not depend on his belonging to a political party, also demonstrates that political participation by ex-insurgencies is not unavoidably attained within post-insurgency party structures or other traditional structures of command and control.

Our analysis incorporated different perspectives, which allowed us to understand the political participation of ex-insurgents in local settings as a multi-layered issue. Political interaction with elites, taking seriously the needs of the population and uniting the population through music and culture help us to better understand that the political performance of ex-insurgents is built by practice, an important insight that allows us to expand the reductionism of the rebel-to-party debate.

Finally, this study has implications for future endeavours since it proposes three important moves not only for research purposes but also for improving electoral performance of rebel actors in post-conflict societies. First, re-politicising reintegration would allow policymakers and society in general,

to understand that rebels usually attempt to change societies and their progressive and emancipatory motivations must not be underestimated or de-politicised. Second, individual trajectories of political reconversion seem to be more protagonist in nowadays electoral politics than the collective way of political reconversion of the past decades. And third, local contexts must be considered either to understand, from an academic point of view, the political participation of rebels embedded in local settings; or, from the rebels' interest to occupy a future role in politics, to comprehend how to launch successful political campaigns considering local actors and local elites.

Notes

1. Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia, Ejercito del Pueblo (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, People's Army).
2. Initially named Fuerza Alternativa Revolucionaria del Común (Alternative Revolutionary Force of the Commons).
3. He was popularly known as 'Julián Conrado', the FARC-EP' singer.
4. Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia, Ejercito del Pueblo (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, People's Army).
5. In the literature, the term 'reintegration' is most frequently used. We propose 'reconversion' for the reasons explained below.
6. A video ethnography on this case can be find at: https://youtu.be/gdqcHXnPYEs
7. While most of the literature regarding reintegration identifies its social and economic dimensions (Gleichmann *et al*. 2004), the Havana agreement – using the term reincorporation, refers to three dimensions: social, economic, and political (Mesa de Conversaciones 2016).
8. Characterized by accordion, trombone, saxophone, and euphonium playing over 18 rhythms, including *cumbia*, *porro*, *paseadito*, and *guaracha*.
9. Belonging to FARC-EP.
10. Member of the town of Turbaco. See Torres' song 'Turbaquero' written when he was in the guerrilla (Nirvana Elles 2015b)
11. To protect some informants, we do not report their names in this article.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank Guillermo Torres and his administrative team for their willingness to support this research project despite their many duties, especially in the light of the COVID 19 pandemic. We acknowledge the participation of Alvaro Cortés, Viviana Barrios, and Erick Rojas, who recorded the interviews and assisted with fieldwork.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

This work was partially funded by the Instituto Colombo-Alemán para la Paz (CAPAZ) as part of a programme to support research projects in 2020–2021.

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