



FARC (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia):

The Farc is the oldest and largest group among Colombia's left-wing rebels and is one of the world's richest guerrilla armies. The group's roots can be traced back to the Liberal guerrilla bands of La Violencia - the civil war between the Liberal and Conservative parties that raged from 1948 until 1958. Farc became disillusioned with the leadership of the Liberal Party and turned to communism. One of the guerrilla bands was led by Manuel "Sureshot" Marulanda (his real name is Pedro Antonio Marin), who in 1966 baptised his group the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC).

Experts estimate that FARC takes in between \$500 million and \$600 million annually from the illegal drug trade. The FARC also profits from kidnappings, extortion schemes, and an unofficial "tax" it levies in the countryside for "protection" and social services. About sixty-five of the FARC's 110 operational units are involved in some aspect of the drug trade, according to a [2005 International Crisis Group report](#), but evidence from that period indicates they primarily managed local production. A [2008 International Crisis Group report](#) notes that the nature of the FARC's drug involvement varies from region to region, and that the group's control of population and territory in rural areas "has allowed it to dictate terms for coca growth, harvest, and processing

According to a US justice department indictment in 2006, [the Farc supplies more than 50% of the world's cocaine and more than 60% of the cocaine entering the US.](#)

Recently, the Farc, which is on US and European lists of terrorist organisations, has suffered a series of blows, including the deaths of several top commanders.

On 23 September 2010, the group's top military leader, Jorge Briceno, also known as Mono Jojoy, was killed in a raid on his jungle camp in the eastern region of Macarena. The group's founder and long-time leader, Manuel "Sureshot" Marulanda, died in 2008 of a heart attack.

The most dramatic setback was the rescue by the military of 15 high-profile hostages, including the former presidential candidate Ingrid Betancourt in 2008. The hostages had long been seen as a key element in the rebels' attempts to exchange their captives for jailed guerrillas. President Alvaro Uribe, who swept to power in 2002 vowing to defeat the rebels and was re-elected in 2006, launched an unprecedented offensive against the Farc, backed by US military aid.

Desertions from the rebel ranks suggest morale has been hit. The group had about 16,000 fighters in 2001, according to the Colombian government, but this is believed to have dropped to about 8,000.

However, the rebels still control rural areas, particularly in the south and east, where the presence of the state is weak, and in 2009 they stepped up their attacks and ambushes.

ELN: (Ejército de Liberación Nacional)

The left-wing group was formed in 1965 by students, Catholic radicals and left-wing intellectuals inspired by the Cuban revolution and Marxist ideology. It was long seen as more politically motivated than the FARC, for example the ELN stayed out of the illegal drug trade for a long period of time on ideological grounds. ELN operates mainly in north-eastern Colombia.

The ELN reached the height of its power in the late 1990s, carrying out hundreds of kidnappings and hitting infrastructure such as oil pipelines. The ELN ranks have since declined from around 4,000 to an estimated 1,500, suffering defeats at the hands of the security forces and

paramilitaries. However, in October 2009, ELN rebels were able to spring one of their leaders from jail, indicating that they are not a completely spent force.

Nowadays, the ELN's primary income source is drug trafficking, a shift from the ransom or "protection" payments that accounted for much of its funding in the 1980s, and the kidnappings that produced revenue in the 1990s. Colombian government sources believe this latest shift occurred between 2005 and 2007, which coincides with increased ELN activity on the Pacific coast and Venezuelan border, coca-growing regions, and drug-trafficking zones.

There have been several rounds of exploratory peace talks with the government in recent years, held in the Cuban capital, Havana, but no concrete progress.

### FARC and ELN

The two groups have similar programs: both say they represent the rural poor against Colombia's wealthy classes and oppose U.S. influence in Colombia, the privatization of natural resources, multinational corporations, and rightist violence. The two groups have an ambiguous relationship; in some parts of the country they cooperate, while in others they have clashed directly.

### AUC: (Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia)

The AUC-commonly referred to as the paramilitaries-is an umbrella organization formed in April 1997 to consolidate most local and regional paramilitary groups each with the mission to protect economic interests and combat FARC and ELN insurgents locally. During 2002, the AUC leadership dissolved and then subsequently reconstituted most of the organization, claiming to be trying to purge it of the factions most heavily involved in drug trafficking. The AUC is supported by economic elites, drug traffickers, and local communities lacking effective government security and claims its primary objective is to protect its sponsors from insurgents. It is adequately equipped and armed and reportedly pays its members a monthly salary.

Estimated 6,000 to 8,150, including former military and insurgent personnel

AUC forces are strongest in the northwest in Antioquia, Cordoba, Sucre, and Bolivar Departments. Since 1999, the group demonstrated a growing presence in other northern and south-western departments. Clashes between the AUC and the FARC insurgents in Putumayo in 2000 demonstrated the range of the AUC to contest insurgents throughout Colombia.

Now that disarmament is reputedly over, it remains to be seen what role former AUC troops will play in Colombian security and politics. Discouragingly, there have been reports from the north of the country indicating that a few small bands of officially demobilized AUC fighters are still involved in terrorist activities -- including extortion, kidnapping, and even murder. The Colombian government has demanded serious efforts to control any outbreaks from senior commanders, particularly Salvatore Mancuso, though Mancuso has denied having any ability to control his former forces.

Sources:

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