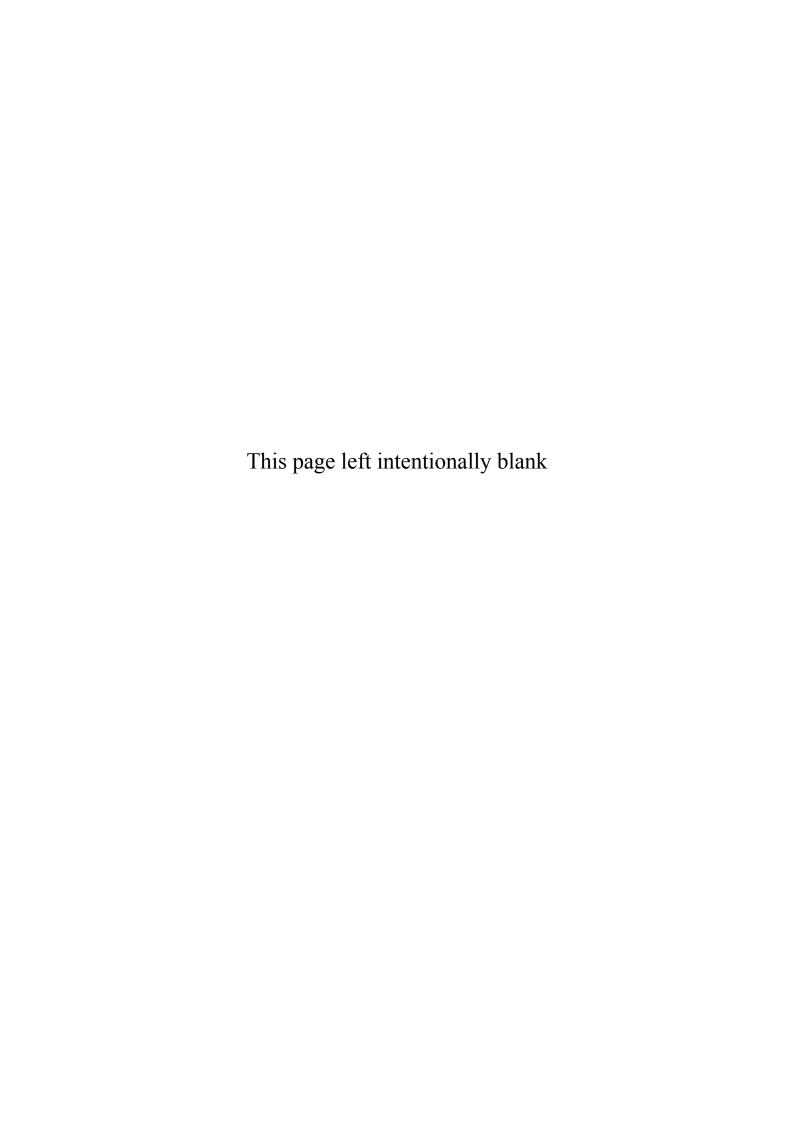Centre for Peace Studies

Beyond the Uniform:

Analysing the Nexus of Privilege-based Violence and Militarisation of Public Security
in the Context of the Colombian Protests of 2019 & 2021.

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Master's thesis in Peace & Conflict Transformation '3901' 14th May 2023

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Acknowledgment

Cover Photo: Riot police ESMAD responding to protests in the aftermath of the death of a lawyer, killed by police in Bogotá. Americas Quarterly, September 22, 2020.

Abstract

"Beyond the Uniform: Analysing the Nexus of Privilege Violence and Militarisation of Public Security in the Context of Colombian Protests of 2019 & 2021" explores the impact of militarisation on civil-military relations during the Colombian protests of 2019 and 2021. The study analyses the behaviour of state security forces, with particular emphasis on traditional law and order maintenance police units; the Anti Disturbance Squadron/Dialogue & Order Maintenance Unit (ESMAD/UNDMO); the military, and their interactions with civilian protesters, examining the factors that contributed to the escalation of asymmetrical violence. Using qualitative research methods, including interviews with activists, security officials and protesters, as well as analysis of official reports, the thesis investigates how the militarisation of public security has affected the civil rights principles of Colombia following the peace agreement of 2016. Consequently, how this could have influenced the development of security policy concerning social mobilisation, marginalised communities, expression of social grievances and the exercise of the right to protest. In addition to analysing the impact of militarisation on civil-military relations, the thesis also employs Kleinfeld's theory of "privilege violence" to contextualise the state's institutionalised use of force against civilian discontent in Colombia. The findings of the study highlight the importance of analysing the interplay between military and civilian authorities in maintaining a balance between traditional security and the promotion of human rights. In the case of Colombia, the security sector's use of force against protesters can be understood as a manifestation of privilege violence, as previous security regimes have institutionalised the delegitimisation of social movements to maintain power and protect the interests of elites. The study argues that the excessive use of security forces in non-military missions has further exacerbated the already fragile civil-military relations in Colombia, ultimately contributing to a deterioration in the opportunities for cooperation and relationship-building, as well as democratic norms and principles in the aftermath of the 2016 peace agreement.

Keywords; Militarisation, Colombia, Civil-Military Relations, Police, ESMAD, UNDMO, Military, Public Security Sector, 2016 Peace Agreement, Privilege Violence.

List of Abbreviations

AUC - Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia

CINEP - Centro de Investigacion y Educacion Popular Programa Por la Paz

CMR - Civil-Military Relations

CSO - Civil Society Organisation

ELN - Ejército de Liberación Nacional

ESMAD - Escuadrón Móvil Antidisturbios

FARC-EP - Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia - Ejército del Pueblo

JCR - Journal Citation Reports

M-19 - Movimiento 19 de Abril

NGO - Non-governmental organisation

NSD - Norsk Senter for Forskningsdata

ROE - Rules of Engagement

SSR - Security Sector Reform

VPN - Virtual Private Network

UNDMO - Unidad Nacional de Diálogo y Mantenimiento del Orden

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1 Introduction

There is a growing body of literature that recognises the importance of identifying the erosion in civil-military relations (CMR) and its adverse effects in establishing a sustainable security regime[1] concerning the post-peace agreement setting of Colombia (Amnesty International, 2020; Arévalo Bencardino *et al.*, 2022; Martín Beristain *et al.,* 2022). These developments have not only raised concerns among academics but have also generated general public interest within the country (Idler, 2021:48). Nonetheless, current developments as seen in the context of Colombia, with an emphasis on an increase in violence and rearmament of certain rebel factions[2], has been problematic insofar as it has negatively impacted the implementation of the historically comprehensive peace agreement of 2016 (Arévalo Bencardino *et al.*, 2022:142-143). Whereby the transformative nature of the *Final Agreement to End the Armed Conflict and Build a Stable and Lasting Peace* (2016) sought to establish a sustainable peace with the most influential rebel group *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia - Ejército del Pueblo* (FARC-EP), and whereas the root causes of conflict, such as rural inequality and a lack of democratic participation were to be addressed, there was renewed confidence that Colombia's protracted conflict was going to gradually de-escalate (García-Godos & Wiig, 2018:42; Richmond & MacGinty, 2020:70; Rodríguez Iglesias, 2020:100).

Nevertheless, despite the efforts made since the peace agreement, heightened tension in-between 2019 and 2021 has indicated major obstacles in establishing sustainable peace. Whether attributable to an alleged deficiency in political will; an inability to execute the prescribed measures of peacebuilding as outlined in the agreement; or an exacerbation of divisions and polarisation in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, the anticipated reduction in cross-sectoral conflict has not yet manifested (Macias Herrera & Croissant, 2022; Passos & Acácio, 2021:266; Richmond & MacGinty, 2020:70-71). This has been especially discernable during the two major periods of social unrest in 2019 and 2021. While both events emerged due to various underlying grievances, the conflict trigger for both cases can be understood as closely related to proposed tax reforms perceived as unfairly targeting middle- and lower-classes while benefiting the already privileged (Plata *et al.*, 2021:77-78). Additionally, cuts to education and healthcare; police brutality; continuous waves of violence towards social leaders and marginalised communities, came to exacerbate these existing tensions (Arévalo *et al.*, 2022).

Due in part to such a negative development, this period has been categorised by heightened levels of social protests and unrest concerning the state's management of various issues,

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[1] A country's security regime refers to the set of formal and informal principles, regulations and norms that govern the conduct of states within the realm of the security governance framework (Carey *et al.*, 2013).
[2] Additional issues that remain unconcluded include drug trafficking and the subsequent violence it invokes (Idler, 2019).

particularly concerning the peace process (Idler, 2021:50). Consequently, in conjunction with this trajectory, there has been a noticeable increase in violent countermeasures from security actors such as the national police during protests, as well as riot police *Escuadrón Móvil Antidisturbios* (ESMAD)[3] in particular (Rodríguez Pérez *et al.*, 2021:145). The occurrence of confrontations between the polity and the government, as evidenced primarily in the widespread social mobilisation during the years 2019 and 2021, serves to highlight an environment characterised by a considerable degree of mutual distrust (Arévalo Bencardino *et al.*, 2022:143; Richmond & MacGinty, 2020:87). The state of affairs, thereby, raises concerns about the potential escalation of conflict in the absence of appropriate measures to address these underlying issue(s). With a contemporary history highly dependent on mainly violent mechanisms for conflict resolution, eruptions of further conflict exhibit high risks of turning violent (Davis & Kilcullen, 2016; Gutiérrez Sanín, 2014).

Given its status as one of the most protracted ongoing multi-party armed conflicts in contemporary history, analysing the various components and dynamics that have contributed to the persistence of remaining grievances in the Colombian conflict is of paramount importance for the field of peace research (Idler, 2021:47). Colombia has persistently encountered incidents of violence in the wake of the emergence of various revolutionary guerrilla groups, including but not limited to the *FARC-EP*, *Ejército de Liberación Nacional* (ELN), and *Movimiento 19 de Abril* (M-19), which have already gained significant recognition (Davis & Kilcullen, 2016).

Predominantly the rural civilian population has suffered the most significant casualties[4] as a result of this conflict, with all three primary actors – guerrilla groups; paramilitaries, such as the *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia* (AUC); and the state, contributing to a nexus of continuous violence against civilians (Davis & Kilcullen, 2016:18). Those who have survived are usually internally displaced, leading to a relocation to the main cities where the traditional rural farmers face the challenges of gaining sustainable employment, with little-to-no previous education (García-Godos & Wiig, 2018:45). As a direct consequence, crime in the informal settlements on the periphery of society have increased significantly since the onset of the conflict (Firchow, 2013:54).

Such an environment of violence has increasingly contributed to a culture of fear, whereby the mistrust between Colombians affects their social coexistence (Higgs, 2020:111). Such a culture of fear can be understood as developing in conjunction with an environment of

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[3] During the duration of the thesis process, the current administration changed the title of the national riot police from "ESMAD" to *Unidad de Diálogo y Mantenimiento del Orden* (UNDMO), which translates to the 'Dialogue & Order Maintenance Unit'(Nivel Ejecutivo, Unidad de Diálogo y Mantenimiento del Orden, 2022). Nevertheless, as the acronym 'ESMAD' was applied throughout the interview process, this is what it will continue to be referred to as.
[4] While the exact number of casualties is up to considerable academic debate, a conservative estimation recently concluded that at least 177,307 civilians have perished since the outbreak of the conflict with FARC-EP (Castillejo-Cuéllar *et al.*, 2022).

violence, which has had a profound impact on the country's social fabric (Rodríguez Iglesias, 2020). Consequently, the relational dynamics between socioeconomic spheres of society (middle-to-low income) have become progressively characterised by asymmetrical hostility and distrust, whereby the institutions of the state in the past have been applied to suppress working-class discontent (Idler, 2019:180). The relational dynamics between the sphere of everyday citizens, businesses, and the state devolves to a stage in which enterprises have historically employed paramilitaries or armed themselves to defend their interests from the lower socio-economic spheres of society (Kleinfeld, 2019:62). Concerning this relationship, certain police units[5] and actors from the military have then acted as gatekeepers between the lower levels of the polity and the highest strata within the social hierarchy (Quintero Cordero, 2021). Therefore, framing CMR as an essential conceptual framework in explaining both cross-sectoral interactions and conflict, as well as the subsequent impact on stability within the post-peace agreement setting.

Through the additional utilisation of the theoretical framework *'privilege violence'* (Kleinfeld, 2019), this study thus goes on to identify that inadequacies within and across the security sector may have roots in a similar historical evolution. Wherein certain modus operandi within the sector may be interlinked to underlying power hierarchies and the interests of the enduring elite[6]. Thereby, delimiting the scope of the paper primarily to the nexus in-between civil and military spheres, and exploring how any perception of the militarisation of the security sector may be understood as an expression of such systemised modes of exploitation.

1.1 Research Problem

There is, thereby, a growing comprehension that the design of the security regime in Colombia is placing certain marginalised communities at a disadvantage in comparison to elite interests (Kleinfeld, 2019:62-63). Insofar as this influences CMR, the militarisation of law enforcement tends to expand the legal powers of the security forces without extending the same considerations regarding any accountability towards their civil stakeholders (Sung *et al.,* 2022:319). In comparison to other cases whereby militarisation has developed over time, the United States being a prominent example within academia (Lieblich & Shinar, 2018), Latin America in general; and Colombia in particular, face more intense trajectories of militarism (Pion-Berlin & Carreras, 2017:9; Ramírez, 2019). Such developments are closely associated with the institution being more central to the political landscape rather than being on the margins as seen in more established democracies (Sung *et al.*, 2022:318). As this has major consequences for the way the relationship is constructed between the two entities in a form of

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[5] As will be further explored in chapter 4.6, this study is delimited to examining the national police responsible for maintaining law and order during social unrest, mainly the crisis and riot units of the police.
[6] The thesis adheres to an understanding of the concept of the elite as meaning a comparatively small group of members of society who holds a disproportionate amount of influence to their size (Mills, 2000).

a self-perpetuating cycle, it could suggest destructive outcomes for both long-term citizen security, and in turn police legitimacy (Alvarado, 2010:4-5; Sung *et al.*, 2022:333).

The utilisation of state-sanctioned violence as a means of oppression is a longstanding phenomenon in the Colombian context. As explored in *El Orangután con Sacoleva: Cien años de Democracia y Represión en Colombia* (Gutiérrez Sanín, 2014), the contemporary history of Colombia as a state have been highly influenced by state repression towards the citizenry, especially concerning disadvantaged residents living outside urban centres. Such a gap between the state and the locals has contributed to immense challenges[7], particularly for minority and indigenous communities (Brittain & Petras, 2010:12). Historically, acts of brutality, including torture, coercion and further acts of violence, have been associated with the aforementioned rural guerrilla organizations, such as FARC-EP and ELN (Flores-Macías & Zarkin 2019:527). However, in more recent academic literature there has been a growing emphasis on the role of the state in perpetrating these routine atrocities, as especially highlighted by Killelea (2020:250) and the recently published report(s) from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (Castillejo-Cuéllar *et al.*, 2022; de Roux *et al.*, 2022).

Concerning this, the now-disarmed paramilitary group AUC was long believed to have acted as an extrajudicial arm of the Colombian economic and political elites, most evidently during the term of former president Álvaro Uribe[8] (Kleinfeld, 2019:395). Despite the partial demobilisation of both AUC and FARC-EP, a notable surge in asymmetric state-based violence has been noted in recent years, particularly targeting minority communities and demonstrators, as evidenced by the events of 2019 and 2021 (Arévalo Bencardino *et al.*, 2022:143).

The central hypothesis of this paper then particularly concerns the role of state forces, especially security actors´ role in maintaining such institutionalised violence during periods of social mobilisation. Accordingly, the utilisation of excessive force by both crisis and riot law enforcement within this context of routine policing and the employment of tactics involving 'shock and violence' to suppress protests, as observed in the aforementioned instances of 2019 and 2021, is perceived as remnants of strategies used during times of active warfare. Such developments seemingly occur when the militarised practices of the armed forces spill over from the target group to law enforcement, which operates within a different context dependent on alternative variables (Malone & Dammert, 2021). Such practices of potential

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[7] Ongoing disputes over land and resources, as well as a lack of respect for cultural practices and traditions, combined with little-to-no understanding of the needs and concerns of these communities have been found to be an influential factor in both subsequent discrimination and abuse by state actors (Idler, 2021).

[8] Similar to the subject of the security sector, the character of former President Uribe is divisive. While some view him as an effective leader who successfully combated guerrilla groups and drug traffickers during his presidency (2002-2010), others view him as an authoritarian who committed human rights abuses and undermined the democratic institutions of Colombia (Davis & Kilcullen, 2016:9).

privilege violence could exacerbate the rift between the governing authority and the populace (Kleinfeld, 2019).

Within this framework, *privilege violence* would be understood as a pattern of governance in which marginalised groups, be it economic, social, ethnic or political, are suppressed by a purposefully vaguely formulated security sector that when colliding with non-state actors, contributes to maintaining certain power hierarchies through a process of politicisation of the security services (Kleinfeld, 2019:53-54). Such a deliberate tool of command would have immense ramifications as it arguably decreases the possibility for democratic governance of the security sector, and as a direct consequence, risks reducing the trust between certain populations and the security actors (Flores-Macías & Zarkin, 2021:1380-1381). In which the trend displays a decrease in trust, the subsequent correlation implies an increase in the perception of violence as a tolerable mechanism for conflict resolution (Kriesberg & Dayton, 2017:30).

When analysed alongside preceding research, a recurring thematic pattern emerges, which underscores the inadequacy of violent responses by law enforcement towards social movements, particularly protesters, in maintaining public order (Bowman, 2002; Balko, 2013; Kruijt, 2020). Moreover; such responses may escalate tensions between various societal factions, potentially exacerbating the potential for conflict (Magaloni & Rodriguez, 2020). Such an increase in the state's violent responses would, accordingly, be described as a consequence of a militarised national police force and, additionally, the increasing intervention of the military in civic affairs (Balko, 2013; Flores-Macías & Zarkin, 2021).

Seeing as Colombian law enforcement has been incorporated into the Ministry of National Defense (then Ministry of War) since 1953[9], the linkages between the national police and military have been steadily strengthening with the duration of the multi-party armed conflict (Quintero Cordero, 2021:27-28). As the national police operate within the authority of national defence rather than following civil jurisdiction, they are thus included within the framework of CMR (Quintero Cordero, 2021:27). Consequently, when the tools available to these security forces are characterised by a sort of *'ruthless pragmatism'* that they acquired during times of active warfare, it is believed to affect the way they view and interact with (perceived) threats within the social sphere, including protesters (Davis & Kilcullen, 2016:47-48).

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[9] Law enforcement was incorporated into the Ministry of War as part of a broader effort to strengthen the government's control over the country and capabilities in combating the influence of armed groups, particularly communist guerrillas (Quintero Cordero, 2021:28)

1.1.1 Relevance

As has been observed by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (de Roux *et al*., 2022:463-464); the security regime which has been dominating the country for decades has treated a significant proportion of the population as potential enemies of the state. The recently published Truth Commission report(s) found that the national police and the military have been highly involved in extra-judicial operations that have targeted non-combatants and marginalised communities (Castillejo-Cuéllar *et al.*, 2022:199). Of particular concern then is the involvement of the security actors in domestic affairs. The commission raises the issue of whether the inclusion of state security forces in civic affairs without a drastic reconfiguration of the institution creates a hierarchy of command that will not adhere to civil but rather military law (de Roux *et al.*, 2022:475). Such a development is problematic insofar as it blurs the boundaries between ethical and unethical conduct, resulting in institutions that prioritise military hierarchy over their obligation to protect the citizenry. Consequently, accountability is compromised and the intended beneficiaries of the wider polity are not effectively accounted for (Carey *et al.*, 2013).

Central to this issue then, as well as to the entire discipline of peace and conflict research, is the concept of security sector governance and reform (SSR). Particularly important is how it relates to the reconstruction of the social fabric fractured by war, categorised by a severe lack of protection and increasing inequality, as seen in the Colombian case (Castillejo-Cuéllar *et al*., 2022:122). As previously indicated, empirical data demonstrate a correlation between the reduction of democratic oversight of the security sector and an accompanying erosion of trust towards security personnel (Flores-Macías & Zarkin, 2021:1379).

Flores-Macías and Zarkin (2019; 2021) have further stated the urgency of changing the course of national police militarisation to efficiently mitigate a degrading perception of the security sector in general and law enforcement in particular. The imperative to understand the course of state violence in Latin America is crucial for several reasons, given the growing public concern among civilians regarding human security by and from the state (Flores-Macías & Zarkin 2021:1378). Moreover; given the historical precedent of the emergence of paramilitary organisations in Colombia, any perceived decline in the state's capacity to ensure security may have adverse effects on peacebuilding efforts, potentially fueling the rearmament of paramilitary groups and encouraging vigilantism among citizens (Brittain & Petras, 2010:20; Leech, 2011:104-105; Karl, 2017:76; Flores-Macías & Zarkin, 2019).

Consequently, as a growing body of literature (Cruz-Rodriquez, 2017; Killea, 2020:250; Lucía & Bailey, 2015) finds that the achievement of sustainable peacebuilding and democratic consolidation is contingent upon the implementation of demilitarisation measures, it becomes crucial to identify the dynamics that form any potential counterproductive relationship.

Accordingly, the study has hypothesised that the correlation between Y = f(X) can be linked to the formula "Deterioration in Civil-Military Relations (CMR) = f(Privilege Violence, Increase in Militarisation)". Testing this formula through qualitative measures, such as through interviews and document analysis, should provide a useful framework of analysis for peace and conflict research concerning how CMR and violence may intersect in the context of Colombia.

1.1.2 Research Questions

Hence, the objective of this thesis is to gain a deeper understanding of the relationship and level of trust between state actors (mainly the national crisis police, riot police & the military) and the various civilian population(s) in the face of an increasing process of militarisation. This is achieved using a qualitative approach applied to the chosen case of Colombia. Specific emphasis is put on the periods of social mobilisation in 2019 and 2021.

To explore this objective, the study poses the following research questions:

- In what ways, if at all, have the lines between national law enforcement, crisis and riot police; and the military been perceived to have changed following the peace agreement, and how has this been reflected in their actions within the realm of public security?

- Following this, has there been a general perception of an increase in asymmetrical privilege violence and further militarisation of the institution(s) during the demonstrations in 2019 and 2021? If so, how has such an expression of militarisation been perceived by the research subjects to have impacted civil-military relations?

- In what way do the participants construct the connection between the contemporary security regime and the general civilian populace in times of social unrest, and to what extent does this perception coincide with the goals and objectives of the institutions' mandates?

- Consequently, what are some of the shared concerns about security for social mobilisation, marginalised communities, expression of social grievance(s) and the right to protest?

- How do variations in social location influence the construction of the narrative surrounding the methods employed by certain police units, the ESMAD and the military?

1.2 Research Disposition

Ultimately, the research is constructed as follows: Chapter 2 provides the essential context for the point of departure for this particular research by providing a systemic literature review and identifying what research gap exists and how this study will aim to fill it. Chapter 3 summarises the theoretical foundation for which the data is viewed, namely that of *privilege violence*. Subsequently, by then narrowing the theory to view the particular concept of *CMR,* the point of departure for the rest of the paper should be made clear. Chapter 4 goes on to then discuss the methodological approach that guides the empirical analysis and the implications social research methods have had on the outcome of the subsequent analysis. Chapter 5 is dedicated to outlining the empirical findings by presenting the main findings of the research, whereby Chapter 6 will critically examine the findings by applying the aforementioned frameworks to answer the research questions. Developing on this, the study then concludes with Chapter 7 by reconnecting to the more considerable research debate while simultaneously summarising the main findings.

2 Literature Review

Publications that concentrate on public security forces such as police and the military more frequently adopt a legal or political framework of analysis. However, to holistically cover some of the main concerns as described in section 1.1, especially as it relates to the case of Colombia, this particular research will cover some of the more overlapping themes to emerge across a multidisciplinary field. To adequately manage this, the literature review of this paper was designed to adhere to an extended systematic design. Such an approach was applied to establish a greater sense of replicability and transparency throughout the process. Further, it also provided the tools necessary to extend the accessed literature beyond any existing knowledge or biases (Bryman, 2021:140).

Following this, this section was constructed following the purpose and scope of the thesis, established by the research questions proposed in section 1.1.2 (Bryman, 2021:105). The four research questions were then constructed in an iterative process which involved: (1) conducting a scoping search; (2) defining the foundation for the original research questions; (3) developing inclusion and exclusion criteria; (4) conducting the overall review and consequently; (5) refining the research questions based on the main body of literature (Silverman, 2016:380). This process ensured a comprehensive and relevant literature review, firmly based on the research topic.

The protocol of the main process then followed a four-step process of a synthesis of the available data and the narrative form that emerged through: (1) the identification of relevant research and journals; (2) an assessment of the quality of the existing research; (3) a summary

of the literature and; (4) an interpretation of common themes and narratives relating to the subject of militarisation (Silverman, 2016:380-381). What originated as research primarily focused on the militarisation of a particular branch of the security sector (traditional law maintenance police), evolved with the duration of the systemic process to also encapsulate other aspects of the public security services (military and riot police). This was especially relevant during times of perceived crisis and social unrest. This led to a minor adjustment of the original research questions, per the systematic collection of data, to allow for greater depth of analysis into the Ministry of National Defense and how it operates with maintaining public and internal security. However, the core structure of the research questions remained the same.

In the first stage, searches were conducted in prominent journals in the field of security research, as well as mainly peace and conflict. These were selected primarily based on the impact factor[10] concerning the field of peace, security and conflict studies, and to what extent the journals exhibited tendencies to have been used in similar types of research according to the 2021 Journal Citation Reports (JCR). On such a basis the following was selected, with their respective score: *Armed Forces & Society* (1.108)*; Journal of Democracy* (4.000)*; Journal of Peace Psychology* (2.417)*; Journal Of Peace Research* (2.786)*; Journal of International Peacekeeping* (0.641) and; *Security Dialogue* (2.493)*.* This part of the review process was limited to the period following the 2016 peace agreement since that is the main exclusion criterion for this thesis. Nevertheless, these searches resulted in a very limited amount of relevant literature as it only contributed eight articles. Consequently, the Peace Research Abstracts database was then used, albeit its utility was limited as it merely incorporated an extra article. Seemingly, there is a scarcity of scholarly works dedicated to examining the phenomenon of militarisation in Latin America and its impact on the facilitation of conflict transformation and peacebuilding. This was especially true regarding the case of Colombia.

Supplementary searches were then conducted in the journals: *Conflict Resolution Quarterly* (0.917); *Global Change Peace and Security* (1.806)*; Journal of Applied Security Research* (0.872) and*; Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding* (1.218) using a variety of combinations of keywords. The keywords militarisation; police; riot police; civil-military relations; Colombia and; Latin America were mainly applied in this step. Regardless, the aforementioned searches also relied upon abstracts and the titles of the different publications, in addition to the previously mentioned keywords. In the end, this resulted in three additions to the literature. Some of the publications collected in this part of the process originated

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[10] The impact factor of a journal is the measure of the average number of citations received per paper published. Concerning this paper, this was evaluated in the context of the specific discipline of peace and conflict and thus included journals with a range of 0.5 - 4.0, as these were the middle - highest values available regarding the topic (Bryman, 2021:114). Notwithstanding this, these numbers are remarkably low (on a traditional 0-10 scale).

before the signing of the peace agreement. Nevertheless, as these related mainly to the conceptual construction of militarisation and militarism, rather than any specific occurrence in Colombia, were still used in the research. All the correct results were assessed in more detail to identify overlapping publications, but also to exclude those publications that were deemed as not being relevant. Such examples involved literature that was outside the area of delimitation, such as those not relating to Latin America, publications before the period following 2016[11] or those which were not peer-reviewed.

Nevertheless, two crucial insights became apparent during this stage of the systematic literature review: (1) the limited amount of literature within the field of peace and conflict journals directly related to the process of militarisation, as noted by their respectively low JCR score and; (2) the gap in local research regarding the subject. To increase the credibility of this assessment, the data collection was extended to include multidisciplinary journals relating to law, political science, anthropology, human rights and criminology. The process of keywords, titles and abstracts was then replicated from the previous process. The journals included notable additions such as the: *American Political Science Review* (6.778)*; Annual Review Of Political Science* (9.190)*; British Journal of Political Science* (3.355)*; Current Anthropology* (3.400)*; Journal of Democracy* (4.750); *Perspectives On Politics* (5.583) and*; Policing And Society* (3.876). Notable in comparison with previous journals then, is the comparably higher scores. Nevertheless, this may in part be explained by the relative size and firmly established nature of the disciplines, in comparison to the field of peace and conflict.

Regarding the second issue, this part of the process heavily emphasised journals, articles and books which were written primarily by both Latin American, but also more importantly, Colombian authors. Nonetheless, in this part of the research process, it became especially discernable that the criteria of selection following JCR would not be transferable to the primarily Spanish literature, as none of the following had an impact factor score. This exhibits certain biases in favouring English language journals. Therefore, the following adhered primarily to a selection based on relevance as identified through the keywords: *militarización*; *"Fuerza Pública; Policia; ESMAD; movilización social* and; *Relaciones cívico-militares"*, in journals which in the past have specialised in similar Latin American issues. These included: *Ciencias Sociales y Educación; Conflicto Armado; Estudios de Derecho; Fuerzas Armadas y Sociedad; Journal of Politics in Latin America; Revista Aragonesa de Administración Pública; Revista De Administração Pública* and*; Revista Logos Ciencia & Tecnología*. To make sure that the process followed a similar pattern of collection, snowball selection was also employed in an attempt to identify further relevant research.

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[11] Exceptions to this particular delimitation was related to a comparative design, as a limited amount of literature published before 2016 provided insightful information regarding changes in degree of militarisation and establishing a conceptual basis.

2.1 Concept: Militarism & the Process of Militarisation

Data from several studies suggest that militarisation as a concept has emerged in Latin America as a natural response to the continent's experiences dealing with counterinsurgency and irregular warfare (Fattal, 2018; Hynes-Bishop, in West & Crosbie, 2021:124; Rodriguez, 2018:110). While a variety of definitions of the term militarisation have been suggested, this paper will adhere to the definition proposed by Flores-Macías and Zarkin (2019) who delimit their understanding of the concept to the confinement of the Latin American experience. Militarisation, in regards to public security such as the nationalised security sector (police, riot police, military) is understood in the broader sense as a process whereby the systematic use of a military module of engagement replaces that of a civilian design[12] (Passos & Acácio, 2021:262).

While the basis for such a conceptualisation is valid insofar as it exemplifies generalised trends, on its own, it fails to adequately encapsulate the higher degree to which the usage of military equipment and tactics have been deployed in civic affairs in Latin America in comparison to other often-cited cases such as the United States or Mexico (McMichael, 2016; Sung *et al.,* 2022). Because as Rodriguez (2018:110) proposes, such cultural militarism is only possible whereby there exists a prevailing and *"excessive faith"* in the possibility of military tactics to resolve social, economic and political goals. Therefore, while critical in identifying cross-cultural similarities and differences in the Americas, the point of departure for this paper will be to follow a more regionalised understanding of the concept.

Following this, much of the trends within contemporary literature on the topic of Colombian militarisation seemingly identify cultural- and civil militarism as a necessary variable in explaining the country's experience with a *"warrior-like culture"* and rationalisation of violence in day-to-day activities such as public security services (Hynes-Bishop, in West & Crosbie, 2021:125-126; Rodriguez, 2018). Insofar as it relates to CMR, the concept of cultural- and civil militarism is understood as: *"... the ideological system which elevates the role of the military in maintaining collective identity and understanding within society, normalising military values as universal values"* hybridised with the later extension that it also requires the *"... exaggerated belief in the effectiveness of military solutions to political problems and the reduced boundaries between civilian-military relations"* (Hynes-Bishop, in West & Crosbie, 2021:126). A frequently referenced illustration within the Colombian context regarding a narrative of military triumphalism and militarism involves the purported idealisation of violence by President Uribe as the exclusive solution to demobilising the

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[12] A civilian design, commonly known as democratic policing, is one whereby police are held accountable to civil rather than military law (Flores-Macías & Zarkin, 2019:312).

multiple paramilitary and guerrilla groups operating within the country (Hanson & Romero Penna, 2005; Rodriguez, 2018:110).

Nevertheless, as it relates to the Latin American experience it is crucial to distinguish what the various amounts of literature are conveying about the degrees of militarisation. Therefore, what is interesting to note is the continuous reemergence of the particular five phases of militarisation as originally proposed by Flores-Macías and Zarkin (2019:521) and later expanded upon by Sung *et al.*, (2022:316):

	Non-militarised police	Militarised police	Paramilitary police	Limited constabularisation of the military	Generalised constabularisation of the military
Accountability	Civil law	Civil law	Civil law (with some exceptions)	Civil and military law	Civil and military law
Weaponry	No access to heavier weapons and equipment	Limited access to heavier weapon equipment	Some access to heavier weapons and equipment	Full access to heavier weapons and equipment	Full access to heavier weapons and equipment
Training	Maintain public order (focus on community development and use of force as last resort)	Maintain public order (non-lethal force)	Maintain public order (non- lethal use of force)	Maintain public order & engage-and-destroy (with restrictions)	Maintain public order & engage-and-destroy
Organisation	Low degree of centralisation and hierarchy, bottom-up command, deployed in small groups	Low degree of centralisation and hierarchy, bottom-up command, deployed in small groups and formed units	High degree of centralisation and hierarchy, top-down command, deployed in formed units	High degree of centralisation and hierarchy, top- down command, deployed in formed units	High degree of centralisation and hierarchy, top-down command, deployed in formed units
Militarisation	Not militarised	Somewhat militarised	Militarised	Very militarised	Extremely militarised
Country (Latin America)	None	Costa Rica and Panama	Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay	Bolivia, Paraguay, and Peru	Brazil, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Mexico, and Venezuela

Table 1. Source: As presented in Sung, Capellan & Barthuly (2022:316), with some minor adjustments due to clarification.

As the table displays, the different variables required to understand to what degree a nationalised public maintenance police force in Latin America is characterised by militarisation is contingent upon several distinct factors, including the entity or individuals to whom they are ultimately accountable; the specific armaments permissible for use during routine policing operations; the particular training regimens undergone by officers, and the underlying structural organisation(s) of the institution(s) in question. When synthesised with the results as presented by other prominent researchers such as Lieblich and Shinar (2018) and Magaloni and Rodriguez (2020), what emerges is a context in which the public order

maintenance police manage to institutionalise the use of violence as a strategically viable solution for perceived offences. Because criminal justice institutions are highly interdependent with militarised narratives and discourses, such a process of institutionalisation would explain the survival of authoritarian policing practices within democratic settings such as Colombia (Magaloni & Rodriguez, 2020:1014).

Furthermore, as additionally demonstrated by Lieblich and Shinar (2018:108) such discourses not only impact the practices of police but also transform the settings of interaction with law enforcement to permanently crystalise the presumption of threat and distrust. As exemplified in heavily policed communities, such as Comuna 13 in Medellin, this severely impacts the dynamics through which the mode of policing is carried out (Arévalo Bencardino *et al.*, 2021:144). Because where the maintenance of public order is strongly correlated with the policing strategy of engage-and-destroy, there can be seen a statistical decrease in the belief in the institution to achieve sustainable and representative security for the community (Flores-Macías & Zarkin, 2019:522; Taylor, 2016:148).

Taken together, this point of departure enables the paper to critically examine the different levels of militarisation and how cultural militarism has been used to rationalise the increasingly militarised strategy within CMR. As will be explored in the subsequent sections in this chapter, this relates to both militarisation of law enforcement (Taylor, 2016), the generalised constabularisation[13] of the armed forces (Flores-Macías & Zarkin, 2019) as well as the increasingly obscure mandate of Colombian riot police ESMAD (Casas Ramírez, 2019).

2.1.1   Militarisation of Law Enforcement

As part of the process to identify the effects of increasing militarism in the different spheres of Colombian public security, first it would be beneficial to note the brutalisation of crime control that has formed the Latin American experience (Sung *et al.*, 2022:334). The specific brutalisation as often cited within the contemporary literature (Carey *et al.*, 2013; Sung *et al.*, 2022:336) is the authoritarian instinct to transform the efforts of crime control into so-called ruthless warfare rather than being for the prevention of and protection from occurrences that could threaten public security. Law enforcement agencies in Latin America are often confronted with the challenge of balancing the tendency towards authoritarianism in treating crime control as a violent struggle against domestic adversaries (Sung *et al.*, 2022:336). Discerning the issue of militarisation as it regards law enforcement, many researchers in prominent journals (Flores-Macías & Zarkin, 2019; Passos & Acácio, 2021; Sung *et al.*, 2022) thus tend to support the empiric claim that within Latin America there is currently no

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[13] Constabularisation refers to the process in which the armed forces may perform tasks traditionally associated with the police, such as restoring public order, riot control as well as stability policing (Sung *et al*., 2022).

"mature form of democratic policing" (as demonstrated in Table 1). Such a conceptualisation of different modes of policing relates mainly to the factors which guide their organisational strategies (Sung *et al.*, 2022:316).

As the key features of Colombian law enforcement observe civil- and military accountability; having access to heavier degrees of weaponry; receiving engage-and-destroy training, and follows a top-down command hierarchy, it is believed to be extremely militarised. While there is a consensus within the academic literature (Flores-Macías & Zarkin, 2019; Gaussian & Jasso González, 2020; Pion-Berlin & Carreras, 2017:19; Sung *et al.*, 2022) that no case in Latin America fulfils the criteria of non-militarised law enforcement, there is a general divide in the findings to what extent Colombia exhibit militarised tendencies within the security sector. Prominent scholars, including Richani (1997), have previously utilised the term "limited constabularisation" to describe the stage of militarisation in Colombia. Nevertheless, as asserted in this study, and further by Sung *et al.* (2022), this situation has transformed since its original publication in 1997.

The narrative of these contrasting findings also suggests that (a) militarised police is reductive as it decreases trust in the institution, and as a result reduces its capabilities (Sung *et al*., 2022:333) or (b) only shows a statistical significance in the increase or decrease of public support and trust insofar as they can achieve results (Malone & Dammert, 2021:427-428; Pion-Berlin & Carreras, 2017:19-20). It is thus questionable how reliable the assumed correlation between trust in the institution and its overall effectiveness is. Moreover; as presented by Tankebee (Reisig & Kane, 2019:239) such discrepancy in the literature may be since police legitimacy within military affairs and its effect on public opinion did not emerge as a field of study in Latin America until the end of the 1990s. Although a direct correlation cannot be established from the existing literature, there appears to be a significant resemblance between the detrimental impact of militarisation on both the public's perception of the institution and democratic consolidation[14] (Alvarado, 2010; Flores-Macías & Zarkin, 2019; Flores-Macías & Zarkin, 2021).

The issue of militarised autonomy of various police units is problematised within the literature as it is theorised to lack the potential of guaranteeing constitutional rights to the constituency (Leal, 2018:5-6; López Ramón, 2017:213). Moreover; as presented by Lopez Ramon (2017:214) the empirical validity of utilising war tactics to address disturbances within the realm of public security remains a subject of doubt. What then emerges in the literature is the hypothesis that the civilian element of policing has been completely removed beneath the narrative of a *"state under constant siege"* (Cruz-Rodriquez, 2017; Lopez

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[14] Democratic consolidation refers to the process by which a newly established democracy increasingly becomes more stable over time. Within academia, it is believed to involve the development of political institutions, practices and values that support democracy (Kriesberg & Dayton, 2017:300).

Ramon, 2017:216). The highly militarised character of the institutional, operational and doctrinal aspects of the Colombian maintenance police thus has become one of the main hindrances in establishing new public security policies through SSR (Cruz-Rodriquez, 2017). Without any counterbalancing mechanism(s) it is believed that the state can impose extraordinary measures through the police without any constitutional restraints (Lopez Ramon, 2017:216).

Thus, there exists a recognized necessity to de-politicize law enforcement agencies by implementing a doctrinal shift that acknowledges societal plurality (Cruz-Rodriquez, 2017:28). Accordingly, instead of placing significant emphasis on counterinsurgency measures, which have previously resulted in substantial militarisation of the Colombian law enforcement, such a paradigm shift should permit the adoption of more comprehensive approaches to fulfil contemporary social demands (Cruz-Rodriquez, 2017:28; González 2020:2-3). As identified by multiple authors (Arévalo *et al.*, 2022; González 2020:39; Sung *et al.*, 2022:335), a continuation of the authoritarianism of the security forces would only further enable asymmetric violence, especially as it relates to the containment of protests and citizen's fundamental rights. An indiscrimination between the armed forces and public maintenance police's roles has over time contributed to the rendering of a militarisation of the police and a so-called "*policisation*" (within this thesis used interchangeably with the term constabularisation) of the armed forces (Malone & Dammert, 2021:431). This next chapter, therefore, describes this type of militarisation of the domestic security sector and its wider impact (Malone & Dammert, 2020:430-431).

2.1.2   Militarism Concerning the Internal Security Sector

Within the literature on militarism (Ramírez, 2019; Rodriguez, 2018), the relative importance of the armed forces has been subject to considerable discussion. As the police and military both function within the Ministry of National Defence, and as such the boundary between the two is not necessarily easily distinguishable (López Ramón, 2017:215), this research is delimited to the security sector as it relates to public security. Nevertheless, as civilian governments in the past have outsourced the internal security mission(s) to the armed forces through presidential decree, their relative mandates can be understood as overlapping to a greater extent (Kruijt, 2017:12).

The multi-dimensional character of internal security in Latin America, which encompasses public security, necessitates the conceptualisation of intermediate threats as presented in Table 2. These identifiers should answer (1) the precise entity posing a security challenge; (2) the magnitude of the threat and its target entity; (3) the geographic area where the operation is taking place and; (4) the party responsible for promptly implementing countermeasures actions.

Security threat	State response	Threat, lethality levels	Geography	Security force interface with the public	Unit size needed	Security force needed
Insurgents/Narco-guerillas	War-like fighting	High	Mostly rural	Low-moderate	Large, formed units	Military
Drug trafficking organisations	Surveillance, interception, fighting, arrest	Moderate-high	Urban and rural	Low-high	Moderate-sized, formed units	Military, special forces, paramilitary w/police
Other transnational criminal organisations	Detection, interception, suppression, and arrests of arms, contraband and human smugglers	Moderate	Urban	Low	Small-moderate-sized, formed units	Military-like forces
Criminal gangs	Deterrence, fighting, arrests	Low	Urban	High	Individuals and small formed units.	Police, military police, w/mil support
Common criminals	Patrolling, deterrence, arrests	Low	Mostly urban	High	Individuals	Police

Table 2. Source: As presented in Pion-Berlin (2016:78).

Such a framing of the issue relates to the traditional boundary between the institutions, however, as has been noted previously – the Colombian case deviates from such a traditional separation within the security sector (López Ramón, 2017:215). What is telling about the findings in Table 2, nonetheless, is how the different aspects of the security sector are supposed to function with security threats. In this regard, what can be identified as a gap between mandate and practice, when the definition of security threat becomes blurred as well as the state response (Lucía, & Bailey, 2015; Pion-Berlin, 2016:80). Seeing as this is believed to highly influence the rules of engagement (ROE), whereby the security forces are allowed the use of force towards a perceived threat, such an obscured gap has major ramifications for the way the security actors operate in civic affairs (Pion-Berlin 2016:77).

Adhering to a more rigid hierarchy of command, military operations within the public security sector tend to form attitudes towards the public in a more hostile manner (Pion-Berlin, 2016:82-83). What results is usually an incoherent attempt to balance the safeguarding of the state and its sovereignty, with the protection of individuals, private property and democratic political institutions (Alvarado, 2010; Pion-Berlin, 2016:74-75). The literature problematises this seeing as it usually impacts the perception of presumed security threats, such as protesters, in a way that encourages a disappropriate state response, such as proactive fighting (Gaussian, & Jasso González, 2020:28; Pion-Berlin & Carreras, 2017:19).

The general narrative, however, appears split in the scientific literature on whether the public perceives the general constabularisation of the military in police affairs as an issue (Malone & Dammert, 2021:427; Passos & Acácio, 2021; Pion-Berlin & Carreras, 2017:19). Whereby the military is applied as a countermeasure for crime intervention, there exists an interesting normative division between data and theory. At first instance, conclusions outlined by authors such as Malone and Dammert (2021), Pion-Berlin and Carreras (2017) and Flores-Macías and Zarkin (2019) find that military law enforcement is contradictory to democratic and effective policing. However, the data as presented by the former two authors seemingly also show a great level of support for the military within the sector of public security in cases where trust in traditional police is low (Malone & Dammert, 2021:427; Pion-Berlin & Carreras, 2017:19). What is interesting then is the correlation between militarised practice and public preferences. There appears to be a normative bias within the main body of literature which states that the general constabularisation of the military in police affairs is a negative development.

Such beliefs are further illustrated by Passos and Acácio (2021:268) whereby the hypothesis of the paper claims that when the military becomes responsible for policing, which differs greatly from their inherent organisational capacities, misbehaviour is increasingly likely to occur. As a direct consequence, belief in the institution should decrease accordingly (Passos & Acácio, 2021:264). However, it should be noted that the empirical deductions presented in the study may prove improbable as they are not backed up by any particular sets of data. In that regard, the findings as presented by Gaussian and Jasso González (2020) would be more convincing in their explanatory power. Basing their research on a qualitative and quantitative case study of Mexico between 2000-2020, the findings suggest that rather than solely decrease the likelihood of crime, the constabularisation of the military in police affairs shows a tendency to exacerbate human rights violations and extrajudicial executions (Gaussian, & Jasso González, 2020:45). What this suggests is that the favorability towards military involvement in public security is contingent upon their association with the perceived shortcomings of law enforcement capabilities, rather than being an inherent preference for military intervention. (Pion-Berlin & Carreras, 2017:20).

Such a development has become increasingly evident in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic (Passos & Acácio, 2021). Whereby the military got increased authority to handle issues of public safety, such as administering curfews and upholding health security, the image of the institution risked degradation (Acacio *et al.*, 2022). When the level of operational autonomy the military had in public security operations was high, there was a statistical increase in human rights violations (Acacio *et al.*, 2022:12). As a consequence, in enforcing punitive COVID-19 measures within the realm of public security it has been hypothesised there may be enduring damages done to democratic CMR throughout Latin America (Macias Herrera & Croissant, 2022). While a recent phenomenon, and as such no

long-term impacts of militarisation can be assured to have statistical significance, instances of social unrest in countries such as El Salvador, Brazil and Mexico (Macias Herrera & Croissant, 2022:8) does imply a negative trajectory concerning CMR.

The concept of militarism, as presented by both Ramirez (2019) and Rodriguez (2018) relates to the Colombian case as being of multiconceptual scope. Nevertheless, militarism as a system of beliefs can be attributed to being one of the core reasons for the normalisation of the military's role in influencing political, economic and cultural affairs (Rodriguez, 2018:112). This manifests itself as militaristic traits are gradually assimilated into the social structures of society and the citizenry begins to expect the growing role of the military establishment in civilian affairs (Ramirez, 2019:139; Rodriguez, 2018:112). To the extent that militarism appears to be a guiding principle in the way the relationship between civilians and the military is constructed, the vast amount of literature (Diamint, 2015; Macias Herrera & Croissant, 2022; Ramirez, 2019; Rodriguez, 2018) displays how the armed forces in Latin America, and Colombia in particular, have penetrated domestic affairs in recent years.

2.1.3 Militarisation of Public Security during Times of Social Unrest

After examining the process of militarisation and its impact on the construction of CMR, this section explores the measures taken to maintain public security during periods of crisis. As described in the *Mediante Directiva Transitoria 0205* signed into law in 1999, the Mobile Anti-Disturbances Squadron (ESMAD) is mainly mandated, as shown in Table 3, in the *"management and control of disturbances [and] crowds…"*. In contrast to the militarisation of the main body of law enforcement and the constabularisation of the armed forces, there is much less information about the effects of this unit available within scientific journals.

1	Apply the procedures for the management and control of disturbances, crowds, de-blocking of roads and accompaniment to evictions of public or private spaces, with the materialisation of terrorist acts in the jurisdiction of the police units that require it, when their capacity has been exceeded in human talent and police mean.
2	Attend training activities for the country's operational units and police training schools, to standardise procedures in crowd control and management.
3	Observe during the procedures the provisions of the norms, agreements and conventions on human rights and international humanitarian law for the use of force to restore order, security and tranquillity in the affected jurisdictions.
4	React, dissuade and control violent acts generated by groups of demonstrators who seek to alter public order and the proper development of social activities in any area of the national territory.
5	Carry out basic community outreach activities, transmitting respect, and good treatment to the community and protecting human rights to improve the institutional image.
6	Develop activities related to police procedures involving the treatment of female personnel, infants and gender communities.
7	Execute riot control and crowd management procedures involving adolescents, children and female personnel to comply with the norms, laws and agreements for the protection of human rights and the law on children and adolescents.
8	Responsible for the maintenance and conservation of the anti-riot body armour assigned for the fulfilment of the mission.
9	Any other duties assigned to him/her following the law, regulations or the nature of the unit.

Table 3. Source: As presented in Casas Ramírez, 2019:78 with certain adaptations (such as translations).

The multi-dimensional character of the ESMAD's mission mandate, as presented in Table 3, would thereby seemingly extend simply to moments of social unrest. However, as explored by both Casas Ramírez (2019) and Garcia (2019), the ESMAD seldom adheres to such mission statements in practice. As far as points 3, 5, 6, and 7 are concerned, previous research has identified a gap between their operational capabilities and protocols (Casas Ramírez, 2019:81; Garcia-Luna, 2019:110). Authors such as Casas Ramirez (2019:85) have found that rather than adhering to these institutional guidelines of human rights, the ESMAD has been a major contributor to the systematic exclusion of social mobilisation as a module of change, something that has been reflected through ongoing repression and criminalisation of protest (Casas Ramirez, 2019:85-86).

ESMAD's main area of responsibility then, especially as it relates to the stabilisation of public order in the post-conflict setting[15] since 2016, has traditionally been to interfere with the

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[15] It is crucial to identify that the concept of a "post-conflict setting" is highly contested in the context of Colombia, as authors have indicated that the peace agreement of 2016 only led to a partial demobilisation of one particular armed actor (Idler, 2021). Nevertheless, as that is the term the author uses in this particular study (Garcia-Luna, 2019), that is the word used here as well.

legitimate use of force when objective one is deemed justifiable (García-Luna, 2019). Such a legal framework of their role in regulating social protest is based on the understanding that within the sovereign state, it is the government that holds the monopoly on violence[16] (Acemoglu *et al.*, 2013). Nevertheless, since the peace agreement, there has been an increase in criticisms towards ESMAD. On account of the right to protest as it exists within the new National Police Code, some researchers have argued that the legal language is constitutionally incompatible with the current mandate to counteract disruptions, blockades, vandalism and other occurrences that may affect the *"security, coexistence and tranquillity of the citizenry"* (García-Luna, 2019:115-116). Such an asymmetry between the right to engage in protests and the right to maintain security is problematised seeing as it has contributed to disproportionate interventions which have violated the expressions of peaceful demonstration (Garcia-Luna, 2019:117).

Such findings suggest that within the framework of the Constitution, there exists a general regulation of social protest as a right in favour of internal security (Garcia-Luna, 2019:116). As such, the security doctrine generally continues to adhere to counterinsurgent strategies which have a discernible effect on how the instruments of the political establishment are used within the realm of public security (Garcia-Luna, 2019:115-116; Olarte-Olarte, 2019). Regarding the operational practices of the ESMAD, existing research recognises the critical role played by the unit in the way alleged disproportionate responses and stigmatisation have transformed the relationship, particularly with indigenous communities (Olarte-Olarte, 2019:33-34; Rodríguez Pérez, *et al.*, 2021:144). The ESMADs presence, it is believed, exacerbates the stigmatising dynamics that facilitate discourses which disregard demonstrations and their declared objectives (Olarte-Olarte, 2019:32). Not only is this identified as problematic concerning democratic consolidation, but multiple studies (Cruz-Rodríguez, 2017; Olarte-Olarte, 2019; Rodríguez Pérez, *et al.*, 2021) have found that it statistically increases the possibility of a self-fulfilling prophecy, increasing the risk of disorder and violent disturbances. Data from the aforementioned studies thus seemingly suggest that the presence of anti-riot police would function as a precondition for the type of unstable environment which motivated their presence.

Whereby the preventive anti-riot police ESMAD is involved, it consequently is found that such a presence signals that the protests are framed primarily as a security threat (Olarte-Olarte, 2019:32-33). Such discourse(s) of insecurity would transform the expression of *"... dissent as [part of a] law-breaking processes, and protestors as trespassers and criminals"* (Olarte-Olarte, 2019:37). As civic- and social protests have become one the

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[16] The legal use of force is understood to be the sole property of a specific polity within society, nevertheless, as the use of violence in Colombia is widespread, this is seldom the case (Acemoglu *et al.*, 2013).

principal mechanisms for conflict resolution for many Colombians since the demobilisation of the FARC-EP, organisations such as *Centro de Investigacion y Educacion Popular Programa Por la Paz* (CINEP) have thus identified the ESMAD as a key gatekeeper for social mobilisation and sustainable peace (Casas Ramírez, 2019). Nonetheless, the way the institution is currently formed, it is rather perceived as a symbol of violence and not as a protector of human rights or security (Casas Ramírez, 2019:85; Rodríguez Pérez, *et al.*, 2021:145).

2.2 Summary & Research Gap

Data from several studies (Acacio *et al.*, 2022; Gaussian & Jasso González, 2020; Macias Herrera & Croissant, 2022) as presented in this section has suggested that previously before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, scholars concentrating on CMR were expressing concerns about a growing re-politicisation of armed forces in Latin America. The emergence of the public health emergency is then believed to have exacerbated the situation (Passos & Acácio, 2021). With a growing role of militarism within civic affairs (Diamint, 2015; Ramirez, 2019; Rodriquez, 2018) attitudes supporting the use of force as a mode of conflict resolution have reemerged within sectors where progress had previously been made. As a direct consequence, governments in Latin America have been incentivised to deploy militarised strategies within the realms of public security to assure a perception of stability (Flores-Macías & Zarkin, 2019). However, as the synthesised data from the various journals (Arévalo Bencardino *et al.*, 2022; González 2020; Sung, *et al.*, 2022) have shown such methods for internal security are, at best, unpredictable in their outcome.

The demilitarisation of the institutions concerning their operational, doctrinal and strategic capabilities is thus widely recognised to be necessary to assure both the right to protest as well as citizen security (Cruz-Rodríguez, 2017). Although it may not yield immediate results due to the Colombian government's ongoing multi-party conflict with armed actors such as ELN and detractors of the FARC-EP, undertaking such endeavours is deemed indispensable in the long run for sustainable peacebuilding endeavours (Lopez Ramon, 2017). However, as has been previously mentioned such empirical assumptions are based on a limited amount of contemporary literature. At the time of writing, there is a significant deficiency in country-specific research regarding the consequences of militarisation in Latin America (Flores-Macías & Zarkin, 2019:533). The existing literature primarily relates to the Central- and North American experiences, in particular, the United States., Mexico and El Salvador.

Therefore, there remain several aspects of militarisation of the various sectors about which relatively little is known. As it relates to Latin America, and Colombia in particular, several trends emerged during the extended systematic literature review process. Flores-Macías and

Zarkin (2019; 2021) have identified three significant gaps in the current literature that require further investigation: (1) the consequences of when armed forces take on the traditional responsibilities of civilian law enforcement agencies and encroach in the civic sphere; (2) the extent to which this [militarisation] process has taken place outside of the United States and; (3) the direct socio-political consequences of such an assertive militarisation process. Regardless, as this research also aims to introduce traditional law enforcement as well as the riot unit ESMAD into the analysis, such a gap can also be extended to include issues regarding: (4) how the criminalisation of protests might have reconducted in the post-peace setting (Olarte-Olarte, 2019), where it was supposed to offer another basis for the conduct of political discourse after the demobilisation of FARC-EP; (5) the absence of SSR (Cruz-Rodríguez, 2017; Garcia-Luna, 2019) and how this has subsequently formed the power dynamics between ESMAD and protesters and ultimately; (6) how the population has responded to overt forms of repression, especially during periods of social unrest as seen in 2019 and 2021 (Acacio *et al.*, 2022).

Despite the significance of civilians' experiences and perspectives in upholding public security, there remains a paucity of empirical evidence based on first-hand accounts. The methodology of most selected literature was founded on qualitative approaches to data collection. There is, therefore, a general tendency to promote mainly macro approaches of data collection and analysis concerning the process of militarisation. Given the identified need and availability gap, this paper presents an opportunity to contribute to the current state of research. Moreover; it is asserted within contemporary academia that the traditional literature on cultural militarism and the militarisation of public security neglects to comprehensively account for the escalating tensions within CMR (Hynes-Bishop, in West & Crosbie, 2021:126). As far as CMR are concerned, the subsequent chapter will, therefore, consider both the theoretical framework applied in the following analysis, as well as a conceptual usage of the aforementioned relationship between military organisations and civil actors.

3   Conceptual & Theoretical Framework

The following section has been hybridised for several reasons: civil-military relations (CMR) is an often-cited key variable in explaining how the internal security sector is constructed in Latin America (Mares, 2019); it illustrates a divide between theory and practice whereby the militarised functions of the sector are utilised against the polity (Kriesberg & Dayton, 2017:35); it describes how the experiences within society matter insofar as it impacts the perception of which mechanisms of conflict resolution are deemed as viable throughout communities (Kleinfeld & Barham, 2018). What follows is thus an account of how CMR is constructed in settings of middle-to-high amounts of distrust, followed by a confined point of departure of how militarised tools of civic interaction may be widely perceived not as a

consequence only of historical developments, but rather as being part of an institutionalised governing strategy (Kleinfeld & Barham, 2018; Kleinfeld, 2019).

The theory of privilege violence, as proposed by Kleinfeld (2019), advance the notion that in societies with entrenched asymmetrical social hierarchies, dominant groups may use violence to maintain their position of power over marginalised groups. This theory can be applied to the study of CMR in order to understand how militarised units of the security sector may be used as tools of violence to maintain authority and control over civilians. By examining the power dynamics at play, this theory provides insights into the challenges and opportunities for promoting civilian oversight mechanisms and perceptions of social justice within society in the long term.

3.1 Concept: Civil-Military Relationship

Despite its common usage, CMR are used in multiple fields to signify different things[17]. Nonetheless, as the delimitation of this particular paper relates closely to the Latin American experience it is associated with the existing research on the regional conceptualisation of the phenomenon. As such, the primary understanding is closely related to patterns of CMR as displayed in countries such as Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Chile, Mexico and Venezuela (Mares, 2019). In accordance with this delimitation, the typology of CMR as a framework of analysis tends to be understood mainly as presented in Table 4.

Determinants of Civil-Military Relations in Latin America

Political Culture	Constitutive Rules	Civil-Military Relationship
Liberal	Inclusive	Civilians dominant
Liberal	Exclusive	Civilians dominant
Corporatist	Inclusive	All types
Corporatist	Exclusive	All types
Militarist	Inclusive	Military dominant; Pact among equals
Militarist	Exclusive	Military dominant
Neopatrimonial	Inclusive	All types
Neopatrimonial	Exclusive	All types

Table 4. Source: As presented by Mares (2019:7)

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[17] Since its emergence, CMR has drawn upon a wide range of academic fields such as (but not limited to) law, cultural studies, anthropology, economics, history, sociology and military research (Mares, 2019).

The common characteristics of CMR are thus widely believed to belong to two different categories: (1) the political culture[18] of the particular context and; (2) the constitutive rules[19] that form political interaction (Mares, 2019:2). Depending on the combinations of variables, this is then believed to make relations either more cooperative or competitive (Mares, 2019:20). Whenever the political culture coheres to more liberal beliefs and attitudes, the relationship between spheres tend to be more dominated by civilian authority (Mares, 2019:8) However, this sole variable does not necessarily explain the extent of which cooperation is made possible. If the constitutive rules of the polity are exclusionary towards certain fragments of society, such as marginalised groups, the risk for a more competitive environment increases notwithstanding the overall political culture (Mares, 2019:3). Therefore, the concept of CMR is used, concerning Latin America, primarily to refer to the specific process in which the civic sector has yet to achieve a degree of civilian control over the institution after a period of structural translation (Illera & Ruiz, 2018:511). Be it due to a lack of the necessary capacities or commitments to handle the Ministry of Defence, such a widening gap between civic and military sectors is understood to be crucial in explaining the relationship between the two in Colombia (Illera & Ruiz, 2018).

Following this internal logic, and taken in conjunction with the literature as presented in the previous section[20] Colombia is characterised by a militarist political culture in the aftermath of a protracted multi-party conflict and constitutive rules which for long have excluded communities on the periphery of the country (Idler, 2021:11). This relates particularly to the concept of militarisation as it constructs the overall cultural imagination of the role which the military holds within society (Gómez Sucre & Cornet, in Mares, 2019:59). In that regard, CMR explains the ways society and military attempts to interact and how this interaction impacts the strategic decision-making of the institution (Kruijt, 2020:3). Regarding Colombia, such an intersection raises several crucial considerations regarding the way society balances the influence of both sectors. Paradoxically, the intent of military actors must, by such an understanding, be designed to protect the polity, while simultaneously being powerful enough to threaten it (Carey *et al.*, 2013). An asymmetry is theorised to otherwise contribute either an increased risk in (a) the military take-over of civic affairs or (b) a gradual de-professionalisation of the armed forces regarding security threats (Quintero Cordero, 2021:78).

In the case of Colombia, as will be further explored in the following section, such a widening of the gap is attributed as a key factor in the making of a more competitive environment of

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[18] A political culture is described as *"...a people's predominant beliefs, attitudes, values, ideals, sentiments, and evaluations about the political system of its country, and the role of the self in that system."* (Mares, 2019:3).

[19] The philosophic vision which is manifested in the political culture, when expressed as actual practice forms the rules which either give legitimacy to certain polity's or restrict others from participating (Mares, 2019:5).

[20] In regard to attitudes, behaviour and widespread values within the political system of Colombia, Ramirez (2019) and Rodriguez (2018) have affirmed that militarised traits persist in the aftermath of the peace agreement.

interaction between some spaces within society and the military (Illera & Ruiz, 2018:528). Whereas the policy preferences between spheres diverge, issues regarding the maintenance of public security tend to develop as a consequence (Quintero Cordero, 2021:28).

3.1.1 Conceptual Review

It is increasingly recognised that higher degrees of militarism within the public sector influence the behaviour of related social systems, especially those recently affected by protracted conflict (Rodriquez, 2018; Quintero Cordero, 2021:1-2). Whereby this interchange between spheres occurs and crosses artificial boundaries it has been shown to highly affect the elaboration of strategies concerning how national interests are perceived and formed accordingly (Quintero Cordero, 2021:12-13). As a result, the relationship between the civil and military sectors within Latin America has often been shown to follow a pattern of balancing civil liberties and national security interests, at times asymmetrically (Quintero Cordero, 2021:2). Therefore, the dynamics of the domestic CMR are crucial in determining to what effect the relations are either cooperative or conflicting (Mares, 2019:1-2). Although the literature (Ramirez, 2019:140; Quintero Cordero, 2021:13) identifies a slight development towards a more democratic CMR, the ambivalent relationship between the two sectors has made the conduct of collaborative CMR in Colombia increasingly complicated.

With the duration of the multi-party armed conflict, the increasingly militarised behaviour of both military and police actors in relation to non-combatants is believed to have worsened CMR (Illera & Ruiz, 2018). Nonetheless, the available literature published after the peace agreement is inconsistent in their overall results. Authors such as Quintero Cordero (2021:2-3) have identified such a paucity as relating to the unique transitional character of Colombian society. According to the author, most CMR research in Latin America relates to the issue of democratic transitions rather than SSR. What such a focus leaves out, however, is the processes that occur when a country evolves from a period of active warfare back to an armistice or peace, rather than from an autocracy to a democracy[21]. Therefore, mechanisms that underpin CMR in Colombia are, not adequately accounted for regarding how the armed forces interact with the population since the peace agreement. Neither how law enforcement's inclusion in the Ministry of National Defence impacted the perception of the institution in general.

As the process of the civilian police force pattern itself after is increasingly militarised, they need to be considered within the military module of CMR in the Colombian case. As such, it would be reductive to limit the scope of analysis to solely consider the traditional armed forces within the framework of CMR. Not only is the institution understood within the same

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[21] Which, according to Quintero Cordero (2021:2), is why most CMR literature emphasises the cases of Argentina, Brazil, Chile and Mexico.

framework as the Ministry of National Defence, but also due to the interchangeable mandates during the multi-party armed conflict. As previously identified by Acacio *et al.* (2022:4), when applied in combination with the concept of militarism, CMR has tended to become increasingly problematic in Latin America once the military achieves higher degrees of control concerning traditional political issues on the professional-political continuum[22].

Having defined CMR and its relation to the process of militarisation, it is now necessary to explain the course of how the construction and subsequent perception of privilege violence can both exacerbate tensions within CMR in marginalised communities and also increase the dependency in more affluent sections of society.

3.2   Theoretical Framework: Privilege Violence in Polarised Democracies

To facilitate an analysis of the research results, the conceptual framework of privilege violence will be employed to interpret the potential linkage between the perceptions of militarisation held by the participants and their subsequent influence in perpetuating systemic inequities and fostering a state of insecurity (Kleinfeld, 2019:209).

The theory of privilege violence was developed by Kleinfeld (2019) as a critique of the failed state hypothesis. Rather than attributing violence as a failure of states to provide sufficient security, Kleinfeld (2019:35) has argued that within certain polarised democracies, it may be seen as a viable option for political and economic elites to maintain the status quo and inherent power hierarchies. Therefore, the statistical increase of violence in democracies would, in accordance with the theory, be attributed mainly to state-subsidised violence rather than weak states or individual deviations (Kleinfeld, 2019:31). While the issues of gang violence, crime and terrorism tend to be acute issues in these countries also, as exemplified in Colombia[23], most recent cases convey particular components of elite sponsored privilege violence (Kleinfeld, 2019:49).

Kleinfeld bases the hypothesis on the latest dataset (at the time) which reveals that although only comprising four per cent of the global population, eighteen countries contributed to almost one-quarter of all violent deaths. While a few of the instances mentioned, such as Syria, are embroiled in ongoing armed conflicts, and some, such as Libya, lack a functional centralised system of governance, the major cases highlighted in the survey pertain to a range of established democracies at varying levels (Kleinfeld, 2019:85). By looking at the key characteristics of these cases, Kleinfeld (2018) identifies that such 'privilege violence' does not necessarily originate from a state being too weak in its capabilities or unable to stop the

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[22] The concept refers to the scope of attitudes and behaviors that emerges when trying to balance professional roles with political beliefs and values (Acacio *et al.,* 2022:4)

[23] *"Organised gangs, professional criminals, militias, and guerrillas have accounted for…"*, as the author describes it, *"...a tsunami of murders"* between 1980-2000 (Kleinfeld, 2019:36, 62).

spread of violence. Rather, it would derive from established power hierarchies which maintain certain levels of violence against particular communities in the lower spheres of society to maintain existing privilege(s). That is, according to the perception(s) of the sources cited during the research.

The theory is based on the empirical assumption that to maintain the aforementioned privilege and, to various levels – impunity, elites within polarised democracies often tend to politicise the security sector so that certain favoured violent groups, paramilitary organisations, for example, do not face prosecution (Kleinfeld, 2019:135). Concurrent with this development, the security sector(s) are simultaneously de-professionalised, whereby the structure of the organisations becomes highly dependent on political favour and patronage rather than merit (Kleinfeld, 2019:141). In the long term, such weaknesses in capabilities render the institutions ineffective to encounter insurgency effectively; however, such weaknesses are deliberate (Kleinfeld, 2019:53). As a direct consequence, most security agencies become increasingly inefficient, repressive and violent, particularly towards more marginalised groups in society (Kleinfeld, 2019:132).

Moreover; this may contribute to unfavourable outcomes, including a loss of confidence among citizens in the government's capacity to protect them, leading to a possible shift towards vigilantism or organised crime for security purposes (Higgs, 2020:35; Kleinfeld, 2019:132). Such a scenario could exacerbate insurgencies, as marginalised factions may support anti-state actors to challenge the prevailing unequal power dynamics (Kleinfeld, 2019:132). Simultaneously, those who profit from the cycle of violence may enlist private paramilitary groups to eliminate such perceived 'undesirables' who seek to disrupt the status quo (Lieblich & Shinar, 2018; Kleinfeld, 2019).

In such a process of so-called 'de-civilisation', whereby violence is normalised within society, the monopoly of violence is temporarily given up by the state. Extra-judicial violence, thereby, becomes increasingly tolerated as a perceived necessary tool to mitigate lawlessness (Kleinfeld, 2019:40). Consequently, it is not unusual for the upper-middle-class residing in such an environment to endorse the escalating employment of violence by state institutions at this juncture to quell violent movements that are perceived as endangering their interests (Higgs, 2020:204; Kleinfeld, 2019:280. Accordingly to the theoretical framework of Kleinfeld (2019), such a process might be a deliberate attempt by elites (be it political or economic) to ensure that their interest is secured by, in essence, criminalising any social movements which threaten their place within the power structure (Kleinfeld, 2019:280; Magaloni & Rodriguez, 2020). Through the understanding of such a theoretical framework, the militarisation of law enforcement and more active participation of the military in civic

affairs would be part of a calculated effort to suppress and delegitimise public discourse and social movements which try to upend the status quo.

3.2.1 Theoretical Review

There is a growing body of literature (Kleinfeld & Barham, 2018; Majeed, 2016:7) that recognises the concept of privilege violence's effect on state capabilities and the military's role within society. According to Majeed (2016:7), such a process tends to follow a pattern whereby political and economic elites aspire to sustain extreme privileges by politicising law enforcement and the security sector to maintain the impunity that protects their rule. As a direct consequence, marginalised or unprotected citizens are hypothesised to start viewing the actions of the government as increasingly illegitimate (Kleinfeld, 2019:132; Majeed, 2016:7).

The existing literature (Kleinfeld & Barham, 2018; Kleinfeld, 2019:31) on privilege violence has found that to maintain certain privileges of a low-taxed societal elite, state actors tend to deliver highly unequal access to public security services which protects elites but is missing for marginalised and unprotected communities. Such an asymmetry in access, and otherwise violent interaction, are believed to contribute to a system of self-protection that facilitates state actors to exacerbate mainstream public sentiment for the allowance of further repression and political exclusion (Kleinfeld & Barham, 2018). Through the application of field research, the findings to emerge as presented by Kleinfeld (2019) have supported such empirical claims. By examining Colombia, Georgia, Italy, India, Mexico and the United States, across a triangulation of data through statistical evidence, a similar trend of intrasocietal violence as closely associated with the internal coordination of socio-economic interests materialises (Kleinfeld, 2019).

Case studies (Sung *et al.*, 2022:318) carried out in the slums of Rio de Janeiro further clarify how methods of counter-criminal insurgency impact the different spheres of society in a variety of ways. In 2019-2020, operations carried out in low-income areas led to the deaths of 606 civilians, contributing to a narrative of fear and mutual distrust (Kleinfeld, 2019:61; Sung *et al.*, 2022:336). Although this engagement was widely criticised, it accumulated an extensive amount of support from Rio de Janeiro's middle and upper classes, who expressed concerns about the increasing violent episodes (Sung *et al.*, 2022:318). The application of privilege violence as a framework of analysis would, following this, conclude that such occurrences are rather to be viewed within the larger structure as a viable tool for maintaining existing power hierarchies, rather than solely as random events of violence (Kleinfeld, 2019).

However, it should be stated that the hypothesis as presented by Kleinfeld would appear to be over-ambitious in some of its claims. At times, the study fails to adequately consider additional explanations of the social phenomena of violence. In the case of Colombia, this

includes a certain assumed level of causality between privilege violence and the overall impact on the public security sector. The presumption that a reduction in the security sector's capabilities is closely tied to the concept of privilege violence and maintenance of the status quo is at times dubious. Nevertheless, as an instrument of analysis, it does provide some insightful tools for further analysis, for example, how indented polarisation between certain marginalised groups and an ambiguous security sector may be viewed as a governing strategy.

In trying to identify privilege violence (Kleinfeld, 2019) it is necessary to incorporate:

1. Experiences and viewpoints regarding the state's capabilities to handle violence, and how this may differ depending on social location.
2. Partisan and polarising narratives which may reinforce the cross-sectoral relationship.
3. Perceptions of any gradual politicisation of the security sector.
4. Normalisation and rationalisation of violence within and across sectors and the extent of its brutality.
5. How social hierarchies are mobilised to either (a) challenge or (b) reinforce the status quo dependent on social location.

As a frame of analysis, privilege violence contributes a set of qualitative variables which does not necessarily translate into quantifiable characteristics. Fundamentally, what this means is that it becomes necessary to form the research in a manner that allows for the identification of more in-depth perspectives, attitudes, beliefs, and motivations. These are then incorporated into the interview guide and subsequent frame of reference. Thus, not only has the intersection between privilege violence and CMR formed the epistemological basis of the paper, but also influenced the modes of analysis.

4 Methodology

The operationalisation of the aforementioned research objective(s) stipulated the overall design of a qualitative case study. Qualitative methods within the field of peace and conflict can be additionally useful in identifying and characterising the social world and its participants operating in accordance with their social construction of it (Muvingi & Duckworth, in Cooper, 2015:96). Such an essence has inspired the application of abductive reasoning whereby the analytical knowledge production adheres to observing and pursuing an overall hypothesis that would best conform to or define such overarching statements (Cooper, 2015:69). The overall methods of data collection consisted of semi-structured interviews to allow for a more detailed and unrestricted examination of the case and subsequent informants (Bryman, 2021:61). An underlying premise of this research then came to rely on the subjective value(s), including perceptions, attitudes, feelings and behaviours, and is, thereby,

firmly grounded in the ontological position of constructivism and the subsequent epistemological foundation of interpretivism (Bryman, 2021:375-376).

4.1 Research Design

The use of qualitative case studies is a well-established approach within the field of peace and conflict studies (Cooper, 2015; MacGinty *et al.,* 2021). The rationale behind such research as inquiry lies mainly in the way the research subjects attach meaning to interactions with others, either in a cooperative or conflicting manner (Cooper, 2015:24). By examining the manner through which the subject constructs a narrative surrounding themselves, dependent on lived experiences and critical events, such variables are crucial elements of human inquiry that are better explained through qualitative methods (Silverman, 2016:16-17). By following a qualitative research design the paper sets out to answer questions such as 'how', 'in what way' and, albeit to a lesser extent, 'why', concerning the research subjects' relation to social reality (Bryman, 2021:380-381). Regarding the former two frames, such formulations have impacted the research design considerably, especially in relation to the research questions.

As the point of departure for this paper sets out to provide a more detailed analysis of the specific case of Colombia, the methodology is closely associated with that of the case study design (Silverman, 2016:204). Within the field of peace and conflict such a framing may appear in various forms, and the conceptualisation of 'case' may as such vary greatly (Cooper, 2015:92-93). Nevertheless, this paper applies a definition in which the case study is understood as the process through which *"the investigator explores a real-life, contemporary bounded system (a case) [...] through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information [...] and reports a case description and case themes."* (Creswell, 2013, in Cooper, 2015:93). Because such a research design provides the flexibility and depth to identify conflict parties' diverging narratives and perspectives within a certain setting, it becomes an especially valuable tool within conflict research.

Furthermore, to provide a clear examination of the case of Colombia the nature of the paper follows a descriptive design. The reasoning for this stems from the internalised logic that a descriptive case study was able to most efficiently achieve detailed accounts of such complex phenomena (Cooper, 2015:96). Ultimately, it is through the incorporation of the subjects' framing of their "social belonging, participation, categories and norms" (Cooper, 2015:92) which then informs the knowledge production throughout the case. The participatory nature of such a research design, as well as the processing and subsequent analysis of the data, becomes essential in forming both ontological and epistemological considerations.

4.1.1 Ontological Consideration: Constructivism

By employing qualitative modes of enquiry, there are certain ontological considerations which first need to be addressed. Such considerations include the foundation of knowledge production and how the entity of the social world is constructed and perceived. In accordance with such a constructivist viewpoint, the methodology becomes guided by a principle of 'plurality of truth perceptions', in which the representation of truth becomes viewed as fluid and highly dependent on the human agency (Muvingi & Duckworth, in Cooper, 2015:93). If then reality is understood as a gradual social construction, there is a certain recognition that the researcher and the research subjects both are "co-contributors to knowledge creation" (Muvingi & Duckworth, in Cooper, 2015:93-94).

As the knowledge production mode follows multi- and interdisciplinary procedures of research carried out in a case-specific context of application it forms the understanding of 'what' knowledge is' and 'who has it' (Bryman, 2021:69). Consequently, it also impacts the results of the data collection as it means the process is not necessarily governed by the traditional paradigms of disciplines of academic knowledge. Rather, the research design draws from multiple academic standards such as from political science, sociology and anthropology, to achieve a closer association with a more holistic constructivist design. In practice, this signifies a collaborative nature of learning, both in between research subjects, but also emphasises the role of the researcher in interpreting and understanding social action to provide a causal explanation of any potential course and effects (Bryman, 2021:29).

The nature of reality, thereby, becomes guided by a viewpoint that social entities are to be understood as highly subjective and case dependent. As such, the research subjects' social reality is believed to be shaped by underlying forces that operate beyond the control of the individual and rather is the byproduct of collective actions (Silverman, 2016:146). Within the delimitation of this paper, that means that perceptions about social occurrence(s) are the main force which guides consequent attitudes, behaviours and contradictions of those social actors (Kriesberg & Dayton, 2017:86-87).

4.1.2 Epistemological Consideration: Interpretivism

If then the methodology adheres to such an ontological basis, it has immense ramifications for what is to be regarded as acceptable knowledge within the multi- and interdisciplinary field of peace and conflict (Bryman, 2021:27-28). By thereby fusing the elements of a constructionist ontology with that of an interpretivist epistemology it should be possible to achieve a wider understanding of human behaviour within the particular case (Bryman, 2021:49). The knowledge acquired about social reality and how it is gained are crucial considerations for such a fusion within the field of peace and conflict (Cooper, 2015:27). Whereby this is the

case, it impacts the logical process through which the observations and hypothesis concur and impacts the overall research design. As such, it would be counterproductive to try to extricate the human element from any observable human enterprise, be it from the research subject or the researcher (Cooper, 2015:27). However, as will be further explored in section 4.2.2 this provides the research with extra considerations regarding biases and empirical errors.

The processes of knowledge production are thought as highly subjective and are thus best identified through in-depth observation(s) and interviews (Cooper, 2015:25). In such an observational design, nonetheless, there is potential for bias regarding the interpretation of the subject and a miscalculation of their actions. As such, a major consideration throughout the research process has been the need to continuously apply evaluative tools to determine a certain level of trustworthiness via: (1) credibility; (2) dependability; (3) confirmability and; (4) transferability (Bryman, 2021:390). As previously mentioned, these are more thoroughly explored in section 4.2.2 but seeing as they had a key impact on the assessed empirical data, they are closely correlated to the epistemological concerns of the interpretive case study design.

When viewing society as an outcome of everyday interactions of individuals it, therefore, has major distinctive epistemological implications (Bryman, 2021:31). The data collection process was formed accordingly with a belief that the most reliable empirical data concerning intersectoral relationships between subjects and the state forces are primary sources of lived experiences and active participation (Seale, 2018:262). Such considerations formed both the sampling as well as the interview guide, as to allow for a more flexible input and output of empirical evidence.

4.1.3 Abductive Reasoning and Reflexivity

In a way to describe how the inquiry of research approached the social phenomenon of militarisation, several frames provided the guiding principles through which meaning was attributed to contemporary events in relation to the overall context. In that manner, abductive reasoning[24] has been applied throughout the process of data collection and subsequent analysis. This understanding is applied in contrast to the more external (inductive) viewpoint of the researcher. Therefore, such reasoning has formed the research insofar as it has influenced the way through which the knowledge has been related to the findings. Rather than trying to generalise any of the findings, the main effort has been to find the best explanation of the social phenomena, following the research subjects' worldviews (Bryman, 2021:399).

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[24] Abductive meaning implies the form of reasoning that closely associates scientific accounts of social reality with a gradual construction through the perspectives and interpretation of the participants (Bryman, 2021:709).

Therefore, the findings and subsequent analysis are closely correlated with those identified by the voices behind the data (Bryman, 2021:401). Notwithstanding this, a major challenge with such an open and abductive methodology was that the constant irregularity of the design, especially regarding the research questions' relation to the theoretical framework, demanded a higher degree of reflexivity (MacGinty *et al.*, 2021:80). Especially concerning how the researcher's cognitive biases could have formed the process of inquiry, such a process of reflexivity involved a process of examination of the data collection and generation (de Guevara & Poopuu, in MacGinty *et al.*, 2021:72). Therefore, almost every interview session[25] concluded with an opportunity for co-learning, confidence-building and co-action (McAllister, in MacGinty *et al.*, 2021:204), whereby key notes from the interview were shared to allow for potential corrections, clarifications and introspection on the side of the participant.

Consequently, the reflexivity process included a procedure of: (1) recording the participants' off-hand comments and any of the researcher's emerging biases or opinions throughout the interview; (2) summaries directly after the interview and; (3) the continuous development of the pre-existing subjectivity statement formed before the data collection process began (Njeri, in MacGinty *et al.*, 2021:204:392). The reasoning for this was to allow for a greater sense of prospective and retrospective reflexivity[26] through which the objective was to achieve some fundamental change(s) in perspective. Also crucial was the realisation of how this awareness informed both the construction of self and, subsequently, the functions of the examined social setting (Njeri, in MacGinty *et al.*, 2021:204:383, 392).

4.2 Qualitative Interviews

The reasoning for applying semi-structured interviews in regard to the case study was primarily to allow for a greater sense of flexibility. Such an internal logic followed the justification that the research subjects would have more comprehensive opportunities to reply and frame the issue (Bryman, 2021:468). Furthermore, just as much emphasis was put on their ability to elaborate on a range of topics, as well as exclude themes deemed either not relevant for that particular subject, or potentially distressing.

A qualitative approach was employed since semi-structured interviews were believed to facilitate consistent data-gathering throughout the process. As such, the interview guide served as the primary boundary setting for the topic, but only to the extent that the research subject expressed previous experience(s) with the different institutions or strong opinions on the subject. In cases where there was a deviation from those criteria, probing questions were

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[25] With the exception of one interview in which the subject abruptly had to leave due to unforeseen events.
[26] According to Attia and Edge (Njeri, in MacGinty *et al.*, 2021:204:392), prospective reflexivity is understood as the effects of the researcher on the study, whereby retrospective reflexivity covers the effect of the research on the researcher.

prepared to efficiently guide the interview along. To accommodate this dynamic to the specific case, various amounts of control were allowed the informant to let the sessions be guided by the respondent's interests and priorities.

The questionnaire was, therefore, designed on a case-by-case basis to calculate the following attitudes, behaviours and contradictions: (1) lived experience regarding either a participatory or reactive role to social mobilisation and protest; (2) technical expertise relating to the public security sector; (3) proximity to the events of 2019 and 2021 and; (4) expressed and varying amount of knowledge about law enforcement, military and riot police. In preparation for the interview, some predetermined possibilities were assessed in terms of answers or topics of expertise. Following this, some questions in the interview guide were highlighted as increasingly important or less so, and some were added. Due to the varied sample of participants, as elaborated further in section 4.2.1, some questions and themes were adjusted according to the respondent. Such a process was increasingly important as some informants were or had been closely associated with the security sector and as such, some of the questions regarding active participation in protests risked inducing a non-response or even hostility.

Moreover; it is crucial to discuss the impact of location as it relates to sensitive data. It should be noted that of the sample, no interviews were conducted on location in Colombia due to various reasons disclosed in section 4.5. As such, sensitive data were only handled in-depth to the extent that they adhered to already agreed-upon standards. The interviews that took place in Pristina, Kosovo; Stockholm, Sweden and; the Hague, the Netherlands followed a more relaxed form of interaction as few-to-no risks faced the direct safety of neither respondent nor researcher. Importantly, the digital interviews were always discussed in advance with the interviewee to allow for a forum[27] they felt comfortable with. This sense of comfort was extended through active efforts of information-sharing and the proposal of open channels in which certain thematic discussions could be held in the aftermath of the interview. In some crucial cases, this allowed for a more participatory role of the research subject(s) and came to contribute further data than originally assumed.

4.2.1 Sampling

The subjects were selected based on the degree of likeness of any participatory role in the 2019 and 2021 movements of protest(s). Such criteria included both the role of the protester, (active) bystander or inclusion within the security sector. Overall, in the end, this came to reflect a total number of fourteen interviews, with eleven subsequent informal sessions. These

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[27] The (digital) interviews took place in: Google Meets, Zoom and Microsoft Teams on a basis of: (1) participant comfort and preference; (2) inherent digital security in regard to online identity & data and; (3) compatibility with an external Virtual Private Network (VPN) to cover any further traceable data.

were identified through an approach of purposive sampling, whereby the identification of informants adhered to a strategic method to enable contact with those deemed relevant to the proposed research objective and questions (Silverman, 2016:25). Such a purposive method of collection was meant to provide a wide variety of data and as such was cross-checked, triangulated and interpreted independently in relation to the thematic coding. The internal logic of this decision-making process was based on a close cooperative knowledge production between the researcher and an already existing network in Colombia[28], delimited in conversation with an external supervisor.

Due to limitations further elaborated upon in section 4.5, the interviews were restricted in their scope to either digital interviews or direct interviews restricted to one of three[29] different locations where the researcher could travel. Such access to informants drew upon an already existing and extensive access to a network of various non-governmental organisations (NGOs) operating both in the host country as well as in Colombia, including the Kosovo Centre for Diplomacy[30], War Child, ForumCiv and Multicultural.

Eligibility criteria thus required respondents to have: (1) previous knowledge and experience with the social movements of 2019 and 2021; (2) existing attitudes and opinions regarding the Ministry of Defence and their relation to the public; (3) at least a solid level of knowledge concerning the peace agreement and; (4) employment (present or prior) which may have formed the way they view the public security sector. Furthermore, regarding security actors, additional criteria were applied to fill the knowledge gap between sectors: (5) extensive involvement (either active or passive) through technocratic, civil or direct means within the security sector and; (6) solid knowledge about the way the public security sector has transformed throughout a set period of time. The latter criteria refer specifically to the way the public security sector has changed following the disarmament and demobilisation of paramilitary and guerilla groups over time (Davis & Kilcullen, 2016).

All informants should, per such criteria, be able to describe some previous experience or strong opinion regarding the movements of social mobilisation, especially in the aftermath of the peace agreement. Those who did were included in the analysis. However, the purposive sampling method only attributed to a limited set of research subjects. As a direct result, a snowball method was applied to extend access to data. This part of the process adhered to similar criteria as the purposive sampling to retain a higher degree of internal credibility. Therefore, the three respondents who referred to further sources of data were asked to support these references with a similar set of criteria as they had been upheld to. Nonetheless, two of

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[28] Such a network has been formed over time, both while the researcher lived in Colombia but also afterwards.
[29] These were delimited to Stockholm, Sweden; Pristina, Kosovo; and the Hague, the Netherlands.
[30] While not operating in Colombia, the forum provided by the organisation allowed for wider interaction with multiple actors with experience(s) in Colombia during the set period of 2019 and 2021.

the sources which later on will be referred to in section 5 did not strictly adhere to criteria 4 regarding relevant employment. Notwithstanding this, after due consideration, these two were included based on being highly involved in the 2019 and 2021 protests.

Turning now to the process through which the data was collected, the considerations regarding sampling were carried over to allow for a greater level of both transferability and confirmability.

4.2.2   Data Collection

To assess whether and how the concept of militarisation was produced and received within the stories and narratives through which the research subjects formed their sense of daily activities functionally and purposefully, it was essential to measure the qualitative variables which generated the data of interest. As such, the method of data collection adhered to a circular module which included a five-stage process of: (1) data collection; (2) data preparation; (3) data input (4) data processing and finally; (5) data storage. The main body of data was collected through semi-structured interviews. The collected information was then prepared for further processing by labelling the raw data and then subsequently transcribed, whereby several key themes and concepts were highlighted for future analysis, as will be described in the next section. To avoid potential biases and empirical errors, extra efforts of reflexivity, triangulation and measures of thick description(s) were applied to assure this part of the process adhered to research standards.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with four active participants in the protests of either 2019 or 2021, six actors from the human- and civil rights sectors, with a complimentary four actors from either within the security sector or who acted as external spectators. However, as some actors from within the human- and civil rights sectors also partook in protests, the questionnaire was widened to also incorporate their experiences. The semi-structured approach was chosen to allow for a wider set of opinions and experiences which could be transformed into qualitative data. To identify their distinctive character concerning both social mobilisation and public security, the participants were asked to make a short statement of position regarding two of the more contested groups on both sides of the protests: ESMAD and Primera Linea[31]. Such efforts were made to code the data input (Bryman, 2021:576-577). The comparison group, involving the three security actors and the external spectator was, furthermore, asked to identify certain traits of the main sample which they had perceived during the period following the peace agreement, with a certain emphasis on the moments of social protest in 2019 and 2021. Such efforts were pursued in an attempt to

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[31] The contested nature of the protest movement Primera Linea stems from the protester defence group's more direct and, allegedly violent, countermeasures to state forces such as ESMAD (Arévalo Bencardino *et al.*, 2021:137).

identify potentially diverging and incompatible social narratives about the same social phenomenon (Bryman, 2021:582).

In conjunction with the data processing, crucial gaps in knowledge relating to the research questions were identified, as well as areas in need of further deliberation. This part of the process, therefore, came to be subjected to additional data collection through three new semi-structured interviews to fill the knowledge gaps. At this point in the research, it appeared as if no new data provided additional insights or information that could enhance the understanding of either the particular phenomenon of militarisation or the research question. As such, data saturation could be said to have been achieved. To ensure this, the process included an extra measure of checking for the presence of particular themes and patterns. This appeared through both recurring keywords and indistinguishable experiences. Furthermore, to increase the transferability of the sample, the data was then triangulated through a cross-checking of primary and secondary empiric data available. By making sure this part of the process was also well documented it should ensure that the subsequent results would likely be repeatable in future research, thus achieving a certain sense of confirmability (Silverman, 2016:135).

In agreement with the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD), any personal data was then stored on an external drive to mitigate any risk of the information being compromised by an unauthorised third actor. Furthermore, on the agreement between parties, any traceable personal data or remaining recording will be terminated at the conclusion of the research project, unless specifically stated otherwise. Such security measures allowed for a greater establishment of trust between the researcher and researched parties. The attempts were made to make each interviewee feel as comfortable as possible, both to establish trust and to maximise the data output.

4.2.3 Data Analysis

To see if the two methods of inquiry, mainly interviews and document analysis, be it concerning the primary or secondary data, gave the same indication, in the first cycle of coding the data was transcribed and whereby the text was identified as being relevant to the research questions, subsequently was labelled according to the procedures of narrative analysis (Bryman, 2021:582). The process of narrative analysis was the elicitation technique applied to the data that was determined to be sensitive to the temporal sequence that the research subjects provided regarding the events identified as important concerning the research questions (Bryman, 2021:582-584). As such, the main objective of the analysis process became fixated on the process through which the research subjects *'made sense of'* external events, rather than on what *'actually might have occurred'* (Bryman, 2021:582). Through such an active participatory role in knowledge construction, the emphasis was thus

aimed at exploring the way the informants made sense of what happened and to what effect it had impacted their lives up until that point in time.

Such an approach had major ramifications for the analysis insofar as it relates not only to singular events but the interconnections in-between episodes throughout an extended period (Bryman, 2021:584). In trying to determine such interconnections the process set out to identify both the various forms and functions of any particular narrative. In practice, as described by Bryman (2021:584), this entailed a heavy focus on questions such for example: *"Can you identify a time when . . . ?"* and *"What happened that makes you remember that particular moment in time…?"*. The construction of any particular narrative and the way the informant positioned themselves within it was thus of utmost importance to the analysis. Any higher degree of agency within the stories the informants shared was also of particular interest in the analysis, as it provided an interesting insight into the way people construct their relationship with the authorities in question.

In the second cycle of coding, such broader thematic patterns were deployed to identify potential grander narratives or overlapping similarities (Muvingi & Duckworth, in Cooper, 2015:105). Throughout the qualitative inquiry, the analysis associated a certain symbolic value to key phrases and emotionally loaded expressions. This process can be likened to a summative and essence-capturing practice, whereby language is a key determinant of data (Muvingi & Duckworth, in Cooper, 2015:105-106). The collected data were subsequently coded to connect to one or more of the research questions. Consecutive codes then began to establish certain overlying and overlapping themes, mostly dependent on patterns such as close similarities, considerable differences, sequence(s) and frequencies (Muvingi & Duckworth, in Cooper, 2015:106). This process then made it possible to create linkages between the available data and the concepts and theoretical framework as presented in section 3. The main analytical technique, namely pattern matching, then made it possible to determine instances of categorical aggregation once the collection of themes converged to a satisfactory degree (Silverman, 2016:367). This was determined on the basis of the possibility of linking codes to the initial research propositions (Muvingi & Duckworth, in Cooper, 2015:105-106).

Notwithstanding this, there are certain precautions which were required in this stage of analysis. A growing concern within academia holds that perspectives and stories tend to change in conjunction with the environment (Bryman, 2021:584). Seeing as the researcher was heavily involved in such a context, this needs to be taken into consideration in the construction of the informants' stories. While it is impossible to determine any exact causality that this may have inferred from the overall findings, it is presumed to be one of the independent variables in explaining certain narratives. Thereby, extra caution was taken in the situations where the researcher's impact on the storytelling devices becomes apparent, for

example where the probing questions diverted the direction of the content to a noticeable degree.

4.3   Triangulation of Data

This paper adheres to an understanding of triangulation which refers to the combination of two or more data sources within the framing of one particular social phenomenon (Muvingi & Duckworth, in Cooper, 2015:103). Per such an understanding, the data sources are described as either being part of primary (observable statements) or secondary material (excerpts from reports). Such sources of primary and secondary data have been used in the past to investigate the public perceptions of the public security sector (Sung *et al.,* 2022). As such, this paper examined both open conversations on public message boards and online discussion sites, but to avoid purposely malicious online behaviour, such as mis- and disinformation through deliberate provocations, official reports were also consulted.

4.3.1   Primary Material

The sources discovered throughout the research process which has not in any way been altered by external interpretation are believed to be part of the primary sources. In addition to the experiences expressed by the research subjects, alternative narratives reproduced online on digital forums are also of particular academic interest (Bryman, 2021:116-117). While digital forums such as Twitter[32] were rejected based on risking being *"... too simplistic, too commercially oriented, too highly opinionated, or [...] not sufficiently academic"* regarding their explanatory value (Bryman, 2021:116), discussions and debates on Reddit have observed as to scale the previous findings to a satisfactory degree. Such discussions were primarily observed on Spanish-speaking sub-sections of the forum, such as *r/Colombia* where 288.000 members constantly discuss various issues. By the delimitation of the paper, the periods between 21 November 2019 and 13 January 2020, as well as 28 April 2021 and 21 May the same year[33] were selected and thoroughly examined.

It is important to bear in mind the possible bias in such responses. As a direct result, in an attempt to make sure such discussions are not overtly impacted by cognitive biases or purposefully mis- and disinformation, official documents and public statements were also collected (Bryman, 2021:444). These also included public statements from political parties during the duration of the protests. These were observed to identify potential divergences between public perceptions and institutional practice(s). The capacities are thus compared to

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[32] Such a process of exclusion was based on the assessment that Twitter, due to (at the time of 2019 and 2021) limited possibility to express oneself (two hundred-eighty character-limit) as well as notoriety for spreading mis- and disinformation regarding contested social phenomena, was a poor alternative for triangulation (Seale, 2018:276).
[33] While there are no cleary identifiable dates for the protests, these dates were selected on the criteria of being extensively believed to be of importance for the active movements of street protests (Amnesty International. 2021).

any potentially contradictory grand narrative as expressed by the research subjects and on the digital forum.

Certain restrictions such as time and access to respondents excluded the possibility to request consent from each user. As such, in adherence with guidelines (Silverman, 2016:126) any traceable information regarding the users will be coded as displayed in Appendix 4.

4.3.2   Secondary Material

Publications that concentrate on CMR with special emphasis on militarised law enforcement force more frequently adopt a human rights approach. In the case of Colombia, this has influenced the general material available. Published material used in this paper has incorporated the following components: audiovisual material available from open sources, as well as statements by journalists, human rights defenders and organisations emphasising the role of victims of protracted repression. This secondary material thus generally tends to support one side of a traditionally divisive narrative. Taken together with the previous primary accounts, such an approach should, nonetheless, allow for a more holistic approach to the militarisation process's impact on CMR.

Moreover; there is a certain assumption that the military institutions in question only share information that may achieve a higher degree of strategic interest(s). As such, statements by such actors in the recently published Truth and Reconciliation Commission's report(s) would appear limited. Nevertheless, some accounts stand out as especially relevant by the point of departure of this paper. With this in mind, after an extensive process of inclusion and exclusion, the material that was used for further triangulation primarily was dependent on official accounts as presented in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's report(s). These included professionals, protesters and certain security actors. As the report(s) was solely published in Spanish, they were both internally (translated by the author) and externally (cross-checked by a translator) translated for the presentation in this paper.

4.4   Ethical Considerations

For the purpose of data collection, each segment of data extraction and analysis adhered to a strict understanding of ethics and further considerations as presented in *The Companion to Peace and Conflict Fieldwork* (Mac Ginty *et al.,* 2021). As a field of research, peace and conflict requires a high standard for ethically grounded decision-making, especially in the conducting of qualitative interviews (Mac Ginty *et al.*, 2021). These considerations especially influenced the aforementioned conduct of interviews, but also the care for data and any subsequent biases the author may demonstrate regarding the subject. This process can be

likened to a so-called moral code that would come to govern the conduct of research (Mac Ginty *et al.,* 2021:7).

Nevertheless, seeing as contemporary ethics guidelines tend to be poorly equipped to deal with the profoundly unpredictable environments of conflict-inflicted areas, any ethical considerations also needed to include *"... complex and gendered power relations between researcher and researched"* to conciliate any deficiency (Fischer, in Mac Ginty *et al.,* 2021:30-31). Therefore, in addition to the main concerns: (1) the respect of privacy; (2) setting an appropriate environment whereby the moral and legal character of that particular society is adhered to; (3) informing about consent and; (4) highlighting anonymity and confidentiality of the participants, the research ethics was extended to also cover (5) how potentially marginalised and traumatised informants were contacted *"sensitively and appropriately"* (Fischer, in Mac Ginty *et al.,* 2021:30). One such procedure included the coding of each respondent, as well as removing any traceable data. Measures, thereby, included both an effort to identify any potential risk of conducting research in conflict-affected societies, as well as the ramifications of transforming people's personal experiences into data (Mac Ginty *et al.,* 2021:7). The reasoning behind the latter measure is closely associated with the experiences expressed by Parashar (Mac Ginty *et al.,* 2021:38) whereby researchers tend to overemphasise "data sensitivity, data protection, data sanitization, data sensitization" and forget the people behind the stories.

To mitigate such risks, the research also adhered to an understanding of the *Do No Harm* principles. In combination with the previously discussed ethical considerations, this, furthermore, meant that the researcher always considered: (6) potentially harmful interference of the research as applied to the group; (7) any potential for misuse and the risks of harm to the group(s) and; (8) the usage of respectful, non-stigmatising language in both interaction and transcripts (Roborgh, in Mac Ginty *et al.*, 2021:116). Taken together, these guiding ethical considerations cultivated in the reflexive questions:

- What does the project have the right to inquire about?

- What are the potential consequences and risks for the individuals participating?

Following these questions, extra measures were taken to mitigate any foreseeable risk to both the researcher and the interviewee. As no interview was conducted in Colombia, little-to-no risk faced the researcher. In an attempt to make sure this sense of safety was also transferred to the informant(s), the digital informants were requested to participate only from a place of privacy, preferably their accommodation. Any traceable data about the research subject was then edited out of the transcripts, such as current employers and general area of residence. Furthermore, additional personal identifiers have been removed from the transcript and hence

the interviews and observations adhere to strict guidelines of coding. These measures were taken to safeguard sensitive data. Subsequent steps involved the encryption and storing of recordings on external devices while maintaining rigorous online security through a VPN and additional cyber security.

4.5 Limitations

By choosing to take a qualitative approach, it has been acknowledged that the aim of the data generated will not be to attain any degree of statistical generalizability. It was thus not possible to investigate the significant relationships between militarisation and CMR to a generalisable level due to a limited sample of informants. This was furthermore impacted by the inability to travel to Colombia and conduct traditional field research. The overall study design was therefore limited to the Colombian diaspora and accessibility to the research subjects through digital measures. This impacted the research to the extent that certain interviews may have lost the element of non-verbal communication (such as body language), loss of rapport[34] and limited depth of response(s), at least in comparison to face-to-face interviews (Silverman, 2016:249). Despite the potential drawbacks, these need to be weighed against the advantages, which include enhanced accessibility, greater convenience for both the researcher and informant(s) as well as improved accuracy once the impact of the interviewer is reduced due to distance (Silverman, 2016:249; Rutakumwa *et al.*, 2020). Additionally, the loss of potential for non-verbal communication and depth of response should be viewed as mitigated through the complementary non-formal sessions and subsequent relation-building which followed the interviews.

Once the interviews had concluded, it was found that variables such as ethnicity and urban-rural political divisions could not be fully accounted for. Nevertheless, through extensive contact with diverse NGOs that work with disenfranchised populations, the research partly succeeded in incorporating a supplementary perspective on the predicament confronted by homeless individuals, rural minorities, sexual minorities, and economically deprived groups. The issue of groups on the periphery of Colombian society is an intriguing one which could be usefully explored in further research, as the limited nature of this study only managed to encapsulate the experiences of those living in predominantly urban areas, with a few exceptions in the Cauca and Norte de Santander regions.

Furthermore, as the researcher does not possess a sufficient language level of Spanish, a translator had to be employed in three separate cases. It can be reasoned that such an inability to speak Spanish, as well as fully understanding the cultural context, also might impact the way the data is translated and subsequently analysed. However, such risks were mitigated by

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[34] "Loss of rapport" refers to a breakdown in the relationship or connection between two or more individuals. Be it due to miscommunication, misunderstanding or a negative change in circumstances (Silverman, 2016:250-251).

the translator(s) being Colombian and having a similar academic background as the researcher. Additionally, as the researcher has lasting experience both working and living in the context, such risks are hopefully sufficiently mitigated.

Consequently, due to the responses relating to polarising experiences being thoroughly subjective, they were, therefore, susceptible to recall bias. It cannot be argued that the answers given in the interviews are representative of more than the personal experiences of the research subject and their most approximate contacts. However, by increasing the variety of data being entered and outputted through a diverse network, it should be feasible to attain a satisfactory level of explanatory ability for the particular case and through the subjects' subsequent experiences.

4.6   Delimitations

To assure that the research project would be manageable and at the same time scientifically sound, there was a need to define the broader parameters and boundaries of the paper. As a result, this section came to form which dependent and independent variables were examined, which target population(s) best could help explain these variables as well as the geographical coverage of this sample (Bryman, 2021:403). In addition to this, the delimitation also included a specific period of time whereby the dependent and independent variables were most observable. Following this internal logic, the prime group of informants was those who continuously got in (direct or indirect) contact with public security sector actors and as a result, may or may not have been affected by an increasing sense of militarisation. This delimitation allowed for a wide and varied set of informants concerning the profession and lived experience, while simultaneously excluding actors with little to no experience of the public security sector.

However, as identified during the process, the original construction of the interview guide had to be adjusted to mainly emphasise riot police and maintenance units of law enforcement. Such adjustments had to be done as none of the respondents had any perceptions concerning militarisations impact on units such as traffic police or other specific units. In forming the interview guide, the identification of actors greatly assisted in which variables needed to be addressed.

The criteria of inclusion thus emphasised relevant profession, level of engagement in the protest(s), proximity to the public security sector and strong (and potentially divisive) opinions regarding the role of traditional law enforcement, riot police and military. What became apparent through the process, nonetheless, was the separation of various police units. As such, the delimitation of this particular paper can only be extrapolated to the crisis unit and

riot unit. Following this, variables such as specific age[35] and ethnicity were not accounted for and are as a result outside the scope of this particular paper. Although recognised as significant in fostering a more comprehensive perspective and thus necessitating additional investigation, no discernible association was found between the variables and privileged violence (Kleinfeld, 2019) or CMR in the particular case of Colombia (Hincapié, 2017:77). Furthermore, in the forming of the original research proposal, the gendered dimension was not accounted for. With the duration of the interview process, however, these dynamics began to be viewed as increasingly essential in explaining the experiences of the research subjective as it related to the security sector. Despite being incompletely examined, the topic of gender concerning the nexus of militarism and privileged violence is a thought-provoking area that warrants valuable exploration in future research.

Originally, the scope of the paper only covered informants with experiences from urban areas. Nevertheless, with the duration of the research, and as a clear division in rural and urban experiences began to emerge, this scope was extended to also include the voices of rural citizens. However, the delimitation only allowed for informants that were in Colombia during the time of protests in 2019 and 2021. Seeing as the paper also seeks to establish an account of the potential transformation of the public security sector since the peace agreement of 2016, this paper only included experiences that were formed during this period. The reasoning stems from the fact that knowledge production is viewed as being highly socially situated, and as such tends to shift with societal developments (Muvingi & Duckworth, in Cooper, 2015:93). To emphasise only the most relevant data, decisions were thus made to increase the depth rather than the width of the sample.

5 Findings

A qualitative approach to data collection involved in-depth interviews with key stakeholders as identified in the previous section, such as government official(s), military personnel, police officer, civil society leaders and community members. The study aims to explore the perceptions, attitudes and experiences of these stakeholders regarding the role of the security sector in balancing the maintenance of public safety and protecting the right to protest. This divide in capacities is related particularly to the interactions with civil society organisations and grassroots protest movements such as, but not limited to, 'la Primera Linea'.

As such, to lay the groundwork for further analysis this process involved participant inquiry and document analysis to gather a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between Colombia's security- and civil sectors. The findings of the study should clarify certain challenges and opportunities for the collaborative or competitive nature of these

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[35] Although general trends that emerged which can be associated with a generational divide are accounted for in the analysis.

sectors, as well as the perceived barriers which impede effective partnerships and trust-building efforts. The outline adheres principally to the civil-military relations (CMR) built upon in-between the two sectors.

This chapter outlines the major findings to emerge throughout the various interview sessions and in subsequent reports and forums to answer the research questions as first introduced in chapter 1.1.2. To assure a high degree of anonymity, the subsequent section will refer to each respondent as INTW-1 to INTW-14, categorised in the Appendix according to their respective unit or organisation.

5.1 Active- & Passive Participants of Social Mobilisation

The main body of data collected throughout the research process is closely related to the experiences of participants of the protests in 2019 and 2021. However, to attain a comprehensive viewpoint on the protests as enduring collective actions, third-party actors were consulted to identify the potential discrepancies or congruences between internal and external perceptions and attitudes. To compare the differences between the two, the informants were asked to provide their experiences to identify how this may have varied depending on their geographical location, social status or political orientation. Such variables were then taken into consideration within the context altogether to see how the trend fit into the overall narrative.

One of these passive participants, a young student who recently left Colombia, describes a situation in which the protest(s) of 2021 was more severe than those in 2019 (INTW-6). While the research subject never became directly involved in the protest, they describe a situation in which the social movements still impacted the daily lives of anyone in the urban centres: *"... a lot of the conversation was around the fact that now a lot of their [non-participators] lives were affected by the protests... There was a lot of anger [surrounding this]."* (INTW-6).

The research subject goes on to explain a situation in which proximity to the events influenced the general discourse. What the informant (INTW-6) describes is a type of *"black and white depiction in the narrative"* whereby those with a more privileged background, including socioeconomic advantaged, tended to be more probable to consume mainstream media, which was less critical of the status quo and the government's actions. Meanwhile, those from the lower classes relied on alternative sources of information which usually described the security sector as *"one-dimensional monsters"*. As one informant partaking in the 2021 protest put it: *"... instead of trying to come to a middle ground and compromise, they were trying to incite the polarisation that [was] going on even more."* (INTW-12) concerning these political figures and media personalities. What they describe as a direct consequence of

this is an environment in which police brutality almost can be understood as a "smokescreen" for the real societal issues, as explained further:

> *"So you are [either] in favour of the 'looters' or you are in favour of the police. That's a frame which is unfortunate. Because even for me, it's not [...] protesters against the police, [...] the police force [are] just like the tools that are used to basically repress [...] the grievances that we are trying to put forth."* (INTW-9)

Such a sentiment seemingly overlaps with the thematic codes of the other protesters (INTW-8;12) as well as the bystander (INTW-6). What the latter describes as an overall lack of *"critical thinking"* on the part of the protesters regarding the perception of the security forces, the former rather emphasises how *"... our conception of security [...] stems from a very stupid way of understanding the concept."* (INTW-12). This seemingly stems from a lack of consensus on the questions regarding security (a) by who; (b) from what and; (c) for what purpose. Depending on the social location of the informant, the answer to all of these questions varied. Certain demonstrators, predominantly students (INTW-8;9), recognised the need for collective security as a means of *"challenging the status quo"* and *"guarding against state repression"* accordingly. Conversely, the bystanders occasionally expressed a demand for state protection from the protesters, to preserve their routine activities and prevent any disruptions, exclaiming that *"There was a lot of anger about the damaging of public transport [...] and protesters damaging shops"* (INTW-6). Although there was a divergence in the general reaction to the involvement of the police, military, and the ESMAD during the period of social mobilisation, it was generally acknowledged that a deterioration in the relationship among these entities ensued as their presence progressively intensified.

In all cases, the informants that had an active role in the protest reported that they had experienced at least some semblance of negative interaction with the public security sector during either 2019 or 2021. Additionally, accounts provided by multiple sources (INTW-4;8;9) suggest that individuals either (a) residing in lower 'estrato[36]' levels or (b) protesting in higher estrato levels were disproportionately affected by violent police encounters. The discourse supports a point of departure that a wider perception views the security forces as using their powers differently depending on the neighbourhood and the people they interact with. Especially concerning the ESMAD unit, they have been described within these settings as acting as "death squad" (INTW-8), "monsters" (INTW-2) and "provocateurs of violence" (INTW-9). When asked about the unit, the various participants were unanimous in the view that they act in the limbo between police and military, using the tools of the latter within the traditional environment of the former. One interviewee recalled a situation whereby:

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[36] The term "estratos" refers to a socioeconomic classification system that divides households and neighbourhoods into various levels (*strata*) dependent on living conditions, income and access to public services. Estrato 1-2 is characterised by poverty; alternatively low-income families. Estrato 3-5 concerns middle-class to upper-middle-class citizens; whereby estrato 6 includes the highest socio-economic level of influence (Idler, 2021).

"Then there was the ESMAD behind us. [...] They had been lined up along the street as we walked up, and [at first] they seemed to be taking care of things. But then [once we had passed] they came up behind us and in front of us… When suddenly… they start gassing straight at us." (INTW-9).

What the informant is describing is a normal military strategy of encirclement whereby an enemy force or target is isolated and surrounded. When asked if the informant believed this was a recurrent strategy used by the ESMAD, they elaborated that *"... they're not interested in protecting, they're not interested in keeping things calm. They're interested in attacking us."* (INTW-9). This view was further echoed by another student who partook in the protest in 2021, saying:

"We were all just protesting peacefully [...] when it, I don't know… it was all chaos. I remember a flash-bang [grenade] kind of went off right next to me out there. There was so much tear gas everywhere. It was hard to see. It was hard to breathe… the ESMAD [were] going through the streets and like, basically either rounding up people or just messing them up" (INTW-8)

A significant proportion of the protesters concurred with the assertion that the police, particularly the ESMAD, functioned as an exogenous factor, thereby mainly enabling endogenous variables such as *"violence"* (INTW-2), *"mass hysteria"* (INTW-8) and *"chaos"* (INTW-9) during the demonstrations. The overall perception converges in a setting whereby (a) peaceful protests turn violent once ESMAD engages or (b) vandalism or tension is exponentially amplified by their presence. The research subjects all contributed to a grand narrative in which the negative influencer remains the ESMAD. Some felt that the unit failed to achieve its overall purpose (INTW-2), while others considered that the ESMAD is highly effective to the extent that *"... they are useful for what they're meant [to do], which intimidation and suppression"* (INTW-8). There were some suggestions that this is formulated in the mandate of the unit, whereby *"... ESMAD [is] immediately confrontational because they're not equal to us in [neither] strength [or] equipment [...] and they can murder freely [as a result] of what they're responsible for"* (INTW-9). This dynamic has shown to be prone to alteration in relation to a gendered and intersectional dimension as well, whereby one health worker who also partook in the protest claimed:

"You find that sexual assaults and rapes here, due to the internal conflict, are perpetrated to a huge degree by them... By military and police and state actors [such as ESMAD]. So that type of precedent will, of course, tend to make a huge difference between the encounters of these actors with a group of women or a variety of people [...] it definitely has a gender connection." (INTW-13)

These experiences are not outliers either. Of all the women that partook in the research process, all claimed to have at least a certain sense of varied relationship with the security sector due to their gender. One interviewee argued that *"[as a young Colombian woman] I am absolutely terrified of them"* (INTW-2). This view was echoed by another informant who shares the experience that *"the [police] have occupied a role of the oppressor… specifically how they use their power to conduct a lot of violence in terms of sexual violence"* (INTW-4). According to the participants with the closest proximity to protests, the issue of sexual

violence appears to be one of the universally acknowledged issues across partisan lines, in which the only time *"the police use the bad apple argument [is] when they were talking about sexual violence against women"* (INTW-7). This discourse alludes to the dilemma that the issue of sexual violence has had within law enforcement agencies and how it is embedded within the broader societal narrative.

The findings presented here reveal that the semantic structures of the data generated by both active and passive protesters are notably distinguished by a pervasive sense of tension and increased violence. Strong emotional outputs tended to occur with successive increases in the active participants' stories. For some, the protests represented a powerful expression of collective action against perceived injustice. Although the manifestation of extreme anger appears to be primarily associated with younger students, certain individuals engaged in human and civil rights activism who participated in the protests also exhibited similar emotional outputs.

5.2 Human- & Civil Rights Workers

To distinguish between possible experiences with the security sector, additional voices from the human- and civil rights sectors have been amplified in this chapter both to cover their unique experiences and also of those who they represent. To that extent, NGOs working with the peace process, victims of the conflict, reconciliation and marginalised communities and indigenous peoples were sought out to determine any significant deviation in the way the relationship is formed with the security sector compared to other control groups. One such experience was presented by a journalist (INTW-7) working with human rights, describing their experience with the police in particular as *"... using excessive force not only [towards] journalists but [towards] other human rights defenders [as well]..."*. The journalist (INTW-7) exemplifies such claims with a story in which a cultural event in Cali during 2021 was interrupted by police and ESMAD, whereby the latter *"... started shooting their gas canisters [...] for no reason"*. In such an environment those who advocated for human rights were predominantly targeted and subsequently arrested or assaulted, according to the testament.

Such a sentiment is reflected in the grander narrative as well. One human rights coordinator were expressing a context in which a sense of fear for violent reprisals was omnipresent but especially present *"... when the lights went out. [Then] we didn't feel safe to be out."* (INTW-10) When asked to clarify if these fears were mainly towards rioters and criminals, or mainly security actors, the research subject (INTW-10) used the following storytelling device: *There's this saying [...] that if you're walking down a street [at night] and there's a homeless person on one side and a police officer on the other [...] you would definitely go to the side of the homeless person"*. Such a construction of the narrative implies not only a systematic and

widespread distrust towards the security sector but more importantly a reinforcement of a perception of how security actors operate and on behalf of who.

What may be highlighted in the stories is a recurring belief that security actors have operated indiscriminately and as a direct consequence have infringed on what the informants term *"protected spaces"* (INTW-12). Such a theme of infringement of protected spaces is evident in the first statement (INTW-7), whereby the police were using excessive force towards human rights defenders and journalists during low-risk settings such as cultural gatherings. Additionally, the fear of the police operating outside their mandate to the detriment of the polity is exacerbated by the second circulated story (INTW-10).

Furthermore, one civil rights worker describes an *"... instance in which teargas ended up inside the premises of [a] hospital [and university] ... [those] should be protected space[s] and those barriers of protection were just falling apart due to the ESMAD..."* (INTW-12). With this occasion, the research subject virtually attributes characteristics of a theatre-of-war to non-militarised settings of interaction. Such logic is further elaborated upon by one of the research subjects working in close proximity with the security sector:

> *"... the enemy isn't outside of the country, it's inside... [An] internal enemy. Such is the discourse that they teach the military and the police [...] Before the internal enemy was very specific, but [since the peace agreement] it's very diverse and the internal enemy can [all of a sudden] be a student, [or] a person who doesn't fit into the patterns of society. That has [other characteristics] in terms of sexuality [...] in terms of politics, in terms of the view of life. So they start identifying you by the way you look."* (INTW-3).

What the research subject goes on to argue is that following the peace agreement, there has been a perceived shift in the lines between police and military, with a certain emphasis on the identification of the "internal enemy". Such a conceptualisation can seemingly encompass various characteristics such as deviating sexuality, politics and ideology. This would suggest a shift towards a more comprehensive definition of what defines an "enemy", which has blurred the traditional boundaries between the roles and mandates of police and military concerning rules of engagement (ROE). In understanding these complex dynamics between police, military and the civilian population it is consequently implied that an increase in asymmetrical violence and militarisation of the institutions may have had potential negative ramifications for CMR.

When raising the issue with an informant from within the civil rights sector (INTW-12), what emerges is a theme whereby *"... youth is [...] in between not completely settled groups [...] from the perspective of traditional values, morals [...] [and is not able] to incorporate itself to a productive superstructure."*. They go on to state that *"what the police [as a result] is tasked to do [...] is to conduct such groups towards a more productive way of being part of the society [...] because these marginalised groups have something in common, the fact that they*

don't belong to [...] the scheme of society and the police [as a result] keeps them in check." (INTW-12). Such statements correspond with several experiences expressed throughout the research process whereby multiple marginalised groups, such as LGBTQI+ (INTW-3), refugees (INTW-13), youth (INTW-2) and socioeconomically disadvantaged (INTW-7), have been noted as having expressed heightened negative memories of the security forces. Such an interaction does not seem to be simple deviations either, as described by a human rights actor operating in Bogotá:

> *"[The] sort of an entity you could call an [...] "inner enemy", that enemy can be either configured through the figure of an outlier in mental health scenarios. So a person who is suffering from a mental breakdown can be configured into an enemy. [A] moral enemy. But you could say the same thing about somebody who's protesting [...] or a sex worker [...] or a homeless person."* (INTW-12).

What then emerges, according to the informant, is a restrictive conceptualisation of how the inner enemy is constructed in the moral imagination[37] across Colombian society. Rather than adhering to the traditional entity as outlined in military doctrine (Quintero Cordero, 2021:21), the research subject testifies about a recurring trend in which the concept of the enemy has evolved into a moral issue rather than purely relating to the state's ability to deal with risks and hazards. The moral component of security thus embeds security actors such as the police not simply as agents of law and order but as being responsible for *"... regulating the moral background or moral space [one is] allowed to occupy as a society"* (INTW-12). The reinforcement of such a narrative would, according to the experience of one research subject operating in the Buenaventura region *"risk increasing police brutality as a result of discrimination and stereotypes"* (INTW-10).

This view was further echoed by another informant (INTW-13) who has been working with health services in indigenous communities since the peace agreement. To the extent that it affects groups on the margins of society, the informant finds that units such as *"... ESMAD is trying to keep everything under control. Not necessarily in regard to security. But protecting private interests. Such as the banks and offices, and everything those things represent."* The police's role in maintaining a status quo and protecting the state's interests would come at the expense of marginalised groups. This would imply a vagueness concerning how the discourse of the internal enemy is constructed, but paradoxically suggests an operational clarity in what is recognised as the referent object which the enemy threatens.

What then started to emerge in the narrative of the research subjects can be summarised by the following excerpt from a human rights journalist:

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[37] The moral imagination of society refers as the capacity to imagine and generate creative responses to interpersonal conflicts that are grounded in ethical considerations and subsequently promotes justice and empathy for all parties involved (Lederach, 2004).

> *"...we started to see that the idea of the police and the high officers were treating everything as war [...] their strategies was actually [to treat the protest] as war, and many times this became very problematic in Cali. They saw social unrest as war [...] reacted as if it was active warfare."* (INTW-7)

The thematic cues of the human rights journalist (INTW-7) suggest that the police and high-ranking officers were approaching the protests of 2021 with a militaristic attitude, perceiving the movements as a form of warfare. Such a frame may have influenced their operational strategies, whereby protesters are treated as enemies in a setting of war rather than citizens exercising their right to protest. This is further supported by the experiences of actors working in Bogotá, Cali and the rural Cauca region. The framing tended to follow the narrative as expressed by one of these prominent human rights workers, expressing how *"They always saw the people in the streets as enemies"* (INTW-1) Such expectations ostensibly form the interaction between the civilian population and the security sector. Several of the research subjects express similar opinions regarding the police, riot police and military. What is apparent throughout these stories is the attribution of personal agency. In cases whereby violence erupted, such development was attributed to the presence of ESMAD. Whereas no violence erupted, this was explained by the absence of security actors. Nevertheless, such an interpretation of events appears restrictive in its explanatory power. Rather, as expressed by one human rights worker *"[What] all these marginalised groups have in common… [is] being able to be easily categorised as the enemy [...] as [needing to be] dealt with violently by the police"* (INTW-3).

The construction of narrative and use of language seems to depict a setting whereby general protesters may be viewed as potential criminals, but marginalised participants rather as a type of (moral) enemy. One such sentiment is reflected in the experiences of the civil rights worker (INTW-12) who expresses that *"… it is very telling of what we think endangers us. And it also tells a lot about how we deal with that danger posed by fringe members of society and marginalised groups…"*. It would thus seem that the ROE varies depending on how the threat is conceptualised within the overall moral imagination. A major proportion of participants (INTW-3;4;13) seemingly agreed with such a statement, with one particular case (INTW-7) exclaiming that particular units such as the ESMAD are *"…brainwashed into [believing that] stuff like this [referring to protests] is a war."* In socioeconomically disadvantaged areas in Cali, they go on: *"The military went into residential areas and just started shooting. Using military vehicles and equipment."*

So far, it has been argued that as increasingly militarised language appears, violence as a mechanism for conflict resolution becomes progressively probable. A recurring example within the sample is that of Cali: *"... the situation in Cali was especially hard [...] there was a general perception that Cali was under siege and that they, the middle-upper class, were in danger because the lower classes were going to invade."* (INTW-10).

This language of war, describing events with terms such as "under siege" and "invade" is a constant presence in the discourses used when discussing the events of 2019 and 2021, especially in Cali. Often cited characterisations of events in 2021 included keywords such as *"civil war"* (INTW-7) and *"class warfare"* (INTW-10). Militarism within the discourse thus not only seems to influence the chronology of security actors but also the way the overall paradigm is shaped after the understanding of events as existing primarily within the sphere of military engagement. Even in situations whereby the research subjects described acts of vigilantism, it was still related to a militaristic framing of events. In describing a situation whereby middle-upper- to upper-class citizens started arming themselves and attacking protesters, one informant expressed that *"the situation got… very dangerous because civil[ians] started shooting as well … [it felt as if we were] at the brink of civil war"* (INTW-7). Another respondent working within the human rights sector, who has since left Colombia due to security concerns, evidently agrees stating that: *"It was only one step behind a military occupation [...] It was scary to see soldiers on the street acting as police"* (INTW-1). Attributing such events to a militaristic modus operandi indicates a certain intersection between civic affairs and security enforcement.

Furthermore, experiences from this period go on to display how this militaristic terminology reflected everyday life. Both concerning protesters and the aforementioned vigilantes, the stories the informants shared evoke an image of events as being highly influenced by asymmetrical power dynamics. Some of the research subjects expressed that they had *"found evidence that the police had hired [...] a group of young people from low socioeconomic backgrounds [...] and then took them to middle-upper class neighbourhoods [to] attack these people"* (INTW-10), while others were considering that *"they [the citizens] started shooting the protesters [...] it was mayhem [...] the police were with them [as] they [were] shooting the protesters"* (INTW-1). In conjunction, such statements appear to give merit to the argument that the security forces were there to *"reinforce that narrative that lower class people are going to attack these [higher class] people"* (INTW-9).

What emerges from the results reported here is that all actors, to various degrees, have expressed a negative relationship with the security sector, be it the police, ESMAD or the military. Some have expressed direct consequences from this interaction, ranging from associates losing their eyesight due to violent clashes with the ESMAD (INTW-1;2), to others being severely injured by being shot by shock grenades and gas canisters (INTW-7). Others have noted a trend whereby the proactive nature of the unit's violent conflict management measures has contributed to the aforementioned culture of fear. (INTW-3;4) In such an

environment, it would appear a sense of learned helplessness[38] has developed. As one interviewee put it: *"There's no cause that is worth following Too many people have died, and nothing has changed"* (INTW-2). Commenting on the intersection between social class and the possibility of being part of such a process of potential change, one of the interviewees said *"... you shouldn't have to kill rich people just to get the attention of society…"* (INTW-12) as a reaction to the perceived bias of the ESMAD in solely holding responsibility for the assault of citizens belonging to the more affluent social station.

Another interviewee, when asked whether they believed an adjustment of particular sections of the security sector could be part of the solution, said: *"I think [...] the boundaries between one another [security sector] is becoming increasingly blurred. So no."* (INTW-1). Such a sentiment reflects an expectation that limited SSR in itself is not sufficient and that the indistinguishable character of the various departments is part of a larger institutional design. Despite divergent assessments concerning the most effective solution to deteriorating CMR, the following remark exemplifies a persistent theme shared by the stakeholders consulted during the interview phase: *"They [the previous administration] were trying to change the perception of the police. [So] they changed their uniforms. [However], that's not going to change their actions."* (INTW-10).

5.3 Security Actors

Before proceeding to examine the findings and analyse their implications, it is crucial to view militarisation as a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that has been a prominent feature of Colombia's security landscape for a long time. This requires the exploration of the perspectives of Colombian security actors, including military and police officers, as well as other relevant stakeholders, such as experts and politicians. The initial assumption for such a point of departure includes a belief that militarisation often is perceived as a necessary response to the country's long-standing internal armed conflict.

One former Colonel (INTW-5), explaining the mandate of the Ministry of Defence stated that: *"The Colombian military is there solely for the protection of Colombian sovereignty. And the police are for the safety of constituents within the states, the cities, the regions in the country."* and further added that *"as a result of [the successes in] lowering the violence, there is a higher increase in people [being able to] expressing lack of social equality, especially in regards to poverty.".* What is most telling then is perhaps the emphasis on how the military training, equipment and resources that militarisation provides, have enabled the military to access the necessary tools and capabilities to mainly restore and maintain the security for the

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[38] A state of mind that develops as a consequence of experiences with repeatedly stressful situations. Correspondingly, a belief emerges in which the subject concludes that nothing can change the situation — even as opportunities for change may emerge (Taylor, 2016:147).

populace. In this instance, the informant related it, especially to the population's possibility to express discontent through social mobilisation. The research subject thus claims a positive causal linkage between militarisation and professionalisation of the armed forces in allowing citizens greater opportunities to express civil liberties without risk of crime or violence.

Another respondent (INTW-11), working as a security consultant and active politician, alluded to this notion of maintaining a certain level of directed violence to control larger moments from becoming ungovernable. The informant expressed that: *"... the use of force is not synonymous with shooting at whoever comes your way and repression and ignoring human rights, etc [...] but to a certain point, to maintain control"*. In the case of protests, the participant concluded that there should be a clear distinction between protesters and criminals, stating that:

> *"I think what they [are] doing is criminal regardless. I mean, you can enter the discussion of whether it's legitimate if they have a reason or not. I think that matters little. I think that when you're looking at crime, it doesn't depend on who's the perpetrator. It's just the behaviour [...] That is illegal. I think that most of their actions in the context of the national strike are illegal and are criminal in terms of their behaviour, [...] I think they started as a genuine social movement [...]But I do think that very soon, as it is usually in Colombia [...) criminals profited from that social discontent and exploited it"* (INTW-11).

Acknowledging the challenges and complexities associated with the issue, the research subject goes on to explain that more severe strategies for crime prevention may be one of the few temporary measures that can restore stability and security (INTW-11). Additionally, the argument is established in the assumption that the goal should be creating an environment conducive to non-military solutions, as a viable option in the face of persistent security threat(s). Another respondent, who at the time of both major protests was working as a police officer in Bogotá, developed the argument that: *"Our reality is that our culture, again, without regard to socioeconomic status, race, ideologies, that we are a violent society. And for that and for the number of riots and the use of force from civil society that we see, [that] an entire riot force is necessary."* (INTW-14). This sentiment was reflected by subsequent security actors (INTW-5;11;14) who partook in the interviews, and even though they agreed the police force had been militarised, this did not have to imply a negative development:

> *"We don't see the military or police going into neighbourhoods to [conduct] such operations, we don't see the military just patrolling entire cities like in other countries [...] I would say that between the military and the police, there's a very clear distinction between and even some competition between them"* (INTW-14).

In one particular instance, the respondent (INTW-14) emphasised how the: *"Improved training and use of better weapons by police officials, as a result of [...] previous connections with the military, [have] led to an overall improvement in defensive tactics"* contributing to a public net good. The more militarised training and tools of units such as the ESMAD should thus be likened, as also expressed by the former Colonel (INTW-5) to those of the British;

German and; American counterparts. The paradigm shift of the Colombian security regime has thus followed international standards and should not be understood as deviating from norms or regulations. As such, the respondent wanted to emphasise that: *"It is important to note that [...] members who did commit acts [of violence] against the protesters have been arrested and investigated and going through a judicial process"*. Such a process is especially related to ESMAD officers, but also the police in general. This issue is worsened by the perception that crisis police officers, including ESMAD, and military personnel are frequently from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds themselves, resulting in limited prospects for social and economic advancement. Consequently, they may thus rely on these professions for their livelihoods, reinforcing their reliance on them:

> *"In Colombia… being a police officer, or in ESMAD or in the army [...] you have no other option of living [...] these are normal men [who] come from very poor backgrounds [...] the police as an institution is a very lower-middle-class institution and it depends so much on [...] poor people not being able to get an education and then they come to the police [as a result]."* (INTW-14).

The research participant in this context presents a portrayal of the police, ESMAD and military that aims to humanise these institutions. The prevailing discourses pertaining to ESMAD are characterised as deeply divisive, with media and specific political actors often allegedly *"scapegoating the unit during times of civil unrest."* (INTW-14). Elaborating on this issue: *" I think that [referring to partisan rhetoric] builds upon this image of the ESMAD as [being] monsters."*. Nevertheless, the informant agrees that in Colombia there exists a very peculiar relationship between the security sector and the public: *"The police in particular in being legitimate, [that] does require a reform in the approach to citizens"*. This is a theme to emerge among all security actors interviewed, whereby there is an agreement that to achieve strategies that enhance their capacity to combat crime and violence effectively, reform would be required.

One respondent summarised the current debate in the following way: *"To improve the lives of people that are wearing the uniform and to improve the perception that citizens have towards them [a] discussion of changing the ministry [would be] cosmetic and pretty much irrelevant for the problems that we need to solve."* (INTW-11). This embrace of the Ministry of Defence is a clear deviation from previous accounts as expressed in the findings section. As will be further explained in the analysis chapter, such a divide will be crucial in understanding the current dynamics of militarisation and its effect on CMR.

5.4 Primary Data: Forum(s)

Historically, Colombia can thus be attributed to having a complicated relationship with its security forces due to past human rights violations and corruption which still forms contemporary perceptions of the sector. Such a narrative was reflected on the discussion board

and forum(s) during 2019 and 2021. Following this, results and trends which emerged from these periods of social unrest and protest(s) include widespread criticism of the police, ESMAD and the military, especially in cases in which excessive use of force, extrajudicial killings, and human rights abuses emerged in various media channels. Incidents that sparked particular public outrage on these forums revolved around the death of Dilan Cruz[39] and the killing of Javier Ordoñez[40].

The deliberation surrounding these circumstances formed a general trend whereby expressions of dissatisfaction with the security forces frequently emerged. Such expressions of disapproval repeatedly used hashtags such as #NoMásESMAD[41] (FP04;06;11) and #PolicíaAsesina[42] (FP05;07) to denounce police brutality and demand accountability. In conjunction with this, phrases such as "*Dicen que estamos en paz. No nos sentimos en paz*" (FP02) emerged as one of the more prominently used, translating closely to "*They say we are at peace. We do not feel at peace*". Other users criticised the government's handling of the security situation in the country, calling for reforms and greater transparency in the security sector. Regarding the ESMAD, many users on Reddit describe them as the "*Squadron of Murderers*" (FP05;06;07) who the government has sent out to "*solve all our social demands at the wrong end of a gun*" (FP11). Another user (FP03) commented on a video of two ESMAD officers striking down protesters from a motorcycle with the description #LosJinetesdelApocalipsis[43].

Nevertheless, it is also crucial to note that such opinions on the security forces are not monolithic. What also emerges in the general debate is a concern regarding the promotion of security and the voices of those who show their support of the police, ESMAD and military. Such users (FP12;13) view the government's response and argue that the police and military are necessary for the maintenance of order and protection of both citizens and businesses during protests. Such statements included the Chamber of Commerce (FP09/C) which proclaimed their "*... support [for the] actions of the ESMAD in controlling and dispersing violent protesters who seek to disrupt the peace and safety of our citizens.*", a sentiment many within the debate agreed with (FP10;12;13). This particular finding, however, should not be extrapolated to the entire sample. It should be interpreted with caution as the original statement no longer remains Online. Nonetheless, seeing as it provided an instrument for the noted discussion, it is still included as a thematic cue.

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[39] A Colombian teenager who was hit in the head by a projectile fired by the ESMAD during a protest demanding better access to education (Sung *et al.*, 2022:321).
[40] A middle-aged man who, according to an UN-backed report, was tortured and subsequently murdered by police officers while in their custody (Amnesty International, 2021:20).
[41] Which translate closely to "No More ESMAD".
[42] Which translates closely to "Killer Police".
[43] This is seemingly a reference to the four horsemen of the apocalypse, signals of the world's end.

Users who adhered to the aforementioned logic tended to argue that they had witnessed protesters engaging in direct violence or vandalism (FP10;12). As such, the description of the event applied here tended to follow a rhetoric whereby protesters mainly are breaking the law and should, consequently, be held accountable for their actions.

Such a narrative of violence, vandalism and accountability was especially reflected in the rhetoric of Centro Democrático[44] during the protests of 2019 (FP01/G) and 2021 (FP08/G). What is interesting to note is how the rhetoric evolved with the duration of time. Whereby statements[45] originated as a condemnation of the *"[...] acts of vandalism and violence committed by some protesters during the demonstrations, while also acknowledging the right of citizens to peacefully protest and express their discontent,"* (FP01/G), it transformed into the Presidents expressing their governments' *"[...] solidarity with the police and armed forces, while condemning the acts of violence committed by protesters during the demonstrations."* (FP08/G). Such a development of partisan rhetoric is particularly interesting as it is also reflected on the forums. Whereby the discourse in 2019 more closely is associated with that of the Centro Democrático's statement of the time, this seemingly evolved in conjunction over time. Users back in 2019 tended to discuss the more violent aspects of the protests with videos of looters and rioters. In 2021, this seemingly changed to a more polarised narrative in which *"left-wing politicians are inciting violence during the protests, and are trying to destabilise the government [of President Duque]"* (FP13).

5.5   Secondary Data: Colombian Truth & Reconciliation Commission

Before proceeding to examine the implications of the findings so far, it is crucial to examine some general trends to emerge in the recently published report(s) by the Colombian Truth & Reconciliation Commission. Some particularly relevant statements and witnesses were extracted and cross-examined to further triangulate the first-hand accounts of both research subjects as well as those discussed online. As these reports thoroughly cover issues which either (a) caused, (b) emerged as a consequence of, or (c) in the direct aftermath of the intrastate protracted conflict, the focus of this section has been delimited to only cover accounts related to the topic of militarisation. What follows is thus different (translated) accounts of experiences with police, riot police or the military and the effects of militarism. One such account originates from a young protester partaking in the 2019 protests: *"The police threw tear gas at us and started beating us with their batons. They dragged me by my hair and threw me into the police van."* (Castillejo-Cuéllar *et al.*, 2022:204).

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[44] The political party of former President Duque (2018-2022).
[45] The statements by President Duque and Centro Democrático tended to be highly in influencial in establishing divisive discussions on the message board, which was noted as many comments had since been removed due to "breaking forum rules"

Interestingly, the narrative that the subject draws upon in this instance establishes a setting of asymmetrical violence with a clear victim (protesters) and perpetrator (police). The testament relates to several action verbs, predominantly as it relates to the subject. What is telling is that these are solely attributed to the police. These action verbs thus explain things done to the subject (the protester), while omitting any details of what these might have been doing within the setting at that time. Such rhetoric constructs an environment in which the protesters are the protagonist of the story, while the police are viewed as an antagonist. This is further elaborated upon by a student partaking in the protests in 2021: *"The riot police were like a wall of shields and helmets. They advanced towards us with batons and tear gas, and they beat us without mercy. They didn't care that we were peaceful protesters, they treated us like criminals."* (de Roux *et al*., 2022:191).

Regarding such a statement, what becomes apparent is the formation of the storytelling device(s) and how this positions the subject in it. Not only does the witness form a distinct "us" meaning the protesters and "them" as a derogatory implication of the ESMAD, but through discourse devices, or rather the linguistic tools employed by the witness, it is also framed that protesters are victims and the riot police as perpetrators. Such a formation is particularly evident when the research subject externally ascribes the point of view of the ESMAD – that they viewed protesters as criminals. Such a point of departure is not restricted to the ESMAD either, as expressed by a human rights activist with insight into the internal dynamics of the police: *"The militarisation of the police has only made things worse. They don't know how to deal with social conflicts in a peaceful way, so they resort to violence. They see us as enemies, not as citizens who have the right to protest."* (de Roux *et al*., 2022:259).

This quote is remarkable to the extent that it relates to previous claims made in the report. Rather than referring to a specific event in time, the human rights activist refers to an overlying process of militarisation. The linguistic tool used to construct this discourse further elaborates on the narrative form in the previous quote. The construction of the sentence puts a certain emphasis on the way the state, allegedly, views them as enemies rather than citizens. Such development takes additional steps from the prior comparison of "*... we were peaceful protesters, they treated us like criminals.*". Instead of constructing their role within the story as criminals, the subject rather positions themselves as individuals who are perceived as adversaries of the state. In such a framing, it is increasingly effortless to expressions of violence, as presented by one of the many lawyers representing victims of police violence: *"The use of military tactics by the police has led to a culture of impunity. They know that they can get away with murder because they are protected by the state. This has created a climate of fear and mistrust between the police and the population."* (Martín Beristain *et al*., 2022:245).

What emerges in this construction of social reality can almost be comparable to a pervasive atmosphere of anxiety and fear. Such a described culture of fear, whereby the respondents are constantly worried about their safety and security, seems interlinked to a range of behaviours which motivates counterreaction such as increased security measures. One of the key features within this narrative, thus, seems to be the way fear is allegedly perpetuated and amplified by various institutions and individuals, such as politicians and high-ranking officers. What the lawyer is describing appears to be an overall breakdown in social trust and cohesion. This construction of social reality appears to categorise the relationship between sectors as one in which fear may be exaggerated or manipulated to keep people in a constant state of alarm. As stated by a rural community leader who has been advocating for police reform, this at times comes at odds with the current form of their mandate: *"The militarisation of the police is not the solution to our problems. We need a police force that is trained to respect human rights and that works in partnership with the community. We need to build trust between the police and the people they serve."* (de Roux *et al*., 2022:448).

Expanding on the logic proposed by the previous witness this community leader seemingly describes a similar situation in which social trust and cohesion have degraded to a point where it negatively impacts any form of partnership building between sectors. Interesting to note in this case is the way the subject positions themselves in the narrative with the police. Rather than apply discursive devices to form a hostile narrative, the subject incorporates the role which both police and community may fill in engaging in productive dialogue and cooperation. Especially interesting in such a case is the notion of the current modus operendi, as described by a police officer working during the 2021 protests: *"We were ordered to clear the area, and we did so using force. I saw protesters being beaten and arrested, but I was just following orders."* (Ganem Maloof *et al.,* 2022:245).

Comparing the results so far, and what emerges from this quote is particularly relevant to the scope of this study as it provides an interesting insight into the perspective of the security forces. What the riot police officer is describing in this instance is both a firsthand account of government-sponsored violence and the usual dissociation from any misconduct through a non-active role in the narrative of just "following order". The construction of the narrative thus seemingly distances the subject from the actions of the institution, meaning some level of malpractice is acknowledged while not necessarily being internalised. Such findings are subsequently supported by the recommendations of the report, acknowledging that: *"The militarisation of the police has resulted in a conception of the social protest as an enemy that must be defeated, generating a climate of polarisation and confrontation that has obstructed the possibility of dialogue and negotiation"* (de Roux *et al*., 2022:222*).*

Taken together, these results suggest an association between militarisation and an increase in the excessive use of violence towards civilians. The main stakeholders in this co-creation of an overall narrative appear to support the assessment that a widespread perception of militarisation has influenced the institution's capacities. These analytical procedures and the implications of the findings obtained from them are subsequently described in the following chapter.

6 Analysis

The purpose of this chapter is to analyse the perceptions regarding the changes in the roles of the police and military and their impact on civil-military relations (CMR), in the context of the post-peace agreement setting. It examines perceptions regarding any adjustments in their functions, responsibilities and relationships with other actors especially during the demonstrations. Additionally, it explores whether there is any perception of increased asymmetrical violence and militarisation of the police and constabularisation of the military in the post-peace agreement setting, especially based on the experiences of marginalised groups. The chapter thus sets out to address the research questions outlined in section 1.3. Furthermore, it investigates the potential impact of changes in the relationship between the police/military and civilians dependent on expressions, or lack thereof, of trust, cooperation and communication between these groups.

The analysis also incorporates the perception(s) of increased coercion, privilege violence or other forms of tension between the police/military and Colombian civilians in the post-peace agreement period, with particular emphasis on the years 2019 and 2021. Whereas the findings indicate negative developments in CMR, the analysis investigates how the perception of riot police has been constructed throughout the civilian population and how this compares to their mission mandate. Additionally, it compares the experiences of the respondent with the institutional design of the military, as described by the former Colonel. Thereby examining whether there is a discrepancy between the expected roles and responsibilities of the institutions as per their mission mandate, and the actual perception of behaviour towards civilians. Consequently, this would have wider implications for security in the context of social mobilisation, marginalised communities, expression of social grievances and the right to protest.

The analysis concludes by examining whether there has been a trend towards using military tactics, strategies and equipment by the police or other security forces and whether this can be likened to the level of militarisation as proposed by Sung *et al.* (2022:316). In accordance with this, the understanding posits that the process of militarisation exhibits varying degrees, as it encompasses three distinct levels. These levels comprise the militarisation of: (1) the

national law enforcement unit; (2) the militarisation of the riot police and; (3) the constabularisation of the military in non-military domains. Taken together, it provides a holistic understanding of the cross-sectoral implications of institutionalised militarism.

6.1 State-Sanctioned Violence and its Implications on How Security Actors and Protesters Perceive Themselves

When a state is granted the responsibility to apply violence to maintain and reinforce societal and moral order, without necessarily adhering to the conditions which form a contemporary state's function in compliance with civilian authority and alignment with democratic principles, this may incentivise using these tools primarily to further private interest. In the case of Colombia, such privilege violence has shown clear tendencies to influence the institution to the degree that militarisation of the security forces may be correlated to socioeconomically privileged groups allowing violence to protect economic and political power. This process has precedent, whereby the military and police have historically been used to protect the interests of certain elites, who have then used their influence to shape state policy (Gutiérrez, 2014). Even supposing democratic progress has been made to mitigate such historical developments, there remained a belief in the persisting culture of impunity throughout the sample. Both regarding state forces being sheltered from traditional legal procedures, but also concerning state-sanctioned violence in which external parties such as paramilitaries or vigilantes conduct activities or tasks on behalf of these interests.

Such an external transfer of the monopoly on violence thus has precedent both following the theoretical framework (Kleinfeld, 2019) and; more importantly – within the sample. According to the stories shared by both protesters and professionals, not only has the line between the various levels of the security sector become blurred but also the cross-sectoral ownership of the means of violence. This has contributed to a setting in which civilian vigilantes have worked in conjunction with state security forces, blurring the line between who is authorised to use force and who is not. Comparable forms of extrajudicial violence appear more prominent in contexts whereby the affiliation with the security forces is anchored in a culture of fear and cross-sectoral distrust. The relationship as expressed throughout the sample, thereby, appears highly dependent on where the subject is socially located in the societal hierarchy. The findings suggest that as most of these security agencies have become viewed by the respondents as increasingly inefficient, repressive and violent, particularly towards more marginalised groups in society, there was a notable breakdown in the CMR in the sample. Such a process was especially discernable concerning the institution(s) ability to provide security during times of protests.

The ability of the security sector to interact with the civil sphere thus appears closely interlinked with (a) how the security forces perceive the group they interact with and (b) the

usage of military tactics, strategies and equipment by the police or other security forces. What the research has found then is that whereas the perception of the group is understood through militarised rhetoric, there was an increase in the risk of reciprocal violence. Both in regard both civilians, protesters and security actors. By understanding themselves within a framing of active conflict, the experiences presented by the respondents support a setting in which violence becomes increasingly tolerable. If the institutional strategies then would encourage a *"warrior-like culture"* and supply the weaponry to support such rhetoric, it would accordingly form the way security forces interact with the public. Furthermore, if the ROE then is heavily impacted by a *"Fog of war"* effect, whereby tensions are high and access to reliable information is scarce, it would encourage the use of militarised strategies whereby they may not originally have been justified.

As expressed throughout the sample, both concerning protesters and human rights workers, the consequent impacts on CMR are immense. The successive increase of tolerable violence by all parties leads to a perceived rebalancing of power in-between civilian and military authorities. In rural settings, this was expressed as a recurring trend insofar as the forces were constabularised into non-military affairs such as the maintenance of order and control. Within the sample, such a shift has been shown to shift the self-perception of protesters in times of social unrest. It was, thereby, telling that as the security sector became increasingly viewed as militarised, the same narrative cues started to emerge on the opposite side. Contrary to civilians confronting security actors, the themes started resembling (albeit asymmetric) war stories whereas settings of protests developed into imaginative social battlefields.

Some of the issues emerging from these findings relate specifically to how the various groups have positioned themselves within the grander moral narrative. Whereby there was an attribution of violence towards protesters, the chronological sequence of events usually tended to dismiss these as rumours blamed solely on the involvement of conscripted actors. Conversely, such rhetorical devices were not employed when addressing the involvement of higher-income individuals in acts of violence and vigilantism. These differences can be explained in part by a restrictive moral imagination of the 'other'. As expressed by one informant, these moral components of behaviour are solely reserved to the in-group, and removed from *"the inner enemy"* of Colombia. The reductive construction of 'us' and 'them', thus, appears very ingrained into the general discourses used throughout the various narratives. To the extent that this inner enemy remains ambiguous, this implies a deterioration in civil-military relationship-building when empathy is solely reserved for either the protester or security actors, never both simultaneously.

6.2 Privilege Violence Enabled through Polarising Narrative(s)

There is an apparent risk that has emerged in the sample, the perception that as the military becomes more central in social issues an imbalance in power between the military and civilian authorities increases. This finding is consistent with that of Kleinfeld (2019) insofar as it relates to the state's capabilities to discourage social mobilisation primarily through targeted privilege violence, which further encourages a relationship based mainly on mutual distrust. A possible explanation for these thematic tendencies in the sample might be directly related to how a culture of fear has emerged through: (1) the construction of threat accordingly with the notion of the *"inner enemy"*; (2) subsequent intimidation to deter changes to the status quo; (3) a general sense of erosion of accountability and; (4) the dehumanising of the population through polarising narratives. Together, these four variables contribute to privilege violence insofar as they create a climate of fear through intimidation and dehumanisation which enable the use of violence and oppression against particular groups of people on the periphery of Colombian society.

The perception of the security forces appears closely associated with that of their equipment and the severity of their response. Especially relevant regarding the ESMAD during times of protest, their presence has been identified as having a negative impact both on the way security is assured within the context of social mobilisation and also on the way it frames the narrative of *"Us"* (everyday Colombians) versus *"Them"* (morally deviations). Introducing tools of warfare in such a civilian environment induces higher levels of fear and a sense of vulnerability in the sample, sometimes disproportionately to the actual threat level. To the extent that this perception informs decision-making, the overall response in the sample seems to suggest that this increases the risk of violent confrontations between state actors and protesters. Such a process is, consequently, mainly responsible for why both protesters and police view 'the other' through a framework of intimidation and suspicion – further impacting CMR.

An alternative explanation for this result was described by the police officer. The informant acknowledged that internal security priorities are closely associated with how some actors reimagine their work as *"heroic"*, especially in the way the units construct their *"camaraderie"* among themselves. Polarising narratives thus emerge from the vacuum which has replaced the intersection between the civilian and security sectors. Whereby the distance between sectors is great, and the relationship low, understanding becomes replaced by hostility as a result of misinterpretations of each other's actions. The internal dynamics of the police units can thus be a result of the erosion of civilian inclusion and accountability mechanisms, combined with a militarised narrative contributing combatant-like attributes to certain citizens. By portraying the target group as criminals, terrorists or adversaries of the

"everyday Colombian" the public becomes more inclined to accept and endorse violent actions carried out to preserve security, as proposed by the theory of privilege violence (Kleinfeld, 2019).

The dehumanisation of certain aspects of the population was especially evident during the sessions with the civil rights actors working in close proximity to the security sector. Whereby asymmetrical violence emerged in their stories, it was almost unanimously attributed within the sample to institutional intent, rather than deviations from the mandate. Such perceptions are especially consequential in the way they form the relationship between sectors. Certain deviations existed as expressed by the security actors, but widely different interpretations of events risk exacerbating the divide between the segments of society. The widespread nature of negative experiences, be it with riot police in cities such as Bogotá or Cali, or with the military[46] in rural communities, depicts an institutional design not just dependent on *"a few bad apples"*. Nevertheless, this finding should not be extrapolated to all various units within law enforcement. With this thesis sample, the findings mainly relate to the crisis unit and riot police. The exact level of militarisation of each unit deserves its focused research but is beyond the scope of this paper.

Moreover; these sets of data must be interpreted with caution because otherwise, it risks further ingraining a reductive perspective of individual security actors into the moral imagination. Thus risking contributing to additional polarisation. Rather, the issue should be understood as a structural design which becomes enabled through an almost self-perpetuating culture of fear and distrust. Contributing to an automatised expression of privilege violence, insofar as it continuously reproduces the interest of the original (elite) beneficiaries. As expressed by some of the experts consulted, it is more likely that this can be related to the institutional legacies of antagonistic directives for engagement that do little to effectively handle social conflict within the civic domain, albeit inhibiting signs of a purposeful design. Rather, the current ROE enables combat engagement to such a degree that the circumstances and limitations become ambiguous when dealing with *"the inner enemy"*, often being synonymous with the *"morally corrupt"* communities on the periphery of society. As such, the wider perception within the sample describes the preconditions for engagement as *"shoot first, ask questions later"* once the interaction materialises between the two.

6.3 Politicisation of- and De-Professionalism within the Security Sector

It thus appears that the composition of law enforcement is still influenced to a certain degree by the enduring effects of their engagement in wartime activities, manifesting in forms such as: biased practices; a perceived detachment from the general populace (potentially viewed as

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[46] The main reason for separating these entities is that the military tends to fill the ESMAD's functions in rural areas whereby riot police is absent. Such a separation of responsibilities was further supported during the interview with the former Colonel.

the new internal enemy); a heightened emphasis on safeguarding national security rather than individualised security. The observed increases in hostile behaviour could be attributed to an overall structure of the political, economic or social system that then influences the occurrence(s) of targeted violence.

A recurrent theme in the sample was a sense amongst interviewees that militarisation seemed to be closely associated with a prolonged politicisation of the security sector and thus is projected to remain reductive. Whereby the general narrative concerning the issue was contested between human rights and security actors, certain overlapping thematic cues emerged. These are mostly related to the institutional history of the Ministry of Defence and how the inclusion of the national police within the institution has guided their mandates during times of crisis. As a setting formed by the recent emergence from decades of extreme violence, it can be stated that certain mandates within the military and ESMAD has had more and less focus. According to the accounts from both civil and human rights workers, as well as the police officer, this shift in focus towards forceful crowd control and eviction of public spaces has prioritised the first principle of their mandate while potentially neglecting other related priorities (Casas Ramirez, 2019:78). A possible explanation for this then might be the institutional legacies of suppressing dissents, intimidating political opponents and extrajudicial killings in maintaining political power, as further identified by the Truth and Reconciliations' reports (Castillejo-Cuéllar *et al.*, 2022; de Roux, 2022).

Since this is a thematic code that occurred in the narrative used by protesters, activists as well as security actors in the sample, the perception of the institutional priorities would support such an assumption. The practices of the unit do not appear to correlate with the stated aims to act *"... within the norms, laws and agreements for the protection of human rights and the law on children and adolescents"* (Casas Ramirez, 2019:78). Rather than adhering to the original mission mandate, the ESMAD unit appears to have deviated following political priorities of prior administrations to the extent that it no longer is capable in handling the original goals. Such a development is especially problematic as original mission priorities such as *"community outreach activities and transmitting respect"* (Casas Ramirez, 2019:78) have been described throughout the sample as crucial in re-establishing sustainable relations with the unit. The removal of essential components would be akin to the de-professionalisation of the unit insofar as it restricts their potential impact and rather contributes to aggravation when engaging groups on the periphery of society.

If this represents a broader trend within the unit, it would suggest that the deployment of ESMAD in previous instances may have been politically motivated rather than complying with the appropriate security protocols prescribed in their mission mandate. This is supported by the experiences that ESMAD tended to apply more communicative solutions to conflict

resolution when operating in well-affluent areas, especially concerning middle-to-high-income citizens. This is in contrast to the experiences in the regions whereby marginalised communities either lived or converged to protest. Based on the representation provided by the sample, it is presumed that the construction of CMR has been adversely affected, particularly concerning societal segments that have limited potential for exerting civilian influence over the security forces.

It is interesting to note, however, the two divergent and often conflicting discourses emerging throughout the research project, whereas some interviewees expressed that security priorities tended to correlate with an economic interest, while others, predominantly from within the security sector, rather insisted that the institution upholds the principles of civilian control of the military, respect for human rights, rule of law and separation of powers notwithstanding socioeconomic system. More interestingly then, however, is the experience(s) of the police officer and how they were observed to deviate from such a narrative. Differentiating between what they ascribe as *"elite conflict"* and *"legitimate security needs"*, the informant provides experiences which may be interpreted as supporting a framework in which a politicised security sector has become increasingly militarised to deal with certain socioeconomic grievances. In support of such an interpretation, the level of intensity of the response within the sample was found to correspond to *estratos* and subsequent socioeconomic belongings of the affected area. With successive increases in the intensity of the police response, the estrato tended to move further towards lower levels, and in the higher levels of estratos the urgency of the call tended to be higher but the action plan in the ROE subsequently became less severe.

Because what becomes apparent throughout the sample is how the increasingly militarised attitudes within and across sectors purportedly have attributed to a de-professionalised standard of engagement. Rather than increasing the capabilities of the sector to handle progressively complex security risks as argued by some, the wider perception both within the sample, the Truth and Reconciliation commissions report(s) as well as in online forums all demonstrates a sense of decrease in the quality of services provided by security personnel. Overall, the themes to emerge show how the militarisation of the security sector contributes to a gradual de-professionalisation of the sector by: (1) overestimating coercion's effectiveness in comparison to negotiations with social protesters as well as; (2) promoting a culture of internal camaraderie and hierarchical compliance over individual professionalism. Throughout this research project, some proponents of police militarisation tended to use language that conveyed a sense of urgency and threat, such as *"warrior," "combat"* and *"battlefield"* when asked about the protests. Such keywords were especially relevant in the

construction of the narrative concerning the protests. This exhibits certain militaristic tendencies in how they operate within the civic sphere.

6.4 Normalisation, Brutalisation & Rationalisation of Violence in the Security Sector

The themes of brutalisation and normalisation of violence in-between sectors recurred throughout the dataset. Most striking, however, was the substantial difference in perceptions regarding how this correlated to the militarisation of the security sector. Initial observations suggest that there is a link between the way overly aggressive or authoritarian behaviours within the security sector have contributed to a breakdown in trust between the military and civilian institutions. This was particularly discernable in situations whereby the research subject expressed environments where the constabularisation of the armed forces meant they engaged in law enforcement, such as Cali and the Cauca region. Nevertheless, these findings cannot be extrapolated to all experiences. What was curious about this, nonetheless, in particular, was the rationalisation of violence by portraying it as a necessary societal element in Colombia for maintaining law and order or protecting national security. Such an argument emerged as a general pattern of internalised logic of violent conflict between spheres.

The empiric evidence as shared by the informants appears to support a conception whereby a pattern of violence perpetuates itself in a cycle. The system of behaviour thus seems to adhere to a circular design in which social protest provokes violent countermeasures from security actors, which causes further discontent that evolves into aggressive reactions. The dependent variable in this violent reciprocity appears to be an external audience which consumes the events and threatening imagery, thereby contributing to a growing culture of fear and amplification of either the representation of (a) the disorderly rioters or (b) brutal security actors. What is lost in this conceptualisation of the narrative then is the issues which may have initially caused the social unrest. Instead, the discourse becomes formed around this reductive framing of *"police versus looters"*. As one of the interviewees illustrated it is almost a *"smokescreen"*, concealing the underlying causes for social mobilisation and shifting the general debate towards *"law and order"* and security concerns.

Such strategies and capacities applied towards protesters display the overemphasis on the use of force and the display of power as modes of conflict resolution. This belief is seemingly supported by recent attempts to title the riot unit the 'Dialogue & Order Maintenance Unit', rather than 'Anti-Disturbance Squadron'. Nevertheless, the attempt to rename the unit without addressing its legacy of perceived impunity and brutality would be similar to cosmetic treatments rather than the required structural adjustments. The decrease in the use of communication and negotiations to resolve conflict become apparent across the security landscape. These essential elements of professional security work are instead complemented

by targeted operations which, according to approximately eighty per cent of the respondents, failed to achieve any long-term goals of either order or maintenance. The internal perspective provided by military and police officer(s) may have identified the reason for this. The reduction of training in areas such as conflict resolution, negotiation and community engagement could be seen as a core reason for a perceived decrease in the quality of services provided by these security actors.

Although the exclusion of training in non-violent conflict resolution did impact the way the actors were perceived throughout the sample, these results should be interpreted with caution. As the Colonel expressed it, all security actors from police to military personnel are expected to acquire training in human rights and de-escalatory methods to the extent of their mandate. However, there appears to be a gap in-between mandate and practice. As identified by two-thirds of the respondents, sufficient experiences indicate that neither police, ESMAD nor the military necessarily adheres to such mandates while engaging civilians in an environment of demonstrations. While some areas show a more reciprocal relationship to security actors, the correlation seemingly being to which class the subject relates to, groups such as marginalised groups or human rights workers tend to reflect a more violent asymmetrical relationship. The dynamics of ESMAD; as well as the police force's crisis unit; manifests itself in distinct ways when engaging with mass movements, contingent upon variables such as socioeconomic status and levels of privilege, as reported by the research subjects' experiences. Whereby the values of these variables are high, the chance for dialogue and negotiations increases substantially, according to the sample.

Notwithstanding this, whereas the value of the aforementioned variables is low, a dependency on militarised strategies and equipment tends to form the relationship, according to the sample. Following the experience of the sample, as well as expressed in the forums and the report by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, these tendencies support the claim by Sung *et al.* (2022) that Colombia adheres to increasingly militarised methods of protest mitigation. Altogether, this reproduces imagery of the security sector as adhering primarily to belligerent tactics of engagement. The internal culture of the institution(s) would thus consequently exhibit tendencies of conformity to hierarchical authority over professional standards and ethics. This would further contribute to a loss of professional values and a decrease in accountability for actions taken by security personnel. Such a process was especially evident when addressing protesters with direct experiences of riot police, as well as human rights workers with proximity to rural military units. The rhetoric of *"only following orders"* has shown to be especially problematic concerning marginalised communities on the periphery of Colombian society.

Privilege violence, thereby, seems not like the aberration but rather a preferred mode of engagement with groups on the periphery of society. It facilitates the process whereby society comes to accept the use of violence as a means of conflict resolution. The highly partisan and factionalised rhetoric guiding such a procedure incorporates the underlying mechanism for maintaining impunity. As the sample tended to express it, the divide emerges mainly between those advocating for *"justice and rights"* and those prioritising *"law and order"*, attitudes that seemingly would align with the established political factions and socioeconomic divisions in Colombia. As one respondent expressed it, *"... violence attached [from] political motivation increase[d] when we [Colombinans] lost faith in [a] societal structure"*. Once such logic is firmly internalised within a community, it is hypothesised to be extremely difficult to change.

6.5   The Impact of Social Hierarchies on Mobilisation Responses:

Concerning overlying strategies of resistance, protest or activism against privilege-based violence, both the active participants in the movements in 2019 and 2021, as well as the human rights representatives, gave accounts of how multiple dimensions of privilege, such as sexuality, gender or class interact to shape the dynamics of violence within the given context. These dynamics would help to explain how the militarisation of the public security sector has contributed to intimidating and subduing certain communities, in particular low-income neighbourhoods, who are understood as a threat to the social order within a restrictive moral imagination. While at the same garnering the support of middle-to-upper-class citizens.

Such a development is especially discernable regarding the perceived criminalisation of protest and the ability to express dissent. The suppression of social movements that challenge the existing power structures limits the ability of citizens to challenge the status quo within the agreed-upon structure of *"peaceful protest"*. In reinforcing the narrative that there is a competitive component to the relationship between lower and higher classes of society, it seems that certain actors have weaponised the story that middle-to-upper-middle-class citizens' social reality is being targeted by alleged 'criminals'. Whereby such a conflict is reflected in the general debate, it thus starts to become categorised as class warfare. This limits the moral imagination to the extent that it restricts which mechanisms for conflict resolution are perceived as viable. As one interviewee put it: *"Their use of the term "war" keeps implying that only those in uniform are [part of] the solution"*.

Promoting the use of such language, further embeds a culture of fear, whereas citizens are taught to fear protesters and marginalised groups as criminals, and these 'criminals' as primary sources of violence. Within such a framing, militarised police units are then presented as the only solution to these problems. Whereby these are not enough, the military is

constabularised to mitigate any deficiencies of the police. In conjunction with such a development, it has been found to contribute to an increase in the willingness to accept increased police and military presence, whereby militarisation becomes a necessary tool for public safety. The position within the system of social relations appears as one of the explanatory variables in the connection between sectors and if it is characterised by competitive or cooperative components. The findings suggest that the main influencer for CMR within such a framing is the perceived systemic delegitimisation of social protest. Thus, any attempts to pursue legitimate means of expressing grievances and promoting change seem to impact how both the role of protesters and security personnel were constructed in the social imagination. Whereby the possibilities for this were limited or marked by hostile responses, it was found to increase the likelihood of expressions of civil-military tensions within the sample.

There are similarities between the attitudes expressed by protesters in this study and those described in the literature (Ramirez, 2019; Rodriquez, 2018) regarding cultural militarism and how it has crystalised the presumption of threat and distrust. The belief system that military-style tactics are suitable to handle domestic affairs can be said to highly influence the decision-making process of the police, ESMAD and military. If the subject(s) then exhibits tendencies of: (1) having access to military equipment and tactics; (2) a mentality which normalises the usage of violence and; (3) a conceptualisation of the constituency based on fear and mistrust, it is believed to attribute to higher degrees of violence which negatively impacting the way CMR is constructed.

Ultimately, cultural militarism within the security sector has been found to blur the line between how the respondents perceive the military and the police. Access to military equipment and tactics within the police department marked a clear escalatory tendency concerning riot policing. Furthermore, whereby the military was constabularied to handle non-military activities, the stories shared indicate a certain weariness and mistrust. Those lines separating different segments within the security sector are becoming more and more indistinct according to the sample. As a direct consequence, non-military activities become informed by the ROE in active warfare.

7   Conclusion

The present study was designed to determine the effect of institutional militarisation to uncover any potential changes in perceptions regarding the separation of mandates between crisis and riot police and military following the peace agreement. Following this, the dynamics of privilege violence and public security militarisation expressed primarily in the Colombian demonstrations of 2019 and 2021, illuminates how the perception of the

institution(s) has gradually changed over time. The relationship between civil and military authority has been significantly shaped by the adoption of certain war strategies, which can be said to originate from an inherent power imbalance between the two entities. Whereby the gap of authority is widened due to the use of military tactics within a civil setting, the subsequent environment becomes characterised by increasing violent confrontations and a general decrease in communicative channels.

The findings contribute to a growing body of evidence regarding the ramifications of the involvement of armed forces in the traditional functions of civilian law enforcement agencies and their incursion into the civic realm. With increased constabularised armed forces and the militarisation of various police units, the lines between segments in the institution are understood as increasingly blurred within the general narrative. This is also reflected in constructing the shared imagination of how security actors perceive protesters and are, subsequently themselves, perceived. Within the warlike comprehension of the social setting, this competitive reconfiguration of the interaction may explain why the assertive militarisation process has contributed to the gradual criminalisation of protests in the post-peace agreement context.

Furthermore, as the perception of both the police and military as it has been constructed in relation to the civilian population reflects tendencies of asymmetrical power relations, the overall discourse showed a growing concern about security for social mobilisation, marginalised communities and the right to protest. With an identified increase in the militarisation of the institution since the peace agreement, concerns about the negative impact on the civilian population have intensified accordingly. The overall perception within the sample affirms a decline in civil-military relations (CMR). This would suggest that incidents of targeted privilege violence perpetrated by security forces, as identified by multiple accounts (Fattal, 2018; Hanson & Romero Penna, 2007; García-Godos & Wiig, 2018) are intended to divert attention from the underlying problems by emphasising superficial issues.

The generalisability of these results is subject to certain limitations. For instance, selection bias may have impacted the results to the extent that those who were willing to testify about their experiences were more likely to possess a negative view of security actors. As such, their recollections of events may have been subject to considerate bias and additional explanatory frameworks are required to ensure replicability. Notwithstanding these limitations, the study suggests that perceptions of events are as crucial in motivating attitudes and behaviours as the original intent behind them. Subjective interpretations of reality, shaped by personal beliefs, experiences and emotions, are understood as highly influential in guiding the actions of both protesters and security actors. Whereby this interaction is shaped by distrust, anger and cognitive biases, such is often the case within cultures of self-perpetuating

fear, even miscalculations of the 'others' behaviour can enable additional violence. The polarising narratives, thus, conceptualises a setting in which a mindset that rationalises violence taken in conjunction with a constant sense of threat regarding the "inner enemy" means a greater propensity for violence. Providing military equipment to these actors and instructing them to use tactics developed for war, then acts as a risk multiplier.

This additional explanatory framework should help to improve predictions of the potential impact of a causal link between the way public perceptions are constructed in conjunction with an increasingly militarised security sector. This expression of state-tolerated privilege violence is then crucial in the way it impacts CMR. Both regarding state violence, but also to the extent vigilantism is authorised. Once militarism discerns a particular spillover effect from the security sector to particular privileged groups, it is no longer within the state's monopoly of violence.

The precise militarisation of the different units of police in exacerbating CMR remains to be elucidated. Therefore, a greater focus on comparative research designs between the various units could produce interesting findings that account more for a critical examination of the role of various police units in the internal security regime. Additionally, as the scope of this study was limited in terms of access to participants, a useful complement for future studies should include longitudinal components to measure a change in attitudes over time.

The findings from this study make several contributions to the current literature. Most importantly, the conceptualisation of security actors and their perceived role in the post-peace agreement setting provides a comprehensive assessment of (1) how the process of militarisation differs depending on contextual variables, but also; (2) pertaining to how the literature on cultural militarism inadequately addresses the escalating strains inherent in CMR characterised by higher degrees of militarism. Thus, it adds to the growing body of research that indicates how the institutional strategies of militarism may actively harm cross-sectoral cooperation. Moreover; confirming the findings of Sung *et al.* (2022:316), displaying Colombia as exhibiting clear tendencies of a fully militarised setting, and calculating the counterproductive outcome, especially for marginalised segments of society.

In essence, the study replicates the notion that current adjustment strategies primarily exhibit a surface-level and superficial approach. Rather than reiterate the *"bad apple"* narrative, changes, therefore, need to go beyond the uniform and address the structural legacies of state-sponsored violence and the internalised privilege culture which enables them. Assuming the accuracy and validity of the findings, certain causal linkages would thus exist between the militarisation of the security sector and a general deterioration in CMR, and how this can be understood as an expression of privilege violence.

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Appendix I: Interview guide

Main Theme(s):	Support Question(s)/Probe:
Law Enforcement	
What occupation do you hold and in what way has this brought you into contact with police officers? Tell me about your experience.	Has the contact been recurring or more rarely occurring? Why do you believe that is?
What is/was your opinion/experience of increased police presence in the main cities during the 2020/21 surge in violence and social unrest, do you believe it stabilised or further destabilised the situation? In what way?	Did you experience a situation in which the military and the police's mission mandate seemingly overlapped? If so, in what way?
Military	
From your experience, both through work and daily life, would you say that the military in any way 'intrudes' in civic affairs? If so, do you have any examples?	Would you say that there has been an increase in military activities in daily life since the demobilisation of FARC and the peace agreement (2016)? If so, how has this been noticeable?
Has there been an increase in military presence in traditionally non-military issues in the aftermath of the peace agreement? (Examples: curfews during the COVID-19 lockdown). Has this in any way altered the perception of the institution?	Before partaking in social movements or protests (if this applies), have you in the past taken the presence of police or military into consideration before joining? If so, has there been a greater sense of fear of violent reprisals or a sense of trust and safety?
State service(s)/Protests	
In what way, if at all, would you differentiate the active role of the police, military and the 'Escuadrón Móvil Antidisturbios' (ESMAD) during social movements/protests?	Would you say that your experience with the two is similar or quite contrasting? What are the main similarities/differences in your opinion?
In what way do you believe that the presence of ESMAD enables or disables the potential to express discontent and citizen participation during protests?	Would you say that their presence is primarily to preserve security or to maintain underlying socio-political interests? In what way, if at all, have you experienced this?
To conclude, do you see, in any way, that the security sector is politicised in Colombia? During the election, what was the discourse surrounding the institutions of police and the military, concerning protests and crime?	Would such a discourse, in your opinion, reflect the wider Colombian society? Why/why not?

Appendix II: Subjectivity statement

The topic of the militarisation of the Colombian security sector is complex and multifaceted, and may be subject to varying interpretations and biases depending on the perspective of the individuals involved. While every effort has been made to present a balanced and objective analysis, it is important to acknowledge that some degree of subjectivity may exist in this thesis. Little-to-no conflict of interest should, however, exist. It is crucial to note, however, that the author did partake in some of the protests in 2019. While influencing the original interest of the topic, this should not be viewed as having influenced the scope, intent or findings of the paper. Nonetheless, the author has taken extra precautions to ensure that a high degree of reflexivity is achieved.

Appendix III: Interview References

Code	Actor	Date	Location
INTW-1*	Head of Quality Support (NGO)	2022-07-26	Stockholm, Sweden
INTW-2	Journalist; Protester; [Fmr] Human Rights Foundation (NGO)	2022-08-16	Pristina, Kosovo
INTW-3	Victims Reparations' Program (NGO)	2022-09-01	Bogotá, Colombia
INTW-4	Analyst & Researcher; Protester	2022-09-01	Bogotá, Colombia
INTW-5	[Fmr] Colonel	2022-09-23	Bogotá, Colombia
INTW-6	Student	2022-11-07	The Hague, The Netherlands
INTW-7	Journalist	2022-11-26	Cali, Colombia
INTW-8	Student; Protester	2022-12-02	Bogotá, Colombia
INTW-9	Student; Protester	2022-12-20	Bogotá, Colombia
INTW-10	Coordinator (NGO)	2023-01-04	Buenaventura, Colombia
INTW-11	Security consultant; Politician	2023-01-12	Cali, Colombia
INTW-12	Coordinator (CSO); Protester	2023-01-20	Bogotá, Colombia
INTW-13	Public Health & Quality Assurance (NGO); Protester	2023-03-29	Bogotá, Colombia
INTW-14	Police officer	2023-04-03	Bogotá, Colombia

*INTW - Interviewee

Appendix IV: Forum References

Code	Date	Forum
FP01/G**	2019-11-22	Reddit; Government statement
FP02*	2019-11-28	Reddit
FP03	2019-11-28	Reddit
FP04	2019-12-11	Reddit
FP05	2019-12-11	Reddit
FP06	2019-12-23	Reddit
FP07	2019-12-23	Reddit;
FP08/G	2021-04-28	Reddit; Government statement
FP09/C***	2021-05-03	Reddit; Chambers of Commerce[47]
FP10	2021-05-05	Reddit
FP11	2021-05-06	Reddit
FP12	2021-05-19	Reddit
FP13	2021-05-19	Reddit

*FP - Forum Post;

**FP00/G - Forum Post / Government statement;

***FP00/C - Forum Post / Chambers of Commerce statement.

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[47] A direct link to the statement could not be accessed, seeming as only a screenshot of the original statement was available due to its removal.