

Bandas Criminales (BACRIM)

AT A GLANCE

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HOW TO CITE

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SUMMARY

Formed: 2006

Disbanded: Group is active.

First Attack: September 2008: BACRIM faction Aguilas Negras launched two attacks within a few weeks of each other. The first attack killed three indigenous leaders in Cauca, and the second attack killed five other community members (8 killed, 1+ wounded).¹

Last Attack: February-March 2018: Los Urabeños and the ELN clashed outside of Bojayá in a competition over access to drug trafficking routes, trapping around 2800 civilians in the conflict zone (unknown killed, unknown wounded).²

OVERVIEW

Bandas Criminales (BACRIM) is an umbrella term that the Colombian government uses for the criminal gangs that grew out of the demobilization of the United Self Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC), a right-wing paramilitary group. While these gangs are collectively referred to as BACRIM, each organization within BACRIM is independent and individual. The most prominent BACRIM groups are Los Urabeños and Los Rastrojos. Unlike the AUC, BACRIM groups have no political motivation and work closely with leftist guerrilla and other organized criminal groups in the drug trade. The Colombian government does not recognize any BACRIM organization as politically legitimate.

NARRATIVE SUMMARY

Bandas Criminales (BACRIM) is a categorization of criminal and drug-trafficking gangs that emerged following the demobilization of the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC) in 2006.³ The Colombian government coined this term as a way to refer to the AUC successor groups that partnered with drug cartels and continued illicit activity after the larger organization demobilized.⁴

BACRIM is comprised of several smaller militant factions; some of these gangs work closely together, while some are rivals. The 16 criminal gangs identified under the umbrella term BACRIM included Aguilas Negras, Autodefensas Gaitanistas de Colombia, Banda Criminal de Uraba, Los Urabeños, Los Machos, Los Paisas, Renacer, Nueva Generación, Los Rastrojos, The Popular Revolutionary Anti-terrorist Army of Colombia (ERPAC), Cordillera, Cacique Pipinta, grupo de Martin Llanos, Los Nevados, and La Oficina de Envigado.⁵ All of these groups were comprised of former AUC members and formed following its demobilization with the exception of Los Rastrojos, which originated from the military wing of the Norte de Valle Cartel.⁶ Together, these groups filled the void in the drug trade created by AUC's demobilization.

In 2008, BACRIM organizations were present in 259 municipalities in Colombia.⁷ At that time, the most predominant BACRIM groups were Los Urabeños, Los Rastrojos, and ERPAC. Historically, BACRIM factions Los Urabeños and Los Rastrojos fought one another over territory and drug corridors. In 2009, conflict between the two factions ended and left a total 2,300 people dead.⁸ By 2010, BACRIM organizations and their influence had become so large that it is believed that they contributed to the country's violence as much as, if not more than, the leftist guerrilla groups operating in Colombia.⁹ However, the violence produced by BACRIM factions was rarely politically motivated. Unlike the paramilitaries created specifically to fight leftist guerrillas, BACRIM groups were involved in the drug trade and illicit activities without a clear political agenda.¹⁰

In 2010, BACRIM organizations continued to grow. The collection of criminal groups extended their presence to 360 municipalities and conducted operations in over 75% of the country.¹¹ Of BACRIM's component factions, Los Rastrojos was present in 207 municipalities, making it the most powerful Colombian criminal organization in 2010.¹² Other prominent groups included Los Urabeños in 181 municipalities and Aguilas Negras in 88 municipalities.¹³

However, in 2011 and 2012, some BACRIM groups began to weaken, surrender, and splinter. In 2011, 200 ERPAC members surrendered to the Colombian government.¹⁴ Those who did not demobilize became known as "Los Puntilleros," which further split into two factions: Los Libertadores del Vichada and the Bloque Meta.¹⁵ The remaining ERPAC members joined rival BACRIM groups. In 2012, BACRIM faction Los Rastrojos was weakened when leader Javier Calle Serna surrendered to U.S. authorities.¹⁶ That same year, the former BACRIM group "Los Paisas" divided into two blocs. One faction followed their leader "Chepe" to support Los Urabeños, while the other joined the rival group Los Rastrojos as Los Rastrojos-Paisas.¹⁷ By the end of 2012, Los Rastrojos-Paisas and Los Rastrojos territory in Bajo Cauca were incorporated into Los Urabeños as part of an agreement between Los Rastrojos and Los Urabeños.¹⁸ In 2013, Los Urabeños replaced Los Rastrojos as the strongest of all the BACRIM factions.¹⁹

In 2014, the Colombian government recognized the existence of only three BACRIM factions: Los Urabeños, Los Rastrojos, and the successor groups of ERPAC, which included Los Libertadores del Vichada and Bloque Meta. In that same year, Los Urabeños made up over 70% of the total BACRIM membership and controlled the drug trade in Colombia. The total estimated size of all BACRIM factions combined in 2014 was 3,400 members. However, BACRIM groups contract out their operations to smaller criminal gangs, so BACRIM's total work force and network was likely much larger.²⁰

Since 2012, the Colombian government has engaged in peace talks with other militant groups in the country – such as the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the National Liberation Army (ELN) – in an effort to end the ongoing armed conflict. However, the Colombian government has barred BACRIM organizations from participating in peace talks or the amnesty process because it has never recognized BACRIM as a politically-motivated group.²¹ Nonetheless, Los Urabeños has sought negotiations with the Colombian government since 2017.²² Los Urabeños claimed that it wanted to

demobilize as a paramilitary group in the same fashion the AUC, its parent organization.²³ There were some initial talks between Los Urabeños and the administration of President Juan Manuel Santos. However, negotiations were suspended when President Duque took office in August 2018.²⁴

After the demobilization of the FARC in 2016, BACRIM groups moved into former FARC territory. These gangs sought to build a monopoly over drug production in those areas and to gain control over valuable drug trafficking routes. The expansion of BACRIM groups into formerly FARC-held areas precipitated conflict between individual gangs, which competed over territorial and market influence. Most notably, conflict has developed between Los Urabeños and Los Rastrojos. Los Urabeños has allegedly won some of Los Rastrojos' territory in Valle de Cauca in violent clashes between the two groups.²⁵

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

A. LEADERSHIP

BACRIM is comprised of smaller militant factions. The most well-known of these smaller gangs are Los Urabeños, Los Rastrojos, and ERPAC (now known as Los Puntilleros, and comprised of Los Libertadores del Vichada and Bloque Meta). Below are leaders of the three factions.

Los Urabeños:

According to InSight Crime, Los Urabeños uses a “franchise” and “mixed network model.” About one-third of group operations are directly commanded by the leadership in Urabá, and the remaining two-thirds of activities are determined by local groups using the Los Urabeños name that have agreed to follow orders from Los Urabeños' central command if necessary.²⁶ In 2015, the Colombian government launched Operation Agamemnon (and subsequently Operation Agamemnon II), a joint military-police operation to neutralize Los Urabeños' leadership and disrupt the organization's finances. As a result of these operations, Los Urabeños lost the majority of their leadership. Los Urabeños have lost the majority of their leadership. A lack of information makes it difficult to determine the identities of Los Urabeños' new leaders. However, the change in leadership may signal a shift in generation and ideology.²⁷

Giovanni, legal name Juan de Dios Usuga (2009-2012): Giovanni was a member of the Popular Liberation Army (EPL) until the group officially disbanded. He then became a member of the AUC until its demobilization. Following the demobilization of the AUC, Giovanni and his brother Otoniel took control of Los Urabeños in 2009.²⁸ Giovanni was killed by the Colombian armed forces during a raid in 2012. Following his death, Los Urabeños announced an “armed strike,” which encouraged its members to engage in violence against Colombian security forces and offered a reward of \$1,000 per police officer killed.²⁹

“Tierra,” legal name Cesar Daniel Anaya Martinez (unknown-2014): Tierra was a senior commander in Los Urabeños until his arrest in 2014; he was sentenced to 13 years in prison for the transport of illegal firearms.³⁰

Gavilán, legal name Roberto Vargas Gutiérrez (2005-2017): Gavilán was a top leader of Los Urabeños. He joined the group after being member of the demobilized EPL and AUC. Gavilán ran Los Urabeños' operations in Cordoba, and he was allegedly the author of Los Urabeños' “Plan Pistola,” a policy in which Los Urabeños offered a \$700 reward to anyone who killed a police officer or military personnel. Gavilán was killed during the Colombian joint police-military operation “Agamemnon II” in August 2017.³¹

El Indio, legal name Manuel Arístides Meza Páez (unknown-2017): El Indio was the finance chief for Los Urabeños, as well as the head of operations on the Caribbean coast, the Pacific coast, and in the Magdalena Medio region. In March 2017, he was killed during a raid carried out by a joint police-military force in operation “Agamemnon II.”³²

Otoniel, legal name Dario Antonio Usuga (2009-Present): Otoniel was a member of the Popular Liberation Army (EPL) until the group officially disbanded in 1991. He then became an AUC member. Following the AUC’s demobilization, Otoniel and his brother Giovanni took control of Los Urabeños in 2009.³³ Giovanni was killed by the Colombian armed forces during a raid in 2012. In 2017, Otoniel made a video asking the Colombian government to negotiate his surrender and the demobilization of Los Urabeños.³⁴

Nicolás, legal name Carlos Mario Tuberquia Moreno (unknown-2018): Nicolás was the chief financial officer of Los Urabeños. He was arrested in August 2018.³⁵

Samuel, legal name Daniel Martínez Caraballo (unknown-2018): Samuel directed operations in the “Erlín Pino Duarte” part of Los Urabeños, and he planned attacks against the ELN and the Colombian military. He was captured on May 21, 2018, and his arrest was a major blow to the organization.³⁶

Los Rastrojos:

As of July 2019, it is unclear who is leading Los Rastrojos. The top leadership of the organization was arrested in 2012, leaving the group without a clear line of succession.³⁷

“Jabon,” legal name Wilber Varela (unknown-2008): Varela, originally leader of the Norte del Valle Cartel, founded Los Rastrojos. He appointed Calle Serna as his closest assistant, and, after conflict between developed between the two group members, Calle Serna had him killed in 2008.³⁸

Diego Perez Henao, also known as Diego Rastrojo (unknown-2012): Diego was a part of the Norte de Valle militant wing and worked closely with Comba until the formal formation of Los Rastrojos. Before Colombian officials captured him in 2012, Diego was in charge of rural security for Los Rastrojos.³⁹ In 2014, U.S. prosecutors sentenced Diego to 30 years in prison.⁴⁰

“Comba,” legal name Javier Calle Serna (2008-Present): Comba was a member of the Popular Liberation Army (EPL) until its demobilization, at which time he became an assassin working for the militant wing of the Norte del Valle Cartel, later known as Los Rastrojos. Calle Serna ordered Wilber Varela, Los Rastrojos’ founding leader, be killed in 2008. Following Varela’s death, Comba took over the leadership of the group.⁴¹ In 2012, Comba turned himself in to U.S. authorities and was extradited to face trial in the United States.⁴²

Luis E. Calle Serna (2008-Present): Serna is the brother of “Comba.” Through this familial connection, he became a leader of Los Rastrojos. Serna managed Los Rastrojos’ coastal cocaine laboratories, as well as its connections with the Sinaloa Cartel. In 2012, Serna turned himself in to U.S. authorities in Panama, and he was extradited to the US to stand trial for drug trafficking charges. He was sentenced to 9 years in prison in 2017.⁴³

Popular Revolutionary Antiterrorist Army of Colombia (ERPAC):

The leadership of the former ERPAC split between two factions after much of ERPAC demobilized in 2011. The two factions, Los Libertadores del Vichada and Bloque Meta, operate under the umbrella name

Los Puntilleros. Following the death of Pijarbey, it is unclear who (or which faction) will take over the leadership of Los Puntilleros.⁴⁴

“Cuchillo,” legal name Pedro Oliveiro Guerrero (2006-2010): Cuchillo co-founded ERPAC alongside Pijarbey. In 2010, Colombian Special Forces wounded Cuchillo in a gunfight, and he later died. Following Cuchillo’s death, Pijarbey took complete control of ERPAC.⁴⁵

“Pijarbey,” legal name Martin Farfan Diaz Gonzalez (2006-present): Pijarbey was a member of the Colombian military and then of the AUC. Following the AUC’s demobilization, Pijarbey helped found ERPAC with Cuchillo. Pijarbey was ERPAC’s military commander until its demobilization. Pijarbey was captured in 2009, and he was released from prison in 2012. Following his release and the death of Cuchillo, Pijarbey became the leader of Los Libertadores del Vichada in 2012.⁴⁶ Police forces killed Pijarbey in 2015.⁴⁷ Since Pijarbey’s death and Caracho’s demobilization, it is unclear who has been leading Los Libertadores del Vichada.

Caracho (unknown-2011): Caracho was the leader of ERPAC from 2010 to 2011 after Cuchillo’s death. Caracho formally demobilized ERPAC in 2011, though only about a quarter of its members laid down their arms. The remaining ERPAC militants formed two groups under the new umbrella organization, Los Puntilleros. The first faction, Los Libertadores del Vichada, was initially led by Careto, but soon taken over by Pijarbey. El Flaco Freddy took over control of the second faction, the Bloque Meta.⁴⁸

El Tigre (2006-2017): El Tigre was the leader of the Los Libertadores del Vichada faction of Los Puntilleros, a splinter group of dissidents from the demobilized ERPAC. In 2012, El Tigre’s commander Pijarbey was released from prison and replaced El Tigre as the leader of Los Libertadores del Vichada. Sources provide no information on why Pijarbey took over the leadership from El Tigre; however, one might speculate that this leadership change occurred because Pijarbey was a higher ranking commander than El Tigre and thus was given the higher status position. In 2017, Colombian police captured El Tigre.⁴⁹

El Flaco Freddy (unknown-2012): El Flaco Freddy was a member of the AUC and then of ERPAC, following the AUC’s demobilization. Continuing in Los Puntilleros after the demobilization of ERPAC, El Flaco Freddy was the leader of the Bloque Meta faction until he was arrested in September 2012.⁵⁰

B. NAME CHANGES

Los Urabeños:

There are no known name changes for this group; however, the group is known by several different names.

- **Los Urabeños:** The name “Los Urabeños” comes from “Urabá,” the region in which the group originated.⁵¹ Los Urabeños is the name most commonly used in association with the group.
- **Autodefensas Gaitanistas de Colombia (AGC):** In English, this name means the Gaitanist Self-Defense Forces of Colombia.⁵²
- **Clan de Gulfo:** The name “Clan de Gulfo” is used by the Colombian government to refer to the group, meaning “Gulf Clan” in English.⁵³

Los Rastrojos:

- **Los Rastrojos:** The name “Los Rastrojos” comes from the last name of the former leader of the group, David Rastrojo.⁵⁴ It is the name that the group currently uses and has historically used, aside from its attempts to negotiate with the Colombian government in 2003.
- **Rondas Campesinas Populares (RCP):** In English, this name means the “Popular Peasant Patrols.” Los Rastrojos used this name when they were attempting to enter into talks with the Colombian government in 2003 while the group was still a part of the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC).⁵⁵

Popular Revolutionary Antiterrorist Army of Colombia (ERPAC):

- **Popular Revolutionary Antiterrorist Army of Colombia (ERPAC):** ERPAC is a name for a collection of groups that formed after the demobilization of the AUC. In 2011, ERPAC officially demobilized; however, many dissidents created splinter groups known as “Los Puntilleros.”⁵⁶
- **Los Puntilleros:** Los Puntilleros is the name of the ERPAC dissident groups “Los Libertadores del Vichada” and “Bloque Meta,” who did not demobilize in 2011 during ERPAC’s formal demobilization process. The group got its name by working as a personal army for Colombian drug lord Oscar Mauricio Pachon, who went by the alias Puntilla.⁵⁷

C. SIZE ESTIMATES

- 2008: 10,200 (Coporación Nuevo Arco Iris)⁵⁸
- 2008: 4,000 (the Colombian Government)⁵⁹
- 2014: 3,400+ (Los Urabeños, 2,650)⁶⁰
- 2014: 3,870 (National Police)⁶¹
- 2014: 7,000 (Institute of Studies for Development and Peace)⁶²
- 2014: 10,000 (Human Rights Watch)⁶³
- 2014: 3,410 (El Tiempo)⁶⁴
- 2016: ~2,800 members of Los Urabeños (Business Insider)⁶⁵
- 2017: 1,500 members of Los Urabeños (Business Insider)⁶⁶
- 2017: 310 members of Los Rastrojos (InSight Crime)⁶⁷
- 2019: 450 members of Los Puntilleros (Colombia Reports)⁶⁸

D. RESOURCES

BACRIM groups earn money primarily from the cocaine trade and from extortion, illegal gold mining, and domestic distribution of drugs.⁶⁹ BACRIM factions specialize in cocaine production but historically have not produced the raw coca base themselves. Instead, they have been reliant on guerrilla groups, such as the National Liberation Army (ELN) and the former Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), for coca base that they turn into cocaine and sell as coca paste.⁷⁰ BACRIM organizations specialize in trafficking shipments of drugs through its territory and to the Caribbean coast, as well as to Colombia’s borders with Panama and Venezuela.⁷¹ For its transportation services, BACRIM groups charge 10% of the price of the package being trafficked.⁷²

BACRIM groups primarily trade with Mexican drug cartels and criminal groups. BACRIM organizations receive \$5,000 per kilo of cocaine they sell to Mexican drug cartels. In 2013, BACRIM factions reportedly were interested in beginning operations in Europe to increase their cocaine sale profits. In 2014, Spanish authorities dismantled one of Los Urabeños’ cells in Spain.⁷³ Analysts speculate that BACRIM organizations can earn three times as much per kilo of cocaine in Spain than what they do in Mexico. In addition to cocaine smuggling, BACRIM groups, especially Los Rastrojos, have smuggled gasoline out of Venezuela for profit.⁷⁴

E. GEOGRAPHIC LOCATIONS

Disclaimer: This is a partial list of where the militant organization has bases and where it operates. This does not include information on where the group conducts major attacks or has external influences.

The strength of BACRIM organizations' presence throughout Colombia is debated. In 2015, BACRIM groups were believed to be active in between 130 to 170 municipalities across the country and in between 15 to 31 of the country's 32 provinces.⁷⁵ At this time, BACRIM groups were most active in Barbacoas and in the process of expanding further in Nariño. Additionally, their presence was growing in Cordoba, Antioquia, Vichada, and Guaviare.⁷⁶ As of August 2019, Los Urabeños has been actively taking control over indigenous and Afro-Colombian areas in Alto Baudó, near the Pacific.⁷⁷ Los Urabeños has also maintained control over Uraba, a region along the Pacific coast of Colombia.⁷⁸

Internationally, BACRIM leaders have been captured throughout Argentina, Bolivia, Honduras, Panama, Peru, and Venezuela. BACRIM factions have a very strong presence in Ecuador and eastern Venezuela, particularly in partnership with guerrilla groups there.⁷⁹ As of August 2019, Los Rastrojos maintains a base in Boca de Grita in Táchira, Venezuela, which borders Puerto Santander, Colombia.⁸⁰ In 2013, BACRIM groups reportedly considered expanding their drug operations to Italy and Spain, which is more profitable than trading with Mexican cartels.⁸¹ As of June 2019, BACRIM organizations allegedly have ties to the Italian Mafia.⁸²

STRATEGY

A. IDEOLOGY AND GOALS

BACRIM groups are considered the third generation of drug trafficking organizations: the first was comprised of large cartels, the second of paramilitaries, and the third of BACRIM factions, the successors of paramilitary groups.⁸³ Though BACRIM groups grew predominantly out of the right-wing AUC, they have no clear political agenda.⁸⁴ AUC actively combatted guerrilla groups and their supporters. In contrast, BACRIM organizations are exclusively involved in cocaine production, smuggling, illegal gold mining, and extreme violence.⁸⁵ Some BACRIM groups have sought political participation in an effort to demobilize under favorable conditions, rather than actually engage in regional or state politics. Political military groups have protections under Colombian law that are not offered to organized crime groups, and BACRIM organizations wanted to take advantage of this distinction. Although some groups and leaders within BACRIM have been working towards demobilization, BACRIM organizations' overall goal is territorial gain and control of the drug trade within their areas of operation. BACRIM factions have frequently been in conflict with one another over territory, which has led to internal alliances and rivalries.⁸⁶

B. POLITICAL ACTIVITIES

BACRIM has no political agenda.⁸⁷ However, BACRIM members, particularly ex-paramilitary members, have used ties to Colombian public officials in order to protect their group's business interests.⁸⁸

Despite the Colombian government's blanket refusal to legitimize any BACRIM factions as political organizations, several BACRIM groups have tried to appear as political organizations so as to be able to negotiate with the government under more favorable terms. Political military groups have protections under Colombian law that are not offered to organized crime groups, and BACRIM organizations have attempted to take advantage of this distinction. In 2003, Los Rastrojos tried to negotiate a peace

agreement with the Colombian government. In an effort to appear to be a legitimate political organization, the group changed its name from “Los Rastrojos” to “Rondas Campesinas Populares” (Popular Peasant Patrols, RCP).⁸⁹ The government refused to allow the group into negotiations, so it changed its name back to “Los Rastrojos.”

Los Urabeños has also tried to negotiate a peace agreement with the Colombian government. Following the beginning of peace talks between the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the Colombian government in 2012, Los Urabeños began to alter its image to appear more political. The group created a website and a newspaper, and it classified itself as a “military-political organization.”⁹⁰ In 2018, the Colombian Congress created a law that outlined the terms for militant groups to demobilize.⁹¹ There were initial negotiations between Los Urabeños and President Santos’ government, including on the application of the 2018 law to Los Urabeños. However, negotiations were suspended indefinitely when President Duque took office in August 2018. Uncertainty surrounding the demobilization and reintegration of the FARC and the Colombian government’s fulfillment of its responsibilities outlined in the 2016 peace process also contributed to the cessation of negotiations.⁹²

In February 2017, Luis Carlos Villegas, the Colombian Minister of Defense declared that there were no paramilitary groups in Colombia. By making such a statement, despite recorded violence conducted by BACRIM factions, the government reiterated its position in not recognizing the BACRIM groups as paramilitary organizations. Instead, the government considers BACRIM groups to be part of organized crime and to have no legitimate political standing.⁹³ As of August 2019, the Colombian government has not engage in any efforts to demobilize and reintegrate of organized crime group because it does not want to give these organizations “political status.”⁹⁴

C. TARGETS AND TACTICS

BACRIM groups directly target Colombian police, especially in retaliation to police attacks on BACRIM organizations.⁹⁵ In 2012, Los Urabeños offered its members a reward of approximately \$1,000 for each police officer they murdered.⁹⁶ BACRIM factions have also targeted indigenous and Afro-Colombian community leaders.⁹⁷ BACRIM’s “sicarios” (assassins) often assassinate uncorrupt political leaders, journalists, “sapos” (informants), and the targets chosen by elites paying for assassinations.⁹⁸

BACRIM operations have included drug trafficking, extortion, gold mining, gambling, contraband smuggling, human trafficking, and the smuggling of gasoline.⁹⁹ Additionally, BACRIM groups have carried out assassination operations for financial gain and to maintain their authority.¹⁰⁰ BACRIM organizations often recruit underprivileged teenagers as “sicarios,” whom they employ and often house with other BACRIM group members.¹⁰¹ In order to avoid authorities, BACRIM factions have utilized a system of “campaneros” (spotters), or unarmed people that watch for authorities and use cell phones or radio to warn the group of threats.¹⁰²

BACRIM groups have also received tips from corrupt Colombian government, police, and military officers.¹⁰³ Though the Colombian government condemns activities of BACRIM organizations, BACRIM members rely on public officials for assistance. Through corruption and the use of bribes, BACRIM groups involve police, security forces, municipal council members, and mayors to protect their own business interests. In 2014, more than 200 anticorruption investigations of Colombian officials were allegedly undertaken to explore suspected ties with BACRIM groups.¹⁰⁴

In June 2019, Colombian authorities discovered that Los Urabeños had been producing landmines at a site in Riosucio, Chocó, near the Colombia-Panama border. Experts believe that Los Urabeños planted these landmines as part of its fight against the ELN’s increasing presence in the region. Additionally, the

landmines might have been intended as a scare tactic to force local populations to stay off drug trafficking routes and confine the expansion of villages.¹⁰⁵

MAJOR ATTACKS

Disclaimer: These are some selected major attacks in the militant organization's history. It is not a comprehensive listing but captures some of the most famous attacks or turning points during the campaign.

This list of major attacks highlights only certain attacks and operations by BACRIM groups. It does not cover all of BACRIM's major attacks, nor does it address BACRIM's daily assassination operations. The lack of communication between Colombian authorities and civilians in the regions that BACRIM factions control, as well as the frequent occurrence of assassinations, makes it difficult to compile a comprehensive list of the use of violence by BACRIM groups.

September 2008: BACRIM faction Aguilas Negras launched two attacks within a few weeks of each other. The first attack killed three indigenous leaders in Cauca, and the second attack killed five other community members (8 killed, 1+ wounded).¹⁰⁶

November 2012: Los Rastrojos killed 10 tree tomato farmers in a municipality northeast of Bogota, allegedly over an extortion fee (10 killed, unknown wounded).¹⁰⁷

September 2014: The Colombian government suspected Los Urabeños for mounting an attack in collaboration with the FARC against police officials in Córdoba (7 killed, unknown wounded).¹⁰⁸

March 2017: Approximately 200 members of Los Urabeños entered Peña Azul in Alto Baudó (northwest Colombia). The militants claimed to be seeking the forces of the ELN. Their appearance caused the forced displacement of approximately 400 civilians (unknown casualties).¹⁰⁹

January 2018: Los Urabeños injured 30 people after throwing a grenade into a dance club in Antioquia (unknown killed, 30 wounded).¹¹⁰

October 30, 2018: Los Rastrojos attacked a Venezuelan military base that was located twenty meters from the Colombian border. The attack was a show of force in retaliation for the capture of one of their members on the previous day (unknown killed, unknown wounded).¹¹¹

February-March 2019: Los Urabeños and the ELN clashed while competing for control of drug trafficking routes along Bojayá, trapping approximately 2,800 people within the conflict area and causing international condemnation of the attacks (unknown killed, unknown wounded).¹¹²

INTERACTIONS

A. DESIGNATED/LISTED

- Los Rastrojos was designated a “Specially Designated Narcotics Trafficker” under the Kingpin Act in 2013 by the United States.¹¹³
- Los Urabeños was designated a “Specially Designated Narcotics Trafficker” under the Kingpin Act in 2014 by the United States.¹¹⁴

- Los Puntilleros (formerly, ERPAC) is designated as a “Class A Organized Armed Group” by the Colombian government. This designation permits the Colombian military to use aerial booming and other tactics that are otherwise prohibited against civilian criminals.¹¹⁵

B. COMMUNITY RELATIONS

BACRIM groups maintain control of communities in their territory through the use of violence. BACRIM organizations have frequently engaged in forced displacement, sexual violence, and massacres.¹¹⁶ The groups are also known for their use of extortion and political assassinations in order to coerce local populations to support the organization and its drug trafficking operations.

In impoverished, rural areas, such as along the coast of Colombia, BACRIM groups have targeted local community leaders, particularly of indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities. Because government involvement in these regions and with these communities has historically been absent, local leaders play a large role in community formation, structure, and decision-making. Analysts speculate that BACRIM organizations attack local leaders to remove traditional sources of order and legitimacy. These leaders are often killed on the charge that they collaborated with the previous organization that was occupying the territory. This tactic gives groups space to exert their control over a given region.¹¹⁷

BACRIM groups, specifically Los Urabeños, are also known for their direct intimidation of and outreach to minors. BACRIM groups have taken over classrooms and given children (mostly teenagers) guns and cars – items that are hard to come by in rural areas.¹¹⁸ Taking over classrooms serves as both an intimidation tactic as well as a recruitment platform, and providing material items acts as an incentive for minors to join the criminal gangs.

Although BACRIM groups bring violence to the regions in which they operate, they also provide protection to coca farmers growing crops in their territories. BACRIM groups that are predominantly involved in drug trafficking have an economic interest in safeguarding coca farms and ensuring some level of economic stability. Consequently, BACRIM organizations provide protection in areas where coca cultivation is a major economy, such as along the Colombian coast and in Cauca. Because President Duque’s government has dramatically increased efforts to eradicate coca production, coca farmers have grown dependent on the presence of BACRIM factions and other militant groups that are involved in the drug trade.¹¹⁹ In addition to providing economic protection, BACRIM groups also claim to provide local communities protection from other militant organizations. For example, Los Urabeños has claimed to be protecting local populations in Cauca from the ELN.¹²⁰

BACRIM groups form the basis of social and political stability for many of the regions in which they operate. BACRIM organizations instill the rule of law within their territory, and they often settle disputes between local parties. Several BACRIM factions believe in “social cleansing,” killing those who they have convicted of crimes like rape, theft, and sometimes drug addiction.¹²¹ Some BACRIM groups have also threatened members of the LGBT community. However, as of 2017, there have not been any definitive attacks on members of the LGBT community specifically due to their sexual orientation.¹²²

C. RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER GROUPS

The involvement of BACRIM factions in the drug trade ties them to leftist guerrilla groups in Colombia, particularly the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and National Liberation Army (ELN). BACRIM groups have traded and bought drug products, namely coca base, from the FARC. Additionally, the FARC reportedly contracted BACRIM’s ‘assassins for hire,’ to provide additional militants for FARC attacks.¹²³ In September 2014, Los Urabeños reportedly collaborated with the FARC in an attack on

Colombian police.¹²⁴ Since the demobilization of the FARC, BACRIM organizations have fought amongst themselves in the FARC's former territory for control of its drug production and trafficking routes.

BACRIM groups have increased their interactions with the ELN since the demobilization of the FARC in 2016. Beginning in 2016-2017, BACRIM organizations like Los Rastrojos and Los Urabeños have been collaborating with the ELN on illegal drug trafficking.¹²⁵ Although Los Urabeños has cooperated with the ELN, the group has also been competing with the ELN for territory and control of drug trafficking routes. Since 2015, violence between the ELN and Los Urabeños has caused the forced displacement of approximately 50,000 people in Chocó.¹²⁶ From February to March 2019, clashes between Los Urabeños and the ELN forced the confinement of approximately 2,800 people in Bojayá, a city along two major drug trafficking routes in northern Colombia.¹²⁷

For its international drug trafficking operations, BACRIM groups have ties to other transnational crime organizations and drug cartels. As of August 2019, Los Urabeños has established business with Mexican drug cartels like the Sinaloa Cartel and Los Zetas.¹²⁸

In Venezuela, the BACRIM group Los Rastrojos is allegedly allied financially with the Bolivarian National Guard (GNB), Venezuela's armed forces. The two have cooperated in gasoline smuggling from Venezuela to Colombia. However, Los Rastrojos and the GNB have also engaged in violence against each other. The GNB arrested members of Los Rastrojos, and Los Rastrojos retaliated with attacks and kidnappings of national guardsmen.¹²⁹

BACRIM groups also have complicated relationships with other organizations falling under the BACRIM label. Los Urabeños has historically been in competition with Los Rastrojos for territory as well as economic influence in the drug trafficking industry.¹³⁰ Simultaneously, Los Urabeños is allied with Los Libertadores del Vichada.¹³¹ Although Los Libertadores del Vichada cooperates with Los Urabeños, it has been in competition with another group in Los Puntilleros, Bloque Meta.¹³²

D. STATE SPONSORS AND EXTERNAL INFLUENCES

International crime groups have historically influenced BACRIM organizations. BACRIM groups have traditionally traded with Mexican drug cartels, particularly the Sinaloa Cartel, and earn \$5,000 per kilo of cocaine sold.¹³³ In 2013, BACRIM organizations explored the possibility of operating directly in Italy and Spain in an effort to earn more per kilo of cocaine sold.¹³⁴ As of June 2019, BACRIM groups allegedly have ties to the Italian Mafia.¹³⁵

The United States has also influenced the leadership and the continuation of BACRIM organizations. Since around 2012, leadership in BACRIM groups, such as Los Rastrojos, have made deals with U.S. law enforcement in order to serve lighter prison sentences in the United States than what they would receive in Colombia. Leaders like Luis E. Calle Serna have turned themselves in to U.S. authorities after negotiating plea deals with the United States government. These proceedings have created divisions within the leadership of BACRIM groups like Los Rastrojos, as leaders who turn themselves over to authorities come into conflict with those who continue the organization's militant operations.¹³⁶

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