

PROJECT BACKGROUND:

Gun-violence is a public health issue disproportionately impacting the Americas. Colombia is one of 6 countries in the Americas, alongside US, Brazil, Mexico, Venezuela, and Guatemala, which make up over half (50.5%) of the 250,000 annual global gun-related deaths as shown in **Figure 1**.

Colombia has a long history (56 years) of internal conflict and a fragile peace building process that as of 2020, is at risk of stagnation, or worse, a return to conflict. Conflict is primarily between Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), National Liberation Army (ELN), and the Colombian government, with additional civilian arms groups (*Villar-Márquez*).

Colombia passed a nation-wide permanent gun-carry restriction for civilians to accompany the peace agreement in 2016, which has been renewed annually by the government (*Johns Hopkins Center for Global Health*).

The media is an important stakeholder in this process, and it is often represents the “voice of society” outside of the government. However, trust and representation in the media are both low. For example, journalism self-censorship occurs to avoid corrupt officials, criminals, and illegal arms groups (*Reporters Without Borders*).

The GEMS team chose to perform a media analysis to assess the tone of media around gun carrying and try to understand how and who framed public discourse on this topic.

Research objectives

1. Perform a thorough media analysis of primary online news sources to analyze mainstream discourse on gun carrying
2. Use media data to inform GEMS Team's evidence-based policy recommendations on gun carry in Colombia

Relevance:

This research examines the interplay between media and politics in determining gun policies for Colombia. These findings are applicable for individuals implementing gun control policies in the US, the Americas more broadly, or other parts of the world with high gun homicide rates.

This poster examines the role of public discourse in post-conflict traumatic recovery

Gun Related Deaths by Country (2016)

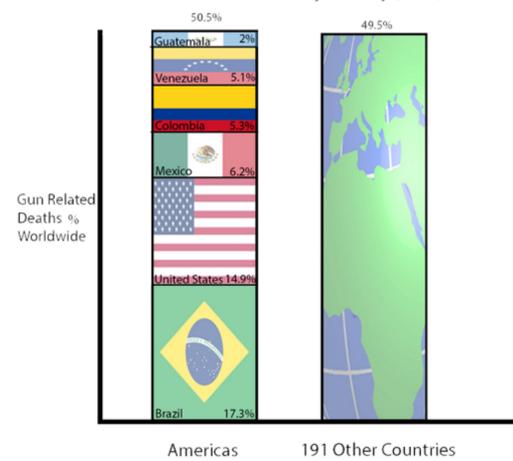


Figure 1. Percentage of Gun-Related Deaths by Country (annually, 2016) (Lopez; Santhanam)

METHODOLOGY:

GEMS Team project:

The overall project draws on qualitative interviews and focus groups that our team conducted during our fieldwork. Our team conducted in-depth research on public policy, media, society, and stakeholder engagement.

My contribution:

I conducted a Media Analysis of news coverage on gun carrying in Colombia sourced from three major online media sources. I conducted an advanced Google Scholar search of “Porte de Armas” (gun carry) from 1990-2019. The sample size of my analysis was 113 articles from the following sources: *El Espectador* (19 articles), *El Tiempo* (19 articles), *Semana* (75 articles). *El Espectador* is the oldest newspaper while *El Tiempo* is the most widely-read, circulated, and influential newspaper in Colombia, both of which are nationally distributed. *Semana* is one of the main current issue magazines. Completing the analysis using online media allowed for access to a large number of articles yet biased the data temporally towards the present with 30% of the articles being from 2019, 26% from 2018, 40.5% from 2017 (due largely to *Semana* maintaining 2017 peace agreement articles on their site), and 3.5% from prior dates.

Each article was broken down into core components: main argument, tone towards gun carry, institutions mentioned, framing of issue, key actors, and critical events. Each component was analyzed, as shown in the figures. Subsequently, I performed a Power Analysis to examine broader questions, such as who funded the media and how much influence is held over these media outlets and resulting discourse.

Tone Towards Gun Control

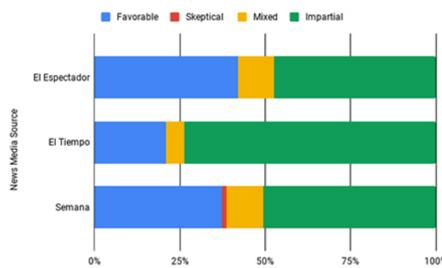


Figure 2. Tone of Gun Control Arguments - by News Station

Actors	Title/Position	# Times Mentioned in Media
Iván Duque Márquez	President (August 2018-Present)	18
Juan Manuel Santos Calderón	Former President (August 2010-2018)	15
Guillermo Botero	Former Minister of Defense (Resigned 2019)	13
Álvaro Uribe Vélez	Former President (August 2002-2010)	12
Juan Fernando Cristo	Former Minister of Interior	11
Christian Garcés	Congressman for Centro Democrático	10
Guillermo Rivera Floréz	Former Minister of Interior	10
Luis Ernesto Gómez	Former Vice Minister of Interior	7
Rodrigo Londoño	FARC Leader- “Timochenko”	5

Figure 4. Predominant Actors Cited in Media The top 5% of actors represent over 1/3rd of the total actors mentions. These 9 actors, all government-affiliated besides Rodrigo Londoño, leader of the FARC, make up only 5% of total actors yet represent 34.6% of media representation. Between the 113 articles, 160 total actors were mentioned, and the number of mentions shared between these actors was 292.

Institutions Mentioned in News Media (%)

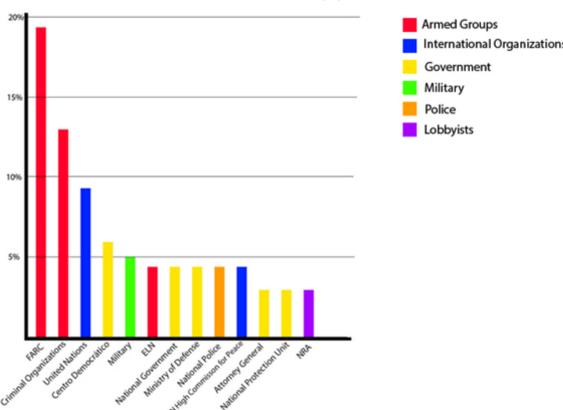


Figure 5. Predominant Institutions Cited in Mainstream Media Top 81% of institutions cited are mentioned.

FINDINGS:

Figure 2 – The majority of media reports are impartial however the biased minority heavily favors restricting civilian gun carry

Figure 3 – The media predominantly frames gun carrying as a macro-level issue—national security, governance, urban centers—rather than at a rural, community, or individual level where impacts of violence are felt daily. Very little discussion existed on public or mental health and only tangential discussion on human rights through the perspective of gun carry laws and disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) procedures for the FARC/ELN/armed groups.

Figure 4 – There are 8 politicians and a FARC leader cited predominantly in the media with civil societies and non-state actors being largely unrepresented

Figure 5 - 36% of institutional mentions were the FARC, ELN, and organized crime, shows that Colombian society still needs to grapple with this violence, with the rest being government officials working on gun regulations, the United Nations, and military/police force. Civil society organizations did not make it in the top 81% of institutions mentioned.

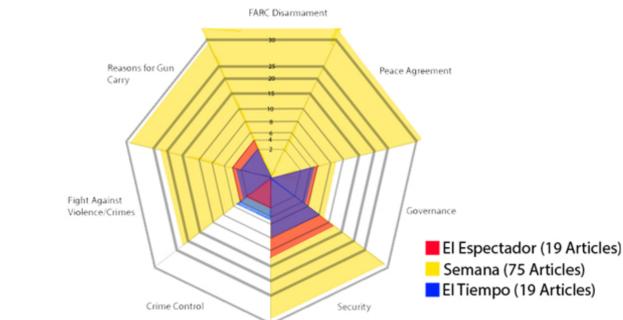


Figure 3. Media Framings of Gun Carrying - by News Station Media frames (themes) are reduced to the 7 most commonly discussed themes around gun carrying. The seven most common frames are depicted with the frequency of citation marked for each online media station. Numbers reflect number of times frame is mentioned, rather than number of articles. Multiple frames could be selected per article, but the same frame was never counted twice per article.

RECOMMENDATIONS: The results of this study show that post-conflict discourse is very state-driven and that pieces of history are being left out. One way media could go beyond narratives of violence and criminality is to increase voices of non-state actors in these major media outlets. Media can be extremely useful in the process of healing collective trauma in times of peace building. To enhance this process, we recommend the media consider the following changes:

State -> Individual

A macro state-level focus leaves out societal actors' and individuals' stories on how guns and violence impact their lives. The media frames gun control as a “policy choice” rather than a human toll. A shift toward the individual might drive the narrative to better represent the opinions of society in media discourse and, subsequently, in policy

Voices left out -> Representation

Gun violence most heavily impacts rural citizens, the indigenous, women, and families. Media must include these individual level voices. By including these voices, the media can better support the post-conflict peace process and present a more accurate picture of the country's collective trauma. These voices are also a useful resource for community level solutions to violence

War journalism -> Peace journalism

Post-conflict media shows a shift in the symbolism of guns as power and protection during war to guns as an outdated vestige of the war in peacetime. The media must continue this trend while including greater coverage of progress in gun violence reduction to enhance public morale around the peace building process. This avoids reinforcing inequalities and violent systems.

CONCLUSION: In post-conflict settings, the media plays a critical role in mental health and trauma recovery as it provides the public discourse of the traumatic memory for society. The fact that 36% of institutional mentions were the FARC, ELN, and organized crime, shows that Colombian society still needs to grapple with this violence, as shown in **Figure 5**. The media continues to depict the conflict at a sterile macro level and mainstream media outlets have yet to express individual changes and transformations that will have to happen to solidify the peace process and prevent new conflict. Positively, media symbolism of guns is shifting from symbols of power and protection to outdated and dangerous vestiges of wartime.

A substantial body of research has highlighted the importance of narrative reconstruction for trauma recovery and post-traumatic growth for survivors in post-conflict settings (*Jirek*). We know that the traumatic storytelling practices emerging from situations of political violence, from Apartheid (*Colvin*) to the Holocaust (*Duchin & Wiseman*), often play a key role in peace processes, memory work, and collective healing for societies.

However, in Colombia, this continued state-driven media discourse is overshadowing individual and collective discourses that could inform public health by enhancing trust and trauma processing and recovery for those most impacted.

THE GEMS EXPERIENCE:

My take-aways: Behavioral observations in your second language are challenging but ultimately rewarding when you are able to navigate the complexity of the situation. Interviewing politicians, in particular, presents a unique experience as one must assess the nuances and layers of their speech and behavior to find their opinion.

My gratitude: I am grateful to have had such a compassionate team and for being chosen to provide this critical piece of data analysis. I am also grateful to GEMS for the opportunity to reconfirm my passion for working in global health and for having this opportunity to expand my perspective and network.

My future pathway: This project was my first opportunity to combine my BS in Neuroscience and Global Health with my MA in International Development. One of our GEMS mentors works as a social psychologist and I was grateful for the opportunity to share discussions with her about opportunities in this field. In the future, I would like to continue working on violence prevention and peacebuilding in Latin America.



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