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Voting for Peace: Understanding the Victory of "No"

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Voting for Peace: Understanding the Victory of "No"[1]

The results of Colombia's recent plebiscite map the profound regional differences within the country. The "yes" vote won in regions that are most isolated from the State and the market, where the armed conflict with the FARC has had the most impact but the dividends of the ceasefire have yet to be seen. The "no" vote, however, took the lead in regions with greater access to the State and the market, where institutions exist and function more effectively.

Electorally speaking, the plebiscite was a poor copy of the second round of the 2014 presidential elections. Those who campaigned in favor of the Havana peace accord were faced with unresponsive regional political machineries and a lack of incentives for those who could mobilize "yes" votes to join the campaign.

Clearly, the "no" victory took a number of people by surprise. Although all of the polls leading up to the plebiscite indicated that the "yes" vote would win with a significant margin,[2] the "no" eked out a victory with slightly more than 53,000 votes. The results of October 2 reflect a country that exhibits profound differences between the center and periphery, between those who see the peace agreements as an opportunity and those who perceive them as a threat to their interests.

Added to this context is the indifference and disinterest of a significant portion of the population. Voter abstention rates were the highest they have been in the past 22 years. With 62.59% of voters deciding not to participate, the abstention of registered voters was higher even than during the most recent presidential elections in 2014, when 59.91% of voters abstained in the first round and 52.03% did so in the second.

The Ideas for Peace Foundation (FIP for its acronym in Spanish) presents six key factors that help to explain why the "No" vote was successful. It is important to note that there is no single or simple explanation for the outcome.

2 For example, Polimétrica showed that 62% of those surveyed would vote in favor of the peace accord, while Datexco showed that 55% would cast a "yes" vote. And in the last survey conducted by Ipsos Napoleón Franco, even though the "yes" vote lost momentum in the final few days before the plebiscite, it still surpassed the "no" vote at 66%.

1. IN THE MAJORITY, ALBEIT NOT ALL, OF THE REGIONS IN WHICH THE FARC ARE PRESENT, THE "YES" VOTE WON

The FARC's physical presence throughout Colombian territory has varied, and manifestations of violence have differed from region to region. This has influenced how the group has interacted with the population and also how they are perceived by it.

Although at first glance the municipalities that voted "yes" seem to coincide with those in which the FARC are present, it is important to examine the results more closely (Map 1). In light of the plebiscite results, two types of regions can be identified: those in which the FARC are the dominant armed group and maintain a certain degree of legitimacy, and those in which the FARC have committed predatory acts that have left hundreds of victims. In the latter areas, citizens found it more difficult to uphold the final accord and the peace process in general.

MAP 1. FARC PRESENCE IN 2016 AND THE PERCENTAGE OF "YES" VOTES BY MUNICIPALITY
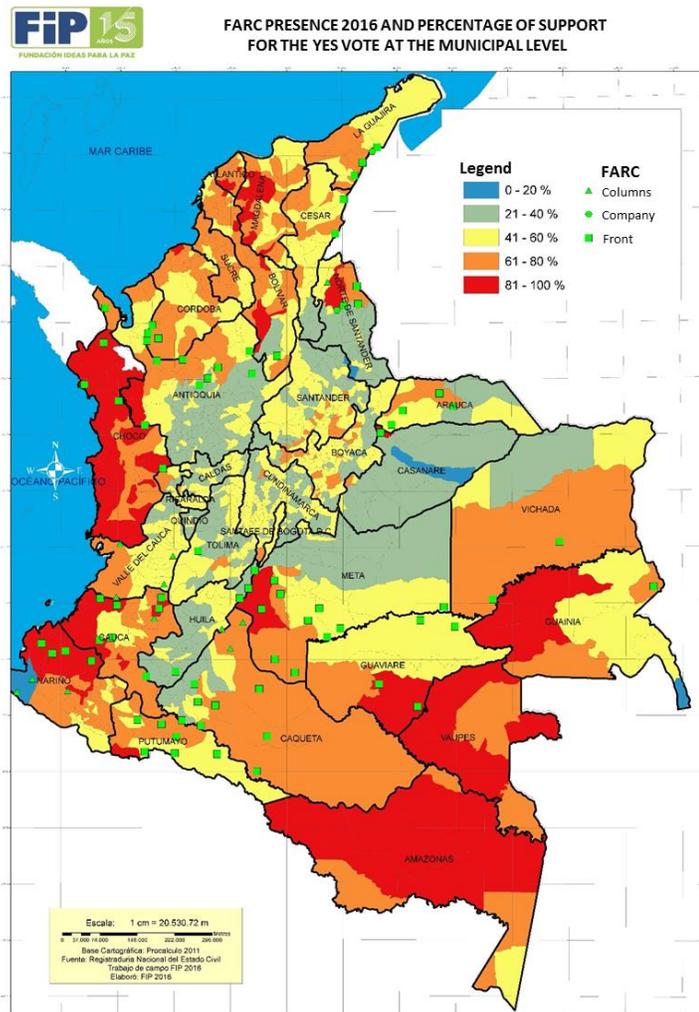
In Map 2, we see that in Norte de Santander (on the border with Venezuela), the Catatumbo region voted at odds with the rest of the department. In the former region, which has historically been home to a greater number of the FARC, ELN, and EPL, the Final Peace Accord gained greater traction. In the municipalities of San Calixto, El Tarra, Hacarí, and Teorama, for example, support reached 95.18%, 91.51%, 89.46%, and 86.47%, respectively.

## MAP 2. MUNICIPALITIES WITH A MAJORITY OF VOTES IN FAVOR OF "YES" AND "NO"
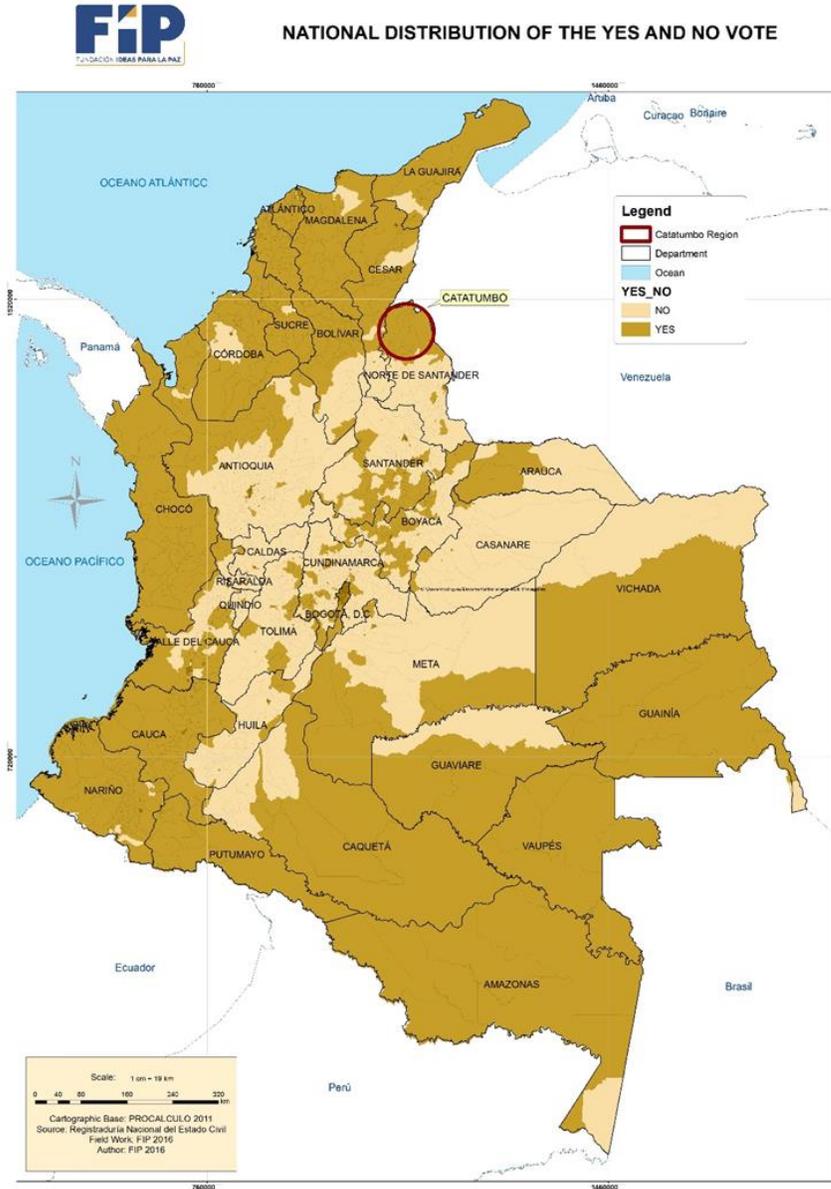
According to FIP's fieldwork in this region, the peace agreement is seen as an opportunity for development, modernization, and regional integration, not as something that benefits only the FARC. Something similar occurs in Putumayo, a department in which the "yes" won in all municipalities by more than 50% of the vote.

In Catatumbo, the FARC is seen not only as an illegal armed group but also as a social and political actor that has accompanied the processes of colonization and has built institutions through the ups and downs of the war, something that has generated social support. Added to this is the fact that, in recent decades, a strong peasant movement has been consolidated in the region, and agrees with the FARC about the importance of integrating Catatumbo into the country as a whole and substituting illegal economies for sustainable ones that take peasants out of poverty.

MAP 3. "YES" VOTES IN ANTIOQUIA, CASANARE, CAQUETÁ, AND META
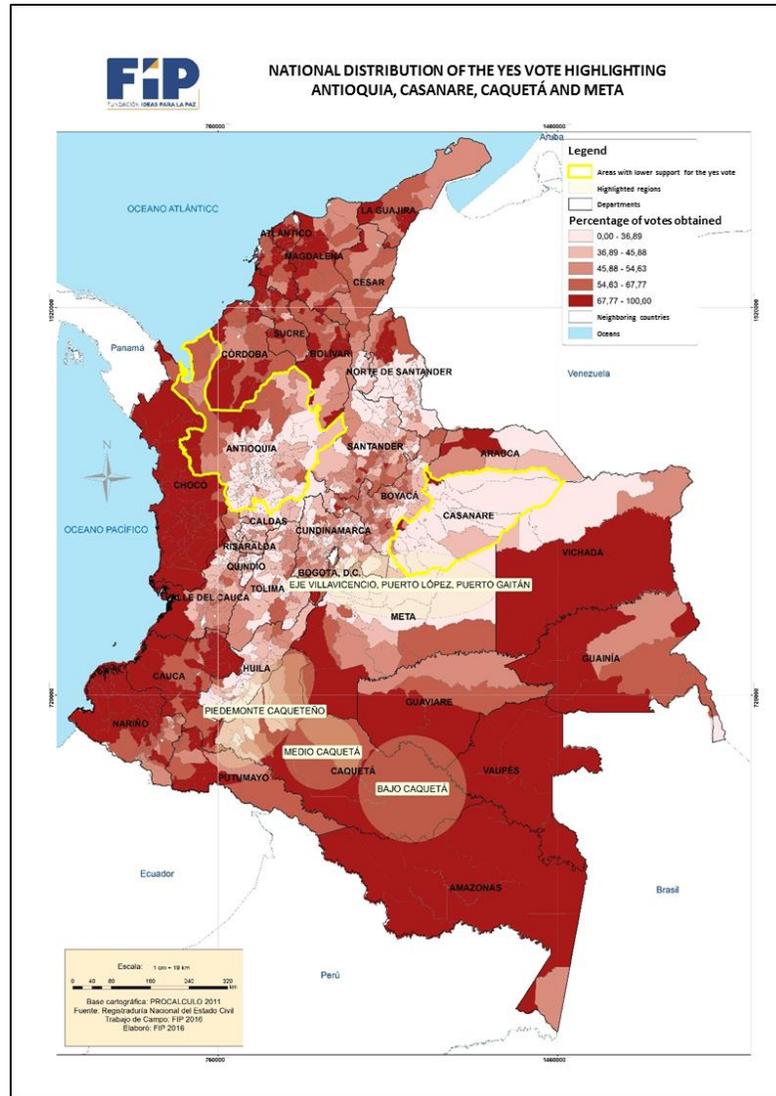
By contrast, in the rest of the department (i.e., the municipalities that are more integrated with the Colombian state and the region's economic centers, such as Cúcuta and Ocaña), the "yes" vote did not surpass 21–40%. In this same region, the FARC perpetrated acts of kidnapping, extortion, and terrorism, which appears to have influenced the rejection of the peace process and affects the ability of guerrilla combatants to reintegrate into civilian life.

Something similar might have occurred in Antioquia, the Meta-Casanare region, and Caquetá. In the latter department, a region of mountains and foothills, the "yes" vote did not exceed 41–50%. However, in the middle and lower regions—including the municipalities of San Vicente del Caguán (63%), Cartagena del Chairá (74%), La Montañita (74%), and Solano (76%)—there was a clear preference for the "yes." In these communities, the FARC have had a historic presence and been instrumental in the construction of political and social identity.

2. IN MOST—BUT NOT ALL—OF THE PLACES WHERE THE ARMED CONFLICT HAS HAD THE GREATEST IMPACT, THE "YES" VOTE WON

The most intense period of the armed conflict took place between 1999 and 2003 (Graph 1). During these years, guerrilla groups, paramilitaries, and the State consolidated areas of control. The violence was greatest in disputed areas, and the civilian population was the principal victim.

GRAPH 1. INTENSITY OF THE CONFLICT BETWEEN 1999 AND 2016(AS SHOWN BY THE RED DASHED LINE)
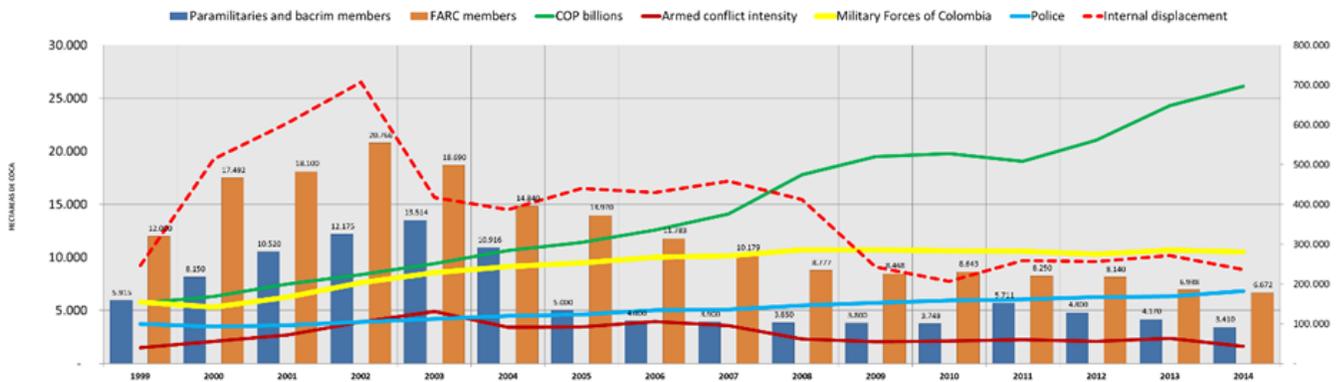

The most affected areas were Arauca, the Urabá region in Chocó and Antioquia, Nudo de Paramillo, Montes de María, Catatumbo, Guaviare, and lower Putumayo. In all of these areas, the "yes" won on October 2 with more than 50% of the vote (Map 4).

The decision by residents of these regions to vote "yes" may mean that citizens associate the consequences of war with the benefits of a Final Accord that is not only an agreement between two parties but rather an attempt to overcome the war. In regions that have experienced new outbreaks of armed conflict either recently (Arauca) or in the last few years (the Pacific region, from Nariño to Chocó), the "yes" vote also won a majority.

In these regions, the peace accord may be perceived as an opportunity for development and regional integration. It is also important to note that, in several of these areas, the de-escalation of the armed conflict as a result of the ceasefire helped to generate support for the agreements.

MAP 4. REGIONS WITH MORE THAN 50% OF VOTES IN FAVOR OF "YES"
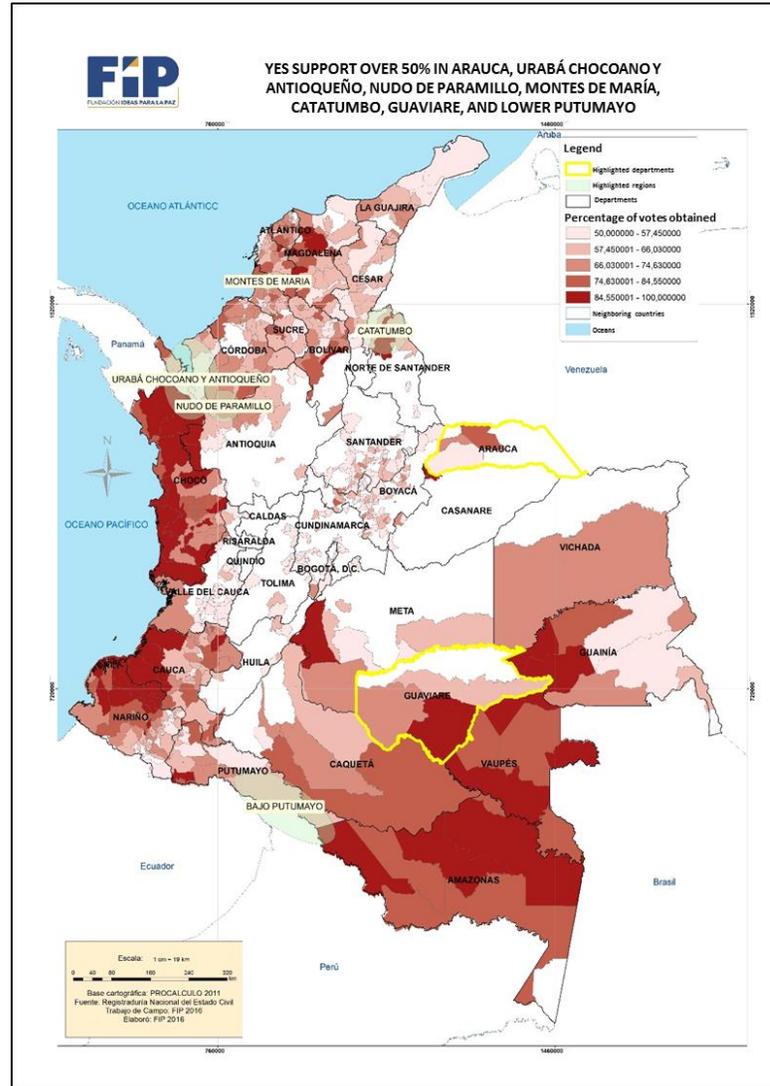
However, it is telling that in other regions of intense confrontation between different illegal armed groups—such as Magdalena Media in Antioquia and Santander—the "no" won the majority of votes, although to varying degrees. In southern Bolívar, for example, the only municipality in which the "no" vote won in the range of 61–80% was Cantagallo. However, in other municipalities that also suffered during the conflict and in which coca cultivation has decreased in recent years—such as San Pablo, Simití, Santa Rosa del Sur, and Morales— the "no" won by a narrow margin.

3. THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE CENTER AND THE PERIPHERY MATTERS (A LOT)

Map 5 shows a nighttime photo of Colombia. The lights indicate the most populated and developed areas in which the supply of goods and services is more comprehensive. With

some exceptions, these areas correspond to the places where the "No" vote received a majority (map on the far right). As can be observed, the more marginalized or peripheral areas such as Amazonia, the Pacific Coast, and part of Orinoquía were in favor of the peace accord (Map 6), while the more populated and developed areas were against it (Map 7).

MAPS 5, 6, AND 7. NIGHTTIME PHOTOGRAPH OF COLOMBIA AND VOTES FOR "YES" AND VOTES FOR "NO"
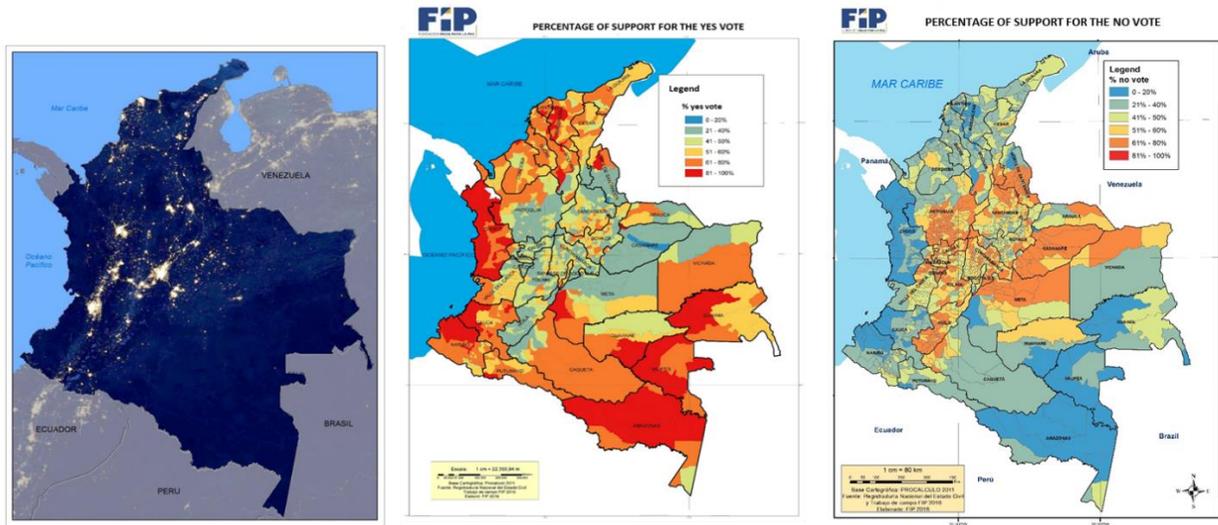
The economists L. Fergusson and C. Molina find a positive correlation between the poorest areas (measured by the Multidimensional Poverty Index, or MPI) and those in which a majority voted "yes" (Graph 2). Meanwhile, the wealthiest areas favored the "no." This relationship can also be seen by contrasting the results of the vote with the municipal distribution of the MPI (Map 8).

GRAPH 2. MULTIDIMENSIONAL POVERTY INDEX AND % OF "YES" VOTES
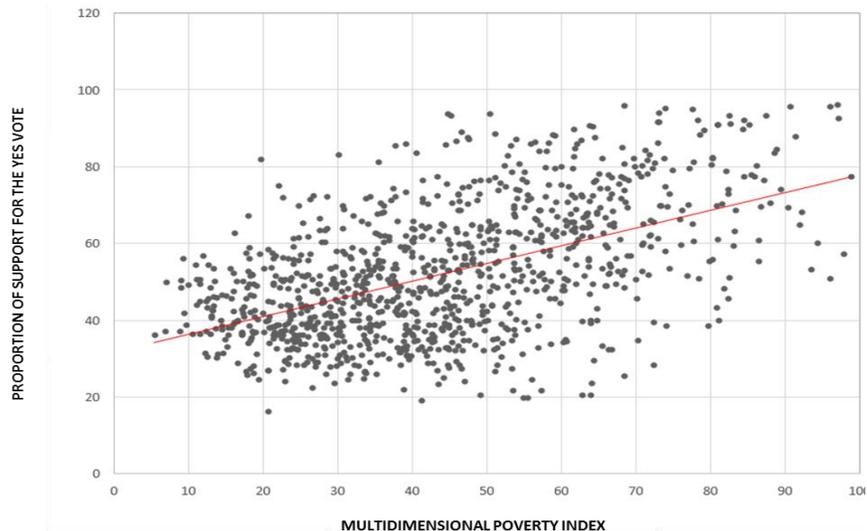
Among the regions in which the percentage of the MPI is higher and the "yes" vote more popular are the Pacific, Orinoquía, and Amazonia. Other municipalities that follow this pattern include San Jacinto, El Carmen de Bolívar, and Santa Rosa in the department of Bolívar, as well as Canalete, Los Córdobas, and Puerto Escondido in Córdoba.

MAP 8. MULTIDIMENSIONAL POVERTY INDEX AND % OF VOTES FOR YES AND NO
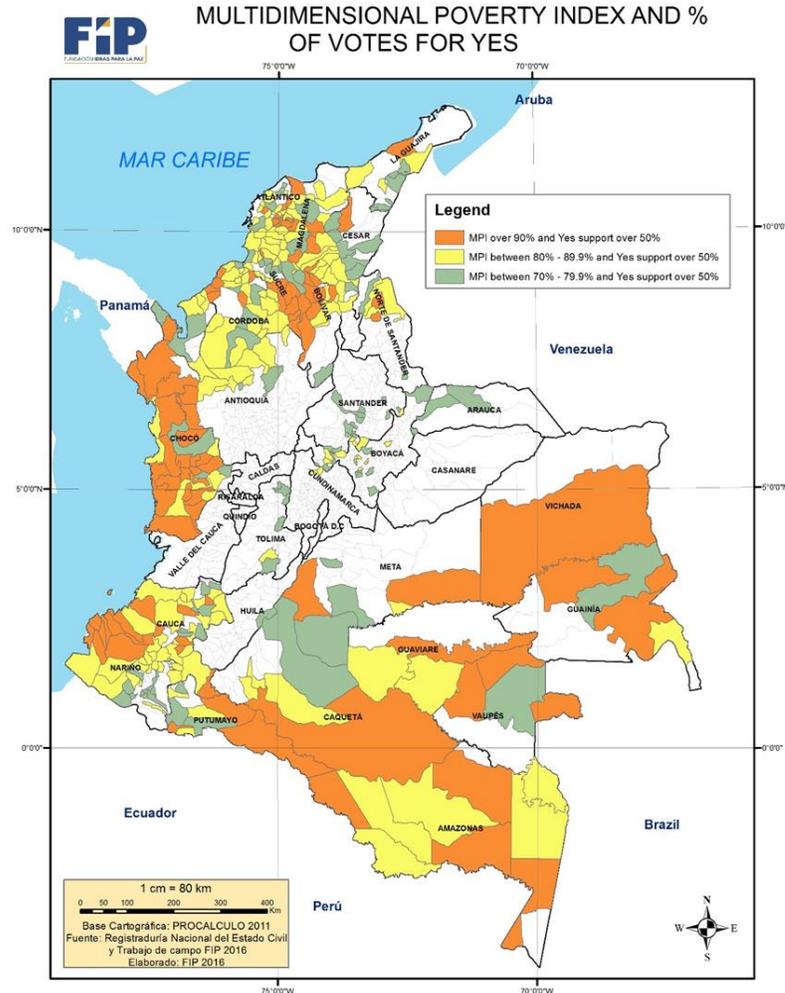
Additionally, when the "yes" vote is compared with the effective presence of the State, an inverse relationship is found. That is to say, in places where there is less state presence or fewer formal institutions, more voters favor the peace accord. The "Integral Performance Index," a tool designed by the National Planning Department to evaluate municipal administration, is one way to analyze the effect of state presence. When the map of institutional "efficiency" is compared with voting patterns, a clear relationship emerges between support for the peace process and poor delivery of goods and services (Map 9). The critical areas (in blue) and low-performing areas (in green) correlate with "yes" votes at more than 50%. Meanwhile, in Antioquia, Cundinamarca, Tolima, and Santander, the "no" vote won the majority in a significant group of municipalities that receive satisfactory performance.

MAP 9. INTEGRAL PERFORMANCE INDEX AND PERCENTAGE OF VOTES FOR "YES" AND "NO"
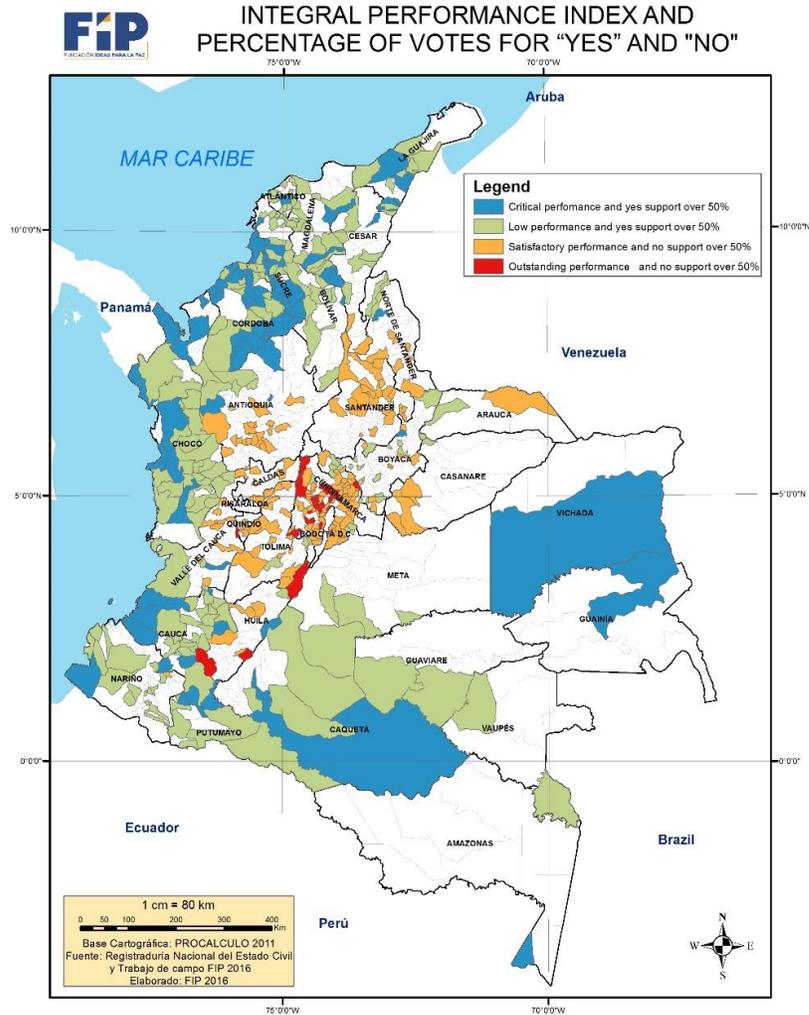
Similar to other analyses, FIP also found a correlation between the average distance from the main population centers and the results of the plebiscite. The most remote municipalities showed more support for the peace accord. In general, the municipalities that are furthest from the influence of the state and market were most in favor of the peace accord.

4. THE RESULTS OF THE PLEBISCITE MIRROR THE RESULTS OF THE SECOND ROUND OF PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS IN 2014

A clear correlation exists between votes in the second round of the 2014 presidential elections and those of the plebiscite: in the areas where Santos won in 2014, the "yes" vote won, whereas in areas where Centro Democrático candidate Oscar Iván Zuluaga made a stronger showing, the "no" vote was also stronger (Graphs 3 and 4).

GRAPHS 3 AND 4. PROPORTION OF "YES" VOTES VS. VOTES FOR SANTOS / ZULUAGA
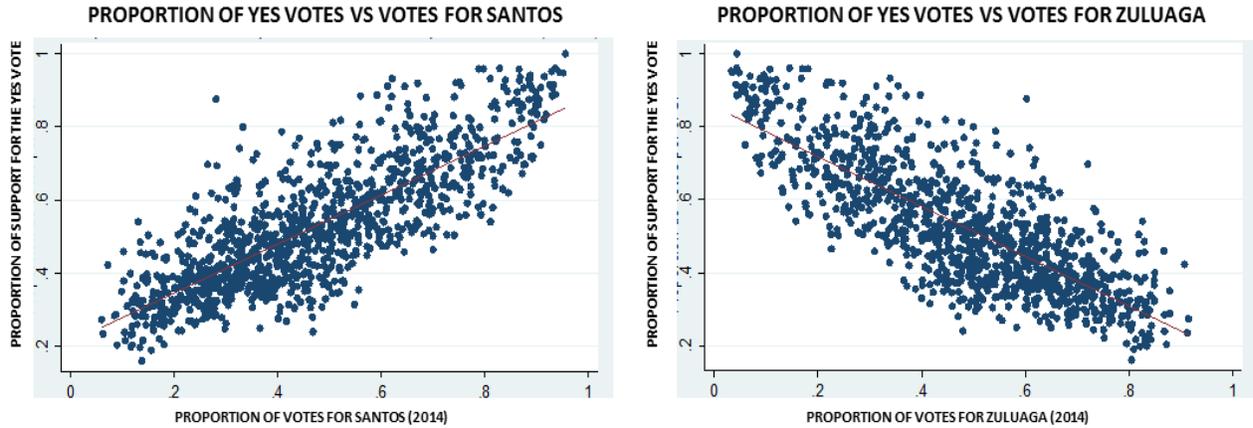
In the case of the "yes" vote, the Caribbean Coast and the plains of Córdoba, Sucre, and Bolívar follow this pattern, as do Chocó, Cauca, almost all of Nariño, the upper and middle regions of Putumayo, and the regions of Urabá and Catatumbo in Antioquia (Map 10).

The case of Córdoba also stands out because its capital city of Montería is the only place in the department in which Zuluaga won in 2014 and the "no" vote won in the plebiscite (52% for "no," 48% for "yes").

In the department of Antioquia, there is also a correlation between the areas in which Zuluaga won the second round of the 2014 presidential elections and those that voted "no" in 2016. In contrast, the "yes" votes in this department were concentrated in Bajo Cauca, Urabá, and the northern regions, where President Santos won in 2014 (Map 12).

The same trend can be seen in Huila, Caldas, and Meta. In the latter department, the "yes" vote was concentrated in some of the municipalities on the left bank of the Ariari river and in areas of historic FARC influence (La Macarena, Uribe, and Mesetas), where President Santos also won the 2014 elections. Meanwhile, the "no" vote triumphed in the municipalities located in the foothills and plains, which are more connected with the region's economic networks; in this zone, the "yes" votes did not exceed the 21–40% range (Map 13).

MAP 10. MUNICIPALITIES IN WHICH THE NATIONAL UNITY COALITION WON THE SECOND ROUND OF THE 2014 ELECTIONS AND THE "YES" VOTE WON A MAJORITY IN THE PLEBISCITE

MUNICIPALITIES IN WHICH THE UNIDAD NACIONAL WON THE RUNOFF VOTING AND THE MAJORITY VOTED YES ON THE PLEBISCITE
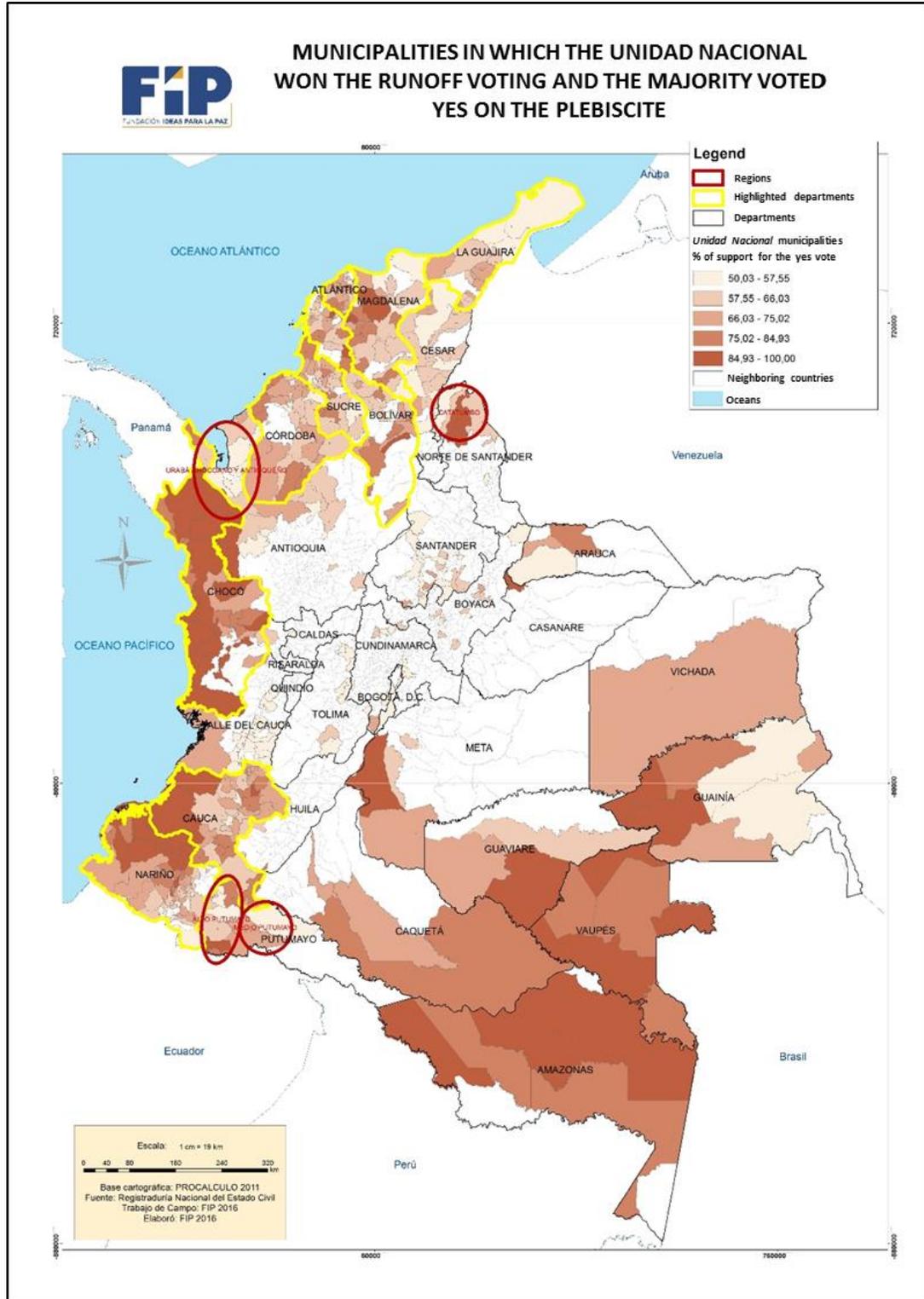
MAP 11. MUNICIPALITIES IN WHICH THE "CENTRO DEMOCRÁTICO" WON THE SECOND ROUND OF THE 2014 ELECTIONS AND THE "NO" VOTE WON A MAJORITY IN THE PLEBISCITE
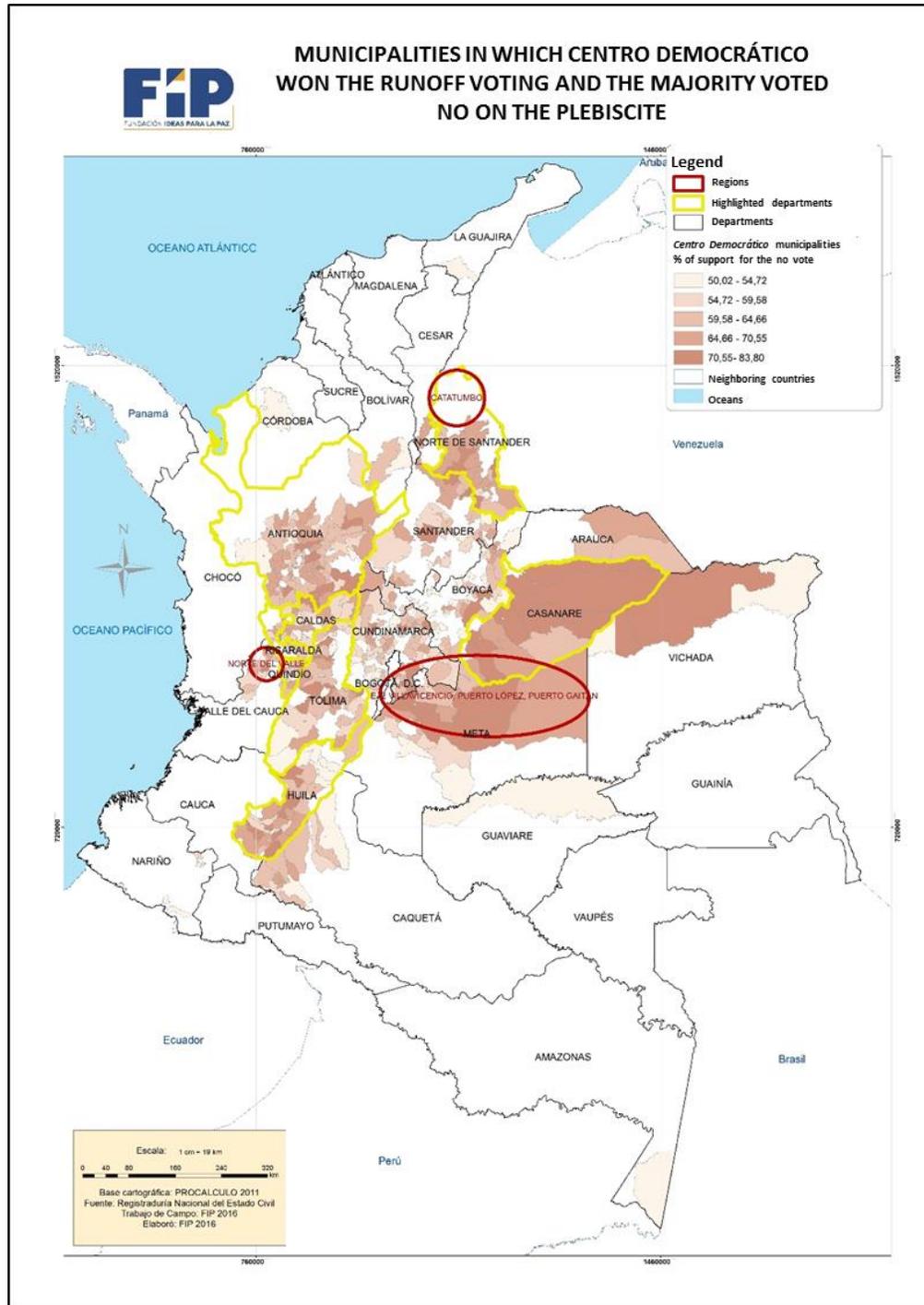
MAP 12. VOTES IN THE SECOND ROUND OF THE 2014 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION AND PLEBISCITE RESULTS IN ANTIOQUIA, CALDAS, CHOCÓ, AND HUILA

SUPPORT FOR THE YES VOTE IN THE MUNICIPALITIES OF ANTIOQUIA, CALDAS, CHOCO, AND HUILA
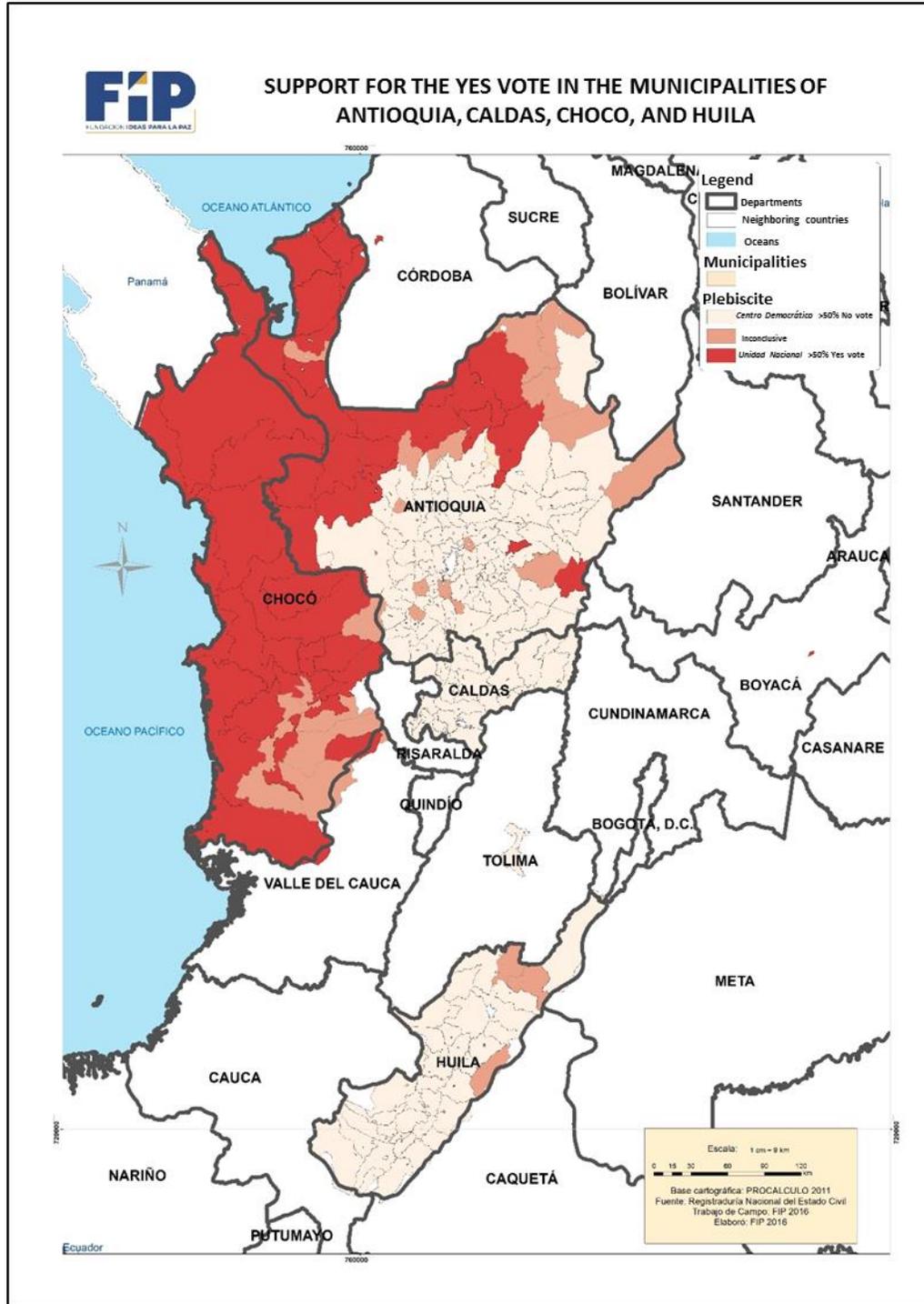
MAP 13. VOTES IN THE SECOND ROUND OF THE 2014 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION AND PLEBISCITE RESULTS IN THE MUNICIPALITIES OF THE FOOTHILLS AND PLAINS REGION

DISTRIBUTION OF THE NO VOTE AND PREFERENCE FOR THE CENTRO DEMOCRÁTICO AT THE RUNOFF VOTING, MUNICIPALTIES IN THE FOOTHILLS AND PLAINS
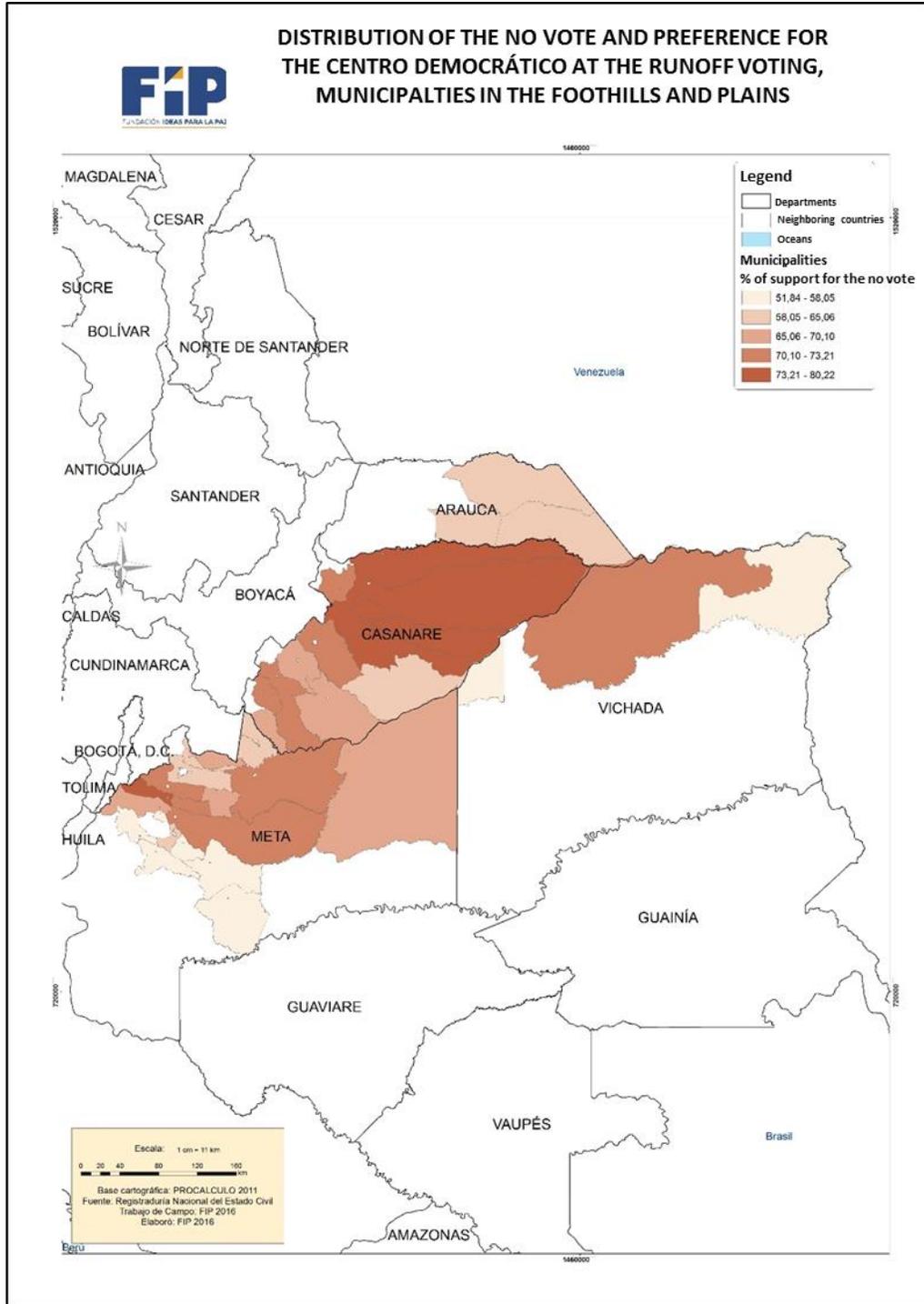
5. THE RURAL AREAS OF COLOMBIA VOTED DECIDEDLY "YES," AND THE URBAN AREAS WERE MIXED

Juxtaposing the Rurality Index with the results of the vote shows a positive correlation between rurality and support for "yes" (Map 14). That is, in rural areas that experienced the most severe effects of the armed conflict, support for the peace accord was highest. The municipalities in orange and yellow represent those that have a rurality index of greater than 50% and where more than 50% of voters voted "yes."

These areas are characterized by lower population density, fewer roads per square kilometer, and greater distance from urban centers. In addition, as the director of the Center for Rural Development, Juan Mauricio Ramírez has stated, in municipalities in which the "yes" vote won, the percentage of the ethnic population is 4.5 times greater than in "no"-dominant municipalities.

MAP 14. RURALITY INDEX AND PERCENTAGE OF "YES" VOTES
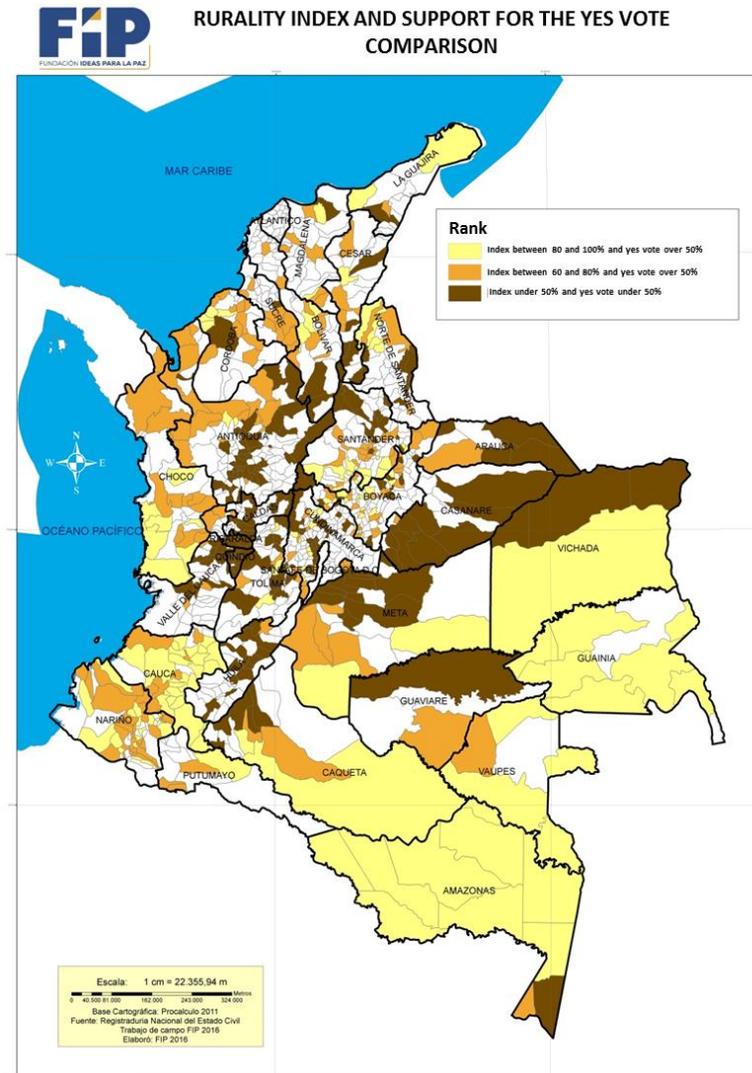
In urban areas, plebiscite results were divided. Overall, voters in the departmental capitals tended to vote "yes," (2,968,204 votes versus 2,723,044 votes for the "no"). If we examine 32 urban centers across the country, we find that 16 opted for "yes" and 16 for "no." Support for the peace process in cities was slightly in favor of "yes," but was far from being decisive.

As can be observed in Graph 5, among the capital cities where the "yes" vote was highest are those closest to recent centers of violence, including Quibdó (Chocó), Pasto (Nariño), and Mocoa (Mitú). Other notable "yes" cities include Barranquilla, Bogotá, and Cali.

GRAPH 5. PERCENTAGE OF THE "YES" VOTE IN DEPARTMENTAL CAPITALS
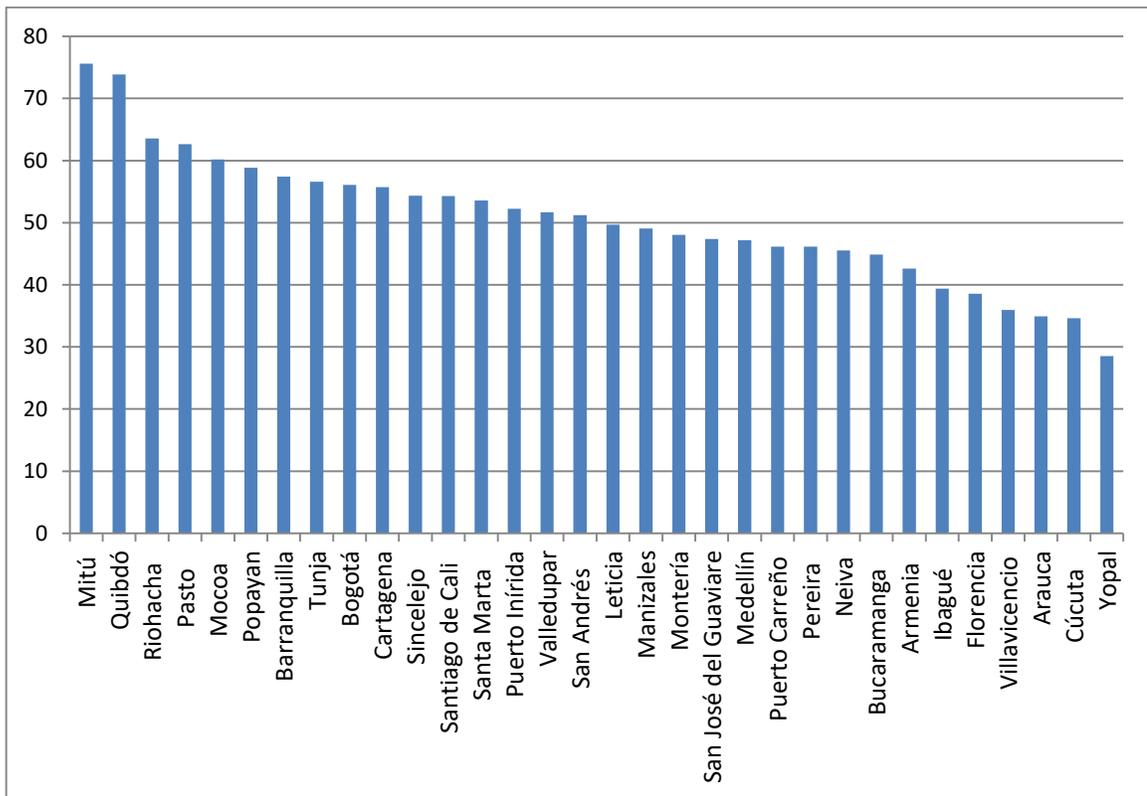
6. ABSTENTION INCREASED AND CONTINUED TO BE CONCENTRATED IN THE PERIPHERY, WHERE THE "YES" VOTE WAS STRONGER

Abstention rates in the plebiscite were at the highest recorded level in the last 22 years, reaching 62.6% of voters (Graph 6) and surpassing rates from the last presidential and congressional elections. While voter abstention is not a new issue in Colombia, its expression was critical in the plebiscite results and therefore deserves closer examination.

GRAPH 6. ELECTORAL ABSTENTION RATE

Election	Rate
Presidential-Election (1994)	66,2%
Presidential-Election Runoff…	56,7%
Presidential-Election (1998)	48,9%
Presidential-Election Runoff…	41,2%
Presidential-Election (2002)	53,5%
Presidential-Election (2006)	55,0%
Presidential-Election (2010)	50,7%
Presidential-Election Runoff…	55,7%
Presidential-Election (2014)	59,9%
Presidential-Election Runoff…	52,0%
Plebiscite(2016)	62,6%

0,0% 10,0% 20,0% 30,0% 40,0% 50,0% 60,0% 70,0%

The abstention rate was influenced not only by coincidental factors—such as the effects of Hurricane Matthew on the Caribbean Coast—but also longstanding dynamics, such as the functioning of political machineries, greater interest in local elections than national ones, and persistently low levels of participation in peripheral areas of the country.

In terms of the official machinery driving the "yes" vote, it is worth noting (as La Silla Vacía has done) that it was not working at full capacity or in a coordinated manner. To give an idea of how this dynamic impacted the vote: if the political machinery had worked as it did in 2014 in the department of Atlántico, 702,000 people who supported Santos in the second round of 2014 would have voted, thereby increasing the "yes" vote by 271,000. In Bolívar 190,000 fewer people voted in 2016 than in the second round of the 2014 elections.

Additionally, there is also a correlation between the areas in which the "yes" won a majority and those that had had high abstention rates. This can be explained by the traditional abstention of voters in peripheral and rural areas, as seen by comparing three maps: the map of voter abstention in electoral cycles 2006/07 and 2010/11 (Map 15, courtesy of the Electoral Processes Observatory of the Universidad del Rosario); the map of voter abstention in the 2014 elections (Map 16, courtesy of the Electoral Observation Mission, and the map of voter abstention in the 2016 plebiscite (Map 17, generated by FIP).

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MAPS 15 AND 16. ABSTENTION RATES IN THE 2006/07 AND 2010/11 ELECTORAL CYCLES (LEFT) AND IN THE 2014 ELECTIONS (RIGHT)

Legend (left map):
- Participación muy alta pero principalmente local N= 189
- Participación alta N= 261
- Participación promedia N= 273
- Participación localista N= 136
- Abstencionismo alto N= 161
- Abstencionismo extremo N= 75
- Ausencia de información

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Legend (right map):
- Muy alta en Congreso y 2da vuelta N= 130
- Alta en Congreso, baja en Presidencial N= 106
- Participación alta (+presidenciales) N= 229
- Promedio nacional (+ presidenciales) N= 330
- Participación baja N= 214
- Participación muy baja N= 93
- Ausencia de información

mƏe Misión de Observación Electoral

MAP 17. ABSTENTION RATES IN THE 2016 PLEBISCITE

ABSTENTIONISM PLEBISCITE 2016

Legend Abstention
- 37% - 54%
- 55%- 61%
- 62%- 67%
- 68% - 75%
- 76% - 100%

As can be seen, some regions have persistently high levels of abstention, including the Pacific, northeast Antioquia, Orinoquía, La Guajira, and part of the plains, as well as some municipalities in the inner Caribbean region. In these areas, the "yes" won a majority, but low levels of voter participation diminished the impact of this preference.

One fact worth highlighting is that, in the 20 municipalities with the highest abstention rates, a smaller percentage of voters participated in 2016 than in 2014 (Table 1).

TABLE 1. MUNICIPALITIES WITH THE HIGHEST ABSTENTION RATES IN THE 2016 PLEBISCITE, AS COMPARED WITH THE SECOND ROUND OF ELECTIONS IN 2014

DEPARTAMENT	MUNICIPALITY	PLEBISCITE ABSTENTION 2016	SECOND ROUND ABSTENTION 2014	DIFFERENCE
GUAINIA	LA GUADALUPE	100.0%	67.7%	32.3%
LA GUAJIRA	URIBIA	96.6%	88.8%	7.9%
MAGDALENA	ARACATACA	94.2%	58.5%	35.7%
LA GUAJIRA	MANAURE	93.8%	84.0%	9.8%
GUAINIA	CACAHUAL	92.6%	83.0%	9.6%
MAGDALENA	ZONA BANANERA (SEVILLA)	91.6%	58.8%	32.7%
GUAINIA	MAPIRIPANA	91.5%	85.4%	6.1%
GUAINIA	PUERTO COLOMBIA	91.2%	85.6%	5.6%
BOLIVAR	VILLANUEVA	86.9%	53.1%	33.8%
BOLIVAR	SANTA ROSA	86.5%	64.3%	22.3%
MAGDALENA	SÍTIONUEVO	85.8%	60.6%	25.2%
ATLANTICO	CAMPO DE LA CRUZ	85.4%	65.8%	19.6%
ATLANTICO	MANATI	85.1%	55.0%	30.1%
ATLANTICO	LURUACO	84.6%	55.5%	29.1%
CESAR	PUEBLO BELLO	84.5%	61.5%	23.0%
ANTIOQUIA	SAN PEDRO DE URABA	83.6%	58.8%	24.7%
BOLIVAR	TURBACO	83.1%	67.1%	16.0%
NORTE DE SAN	PUERTO SANTANDER	83.0%	66.9%	16.1%
BOLIVAR	CLEMENCIA	82.8%	55.3%	27.5%
LA GUAJIRA	MAICAO	82.7%	72.5%	10.3%

WHAT LIES AHEAD

This analysis of what happened in the plebiscite is intended to shed light on the debates that lie ahead. This debate needs to take into account the many Colombians who supported the peace process with the FARC precisely because they know what it means to suffer war firsthand.

The most emblematic case of this is that of the community of Bojayá (Chocó). The victims of this community saw forgiveness and the final peace accord as a way to end a decades-long cycle of violence, but now feel that the country has turned its back on them: "We had hundreds of reasons to vote 'no.' But we have suffered more than anyone else. At the polls, we saw the possibility of concluding 52 years of conflict, but that was not a perception shared by the rest of the country," explained Father Antún Ramos to Semana Magazine.

There are no simple or easy ways to understand the results of the plebiscite. The victory of the "no" vote provides a strong dose of realism in a polarized, fragmented, and unequal country that now faces the task of finding a viable way to build peace in the midst of profound and persistent differences.

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