

The mining boom in Colombia: A story framed between development, security, and environmental agendas

In the last 30 years, Colombia has followed an aggressive phase of expansion and control of the mining sector justified under the premises of economic growth, social development, long-lasting peace, and environmental protection (Bebbington & Bebbington, 2012; Le Billon & Levin, 2009; Merino, 2020; Orihuela, 2021). This shift has been supported by significant institutional and policy changes to create favourable regulatory, tax, and royalty environment for investors. Since the 2000s different governments have pursued an agenda to turn Colombia into a mining country, by strengthening the institutionality and authority of the state to administer mineral resources and by simplifying the procedures to request titles for mining exploration to attract more foreign direct investment (Echavarria, 2014). More recently, the mining sector was made one of the main pillars of social and economic development by including it into the National Development Plan (2010 to 2014). This development agenda merged with security concerns due to the expansion of illegal mining financed and controlled by armed actors and criminal gangs, which was depriving the state of important financial resources (Echavarria, 2014). All this happening at a time when peace negotiations (2012-2016) with the FARC (the oldest guerrilla group in the world) were taking place is no coincidence. Their demobilisation implied the liberation of numerous areas under their control which could be allocated for resource extraction. Additionally, the negative environmental impacts generated by uncontrolled extraction justified the need to improve the environmental performance of the sector. Recently, the transition to a low-carbon economy is also incentivising further extraction. Colombia ranks sixth in Latin America in terms of copper production. Reports already show that copper production in the country is increasing (see *El Espectador*, 2021). This combination of incentives and constraints have been used to promote mineral extraction in Colombia, with different implications on the way the sector is governed. This situation has fuelled mining conflicts all over the country, where the central government is accused of prioritizing and using discursive and material force to promote national agendas over local livelihood concerns or territorial demands (Bebbington & Bebbington, 2012).

In this context a **master thesis** could focus on:

- Developing a broader analysis of the mining debate in Colombia, especially during the periods prior to, during and after the peace negotiations (ca. 2008 to 2020) that highlights the different discursive strategies used by the state to pursue particular political interests.
- Comparing development, environmental, and security discourses (placing a special focus on the state) within the mining debate at different scales – national, regional, local.
- Analysing how pro and anti-mining stakeholders strategically shape the mining discourse during the selected time period in Colombia.

Theories: discourse analysis, content analysis, framing analysis

Methods: qualitative-interpretative, document analysis, expert interviews

References:

- Bebbington, D. H., & Bebbington, A. (2012). Post-What? Extractive Industries, Narratives of Development, and Socio-Environmental Disputes across the (Ostensibly Changing) Andean Region. *New Political Spaces in Latin American Natural Resource Governance*, 17–37. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137073723_2
- Le Billon, P., & Levin, E. (2009). Building peace with conflict diamonds? Merging security and development in Sierra Leone. *Development and Change*, 40(4), 693–715. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-7660.2009.01568.x>
- Merino, R. (2020). The cynical state: forging extractivism, neoliberalism and development in governmental spaces. *Third World Quarterly*, 41(1), 58–76. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2019.1668264>
- Orihuela, J. C. (2021). The environmentalization of mining in Colombia, Chile, and Peru: A comparative analysis of green state formation. *Extractive Industries and Society*, 8(4). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.exis.2020.10.012>

Starting date: as soon as possible

For how many students this topic is available: 1-2 (Spanish language knowledge is recommended)

Supervisor: [Michael Pregernig](#)

This master thesis is linked to [Zabrina Welter](#)'s PhD project, who will serve as additional expert guide.