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Reintegration and forgiveness to ex-combatants in Colombia

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ABSTRACT
The aftermath of over 50 years of uninterrupted conflict is not only underdevelopment and casualties. It is also the loss of social ties, the mistrust, and the difficulties to build a society where victims live with those who once were their perpetrators. These difficulties are many times linked to strong negative affect, prejudice, and skepticism towards forgiveness and reintegration. This paper uses the 2016-Americas Barometer database to provide empirical evidence of how Colombians' attitudes towards the FARC-EP shape the probability of believing in forgiveness and supporting the reintegration process. We find that for demobilization to be successful a society needs (i) to reduce the perception of danger when surrounded by former rebels, (ii) to enhance perceptions of friendliness and hard-working on behalf of the ex-combatants, and (iii) to be more educated and allow the victims to speak up.

1. Introduction

Since the 1980s, it has become increasingly common for countries to end their armed conflicts through disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) processes. With these processes, Muggah (2008) warns on how fragile peace is when the armed conflict's underlying causes are still alive. Although the violence may disappear for a time, embers continue to burn to wait for a spark to reactivate the confrontation. The fragility is due to the economic deterioration and social isolation of the ex-combatants, for which frustration and desperation may lead their way back to join armed groups (Knight and Özerdem 2004; Bauer, Fiala, and Levely 2017). As Nussio (2009) points out, discrimination, life threats, and political confinement also exacerbate the former rebels' intention to go back to combat.

DDR processes include reintegration and reconciliation. The rebel party agrees to reintegrate into society, committing to cease fire and become a productive actor, in exchange for economic, political, and judicial benefits (Muggah 2008). However, reconciliation is a hazardous multidimensional process in which both parties must agree with peacefully addressing any situation, triggering animosity, and discrimination of ex-combatants. In the Colombian conflict, these situations are related to social inequality, narcotraffic, and common resources' exploitation.

Hagmann and Nielsen (2002) point out that the demobilized are usually received with feelings of mistrust, resentment, and even envy when receiving public aid and benefits from governments. In a sense, efforts to facilitate their economic integration by offering them a safety net can undermine reconciliation (Annan and Patel 2009). Most of the DDR processes include these reconciliation initiatives carried out with extreme caution not to become the spark igniting a new confrontation (Blattman, Hartman, and Blair 2011). For this process to succeed, it requires both the rebels' goodwill and society's acceptance. Nevertheless, acceptance goes beyond forgiveness and entails seeing the new actor as an equal, overcoming prejudices against ex-combatants, and the anxiety for the new status quo.

In 2016, the Colombian government and the Colombian Revolutionary Armed Forces (FARC-EP) signed a peace accord to end 52 years of uninterrupted conflict between the two. This is not the only DDR experience that Colombia has had in recent times. In the last five decades, the Colombian government negotiated a permanent ceasefire with other irregular armed groups such as the M19, the Popular Liberation Army (EPL), the Quintín Lame-MAQL Armed Movement, the revolutionary workers' party (PRT) (Pares 2019), and the Colombian United Self-Defense (AUC). However, previous attempts to negotiate a similar peace agreement with the FARC failed, and the prospects of ending the confrontation were rather pessimistic (Castaño 2019).

The FARC has a lousy reputation among Colombians for its arbitrary acts during the conflict. The long tradition of

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right-wing governments and conservative norms among the population made negotiation and reintegration a real challenge (Villarraga 2015). According to the Democracy Observatory, in 2016, the peace agreement support was below 50% among Colombians, and 46.5% of them said they did not want a demobilized person in their neighborhood. They were perceived as potential criminals, as happened with the AUC's demobilized (Muggah 2008). As a result, when the FARC's peace process was cast out in a plebiscite, the proportion of people voting against outweighed those in favor by less than one percentage point, and with a 38% turn-out. Despite the rejection of the peace accord in the plebiscite, a variant of the peace agreement was approved in parliament, and the DDR went through. The process meant a threat to the reconciliation possibilities, regardless of any ex-combatants' genuine interest in reintegrating into society.

This paper tries to understand the underlying mechanisms behind the rejection of former FARC combatants from two perspectives: forgiveness and reintegration public support. Are these two variables related? What are the socioeconomic, behavioral, and demographic characteristics explaining any correlation? This analysis is essential for post-conflict countries as DDR's social acceptance is required to avoid the danger of igniting a new confrontation cycle (Muggah 2008; Blattman, Hartman, and Blair 2011).

Forgiveness has been defined as the ability to use compassion to let go of the negative affect while providing a positive response to the perpetrator (Rye and Pargament 2002; Menezes Fonseca, Neto, and Mullet 2012; Mukashema and Mullet 2013; López-López et al. 2018; Pineda-Marín, Muñoz-Sastre, and Mullet 2018). It is, in general, sensitive to the existence of an apology. However, it is rare and complex when there is intergroup animosity (Hornsey and Wohl 2013; Noor, Branscombe, and Hewstone 2015). In such cases, feelings of threat exacerbate collective anguish, anger, and anxiety (Wohl and Branscombe 2009). Additionally, it is more frequent the victimizer's dehumanization, and their actions are perceived as unforgivable (Tam et al. 2007; Voci et al. 2015). In this context, to promote inter-group forgiveness, there must be a switch in the counterpart's perceptions and emotions. For instance, friendly contact between groups might reduce prejudices and increase the likelihood of forgiveness (Pettigrew 1998; Swart et al. 2011; Noor, Branscombe, and Hewstone 2015). Additionally, since apologies may not be enough, the victimized group must perceive a change in attitude and regret on behalf of aggressors to be ready to forgive (Tam et al. 2007; Voci et al. 2015).

We study the extent to which attitudes towards forgiveness and reintegration support are linked. Is a DDR process possible if individuals cannot forgive ex-combatants? Are those who are more optimistic about forgiveness also willing to support the FARC-EP reintegration? What socioeconomic factors explain these two events? Do factors work separately or jointly? We contribute to the post-conflict literature by bridging three behavioral determinants of forgiveness and reconciliation (reintegration support): behavioral biases (parochialism), negative affect, and prejudices. Even when the effect of conflict exposure may generate parochial preferences (Bauer, Fiala, and Levely 2017), this is the first attempt to use parochialism to link forgiveness and reintegration.

Following recent work, we hypothesize that discriminatory biases (lack of trust and cooperation), negative affect (envy, fear, and anxiety), and prejudices (unfriendly, lazy, violent, dangerous perceptions) might reduce both the *forgiveness perception and reintegration support* (Bellows and Miguel 2009; Blattman, Hartman, and Blair 2011; Voors et al. 2012; Bauer, Fiala, and Levely 2017; Restrepo-Plaza 2019, among others). We also hypothesize that an apology will increase the forgiveness perception (Voci et al. 2015), but it will not impact reintegration. Finally, we are agnostic regarding the socioeconomic and demographic effects, except for the political orientation, which drives subjects' opinions on the FARC. We pay special attention to the victim status due to the contradictory evidence available. While there is plenty of evidence of ingroup favoritism in Burundi and Sierra Leone, new evidence points in the opposite direction in the Colombian context (Restrepo-Plaza 2019; Unfried, Ibañez, and Restrepo-Plaza 2020).

We use the 2016-Americas Barometer to test our hypotheses. The Barometer is a longitudinal database; however, the section feeding this paper was only available for 2016. Thus, ours is a cross-sectional analysis. We estimate two bivariate Probit models to measure the effect of apologies, emotions, prejudices, parochialism on forgiveness, and reintegration. Our results suggest that apologies, feelings of calm when surrounded by ex-combatants, and perceptions of friendliness and hard work play a positive role. We also find that more educated individuals and those wounded by conflict were more likely to support former FARC members' reintegration, even when it did not mean to be open to forgiveness. Our results may shed light on the DDR process attributes for the demobilization to succeed. The rest of the paper is divided into four sections. Section 2 presents the conceptual framework. In section 3, we describe our empirical strategy. In section 4, we display parametric and non-parametric results. In section 5, we conclude.