Artículo Científico

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Discrimination in post-conflict settings: Experimental evidence from Colombia

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ABSTRACT

After a civil war, community support for the reintegration of ex-combatants is crucial for peace-building. Using a crowdfunding campaign to promote trainees' business ideas, we investigate whether university students discriminate against ex-combatants in Colombia. Our results show that there is no discrimination against ex-combatants in terms of donations compared with other trainees, but there is a substantial degree of prejudice and skepticism. This finding suggests that the reintegration of ex-combatants might be affected by the NIMBY phenomena. Although willing to economically support the peace process, individuals are skeptical towards personal encounters with ex-combatants. This suggest that to achieve sustainable peace, policies should focus on decreasing stigmatization towards ex-combatants.

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1. Introduction

A peace declaration and fighters' disarmament are the first steps in reconstructing peace after a civil war. To sustain the declared peace, a successful social and economic reintegration of ex-fighters is necessary as post-conflict societies risk recidivism once ex-combatants feel socially isolated and become economically worse off (Collier & Hoeffler, 2004; Knight & Özerdem, 2004). Nevertheless, the reintegration process's success depends crucially on society's attitudes and behaviors towards the ex-combatants (Bauer, Fiala, & Levely, 2017; Kaplan & Nussio, 2018). If there is no direct (personal interaction) nor indirect (societal acceptance) community support towards the reintegration process, the peace reconstruction efforts of policymakers may fail.

Community support for the reintegration of ex-combatants is crucial but also challenging. On the one hand, there is an incentive to overcome violence; on the other hand, it is difficult to forgive as the civil society has suffered under the violent acts of former combatants (e.g. Miguel & Roland, 2011; Minoiu & Shemyakina, 2014; Bertoni, Di Maio, Molini, & Nistico, 2019), causing fear, mistrust, and skepticism towards fighters. Moreover, civil wars segregate and polarize society, causing division among citizens along diverse dimensions like "enemy vs. friend" or "offender vs. victim" (Cilliers, Dube, & Siddiqi, 2016). These in-group/out-group stereotypes – once established – often persist and may be manifested in discriminatory behavior.

This paper studies the 2016 Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC-EP) process of disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR). We assess the extent of discrimination against ex-combatants among university students using three different measures: donations, attitudes, and implicit associations. Our experimental design allows us to investigate whether discrimination is based on a dislike of demobilized persons (taste-based discrimination (Becker, 1971)) or instead on the unwillingness to support ex-combatants economic reintegration. Hence, our work provides novel evidence on the NIMBY (not-in-my-backyard) phenomenon where the population, although willing to support DDR projects (e.g., refugee settlement projects), might oppose having former rebels in their neighborhood (Ferwerda, Flynn, & Horiuchi, 2017; Hubbard, 2005; Hatton, 2016; Sanghi, Onder, & Vemuru, 2016).

Colombia is a suitable setting for our research as peace construction is at the forefront of the political agenda. After 50.2% of the referendum voters rejected the Peace Accord in 2016, it remains unknown what is driving the polarization and skepticism behind it. We focus on university students as they are a sizeable and growing group representing potential employers and policymakers in the future.[1]

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[1] Gross enrollment rate in tertiary education amount to 55% in Colombia and is on a positive trend (Worldbank, 2020).