

Abril 2019

ART6_A1_2019_2

N° de serie

Artículo Científico

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ALIANZA EFI
Economía Formal e Inclusiva

How long-duration kidnapping might have affected the preferences of FARC-EP operatives?

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* The author thanks the comments and suggestions of Boris Salazar and all peer reviewers. I acknowledge the financial support for my research study of the *Vicerrectoría de Investigaciones* at Universidad del Valle, Cali, Colombia.

ABSTRACT

Based on the announcement of the FARC-EP or Colombian Revolutionary Armed Forces – People’s Army, that will give up kidnapping and start a general agreement with the Colombian government for the termination of the Conflict in 2012, this paper examines how long-duration kidnapping might have affected some operatives’ preferences in the organization, reflected in a high desertion rate of operatives in a period of Colombian history characterized by many high-profile kidnappings. I applied two approaches—one from Phillips and Pohl and the other from Shapiro—to discuss an alternative explanation for a change in the behavior of some FARC-EP operatives. The main result of this paper is to show that different approaches from economic theory may explain why some operatives change their preferences in spite of such preferences were considered unchangeable. Two factors affect scenarios in which operatives make decisions: i) the leadership’s decisions in which operatives don’t take part due to the organization’s top-down decision-making structure, which reduces any space for operatives’ participation, and ii) the external conditions that indirectly depend on the behavior of the organization as a whole.

Keywords: kidnapping; risk preferences; rational choice; FARC-EP.

¿HASTA QUÉ PUNTO EL SECUESTRO DE LARGA DURACIÓN PUDO HABER AFECTADO LAS PREFERENCIAS DE LOS MIEMBROS DE LA GUERRILLA FARC-EP?

RESUMEN

Basado en el anuncio de las FARC-EP o Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia - Ejército del Pueblo, de renunciar al secuestro e iniciar una negociación con el gobierno colombiano para la terminación del conflicto en el año 2012, este documento examina cómo el secuestro de larga duración podría haber afectado las preferencias de algunos de los miembros de esta guerrilla, lo cual se reflejó en una alta tasa de desertión de los mismos en un período de la historia colombiana en el que se caracterizó por la existencia de numerosos y notorios casos de secuestros. Aplicamos dos enfoques -uno de Phillips y Pohl y el otro de Shapiro- para discutir una explicación alternativa para un cambio en el comportamiento de algunos miembros de la guerrilla de las FARC-EP. El principal resultado de este trabajo es mostrar que diferentes enfoques de la teoría económica pueden explicar por qué algunos miembros cambian sus preferencias a pesar de que tales preferencias fueron consideradas inmutables. Dos factores afectan los escenarios de esta toma de decisiones: i) las decisiones del liderazgo en las que los actores participan debido a la estructura de toma de decisiones de arriba hacia abajo de la organización, lo que reduce cualquier espacio para la participación de los actores, y ii) las condiciones

externas que dependen indirectamente del comportamiento de la organización en su conjunto.

Palabras clave: secuestro; preferencias de riesgo; elección racional; FARC-EP.

Fecha de recepción: 30/10/2018

Fecha de aprobación: 29/04/2019

INTRODUCTION

On 26 February 2012 official communiqué issued by the FARC-EP secretariat (leadership) surprised Colombia. It announced that the guerrilla group would give up kidnapping as one of its strategies of war. The FARC-EP, or Colombian Revolutionary Armed Forces – People’s Army, made that decision after almost twenty years of systematic kidnapping and prolonged captivity of hostages. It can be seen as an important prerequisite for the announcement of a general agreement for the termination of the Conflict and the construction of a stable and lasting peace that was signed by representatives of the Colombian government and the FARC-EP on August 26, 2012 in Havana, Cuba. After four years of negotiations both sides announced the final agreement on August 24, 2016. In that document, “the FARC-EP renounces its political project to take power by means of weapons, and agree to follow the rules of Colombian democracy to pursue its political objectives. The Government, for its part, renounces to impose on the rebels the punishments defined by the penal law for their political crimes, related to other, and is trade by a set of sanctions that allows the members of the FARC-EP to act legally in politics” (Melo, 2016, 1). However, in October of that year a referendum to ratify the agreement lost at the polls. 50.2% of voters rejected FARC-EP final agreement, while 49.8% voted in favor. Afterward, the government negotiation team and the FARC-EP signed a revised peace deal on November 24 and sent it to Congress for ratification which was achieved on November 29–30, 2016. At least 500 community leaders and social activists have been killed in diverse regions of Colombia after the signing of the peace agreement.

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My guess is that the FARC-EP belatedly realized the strong effects of the political long-duration kidnapping on the preferences of its middle and low-ranking members, those who were in charge of handling hostages. This came as a result of the problems created by direct daily contact between FARC-EP operatives and hostages for long periods in a context of intense military pressure, leading to a widening gap between the preferences and beliefs of leaders and those of middle and lower ranking members of the organization.

Unlike Castillo and Balbinotto (2011) in which the organization of the FARC-EP is described and the effects of the kidnapping on its structure are shown, this paper is mainly based on two different interpretative approaches from economic theory. The first was taken from Phillips and Pohl (2013), who saw the preference problem as a change in risk for operatives. The second approach came from Shapiro (2013), who presented the problem as a divergence of preferences both underlying and induced between combatants and leadership. In short, the approaches of Phillips and Pohl (2013) and Shapiro (2013) discuss why some FARC-EP operatives’ interests may have deviated from those of leadership’s in the Armed Illegal Organization—henceforth AIO— in spite of combatants’ preferences were considered unchangeable. This deviation might be related to a shift in the operatives’ preferences due to changes in their relationship with the leadership, as its new decisions as the long