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Community counts: The social reintegration of ex-combatants in Colombia

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Abstract

What explains the social reintegration of ex-combatants from armed conflicts? Community-level programs to reintegrate ex-combatants into society are based on the theory that the participation of ex-combatants in their communities can promote reconciliation and minimize recidivism to illegal activities. We evaluate community and security-related opportunities for and constraints on social reintegration using a survey of ex-combatants from Colombia. We find that ex-combatants in more participatory communities tend to have an easier time with social reintegration and feel less of a need to organize among themselves. These findings suggest that to help ex-combatants, reintegration processes should also work to improve the social vibrancy of receptor communities.

Introduction

A central challenge in decisively bringing civil conflicts to an end is the reintegration of combatants.[1] Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) programs to bring ex-combatants back into society have been multifaceted and there has been growing interest in community-based activities in post-conflict settings around the world. Community-based reintegration policies have been implemented in countries as diverse as the Philippines, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Colombia. Implicit in these programs is the theory that the social participation of ex-combatants in the communities where they settle and their acceptance by these communities are helpful for minimizing recidivism to illegal activities

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and promoting reconciliation with victims of armed conflicts. In this study, we explore the drivers of social reintegration in the context of Colombia with data from a nationwide survey of randomly sampled ex-combatants as well as ex-combatant interviews.

Some studies on reintegration have encountered that ex-combatants can contribute positive leadership to their communities (McEvoy and Shirlow, 2009), yet others have identified the problems of violent spoilers and the security dilemma that combatants face when they disarm and re-enter society as key hurdles to consolidating peace (Themnér, 2011). Reintegration programs designed to affect the calculus of ex-combatants—to keep them from becoming rearmed spoilers and help them become functioning members of society—include approaches as diverse as education, occupational training, psycho social counseling, police monitoring of ex-combatants, and financial subsidies. Prior studies by Gilligan et al. (2013) on Burundi, Humphreys and Weinstein (2007) on Sierra Leone, Blattman (2009) on Uganda and Phayal et al. (2015) on Sudan have explored some of these elements as well as community acceptance of ex-combatants and voting patterns. Yet, there remains little empirical evidence on the determinants of social reintegration and community participation among ex-combatants.

One obstacle to investigating social reintegration is the absence of agreement about the concept among practitioners or scholars. The technical Integrated DDR Standards (United Nations, 2006) assume that social reintegration occurs at the community level, but offer no clear definition. Empirical studies have variously identified social reintegration with acceptance of ex-combatants by their families and neighbors (Gomes Porto et al., 2007; Humphreys and Weinstein, 2007), as an outcome of successful transitional justice measures and reconciliation (e.g. Annan and Cutter, 2009), or related to economic and political reintegration (Özerdem, 2012). In a complementary mode, we conceive of social reintegration as the process by which ex-combatants become involved in their communities. Yet instead of focusing on perceived acceptance, we study behavioral expressions of social reintegration as reflected by the level of participation in community organizations, which imply deeper engagement with receiving communities.

There are several reasons why social reintegration merits being studied as a distinct form of reintegration and social participation. First, social reintegration may help to limit the recurrence of civil war. According to Walter's (2004, p. 371) cross-national study, greater access to political participation has "a significant *negative* effect on the likelihood of renewed war." Participation can help ex-combatants feel socially fulfilled and accepted by their communities and can reduce their need to maintain social connections to their former armed group networks and bosses. While retaining ties to former combatant companions can aid some ex-combatants as they reintegrate into society (de Vries and Wiegink, 2011), persisting networks among ex-combatants may also create risks of remobilization (Zukerman Daly, 2011). A better understanding of the micro-foundations of ex-combatants' social participation can help address the needs of this conflict-prone population and suggest actions to prevent conflict recurrence.

Second, social reintegration involves special challenges compared with other aspects of reintegration (political, economic) because of its interactive nature that places primacy on *relationships* with other actors. As an ex-combatant, participating in the activities of a community or forming social groups may entail exposing oneself and facing security-dilemma risks from armed groups (Nussio, 2011a). In their interactions with community members, ex-combatants may also encounter stigma, jealousies over demobilization benefits, and animosities between victimizers and victims that further impede reconciliation.

Community-level reintegration efforts can help balance the rights and interests of the community with the assistance provided to ex-combatants, fostering a feeling of inclusion and enhancing the legitimacy of DDR programs (CCDDR, 2009; Stockholm Initiative, 2006).

Third, while everyday forms of social and political participation have been studied for decades in fields such as sociology and American politics (e.g. Verba et al., 1995), the social participation of ex-combatants may involve potentially unique challenges because these individuals may have undergone great trauma, have limited human capital and social connections, and live in dangerous settings.

We theorize that community characteristics are critical and find that where there are higher rates of participation in organizations among the general population there are higher levels of ex-combatant participation. This finding supports our hypothesis that well-organized communities may support ex-combatant participation through providing opportunities to do so. Such communities may also advocate and vouch for the ex-combatants in their midst to mitigate the security dilemma they face and protect them from remaining armed groups. By contrast, communities with less social participation (and fewer participation opportunities for ex-combatants) are associated with higher levels of organization among ex-combatants themselves. This may speak to the individual agency of ex-combatants to seek opportunities for social contact and organization, wherever those opportunities may lie. Security risks, such as living near ongoing armed conflict, are not found to be significantly related to lower community participation by ex-combatants, but are associated with greater organizing among ex-combatants.

Colombia is a relevant context for studying community-based reintegration. It exhibits variation in levels of social cooperation and organizational capacity across communities and has also had experience with demobilizing various armed groups from across the political spectrum—from left-wing, politically oriented insurgents to right-wing paramilitaries. Created in 2006, the Colombian Agency for Reintegration (ACR) has emphasized community reintegration in its programs. Social reintegration has also proven to be extremely important in the Colombian context, as 97% of ex-combatants reported that they had to feel like an active part of their communities to be completely reintegrated (DNP, 2010). However, achieving acceptance is often a daunting task as community members often view ex-combatants with fear and distrust (CNC, 2011). Our analysis builds on these largely descriptive accounts by more formally testing implicit hypotheses about social reintegration in Colombia.

The Colombian case also likely holds relevance for other countries dealing with the reintegration of ex-combatants. Colombia is by no means a participatory country where encouraging ex-combatant participation might be considered a simple endeavor. Sudarsky's (2007) analysis of the 1998 World Values Survey puts Colombia in the lower half among a set of 27 developed and developing countries in membership in voluntary organizations. This description is consistent with an uneven social landscape with low overall "civicness" but also pockets of social cooperation.

In what follows, we first discuss the existing literature on communities and reintegration and formulate hypotheses about the predictors of ex-combatant social participation. Next we provide a brief history of conflict, demobilization, and reintegration experiences and programs in Colombia. We then describe the research design and data, and subsequently present our statistical results. We conclude with a summary of our findings and implications for community reintegration programs in Colombia and beyond.

Literature on social reintegration

Social and community-based reintegration has been widely discussed among DDR practitioners in recent years. It can offer high political appeal at relatively low cost since these policies are seen as a way to include community members and compensate for the "inherently unfair [DDR] process" that advantages ex-combatants (CCDDR, 2009, p. 78). Community reintegration is thought to address particular needs of both ex-combatants and communities that are not met by existing government programs. It is therefore no wonder that communities have been involved in reintegration activities in cases such as Haiti, Mozambique, the Philippines, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Sudan (Muggah, 2009; Oppenheim, 2012).

From case to case, the ways that communities are incorporated into the reintegration process can vary. In various African societies, traditional cleansing rituals have been used to reconcile former combatants with their receptor communities, as in the cases of Mozambique (Granjo, 2007) or Sierra Leone (Stovel, 2008). These rituals protect the individual ex-combatant from danger and from being considered dangerous to the community, freeing them from stigma. In Rwanda, more institutionalized reconciliation was instituted in the form of the community Gacaca courts after the genocide in 1994, although with mixed results (Brounéus, 2010). In Liberia, female fighters have participated in women's organizations (Basini, 2013). Even powerful militaries such as NATO's International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) have come to rely upon communities in reintegration processes in Afghanistan (and also Iraq). NATO's Joint Task Force 435 held many reintegration *shuras*, or tribal council meetings, where community leaders and members welcome former (suspected) Taliban militants back to their communities. They then all sign pledges with the NATO forces to vouch for these returnees and guarantee that they will not turn back to the conflict (Bumiller, 2010).

Even with these many cases and a growing body of literature on the diverse aspects of reintegration, there are no systematic cross-national comparisons of social reintegration experiences and few such subnational empirical studies. This may partly be a symptom of the absence of a consensus about what community-based reintegration means in terms of concrete reintegration processes and measurable outcomes (Özerdem, 2012). For instance, Annan and Cutter (2009) consider social reintegration as primarily having to do with community reconciliation, justice, and psychological healing for "re-knitting the social fabric of often divided societies" (Annan and Cutter, 2009, p. 2). Transitional justice can certainly benefit victims (Sriram and Herman, 2009; Stockholm Initiative, 2006), but it may not necessarily resolve the spoiler problem whereby struggling ex-combatants return to violence.

Empirical studies have conceived of social reintegration in different ways. Several studies have used the indicator of self-reported acceptance of ex-combatants by their communities and families (Gomes Porto et al., 2007; Pugel, 2006). For example, Pugel (2006) finds that Liberian ex-combatants who participated in the DDR program perceived greater acceptance by their communities than non-participants. Humphreys and Weinstein (2007) find that past participation in abusive military factions intensifies the divide between community members and ex-combatants and decreases self-reported levels of acceptance. They argue that this may either be due to the psychosocial impacts of the conflict on the ex-combatants or a lower willingness of host communities to accept abusers. Blattman (2009) focuses on political rather than social reintegration and finds that abducted former child soldiers of the Lord's Resistance Army in Uganda voted in elections and participated in leadership roles in their

communities at higher rates than civilians. Blattman attributes this increased participation to psychological theories that relate exposure to violence to personal growth and political activation. Nussio and Oppenheim (2014) further find that involvement in particular activities while in an armed group, such as military training and participation in civilian abuse, are associated with greater difficulty in reaching out to communities and greater bonding with former comrades in arms.

We depart from these prior studies by concentrating on low-scale inter-group contact (see also de Greiff, 2009) in the form of social participation. We concentrate on participation because it is a concrete behavioral process that has the potential to durably enmesh ex-combatants in civil society and transform potential spoilers in a personalized way. In the next section, we develop a theory about the factors that influence the decisions of ex-combatants to participate in their communities.

A theory of social reintegration

Practitioners and scholars alike implicitly assume that community-based social reintegration is necessary and good. But how is social reintegration achieved? In our analysis, we focus on a key aspect of social reintegration: participation in community organizations.[2] We theorize that ex-combatants' decisions to participate in such organizations are shaped by opportunities and constraints related to community characteristics and the security environment.

Community characteristics

We argue that the level of social organization of a community can create more or fewer opportunities for participation available to ex-combatants (Wandersman, 1981). This mechanism may be considered part of a community's "absorptive capacity" to accept ex-combatants into the fold (de Vries and Wiegink, 2011). A disorganized and fragmented community characterized by a "culture of distrust" (Sztompka, 1999) may provide few openings for participation. As a second mechanism related to community characteristics, well-organized communities may also be able to advocate and vouch for ex-combatants to mitigate the security dilemma they face and provide them with protection from remaining armed groups (Kaplan, 2010). From this literature, we derive our first hypothesis:

> **H1a:** Ex-combatants living in communities with strong existing social ties and high rates of social participation are themselves more likely to participate in community organizations.

Related to this first hypothesis, we also hypothesize that, as actors with individual agency, ex-combatants in environments with fewer opportunities for participation in existing organizations will seek to form their own organizations. This coincides with recent DDR literature that emphasizes the active role of former combatants in post-conflict scenarios, especially for the case of Northern Ireland (Clubb, 2014; Dwyer, 2012; McEvoy and Shirlow, 2009). While several studies have warned against the risks of persistent ex-combatant networks, such legal organizations of ex-combatants may also help them find employment or feel less isolated after demobilizing (de Vries and Wiegink, 2011). We thus derive a variant of our first hypothesis focusing on an alternative dependent variable:

H1b: Ex-combatants living in communities with low rates of social participation are more likely to organize and participate in ex-combatant organizations.

Security environment

In addition to community characteristics, we theorize that the security environment is one of the main constraints on ex-combatants' social participation. An environment of insecurity can limit incentives to participate in the community through at least three different mechanisms. First, intense violence or armed conflict may increase the dangers ex-combatants face from participating in social organizations. Participation may entail that they expose their identities or patterns of daily life and thus may make them vulnerable to being targeted by belligerents for retaliation or as a means of eliminating perceived enemy collaborators. Such risks may move ex-combatants to adopt strategies of anonymity and social isolation (Nussio, 2011a) or seek security by rejoining armed groups and thus limit their incentives to participate in their communities.[3] Indeed, many ex-combatants have been targets of violence in Colombia (Observatorio de Procesos de DDR, 2010). Second, generalized insecurity may erode interpersonal trust and increase levels of fear among the general population (Cassar et al., 2013). This may depress general levels of community organizational activity and consequently curb the number of opportunities for participation available to ex-combatants and the general population alike (Bar-Tal, 2007).[4] Third, communities that are affected by ongoing violence, armed conflict, and remobilized ex-combatants may be more fearful of ex-combatants and stereotype them (rightly or not) as perpetrators of violence (McMullin, 2013). This suggests a second hypothesis:

H2: Ex-combatants are less likely to participate in community organizations if they reside in communities with higher levels of insecurity.

Social reintegration in Colombia

The testing ground for our hypotheses is the process of DDR taking place in Colombia. Many former members from both right-wing paramilitary groups and left-wing guerrillas have been demobilized in recent years, with 52,419 individuals certified as demobilized between August 2002 and January 2010 (ACR and National Police).

The majority of demobilized fighters belonged to the right-wing paramilitary group United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC), the main responsible group for war atrocities, especially during their time of expansion between 1997 and 2002 (Granada et al., 2009b). After negotiations with the government of Álvaro Uribe, 31,671 members of the AUC collectively demobilized bloc by bloc between 2003 and 2006 during a process that was criticized for its lack of transparency, inflated numbers of demobilized fighters, and continued violence by spoiler factions (Nussio, 2011b).

Members of guerrilla groups have largely demobilized in a different way. Since the main guerrilla groups (the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, FARC, and the National Liberation Army, ELN) are still active, the guerrilla fighters that have demobilized have often been lured away from their groups with the promise of reintegration benefits. A policy to promote the individual demobilization of combatants has been in place since 1984 and, since 2002, has become an increasingly important element of the government's

counterinsurgency strategy. Between 2002 and January 2010, 20,748 total combatants decided to individually demobilize.[5]

Since 2006, the ACR[6] has administered Colombian reintegration policies and programs. The ACR has assisted ex-combatants with education, vocational training, grants for micro-business projects, psychosocial support, healthcare, and a monthly stipend conditioned on participation in program activities. Access to these benefits was initially open-ended with no planned cut-off date (however, a policy of "graduating" ex-combatants from the reintegration program started several years after our survey was conducted). Since 2007, the ACR has also received financing from the European Union to support the reintegration of ex-combatants in their receiving communities (ACR, 2012). Community reintegration is included in Colombian DDR policy to facilitate ex-combatants' adaptation to civil life by opening channels of communication between them and receptor communities (Conpes 3554, 2008). Symbolic initiatives, such as sports events and restoration of public spaces by demobilized people, have often been used in this context to publicize the reintegration activities and promote social acceptance.

Between 2007 and January 2011, community initiatives were launched by the ACR in 84 municipalities with the explicit goal of increasing the level of confidence between communities and demobilized people. The separate "Peace and Reconciliation" reintegration program of the mayor's office of Medellín, begun in 2004 after the first demobilizations of urban paramilitaries in the city, has also consistently focused on community reconciliation activities (Alcaldía de Medellín, 2007). The basic model of these programs is to bring community members and ex-combatants together to dialogue, build a community project or produce a cultural event, and call this instance of cooperation "social reintegration." We do not expect that these community initiatives influenced the survey respondents in this study since almost all of these initiatives were started after the survey was conducted and, according to a recent internal evaluation, are still not widespread (CNC, 2011).

Despite these efforts, community-based reintegration has been criticized as being insufficient (Conpes 3554, 2008). Indeed, according to one ex-combatant we interviewed, many demobilized people still feel discriminated against in their communities, "You end up stigmatized as if you were the scum of the earth, a plague or something, like that demobilized people are bad people."[7] Along these lines, an ACR-funded evaluation of the community reintegration policy in Colombia (CNC, 2011) found that a large share of community members (41%) view ex-combatants with fear and distrust them more than non-ex-combatant residents (82%). This may lead to the segregation of ex-combatants. As one interviewee recounted, "My friends are above all demobilized people [that I met] in the meetings. Apart from that, [I have] nearly no friends."[8] According to the mentioned evaluation, demobilized people usually live in poor neighborhoods with low institutional capacity and high levels of crime. Members of the receiving communities are often not aware of ex-combatants living in their midst and most members of receiving communities do not participate in community organizations (83%). However, 81% of those that do participate in social organizations favor the inclusion of demobilized people in their organizations.

In addition to the formal government programs in Colombia, certain particularly well-organized communities have themselves innovated community-based social reintegration processes. The Peasant Workers Association of the Carare (ATCC) dialogued with armed groups to provide security guarantees through a community-based monitoring system to ensure that demobilized fighters would be safe and not re-join any armed faction (Kaplan, 2013). Indigenous populations have also practiced their own special forms of community

reintegration. Arhuaco and Nasa populations employ a communitarian healing process to re-join former combatants (usually guerrilla members) with their families and communities (CNRR, 2010). The ACR supported one of these ceremonies, which included marches, recovery of public spaces, donating blood, and public apologies for acts of violence (Derks et al., 2011). Reintegrated Indigenous persons are even sometimes required to perform community work as part of their price for readmission to their communities.

In addition to integrating into existing community organizations and practices, ex-combatants have also organized among themselves in Colombia. Between 2002 and 2009, 263 ex-combatant organizations were formed in about 100 municipalities (Observatorio de DDR, 2009). Of these organizations, 169 had economic purposes (e.g. business projects) and around 40 were oriented toward community development. While many of these organizations positively contributed to the reintegration of ex-combatants and their surrounding communities, some have mobilized for illegal activities.

Both formal government policies and less formal community-led initiatives rely on communities to welcome ex-combatants into the fold or provide ex-combatants with opportunities to create their own organizations. It is surprising given the breadth and intensity of interest in communities in Colombia that they have been understudied in reintegration scholarship (exceptions are Derks et al., 2011; Prieto, 2012).

Research design and data

The main data we use to evaluate our hypotheses on social reintegration come from a survey of former combatants in Colombia in 2008. This survey was conducted by the Fundación Ideas para la Paz (FIP), a Colombian foundation with a long history of working on conflict issues, in collaboration with the ACR and was funded by the Canadian government.

Various regional teams directed by a central national coordinator executed the survey between February 5, 2008 and May 31, 2008, resulting in a sample of 1485 ex-combatants. As is the case with most DDR processes, it is a challenge to construct an adequate sampling frame since many ex-combatants choose to live in anonymity after leaving their armed groups, may prefer not to participate in DDR activities, or enter newly created armed groups and criminal organizations (Nussio, 2011a). Given the difficulties with locating and enrolling former combatants, different procedures were applied to obtain adequate coverage of various subpopulations of interest.[9]

In a first procedure, a random sample of 944 ex-combatants (64% of the sample) from the ACR's database was directly contacted and surveyed or contacted and surveyed through ACR psychosocial tutors from regional reintegration centers.[10] FIP used a second procedure to increase the subsamples among still under-sampled ex-combatants who participated in joint or individual micro-enterprise projects or were minors. A total of 132 ex-combatants were selected for being participants in the joint micro-enterprise projects, 197 were selected for being participants in the micro-business projects, and 212 minor ex-combatants were identified across Colombia's major cities. These three groups were not selected under perfectly random conditions, which could introduce bias into the sample.[11] The resulting sample includes demobilized persons living in 73 different municipalities in 20 departments. The sample includes 232 women and 1253 men, 846 former members of the AUC, 476 former members of the FARC, 119 former members of the ELN, and 36 from other illegal armed groups.

Even with the sources of potential sampling bias, the sampling procedures still permit the construction of a relatively representative sample. To assess representativeness, we can compare aggregated characteristics of the FIP survey with available aggregate data on these same characteristics from ACR reports on the total population of reintegrating ex-combatants. These comparisons indicate that the FIP sample slightly oversampled individuals from the FARC and from the East Andean region, but that the sample and total population proportions closely coincide for gender and employment. The sampling procedures are also advantageous for sampling a partially hidden population because they mitigate security concerns.[12]

To test additional measures for our hypotheses that are not available in the FIP dataset we use Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) surveys of random samples of the Colombian population. We also include various observational indicators of the security and social environment in the towns where ex-combatants (re-)settled from the Office of the Vice-presidency's Human Rights Observatory, the National Police, and the Colombian national census of 2005. These indicators are detailed below. To complement the quantitative analysis and aid in the interpretation of the results, we draw on qualitative evidence from interviews we conducted with 96 ex-combatants between 2009 and 2011.

The dependent variable: measuring social participation

We use several different variables to measure social participation but focus primarily on one. We construct a dummy variable based on ex-combatants' survey responses to the question, "Are you part of any group within your community?" The possible options of groups from which respondents could indicate participation included social, religious, cultural, civic, political, ethnic, campesino (farmer), or sports groups.[13] The distributions across these types of community groups and across different armed groups are displayed in Table 1.[14] Overall, 41% of respondents reported participating in at least some kind of community group, with 49% of former FARC and ELN guerrillas participating in groups and former AUC paramilitaries participating at a lower rate of 36%.[15] Individuals reported most frequently participating in sports (38%), religious (27%), and social (11%) groups.[16]

In order to test Hypothesis 1b, we constructed an alternative dependent variable, Participate Ex-combatant Group, based on a survey question that asked, "Are you part of a legal organization of demobilized people?" In all, 269 respondents (18%) reported being part of an ex-combatant organization.

We believe our dependent variables represent an improvement over social reintegration indicators used in prior studies since they relate to behaviors and specific activities rather than to perceptions. Other studies (e.g. Gomes Porto et al., 2007; Humphreys and Weinstein, 2007; Pugel, 2006) measure social reintegration as the level of perceived acceptance reported by ex-combatants, generally asking about problems in gaining acceptance from their families and neighbors. However, this indicator of self-reported acceptance may not uniquely capture perceptions of acceptance by the community but also capture other perceptions about quality of life and more generally feeling at ease. It may not necessarily indicate whether an individual is actively socially reintegrating or thriving. Not surprisingly, the acceptance levels in these three studies are around 90%. In our data, 92.7% of ex-combatants reported acceptance in their neighborhoods and 90.3% reported acceptance by their families in response to similar questions. Summary statistics for the dependent and independent variables are presented in Table 2.

Table 1. Participation of ex-combatants in community groups

Group type	All groups		AUC		FARC		ELN		Others	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Any	601		304		229		56		11	
Unspecified	162		4		126		27		5	
Social	48	11%	32	11%	13	13%	2	7%	1	17%
Religious	118	27%	76	25%	29	28%	11	38%	1	17%
Cultural	36	8%	25	8%	6	6%	5	17%	0	0%
Civic	38	9%	33	11%	4	4%	1	3%	0	0%
Political	21	5%	19	6%	2	2%	0	0%	0	0%
Ethnic	4	1%	2	1%	2	2%	0	0%	0	0%
Farmer	8	2%	5	2%	2	2%	1	3%	0	0%
Sports	166	38%	108	36%	45	44%	9	31%	4	67%

Source: FIP survey.
Note: Some individuals reported participating in more than one kind of group. Participation in "any group" also includes reported participation in "other"/"unspecified" groups.

Table 2. Summary statistics

Variable	Observations	Mean	Standard deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Participate Any Community Group	1452	0.41	0.49	0	—
Participate Ex-combatant Group	1457	0.19	0.39	0	—
Community Organization Participation Rate (DANE 2005)	1442	0.05	0.02	0.01	0.16
Approve Participation	1400	7.95	0.16	7.41	8.49
Total Attacks (2007–8)	1442	14.07	12.44	0	66
BACRIM	1442	0.88	0.33	0	—
Homicide Rate (2007–8)	1442	38.19	25.59	2.01	128.94
FARC	1485	0.33	0.47	0	—
AUC	1485	0.57	0.50	0	—
ELN	1485	0.08	0.27	0	—
Age	1480	29.9	7.94	11	68
Rural	1472	0.07	0.26	0	—
High School	1472	0.22	0.41	0	—
Live Same Place	1485	0.22	0.41	0	—
Time Since Demobilization	1445	3.01	1.44	0	17
Political Party Preference	1471	0.22	0.42	0	—
Contact Any Ex-combatant	1485	0.78	0.41	0	—
Neighbor Problems	1479	0.07	0.26	0	—
Employed	1478	0.54	0.50	0	—
Ideological Training	1485	0.73	0.44	0	—
Caribbean	1485	0.53	0.50	0	—
Pacific	1485	0.03	0.17	0	—
Andean	1485	0.24	0.42	0	—
East Andean	1485	0.44	0.50	0	—
Eastern	1485	0.04	0.20	0	—

Independent variables and control variables

To test Hypothesis 1 about community characteristics, we construct two independent variables. Our main independent variable is the *Community Organization Participation Rate* (DANE, 2005) calculated for the general population of each municipio from responses to a question from the 2005 census.[17] As a secondary measure, we also include an *Approve Participation* variable of the averaged responses in LAPOP surveys for the degree that civilians in a community approve of social participation in general. Since LAPOP data does not contain a sufficiently large sample to cover the municipios of interest where ex-combatants reside, we calculate department level averages from the annual survey waves from 2005 to 2010.[18]

To test Hypothesis 2 about the security environment, we use three indicators for the three mechanisms outlined above. To account for conflict-related threats, we include a measure for *Total Armed Actions* for 2007 and 2008 (years prior to our survey), which is a composite of actions recorded by guerrilla groups and members of the government public security forces from the Colombian Vice-presidency's Human Rights Observatory. To proxy the second mechanism of Hypothesis 2 of the general level of insecurity in each municipality, we use a *Homicide Rate* variable (Colombian National Police). To analyze the third mechanism of Hypothesis 2 we also account for the influence of the armed groups that emerged after the paramilitary demobilization, commonly referred to as "criminal bands," or *BACRIM*. Many BACRIM are composed of remnant or remobilized paramilitary groups that have continued to operate and are frequently involved in illicit activities such as drug trafficking, mining, extortion, etc. (Granada et al., 2009a).[19] Similar to other forms of armed activity, BACRIM presence may increase the risks of participating in social organizations. We measure the impact of BACRIM through a binary indicator from the NGO Indepaz from the first semester of 2010 for whether or not a municipio registered presence of BACRIM.[20]

We include a series of control variables in order to filter potential confounding relationships between our independent and dependent variables. We first include indicators for personal characteristics. Variables for whether ex-combatants express a *Political Party Preference* and whether they graduated *High School* are intended to measure levels of education and political sophistication, where higher levels are expected to increase the likelihood of social participation. We include a *Rural* indicator since there may be more opportunities or reasons to participate in community groups in small, isolated communities. We include an indicator for whether an individual is *Employed* to account for successful economic reintegration, which may be related to social reintegration (however, being employed may also limit one's time available to participate in the community). The ex-combatants'*Age* is included as demographic control.

We also include indicators for the ex-combatants' various wartime experiences that might influence their reintegration. We include dummies indicating which armed group the ex-combatants fought for (*FARC* and *ELN*, using AUC as the excluded reference group). We also include an indicator for whether individuals received *Ideological Training* while in the ranks, which may reinforce in-group identifications, increase social and political awareness, and also be correlated with post-demobilization social participation.

We then measure post-war experiences and perceptions. A *Live Same Place* variable captures whether ex-combatants again live in the towns where they grew up or instead demobilized to other locales. Returnees identified by this variable may be more inclined to participate in their communities given their likely larger and more familiar social networks.

A variable for *Contact Any Ex-combatant* measures the breadth of ex-combatants' social networks and whether they socialize with former members of any armed group. A *Neighbor Problems* variable for whether individuals reported problems with their neighbors may also reflect how welcome and socially connected individuals may be in the communities where they reside. Conflicts with neighbors may make participation more difficult. A variable that measures the amount of *Time Since Demobilization* is also included since we expect increasing integration into community life as time passes.

Empirical results

What explains why some ex-combatants participate in community groups? To examine this question, we employ cross-sectional logit regression models that predict the probability that an individual will participate in a social organization.[21] These models include dummies for Colombia's six main geographic regions to account for unmeasured geographical heterogeneity across observations (since the additional variables are averaged to the department level they are collinear with departments and preclude the use of department effects). The results of these models are displayed in Table 3.

Community characteristics

Several community and social environment variables are strongly related to ex-combatant social participation (Hypothesis 1a). Higher Community Organization Participation Rates among members of an ex-combatant's municipio are strongly and significantly associated with greater participation in all models of Table 3, including in the bi-variate regression in Model 1.[22] This is consistent with an opportunities argument where individuals are more likely to participate the more opportunities and invitations they have to do so. Given that we control for individual-level predictors of participation, including whether individuals live in the same place where they demobilized, education levels, and political engagement, it is unlikely that this result reflects a selection process whereby individuals with greater proclivities for participation are sorting out to more participatory locales.[23]

As a second variable to capture a community's predisposition for participation, we also use the averaged responses from the LAPOP survey for the degree that respondents in a community approve of social participation in general. This Approve Participation variable shows no relationship with participation in community organizations but is significantly associated with less participation in ex-combatant organizations. Further, Approve Participation is significantly associated with ex-combatants having fewer problems with their neighbors when using that indicator as an alternative dependent variable (see Online Appendix).

These results are consistent with qualitative evidence on ex-combatant social participation. Rozema (2008) illustrates how neighborhood committees in parts of Medellín have actively engaged with former paramilitaries to assist with their integration. As one community leader he quotes recounted:

> We organise youth gatherings and demobilised paramilitaries are participating too. We have discussions with them about family life, the education of their children, and also about the violence, the assassinations … But I'm also worried because the ex-paramilitaries are still using violence against residents. We need to work to change their mind set. It is a long-term process.

Table 3. Models of predictors of ex-combatant social participation

	1 Participate Any Community Group	2 Participate Any Community Group	3 Participate Ex-combatant Group	4 Participate Ex-combatant Group
Community Participation Rate	13.946 (5.01)**	8.600 (2.77)**	−9.349 (2.43)*	−10.729 (2.64)**
Approve Participation		0.188 (0.29)		−4.810 (5.79)**
Total Armed Actions (2007–8)		0.010 (1.01)		0.044 (3.52)**
BACRIM (2010)		−0.124 (0.50)		−1.167 (3.86)**
Homicide Rate (2007–8)		−0.002 (0.49)		0.001 (0.16)
FARC		0.746 (4.74)**		−0.067 (0.31)
ELN		0.682 (2.93)**		0.097 (0.32)
Age		−0.008 (1.04)		−0.002 (0.23)
Rural		0.272 (1.11)		0.242 (0.85)
High School		0.486 (3.36)**		0.373 (2.11)*
Live Same Place		−0.145 (0.87)		0.423 (2.24)*
Time Since Demobilization		0.011 (0.27)		−0.036 (0.61)
Political Party Preference		0.588 (4.03)**		−0.044 (0.23)
Contact Any Ex-combatant		−0.137 (0.92)		0.283 (1.45)
Neighbor Problems		−0.015 (0.07)		−0.529 (1.67)†
Employed		0.100 (0.80)		0.030 (0.19)
Ideological Training		−0.076 (0.54)		−0.483 (2.90)**
Constant	−1.117 (6.88)**	−5.187 (1.01)	−1.002 (4.70)**	34.750 (5.29)**
N	1413	1309	1417	1313
Region effects	No	Yes	No	Yes
Pseudo-R^2	0.01	0.07	0.01	0.11

†$p < 0.1$; *$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$.
Z-Scores in parentheses.

In this instance, the local community is seen to both foster an active social life as well as invite paramilitaries to join in its events. Rozema similarly reports that some demobilized paramilitaries were elected to various Juntas de Acción Comunal in Medellín (local councils) during the local elections of April 2004. These examples are consistent with our data, which

shows that Medellín itself is a relatively highly participatory city and also has high reported rates of ex-combatant social participation. There is reason to believe that such participation might evolve and deepen over time. A former paramilitary fighter recounted how his initial participation in a football (soccer) association for children in his neighborhood served as a gateway to deeper engagement with other community members, "I was the president of sports activities in the neighborhood. We formed four teams, and decided the winner would get a fried chicken. That is when I created trust with the youth and their parents and got close to the community."[24]

In Hypothesis 1b, we posit that low levels of social participation in communities might also leave ex-combatants to organize among themselves. Models 3 and 4 in Table 3 show that the community participation rate is significantly and negatively associated with Participation in Ex-combatant Groups.[25] The Approve Participation variable, reflecting if residents approve of social participation, is also significant and negatively associated with participation in ex-combatant organizations. As with the results for the Participate Any Community Group dependent variable, these results are consistent with an opportunity theory of community-based social reintegration (these two dependent variables are uncorrelated; $r = 0.05$). The results also speak to the agency of ex-combatants and may indicate that ex-combatants take the initiative to organize among themselves when there are few opportunities for participation in existing community organizations.

Security environment

No evidence is found in support of the security environment hypothesis (Hypothesis 2), where higher levels of insecurity inhibit the participation of ex-combatants in community organizations. Ex-combatants in municipios with more Total Armed Actions are found to be neither more nor less likely to participate in community organizations. However, conflict activity is associated with greater participation in ex-combatant organizations (see Table 3, Model 4), suggesting that sticking together may be a safety-seeking strategy.

We find that the BACRIM variable is not correlated with participation in community groups in Model 2 after taking into account the number of attacks in a municipio and other independent variables (this may be because 88% of the ex-combatants surveyed reside in municipalities with some BACRIM presence). By contrast, participation in ex-combatant social organizations is found to be significantly lower where BACRIM are present (this is especially true for ex-paramilitaries, who may be drawn to BACRIM instead of participating in legal ex-combatant social organizations). Homicide Rate is also not a significant predictor of social participation, which suggests that conflict-related insecurity may have a greater influence on social behavior (at least for joining ex-combatant organizations) than general violence.

To help assess the substantive magnitude of the effects of the logit coefficients of the independent variables, we also calculated the predicted probabilities of participation for Model 2 in Table 3. Figure 1 displays boxplots of the *differences* in probability estimates from the low and high values of selected independent variables while the values of the other variables in the model are held at their means (these values range from zero to one for dummy variables and from the 25th to 75th percentile values for interval variables). Although changes in the values of some of the independent variables (both significant and insignificant) do not substantively affect probabilities of participation, several variables have effects of striking magnitudes. Most notably, an increase in the participation among community members in
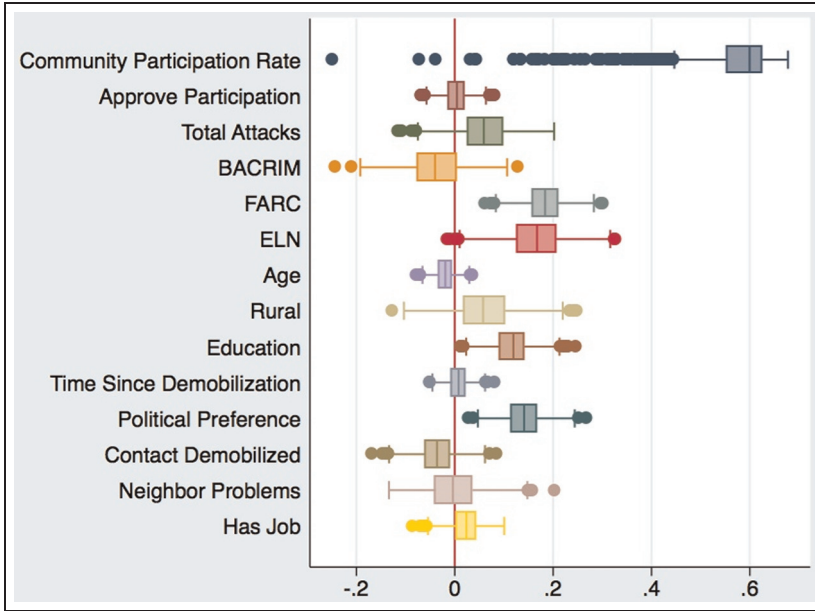
Figure 1. Changes in predicted probabilities of social participation among ex-combatants (using coefficients from Model 2 of Table 3).

Notes: Means represent estimated changes in probabilities of social participation as independent variable values vary. Dummy variables vary from 0 to 1; interval variables vary from the 25th to 75th percentiles; AUC paramilitaries is the out-group; model includes region effects; Pacific region dummy omitted owing to collinearity. Produced using Clarify for Stata.

community organizations in the municipios where ex-combatants reside produces an estimated change in the probability of participation of ex-combatants of 0.57 (from 0.38 to 0.95; see Table 2 in the Online Appendix). This constitutes a *more than doubling* of the likelihood of participation. Fitting with expectations and providing added validity to the model, other substantively important variables associated with increased participation include Political Party Preference, High School, and former membership in a guerrilla group (FARC, ELN).

Conclusions

Social and political participation has been cited as a potential remedy for the recurrence of civil conflicts (Walter, 2004). As highlighted in this study, one promising approach to prevent conflict recurrence is the social reintegration of ex-combatants. We sought to give clarity to the at times murky subject of social reintegration by delimiting and operationalizing it as the social participation of ex-combatants in the communities where they settle. We argued community participation of ex-combatants is a more personal, local, and sustained form of social reintegration than the mere perception of social acceptance, an indicator often used in previous studies.

Our analysis of participation sheds light on the questions of who can be expected to socially reintegrate and where social participation is likely to be a problem. We found vast

differences among who participates, which may suggest ways to stimulate pro-social preferences and behaviors. We found that community contextual variables are significant predictors of social participation. Ex-combatants are more likely to participate where civilian community members themselves participate at higher rates—where there are opportunities to participate. With fewer opportunities to participate in existing community organizations, ex-combatants are found to organize more insularly. Additional research can help to better understand the mechanisms behind this relationship, including whether it is related to community-provided protection for ex-combatants, lower levels of social stigma, or simply more ample opportunities to participate in organizations.

Given Colombia's relatively meager levels of general social participation compared with other countries, the findings of this study may be relevant to other post-conflict scenarios around the world. Social participation may be an especially important form of reintegration in post-conflict settings where opportunities to participate in national political life may be curtailed (such as under authoritarian rule). Additional country studies can provide greater insight about whether the drivers of social reintegration that we identify in Colombia are dependent on its specific national or armed group contexts. One note of encouragement for the external validity of our results is that some are consistent with the findings from studies of civic and political participation in American politics and other fields. Like other citizens around the world, even ex-combatants who face potentially hazardous war-torn environments and possible social stigma and personal trauma are more likely to socially participate when they have opportunities to participate and are invited to do so (Verba et al., 1995).

For this study we unfortunately did not have sufficient data or variation in ACR programs to determine whether community reintegration policy initiatives are effective at boosting ex-combatant social participation. However, there is at least some evidence that the ACR's program is perceived as beneficial: 95% of ex-combatants felt that going through the ACR program helped them be useful in the communities where they live (DNP, 2010). Further study using data on social reintegration programs and outcomes will be required to more carefully evaluate whether particular policy interventions can contribute to reintegration. Yet, for all the (sometimes controversial) focus of DDR on the ex-combatant for achieving sustainable reintegration into society, we find that community counts, too. With this in mind, one path to improve the lot of ex-combatants may be to widen our focus and also improve the social vibrancy of communities. While stimulating community social participation can benefit communities, it may also be a way to provide openings for ex-combatants looking for new notions of belonging.

Funding

Notes

1. Replication files and Online Appendix are available at http://mysite.du.edu/˜okaplan2
2. Participation in community organizations may not always contribute to society as community organizations may sometimes be affected by the "dark side of social capital" (Ostrom, 2000; Nussio and Oppenheim, 2014). However, we did not encounter such forms of social capital to be prevalent in our field research in different areas of Colombia or in other reports (Observatorio de DDR, 2009).
3. Violence may also drive migration decisions, although ex-combatants are not always able to escape threatening environments because of poverty, limited mobility, or other factors.
4. However, this relationship between violence and community participation has been challenged in recent research that identifies a positive relationship between exposure to violence and pro-social behavior (Bellows and Miguel, 2009; Blattman et al., 2013; Gilligan et al., 2011; Voors et al., 2012).
5. FARC, 13,691; ELN, 2889; AUC, 3682; other armed groups, 486.
6. Now the Colombian Agency for Reintegration.
7. Ex-combatant interview, Tierralta, April 2009.
8. Ex-combatant interview, Bogotá, January 2009.
9. Additional common problems with demobilization may also affect how representative the sample is of all demobilized fighters in Colombia. For instance, not all combatants from different armed groups may have actually demobilized, and some of those that entered the demobilization may not have actually been members of armed groups but instead been recruited to inflate the demobilization numbers (Nussio, 2011b).
10. Sampling procedures are described in "Encuesta a desmovilizados, Ficha técnica (Technical Sheet)," Fundación Ideas para la Paz, Bogotá, June 2008.
11. It is unfortunately not possible to identify the type of sampling that was used for each subject in the database since some individuals in the populations that were oversampled using the secondary procedures were included in the initial random sample as well. However, our results are generally robust to the exclusion of the subpopulations that were less likely to have been sampled randomly.
12. Humphreys and Weinstein dealt with the difficulties of sampling in Sierra Leone using different levels of randomization but nevertheless conclude "there is no guarantee that the lists generated in this process are statistically representative of the population of fighters in each chiefdom" (Humphreys and Weinstein, 2007: 540).
13. We are confident that the survey answer options are sufficiently clear as to minimize likelihood of respondents conflating participation in the civil society organizations listed with organizations with criminal or anti-social orientations.
14. We also considered an indicator based on a question about participation in specific activities as opposed to the more general and perhaps more sustained participation in a group, but this does not exhibit sufficient variation for quantitative testing.
15. An additional comparative analysis included in Table 1 of the Online Appendix shows that ex-combatants are less participatory than Colombians in general.

16. The prevalence of participation in sports organizations corresponds with the finding in the classic study by Putnam (1993: 92) that sports organizations comprised the largest share of civic associations (73%) in Italy in the 1980s.
17. This is based on answers to the question, "Did someone in this household participate actively in an organization that benefits the community?"
18. The LAPOP samples contain responses from members of the general Colombian population for 25 of Colombia's 32 departments, so the ex-combatants from the seven departments without coverage drop out of our samples. To avoid the loss of these individuals from the sample we also ran additional models with only variables from the FIP survey and other observational datasets and department fixed effects, which yielded similar results (not shown). LAPOP's random stratified sampling means not every municipality is included and that even the number of individuals sampled by LAPOP in some departments in particular years is low. These sampling issues could produce estimates of average traits for communities with high levels of error. To deal with this concern we display models where department traits are calculated from the average of civilians' responses from multiple annual waves of the LAPOP survey (from 2005 to 2010). We believe that this is a reasonable solution since many of the factors we measure are likely slow moving processes.
19. In contrast to their nominally counter-insurgent paramilitary *self-defense* group predecessors (AUC blocs), the BACRIM have had varying relationships with the FARC and ELN insurgent groups. In some cases they have cooperated with insurgents to move drug products to market while in other cases they have continued to contest these groups in battles for territorial control. These groups pose a security threat to civilians with continued stigmatization and violence and may also pose special dangers to demobilized fighters, whom they may perceive as capitulating to the demobilization accords and justice system or betraying them to the authorities (CNRR, 2010; Munévar and Nussio, 2009).
20. We use an indicator from 2010 since few earlier measurements are available and the presence of BACRIM has been relatively stable over time.
21. Results are largely consistent whether using standard errors, robust errors, or errors clustered by municipios. However, the results for the Participation in Ex-combatant Organizations dependent variable are less stable.
22. These results are robust when individuals who reported participating in sports groups are excluded from the models, suggesting that the community participation rate explains diverse forms of ex-combatant social participation. See Online Appendix.
23. Figure 1 in the Online Appendix provides a graphic representation of this correlation at the municipio level for municipalities with more than five ex-combatants in our survey.
24. Ex-combatant interview, Barrancabermeja, March 2009.
25. The result is significant using robust standard errors. It is negative but not significant in clustered-error specifications.

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