

When Reintegration of Ex-Combatants Turns Deadly: The State’s Role in Preventing Post-Conflict Homicides

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January 23, 2026

Abstract

Post-conflict societies often experience high levels of violence after demobilizing armed groups. Is this violence driven by resettling former combatants within civilian communities? And how can states prevent this form of violence? We answer the first question affirmatively but argue that the rise in violence is chiefly the result of targeted attacks against ex-combatants. These revenge killings may spill over, creating more insecurity for host communities. The state can prevent this kind of violence by providing protection for ex-combatants. We theorize that credible state security guarantees reduce violence through two mechanisms: first, by deterring attacks through physical protection, and second, by encouraging ex-combatants to rely on the state for security provision. Drawing on geo-located data from 12,000 fighters of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), we show that the presence of ex-combatants increased targeted assassinations and general homicide rates after the 2016 Peace Agreement. These effects were compounded when ex-combatants became more visible and identifiable through participation in collective economic projects or collaboration with civilians – two hallmarks of community-based peacebuilding. However, state protection moderated these effects. FARC members who received state protection were more likely to trust state agents and report security threats to them. Unlike previous studies that focus on reconciliation between civilians and ex-combatants, this paper theorizes the role of the state in rebuilding state–rebel bonds during Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR).

Keywords: disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration; post-conflict violence; peacebuilding; state protection; FARC

Word count: 11,000

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1 Introduction

In the demobilization camp of La Paz in Colombia’s province of Cesar, ex-combatants of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) play soccer every Sunday. To an outsider, the game – featuring casual competition and innocuous jerseys – might seem like any other weekend match. Yet, once the game ends, players from one team don khakis and pick up their guns, while the other team remains disarmed. Both teams then rush to a nearby *tienda* with a small television to watch an international soccer match, during which army soldiers place their weapons casually to the side as they reach for cold drinks.¹ These Sunday games and post-match rituals between the Colombian military and FARC ex-combatants symbolize an unexpected level of trust among former adversaries who fought a five-decade war. Ex-combatants in La Paz report feeling generally secure and actively participate in the reintegration program. By contrast, in other areas, similar collective projects became visible targets of lethal selective violence, precipitating the collapse of reintegration and forcing ex-combatants to disperse or remobilize. What explains the variation between functioning reintegration programs and those that increase post-conflict insecurity?

Countries emerging from civil war often enter a precarious post-conflict phase characterized surprisingly by an *increase* in violence. In Latin America, post-conflict states have eight more homicides per 100,000 people than states with a peaceful past (Rivera 2016). Post-conflict contexts differ from wartime conditions because former combatants resettle among civilians and may perpetrate violence using skills acquired during the war. Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) programs aim to improve post-war security by increasing the opportunity costs of engaging in violence (Muggah 2006; Humphreys and Weinstein 2007; Sharif 2018). DDR has become a central component of the majority of large-scale peace operations (Matanock and Lichtenheld 2022; Di Salvatore et al. 2022; Campbell and Di Salvatore 2024). Yet, empirical evidence on its effectiveness remains inconclusive, with some civilian communities experiencing an immense rise in violence following attempts

1. Section 6 of the Online Appendix provides visual context from the field research for this project.

to reintegrate members of armed groups (Kilroy 2014; Blattman and Annan 2016; Daly, Paler, and Samii 2020; Sharif 2024; Vásquez-Cortés 2024).

In transitions to peace, does resettlement of former combatants within civilian communities contribute to post-conflict violence? And how can states prevent this form of violence? Since the end of the Cold War and the increasing fragmentation of armed organizations, post-conflict states have more frequently featured what Nilsson terms “partial peace” (Nilsson 2008). In these settings, one group may disarm and enter a reintegration process, while other non-state actors remain armed. When reintegrating ex-combatants become targets of these still-active groups, insecurity persists and DDR efforts risk unraveling (Themnér 2013; Gilligan, Mvukiyehe, and Samii 2013; Boyle 2014; Nussio and Howe 2016). The existing academic literature and donor evaluation of the programs have focused heavily on reconciliation between ex-combatants and civilians (Colletta, Kostner, and Wiederhofer 1996; Gilligan, Mvukiyehe, and Samii 2013; Kaplan and Nussio 2018; Gelot and Khadka 2025). However, little attention has been paid to rebuilding ex-combatants’ relationship with the state.

We argue that collective demobilization under a peace agreement makes ex-combatants highly visible and vulnerable to selective attacks, which spill over to create more insecurity for host communities. The provision of state protection to ex-combatants, however, moderates this effect. We theorize that credible state security guarantees reduce violence through two mechanisms: first, by deterring attacks through physical protection, and second, by encouraging ex-combatants to rely on the state for security provision rather than turning to former commanders or local non-state actors. This form of reliance marks a major shift in relations between former warring parties, since ex-combatants are least likely to have high levels of trust in the state. Thus, protection mitigates the risks introduced by visibility and enables community-based reintegration to function safely in volatile post-conflict settings.

To empirically assess this argument, we first examine whether the presence of ex-combatants leads to more violence once they resettle within civilian communities. We expect a higher concentration of ex-combatants in an area to lead to higher levels of selective violence against

ex-combatants, as well as an increase in general homicide rates. Further, if the logic of visibility holds, then ex-combatants engaged in community-based reintegration should be more vulnerable. These programs have become increasingly common in DDR since the early 2000s, particularly as the United Nations and the World Bank have moved away from purely individualized support (like cash payments or vocational training) (United Nations 2006). Community-based reintegration aims to reduce violence and build social cohesion by encouraging collective economic projects and collaboration between ex-combatants and civilians. Based on the argument, we expect that these programs increase ex-combatants' visible public presence and heighten the risk of selective targeting. We expect state protection to counter the effect of visibility and increase ex-combatant reliance on the state, thus reducing homicides.

To provide evidence for the theory, we leverage geo-located survey data from 12,000 former combatants of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – People's Army (FARC-EP) who demobilized under the terms of the 2016 Peace Agreement.² The data provide information on the location of ex-combatants, their economic activity (collective versus individual), collaboration with civilian populations, and interactions with the state. We merge these with municipal-level homicide data from Colombia's National Police (2012–2020) to analyze three outcomes: homicides of ex-combatants, homicides of victims that are not ex-combatants, and overall homicide rates. Finally, we leverage the survey's rich security-related indicators to assess whether receiving protection from the state is associated with greater willingness to report security threats to state agents.

The analysis shows that Colombian municipalities with a greater number of resettled ex-combatants experienced both higher rates of selective violence against ex-combatants and increased levels of homicides. However, this effect was significantly reduced in municipalities where ex-combatants received state-provided security, including those participating in community-based reintegration programs. Moreover, ex-combatants who received protec-

2. For simplicity, we refer to FARC-EP simply as the FARC throughout the manuscript.

tion were more likely to report security threats to state agents, suggesting that protection fosters greater engagement with formal institutions. To further examine the mechanisms at work, we incorporate qualitative evidence from semi-structured interviews with FARC ex-combatants. These interviews shed light on how patterns of violence and protection unfold on the ground, revealing that long-term improvements in security happen in areas where peacebuilding efforts increase reliance on the state for protection.

This study advances research on DDR and post-conflict peacebuilding by highlighting the central role of the state. This perspective helps explain variation in outcomes depending on the type of reintegration program and engagement with state security forces. Our findings carry direct policy relevance, demonstrating that efforts to reintegrate ex-combatants into civilian life without a credible and visible state security presence expose them to heightened risks and weaken their trust in state institutions. In fragile post-conflict settings, community-based peacebuilding absent state protection may unintentionally aggravate insecurity, triggering renewed cycles of violence. In what follows, we first draw four hypotheses from the theory, before testing them with municipal- and individual-level data. Finally, we show how the qualitative evidence complements the quantitative findings and conclude.

2 Reintegration and Post-Conflict Violence

Post-conflict violence can emerge through multiple channels. Boyle (2014) distinguishes a direct pathway that extends the wartime logic and an indirect pathway centered on former combatants. The latter emphasizes how resettled ex-combatants may perpetrate violence given wartime skills and networks (Daly 2016), how poorly designed DDR can inflame grievances through unequal benefits (Schulhofer-Wohl and Sambanis 2010), and how cohesive wartime ties are sometimes repurposed for illicit activity (Vásquez-Cortés 2024). Where violence rises with ex-combatant presence, the dominant account casts former fighters as *perpetrators* under an opportunity-cost logic: illegal economies and wartime social ties expand

opportunities for it. Wartime networks lower the risk of offending by transmitting skills and pro-crime norms (Daly, Paler, and Samii 2020; Vásquez-Cortés 2024; Wyr 2024). For instance, evidence from Colombia shows that paramilitary units that demobilized collectively increased homicides and robberies when they exited DDR, while higher robbery rates were reported in areas where individual guerrillas were resettled (Peña and Dorussen 2021).

To curb post-conflict violence, DDR programs aim at raising the opportunity costs of rearmament (Ucko 2009). Participation in DDR raises the costs of crime, with targeted reintegration improving economic and social outcomes for ex-combatants and their neighbors (Gilligan, Mvukiyehe, and Samii 2013). Similarly, DDR can repurpose wartime ties to leverage ex-combatant cohesion and leadership for the purpose of peace (Sharif 2022; Sabogal 2024). Yet the effect of DDR is mixed: reintegration reduces violence in some settings but exacerbates it in others (Kilroy 2014; Daly, Paler, and Samii 2020; Vásquez-Cortés 2024). More broadly, weak links between reintegration and long-term development remain a persistent challenge, reflecting tensions between security and development objectives (Buxton 2008).

We argue that post-conflict homicides may be driven by a different logic: DDR can render ex-combatants highly visible, making them *victims* of selective violence. In many post-conflict settings, targeted violence against those involved in peacebuilding is common (Maher and Thomson 2018; Sharif and Carranza-Franco 2025). Selective violence creates incentives for ex-combatants to defect from the peace process and remobilize in order to protect themselves. Ex-combatants are often targeted because of their role as wartime perpetrators of violence (Ríos 2022). This logic is especially salient under collective demobilization. Unlike fighters that defect from armed organizations and undergo DDR individually – such as al-Shabaab members in Somalia or FARC defectors in Colombia – ex-combatants that demobilize collectively as part of a peace agreement become highly visible and easy to identify. They cannot benefit from the anonymity of reintegration into urban environments or the shield of family and community ties in rural areas. In Colombia, for example, authori-

ties publicly announced the location of demobilization camps, where 100–500 ex-combatants were concentrated, heightening their exposure to targeted attacks.

If the logic of visibility holds, then reintegration programs that increase ex-combatant visibility should increase violence post-conflict. Community-based reintegration, part of the broader local turn in peacebuilding (MacGinty and Richmond 2013), facilitates ex-combatants’ social and economic reintegration by supporting collective economic projects for ex-combatants and encouraging collaboration with civilians (De Vries and Wiegink 2011; Kaplan and Nussio 2018). This new and preferred form of DDR aims at increasing economic opportunities for ex-combatants by leveraging wartime ties and removing stigmas by increasing contact between civilians and ex-combatants (Berdal and Ucko 2009; Zyck 2009; United Nations 2019). By mobilizing wartime ties for licit ends, ex-combatants broker new relationships with surrounding communities (Sabogal 2024). Thus, community-based reintegration makes ex-combatants *agents* of peacebuilding rather than passive recipients of it. This active role or agency-taking is associated with better reintegration results (Sharif 2023). Nevertheless, community-based reintegration makes ex-combatants highly visible, and visibility heightens exposure to rival armed groups, criminal organizations, and spoilers seeking retribution or control. Ex-combatants who lack personal security are “remarginalized” and are more likely to remobilize or drift into post-conflict criminal activity (Themnér 2011, 15).

Thus, we argue that armed groups that demobilize collectively as part of a peace agreement become highly visible, making them more vulnerable to selective violence. This heightened exposure stems from their concentration in specific locations, continued social ties with wartime comrades, and collaboration with civilians. Thus, while maintaining wartime cohesion may contribute to peace (Sharif 2023; Sabogal 2024), collective reintegration may, as a byproduct, worsen the insecurity of ex-combatants going through DDR. Ex-combatants who reintegrate into communities without adequate security guarantees face significant risks, as armed groups and criminal networks may view them as threats or targets (Meernik, Gaviria Henao, and Baron-Mendoza 2021; Daly, Paler, and Samii 2020). While community-based

reintegration programs aim to promote economic collaboration between ex-combatants and civilians, they can inadvertently increase ex-combatants' exposure to violence. By fostering social and economic ties within civilian communities, these programs make ex-combatants more identifiable and accessible to those seeking retribution or attempting to reassert control over contested areas. We thus hypothesize that,

H.1. The presence of ex-combatants increases post-conflict violence, particularly when they participate in community-based reintegration programs.

Ex-combatants who demobilize collectively are more likely to maintain their wartime bonds and continue to depend on former command-and-control structures when faced with post-conflict challenges. Wartime social networks often serve as primary social ties after demobilization, particularly because many combatants have severed relationships with civilians, complicating their reintegration into society (Daly, Paler, and Samii 2020; Themnér and Karlén 2020; Martin, Piccolino, and Speight 2021). These networks provide not only psychological familiarity and social cohesion, but also alternative security arrangements, especially in contexts where state protection is absent or unreliable (Sharif 2023). Bonds forged through prolonged socialization under threat persist long after war, reinforcing group identities and shaping post-conflict behavior (Zyck 2009). When ex-combatants lack confidence in the state's ability or willingness to protect them, they are more likely to turn to former commanders or armed groups for protection, increasing the risk of remobilization and perpetuating cycles of violence (Meernik, Gaviria Henao, and Baron-Mendoza 2021; Reno and Matisek 2018).

Empirical research highlights the enduring influence of both vertical ties to former commanders and horizontal ties among ex-combatants in shaping post-conflict trajectories. Daly, Paler, and Samii (2020) and Vásquez-Cortés (2024) show that these ties significantly contribute to ex-combatant involvement in post-conflict criminality. Those who retain strong primary group cohesion after conflict often exhibit continued solidarity with former rebel

institutions and heightened skepticism toward state authorities (Sharif 2023). This distrust is rooted in persistent in-group loyalty, which reinforces wartime perceptions of the state as an adversarial actor. When ex-combatants view the state as unwilling or unable to provide security, they frequently reactivate wartime hierarchies, turning to former commanders or trusted non-state figures for protection (Martin, Piccolino, and Speight 2021). As a result, community-based reintegration – particularly through collective economic projects and collaboration with civilians – may inadvertently sustain wartime loyalties rather than dismantle them. Thus, we hypothesize that,

H.2. Ex-combatants in community-based reintegration programs are more likely to depend on their wartime units and local non-state leaders for security, rather than state agents.

3 The Moderating Effect of State Protection

Our theoretical framework identifies state protection as a moderating factor. We theorize that state-provided security mitigates the risks involved in reintegration by providing protection and by incentivizing ex-combatants to rely on state institutions for protection. Reliance on wartime networks can limit ex-combatants’ engagement with the state (Gilligan, Mvukiyehe, and Samii 2013). In the absence of state protection, ex-combatants often depend on wartime ties for security and economic stability (Hart and Gomez 2022; De Vries and Wiegink 2011; Themnér and Karlén 2020; Martin, Piccolino, and Speight 2021). State security provisions break this cycle by fostering trust between ex-combatants and state institutions. By offering direct protection – such as safe housing, security escorts, or law enforcement interventions – the state reassures ex-combatants that they will not be abandoned to fend for themselves. This protection not only reduces immediate threats but also encourages ex-combatants to engage with state institutions rather than retreat into informal security arrangements (Kasher 2003). Over time, this engagement strengthens ex-combatants’ trust

in the state, making them more likely to report security threats and cooperate with law enforcement.

The role of state security is particularly crucial in the context of community-based reintegration programs. While these programs emphasize collective reintegration and collaboration with civilians, they do not inherently provide physical security (Kaplan and Nussio 2018; De Vries and Wiegink 2011). In cases where the state fails to offer protection, economic reintegration efforts may increase ex-combatants' exposure to selective violence. For instance, ex-combatants developing and sustaining economic projects with civilians may be viewed as political threats by rival groups or as competitors by criminal organizations (Colletta, Kostner, and Wiederhofer 1996; Daly, Paler, and Samii 2020). Without state protection, their visibility and participation in civilian life make them easy targets for attacks. However, when the state actively protects reintegration sites and ensures the safety of ex-combatants and their collaborators, the risk of selective violence diminishes, allowing reintegration programs to achieve their intended objectives.

H.3. Provision of security by the state moderates the effect of ex-combatant presence on post-conflict violence.

State-provided security not only prevents immediate violence but also reshapes post-conflict governance by integrating individuals into formal security structures (Karim 2020). When ex-combatants feel protected, they are less likely to rely on extralegal forms of security provision and more likely to engage with state institutions (MacGinty and Richmond 2013). This shift reduces their reliance on wartime commanders and non-state actors while reinforcing the legitimacy of the state's monopoly on violence (Walter 1997; Hutchison and Johnson 2011). While wartime ties can facilitate collective projects and social bridging during reintegration (Sabogal 2024), these benefits do not substitute for formal security provision. Wartime commanders may not be effective as guarantors of security once they are disarmed. In addition, relying on commanders and ex-combatant networks for protection

risks reproducing parallel chains of authority and selective enforcement. This weakens accountability and the state’s monopoly of force, and raises the probability of remobilization when informal guarantees fail.

Protection embeds ex-combatants in routinized contact with state security institutions (e.g., scheduling escorts, filing alerts, coordinating routes). Consistent with relational accounts of security provision, contact normalizes cooperation and reduces social distance (Karim 2020; MacGinty and Richmond 2013). When security alerts yield timely responses by the state (e.g., patrols deployed, threats disrupted), ex-combatants update their beliefs about state reliability. This lowers expected costs of reporting and further increases use of state channels, thus reinforcing confidence. Visible provision of protection for collectivities of ex-combatants also signals to civilians and rivals that the state will enforce security, which helps reassert the state’s claim to the legitimate use of force (Hutchison and Johnson 2011). Thus, state protection does not merely shield ex-combatants from harm, but it transforms their relationship with the state, making them stakeholders in post-conflict stability rather than liabilities. We expect that when the state provides credible protection, ex-combatants are more likely to rely on the state for security and report security threats to state agents. We thus hypothesize that,

H.4. Ex-combatants that receive protection from the state are more likely to report security threats to the state, rather than their wartime commanders or local community leaders.

4 Alternative Explanations

Pre-existing variations in local governance and institutional capacity offer an alternative explanation for reductions in post-conflict violence. Areas with stronger administrative capacity, better-trained local security forces, or a history of rule of law compliance may naturally experience improved post-conflict security outcomes, independent of reintegration strategies

or state support. In such areas, the observed effects might overstate the role of state protection in reducing violence and fostering trust. Another plausible explanation is that state protection is a response to heightened risks faced by ex-combatants, rather than a causal factor in reducing violence. Here, while state protection likely deters violence, the observed effects may underestimate its true impact because the baseline risks faced by recipients of protection are already elevated.

On the individual level, ex-combatants who already distrust the state may self-select into community-based reintegration programs, reinforcing their reliance on wartime networks and driving the observed reduction in trust in the state. Conversely, those with pre-existing trust in state agents may be more inclined to seek and receive state protection, with trust itself explaining both access to security and willingness to report threats. In these cases, the relationships between reintegration, state protection, and trust may reflect selection effects or reverse causality rather than causal mechanisms. Similarly, ex-combatants with stronger social capital or facing greater security risks might self-select into reintegration programs or state protection, confounding the relationships of interest. Unobserved factors, such as pre-existing security concerns may further obscure our theory’s mechanism. In the following sections, we present the case of Colombia and assess the empirical evidence for our theoretical argument while systematically accounting for these alternative explanations.

5 The Reintegration Program in Colombia

Colombia is both a “typical” and “influential” case for studying post-conflict violence (Seawright and Gerring 2008). The 2016 reintegration program with the FARC provides a critical test of state-provided security in post-conflict settings. Since the DDR program followed a comprehensive peace agreement, it involved the collective demobilization of the FARC, with ex-combatants resettled across the country (Figure 1). Some ex-combatants engaged in col-

lective economic projects with other ex-combatants and some collaborated with civilians.³ The state selectively provided security for some ex-combatants considering resource constraints. The geographic variation in resettlement and state security provisions gives us the opportunity to evaluate the impact of ex-combatant presence, engagement in various reintegration tracks, and the state’s provision of protection. Given the presence of active armed groups, historical state absence in peripheral regions, and ongoing threats from dissident factions of the FARC, Colombia represents a “hard test” for our theory. If state protection mitigates violence in such a challenging environment, its effects are likely to hold in less volatile cases.

Ex-combatant resettlement had direct implications for local violence. As Figure 2 indicates, post-disarmament homicides increased in municipalities with ex-combatant presence, while levels stayed stable in others. A portion of this violence specifically targeted ex-combatants: by the end of 2020, over 200 FARC ex-combatants had been assassinated, largely by criminalized former paramilitary groups (BACRIM) and FARC dissidents who defected from the peace process and remobilized (United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia 2020). Municipalities where ex-combatants eventually settled saw a decline in homicides between 2012 and 2016, coinciding with peace negotiations and the group’s declaration of a permanent ceasefire in 2014. The reduction in violence during the peace process suggests that the escalation of post-reintegration violence was not an inevitable consequence of ex-combatant presence but was shaped by shifting security dynamics.

Before the 2016 Peace Agreement, Colombia had demobilized multiple armed groups, but earlier DDR programs often led to increased violence in areas where ex-combatants resettled (Carranza-Franco 2019). Learning from past failures, the 2016 reintegration strategy adopted a fundamentally different approach: rather than dispersing ex-combatants individually, it prioritized collective economic reintegration (*reincorporación económica colectiva*) (Peace

3. Ex-combatants opted for collective reintegration for a variety of reasons, including better economic prospects, maintaining their wartime group identity, and feeling more protected as members of their wartime group. However, as our results show in the next section, engaging in collective reintegration had the opposite effect: it worsened security conditions for members.

Agreement 2016, Provision 3.2.2).⁴ Under this model, ex-combatants were encouraged to form cooperatives and launch small-scale economic initiatives, including agriculture, fisheries, artisanal production, and ecotourism, with the goal of fostering economic self-sufficiency. The Agreement also incentivized collaboration with local civilian communities, linking ex-combatant cooperatives to local markets, labor networks, and communal infrastructure. The government provided 8 million pesos (2,400 US dollars) per ex-combatant for individual or collective economic projects. This emphasis on economic interdependence reflected a broader strategy: reintegration was not merely about providing livelihoods for ex-combatants but about embedding them within civilian communities to facilitate social reintegration and reduce incentives for remobilization.

Given the security risks faced by ex-combatants in previous DDR programs, the 2016 Peace Agreement placed unprecedented emphasis on state security guarantees (*garantías de seguridad*) (Peace Agreement 2016, Provision 3.4). The Agreement explicitly recognized protection as a prerequisite for reintegration, extending security provisions to ex-combatants, community leaders, human rights advocates, and political actors. Security measures included threat assessments, bodyguards, armored vehicles, and early warning systems, with implementation overseen by state agencies, such as the National Protection Unit (Unidad Nacional de Protección). However, the allocation of security resources was uneven, contingent on threat assessments, regional conflict dynamics, and logistical constraints. While some ex-combatants in high-risk areas received robust protection, rank-and-file members in remote areas remained vulnerable. This divergence in security provision creates a quasi-exogenous source of variation, as protection was allocated based on external risk factors rather than individual trust in the state. This allows us to assess the impact of state protection on ex-combatant security and trust-building while minimizing concerns of reverse causality.

4. The text of the peace agreement can be found at <https://www.refworld.org/legal/agreements/natlegbod/2016/en/121520>. In the Peace Agreement, the FARC preferred the term reincorporation (*reincorporación*) – in lieu of reintegration – to distinguish this process from earlier DDR experiences in Colombia, particularly those involving paramilitary groups and guerrilla deserters.

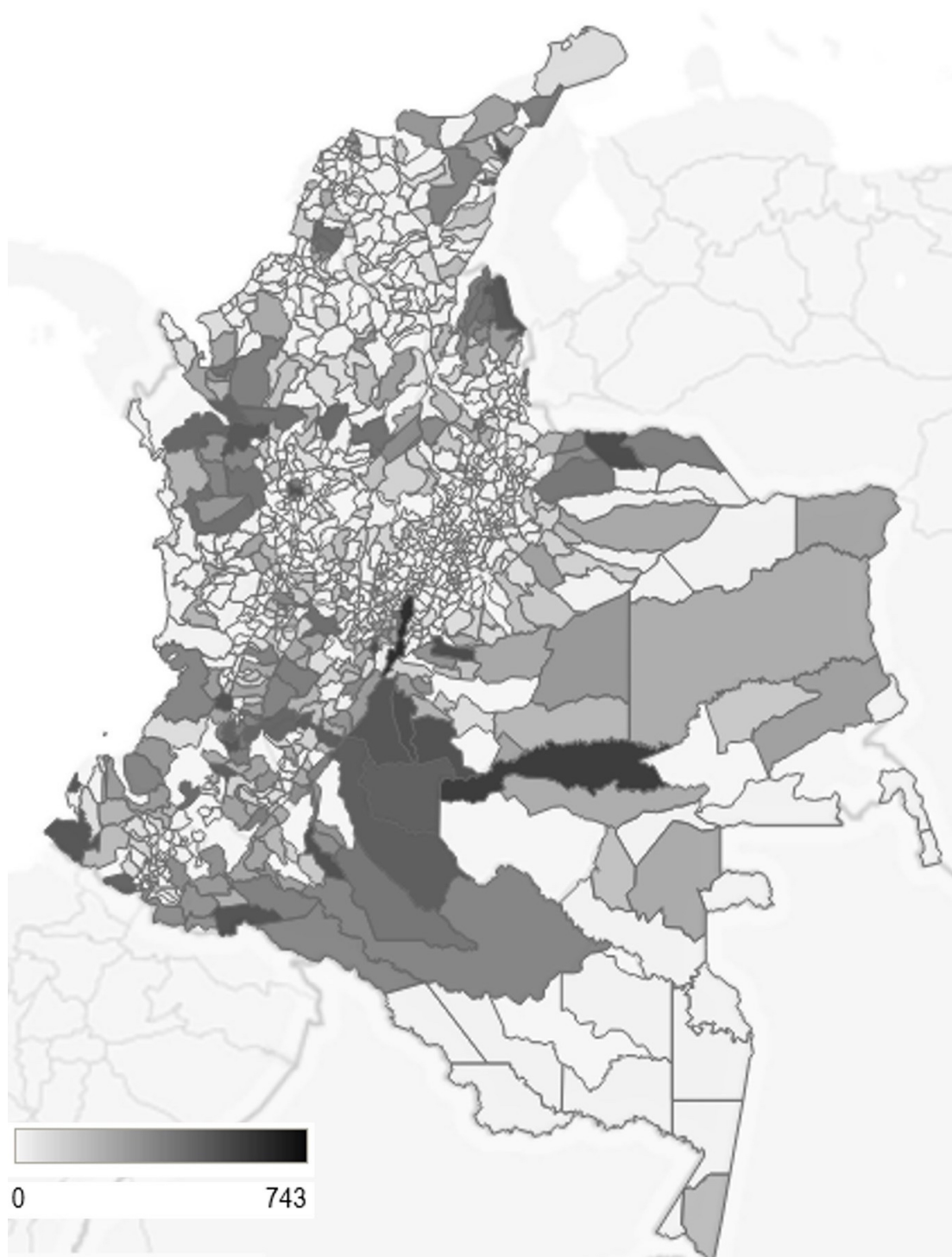


Figure 1: Geographic distribution of ex-combatants in Colombian municipalities following the 2016 Peace Agreement with the FARC.

Source: Authors' calculations using the Agency for Reincorporation and Normalization (ARN) survey of demobilized FARC ex-combatants (2017).

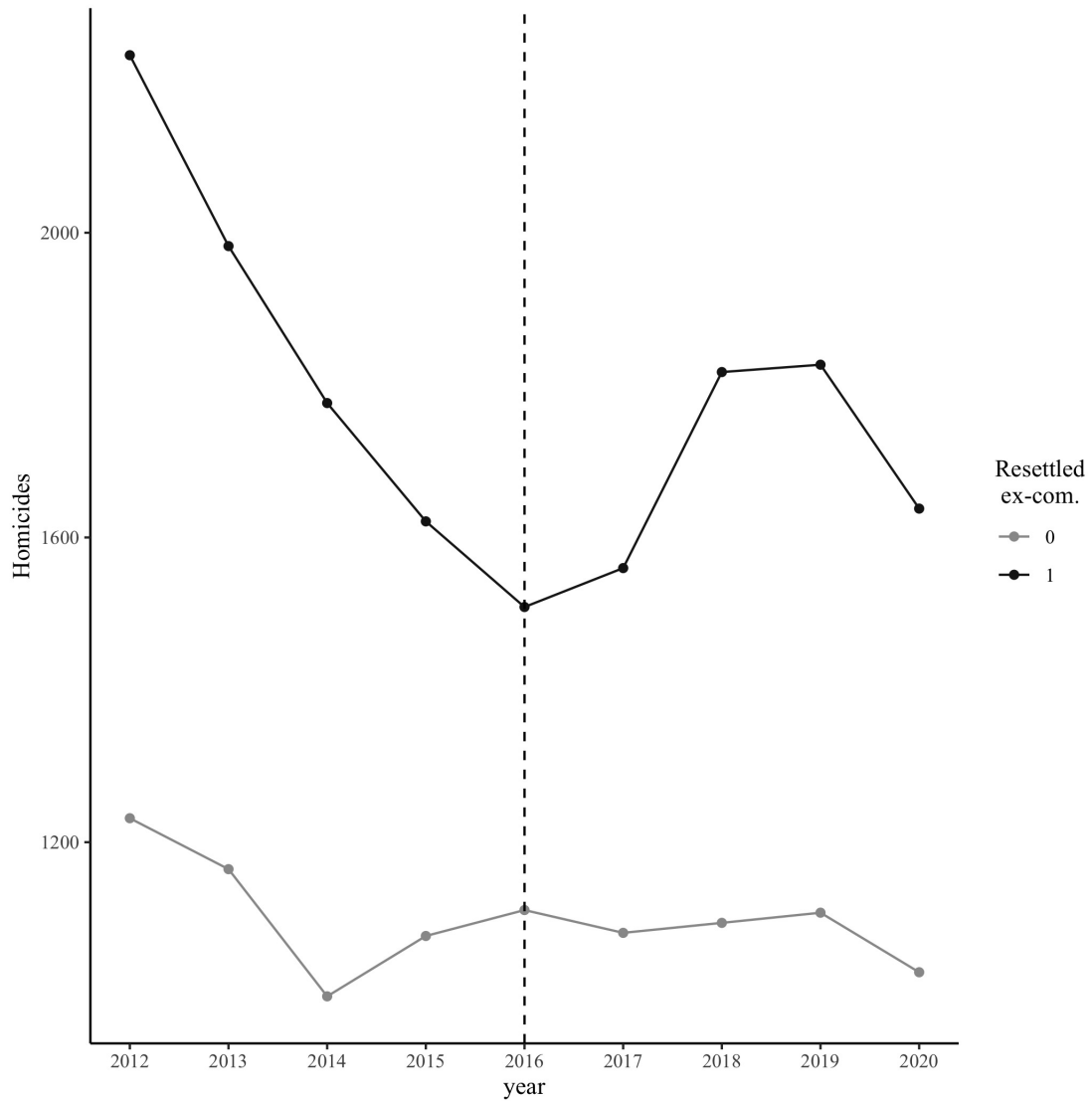


Figure 2: Homicides in Colombian municipalities based on ex-combatant resettlement (2012–2020).

Source: Authors' calculations using municipal homicide data from Colombia's National Police (SIEDCO) (2012–2020) and ex-combatant resettlement from the ARN survey (2017).

6 Quantitative Evidence

6.1 Municipal-Level Data

To test Hypotheses 1 and 3, we compiled a municipal-level dataset covering incidents of homicide in Colombia between 2016 and 2020, including total municipal homicides, those with ex-combatant victims, and non-ex-combatant victims. We use this approach for two key reasons. By separately analyzing homicides of non-ex-combatants, we assess whether the violence linked to ex-combatant presence spills over to the civilian population or remains confined to targeted attacks. The municipal homicide data were obtained from the Observatory for Crime in Colombia’s National Police Department (Observatorio del Delito, Sistema de Información Estadística, Delincuencial, Contravencional y Operativo - SIEDCO). Data on ex-combatant assassinations were acquired from the Colombian Observatory of Organized Crime and the non-profit Institute for Development and Peace Studies (INDEPAZ). Section 1 of the Appendix presents a full description of the variables, descriptive statistics, and bivariate correlations.

The key independent variables capture ex-combatant presence, their involvement in community-based reintegration, and receiving state protection. The data come from a comprehensive survey conducted by the Agency for Reincorporation and Normalization (Agencia para la Reincorporación y la Normalización - ARN). Established with the 2016 Peace Agreement, the ARN is a collaborative entity comprising both governmental and former FARC components. The agency’s primary responsibility is to oversee the reintegration process, proactively identify potential challenges, and serve as an intermediary between ex-combatants and the government. In the initial stage of DDR in 2017, the ARN conducted a survey of the population of ex-combatants (N=12,138) to identify patterns of economic, political, and social reintegration. The survey data were made available to the authors in a confidential manner by the ARN. Section 2 of the Appendix includes further information about the survey.

Based on the survey data, we recorded the number of ex-combatants resettled in each municipality. Ex-combatant presence is operationalized as the log-transformed number of resettled individuals. Under the terms of the 2016 Peace Agreement, ex-combatants could choose between collective and individual reintegration tracks. We recorded the (log-transformed) number of ex-combatants in each municipality that engaged in each track. To assess the impact of state involvement, we included a binary variable indicating whether ex-combatants received formal protection from the state. To test the moderating effect of state-provided security, we include an interaction term between the number of ex-combatants present and protection.

We control for multiple municipal-level characteristics associated with violence. The first is baseline homicide rates (2016), which serves as an indicator for pre-existing violence, ensuring that observed post-conflict trends are not simply a continuation of prior patterns. We also control for insurgent and state presence in 2016, as municipalities with active insurgents or government forces before demobilization may have different security dynamics. Coca cultivation (log-transformed, 2016) is included, as municipalities with illicit economies are more prone to violence (Wyer 2024). The institutional capacity index (2016), drawn from Colombia’s National Administrative Department of Statistics (DANE), measures the strength of local governance structures, which should correlate with lower violence levels (Carranza-Franco 2014). Finally, population size (log-transformed) accounts for the fact that larger municipalities generally experience higher homicide rates due to greater social interaction and the possibility of contagion effects (Quinn et al. 2024). We also control for the number of internally displaced persons (IDP) that arrived in each municipality in 2016, with data from Colombia’s armed conflict Victims Unit (*Unidad para las Víctimas* – UARIV).

6.2 Municipal-Level Analysis

We estimate a series of negative binomial regression models using three dependent variables: total municipal homicides, homicides with ex-combatants as victims, and other homicides

(where victims were not ex-combatants). These variables are measured as annual counts at the municipal level from 2017 to 2020. We exclude municipalities that reported zero homicides in the study period to ensure meaningful variation in the outcome. The dependent variable Y_{it} represents the count of homicides in municipality i and year t (2017-2020). The baseline model is specified as:

$$\log(E[Y_{it}]) = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \log(\text{Ex-combatants}_i + 1) + \mathbf{X}_{it}\boldsymbol{\beta} + \epsilon_{it} \quad (1)$$

where $\log(\text{Ex-combatants}_i + 1)$ is the log-transformed number of resettled ex-combatants in municipality i , and \mathbf{X}_{it} is a vector of control variables (including population, coca cultivation, institutional capacity, baseline homicides in 2016, and insurgent and government presence). ϵ_{it} is the error term.

To test whether protection moderates the relationship between ex-combatant presence and violence, we add a binary indicator for state protection and an interaction term:

$$\begin{aligned} \log(E[Y_{it}]) = & \beta_0 + \beta_1 \log(\text{Ex-combatants}_i + 1) + \beta_2 \text{Protection}_i \\ & + \beta_3 [\log(\text{Ex-combatants}_i + 1) \times \text{Protection}_i] + \mathbf{X}_{it}\boldsymbol{\beta} + \epsilon_{it} \end{aligned} \quad (2)$$

In Equation 2, Protection_i is a binary variable equal to 1 if any ex-combatants in municipality i received formal protection from the state. The interaction term captures whether the effect of ex-combatant presence on violence is conditional on the existence of state protection. We report additional estimates in Appendix Section 1 with zero-inflated negative binomial. The supplementary models confirm that the results are not driven by model choice or sample selection.

6.3 Municipal-Level Results: The Effect on Homicides

Table 1 reports negative binomial models with heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors. Results are consistent with the visibility mechanism: municipalities with more ex-combatants see higher total homicides (Model 1: $\beta = 0.044$, $p < 0.01$), but this pattern is overwhelmingly driven by ex-combatant victims (Model 3: $\beta = 0.783$, $p < 0.001$). Substantively, a 10% increase in ex-combatant presence is associated with roughly an 8% increase in expected assassinations of ex-combatants. By contrast, effects on other victims are small in magnitude (Model 5: $\beta = 0.037$, $p < 0.05$), suggesting that post-conflict homicide dynamics are disproportionately shaped by selective attacks against ex-combatants. The provision of security by the state attenuates this risk. The interaction between ex-combatants and protection is negative but not statistically significant for ex-combatant assassinations (Model 4: $\beta = -0.220$).

Coefficients for controls behave as expected: coca cultivation is positively associated with violence across outcomes, baseline homicides in 2016 are strongly predictive of post-2016 homicides, and population size is positively associated with overall homicides (Models 1–2, 5–6). Government attacks in 2016, suggesting stronger state presence, are negatively associated with homicides (Models 1–2, 5–6), while IDP arrivals in 2016 are positively related to homicides (Models 1–2, 5–6). However, the presence of IDPs is unrelated to ex-combatant assassinations (Models 3–4).

If the logic of visibility holds, municipalities with more ex-combatants in collective economic projects and those with more ex-combatants collaborating with civilians should experience more selective violence. Table 2 shows that both collective projects and civilian collaboration are strongly and positively associated with ex-combatant assassinations. In models without controls, collective projects ($b = 1.005$, $p < 0.001$) and civilian collaboration ($b = 1.132$, $p < 0.001$) are each linked to substantially higher assassination counts (Models 1 and 3), and these relationships remain positive and statistically significant when adding controls (Models 5 and 7).

Table 1: Negative Binomial Estimates of Homicides and Ex-Combatant Assassinations

	Homicides		Ex-comb. victims		Other victims	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Ex-combatants (log)	0.044** (0.016)	0.032 (0.020)	0.783*** (0.069)	0.817*** (0.102)	0.037* (0.016)	0.024 (0.020)
Ex-combatants (log) \times protection		0.059 (0.038)		-0.220 (0.152)		0.059 (0.038)
Protection (0,1)		-0.177 (0.126)		0.998 (0.580)		-0.175 (0.126)
Population (log)	0.376*** (0.030)	0.376*** (0.030)	-0.284 (0.177)	-0.278 (0.175)	0.378*** (0.030)	0.378*** (0.029)
Coca 2016 (log)	0.102*** (0.009)	0.102*** (0.009)	0.235*** (0.035)	0.227*** (0.035)	0.100*** (0.009)	0.100*** (0.009)
Institutional capacity 2016	-0.002 (0.002)	-0.002 (0.002)	-0.007 (0.013)	-0.006 (0.013)	-0.002 (0.002)	-0.002 (0.002)
Homicides 2016 (log)	0.705*** (0.026)	0.707*** (0.026)	0.502** (0.153)	0.492** (0.151)	0.708*** (0.026)	0.709*** (0.026)
Insurgent attacks 2016	0.011 (0.014)	0.010 (0.014)	0.022 (0.038)	0.021 (0.037)	0.011 (0.014)	0.011 (0.014)
Government attacks 2016	-0.019* (0.008)	-0.020* (0.008)	-0.016 (0.023)	-0.011 (0.023)	-0.018* (0.008)	-0.019* (0.008)
IDP arrivals 2016 (log)	0.032** (0.011)	0.033** (0.011)	-0.055 (0.063)	-0.057 (0.063)	0.033** (0.011)	0.034** (0.011)
Constant	-2.101*** (0.264)	-2.099*** (0.264)	-1.616 (1.477)	-1.798 (1.475)	-2.126*** (0.264)	-2.124*** (0.263)
Observations	990	990	990	990	990	990
Log Likelihood	-3501.002	-3499.777	-321.720	-320.303	-3494.057	-3492.834
AIC	7022.004	7023.553	663.440	664.606	7008.115	7009.668
BIC	7070.981	7082.326	712.417	723.379	7057.092	7068.440

Note: Robust standard errors in parentheses. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

Consistent with a protective dampening mechanism, the interaction between visibility and state protection is negative and statistically significant in both sets of models. In the controlled specifications, protection reduces the marginal association of collective projects with assassinations (Model 6: $b = -0.437$, $p < 0.01$) and similarly attenuates the association for civilian collaboration (Model 8: $b = -0.557$, $p < 0.01$). Substantively, a 10% increase in collective projects or civilian collaboration is associated with roughly a 9–11% increase in expected assassinations when protection is absent, but this increase falls to about 5% when protection is present. Among controls, baseline homicides and coca cultivation are consistently positive and statistically significant, while population size is negative and IDP arrivals are small and not statistically significant.

As another test of the logic of visibility, we expect municipalities with more ex-combatants to face strategic targeting by rivals acting as peace spoilers or seeking revenge. We assess municipal-level variation in attacks by FARC dissidents and criminal groups (BACRIM – criminalized former paramilitaries) in the post-2016 period. The results in Appendix Section 1.5 show that municipalities hosting more ex-combatants are significantly more likely to experience such attacks, reinforcing Hypothesis 1. To address selection into settlement locations, we implement an instrumental variable strategy using the average number of FARC attacks between 2012 and 2016 as an instrument for the number of ex-combatants resettled in a municipality. Results are reported in Appendix Section 1.4. The first stage is strong (0.09 , $p < 0.001$) and, the second-stage regressions show a positive and significant effect of ex-combatant numbers on assassinations ($\beta = 0.89$, $p < 0.001$). The first-stage residuals are not significant, suggesting the instrument potentially addresses endogeneity concerns.

6.4 Individual-Level Data

To test Hypotheses 2 and 4, we probe the survey data for evidence of ex-combatants’ reliance on the state for security. Ex-combatants were asked to indicate which actors they approach in the event of a security threat, with the option to select multiple entities. We created three

Table 2: Negative Binomial Estimates of Ex-Combatant Assassinations

Dependent Variable: Ex-Combatant Assassinations (counts)								
	Models without controls				Models with controls			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Collective projects (log)	1.005*** (0.073)	1.229*** (0.141)			0.736*** (0.064)	0.931*** (0.118)		
Coll. proj. (log) \times Protection		-0.621*** (0.189)				-0.437** (0.153)		
Protection (0,1)		1.454*** (0.418)		1.596*** (0.392)		1.015** (0.381)		1.096** (0.362)
Civilian collaboration (log)			1.132*** (0.091)	1.318*** (0.176)			0.853*** (0.078)	1.091*** (0.145)
Civ. coll. (log) \times Protection				-0.698** (0.226)				-0.557** (0.182)
Population 2016 (log)					-0.226 (0.175)	-0.287 (0.175)	-0.144 (0.180)	-0.229 (0.179)
Coca 2016 (log)					0.289*** (0.035)	0.273*** (0.035)	0.349*** (0.037)	0.325*** (0.036)
Institutional performance 2016					-0.012 (0.013)	-0.011 (0.013)	-0.007 (0.013)	-0.007 (0.013)
Homicides 2016 (log)					0.625*** (0.154)	0.640*** (0.153)	0.504** (0.156)	0.543*** (0.154)
Insurgent attacks 2016					0.032 (0.040)	0.035 (0.038)	0.025 (0.042)	0.026 (0.040)
Government attacks 2016					-0.019 (0.025)	-0.013 (0.024)	-0.022 (0.026)	-0.011 (0.025)
IDP arrivals 2016 (log)					-0.045 (0.062)	-0.044 (0.062)	-0.034 (0.064)	-0.032 (0.063)
Intercept	-2.806*** (0.145)	-3.027*** (0.167)	-2.643*** (0.139)	-2.865*** (0.158)	-1.488 (1.499)	-1.126 (1.479)	-2.373 (1.552)	-1.778 (1.527)
Observations	990	990	990	990	990	990	990	990
Log Likelihood	-392.864	-386.974	-404.881	-397.409	-330.435	-326.457	-334.822	-330.010
AIC	791.728	783.948	815.762	804.819	680.871	676.914	689.643	684.019
BIC	806.421	808.437	830.455	829.307	729.848	735.686	738.620	742.792

Notes: Robust standard errors in parentheses. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

binary variables based on responses to this question. The variable *report to the state* was coded as 1 if the respondent indicated a formal state entity, including the National Army, National Police, National Protection Unit (UNP), Ombudsman, or Prosecutor General’s Office. The variable *report to the military/police* was coded as 1 if the respondent specifically indicated the National Army or the National Police. And the variable *report to non-state* was coded as 1 if respondents identified non-state actors, including other ex-combatants, local leaders, ethnic authorities, religious leaders, family members, or non-combatant friends.

The core explanatory variable captures whether ex-combatants received protection from the state *alguna entidad del Estado*. Second, ex-combatants were asked whether they were currently involved in a collective versus individual productive venture or initiative, and if these ventures included participation by local civilians. Following Hypothesis 2, we expect ex-combatants in community-based reintegration to be more likely to turn to other ex-combatants (including former commanders) or non-state actors for protection. Hypothesis 4 further suggests that receiving protection from the state moderates this effect, increasing the likelihood that ex-combatants report security threats to the state.

We employ logit models for the analysis, while including several individual-level controls to account for personal characteristics that could shape ex-combatants’ trust in the state. We control for gender (male vs. female), given socialization patterns and experiences with armed conflict can differ markedly between men and women, potentially affecting their comfort in seeking help from the state (K.C. 2019). We also accounted for employment status and friendship networks, reasoning that socially integrated individuals may have greater access to information and broader support systems that shape their trust in formal authorities (Kaplan and Nussio 2018). Marital status and education can influence stability and risk tolerance, with more educated or married ex-combatants possibly feeling more secure in relying on state institutions (Suarez and Baines 2022). Finally, we considered disability status, as physical or mental impairments may alter the need for and perception of state assistance. Appendix Section 2 provides descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations.

6.5 Individual-Level Results: Reliance on the State for Security

H.4 posits that state-provided security enhances trust in state institutions, leading ex-combatants to report security threats to state authorities rather than relying on non-state actors. The results in Table 3 offer strong support for this hypothesis. Models 1 and 2 show that ex-combatants who receive state protection are significantly more likely to report security threats to any state entity ($\beta = 0.825, p < 0.001$). This suggests that state security guarantees not only provide physical protection but also increase confidence in state actors, encouraging ex-combatants to seek institutional support in addressing security concerns. In contrast, state protection does not significantly reduce reliance on non-state actors for security ($\beta = -0.054$), suggesting that while protection increases engagement with state institutions, it does not necessarily dissuade ex-combatants from turning to alternative security providers.

Models 2, 4, and 6 include individual-level controls. Employment and socioeconomic stability also shape reporting behavior. Models 2 and 4 show that employment significantly increases the likelihood of reporting threats to state actors, including the military or police. Model 6 indicates that employment is also positively associated with reporting to non-state actors, suggesting that those who are economically stable may still hedge their security options by maintaining connections to both state and non-state entities. Higher levels of education are positively associated with reporting threats to state actors and negatively associated with reliance on non-state actors ($\beta = -0.115, p < 0.05$). Having strong friendship networks increases the likelihood of reporting to state actors, but also correlates with reliance on non-state actors. This highlights the complex role of social capital: while networks can facilitate institutional trust, they may also sustain alternative security structures.

We repeated the analysis in a subset of demobilized FARC ex-combatants who participated in community-based reintegration. We expect ex-combatants involved in collective projects and those collaborating with civilians to be less likely to report security threats to state agents (H.2). State protection should have a moderating effect on this (H.4). The re-

Table 3: Logit Estimates of Ex-Combatant Reliance on State and Non-State Entities for Security Provision

	State		Military/Police		Non-State	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Protection	0.825*** (0.105)	0.676*** (0.111)	0.172 (0.096)	0.019 (0.101)	0.179 (0.102)	-0.054 (0.109)
Employed		0.127** (0.039)		0.167*** (0.039)		1.137*** (0.046)
Age		0.011*** (0.002)		0.009*** (0.002)		-0.016*** (0.002)
Male		0.112* (0.045)		0.085 (0.046)		0.075 (0.051)
Education		0.416*** (0.050)		0.174*** (0.049)		-0.115* (0.055)
Friends		0.163* (0.067)		0.107 (0.068)		0.452*** (0.084)
Married		-0.045 (0.041)		-0.045 (0.041)		-0.092* (0.046)
Disability		0.053 (0.064)		0.066 (0.064)		0.002 (0.072)
Intercept	0.070*** (0.019)	-0.703*** (0.101)	-0.317*** (0.019)	-0.918*** (0.102)	-0.909*** (0.021)	-1.274*** (0.120)
Observations	11,845	11,018	11,845	11,018	11,844	11,018
Log Likelihood	-8,162	-7,518	-8,068	-7,476	-7,116	-6,283
AIC	16,328	15,054	16,140	14,970	14,236	12,584
BIC	16,343	15,119	16,155	15,036	14,251	12,650

Notes: Robust standard errors in parentheses. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

sults in Table 4 support these expectations. Collective reintegration is negatively associated with reliance on military and police ($b = -0.174, p < 0.1$) and positively associated with reliance on non-state actors ($b = 1.003, p < 0.001$).⁵

Similarly, collaboration with civilians in economic projects reduces reliance on the state ($b = -0.124, p < 0.05$) and military and police ($b = -0.217, p < 0.001$). However, state protection moderates these effects ($b = 0.519, p < 0.05$), increasing reliance on military and police. These results suggest that community-based reintegration reduces dependence on state actors, but state protection can encourage engagement with the state. While wartime ties can aid social and economic reintegration (Sabogal 2024), and mid-level commanders may effectively coordinate local initiatives, they are ineffective in protecting ex-combatants after disarmament. Disarmed ex-combatants in groups are also incapable of protecting themselves. In addition, informal security reproduces parallel authority and selective enforcement and lacks accountability, which can elevate remobilization risks.

To address the concern that more security-conscious ex-combatants both seek protection and report to the state, we reanalyzed the survey using matching and sensitivity checks. First, we used propensity score matching on perceived insecurity, age, education, and employment, producing a balanced sample of 443 protected and 443 similar unprotected respondents with all standardized mean differences below 0.02. In this matched sample, protection doubled the odds of reporting threats to state actors (OR = 2.0, 95% CI: 1.5–2.7). Rosenbaum bounds show the result is robust to moderate hidden bias up to $\Gamma = 2$. Second, we replicated the analysis with coarsened exact matching, retaining 443 protected and 10,486 matched controls with near-zero imbalances. The estimated effect is very similar and slightly larger (OR = 2.26, 95% CI: 1.87–2.73), and remains robust in sensitivity checks up to $\Gamma = 6$. Appendix Section 2 reports the results of robustness tests. Together, these tests indicate that the protection–reporting relationship is unlikely to be driven by selection.

5. Because the interacted regressors are binary, the “main effects” are conditional: the coefficient on Collective projects is the effect when *Protection*=0; and the interaction term is the additional change when both equal 1 beyond the sum of their separate effects.

Table 4: Estimates of Ex-Combatant Reliance on State and Non-State Entities for Security Provision

	State		Military/Police		Non-State	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Collective projects	-0.097 (0.074)		-0.174* (0.073)		1.003*** (0.082)	
Coll. projects * protection	-1.123 (0.631)		-0.117 (0.437)		-0.498 (0.481)	
Civilian collaboration		-0.124* (0.062)		-0.217*** (0.063)		0.359*** (0.063)
Civ. collab. * protection		0.095 (0.270)		0.519* (0.248)		-0.022 (0.257)
Protection	1.762** (0.616)	0.640** (0.201)	0.144 (0.418)	-0.268 (0.188)	0.262 (0.463)	-0.090 (0.194)
Age	0.013*** (0.003)	0.015*** (0.003)	0.012*** (0.003)	0.015*** (0.003)	-0.021*** (0.003)	-0.021*** (0.003)
Male	0.111 (0.069)	0.122 (0.070)	0.056 (0.069)	0.075 (0.070)	0.181* (0.071)	0.132 (0.072)
Education	0.496*** (0.075)	0.548*** (0.076)	0.212** (0.072)	0.278*** (0.074)	-0.165* (0.075)	-0.181* (0.075)
Friends	0.358** (0.118)	0.266* (0.121)	0.244* (0.118)	0.153 (0.121)	0.276* (0.127)	0.342** (0.125)
Married	-0.039 (0.064)	-0.013 (0.065)	-0.014 (0.063)	0.010 (0.065)	-0.007 (0.065)	-0.014 (0.066)
Disability	-0.031 (0.095)	0.007 (0.097)	-0.035 (0.094)	0.000 (0.095)	0.100 (0.097)	0.108 (0.096)
Intercept	-0.801*** (0.181)	-0.869*** (0.176)	-0.895*** (0.180)	-1.027*** (0.175)	-0.786*** (0.192)	-0.064 (0.180)
Observations	4,762	4,605	4,762	4,605	4,762	4,605
Log Likelihood	-3,216	-3,109	-3,251	-3,130	-3,106	-3,062
AIC	6,452	6,239	6,522	6,281	6,233	6,144
BIC	6,517	6,303	6,587	6,345	6,297	6,209

Notes: Robust standard errors in parentheses. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

7 Qualitative Evidence

Without longitudinal survey waves, we cannot track within-person transitions from relying on non-state actors in dealing with security threats to reporting them to the state. Our qualitative evidence, however, speaks directly to this dynamic: receiving protection increased reliance on and demands of the state, as ex-combatants leveraged formal reporting channels, sought expanded coverage for cooperative leaders, and coordinated with officials to secure reintegration sites. Drawing on participant observation (2017–2022) and roughly 200 interviews with FARC ex-combatants, community leaders, legislators, and UN officials, we examine how protection reshaped routine interactions with state agents and civilian partners. Appendix Section 3 contains the interview protocol and ethical considerations in research with human interlocutors. The first subsection below traces perceived visibility and targeted risk; the second shows how protection triggers information exchange and formal reporting; and the third demonstrates durable reliance on state security rather than remobilization.

7.1 From Visibility to Targeted Risk

We found that ex-combatants perceive themselves as a socially distinct in-group that is highly identifiable, visible, and vulnerable. Community-based reintegration exacerbated this visibility. For instance, ex-combatants that had started a collective artisanal chocolate-making project in the city of Tumaco (Nariño) had to go underground because their workshop was constantly targeted.⁶ They reported that, had they found jobs individually, they would not have been identified so easily. Demobilization camps and other collective forms of reintegration, such as New Areas of Reincorporation (Nuevas Áreas de Reincorporación – NAR) were highly visible, and collective economic projects by ex-combatants were easily identifiable through names and affiliations (e.g., *Café de Esperanza* coffee project led by ex-combatants, *Paz & Pan* bakery, *Nueva Esperanza* chocolate, and *La Roja* artisanal beer). An ex-combatant in the demobilization camp of La Fila explained that community-based

6. Interviews with ex-combatants in Tumaco, Nariño, June 2023.

reintegration is very effective for improving ex-combatants' livelihoods but is *pointless* if not protected by the state.⁷

Look at these coffee trees. We planted these with the money we received at the beginning of the peace process. We now have civilians working for us in the plantations. All of these efforts and collaboration means nothing (es para nada) if paramilitaries descend those hills [pointing to the surrounding hills] and make us leave this space. We are disarmed. If they come, we cannot protect ourselves.

State provision of security created safe spaces for ex-combatants to engage with other ex-combatants, civilians, and state agents without fearing persecution. When protected by the state, ex-combatants – as a socially distinct in-group – reconfigured ways of interacting with the civilian out-group. Interactions with state agents over security issues created bonds of trust, gradually increasing reliance on the state for more security provision. One of the mid-level commanders of the FARC's Caribbean bloc, interviewed in August 2019 in the demobilization camp of La Paz, explained that receiving protection from the military made ex-combatants more trusting of the officers.⁸

We have good relations with the military here. The comrades were first skeptical of having the military nearby, but they now play or watch soccer with them. Civilians around here were first skeptical, thinking our presence here was going to attract all kinds of armed groups. But they now work with us to improve security and bring investment to Cesar.

7.2 From State Protection to Reporting Threats to the State

Once trust was established, ex-combatants began to demand *more* protection from the state, especially for the economic projects they had collectively developed.⁹ The 2016 Peace Agreement mandated the creation of a national entity for both individual and collective protection

7. Interview with an ex-combatant in Icononzo, Tolima, June 2019.

8. The FARC constituted seven operational regions or “blocs” (*bloques*): Caribbean, Middle Magdalena, Western, Eastern, Central, Southern, and Northwestern. A bloc is composed of 500 to 5,000 combatants and corresponds roughly to a battalion or brigade in state military structures.

9. Interviews with ex-combatants in demobilization camps of Agua Bonita (Caquetá), La Fila (Tolima), and Tierra Grata (Cesar) in June-August 2019.

of ex-combatants (Unidad Nacional de Protección - UNP). It also established the legal basis for the creation of communal enterprises (*Economías Sociales del Común* - ECOMUN) to improve the economic standing of the community. These cooperatives requested collective security in the form of bodyguards and shielded cars.¹⁰ The armed bodyguards protected ex-combatant cooperative leaders, as well as the buildings and lands associated with cooperatives. In the demobilization camp of La Fila (Tolima), protection teams and the rapid-alert channel produced routine joint patrols and escalated requests for coverage. However, in the camp of El Oso, also in Tolima, ex-combatants did not receive protection, as a result of which cooperative leads avoided formal reporting and suspended collective projects after threats. The contrast suggests that state protection was the lever pushing more engagement with the state.

The Peace Agreement also established a rapid alert system to encourage reporting security threats to the state in order to reduce repeat offenses. Ex-combatants who had received protection from the state reported making extensive use of the rapid alert system because they found state agents to be effective in providing security.¹¹ The shift toward formal reporting under protection aligns with the interaction effects in Table 3 (Models 1–2). These information networks thrived due to the trust ex-combatants had built in the state, which in turn allowed them to tap into state security guarantees that would have otherwise remained inaccessible. While the Peace Agreement had mandated the creation of various state-provided security measures, we found through interviews with state officials that these measures were only implemented if ex-combatants trusted the state enough to ask for protection.

7.3 From Effective Response to Durable Reliance on the State

Through participant observation and interviews, we found that trust in the state did not dissipate after the first few years post-conflict. When the state responded effectively to

10. Interviews with cooperative leaders in the provinces of Cauca, Valle de Cauca, and Nariño (December 2021- January 2022).

11. Interview with the Administrative Manager of CECOESPE, the largest cooperative of coffee producers operated by FARC ex-combatants (Popayán, August 2021).

curb violence, ex-combatant collective action and advocacy to protect themselves and their livelihoods increased. Between 2018 and 2020, the UNP’s budget increased by 270% to 40 million US dollars to meet further security demands made by ex-combatants.¹²

Another organization created with the Peace Agreement was the Investigation and Prosecution Unit (*Unidad de Investigación y Acusación*), tasked with investigating crimes against ex-combatants. However, this state protection tool had remained inefficient and ineffective in preventing violence. With the rise in assassinations, ex-combatants called on the state for accountability. Ex-combatants in municipalities of Ituango (Antioquia), Argelia (Cauca), and Popayán (Cauca) held gatherings in public squares and marched to Bogotá, protesting selective violence in the post-2016 period. Our interviews revealed that these ex-combatants had received protection during the reintegration process and were incentivized to make more demands on the state, rather than taking up arms against it.¹³

Following the march to Bogotá, ex-combatants and civil organizations protested for three days in Popayán (the provincial capital of Cauca) to demand more security from the state. After this collective initiative, a special branch of Colombia’s transitional justice court (*Jurisdicción Especial para la Paz* – JEP) requested that the government establish a special fund for improving infrastructure and security.¹⁴ Responding to JEP’s request, the government initiated investigations into these cases, leading to the arrest and indictment of forty percent of the perpetrators.¹⁵ Active investigation and indictment of perpetrators of violence functioned as a preventive mechanism, reducing criminal activity in these areas.

Table 5 summarizes the qualitative evidence into process observations that map each step

12. The Ombudsman’s Office of Colombia issued a report in March 2022, outlining the security measures taken by the state to protect individuals involved in the peace process. The report is available online at https://forseti.defensoria.gov.co/gestor/compilacion/docs/pdf/doc_dp_0001_2022.pdf.

13. Interviews with (1) the leader of the FEDECAFE, Colombia’s largest federation of coffee cooperatives (Popayán, 2021), (2) the leader of FEDECOMUN, the federation of all cooperatives in South-West Colombia (Cali, 2021), and (3) the leader of COMULNES, a coffee cooperative in Argelia, Cauca (Argelia, 2021).

14. The authors attended the two-day preparatory meeting in Popayán, during which ex-combatants gathered evidence and composed the claim to send to the Court. Appendix Section 3 includes the text of the Court’s request to the government.

15. El Espectador (June 2020), “Las propuestas que FARC le hizo a la JEP para detener los asesinatos de excombatientes.” <https://www.elespectador.com/colombia-20/jep-y-desaparecidos/las-propuestas-que-farc-le-hizo-a-la-jep-para-detener-los-asesinatos-de-excombatientes-article/>.

of the mechanism from visibility to violence reduction. The rows show how protection generates repeated contact with state agents, which in turn builds trust and routinizes reporting. Then, subsequent accountability actions (arrests/indictments) deter repeat violence.

Table 5: Process Observations

Claim step	Representative evidence
Visibility→targeted risk	Collective reintegration projects and demobilization camps made ex-combatants highly visible and easily identifiable. Ex-combatants reported recurrent threats and attacks on workshops and camp perimeters, noting that <i>individual</i> job placement would have reduced their exposure.
Protection→reporting threats	The deployment of protection teams and a rapid-alert channel generated routine contact with security officers and systematic filing of incident reports. Protected reintegration sites increased coverage requests and coordinated patrols, whereas unprotected sites avoided formal reporting and suspended projects after threats.
Effective Response→durable reliance on the state	Where the state responded to threat reports effectively and reduced violence, cooperatives sought expanded coverage for leaders and facilities and coordinated with officials to secure the sites, shifting reliance from wartime networks to state security. These practices facilitated preventive actions that reduced repeat attacks and sustained reintegration activities.

8 Conclusion

This paper shows that resettling ex-combatants in civilian communities increases homicides, but that ex-combatants are the main victims of this form of post-conflict violence. We show that community-based reintegration heightens ex-combatant visibility and risk, but credible state protection converts that vulnerability into routine security and reliance on state institutions. Evidence from Colombia’s DDR program shows that state-provided security both deters attacks and encourages ex-combatants to engage with state institutions. The qualitative and quantitative findings suggest that the effectiveness of reintegration in reducing post-conflict insecurity hinges not only on social or economic inclusion of ex-combatants but improved relations with the state.

These insights have important implications for post-conflict policy design. Reintegration programs are political interventions that require robust state engagement, particularly in contexts marked by fragmented authority or ongoing armed activity. Rather than outsourcing security to communities, policymakers should integrate protection into reintegration frameworks to deter violence and build institutional trust. By reinforcing the state’s role as a guarantor of security, such programs can reduce the negative externalities of community-based reintegration. Similarly, credible security guarantees can convert volatile reintegration environments into safer spaces for collaboration, enabling ex-combatants to shift reliance from wartime commanders to formal institutions.

This study has several limits that future research should address. The survey data we use is cross-sectional, so we cannot quantitatively track how protection and trust coevolve over time or identify the sequence of events around threats, reporting, and state response. Our measures of violence and protection are observational and may contain reporting error, and the protection indicator is coarse relative to how protection is actually delivered. Although the research design includes multiple checks, unobserved confounding cannot be fully ruled out. Future work should pair panel surveys with administrative records on protection requests and deployments, use designs that exploit sharper quasi-experimental variation in security provision, and compare cases across countries to assess scope conditions.

Acknowledgments

For excellent feedback, we thank Jake Bowers, Sebastian Calonico, Dara K. Cohen, Camilo Ernesto Serrano, Gary Goertz, Bill Kakenmaster, Oliver Kaplan, Irene Pang, Anna Pechenkina, Jason Quinn, Christopher Schwarz, Mark Ungar, Gonzalo Vazquez Bare, Michael Weaver, and Yiqing Xu. We are also thankful to audiences at the annual meetings of the International Studies Association (2023), the Western Political Science Association (2024), and the Latin American Peace Science Society (2022), as well as members of the International Studies Colloquium at Simon Fraser University (2022) and the COMP-CAN Colloquium at the University of British Columbia (2023). Finally, we thank three anonymous reviewers and the editors for their constructive comments.

Funding

This research was funded by Mitacs Canada (Grant number: IT34101) and the Fundación WWB, Pontificia Universidad Javeriana (Award number: 130100120).

Ethics Approval

The project received Institutional Review Board approval at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York (018-1590) and Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences, Pontificia Universidad Javeriana (DECA-79-2021).

Data Availability Statement

Data and replication files for this study are available through the Harvard Dataverse repository at <https://dataverse.harvard.edu/dataverse/internationalinteractions>.

Conflict of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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