Unintended Consequences of UN Reports: Evidence from a Post-Conflict Context

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Abstract

International organizations play a crucial role in the reintegration of former rebels. They are often the main guarantors and providers of reincorporation projects and are pivotal in revealing violence during the post-conflict period. Some studies, however, associate the presence of international missions with political violence. I argue that international organizations can increase the probability for members of successor rebel parties to reconsider the use of political violence by providing condemning reports that reveal government misconduct. How these messages are currently communicated does not take into consideration the higher psychological susceptibility, existential vulnerabilities, and volatile environment surrounding this audience. I test my arguments in Colombia, where the former rebel group FARC participated for the first time in elections in 2018. Based on a unique sample of FARC supporters and an experimental design, I show that members of former rebel groups were more prone to support the reconsideration of political violence when they were confronted with UN reports condemning government misconduct against their group. I also show that the FARC did not share these messages on Twitter, indicating that the FARC leadership is aware that these reports could have the leverage to influence a critical threshold for former rebels. These results suggest that UN reports have the potential to negatively affect volatile post-conflict contexts and reveal the necessity for reevaluating how the UN communicates at the local level.

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Introduction

Since the end of the Cold War, several Western countries and international organizations, such as the United Nations (UN), have contributed to the signing of peace agreements in order to end civil conflicts. A key feature of peace agreements is the transformation of armed groups into regular political parties and their participation in free and fair elections. The international community increasingly oversees whether conflict parties abide by the accords of peace agreements as well as by democratic standards in elections. International missions regularly report on any shortcomings or violations of these norms (Matanock, 2017a,1).

Yet, the recurrence of civil wars and political violence in the aftermath of conflict is widespread, particularly during electoral cycles (Hyde and Marinov, 2012). Some studies link the presence of international missions with higher rates of violence (Daxecker, 2012,1; Smidt, 2016), thus suggesting that international missions could have unintended negative consequences; particularly, there appears to be a link between international missions' presence and the recurrence of violence in post-conflict settings. However, we do not know how international missions could trigger local actors to re-engage in (political) violence. So far, we only have a limited understanding of the microfoundations that give rise to these associations on the macro level. In contexts where peacekeeping missions are deployed, a lower risk of electoral violence has been observed; however, missions were more effective at limiting violence by non-state actors compared to government forces (Fjelde and Smidt, 2022). Effective mission design also appears to be crucial for violence mitigation in post-conflict electoral contexts (Smidt, 2021).

The political and economic reintegration of former combatants is a fundamental principle of peace negotiations and a key component of peace agreements. However, it is often a challenging and rocky process with varying levels of success. Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) programs attempt to target the overall reincorporation of former rebels. However, these programs can have unintended consequences if proper reintegration into civilian life fails (Di Salvatore, 2019). The lack of economic opportunities, isolation, resentment, and security threats often faced by former rebels can drive them to rejoin other illegal groups or criminal organizations that profit from their previous experience and expertise with the use of (political) violence. Thus, although international missions can and do provide security and stability if post-conflict settings, they can also increase violence by affecting the balance of power between warring parties (Hultman, 2010) and by unintendedly providing the necessary conditions for criminal violence to spur once political violence begins to cease (Di Salvatore, 2019).

I make the following two-stage theoretical contribution at the member and elite levels of former rebel groups to explain why the presence of international organizations could be linked to the recurrence of political violence via elite power struggles of former rebel groups.

At the member-level, international organizations affect political behavior by providing credible news on government misconduct. Given their past experience with political violence, a strong sense of solidarity, and strong ideological motivation, the threshold for reconsidering the use of violence is relatively low among members of former rebel groups (Bhavnani and Jha, 2014; Jha and Wilkinson, 2012; Kreutz, 2012,1). Thus, any credible

source affirming attacks against their group increases their willingness to reconsider the use of political violence.

However, former rebel members do not perceive political information in a political vacuum. Information is mediated or interpreted by their rebel group's leadership. At the elite-level, rebel groups or former rebel groups that transformed into regular political parties are not uniform actors. Such organizations consist of different factions, and there are intra-party conflicts over leadership selection, policy preferences, and supporting a peace agreement. Prior research suggests that rebel groups frequently experience fragmentation (Perkoski, 2019). I argue that successor rebel parties' leadership is aware of the fact that credible reports on government misconduct can potentially influence a critical threshold for former rebels and, thus, jeopardize their adherence to peace accords and peace implementation. Consequently, they strategically choose which information to disseminate among their members and supporters.

I evaluate my arguments in Colombia. In recent years, the most prominent rebel-to-party transformation in international politics has been the one of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – People's Army (FARC-EP, FARC hereafter). The FARC participated for the first time as a regular political party in the 2018 Colombian legislative elections as the Common Alternative Revolutionary Force (retaining the acronym FARC[1]), receiving a disappointing vote share of 0.36 percent. The UN Verification Mission has played an essential role in implementing and verifying the peace agreement and in reporting shortcomings, such as government misconduct against the FARC, which

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[1]In January 2021, the party "Fuerza Alternativa Revolucionaria del Comun" (FARC) was renamed "Comunes." For clarity purposes, I will refer to the party by its previous acronym FARC throughout the article.

was exacerbated between 2018 and 2022 during the presidential term of right-wing president Iván Duque. Support for the peace agreement became a contested issue within the new FARC party. An increasing number of demobilized FARC supporters joined splinter groups to continue the insurgency, culminating in the declaration of key FARC leaders to take up arms again in late August 2019.

The microfoundations of violence largely remain a black box due to the empirical inaccessibility of party supporters who engage in violent behavior. I employ the advertising option of the social media page Facebook to obtain a large-scale sample of FARC supporters. Facebook sampling allows for pre-sampling demographic quotas and can be used to conduct survey experiments and to obtain representative samples of party activists (Bentancur et al., 2019; Samuels and Zucco, 2014; Zhang et al., 2020).

I test the effect of UN "condemn[2]" reports highlighting government misconduct against the FARC on different types of supporters by employing an experimental survey design. Each respondent had a 50 percent probability of being exposed to critical UN reports. The empirical analysis shows that these reports appear to make members of former rebel groups more likely to support the reconsideration of political violence.

In addition, I conducted a Twitter analysis in order to evaluate how the FARC and other Twitter users reacted to UN reports. The FARC's reaction to UN reports criticizing government misconduct is relevant to my theory. As in the case of other

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[2]The UN verification mission employs the word "condemn" in the majority of its reports highlighting either government misconduct, violence perpetrated by illegal groups, armed groups associated with the government, and the military. The Spanish language translation of the word "condemn" is "condenar" a word that has powerful legal and factual connotations equivalent to the English legal terms "sentence or sentencing."

former and current rebel groups (Loyle and Bestvater, 2019; Zeitzoff, 2017), social media has been the major communication tool of FARC leaders to inform their supporters and the wider public. Jones and Mattiacci (2019) show that rebel groups welcomed news reports verifying government misconduct against them in the Libyan conflict and shared them widely on Twitter in order to gain international support. Usually, political parties should welcome the reporting of news concerning government misconduct against them. In this case, however, my theory suggests that the FARC does not welcome such reports, as these messages could increase the doubts and fear for the implementation of the peace agreement and a potential reconsideration to renege it, thus jeopardizing their own agenda of sustaining the peace agreement. The Twitter analysis shows that UN reports highlighting government misconduct received the most attention on Twitter in general, while these were the only type of messages that were not shared further by the FARC leadership.

Violence in Post-Conflict Societies

Peace agreements and provisions for rebel-to-party transformations have emerged as global trends since the end of the Cold War in order to reduce to recurrence of violence. Such arrangements are often supported by international organizations in order to reduce the risk of conflict recurrence. 196 peace agreements were signed with 93 non-state armed groups to end civil conflicts over the period 1975 – 2011. 30 of the peace agreements included explicit provisions for rebel-to-party transformations (Söderberg Kovacs and Hatz, 2016). Furthermore, Manning and Smith (2016) identify 72 former rebel parties that have emerged over the period 1990 – 2009.

The signing of peace agreements provides the involved parties with commonly agreed and binding procedures to achieve a peaceful transformation of the conflict. However, the involved parties face a credible commitment problem, as they cannot credibly signal to the other party that they will not renege from the agreement once the other side has demobilized. Matanock (2017a,1) suggests that the international community can serve as a third-party monitor and enforcer to ensure compliance with electoral participation provisions for former rebel parties. The international involvement functions as a credible signal to former rebels that they can demobilize and transform into a regular political party. Electoral participation provisions are positively associated with lasting peace (Matanock, 2017a,1).

Among the different types of international missions, election monitoring has become an international norm as well as a major tool for the international community to observe the implementation of electoral participation provisions. Inviting foreign election monitors can function as a credible commitment of governments to democracy. As monitors would reveal any detected irregularities, governments are expected to be deterred from cheating. Moreover, the electoral losers are more likely to concede if impartial monitors certify that an election was free and fair (Hyde, 2011; Kelley, 2008). Experimental evidence suggests that the presence of foreign election observers tends to reduce direct fraud and violence on election day, particularly at the monitored polling stations (Asunka et al., 2019; Enikolopov et al., 2013; Hyde, 2007; Ichino and Schündeln, 2012).

If election fraud occurs, credible reporting by international monitors provides a focal point for opposition forces to coordinate post-election protests against the regime,

thus contributing to popular demands for democratic reform (Hyde and Marinov, 2014; Tucker, 2007). However, such events could turn violent and have unintended negative consequences for the longevity of peace. Daxecker (2012) links the presence of international observers to an unintentional increase in electoral violence. By providing credible information on fraud, election observers reduce the uncertainty on whether fraud occurred, thereby increasing the willingness of opposition groups to challenge the government in violent contestation. Smidt (2016) finds that the presence of international monitors increases post-election violence by the opposition if no fraud was detected. In addition, the presence of international monitors on election day can shift the incentive to use violence to the pre-election period when such actions are less likely to be reported (Daxecker, 2014). Based on game-theoretic considerations, Luo and Rozenas (2018) argue that election monitoring inherently involves such undesired trade-offs, because monitors can only reduce electoral fraud and violence on average if they cause more violence in some fraudulent elections.

Thus, it appears that international missions can have negative consequences. However, we have a limited understanding of the underlying mechanisms so far. The literature mostly relies on large-N studies that, by design, cannot capture the dynamics of violence on the micro-level.

The Effects of Reporting Government Misconduct

on Former Rebel Members

Previous research shows that political parties and their supporters play an important role in organizing and conducting political violence (Asunka et al. 2019: 130; Höglund 2009: 416-7). As described by Matanock and Staniland (2018: 710), "party armed wings clash, party supporters riot, incumbents target opposition parties, and insurgents attack politicians." I argue that members of parties with a rebel past are particularly vulnerable to reconsider the return to violence due to four reasons:

First, transformed parties often consist of ideologically motivated members who joined during the organization's rebel past. The ideological motivation of rebel recruits must have been substantial in order to outweigh the social costs of being part of an illegal organization and engaging in violence (Stewart 2018: 208). Ideologically motivated members are more likely to commit to the lifestyle of an armed group and withstand hardships as well as economic offers by the government or other groups (Oppenheim et al. 2015: 799).

Second, individuals could have joined rebel groups because they derive pleasure and pride from the militarist lifestyle. Their propensity to engage in violence might persist even after they have returned to civilian life (Kaplan and Nussio 2018: 70).

Third, military training and combat experience provide former rebels with the knowledge and experience of how to organize violence in the future (Bhavnani and Jha, 2014; Kreutz, 2012,1). The background can be seen as human capital, which reduces the psychological cost of using violence, and taught ex-combatants the organizational skills to improvise in rapidly changing environments (Jha and Wilkinson, 2012). Given their past

experience and skill level in employing violence, their threshold for reconsidering the use of violence is relatively low.

Lastly, a rebel past also creates close social bonds and a sense of a common identity among ex-combatants (Gates 2002: 115). Ex-combatants are embedded in common social networks that tend to persist long after demobilization. The common identity and network ties ensure a feeling of solidarity among former rebels, which could lead to a reoccurrence of the armed struggle if ex-combatants experience that they or their former comrades become the target of violence by the state or other armed groups. The honor cultures of former rebels "make it more costly for some to 'turn the other cheek' when confronted with violence" (Bhavnani and Jha 2014: 77).

The DDR strategy of the international community also takes the potential security threat of demobilized party members into account. In order to ensure sustainable peace, peacekeeping missions focus on removing weapons, disbanding armed formations, and providing reintegration measures, such as social, educational, and employment assistance programs for ex-combatants (Humphreys and Weinstein, 2007). The discussion gives rise to the following hypothesis:

Rebel Hypothesis: Members of former rebel parties are more likely than non-members and sympathizers to reconsider the threat of using political violence when reading reports by international organizations on government wrongdoings (e.g., violence against their group).

The Rebel-to-Party Transformation of the FARC

and the Role of the UN in the Peace Process

How to make peace sustainable? This has been a critical question for the current and past Colombian governments. In September 2016 – after 53 years of civil war – the largest guerrilla group in the country, the FARC, signed a much-expected peace agreement that put an end to the most protracted conflict in the Western hemisphere. This was not the first attempt at a peace agreement with an electoral participation provision between the Colombian government and the FARC or another rebel group. Unfortunately, past experiences have left less than positive lessons for the current peace implementation process.

As a consequence of the historical background, skepticism plagued the proceedings of the latest peace process, which began in September 2012 with negotiations between the Santos administration and the FARC. The UN has played a crucial role in the signing of the peace agreement and in its implementation. The 2018 Verification Mission was the second UN mission since the beginning of the peace talks. It began its task following a joint formal request by the Colombian government and the FARC in November 2016. The mission was then approved by the UN Security Council by means of Resolution 2366 on July 2017. As its mandate indicates, the mission's responsibility is to verify that both parties, the government, and the FARC, fully comply with the implementation of the Peace Accord.

The peace agreement includes amnesty for former rebels and the reincorporation of the FARC into civilian life at the economic, social, and political levels in order to create

the fundamentals for a stable and long-lasting peace. The FARC terminated, on the other hand, the armed struggle and became a legal entity in the political system. Regardless of their election results, the Peace Accord guaranteed the FARC ten seats in Congress for a period of eight years. The peace agreement also focuses on security warrants for FARC members and the fight against criminal organizations and paramilitary groups accused of committing assassinations and massacres against human rights advocates and social and political movements.

These components of the peace agreement dominated the public debate during the October 2016 peace agreement referendum in which the Colombian electorate rejected the Final Peace Accord with 50.22 percent. The legislative later unanimously approved a slightly different version of the agreement. Part of the opposition party Centro Democrático (CD), which campaigned in the referendum against the peace agreement, boycotted the vote in parliament.

The agreement was an unprecedented achievement for Colombia's democracy, as over 7,000 fighters demobilized (Gamboa 2018: 58). The FARC party was officially established in a delegate congress on 28 – 31 August 2017 when it also adopted a party manifesto with rules for members and an ideological platform.

The FARC participated as a political party in the 2018 legislative elections. Several indicators of violence, such as homicides, kidnapping, or terrorist attacks, were at a historic low. Nonetheless, several challenges emerged, which undermined the peace process: Until the 2018 presidential election, paramilitaries had killed 40 demobilized

FARC members and 261 social leaders, particularly in areas that were vacated by the FARC. FARC members expressed major concerns about their security in interviews (Maher and Thomson 2018: 2149-51).

The FARC suspended their election campaign as a response to public animosity that culminated in violent protests and threats against their candidates. The FARC received a disappointing 0.36 percent in the legislative election. The peace agreement was a major issue in the election campaign, which was characterized by extreme polarization. Opponents of the peace agreement rallied behind the CD candidate (and Álvaro Uribe protégé) Iván Duque, who was victorious in a polarized presidential run-off against the left-wing candidate and former M19 member Gustavo Petro. Duque promised corrections to the peace agreement, explicitly questioning the promised amnesty for guerilla fighters. Duque's election implied uncertainty over the peace process and that a backward tendency was conceivable (Gamboa, 2018).

Within the FARC leadership, there has been a conflict since the signing of the peace agreement, which can be divided into optimists and skeptics. The optimists, such as party leader and former commander-in-chief Rodrigo Londoño (Timochenko), are committed to the peace agreement. In contrast, the skeptics believed from the beginning that the newly elected Colombian government would refute critical principles of the agreement, which eventually was indeed the case. Former second-in-command and leader of the FARC negotiating team in Havana, Ivan Marquez, resigned from his seat in Congress in July 2018 in protest over the arrest of Jesús Santrich, another senior leader who was accused of drug trafficking. Marquez went into hiding and criticized the government in a

letter for failing to implement the peace agreement. It is generally assumed that Marquez stayed in close contact with dissident groups (Peinado Delgado and Ojeda Vega, 2018).

Some FARC members have repudiated the peace agreement and continued the armed struggle in dissident groups or joined the still active ELN or EPL, which have taken control over former FARC territory and drug trafficking activities International Crisis Group (2018: 12). While the initial estimate of the number of dissident FARC fighters was 300 in February 2017, it increased to 1,200 by March 2018 and reached 2,500 – 3,000 by December 2018 according to Colombian intelligence reports and various news reports (Posada, 2018; Reuters, 2018). While news reports regularly report on violent clashes between official forces and these guerilla groups, the bloodiest guerilla attack in 16 years was conducted by the ELN on 17 January 2019 in Bogotá when a car bomb at a police school killed 21 and injured 68, leading to the complete suspension of peace negotiations between the Duque administration and the ELN. The tensions culminated in late August 2019 when the leaders of the skeptics' faction, Marquez and Santrich, called their supporters to rearm and continue the armed struggle. FARC party leader Timochenko responded by declaring his commitment to the peace agreement.

Hence, Colombia, with its long history of violence, failed peace agreements, unsuccessful rebel-to-party transformations, and rebel re-mobilization, is an appropriate case for evaluating my theory. First, the UN plays a crucial role in monitoring the implementation of the peace agreement. This includes providing reports on implementation shortcomings or violence against opposition groups. Second, the FARC is a former rebel party, participating for the first time in an election under its acronym. FARC members

have a strong ideological motivation, a background in military training and fighting, and are embedded in wartime networks (Gutiérrez Sanín, 2008; Nussio and Oppenheim, 2014; Söderström, 2016). Thirdly, dissatisfied members who wanted to resume fighting joined splinter groups, the EPL and the ELN.

Thus, I expect that FARC members – in contrast to FARC sympathizers – become more supportive of reconsidering the use of violence when confronted with UN reports informing them of government misconduct against other FARC members in the post-election period.

Sampling and Identification Strategies

Large population samples, such as the Latinobarómetro, have a high degree of representativeness but often do not include survey items pertaining to the study of political violence. Moreover, a large section of the population is not actively involved in politics – let alone engaging in violence for political means. Consequently, representative population samples might only capture a small number of party activists, which is too small for reliable inference.

A problem in the study of political activists is that access to member lists is often not possible. Surveying activists requires the cooperation of the respective party administration, which might be unwilling or may want to achieve its own agenda. This problem is particularly strong for recently transformed rebel parties. Their illegal nature forced them to operate in an opaque environment beyond the reach of the public and the

security forces. Consequently, newly transformed rebel parties might not have accessible membership data or are particularly unwilling to share this information with researchers.

A relatively novel procedure to sample hard-to-reach populations like political activists is Facebook sampling, which is based on the advertising option of the social media platform Facebook to randomly invite members of political groups to an online questionnaire. The procedure of Facebook ads is the following: On the Facebook interface, Facebook ads show small advertising boxes on the right side, in the news feed, or on the front page to logged-in users of a target population, which the researcher determined by choosing a list of relevant fan pages for the political group of interest. An advertisement box consists of a picture of choice and a small text about the survey together with a link to an online questionnaire[3]

In previous studies, Facebook ads has been used to obtain samples of voters in Brazil (Samuels and Zucco, 2014) and party supporters in Uruguay (Bentancur et al., 2019) and Colombia (Ibáñez and Jäger, 2023). Facebook sampling appears to be the best choice in comparison to other alternatives to access hard-to-reach populations at a low cost and with quota options to obtain a large-N sample. Facebook has become a major communication tool for former FARC rebels to communicate with each other and with their families. It is also a source of entertainment as the demobilization camps do not offer many alternatives (The Guardian, 2017). Consequently, I utilize this sampling strategy to study the willingness of members and sympathizers of the FARC to reconsider

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[3]The Appendix A.1.1 and A.1.2 illustrate the advertisement placement and show an actual advertisement that was used to target FARC supporters in the survey. The full sampling procedure is described in Zhang et al. (2020).

the use of political violence.

I conducted an online survey among FARC supporters about six weeks after the second round of the Colombian Presidential election on 17 June 2018 for three weeks from 27 July to 17 August 2018. Facebook Ads were used to invite users whom Facebook considers to have an interest in the FARC[4] to a Spanish online questionnaire on the survey platform Unipark[5]. The sampling procedure was based on nine advertising campaigns to ensure equal sampling quotas for the nine age groups 18 to 24, 25 to 29, 30 to 34, 35 to 39, 40 to 44, 45 to 49, 50 to 54, 55 to 59, and 60 years and older. I chose this quota strategy to ensure a similar representation of older cohorts that, at the time, were underrepresented on Facebook. The survey consisted of two pages in Spanish with specific questions on vote choice, political preferences and attitudes, political activism, and the experiment. The respondents could not go back to the first page to change recorded answers. The average gross completion time of the survey was 7 minutes and 27 seconds[6].

Given the FARC's poor election result and the inability to target FARC supporters directly via Facebook ads, I could still obtain a large sample of FARC supporters.

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[4]As the FARC was a new party, it was not yet possible to target their supporters directly in the Facebook system during the sampling period. Consequently, other fan pages were used as targets that were close proxies for FARC supporters (e. g. an interest in Socialism or the Venezuelan-sponsored Telesur television network) according to the analysis tool "Facebook insights".

[5]In order to access the online questionnaire, participants needed to give their informed consent after receiving information on the research project and their rights, and could withdraw their participation at any time. The online survey was conducted and stored at the platform Unipark in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). Survey responses were anonymized before the empirical analysis, i.e., identifiable information such as IP addresses were removed. The ethics commission of the University of Mannheim decided that it had no general objection against the Facebook-based sampling procedure of the study.

[6]Respondents had the option to continue the questionnaire at a later point in time, and the average gross completion time includes potential breaks by respondents. The effective response time in pre-survey tests was about 5 minutes.

Facebook ads reached 134,052 people, of which 8,148 clicked on the advertisement (CTR of 6.08 percent). 3,048 participated in the survey, yielding an effective response rate of 37.41 percent[7].

As there is no clear definition in the literature on what constitutes a sympathizer, I use two definitions. A narrow definition based on voting for the FARC and a broad definition based on whether respondents chose at least "a little bit" among the options "Not at all (1)," "A little bit (2)," "Moderately (3)," "Much (4)," and "Very much (5)" on the item "How closely do you identify with the FARC?" Among the respondents, 1,899 participants qualified at least as FARC sympathizers according to the broad definition. Membership is based on an item that asked respondents whether they are a party member.

In order to test my Rebel Hypothesis for FARC members and sympathizers, I employ an experimental design. The first page consisted of items on vote choice, political opinions, attitudes, trust in the UN Verification Mission, and the frequency of following UN news. On the top of the following survey page, respondents had a random 50 percent probability of seeing an information box if they were either FARC members, FARC voters, or identified at least weakly with the FARC. The information box was based on an actual report by the UN Verification Mission in Colombia from 20 July 2018, delivered to the UN Security Council, highlighting the government's failure to fully implement the peace agreement and reporting the killing of FARC members. Furthermore, the report expressed understanding of the discontent of FARC members with the peace process (United Nations Security Council, 2018). It stated the following:

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[7]Appendix Table A.1.1 shows the summary statistics of all sampling quotas for the survey.

The United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia presented a report to the UN Security Council on July 26, 2018 highlighting that the efforts by the government to protect demobilized rebels have been insufficient as the killings of former FARC rebels have strongly increased since the implementation of the peace agreement. According to the report, "51 former FARC-EP members have been killed and 5 others were victims of forced disappearance since August 2017." In the past four months during the election period, "22 former FARC-EP members and 2 relatives were killed." The report concludes that the "peace implementation in Colombia has been dogged by levels of uncertainty that have raised deep and understandable misgivings among FARC members reintegrating into society."

The treatment was followed with the item text "Among the following alternatives, what proposals should the FARC adopt in the future in your opinion?", which allowed respondents to choose on a five-point Likert scale between the trade-offs "Repudiating the use of violence" and "Reconsidering the use of violence."

The experimental set-up enables us to identify whether a major UN report describing government misconduct and violence against FARC members can increase the willingness of party members and sympathizers to support the use of violence. When evaluating the effects of the treatment variable, I also take the following survey items as explanatory variables into account:

Trust: UN Monitors. The item was introduced to all respondents in the following way: "The United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia monitors and supports

the correct implementation of the peace agreement. How much do you trust the United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia that they will perform their tasks in a competent and unbiased manner?" The answer options were "None at all (1)," "Not very much (2)," "Quite a lot (3)," and "A great deal of trust (4)."

Follow: UN Monitor Reports asked respondents in the FARC survey "How often do you follow reports that inform about the work of the United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia?" The answer options were "Never (1)," "Rarely (2)," "Occasionally (3)," and "Often (4)." Both trust-and-follow variables are important for our analysis, as they control for the predisposition as well as the level of information of respondents towards the UN before some of the respondents received the treatment.

The next set of explanatory variables measure respondents' ideological positions. *Left-Right Self-Placement* asks respondents to place themselves in political space on a scale from 1 (extreme left-wing) to 11 (extreme right-wing). *Difference FARC to Median Voter* measures the difference of the respondents' placement of the FARC relative to the placement of the median voter in the political space. A negative value implies that the FARC is considered to be to the left in political space from the average voter.

Perception: Colombia is a Democracy is based on the statement "Colombia is governed democratically," on which respondents could respond with "Strongly disagree (1)," "Disagree (2)," "Neither agree nor disagree (3)," "Agree (4)," and "Strongly agree (5)." The item indicates whether survey participants believe that the democratic process is working in Colombia. The variable *Perception: Violence against Voters* relates to

the presence of political violence by showing respondents the statement "Voters are threatened with violence at the polls" with the same answer options.

Political Activism is an index measurement based on the sum of three items that relate to the activism of respondents in the election campaign. Respondents were asked "How often do you perform the following political activities?," and then presented with the items "Putting up political posters," "Handing out political flyers," and "Canvassing voters on behalf of the party / Going door-to-door to convince voters," which they could answer with "Never (1)," "Rarely (2)," "Occasionally (3)," or "Often (4)." The variable evaluates whether active campaigners differ in their evaluation from inactive supporters.[8] All these explanatory variables were placed a page before the treatment in the survey.

Empirical Analysis of the Survey Experiment

Table 1 shows the results of the regression analyses with the treatment variable and all control variables for members and both categories of sympathizers to explain support among respondents for reconsidering the use of violence. The model specifications also include age based on the nine sampling age quotas, gender, and education as control variables. The regression analyses are based on robust standard errors to account for heteroskedasticity.

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[8]Appendix Table A.1.2 shows the descriptive statistics of the introduced variables for members and the broad and narrow categories of FARC sympathizers. A t-test of means shows that members were significantly more left-wing (t-value 6.3) and significantly more likely to support to reconsider the use of violence relative to sympathizers (t-value 3.2) at the 99-percent confidence interval compared to non-member voters and sympathizers of the FARC.

Table 1. Regression Analysis to Explain Support for Reconsidering the Use of Violence Among FARC Members and Sympathizers (Narrow and Broad Definitions)

Explanatory variables	Members		Sympathizers - Narrow definition		Sympathizers - Broad definition	
	1	2	3	4	5	6
UN: Treatment	0.74***	0.99***	0.12	0.18	0.09	0.07
	[2.86]	[3.04]	[0.74]	[1.01]	1.39	[1.05]
Trust: UN monitors		−0.13		−0.12		−0.07*
		[0.55]		[1.14]		[1.74]
Follow: UN monitor reports		−0.19		−0.13		−0.05
		[1.08]		[1.30]		[1.36]
Left-right self-placement		0.01		−0.05		−0.05***
		[0.11]		[0.87]		[2.70]
Difference FARC to median voter		0.10*		0.04		0.03**
		[1.69]		[1.11]		[2.04]
Perception: Colombia is a democracy		0.06		−0.19		−0.06
		[0.21]		[1.55]		[1.53]
Perception: Violence against voters		0.01		−0.06		0.01
		[0.12]		[0.58]		[0.36]
Political activism		−0.03		−0.02		0.01
		[0.24]		[0.48]		[0.45]
N	110	90	275	222	1,719	1,464
R^2	0.0862	0.1550	0.0100	0.0558	0.0043	0.0240

Notes: * $p \leq 0.10$; ** $p \leq 0.05$; *** $p \leq 0.01$. Absolute t-values in brackets.
Controlling for Age, Gender, and Education.

The first model only includes the UN treatment variable as an explanatory variable to explain support for violence among former rebel members. The treatment variable is associated with support for reconsidering violence, which is significant at the 99-percent confidence level. The treatment effect also appears to be significant at the 99-percent confidence level in model 2 when all explanatory variables are included. The coefficient is 0.99, thus, the treatment increases the support for the reconsideration of violence by nearly one Likert-scale point, which is sizeable given that the variable ranges from 1 to 5. No treatment effects were found in any model specifications for FARC sympathizers (models 3 – 6).

No control variable is significant across all model specifications. Members who did not place the FARC on the far left relative to the median voter were associated with

supporting the reconsideration of violence at the 90-percent confidence level. This is also the case for the sample of sympathizers (broad definition) at the 95-percent confidence level. In addition, sympathizers who placed themselves on the left side of the ideological scale appeared to be more likely to be supportive of reconsidering political violence at the 99-percent confidence level, and trust in UN monitors is associated with repudiating violence at the 90-percent confidence level.

Relying on King et al. (2000) simulation-based approach as another measurement of the substantial impact of my treatment variable in the members subsample. The Stata-software "Clarify" uses the results of multiple regression analyses to obtain 1,000 sets of simulated coefficients from the posterior distribution. This procedure ensures that detected differences are not caused by coincidence (Tomz et al., 2003). All control variables are fixed at their means. The treatment variable is either fixed at zero or one, yielding the two counterfactual scenarios with and without the treatment. Figure 1 plots the density estimates for the two scenarios over the support for reconsidering the use of violence. The average violence support for members who have not received the treatment is 1.67, while it is 2.66 for members who have received the treatment information. As the two density estimates are hardly overlapping, it appears to be likely that the treatment effect on violence support is substantial.

Figure 1. Simulated Effects on Support for Reconsider the Use of Political Violence by Members
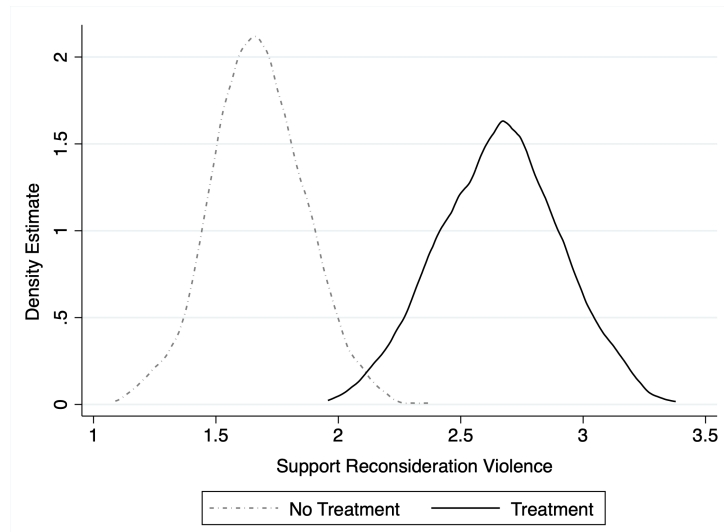
The experimental setting shows that the treatment makes members of transformed rebel-to-party groups substantially more likely to support the reconsideration of violence. This was not the case for sympathizers of the FARC, thus providing evidence for the Rebel Hypothesis.

Empirical Analysis of the UN Twitter Content

I performed a content analysis of each tweet by the UN over the period 1 January 2018 until 17 August 2018, when the Facebook survey was closed. The sampling covers 600 tweets by the UN over the election cycle and the pre-and post-election periods. I conducted a count analysis of the number of likes and retweets from official FARC accounts, which retweeted or liked UN messages, and from other Twitter users for each UN tweet. This allowed me to contrast the social media behavior of the FARC with a broader audience. In total, there were 18 official FARC accounts of politicians and party branches that retweeted or liked UN Twitter content. The most influential ones (in 2018) in terms of following were the Twitter accounts by party leader Timochenko (TimoFARC)

with (at the time of analysis) 152,100 followers, the national party (PartidoFARC) with 132,800, Senator Carlos Lozada (CarlozadaFARC) with 30,700, the party's women branch (MujerFariana) with 28,300, and Senator Victoria Sandino (SandinoVictoria) with 25,900. I categorize the UN tweets into the following variables that capture the major types of activities by the UN Verification Mission in Colombia:

Peace Implementation: This variable consists of all tweets which relate to violence, security issues, and other challenges to the implementation and verification of the peace accord. Only tweets directly related to security challenges in the implementation and verification process have been counted for this variable. For example, a tweet that would only mention a region in which the mission operates but nothing related to challenges, such as security concerns, security warranties, and other difficulties, has not been included in this category. The variable also captures Condemn tweets in which the UN strongly declared its misgivings to government conduct or violence against FARC supporters using words such as condemn, vehemently condemn, concern, reject, or repudiate.

Reintegration: This variable consists of all tweets related to the reincorporation and reintegration of ex-combatants into civilian life. This includes projects in the economic, social, cultural, educational, and political spheres.

Reconciliation: The reconciliation variable includes all tweets regarding peace and reconciliation. It consists of reconciliation messages, testimonials, events, and projects implemented by the mission, the local communities, the government, and the international community.

These three categories constitute over two-thirds of the Twitter activity by the UN Verification Mission. Tweets that did not relate to either of the three categories were coded as zero for all. In the empirical analysis, I evaluate whether these content categories of tweets are associated with more likes and retweets by the FARC and the general Twitter audience.

The empirical analysis also includes the following dummy variables as controls: English Tweets, which equals one if a tweet was in English rather than Spanish, and Election Cycle, which is one in the period of one week before an election until three days after. Moreover, a Count variable is included, which increases by one for each day in the sampling period in order to account for the fact that the number of followers of the UN Twitter page grew incrementally over the sampling period.

The FARC actively engaged with the UN messages on Twitter, liking 95 and retweeting 96 tweets by the UN over the period of observation. Overall, the FARC engaged at least once with 17 percent of the UN tweets. On average, a tweet by the UN Verification Mission was liked 47.7 times and retweeted 32.2 times. A tweet from 5 July 2018, in which the UN vehemently condemned the killings of human rights defenders and social leaders, received the most attention with 2,719 likes and 2,452 retweets, followed by

a tweet from 26 June 2018 with 879 likes and 883 retweets that requested the government to remove the obstacles that continue to impede Colombia's peace agreement. About 15 percent of tweets concerned the implementation of the peace agreement, of which 14 were tweets in which the UN were concerned with violence or expressed their condemnation. Reintegration and reconciliation were the content of 34 and 21 percent of the tweets[9].

I estimated a count model to evaluate whether different tweet content is associated with a higher number of likes and retweets. As the count variables for likes and retweets have a higher variance than the Poisson distribution assumption, I conducted a negative binomial regression analysis with robust standard errors that accounts for the overdispersion and heteroskedasticity. The results are shown in Table 2. The first four models pertain to the FARC, and models 5 – 8 to the general Twitter audience. Twitter likes are the dependent variable in the first two models and models 5 – 6, while retweets are the dependent variable in models 3 – 4 and 7 – 8. The negative binomial regression coefficients have been transformed into incidence rate ratios for interpretation.

Model 1 of Table 2 shows that there are no systematic trends for the categories peace implementation, reintegration, and reconciliation. The FARC was less likely to like UN tweets in English or those that occurred later in the observation period. When distinguishing between condemnation of violence and peace implementation in model 2, we see that the condemnation of violence is significantly negative at the 99-percent confidence interval, as the FARC did not like any of these UN tweets. For analyzing retweeting in models 3 – 4, the result for the condemnation of violence is similar, as the FARC did

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[9]Appendix Table A.1.3 shows the descriptive statistics of all variables.

not retweet any of these messages. In addition, reintegration tweets are associated at the 95-percent confidence interval with retweeting by the FARC.

Table 2. Negative Binomial Regression Analyses to Explain Support for UN Tweets by the FARC and the General Twitter Audience

| Explanatory variables | FARC | | | | General | | | |
| | DV: Likes | | DV: Retweets | | DV: Likes | | DV: Retweets | |
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Peace implementation	1.27 [0.70]	1.51 [1.21]	0.96 [0.12]	1.14 [0.34]	1.69** [2.03]	1.14 [0.74]	2.20*** [2.86]	1.33 [1.23]
Condemn		0.00*** [−53.64]		0.00*** [−48.04]		4.92*** [2.74]		7.31*** [3.73]
Reintegration	1.55 [1.62]	1.33 [1.58]	1.68** [2.00]	1.66** [1.97]	0.73*** [−3.19]	0.76*** [−2.99]	0.68*** [−3.75]	0.71*** [−3.50]
Reconciliation	1.02 [0.07]	1.02 [0.05]	0.91 [−0.27]	0.91 [−0.27]	0.91 [−0.75]	0.96 [−0.34]	0.76** [−2.18]	0.82* [−1.68]
English language	0.42* [−1.78]	0.40* [−1.85]	0.13** [−2.00]	0.13** [−2.02]	0.28*** [−11.36]	0.30*** [−11.02]	0.25*** [−10.39]	0.27*** [−9.54]
Election cycle	1.12 [0.30]	1.10 [0.25]	1.17 [0.46]	1.15 [0.41]	1.11 [0.62]	1.13 [0.76]	1.01 [0.09]	1.04 [0.28]
Count	1.00** [−2.29]	1.00** [−2.21]	0.99*** [−3.10]	1.00*** [−3.04]	1.00*** [5.49]	1.00*** [6.28]	1.00*** [4.95]	1.00*** [5.36]
N	600	600	600	600	600	600	600	600
Log-Likelihood	-272.1	-269.8	-266.9	-265.0	-2806.2	-2780.4	-2559.8	-2528.3

Notes: * p≤0.10; ** p≤0.05; *** p≤0.01. Incidence rate ratios; Z-values in brackets.

We see in the fifth model that tweets on peace implementation are associated with 1.69 times more likes for the general Twitter audience, which is significant at the 95-percent confidence level. UN tweets reporting on reintegration (0.73 times) are associated with fewer likes at the 99-percent confidence level; reporting reconciliation appears insignificant. When condemnation of violence is separated from peace implementation in model 6, peace implementation is no longer significantly related to tweets. Instead, the analysis shows that condemn tweets received 4.92 times more likes, which is significant at the 99-percent confidence level.

The results look similar for the general Twitter audience in models 7 – 8 when retweets are used as the dependent variable. Peace-implementation content is associated

with more tweets, but this relationship becomes insignificant when condemn is used as a separate variable; Condemn content generates 7.31 times more retweets, whereas reintegration and reconciliation content is significantly negatively associated with retweets. Among the control variables, English-language tweets have significantly fewer likes and retweets, and tweets that appeared later during the sample period tend to receive more likes and retweets.

The analysis shows that the FARC's behavior on Twitter substantially deviates from other Twitter users. Twitter users, in general, tend to pay more attention to messages about the peace implementation process, particularly to messages in which the UN condemned government misconduct. By contrast, the FARC did neither like nor retweet any UN messages condemning the government, while there were no trends for all other types of UN messages. The unwillingness of the FARC leadership to share such otherwise popular messages shows that the FARC does not consider them helpful for the sustainability of the peace agreement, which indicates that the FARC recognizes the potential of a backlash that could be caused by such messages among their supporters.

Conclusion

Prior research finds an association between the presence of international organizations and the occurrence of violence, arguing that critical reports by international monitors serve as a focal point for opposition groups to mobilize against the government. I argue that international reporting on government misconduct has the potential to increase the willingness of former rebel members to reconsider the use of political violence because how

these messages are currently communicated does not consider the higher psychological sensibility and volatile environment surrounding this audience.

Colombia is, for several reasons, an appropriate case study for my theory: First, Colombia has a long history of failed peace agreements with rebel groups. Second, a new peace agreement between the government and the FARC received wide international attention, and the UN plays a crucial role in supervising the implementation of the peace accord. Finally, the guerilla group FARC has transformed into a legal, political party. Still, government violations of the peace agreement and an intraparty conflict inside Comunes over the peace agreement have jeopardized the future of the peace agreement implementation.

Utilizing Facebook ads, which can generate reliable samples of political activists, I obtained a sample of FARC members after the 2018 electoral cycle. Based on an experimental survey design that randomly provided about half of the respondents with a UN report criticizing the government for violence against FARC members, I was able to detect the effects of reporting on political attitudes on the micro – level. I find that members of former rebel groups tend to become more supportive of reconsidering the support for political violence as a consequence of being exposed to UN reports that condemn government misconduct. The empirical analysis of Twitter messages by the UN Verification Mission shows that messages received the most attention on Twitter when the UN condemned government misconduct. By contrast, the FARC did not share these critical messages, suggesting that the FARC was aware that these messages could arouse negative attention among their supporters, potentially undermining the sustainability of

the peace agreement.

My study also has broader implications beyond Colombia. Political violence is a widespread problem, particularly in societies that have experienced cycles of violence in the past. For instance, there were 54 countries that held elections during a civil conflict over the period 1985 – 2012. Electoral violence, in these cases, accounts for 59 percent of total electoral violence worldwide. Armed groups were the most frequent perpetrators of electoral violence in civil-war countries (Daxecker and Jung 2018: 60-2). International organizations are regularly present in these conflict-prone countries on peacekeeping missions or as election monitors. Thus, strategic political communication of IOs at the local level is potentially crucial for their overall mission success and their effect on peace sustainability.

In addition, social media has increasingly become a primary communication channel for former rebels. Research is still in its infancy, but this study suggests that successor rebel parties use social media strategically, as with any other political party. In this case, in an attempt to decrease or neutralize the potential effect of the UN condemning reports on the position of their members. Former rebels are already going through the challenging process of reintegrating into civilian life and are the main target of political violence by the state and other groups. Their proneness to reconsider the use of political violence can be associated not only with their rebel past but also with psychological vulnerability, susceptibility, and the volatile environment they find themselves in. All this should be considered by international organization reports.

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Appendix

Table A.1.1. Summary Statistics of Age Quotas Used to Target FARC Supporters

Age quotas	Clicks	Reach	Impressions	Cost (Euro)	CTR (R %)	Cost p. Cl.	Supporter participation	Response rate (%)
18-24	1,405	27,288	55,507	21.16	5.15	0.015	797	56.73
25-29	1,046	21,836	45,183	21.14	4.79	0.020	434	41.49
30-34	884	18,180	39,334	21.08	4.86	0.024	296	33.48
35-39	726	12,316	33,808	21.09	5.89	0.029	243	33.47
40-44	664	13,100	30,723	21.15	5.07	0.032	192	28.92
45-49	706	11,680	28,272	21.08	6.04	0.030	147	20.82
50-54	762	10,856	28,025	21.06	7.02	0.028	165	21.65
55-59	790	9,720	26,201	21.07	8.13	0.027	164	20.76
60+	1,165	9,076	27,026	21.05	12.84	0.018	169	14.51
Total	8,148	134,052	314,079	189.88	6.08	0.023	2,607 (3,048)	32.00 (37.41)

Notes: CTR = Click-through rate (reach/clicks).
Participants in brackets include those without age information.

Table A.1.2. Descriptive Statistics of the Dependent and Explanatory Variables.
T-test of Means for Significant Differences between FARC Members and Sympathizers.

	Range			FARC sympathizers	
	Min.	Max.	Members	Narrow definition	Broad definition
Dependent variable:					
Support violence	1	5	2.17	2.00	1.79
			(1.35)	(1.30)	(1.29)
			[113]	[280]	[1,748]
Trust: UN monitors	1	4	2.68	2.65	2.70
			(0.77)	(0.86)	(0.87)
			[133]	[307]	[1,891]
Follow: UN monitor reports	1	4	3.41	3.17	2.88
			(0.79)	(0.91)	(0.98)
			[132]	[307]	[1,889]
Left-right self-placement	1	11	2.82	3.21	3.84
			(2.34)	(2.09)	(1.91)
			[125]	[289]	[1,797]
Difference FARC to median voter	-10	10	-3.82	-4.34	-4.57
			(3.17)	(3.02)	(2.98)
			[119]	[277]	[1,734]
Perception: Colombia is a democracy	1	5	1.57	1.55	1.81
			(0.71)	(0.78)	(0.92)
			[120]	[271]	[1,754]
Perception: Violence against voters	1	5	3.51	3.59	3.44
			(1.23)	(1.18)	(1.18)
			[118]	[268]	[1,743]
Political activism	3	12	8.91	7.54	6.83
			(2.42)	(2.65)	(2.60)
			[109]	[276]	[1,732]

Notes: The first row of each entry shows the mean. The second row shows the standard deviations in parentheses. The third row shows the number of participants in brackets.

Table A.1.3. Descriptive Statistics for the 600 Tweets by
the UN Verification Mission in Colombia

	Min.	Max.	Mean	Std.dev.
Dependent variable: FARC likes	0	3	0.16	0.45
Dependent variable: FARC retweets	0	4	0.16	0.46
Dependent variable: General likes	1	2,719	47.74	124.81
Dependent variable: General retweets	0	2,452	32.24	109.72
Peace implementation	0	1	0.15	0.36
Condemn	0	1	0.02	0.15
Reintegration	0	1	0.34	0.47
Reconciliation	0	1	0.21	0.41
English language	0	1	0.14	0.34
Election cycle	0	1	0.13	0.34
Count	0	228	117.73	68.86

Figure A.1.1. Advertisement Box Placement on the Facebook Interface (Source: Facebook.com)
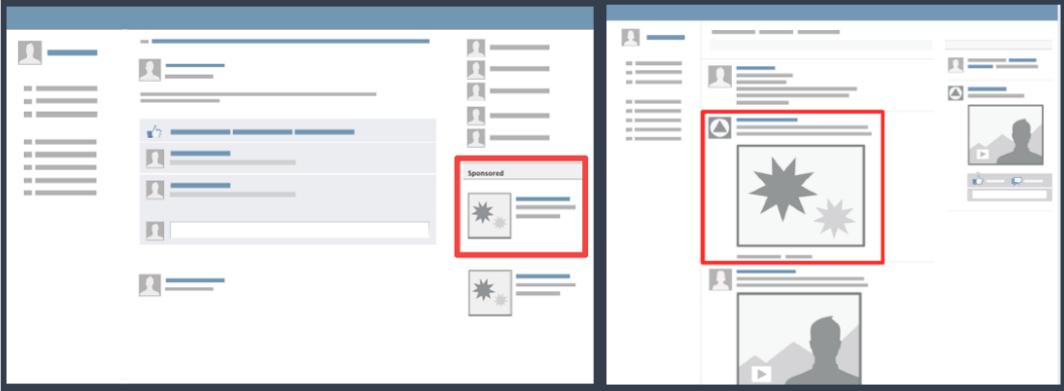
Figure A.1.2. Example of a Facebook Advertisement Box.
Spanish Original for Candidate Support

Note: English translation reads:

"Please participate in our 5-minute survey. Your opinion is important!

Which candidates do you support in the upcoming elections?"