

Achieving Post-War Peace: The Internal Politics of Colombia's Demilitarizing Paramilitary Groups¹

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Abstract

This paper seeks to explain variation in the post-demobilization trajectories of paramilitary organizations. To date, there exists a dearth of scholarship on the post-conflict landscape. 49% of civil wars which ended between 1945-1999 erupted in subsequent war; 51% consolidated peace. To explain this variation, Political Science offers macro-level theories and micro-level empirics, but nothing in between. This paper seeks to fill this gap and theory build at the organizational level. Through in-depth analysis of the demilitarization of 34 paramilitary blocs in Colombia, it gains analytic leverage on the question of when and why post-peace agreement, armed groups disappear, return to arms, or maintain social and political control. My empirical strategy includes surveys of three populations: 15,000 demobilized ex-combatants, 600 ex-paramilitaries that have returned to arms, and 420 civilian communities with a significant demobilized presence. I further carry out several in-depth case studies of organizations, which have followed divergent post-peace agreement paths. I find little evidence that one can predict rearming by examining the armed group's leadership. One would further expect remobilization to occur where the (illicit) political economy of conflict is strongest. This expectation is not borne out in the data. Instead, ex-combatants' network configurations (where they are recruited, fight, and demobilize) and the armed organizations' degree of territorial control best account for variation in the dismantling of paramilitary political, financial, and coercive structures.

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