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Policy Memo

A Media Intervention Featuring Indirect Contact Promotes Peace in Rural Contexts Marked by Longstanding Internal Conflicts in Colombia

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MANAGING EXITS
FROM ARMED CONFLICT

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About the Author

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Acknowledgments

KEY FINDINGS

·   This media intervention had an effect on humanization and negative beliefs about FARC ex-combatants in the Territorial Focused Development Plans (PDET) municipalities included in the study.
·   Age influenced participant responses to the media intervention; older people in PDET municipalities were less likely to change their minds about FARC ex-combatants as a result of viewing the media intervention.
·   Using an evidence-based indirect contact intervention is a cost-effective, powerful buffer and acceleration tool for programmes and peacebuilders at the frontline of the local implementation of a peace process amidst ongoing post-conflict risks.
·   Our results show a promising alternative to inform and scale-up effective programmes that aim to change minds and hearts and facilitate reconciliation after long-lasting divisions at the local level.

About this Report

This report is the result of a research collaboration between Andrés Casas – as part of his senior fellowship at UNU-CPR – and the Managing Exits from Armed Conflict (MEAC) project. The report presents the results of an ongoing project initiated in collaboration with the late Emile Bruneau to scale up an innovative intervention to reduce the sociopsychological barriers that make it difficult for communities and countries to transition out of conflict. Emile Bruneau's research philosophy aimed to apply brain and behavioural sciences to work for peace and security. His work explored an empirical framework focused on the drivers of intergroup conflict and discrimination[1] and tested intervention alternatives to identify and remove barriers to peace and integration. His goal was to find the mechanisms that could pull people and groups out of violence using a bottom-up approach to build peace in tandem with practitioners and communities.[2]

Casas' research and that of the MEAC project are synergistic. MEAC is a multi-year, multi-partner collaboration that aims to develop a unified, rigorous approach to examining how and why individuals exit armed conflict and evaluating the efficacy of interventions meant to support their transition to civilian life. MEAC seeks to inform evidence-based programme design and implementation in real-time to improve efficacy. At the strategic level, the cross-programme, cross-agency lessons that will emerge from the growing MEAC evidence base will support more effective conflict resolution and peacebuilding efforts. MEAC is supported by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Switzerland's Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA), the UK Foreign, Commonwealth, and Development Office (FCDO), Irish Aid, the UN Development Programme (UNDP), and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), and is being run in partnership with the UN Department of Peace Operations (DPO), UNICEF, and the World Bank. MEAC has been operating a case study in Colombia for almost two years, examining the trajectories of ex-combatants out of armed groups and into civilian life as well as community perceptions and preferences regarding ex-combatant reintegration.

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A Media Intervention Featuring Parasocial Contact Promotes Peace in Rural Contexts Marked by Longstanding Internal Conflicts in Colombia

Overview

The reintegration of ex-combatants and those previously associated with armed groups is a two-way street, contingent on the acceptance of the receiving community, and society more broadly. While UN-supported programmes have long tried to address some of the economic impediments to reintegration, less attention has been focused on addressing social obstacles such as the biases that impede receptivity to return and reconciliation after conflict.

This study replicates and extends a successful peacebuilding intervention led by Emile Bruneau, Nour Kteily, Boaz Hameiri and the author, conducted between 2018 and 2020 in Colombia. It involved a short video that documents stories of positive ex-combatant involvement in communities (both from the ex-combatant perspective and the community's). The five-minute video media intervention is shown to 50 per cent of the community members in the sample, to measure the effect of the video on their perceptions of Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) ex-combatants. The 2018-2020 study found that the video intervention reduced the belief that ex-combatants are unwilling and unable to change, and increased humanization and support for peace and reincorporation of former combatants.

The present study examines the same intervention in locations that are expected to be especially resistant to returning ex-combatants: those living in the Territorial Focused Development Plans (PDET) municipalities where peace efforts have faced significant challenges due to security, political, health, and social crisis in recent years. This study also introduced a voluntary messaging activity to explore community members' openness to sending messages of support to former combatants.

Literature

Changing attitudes is one of the most challenging and important endeavors peace researchers and practitioners have undertaken in order to promote a better quality of life for individuals and collectives.[3] The background literature that supports this study shows that when addressing pressing issues such as intergroup conflict, racism, and inequality, changing attitudes is particularly difficult as individuals are often frozen in their attitudes,[4] especially when the possibility of direct contact is scarce.

In conflict, people develop cognitive and affective biases about the outgroup,[5] hindering reconciliation. But even strongly held intergroup biases are mutable. Positive contact between

groups can improve intergroup attitudes and behaviour[6] even after prolonged violent conflict.[7] Furthermore, media-based interventions can extend such benefits beyond those willing and able to engage directly with outgroups.[8]

The theory behind this intervention is based on the idea that while many debiasing and conflict resolution efforts focus on direct person-to-person contact, these interactions can be logistically difficult to achieve for groups involved in the conflict and are often limited to those already possessing sufficient motivation to meet face-to-face with "the enemy".[9] In such a context, technology provides alternatives to person-to-person contact. Parasocial contact[10] helps change minds and hearts by indirectly exposing individuals to information about the outgroup and its views through live or pre-recorded audio or visual media.[11]

This study applies Bruneau's framework,[12] identifying and reducing impediments to peace among the civilians who face the challenges of reconciling with and reintegrating ex-combatants following internal conflicts.[13] This study furthers the research agenda started by Bruneau et al. (2022)[14] by exposing non-ex-combatant Colombians to the intervention in the field, specifically in PDET municipalities challenged by the implementation process: Caldono, San José del Guaviare, San Vicente del Caguán, and Santander de Quilichao. In line with previous outcomes,[15] the present results show that this intervention was effective in the rural municipalities selected for the study, as will be outlined below.

The present intervention successfully reduced levels of adherence to the belief that FARC ex-combatants are unwilling and unable to change; increased empathy toward FARC ex-combatants; increased levels of hope for peace; reduced dehumanization; and reduced prejudice. Women were more willing to write a message of support to ex-combatants than men, and exhibited a significant willingness to hire an ex-combatant. Participants who watched the treatment video showed significantly higher support levels for economic reintegration policies than those who did not. Finally, the younger participants were, the likelier the treatment video was to have a significant positive effect. While the video's effect was robust when the dependent variables were measured immediately after exposure, the effects persisted over time only among the younger participants. Therefore, it seems that age provides the most robust explanation for the effectiveness of the intervention over time.

The policy and programmatic implications are strong. The data confirms the importance of collaboration between scientists, practitioners, decision-makers, and the protagonists of peace implementation to craft effective policy and practices that address the impediments to peace and reconciliation. Our present results highlight that understanding local contexts is key to crafting effective interventions, and that peace processes are always imperfect works-in-progress that require continued study, adjustments, and corrections as they unfold. A new generation of peace researchers and practitioners is changing how we conceive and intervene to mitigate war and promote peace.[16] This study highlights the value of cost-effective alternative solutions to identify and remove the sociopsychological barriers to better intergroup relationships and sustainable peace.

Theory and Methods

The theory is inspired by Bruneau and colleagues' research (2022),[17] which focused on better understanding the psychological and cognitive biases that drive intergroup conflict,[18] and critically examining the impact of interventions aimed at decreasing intergroup hostility.[19] Specifically, the theory focuses on (the lack of) empathy,[20] dehumanization,[21] and erroneous meta-perceptions (i.e.,

how I think outgroup members perceive me and my ingroup)[22] that often characterize intergroup conflicts; and how empathy and humanity can potentially be restored, and erroneous meta-perceptions can be corrected through virtual and media-based encounters with 'the other'.[23] Additionally, the theory draws on recent efforts focused on reducing hostility towards minority groups (e.g., Islamophobia, anti-Roma bias)[24] and between groups in conflict (e.g., Israelis and Palestinians).[25]

Methodologically, the present study replicates the original design that was carried out between 2018 and 2020 by Bruneau et al. (2022).[26] The successful intervention design this proposal draws upon shows that exposure to the tested media intervention humanizes FARC ex-combatants and increases support for peace and reintegration in the Colombian context. These effects persisted at least three months post-exposure and affected both attitudes (e.g., support for reintegration policies) and behaviour (e.g., donations to organizations supporting ex-combatants). The original prediction posited that by humanizing ex-combatants and sharing stories from community members about their successful transition to civilian and community life, civilian views change in positive and enduring ways. In the original study,[27] after exposure to the video, Colombians were more supportive of the return of FARC ex-combatants and the peace process.

The original study implemented by Bruneau et al. (2022)[28] piloted 11 video interventions on the diagnosed panel of a representative sample of Colombians using an intervention tournament.[29] The videos were built from interviews conducted alongside local filmmakers with FARC ex-combatants and their non-FARC Colombian neighbours and authorities in a rural demobilization camp known as ETCR (Territorial Space for Reincorporation and Training) in Dabeiba, Antioquia.[30]

The authors found that one of these media interventions, in particular, humanized FARC ex-combatants and increased support for peace and reintegration support (effects that persisted at least ten-12 weeks post-exposure). On that occasion, two large-scale preregistered replication studies that also included behavioural measures were deployed and found in two independent samples of Colombians that the media intervention affected both attitudes (i.e., reduced blatant dehumanization of FARC ex-combatants and increased support for peace and reintegration policies) and behaviour (e.g., donations to organizations supporting ex-combatants). That study found that the intervention's effects were mediated by changing conflict-associated cognitions – reducing the belief that ex-combatants are unwilling and unable to change – beyond affective pathways (i.e., increased empathy or reduced prejudice).[31]

Would the impact of such an intervention work after several more years of slow implementation and politicization of the peace agreement, devolving security, and the challenges of COVID-19 pandemic? Would the intervention influence the attitudes and behaviour of local populations that had often suffered the most during the civil war and were the most in need – but often still waiting to see the results – of the peace process' implementation? The present study examines the same media intervention in different locations considered, particularly resistant to the reincorporation of FARC ex-combatants, as outlined above.

Context - The ongoing challenges of territorial peace six years after signing the peace agreement

The peace agreement signed on 24 November 2016 by the Colombian Government and the FARC-EP was based on four fundamental steps focusing on a victim-centred approach: truth, justice, reparation, and non-repetition. The fifth essential step regarded the reincorporation of former

combatants into civilian life. Nevertheless, this process has not been straightforward.[32] On the one hand, negative biases and social norms against former combatants were determining factors in rejecting the Peace Agreement initially. The result was the victory of the "No Vote" – against the peace agreement – by 50.22 per cent versus 49.78 per cent. One of the key explanatory factors for the referendum results was misinformation that exacerbated well-rooted prejudices and fears.[33]

The agreement aimed to build lasting and stable peace by adopting the concept of 'territorial peace.' 'Territorial peace' implied a recognition that peace goes well beyond the silencing of guns and the demobilization of combatants. This wide-ranging approach to peacemaking aimed to create a sense of citizenship and a new way of building and implementing territorial development as the building blocks of reconciliation and long-lasting, stable peace. To help achieve territorial peace, the PDET[34] scheme was created as the key tool for planning and managing a comprehensive rural development process that aims to transform the 170 municipalities (covering 16 sub-regions) most affected by the armed conflict. Those municipalities designated as PDET had high forced displacement and land dispossession, killings, massacres, forced disappearances, extreme poverty, inequality, illicit crop production, and poor institutional performance. The PDET model was intended to address conflict-affected areas beset by other historical inequalities and new challenges that make developments difficult and violent relapse likely.

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic struck, many PDETs failed to make progress toward their goals.[35] Today, economic decline exacerbated by COVID-19, the systematic killing of ex-combatants and social leaders, resurgent armed and criminal elements, and failed efforts to create alternatives to the drug trade and other illicit economies that fuel conflict have created additional obstacles to the already ambitious plan to develop and implement these tailored development plans in municipalities across the country.[36] This failed expectation has left people in PDET municipalities frustrated over the delayed implementation of the peace agreement. In many cases, they are potentially resistant to implementing other parts of the accord that they perceive to have benefited the perpetrators of the violence that wracked their communities for so long. In such a context, the rise of post-conflict risks[37] and the decrease in political support for the peace process jeopardize the reincorporation of former combatants and the chances to reconcile in the sub-regions of Colombia. These challenges reinforce and crystalize long-lasting sociopsychological barriers that show strong persistence.[38]

But how can this problem be intentionally addressed? How can the sociopsychological legacy of civil war be dismantled and transformed in regions heavily affected by violent conflict? How can the hearts and minds of Colombians be challenged to reappraise deeply rooted visions to move on? As stated above, while many debiasing and conflict resolution efforts focus on direct person-to-person contact, these interactions can be logistically difficult for groups involved in the conflict and are often limited to those already possessing sufficient motivation to meet face-to-face with "the enemy".[39]

Even demobilized ex-combatants are still largely sequestered in rural demobilization settings with limited infrastructure (e.g., non or limited internet access). They mostly interacted with only a few other non-FARC Colombians, with mixed results.[40] Moreover, because the conflict has been going on for several decades, most non-FARC Colombians have never interacted with a FARC member, creating fertile conditions for the proliferation of unchecked negative intergroup beliefs and misunderstandings. This lack of interaction is compounded by individuals' baseline tendency to consistently overestimate outgroup negativity towards the ingroup, particularly in competitive intergroup contexts – a tendency that work has shown can be corrected by exposure to disconfirming information.[41] Thus, we aimed to increase support for peace and reintegration among non-FARC Colombians by exposing them to FARC ex-combatants and their beliefs.

In light of the segregation of the different populations of interest, technology provides alternatives to person-to-person exposure. For example, technology has been used to facilitate computer-mediated or virtual contact between enemy group members and to provide parasocial or vicarious contact, exposing individuals to information about the outgroup and its views through live or pre-recorded audio or video media (i.e., a media intervention).[42]

The 2016 peace deal with the FARC guerrilla group – promising to end a 60-year internal conflict – has faced many significant challenges, risking relapse given the pandemic and the persistence of violence in the territories. Amid a context marred by generations of violence and propaganda, here we show how an effective remedy can be fostered by identifying the psychological perceptions most associated with opposition to peace and reconciliation and then targeting them with a film-based intervention.[43]

Using Parasocial Contact to Promote Peace in Rural Contexts to Reduce Intergroup Hostility

Locations. Our goal was to apply a behaviourally-informed intervention in a panel study to a sample of approximately 1000 participants living in four PDET municipalities. All municipalities were identified as having higher levels of negative attitudes towards FARC ex-combatants in a MEAC community phone survey carried out between April and May 2021. The participants in the PDET municipalities were randomly assigned to a control or a treatment condition. Participants were incentivized with a monetary incentive. The study took place over a two-month period and included an initial survey and a follow-up survey. The fieldwork was carried out by Centro Nacional de Consultoría (CNC) and was conducted between January and March of 2022. Given security conditions in Caldono, Cauca, we could not complete our quota of participants there and selected a new sample in the nearby municipality of Santander de Quilichao. We will examine the differences between Caldono and the other three municipalities, but these participants were removed from the rest of the statistical analysis.

Sample. Overall, 916 participants completed the study. Out of the complete sample, 65 participants (7.1%) were sampled from Caldono, Cauca, 304 participants (33.2%) were sampled from San José del Guaviare, Guaviare, 293 participants (32.0%) were from San Vicente del Caguán, Caquetá, and 254 participants (27.7%) were sampled from Santander de Quilichao, Cauca. For sample demographics, including a breakdown of the demographic information by municipality, see Table 1.

Procedure and measures. Participants were randomly assigned to either the FARC integration video condition (v.1) or a control condition (v.2) and were surveyed. The FARC integration video (v.1) was identical to the video we used in the original study. Participants in the control condition (v.2) were asked to watch a short (4.75-minute) video about ecotourism in Colombia. We examined the effect of the FARC integration video vs. control on participants' assessment of potential FARC ex-combatant applicants' suitability for different jobs and their actual willingness to send a message of support to ex-combatants facing difficulties reintegrating into Colombian society. We recontacted participants for a follow-up assessment after several weeks.

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Table 1 Comparison between each municipality's demographics

	Complete Sample (*n* = 916)	Caldono, Cauca (*n* = 65)	San José del Guaviare, Guaviare (*n* = 304)	San Vicente del Caguán, Caquetá (*n* = 293)	Santander de Quilichao, Cauca (*n* = 254)
Gender (%)					
Female	52.8%	61.5%	48.7%	52.2%	56.3%
Age M (SD)	36.64 (14.89)	33.02 (13.30)	34.27 (14.05)	40.03 (15.27)	36.54 (15.10)
Indigenous (%)					
Yes	19.0%	67.7%	11.8%	10.6%	24.8%
Official Victims (%)					
Yes	28.4%	50.8%	31.6%	31.1%	15.7%
Rural Communities (%)					
Yes	18.8%	50.8%	10.5%	21.2%	17.7%
Armed Forces (%)					
Yes	5.9%	7.7%	5.3%	5.8%	6.3%
Combatants (%)					
Yes	2.3%	1.5%	1.3%	3.4%	2.4%
SES (%)					
Strata 1	67.9%	87.7%	67.8%	66.9%	64.2%
Strata 2	26.5%	9.2%	27.3%	28.7%	27.6%
Strata 3	4.8%	3.1%	3.9%	4.1%	7.1%
Strata 4	0.5%	0%	0.7%	0.3%	0.8%
Strata 5	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Strata 6	0.2%	0%	0.3%	0%	0.4%
Education (%)					
Cannot read nor write	1.3%	0%	1.3%	2.0%	0.8%
No studies / incomplete	5.3%	6.2%	5.9%	6.5%	2.8%
Primary	21.8%	18.5%	16.5%	25.9%	24.1%
High school	39.6%	33.8%	38.6%	37.2%	45.1%
Technical career	16.6%	26.2%	23.4%	9.9%	13.8%
College	12.9%	13.8%	9.6%	16.0%	13.0%
Postgraduate	2.5%	1.5%	4.6%	2.4%	0.4%
Political Orientation M(SD)	6.45 (2.67)	5.89 (2.56)	7.20 (2.72)	6.57 (2.10)	5.56 (2.93)
Condition (%)					
Treatment	50.9%	61.5%	49.3%	50.2%	50.8%
Completed Follow-Up (%)					
Yes	68.6%	33.8%	70.7%	74.1%	68.5%

Data analysis. First, we analysed the differences between the treatment and control conditions on all dependent variables (DVs), measured immediately after the manipulation (proven to be reliable), using independent *t*-tests.[1] This was followed by a similar analysis for all DVs measured in the follow-up assessment. Then, using a two-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA),[2] we examined the effect of the manipulation on all DVs moderated by the municipality. For these analyses, we also controlled for participants' political orientation, which was found to be dependent on the interaction between condition and municipality (however, not controlling for political orientation did not have a meaningful impact on the pattern of results). This was followed by a similar two-way ANOVA[3] in which we examined the moderating effect of gender on the effect of the manipulation on the DVs. Finally, using Hayes's (2018) PROCESS macro add-on for SPSS[4], we looked into the moderating effect of age and some additional demographic variables (e.g., socioeconomic status [SES], level of education) on the effect of the manipulation on DVs. Only age proved to be a reliable moderator and therefore is detailed below.

Main results

For the main effects of condition on outcome measures, see Figure 1 for effects of the follow-up assessment, see Figure 2.

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[1] A t-test is a type of inferential statistic used to determine if there is a significant difference between the means of two groups, which may be related in certain features.

[2] Is an analysis tool used in statistics that splits an observed aggregate variability found inside a data set into two parts: systematic factors and random factors. The systematic factors have a statistical influence on the given data set, while the random factors do not.

[3] A two-way ANOVA tests the effect of two independent variables on a dependent variable. A two-way ANOVA test analyzes the effect of the independent variables on the expected outcome along with their relationship to the outcome itself.

[4] PROCESS is an observed variable OLS and logistic regression path analysis modeling tool. It is widely used through the social, business, and health sciences for estimating direct and indirect effects in single and multiple mediator models (parallel and serial), two and three way interactions in moderation models along with simple slopes and regions of significance for probing interactions, and conditional indirect effects in moderated mediation models with a single or multiple mediators or moderators.
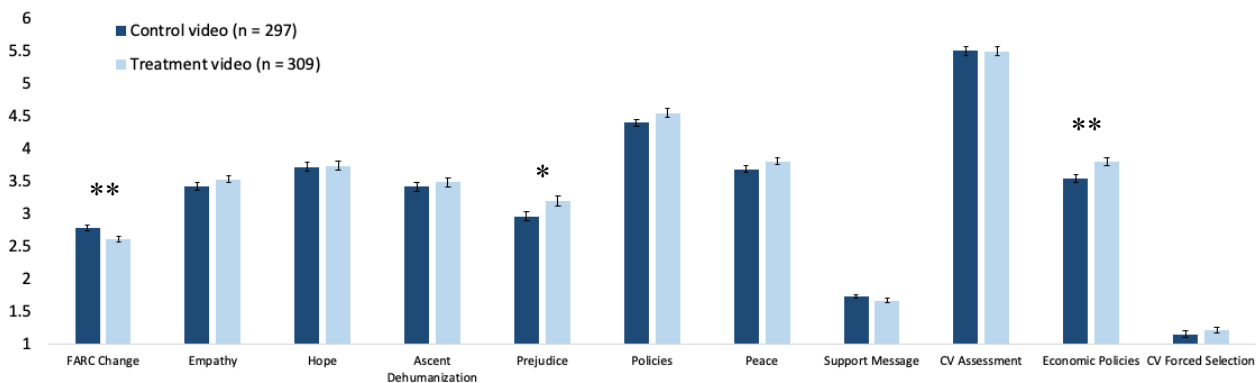
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Figure 1. Main effects of condition on outcome measures
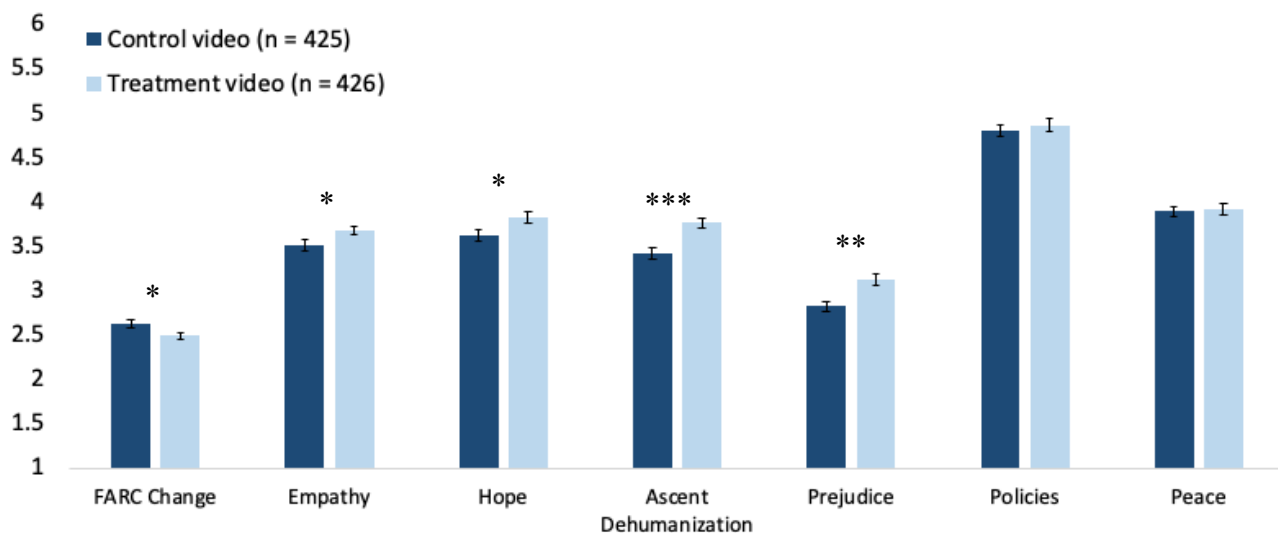
Note: For prejudice, higher scores indicate more warmth (i.e., less affective prejudice). For ascent dehumanization, higher scores indicate more perceived evolvement (i.e., less dehumanisation). Error bars represent standard errors. * *p<.05; ** p<.01; *** p< .001*

Figure 2. Effects at the follow-up assessment

Note: For prejudice, higher scores indicate more warmth (i.e., less affective prejudice). For ascent dehumanisation, higher scores indicate more perceived evolvement (i.e., less dehumanization). For Curriculum Vitae (CV) forced selection, higher scores indicate a stronger tendency to select ex-combatants. Error bars represent standard errors. * *p < .05; ** p <.01.*

*FARC ex-combatants are unwilling and unable to change*[5]

The video intervention appears to have a significant impact on people's attitudes. Participants who watched the treatment video showed **significantly lower** levels of adherence to the belief that FARC ex-combatants are unwilling and unable to change versus the control group. This effect **persisted** at the follow-up assessment. This finding replicates our previous results. This effect was dependent on the municipality, such that it was significant in San Vicente del Caguán and Santander de Quilichao, but not in San José del Guaviare (see Figure 3).

This may be explained by the presence of a dissident armed group in San Jose that never disarmed. Here, the 1st Front knew from before the agreement that they were not going to disarm and so the community has a sense that the same armed group is still doing the same thing as before. In the other two communities, the dissident groups present arrived after the agreement, so it seems the community can make the distinction and evidence the change. In San Jose de Guaviare, civilians might be transferring that sense of "business as usual" to the ex-combatants as well.

This effect **did not last at the follow-up assessment**. Men and women reacted similarly to the intervention both immediately after exposure and at the follow-up assessment.

The effect of the manipulation on beliefs about FARC combatant's unwillingness and inability to change is moderated by municipality as shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Main effects disaggregated by location.
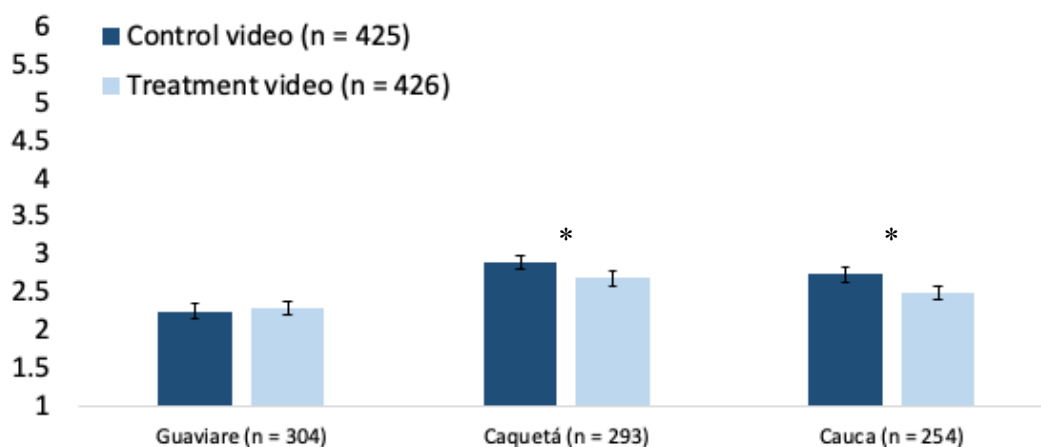
Note: Error bars represent standard errors. *p < .05*

Empathy toward ex-combatants

Participants who watched the treatment video showed **significantly higher** empathy levels toward FARC ex-combatants than the control group. This effect **did not persist** at the follow-up assessment. This partially replicates our previous results. This effect was not significantly moderated by the municipality, but a pattern of results indicated that the video led to more empathy among

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[5] Malleability was a combination of different measures that assessed willingness and ability of FARC ex-combatants to let go of violence and peacefully reintegrate in the Colombian society.

participants in San Vicente del Caguán but not among participants in San José del Guaviare and Santander de Quilichao. Gender did not play a role when it came to empathy (although women generally showed higher levels of empathy).

Hope for Peace

Participants who watched the treatment video showed **significantly higher** levels of hope for peace than the control group. This effect **did not persist** at the follow-up assessment. This evidence replicates our previous results. The effect was not moderated by the municipality. Also, the effect was not moderated by participants' gender.

Ascent Dehumanization

Participants who watched the treatment video showed **significantly higher** levels of the perceived evolvement of FARC (i.e., less ascent dehumanization) versus the control group. This effect **did not persist** at the follow-up assessment. This evidence partially replicates our previous results. This was not moderated by the municipality, but the dehumanization of FARC was generally higher in San Vicente del Caguán. This was also not moderated by gender, but the dehumanization of FARC ex-combatants was generally higher among men.

Affective Prejudice (i.e., Feeling Thermometers)

Participants who watched the treatment video showed **significantly higher** levels of warmth toward FARC (i.e., less prejudice) versus the control group. This effect **persisted** at the follow-up assessment. This replicates our previous results. This was not moderated by the municipality, but levels of warmth were generally lower in San Vicente del Caguán. Including gender yielded an interesting finding: The treatment video had a **positive effect only among men** but not among women (see Figure 4). A similar pattern emerged at the follow-up assessment, albeit it was not significant.

Figure 4. The effect of the manipulation on affective prejudice moderated by gender
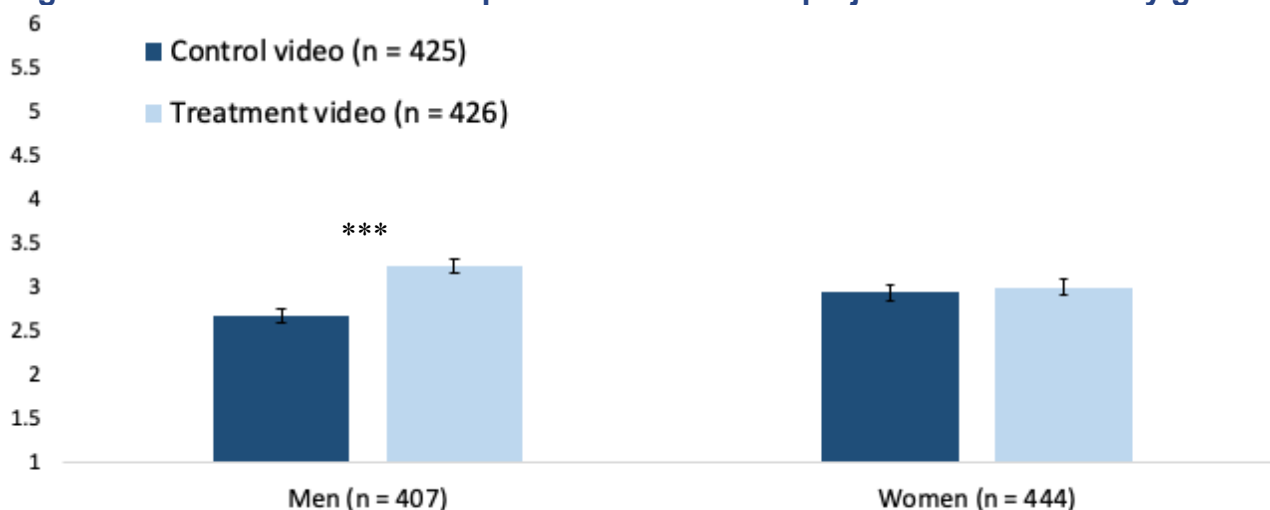
Note: Higher scores indicate more warmth (i.e., less affective prejudice). Error bars represent standard errors. *** *p < .001*

Support for Reintegration Policies

While the video intervention appears to have impacted respondent attitudes toward FARC ex-combatants, it does not appear to have changed people's policy preferences about how the government should respond to them. The video did not affect support for policies. This **does not** replicate our previous findings. One potential reason for this: the policy items we used as an extension of prior research[44] might have been understood as having a zero-sum nature. In other words, participants might have understood them as policies that will support ex-combatants at the expense of the local non-ex-combatant residents. It was not moderated by the municipality, but overall, it seems that participants in San Vicente del Caguán (and to a lesser extent, Santander de Quilichao) were much less in favour of these policies than participants in San José del Guaviare. This and other findings may be affected by these specific communities' relationships with FARC over time. Gender did not play a significant role here. However, there were some (very weak) indications that the video positively affected support for reintegration policies only among men.

Support for Peace

As reported earlier, the video caused those who saw it to initially feel more hopeful about peace, but it did not, however, have an effect on support for peace. However, there was a **marginally significant effect during the follow-up assessment**. This partially replicates our previous results. One reason for that might be that the support for peace items differed from what we used in our previous studies. The items here focused on **perceived normative** support for peace, more than the participants' support. Similar to previous analyses, the municipality did not moderate the effect of the videos on support for peace, but levels of support for peace were generally higher in Guaviare, and the lowest in San Vicente del Caguán. Gender did not play a meaningful role here, although there were some very weak indications that support for peace was somewhat higher among women.
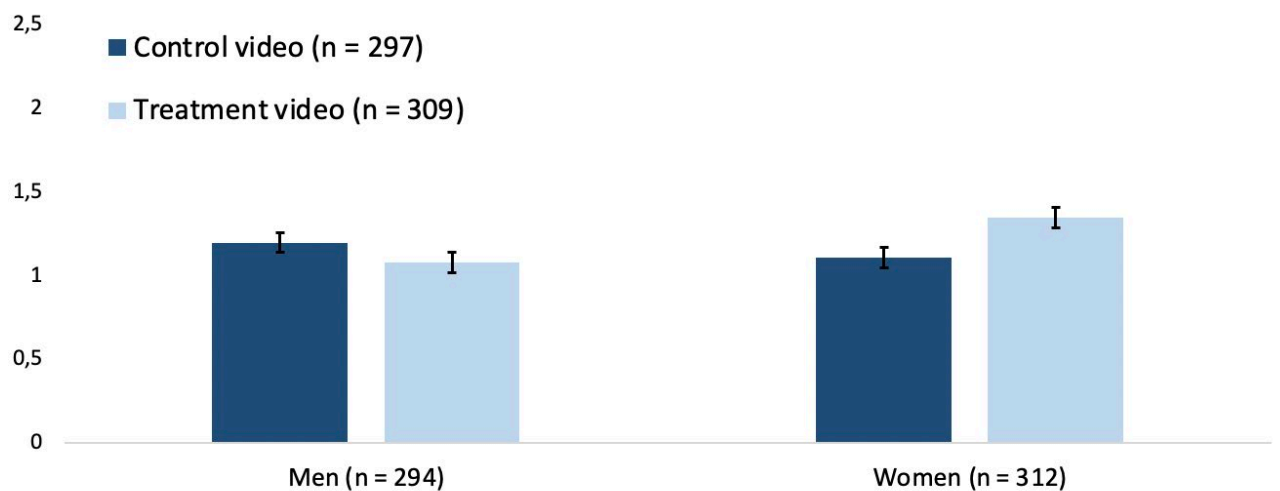
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Willingness to Write a Message of Support

In addition to attitudes, the study examined the video's impact on behaviour including whether respondents would choose to write a message to an ex-combatant or how they would view their CVs. Generally speaking, there was a trend wherein respondents who watched the video intervention were more likely to write such messages, but the effect was not significant. The effect was not moderated by the municipality, although participants in San Vicente del Caguán were much less willing to write a message of support. The effect was not moderated by gender, but women were more willing to write the message than men. In total, people sent 117 positive messages and 20 with negative messages.

CV Assessment

The study's examination of the video's impact on how respondents assessed CVs – including ex-combatants – produced an interesting result. On the surface, it seems like the manipulation did not affect this measure at all, as with previous analyses, it seems that people in San Vicente del Caguán were much more negative toward FARC ex-combatants. It seems that the treatment video had a **negative effect** on men (which was especially pronounced when they assessed the position of a nurse, but not significant) and a significant **positive effect** on women. This was true for both the assessment of the CVs (i.e., "To what extent do you trust this applicant to do a good job as a nurse?" and "To what extent would you hire this applicant?") and the forced-choice they had to make (see Figure 5). This is again only a partial replication of the previous results. This might have been due to the fact that the measure was done differently in the present study (i.e., it compared FARC with non-FARC applicants, and it included a short description of the applicants rather than their CVs).

Figure 5. The effect of the manipulation on forced applicant selection is moderated by gender.

Note: Higher scores indicate stronger tendency to select ex-combatants. Error bars represent standard errors. ** *p < .01*

Support for Economic Policies to Support Ex-Combatants to Benefit the Territory[6]

Participants who watched the treatment video showed **significantly higher** support levels for economic policies than the control group. Participants in San Vicente del Caguán were **much less** in favour of these policies than in the two other municipalities. But there were some limited indications that they were also more affected by the video. While for the two other municipalities, levels were high in both conditions. In interviews done by the MEAC team in San Vicente del Caguán, some rural agricultural populations ('campesinos') did express rejection of the economic benefits that the guerrillas would receive compared to those received by the communities.

The Moderating Effect of Age

Interestingly, in almost all outcome measures assessed at the follow-up assessment, there were significant effects for the younger participants but not for the older participants. Put differently, at the follow-up assessment; the younger participants were, the likelier it was to find that the treatment video had a significant positive effect. This was true for *FARC are unwilling and unable to change, empathy, ascent dehumanization (marginally significantly), affective prejudice, supporting reintegration policies, supporting the peace process, supporting economic policies to support ex-combatants to benefit the territory, and selecting the FARC applicant.* Note that in many of these outcome measures, the main effect of the treatment video was not significant. Put simply, while it seems like the effect of the video was robust when the dependent variables were measured immediately after exposure, the effects persisted only among the younger participants. Therefore, it seems that age provides the most robust explanation for the effectiveness of the intervention over time.

Our results generally show that the intervention was effective in the rural municipalities selected for the study. There were differences between the municipalities, but overall, the intervention was effective – to a large extent – equally across contexts. Moreover, it seems that the intervention worked less in Guaviare, which compared to the other locations, has residents with a more positive view of FARC ex-combatants. The only three major differences from Bruneau at al. (2020)[45] were: a) it seems that the effects were smaller in the current study and to a large extent moderated by age; b) changing the hearts and minds of older people was more difficult; we did not notice that in the previous studies; and c) there was some indication that participants understood the items less well in the current study as in the previous online studies.

After six years of the peace agreement, this analysis was a successful examination of a previous intervention to reduce intergroup hostility between civilians and former combatants in Colombia. Taking into account the persistent hurdles faced by conflict-affected communities and the shared frustration over the slow implementation of the agreements, this form of intervention could be another tool to facilitate peace and reconciliation.

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[6] Here, there were four items. Two focused on supporting ex-combatants to support the economy in the territory, and two were more general about the community. We focus here only on the two specifically about ex-combatants.

Policy and Programmatic Implications

The intervention described in this report was designed to help foster peace six years after the signature of the peace agreement between the Colombian Government and the FARC-EP. The study aims to contribute to a new trend of innovative interventions for restoring the social fabric among local communities that experience first-hand the hurdles faced by the implementation of peace after decades of suffering, division, and resentment amid the persistence of structural and long-term legacies of injustice, inequality, and marginalization.

The results show that changing minds and hearts can be done, but doing so may be more difficult in some places, and with waning effects, if interventions are not continued. The results show that in the PDET municipalities under study even though the intervention was effective, there were more moderate effects in the follow-up measurement than in the prior national, more urban sample. Contextual factors might have affected the intervention's power to change minds in these PDETs, especially regarding people's feelings and attitudes towards economic policies between the first and the second assessment, in part because the PDETs as rural settings had different exposure to the FARC over the course of the conflict, and have experienced conflict violence and economic challenges differently, both before and after the peace agreement. These findings have several policy implications that will be examined in conclusion to this report.

First, the experiment described herein proved that parasocial contact is an effective tool to combat conflict associated cognitions after years of war. Nevertheless, our results show that even though communication interventions can have a mass and immediate positive impact to accelerate peace among citizens with less direct contact with war and the outgroup, this particular intervention's effects were moderate in the follow-up assessment. In contexts where inhabitants were more directly exposed to FARC, and to local persistent violent and criminal dynamics related to the post conflict scenario, psychological barriers may persist more than in other locations. Such barriers might be overcome by more routine exposure to positive contents and messaging.

Secondly, peacebuilding is a fragile process that benefits from localized policies and tailored programmes. By bringing together all affected parties - local communities, peace builders, social leaders, local officials, victims and ex-combatants – it is possible to correct biases and erroneous beliefs, and tackle toxic norms that governed intergroup relations as a result of decades of conflict. That is why social and behavioural change communications offer an excellent mechanism to scale up information outreach (about the real life of the communities involved), stories (humanizing outgroup members and confirming their ability to change), and positive descriptive norms (what people are doing for peace). As the evidence herein suggests, evidence-based campaigns may act as a prosocial buffer to build peace in communities, and help public officials committed to implementing interventions to mobilize cognitive support from citizens. The results show that for each context different aspects of the communications might need to be emphasized, repeated, or adapted to overcome hurdles that may make it difficult for certain populations to see outgroup members such as FARC ex-combatants in a new light.

Finally, this intervention shows how programmes that opt for pilots that use randomized controlled trials before scaling up could benefit from intervention models that take context seriously, identify barriers and use translational research,[46] implementation, and intervention science to responsibly inform their activities.[47]

The various effects seen in this research across PDET municipalities remind us about the need to tailor communications, activities, or interactions with key local actors and communities. The key example here, is the effect of age moderating support for peace and willingness to reconcile. This could be a good place to start auditing research designs, implementation strategies, and programming activities that are currently being planned or implemented in Colombia, and other peacebuilding contexts. The results show that sociopsychological barriers might not be the same across sociodemographics, geographies, and individuals over time. Future endeavours may be focused on how to unfreeze minds and hearts in a differential manner across the population.

A new generation of peace researchers and practitioners is changing how the international community conceives and intervenes to mitigate war and promote peace. This research hopes to widen the options for cost-effective alternative remedies to identify and remove the sociopsychological barriers to better intergroup relationships and sustainable peace from a bottom-up perspective. Behaviourally informed interventions are not a magic remedy to decades of division and violence,[48] but they offer a solid alternative to complement the efforts made by programmes and communities to protect and boost what has been achieved so far by the protagonists of peace: victims, ex-combatants, survivors, public officials, veterans of war, and international allies that silently and stubbornly work for peace despite all ongoing challenges.

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