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Introduction: A Farewell to Arms?

What happens to powerful non-state armies after they sign peace accords, disarm, and demobilize? Why do some former belligerents reactivate their organizational structures and return to perpetrating violence, whereas others transition away from violence and enable peace to consolidate? These are the questions that motivate my book.

Colombia provides a rich comparative laboratory in which to seek answers. In the aftermath of its mid-twentieth-century partisan civil war, known as *La Violencia*, a surge of left-wing armed mobilization erupted, seeking to overthrow the state through communist revolution. In response to these rebel movements, right-wing militias proliferated during the 1980s and 1990s. They became strong armed organizations that sought to control specific territories, engaged in irregular warfare against the rebels, advocated a conservative ideology, funded themselves through extensive licit and illicit dealings, and sought state takeover not through revolt, but through alliances, co-optation, and corruption.

The Colombian conflict, still ongoing, has touched every region of the country, stolen the lives of at least 220,000 people, and internally displaced 4.7 million (Grupo de Memoria Histórica 2013).[1] In 2002, negotiations to end the militias' violence began. These yielded successful peace bargains between President Álvaro Uribe's administration and the thirty-seven militia organizations, and led, between 2003 and 2006, to the decommissioning of these formidable, illegal non-state armies.

Thereafter, these armed organizations exhibited significant divergence in their postwar trajectories.[2] Roughly half of the warring factions

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[1] There were 220,000 or more fatalities between 1958 and 2013. During *La Violencia* (1948–58) approximately 250,000 individuals lost their lives (Guzmán, Borda, and Umaña 1962).

[2] This book uses the words "post-conflict" or "postwar" at the organizational level and not the country level to refer to groups that have signed a peace accord and are, in that sense, in a post-conflict stage, even if the country as a whole may still be at war with other armed factions.

remilitarized over the next five years: they reenlisted their fighters and revived their command-and-control apparatuses to carry out coercion in the form of massacres, displacement, extortion, and widespread abuses of the civilian population. In other words, they returned to being armed groups and shattered the emerging peace in their regions. Armed with assault weaponry and dressed in camouflage, their members confronted other illegal non-state armies and state security forces and engaged in sophisticated criminality.[3]

The other half of the militia structures, however, demilitarized. While in the short run, they retained the ability to coerce and to remilitarize, equipped with "silenced guns," they did not revert to using violence.[4] In the five years following the signing of accords – the postwar period with which this book is concerned – many of these groups reinvented themselves as sociopolitical entities or nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) with significant leverage over civilian affairs. They sought political office, exercised social control, administered local justice, regulated economic activities, and behaved as proto-states. In the long term, they fully demilitarized. What explains the variation across these armed groups? Why did some transition back to organized violence while others did not?

This same puzzle manifests itself around the world where similar organizations diverge in their postwar trajectories. Failure of peace processes and recurrence of civil war are widespread. Almost half of all countries emerging from conflict relapse into war within five years of signing a peace agreement (Collier et al. 2003).[5] Even where civil war does not resume, most post-conflict environments experience elevated levels of violence (Call 2012; Grandi 2011). Yet the extent of remilitarization varies across nations, over time, across geographic regions within countries, and across warring organizations.[6]

In Nicaragua, for example, after the civil war of 1982–90, the Contras and Sandinistas reverted to collective violence as the Re-Contras, Re-Compas, and Revueltos (Brown 2001). In Angola, after only a brief period of peace in 1994, war resumed between UNITA and the MPLA.[7] In Myanmar, the Kachin

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[3] The remilitarized groups' sources of funding included narcotrafficking, extortion, arms smuggling, kidnapping, and alliances with micro-drug cartels. In the 1980s and early 1990s, powerful drug cartels, in particular the Medellín and the Cali cartels, rose to prominence in Colombia riding the wave in marijuana and cocaine production. After Pablo Escobar's death in 1993 and the capture of the Orejuela brothers in 1995, the Medellín and Cali cartels fractured into micro-cartels.

[4] As the empirical chapters demonstrate, demilitarized organizations usually facilitate negative peace: the absence of manifest violence. This does not mean that they are necessarily "peaceful"; in fact, these units often threaten violence, are latently coercive, and retain the ability to remobilize militarily. They also tend to remain involved with criminal dealings and illicit financing.

[5] The five-year period has become standard in the quantitative literature on civil war recurrence and peace.

[6] It should be noted that remilitarization includes any return to organized violence, not just a recurrence of the earlier civil war.

[7] Spears (1999). UNITA: National Union for the Total Independence of Angola; MPLA: People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola.

Independence Army reactivated its armed movement in 2011 after almost two decades of ceasefire (Themnér and Wallensteen 2012). And in Iraq, the Mahdi Army, which had disbanded in 2008, reverted to full-scale militancy in the form of the Peace Brigades in 2014 (Bayless 2012).

In contrast, in Mozambique, RENAMO, FRELIMO, and the Naparama militias engaged in a sustained transition to peace following the 1992 Rome General Peace Accords.[8] In El Salvador, the FMLN and ARENA relinquished their arms in 1992 and fully demilitarized.[9] In the Philippines, the MNLF largely ended its campaign of violence in 1996 and transitioned to legitimate politics as did the IRA in 1997 and Indonesia's Free Aceh Movement in 2005.[10]

Across the world, after entering peace agreements, insurgents, rebels, paramilitaries, and militias dissolve or endure and redeploy, for violence or for peaceful politics. A better understanding of the organizational processes that generate remilitarization or demilitarization can help shape policy to disrupt chronic patterns of violence, render peace settlements sustainable, effectively transition former combatants back into civilian life, and enhance the prospects for advances in human rights, reconciliation, democratic governance, reconstruction, and state-building in territories under the control of non-state armed groups. Peace depends on warring factions not returning to violence; thus the trajectories of these factions matter deeply for the quality of people's lives in post-conflict environments.

ARGUMENT AND MECHANISMS

This book seeks to answer why peace consolidates in some contexts while violence recurs in others. It does so by examining the processes of organizational formation and evolution. I argue that the effects of a single distinct factor – the geography of the armed organization's recruitment, whether local or non-local, and that of its neighboring armed actors – determine whether the organization goes back to or turns away from the use of collective violence.

First, I look *inside* the armed organization. I argue that where, geographically, the armed organization recruited – locally, or not – affects its network structure, whether it sustains its power during the transition from war to peace, and how accurately it estimates its own power as it decommissions. I then look at how these effects influence the dynamics *between* armed organizations. Within regional configurations of groups, I map the geography of each organization's recruitment, predict where the distribution of power shifts or is instead

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[8] Themnér (2011). RENAMO: Mozambican National Resistance; FRELIMO: Mozambique Liberation Front.

[9] Holiday and Stanley (1993). FMLN: Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front; ARENA: Nationalist Republican Alliance.

[10] Neumann (2005); Stange and Patock (2010). The MILF (Moro Islamic Liberation Front), meanwhile, reinitiated its attacks (Noble 1981). MNLF: Moro National Liberation Front; IRA: Irish Republican Army.

preserved after the peace accords, and identify which sets of groups have good informational bases for renegotiating bargains if the balance of power does change.

I argue that remilitarization results when the distribution of capabilities shifts and bargaining fails because of information problems. Specifically, I find that armed groups built on a local recruitment strategy – drawing participants from the same area where they were deployed – enjoy stronger prewar networks and, after demobilizing, tend to remain geographically clustered where they operated. As a result, the local groups tend to remain cohesive, with their command-and-control apparatus intact. They also retain stronger information-gathering capabilities, and thus are able to provide their leaders with more accurate intelligence on the resolve and abilities of their former members and those of their neighboring armed groups.

In contrast, armed organizations that drew their recruits non-locally, from outside of their zones of operation, tend to have weaker pre-conflict social bonds and, after surrendering their weapons, tend to disperse away from where they fought. As a result, they weaken, and they suffer more from information problems; they cannot accurately assess the extent of their erosion in power.

Accordingly, I find that a change in relative power occurs in areas where groups engaged in divergent recruitment strategies: local groups stay intact while non-local groups weaken. Bargaining tends to fail because of the inability of the groups to agree – due to information asymmetries – on the extent of the power shift. Both groups then remilitarize, the cohesive local groups more powerfully and the non-local rump groups more weakly.

In contrast, where the distribution of relative power remains unchanged by the peace process – because all groups were local and thus remain cohesive – the bargains tend to hold and the local former armed actors demilitarize over time.

Table 1.1 summarizes these relationships between armed organizations' recruitment geographies and their postwar trajectories.

ARMED ORGANIZATIONS DURING TRANSITIONS
FROM WAR TO PEACE

This book builds a novel organization-level theory to explain variation in a previously unstudied dependent variable: whether armed groups remilitarize or demilitarize after signing peace accords. In so doing, this study extends in important ways research on armed organizations during war. Other scholars of armed groups have focused on the groups' origins, internal structures, or dynamics of contestation; these studies are usually truncated at war's end. Rigorous research on armed organizations postwar remains scarce; this study seeks to fill that gap.

I look at the inner workings of organizations for answers to outcomes relating to violence and peace, following the lead of founding scholars of non-state

TABLE 1.1. *The Relationships between Recruitment Geographies and Postwar Remilitarization or Demilitarization*

Step 1: Recruitment Patterns and Postwar Organizational Capacity	
Local Group (L)	**Non-Local Group (NL)**
Concentrated recruitment	Dispersed recruitment
Dense networks	Thin networks
Physical proximity of combatants in zone of deployment after demobilizing	Geographic dispersion of combatants away from zone of deployment after demobilizing
Resulting maintenance of networks	Resulting decay of networks
Postwar cohesion preserves power	Postwar dissolution weakens power
Step 2: Regional Configurations of Armed Groups and Remilitarization	
Configurations that include only Local Groups	**Configurations that include Non-local Groups**
No change in balance of power	Change in balance of power
Physical proximity and networks of local groups allow local groups to obtain accurate information about their power	Dispersion and decayed networks of non-local groups result in information problems, thus non-local groups cannot estimate their power accurately
Successful renegotiation of bargains	Unsuccessful renegotiation of bargains
Local groups demilitarize	*Local groups remilitarize in powerful fashion; rump non-local units remilitarize in weak fashion*
State respects local groups' sovereignty in their territories	State engages in confrontational state-building in non-local groups' territories
Embedded in communities, demilitarized local groups maintain social and political influence	Non-local groups have influence through coercion

armed structures during the onset and duration phases of war.[11] I diverge from those scholars not just in the phase of the conflict cycle that I examine, but also in the organizational factors that I highlight. The established accounts propose, as causes of variation in war onset and dynamics, differences in motivations for participation, in territorial control, and in resource endowments. My study instead focuses on the mapping of recruitment: whether leaders staff their structures with local members or with non-local members. My findings therefore emphasize the importance of human and social geography over physical and economic geography, and over greed, grievance, and other moral and emotional motivations for participation.

[11] I draw especially on the work of Stathis Kalyvas (2006), Roger Petersen (2001), Jeremy Weinstein (2007), and Elisabeth Wood (2003).

The book's organization-level focus suggests implications about the nature of combatants' postwar social networks. These implications contribute to a recent literature on the microdynamics of peace that focuses on the trajectories of *individuals* emerging from conflict: their demobilization, political participation, economic reintegration, reconciliation, and psychological transitions.[12] The microlevel literature treats former fighters as independent agents, rather than as components of a web of ex-combatants and armed institutions that structure their postwar paths. This book demonstrates the critical role played by social bonds and how organizations pull their combatants with them, either back to violence or toward more peaceful activities. Individual-level postwar trajectories cannot be fully understood without taking into account the organizational outcomes of cohesion, dissolution, remilitarization, and demilitarization modeled in this book.

Most studies of peace have examined the war or the country as the unit of analysis.[13] Such macrolevel research tends either to ignore the role of armed organizations or to take the organizations as unvarying. By using the armed organization as the object of analysis, I can account for the significant subnational variation in the recurrence of organized violence that often exists even when macrolevel variables such as power-sharing and external guarantees are held constant.

Instead of treating the armed organization as a black box, I look inside it: there I uncover networks and principal-agent dynamics that enable me to integrate a key insight of bargaining theory into our understanding of civil war resolution. To date, it has been assumed that information on capabilities and resolve is complete in intrastate contexts (Fearon 2004; Walter 1999). I argue instead that information problems resurface during the uncertain transition to peace and, moreover, that they vary depending on the structures of the armed groups. I thereby provide nuance to the nature of the information problem, emphasizing not only the intelligence asymmetries that exist between belligerent organizations but also those that emerge within organizations. These asymmetries are key to understanding remilitarization.

By engaging in organization-level analysis, I build on emerging work on multiparty wars, looking beyond state-rebel dyads to illuminate the critical strategic interactions among various non-state actors and their effects on postwar outcomes.[14] The organization-level approach also facilitates theorizing

[12] See Annan et al. (2011); Bellows and Miguel (2009); Blattman (2009); Gilligan, Mvukiyehe, and Samii (2013); Humphreys and Weinstein (2007); Samii (2013).

[13] See Call (2012); Downes (2004); Doyle and Sambanis (2000); Fortna (2003, 2008); Gilligan and Sergenti (2008); Hartzell (1999); Licklider (1995); Mattes and Savun (2009); Reiter (2009); Toft (2010); Walter (2002, 2004).

[14] Bakke, Cunningham, and Seymour (2012); Christia (2012); Pearlman and Cunningham (2012); Staniland (2012b). The book's organizational approach enables analysis of the common phenomenon of "partial peace": when some armed groups sign peace accords while others continue to fight (Nilsson 2008).

about the other actors in civil conflict, such as militias, warlords, self-defense forces, paramilitaries, and civilian patrols that fall outside of the traditional "rebel" category.[15] The literatures on war recurrence and on peace have almost entirely ignored these large, prevalent, and influential actors. Militias were present in 81 percent of the country-years in places that experienced civil war between 1981 and 2007 (Carey, Mitchell, and Lowe 2013, 254). These forces mobilized more than one million combatants in Pakistan, and similar numbers in Indonesia, Guatemala, and Ethiopia. Most importantly, militias do not just disappear after peace accords; in some cases, they facilitate an end to violence, but in others they pose a challenge to the durability of peace. This book's journey inside the Colombian militias contributes to the conflict resolution literature by building theory on the war-to-peace transitions of these underexamined groups.

Study of these non-state actors also advances the broader research agenda on militias in the context of civil war and state formation. It deepens our understanding of governance by "incomplete" states where sovereignty is fragmented (resting both with the state and with non-state actors) and where the state lacks "the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within [a] given territory" (Weber 1946, 78).[16] It joins an emerging literature that does not presume that state formation constitutes a natural progression toward a monopoly over the means of coercion,[17] arguing instead that the lack of such a monopoly may also constitute an equilibrium, one that serves the interests of certain stakeholders.[18] In this sense, the book helps lay the foundation for a research agenda on the varied relationships between the state and militias. It sheds light on the conditions under which the state is likely to continue to outsource state functions to these proxy forces or to tolerate shared rule, rather than seeking to extend its sovereignty by confronting the forces and establishing a state monopoly over the means of violence.[19]

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[15] On warlords, see Jackson (2003); Marten (2006/07); Olson (1993); Pye (1971); Reno (1998). For an excellent typology of militias and a theory of the timing and location of their emergence, see Jentzsch (2014). In Colombia, the rebels or insurgents are revolutionary and are called *guerrillas;* they fight against the state security forces and the militias. The militias are called *paramilitares* (paramilitaries) or *autodefensas* (self-defense forces), and they fight against the rebels. Chapter 3 elaborates further on the nature of the armed actors in Colombia.

[16] On "shadow" or "incomplete" states, see Clunan and Trinkunas (2010); Davis and Pereira (2003); Kingston and Spears (2004).

[17] The traditional assumption is that the state wishes to retain or recover a monopoly over the means of force and that if this does not occur, it is either because the state lacks the ability due to poverty, a weak military, difficult national topography, dispersed populations, or lack of infrastructure (Fearon and Laitin 2003; Herbst 2000), or because it lacks the incentives since it does not face exogenous shocks such as warfare (Migdal 2001; Tilly 1990).

[18] Acemoglu, Robinson, and Santos (2013); Driscoll (2012); Hidalgo and Lessing (2014); Staniland (2012c); Walston (1988).

[19] See Daly (2016).

RESEARCH STRATEGY

This book contributes to the methodology of studying war and peace. To demonstrate how the geography of recruitment by armed organizations conditions their postwar trajectories, I draw on empirical materials from the extraordinary comparative laboratory of contemporary Colombia.

My study employs a complementary mix of qualitative and quantitative approaches. In addition to large-n statistical tests, I employ extensive primary qualitative data collected during a year and a half of fieldwork in Colombia over the period 2006–13. I analyze eleven original surveys of ex-combatants, their families, psychologists, and civilian community members, conducted by myself and others over the course of ten years, to trace the inner workings, network structures, and information asymmetries of the armed groups. Organization-level information on all militia factions and remilitarized units, and geo-referenced data on 29,000 violent events between 1964 and 2013, allow me to measure precisely where organized violence recurred. I trace the mechanisms underpinning the warring groups' evolution and their postwar trajectories with in-depth primary accounts derived from more than 300 interviews I conducted with ex-combatants, victims, military personnel, civilians, politicians, and experts on the armed conflict.[20] The scope and detail of the data enable significant empirical rigor, facilitating testing of every step along the causal chain of my geography of recruitment theory of remilitarization.

POLICY LESSONS

Knowledge of why groups remilitarize or demilitarize in the aftermath of peace agreements offers clear policy implications. The theory presented in this book reveals forces that influence these postwar outcomes, and suggests policy instruments that could help prevent a return to violence and encourage a sustainable end to armed conflict. For example, a better understanding of why groups follow divergent paths helps illuminate why, after war, large-scale violence recurs in certain regions, why low-level conflict persists in others, and why relative peace emerges in still others. This understanding enables us to anticipate where and how a state may effectively engage in state-building, where non-state armed actors are likely to dispute territory or retain hegemonic control, and what these dynamics imply for the populations living through the volatile transitions from war to peace.

[20] The majority of my interviews were conducted in confidentiality; the names of interviewees are withheld by mutual agreement and changed in the text to protect my respondents, and to adhere to my Human Subjects Protocol. I do not cite my interviewees' names unless they granted me permission to do so. Throughout the book, translations from Spanish into English are my own.

In Chapter 9, I examine several of the instruments that policymakers employ to influence or constrain outcomes after peace accords. The theory advanced in this book suggests, in particular, that there may exist potential dangers and unanticipated negative side effects of an approach that seeks to break up all organizations and networks uniformly. It shows that this approach is likely to spark shifts in power and remilitarization. I recommend instead that policymakers seek to preserve the balance of capabilities and to mitigate information problems within organizations. To do so, in its efforts at consolidation, a state should strategize differently toward different types of armed organizations based on their structural characteristics. I propose specific reintegration, information, and reconstruction tools aimed at diminishing the risks of renewed violence and enhancing the prospects for consolidated peace.

ROAD MAP

The book unfolds as follows: Chapters 2 and 3 show how the geographic patterns of recruitment shape the postwar trajectories of armed organizations, and they introduce the methodological and historical context in which I evaluate my argument. Chapter 2 develops the proposed causal process in detail. I describe how the geography of recruitment affects the networks, cohesion, and information asymmetries within armed organizations. I then explain how variation in recruitment patterns across armed organizations in strategic interaction causes the organizations to either cooperate and demilitarize, or defect and fight. The chapter demonstrates how other explanations, centered on peace terms and on the correlates of civil war, cannot account for postwar variation in remilitarization. Chapter 2 concludes by presenting the research design and the rich sources on which the project draws.

Chapter 3 provides a historical narrative of the origins and evolution of the Colombian militia forces. It examines three important analytic background questions: why these powerful belligerent groups decided to enter negotiations with the Colombian government when they easily could have continued fighting; why these armed organizations signed peace agreements that lacked guarantees, and that failed to reflect the military, political, economic, and social power with which they entered negotiations; and why non-local units, in particular, agreed to peace terms and implemented demobilization when they would weaken as a result. By exploring this puzzling behavior, the book lays the groundwork for a future research agenda on bargaining and implementation of peace accords when information is incomplete, when parties to the conflict fail to anticipate the future accurately, and when actors are multiple and non-unitary.

Chapters 4 and 5 then engage in quantitative tests of the proposed argument and mechanisms. Chapter 4 explores variation in the geography of recruitment in Colombia and its implications for the militia groups' social network structures and postwar cohesion. To code whether individuals operated

locally or not, the chapter uses survey data on all 35,310 ex-militia members' self-reported locations of origin[21] and information on the armed groups' zones of operation derived from the confidential testimonies of 2,700 former top and midranking militia commanders under the Justice and Peace Law.[22] The chapter looks inside the armed organizations and explores how their members were connected to each other and how their social networks were situated in geographical space. It traces the combatants' prewar and postwar social connections, based on a series of four surveys of the former fighters, triangulated with additional surveys of their families and psychologists. These survey questionnaires facilitate indices of the combatants' norms of reciprocity and mutual dependence, and indices of the extent of commanders' information about their subordinates. I use geo-coding to estimate the former fighters' postwar geographic clustering or dispersion. After accounting for endogeneity and controlling for alternative hypotheses centered on recruit type, motivations, and socialization, I show that there exists a strong relationship between armed groups' geography of recruitment and their postwar organizational capacity.

Chapter 5 explores the regional configurations of the armed groups and how their recruitment patterns affected their remilitarization and demilitarization. It also analyzes how the strategic dynamics between armed factions influenced regional levels of remilitarized violence. For these statistical analyses, I developed a series of original organizational and municipal-level databases on remilitarization, constructed with data from Colombia's intelligence agencies, Attorney General, National Police, Institute of Forensic Medicine, National Penitentiary Institute, Observatory of Human Rights of the Vice-Presidency, and National Commission of Reparation and Reconciliation, as well as with information appearing in reports of the Organization of American States' (OAS) Peace Mission, Colombian press, and various Colombian think tanks. The quantitative tests evaluate the explanatory power of the book's theory against rival explanations derived from the literatures on war outcomes, tactical terrain, and the political economy of violence. The results prove extremely suggestive of the proposed relationship between recruitment and remilitarization.

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[21] The International Organization for Migration (IOM) asked for "locations of origin" in its baseline survey administered in the "concentration zones" of each of the paramilitary bloques prior to their demobilization. The Agencia Colombiana para la Reintegración (ACR) conducted follow-up surveys to fill in any missing values.

[22] The Justice and Peace Law (Law 975) was the transitional justice regime governing the peace process with the militias. Approved on 21 June 2005, the act aimed "to facilitate the processes of peace and individual or collective reincorporation into civilian life of the members of illegal armed groups, guaranteeing the victims' rights to truth, justice, and reparation." See Comisión Colombiana de Juristas (2008). Under the regime, former combatants found guilty of crimes against humanity were required to make full and honest confessions of their actions (known as *versiones libres* or "voluntary depositions"), make reparations to victims, and not commit further acts of violence or criminality. In return, they received reductions in their prison sentences.