

Attitudes Towards the Implementation of the Colombian Peace Agreement in Mesetas

On November 24, 2016, the Colombian government and the FARC signed an ambitious peace deal, ending more than five decades of conflict. Despite significant obstacles, independent reports indicate a number of the components of the agreement have been implemented according to schedule, yet we know little about public attitudes towards implementation, particularly in locations deeply affected by conflict-related violence. This paper examines results of a survey conducted in a former FARC stronghold in central Colombia.

Brief Points

- Residents of Mesetas, on average, report being quite satisfied with the overall peace process.
- Support for individual components of the peace accord are also high.
- Respondents in Mesetas, on average, report that the implementation of the accord is more on track than respondents in Tumaco, the other survey site.
- People report a failure to improve public services as an issue of particular concern.

Helga Malmin Binningsbø *Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO)*

Marianne Dahl *Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO)*

Håvard Mogleiv Nygård *Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO)*

Michael Weintraub *Universidad de los Andes*



Figure 1: How satisfied are you with the peace process? Results from Mesetas

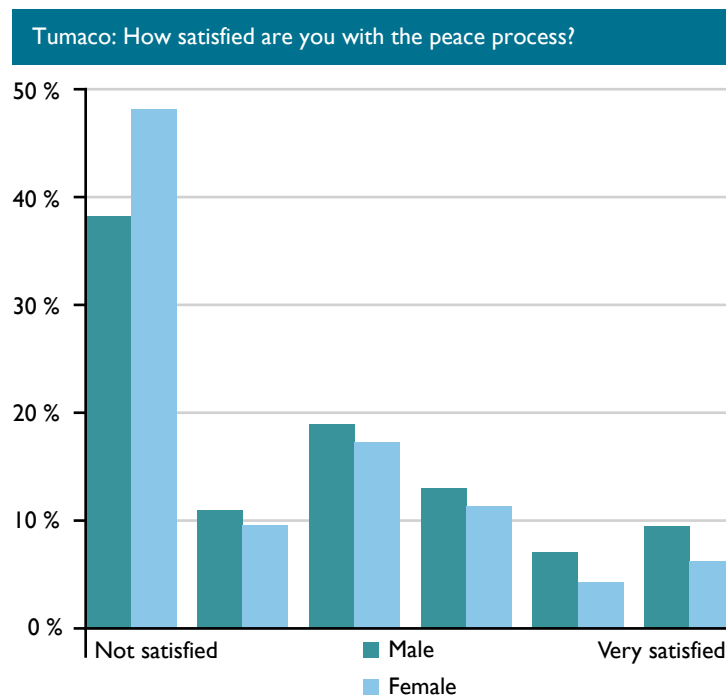


Figure 2: How satisfied are you with the peace process? Results from Tumaco

Peace Dividends in a Former FARC Stronghold?

The peace accord signed between the Colombian government and the FARC in November 2016 is a major achievement for a country that has seen nearly sixty years of continuous armed conflict. Given its progressive approach to transitional justice, including an ambitious reparations program and a strong commitment to addressing the historical roots of the conflict, including inequality and rural development, the accord is among the most ambitious peace agreements ever signed. The success of the deal, however, will depend fundamentally on people's perceptions of and experience with the peace process. Should ordinary citizens fail to see tangible benefits of peace, the successful implementation of the peace deal will be made considerably more difficult, if not impossible.

We have developed a systematic survey tool for measuring people's perceptions towards the peace agreement and its implementation, and have piloted this tool in Tumaco, in the department of Nariño, and in Mesetas, in the department of Meta. Our surveys were carried out by Cifras y Conceptos, a Bogotá-based survey firm that has worked extensively on conflict issues.

In this paper, which is a companion to a similar, recently-published paper for Tumaco, we discuss some preliminary findings from the Mesetas survey.

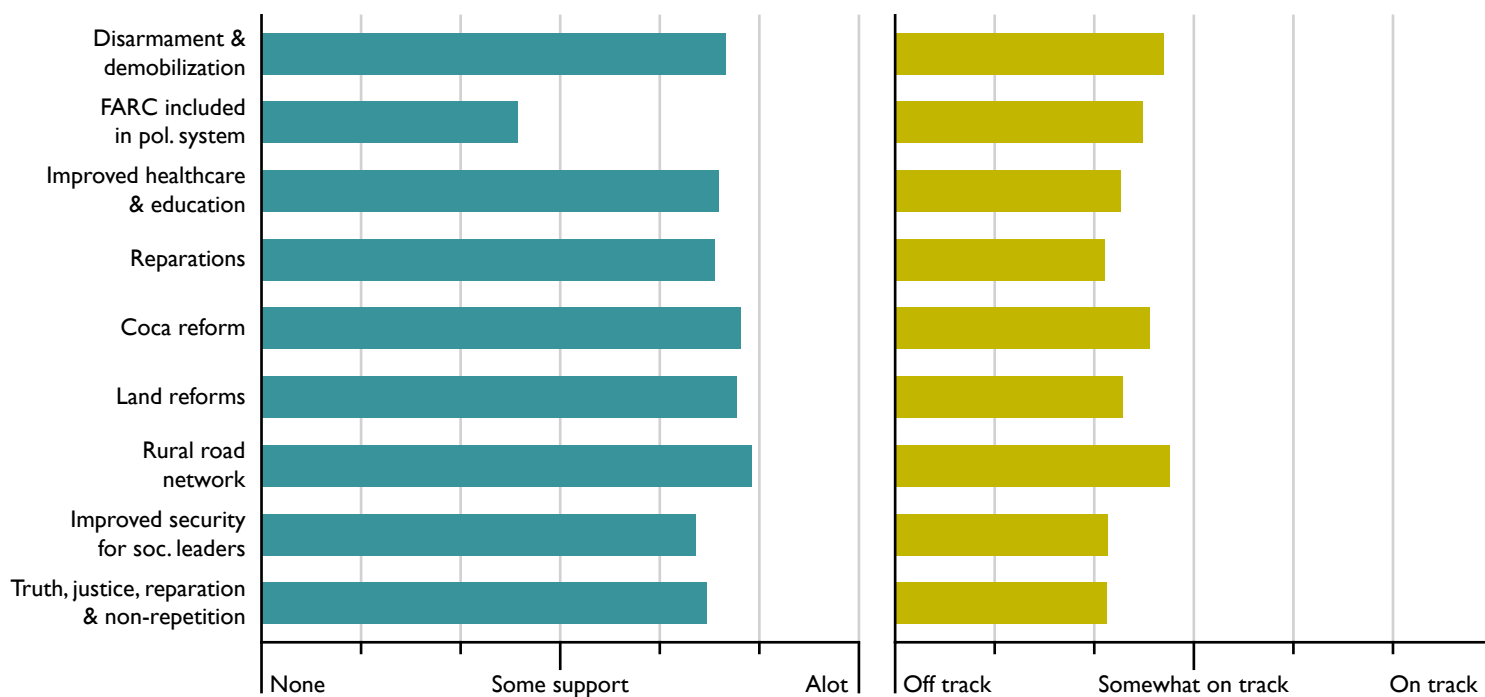
Mesetas is currently home to a large FARC reintegration zone, and is located in a region considered a FARC stronghold for much of the conflict. Indeed, the area was essentially ceded to the FARC during a peace process in the late 1990s, and historically has seen limited state presence.

As part of the peace accord, the FARC and the government agreed to develop 26 demobilization and reintegration zones scattered across the country. These reintegration zones would allow former FARC combatants to disarm and demobilize under the supervision of the United Nations. Just as importantly, FARC ex-combatants were also to be reintegrated into civilian life in these camps, providing them with crucial skills and rudimentary education. One of the largest of these zones is located in a rural area of Mesetas. Measuring residents' perceptions of the peace process here, where people live near former combatants and where FARC traditionally had a monopoly on governance, is particularly crucial given the significant government attention assigned to the area, along with FARC's political interest in it, which is likely to continue.

During the armed conflict, Mesetas and surrounding areas were characterized by a strong FARC presence. In many ways, this was both the stronghold and heartland of FARC: inhabitants have thus spent prolonged periods of time under FARC governance, including having benefited from a vast road network built by the FARC while also having suffered from wartime "taxes" imposed upon the population by the armed group. As the Colombian state attempts to reassert itself in areas previously governed by illicit armed groups, understanding people's attitudes towards the peace process and their perceptions of progress in its implementation will be critical.

Attitudes Towards Components of the Peace Agreement

Figure 1 shows overall levels of satisfaction with the peace process among the 500 individuals we surveyed in Mesetas, disaggregated by sex of the respondents. Residents of Mesetas, on average, report being quite satisfied with the overall peace process: a majority of respondents reported they are somewhat or very satisfied. The figure also shows a slight disparity in support for the overall peace process depending on the respondent's sex, with men on average supporting the peace process more than women.



Figures 3 & 4: Average level of support for peace accord components (left), and off or on track of peace accord implementation (right), in Mesetas

These results stand in contrast to opinions of those in Tumaco, reflected in Figure 2, which indicate both strong dissatisfaction with the process overall and sharp disparities in terms of sex. Women in Tumaco tend to be extremely dissatisfied with the peace agreement. Future work could explore the reasons for differences in women's attitudes between the two municipalities.

Figure 3 shows respondents' support for a set of key provisions stipulated in the peace accord. The general picture is one of considerable support across core provisions, from disarmament to land reform. As was the case in Tumaco, the only core item in the peace accord without comparable levels of support is the provision to integrate members of the FARC into the political system. Given the long and complex relationship between the local population in Mesetas and the FARC, we might expect that support for FARC's transition to a legal political party would be welcome, yet this is not the case. Other noteworthy results include significant support for the reconstruction of the rural road network, intuitively appealing for a rural municipality like Mesetas, located nearly 3 hours' drive (and approximately 130 kilometers) from the departmental capital of Villavicencio. Finally, citizens in Mesetas indicate strong support

for coca reform efforts (e.g. crop substitution) and land reform.

Attitudes on How the Agreement Is Being Implemented

Figure 4 moves beyond asking about individuals' support for individual components of the agreement and focuses on their perceptions of how these components are being implemented.

A number of issues stand out. First, residents of Mesetas do not rate any single item as being even "somewhat on track." Nonetheless, nearly across the board respondents in Mesetas rate implementation progress more highly when compared to those in Tumaco.

Indeed, respondents in Mesetas give comparatively higher marks to efforts made to repair the rural road network. Additionally, and particularly important given the presence of a FARC reintegration zone in the municipality, residents in Mesetas say that disarmament and demobilization efforts are at least somewhat on track, as are efforts to include FARC in the political system. This latter point is particularly interesting: while support for FARC participation in the political system is very low, respondents believe such efforts are just below "somewhat on track."

What Might Explain Attitudes Towards the Agreement and Its Implementation?

Perceptions of acute security may be responsible for shaping citizens' attitudes towards the agreement, given that improvements in security would be a logical expectation for many. Most respondents in Mesetas report that they feel neither insecure nor secure in their neighbourhood. When asked to compare whether security conditions have worsened or improved over the last year, they indicate slight improvements overall. This represents an important contrast with Tumaco, where respondents reported high levels of perceived insecurity as well as a sharp deterioration over the last year.

Perceptions of the quality of public goods offered in their communities may also shape attitudes towards the agreement, both in the current period and when compared to the past. Results from Mesetas diverge depending upon whether respondents are asked about the quality of schools or health services. Residents of Mesetas generally believe that the quality of their schools is neither very bad nor very good, and likewise indicate a slight deterioration of school quality in the last year. Even more worryingly, respondents are extremely critical of health services in their neighbourhoods, indicating a low overall assessment

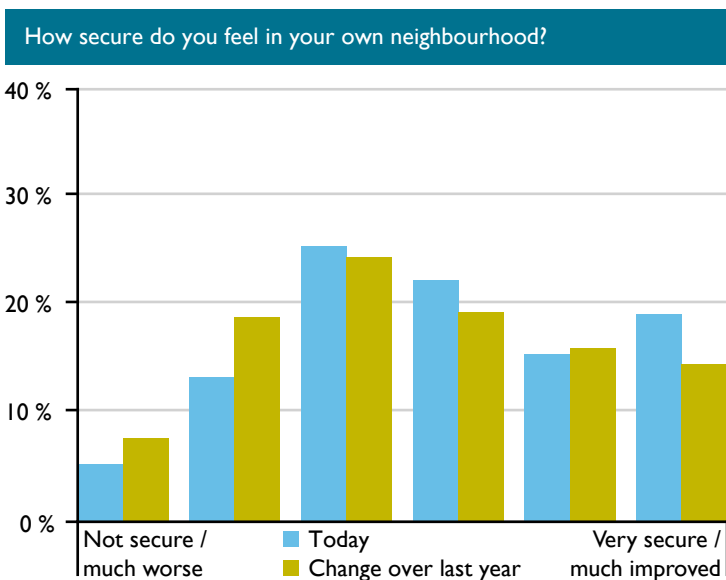


Figure 5: How secure do you feel in your own neighbourhood?

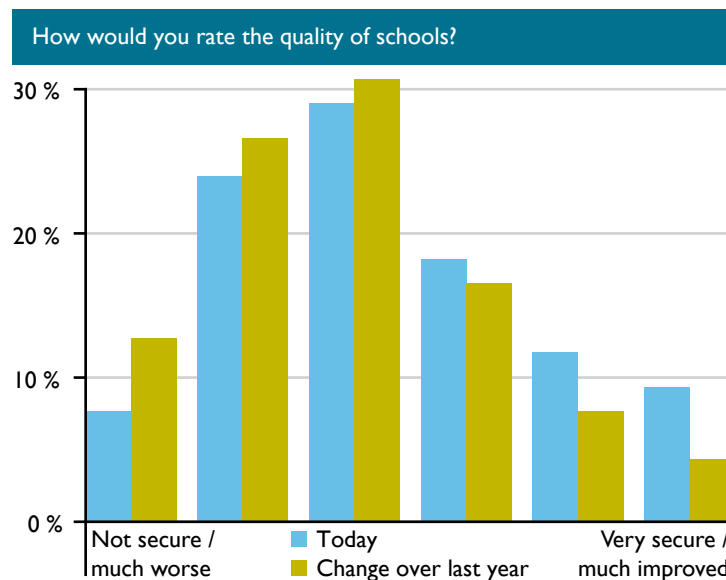


Figure 6: How would you rate the quality of schools?

and a perceived sharp decline over the last year. Interestingly, these are not unlike the survey results from Tumaco. Given the need to demonstrate the benefits of peace to local populations, a failure to improve public services may represent a missed opportunity for the Colombian government to strengthen support for the agreement.

Conclusion and Next Steps

This paper has offered preliminary results from a survey of more than 500 respondents in Mesetas, a largely rural municipality in central Colombia. It has also contrasted these findings with those from Tumaco, a radically different context but also a municipality with significant ongoing security challenges.

Our pilot surveys in Mesetas and Tumaco have demonstrated the importance of measuring people's perceptions of and experience with the peace process, and that it is possible to do so

under very demanding conditions. These pilots constitute the first steps in the Monitoring Attitudes, Perceptions, and Support of the peace process in Colombia (MAPS) project, which seeks to develop an innovative survey to measure people's perceptions of the peace agreement and its specific provisions; provide an assessment of the current situation in the country, including implementation of the provisions related to security and social services, among other factors; and measure opinions about transitional justice and peacebuilding efforts more broadly.

The scaled-up version of this project will cover all 16 prioritized post-conflict sub-regions of Colombia (*Programas de Desarrollo con Enfoque Territorial*), which include 170 municipalities, and will produce systematic knowledge and representative data at the sub-regional level. The survey will also be directly useful for local-level efforts to measure and track several of the new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially

those that pertain to SDG 16 on achieving peaceful, just, and inclusive societies. The project will serve as a tool for policymakers and international organizations implementing and overseeing the implementation of the peace accord, helping to inform the design of public policies by diagnosing local needs, and examining whether changes in "objective" local conditions produce corresponding changes in perceptions. The survey will also produce novel academic knowledge on peace processes more generally, with the aim of developing a survey tool and set of findings from Colombia that can be applied beyond Colombian borders. The primary goal is to allow international, governmental, and civil society actors in Colombia to better understand complex processes of attitude formation and transformation in areas heavily affected by conflict. Our contention is that this is a necessary step in the construction and consolidation of a lasting peace in a country that faces its best hope in more than half a century of escaping organized political violence. ■

THE AUTHORS

Helga Malmin Binningsbø is Senior Researcher at PRIO, Marianne Dahl is Senior Researcher at PRIO and Deputy Editor of the *Journal of Peace Research*. Håvard Mogleiv Nygård is Research Director and Senior Researcher at PRIO. Michael Weintraub is Associate Professor at the Escuela de Gobierno Alberto Lleras Camargo at Universidad de los Andes.

THE PROJECT

This Paper is an output from the Monitoring Attitudes, Perceptions, and Support of the peace process in Colombia (MAPS) project. MAPS is a collaboration between PRIO, Universidad de los Andes, and the UNDP Country Office in Colombia. The Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the UNDP Oslo Governance Centre funded this project.

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